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An (Enduring) Ecclesiology Beyond the Cultural Captivity of the Church

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AN (ENDURING) ECCLESIOLOGY
BEYOND THE CULTURAL CAPTIVITY OF THE CHURCH

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To Bethany

To be sure, it would be impossible to completely disentangle the church from any society in which it is found. Christians, like all human beings, are constituted by the particularities of their time and culture, and it is only natural that they should identify with their communities and nation. But on all fronts, the merging of faith and politics/culture is deeply problematic. It is time for a disentangling.

James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World*

The proclamation of grace has its limits. Grace may not be proclaimed to anyone who does not recognize or distinguish or desire it. Not only does that pollute the sanctuary itself, not only must those who sin still be guilty against the Most Holy, but in addition, the misuse of the Holy must turn against the community itself. The world upon whom grace is thrust as a bargain will grow tired of it, and it will not only trample on the Holy, but also will tear apart those who force it on them. For its own sake, for the sake of the sinner, and for the sake of the community, the Holy is to be protected from cheap surrender. The Gospel is protected by the preaching of repentance which calls sin sin and declares the sinner guilty. The key to loose is protected by the key to bind. The preaching of grace can only be protected by the preaching of repentance.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Statements about the Power of the Keys and Church Discipline in the New Testament"

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PREFACE

Enduring. I might also have chosen another word: tragic. Both fit as proper descriptors of the ecclesiology found within these pages, and each can be applied in numerous ways. It's the play on words that interests me. And the provocation.

I chose enduring because thematic throughout this work the reader will constantly be exposed to the theme that the people of God must endure God's work. I use endure here in the sense of suffering, borrowing from the Latin *passio*, the same term which we use to describe Holy Week also as Christ's Passion. For the church to become the church, for a Christian to become a Christian, God's work must be endured. It is an offensive, terrifying, deadly work. Simultaneously, it is a vivifying, quickening, re-creative work.

Furthermore, I chose enduring because the reader will also be exposed to the centrality of how the church's narrative is of constant concern for its own life. This is true whether the church realizes it or not. The biblical narrative from which emerges the ecclesiology I offer in these pages is an enduring narrative. It is the very word of God which will endure forever. The argument here will in part direct the church back to this word of God from which it has departed, however unwittingly.

I could have chosen tragic, and for similar reasons. Tragic has a greater sense of provocation. As a title, it might have grabbed greater attention. Perhaps not. Tragic is definitive of the story I will tell about the cultural captivity of the church. This is the sense of tragic that is generally familiar within our normal usage of the term. It's a story of how the church has tragically lost its way and wandered off the path of faithfulness.

Tragic, like the first sense of enduring, also gets at the character of the church's life. Suffering the work of God, an event in which humans must undergo God's killing word of judgment, is a tragic situation because it brings about death. Indeed, we know that death is not the last word—in this life or the resurrection life—but in the story I will tell, I make sure to emphasize this portion of the biblical narrative which is often missing in much of American Christianity, which tells the story of a happy faith, a God who turns out to be a nice guy, and a church who just wants to help you become a better version of you. The biblical narrative actually tells us quite clearly that this is not the case at all. God wants to kill you. And he will. Yet he will also raise you to new life. This is a tragic story compared to what many churches teach about God and the Christian faith.

The work of these pages might be said to fit within the canon of many areas of theological literature. Since I interact with so many different major voices, whose contributions are substantial within singular theological disciplines, every interaction might warrant placing my work in that field. Some possibilities include: narrative theology, theology and culture, Christian practices, and of course, ecclesiology. If I had to choose, and I am somewhat reluctant to do so, I would pick the biggest tent I could so as to capture as adequately as possible all the ways one might see what I'm up to. So the reader might see this work as something of a "sociological ecclesiology." Another way of saying it would be to call it "theology as social theory." By this I do not mean I'm using sociology to do theology. Rather, sociology is helpful to theology. It is ministerial in these pages. This will become clear by reading on. However, allow me to help establish a vision of how I hope my work might function by borrowing from the late ecclesiologist Lewis Mudge:

> Ecclesiology understood as social theory... [is] based upon the biblical story which reads and interprets the stories told by congregations of God's people in their concrete social existence. It explores the various "signs" by which churches express themselves in the midst of their social environments. It considers the ways in which congregations "read" their surroundings and appropriate meanings from them that eventually become part and parcel of their own understandings. Ecclesiology tries to judge the appropriateness and faithfulness of this ongoing hermeneutical process.
>
> ...Above all, it is important to understand that, so understood, ecclesiology is not merely a theory of the church as social institution. It is also a theory of *human society* as such. It is a theory of society as pregnant with the possibility of being ecclesia. It is a theory of society as a place in which ecclesia, as society's true fulfillment is, by God's grace, coming to be. The church as visible institution lives by acting so as continually to make space for that communal *parousia.*[1]

Mudge's characterization about ecclesiology as a social theory and as a discipline is that it is flavored with hope. In the same way, the ecclesiology of these pages ought to be understood as a work of hope. These pages are critical of the church because the church needs this critique. But I have not left the church only with criticism. God's word endures. And so for the church there is hope.

Vancouver, WA
December 2012

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[1] Lewis Mudge, *Rethinking the Beloved Community: Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, Social Theory* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001), 7.

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It has been said, "if I have reached the stars, it is because I have stood upon the shoulders of giants." Indeed, the accomplishment of a project like this can only be accounted for by looking at the foundation upon which it rests. That is, there are many who are responsible, for no one writes alone.

Most closely related to the project is my *doktorvater*, dissertation supervisor, mentor, and friend, Joel P. Okamoto. At every turn his sharp eye and discerning interrogations directed me toward better questions, clearer writing, stronger arguments, and more coherent arrangements. He is one of the best readers of texts I know. As a theologian he truly is someone to whom I am apprenticed and desire to emulate. He challenges me remarkably. His method of inquiry will always haunt my work if only because I feel that I cannot adequately mimic his skill.

My readers Joel Biermann and David Schmitt offered insightful and fruitful comments and direction. This dissertation is richer—and I am a better theologian—because of their thoughtfulness and articulate contributions.

More broadly with the Concordia Seminary community, within which this dissertation was birthed, there are many more to thank. Joel Meyer and Beth Hoeltke were always ready to reflect out loud on theological topics that were of mutual interest and value to our projects. Andy Bacon, Michelle Christ, Tony Cook, Jeff Gibbs, Robert Kolb, Jeff Kloha, Dale Meyer, and a host of others provided a reflective and hospitable community within which to work, relax, engage, and pursue with passion the topic of this dissertation. They were the encouragers who told me my work was important and to keep going.

Of course, outside of the academic community, there are many to thank. I will name only a few. First, my parents. I have been blessed with parents who have supported my every endeavor, been at every event and performance, and cheered me on as my biggest fans. I am not sure there is anything more that a child can ask for. Their support is always there. It's a constant. I can rely on it. Their love is a gift from God.

I never would have written a doctoral dissertation in theology had it not been for two people who took a risk on me in 1998. Cliff and Carolyn Bira asked me to play drums in their church while I was still an atheist. Carolyn befriended me and nurtured me into the Christian faith. Cliff mentored me into the beginning of a pastoral calling. And for more than a decade they have supported me endlessly as my mother- and father-in-law.

And finally, no one deserves more thanks than my dear wife Bethany. Words are inadequate for expressing the sense of how I experience her as a gift of God in my life. She is someone who loves me for me and in so doing she reveals how God loves me. Her support throughout my research and writing remains invaluable. Bethany allows me to think and write, encourages me as a teacher and a reflective practitioner, and lets me do it all to support our family. And now, at the end of writing, we have our daughter Anabel, who is a delicate treasure. I thank God for her and the privilege and adventure of being her dad.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM OF THE CHURCH'S CULTURAL CAPTIVITY

We need to disentangle the American story from the Christian story.
Peter Liethart

In a recent public lecture, Stanley Hauerwas spoke about the medicalization of our culture.[1] Concentrating particularly on the topic of disability, Hauerwas was careful to note that his topic was fraught with difficulty. To wield the label of "disabled" is a daunting task. To use it requires a narrative. Hauerwas compared two different narratives in his lecture. The first narrative was the narrative of modern technology, with all its attendant promises of curing ills and creating the possibility of life without ailment, without disability. This narrative extends into the present from the Enlightenment, with the promised hope in humanity's ability to progress through any and all obstacles, toward a utopic future. Disability in this narrative is, of course, an obstacle to be overcome. It is purposeless, and therefore it stands to be eliminated. The elimination of pain and suffering is the very purpose of modern medicine. Thus, Hauerwas argued, in our culture so influenced and formed by these Enlightenment values, it is no surprise that the medicalization of many of our obstacles is constitutive of our current cultural condition. The technologies that drive this medicalization supposedly offer the very promise of cure from the obstacles of disability. After all, disability within this particular narrative gestures in some sense at an established and normative difference between those labeled with "disability" and those who are not so labeled. Those who are not disabled are "normal." Being "normal" in this narrative carries

[1] Stanley Hauerwas, "Disability: An Attempt to Think With" (lecture, Fontbonne University, St. Louis, MO, October 17, 2011).

a moral value—it is the "better" of the two. Being normal is that which is to be sought by all. In the medicalization of our culture, driven as it is by technology that makes "better" living possible, the disabled are offered the possibility of becoming more normal, and thus, it is implied, having a "better" life.

This sense of "better," built into the moral discourse of modern medicalization, is perhaps just what makes using the label "disabled" so problematic. Because "disabled" is associated with something less than "normal" and therefore life could be "better" for those labeled "disabled," Hauerwas suggests there is more than one narrative option for understanding disability. One need not uncritically accept, as he suggests many of us have, the narrative that undergirds the characterization of disability within the medicalization of culture.

As a Christian theologian, Hauerwas unsurprisingly offered the Christian narrative as an alternative. Within it, he said, the disabled can rightly be understood to be suffering. But their suffering is not a condition that is necessarily understood to be in need of a cure, because within the Christian narrative, the very story of the life of a disabled person is constituted by their disability. Thus, for Hauerwas, disability is part of the personal narrative of individuals—disability is part of their identity. The grand Christian narrative is able to situate such suffering and the lives defined by it as purposeful. Hauerwas is careful not to go so far as to offer an articulation of such purposes. Rather, he simply notes that within the Christian narrative suffering has a point, even if one cannot be articulated. The articulation of such a point, the revelation of such mysteries is deferred in an act of hope. In the meantime, for those who are disabled, their stories are to be heard. They are to be cared for, rather than looked at with ambivalence. Christians are called to *be with* those who suffer in any sense, and thus also the disabled. For Hauerwas, that sense of *being with* meant allowing for the narrative of the one who suffers from being disabled to be heard, to the extent that the label "disabled" emerges from

within one's own story. To allow such a label to be offered from within one's own narrative is a means of protection against being labeled as such from without. To be called "disabled" from without, Hauerwas argues, is a phenomenon that constitutes a risk of changing the relationship between the caregiver and the one who suffers from the form of *being with* to what he calls *being for*. *Being for*, says Hauerwas, might just be the identifying factor of relationality for the cultural narrative the medicalization.

The description that Hauerwas offers to us is an example of what I will refer to in this dissertation as "cultural captivity." Cultural captivity is characterized by an unwittingly and uncritical embrace of a cultural narrative by persons or communities that believe they are living according to one narrative, but in fact, through their lived and embodied practices, it can be discerned that they live according to and are thus fostering an alternative narrative. The sense of captivity comes from the simple fact that it is through narratives that we understand our practices and ways of life. We are all *grasped* by narratives—all persons and all communities. To speak of *cultural captivity* within this dissertation then refers to persons or communities being grasped by a narrative that is 1) not the narrative according to which they believe they are living, and 2) is actually the more accurate narrative for use in discerning the meaningfulness of their practices.

This is no shortage in the present of reflection on the influence of culture. Especially in our time when the world is facing a financial crisis the likes of which constitutes an event unprecedented in history because of its global proportions, we hear much criticism about captivity to greed. Compound the global economic fear with the fact that we are presently experiencing the fallout of a presidential election year and other worries about our cultural captivity are being heard. Has our political system become a trivial sham because political maneuvering is more clearly evident as a public spectacle than ever before—is politics overrun by the necessity of posturing and the projection of certain kinds of image? Such maneuvering

now happens before the public eye in television commercials, televised debates, biased media coverage and campaign ads, instead of staying behind closed doors as it once did. At least when it was less visible, as the philosopher Slavoj Zizek would put it, we were more willing to pretend it was not happening even though we all knew it was. Now that it is presented for public scrutiny, the "Real" has irrupted and something must be done—that something at least begins with the considerations and reflections we are seeing.

Such consideration and reflection characterizes this project. In taking up the topic of cultural captivity, I mean to raise a question for the church. Is the church culturally captive, and if so, what does that mean? The cultural context of the church, aside from the present global and political concerns that demand attention, provides a tenuous setting for the church in the present, just as it has since the church's inception. The call of the church is always to be in the world, but not of it. But analyzing the church's success in this endeavor is always an ongoing process. This project joins with others who have asked similar questions and raised similar concerns regarding the church's relationship with the cultures and communities in its context. I mean to make a contribution to that conversation by engaging with those thinkers in order to advance ecclesiological reflection for the sake of carrying on the church's ongoing analysis and navigation of its relationship to culture.

The Thesis

This dissertation is located within the larger conversation about ecclesiology as it is emerging in our post-Christian era. Its effort is both theoretical and practical. Not only will it provide a theological account of the church, but it will do so for the sake of reflective practitioners who are looking for guidance in navigating and negotiating our post-Christian culture in the effort to form faithful Christians. Thus, this dissertation will articulate an ecclesiology of the Christian life, thereby enabling the church to diagnose, assess, and respond to

contemporary instances of its own cultural captivity so that it might better embody God's mission in its social location.

On Cultural Captivity

The concept of cultural captivity is not a new one. Paul was dealing with cultural captivity of a sort in his letters to the Corinthians and Galatians, although he did not quite articulate it that way. Furthermore, it is not even a recent idea to be brought into the ongoing contemporary conversation in ecclesiology. Martin Luther may perhaps be the first person to have articulated the idea of captivity in relation to the church. His essay on the Babylonian Captivity of the church, where he argued that the practices of the church's life—with special regard for the sacraments—were captive to the tyrannical papacy, was first published in 1520. In more recent years, the concept has been employed variously by contemporary theologians like L. Gregory Jones, Stanley Hauerwas, and Carl Braaten.[2] In each of these cases, the concept of captivity is rendered critically. But it need not be so. Captivity to culture is simply a description of the way that culture functions to orient the lives of all people, in any community, according to any relationship. For maintaining a relationship and for the possibility of its functioning in any manner, culture is necessary as the provision of a shared set of images, symbols, metaphors, practices, and language. In this simple sense, every person and community is captive to culture because culture provides the context of interrelationality and getting things done.

This project however, intends to push beyond this more neutral observation about the ubiquity of cultural situatedness to the more critical attitude shared by the thinkers referenced

[2] See L. Gregory Jones, "The Psychological Captivity of the Church in the United States," in *Either/Or: The Gospel or Neo-Paganism*, ed. Karl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 97–112; Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); Carl E. Braaten, "The Cultural Captivity of Theology: An Evangelical Catholic Perspective" (lecture, Nepean Presbytery of the Uniting Church in Australia, Melbourne, 1997).

above. This dissertation is an effort at critically examining the life of the church, a unique community among communities and within a unique cultural setting (however unwieldy to comprehensively define and account for): contemporary America. Here in I suggest that the church in America is captive to culture in three ways, each of which manifests an interrelated condition of American culture that I will connect through narrative accounts below: therapeutic culture, consumeristic culture, and the culture of total work. My examination of such captivity will take place through an elaboration of the cultural narrative of America by means of which each instance listed above is visible within a particular practice constitutive of the life of the church. My analysis will be enabled through an articulated ecclesiological narrative from which I derive my ecclesiological account of the church's life. That narrative with its concomitant theological account of the church will provide the contrasting point of comparison for carrying out the analysis of those aspects of the church's life that I will argue are instances of its cultural captivity.

On the Church's Cultural Captivity

To introduce the problem of the church's captivity to culture, it is important to note that I am arguing explicitly for the fact that within the practices of the church, there has taken place a corruption of their formative effects. Whether by intentional adoption of cultural values by church leaders, or unwitting cooperation through the subtle influences present in the interpretive matrices of the church's constituents, the practices of the church at times form members to be something other than Christian. To give an example, let me borrow from the work of a sociologist whose work both raises this kind of implication and concretely presents a problem with formation, one that is central to this dissertation. In 2005 Christian Smith coined the now oft-used phrase, "moralistic therapeutic deism" to describe the faith of modern American

teenagers.[3] Smith used the term "therapeutic" to describe the way his interviewees construed what they believed is the goal of life. That is, the goal of life is to be good and to be happy. Smith writes, "what appears to be the actual dominant religion among U.S. teenagers is centrally about feeling good, happy, secure, at peace. It is about attaining subjective well-being, being able to resolve problems, and getting along amiably with other people."[4] Moralism then, is the assumed means for attaining the happiness that is life's goal—being a good person, it is believed, has positive consequences.

What stands out in his account is the report from his interviewees that the faith they adhere to is the faith they learned and have seen in the lives of their parents.[5] This is a remarkable implication. It should cause us to wonder about the faith of America's adults, or at least the parents of the average American teenager. Are they passing down moralistic therapeutic deism? Smith, in fact, goes on to make this very suggestion. "Most American youth faithfully mirror the aspirations, lifestyles, practices and problems of the adult world into which they are being socialized. In these ways, adolescents may actually serve as a very accurate barometer of the condition of the culture and institutions of our larger society."[6] Smith is quick to qualify his claim, however, noting that the dominant religion of moralistic therapeutic deism cannot stand on its own, but rather always leans on some longer standing tradition. Thus, he writes about Jewish moralistic therapeutic deists, Christian moralistic therapeutic deists, Hindu moralistic

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[3] Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2005), 162. Smith's work is based on the National Study of Youth and Religion, conducted between 2003 and 2005.

[4] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 164.

[5] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 120. On this account, another researcher from the same study raises this concern and offers some helpful responses. See Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2010), chaps. 1 and 6.

[6] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 191.

therapeutic deists, and so on.[7] And here a further implication arises—one that brings with it a haunting conviction: if moralistic therapeutic deism is indeed always attached to a tradition, how is that particular tradition handing down moralistic therapeutic deism, rather than its own authentic tradition? Even more, might the older tradition upon which this new American religion depends actually be working to foster the new tradition rather than its own? Pushed to the limit, might the historic traditional religions be fostering more than one new inauthentic tradition, something more than moralistic therapeutic deism alone? This conclusion then, is one of the contentions of this dissertation.

The Psychological Captivity of the Church

It is one thing to claim that one of the ancient traditions is fostering some new way of life, rather than its own historically authentic tradition. It is another to give examples of how it might be doing so. L. Gregory Jones writes of the psychological captivity of the church and how such captivity results in a church that fosters a therapeutic religion.[8] Concerned with how forgiveness is actually performed in a culture where sin seems no longer to be a valid concept, Jones argues that the church has come to embody a therapeutic culture that merely attempts to make everyone feel better or equip them to cope or "get through" life. Jones tells the familiar story of Protestant liberalism and how it has weakened the church's immune system to the invasive cancer of therapeutic culture by its account of the Gospel that lacks any sort of eschatological content.[9] The Gospel has become all about the here and now, feeling better today, adjusting society in the present, promoting social justice. "Protestant liberals evacuated the gospel of eschatological

[7] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 166.

[8] Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 35–69; "The Psychological Captivity of the Church in the United States."

[9] Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, 64–65.

content, deprived it of its ability to interrogate us, and transmuted it into (at most) banal truisms such as "God loves you."[10] One might add the familiar truism of the Lutheran tradition, meant to assuage the guilt of the sinner: "It's okay. Christ died for your sins."

To describe the church as captive to the therapeutic is not to say that the church is employing too much psychological language into its thinking or practices. Nor is it to say that psychological knowledge is not at times helpful, which Jones clearly admits.[11] Rather, it is to say something much more dramatic. To describe the church as captive to the therapeutic is to say that psychological language *has us*. Even further, it is to say that the very imagination by which we operate is already unconsciously dominated by a therapeutic vision, such that we are unable to even see the problem, much less know we need to defend against it. An apt analogy for grasping this dramatic proposal comes from Stanley Fish in an article about the nature of belief. Borrowing from another writer, Fish describes the phenomenon of coming to have a belief as being very much like catching a cold.[12] There is very little, if any sort of intentionality in the process. It is something that *happens to* you. And that cold, very much like pain, ends up being something to which you are subject. The cold, or say, the pain of a headache, *has* you. Rather than the common description we use of *having* a cold or a headache, Fish's analogy suggests we speak in the very opposite manner. Thus, someone having a belief is really better described as someone being *had* by a belief. One becomes captive to a belief. In the same way, the church has not *decided* it will adopt a therapeutic framework of merely assuaging guilt for the purpose of making people feel better over and against actually proclaiming the Gospel, holding people accountable to the consequences of sin, and struggling through the *tentatio* of the Christian life in

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[10] Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, 65.

[11] Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, 42.

[12] Stanley Fish, "Beliefs about Belief," in *The Trouble with Principle* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1999),

hope as a body. Rather, the church has become captive to the psychological imagination, which fosters and is fostered by the therapeutic imagination that is dominant in culture at large, as the work of Christian Smith above clearly shows.

The Cultural Captivity of the Church

To speak of the church's psychological captivity is but one example of three instances this dissertation will discuss. Each of them will be discussed and presented similarly, noting like the above example that the church is *captive*, literally *had* or *possessed* by a cultural framework that has its own narrative—a story other than the church's own. Each of the instances of cultural captivity flows from this unique narrative that is perpetually in competition with the church's narrative, always competing for the allegiance of adherents. My argument will be, even if unsettling, that the church is helping this alternative narrative win adherents—and not just win them, but the church's very own practices are helping to foster greater adherence to practices that fall outside of its own authentic tradition. In other words, because of its cultural captivity the church is fostering something other than the Christian life.

Moving forward with such a characterization of the church requires employing an ecclesiological framework that understands the church as a community whose life is oriented around a particular narrative. Even further, it requires saying something about what that narrative actual is and what consequences it has for the life of the church. To do this I will employ the above distinctively Lutheran narrative regarding how God's people are formed, which will thus allow me to speak about how people are formed in a more general manner. Further, I will elaborate some of the means by which people are formed in concrete terms that denote familiar Christian practices such as preaching, absolution, catechesis, and evangelism.

279–84.

The motivating concern for this dissertation is maintaining—or where necessary working to recover—faithfulness in the practices of the church for the formation of the people of God. I do not wish to help the church win some battle against culture it senses it is losing. I prefer not to use that language, since the picture I have begun to paint of the church is that it is in and among the cultures of the world. Being *in* the world but not *of* it is not the language of war where there is a clear winner and a clear loser. The church itself cannot, from its own theological perspective, settle such things: such conclusive settlements are the prerogative and work of God alone. Rather, because I picture the church's relationship with culture as one of conflict where there is ongoing negotiation between various communities regarding the truth of their narratives, my goal is to assist the church in maintaining faithfulness as God's called and gathered people. Thus, as James Davison Hunter argues, the church is meant to embody a faithful presence, to be a witness to God's presence in the kingdom as it has been established and made manifest now, even if it is not fully manifest yet.[13] The church as a community is in perpetual relationship to the other communities and cultures that surround it. The nature of this relationship, as God has created it, is not one of retreat or vying for dominance, but of engagement through faithful presence. God has called people to be his witnesses from their local settings to the ends of the earth. This dissertation is an effort to articulate an ecclesiology that will help the church fulfill this calling.

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[13] James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of the Church in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2010), 237–48, 255–72.

PART I

AN ECCLESIOLOGY FOR A CHURCH IN CULTURAL CAPTIVITY

In the following three chapters, I want to articulate an ecclesiology for the church that allows me to account for it in a manner that one might apply the description "culturally captive" to the church. As a community that lives according to a story, the church demonstrates at various points within its own life a substantial discontinuity with its own story, reflecting instead the story of another community or culture. What is needed for this project then, and will be given in chapters 2–4, is an ecclesiology of the church as a community that lives according to a story.

Chapter 2 will introduce the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, a philosopher whose work has been adopted and appropriated by theologians for the sake of an ecclesiology that pays specific attention to the church as a community. I will lay out the key concepts from MacIntyre that will play a crucial role through the remainder of the dissertation and then begin to analyze various appropriations of those concepts that have been made by theologians. Some have appropriated his work holistically, taking up all of his concepts for an ecclesiology of the church as community. Others have appropriated his work for narrower discussions of church practices. I will take the time to show how MacIntyre has been fruitfully appropriated but also show the inadequacies of some of those appropriations in order to make way for how I will use his social theory.

Chapter 2 will also account for the church by understanding it as a community that has particular practices that guide its life. Those practices, it will be argued, are guided by its narrative. What is more, the church as a community has an ongoing existence that transcends the mere lives of its constituent members. Its story is passed down as a tradition through the

generations that constitute its membership. That tradition also captures and is carried in the practices of the church itself. The life of the community is constantly being renewed as new members are added and the story is passed along through the church's practices and by the articulation of the community's story amongst its members as they are initiated into the community's life and as they rehearse their own story throughout their existence in the embodiment of their tradition. Chapter 2 will lay out this account of the church as a community while also noting that others who have taken up such a MacIntyrian account have left room for his work to be appropriated differently.

Chapter three will be my own engagement and appropriation of MacIntyre by bringing him into conversation with the Lutheran theme of the *vita passiva.* The Lutheran theme is derived from a particular reading of the narrative of Scripture, which I will argue is the most appropriate reading of Scripture because it follows the pattern of how the disciples preached about Jesus and the kingdom of God in the New Testament. From the perspective of the Lutheran tradition, chapter 3 will explore the question of narrative explicitly, drawing from that narrative a particular manner of understanding the church. In other words, chapter 3 will ask about the story the church tells itself about itself and why that story is the appropriate story. I will argue that the church's story is one in which God is the exclusive agent responsible for the formation of the church, an argument that makes this dissertation unique for the kind of response the church must employ in its ongoing conflict and negotiation with culture, especially in terms of maintaining faithfulness and gaining freedom from cultural captivity.

Chapter four will be something of a bridging chapter. There is an inextricable link between considering the church as a community of formation and a characterization of the Christian life. This is especially the case in the Lutheran theme of the *vita passiva.* In other words, to talk about the church as the location of God's formative work is also to talk about the individuals upon

whom that work is effective. Thus, chapter four will perform a dual function. Not only will it elaborate the nature of church as the formative location God has chosen for shaping the Christian life, but it will also work to extend the Lutheran tradition in such a way that the topics of Christian Life and Ecclesiology are shown to overlap and be mutually informative much more than they typically have been treated in Lutheran dogmatics up through the 20th century.

The work in part 1 will anchor the analysis offered in part 2 within which the arguments about the church's cultural captivity will be articulated. Here in part 1 the unique contribution of this dissertation will be set forth in order that it may be extended and put to work in the analyses of part 2 wherein this dissertation does not merely add another voice to the many already criticizing the church in terms of its cultural captivity but articulates a further unique contribution—offering the church a means of overcoming its captivity.

CHAPTER TWO

ECCLESIOLOGY AFTER MACINTYRE: THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY

In a world characterized by the presence of a plurality of communities, each of which gives shape to the identities of its participants, the Christian community takes on a new and potentially profound theological importance as the people who embody a theological vision that sees the divine goal for humankind as that of being the bearers of the image of God who is triune.
Stanley Grenz

Ecclesiology After MacIntyre

Chapter one made the argument in brief, that in order to account for the church's captivity to culture, what is needed is an ecclesiology that understands the church as a community, much like the many other communities of the world, whether nations, social groups, tribes, clubs, etc.

As I noted in chapter one, the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre's social philosophy provides a unique and fruitful work that can be seen as a resource for ecclesiology. Indeed, for the last quarter of a century, his work has been used for just that purpose. I will spend time elaborating and evaluating some of those appropriations below. This will involve a critique highlighting the fact that some of the uses of MacIntyre lack a distinct theology of the work of God through the practices of the church for the formation of the individual and the body of Christ as a whole. That critique will come toward the end of the chapter, making way for my own appropriation of MacIntyre and a presentation of my own ecclesiology in chapter 3. For now, it is important to carefully sketch MacIntyre's work for the dual purpose of describing its role in this project and understanding why his construal of community is so important for the ecclesiology I will offer.

The kind of ecclesiological account I am giving here is not particularly new or innovative. For it, I am relying especially on Alasdair MacIntyre's account of community as found in *After Virtue*, an account that has been adopted by no small number of theologians because of its

fruitfulness for understanding the church in light of both its context within broader culture and in its own operations as a community oriented around a particular story.[1] In that MacIntyre's account is just so comprehensive, the community of the church as a social body can use his account's language and concepts in describing itself.

After the first edition of MacIntyre's *After Virtue* was published in 1981, its influence was quickly felt in conversations in Christian theology. The importance of MacIntyre's work has been well noted by Stanley Hauerwas, himself a dominant contributor in the conversation about the community of the church and Christian practices. A turning point in Hauerwas's own journey was, he notes, when MacIntyre published *After Virtue*. In a new introduction to his work *Character and the Christian Life*, which was included in a reprint after the publication of MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, Hauerwas admits, "MacIntyre has changed the agenda of contemporary philosophers and theologians by an almost violent redirection of their attention."[2] Hauerwas was not unaware of MacIntyre's work before *After Virtue*, but in Hauerwas's view that particular book was crucial to the conceptualization and subsequent conversation about the Christian life. Hauerwas has appropriated MacIntyre most significantly in his work on virtue, character, and the community of the church.[3] MacIntyre's work has subsequently been taken up by a multitude of writers and thinkers within Christian moral theology and narrative theology.

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[1] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

[2] Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1994), xv.

[3] In addition to the new introduction to *Character and the Christian Life*, see for example, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1983), and with William Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

Sketching MacIntyre's Account and Defining his Concepts

MacIntyre's project in the now classic *After Virtue* is an effort to account for moral discourse.[4] Stripped of all connections to the past from which the moral terms in use today have been handed down, MacIntyre argues that the culture of the North Atlantic world at best employs "emotivism" as a mode of moral discourse.[5] As Gerard Mannion has noted, MacIntyre's picture of the world in *After Virtue* is rather bleak. It shows that modern ethics is comprised of "too many competing and contradictory moral frameworks jostling for primacy. Many such frameworks had long since been rendered meaningless, having been divorced either historically, culturally, or intellectually from the contexts in which they arose and were applicable and relevant."[6] The discontinuity present in the modern situation has led to the impersonal kinds of language that characterize emotivism and that are being employed for personal ends. The

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[4] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. See also Brad Kallenberg, "The Master Argument of MacIntyre's *After Virtue*," in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre*, ed. Nancey Murphy, Brad Kallenberg, and Mark Theissen Nation (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity International, 1997), 7–29; Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 9–20.

[5] Emotivism is not the only account MacIntyre offers, but he does strongly suggest that it is the dominant mode of moral discourse. Alternatively, he notes, there is the will to power. Both discourses arbitrarily determine what passes for morality and thus are nihilistic. Emotivism ends up being rather confusing because it further evacuates meaning from moral concepts. The will to power is ultimately domineering since it is assertive and maintains a foothold by silencing other perspectives. For MacIntyre's account of "emotivism, see chaps. 2–3. For his account of the will to power, following Nietzsche, see chap. 9. See also Richard Bernstein, "Nietzsche or Aristotle: Reflections on Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*," *Soundings* 67 (1984): 6–29.

[6] Gerard Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: Questions for the Church in our Time* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2007), 193. Charles Taylor discusses this phenomenon as an immanentization of ethics in his *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1989), 94–95. With the loss of the old moral sources from Platonism and Christianity, we are left without any goods to point to outside ourselves and must look inward for our justification of moral choices. He notes, "I don't want for a minute to underplay the tremendous importance of this internalizing move of modern humanism, which recognizes no more constitutive goods external to us. It involves a veritable revolution in moral consciousness. It would be tempting to mark it by describing it as the definitive rejection of constitutive goods. Certainly it does away with these in the traditionally recognizable sense, for which Platonism and Christian theology provided the paradigm models." (94) Taylor goes on to say that the confusion in our age that MacIntyre describes is a result of our practice of moral discourse in the same manner as before, but with different sources that don't work to justify or uphold our discourse. "[M]odern immanent humanism has no more place for constitutive goods" and "nothing functions quite like the moral sources of premodern theories. But what remains true is that something still functions analogously." (95) The problem, as MacIntyre will point out in *After Virtue*, is that while something still functions analogously, in the end, it is actually not functioning at all but only attempting to function in an analogous manner. This is what he will call the failure of the enlightenment project.

language becomes entirely manipulative. As Luke Bretherton points out, the lack of a teleological framework in modern moral discourse accounts for the discontinuity. Having abandoned a teleological approach to human nature, moral concepts are left without content, uprooted and disconnected from their original historical context and use. Yet the same moral concepts are what continue to be used under the assumption that they can still have meaning. "[T]here is no way to relate coherently existing moral imperatives to the notion of human nature as it naturally existed because the teleological framework to relate them was abandoned. The ethical injunctions could not be derived in reverse from an appeal to the reality of human nature. Yet this is precisely what was attempted."[7] The failure of this attempt is what MacIntyre calls the failure of the enlightenment. That failure produced his famous antagonism between Nietzsche and Aristotle.[8] Either, following Nietzsche, morality boils down to a matter of the will because there is no means of determining morality on the basis of conscience, sentiment, or some categorical imperative; or, following Aristotle, we recover the kind of community that fosters moral discourse in a continuity between a teleological account of human nature and the moral injunctions meant to bring it about. MacIntyre's argument is for the latter. Recovering community for MacIntyre means recovering a sense of the human being as creature of virtue—one who participates in a community of practices who has as part of its own story, a vision, not only of what the right thing to do is, but also of what a human being is supposed to be.[9] This vision, along with the story that undergirds it, is handed down as a tradition through the

[7] Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness*, 12. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 55, writes, "The eighteenth-century moral philosophers engaged in what was an inevitably unsuccessful project; for they did attempt to find a rational basis for their moral belief in a particular understanding of human nature, while inheriting a set of moral injunctions on one hand and a conception of human nature on the other which had been expressly designed to be discrepant with each other."

[8] See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 109–20; Bernstein, "Nietzsche or Aristotle."

[9] See Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness*, 12.

generations of a community. MacIntyre argues in *After Virtue* that we have lost this sense of sociality. And because we have lost our ability to see ourselves as part of communities we have also lost our ability to adequately foster moral discourse, since moral discourse emerges from and finds meaning ultimately in the narratives of communities.

MacIntyre's account in *After Virtue* is rather broad. Fleshing it out more fully is not necessary for this project. The most important parts of his project for the purposes of this dissertation come to us through the specific concepts he uses when presenting his vision for the recovery of community, the latter part of *After Virtue*. Key to the argument herein will be the concepts "community," "narrative," "tradition," "practices," and "virtues." Each of these concepts has already been in play throughout the preceding introduction, as well as in chapter one.[10] In the following section, I will take the time to define and elaborate MacIntyre's concepts. It is important to note that for the reader, it is impossible to accurately define just one of these concepts in a manner that is faithful to MacIntyre's use of them without simultaneously involving each of the others. This phenomenon is native to MacIntyre's own articulations—in defining them for his readers he inevitably has to invoke the others.

What is most advantageous in MacIntyre's work for the present dissertation is his comprehensive account of communities. It has implications and suggests uses in line with

[10] While "virtue" plays a significant role in MacIntyre's work, it will not play one in the body of my work. I retain it in this chapter for the purpose of demonstrating how these key concepts hold together and necessarily implicate each other. For MacIntyre, virtues are produced through ongoing engagement in the practices of a community. Practices cultivate the virtues. Virtues are that which characterize human life in the form of *teloi*, or those characteristics toward which practices should aim practitioners so that they will embody the goals of the practice and thus be called virtuous. In this dissertation, I will adapt MacIntyre's account of practices to speak about the formative practices of the church, but not with an eye specifically on virtue. I am referring to practices as MacIntyre does, but I will not follow through with further conversation on virtue. Rather, I will spend most of the dissertation focusing on the phenomenon of practices, the process of formation and transformation, the role of God in these matters, and the stories that undergird a community's practices. For more on MacIntyre'e understanding of "virtue," see MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 191; Kallenberg, "Master Argument." Others have carried MacIntyre's work on virtue ethics into Christian ethics. See for example, most formidably the work of Stanley Hauerwas. For an exemplar work within the Lutheran tradition, see Joel D. Biermann, "Virtue Ethics and the Place of Character Formation within Lutheran Theology." (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, 2002).

various communitarian accounts that have taken a dominant and persuasive role in contemporary theological conversations. For example, George Lindbeck highlights the importance and fruitfulness of a communitarian focus in his *The Nature of Doctrine.*[11] His argument moves an account of doctrine away from a strictly cognitive world, in which doctrines exist as propositions grasped by the mind. His argument also moves an account of doctrine out of the realm of purely personal experience, such that doctrine becomes nothing more than an expression of that experience. Lindbeck's articulation of the cultural-linguistic model for conceiving of doctrine situates the community at the center, rather than the individual, so that doctrines are more like rules that function within the language of a Christian community, shaping their grammar (not conceived here as strictly spoken/written words, but also as an embodied way of living) such that they can be said to be living and speaking Christianly. The individual's life, and his or her evaluation thereof, is implicated within the community's life, to the extent that one cannot understand the individual Christian life outside of the Christian community of which those individuals are a part.

The adoption and adaptation of MacIntyre's account in the last quarter of a century or so reveals its usefulness beyond the field of moral theory within which it is fundamentally situated. His account of community has been found, as I noted, particularly useful for Christians attempting to give a fresh ecclesiology for the purposes of understanding the church in the modern world. Not only that, but those efforts have also aimed at helping the church understand itself—this is perhaps more valuable. So what is MacIntyre's account and why is it so useful?

MacIntyre's account of a community begins with the nature of a community as a group of individuals gathered around a shared story. Through a community's narrative, such questions can

[11] George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox, 1984).

be answered as, "why do we gather?" or "what does this particular ritual mean?" or "why do we talk that way?" or "why are we doing this activity?" Narrative for MacIntyre is that which makes sense of the life of a person or a community.[12] Persons and communities have lives that constitute a narrative unity—they have a beginning, an end, and everything in between fits within the boundaries of the beginning and end. Narratives make moments in the life of a person or community—that is, actions or experiences—intelligible. Narratives are also identity giving. Answering the question "who am/are I/we?" requires referring to the particular story in which I/we participate. For example, to say I am a Christian means referring the particular story of the Christian community, which subsequently also gives shape to my interpretation of my actions and experiences—they, as well as the practices of the Christian community in which I participate, are part of the Christian life.

The reader might wonder, why must narrative be so particularly important in this account? Might it not be better to talk about a community based on its beliefs or practices alone? Might a community be better understood by the values it expresses or the cause around which it organizes? Might a community be better understood by describing the kind of people of which it consists? While there is value in answering each of these questions, in fact whatever answers we might come to will derive in the end from a narrative. To answer anything about a community's values, its beliefs, its actions or its cause(s), the narrative by which they live must first be examined, even if that means it must first be unearthed. To say a narrative must be unearthed is simply to recognize that in some communities, narratives are not obvious. They are not necessarily told and retold in some explicit manner, as if they were sacred, canonical, or

[12] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chap. 15; Kallenberg, "Master Argument." L. Gregory Jones argues that MacIntyre uses various definitions of "narrative" that are at times, seemingly incommensurable. His argument, while helpful, is of no consequence for this dissertation, which makes use of perhaps the most general definition of "narrative" MacIntyre employs. See "Alasdair MacIntyre on Narrative, Community, and the Moral Life," *Modern Theology* 4

scriptural. But that may not make them somehow non-sacred. It may simply mean they have not been told explicitly and nothing more.

Stephen Crites writes similarly to MacIntyre about the narrative quality of experience. Regarding sacred stories—stories that are authoritative for a people and crucial in coming to identify a people as a unique community and for understanding their life—Crites states that such stories

> are anonymous and communal. None of our individualized conceptions of authorship are appropriate to them, and while rich powers of imagination may be expressed in them they are certainly not perceived as conscious fictions. Such stories, and the symbolic worlds they project, are not like monuments that men behold, but like dwelling-places. People live in them. Yet even though they are not directly told, even though a culture seems rather to be a telling than a teller of these stories, their form seems to be narrative. They are moving forms, at once musical and narrative, which inform people's sense of the story of which their own lives are a part, of the moving course of their own action and experience.[13]

In a similar way to the question of narrative, the reader might wonder why it is worthwhile to center our attention on communities. Why the concentration on the social? It seems that the simplest answer flows from the same point about why narratives are important. Individual lives, if they have a narrative shape, are necessarily implicated with a network of relations. There would be no narrative if there was no one else whose action it was necessary to understand. There would be no narrative is there were no one to ask, "who are you?" Further, without the need to explain or understand ourselves, there would be no question, "who am I?" Because of the fundamentally social nature of human creatures, a concentration on individuals or individuality—or work from that kind of atomistic perspective—eclipses the rich depth that can be had from the narratival ability to answer the above questions. The social nature of human

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(1987): 53–69.

[13] Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 65–88.

creatures has long been recognized, so my argument here is nothing new. It may nevertheless be a voice in the ongoing recovery of the significance of how narratives and the socialities within which we participate make us who we are. Even as the predominant attention to the individual was taking root in the early Enlightenment through the work of one of its greatest proponents, Immanuel Kant, one of Kant's critics and a generally counter-Enlightenment thinker was issuing the call not to forget community and the social nature of man. As opposed to the Enlightenment's, and particularly Kant's concentration on reason, J. G. Hamann was concerned with *reasoning*. Contra the Enlightenment thinkers, Hamann was concerned with man's inability to know the world as objectively as the Enlightenment believed. Reason was not merely some power man possessed that allowed him to have a kind of God's-eye-view of reality by means of the highly valued scientific method and philosophical reasoning. For Hamann, reasoning is something that man does, in relation to his world as he experiences it and as it forms him. This kind of situatedness is, for Hamann, inescapable. Gwen Griffith Dickson explains Hamann's conception of reasoning (as an activity) as opposed to reason (as a thing):

> [I]f it is viewed as one activity a human being performs, alongside others—as *reasoning*—then one must acknowledge that it is subject to the same conditions that pertain in all our other undertakings. It has a biography, and a geography; it is guided by our interests and desires. Most importantly for, Hamann, it is inextricable from the rest of our personality and being; not only our passions, but also our beliefs, and above all, our language.[14]

Dickson is highlighting that present in Hamann's work is all the marks of a community. Reasoning is performed alongside others—in fact, we learn to do it in community. As such, our communal situatedness carries in it a narrative because it makes up our biography. It will inevitably have a geography, for we each inhabit a place for a time, or we might describe our

[14] Gwen Griffith Dickson, *Johann Georg Hamann's Relational Metacriticism* (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 1995), 24.

lives as having taken place in a variety of places over time, such as where we were educated. In that sense too, the narrative takes on the character of a history—one of interactions with others in particular locations at particular times with particular durations.

Community then is a central feature of human life and is thus a central feature for this dissertation. MacIntyre's concept of community will prove expedient in offering the ability to understand the church as a social body amongst other social bodies; unique in its narrative character just as every other body has its own narrative character; empirically identifiable through its practices—the embodiment of its story. We should say lastly, and perhaps obviously, that communities, like individuals, have a history in time—they exist in a particular time and have a particular duration: we speak about these by means of the community's narrative.[15]

Referring to an exemplar community, Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, noting the specific narrative of Christianity and its centrality for the life of the community called the church, write

> By telling these stories, we come to see the significance and coherence of our lives as a gift, as something not of our own heroic creation, but as something that must be told to us, something we would not have known without the community of faith. The little story I call my life is given cosmic, eternal significance as it is caught up within God's larger account of history. '*We* were Pharaoh's slaves..., the Lord brought us out...that he might preserve us.' The significance of our lives is frighteningly contingent on the story of another. Christians are those who hear this story and are able to tell it as our salvation.[16]

Hauerwas's and Willimon's argument flows quite in line with MacIntyre's preference for conceiving of life as a quest that is definitively constituted by a narrative arc.[17] Individuals and

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[15] Nancey Murphy and Brad Kallenberg helpfully account for the necessary and renewed interest in communal accounts in their article "Anglo-American Postmodernity: A Theology of Communal Practice," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003), 26–41.

[16] Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resdient Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 55. Emphasis in original.

[17] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 219.

communities might sense that they are on a trajectory, but knowing what that trajectory is only comes from the story by which they are formed as a community.[18] This is a point made by the philosopher Richard Kearney, a student of Paul Ricoeur. In other words, to know who you are (either as an individual or a community) you have to be told. Our story is "something that must be told us...The significance of our lives is frighteningly contingent on the story of another." As MacIntyre says succinctly, such knowledge comes through the narrative by which the community lives, "for the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity.[19] Kearney's words pull these thoughts on identity and narrative together when he says, "In order to have a sense of identity, people need to recognize that this involves a *narrative* of identity." Kearney goes on to define "narratives of identity" for communities as "the tapestry of the stories they tell about themselves and other people tell about them and that they inherit from tradition."[20]

All of this points to one of the significant movements of contemporary sociology, that is, in the last quarter-century there has been an increasing turn toward relationality, and a subsequent recognition, now in many ways taken for granted, that humans are social creatures. Thus, as MacIntyre writes about the centrality of a community's narrative for giving identity to the community, it should also be recognized that the same narrative functions to give identity to the individuals that constitute the community. The community, in narrating the lives of individuals in a certain manner, is forming the identity of those by whom the community itself exists.

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[18] Richard Kearney references Paul's Ricoeur's point that by telling stories, communities are created. "Telling a story...is the most permanent act of societies. In telling their own stories, cultures create themselves." Paul Ricoeur, "L'histoire comme récit et comme pratique." Quoted in Richard Kearney, "Between Imagination and Language," in *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 35–58.

[19] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 221.

[20] Richard Kearney, "Stony Brook Colloquy: Confronting Imagination" in *Debates in Continental Philosophy*, 261–83. Emphasis his.

MacIntyre's work then, is what is generally defined as communitarian because of its focus on relationality and the social nature of human beings, as well as the centrality of narrative for identity formation.[21]

Narrative moreover forms and informs the practices of the community, including the very gathering of the community itself. The narrative makes the practices of the community intelligible and their life together coherent. The practices of a community, according to MacIntyre, emerge out of the shared story by which the community identifies itself. Practices, as MacIntyre defines them, are

> any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.[22]

Practices are aimed at the *teloi*, the goods, goals, and/or ends presented in the community's narrative. In fact, practices develop for the very purpose of being means toward those ends. Alexander Lucie-Smith comments regarding the inextricable link between a community's narrative and the practices that emerge from it,

> [H]ere, in a nutshell, we see the fundamental point about narrative thinking: a narrative proposes a shared set of goods. Indeed the practical reasoning done within a community that shares a narrative and is constituted by it will depend on having a common good. For practical reasoning is about means, not ends and presupposes agreement about ends; it involves reasoning together with others within a determinate set of social relations. Again, we see the link between practical reasoning and

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[21] For a bit more elaboration on these points, see Stanley Grenz, "Ecclesiology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003), 252–268.

[22] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187. He goes on to say, "Tic-tac-toe is not an example of a practice, nor is throwing a football with skill; but the game of football is, and so is chess. Bricklaying is not a practice; architecture is. Planting turnips is not a practice, farming is. So are the enquiries of physics, chemistry and biology, and so is the work of the historians, and so are painting and music."

> community in the assertion that self-knowledge is necessary for practical reasoning and that this self-knowledge is socially achieved.[23]

Further, it is important to say more about those *teloi*, the goods present internally in a practice, the kind that are fostered by a practice, as opposed to external goods. In short, internal goods are predicated as responses to the question of what kind of person should one become according to the narrative of the community. If a person is to be brave, practices will foster that kind of characteristic. MacIntyre uses the example of chess. The internal good of playing chess is the joy of playing the game well. Other internal goods might include "the achievement of a certain highly particular kind of analytic skill, strategic imagination and competitive intensity"[24] External goods on the other hand, take the form of utilitarian "reasons" for engaging in a practice. They are some kind of "extra" benefit. An external good of a particular practice might be understood as a reason for engaging in a practice such that one might procure a good that is outside of it—like luring a child to play chess through the reward of candy (or for players of chess, wins, prestige, status, or money). Kelvin Knight is helpful for reiterating the difference.

> A child may be enticed to learn to play chess by the lure of candy, which is a good external to the game. By contrast, "the achievement of a certain highly particular kind of analytic skill, strategic imagination and competitive intensity' and, more generally, of excellence in what 'the game of chess demands" are goods internal to chess as a practice. What is most valuable in chess, MacIntyre suggests, is not the production of wins, nor of such external "goods as prestige, status, and money," nor candy, and nor can it be the process of effecting any of these. Rather, what is valuable is the activity itself; or, to be more precise, what is valuable is progress in the practice, both collective and individual.[25]

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[23] Alexander Lucie-Smith, *Narrative Theology and Moral Theology: The Infinite Horizon* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 24. See also, Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), 94–95, 107–8.

[24] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 188.

[25] Kelvin Knight, *Aristotelian Philosophy: Ethics and Politics from Aristotle to MacIntyre* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2007), 147.

As goods internal to practices are found in the narrative of any community, it is important to point out that for MacIntyre, the narrative of a community is often not limited in scope but functions as a veritable story of everything. Not all communities must have stories so comprehensive. For example, a rock band need not necessarily have a grand story of everything to make sense of its own existence and itsown practices. It may borrow or make purchases on a story of everything told by other communities, but it need not have one of its own. But here we are talking about a different kind of community. The main difference is that MacIntyre has in mind communities that have a significant historical past, a memory that is rehearsed in its identity-giving narrative, as well as a hoped-for future, which is partly visible and intelligible through the community's practices. To be a member of a community of this sort is to be on a trajectory, which has a history as well as a perceived future, both of which extend beyond the limited life-span of individual members.

To talk about a community as having an historical trajectory through time is to speak not only of its own narrative and practices, but also of the tradition through which that narrative is passed down. Communities, it can be said, are living traditions—they are the embodiment of an historical tradition of practices, all of which are made intelligible by their unique narratives. MacIntyre defines a tradition is as follows: "an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute the tradition."[26] MacIntyre offers even more clarity about this in a later work, entitled *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, where he describes a tradition as

> an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflict: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition...and those internal, interpretive debates through which the

[26] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.

> meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and by whose progress a tradition is constituted.[27]

As a socially embodied argument that extends through time, a tradition carries on a particular story through a set of practices. That story is a story of everything that, as an argument, is meant to be the very lens through which, for those who adhere to the story, reality is understood. Thus according to MacIntyre's argument, there is a plurality of traditions, each of which are carrying a unique story of everything, vying for allegiance, in competition, and co-influencing each other all the time. Any community, as a living tradition with a unique narrative, offers but one interpretation of reality within the conflicting plurality of grand narratives.

I have tried thus far to write in a way that demonstrates the inextricable relationship between each of the three MacIntyrian concepts this dissertation will employ. One cannot separate tradition from practice from narrative—each is intrinsically bound up with the others. The concepts cannot be made sense of without reference to each other.

Having said all this regarding MacIntyre's concepts of practice, tradition and narrative, it is important finally to say something regarding his concept of a community, since it is so central to this dissertation when accounting for the church. It is important to articulate as well as possible what constitutes a community in MacIntyre's terms. MacIntyre's basic understanding of a "community" is that it is a group of people who through their lived material practices (their embodied life in the world) carry on a tradition. That tradition in turn is understood through a certain narrative, one that accounts for all of reality and therefore is determinative in a normative manner for how a community lives and thus establishes practices. The church itself is just this sort of community.

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[27] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1989), 12. See also Jean Porter, "Tradition in the Recent Work of Alasdair MacIntyre," in *Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. Mark C. Murphy (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003), 38–69; Brad Kallenberg, "Master Argument."

Theological Sociology à la MacIntyre

As I noted above, MacIntyre's social theory can be considered a theological account of the church. In this way, I mean to transcend the boundary between theological and sociological language. MacIntyre's account can be considered a Christian theological sociology because it follows from and accounts for the very same story the church tells about itself. In its creation by God, the church is a community that eschatologically exists in the midst of the present. As such, traces of God's future order in the New Jerusalem are present in the church. The church as a community was called forth by God from the very beginning. After the creation of Adam, God said it was not good for man to be alone. Thus the community of humanity emerged in the creation of Eve. In this prelapsarian reality, humans were not only in community with each other however, but also with God himself, as the narrative tells us he walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the Garden. In the eschatological plan revealed in Scripture, God intends for nothing less than the restoration of that very same kind of community after the Fall—God will once again dwell amongst his people. A theological sociology following this narrative of the church will be offered below. It might better be understood however as a sociological ecclesiology. That is, it is an account of the church as the community that God has established.

Since the Christian community is the focus of this dissertation, it makes sense to follow the above account of MacIntyre's project and his concepts to speak about the community of the church through MacIntyre as a lens. I will be doing so in an effort to begin putting MacIntyre's concepts to work to offer an ecclesiology that will serve as a foundational frame of reference for the remainder of the dissertation. Their value for accounting for the nature of the Christian community raises to clear visibility one of the issues at stake in this dissertation. Without MacIntyre's understanding of community, I would not be able to articulate adequately the close connection of the practices and traditions involved in the various narratives that are competing

for cultural dominance, especially in the life of the unique community of the church as it seeks to foster the specifically *Christian* life of its members. MacIntyre's sociology allows for the construction of an ecclesiology that subsequently enables the analysis and assessment of the church's life in order that it might be judged as authentically living according to its own narrative, or not. Whatever life is fostered by the church is carried in its practices and tradition, according to its narrative. My concern in this dissertation is that the church is fostering a Christian life through its practices that embody a tradition (or more than one) that is not its own. Thus it is also appropriate to say the church is living according to a story that is not its own. I will spend some time in chapter 3 elaborating the uniquely Christian narrative, which will stand in contrast to the cultural narrative I argue is the very narrative that the church is unwittingly fostering in its members. For now, I want to carry on with the development of a theological sociology, or "ecclesiology as social theory" following MacIntyre's account of community.

Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon's account of the Christian church reserves a critical place for community. The concept of community functions as a fundamental element of their ecclesiology. Thus they are primary examples of theologians who employ a "theology as social theory" methodology, accounting for the church primarily in their writings as a sociality. In their *Resident Aliens*, they begin their account by saying, "American Christians have fallen into the bad habit of acting as if the church really does not matter as we go about trying to live like Christians."[28] Yet for Hauerwas and Willimon, the possibility of living as Christians (for them, that means appropriating the truthful story of God in Christ and following Jesus) in some sort of bare, individualistic manner simply does not exist. Why? Because to live outside the community of the church is to live in a manner that evacuates the meaning of the story that gives

[28] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 69.

one an identity and tells the true story of one's place in the world. It is to betray and deny the very tradition and narrative that has made the person, assuming instead that living as a Christian can be done as if the Christian life was defined according to some moral principle or set of rules to follow, all of which can be done by one's own deliberative will. To follow this path is to embrace what Hauerwas and Willimon rail against earlier in *Resident Aliens*, that is, the spirit of autonomy that dominates the Western imagination.

Furthermore, they argue there is a much simpler and more practical reality we must consider. To live as God calls Christians—as a witness to his work and as one who does what Christ does—is impossible outside of the community of the church for the simple reason that doing what God calls us to do is difficult. "Practically speaking," Hauerwas and Willimon state, "what the church asks of people is difficult *to do* by oneself."[29] Concerning this same issue, L. Gregory Jones makes much of the necessity of friendship in the Christian life.[30] It is through friendships and relationships that the Christian life is learned, passed on, and struggled through. Community carries a particular *ethos*. Community is in fact the very condition of possibility for the passing down of the tradition, the living out of the Christian life, and a true witness to/as Christ in the world. Without the practice of walking together, there will be no such thing as the church.[31] There will be no "body" of people who share the same story, only perhaps distorted atomistic occurrences of it.

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[29] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 71–72.

[30] See L. Gregory Jones, *Transformed Judgment: Toward a Trinitarian Account of the Moral Life* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1990), 75–86.

[31] It is important to note here that the Lutheran Confessions speak to this very issue, but in a way not often noted specifically. As the Augsburg Confession (Article VII) states, the church is "the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel." Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 42.While preaching and administration of the sacraments typically garner most attention, the community of gathered believers is generally ignored. The sacraments and preaching are also the very means of the creation of the community of the church. God uses them to bring about the community. Often, reflection on Article VII focuses so strongly on

The account of the church as a community here is already revealing the heavy influence of MacIntyre, especially in terms of how the concepts of narrative and practices are invoked. For Hauerwas, Willimon, and Jones the church is that community that is identifiable through the practices that are visible to others and which thus serve as a witness to the story that constitutes the church as a particular community. This should not come as a surprise, since, for example, Hauerwas's work is most interested in focusing broadly on questions of character and moral issues.[32] Portions of Hauerwas's work developed into discussions on the practices of the Christian community, the very location that served as the center of the Christian life and Christian character because it was the location within which Christians participated in common practices under the authority of a common story.[33] For Hauerwas, the very idea of becoming a member of a community is founded on the sense that "becoming" is a process of conversion, a process that involves participation in practices. Membership is determined by participation and habituation in practice. Thus, Hauerwas can say (with William Willimon), "Acquiring practices is another way to say *conversion.*"[34]

Perhaps Hauerwas makes most use of the MacIntyrian argument that there is a connection between understanding how a community lives and the narrative that underlies and constitutes a community's identity in a brilliant article entitled, "A Story-Formed Community: Reflections on

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preaching and the sacraments that they can be misunderstood as ends in themselves, rather than the means God uses for bringing about a particular end: the creation of his people.

[32] See Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life, and the later essays in Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1977).

[33] Hauerwas's corpus is quite large, and MacIntyre's work looms behind much of it. The works of Hauerwas cited throughout this dissertation are exemplars of where MacIntyre's influence is clearly visible. Nevertheless, those works are not an exhaustive bibliography of those places wherein MacIntyre's influence can be found.

[34] Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live: Exercises for Christian Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 80.

Watership Down."[35] In his reflections on the various communities of rabbits that are the focus of the fictional narrative *Watership Down*, Hauerwas highlights the moral significance that narrative has for giving an account of the lives of those who live in community. He points out that *Watership Down* helps us to see that the very nature of a community is not centered on its polity and practices, its organizational principles and rules, but on a story, to which all the rest is subordinate. Communities are not simply given. They do not simply exist as organized bodies positioned to achieve some particular goal. Rather, they are always already groups of people who are "inheritors and exemplifications of a particular tradition" that is best "understood as an extended argument, since living traditions presuppose rival interpretations."[36] Whatever goals or organizational schemes that might in some way be critical to the life of the community, those elements emerge from and are understood by the community's story.

L. Gregory Jones's work continues in this same vein. Particularly in his *Transformed Judgment*, Jones sounds very much like Hauerwas in his appropriation of MacIntyre regarding community and narrative. Jones writes, "Friendship involves growing morally and becoming virtuous in ways that form and deepen people's lives, conceptions of their ends and the friendship itself." He goes on to focus on the primacy of friendship as constitutive of a certain kind of community, and thus is an integral practice to the moral life. Noting three reasons, Jones states,

> Friendship is integral because (1) human life is fundamentally relational, (2) people come to know themselves through friends, and (3) the community that emerges provides a conversation through which particular conceptions of how people ought to

[35] Stanley Hauerwas, "A Story-Formed Community: Reflections on *Watership Down*," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham: Duke University, 2001), 171–99.

[36] Hauerwas, "A Story–Formed Community," 174.

> live are redefined and extended. The practice of friendship is both indispensible to moral formation and an important constituent of the moral life itself.[37]

Similar here to Hauerwas's argument in "A Story-Formed Community" is the close connection to the narrative of a community that can only be carried on and handed down within community, amongst persons in relation. Friendship then is going to have to be considered constitutive of community. For as Jones argues, the bare idea of community, while harboring a space for friendship and the intimacy that might characterize it, does not even imply that friendship is going to be the location for the kinds of close social interaction through which such things as stories, mutual criticism and encouragement, and the learning of a particular way of life (which is the handing down of a tradition) can occur. Yet all of these points are exactly what Jones wants to bring out in his MacIntyrian ecclesiology. Jones's argument here is also a helpful extension of MacIntyre's work for it brings MacIntyre's concept of community further into a concrete instantiation to which reflective practitioners can relate—that is, he is talking about a characteristic of the Christian community of which readers might have direct experience. In fact, Jones's argument might be a basic reason for why small groups can be effective, especially when they are an organic outgrowth of mutual friendships amongst members of local Christian communities.

Taking MacIntyre even further, the ecclesiological work of the Christian practices movement[38] focuses intensely on the practices of the Christian community. In a very simple

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[37] Jones, *Transformed Judgment*, 86. Note the close connection to the comments of Kearney and Ricoeur above. See footnotes 18 and 20.

[38] The "Christian Practices Movement" is led by the work of Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra. It is linked with the "Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith, a Lilly Endowment project based at Valparaiso University." The name "Christian Practices Movement" can be found in various places to reference the efforts of this project, as well as more specifically the books and collections of essays that have emerged in association with the project. For example, see Michael G. Lee, "Adolescent Catechesis in a Culturally Diverse Context," *Catechetical Leader Magazine* (Nov/Dec 2007): 14–15; and "RIG: 'Shaping Communities' as a Christian Practice and Popular Religion: Their Implications for Latino/a Religious Education in the United States" (lecture, Religious Education Association, November 2007),

manner, Craig Dykstra notes just how central practices are to the Christian community and those who wish to be a part of it. He says, "people come to faith and grow in the life of faith by participating in the practices of the Christian life."[39] Defining his specific view of Christian practices, he goes on to add,

> [P]ractices are those cooperative human activities through which we, as individuals and as communities, grow and develop in moral character and substance. They have built up over time and, through experience and testing, have developed patterns of reciprocal expectations among participants. They are ways of doing things together in which and through which human life is given direction, meaning, and significance, and through which our very capacities to do good things well are increased. And because they are shared, patterned and ongoing, they can be taught. We can teach one another how to participate in them. We can pass them on from one generation to the next.[40]

Notice how Dykstra's work incorporates the teleological language that MacIntyre employs in his own definition of practices, referring to the "goods" inherent in practices. The good of the Christian life, and thus the practices by which it is constituted, is to form a particular kind of person. Dykstra writes about this using the language of "moral character and substance." Christian practices each have an aim, a *telos*, which puts the practitioners on a certain trajectory. There is a goal to the Christian life. Christians are being "made." Practices are formational. A particular people is being created and re-created as practices endure and are passed on from generation to generation in the community of the church.

As a community, the formation of the church is an ongoing phenomenon as God works in and through Christian practices to create his people. This work extends through history, being carried in the life and practices of the church by those who participate. As a product of such

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http://www.religiouseducation.net%2FResources%2FProceedings%2F21Lee2007REANov1-4RIGpaper.pdf&rct=j&q=%22christian%20practices%20movement%22%20dykstra%20bass&ei=wu1BTZnLMcH7lwfiqdwL&usg=AFQjCNEWISDLB_5sAsjy5Ofa9F5rUCoEyg&cad=rja (accessed January 27, 2011).

[39] Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*, (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1999), 66.

formation, the Christian community fundamentally becomes the embodiment of its own story. Communicated in and through the practices of the church, the church's narrative shapes its life and is carried forward in a way that others are initiated into the story, resulting in a passing down of a heritage or a history, which takes the form of a *traditio.*

Thus, the church also understands itself as handing down a tradition. This self-awareness was present from the earliest days of the church. They understood themselves as bearing witness to a particular story, and taking up the practices involved in that story. It is in this sense that Paul reports the story through which the practice of the Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus, then repeated and rehearsed in the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 11). The church in Acts 2 is described as having its own unique way of life to which the members were committed (Acts 2:42–47). That way of living emerged out of the very story with which they identified—one of sacrifice, concern, and care for the other, The writer of Jude writes of the faith that was entrusted to the people of God, the church (Jude 3). Within the church's sense of its own tradition is wrapped the story of the church's life as being created by God through his gathering, as well as a kind of imitation through which the Holy Spirit was bearing fruit in them as the very body of Christ. That imitation takes on the form of certain kinds of practice, such as the sacrifice and sharing noted above. Yet in addition to that invitation, other practices of the church are passed down as they were instituted by Christ himself, like baptism and the Lord's Supper mentioned above. These practices have made their way into the present life of the church through the ongoing work of the Spirit faithfully forming Christians in and through them, and through his simultaneous gathering and constitution of the people of God through them. Generation after

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[40] Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith*, 69–70.

generation, God in the Spirit works in this way to continue to create and re-create, begin and perpetuate his community.

This tradition is handed down through various structured ways, but two stand out in particular: liturgy and catechesis. Simply put, both are vehicles by which the faith is passed on. One is primarily a set of practices through which rituals form the collective memory of the people of God, a narrative memory that is rehearsed and recited regularly as God's people gather together. The Word of God is preached in these gatherings and the Lord's Supper celebrated, both of which create and sustain the people of God. Catechesis is the practice of handing down the faith through teaching and formation, the close contact of a mature teacher with students wherein the stories of the people of God are retold, just as they are in liturgy, but also elaborated, weaved together through connections of significance and meaning. In catechesis the practices of the liturgy can be explained and expounded upon as well, further forming the imagination of those who participate in those very practices to the extent that they can be engaged in more fully with the attendant effects of theological (catechetical) reflection.

Thus far then, I have offered a sociological ecclesiology that presents the church as a community that has its own story. It lives an embodied life, which takes the form of practices that emerge from and find their intelligible meaning in that story. Those practices function to make the participants the very kind of people that the community's story envisions. Finally, the practices are ongoing, to the extent that life in the community transcends the boundaries of generations and geographical localizations, and has come into the present age as a tradition, passed down historically, and leaving in its wake an historically linked, embodied way of being in the world—the very community called the church. This kind of account parallels the church's account of itself as it is retold in its own narrative. Created and called forth by God, the church as God's people live a particular kind of life in this world (they are a peculiar people) and their way

of life is continually being perpetuated through the work of the Holy Spirit in his ongoing presence in the life of the church—through its practices and through the power of the Word. God has made for himself a people, and he has them on a path toward a future that he has ordained. The identity of the church is wrapped up in God's own story then, a witness to his work and presence in the history of the world up to the present, an instrument of formation and transformation, a vision of the age to come and community as he meant for it to be.

The kind of ecclesiological account I am giving here, which describes the church as a community, is crucial to the further examinations I will undertake later regarding how Christian practices are both at times formative in manners that are perverse according to their originary *teloi*, or faithfully effective to them. This ecclesiology is critical for being able to analyze and assess such circumstances. Yet this work will come later. For now however, it is necessary to provide an evaluation of the various appropriations of MacIntyre's work that have garnered the most attention within contemporary theology. The guiding question here, now that I have presented an ecclesiology à la MacIntyre, is to what extent it is successfully offered in other writers, versus how I will employ it later. In other words, if MacIntyre's work in social theory has already been appropriated by others as a sociological ecclesiology, what makes my own work different, and perhaps better?

Appropriations and Uses of MacIntyre in Contemporary Theology

The Fruitfulness of MacIntyre

The point of using MacIntyre's account of a community is that it is fruitful for developing an ecclesiology that focuses attention on the lived, material practices of the church. Jonathan R. Wilson has advocated for the necessity of such an ecclesiology, saying, "[W]e must simply learn to think of the church's activities as practices in MacIntyre's sense," because, he notes, "Many, if not most, of the church's activities today lack this understanding of practice. We do many things

as a church, but we would find it difficult to give an account of how those activities reflect our conception of the human good and how those activities constitute the church as a community."[41] The fruitfulness of MacIntyre for this purpose is already present in the work of Stanley Hauerwas for example, or L. Gregory Jones. What arises in their appropriation of MacIntyre is a methodological framework in which ecclesiology pays explicit attention to the contexts of the church's life. Earlier ecclesiologies have lacked this explicit attention, a lack that became in part an impetus for the work of theologians like Hauerwas or Jones.[42]

In the section above, I showed how Alasdair MacIntyre's social theory could be appropriated theologically. In this section, I will evaluate various instances of MacIntyre's work that take the shape of "theology as social theory" through the uses and appropriations of him in contemporary theological conversations. I have already acknowledged some of MacIntyre's biggest fans in showing how his work plays out by citing the writings of Hauerwas, Willimon, Greg Jones, and the Christian Practices movement. I will take some of them up further here for the purposes of making two particular critiques: first, most appropriations of MacIntyre do not employ his work holistically, that is, they focus too intensely on one element of his social theory for the sake of appropriating it theologically/ecclesiologically; second, too often in theological

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[41] Jonathan R. Wilson, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: Lessons for the Church from MacIntyre's* After Virtue (Harrisburg: Trinity International, 1997), 62–63.

[42] Such ecclesiologies might be called essentialist or idealist. The Lutheran Confessions and dogmatics work with just this kind of ecclesiology. By "essentialist" I mean that the church is often understood as existing primarily as some sort of formal community, invisible empirically, but nevertheless real, which in some sense, individual congregations "participate" in or resemble. Such ecclesiologies are, for my purposes, too formal. For further discussion on this topic, see Nicolas Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), 28. For an example of a theologian who articulates the consequences of doing essentialist or idealist ecclesiology versus understanding the ecclesia as community, see Christian Scharen, "'Judicious Narratives', or Ethnography as Ecclesiology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 (2005): 125–42. Scharen argues that idealized accounts of ecclesiology do not account for the "real" church in terms of its actual, empirical existence. Ethnography provides a counter to idealized accounts of ecclesiology, thus allowing churches to better understand themselves according to their concrete contact with the life of their own community. While I will not explore ethnography here, Scharen's argument resonates with my (and Hauerwas's and Jones's) distantiation from formalized accounts of the church.

appropriations of MacIntyre the uniqueness of the Christian community is lost—it ends up being a sociological reduction: the church looks predictably like one more community among other communities. I will elaborate both issues below.

Fragmented Appropriations of MacIntyre

Some of those who have taken up MacIntyre's work for their own ecclesiological articulations have ended up using only pieces and parts of MacIntyre's social theory. The result has been less than helpful for understanding how their work gives a comprehensive account of the Christian community. I will grant, however, that such an account was not necessarily the intent of some of those whom I will highlight below. However, this only tends to be detrimental to their project, since it leaves more questions than answers regarding the meaning or significance of certain concepts within their project.

One example here is the Christian practices movement. As I noted above, Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass appropriate MacIntyre's concept of practice for their project, but understand their appropriation to be distinguished from a simple conceptual identification—that is, they see their understanding of practices having a theological grounding that is not present in MacIntyre. Bass distinctly points out that MacIntyre's work, as it stands, is not adequate for theological appropriation. "Dykstra's and my own work on practices began with Alasdair MacIntyre's account of social practices, but the theological turn we have taken marks a significant break with the concepts developed there. The 'goods' that concern us are not 'internal' to a practice but are oriented to God and God's intentions for all creation."[43] Dykstra and Bass

[43] Dorothy C. Bass, "Ways of Life Abundant," in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 20–41. It is unclear why Bass wants to distinguish the sense of practice she and Dykstra employ from MacIntyre on the particular point of the "goods" of practices, especially through her denial that Christian practices are not about "internal" goods, but the goods of God's intentions for creation. If MacIntyre's sense of practices is about what kind of person must emerge as a result of engaging in those practices (and thus what kind of community or people is to be

conceive of particularly "Christian practices" as those "things which Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in light of God's active presence for the life of the world."[44] This definition attempts to decisively fit Christian practices into the active relationship with and response of a Christian to God. They go on to speak of common Christian practices like hospitality, rest on the Sabbath, and embracing death well, noting that when Christians engage in these practices, they are engaged in the imitation of God (*imitatio Dei*). Dykstra and Bass subsequently assert that Christian practices are ultimately sharing "in the practices of God"[45] Yet what is missing here is any solid conceptualization of exactly *how*. There is no narrative construal, except a vague sense that God is in control of reality and that he is working for the good of humanity or to promote human flourishing. Nicholas M. Healy's construal of their work clearly captures the vagueness of their proposal:

> As Bass and Craig Dykstra note, a practice may be "almost any socially meaningful action," though they themselves say an activity qualifies as an ecclesial practice "only if it is a sustained, cooperative pattern of human activity that is *big enough, right enough, and complex enough* to address some fundamental feature of human existence."[46]

Christian practices in their writings seem strangely to be held in a positive light only because they are "healthy" things in which humans should engage. While this may nevertheless be true, there is no further justification or explanation of the place of Christian practices in the life of the

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formed), and if practices are very much related to the teleological character of a community's story, would this not suggest that the internal goods of Christian practices are precisely the kind she (and Dykstra) would be after? Would they not desire practices that form a particular people? But this is one of the very reasons their use of MacIntyre is fragmentary and unclear. Their work seems, at this very point, to be lacking the kind of explanatory power that the narrative of a community offers to practices. Dykstra and Bass undoubtedly adopt the Christian narrative, but one that seems to lack a central place for the role of the church and how God is working through practices to *do* something in the world.

[44] Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," in *Practicing Theology*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 13–32.

[45] Dykstra and Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," 23.

[46] Nicholas M. Healy, "Practices and the New Ecclesiology: Misplaced Concreteness?" *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5 (2003): 287–308. Emphasis mine.

community, in relationship to its narrative, or as the extension of its tradition—that is, the presentation of Bass and Dykstra does not holistically hold together MacIntyre's social theory, but only focuses on practices. Yet, as I have argued above, MacIntyre's theory is necessarily holistic in that each of the elements is inextricably linked. Dykstra and Bass may agree here, but their work does not bear this out.

Another engagement with the thought of MacIntyre is that of James William McClendon.[47] To state it as briefly as possible, McClendon's view of the church is that it is a witness in the midst of society. For McClendon, the church, as well as the rest of the rebellious society, is constituted by powers and principalities that are themselves constituted in the various practices of the various communities. The church, as a distinctive community, will have different practices than the rest. The church is also vulnerable in its practices, as they are corruptible, to the extent that they can be just as rebellious as the rest of society. The church's witness in the world happens as Christian practices witness to the future reign of God when every power and principality will be re-ordered to God's Order as they were originally created to be. It is possible, in McClendon's view, that the church's faithful practices might actually affect the practices of other societies positively to the extent that they might fall more into their ordered places within creation.

McClendon's work is another helpful use of MacIntyre's thought. Like the work of all those noted throughout this chapter, McClendon's work pushes for an understanding of the church as a community; his work is intentionally pushing against a particular kind of individualism.[48] He argues for a sense of practices which shows that Christians are not simply

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[47] James William McClendon, *Ethics*, vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 167–82.

[48] McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 163–4.

acting independently and atomistically in the world, but that they are a part of something bigger than themselves, formed and practicing *with* others. But a similar question can be asked of his work as that of Dykstra and Bass: in what way is God specially involved in the practices of the church? McClendon's work seems too reductionistic toward a particular sociological account of practices, rather than a theological one. Commenting on McClendon's work, L. Roger Owens points out, "[I]t is hard to see how or whether God himself is involved in the powerful practices of the Christian community."[49]

Thus in McClendon and the Christian Practices Movement, we see fragmented appropriations of MacIntyre that arise as a result of using only portions of his social theory. While the various concepts MacIntyre uses have a certain kind of explanatory power in themselves, they cannot simply be appropriated singularly, without reference to the others. Just as is visible in my definitions of them above, they can only be understood within a matrix of their own interrelationality. To borrow one concept for describing an aspect of the Christian community without elaborating, at least in a basic manner, how the Christian community can be accounted for in light of the other concepts produces an incomplete ecclesiology because it is not a holistic enough account.

One Community Amongst Communities: The Sociological Reduction

There is a certain fear that adopting sociological accounts in theology will be reductionistic to the extent that the church will come to appear as just one community among others, the only distinguishing factor being that it has its own unique story. In that way, the church can be considered a community as MacIntyre would define one, yet it is faithful to the church's own narrative, which tells that the church has been gathered into the end of all things from the very

[49] L. Roger Owens, *The Shape of Participation: A Theology of Church Practices* (Eugene, OR: Cascade,

beginning by the hand of God himself in the work of the Holy Spirit. God is constantly working to bring about community between himself and his people, from the beginning of the Scriptural narrative to the end. While my own account will not fall into the reductionistic tendencies of which we should be wary, others have perhaps moved too far in that direction, even if not intending to or being aware that they have done so. One of the key factors for noticing this tendency is through the way such ecclesiologies characterize God's role in the life of the Christian community.

In a recent article in *The Christian Century*, William Willimon lamentingly recounts that perhaps too much has been made of a concept within his collaborative work with Stanley Hauerwas. In both *Resident Aliens* and the subsequent *Where Resident Aliens Live*, they regularly traffic an idea of "practice" without a clear concept of God.[50] What was lacking in particular was an answer to this question: how can church practices be accounted for in a way that is not reductionistic, that is, only sociological (or anthropological) in nature? Hauerwas and Willimon seemed to merely borrow MacIntyre's concept of practice, which can be understood from a theological perspective as just so reductionistic.[51] It lacks a theology, construing a basic anthropology of agents engaged in practices as members of societies that are constituted by an institutionalized form of said practices. Willimon, in noticing the significant conversations that have emerged around the idea of practices within the Christian life (some of which were highlighted above), is concerned that his own contributions and those that make up the current

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2010), 56.

[50] William Willimon, "Too Much Practice: Second Thoughts on a Theological Movement," *The Christian Century*, March 9, 2010, 22–25.

[51] Yet their project is not fragmentary in the manner for which I have criticized Dykstra, Bass and McClendon. Hauerwas and Willimon, as I noted variously above, also understand the church as having and living by a central narrative and passing on its ways of life according to that narrative in the form of a tradition.

conversation are lacking in a divine theology. What is not accounted for is how the church is the location of God's work.

Echoing the sentiments of Willimon, part of my fundamental argument is that some of the uses of MacIntyre lack a distinct theology of the work of God through the practices of the church for the formation of the individual and the body of Christ as a whole. This is why they cannot sufficiently function as an ecclesiology. For all of the talk of how practices are important, formative, or how, through them Christians participate in the life of God, there is no distinct talk about the church as God's place of formation. As a result, the church becomes just another community amongst communities—nothing is truly unique about it beyond its own particular story.

For example, Dorothy C. Bass writes regarding Christian practices, "Christians practice these practices not for our own sake but *for the good of all*, and not by our own power or vision but *in response to God*, whose grace and call provide this way of life."[52] It might seem here that Bass has plenty of room for God, since he is clearly affirmed here and in the references I made of her work with the Christian practices movement above. But this seems something of a ruse. The writers of the Christian practices movement are never really clear at all about what God's role is in their account. At times, it seems that God's work was finished in Christ, and now the work is up to us (as a response). Or it could mean that God is still at work, but we cannot definitively say where or how (in the Christian community, outside of it, or in some transcendent manner distinct from the created world). Regarding the work of the Christian practices movement, L. Roger Owens has pointed out their "way of talking about practices—'in light of and in response to [God]'—suggests the activity of God for the life of the world is happening somewhere other than

[52] Dorothy C. Bass and Susan R. Briehl, *On Our Way: Christian Practices for Living a Whole Life* (Nashville: Upper Room, 2009), 12. Emphasis in original.

in the practice of the Church."[53] Thus, the church might simply be one instance, one location of God's special work. Who is to say, in light of the proposal of Dykstra and Bass, where those other locations might be? At the same time, it would seem that a Christian theology of creation would want to affirm that God is at work in other places beyond the church, but Bass and Dykstra do not account for such a creational theology in any concrete way. It is thus difficult to determine what their presuppositions might be in this regard. Nevertheless, the church as it appears in the writings of the Christian practices movement looks like just one more community among others.

The work of Stanley Hauerwas and L. Roger Owens however, offer more comprehensive possibilities for accounting for the uniqueness of the Christian community, so it is necessary to say more about their work here. Indeed, L. Roger Owens's work proves to be a uniquely holistic ecclesiology that understands the church to be a community in MacIntyre's sense. Owens's book, *The Shape of Participation*, argues for "a theological account of ecclesial practices appropriate to the claim that in the practices of the church the church is practicing its own identity as the community that God is sanctifying by taking it, through those very practices, into a participation in God's own life as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."[54] Owens's work is quite successful at this endeavor specifically because of the participatory ontology he advocates.[55] It is strongly Christological, relating particularly to the historical life and work of Jesus Christ, and further, by maintaining the active work of the three persons of the Trinity in the economy of salvation. For Owens, a theology of church practices holds that "the church's participation in God is none other than Christ's practicing himself as the embodied practices of the church, in the

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[53] Owens, *The Shape of Participation*, 59.

[54] Owens, *The Shape of Participation*, 60.

[55] Owens's work holds together specifically because of his participatory ontology, especially through his

Spirit, on behalf of the world. Moreover, this practicing, this participation, has a particular visibility, because it is the Jesus of the Gospels who practices himself in the church; this visibility of the form of Jesus shows the world the shape of its own *telos* in God."[56]

What is important about Owens's contribution is his sense of *telos* in regard to MacIntyre's concern with virtue in relation to practice. Here is where Owens's work is able to appropriate MacIntyre more holistically, as opposed to the fragmented appropriations I noted above—to have a *telos* already implicates a practice (or set of practices) within a particular story and the ongoing life of a community (or *polis*). Owens's work situates Christian practices within the very story the church articulates—that of God's work for the redemption of humanity and the re-creation of all things through Christ in the power of the Spirit. Those practices that find their meaning in the narrative of the Church also find their *telos*, which they are able to achieve by the virtues inherent in their practices. That is, each practice, aimed as it is toward a particular end is like a quest (which MacIntyre says is definitive of human life), thus Brad Kallenberg concludes, "if human life is a quest, then human virtues are those qualities that assist it."[57]

Nevertheless, however much I see Owens's work as important and faithful to MacIntyre, I still want to distance myself from him. While his work is one of the best methodological examples of theology as social theory because it adopts MacIntyre so well, my reason for distantiation can be briefly stated. Owens comes closest to seeing the church as the location of God's work in his participatory construal of the church. Yet because of his participatory ontology, the church is not really a *location* but a sort of divinized extension of God himself.[58]

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interaction with Gregory of Nyssa as well as Maximus the Confessor.

[56] Owens, *The Shape of Participation*, 183.

[57] Brad Kallenberg, "Master Argument," 7–29.

[58] Owens's participatory ontology attempts to affirm the materiality of creation in his discussion earlier on about the embodied church. Nevertheless, there are various critiques of participatory ontologies, to the extent that

Thus, while Owens's contribution is strong in the sense that the church is really understood as a community, it is almost as if the church itself is subsumed and eclipsed behind the ontology Owens adopts as necessary for accounting for church practices. Participation dominates his picture in the end. God is *too* present in his picture, such that the importance of the worldly community fades away and the agency of the people of God is too easily forgotten. This is important, because if God is entirely in control of church practices—if church practices are actually a sort of direct participation in the life of God—then Owens is lacking a certain explanation for why and how church practices can become corrupt, how they can be culturally captive. If they are a direct participation, it seems that preaching for example, would always be perfectly orthodox, transformational, and so on. Yet this is not the case. The kind of strongly participatory account offered by Owens does not seem to leave a space for understanding this disparity.

Finally, I need to discuss the nature of Stanley Hauerwas's work in this regard. It might seem strange that I would object to Hauerwas's ecclesiology as not having a place for God, and thus the community of the church ends up looking like any other community through his work. Yet at least in his earlier work, he has been challenged on just that issue. He even admits as much at one point.[59] Throughout his work Hauerwas seems to affirm the importance of the

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they risk overemphasizing transcendence over immanence and materiality, they open a space for speculative theology to the extent that reality is accounted for with an almost mathematical comprehensiveness without an epistemic humility, and that in them the economy of God and biblical history (not to mention explicit reference to the testimony of Scripture) is elided over against an ethereal symbolic and metaphorical order. For a criticism of the role of participatory ontology in the Radical Orthodoxy movement, which seems to be of the sort toward which Owens leans, see James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 185–229. For a criticism from a Lutheran against the participatory ontology that underlies the Finnish Lutheran School (which is similar to that of Radical Orthodoxy), see Dennis Bielfeldt, "Response to Sameli Juntunen, 'Luther and Metaphysics,'" in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. Karl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 161–66.

[59] Hauerwas recounts a conversation with Barth scholar Nigel Biggar, wherein Biggar noted that he simply did not see a place for God in Hauerwas's work. While initially surprised, Hauerwas confesses he eventually began to think that Biggar was right. See Stanley Hauerwas, "The Truth about God: The Decalogue as Condition for Truthful

church—he even comes close to asserting that it is God's agent—but at best it is an assertion and his account is never elaborated.[60] Hauerwas has been pointed up as problematic on the issue of not having a distinct place in his theology for the agency of God in the church.[61] Such is the case perhaps because of his more general theology of God's active role in the world in combination with his distinctively strong emphasis on nonviolence. Allow me to provide a brief explanation.

Hauerwas writes, in reaction to Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Laborem Excercens* and the subsequent endorsement and extension of it by the Catholic Bishops, that the pope is dangerously close to making work to be idolatrous in that it is construed as man's act of co-creation as one made in the image of God.[62] What makes Hauerwas afraid is the sense that man's activity is understood to be some means of securing meaning for his existence, some means by which to direct history, some means by which man is accomplishing the will of God. To abstractly reflect on one's work as co-creative with God, Hauerwas argues, is tantamount to demonic temptation toward idolatry. It is idolatrous because it is a position which risks man construing himself as somehow responsible for how history plays out.[63] In the end, Hauerwas

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Speech," in *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 37–59.

[60] For example, see *Resident Aliens*, 83.

[61] See Joseph M. Incandela, "Playing God: Divine Activity, Human Activity, and Christian Ethics," *Cross Currents* 46 (1996): 59–76.

[62] Stanley Hauerwas, "Work as Co-Creation: A Critique of a Remarkably Bad Idea," in *Co-Creation and Capitalism*, ed. John W. Houck and Oliver F. Williams, C.S.C. (New York: University Press of America, 1983), 42–58; Incandela, "Playing God." The pope's position which Hauerwas is arguing against is summarized in Candela, who cites the pope's encyclical *Laborem Excercens*: "The word of God's revelation is profoundly marked by the fundamental truth that man [sic], created in the image of God, shares by his work in the activity of the creator and that, within the limits of his own human capabilities, man [sic] in a sense continues to develop that activity, perfects it as he advances further and further in the discovery of the resources and values contained in the whole of creation."

[63] Hauerwas makes the distinct point that man need no longer be "driven by the assumption that we must be in control of history, that it is up to us to make sure things come out right." Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 87. The point here is legitimate and thus his concern with idolatry is fair. Nevertheless, it arises because Hauerwas sees man's responsibility as one who simply "rests" in the creation that God has already completed, perfected, and called Good. There is nothing more to do. Hauerwas, "Work as Co-Creation." Rather, for overcoming the problems of the world, man is simply to exist in a space where the miracles of God are possible in his midst, miracles that allow man simply to be witnesses of God through nonviolent love. Work on the other hand, risks actually being violent. It risks getting in the way of God's saving work. Incandela points out that this is the position of Yoder, which Hauerwas

wants to argue, contra someone like Luther on vocation, that God is not actually active at all in the labor of man.[64] Perhaps this rigid position stems out of Hauerwas's constant fear that the church will continue to perpetuate the Constantinian project of "world-building," but as James Davison Hunter notes, it goes "too far to suggest that the life and work of Christians in the world have no spiritual significance outside of explicit enactments of church life."[65] If this is the case, it seems an easy extrapolation to say that this explains Hauerwas's lack of any sort of account of how God is active through the church at all. He seems to affirm God's activity in the church, as if, since he is a Christian, he just has to take this fact for granted. But he does not work it out in any satisfactory detail. Perhaps there is yet a further reason for this.

Hauerwas's position here is closely connected with his lack of a place for forensic justification. Rather than declaring humans righteous for Jesus's sake, Hauerwas argues that what God has done in Christ is merely provided "us with a path to follow."[66] The responsibility for getting on that path seems to rest entirely on the volition of a human being. If justification for Hauerwas is that God has provided the path to follow, sanctification is "but a way of reminding

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endorses and carries forward. Incandela, "Playing God." Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 106. While this risk may always be present, nevertheless, Hauerwas has a limited view of how and by what means God works. In fact this is the very problem. Hauerwas will concede that God's people work, in that they initiate others into their shared story. But their work in the world is relegated to a place of passive witness. This stems it seems, out of Hauerwas's constant fear of violence that still attends Constantinian projects. Yet it is not entirely clear how seeing the life of a human with its attendant work as co-creator is a life that is inevitably violent. Even it were so at times, the fact that God chose feeble human beings upon whom to build his church is a testament to the fact that God can work through imperfections to bring about his purposes. Paul testifies to this very truth (e.g., Romans 8:28–30; Ephesians 4.11–13).

[64] While Lutheran's might not use the language of "co-creator" (although they may not be averse to it), we find the language of "co-operation" in Wingren's explication of Luther's thinking on vocation. Further, here Wingren construes Luther's theology according to a theology of the creation as God's work and according to a theology that understands God to be hidden behind the workings of the world. Thus, bringing the two together, Wingren explicates Luther's understanding that humans act as the mask of God. See Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (1957; repr., Evansville, IN: Ballast, 1999), 137–38.

[65] James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2010), 234.

[66] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 94.

us of the kind of journey we must undertake if *we are to make the story of Jesus our story.*"[67] The problem here is the volitional move to take up God's story as one's own, without first undergoing God's gracious work of conversion in which God himself engrafts a person into his story. This lack of a proper place for forensic justification, as well as the related problem of not accounting for the church as a place/people through which God works results in Hauerwas's ecclesiology being problematic for the kind of ecclesiology that emerges from MacIntyre's social theory.

But if the church is, as I have been suggesting thus far, a community called together, gathered, created, made, and formed by God himself, an ecclesiology that accounts for the church as just such a community must have a place for the role of God as an agent working in and through the church's life to accomplish those things. There must be a place for talk of God's transformative—killing and making alive—sort of work. There must be a place for talk about God's formative work in bringing good fruit from good trees. But this kind of ecclesiology is not articulated by Hauerwas. Hauerwas's construal of the Christian community does not seem to make it unique in any sort of theological sense. It is merely just another community, and works just like every other community in terms of membership concerning both initiation into the community's story, and engagement in the practices that flow out of the community's story. Nevertheless, if the Christian community is indeed unique, part of the nature of construing how members of the Christian community are formed must include a biblical account of conversion that is lacking in Hauerwas.

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[67] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 94.

For Hauerwas the church is where the formation of the Christian community happens. It is initiation into that church that begins the process of formation.[68] Yet, formation for Hauerwas is the work of the church, not God. The church is the only agent. But if the story of the Scriptures is true, construing humans after the Fall as diametrically opposed to the ways of God, Hauerwas's account of conversion or initiation is just plain wrong. Hauerwas's picture of the church as a peaceful community seems to betray a human anthropology that construes human beings as always perpetually attracted to the good, the beautiful, the peaceful. And for Hauerwas, the church is the peaceful community, the kingdom of God the "peaceable kingdom." Thus, human beings, in Hauerwas's view, would simply be attracted to the community of the church because peaceableness is just *better* than anything else. It seems to have some sort of irresistible appeal. Yet this is not the kind of anthropology the Scriptures offer. From a social perspective, Scripture construes something more of a war of all with all, including humans as enemies of God. If this is the case, what can really convince me to join up with the church? Where is the turning point? Why would a human being who is fundamentally opposed to God and predisposed to violence decide to make someone else his Lord and follow his nonviolent example, much less cooperate with others in some sort of true peacefulness, sacrificially, pacifistically, and not in the selfish mode of a social contract? How could this happen of one's own free volitional act? Such a move, a turning, can be nothing but the ultimate denial of and death to self of which Scripture speaks. But such a thing cannot happen without God, as the Scripture also says. The new birth that results comes only from above. Denial of and death to self are moves of the Holy Spirit in man. God is the agent, man is acted upon, grace is given and received in faith. Man is made new, liberated to follow the call of God. Thus, here is where forensic justification becomes the central

[68] See Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens*, 83; *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 95.

issue. Yet it is also here that the claim is made that God is at work in the community of the church. It happens through the proclamation of the Word, one of the distinct practices of the church. In that proclamation, God kills the old man and raises him to new life. It is this new creature who, led by the Spirit, engages in and is formed by the practices of the church and with that community lives as Christ.

It is this transformational account that is missing from Hauerwas. Hauerwas's position, as I noted above, construes the community of the church as just another community. His ecclesiology cannot do anything more because his construal of the church does not make it unique. His lack of a place for forensic justification or the agency of God in the church is the problem, leaving the church to appear to function like any other community, rather than a community that only can be created, formed, and sustained by God himself. The Christian life is not merely one of formation or habituation into a certain way of life, unique because of its "character." Before that is even possible, a different sort of conversion than Hauerwas allows is necessary. Conversion is not merely initiation into a set of practices.[69] God must kill the old creature and bring forth a new creature. The righteous creature who comes forth into new life is the one who is made to live as Christ through and in the life of the church.

Such an anthropology and account of God's action would allow for the kind of ecclesiology I have begun to develop here and will carry further in the next chapter. There, I will offer a more concrete ecclesiology that emerges from a distinctly Lutheran theology and which is thus primed to be a unique contribution to the current conversation on sociological ecclesiology, church practice, and formation. Namely, I will articulate an ecclesiology in which God is the one who is at work in the church forming his people, and this work is passively undergone by those

[69] Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live: Exercises for Christian Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 80.

in the Christian community through their participation in the practices of the church. This same theological account will lend credence to the extension of MacIntyre I will employ through further engagement with cultural theory. This will allow me then to take up in later chapters the issues of cultural captivity and the practices of the contemporary church. Only through this ecclesiology as social theory will I be able to analyze and assess the nature of the church's cultural captivity.

CHAPTER THREE

ECCLESIOLOGY AND THE PASSIVE LIFE

The experience of faith is painful.
Oswald Bayer

In the previous chapter, I argued that appropriating MacIntyre's social theory for ecclesiology was a fruitful endeavor. I showed various models of appropriations of his work present in recent theological literature. I also concluded that for various reasons, none of those appropriations were quite adequate either because MacIntyre's work was often not adopted holistically (e.g., Dykstra and Bass), or because the church could not ultimately be accounted for as a unique community formed by God himself and used as his location for the formation of his people (e.g., Hauerwas, Owens). In this chapter, I will present an ecclesiology that appropriates MacIntyre differently, and does so toward the very end of construing the ecclesia as God's chosen instrument for formation of the Christian life.

Which Biblical Narrative?

According to MacIntyre's understanding of community, narrative is a central concept both for identity formation and for making intelligible the practices of a people, that is, the means by which a "people" can be identified concretely in the world. But what narratives warrant attention in this dissertation? How, given the various narratives in play within the church's life, can this dissertation work with a particular one as opposed to any of the others available?

Within modern theology there are an abundance of narratives that claim to be biblical and offer us helpful theological accounts that emphasize certain concerns that connect with related concerns present in modern culture. Each of them may be legitimately biblical in their own way.

Kevin J. Vanhoozer has coordinated a collection of some of these theological accounts that are often visible in contemporary theology. In his *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, there are articles on Feminist Theology, Communal Theology, Deconstructive Theology, Post-liberal Theology, and others. Each has its own unique method for engaging the Scripture; each then brings out or works with a particular narrative account.[1]

Beyond those covered in Vanhoozer's collection, other theological accounts on offer within contemporary theology present themselves for broader consideration. Take the example of liberation theology, with its focus on justice and a predominant concern for the poor and oppressed. Liberation theology reads the biblical narrative in a manner to the extent that we can see certain features emphasized. Jesus as *Christus Victor* features prominently in such theologies. The narrative of liberation theologies tends to follow the contours of the Exodus story in which God released the captive Hebrews from the bondage of slavery to the Egyptians. Within such theologies, it is only a short typological step to characterize Christ as the ultimate freedom fighter. The narrative of liberation theology can easily be characterized in its most basic sense as immanent because it is most concerned not with an eschatological future, but one in which all who are oppressed might experience freedom within the bounds of history. Daniel Bell highlights their immanence by focusing on their efforts toward relevance and legitimation according to contemporary cultural and intellectual fashions. He notes that liberation theologies, with their concern for justice, are at work attempting to appear credible in and to the modern world. "It is frequently asserted that Christianity is credible only insofar as it underwrites the

[1] Vanhoozer's project is meant to cover the most recent theologies, and even more specifically, those characterized as postmodern. Thus his collection should not be understood as exhaustive. Furthermore, however much his collection represents contemporary theological concerns, some of them are rather marginal and attract a limited amount of attention. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003). This dissertation intersects specifically, if not explicitly, with interests present in two of the areas listed: Communal theology and Post-Liberal theology.

pursuit and promotion of (secular) justice. Thus, theological accounts often amount to effort to prove that Christianity is up to the challenge, that it is a faith that does (secular) justice."[2]

Another example would be the widespread modern use of the Bible as a collection of rules for how to live, an example that constitutes a modernist systematic account of theology. Reflecting on one of the formal problems with this generically labeled "modern" (perhaps meaning current, perhaps modernistic) theology, Peter Leithart comments, "Formally, the Bible is not a 'theology text' or a 'catechism' that arranges doctrines in a systematic order. Paul's epistles have often been treated as mini-textbooks, but they are manifestly not. They are epistles, encyclicals, addressing specific issues in the churches."[3] These theologies take different forms, but the mode of reading the Scriptures and the method of deriving such "doctrinal" content is the same across the modernist theological offerings. One might think here of the Princeton Biblicists as examples, or perhaps generically speaking, fundamentalism. Some might argue that construing the Bible as a rulebook is a legitimate interpretation of the biblical narrative following from the covenant that God made with his people, emphasizing the Law given as fundamental to that covenant. With the Law, the obligation of those who are called God's people is to live in a particular manner in the world. Thus, the Scriptures can be read as God's delivery of a rulebook of sorts. The Scriptures have been given by God to his people as a means of telling them how to live in the world. To live life as God has called is understood as the means for salvation for his people. Even with the arrival of Christ, the goal of life is still to follow rules. While the

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[2] Bell's example serves as another instance of how the narrative of the church founds its practices to the extent that it can be said to be captive to culture. See Daniel M. Bell, Jr., "Deliberating: Justice and Liberation," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 182–95. Bell's argument points to the use of liberation theology in a manner that is meant to correlate with modern cultural concerns and forms of justification. While I do not agree with such methods, the very point of correlationism is to justify theology to the world (particularly the academy) and is thus considered a legitimate use of the biblical narrative.

[3] Peter Leithart, "Against Theology," in *Against Christianity* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2003), 43–68.

forgiveness of sins is recognized and the gift of eternal life clung to, the rules become, in part at least, about believing in the right way or maintaining a certain type of worship practice.[4]

What is needed for this dissertation is a different account. It must be one which, as Hans Frei has put it, is "fitting" for accomplishing the goal of this dissertation—that is, accounting for the church and its cultural captivity—as well as "fitting" to the biblical narrative itself.[5] While the accounts above can certainly be argued to be biblical, they cannot account for the church in the manner that this dissertation requires. In order to account for the church as culturally captive, what is needed is a biblical account that recognizes the church as created by God. The church must be accounted for as a creation by the hand of God himself, for God is the agent who has made his people. Such an account must understand the people of God as "chosen." To be chosen is to experience the work of God since choosing is how God makes his people. This argument about the creation of the people of God by God's very hand will show itself important for the later discussion of the church's cultural captivity for one substantial reason: the church's creation will be construed as a passive event.

In opposition to the above examples—each of which would make the claim to being "biblical"—I want to offer one which seems to better fit the biblical narrative in accounting for God's people in this manner—that is, specifically in terms of his formative work and his choosing of a particular people. Choosing is God's doing. Making a people is what the biblical narrative tells us God is doing.

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[4] On the issue of believing in the right way, especially in terms of fundamentalism, see Rodney Clapp, "How Firm a Foundation: Can Evangelicals be Nonfoundationalists?" in *The Nature of Confession*, ed. Timothy R. Philips and Dennis L. Ockholm (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 31–52.

[5] See Hans Frei, *The Eclispse of the Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University, 1974). See also Frances M. Henderson, "The Logic of Belief and the Content of God: Hans Frei's Theological Grammar." (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2010).

Deriving Theology from the Biblical Narrative

Following from Luther's theology of the Scripture, James Nestingen writes that the Scripture's message "does not require the services of an interpreter but, instead, interprets all attempts at interpretation. The final interpreter, then, is not the scholar, the preacher, or the piety of the pious, but the Spirit of the risen Christ using human words to breathe God's creative power into a broken world."[6] Luther believed that the Scriptures would always interpret the interpreter. Thus theology will always be *derived*, rather than assumed ahead of time and then forcing the biblical message to cohere with the assumptions.[7] In this sense, speaking very simply, the Scriptures should be understood as an address, a Word of God to his people—not a collection of facts and doctrines or the vindication of a secular philosophy. The narrative I offer will demonstrate how the theological account of the church that follows simply falls out of the narrative. The narrative itself tells us how we should see the world, and particularly for this dissertation, how we should understand the church, especially in terms of its existence as a creation of God himself. The story I will tell is a story that functions as the particular narrative of the people of God, noting specifically their creation through his agency.

Speaking specifically about the agency of God in creating and sustaining the community of the church will do two things: on the one hand it will show through the church's own narrative that it is indeed a unique community amongst communities because it has been brought into existence through a force outside of itself in a way no other community has. On the other hand, it will serve to undergird the presentation of the church as a community of practices in which

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[6] James Nestingen, introduction to *The Captivation of the Will*, by Gerhard O. Forde, ed. Steven Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1–21.

[7] Of course, this statement ought to be nuanced, especially with regard to the hermeneutical circle. At best, I ask my reader to assume I work with such a nonfoundationalist approach. But there is not space to work that out here.

people are shaped and formed in a passive manner; it is formation that is passively suffered by God's people through his agency. I want to emphasize here the sense that this is a "passive" formation, a making that is "undergone" or "suffered" as a work of God himself. The work of God is what makes both the community and the manner of formation unique. Thus, through the narrative below I will set up my further conversation about the nature of formation in an engagement with Lutheran theology. My reflection in later chapters will show how the church has become culturally captive as it has been influenced by other cultures.

Suffering God's Formative Work – Narrating the Passive Life

One might choose from a number of places within the Scriptural narrative to begin by telling the story of how God has called unto himself a people. Tracking the significance of his work in this regard—not simply through making reference to individual stories, but taking them into account as part of the economy of salvation as well as working through their interrelationality regarding theme or typology in the biblical narrative—is the kind of work that could take the length of a book within itself. Here I want to point out a few instances within the narrative of Scripture—smaller narrative moments representative of and contributing to the whole—that exemplify God's movement of choosing and making for himself a people. I am not telling the story as perhaps someone else would. I am not beginning with Genesis and ending with Revelation, yet I am not leaving them out entirely either. Rather, I am beginning with Jesus and reading the rest of Scripture around him, focusing especially on how the New Testament writers did the same. Nevertheless, my intent is to tell a short version of the story of God's formation of his people for the purposes of outlining its shape, framing the ecclesiological narrative that is central to my work, and highlighting the particular kind of phenomenon that characterizes the birth and sustained existence of the church in the power of God as passively undergone by his people.

The story I will tell is the biblical story. It begins with Jesus and how he was preached. In that way, it starts with how the New Testament writers understood what they were a part of as the newly created church. It also shows how the Old Testament stories of God's work should be understood and how the New Testament presents the church in ways that look like what God was doing in events of the Old Testament—that is, when Christ is seen as the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament, the church is seen as the people of the new covenant in concert with Israel, but a people that now include more than Israel. As Christ is the fulfillment of Israel, the church inaugurated by Christ's authority is now understood as the chosen people of God through whom God continues the work he began in Israel—choosing a people, setting them aside for himself, making them holy, and sending them as his witnesses into the world. Further, from this story, a particular theology can be derived, which I will elaborate below.

The Story

In Acts 2, Peter preached a sermon to those gathered in Jerusalem on Pentecost. He told them that they had acted complicitly with wicked men and crucified Jesus Christ, the Lord. God had sent Christ to them, and Peter spoke of how his identity as the Son of God was presented for them to see in the mighty acts Jesus performed—miracles, forgiving sins, and raising the dead. Yet these acts were unacceptable, and Jesus was accused of blasphemy and handed over to be crucified, all in line with God's set purpose. His crucifixion was performed by evil men with the encouragement of those gathered in Jerusalem to whom Peter was preaching. But, Peter told them, God vindicated the one who was crucified, raising him again to life because death could not hold him. Peter spoke as a witness to this very fact—he had met, spoke, and dined with the Risen Christ. He told them of how their own Scriptures foretold of these events surrounding Jesus. The Messiah would not see decay. Death would not have the final word. The Holy One would be King over Israel and Lord over all. In resurrecting him from the dead, God made Jesus

both Lord and Christ. Jesus is the fulfillment of their Scriptures. Those who heard this message "were cut to the heart." They were confronted with the fact that they had crucified the Messiah himself, the Lord and creator of all things. They were confronted with their complicity in killing God.

The proclamation of Peter was enough to put them to death. Could there be any other consequence for killing the Lord? They cried out to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" They were pleading for a way out. They were backed into a corner with nowhere to turn, confronted with their heinous acts, facing down the death dealt by their own sins. Yet Peter responded, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38–39). Peter called for repentance, an enactment and embodiment of the death of the old creature. He called his hearers also to be baptized, a further embodiment of one's death, but a subsequent raising to new life (Romans 6:3–14). Many received Peter's message and were baptized. And so we see the beginning of the church. Peter's message functioned to do God's work—it killed and it made alive again. Peter's proclamation was a matter of God's choosing and making for himself a people. Echoing God's promise to Abraham, Peter proclaimed, "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:39). Those who were once the enemies of God and murderers of Christ became his disciples. God's transformative work created the church.

Peter's sermon recounts the life of Christ, casting the very moment of his preaching within the narrative arc of God's plan from the beginning, culminating in Jesus, and confronting the Jews who were present with Peter. God revealed to Adam and Eve of his plan of redemption (Genesis 3). That plan was carried out by God through the choosing of a particular people—

Israel—through whom alone God spoke, his message carried into the world, and his will accomplished. The Israelites were promised a king and Jesus Christ came announcing he was that king. He performed miracles, healed the sick, raised the dead, turned water into wine, and did many other things, including much that was not recorded (John 21:25). Jesus referenced the very Scriptures of the Jewish people in making his claims, saying that he was the Anointed One of Israel and the Son of Man. Claiming the very identity and authority of God, Jesus announced the reign of the Kingdom of God and called for the repentance of God's people. It is by that very authority, and as a demonstration of it, that Jesus gave signs of his identity through miracles, healing, and even forgiving sins.

But Jesus's claims about himself were viewed as a frontal assault on the authority of the religious leaders of the Jews. Worse yet, Jesus openly criticized the religious leaders for withholding from God's people the very gifts God had meant for them to administer. He criticized their false righteousness and their empty religiosity, even astounding them by breaking the most sacred rules of Jewish life by "working" on the Sabbath. The religious leaders denied his authority and identity and they rejected his work. Jesus was an offense to what the Jewish authorities thought was the primary reason God had established the law for the lives of his people. Jesus embodied a way of life that exemplified the law but which they thought utterly careless of the law. Who could forgive sins but God alone? How could Jesus forgive the sins of those who were not accepted within Jewish society, but with whom Jesus chose to associate and for whom he said he came? And how could they be forgiven as Jesus declared, for such forgiveness had not been procured through the proper rituals? Jesus was thus accused of blasphemy and handed over to be put to death. He was called into question and condemned on the very point of his claim to be king of the Jews, the awaited king of Israel and Son of God. He

was condemned to death and he was crucified. After his death, his own friends and followers left him, some running away in fear. It seemed that Jesus was defeated.

Three days later however, Jesus emerged from an empty tomb. He appeared to his disciples and taught them over a period of forty days. In that time Jesus showed his disciples that he was the true king of Israel—God's chosen people—through their very own Scriptures. In his resurrection, Jesus's claims were vindicated and God's mission was then handed on to the disciples, whom Jesus authorized to carry it out, sending them to baptize, teach, and make disciples in his name. Because of this, the church believes that Jesus Christ is the true Son of God, and the story handed down to the church in the Scriptures is the authoritative account that the church tells in its preaching and teaching.

This same story of proclamation is repeated in the book of Acts when Peter stands before the Sanhedrin. Just as Jesus confronted the religious leaders, Peter calls the members of the Sanhedrin the builders who rejected the cornerstone. The cornerstone was Christ, and their rejection resulted in Christ's death (Acts 4:8–12). Yet in this moment the response was different than that recorded at Pentecost. Peter's words fell on deaf ears. There was no repentance. Such is the possibility with the phenomenon of preaching. As the Scriptures testify, God in his mercy chooses whom he will choose and hardens whom he will harden (Romans 9:15).

Again this central narrative of God's work in Christ to make a people is repeated in the words of Stephen when he stood before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:51–53). Philip repeats it before he baptizes the Eunuch (Acts 8:26–39). Paul repeats it in Athens' Areopagus (Acts 17:22–34).

The letters of the New Testament continue to show that Jesus is a fulfillment of the Old Testament. Abraham was promised something great. Through his seed the Messiah would come. That promise was established in a covenant with Abraham's son Isaac. Just as Christ declared regarding himself, the Apostle Paul reads Christ as the fulfillment of that covenant (Genesis

17:19, Galatians 3:16–26). David was promised a king who would take on his throne. Jesus is made both Lord and Christ, king over Israel and over all (Psalm 16:8–11, Acts 2:25–35). The narrative and preaching of the New Testament tells the story of God's economy of salvation, of his promises, righteousness, mercy and grace just as it is rehearsed in Nehemiah 9 or Psalm 136, just as it was told for the first time throughout Deuteronomy (see particularly Deuteronomy 4:32–40).

This story of Jesus is the one that was preached by the apostles, the one that accounts for Jesus' death, his resurrection, and the one by which many became his disciples. It is the story that is read as a fulfillment of the Old Testament promises—Jesus is that fulfillment. Those who became his disciples and entered into the new covenant by his blood are the church, those whom God has called and made his own, just as he did with Israel. In the words of Gerhard Forde, those who became Jesus's disciples were "caught in the act" of crucifying Christ through the preaching of the apostles.[8] In and through such preaching, they experienced a death. God worked death in them through confrontation with sin, yet simultaneously the mercy of God was also worked in his choosing and calling of them.

As the apostle Paul recounted, when he met the law and was confronted with his sin, he died. The death that is worked in such confrontation is the result of God's alien work. He terrifies sinners. But God does not stop there and neither does the preaching of the New Testament. The crucified One was resurrected and made Lord. And God would impute to those who believed in his name the very righteousness of the Son, because Jesus died and was resurrected *for us*. This is God's proper work. He chose to save the world through the Son (John

[8] Gerhard O. Forde, "Caught in the Act: Reflections on the Work of Christ," in *A More Radical Gospel: Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism*, ed. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 85–97.

3:16–17). He justifies the terrified. He raises to new life those who have been put to death. Those who became Jesus's disciples then followed him as Lord. It is through them that God worked to bring about the ongoing fellowship of the Christian church. The preaching that they received they also carried on and preached throughout Jerusalem, Judea, and to the ends of the earth (Acts. 1:8).

I want to return to the Old Testament for a moment and focus on the concept of choosing in order to further expand this story of Jesus and the church. In the twelfth chapter of Genesis we meet Abram. God interrupted Abram's life with a call—he was ordered to leave everything and go to the land God will show him (Genesis 12:1). God promises that from Abram and his family, a great nation will come. We know from the remainder of the Old Testament that the people of Israel and further, the church, are that promised great nation. It is from Abram, who would eventually become Abraham, that God would also bring the Messiah, promised already in Genesis 3. The reason for returning to a focus on Abraham here is to note that God chose to do a new thing in and through Abraham. Abram was chosen to become the seed for the new people of God. From him and through his sons, the nation of Israel would arise. We read later in the book of Exodus of the Israelite's oppression under a new king in Egypt who cared nothing for Joseph—one of Abraham's descendants who saved Israel and Egypt from famine—and his legacy amongst the Egyptian and Israelite peoples. In response to his people's oppression God again chooses another servant, Moses, to bring about the rescue of the Israelites from Egypt. In all of these acts and through the promises of God like that which was made to Abraham, we see God's special concern for the people of Israel. He had made, first in the calling of Abraham and subsequently through all of his descendants, a people set apart for himself. In creating a covenant with that people at Sinai, God had distinguished his people from all others through the giving of the Law. Throughout the Old Testament we read over and over again about God's special

concern for the people of Israel, rescuing them from exile and oppression, calling them back to himself. At the same time, the people of Israel, God's chosen ones, carried and bore the promise of the coming Messiah. And finally, through Matthew's genealogy, we read of Jesus as one of the very descendants of God's chosen people.

As I noted above, Jesus went on to choose disciples and subsequently to authorize them to carry his message into the world. Jesus radically reoriented what it meant to be a part of the people of God. Those who believed in him and became his followers were not distinct in some ways from the Israelites. In the preaching of the apostles, like in Peter's sermon at Pentecost, because they had the authority to speak for God and in fact were doing so, God did his work of choosing and making for himself a people. Just as Peter preached to the Jews, Paul was sent and preached to the Gentiles. God was making a people now beyond the boundaries of the nation of Israel alone, engrafting others into his people by the preaching of his word. All of this amounts to a picture of the church—from the New Testament period up to the present day—as constituted through God's act of choosing. God chooses through those who proclaim his word. God brings his word that kills and makes alive. And it is through the church that preachers are called to be God's chosen servant in a particular local context. It is also through the church that members are added. Preaching the word is an office of the local congregation. Preaching transforms a person through God's choosing of them in a particular moment through a particular office. "I, here, now, forgive your sins. I, here, now, choose you." Thus, those who are Gentiles are engrafted into the people of God. If Peter preached to the Jews to and for whom Jesus came, then pastors in the present are preaching to Gentiles, performing God's act of choosing. This act, performed locally through the pastoral office, renders those present and hearing the word as passive experiencers of God's agency. God's people are made by suffering his work in this manner.

It is from this story that the dogmatic formulations I will discuss below are derived. The talk of killing and making alive, God's alien and proper work of terrifying the sinner and justifying the terrified, the suffering of God's transformative work by those who are part of the church—these are ways that Lutheran dogmaticians have read the biblical narrative and taken up features of that narrative to speak about God's relationship with the sinner.

Why This Story?

Before I continue on, it seems necessary to offer an argument for why I am using this particular interpretation of the biblical narrative. Above I noted other interpretations of the narrative and how those readings can be argued to be legitimately biblical. Yet I claimed that, while perhaps adequately biblical, none of those interpretations or uses of the biblical narrative was appropriate for the project I have laid out in this dissertation. To account for the church and its cultural captivity, I need a biblical account that understands the church as a creation of God, one that especially understands the process of creation as something that is suffered or undergone by God's people. My story is more fitting for an account of this sort. But such claims cannot be mere assertion. Even with the reference to the Scriptures I gave above in telling elements of the biblical narrative, I still need to show how my construal is biblical in a traditional sense—that is, in fitting with traditional interpretations of the biblical narrative for the earliest points in the church's life as possible.

I know not how to argue for the validity of my own narrative by means of some outside criteria. Nor can I argue for why the Christian narrative, especially as I have construed it, is a better or truer narrative than any other cultural or religious narrative on offer in a manner that will be anything other than aesthetic. Using outside criteria would relativize the authority of the biblical story to some other authority—a set of criteria, presumably justified within its own unique narrative context. Making an aesthetic argument is bound to be nihilistic for if one does

not simply run perpetually up against relativism and personal opinion, one at least runs up against the inability to articulate good reasons because aesthetic judgments are not entirely linguistic. Yet there must be some way to better establish the validity of my claim than mere assertion

Within the life of the church, there are helpful resources that tell us why the biblical narrative should be read in the above manner, and in fact establishes those reasons on the basis that the biblical narrative has been read this way in the apostolic age and passed down through the church to the present. The 2nd century church father Irenaeus of Lyons makes just this sort of argument. The patristics scholar John Behr is helpful for showing how Irenaeus's argument can be useful to us in the present.[9]

Irenaeus means to present a particular reading of the biblical narrative as the authoritative reading. His reading is the one against which every other reading is meant to be judged. Ireneaus's work in his *Against Heresies*, as Behr describes it, is pertinent for my project at just this point because Irenaeus was up against just the kind of question I am facing. In light of the Gnostic claim on the Scriptures, the church was suddenly unable to simply assert the biblical text as their own. They now had to defend and justify their reading of it over and against that adopted by the Gnostics, even though so much of the Gnostic's theology was remarkably different from the church. Although the differences between the Gnostics and the church seemed so vast, Irenaeus did not make an aesthetic argument or appeal to some outside standard of authority or set of criteria for establishing the church's reading of the Scriptures as the authoritative interpretation. Instead, he founded his argument on Jesus Christ himself, the very Son of God who authorized the message proclaimed by the church, one that could be traced to the apostles

[9] See John Behr, *The Way to Nicea*, vol. 1 of *The Formation of Christian Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 2001), chap. 1.

upon whom Jesus breathed as he commissioned them, and which has been handed down to us in the present. Their message was set down and passed on to us in the Scriptures received and understood as an authoritative witness to that message. In it, as the Gospel writer John states, is a message that is meant to convince readers and hearers of the Lordship of Jesus Christ (John 20:30–31). It is a message proclaimed for the purpose of life and salvation, the fulfillment of God's mission. It is this message that brought about the inception of the church. Through it, God called together his people. In an oft-cited passage, Irenaeus is succinct in his description of how this has all happened.

> For the Lord of all gave to His apostles the power of the gospel, through whom also we have known the truth, that is, the doctrine of the Son of God; to whom also did the Lord declare: "he that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me, and him that sent me." We have learned from none other the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith.[10]

Behr recounts how Irenaeus saw himself in the very line through which the message of the Scriptures was passed down, first from the apostles, then to their immediate disciples, and finally on to himself and his contemporaries. The same *traditio* is present in the contemporary church and just the same kind of genealogical account given by Irenaeus underlines the passage of that *traditio*. The interpretation of the biblical narrative I am working with here, just as with Irenaeus, is the authoritative narrative against which I will evaluate the cultural narratives addressed in this dissertation, not because it meets the standards of a set of criteria or because it is somehow a "best account" because it makes sense of the world, but because it was authorized by Jesus Christ, and handed down through his commissioned disciples into the modern day church. Do other interpretations exist? Indeed, and I have noted some of them above. They too must be

[10] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers,* vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson

judged as fitting or not relative to the narrative the church has received according to the rule of faith and the tradition by which Irenaeus and countless others have made their evaluation. Yet further, the traditional interpretation handed down from Irenaeus is the one that is necessary to account for the church in the argument of this dissertation. Those noted above are unable to account for the church in this manner, however biblical they may be argued to be.

Following from the work of Irenaeus, it is helpful to add that, as a member of the church, one comes to trust in the story the church tells. One believes the story because Jesus authorized it and ordained those who would hand it down. This same story comes to believers today who trust the community of the church in its transmission of the story of Jesus. Jesus himself says that the Scriptures (referring to Israel's Scriptures in the Old Testament) are actually about him. Following his resurrection he taught his disciples that he was the fulfillment of Israel's Scriptures, and subsequently authorized his followers, now sent as apostles to preach, teach and baptize, to make disciples, and it is through their writing and witness that we receive the New Testament. Many people are referenced in the witness of the New Testament who were not themselves the writers, but could verify the accounts offered in the Gospels and Epistles as true and authoritative accounts of Jesus Christ. Their witness and validation was the beginning of canonization and the handing down of an authoritative collection of writings within the life of the church. It is this collection to which Irenaeus refers. It is this collection by which he reads in light of the tradition handed down from the apostles and against which he judges the writings of the Gnostics as heretical. The Gnostic's message was simply not the message of the church. And as I continue on, just as Irenaeus understood this reading of the biblical narrative as I have given it here, I stand in the ongoing tradition of the church in maintaining and perpetuating this

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(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 414.

reading, especially for my later task of using it as the authoritative source against which to judge the cultural narrative to which I will argue the church is captive.

At bottom, the answer to why this story as opposed to another might simply be stated like this: the narrative I am using is the authoritative narrative because it is the church's confession. It is the authoritative story because it is the church's tradition.

The Church's Formation

The element I wish to highlight from the above narrative is simple: the people of God have been made a people by the very work of God himself. Here I have highlighted specifically the practice of preaching through which the people of God have been created by the work of an agent, which they have suffered. It is preaching that is characterized by narrating the hearers into the story of the biblical narrative. The people of God have not gathered themselves together. Theirs is a creation, a formation that is pathic or passive. It is this phenomenon that I want to argue is distinctive for and constitutive of the church's uniqueness as a community. Primarily, God performs his work through speaking, a constitutive characteristic of his being as it pertains to his relationship, as Luther puts it, with the justified sinner.

This is a central conviction of Lutheran theology in which God is one of "conversation and community."[11] God works through His Word. Preaching, absolution and the Lord's Supper come to mind immediately in this regard, as does baptism and marriage. God does what He says. And He speaks definitively in the life of the church through the practices of preaching and through his called and authorized servants when they speak on his behalf by declaring the forgiveness of sins, naming a child of God, pronouncing husband and wife, or instituting the Sacrament of the Altar. God has been speaking and working through his word for a very long time.

[11] This phrase is an oft-repeated aphorism of the distinguished Reformation and Luther scholar, Robert Kolb.

The phenomenon of the church's creation is an act of God alone, passively received or suffered by his people. Creation by God's agency is the distinguishing characteristic of the church as a community, and simultaneously constitutive of it. The church is God's chosen people. To flesh out this account of the church requires an engagement with Lutheran theology from which this unique account emerges. Found first in the writings of Luther himself, contemporary dogmaticians in the Lutheran tradition and theologians who reflect on the work of Luther more broadly have offered helpful and concise construals of Luther's genius here.

The focus on the tradition of Luther's theology and its outworking will constitute the remainder of this chapter and much of the next. Attention will be given here to ecclesiology in particular. Working briefly through Luther's characterization of the Christian life through his understanding of theology will also be helpful for considering how the church is a formative community. Having been formed by God, the church itself is also God's chosen instrument for the formation of the Christian life. I will speak more in depth about the formation of the Christian individual in the next chapter. I want to spend more time here focusing on the *context* in which Christians are made—that is, the church.

The Uniqueness of Lutheran Theology for Ecclesiology: The *Vita Passiva*

Key to Lutheran theology when thinking about the context of formation as it flows from the biblical narrative is the nature of the human being as a *passive receiver* who undergoes the work of God in the community of his people. I have been using the term "passive" occasionally in the previous pages. Perhaps a definition in a light that reflects my usage of it so far will be helpful. Oswald Bayer, the distinguished Lutheran systematician notes, "Today the word 'passive' is often misunderstood to mean inert. However, when Luther says that the Christian life is 'passive' (*vita passiva*) he means that God is the active subject and that the Christian is the object of God's action. The Christian life therefore is *passive* in the sense that it *suffers*, it

undergoes God's work and so passively receives it."[12] The *vita passiva*, or "receptive life" is a central concept for construing the nature of the Christian life, and further, for accounting for the nature of the church as a community in which the Christian life is formed. Yet, what does the *vita passiva* look like? A simple example is found in the two kinds of God's work noted in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (AP XII, 53) and highlighted by Danish theologian Regin Prenter: the alien and the proper.[13] God's alien work is to work the *odium sui*: hatred of self to the extent that one despairs of one's own possibilities to ever find the favor of God and be saved from the consequences of sin, and further, to acknowledge fully one's utterly deserved fate of eternity in separation from God, an everlasting lack of community with one's Creator. God's alien work is a killing work, bringing a sinner to the end of him/herself, opening a space for a new life to be created. Adolf Köberle aptly construes the predicament, giving answer to the question of what can be done when man has been brought to his end. "Only a single way for salvation still lies open, a way that man himself does not control, namely, when God himself through a paradoxical, free *eudokia* which cannot be forced nor set in motion by any human means, decides to overlook and pardon sin, and so, by his act, makes communion possible!"[14] This final end of God's alien work opens the way (logically speaking at least[15]) for God's proper work. That is, God justifies those he has terrified in his alien work. Put simply, God goes to work forgiving sinners. The word that killed subsequently also raises to new life. After God's proper

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[12] Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, trans. and ed. Jeffrey G. Silcock and Mark C. Mattes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 22.

[13] See Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 195; Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator* (1953; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 16.

[14] Adolf Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness* (1938; repr., Evansville, IN: Ballast, 1999), 52.

[15] The hatred of self is really the love of self in concert with an agreement to God's judgment. That is, man sees himself *rightly* according to how God sees him. That same work of God that brings man to see himself aright is the work that brings man also to see God's graceful pardon and love. Logically speaking, we must discuss and distinguish the two acts, which are but the holistic working of God himself in a simultaneous act of killing and making alive.

work, the life of a Christian begins to appear different. Good works begin to show up. The Formula of Concord construes the life of faith as one in which, "without compulsion, a person is ready and glad to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything, out of love and praise to God, who has shown this grace" (FC IV, 12; see also 7, 10, 18–19, 33).[16] All such good works are the performance of the Holy Spirit as He lives in the new creature who has been raised in the proper work of God.

The concept of the *vita passiva* comes from Luther's understanding of the Christian life is a unique formulation, which stood apart from the dominant perspectives of his time. Luther worked to account for the Christian life distinctively as a passive life. He called it the *vita passiva* over against the two other alternatives currently in use during his life, which had been handed down since at least Aristotle—the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. Luther wanted to argue that theology, as a kind of access to knowledge, was neither an active discipline in that it took the form of a practice, nor a contemplative activity in that it took the form of theory or mere reflection.[17] His reasoning here was the risk of being misled by each of those modes of accounting for how one gains knowledge. That is, the *vita activa* is concerned with works and practical knowledge and the *vita contemplativa* is concerned with and caught up in speculations. Both, whether mutually exclusive or mutually informative, were modes of accessing knowledge that were inherently active in a searching manner, as if looking for or attempting to produce illumination. But illumination is something that *happened to* a person. Thus for Luther, theology as a kind of access to knowledge was a matter of experience. And experience could only be received. Thus, the passive nature of theology is a matter of reception. The Christian life then, as one lived in the encounter with God through which knowledge of him, oneself, and all of

[16] Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 574–81; see also FC VI, 587–91.

creation was gained, was construed as one of passive reception. Thus Bayer can say, "The crucial thing about the receptive life (*vita passiva*) is that it is connected with a particular experience: an experience that I do not primarily produce but suffer or undergo." Bayer continues, quoting Luther: "It is by living—no, not living, but by dying and giving ourselves up to hell that we become theologians, not by understanding, reading, and speculating."[18] This is not to say that Luther rules out such things as understanding, reading, or theorizing. Rather, he subordinates them to the centrality of the experience of encounter with God, an experience that *happens to* an individual, rather than one that is fabricated. In the end, Luther goes on to call his own theology practical, but his use of this term reflects how the word of God is put to use by God himself through the work of the church to accomplish God's own work.[19]

Luther's account of the Christian life, the life of a theologian (for in Luther's definition, all are theologians[20]) emerges as a result of his understanding of the Christian life in general. Or perhaps better, it emerges from his theological method, which was constitutive of his understanding of the Christian life. His method involves three rules for the study of theology: *oratio*, the prayer that God would be so gracious to send his Holy Spirit to guide one's understanding; *meditatio*, the practice of not simply internally reflecting on the word, but also externally hearing it, reading it aloud, even singing it in hymns; and *tentatio*, the agonizing struggle through which the Christian is afflicted with the work of the devil that causes the Christian to experience the true credibility and mighty power of the word when opposing his

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[17] See Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, 21–27, 107–14.

[18] Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, 23. He translates Luther's Latin from *WA* 5:158, 28.

[19] Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, 22–23.

[20] Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 17.

threats.[21] Together, these three comprise an order of experience through which one gains wisdom. Through this understanding, we can make sense of Luther's position that theology is a kind of knowledge that can only be received. It cannot come through mere rational thought or through practical experience that is not accounted for by the work of the Holy Spirit illuminating one's understanding by the power of the word. Theology is an activity of accessing knowledge in such a way that it is not active, a matter of work and manipulation; nor is it contemplative, a matter of mere theoretical speculation. Rather, it is less of an act(ion) altogether, but something that is suffered. It is an experience in which knowledge is received. That reception comes through the various kinds of encounter Luther highlights in his conceptions of *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio*.

Even further, the construal of Christian life as a matter of receptivity comes as an extension of how Luther framed the object of theology. For Luther, the object of theology was not God himself, nor the study of humanity (or, more generally all of creation) as the object upon which God as a subject acted. The object of theology was rather a relation, or the phenomenon of God's justifying the sinful human being. Again, because of this particular construal of the object of theology, Luther's conception of the Christian life was inherently passive because the manner of relationship that God formed with man was through God's coming to man and acting upon him, either through the convicting Law that creates anxiety, the liberating gospel that creates joy, the hiddenness of God known in such things as natural disasters, suffering, and the anticipation of death that creates terror, or finally, through the preservation of life and creation that creates thanksgiving.[22] In all cases God himself is the acting agent upon humanity, and thus the mode of coming to know God is one of experience and reception. Thus Oswald Bayer can say, "The

[21] Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 30–37.

object of theology encounters us in different ways: it can oppose us, seize us, and liberate us. But at no time can we ever gain control of it, press it into our service, or make it fit our predetermined system. We can neither establish it nor be certain of it. We can do nothing except receive it. We can neither determine nor define it, but on the contrary, the object of theology determines and defines us."[23] Knowledge of God, ourselves, and the creation is given, rather than derived, deduced, or imposed. And it comes as a gift, at the mercy of God, by his prerogative—he chooses those upon whom he will have such mercy. The Christian life is a *vita passiva.*

The passive, or, as Reinhard Hütter would have it, *pathic*, nature of our formation[24] is carried in the Lutheran dogmatic tradition through voices like Prenter, Köberle, Forde, and Bayer. This is a one of the aspects that makes Lutheran theology unique and particularly pertinent for the contribution of this dissertation to current theological discourses. Speaking again of the *odium sui* and God's alien work, Prenter is clear to construe the pathic phenomenon in such a way that man is clearly not the intentionally acting subject, rather God himself is the agent. "[T]he subject of the act of self-condemnation is not the natural self of man, but God himself, who in the act of self-condemnation makes himself the master in man. *Odium sui* or *condematio sui* is in reality no human act, but a suffering (*passio*) under the effective judgment of God."[25] Hütter argues similarly (following Luther), construing man as suffering divine agency.[26] God is our opponent, driving us to despair, causing us to suffer him as an opponent, until we agree with him. This sense of passivity proves immensely fruitful as we reflect on the

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[22] Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 106. See also 102–5 and 113–14 for an extended discussion.

[23] Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 107.

[24] Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 31.

[25] Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, 7.

[26] Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 31.

nature of what the Jewish philosopher Emmanual Levinas has called "the posteriority of the anterior."[27] That is, regarding grace, we know the cause of grace only after its effects. In the case of the grace of God, we come to know grace (and God) only after we have experienced unknowingly the God who works in man a desire to go to hell in self-condemnation; yet, as Luther pointed out, this very man is the one whom God could never send to hell and therefore shows grace. As Prenter writes, "Therefore *resignatio ad infernum* does not become proof that man is now fit soon to receive grace and the Spirit, but of the fact that man already *has* grace and the Spirit."[28] All of this is to say that God is at work on us, such that we suffer his operations in a passive manner, only to be made aware of them after the fact.

The power of this kind of account, the construal of a pathic existence—the *vita passiva*—comes in its ability to expose how the Christian life is passively formed by the power of God through his Word and Spirit in the practices of the church. Since the existence of every Christian is pathic in this way, the very community of God's people can be understood as a collectively pathic existence. The suffering of God's work upon the Christian is one that can only be experienced within the community of others who suffer likewise. This is because the very encounters with God as noted above (except for those with the hidden God, as in natural disasters for example) are those that God has ordained to occur within his community where he dwells and speaks by his Spirit. It is in the church where the word of God comes to us, that very word that reestablishes community between humanity and God and goes forth into the world to

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[27] See Michael Purcell, "The Prevenience and Phenomenality of Grace, or, The Posteriority of the Anterior," *Heythrop Journal* 50 (2009): 966–81.

[28] Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, 12. See also Martin Luther's related comment on the salvation of Isaiah. "It turned out for the prophet that he was thus thrust down to hell, so that he might be led away and lead others away from that uncleanness of the Law to the purity of Christ, so that he alone might reign. Here now a resurrection from the dead takes place." *LW* 16, 73.

bring all into relationship with him. Encounters with God in his word are the receptive experiences that birth the community of his church and make new individuals its members.

Its power also comes from the sense I mentioned above—that God's choosing is exactly the work that renders God's people passive. The work of choosing is just how God works. Just as Israel does not choose its God, but God chooses his people, the same is true for the present day church. God has chosen them to be his people. His work in this regard is ongoing. Through preaching and the sacraments, God is still choosing. It is through the community of the church that others are invited into the Kingdom, welcomed into the banquet prepared for them. Their invitation is known through the garment they wear—the white robe of righteousness. And that garment is distributed only through a particular avenue—that is, the church. God sends his servants, his chosen ones, the church, out to do the inviting. The only way into the banquet, into the kingdom, is through the church.

Furthermore, to focus for a moment on suffering, not just in the sense of *undergoing* God's fashioning, but in the sense Luther used in the term *tentatio*, the Christian life is centrally characterized by a struggle that is ongoing, burdensome, and agonizing. Suffering of this sort takes the form of standing before God and wondering if one measures up. This seemed to be Luther's experience. It may helpfully be understood simply by reference to a different, yet common experience in many of our lives. In a marriage proposal, a man asks for a woman's hand in marriage. That moment between the proposal and the response might be one of agony. It might be one of complete fear, the kind exhibited in part by a similar question: "do you love me?" There is a certain agony in awaiting a response, but posing such a question takes a great risk. The Christian life experiences a suffering much like this agony. Perhaps the answer in asking whether or not one is loved offers a negative response. "Do you love me?" "No, I do not." This is a crushing blow. A similar experience is found in turning one's best work into his master

for evaluation. It is a work into which much life has been poured, toil exerted, and a great deal of emotional investment made. Having the master evaluate that work in a negative fashion can be devastating. In terms of the Christian's *tentatio*, suffering God's work through real suffering, disappointment or loss in life is simply to experience the manner in which God works. This is Luther's insight that distinguishes him for all others. God kills, then he makes alive. One dies, then is raised. It is just this insight that seems to make Luther, at least on this note, the marginalized voice that he is. Luther's realistic (and apocalyptic) appraisal of the ongoing and necessary suffering of the Christian life is an idea that comes to us modern thinkers as particularly disturbing. What seems most disturbing about it relates to what I discussed above, that God somehow intends for suffering to afflict the Christian (but not just the Christian). To have a God who is responsible for such things seems the ultimate offense. It is at least contrary to our intuitions. And so countless efforts are made to reason such a God away. But then we end up with a God who is not God, not the God of the Scriptures, not the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus. But as I have mentioned, perhaps it is because we do not want this God in the first place that we attempt to reason him away and install in his place a God who we can tolerate. Perhaps we live with what Merold Westphal has called, "ontological xenophobia."[29]

Nevertheless, this insight of Luther, offensive and counter-intuitive as it may be, is one with which we must reckon for it will play a significant role in discussing constructive solutions to the instances of the church's cultural captivity in later chapters. In fact, it will even help us to plausibly account for them in some manner. For the Christian life to be characterized by *tentatio* means that the Christian wrestles not with the God of the Law or the Gospel, but with the hidden

[29] Ontological Xenophobia is fear of the "Wholly Other." Westphal is correct here, if we understand his use of the term "xenophobia" in the sense that Luther does—God terrifies. The article where Westphal uses this phrase does have other concerns however, but they are not entirely unrelated to this point. See Merold Westphal, "Faith as the Overcoming of Ontological Xenophobia," in *Overcoming Onto-Theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian*

God veiled to us but at work afflicting and crushing us. This affliction, as Luther understood it, leaves the Christian with two options. On the one hand, the Christian can turn away from God to seek solutions to God in some other terms, perhaps resulting in rejection and apostasy. On the other hand, the Christian can turn to God in his utter need, his broken will expecting hell, to seek to experience from God further suffering but of a different sort. Luther argues that in the *tentatio* of the Christian life, the turn to God through turning to the Scriptures, in just the same way as the Psalmist often demonstrates for us, is to turn to the only source where the experience of life as a Christian will bring wisdom, will make the Christian a theologian, a true doctor of the church. The Christian, who, in his suffering, simply wills to die, must turn to God as he is found in the Scriptures, to the God who speaks. There, Luther states, will the Christian learn just how sweet and comforting God's Word is. We return here then to Luther's point about knowledge. Knowledge for Luther is received. In coming to God's Word, we do not come seeking knowledge. For that is not how theologians (that is, Christians) are made. Rather, as Bayer helpfully puts it,

> The way I experience Scripture is that it interprets me and thus provides for its own interpretation. Indeed, it is its own interpreter, *sui ipsius interpres*, as Luther neatly puts it with reference to Psalm 119. He insists that "the words of God are more intelligible and certain than the words of all human beings...so that they are not informed, tested, understood and confirmed by human words but human words by them." It means letting the author, the triune God, work in me through the Scriptures. That is the passivity that is unique to the experience of faith. It is primarily the passive life, the receptive life (*vita passiva*).
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> ...The gospel acts on us very differently than the law and even more differently than God's hidden work, which can plunge us into the worst kind of spiritual attack [*tentatio*]: the attack by God himself. Overcoming this by means of the *deus praedicatus*, the proclaimed God, which is the opposite to the hidden God, lets us

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Faith (New York: Fordham University, 2001), 229–55.

"experience" in a profound way "how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's Word is."[30]

God's Word interprets me. My suffering, my *tentatio*, is given interpretation and intelligibility (if not always articulately) only through the experience of the Scriptures, the experience of the Word. The affliction of life requires the affliction of faith. Suffering requires further suffering. It requires suffering God's work of formation, being killed and made alive. The life of faith is always characterized by the situation of *tentatio*, suffering the crushing work of God, to the extent that such suffering even challenges faith itself. But it is in this very suffering that faith is worked, and by faith, the promises of God in the Word of the Scripture and proclamation are truly grasped and claimed for the Christian life. It is through this power of the Word that we will turn again in the later chapters to address how the church gains freedom from cultural captivity.

Our reflections here on Luther's theology of the Christian life highlight the central contention of the ecclesiology I am putting forward here. That is, God is the agent who is at work in the life of the Christian to bring about his transformative work of killing and making alive. From this very work emerges the community called the church. Through it, God makes his people. Those who constitute the church are those who have undergone his work in this regard. Thus the church is a unique community, different than any other, because it has been created out of nothing. As the apostle Peter writes, "once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God" (1 Peter 2:9). Only through God's work does the church come into existence.

The narrative with which I am working in this chapter, not simply the narrative by which we come to account for the formation of the church, but also the passive life of the Christian, is not a narrative that is particularly widespread. This point will play a substantial role in the

[30] Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, 63–64.

second part of this dissertation. There, my exploration can be understood as a way of analyzing why the church wants in some sense to avoid the story of the passive life, with all of its suffering. This will give me the opportunity to explore the various instances of cultural captivity present in the church, for each of them can plausibly be understood to be a means of avoiding the authentic story for what amounts to a happier, nicer, easier to swallow story.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE INDIVIDUAL IN THE COMMUNITY: EXTENDING THE TRADITION ON TRANSFORMATION AND FORMATION

As it is, there are many parts, but one body.
1 Corinthians 12:20

Having argued in the last chapter that the community of God's people is passively formed by his work, I offered particular implications on the nature of individual formation as well. I spoke specifically about the formation of a particular kind of subject, but I made that note within the context of the community as manifesting a particular kind of collective subjectivity. That is, God has chosen his people and through the church, continues to do so. In this chapter, I want to be clearer about an inherent implication in this dissertation. In all the talk of the previous two chapters, and even in the Introduction, I have been arguing that accounting for the community of the church requires seeing its members as living by a certain narrative from which certain practices and ways of life have emerged that are historically rooted in the ongoing life of the community itself that extends through a long period of time. Accounting for the church in this manner has allowed me to describe the church as a community, a context within which God does his work. Although I have briefly mentioned the individual in the above chapters, I have not elaborated on the nature of how an individual is transformed or formed. Rather, I have concentrated on the fact that the community of the church is where such ongoing events occur. In this chapter then, I wish to explore this phenomenon more broadly by speaking about the individual, even if in generic terms. But I do not intend to suddenly break into a different way of speaking in the middle of this dissertation, as if moving from a focus on community to individual Christians. Rather I wish to point out something that has been implicit in how I have been

speaking all along and will continue for the duration of this project. In speaking about the community of the church, it is inevitable that I also at times get more pointed in order to speak about the individual, for community is always constituted as a collection of individuals. This seems obvious as communities are not bare givens. Yet what is less obvious I think is that to talk about individuals requires talk about communities. For, as was clear in chapter 2 when I discussed the nature of story according to MacIntyre, an individual's life is a narrated phenomenon. However individuals are not the sole narrators of their own story, but rather the community of which individuals are a part gives narration to an individual's life. Individuals learn how to see the world, and themselves "as" they are told by the community's story. Learning to tell a particular kind of story by being given a story to tell is a matter of formation. In this way, as every individual is a storyteller, at least of one's own life, every individual is thus implicated within a community from which they receive their story. The point I want to make in this chapter then is that communities and individuals are inextricably linked in the argument I am trying to make about the cultural captivity of the church. To account for the cultural captivity of the church, and to begin to offer contemporary ways of overcoming it, this connection between individuals and communities must be explored more fully, especially in terms of the church as a community in which certain kinds of formation (are meant to) occur.

To be more specific, the reason why it seems necessary to bring these two concepts into a more explicit connection is that within the Lutheran tradition, and even within Protestantism generally, talk about formation and transformation are generally relegated to their own area as a locus of dogmatic theology. The discourse is often under a heading like "Justification and Sanctification" or might be handled under the broader category of "The Christian Life." In the same way, talk about the church, "Ecclesiology," is often found under its own independent heading. Gerhard Forde brings up a danger inherent in these kinds of dogmatic presentations.

"The danger is that the rhetoric will float above reality, living a life of its own in dogmatic texts and sermons with little or no relation to what Christians or others think or do. It becomes a fiction that may entertain those who still have a taste for it on Sundays but has no vital functions in their lives."[1] In addressing the Christian life, the discourse of dogmatics is oriented around talk of a generic individual. The context that forms the Christian life, the church, is at best generally assumed, but the connection between and co-implication of the individual and the church lacks explicit attention. What is necessary, Forde seems to suggest, is a doctrine that takes into account the abstract truths of theology while not leaving behind the concrete implications for real life. In the case of this dissertation, we cannot merely talk about ecclesiology without also talking about the Christian life. This is because the Christian life is formed in the church. Thus, this chapter is meant to serve as something of a bridge between the first and second parts of this dissertation—the first part being particularly methodological and dealing with theological construals; the second being particularly analytical in giving attention to the wider concern about cultural captivity as set forth in chapter 1. This chapter will also serve, like its subtitle suggests, as an extension of the tradition of dogmatic theology in Protestantism, and particularly within Lutheranism. Since the phenomenon of the separation of dogmatic loci is reflected in the broad range of Protestant dogmatics and Confessional documents, my concentration on Lutheran theology will be both an extension of the Lutheran tradition and demonstrative of what is possible in Protestant theology at large.[2] In whole, what I wish to make clear is that while it might be possible to *derive* the connection between the community and the individual within Protestant dogmatic discourse, it is imperative that this connection be *explicitly made* for the

[1] Gerhard O. Forde, "The Christian Life," in *Christian Dogmatics* vol. 2, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 395.

[2] On the nature of the separation of dogmatic loci, see Ted Campbell, *Christian Confessions: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 158–59.

kind of ecclesiological account I am giving. In it the Christian life is implicated because I have argued that God's chosen location and instrument for the creation of Christians and the formation of the Christian life is the community of the church. And if my account is reflective of how Lewis Mudge brilliantly describes ecclesiology—as a theory of society[3]—then by extension any account of community like my own must also account for the unique life of the individual as it emerges out of that community.

In order to explore this connection between community and individual I will discuss three areas. First I will further elaborate and demonstrate the nature of the discontinuity between talk of the Christian life and talk of ecclesiology. This will serve to advance entry into the discussion and to further solidify the lack of a connection between the two areas of dogmatic discourse. Second, I will note the particular genius of the Lutheran tradition regarding the simultaneity of justification and sanctification, rather than the typical sense of seeing justification as an event that gives way to a lifetime of ongoing sanctification as if the Christian life is some sort of development, or that it experiences the phenomenon of progress and growth. Rather, transformation, the killing and making alive of the new creature through the word of God, is the event of creating a good tree that by nature bears good fruit. Accounting then for the lack of good fruit is not an issue that requires seeing the Christian life as one of training or growth, but

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[3] Lewis Mudge writes about ecclesiology as social theory, a point we already addressed in chapter 2, saying: "Ecclesiology understood as social theory... [is] based upon the biblical story which reads and interprets the stories told by congregations of God's people in the concrete social existence. It explores the various "signs" by which churches express themselves in the midst of their social environments. It considers the ways in which congregations "read" their surroundings and appropriate meanings from them that eventually become part and parcel of their own understandings. Ecclesiology tries to judge the appropriateness and faithfulness of this ongoing hermeneutical process....Above all, it is important to understand that, so understood, ecclesiology is not merely a theory of the church as social institution. It is also a theory *of human society as such.* It is a theory of society *as* pregnant with the possibility of being ecclesia. It is a theory of society *as* a place in which ecclesia, as society's true fulfillment is, by God's grace, coming to be. The church as visible institution lives by acting so as continually to make space for that communal *parousia.*" *Rethinking the Beloved Community: Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, Social Theory* (New York: University Press of America, 2001), 7.

accounting for that lack in a different manner. On this point however, I am not intending to spend time directly refuting the "sanctification as growth" model. Rather, I want to give a fuller account of the Lutheran understanding of the Christian's life as it is classically understood: simultaneously justified and sanctified.[4]

Third I will examine the dogmatic discussion of the will. This is a key area of investigation because of its close relation to my argument in the previous chapter about passive formation and the *vita passiva*. There I will further establish the position that the church is a unique community because it is God's chosen people through a deeper discussion of transformation (or conversion), desire, and the nature of the will itself as always already aimed at something, rather than existing "freely" in a neutral position that is up for grabs. In the end, I can return to the important construal that the church understands its nature as a community that forms particular kinds of subjects.

The Discontinuity between Individual and Community

It has been noted over and over again that our culture is particularly atomized and individualistic.[5] Even Lutheran theologians have made such an observation.[6] Ironically enough, amongst Lutherans at least, it seems their own theology, through the imagination it fosters, has

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[4] It is important to note in light of this comment and in some of the things I will say below regarding problems with how the Law has been understood within Lutheran theology, that the idea of "growth" is not to be understood as "foreign" to Lutheran theology. Joel Biermann has argued quite convincingly for this point. See Joel D. Biermann, "Virtue Ethics and the Place of Character Formation within Lutheran Theology." (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, 2002), especially chapter 6.

[5] The number of resources that could be listed here is overwhelming. Rather than trying to list even a sample, I'll point out one creative book that traces the phenomenon of the loss of community and its forthcoming perpetuation—in an almost prophetic manner—in virtual realities, while at the same time offering an alternative vision for the church that might allow for the restoration of community. Graham Ward's *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000) is brilliant in this regard, especially for its ability to see and describe the problem. His solution is debatable, but nevertheless the work is a profoundly creative offering with which all others should be in conversation.

[6] See Robert Benne, *Ordinary Saints: An Introduction to the Christian Life*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 1–20.

contributed to the very individualization and atomization it seeks to critique. In large part, this seems symptomatic of Protestant dogmatics in general.[7]

Reformational theology, even in its contemporary articulations, has a vestigial propensity to be done in manner that operates with a particularly individualistic anthropology in which talk of sanctification is restricted to talk about the individual. Justification, as talk of the event of transformation, is individualistic in this vein as well, which contributes to the aforementioned narrowness of sanctification talk—justification is understood as something that God does *to me*, and thus sanctification is discussed in a manner that makes it a feature of *my life*. In a simple sense, this might be understood as what could be called the "just-me-and-God" problem. Evidence of this problem affecting theology today can be found in the lyrics to a recent song, which has a bridge section with the words "It's only You and me here now."[8] Yet recent work only repeats old problems. The hymn "Take My Life and Let It Be" is another example.[9]

Reformational theology's propensity to operate with an individualistic anthropology can be widely demonstrated without much effort. For example, John Calvin writes in his *Institutes*, "A person is said to be justified in the sight of God when in the judgment of God he is considered righteous and is accepted because of that righteousness...[A] man will be 'justified by faith' when, quite apart from the righteousness of works, by faith he lays hold of the righteousness of

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[7] This is not a position I can argue for in this dissertation, for it takes us too far afield. However, I am not the only one to make such a suggestion. The individualistic imagination, that is, the propensity to focus on the individual and use language within dogmatics that narrowly focuses on the individual, has been pointed to by others. In fact, D. Stephen Long would push this position even further and blame the loss of the community with its concomitant focus on the individual on the Reformation itself with its focus on the human ability only to know God "for us." See Long's "God is Not Nice," in *God Is Not...*, ed. D. Brent Laytham (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 39–54.

[8] "Only You," David Crowder Band, *Illuminate*, Six Step Records, 2003. There is still much to praise about this song, as it speaks from the place of the existential encounter between the Christian and his/her Lord in a moment of praise and prayerful response for God's gifts.

[9] *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 783.

Christ (Book 3, Part X, Chap. 11)."[10] Another example can be found in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) wherein justification is characterized as a work of God upon an individual. That such work presumably occurs in the church is not evident. The event of justification is simply described as a one-on-one event.

> Those whom God effectually calleth he also freely justifieth; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous: not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God (Chapter XI, Of Justification).[11]

The Edwardian Homilies (1547) of the English Reformation have it similarly.

> [E]very man of necessity is constrained to seek for another righteousness or justification, to be received at God's own hands, that is to say, the forgiveness of his sins and trespasses, in such things as he hath offended. And this justification or righteousness, which we so receive of God's mercy and Christ's merits, embraced by faith, is taken, accepted, and allowed of God, for our perfect and full justification.[12]

Within the Lutheran tradition, the case is no different. The Augsburg Confession, influencing all Reformational confessions and dogmatic positions that would follow, was a model for those points noted above. Article IV of the Augsburg Confession speaks similarly to the above examples. "[W]e cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our merit, work, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ's sake through faith."[13]

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[10] John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. Tony Lane and Hilary Osborne (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 181–82.

[11] "The Westminster Confession of Faith," in *Creeds of the Churches*, 3rd ed., ed. John H. Leith (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 193–230.

[12] Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 239.

[13] Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 38, 40.

Of course, the issue in all of these cases boils down to the location of "faith." Faith is characteristic of the individual Christian life. It is the individual who "has" faith. Faith is located not in some collective, but in individual lives. It is individuals who are called believers. It is for individuals that Christ died. Fair enough with regard to faith—its centrality for Reformation theology oriented how such things as justification and sanctification were construed. Yet what is missing is the context in which faith is worked. What is missing is that even within the traditions of Protestant theology, however divergent they are in some ways, it is through the practices of the community that faith is worked. It is through the hearing of the word in the gathering of God's people. It is through baptism. It is through participation in the Lord's Supper. These practices of the church are where faith is given because God has instituted them and chosen thereby to do his work through them.

The focus on the individual as *modus operandi* at least when it comes to justification and sanctification is easily observable throughout the Lutheran Confessions. For the sake of brevity, I will refer only to an instance in the Formula of Concord. Article VI on "The Third Use of the Law" is an example.[14] The writers state,

> The law has been given to people for three reasons: first, that through it external discipline may be maintained against the unruly and disobedient; second, that people may be led through it to a recognition of their sins; third, after they have been reborn—since nevertheless the flesh still clings to them—that precisely because of the flesh they may have a sure guide, according to which they can orient and conduct their entire life.[15]

While speaking of a plurality of "people," the sense is still oriented in a generic manner that could describe any single Christian's life. Simultaneously there is a lack of any reference to the communal context of the church. Such individualism is also present in Luther, for example,

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[14] Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 502–3; 587–91.

[15] Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 502.

in his *The Freedom of the Christian.*[16] More recent dogmaticians have trafficked in the same kind of reflection. Adolf Köberle's work speaks of the singular life of the particular Christian. The title of his work, *The Quest for Holiness*, reflects the very idea of personal holiness, set out as a goal for individuals.[17] Within Regin Prenter's *Spiritus Creator* such an individualistic focus is also in play as it seeks to address and promote the difference Luther's theology of the Holy Spirit makes to the conversation on sanctification, the individual's Christian life in the Spirit.[18] Gerhard Forde's work carries this issue into the contemporary conversation.

Forde's work is primarily aimed at shaping the practice of preaching, and therefore also, what the hearers received from their preacher.[19] Forde meant for the preacher to return to the risky work of simply proclaiming what God has done—that is, God has come as a Man, the God-man Jesus Christ, to do only what God could do and man cannot—get God off our backs. In other words, God came to do God's work—killing man and raising Him to life again through His life-giving Word of forgiveness and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ accomplished in the power of the Spirit. The preacher's calling is simply to proclaim that Word, calling into question the efforts of man to solve his own situation before God, presenting the God who cannot be satisfied by any of man's efforts and choices, but only by God's own work—

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[16] *LW* 31:327–77. This is not to say that Luther is wholly individualistic. Yet it is to provide an example of a moment in his writings where his focus is strictly on the life of the individual Christian. This kind of second order reflection has extended into the present as the dominant mode of reflection.

[17] Adolf Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness* (1938; repr., Evansville, IN: Ballast Press, 1999). The original German title is translated with equal appropriateness for the tradition in which it is found: "Justification and Sanctification." See David Scaer's Foreword, x.

[18] Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator* (1953; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001).

[19] The various edited volumes of Forde's work published in the Lutheran Quarterly Books series by Eerdmans include collections of Forde's sermons.

which we are assured that He has done by the witness of Christ and the Scriptures. Forde's work was an effort at returning to Luther's work—a doing of the Word to the hearers.[20]

What stands out in Forde's legacy is the centrality of the preacher-to-hearer relationship.[21] The preacher-to-hearer relationship, while rightly characterizing a Lutheran doctrine of preaching, is an example of the rather individualistic anthropology that has characterized theology in modernity. Its effect on our perception of what is going on in the liturgical practice of preaching (and subsequently reinforcing this view in other liturgical practices, such as baptism, absolution and the Lord's Supper) has been to establish a sense of the "just-me-and God" problem. *I* come to hear the preacher speak on behalf of God himself *to me* so that *my* sins are forgiven and *I* leave restored. Indeed, there is room for speaking legitimately about the relationship between God and individuals, but only in significant neglect of the greater context in which those relationships exist in the first place—that is, in the midst of the Church.

It would be wrong to conclude based on this criticism that Forde's work is somehow to be dismissed or rejected. I am only suggesting an inadequacy in his work. Yet, in many senses it would be wrong to even speak of such an inadequacy for Forde's concern for the practice of preaching was being addressed quite well in his work. He intended to speak strictly of preaching, not necessarily of the larger practices of the Church. Forde's work is acting as an example here because it suggests a place where a legitimate expansion can be made toward a greater focus on the community of the church.

Further, I do not wish to imply for Forde, Prenter, or Köberle (or the Lutheran Confessions, or Luther himself) that their theology is in some way flawed or wrong. My point is only to note

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[20] See Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson, introduction to *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, by Gerhard Forde (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1–29.

[21] For example, this is clearly evident in two of Forde's articles in *The Preached God*: "Whatever Happened to God? God Not Preached" (33–55) and "Absolution: Systematic Considerations" (152–62).

these examples of theological reflection that are individualistic in focus, and thus there is a warrant for further work that concerns the ecclesial location and expression of a Lutheran theology of transformation. I still consider these thinkers to be critical resources for my project, even if I do not wish to take up the style of presentation that characterizes them, that is, their generic individualism.

What makes these thinkers so useful here is their uncompromising effort to maintain the intimate relationship between justification and sanctification as they describe the Christian life. Each of them writes with a pointed critique of the fact that some Lutheran theologies of justification, and therefore sanctification, are law-centered. That is, they see a certain reliance on the law to tell Christians how to live. After the preaching of law and gospel, after the confession of sins and the proclamation of forgiveness, there is a return to the kind of talk that says, "now this is what you must go do." Such talk assumes in a significant sense that there has actually been no real transformation. It is as if no new creature has emerged from the killing word that also makes alive. Forde would say that there is implied no sense of a death, and therefore no sense of a new life.[22] Köberle and Lauri Haikola (a strong influence on Forde[23]) note the same issue, effectively blaming Melancthon.[24] Sanctification that is Law-centered assumes man still needs help, that man is still striving toward some perfect state, some idealistic existence, some

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[22] See Gerhard O. Forde, *Justification By Faith: A Matter of Death and Life* (1982; repr. Mifflintown, PA: Sigler, 1990).

[23] James Nestingen, introduction to *The Captivation of the Will*, by Gerhard O. Forde, ed. Steven Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1–21, notes Haikola's influence on Forde.

[24] See Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness*, 92n12; and Lauri Haikola, "A Comparison of Melancthon's and Luther's Doctrine of Justification," *Dialog* 2 (1963): 32–39. Whether or not Melancthon should be to blame is not a point this dissertation will dispute. The significant point to note for this dissertation is that, however such a law-centered idea of sanctification began, it did and it took hold. This means that many "Lutherans" did not and have not worked with a Lutheran understanding of transformation, but rather a form of what Karl Rahner has called "extrinsicism." See Nestingen, "Introduction," 15.

sense of being-on-the-way wherein progress is measurable.[25] It is often pointed out that law-centeredness was a reaction to the threats of antinomianism—of which Lutherans were accused—or enthusiasm. Whether such law-centeredness was to overcome the perceived threat of enthusiasm or antinomianism is not important for this project. What is important was the agreement among these thinkers, which notes that such talk has not properly understood the relationship between justification and sanctification. The meaningfulness of justification as an event of transformation is simply lost. Thus, even if the focus of these thinkers is too narrowly concerned with the individual, their work is worth pushing forward toward a concern with the ecclesial location of the event of transformation and the life of God's transformed people.

Toward this end, there has been a significant emphasis within contemporary theology on the community of the Church, as opposed to the individualistic anthropology I have been criticizing. Such efforts have been made in hermeneutics with a focus for example, on the

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[25] Such a conception of sanctification—as process or a mode of progress—and its relationship to justification was more common in non-Lutheran Protestant bodies. For example, the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), chap. XIII states, "[A]lthough the remaining corruption [of the flesh] for a time may much prevail, yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome, and so the saints *grow in grace, perfecting holiness* in the fear of God" (emphasis mine). See Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 208. The Lutheran ontology of the human person does not divide the person into parts, such that one part slowly overtakes another so long as it "grows in grace." Rather, the human being is always a whole person, fully sinner and fully saint at the same time. The flesh always remains, clinging to the believer. There the battle wages; there the law is necessary as the sinner in his transformed state is free to follow the law without compulsion or fear of the curse. The law of God is written on the heart. The transformed believer, who is made in the image of God, is free to practice it day and night. See Article VI of the Formula of Concord in Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 502.

At the same time, it is worth pointing out the critical nuance in this issue within Lutheran theology. The Lutheran framework of two kinds of righteousness understands man as fully justified *coram Deo* (before God), and thus also sanctified, completely holy, in need of no further training. In this regard, Gerhard Forde would say that sanctification is "the art of getting used to justification." See Forde, "The Lutheran View of Sanctification," in *The Preached God*, 226–44. But civic righteousness or human righteousness *coram hominibus* (before man) is indeed a place of growth and virtue, a place where the law plays a necessary and positive role, just as God intends (FC VI). This is the realm of the moral life, as Forde calls it, where the battle with the flesh is ongoing, where Luther's organic model of a good tree simply bearing good fruit seems to bump into empirical befuddlement. However, the growth that occurs in this realm, through the work of the law, is still the work of God (it is his law after all) coming to the sinner (in an act of grace) to further transform her such that her engagement with her neighbor is more regularly spontaneous, happy, free and uncalculating. Adolf Köberle is of the same mind in terms of the usefulness of the law in this regard, especially for working against the evil habits that exist in the flesh by means of the new habits inculcated there by the individual's participation in the life of the church. See Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness*, 202.

"interpretive community."[26] Similar efforts have been made in ecclesiology, with a focus on personhood as characterized primarily as being-in-relation to the extent that individuals are always persons-in-relation to other persons.[27] Other similar efforts have been made in the field of Christian ethics where accounts are given in which the Church is understood primarily as a community that has specific practices.[28] Still others have argued that theology is inherently communitarian.[29] These efforts attempt to overcome the social atomism and ahistoricism that has and continues to influence theology—problems present in the tendency toward individualism I have been critiquing.

While these efforts overcome individualism in other areas of theological conversation, it is important to address how we might overcome the discontinuity between the individual and the community in the theological conversation about the Christian life, which have characteristically been oriented with a focus on the individual. If we can only bring ourselves to consider them from more of a community oriented perspective, we can easily begin to notice just how necessary it is that the Christian life must always be discussed in terms of ecclesiology, lest we risk forgetting the very context of the Christian life itself.

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[26] For example, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Scripture and Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin. J. Vanhoozer, (Cambridge: Cambridge University: 2003), 149–69; Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1980). Often this conversation involves references to Wittgenstein's concept of "language games" with the conclusion drawn that unique communities use unique grammars. See in this regard William Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989); and Paul Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978).

[27] See for example, Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the* Imago Dei (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001); John D. Zizioulas, *Being As Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1985); and F. Leron Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

[28] See for example James Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961); Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981); and L. Gregory Jones, *Transformed Judgment: Toward a Trinitarian Account of the Moral Life* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1991).

[29] See Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001), especially chap. 7.

Overcoming the Discontinuity

The ability to overcome the discontinuity I am discussing, bred by the over-emphasis on the Christian life as it relates to the generic individual, is in fact present already in Reformation theology, particularly within the Lutheran tradition. When we have in mind MacIntyre's construal of a community, we can read the acts of that community in ways that bring out previously underemphasized features that are reflective of their inherently communal, as opposed to individualistic, nature. The sacrament of baptism can serve as a paradigmatic example. Briefly stated, baptism is a political act of the community of God. Baptism is not simply something undergone by an individual alone. It is performed by the ordained servant who has been called to do so on behalf of the congregation. Baptisms are acts in which the church itself participates. But their participation goes far beyond delegating the act of baptizing to the pastor. They also participate through their witness of the public baptism, their simultaneous confession along with the baptized, their implication in the future faith and formation of the newest member of their body, and their welcoming of that newest member into their midst as one of them. In baptism, God makes a person his own through the community of the church. In baptism, God performs his act of choosing, making a person his own, and the Christian suffers his work. Through the drowning and raising to new life that is a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, the Christian comes forth from baptism newly identified as God's child, a new creature in which faith has been given and simultaneously allowed to be grasped by the presence of the Holy Spirit. This new creature that has arisen from the baptismal waters shares with all those present in the community a common identity since all have suffered the event of God's transformation in baptism. As much as baptism constitutes the community of God's people, baptism is a work of that community as God's chosen vessel upon an individual. Such is the nature of the Christian

community where God works—through the acts of the community, God transforms and forms his people.

The Lord's Supper is another paradigmatic example where the discontinuity between individual and community is shown to be non-existent. Graham Ward points out a key piece of the liturgy that is now missing in his tradition (Anglicanism) but which can easily stand in a great many traditions.

> There is a rich and complex liturgical interchange prior to the distribution of the Eucharistic elements. It is called the fraction. The interchange has disappeared from the modern Catholic mass, through it is retained from the old Sarum Missal in the Anglican rite. The priest holds the wafer over the chalice of wine and breaks it into two saying: "We break this bread to share in the Body of Christ." The congregation respond with: "Though we are many we are one body because we all share in one bread."[30]

The communal tone of the language, the "we" repeated between the priest and those gathered, acts as a performance that foreshadows what happens in the Supper wherein Christ's body is broken, but only to be constituted again in the midst of those to whom it is distributed, transcending the language of the individual that so commonly characterizes many liturgical elements. Not only does it simply use the pronoun "we" but the act of performing the fraction, participating in the liturgical rite, functions to shape the Christian imagination politically, such that the individuals see themselves as part of a larger body.[31] Even further, the very participation in the rite is a performance that constitutes the individuals as a particular kind of community, one formed by God, the church.

Luther's teaching on the Lord's Supper carries the very same kind of communal character that is not expressed in the church's practice. Since the individualistic focus of the act is to

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[30] Ward, *Cities of God*, 152.

[31] See Bernd Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship: Ethics for Christian Citizens* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004), 89.

"discern the body," the importance of having one's "beliefs" in order takes precedence over and against one's participation in the communal relation that occurs in the Supper.[32] The communal element that does exist is only a one-on-one between the believer and Christ. But Luther requires that we take account of everyone else at the table. As Luther notes, the fellowship that is affected by the sacrament "consists in this, that all the spiritual possessions of Christ and his saints are shared with and become the common property of him who receive this sacrament."[33] Luther continues, the fellowship "is like a city where every citizen shares with all the others the city's name, honor, freedom, trade, customs, usages, help, support, protection, and the like, while at the same time he shares all the dangers of fire and flood, enemies and death, losses, taxes, and the like." Bernd Wannenwetsch, following Romans 12:5, captures Luther's sentiment when he examines the political ethic present in Paul's description of the community of God's people as "members of one another."[34] Just as I mentioned above regarding baptism, the sacrament of the

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[32] One might argue that this has communal implications—namely, that all who participate in the Supper might be of united heart and, more specifically, confession (read: mind). But the argument for the practice of discerning the body tends to primarily emphasize the need for individuals to receive the body and blood correctly, so that they do not eat and drink to their own destruction. Receiving it correctly is interpreted as "believing correctly" according to the exhortation to "discern." This argument relies on a brief passage in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (11:27–29), one which, when read in context (11:17–34), focuses strictly on the nature of the practice of the Lord's Supper in the community at Corinth. The text is not providing dogmatic instruction, but rather Paul is rebuking the Corinthians for practicing poorly *as* a community. Some have been left out; the practice does not include everyone. Paul is rebuking the Christians there for missing the sense of the Supper—that Christ has instituted it for all of God's chosen people. Discernment amounts more to understanding the nature of the community, rather than understanding and confessing correctly the mystery of Christ's body in the Lord's Supper.

The point to be made in this regard is that, while there is indeed a valid argument regarding doctrinal fidelity and the unity of the community, there is more to be explored and noted than merely the cognitive/propositional facet of the phenomenon in order to understand its place within the life of the community. The community is constituted by more than this. Communal practices exhibit more than doctrinal unity (shared propositional beliefs) but also narrative unity from which a certain kind of political identity emerges. It is the broader understanding that helps us make sense of the church's practices and perhaps even helps us to practice them more faithfully, as I suggest in what follows.

[33] *LW* 35:51.

[34] See Bernd Wannenwetsch, "Members of One Another: Charis, Ministry and Representation—A politico-ecclesial reading of Romans 12," in *A Royal Priesthood. The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically*, ed. Craig Bartholomew et al., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2002), 196–220. While not speaking directly about Luther or referring to his writings on the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (but more often to baptism), Wannenwetsch's argument in some ways bears close resemblance to Luther's presentation on the Supper. See *LW* 35:50–58.

Lord's Supper is an act in which each member of the community is implicated in a relation of responsibility for every other. In communing at the Lord's Table, each member of Christ's body shares with Christ all that belongs to Christ while at the same time Christ takes on all that belongs to the Christian. Because the body of Christ communes at the Lord's Table *together* the same kind of sharing and exchange occurs on the horizontal level as well. Not only do we share an intimate connection with him through the possession of what is his and he of what is ours, but we also share the exact same connection with all others at the table. My hopes, dreams, joys, triumphs, sorrows, pain, fears, sins, failures and despair are his—*and* they are yours. And yours are mine, as well as Christ's.

In both baptism and the Lord's Supper then, there are resources for overcoming the strong tendency toward individualism in dogmatic construals of the Christian life. By approaching them with a sense of community in mind, strong communal characteristics emerge. In so doing, we can clearly hold the more generic construal of the individual Christian life together with the ecclesiological construal that speaks of the church as the formative source for the Christian life. In speaking about those paradigmatic acts of the church above, the sacraments instituted by Christ himself to form and constitute his body, we see that God has chosen to use the practices of his people to compose and perpetuate the community of the church. In essence, the acts of the body of Christ—a community in its own right, thus we can also refer to the political use of the term "body"—are political acts used by God to continue making citizens of his kingdom. In fact, Wannenwetsch characterizes Luther's theology of the sacramental practices of the church in just this manner. "Luther makes clear that celebrating the Eucharist is nothing less than a political act in which the communicants actualize and suffer the citizenship that has been bestowed on them

by baptism."[35] Following from this, Wannenwetsch offers a precise conclusion for dealing with the overemphasis on individualism in dogmatic accounts of the Christian life. Luther's theology of the sacraments, he notes presciently, allows us to draw no other conclusion than to say, "strictly speaking, there is no such thing as an individual Christian, there are only 'fellow citizens of God's people'—or there are no Christians at all."[36]

On The Will

I want to add this final section on the will to continue holding together as inextricably linked the individual and the community. The individual is always already *in* a community. The community is, as I wrote earlier, the very location from which the individual receives the ability to identify himself or herself as an individual. It is the context from which the individual's own story emerges. I wish to focus briefly here on the will to highlight the fact that being a member of the community has implications for how and what one wills. I want to speak most specifically of the very lack of freedom of the will. This lack of freedom is another feature of the *vita passiva* that I discussed in the previous chapter. I will return to this point in a moment. For now, I will briefly discuss the nature of the will according to Lutheran theology.

The will is always directed—either by God or by the devil as Luther would have it. The will is always formed and transformed within either the community of the church to will as God desires, or outside of that community, to will otherwise. According to Luther's interpretation of the First Commandment, for the will to ally itself with anything other than God and God's will is to ally itself with a false god, and thus, with the devil. Key to my argument in chapter 3 about the

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[35] Bernd Wannenwetsch, "Liturgy," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William Cavanaugh (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 76–90.

[36] Bernd Wannenwetsch, "The Liturgical Origin of the Christian Politeia," in *Church as Politeia: The Political Self-Understanding of the Church*, ed. Christoph Stumpf and Holger Zaborowski (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 323–40.

passive formation of the individual within the community is the assumption that the will of the individual is not free. The community itself, as passively created, should thus be understood as led by God in all things, yet constituted by those who are still being formed. The individuals who constitute the community of the church are always what Luther would call *simul iustus et peccator*, saint and sinner at the same time. The old man who was killed is still the man of the Christian's flesh. The old man is the man who must be, as Luther describes in his Small Catechism, drowned daily in baptism reminding the Christian of his identity as saint, a creature created and born of the Spirit.[37] The flesh clings to the new creature. The Christian life, characterized by simultaneous existence as saint and sinner, is a life of battle between the old man and the new.

The background of Luther's position in the *simul* extends in part from his polemic against Erasmus. Luther's position against Erasmus—who argued for the freedom of the will—was to argue forcefully and unapologetically that the will of human beings was in fact bound. Free choice did not exist, even if in experience one "feels" as if the will is free. Luther's position here, which gives way to his *simul* in order to account for the transformation of the Christian life as eschatologically finished but not fully realized in this age, also lends clarity to the argument above about the receptivity of the Christian life in the *vita passiva*. For as Luther argues about the will, it is bound because it is never simply neutral. What is to be willed is never up for deliberation, such that the will could be pictured as some inert faculty always in a position of neutrality, waiting to choose, waiting for persuasion. Rather, the will is always already aimed. We can make sense of this position by comparing it with a position that emerges nearly four centuries later out of the phenomenological tradition regarding consciousness: consciousness is

[37] Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 360.

not simply some inert faculty or state of being; for consciousness as a phenomenon to even make sense it can only be understood as a person's being *conscious of* something.[38] Similarly, in the hermeneutic tradition, extending as it does from phenomenological tradition, Paul Ricoeur helpfully notes that we never simply see, but that we always "see as."[39] More simply put, we never simply "read" the texts of the world; rather we are always practicing interpretation since all reading is interpretation.[40] In the same way, the will always *wills*. The will always wants. It is always in a state of desiring something. As sinners, the will is always busy willing something selfish, something ungodly, something that is an offense to God. Thus, following the construal of the Christian life in the *vita passiva*, the Christian suffers God's confrontation because the will is bent away from God. Counter-aiming the will requires something radical. It requires the work of God in his renewal through the power of the Spirit, which occurs first in death. The old man is put to death, and the new one who is raised is created with a will aimed toward God's good and pleasing ends.

The modern belief in the freedom of the will, which is an extension of an Enlightenment anthropology that posits a total human autonomy, is perhaps the greatest obstacle for understanding the nature of passive formation, especially in relation to the understanding of the will as found in Luther. It is unquestionable that moderns believe, like Erasmus, that the will is simply free and thus that humans are purely deliberative beings. Freedom of the will has been a

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[38] Edmund Husserl, the father of the phenomenological tradition, articulated this in his discussion of intention. See Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy; First Book, General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F. Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982).

[39] Paul Ricoeur, "Imagination in Discourse and in Action," in *From Text to Action*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Evanston: Northwestern University, 2007), 168–87.

[40] In the end, since Luther argued so much earlier than either of these traditions about the non-neutrality of the will, it is worth speculating whether the "discoveries" of the phenomenological and hermeneutic tradition are not simply repristinations of the earliest theology of Protestantism (and of course, even earlier, Augustinianism of a sort), yet both traditions themselves seem unaware of their roots in this way.

treasured faculty of man since at least the humanism of Erasmus, but becomes a common part of human anthropology within the philosophers of the Enlightenment, perhaps most famously with Descartes. Charles Taylor demonstrates the influence Enlightenment philosophers like Descartes have had on modern conceptions of the will. He quotes from a letter written by Descartes to Christina of Sweden.

> Now freewill is in itself the noblest thing we can have because it makes us in a certain manner equal to God and exempts us from being his subjects; and so its rightful use is the greatest of all the goods we possess, and further there is nothing that is more our own or that matters more to us. From all this it follows that nothing but freewill can produce our greatest contentments.[41]

This point about the freedom of the will is important for reasons beyond the kind of individualism it supports. Following from the argument in the previous chapter, the fact that God's people are indeed chosen and suffering God's formative work is an affront to the freedom of the will. Luther's argument with Erasmus takes on the false notion of the freedom of the will in a manner helpful for situating the life of the Christian in terms of God's work of choosing for himself a people, a work suffered by those who are God's enemies, yet whom he is calling to himself through the word.

Luther argued with Erasmus, long before the modern notion of free will gained its dominant foothold, that the belief in a free will or Enlightenment autonomy is nothing more than a fantasy. Even if it is argued from an existential perspective that the will is free simply because we do what we want, that position is already hobbled with a significant problem. Gerhard Forde states the problem precisely: "We do what we want. And that is just the trouble! We are bound to do what we want. That is why there is no such thing, really, as a free will."[42] The will simply

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[41] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1989), 147.

[42] Gerhard O. Forde, *The Captivation of the Will: Luther vs. Erasmus on Freedom and Bondage*, ed. Steven

does what it wants. As noted above, by definition the will is always in a state of wanting one thing and not wanting another. And from that state, it cannot be changed—it is, as Luther says, immutable. Forde continues, "[T]he will is not a thing, not a faculty or some such, but something like loving and being loved, a state of being grasped, a possibility of being captivated. Thus Luther could say that he certainly acknowledged the existence of this fitness, or 'dispositional quality' and 'passive aptitude.' Human beings, even though they cannot change themselves, can be 'gotten at.'"[43]

In community then, the will is taught to be directed. Either it is directed by the God—God has "gotten at" the will in his transformative work, and subsequently forms it through the preaching, teaching, and other practices of the church. Or, it is directed and the devil himself rides it, as Luther would say. Under the formation of anything or anyone but God himself, the will of the individual is formed to desire things other than what is God's will. In either case, as we have noted, the will is always already directed. The will is never free.

The theological consequences of considering the bondage of the will include the fact that transformation must be a condition of possibility for engaging in the life of the church. One cannot choose by any motion of the will to become a child of God. In fact, terrified by God himself, one is only driven to choose hell. Engaging in the life of the church is something that can only be worked by God and through his choosing to make one a member of his people. Once again, as it is God who forms the church, being killed and made alive is the basic event that constitutes an individual as a member of the church, an event suffered by every one of its members and thus it is an event that constitutes the collective identity of the church as a community. All have been killed and made alive—all have been transformed—and through this

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Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 54.

work of God's Spirit the church is not only perpetuated, but, reflecting historically, it was also the very same event that birthed the church in the first place. The disciples were chosen. The Spirit worked transformation in the apostles, whose subsequent preaching in the power of the Spirit chose further disciples and brought the church to life. As Christ breathed his Spirit on the disciples, the birth of the church was like a breathing of the Spirit into the new body left behind after Christ's Ascension. As Graham Ward provocatively notes, the Ascension did not cause Christ to be absent—it did not cause a lack—but the Ascension was the condition for the expansion of Christ's body into the body of the church, an act that is repeated, rehearsed, and re(-)membered in the church's practices, particularly preaching, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.[44] As noted above, when Ward discusses the liturgical performance of the fraction, it marks the necessity of the breaking so that all who are broken can be re-membered again as the community of God's people in the act of Communion. All are consuming that which was once whole and now broken only to be formed as a unified community, the very Body of Christ. As Luther states, "The *significance* or effect of this sacrament is fellowship of all the saints....Hence it is that Christ and all saints are one spiritual body, just as the inhabitants of a city are one community and body, each citizen being a member of the other and of the entire city."[45]

The Body of Christ, the church, comes forth through the event of transformation. The will of those who crucified the Lord was crushed in the preaching of the word, in the confrontation with their complicity in putting the Lord to death. God worked death in that proclamation. But just as Christ was raised, those who heard were raised to new life because Jesus's death was proclaimed for them as their salvation, and Christ was proclaimed as their Lord in his

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[43] Forde, *Captivation of the Will*, 57.

[44] Ward, *Cities of God*, 112–14.

[45] *LW* 35:50–51.

Resurrection. As new creatures, the community of God's people that emerged as a result of the apostolic proclamation walked in new life with a will that was directed by the Spirit. No longer in bondage to the desires of flesh and self, they were free in Christ to serve God, love their neighbor, and live as witnesses to God's saving work. The will goes, as Luther puts it, where God wills and goes.[46] The will is directed once again, but not toward the death that would result when one is a slave to self and Satan, but as captive to the Spirit of God, which Luther describes as "royal freedom."[47]

Furthermore, as God has so chosen to use the communal practices of the church to transform those whom he would make to become a member of his people, the will of each individual is directed by God to continue doing his work. It is through the practices of the community that God does his work. He has chosen to speak and act through the church, proclaiming his word to the world. And so the church's narrative is perpetuated as it embodies it within the practices of its tradition. The community of the church becomes God's means of working in the world.

Finally, the theological consequences of Luther's understanding of the bondage of the will pertain to the argument of this chapter. The individual is always given an identity as part of a community. The Christian individual is always given identity in baptism, a communal act of God's people, a moment within which God chooses to act through his chosen vessel, the church. The relationship of the individual to the community is thus inextricable, and as we have shown here, when the community is of central concern, the formerly dogmatic restrictions and boundaries are easily made to disappear since it becomes quickly clear that the Christian life can never be discussed without constant reference to ecclesiology.

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[46] Forde, *Captivation of the Will*, 58.

Conclusion

With this, not only the chapter but also the first part comes to its end. In conclusion, I would draw attention to three matters.

First of all, in this chapter I completed my demonstration of how central the notion of the individual Christian and the attendant doctrine of the Christian Life cannot be separated from doctrine of the church. Rather, both doctrines are inextricably linked in such a way that when we take notice of this, our sense of both is enriched. They each become thicker, more robust, if you will. At this point, we can conclude that treating them separately is detrimental and confusing. The Christian life is unquestionably formed within the life of the ecclesia. To say this is to draw a logical conclusion from what we have said concerning the *vita passiva* and how we understand God to be at work. It is through the church and its practices—through the church's very life—that God brings about the Christian life in any individual.

A second feature follows from this. At particular junctures in this chapter I have adopted a certain language which favors talk of the Christian life that seems to be quite critical of the work and use of the law in the life of the Christian. This has been in an effort to clearly distinguish my argument against perspectives of sanctification that understand the Christian life as strictly a process of growth and habituation. But my argument might cause readers to believe that I think there is no room for or no sense of growth in the Christian life, or that habits are not present in the Christian life or that I do not believe that life in the church and participation in its practices actually fosters habits and virtues. I must be clear that my argument has not been aimed at this particular point. Rather, as I have just said above, it is the church that produces the Christian life. Indeed, the title of this chapter alludes to my position on this issue—that the church produces the

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[47] *LW* 33:65. See also Forde, *Captivation of the Will*, 59.

Christian life. By participating in the life of the church, the individual Christian is fostered into the ways of the Christian life by the means God has chosen to use to make his people. In other words, the practices of the church, where God uses preaching, catechesis, worship, and so forth—are the places and practices that nurture and engender the Christian life. These communal practices engage the individual into the narrative of the community itself as a means of being shaped by God who is actively at work upon the very people he has gathered together. And thus, just as Luther described it, their collective life is a *vita passiva* as God so works to transform them and they undergo his shaping.

Finally, it is important to note that the preceding paragraph also captures in brief the ecclesiology I have set forth in these first chapters. The *vita passiva* is not just descriptive of the Christian life but the collective life of the ecclesia. Its communal practices carry, exhibit, and engender the biblical narrative. That narrative features God as the main character, the protagonist, the primary actor, the operating agent—and the rest of the cast is rendered passive in the sweep of his actions. The narrative of the church expresses that God uses its life and is active in and through it to make his people. As the church remains faithful to that narrative, it endures. But the church must also endure the God who will keep the church faithful to its narrative. In the chapters that follow, I will explore three areas in which the church can be called unfaithful in our time. Yet in each, we will see how the church can return to faithfulness by means of enduring the work of God in its life.

PART II

THE CHURCH'S (CAPTIVITY TO AN) ALTERNATIVE STORY

In the following chapters, I want to account for the church's captivity to the narrative of American culture by reflecting on three practices of the church that demonstrate such cultural captivity. The church's captivity is visible in these practices because, as we have already examined, practices are meant to reflect the story of a particular community. Since we have already established the church's narrative according to the Scriptures as one in which God is the agent working to create his church and thus renders the Christian life as a *vita passiva*, we have a means of recognizing when the church's practices do not reflect this story. In the chapters that follow, I will argue that the church's practices are captive to characteristic features of American culture and its narrative rather than the church's own.

As I proceed, my argument in the second part builds on the work of the first. Not only have we established the proper narrative of the church, but we have also extended the tradition of understanding the Christian life ecclesiologically. This extension or progress can be understood, as we noted in the Introduction to part 1, to be a means of perpetuating the church's own tradition, part of the ongoing negotiation that any community's tradition experiences as it is constantly being rearticulated within its own life. One basic reason for this rearticulation or negotiation is that the world in which any community exists is always changing. Thus the community must reestablish the meaningfulness of its own narrative over and against its relationship to the world and the context in which the community finds itself.

In the previous chapters however, we have understood what it means to reestablish the tradition in a different manner. As MacIntyre argues, every tradition can experience two kinds of

conflict.[1] One of them is internal. That is, members of the community that embody the tradition are able, by means of the tradition itself, to question the meaningfulness of the tradition. In other words, they are able to examine how members of the community ought to understand the tradition and whether or not the members of the tradition do actually understand it. Of course, this can be done by examining whether or not the practices of the tradition are being faithfully embodied. To do this, one simply observes whether the practices of the tradition are creating persons who embody the narrative of the community. In the first part of this dissertation then, we have been doing this sort of work, extending the tradition by means of posing an internal conflict.

The extension of the tradition in the first part examined how well the two typically discrete doctrines—ecclesiology and the Christian life—ought to be brought together in a manner that (re)affirms their interrelationality. That is, we saw how the two doctrines inevitably mutually inform and implicate each other. Thus the argument of those chapters was to show how the two doctrines do in fact hold together and are effective for helping the church understand its own life more appropriately according to its own narrative, thus also making the church's own narrative more clear. The effect of this work for the project at hand now presents itself.

MacIntyre pointed out that traditions can also be challenged from the outside, in an external manner. The work of the first part of this dissertation provides the opportunity to adequately analyze select practices of the church in order to see if they are appropriately

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[1] MacIntyre writes in his *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1989), "an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflict: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition...and those internal, interpretive debates through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and by whose progress a tradition is constituted," 12. For further elaboration on MacIntyre's concept of tradition, see Jean Porter, "Tradition in the Recent Work of Alasdair MacIntyre," in *Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. Mark C. Murphy (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003), 38–69; Mark T. Mitchell, "Michael Polanyi, Alasdair MacIntyre, and the Role of Tradition," *Humanitas* 19 (2006): 97–125.

reflecting the church's narrative in a faithful way over and against or in light of the presence of other communities with their alternative stories. By performing this analysis then, we will move into the kind of negotiation of a tradition MacIntyre characterizes as external. Since traditions are living arguments embodied by communities that carry a veritable story of everything, traditions, by their very existence suggest the existence of alternatives with which they are in conflict. My argument in this dissertation is that the church is culturally captive to an alternative narrative in just such a way that demonstrates the church's conflict with another community. By engaging in an analysis of the church's practices, I will assess them as culturally captive, but not entirely lost. Rather the church's captivity is best understood as unwitting. In fact, as I will argue, the church believes it is being faithful, and is virtually unaware that it is not. By drawing on the work of part 1, I will make suggestions in each chapter for how the church can recover the faithful performance of its life through its practice by articulating how faithful practices ought to look and what the church can do to once again re-embody its own narrative in its practices.

As follows then, the first chapter in part 2 will examine the church's practice of preaching. I will argue that it is captive to American culture in that it embodies the characteristic feature of American religiosity that has been dubbed "therapeutic." Thus, the chapter is entitled "Preaching in Therapeutic Culture." The second chapter in part 2 examines the church's practice of evangelism. Entitled "Church Marketing in Consumeristic Culture," the chapter will assess the church's practice of evangelism as not only appearing to be but also operating like marketing. The final chapter will analyze how the church teaches a specific doctrine: vocation. There I will argue that the church catechizes its members into a doctrine of vocation that is captive to the culture of total work. "The Catechesis of Vocation in the Culture of Total Work" will examine this captivity and suggest, as will be the case in each of the preceding chapters in part 2, how the

church can recover a faithful practice, particularly in this chapter, of catechesis, by retrieving a proper understanding of vocation.

Each of these chapters examines the external conflict of an alternative story invading and perverting the life of the church. Each of them provides an analysis of the contemporary situation and suggests how the church can respond to its own cultural captivity and recover faithful practices that embody its authentic narrative, thus allowing it to be the place where God is at work making his people through the church's life.

CHAPTER FIVE

PREACHING IN THERAPEUTIC CULTURE

In this new global order, religion has two possible roles: therapeutic or critical. It either helps individuals to function better in the existing order, or it tries to assert itself as a critical agency articulating what is wrong with this order as such, a space for the voices of discontent—in this second case, religion as such tends toward assuming the role of a heresy.
Slavoj Zizek

In this chapter, I want to focus on the therapeutic character of religion as it resulted from the epistemological revolution that has relegated religion to the private sphere of society where it has been counted only as a value and thus come to be treated merely instrumentally. Within the life of the church, its cultural captivity to American culture and its therapeutic character is visible in the church's practice of preaching. I will argue here that preaching in American churches is captive to the therapeutic when preaching does not actually transform the people of God. And if preaching is to be transformative in the church—which is how the biblical narrative construes it—then the therapeutic is an important factor to deal with since therapy only leaves people as they are. To make this argument, I will first define preaching so that we can easily see it as a practice that flows from the Christian narrative as a work of God. Then I will analyze the state of preaching in America by engaging with a number of thinkers who have articulated the criticism that preaching is therapeutic, along with discussing a classic exemplar of preaching that might be considered therapeutic. One of the critics with whom I will interact, John Wright, has articulated a substantial recommendation for recovering faithful preaching, yet I will argue his recommendation does not go far enough toward understanding the practice of preaching as a

work of God in the life of the Christian community that transforms people and makes the church.[1] That God is at work transforming and creating his people is of course the significant concern of this dissertation, which I laid out in earlier chapters. Those who share my own cultural analysis of preaching (or by whom I have come to share the same conclusions about culture) do not have good answers for helping to see how God is carrying out his work in the church's life. As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, some simply assert he is there, as if it is a working assumption, but there is no follow through theologically. This chapter will include an articulation of that theological issue. Following my analysis of Wright, whose own work fits among those who lack such an articulated divine theology, I will suggest a more faithful practice of preaching that actually transforms and provide an example of what such preaching might look and sound like.

Perhaps it would be helpful to think of this chapter as addressing this working question: "how does one distinguish between what is appropriate in preaching as opposed to what is inappropriate?" In order to answer this question, it should be clear from my previous articulation of ecclesiology, following MacIntyre, that the church must be understood as a community with particular practices that are made intelligible by and emerge from the narrative by which the community lives and from which it gains its identity. That narrative for the church comes from the Scriptures—it is the biblical narrative. Thus, for this chapter, we must understand that preaching is necessarily both a product of and a practice that communicates that narrative. To answer my working question then requires examining the present conflict between the narrative

[1] The reader should note that I do not engage this conversation on preaching from the perspective of homiletics but from the perspective of systematic theology. John Wright's work is a clear example of a theological discussion of preaching that recognizes the challenge of the therapeutic situation and the importance of the biblical narrative. These features make Wright a valuable conversation partner for my purposes. I readily acknowledge that there is great value in engaging with the various thinkers and conversations emerging within the kerygmatic and post-liberal schools of homiletical thought, but such an engagement is outside of my intentions here.

to which I argue that preaching is captive, and the narrative from which we understand faithful preaching. Preaching that fosters the same therapeutic narrative that has come to characterize religion generally in American culture is preaching that is *inappropriate*. Preaching that is faithful to the biblical narrative is *appropriate*. The challenge is perhaps navigating the differences, since I will argue below that the therapeutic narrative is parasitic upon the biblical narrative, that is, it uses similar language but performs something different. But before we go any further, it is important to zero in on preaching as a practice. We must examine in a basic sense, what preaching is, as well as to give an initial theological account of preaching in order to see how preaching that is therapeutic departs from faithfulness.

What is Preaching?

When we talk about preaching, what exactly are we talking about? I take the referent "preaching" to summon up familiar and common images in the reader's mind. To settle on the basic sense of what I mean when I use the term "preaching," I want to offer what I take to be a basically agreeable definition of preaching "as we imagine it." I will make a few adjustments to it below, but for now, I want to state it up front in the plainest sense just for the sake of being clear. Preaching, for all intents and purposes is relatively obvious. We all know where to look for it. It is what we see on Sunday morning. Just visit the local church down the street. It is also easy to find on television during the week. Just turn on EWTN or TBN. Preaching is what pastors do at some point during a worship service where the people of God are gathered together. It is part of most congregations' weekly ritual—somewhere within the worship service a sermon will be preached. It will probably last 10–20 minutes, perhaps longer depending on the context. Preachers offer sermons on the biblical text. They usually speak from some place of prominence where the attention of those gathered is directed. Those who preach are those who have been publicly appointed within the local congregation to carry out that task and fulfill that calling on

behalf of those gathered. *This is what I want the reader to imagine when I use the term "preaching."* This is not a theological account yet. All this brief description is meant to do is point to a certain activity that happens in a certain context and to note, when we see that activity happening, that is what we call preaching. I do not mean to be comprehensive in any manner here. As a practice, the description I have noted is what I think of when I hear the word "preaching" and so I simply want the reader to share this image. I will address preaching in a more theologically descriptive but also more abstract manner below.

Preaching As Authoritative Divine Discourse

How else should we understand preaching? To move past a merely observational description that accounts for preaching as a phenomenon we see and experience, we might describe it in a way that reflects exactly what we would expect from the biblical narrative. Preaching is authoritative divine discourse. It is God speaking. And he is doing so as he always does—through means. For preaching, the particular means is obvious: it is the voice of a human being. God has been doing this for the entire history of the world, as the Old Testament recounts for us. On rare occasion, God chooses to break in through other means, like angels or a disembodied voice where humans experience his address, but consistently God chooses to speak through human beings. This highlights three simple things about how God has revealed himself to us, both particularly pertinent for preaching. First, as the distinguished Luther scholar Robert Kolb will often say, "God is a God of conversation and community." God is a speaking God. The biblical narrative makes this clear. And God speaks specifically to his chosen people. Second, God does what he wants and his prerogative is to reveal himself to us through means, rather than directly. Thus he ordained that he would address his people through the voices of those he has chosen. In the Christian church, those individuals who speak publicly on behalf of God are pastors. They follow in the footsteps of Moses (Exodus 4:10–12) and the Prophets (e.g.,

Jeremiah 1:6–10), delivering the same kinds of authoritative messages, all of which originate within the story of how God has chosen to reveal himself and interact with his people in the world. Third, God's work through means offers to his people a mode of experiencing his work that is beyond the subjective. What I mean by that is God has chosen to give us authoritative external works and words to which we can look and point to confidently as those locations where his promises are made real to us. Rather than relying on our own subjective "feeling" of experiencing God, we can look confidently to baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the preached word as those places where God authoritatively addresses his people in such a manner that we do not have to question our "inner experience" but have been given something to believe in—that is, the means by which God has chosen to communicate. They are always external, authoritative, and a manner of address, which communicates either confrontation or promise.

Preaching as read through the biblical narrative of the *vita passiva* should be understood as demanded and necessary within the life of the church. If the church, as God's people, are chosen, formed, and sustained by the work of God alone—a work that is *suffered* by God's people who undergo his address, gathering, and formative work—preaching is a foundational part of God's means of making his people. For it is by faith, as the confessional writers constantly emphasize, that the Christian life is lived and experienced. And faith, as the apostle Paul writes, comes by hearing (Romans 10:17). Oswald Bayer emphasizes how this point cannot be overlooked, saying "it is so important to take note of the means or medium by which justifying faith comes." He continues,

> According to Romans 10:17, faith comes by hearing. It comes by hearing the Word that addresses us. It comes in the promise and pronouncement by which Jesus Christ opens up himself and the kingdom of God to me, bringing me, within the Christian community, back home, to paradise, making me a new person. The Augsburg Confession was adopting the theology of Luther [that is, the *vita passiva*] when in Article V it spoke about the ministry of the Word—its "institution"—by which we receive justifying faith: "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as (i.e.) through means, he gives

> the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. It teaches us that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ's merit, when we so believe."[2]

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, faith is generated in the hearing of the word of God. In the narrative of the *vita passiva*, that faith is a faith which arises from being killed and made alive again by the very word that is heard. Subsequently, that faith is further bolstered and sustained through the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about ongoing repentance and confession, prompting absolution—a regular ritual that characterizes the Christian life within the narrative of the *vita passiva* in the same manner Luther describes it in his Small Catechism. Preaching that works repentance carries the Christian community through their communal memory of baptism, fostering what Luther describes as a daily practice of drowning the old man as an embodiment of the life of the new man. In sum, Luther's baptismal and penitential piety is a return to the word, the authoritative address to which Christians must always look for assurance of their election. If Christians look elsewhere (which means, in essence, at ourselves, for in such moments we break the First Commandment and make a God out of our own choosing, rather than suffering God as God), they risk missing the promise. Bayer again returns us to the necessity and demand of preaching that falls out of the Christian narrative.

> The moment we turn aside and look back at ourselves and our own doings instead of at God and God's promise, at that moment we are again left alone with ourselves and with our own judgment about ourselves. We will then be inevitably entangled in ourselves. We will fall back into all the uncertainty of the defiant and despairing heart that looks only to self and not the promise of God. That is why it is so important to take note of the means or medium by which justifying faith comes.[3]

Preaching then, is the very means by which God has chosen to address his people. It is an external means upon which we can look for where God has authoritatively done his work to

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[2] Oswald Bayer, *Living By Faith: Justification and Sanctification*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 44.

deliver his word and create faith. And the *vita passiva* accounts for it by understanding the hearing of the word of God—hearing that works faith—as something that is suffered by God's people. Here, as opposed to the church practices analyzed briefly in chapter 2, we see clearly that God is the central actor. In preaching, through the preacher God speaks directly to his people. He speaks to confront, he speaks to absolve, and he speaks to exhort—he chooses and elects, and those who hear and are given faith become his people. As William Willimon would put it, through preaching, God intrudes into the lives of his people.[4] God's address, which comes already after his work of gathering his people for worship[5] is a move that renders the hearer passive to his work, be it confrontation of sin or restoration toward life. In the declaration of God's promise God reveals himself to his people and they are made his.

Another helpful way of understanding preaching as authoritative divine discourse comes from the work of Gerhard Forde, who argued that preaching must always include proclamation. This is because preaching is God's address. Preachers act as God's mouthpiece. Preaching, it should be said, is a *form* of proclamation. Preaching may or may not be, at any given instance, proclamation. But preaching always *should include* proclamation. But what is proclamation? It is, as Forde helpfully states in the very beginning of his *Theology is for Proclamation*, "explicit declaration of the good news, the gospel, the *kerygma*. It is at once more specific and more comprehensive than preaching." Forde continues,

> Proclamation is more specific than preaching because not all that we ordinarily call preaching—teaching, edifying, ethical exhortation, persuasion, apologies for Christian living—is necessary for proclamation. At the same time, proclamation is more comprehensive because it occurs apart from formal preaching, most notably in

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[3] Bayer, *Living by Faith*, 44.

[4] William Willimon, *The Intrusive Word: Preaching to the Unbaptized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

[5] *Gottesdienst*, *cultus dei*, or *cultus divinus* are better terms here, for they capture the sense that worship is in fact primarily God's work rather than a human work, thus keeping with the narrative of the *vita passiva* employed here. See *Worship, Gottesdienst, Cultus Dei*, ed. James L. Brauer (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 291–93.

> the sacraments and the liturgy, and also in the everyday mutual conversation of Christians.[6]

Proclamation then should be understood as a central feature of preaching because it construes preaching as authoritative divine discourse. Through the preacher as mouthpiece, God speaks. If the preacher does not proclaim the promises of God he has been called to deliver, proclamation is not present. Thus, Forde's argument suggests that preaching should always include proclamation. Forde's argument also suggests that proclamation can take place in contexts other than the pulpit or in sermons. We will visit this point in the next chapter.

Preaching as a Practice

It is also helpful to understand how it is that preaching should be called a "practice," especially since we are relying on MacIntyre's construal of communities in which practices are fundamental to their identities. If, as I noted above, preaching makes and sustains the church, it is just the kind of practice MacIntyre highlights that helps us to understand the church as a community in the sense he means it. This is because we can see that preaching is a practice that emerges from the community's narrative and is constitutive of its existence as part of its ongoing embodied tradition. In my observational description, I noted that preaching is an activity to which one has been called on behalf of the local congregation where one practices preaching, but what exactly is the task of preaching to which one has been called?

Let us answer briefly two questions. First, what is the "practice" of preaching? Second, what is the task to which one has been called as a preacher? Answering these questions will allow us later to engage with the analysis of preaching as captive to the therapeutic by giving us a basic faithful definition of preaching from which "therapeutic preaching" has departed.

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[6] Gerhard O. Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 1–2. The reader should note that Forde is distinguishing proclamation from systematic theology. See also Gustaf Wingren, *The Living*

What is the practice of preaching? For one thing, preaching is not just the task of some*one*. Rather, we must remember MacIntyre's definition of a practice, which implies all practices are practices of communities. Preaching then, is not just a practice of preachers. Preaching is not simply done by a lone individual lurking in the midst of a community to whom he makes his address. Preaching, as Stanley Hauerwas helpfully recognizes, "is not what a preacher does, but rather it is the activity of the whole community. Preaching as a practice is the activity of the whole church that requires the church to be as able listeners, as well-schooled and well-crafted hearers as the preacher is the proclaimer."[7] Preaching is a practice that in part constitutes the life of the community. In other words, to be the church, preaching must be practiced. Yet, we must also understand that preaching is a practice that also constitutes the community itself, that is, preaching is a practice that makes the church. This point is obscured in Hauerwas's definition, but he comes at it later in his article by saying, "It should be obvious that preaching as a practice required by and for the church is not separable from what preaching is about. Preaching is the proclamation of the Word of God as found in the people of Israel and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth."[8] Here, Hauerwas is pointing out that the narrative of the community demands preaching in order both to be communicated as well as to be performed. That is, preaching as a practice emerges from the biblical narrative, the narrative around which the church's identity is constituted and understood. Preaching communicates that narrative by telling the story of God's creative work in making his people *and* it also performs it by being the very means by which God makes his people. In that way, pushing beyond Hauerwas, preaching is God's address to his people. That fact is exactly what makes preaching a practice. While

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Word: A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church, trans. Victor C. Pogue (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), 17.

[7] Stanley Hauerwas, "Practice Preaching," in *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 235–40.

Hauerwas reflects on the politico-communal nature of the practice of preaching—that is, preaching is a necessary practice of the entire community of the church without which there would be no church—we are adding the theological dimension typically missing from Hauerwas: that God is active in the preaching of the Word to speak through the preacher to transform hearers and make his people. If we were to follow Hauerwas, we would conclude that preaching, while important and constitutive of the community of God's people, is only an act of the community itself. While at times, Hauerwas comes close to expressing something of a divine theology where God is shown to be the one at work in making his people, preaching turns out not to be one of those means God uses to accomplish his work. At least, if Hauerwas thinks it is one of those means, no evidence of such a position exists. And this is just the problem with understanding preaching as a practice and locating the source and norm of that practice strictly within the narrative of a community while treating that narrative as purely immanent. This tends to be Hauerwas's weakness. He seems to build a theology off of MacIntyre's concepts, rather than simply using them methodologically as I have done.[9] This brings us to the second question concerning the task of preaching.

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[8] Hauerwas, "Practice Preaching," 237–38.

[9] Hauerwas seems to indicate the reasoning behind this position in two places from his work, one early, another late. Hauerwas admits he does not know how God works, and in fact, is not sure if he believes in God most of the time. In a brief editorial in the Huffington Post, Hauerwas offers that confession in reflection on responses to his recent memoir, *Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). He says in the editorial, "God is just not there for me like he is for other Christians." A cryptic comment, it is not entirely clear what he means. But I find it somewhat revealing about his theology, where God seems in some sense to be remarkably absent in the working of the community that is the church. If anything, the assumption that God is there might suffice for Hauerwas, but, as is the problem for this dissertation, exactly how God is present and what he's up to is not clear. Hauerwas's assumption of God's presence seems to limit his ability to understand transformation, and perhaps even to believe it is something God does, rather than conflating transformation with his own Aristotelian position on practices and habituation. See Stanley Hauerwas, "The Surprise of Being a Christian," in *The Huffington Post*, June 3, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/stanley-hauerwas/people-are-surprised-that_b_599230.html (accessed August 2, 2011). In an earlier work, his position in this regard is already clear. See my discussion of Hauerwas in chapter 2, especially in relation to his comments in *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1983).

We should understand the practice of preaching from the perspective of the task to which the preacher is called, and further, how one is called to that task. In a very plain sense, one is called to the task as a simple member of the church. The Great Commission calls disciples to go and make other disciples (Matthew 28:18–20). The important concept here is that disciples have to be *made*. A task is given, and God is the one who gives it. Further, the calling to make disciples is a calling to proclaim God's word. And when the word of God is proclaimed, God is at work making disciples out of those who hear and to whom he has given the gift of faith. Preachers then, are called to a unique office, the office of the ministry, through the church. This is because for the church to be the church and for disciples to be made, the word must be heard. For the word to be heard, it must be preached. The church recognizes this fact of its existence and thus calls some men to fulfill this task—the preaching of the word regularly so that Christ is proclaimed and therefore the congregation is addressed by God in the word preached. Through this address, the preaching of the word as a practice of God's people, God actually comes to his people through means in order to do his work of transforming human beings and making the church. Through preachers, as they speak God's word and God thus reveals himself to those who hear, God is actually electing. In other words, preachers are the means by which God chooses his people—preachers do the electing. Gerhard Forde states this point strongly saying, "the point of preaching is that it is the instance in which the God who rules all things by necessity reveals what it is that he necessarily wills. The preacher, that is, has the authority from the Lord Jesus actually to do the electing!"[10]

For greater illumination on this point, it is helpful to refer to the work of Gustaf Wingren. In discussing the ministry of reconciliation in his *The Living Word*, Wingren describes the office

[10] Gerhard O. Forde, *The Captivation of the Will: Luther vs. Erasmus on Freedom and Bondage*, ed. Steven Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 67–68.

or vocation that the preacher has and by which he comes to have it.[11] In the first place, Wingren points out the office of the ministry has already been established by God in Christ who was the Word. The authority for placing one into the office is not the congregation's, but Christ's who first established and instituted the office as he himself was sent. God sent Christ into the world to do the work of God himself, a fulfillment of the promises God made to his people beginning with Adam, then Abraham, then Israel. Christ, upon his resurrection, authorized others to carry out his work of reconciliation. Through the proclamation of Christ by the apostles—those chosen and sent by Christ himself—the church was born. The church further participates in the ministry of reconciliation, and, having been fashioned into the body of Christ by the word that was heard, continues the work of calling others by the word and sending them into the world to proclaim it. Like Christ, the church calls individual men to proclaim the word and further carry out this vocation in a special manner, as unique representatives of Christ but not distinctly different from all other members of the congregation who also are called to and participate in the ministry of reconciliation as Christ's body. Preachers then, are given a particular task by God through the congregation—that is, they are to preach the word and administer the sacraments, and so act as God's voice amongst the people he gathers, forms, and sustains through the office of the ministry. Preaching then is a practice ordained and authorized by God in Christ. It is a task to which men are called that has been established by the word itself, and by which the word is carried into the world to accomplish what God has sent it to do: reconcile humanity to himself.

Preaching According to the Christian Narrative

In every way I have discussed preaching above in a manner that is consistent and faithful to the biblical narrative. As authoritative divine discourse, God speaks to whom he wants to speak

[11] Wingren, *The Living Word*, 96–107.

when, where, and however he chooses. He has chosen to do so through the mouths of preachers just as through the Prophets and Moses. The narrative of the *vita passiva* construes preaching as a means by which God works. And the people of God suffer the ways of God by being addressed through his chosen means and thus transformed when his word is heard. Faithful or appropriate preaching declares the promises of God through which God works to kill and make alive. Preaching is also a practice in the MacIntyrian sense. And MacIntyre has been helpful for offering a way to understand the community of God's people. As a community of distinct practices that comes from a particular narrative, the church's practice of preaching emerges directly from that narrative and functions to make the community of the church distinctly what it is as well as to sustain it in its ongoing life.

Yet for the church in the American context, a problem arises immediately at this stage. The fact that preaching is authoritative divine discourse should be uncontroversial, but in fact we have a problem with it. We feel we need to reconcile it with the fact/value distinction within American culture. The American cultural context provides another narrative, which challenges that of the church. The fact/value distinction relativizes the authority of God's voice for us, and thus preaching as a practice becomes relativized to a different narrative. The church has felt the need to adapt. This sense of obligation is definitive of its cultural captivity to the American narrative. The preacher John W. Wright, in a reflection on his own preaching, helpfully points out how this obliged adaptation has come to infect the life of the church.

Preaching in America: Fostering the Therapeutic

Wright begins his work, *Telling God's Story*, by reflecting on his own preaching. He was intending to do one thing: preach faithfully. But people were not hearing him. His personal reflection caused him to realize he was not being heard because his hearers wanted and expected something else. Their imagination was tuned to a different kind of sermon, a different experience

of religion as delivered through preaching—that is, therapy.[12] Wright characterizes his hearers as users of religion to meet their needs. Preachers then were obligated to preach in such a way to accomplish those ends, bringing their hearers back each week—maybe with a friend or neighbor in tow—and perhaps attracting others to stop in and see what the church had on offer.[13] But from whence the therapeutic imagination?

American culture is commonly perceived to be radically divided as a result of the epistemological revolution of the Enlightenment into a world of public and private spheres of life. That revolution also produced the fact/value distinction, a further conceptual referent around which American culture itself came to be organized.[14] The distinction now shapes the American social imaginary—it exists in the background and tends to be the means by which we see and evaluate so much of life.[15] One of its significant effects was to relegate religion to the world of

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[12] John W. Wright, *Telling God's Story: Narrative Preaching for Christian Formation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 9–12.

[13] Wright, *Telling God's Story*, 128–29.

[14] The late missiologist Lesslie Newbigin helpfully pictures for us the consequences of the fact/value distinction: "First, it created the dichotomy between 'fact' and 'value' which underlines the division of our society into a public world of facts which we know and a private world of values in which some people are free to believe. Cultural anthropologists, looking at our 'modern' culture and comparing it with other human cultures, tell us that this public/private dichotomy is unique to our culture. Its heart is the separation of 'facts' which are true for everyone and form the substance of public truth which every child is expected to understand and accept as a condition for living in society, and a private world of personally chosen values. In this society, therefore, there is no logical possibility of moving from a factual statement 'this is the case' to a value judgment 'this is good.' For if purpose is rejected as a category of explanation, this gap must be unbridgeable, for we do not know whether a thing is good or bad unless we know the purpose for which it exists. It may be good for one purpose but bad for others. 'Good' and 'bad' can only be expressions of personal opinion." Lesslie Newbigin, "The Bible: Good News for Secularised People," (lecture, Europe/Middle East Bible Societies Regional Conference, Eisenach, Germany, April 1991), www.newbigin.net/assets/pdf/91bgn.pdf (accessed September 28, 2011).

[15] I borrow the term "social imaginary" from the philosopher Charles Taylor. I find it helpful for understanding the depth and taken-for-grantedness of the cultural conditions I am discussing in these final chapters. In his *Modern Social Imaginaries* Taylor defines the social imaginary as "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations." In another place he continues, "Our social imaginary is at any given time, complex. It incorporates a sense of the normal expectations we have of each other, the kind of common understanding that enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life. This incorporates some sense of how we all fit together in carrying out the common practice." Social imaginaries are not just the imagined reality of a small group of individuals, but dominate the thinking about or interpretation of the world for a huge swath of the general populace. Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*

value. It was a matter of mere opinion, a private concern, and irrelevant to the cold and calculated world of facts. Left on its own in this private sphere, religion took on a much more instrumental character. In the private sphere, religion helped to do a lot of things. Intellectually speaking, this included providing a source upon which to draw for moral arguments, but only one source among many which were indistinguishable authoritatively. It also provided something of an underlying pseudo-narrative for American culture. God, a remnant of the biblical narrative, became a character in an American form of religious belief wherein he was viewed as distant, but benevolent and always willing to help. You relied upon him to make you feel better, help you get through life, and fulfill your dreams. Peter L. Steinke describes the God of privatized American religion well, saying,

> [T]he new god is like a giant Prozac or a sweetener. God will help you improve yourself, give you tips on reducing stress in your life, and offer a Scripture-based set of coping skills with satisfaction guaranteed.
>
> Satisfaction as redemption is what theologian Shirley Guthrie had in mind in his critique of the "candy machine God." God has become a dispenser of goodies to indulge our appetites, champion our causes, or steady our nerves. But Guthrie believed that the Holy One had more important things to do than spend time doting on our transient happiness. Guthrie announced frankly, the candy machine doesn't exist.[16]

Not wanting to abandon religion altogether, Americans retained religion and religious practice within the private sphere. But religion took on the character of what some have called "therapeutic." John Wright draws from this tradition of understanding religion as therapeutic—particularly as an accommodation to the fact/value distinction. It will be helpful at this point to briefly see where that tradition began.

(Durham: Duke University, 2004), 23–24.

[16] Peter L. Steinke, *A Door Set Open: Grounding Change in Mission and Hope* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2010), 16.

The work of the late sociologist Philip Rieff is foundational for understanding religion's new place in American culture as merely instrumental. In his classic *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, Rieff works to describe how, in an age where culture has been bifurcated into two opposing realms—the public realm of facts and the private realm of values—religion will inevitably take on such an instrumental character.[17] That is, religion will simply become something that is used to reach a particular end. That particular end, Rieff suggests, is therapy. Religion will be that which helps individuals cope with the stresses of life in the public realm. What Rieff refers to as the bureaucratic realm (others later refer to it as the managerial realm) is equivalent to the public realm. Conversely, the private realm is also known as the therapeutic realm. Religion, in the disenchanted age where the fact/value distinction holds, is relegated to the private realm of values because of its perceived lack of factual basis. Religion's function in this private, therapeutic realm will be to assuage the ongoing crisis of the self that results from the

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[17] Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (1966, repr., Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006). Rieff's work, as I will employ it here, is not the only means for understanding therapeutic culture. As Rieff's work has been taken up by Robert Bellah, Alasdair MacIntyre (both of whose appropriations of Rieff I will mention at least briefly below), and others, it is worth noting that a different view of therapeutic culture has recently appeared, especially because of the concern for its impact upon contemporary religion. In chapter 1, I briefly mentioned the work of Christian Smith, the prominent sociologist, perhaps most well known for his work in the first decade of the 21st century on the faith of America's younger generations. In particular, in his *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2005), Smith (with Melinda Lundquist Denton) argues that the faith of American teenagers is not so much the faith of the various religious traditions of which they are a part, but is what he calls "moralistic therapeutic deism." Smith's use of the term therapeutic here is different from Rieff's (as well as Bellah's and MacIntyre's), though somewhat closely related to some of John Wright's construals in *Telling God's Story*. The therapeutic vision Smith employs is one that believes that God means for human beings to be happy. Being happy comes from being a good person. Being happy means being rewarded for being a good person by means of good consequences following one's good behavior, consequences that make life enjoyable. The therapeutic also means getting along with one another, having an amiable existence with other people. In the background lies the contemporary aversion to confrontation and the ever-present desire to be "liked" by others. While Smith's version of the therapeutic is not utterly distinct from Rieff's, it will not come across as strongly here as Rieff's version. It will appear most strongly through John Wright's version of the therapeutic that tends to focus in some ways not so much on coping but on the happy responses of audiences to preaching.

It should also be pointed out that within Rieff's own body of work, the concept of the "therapeutic" tended to remain in play, but the manner in which he talked about it, especially through his use of "characters," changed. I will not employ those differences here, however. For example, in his *Charisma: The Gift of Grace and How it has been Taken Away from Us* (New York: Pantheon, 2007), published after his death, Rieff writes about the "therapeutic" as a character over against the "charismatic."

self's fractured existence of perpetually trying to reconcile the goals and values of the two realms that constitute human existence in society. Rieff's work is taken up within two other well known sociological projects. Alasdair MacIntyre adopts Rieff's characters, the manager and the therapist, to help understand the roles of normative individuals in the emotivist society he describes in the early chapters of *After Virtue*.[18] Robert Bellah and his co-authors take up Rieff's work in a similar manner in *Habits of the Heart*, but focus more upon the disjunction between the two realms and how the sociality of each functions in a manner that constantly produces a need for resolution—something analogous to experiencing a bipolar disorder—which seemingly can never be found however much it is creatively and desperately sought.[19]

Vincent J. Miller helpfully reflects back on Rieff's work in a manner that will help us excavate American culture so as to reveal its narrative about life and the world, especially in light of religion as instrumentally therapeutic and private. Miller writes, "deprived of any transcendent good or even shared communal values, human existence is reduced to 'an intensely private sense of well-being.'" Remember we established in chapter 2 that the narrative of a community is that which determines the "goods" of the world, and thus what the "good life" is. Narratives have an orienting function in that sense, aiming the members of the community toward something that commands an ultimate sort of allegiance. Miller is suggesting that therapeutic religion offers no communally orienting story like the religions of old. Rather, all individuals are caught up in a communal (only because it is cultural) story that is characteristically individualistic. The good toward which all are aimed is each individual's own

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[18] Rieff's account centered on three characters within Western society, two of which MacIntyre found particularly useful: the bureaucrat, as representative of the public or bureaucratic realm; and the therapist, representative of the private or therapeutic realm. MacIntyre changes the name of the bureaucrat character to that of a manager. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984), particularly 30–33, 74–75.

[19] See Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York:

perceived good (Miller's "intensely private sense of well-being"). Without a grand orienting story, there is no mode of judgment by which to understand any "good" as *more* good than any other. Building on the work of Christopher Lasch, which Miller views as complimentary to Rieff's, he continues,

> People no longer hunger for salvation or an era of justice, but for "the feeling, the momentary illusion, of personal well-being, health, psychic security." [Lasch] attributes the genesis of this sensibility to the bureaucratic complexities of modern existence, which erode peoples' "everyday competence." The resulting dependence is manifested psychologically as narcissism, where a "grandiose, narcissistic, infantile, empty self" depends on others to validate its existence. Morality is replaced with a shallow ideal of psychic equilibrium. Shorn of its disruptive challenge, religion becomes a mere coping mechanism employed to smooth the contradictions of the middle-class status quo.[20]

Religion is simply meant to help us feel better. For that, it is used. And it is just this sort of religion that features prominently in American culture.

The Critique of American Preaching

It is just in light of such an account of American culture that preaching came to be criticized as accommodating to it, and thus given the derisive descriptor, "therapeutic preaching." Besides John Wright's articulation of the problem, many others have voiced this condemnation as well.

L. Gregory Jones cites a *Time* magazine article that notes, "Some of today's most influential religious leaders are no longer theologians but therapists." Jones goes on to say,

> Such a diagnosis is stunningly accurate. Even so, the therapeutic shaping of the church in the United States is both more pervasive and more pernicious than we have wanted to admit. The church's captivity to therapy is not just a reflection of the influence of James Dobson or of M. Scott Peck or of any version of the self-help/codependent/twelve-step recovery programs. Our deeper problem is that

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Harper and Row, 1985), particularly 42–48.

[20] Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 85. Miller is referencing Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: Norton, 1978).

> psychological language and practices have become more powerful than the language and practices of the gospel, not only in the culture but within the church. As a result, we have translated and reduced the gospel into psychological categories. Such reduction has altered it to be captive to psychology and psychological accounts of God, the world, and the nature and purpose of human life.[21]

Stanley Hauerwas has gone further by fully engaging a sermon that embodies this critique. Almost 20 years ago, Hauerwas offered a sharp critique of what he called one of the most notable sermons of the last 50 years.[22] One could imagine Paul Tillich's "You Are Accepted" sermon having at least as significant an impact today as it must have had then. Tillich describes our ongoing struggle with sin and the moment when grace breaks in. "It strikes us when, year after year, the longed for perfection of life does not appear, and the old impulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage. Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness and," Tillich stirringly writes, "it is as though a voice saying: 'You are accepted. You are accepted, accepted by that which is greater than you, in the name of which you do not know....Simply accept the fact that you are accepted.'" Tillich concludes, "If that happens to us, we experience grace."[23]

Hauerwas admits that Tillich's sermon is moving. He even admits that Tillich's sermon is a word that we need and continue to need. Grace is a necessity for sinners. And grace is there, just as Tillich said. But Hauerwas goes on in his own sermon—which takes its lead from Tillich while ironically making Tillich's sermon vacuous—to say that grace does not come from

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[21] L. Gregory Jones, "The Psychological Captivity of the Church in the United States," in *Either/Or: The Gospel or Neo-Paganism*, ed. Karl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 97–112.

[22] Stanley Hauerwas, "You Are Not Accepted," in *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 73–83. Others have pointed to this sermon as a classic example of preaching gone wrong. For example, David Lose references Tillich's sermon (via Charles Campbell) as a misguided effort at relevancy in preaching. See Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ*, 113–14, including footnote 4 on page 114. See also footnote 29 below. John Wright references Tillich's sermon similarly. See Wright, *Telling God's Story*, 18.

[23] Paul Tillich, "You Are Accepted," in *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), chap. 19. Available online: http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=378&C=84, (accessed November 4, 2011).

nowhere. Grace does not just suddenly hit you like a bright light and a calm, soothing voice in your moments of deepest despair. Grace certainly does come to you in a voice, Hauerwas argues. And that voice is the voice of Christ, through the church, in the mouth of the preacher. Hauerwas critiques Tillich's sermon for being too safe, too inclusive, too generalizing.[24] True grace is particularistic, dangerous, and scary. It is offered, Hauerwas says, by a God who is not nice. In bringing his grace God delivers the oppressed and simultaneously destroys the oppressors. For those who like Tillich's kind of sermon, the second part of the statement about destruction is something that, Hauerwas points out in the midst of his own sermon, we tend to like to gloss over and avoid. Hauerwas goes further, pointing out something else those of us who live by the American therapeutic narrative, with its attendant image of God, do not like: God plays favorites; God is particular. Hauerwas undermines the universal aim of Tillich's sermon by contrasting his underlying narrative with the biblical one. Tillich's narrative, embodied in a sermon that seems aimed at America's intelligentsia—the cultural elite of which Tillich was a part[25]—presents a God who will accept everyone, simply because in some way, they are "worth it." Because of this assumed intrinsic goodness, God will simply choose or "accept" everyone, and at some point in one's life, Tillich argues, some voice or experience breaks into one's existential reality to assure

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[24] Steven Paulson would call Tillich's sermon just plain "bad" preaching. He writes, "Christ was murdered in order to stop all preaching and election. The cross failed to do this, despite all human efforts, and now that Christ cannot be killed again, the next best thing is to execute the ambassadorial preacher. Sometimes blood is spilled again and we call it martyrdom, but more often it is easier to execute a preacher in a bloodless coup. If the preacher can be enticed to give something else than Christ as the proper predicate for the true Subject, the Creator, then a death occurs with no apparent violence. It seems like the perfect crime. Just predicate something other of God than Christ—you have the freedom to say whatever you want, do you not? Consequently, the largest offenders against God's mission on earth are preachers themselves.

"The formula for bad preaching is simple, you mix law and gospel and come out with a law that sounds like the gospel in its excessive religiosity like: 'Grace means unconditional acceptance of your good creation,' or even 'acceptance of your acceptance while unacceptable.' 'Try, but if you fail God will not condemn.' 'The Gospel is free, now all you need to do is join God's mission and spread it.' 'God is love, so there is no law,' or 'Christ stands for no barriers or divisions.' Most especially, bad preaching offers Christ as a principle or a sign that is supposed to influence you to become like him as measured by the law." See Paulson, "Categorical Preaching," *Lutheran Quarterly* 21 (2007): 268–93.

a person of his or her place among the elect. It seems that grace is somehow inevitable. Hauerwas contrasts this universalism against the particularity of the biblical story. God chose Israel—one nation; not all of them. Then, through the preaching of the church, God chose also the Gentiles, expanding his people Israel through his word. But there was still a boundary and only one way in: Jesus. Being accepted by God, Hauerwas argues, only happens through the church, the church that preaches Christ. Hauerwas's example of Tillich's sermon and his correction of it by saying, "You are *not* accepted," points up the disquieting problem that preaching in the church has become captive to the therapeutic.

What Happened and How Can the Church Recover?

John Wright uses a typology of tragic and comedic preaching to help describe what has happened to preaching in the church. Preachers think they are giving away the gifts of God—grace and forgiveness in particular. But instead they are caught up in a captivity that makes their preaching out to be mere efforts at helping people cope with life in our world. In *Telling God's Story*, Wright convincingly argues that preaching is captive to therapeutic culture. Such preaching he says,

> is practiced within and for the subjective, private, concrete, therapeutic realm of the individual. Preaching is to help people adjust to the often cruel demands of the managerial [public] realm, to help compensate for the disorder wrought in individual lives from conforming to the competitive, impersonal order of the managerial realm...Repeating a recent popular mantra, in such a therapeutic context, preaching must become need-centered and biblically based.[26]

Wright later describes what such preaching looks like—it has the narratival character of a comedy. Comedies, Wright says, are feel-good stories. And everyone likes them. Comedic preaching, Wright describes, has the basic task of ensuring

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[25] Wright, *Telling God's Story*, 37.

> relevance by translating the biblical text into the [interpretive] horizon, convictions and experiences that each member possesses. The end result is to provide a biblically based answer to the questions and needs that an individual brings into the sanctuary/auditorium through fusing the biblical text into the experience of the hearer...Preaching to fuse the horizon of the text within the horizon of the hearers addresses tensions that already exist in life but works through them. The tension-release allows people to feel challenged from the fact that the tension was addressed, but confident that it can be surmounted. The sermon successfully seals the text as an answer to the question that already exists in the horizon of the hearer. Hearers come away energized, fed from the preached Word, soothed and ready to come back again next Sunday to consume more of the product that the Scriptures have to offer...[T]he comedic hermeneutic of preaching leads to believers who share the identical convictions of the society but possess a value-added dimension—Jesus in one's heart or a personal relationship with God or some other life-enriching experience that helps one to exist as a member of the society as it is.[27]

What is especially noteworthy here in terms of our contention that the church is captive to culture and the present focus on preaching as evidence of such captivity, Wright suggests preachers simply feel obligated to address hearers "where they are" to the extent that they simply end up preaching them into the American narrative where they "share the identical convictions of a society." What is unique is that those hearers now have this value-added dimension, one that affirms the hearer's cultural context and the identity it gives to them, while at the same time enhancing that existence by adding a little Jesus into the mix. Jesus and the Christian life thus function to provide something that can be life-enriching; they are something that can be used for a particular purpose. Of further interest is that Jesus, through the biblical text, tends to provide answers to questions that resolve tensions in the lives of hearers. The effect is that because the biblical text can be applied to the life situations of the hearers, they end up walking away feeling assured that whatever they face is surmountable, either because "God has a plan" or "Jesus overcame all temptations and so can I."

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[26] Wright, *Telling God's Story*, 18.

[27] Wright, *Telling God's Story*, 35, 37, 38.

In this way, Wright suggests preaching has gotten off the track of faithfulness to the church's narrative and has fallen into the comedic.[28] Tensions are resolved, hearers walk away relieved and feeling better about life. In the sermon by Paul Tillich, the generalization of grace into an ambiguous ontological category of experience makes his sermon comedic. Everybody feels good at the end. They are uplifted, encouraged, happy and "accepted." Tillich took all of his hearers who were experiencing existential struggles with sin (whatever that might be for Tillich, it at least includes an existential sense of *not* being accepted) and made them feel better, promising and performing in his sermon the therapeutic move of relieving them of their own symptoms.[29] Hauerwas's analysis of Tillich's sermon demonstrates how it is comedic. Tillich's statement "You are accepted," Hauerwas writes, "can too easily become, 'I'm okay. You're okay.'"[30] That is the experience of grace for Tillich. Sermons that preach grace in that manner are comedic because they resolve the tensions of life as they are taken up and re-narrated by the sermon itself. In the end, the tensions turn out not really to be tensions at all. It is as if they are a non-issue altogether.

Wright's suggestion that preaching maintains the cultural convictions of American society explains how sermons can be aimed at meeting felt needs and provide some form of life-enrichment. They narrate the hearers further into the American narrative, using the Bible as a

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[28] Wright, *Telling God's Story*, 32–37.

[29] Charles Campbell, in his *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) suggests that Tillich's sermon epitomizes the effort of so-called contemporary narrative preachers to correlate the biblical narrative with their hearer's lives, and in so doing end up surrendering God's unique work in Christ to save. By employing the kind of comedic plotline that Wright describes, characterizing the lives of hearers in that kind of narrative arc, such well-intentioned preachers who desire to make the Christian message relevant end up making Jesus just some commodity that people *need* for the purposes of achieving well-being in life (40–44). David Lose adds, "The inherent danger of such an approach manifests itself in the eventual irrelevance of the particular Jew from Nazareth named Jesus, who inevitably takes a back seat to the more general and humanistic goals of 'acceptance,' 'the good,' 'authentic life,' and so forth, which he merely represents." *Confessing Jesus Christ*, 113–14.

[30] Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture*, 80.

means of affirming their existence and answering their concerns. That comedic sermons embody and foster the therapeutic results from an accommodation of preaching to American culture, and particularly the fact/value distinction. After religion had been relegated to the private sphere, all it was really able to do was function therapeutically. Wright's critique shows just how prescient Rieff's more than half-century old analysis still is.

As opposed to the comedic, Wright argues preaching ought to be tragic because the true narrative of the church is tragic. This is his solution to the problem of therapeutic preaching. Tragic sermons do not simply affirm the American cultural situation of the hearers; rather, they call such a situation into question. The tension in the story of the hearers is not resolved, but a new situation is born out of the tension. Calling the present way of life into question is a word that challenges and can ultimately destroy that way of life. In the biblical narrative, the church's life emerged out of death—Christ's death, and the death of every Christian in baptism—to offer a true word of life and the gift of life abundant. It is more than life-enrichment, but life-transformative because it gives *new* life. The church's message also says more. It promises Christ's word of true and unconditional acceptance because it was bought with a price. The church proclaims the inauguration of the kingdom of God in Christ, a kingdom that is embodied and perpetually announced in the concrete people of the church. The church's message is tragic. God accepts you, but he accepts you through Christ, and Christ alone. And Christ is preached and given in and through the church. You are not accepted by God except through the church that preaches Christ.

Following Wright's typology (but not necessarily his argument), preaching that is comedic seems to work like an avoidance strategy. It avoids the scandal of particularity—that God plays favorites—and that one has to *suffer* the work of God in order to "be accepted." One is not simply accepted by God because of their intrinsic work, because one is a "good person," because

they choose God on account of their free will, or because grace is simply inevitable. One is only accepted when God says so. Preaching in the style of Tillich—which Wright compellingly suggests is all too prevalent in the church—is therapeutic. And therefore it is unfaithful and inappropriate.

Wright's analysis tells a long story of how the context of American culture has become the crucible in which contemporary preaching in the church has been formed in this manner. In his final chapter, he offers a brief summary, saying,

> American Christianity has provided a resource for the development of such a therapeutic homiletical rhetoric. The Puritans built their regular sermon around the covenant of grace, in which an individual moves from a negative state (sin) to a positive state (salvation) by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. This narrative can undergo simple modification without disturbing its fundamental structure. All that needs to be done is to translate the terms of these states into contemporary therapeutic language. The negative state (sin) can easily become individual feelings of alienation, and the positive state (salvation) translates easily into an expressivist language of self-fulfillment. Rather than grace as the forgiveness of sin, God's grace becomes God's empowering presence in a personal relationship that helps individuals overcome the experiences of disquiet that come from living in the culture.[31]

The language of forgiveness of sins, which constitutes much of the content of preaching, is still very present in the church. It is theologically appropriate and orthodox language. And yet this very language still plays the part that Wright is pointing out in his argument—that the biblical message is meant to help satisfy the personal needs of those who come to church. The church's tradition and orthodox "words" have been hijacked by new "meanings."[32] Preaching to forgive sins in America really amounts to preaching a soteriology of self-fulfillment. The gospel

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[31] Wright, *Telling God's Story*, 135–36.

[32] One might say, as I note in the first lines of this chapter, that these new meanings are parasitic upon the words, since the words find their home within a narrative and a tradition that has for some time provided their context and thus their meaning. As the American narrative "hijacks" these terms, it acts parasitically on the pre-existing narrative and tradition, using its traditional terminology but filling it with new content.

becomes a message that is meant to help hearers cope with the stresses of their life, to offer strength in hard times, to help them feel better about their lot in life.

Preaching in Therapeutic Culture

While I will further engage Wright's solution to therapeutic preaching below, it is helpful to reflect on how the previous analysis provides us with a picture of our own social imaginary. To say that we are describing our social imaginary is to say *we do not think* about doing therapy. We do not decide to orient our lives around choices that offer the most satisfactory experiences. We do not deliberate; we just do it. It is habitual. American culture *has* us. As Rieff has said, "Man shall be mastered only by his desires."[33] But the biblical narrative says, "You shall have no other gods." The Burger King Corporation encourages us to "Have It Your Way." God tells us, "It's my way or the highway." A common cultural motto is "Do What Feels Good." All of Scripture warns us against such thinking. Gerhard Forde already noted the problem in chapter 4: "We do what we want. And that is just the trouble."[34] American culture is the church's context. It is the culture that forms and shapes the church's members' desires, hopes, and imagination; the culture to which the church is captive. It is the culture in and to which we feel obligated to preach, and that orients how we preach and how our preaching is heard, that is, by accommodation to the fact/value distinction that has led to religion in general—and preaching specifically—as a form of therapy.

The church is captive to the therapeutic. Similar to the statement that we do not *think* about doing therapy, preachers do not *think* they are preaching merely therapeutic sermons. The psychological imagination that dominates in the private religious sphere of American culture

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[33] Philip Rieff, *My Life Among the Deathworks* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2006), 17.

[34] Forde, *The Captivation of the Will*, 54.

provides the presupposition preachers think *with* as they craft sermons. Their self-perceived intent is not to help people cope, but to deliver the gospel. Preachers think they are preaching the gospel, and doing so rightly. Yet the critiques of those such as Jones, Hauerwas, and Wright argue otherwise. The gospel for preachers turns out to be a message much like Tillich's. Preachers use psychological language because it is the language of the culture in which the church exists and to which it is called to preach. The church is creating and fostering the therapeutic through its own practice of preaching.

The broad critique of therapeutic preaching is that it is unfaithful to the church's tradition and to its narrative to the extent that it does not preach Christ fully, or Christ crucified. It does not allow God's address to break through. God's true address is too harsh in therapeutic culture. God cannot be preached as selective, but only as all-inclusive in his forgiving, healing, helpful, and comforting characteristics. In American culture it is unthinkable that God would make specific demands, maintain specific standards, or be particular about who he chooses to include in his distribution of gifts.[35] Here is where preaching in the therapeutic church deviates from the kind of faithful preaching we ought to find in the church. It does not preach God to the extent that true repentance is fostered, opening the way for the transformative and formative word of the Gospel and the exhortations toward the Christian life. Rather, therapeutic preaching strips out any effort at fostering true repentance—in fact it avoids it. Thus there is no transformation. God is silenced. There is no death because there is no God who actually does any speaking in the church. Hearers are simply allowed to remain the same, being somehow encouraged with a pep

[35] This comment reveals there is more that could be said about the captivity of preaching. Rather than limiting the conversation to the therapeutic, there is room to speak about how American politics has influenced preaching to the extent that preaching should be inclusive and embody a certain kind of liberal tolerance—the same kind that seems to constitute the narrative of American culture. But, in relation to the therapeutic, the presence of such characteristics in preaching is part and parcel of a therapeutic narrative, for the faithful narrative of a selective God who plays favorites has simply been avoided and replaced by a God who embodies a conflation of the American

talk from the pulpit. If they are strengthened at all, it is not because they have new life and live by faith, trusting in the God of Jesus Christ for all things. Rather, they still trust themselves because they have been told from the pulpit "you can do it!"

Therapeutic preaching is in conflict with faithful preaching as it is understood according to the Christian narrative of the *vita passiva*. Therapeutic preaching fits into the "comedic" side of Wright's typology. As we have said, the narrative of the Christian life on the other hand, the *vita passiva*, is a tragic narrative. It is a narrative of death, re-creation, new life. It is a story in which the old man is killed and God raises a new man to life. Faithful preaching does this work through preaching the law in order to kill, a performance of God's alien work. Faithful preaching also works new life through performing God's proper work, the work of the Gospel through the word of the Gospel. In that word those who have been killed are raised to new life. Those who are moved to repentance are restored to unconditional acceptance by God. Those who have been called, chosen, transformed, and made to be the church live a life of trust in God because of Jesus.

The problem with preaching in America needs a solution. Wright is convicted that continuing with a comedic hermeneutic that informs preaching in contemporary American churches risks what Hans Frei has called "the eclipse of the biblical narrative" behind the American narrative. Such a move effectively makes the church an institution of America and renders its allegiance not to Jesus but to the state, a situation Wright has convincingly argued is the case in American churches—a situation that amounts to cultural captivity. Thus Wright argues the church should adopt a tragic narrative, one that actually narrates the local communities of the church into the story of God. Wright then goes on to demonstrate a preaching

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story with the biblical story.

method that does just what he suggests: narrates the hearers into the story of God by making them characters who participate in the sweeping scope of the biblical narrative, even as it plays out in their lives. Wright's suggestion has been made by other homileticians. In that regard it is laudable but rather simplistic methodologically. There are better suggestions in terms of method. But his method is not really the problem. There is a deeper reason to critique Wright. While he pushes us in the right direction by suggesting a tragic hermeneutic, Wright still sounds like those who have no place for a divine theology. Like Hauerwas and the others we critiqued in chapter 2, Wright puts all the work of preaching within the church, and has no clear understanding of God as agent in the church, particularly in preaching. The focus is on hermeneutics, how the preacher interprets the Scriptures, and then how he translates his interpretation into his sermons. But preaching for Wright is just a practice of the church. He does not understand them as works of God through the people of God.[36] He does not have a place for transformative preaching that truly gives *new* life, but only preaching that is formative, that challenges habits in order to change them, that challenges imaginations only to offer up another choice for seeing life and the world a different way. But none of this will really account for how God is at work in the church. It will only account for what the practices are for within an immanent frame. Jesus is just an example. The Christian life is just something we should do. The problem is that it is not clear why we should do so; it is not clear why Jesus is someone we should follow as opposed to Buddha or some other "god" to whom we can render allegiance. And this is so in part because there is no authoritative discourse addressing us, but rather a moralistic challenge to narcissistic and individualistic Americans. While such a confrontation might be necessary, it is not "tragic" enough.

[36] Wright similarly characterizes the Lord's Supper, sharing, and hospitality and other practices that constitute the life of the church. See *Telling God's Story*, 141–52.

Wright's sermonic exhibits demonstrate this. For example, as Wright concludes his third sermonic exhibit, he tells he hearers what they must do and why. They are to demonstrate Christian love and mercy since that is effectively what it means to receive eternal life. The logic seems to be, "You've been given this gift. Now here's what you must go do."[37] Mercy and love are just good things to do. Wright does not say why this is. He also makes it sound like it is just up to us. Where is God? In his second sermonic exhibit, Wright calls his hearers to holiness, and notes that "This is our agenda for the New Year."[38] How does holiness come about? Wright answers this earlier in the sermon. Holiness is brought about by God through the life of his church. All we have to do is participate in this life and the "seed" he planted in our hearts will be caused to grow.[39] His suggestion sounds simple enough. But exactly how it all works is utterly unclear. What is lacking from Wright's exhibits, which provides a demonstrative hinge for the argument of his book—he tries to show us what to do rather than simply tell us—is a narrative that is made robust by an explicit divine theology in which God is the agent of transformation in a concrete way. Rather, at best for Wright, this position seems only to be assumed (at least he does not deny it). But this makes his argument quite weak for helping us, even though his analysis of the problem of the therapeutic is so insightful. His "tragic" sermons really only call the church to live out a different way of life—to embody a different *ethos*—because it is based on the Bible that he simply assumes is better than the American narrative because it is God's story. There is no account of how transformation happens, how God makes us new, how he creates out of nothing a people who will be the kind of community Wright argues that the Bible

[37] Wright, *Telling God's Story*, 121.

[38] Wright, *Telling God's Story*, 116.

[39] Wright, *Telling God's Story*, 114–15.

describes and inculcates. So while Wright's suggestion toward a tragic hermeneutic is leading us in the right direction, we must say more.

Tragic Preaching as Faithful Preaching

While I have construed preaching here according to the narrative of the *vita passiva* as a practice of the community of God's people the church, I have not yet concretely addressed the challenging issue of how preaching that is faithful to the narrative of God's people serves to overcome the church's cultural captivity. And while Wright is helpful in pointing us in this direction, he does not entirely get us to a resolution either. It is simple enough, and even adequate to say that preaching that kills and makes alive and preaching that brings about regular and true repentance is the only means by which the church can overcome its cultural captivity to the American narrative. It is the former self, the one with which the new creature constantly battles, that is captive to the alternative narrative offered within our culture. Preaching that is therapeutic in nature can only be addressed by preaching that is authentically an address from God—confrontational and life-giving—rather than therapeutic and non-transformational. Preaching then, as Wright says, must be tragic. But we have to go further than Wright's definition of tragic. Preaching that is truly tragic will be the kind that counters the prevailing cultural narrative by, as Wright would say, "telling God's story." This is the kind of preaching that the church and its hearers need and must endure. Suffering this counter-narrative is indeed tragic. Tragic preaching must be the address of God and only then will it be transformative. It must confront, and it must absolve. More than narrating hearers into the biblical story, it must actually perform that story upon the hearers. That doing of the word is, in the end, true narration into the biblical story. For that is why the biblical story construes the Christian life as a *vita passiva.* Through preaching, the hearers actually experience God by undergoing his work. As we stated in the beginning, God is the agent in preaching, speaking his word and revealing himself

to his people. It is this kind of preaching that makes the church because it is God who is doing the making by doing the choosing, the electing, and playing favorites. It is this kind of preaching that not only stands in opposition to the American narrative, but undoes its control in the lives of Christians who faithfully hear the word—it truly frees hearers from their captivity. The word of God itself actually makes faithful hearers, and the new creatures who result will no longer be captive to American culture. Instead, they become the people of God.

Having said all this about preaching, in the end, it is finally helpful to offer an exemplar of what I have been arguing for.[40] Tillich's sermon served as an example of what is inappropriate in preaching. What comes next will give us an idea of what is appropriate. Not only is the sermon itself tragic, but it narrates the hearers into the biblical narrative by performing it in their midst. Through the voice of the preacher, the true biblical narrative is heard and performed: God actually reveals himself to the hearers—choosing them, playing favorites, and rendering them passive to his work. God confronts sinners for worshipping a God they *like*, rather than the true God. The preacher faithfully proclaims the biblical narrative in the face of the countervailing and more popular narrative of American culture. Through the preacher God reveals himself to his people and promises through his word that he has chosen them even while they were idolaters. In this sermon, God builds and perpetuates his church.

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[40] Stanley Hauerwas's sermon referenced earlier in this chapter—a response to (and criticism of) Paul Tillich—had something of a tragic character, but its move was founded on a different theological position. I have criticized Hauerwas's theology in chapter 2, noting that for Hauerwas transformation as I have construed it here is not necessary. Rather, for Hauerwas, entering into the Christian life seems only to be an effort at joining in the practices of the Christian community. It is a sort of participatory act through which one becomes habituated into a new way of being. What is lacking in Hauerwas's work is in fact an account of how God works to make individuals a part of his people. God seems utterly absent from the picture. On the other hand, from the perspective of analyzing his sermon as comedic or tragic, his sermon is unquestionably tragic in that it preached God as playing favorites. The kind of argument that ought to be made about Hauerwas's work is that in fact his theology would really be more palatable to a Lutheran when it is understood that he simply lacks a place for understanding God's work. He is certainly useful to Lutherans, but he must always be adopted through the framework of the *vita passiva* and not on his own terms. Only then is God and not the Christian made the primary actor.

In the chapel at Concordia Seminary on February 2, 2012 professor David Lewis delivered a sermon on the Presentation of our Lord.[41] His text was Luke 2:22–32. Lewis demonstrates in that sermon what tragic preaching looks and sounds like according to the biblical narrative and the construal of that narrative as it impinges upon the Christian life as a *vita passiva*. Lewis's sermon follows the narrative arc of God's people Israel, how they were formed and created by God, and how finally, because of what God did in sending Jesus as the Promised Messiah to the people of Israel, God has also worked in the lives of every hearer who is present and addressed by that same God in the hearing of his word.

Lewis begins his sermon reminiscing about a line his father always used to repeat around the Christmas season. Lewis's father, despondent about the lack of hearing the whole narrative of the Christmas story throughout his Christian life, always used to speak of the need to hear the "whole Christmas story." Lewis demonstrates this by noting a conversation his father had with a woman who was disappointed in not hearing about the traditional story on Christmas Day: the shepherds, the star, the magi. Lewis's father articulated this point within the midst of his growing appreciation of the church year—those festivals, events, and pericopal texts that take the people of God through their own narrative. His father speaks about his love for the church calendar, especially the readings that tell about how God revealed Jesus to those particular people of God mentioned in each story. To the shepherds at Christmas, Jesus was revealed through angelic announcement. To the magi at Epiphany, Jesus was revealed through the star. At the Presentation, God the Holy Spirit revealed Jesus to Simeon in the temple. Each of these moments, Lewis's father noted, were foreshadowing how God would reveal Jesus to him—that is, within his lifetime, God revealed Jesus to Lewis's father through the Holy Spirit. In light of

[41] Audio available for free on Concordia Seminary's iTunesU page: http://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/luke-2-22-32/id463450793?i=110184864 (accessed February 24, 2012).

these central elements of the biblical narrative, stories that *should* be in the church's retelling of the "whole Christmas story," there are stories that Lewis's father mentions *should not* be there, like the little drummer boy. In our American culture, certain stories are missing from the church's preaching. Those stories are important moments that God uses to reveal Jesus Christ to his people, to bring the Christmas story "home" to each one of them, as Lewis's father fondly recognizes.

Lewis continues his sermon, developing a new point. He goes on to note just how much the announcements of Jesus's birth, as well as John the Baptist's, were centered on Israel. Jesus, it was announced, would sit on David's throne. John the Baptist would turn many of the people of Israel to Yahweh, their God. In the Magnificat, God is said to remember his mercy to his people, Israel. Even the shepherds, who heard the announcement from the angels, were Israelites.

In the Presentation of Jesus in the temple, the ritual of presenting the firstborn is very Israelite. It is a means of remembering that God saved every Israelite while simultaneously killing every first born of the Egyptians at the Passover. Also at the Presentation, Mary is ritually cleansed from childbirth, another thoroughly Israelite practice (Exodus 13, Leviticus 12). Lewis notes the irony of these situations. The one who is to be the Redeemer is being redeemed in the temple. Mary is being cleansed from her recent pregnancy, which, we should remember, was ultimately the responsibility of the Holy Spirit.

Further, in Lewis's text, the Israelite Simeon has been told by the Spirit that he will not experience death until he sees the Christ, Israel's redeemer. So Simeon, when Jesus appears with his parents, is waiting for the consolation of Israel. He is waiting for God's promise from Isaiah 40. At the moment of witnessing the appearance of Jesus, Simeon says something that breaks from the very Israelite theme that has been maintained up until now. He says, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your

salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel" (Luke 2:28–32). Suddenly the Gentiles enter into the picture. Suddenly we are introduced to an anticipation of what Christ would proclaim after his resurrection: that in his name, forgiveness is available to all. Thus we also anticipate, as Lewis notes, the events of the book of Acts and the expansion of the church to include Gentiles amongst God's chosen people.

Lewis returns to thinking about what his father had said that Christmas Day. In this particular passage, one that occurs long after Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, long after Epiphany, Lewis's father says that this passage in particular is the one through which he anticipates the moment when God would call him. He never took God for granted, assuming as many do, especially in therapeutic culture, that God is just a nice guy and that he is obligated to save everyone. No, Lewis's father not only knew, but lived in light of what I have recounted in the narrative of the *vita passiva*—namely, that God plays favorites. Salvation then, for Lewis's father is a wonder. And it should be so for us as well. Following the words of the Psalmist, "what is man that you are mindful of him?" (Psalm 8:4, ESV), Lewis's father wondered the same about himself. Who is God that he would reveal himself to, and so save, me? God is the God of Israel. He promised indeed to save them. He was not obligated to save anyone else. Yet, Lewis's father rejoiced that God had also saved him.

Lewis concludes his sermon, noting that the words of Simeon not only anticipate the events of Acts, but also that God, in these latter days, has also revealed his Son to us. He did this through the proclamation of the Gospel to us, through the waters of baptism through which we have passed. God not only revealed himself to his people Israel, but also to us. Just as God fulfilled his promise to Israel, and to Simeon, God will fulfill his promise to us. As Jesus has been revealed to us, we like Simeon are given hope that death is not the end. Simeon welcomed

God's calling of him home in death because he knew that death was not the end of the story. Lewis narrates his hearers into the same position as Simeon, into the same position as his own father.

Lewis's sermon is an example of the tragic sermon. He notes that God did not have to save any of us. None of us are Israelites. God has a people upon which his favor rests, and we Gentiles are not among them. Yet God chose, by his own volition, to make us his people. Tragic sermons narrate this passive life, the passive reception and experience of God's mercy. Such gifts come by no merit of our own. They indeed come from merit, but a meritorious sacrifice—the one made by God's own Son, Jesus Christ. Tragic sermons will always narrate us into the passive position of only being able to receive God's gifts when God so chooses to give them. Such sermons will, when received in faith, always leave us thankful like Lewis's father, that God has chosen to reveal himself to us, to show us his mercy, and does so over and over again.

CHAPTER SIX

CHURCH MARKETING IN CONSUMERISTIC CULTURE

The church becomes one more consumer-oriented organization, existing in order to encourage individual fulfillment rather than being a crucible to engender individual conversion into the Body...And we modern people adore personal power above almost anything else. Our society in brief, is built on the presumption that the good society is that in which each person gets to be his or her own tyrant (Bernard Shaw's definition of hell: Hell is where you must do what you want to do).

Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon

After the Lord rose from the dead he commanded the apostles to be his witnesses throughout the world (Acts 1), to proclaim repentance and forgiveness in his name (Luke 24), and to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28). It is usual to think of this work as the "mission of the Church" and to call this work "evangelism."

In recent decades there have been theological challenges to this mission and this work. For example, proponents of a pluralistic theology of religions often will regard evangelism as arrogant and intolerant.[1] Nevertheless "missions" in this traditional sense remains a basic responsibility and "evangelism" a high priority for many individual Christians and Christian congregations.

But among many of these Christians there is another challenge to missions and evangelism, and it is this challenge that I wish to examine and address in this chapter.

What is this challenge? It is "church marketing." How is it a challenge? "Marketing the

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1 John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987); John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1989); Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995); Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985); Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith*

church" challenges, marginalizes, distorts, and even supplants evangelism as the mission of churches just as "institutional survival" challenges, marginalizes, distorts, and even supplants making disciples as their basic goal. This does not mean that evangelism has become obsolete, but that it has been reframed as a different story about the church has arisen and taken hold of the imagination of many churches. What kind of story is that? It is the widely-held story of individual choice and autonomy, borne out in buying and selling. I agree with those (like Hauerwas and Willimon quoted above) who find that churches have been taken captive to the economic story of America.

I am sure that many resonate with all of this, just as I have when hearing or reading others on this situation. My criticism of American churches on this point follows those of others, some of whom I will explicitly cite and follow. My purpose in this chapter, however, is not primarily critical or analytical, but constructive, namely, to offer a concrete suggestion for faithfully thinking about and conducting evangelism in our situation.

On "Marketing" and "Church Marketing"

As with the rest of the dissertation, my analysis discerns an underlying narrative that explains the life and practices of churches, and the form of my criticism shows that in this way they follow a significantly different story than that of the Scriptures. This chapter examines the practice of "marketing the church," or "church marketing."

Before saying much more, however, let us first explain "marketing" and characterize "church marketing." Marketing functions within a relationship between a "producer" and a "consumer." The producer offers something of value to the consumer, and in exchange the consumer returns something of agreed-upon equal value to the producer. The practice of

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Dialogue and Global Responsibility, preface by Hans Küng (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995).

marketing is meant to bring about this exchange through various means, but in its most general form it brings about awareness of the product to meet a particular need in/for the consumer. Such awareness, it is assumed, will be enough to cause the exchange, since the consumer desires to meet a need the product promises to meet. In short, marketing works to manage and control exchanges; in fact, it is the process of such control. As one set of authors describes it, marketing is "the management of an organization's exchanges with its various constituents."[2]

Church marketing, then, should be understood as the church's effort to construe itself in some way as a producer of products (or at least that it has products to offer) in a manner that is meant to be attractive to consumers who desire the kinds of products the church offers. Church marketing will work to bring people into the church through a means of attraction attached to the felt needs of those to whom it is aiming its products. In terms of managing the process of exchange, the authors of *Marketing for Churches and Ministries* write, "One party, a church or ministry, is offering something needed by the other party. The other party, constituents, enters into the exchange and has its needs met while at the same time meeting the needs of the church or ministry."[3] In particular, the church markets itself as a service organization, offering such products as a means to cope with life, the ability to create happy families, an experience of transcendence, and a sense of community.

It is easy to see how pervasive church marketing has become in contemporary America by looking at the worship, preaching, programs, websites, and organizational structures of churches around the country. It is also not hard to think it has arisen suddenly. Some, however, have pointed out that its development has been long in coming. In fact, R. Laurence Moore describes

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[2] Robert E. Stevens and David L. Loudon, *Marketing for Churches and Ministries* (Binghampton, NY: Haworth, 1992), 2.

[3] Stevens and Loudon, *Marketing for Churches and Ministries*, 3.

the American religious scene as, from its very inception, inevitably heading toward the sort of marketplace that we presently experience. A central contention in his *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* is that disestablishmentarianism structured American culture in such a way to create a buyer's market for religion.[4] In brief, religious disestablishment was a constitutional clause that prevented the state from creating a church. Churches were free to exist on their own. That freedom opened a space for a plurality of churches to immediately begin competing for congregants and doing what they could to attract members. The buyer's market that resulted from disestablishmentarianism created an atmosphere of competition between religions that is still in play today.

Peter Berger offers a similar explanation in more consistently economic terms. In his 1967 work *The Sacred Canopy*, Berger gave an account of what the religious landscape of America would look like in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.[5] He described a pluralism that can hardly be denied in contemporary American culture—religions, denominations and secularism competing for allegiance. Berger frames this situation by comparing it to a free market. Products are for sale and they are in competition with each other. Something additional must be done to get attention for one product over the other(s). Otherwise, the possibilities for making a sale are nil. Concerning religious communities then, Berger writes that they "can no longer take for granted the allegiance of their client populations." He continues,

> Allegiance is voluntary and thus, by definition, less than certain. As a result, the religious tradition, which previously could be authoritatively imposed, now has to be *marketed.* It must be "sold" to a clientele that is no longer constrained to "buy." The

[4] R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York: Oxford University, 1994).

[5] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (1967; repr. New York: Anchor, 1969), particularly chap. 6. Perhaps Berger's argument could be considered in a similar manner to Rieff's in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*. Both seem to have been prophetic, and more accurate than could have been imagined at the time.

> pluralistic situation is, above all, a *market situation.* In it, the religious institutions become marketing agencies and the religious traditions become consumer commodities. And at any rate a good deal of religious activity in this situation comes to be dominated by the logic of religious economics.[6]

As a consequence of the competition that inevitably arises within this situation, Berger states, "All at once, the question of 'results' becomes important."[7] Thus the structure of religious practice becomes that which will allow for the most effective means of marketing, getting results, and attracting adherents. It is as if religious communities have no choice whether or not to participate in this market economy. Berger captures it cogently: "religious institutions are compelled to seek 'results' by methods that are, of necessity, very similar to those employed in other bureaucratic structures with similar problems."[8] Since it seems that this situation is "necessary" or "inevitable," church marketing also becomes "necessary" or "inevitable." The economic realities of the religious marketplace demand this conclusion.

More recently, this readiness to attract individuals in the area of spirituality and religion has become increasingly clear and intentional (as the literature on church marketing shows), and the assumption that the spiritual and the religious are "for sale" has become increasingly widespread. This assumption has been studied in detail by sociologist Wade Clark Roof. Given the fact that individuals are looking for ways to fulfill their needs in any manner they feel best suits them, Roof describes contemporary religious society as a "quest culture" in which there is a "proliferation of new spiritual suppliers now making their appeals."[9] These new spiritual suppliers are easy most visible in the religious sections of bookstores that seem to exhibit

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[6] Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 138. Emphasis in original.

[7] Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 138–39.

[8] Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 140.

[9] Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1999), 9.

something like a microcosm of the present state of American religion.[10] Yet this "spiritual marketplace" is not simply filled with "new spiritual suppliers" The old religions that have been present since America's birth constitute a substantial part of it too. But the new reality of a religious marketplace has forced a radical change in their approach to reaching potential adherents. Rather than simply assuming the kind of ongoing dominance and influence they formerly had (or perhaps more basically, that parents would just beget more children to the same faith), their practices have turned to reflect those of Roof's "new spiritual suppliers." It is not a matter of taking up the faith and becoming disciples, but being attracted to it because it can meet a certain set of needs. Even the old religions must become "suppliers" who sling their wares in the spiritual marketplace.

Other features of American life sustain this picture. First, as I discussed in the previous chapter, religion has become instrumentalized. It performs a particular function: it meets needs. Add to this understanding the dominant view of individualism, which is also characteristic of American culture.[11] Individualism values choice, free will, and the ability to rationally decide based on any number of personally chosen criteria. Furthermore, the individual is seen as an autonomous agent who can indeed make free choices and justify why such choices were made. Individualism has, over time, eroded the ability to find anything like the common good within society, the very kind we have noted MacIntyre says all communities have.[12] What seems to be

[10] Roof notes that one can find sections "catering to popular topics such as angels, Sufism, journey, recovery, meditation, magic, inspiration, Judaica, astrology, gurus, Bible, prophecy, Evangelicalism, Mary, Buddhism, Catholicism, esoterica, and the like" *Spiritual Marketplace*, 7. What formerly used to be simply a religion section has now been rebranded with books categorized according to the trends in spiritual interest. The marketplace of religion then is thus very visible inside America's bookstores.

[11] America has been characterized as individualistic at least since Alexis de Tocqueville wrote his reflections on his visit to the country. Many others have carried on in using this description, including MacIntyre, Bellah, and others cited herein. The assumption of individualism and its characterization as a problem often provides the basis for the questions they address in their work.

[12] See chapter 2.

the case now, with the loss of a common story and its central common good, is a plurality of stories, one each for every person. And individuals, lacking any exterior source for guidance in life, turn inward to the self. As Robert Bellah and his co-authors write, "In the absence of any objective criteria of right and wrong, good or evil, the self and its feelings become our only moral guide."[13] Individualism drives the necessity of the marketing religion just to the extent that each person, it is believed, will make a choice about religious values in their life. Churches must be ready to attract those individuals at the right time by marketing to them according to those values that matter most. The thrust of marketing must then be felt needs. Churches are encouraged to ask what a person wants or needs, and then situate itself to provide for those things through services of various sorts.

From the perspective of the practitioner, church marketing feels pervasive and simply seems natural. If they are wondering how to build the church they are inevitably going to run into instances of church marketing as the solution. Not only will church marketing seem important in this regard, it will be perceived as necessary. We should take note of this. We may do so by observing that which has emerged *around* church marketing. For example, the Internet has a huge number of websites on the topic of church marketing. To appreciate the vastness of this, one might turn to a website like ChurchMarketingSucks.com, one of the largest online clearinghouses for advice, strategies, recommendations, and even feedback on church marketing.[14] There are regular posts about anything from critiques of really bad church marketing to in-depth advice columns on how to improve church marketing.

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[13] Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkley, CA: University of California, 1985), 76.

[14] See www.churchmarketingsucks.com.

Another indication of the importance of church marketing is the level of explicit reflection on the topic shown by the literature that has emerged. There is a whole class of books and articles explaining and advocating church marketing. The most well-known figure here has been George Barna, the author of such books as *Marketing the Church* and *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches.*[15]

Furthermore, one might look to the seminars, conferences, online videos, or webinars on church marketing as even further evidence that the importance of church marketing is virtually taken for granted.[16]

George Barna, as just mentioned, is a key figure in thinking about church marketing and serves as a useful example for analyzing it. This usefulness arises not only because of his notoriety, but also in the fact that criticism of the thinking behind church marketing regularly refers to him. Barna makes church marketing seem perfectly plausible by working within the presuppositions of a market culture. We can see the extent to which he thinks this is plausible from his own defense against challenges. In fact, it seems clear that his view is not only that church marketing is plausible, but natural. He responds by citing biblical examples, which, he says, demonstrate that even Jesus and the apostles employed modern day marketing techniques.[17] Barna deals with other objections as well, deftly fending them off or reorienting the perspective

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[15] George Barna, *Marketing the Church: What They Never Taught You about Church Growth* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988); and *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches: Being Strategic in Your God Given Ministry* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1999). There are of course others who make similar arguments. Barna's voice is simply the most well-known and pervasive. (It should be noted that some, perhaps much, of the attention he has attracted is related to the research on American culture conducted and published by his company, The Barna Group.) These are the other voices I mention who share Barna's views and presuppositions. See Stevens and Loudon, *Marketing for Churches and Ministries*; Norman Shawchuck, et al., *Marketing for Congregations: Choosing to Serve People More Effectively* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992); and Richard L. Reising, *Church Marketing 101: Preparing Your Church for Greater Growth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

[16] See for example, the work of Justin Wise (www.justinwise.net). See also the Center for Church Communication (www.cfcclabs.org), of which churchmarketingsucks.com is a project. A major center of gravity in this conversation at present is the use of social media for church marketing.

[17] Barna, *Marketing the Church*, 33.

of the objector to see that marketing is actually a gift from God that must be used well.[18] Barna simply does not have a problem with marketing the church and believes that we should not have a problem just the same. In fact, he seems to think such a question does not need to be asked. Rather, to help readers get over any fears or misgivings they have about his proposal, he simply begins by pointing out that churches ought to admit they are marketing already.

The extent to which Barna takes time to address any sort of challenges raised against a market mentality from a biblical perspective reveals what seems to be a shared set of presuppositions among others who advocate a marketing approach—presuppositions that assume marketing the church is a good and faithful practice, God-pleasing even—tends to make marketing the church a plausible and even desirable activity in our present consumeristic culture. The marketplace of spirituality, he argues, offers room for adopting the techniques of marketing while not encroaching on the church's biblical foundations. In other words, Barna assumes that marketing is a neutral activity that will have no influence whatsoever on the church's ultimate identity.

What's Wrong with Church Marketing?

Now that we have analyzed church marketing, we should characterize how it goes wrong. A key problem with church marketing is seen in its aim: church marketing does not aim to make a distinct people of God. The reason for this is because the church is primarily interested in growth and survival. This is how church marketing subverts the true mission of the church and reframes, if not entirely supplants, faithful evangelism. Church marketing resembles something far more similar to the consumeristic character of American culture—it has become a practice

[18] He deals with objections such as that marketing is a worldly activity meant solely for personal gain, that marketing prescribes a rigid structure of practices and does not take into account the unique character of all churches, and that marketing is all about numbers and growth.

that traffics in elements of attraction for the sake of selling and survival—rather than making disciples by proclaiming Jesus as Lord. It attempts to replace the practice of making disciples with practices that will build and sustain the institutional church, but not necessarily to make the people of God. Practices meant to build the church—i.e., add to membership, keep the doors open through adequate offerings, function competitively in the pluralistic marketplace—might at times co-opt the church's legitimate practices and put them to work for other purposes.[19]

Take preaching. While still a practice of the church, preaching can easily be understood concretely as a means to meet people's needs. Worship can be understood similarly. Furthermore, these practices are in fact marketed to do just this sort of thing. Let us briefly examine some examples.

First, we can construe church marketing in relation to preaching. To return to an insight from the previous chapter, in *Telling God's Story*, John Wright speaks about preaching in light of the therapeutic narrative, as a product.[20] He helpfully frames for the reader the fact that sermons have become need-centered commodities that the church offers. If those products are deemed helpful and satisfying by those to whom they are offered, Wright argues, return-customers will be created. In this simple way, we can also see how sermons can function in the marketing framework we have been describing.

Following from my criticism of the therapeutic in the previous chapter, we might also add the well-known desire for "relevant" messages in the church—messages that tend to be at bottom, mostly therapeutic. The preacher is supposed to give you advice on how to live your life.

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[19] In the previous chapter, I noted how preaching is still a church practice, even when it is performing a therapeutic function. The same is true here when we consider church practices that are performing marketing functions. The authentic practices themselves have taken on a new function through the parasitic story of American culture that has infected the life of the church to the extent that it is always already formative of its members.

[20] John W. Wright, *Telling God's Story: Narrative Preaching for Christian Formation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 37.

Similar to the contents of the bestseller shelves in the local Christian bookstore, churches try to gain and retain members by offering relevant, self-help, life-applicable messages often by twisting the biblical narrative into a book of practical wisdom for how to live life in the 21st century. Such pragmatism is much in vogue outside of the church as evidenced by the self-help section in any bookstore. When the church presumes to offer a similar message, yet with God's stamp of approval, it is merely another means of attraction and participation in the competitive marketplace of spiritualties that offer wisdom for living.

Second, in the same way that preaching can be marketed, the context in which preaching occurs—the worship service—can also function in the market framework. If preaching has been hijacked for the purposes of attraction, building or growing the church, and of course, keeping business alive, then the *context* in which sermons occur—worship—is just as much a means by the church markets itself. Pastor and seminary professor David Fitch has characterized the worship of the church in contemporary culture—and he refers to both traditional styles and contemporary styles because both have certain goals and motivations—as an effort to produce a particular kind of experience. It will be something that feels good, or right, but in the end, the emotional connection is where the coupling with felt needs can be seen. The production of experience might look different in different churches, but worship services, he argues, intend to produce experiences. And it's the experience that gets sold. He writes that either kind of worship service "by default 'gives away' the production of experience to the post-Christian cultures of North America. We give away the entering of the experience of 'Jesus is Lord' by choosing to nurture whatever is immediately available to the worshiper instead of forming it anew."[21]

[21] David Fitch, *The Great Giveaway* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 104.

When seen in this way, we can see that the problem posed by church marketing is not a matter of a simple conceptual mistake. What goes wrong here of course is the formation of those who would be, ultimately, members of the authentic church. Formed in a context where the practices of the church (many of them anyway) function to attract members and cater to felt needs, those members are going to end up looking much more like the culture to which the church is captive than the authentic and unique sociality of the church itself. Church marketing in its insidious and invasive cooptation of much of the church's own practices for the sake of accomplishing other goals is counter-formative for those who participate in the life of the community. The problem with church marketing, for the purposes of this dissertation is twofold. First, it deviates from the church's true ecclesiology. Second, it is formative of the American narrative in the life of the church's members, rather than the biblical narrative.

When church marketing takes hold of the imagination of the Church, Christians simply are not being made. This is the case because practices always *do* something to people. They always form a particular kind of person. In a sense, when the church offers its products to meet the needs of people, it is simply trying to help them feel fulfilled. The church's social imaginary, so formed according to Berger by American consumeristic culture, is affected by this sense of needing to gain clientele and compete with others. The added desire to keep the doors of the church open means desiring more bodies. But needing more bodies means attracting more bodies by offering something people need, and following Berger's analysis, something more competitive with or attractive than everything else on offer. In the end, the church is "practicing" evangelism as if it were marketing. What results is a church that is effectively not making Christians out of the people it is bringing into its midst; rather, the church is only really making better Americans, further fostering their identity through practices that reflect the American consumeristic narrative.

Philip Kenneson offers a clear insight into church marketing as an ecclesiological problem.[22] He suggests that marketing in the church entirely reframes its inherent ecclesiology. This reframing accounts for the abandonment of the biblical narrative rehearsed above and its particular understanding of evangelism as making disciples as a form of God making his people, the church. Kenneson offers an example of just how pervasive this new ecclesiology seems to be. Making reference to George Barna's well-known book *Marketing the Church*,[23] Kenneson points out (that at the time of his writing[24]) the book had sold 44,000 copies in the United States and was in its eighth printing. For Kenneson, such a wide audience for this new ecclesiological framework is reason enough to be concerned.[25] But he adds more. Citing the cultural context into which *Marketing the Church* was released, Kenneson notes that "the reason Barna and others like him are gaining such a hearing is that he and his audience share certain presuppositions about the nature of the church and its place within American culture." These presuppositions he argues "have the power to distort further what Christians think the church is, and concomitantly, who they believe themselves to be."[26] In this chapter, I stand in agreement with Kenneson—he has pointed up a truly problematic situation in the life of the church—but he is not alone in pointing out the problem of church marketing.

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[22] Philip D. Kenneson, "Selling [Out] the Church in the Marketplace of Desire," *Modern Theology* 9 (1993): 319–48.

[23] It is worth noting that readers may perceive an interaction with someone like Barna within an academic work such as this to be a bit odd. Kenneson admits the same as he reflects upon his interaction with Barna in his article "Selling [Out] the Church." Yet, Barna is not strictly a non-academic; he is not merely a popular author, even though he writes for a popular audience. Barna's research organization, Barna Group, has had its work featured widely, including in the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and used by Fox News. So while he does not publish with and for a general academic audience, he is still worth our attention for a number of reasons, not least of which are his wide readership and the level of trust garnered by the Barna Group as evidenced by those who rely upon their work.

[24] Kenneson's article appeared in 1993. That means it was likely written about 1 year prior to publication. Barna's book had likely been out about 4 years by the time Kenneson was critically reflecting on it.

[25] Kenneson, "Selling [Out] the Church," 320.

[26] Kenneson, "Selling [Out] the Church," 320.

Marva Dawn has voiced similar concerns. In her *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*, Dawn warns that, by adopting the vision of the market strategists, one also adopts a vision that leaves the traditional church behind. Churches that do this are capitulating to a world they ought to resist. This world is characterized by church marketing proponents like Barna who encourage the church to focus on and cater to the felt needs of those around them.[27] One of those apparent needs, according to Barna, is a happier church. Dawn reckons Barna is captive to the idol of happiness in American culture, and to the extent that he sees everyone else desiring happiness (through his organization's research, of course), he concludes the church ought to orient its ministry around this need. Thus its evangelism would be configured to attract others to the church because it is the kind of happy place that people desire. Dawn quotes Barna arguing for as much by saying we must "shed existing attitudes of piety and solemnness, in favor of attitudes of anticipation, joy, and fulfillment."[28] Dawn's concern is the same as my own. She wonders if Barna is so captive to culture that he feels obligated to meet the felt needs of others, and further, to develop resources and strategies that encourage and assist the church in doing so. She is worried that Barna has not thought deeply enough about what he is doing, especially in terms of abandoning the historic Christian faith, which, while at times reflects holy attitudes of joy and anticipation, also must reflect attitudes of repentance, lament, piety, and solemnity.[29]

Douglas Webster echoes many of the same critiques that Kenneson and Dawn leveled at Barna and those like him. However, he helpfully elaborates what are the felt needs that the church senses it must work to meet. According to Webster, the central value in the work of

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[27] Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 61–62.

[28] George Barna, *The Frog in the Kettle: What Christians Need to Know about Life in the Year 2000* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990), 153. Quoted in Dawn, *Reaching Out*, 62.

[29] Dawn, *Reaching Out*, 62.

marketing the church is popularity.[30] Churches that do not get on the bandwagon of church marketing risk becoming unpopular or irrelevant and open themselves to failure and closure. Therefore they seek to identify and meet "felt needs." Webster describes and analyzes two kinds.[31] First, there are the relational needs. One important area in which relational needs arise is in the environment of the church service. In this regard, the church, it is argued, ought to be concerned with providing a welcoming atmosphere, high energy performance in worship in order to avoid boredom, and sermons that are short, relational, not abstract and aimed at personal rather than doctrinal concerns. Webster adds that personal needs met through such an environment include a sense of success as opposed to spirituality and excitement over a sense of significance.[32] Another important area for relational needs include the other felt needs of the church's target audience who are coming to the church looking for help in a life crisis. Thus, there are various support groups that constitute part of this effort to meet relational needs. Webster notes that one can find groups for helping with codependency, eating disorders, addictions, and divorce among others.[33] He also notes there are needs according to family related concerns. Citing the fact that for a variety of reasons, parents are coming back to church for the sake of their children, Webster writes that they are looking for "modern nursery facilities, excellent pre-schools, attractive youth programs and recreational activities. They have high expectations: these services should be provided in a professional and excellent fashion, and parents should not be pressured to volunteer their personal involvement."[34]

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[30] Douglas D. Webster. *Selling Jesus: What's Wrong with Marketing the Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 91.

[31] Webster, *Selling Jesus*, 75.

[32] Webster, *Selling Jesus*, 81.

[33] Webster, *Selling Jesus*, 76.

[34] Webster, *Selling Jesus*, 76.

I agree with these critiques, but there is more to be said. At the end of the last section, we noted that Barna believes that marketing as a practice is simply neutral and that it has no effect on shaping the lives of those who participate in the community of the church. But as we have just seen, there is good reason to believe that Barna is quite mistaken about this. For Barna, felt needs are the central concern. But ought felt needs be the concern of the church according the biblical narrative? Let us explore this point further. Now that we have asked what's wrong with church marketing, we can press further to discern the narrative or story with which church marketing works to see how it is indeed a story that is unfaithful to the biblical narrative.

Barna is mistaken in considering marketing to be a neutral activity. As an exchange relationship, marketing cannot avoid being a value-laden practice. The value is built into the goal—exchange. Marketing, we must recognize, always has an aim. As we have already seen, the church's self-understanding has come to be that of a service organization. Its aim is to meet felt needs. In fact, Barna articulates this very point in attempting to help readers re-imagine the identity of the church. Beyond advocating that we should think of the church as a business, he writes, "Think of your church not as a religious meeting place, but as a service agency—an entity that exists to satisfy people's needs."[35] This is just the kind of re-imagination that Kenneson tells us is inescapable if the church adopts marketing practices. Rather than leaving the church just as it is, marketing practices allow "its identity to be transfigured" and produce for it "an entirely new set of questions" that "frame ecclesial thought and practice."[36] For example he leads us to ask, "who are the producers and the consumers in this new ecclesial framework?" He answers for us, noting that within this framework the clergy are often understood as the producers and the laity as consumers. It follows then that "the church does not gather for worship and discipleship;

[35] Barna, *Marketing the Church*, 37.

rather, the gathering is an opportunity for the professional purveyors of religion to dispense their products to consumers."[37]

Now that we can understand that chief value ascribed to marketing the church, we also can discern its underlying narrative. As Kenneson explains, "Once we understand that marketing is not a neutral technique, but an activity already embedded within a set of convictions, practices and narratives that makes this activity intelligible, we see the importance of probing the history of this practice."[38] While we are not interested in probing that history for our purposes, it is important to further explore this point about the non-neutrality of marketing as a practice, especially as it affects evangelism and the church's self-understanding (its ecclesiology). Kenneson notes that since "the whole enterprise of marketing centers on the attempt to manage a series of 'exchanges' or 'transactions' that take place between a 'producer' and a 'consumer' for the mutual benefit of both," we have to conclude there will be unavoidable effects on the self-understanding of any entity that employs marketing techniques, including the church.[39]

The practice of marketing invites us to consume the products that church has on offer in order to meet our needs, enjoy their benefits and find fulfillment. The fact that this mode of operation tends to be something the church does not notice—it is in the background—is an

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[36] Kenneson, "Selling [Out] the Church," 326.

[37] Kenneson, "Selling [Out] the Church," 326. Marva Dawn aptly cites Philip Rieff on this point: "In answer to the question 'What, then, should churchmen do?' Rieff reports that the answer was clear: 'become, avowedly, therapists, administrating a therapeutic institution—under the justificatory mandate that Jesus himself was the first therapeutic.'" See Dawn, *A Royal "Waste" of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 96.

[38] Philip D. Kenneson and James L. Street, *Selling Out the Church: The Dangers of Church Marketing* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 36. It might be argued that Kenneson's narrative is too simple. Yet his intent is not to be comprehensive. He will leave that to the marketing experts. His narrative, while simple, relates closely to the argument offered by Berger as he tells of the nature of sociological structures necessary for competition in the marketplace of religious communities. For that reason, the simplicity of his narrative is helpful for not taking us too far afield, but adequate enough for giving us an accurate picture of how consumeristic culture emerged. See also Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 138–47.

[39] Kenneson, "Selling [Out] the Church," 326.

example of the church's captivity to it. The church does not know that it is being unfaithful. James K. A. Smith captures this point well. According to the story by which we understand our lives, our practices are simply a *reflection* and a *shaping* of what truly matters to us in an ultimate sense—thus the church's perpetuation of consumeristic practices only reveals that its story of everything has the character of a religion, yet one that is unbiblical and therefore unfaithful.[40] Berger's (and other's) story of the religious marketplace gives us an account of the narrative the church is following. In part, religious communities have begun marketing themselves as commodities because they simply have been formed by consumeristic culture already. What truly matters in consumeristic culture is attracting customers. For the church it also means the added pressure of keeping the doors open and the lights on—that is, maintaining any sort of existence at all. Berger argues that the economic factors that have shaped the structures of bureaucracies similarly come to characterize the nature of the pluralistic religious marketplace is not surprising.[41] What the church produces then by its participation in the market environment with its inherent dynamics of practice and formation according to a particular story, is a community of people who reflect the culture from which the church learned its practices—America. The identity of the community is rooted in the American story rather than the Christian one precisely because the marketing practices are rooted in the American narrative. In the end, the American narrative takes the place of the Christian narrative, even to the extent that it has a religious character—the American narrative fills in as an identity-giving narrative that used to be fulfilled by the religious narrative of the church. Through consumerism and the practice of

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[40] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 87, 93.

[41] Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 139–41.

marketing, the church has simply become another entity within American culture that fosters the American narrative, rather than promoting an alternative.

The logic of church marketing turns the church into a different kind of community than it claims to be. Its ecclesial identity is ruptured by means of adopting what is argued to be a neutral practice. The church's captivity to consumeristic culture exists in just this phenomenon. It operates under what Berger describes as a sense of necessity—the church feels obligated to market itself. The cultural conditions of consumerism, which produce the spiritual marketplace that constitutes the church's context, encroaches upon the church's life like an unavoidable reality that the church cannot help but to face through some sort of accommodation and adjustment, if for no other reason than to survive. Yet our examination here does not necessarily express such dire straits for the church—survival does not seem to be one of the motivating factors behind Barna's and other's recommendation that the church market itself. Such alarmism is not simply present in their work.[42] Rather, as even the critics of church marketing recognize, those who commend the practice to the church do so out of a sense that they are helping the church succeed in its call to evangelize and in fact believe marketing can be a gift from God for that purpose.

Recovering Faithful Evangelism

When church marketing supplants evangelism in the traditional sense as the mission of a congregation, then that church's ecclesiology will have been reframed. Its own story will be eclipsed by the modern American consumeristic narrative.

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[42] We should not conclude on this basis however, that such a concern is not "felt." Media coverage of the ongoing decline in church attendance in America is reason enough for churches and leaders to feel pressure to do whatever it takes to survive. Compound that with pastors who have to support families and churches that are in debt over building endeavors from 20 years ago, and the desperation to do something in order to stay alive becomes quickly palpable.

We can find three kinds of problems in church marketing. First, evangelism as "making disciples" is challenged, if not eclipsed, as the mission of the church. Rather, the goals will be about the congregation as an institution: at a minimum, its survival, and, it would be hoped, growth and continued success. Second, transformation—the very work wrought by God that in the end makes a person a member of his people—is ruled out as an expectation or aim. Church marketing requires no more than that one comes "as you are," because it aims to address "felt needs." Such a church cannot expect transformation, because it aims to help others as they are. Third, since marketing in the church aims at felt needs, it is hard to see much of anything at all that resembles the biblical narrative. Contrary to the biblical narrative, this church does not serve as an agent of God at work to renew and transform. There is no sense that coming into the kingdom of God and being made a disciple requires any sense of the death to self that the biblical narrative requires. No change is worked nor even required in those who would constitute the church's clientele. Those whom the church seeks to reach are just fine as they are. In fact, while we might be describing a religious institution as a marketing agency, the religiosity of the institution and its reference for (or reverence for) God seems to be beside the point altogether. There is no gathering under the Lordship of Christ in the marketed church. Rather, the church commends itself to gather around and meet the needs of the self—who, in the marketed church is Lord: just tell the church what you want and need. There is no sense that killing and making alive again is what must be suffered by all.

As we noted in the previous chapter, the narrative of the managerial/therapeutic operates on just this premise. It is no surprise then that the consumeristic narrative under which the church markets to consumers assumes the same. Perhaps healing or fulfillment might be needed when the goal is to meet felt needs, but there is no construal of human beings requiring transformation.

Church marketing then has jettisoned the biblical narrative in its unwitting complicity with American culture.

A recovery of faithful evangelism is in order. But how does that come about? I propose a few theses that help us understand the logic of evangelism according to the biblical narrative.

The Church is the agent of God to make a people

God uses the practice of evangelism to accomplish his work of making a people. Through evangelism, the body of Christ is built. We have explored this central feature of the biblical narrative above, noting that throughout Scripture we can understand God to be work creating a people for himself. Evangelism as the making of disciples takes into account the fact that God is indeed at work creating for himself a people, and that he does so in just the way he reveals himself—as one who works through means. Those "means" in the case of evangelism will be the proclamation of the word accomplished through human beings. Evangelism is meant to bring about the making of disciples. In other words, through God's use of the church's evangelism—which, since Jesus began preaching, is understood as the announcement that the kingdom of God is at hand—his people will be made. As the kingdom is proclaimed in evangelism, God's rule extends over more and more people who come under his Lordship as disciples of Jesus Christ.

This of course is a mysterious situation. It takes evangelism and the building of the church out of our hands. It puts all the responsibility on God who then acts through the body of Christ to further build the body of Christ. All evangelistic efforts then are going to come down to the means God chooses to use. Thus, proclamation will be central and basic. Gimmicks, attractive features and marketing campaigns are rendered irrelevant, and even to some extent heretical. When God is at work, he does things his way. This means of course there are no guarantees and there is nothing we can do about it: perhaps the church will not grow or appear successful according to the numbers. Faith is worked in those who hear the word when and where it pleases

God. The church is called simply to proclaim the word and God will so use it as he wishes to make disciples.

The basic activity of the Church is proclamation of the kingdom of God

Just as Jesus announced and inaugurated the kingdom of God, so the church carries on that announcement and embodies its presence through the ongoing proclamation of the kingdom. This is a central characteristic of the life of the church. As the church itself is produced from such proclamation, it carries on the very practice from which they have been created. From the New Testament we see the emergence of the church as the people of God who have heard the word proclaimed and believed it through the presence of the Holy Spirit. That this word was preached and subsequently the church was produced show that evangelism is proclamation, and specifically the proclamation of the kingdom of God. As William J. Abraham puts it, "What makes proclamation evangelism is not the act of proclamation *per se* but the message being proclaimed: the coming rule of God. Surely this deserves to be announced and made known."[43] Furthermore he says, "The kingdom of God must be the primary, unconditional priority of the church, which exists in and for the coming rule of God in history."[44] Proclamation of the kingdom is basic to the church's life and evangelism is a form of that proclamation. "Proclaiming the good news of the kingdom is foundational in evangelism," writes Abraham. This is because the narrative of the church, that by which it lives and fully understands itself provides the proper ecclesiological framework for faithful evangelism to emerge as a practice of God's people. It "is the unique narrative of what God has done to inaugurate his kingdom in Jesus of Nazareth, crucified outside of Jerusalem, risen from the dead, seated as the right hand of

[43] William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 59.

[44] Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 182.

God, and now reigning eternally with the Father, through the activity of the Holy Spirit, in the church and world."[45]

Fundamental assumptions about human creatures include sin and passivity

"The coming of the rule of God does indeed mean a profound crisis for the individual. It calls for a death to the old life and a resurrection to a new life in the Spirit."[46] When God comes to those who hear he comes on the offensive. The announcement of God's kingdom in the proclamation of his word is an act of judgment. The announcement of the Kingdom is the announcement of a new world order, one that is to overtake the old, and in the process to call the old what it is: bad, evil, ungodly. In light of the advent of God's kingdom, humanity is also overcome by God and judged just the same. As part of the old world order, which is being overtaken by the kingdom, human beings—captives who are being won back by God himself—as bound to sin are rendered passive to God's work. And his work of bringing the Kingdom names their boundedness as sinfulness. The in-breaking of the kingdom simultaneously alienates humans from himself as enemies of his kingdom while also positioning them as captives to be rescued and made free as the newest citizens of that kingdom for those who would follow Christ as Lord. For, it is in the announcement of Christ as Lord that the kingdom of God arrives and is inaugurated. This rescue is just the reason God sent Christ; it is just the reason God establishes the kingdom. He is doing what he has been doing throughout the biblical narrative: making for himself a people. In this making of a people of God, human beings are rendered passive. On account of their sinfulness, they are bound and captive to the evil and ungodly reality that is being overcome. And to be made the people of God, they must be made righteous. Sin must be

[45] Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 170.

[46] Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 34.

dealt with and God deals with it in Jesus Christ who has been made sin so that those who believe would be made righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21). In the coming of the kingdom, humans passively undergo God's work of transformation as they are rendered sinful and made righteous.

The announcement of the kingdom of God began in Christ and was carried on through the disciples into the ongoing proclamation of the church. God in Christ chose and commissioned the church to preach the kingdom just as Christ did. It is to make the announcement of God's judgment upon the world and upon sinners. The life of the church is going to resemble that of Christ's disciples recounted in Matthew 10. Sent out to proclaim the kingdom, Jesus instructed them to do so boldly to all who would hear. But if there would be any who did not hear and were unwilling, the disciples were to shake the dust from their feet and move on to others who might hear. The same is true for the church. Commissioned by God to proclaim the kingdom, they are to speak to those who will hear. For those who do not hear, the judgment upon them is clear. In God's coming to them with open arms through the church's message, if their response is "no" then there is no need to for the church to do anything further. God has been rejected and the Almighty will render his judgment, just as Christ says: "it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town" (Matthew 10:15). There are other sinners to whom God wishes to bring the message through the church. In the end, we see clearly that God is fully in charge here. The church, of course, always hopes for repentance and celebrates with God and all the host of heaven when God works faith and brings a sinner to repentance and salvation through making her righteous and establishing her as part of the people of God. But if a sinner will not repent, the church has no power greater than the word it proclaims to bring to bear on the situation.

The aim of the Church's proclamation is repentance and baptism

The proclamation of the word demands repentance. If a new kingdom is inaugurated, a question immediately poses itself: to whom does my allegiance belong? If the new kingdom is in fact the kingdom of God, which the church proclaims, then that question is of greatest importance. The proclamation of the word demands repentance since those who have not been made disciples have an idolatrous allegiance. Evangelism, then, is urgent because when the word is preached the expectation immediately follows that, as promised in Scripture, the word of God will do the work is was set out to do (Isaiah 55:11).

The church's proclamation, urgent as it is, is an apocalyptic word. As such, it is not concerned so much with the present, but with the future. Faced with a future that might have one consequence or another (the Kingdom is here: either you're in or you're out), apocalyptic speech forces the issue. One must choose. For those in whom God works faith, he works the will to follow Christ. For those who do not believe, they are left behind, their hearts are hardened. The call for repentance demands just that, repentance, announcing the presence of the Kingdom of God. The question is implied, if the Kingdom of God is here, what will we do now? What can we do to be saved?, said those who heard Peter's Pentecost sermon. Repent, and believe. The apocalyptic urgency of evangelism reflects the expectation of transformation that comes from hearing the word.

Following from this, if evangelism is to be faithful it must make demands on the life of those who are made disciples. Repentance is a turning from one's old ways to a new way, the way of Christ. Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Jesus was not shy about making demands. And some of them were crushing. To a disciple who wanted to tarry in order to bury his dead father, Jesus said, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead" (Matthew 8:22). To the rich ruler

Jesus said, "Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Luke 18:22). Luke goes on to imply that the ruler did not follow Jesus, noting that he reacted with sadness to Jesus's command. To those who would be Jesus's disciples, he says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). Evangelism makes demands. The life of a disciple is one that emerges only after the old life is left behind. Again, such demand is reflective of the expectation of transformation. As God kills and makes alive, a new creature emerges whom God makes able to follow him and who naturally begins to live in such a way that God's demands are met.

We ought to conclude then that contrary to the image of people seeking out the attractive churches and finding them by means of their various modes of marketing, those who appear to be seeking to live the Christian life ought to be appropriately warned. John the Baptist did this very thing as many approached him in the desert. "Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" John asked (Luke 3:7). Calling them a "brood of vipers," John warned them of the impending judgment of God and the demands for transformation, not a life that merely stays the same. Thus, for those who come to the church seeking to be welcomed or accepted, this warning is apt, and in such circumstances, evangelism ought to employ it.

Consequently, for those who are made disciples, the church recognizes and further performs God's work of disciple-making in the practice of baptism. As William Willimon has pointed out, baptism is the natural outworking of evangelism. "[T]he goal of our evangelistic proclamation is always baptism."[47] Willimon highlights this within the context of the church, noting as we have in many ways already, how central the church is in God's work of making his

[47] William Willimon, *The Intrusive Word: Preaching to the Unbaptized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 131. See also Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 130.

people. Willimon continues, "We must speak in such a way as to make clear that, in the light of Easter, there is no way to survive with a risen Lord, there is no way to encounter the risen Lord, except by means that are bodily, corporate, ecclesial."[48]

Baptism is the end of evangelism. Jesus commanded it when he commissioned his disciples. He told them to go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them all of his commands (Matthew 28:18–20). Evangelism is the act of making disciples, and disciples are decisively made in baptism when God claims them for his own and marks them with his name. In the waters of baptism, they are drowned with Christ and raised again to new life (Romans 6:3–10). And central to the act of baptism is the church, through which God has decided to do this remarkable work. Following from what we have just said about God's selectivity, Willimon critically notes the centrality of the church in God's work because evangelism is the call to be "incorporated" within the body of Christ.[49] "Corporate worship is central to the process, an every-Sunday reminder that we did not come here on our own, that we did not tell this story ourselves."[50] Corporate worship, with its invocation in the name of the Trinity—a memorial to all of our beginnings as members of the people of God—is that event wherein God continues his transformative work that began in baptism and which he promises to bring to completion (Philippians 1:4–6).

Baptism as a result of evangelism is just what we see happening in the early church. Peter's sermon at Pentecost resulted in the call to repent and believe in Jesus as Lord, and then to be baptized (Acts 2:14–41). Peter later goes to the family of Cornelius, preaches the gospel, then baptizes the family (Acts 10). The same is true of Philip's interaction with the Ethiopian eunuch.

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[48] Willimon, *The Intrusive Word*, 131.

[49] Willimon, *The Intrusive Word*, 134.

[50] Willimon, *The Intrusive Word*, 133.

After explaining the Scripture to the eunuch, the Holy Spirit leads the eunuch to request baptism, which Philip gladly obliges (Acts 8:26–40). Such evidence of the church's work of baptism should be no surprise when we read the biblical narrative through the lens of the *vita passiva.* God transforms human beings and creates his people through the work of the church. In it, he is the acting agent to accomplish his work of making disciples. Through baptism, the church definitively participates in God's work of making his people.

The basic understanding of baptism is political/social/ecclesial

Baptism is incorporation into the body of Christ. It is a political act in which the church recognizes that God has done his work and that the newly baptized is now a part of the body. Its character is political in this manner just to the extent that the baptized are now citizens of the kingdom of God, a kingdom that is embodied and present in, with, and under the church. Those who have been baptized into the kingdom now live under new Lordship. Their allegiance is to God alone. And they embody a life that fulfills the First Commandment.

Baptism in the church is also a new social reality. Baptism is initiation into the story of the people of God; into Israel's story. Through the practices, rituals, and rites of that community, the newly baptized is fostered into the story that commands and norms the life of the community of God's people. As a member of this new community, the baptized enters into a relationship of mutual responsibility with every other member all of whom thus rely on each other for the purposes of realizing the commitments of the faith.

Baptism is also entry into the life of the ecclesia. As H. Tristam Englehardt has noted, "The church does not exist abstracted from right worship and right belief but lives in doxologizing and theologized God. The church unites her members in her *ecclesia*, the assembly of the faithful, which assembly is united in the body of Christ insofar as it maintains right worship and right

belief."[51] Certain consequences emerge for those whose lives are now inextricably intertwined with the created ecclesia. It means teaching disciples all that Jesus has commanded. In other words, entry into the life of the fellowship of God's people requires catechesis. Furthermore, it means that the commitment to one another noted above will be carried out as all are gathered together by God for worship where they hear the word and receive the sacraments. Within worship they suffer God's work in the liturgy of the word in which the practices of the Christian life are engendered. Therein the members of the community learn and are enabled to care for each other as the embodiment of God's care for them. Yet the boundaries of their mutual care do not merely end at the edges of their fellowship. Rather, because they have been made the people of God through the proclaimed word, their initiation and creation into the ecclesia demands that they too not only live a life that embodies their new identity as members of God's people, but that they also speak the same word to others that was spoken to them. They too are called to proclaim the Gospel, to announce the presence of the kingdom, just as they are also to embody it in their care for each other and service to the world.

Faithful evangelism will emerge from within this ecclesiological framework, but only from within this one. What shape it takes in various church contexts will indeed be different, yet it will be flavored the same. As God works to build his people through the church, what will not be the case is that the variety of forms of evangelism work to attract. Rather, they will always be an encounter in which one loses oneself when God works faith. Those who believe will turn from their former ways to become disciples of Jesus, members of the kingdom of God, a people who ascribe Lordship to Jesus and proclaim his name to the world.

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[51] H. Tristram Engelhardt, "The Belligerent Kingdom," in *God, Truth and Witness: Engaging Stanley Hauerwas*, ed. L. Gregory Jones, Reinhard Hutter, and C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 193–211.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CATECHESIS OF VOCATION IN THE CULTURE OF TOTAL WORK

God is hidden in vocation.
Gene Edward Veith

When the Lord commanded the apostles to make disciples, he commanded not only that they baptize but also that they teach the baptized to keep all he had commanded. From this we see clearly that "catechesis," understood as the teaching of the Christian life, derives from the biblical narrative, just as much as preaching and evangelism does.

In our exploration of catechesis, the topic of this chapter, we will narrow our focus to the teaching of one particular doctrine: vocation. I will not be wrestling with catechesis as a whole here. Catechesis has to do with teaching all that the church believes, teaches, and confesses. Such a topic would be too broad. Rather, I will focus on the church's teaching of vocation. Even within the catechesis of vocation however, we will narrow our focus even further to discuss the idea of work, especially as it relates to the workaday world of jobs and careers. For it is here that we are able to see another instance of the church's cultural captivity. It is subtly hidden, unnoticed most often because of the very way the doctrine of vocation is taught frequently takes on a spirit of devotion, piety, and is regularly construed as good and true worship of God.

In this chapter, I want to argue that the church is culturally captive to the total work world (a concept I will explain below) to the extent that its teaching of vocation derives not from its own narrative but the narrative of the world in which the church finds itself. What is at issue here is particularly how the church teaches about work within the broad cultural context in which that teaching occurs. To deal precisely with this issue, the basic lesson of the chapter will focus on

how to teach vocation for present day Christians. The flow of the chapter will present the problem of the church's teaching of vocation in a manner that highlights its cultural captivity. This will include some analysis of how the church has taken on an alternative narrative for justifying its teaching of vocation. The last portion of the chapter will offer a corrective argument for how vocation ought properly to be understood and taught in light of the church's authentic narrative.

In his classic sociological study *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber's examination of the Protestant ethic shows how the characteristic piety of the later Protestant churches significantly affected their teaching on vocation. They placed a significant valuation on the active, working life. Confusing calling with occupation, the doctrine of vocation as it was handed down from Luther, Calvin, and other Reformers, was reduced in the Puritan teaching that fulfilling the duties of one's occupation well was equivalent to living out one's calling. They construed such a life as one lived in praise to God, one that glorifies him. This construal is seemingly in line with the biblical mandate, "do everything for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31, see also Colossians 3:17). In this distortion of work as worship, we have our third example of how the church often thinks it is living faithfully according to its own narrative, but in the end it does not even know that it is living according to another story. In the narrative of the culture of total work, the anthropology offered describes human beings as meant for production. The world is ruled by the idol god of effectiveness and productivity. Below we will engage Josef Pieper, who will argue that such concepts are not only inadequate because they are not exhaustive enough to account for all of life; even further, they are plainly in error according to the biblical narrative. However, according to Weber and Pieper, the narrative that undergirds the culture of total work began as a religious doctrine that subsequently influenced culture until it became a normal condition no longer in need of its original religious justification. As such, it is

difficult to map in a concrete manner just how the discontinuity arose between the formerly religious position and the contemporary secular ethos. Weber's and Pieper's work simply function to point out the reality of this discontinuity, and to strongly indicate that with or without the rhetorical support of the religious sanction, the misappropriation of the doctrine of vocation has played a significant role in producing the culture of total work. The now secular doctrine has as strong a hold on our culture as it did in producing the Germany Weber was investigating in the early 20th century, as well as the post-WWII Germany Pieper was addressing in his time. Pieper's work was translated in part because it was also so applicable to North American culture as well.

The Total Work World

It is helpful, at this early point, to define the concept of the total work world, especially regarding how it is normative for the church today in terms of its catechesis regarding work and the associated "career" or "job" aspect of the doctrine of vocation. To understand the total work world, I simply want the reader to think of his or her life-world, the situation within which one finds himself or herself, as a world oriented specifically around work. Work, in the total work world, becomes definitive of one's life. One is raised in order eventually to work. One's outlook on life is defined in relation to one's work. Education leads to work. Work leads to income. A lifetime of work leads to a time *after* work, called retirement. From beginning to end, work can be understood as central. Truly, in the total work world, work is an end in itself and therefore orients all of life. Furthermore, one's identity is caught up in one's relation to his or her work. Since work is definitive of life, one's world is seen through the eyes of one's work. Work then should be understood as whatever one does to gain an income.

In a previous chapter we noted some specific features about American culture that are also relevant here. Regarding the distinction of the public and private spheres from chapter 5, we

should point out that the place of work is the public sphere. Work is for the production of goods and services, both of which are marketed and sold to the public. The place of work was dominated by the epistemological realm of facts where efficiency for the sake of productivity and profitability was the dominant goal. Human beings are laborers caught up in a system of efficiency, a mechanical enterprise that cares not for the human beings themselves, but only for the end result of their labors—the production of more things, better, faster, and cheaper. Like the epistemological revolution we noted in chapter 5, it is widely recognized an industrial-economic revolution has also occurred—one that has reduced human beings and their meaningfulness to a kind of commodity. They are valued only to the extent that they could do something—in particular, be productive.[1] The concern centered on what humans could do and how profitable they might be.

How did we arrive here? How did the view of human beings become reduced to such a narrow state from the formerly religious view that understood humans to be intrinsically valuable in themselves simply by virtue of being created by God, and thus "good." Part of the answer is that since religion was relegated to the private sphere, its influence in the public sphere—where the social imaginary might by shaped to see humans made in the image of God—was virtually non-existent.

There are, however, more specific explanations about how this situation arose. For example, John Milbank offered a theological explanation. He noted that "[o]nce there was no

[1] We could explore other ways of construing humans as valuable, especially in terms of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's very insightful concept of "capital." He would ascribe to human beings three kinds of capital: social, cultural, and economic. All of these are in some way interchangeable, especially the social and cultural with the economic. Bourdieu outlines each kind of capital and gives examples of how they function in a brief article entitled, "Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. E. Richardson (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986), 241–58. Bourdieu would add a fourth kind of capital, the "symbolic" in his *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University, 1993).

'secular,' that is, no thought or notion that there existed an autonomous sphere."[2] The secular had to be "imagined"—and it was, with its roots planted firmly in the theological tradition of Western Christendom.

But the famous theological explanation remains the one Max Weber offered in *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.*[3] His account of the emergence of this "spirit" has been examined many times and challenged in many ways.[4] But it is nevertheless pertinent for my purposes in several ways. First, the "spirit of capitalism" was and remains very much the "spirit of our age." However its emergence might be accounted for, Weber rightly identified a basic feature of the modern situation. Second, his account of its emergence, which relies on the concept of vocation, does make it clear how the Reformers' notion of calling is so distant from the notion common even among contemporary Christians.

Very quickly, then, the "spirit of capitalism" is prevalent where "[m]an is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life."[5] Acquisition is not merely a necessity for survival, but a fundamental imperative, an "end in itself."[6] The good for man who embodies the spirit of capitalism is not just profit, but recurring profit. More capital is the goal, and not for any other purpose than simply to have more. "[C]apitalism is identical with the

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[2] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 9.

[3] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Routledge, 2001).

[4] Weber has been widely critiqued for a number of reasons. Some believe a particularly important problem with Weber's analysis is the aspect of his argument that argues strongly that Puritanism's influence on business in American culture had been substantial is actually unfounded. This point is also related to a critique of Weber's use of Benjamin Franklin's life and work as "evidence." On this note, see Tony Dickson and Hugh V. McLachlan, "In Search of 'The Spirit of Capitalism': Weber's Misinterpretation of Franklin," *Sociology* 23 (1989): 81–89; Gabriel Kolko, "Max Weber on America: Theory and Evidence," *History and Theory* 1 (1961): 243–60. Weber is also criticized for misrepresenting Catholic thought as well as for his argument that Protestantism (Puritanism) gave way to capitalism rather than capitalism giving way to a form of Puritanism. See on these points Werner Sombart, *The Quintessence of Capitalism* (London: Unwin, 1951). There are yet other criticisms as well.

[5] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 18.

[6] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 18.

pursuit of profit, and forever *renewed* profit, by means of continuous, rational, capitalistic enterprise."[7] The spirit of capitalism stands in contrast to the "spirit" that characterized what Weber calls traditionalism. Traditionalism was an economic way of life that involved many limitations on the kinds of transactions that could take place and thus limited the ways in which profits could be made and capital gained. Traditionalism made capitalism seem irrational, unnatural, and therefore undesirable. This way of life was something that needed to be overcome in order for capitalism, at least of the free market variety, to become the normative economic situation. Traditionalism is something from which man must be "emancipated" for capitalism to flourish.[8] In fact, that is just what happened. As Nicholas Wolterstorff has concisely put it, "For capitalism to emerge, [traditionalism] had to be removed and replaced by a rationalized legal system whose centerpiece is laws enforcing the sanctity of contracts freely made between non-deceiving parties."[9]

Although the spirit of capitalism appears to the contemporary observer as natural and inevitable, as Weber shows, it is the product of particular historical developments. The first such development was Martin Luther's teaching of the concept of *Beruf* or calling or vocation. Weber begins with Luther's account, but continues on from there, the development of which leads to the perversion of the concept. Luther's teaching understood vocation within a particular framework, his theological hermeneutic of two kinds of righteousness. We will say more about this later. For now, what is important for Weber from Luther's work is the sense that vocation sanctified the "mundane" activities of life. No longer was there any division between the churchly callings as

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[7] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, xxxi–xxxii. Emphasis in original.

[8] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 35.

[9] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Can Life in Business Still be a Calling? Or is That Day Over? (lecture, Colloquoy on Religious Faith and Economic Life, March 2004), http://reformedtheology.org/SiteFiles/PublicLectures/WolterstorffPL.html (accessed August 2, 2012).

someone more important or more God-pleasing than any other activity. Farmers, bakers, cobblers, and many others were now able to understand their earthly occupation as a direct calling from God through which their work pleased him as well as served their neighbor. Weber wrote, "[T]he valuation of the fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs is the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume." He continues, "[T]here remains, more and more strongly emphasized, the statement that the fulfillment of worldly duties is under all circumstances the only way to live acceptably to God. It and it alone is the will of God, and hence every legitimate calling has exactly the same worth in the sight of God."[10] Of course, for Luther, the emphasis on earthly duties is contrasted with the high view of monasticism of his time. Luther rejected the view that elevated the churchly calling because it constituted a fundamental abandonment of worldly duties. Since Luther understood humans to be God's instruments in his care for creation through an individual's providing for one's neighbors—the very foundation of Luther's doctrine of vocation combined with his sacramental understanding of the church—Luther would not stand for monastic orders but instead sharply criticized them to the extent that they in fact we not holy at all but indeed sinful in their retreat from the world.

We should be clear however that Weber did not see in Luther's doctrine of vocation any explanation or source for the spirit of capitalism. Rather, Weber's account of the emergence of this spirit saw in Luther's doctrine only the beginning of a development which would give way to that spirit. In fact, Luther's doctrine would reject much of what can be found in the spirit of capitalism, most particularly the centrality of work for the sake of work and profit for the sake of (recurring) profit. For Luther, such things were not ends in themselves but means within a larger framework according to how God was at work in the world.

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[10] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 40, 41.

How then did this spirit emerge? Weber identifies the preaching and teaching of the Puritans as decisive. As Nicholas Wolterstorff demonstrates in a lecture on calling within which he highlights the preaching of some prominent Puritans, what seems to be their position is that whatever one's occupation, the calling upon the life of a Christian is simply to do whatever one's work might be to the glory of God.[11] It is the centrality of this sort of piety that accounts for the apparent semantic collapse of the two concepts. Weber interpreted (wrongly it seems, according to Wolterstorff) that the Puritans collapsed the concept of calling in their discourse to be referring simply to work and occupation. What was important for the Christian was the sense that one's work, whatever it may be, was always done in the eyes of God, and therefore doing one's best was a fundamental duty of the Christian life.

As mentioned before, although Weber's account of the emergence of the spirit of capitalism can be challenged, supplemented, or appropriated, it is clear that he was dealing with an important phenomenon, with a significant feature of modern social life. This "spirit of capitalism" was indeed and remains the spirit of the age, or the spirit of the "total work world."

The Culture of Total Work

Writing in perhaps his most famous oeuvre, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture*, Catholic philosopher Josef Pieper takes the reader on a brief, yet cogent (for Pieper, *urgent*) journey toward understanding how work has come to be definitive of human existence, rather than merely a part of it. Here Pieper means to raise a question for his readers about the centrality of work in their lives. Work, Pieper will argue, has become definitive of human existence. Our lives are oriented around it. Pieper thinks this is a substantial problem. But he goes about problematizing it in a roundabout manner, starting with what is often understood as the

[11] Wolterstorff, "Can Life in Business be a Calling?"

"opposite" of work: leisure. It quickly becomes clear however that leisure is in fact no opposite. It barely stands in *contrast* to work. Rather, because work is so central, leisure is caught up in the grammar of the total work world, defined against work, which serves as a basic and normative formulation. As we will see, Pieper thinks it ought to be the other way around.

Pieper writes at a time when people are busy working. Germany is in the middle of recovery from WWII. It is into this setting that he asks whether or not it would a good time to speak about leisure, of course assuming the answer will be "no" since the necessity of rebuilding is at hand.[12] Further, Pieper goes on to say that his question about work is going to seem not only strange but also offensive. Pieper is fundamentally challenging a deep-seated narrative of culture—one in which humanity's place in the world is clearly articulated: man is meant for work.[13] Work is the point of life. To work is to be fully human. This is the narrative of the culture of "total work" that Pieper wishes to challenge. To demonstrate this, Pieper highlights how our grammar regarding other aspects of our life that are not "work" is still circumscribed by the grammar of work. That is, "leisure" for example, is defined in relation to work. To not be at work is to be at leisure. Leisure is not an outright negation of work, but it is clearly defined negatively in light of work. Our culture's overemphasis on work, Pieper notes, results in our definitions of those things that are considered "leisurely," like "breaks" or "time off" or even "vacations"—each term derives its meaning first and foremost within the bounds of work itself.[14] Leisure in this sense is the means by which man is refreshed for more work. Again, we see here the ideological dominance of man as worker and life as work.

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[12] Josef Pieper, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture*, trans. Gerald Malsbary (South Bend: St. Augustine's, 1998), 3.

[13] Pieper writes, "An altered conception of the human being *as such* and a new interpretation of the meaning of human existence *as such*, looms behind the new claims being made for 'work' and the 'worker.'" *Leisure*, 7.

[14] Pieper, *Leisure*, 30–31.

Work, Pieper proceeds to suggest, has a certain moral status. While he never articulates it using those particular terms, his book functions to point out something endemic to the moral discourse of our culture.[15] The productivity and activity of the "total work" world takes on the character of a moral good, exemplified in the positive connotations that come with the use of the terms (often in a manner of praise) "effort" and "industrious," or even "stress" in a certain way (that is, as a result of work or the expenditure of energy in labor). Further, that which is difficult is connoted as a good to be sought, or at least as something better than that which is easy.[16] In an example of this very kind of discourse and its rhetorical force, Pieper references Kant's description of philosophy as a "Herculean labor," a description that functions simultaneously as a legitimation.[17] Philosophy as a discipline of labor is (a) good because it is difficult in the sense that only those who are of Herculean strength and stamina should engage in it. It is no leisurely (in the sense of *easy*) activity. Work, Pieper argues, is further elevated as a "good" within the social doctrine that is concealed within this very discourse. He notes work is often defined as a contribution to society, as a social service, and as contribution to the common utility.[18] Here we are able to hear an echo of the Puritanical perspective on work as Weber cites it. In Weber's argument, work and working hard are understood by the Puritans to be the carrying out of

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[15] In this manner, he is pointing out something similar to MacIntyre when he spoke about moral fictions. See the conversation on the manager and the therapist in *After Virtue* where MacIntyre notes that they traffic in moral fictions. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1984), 74. See also Philip Rieff, *My Life Among the Deathworks* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, 2006), 4.

[16] Pieper, *Leisure*, 13, 19.

[17] Pieper, *Leisure*, 15.

[18] Pieper, *Leisure*, 20. Miroslav Volf, in his *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford, 1991), writes that, in general, the consensus in modern culture is that work is and should be for the common good. This for him is a central value to be commended. But Volf's comment, one amongst many Christians who share this view, does not echo the empty secular idea of "common good" that Pieper is pointing out here. Rather, Volf's articulation fits within a larger Christian framework. Work for Volf, much like it will in this chapter, is good because God uses it to accomplish his purposes. Volf, 186–87.

Christian duty and thus to be God-pleasing. The moral value Pieper notices in the way work is regarded mirrors the picture of piety afforded work in Weber.

In the culture of total work, Pieper notes, man is captive to work. He writes, "To be bound to the working process is to be bound to the whole process of usefulness, and moreover, to be bound in such a way that the whole life of the working human being is consumed."[19] Leisure, if defined within this orientation of life as total work, is inevitably going to be construed as idleness or laziness. This, for Pieper, is just the problem. The circumscription of leisure under the dominant rhetoric in the language of productivity and activity evacuates leisure of its original meaning. Idleness (Latin: *acedia*) in its originary context—which was religious and oriented by a teleological narrative—had the sense of not being willing to accept, or an outright rejection of, one's identity as a creature of God. "Idleness, for the older code of behavior, meant especially this: that the human being had given up on the very responsibility that comes with his dignity: that he does not want to be what God wants him to be, and that means that he does not want to be what he really, and in the ultimate sense, *is*."[20] Idleness is not understood in this context as doing nothing, but means the very opposite—filling one's life with activity in order to avoid facing the reality that one ultimately wants to reject: that he or she is God's and that there is a calling placed on one's life. Leisure then, is not idleness or laziness but is rather the "cheerful affirmation by man of his own existence, of the world as a whole, and of God—of Love, that is, from which arises that special freshness of action, which would never be confused by anyone with any experience with the narrow activity of the 'workaholic.'"[21] Notice the turn to a different narrative in this sentence. Here is what makes Pieper so helpful. By understanding Leisure

[19] Pieper, *Leisure*, 42.

[20] Pieper, *Leisure*, 28.

[21] Pieper, *Leisure*, 29.

according to the biblical narrative as a response to Love, work becomes the kind of ethical response to a different narrative subjectivity. Leisure is centered in a life of worship (Pieper often connects worship with contemplation and festivity) within which it is possible that the meaning of one's work can be clearly seen and so one can participate in it rightly. In a complex turning of the imagination, Pieper means to set the world right-side-up by orienting work within the larger picture of man in relation to God and all creatures. What is meant to be definitive, what is meant to provide the circumscriptive boundaries is not the narrative of culture that offers the anthropology of man as laborer. Rather, Pieper argues this anthropology can never be exhaustive enough—it cannot encompass all of life. Thus, Pieper's project attempts to recover the theological and teleological character of the ancient Greek narratives, but even more strongly, the biblical narrative. The scriptural anthropology situates work, rather than makes it definitive. God and his story are definitive and work is understood as but one part of life in one's relationship to God as creature and in one's interrelatedness to all of creation.

In a previous chapter, I discussed therapeutic culture and its division into the realms of the manager and the therapist. The total work world can be understood as the world of the manager. The culture critic Curtis White wonders whether or not "the values of the boss have been internalized by the workers."[22] Josef Pieper's work compels us to answer in the affirmative. Uwe Siemon-Netto, the distinguished German journalist and sociologist of religion, has often pointed out in his classes and lectures that it was Max Weber who originally noted the internalization of a working ethos into a society. Weber's classic work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is an exploration of this very phenomenon. Weber argued that one of the social consequences of the Reformation, Luther's teaching on vocation through its development within

[22] Curtis White, *The Spirit of Disobedience: Resisting the Charms of Fake Politics, Mindless Consumption, and the Culture of Total Work* (Sausalito, CA: PoliPoint, 2007), 129.

American Puritan thought, was an internalization of "the valuation of the fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs is the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume."[23] For Weber, work, in the form of "routinized activity in the world," is captured in the conception of calling. Weber's description of the attitude toward work, with its pious orientation toward pleasing God, is still applicable in the culture of total work today. The total work world is the context of the church, and as such it has subtly formed the church's own understanding of work.

What is important for the present project is to ask how the church participates in the culture of total work, adopting its values and perpetuating its narrative. One way the church participates in it is as "therapy." We've already explored one side of the therapeutic church as a captive church under the theme of preaching, and another under the theme of evangelism. In preaching, cultural captivity emerges in preaching that is comedic to hearers looking for the therapeutic. In evangelism, cultural captivity emerges in the assumption that churches offer services to customers, and that evangelism amounts to kinds of "church marketing." Now with catechesis we can see how the doctrine of vocation enters as "therapy" and in so doing, underwrites rather than challenges the social situation.

Practicing the Catechesis of Vocation in the Culture of Total Work

Pieper's greatest lament is, perhaps, the direct link made between the social doctrine of total work and the doctrines of Christianity. "[E]specially to be regretted is the apologetic enthusiasm of the attempt to legitimize 'Christian teaching' through making it agree with the current fashion and, in this connection, to read modern activism in the 'working-ethos' of the

[23] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 40.

Church."[24] Here Pieper's work comes into contact with the concerns of this dissertation. Let us explore an example of exactly what Pieper is describing.

What we must first notice is how "vocation" is a proper and natural topic of catechesis. In Luther's Small Catechism, for example, his Table of Duties placed vocation front and center in the lives of Christians.[25] Their education as Christians was oriented in many respects toward narrating their lives, as they serve in particular vocations, into the larger story of what God was doing in the world. Namely, for vocation, the basic idea is that God was working through human beings, not only to save sinners, but also to simply care for humans and all of creation. Luther's understanding of the three kinds of orders or estates into which God places people to serve—the ecclesial, the political, and the economic—each have a place in the Table of Duties. Luther briefly gives direction to each one, effectively closing the Small Catechism with a reflection on how one might apply the previous teachings about the Christian life in the particular God-given roles in which they find themselves, whether as leaders in the church, community, or within the household.

Furthermore, Luther encourages confession of sins on the basis of one's vocation. In the form of confession offered in the Small Catechism, Luther suggests that one ought to reflect on his or her sins, answering the question "Which sins is a person to confess?" not by saying "All of them." This is confusing and impossible; how can one know all of his or her sins? Rather Luther suggests confessing those sins that are knowable. Thus he proceeds to offer a perspective for reflection in order to make a proper confession:

> Here reflect on your walk of life in light of the Ten Commandments: whether you are father, mother, son, daughter, master, mistress, servant; whether you have been

[24] Pieper, *Leisure*, 29.

[25] See Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 365–67.

disobedient, unfaithful, lazy, whether you have harmed anyone by word or deed; whether you have stolen, neglected, wasted, or injured anything.[26]

If the Small Catechism is oriented around vocation in a basic manner so that Christians might properly learn and live the Christian life, Luther's Large Catechism is even more specific. In his exposition of the Fourth Commandment, Luther focuses specifically on the God-given vocations of parents and children.[27] He speaks clearly about how these roles are in fact assigned by God, offices that God creates and through which he works. Parents are God's representatives. Family life is substantially extolled, yet Luther goes beyond mere family life to reflect also on the vocations of others whose vocation supports family life: teachers, friends, neighbors, and household servants. These individuals take on certain roles because of their vocation that contribute in the same manner as a parent, as if the parent's role were delegated, as indeed Luther notes it is at times. Furthermore, Luther also notes that fatherhood can be understood in political leaders, such as the "fathers of the nation."

A central thread in Luther's exposition here is the concern for the neighbor. Just as parents are called to care for their children and others are at times delegated a portion of those roles—or can be understood as "parents" in a particular manner—serving the neighbor amounts to Luther's vision for a kind of "civics of the kingdom" that finds its foundation in the relationships of a family.

Similarly in his exposition of the Sixth Commandment, Luther focuses on the callings of marriage.[28] Again, his concern for the relation to one's neighbor is central. In particular, the focus is on those neighbors who exist in relation to the married couple. Their status as belonging

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[26] Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 360.

[27] Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 400–10.

[28] Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 413–16.

to each other because God ordains and honors marriage is the reason for the giving of this Commandment. Keeping the Commandment to not commit adultery is a means of caring for one's neighbors. As a neighbor, to not commit adultery constitutes in part the vocation of "neighbor." Additionally, the same command constitutes the calling of a husband or wife.

Yet in light of all this, vocation as a historic doctrine has all but completely disappeared. For example, theologian Gene Veith has commented on this phenomenon explicitly.

> Today, in an age of unbelief, many of the old theological words remain, even after the faith that gave them meaning is gone... *Vocation* also has a common meaning today. It has become just another term for job, as in "vocational training" or "vocational education." The term, though, is a theological word, reflecting a rich body of biblical teaching about work, family, society, and the Christian life."[29]

Veith argues that "vocation" along with a handful of other theological terms have been evacuated of their original meaning in contemporary culture. They have been simply adopted by the world and used carelessly. What is worse, however, is the fact that in the case of "vocation" the church has not taken care in its own use of the term to distinguish it from more common usage and define it according to its historic meaning. And this is particularly problematic when the people who make up the learning communities of the church, those who are being catechesized into the faith that is believed, taught, and confessed are not able to make the distinction themselves, thus using the term not as the church would have it, but as they have inherited it from culture. Vocation, as it has been historically understood and taught, is simply not visible anymore. Veith writes, "the concept of vocation has been gradually lost. First, it was turned into a 'work ethic'; then it was turned into a pious attitude empty of specific content; then

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[29] Gene Veith, *God at Work* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 17.

it was reduced to just another synonym for 'a job.'"[30] Thus, even when vocation is retrieved, it is retrieved in a manner that is culturally captive.

In a catechetical series on Lutheran Spirituality, Chad Hoover penned the volume on the doctrine of Vocation. In it, learners are encouraged to work hard and "give their all" because Christ, in his life, death, and resurrection gave his all.[31] At best, Hoover fits into Veith's second option, that vocation or calling has something to do with a "pious attitude empty of specific content." Indeed, Hoover will go on to fill the concept with content, but as we will see, it is the wrong content. His justification for hard work and dedication comes in the section addressing work outside of the home, that is, work as career or wherever it is that one earns an income (generally understood as "the workplace"). What stands out in Hoover's work, however, is the distinct lack of connection with the historic doctrine of vocation. Rather, his guide is more practically oriented, focusing particularly on the character and kind of work in which one engages.[32] His approach reveals the church's cultural captivity. That we find exhortations to work hard and be dedicated is therefore not surprising. Allow me to note some specific problems in Hoover's approach. Keep in mind that his material is meant to be used by pastors and other church educators for catechizing God's people in the contemporary church.[33]

It is disappointing that Hoover's encouragement to work hard results from a confusion of Law and Gospel, a turning of Gospel into Law. It is the Gospel message of Christ's life, death,

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[30] Gene Veith, "Vocation: The Theology of the Christian Life," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 14 (2011): 119–131.

[31] Chad Hoover, *Vocation: God Serves Through Us* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 52.

[32] For the sake of space, I will not seek here to correct Hoover inadequacies in this sense. Rather, I want to deal with what seem to me to be the underlying and implicit problems built into his guide which connect most directly with the influences that mark his guide as more a product of the culture of total work than one which is faithfully a product of the authentic Christian narrative.

[33] Keep also in mind that this material passed doctrinal review within the publishing arm of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. This factor alone indicates that even those who approve the content that will be taught in our churches are themselves culturally captive, for they clearly did not notice the problem I will elaborate.

and resurrection—his sacrifice *for us*—which is given as the justification for engaging in hard work and dedication. Hearers and learners of such teaching come away with a strong sense of obligation rather than a sense of freedom and joy about their work. Their work is oriented toward pleasing God (with perhaps too much of a meritorious tone)—because that is what Jesus did—rather than being oriented toward the understanding of vocation present in the classic work on Luther's doctrine of vocation by Gustaf Wingren[34] and the contemporary material by Veith wherein our work is construed as service to neighbor and to God enacted in freedom as new creatures who have been transformed.

It is further striking how Hoover's work lacks any sense of transformation at all, but rather seems to adopt the language of the total work world—he sounds more like Weber, especially in his language that reflects the Puritanical sources that Weber notes gave way to the spirit of capitalism. It is the duty of humans to work hard. This is the Puritan's sense of calling or vocation that Weber reflects upon. For the Puritans, this was the sense of calling because it was undergirded by the necessity of acting in obedience to God. As Weber puts it, "The earning of money within the modern economic order is, so long as it is done legally, the result and the expression of virtue and proficiency in a calling."[35] He continues,

> [T]his peculiar idea, so familiar to us to-day, but in reality so little a matter of course, of one's duty in a calling, is what is most characteristic of the social ethic of capitalistic culture, and is in a sense the fundamental basis of it. It is an obligation which the individual is supposed to feel and does feel towards the content of his professional activity, no matter in what it consists.[36]

For Hoover, what seems important is also this same sense of obedience and duty. Lutherans might say that Hoover is concerned with the First Use of the Law. In his guide on vocation,

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[34] Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (1957; repr., Evansville, IN: Ballast, 1999).

[35] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 19.

[36] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 19.

Christians need to be told what to do. That is, work hard, be committed, live obediently: do all this because that is what Jesus did for you. The Gospel is turned inside-out as if no transformation is necessary or even assumed. Rather, people are assumed to be the same as they ever were, and thus applying the law in the form of its First Use (applicable also to all non-believers) is how Hoover's work functions. As David Scaer has helpfully noted, "The law with its prohibitions and threats can never be a motivation for *Christian* living. It can prevent us from gross sin, but it cannot produce good works."[37] Hoover's work seems in some sense not to have Christians, properly understood, in view at all. Yet his guide claims to be for Christians and aims at shaping the Christian life.

Perhaps, however, Hoover had in mind that work will at times still feel like drudgery, and thus the law will always prod us onward, even coercing us. Of course the Formula of Concord does speak this way about the law (FC SD VI, 16–17).[38] Yet if this was Hoover's concern, it is quite unclear that he was writing for Christians, those who had been transformed and made new. For such an understanding—that is, of the necessity at times for coercion in work, even for Christians—would proceed out of an understanding of the Christian life as a *vita passiva*, wherein one is really transformed and has been raised a new creature. As Scaer has pointed out, "Good works flow from the Gospel and not the law."[39] In saying this he reminds us about how the Formula of Concord describes the Christian life: the Christian "does everything from a free and merry spirit."[40] Good works are the fruit of God's transformative work. But Scaer is quick to remind us that "as long as we live we are sinners who must be compelled by the law to do those

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[37] David P. Scaer, "Sanctification in the Lutheran Confessions," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 53 (1989): 165–81. Emphasis mine.

[38] Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 589–90.

[39] Scaer, "Sanctification," 173.

[40] Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 590.

things which our old natures hate."[41] It is the new creature who battles against the flesh of the Old Adam and who needs the coercive word of the law.[42] But this only is necessary after God through the word of the gospel has done his work. Thus, even to give Hoover a charitable reading in this sense only goes to show that he still is working from a narrative different from the Scriptures. Law and gospel are confused in his exhortation to hard work and it is questionable if Hoover's imagined audience is really constituted by Christians who have been transformed, since he seems to betray in his work a perspective that transformation is unnecessary and that the doctrine of vocation is linked primarily with the first use of the law.

After his exhortation toward hard work, Hoover goes on to note that Christian worship "strengthens us so that we can go out into the world with the assurance of Christ's forgiveness and be equipped for service to our neighbors in the workplace (and elsewhere). Despite the struggles and difficulties in this life, our faith keeps us going and provides hope for us as we look forward to the fullness of the life that awaits us."[43] Here this catechetical resource connects us back to the therapeutic culture within which the culture of total work is a concomitant manifestation. When Christian worship is supposed to strengthen, refresh and equip, especially for the purposes of going back to work, it has become therapeutic, and in this particular sense, complicit in fostering the culture of total work. What is at stake here, again, is the very issue of transformation. In the therapeutic church, transformation is not needed. All that is necessary is finding a way to help hearers cope with the life they already have. I have already brought this out

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[41] Scaer, "Sanctification," 173.

[42] To be sure, the new creature is informed of the law and formed by the law in the midst of his or her participation within the life of the ecclesia, where God is at work making his people. This is just as the writers of the Confessions understood the way the law functioned (FC VI). Indeed, the Christian will learn new habits and come to exhibit new virtues as, *coram hominibus*, they embody the law and serve their neighbor faithfully each day. See pg 97, footnote 25.

[43] Hoover, *Vocation: God Serves Through Us*, 52.

in the previous chapter regarding preaching that only makes everything okay. When worship becomes merely a source of strength and refreshment for tired and frustrated workers, transformation is forgotten. What is assumed to be the refreshing word of the gospel amounts only to an obligatory word of law—Christ gave his all, therefore I must too. Catechesis and sermons become motivational speeches rooted in the same conception of vocation as Weber noted above: it is all about our duty.

The therapeutic sense of worship with which Hoover operates does not seem to have room for the transformed life of the new creature, but tends simply to function on the premise that worship and the proclaimed forgiveness of sins does not kill and make newly alive, but rather covers over or soothes our problems so that life may continue as usual. In terms of the freedom of a Christian and the doctrine of vocation, this comes out most prominently through the inversion of law and gospel present in the teaching that Christians should serve their neighbor or work hard in response to the gift of Christ—I now have this obligation to serve as a response. The language of gift in this sense is circumscribed within an economy of exchange—I owe my service on account of Christ's service. Rather, if transformation were really assumed, we would be speaking to the new creature and simply describing his or her life, rather than subversively trying to coerce them into thinking they ought to serve. Good trees simply bear good fruit—they do not have to be convinced to do so. This is not to say that coercion has no place or that the law is to be understood as entirely negative, for the flesh certainly clings to the new creature like a body of death. Nevertheless, coercion in this sense situates the law appropriately in relation to the gospel. The law is good and useful when delivered to the new creature for use in his or her daily battle with the old Adam. Such delivery occurs in the training of the Christian life that occurs in the midst of the practices of the ecclesia, such as in catechesis (in the broad sense of teaching the whole Christian life), as well as worship and preaching. Indeed it is in the life of the

ecclesia that the Christian gains new habits and ways of being by means of the law and its goodness for the Christian life, in just the manner God intends.

Furthermore, the relationship between work and worship in Hoover is turned upside-down. Pieper describes the culture of total work in exactly this way. That work is related to worship in the sense that worship is a break or respite from work is, for Pieper, all wrong. Certainly those who teach on vocation would note that work is a form of worship. This is not denied. Nor is there any slippage into the kind of man-is-made-for-work anthropology Pieper conceives as not being exhaustive enough—as if the world of total work were sufficient for understanding what it means to be human. The church does not go that far. Hoover does not go that far. Human life is conceived at least more holistically in the doctrine of vocation than being a life of total work, especially in regard to the workplace and its central role in Pieper's critique. But work is still, in the language of Hoover above, that for which we are equipped and refreshed in worship. Work retains a place of primacy in Hoover's framework, even over worship. Like Pieper argues, work is conceived in a primary sense, and worship is subordinated to it in our imagination. Pieper's response is that this relationship should be inverted. Pieper's argument is that work only gets its meaning from worship—it only makes sense in the context of a worshipping life. Allow me an extended explanation as this reorientation aims at offering a corrective to the church's cultural captivity.[44] Pieper will not be enough for Lutherans, but his conception of the relationship between worship and work is helpful. In order to round out his argument, I will return to the Lutheran understanding of the biblical narrative and the Christian life later.

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[44] Some of the following content is adapted from my "Challenging the Cultural Imaginary: Pieper on How Life Might Live," *New Blackfriars* 91 (2010): 499–510.

Work and Worship—Reframing a Central Connection; Understanding Work Faithfully

Pieper's work contrasts two views of life—a life of total work against a life of leisure, contemplation, festivity, and worship. The first view is familiar and we discussed it above as the narrative undergirding the culture of total work. It is the contemporary picture that casts life in terms of an internalized sense of the necessity of production, hard work, utility, and the resultant income and satisfaction that comes from such. This internalized sense has become part of the social imaginary of life's meaning, its purpose, and therefore, is taken for granted by many as definitive of how life is to be lived. Thus Pieper, among others, has characterized our culture as one of total work. At least in the West, he argues that man is captured by this view—it has us—in such a way that we can imagine no other possibility for how life could be lived, no other way for things to be. He frames our entrapment in such a way that it is capable of causing delusion, such that man thinks he is happy living purely for production in a system that only values usefulness.

Pieper formulates the definitive attitude of those who would defend our taken-for-granted culture of total work:

> [M]an obviously feels himself happiest when he is able to work in a creatively active fashion in the world, following out his own impulses and plans. Is not the man who labors constructively, the plowman, the gardener, and above all the creative artist, considered the prototype of the happy man, in spite of all the sweat of toil or the pangs of creation—considered so because it is granted to him to bring into the world out of his own body and mind a whole *poiema*, an objective product?[45]

Readers of these words might immediately react to what seem to be the positive factors mentioned here: creativity, happiness, a uniquely human creation. Certainly such ideas are not considered negatively by Pieper himself. What is problematic is that the conceptions of

[45] Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (South Bend: St. Augustine's, 1998), 56.

creativity, production, and happiness used above are circumscribed by the processes of usefulness defined and legitimated by the economic hegemony of modern culture—that is, an economy of commodity fetishism where work has become meaningless in itself and only products have value. To that extent, both Pieper's statement that "man's happiness consists in contemplation" and the title of his book, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture*, tend to register only a sense of confusion in the mind of the reader. At the very least, the reader might think, much more must be said and a great deal more defense given for the ideas to even seem plausible. On their own, those statements risk almost immediate dismissal and marginalization due to the firmly rooted nature of the narrative of total work.[46]

Pieper considers the Protestant work ethic that upholds the total work world to be both dangerous and destructive. Simply put, it is not conducive to life; rather, it can only lead to death. The culture of total work is, no pun intended, a deathwork.[47] This is why Pieper frames the issue of a work ethic in terms of entrapment and boundedness. It is like being a prisoner or a slave but not knowing it—the ethic is so constitutive of the social imaginary that it is unrecognized and taken-for-granted; it *has* us. So Pieper dares to imply that we cannot escape it. In his application of the problem to all of Western society, he says that we are all proletarians—that is, he defines being proletarian as "being *bound to the working-process.*"[48]

Here we encounter what may be the heart of the problem that Pieper is trying to point out. While humanity's boundedness to the total working-process finds its cause in part as a result of one's being a member of the state with its narrative of capitalism and therefore trapped within

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[46] It is similar to MacIntyre's description of modern moral discourse, where moral terms have lost their meaning; Pieper's concepts seem totally foreign since the modern discourse on work has no room for them with the use Pieper employs.

[47] This is Philip Rieff's concept. See his *My Life Among the Deathworks*, 7.

[48] Pieper, *Leisure*, 42. Emphasis in original.

the social imaginary in which one cannot imagine life otherwise, Pieper's story of a spiritual cause reveals a more serious crisis. The social imaginary in which the total work world as a form of sociality is possible emerges from a spiritual poverty in which the image of life has no room for any greater good than merely the production of "goods." Thus life itself must be re-imagined so that the spiritual dimension once again plays a central role.

We have noted above that leisure for Pieper does not amount to inactivity, as if the answer to the total work world is simply less work, or that the remedy to constant productive activity is simply inactivity. Leisure is a different sort of activity, but one that is not circumscribed within the boundaries of *activity as production.* Leisure then, is distinct from work and to be at leisure requires being not "at work." However, due to the boundedness or entrapment to one's life of total work, leisure seems impossible.

Leisure for Pieper does not mean a vacation, a long weekend, or time off, because in fact, these things find their meaning only within the total working life.[49] For Pieper, leisure is much more cognitive and contemplative. And it is specifically religious. This emerges out of the real problem Pieper seems to be trying to address—the loss of an appropriate anthropology. But he is not referring to a strictly secular anthropology. Rather he is advocating one that repristinates the reflections of ancient Greek philosophy and early and medieval Christianity: Who is man? What is the good life? Where does man find happiness? These answers, of course, as MacIntyre tells us, emerge out of a community's narrative. Pieper shows us that the culture of total work offers us one particular narrative with its own set of answers to those questions.

Pieper re-imagines how life could be, re-invoking the contemplative way of life heard in the voices of the ancient Greeks and medieval Christian thinkers like Thomas Aquinas in order

[49] Pieper, *Leisure*, 31, 34.

to return us to what worship does. It reorients our imagination and our desires, helping us to see ourselves differently as the new creatures that we are. The interest of the ancients and Aquinas was clearly in questions of anthropology, and Pieper returns to their thought because he believes their conception of human life thoroughly stands in opposition to the modern social imaginary. What then is their conception of life; what does man live for? Pieper describes it simply: "The ancients conceived the whole energy of human nature as a hunger. Hunger for what? For being, for undiminished actuality, for complete realization—which is not attainable in the subject's isolated existence, for it can be secured only by taking into the self the universal reality."[50]

In both *Happiness and Contemplation* and *In Tune with the World*, Pieper raises the specifically Catholic idea of the beatific vision. His argument is that man is made for "seeing" and the ultimate kind of seeing is, as Plato concluded, "contemplation of divine beauty." And before Plato, Anaxagoras gives the same purpose for life: seeing.[51] In seeing, we are presented with a sharp alternative to the present social imaginary that sees life as purposed for productivity. We recall here Ricoeur's argument that in seeing, we *see as* and therefore in our orientation to particular narratives, we are offered a vision of ourselves in a particular identity. In the Christian narrative, this identity is characterized by a remarkable break with that offered in the narrative of total work. Protestant readers might be uncomfortable with the teleology offered by Aquinas or the ancients. And rightly so. The Reformer's turned the ancient ontology on its head and with it the scholastic teleology was reversed. God was no longer something to be reached or seen. Rather, for the Reformers, God had come to humanity in Jesus Christ. Humanity was no longer burdened with going up, for God had come down. And in so doing, God had shown himself to be

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[50] Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, 64.

[51] See Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, chap. 7; *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (South Bend: St Augustine's, 1999), 16.

oriented entirely toward humanity and to be working for the sake of humanity through humanity itself. This was demonstrated paradigmatically through Christ, through whom man's chief end was revealed anew in Reformational theology. God in Christ recreates man to live as Christ. Man's chief end then becomes service to neighbor within the created order that simultaneously is constitutive of man's life of worship before God.

Here work as vocation is situated appropriately within one's life as a member of the community of God's people, narrated in a story that is enacted and practiced in worship. The members of the community of the church as the body of Christ embody Christ's outward orientation toward others and the Father's care for creation and mission to the world. Through worship, which orients the church's members faithfully according to the church's true narrative, we overcome the deficiencies of the practice of catechesis that is captive to the culture of total work (yet worship also is formative for faithful catechesis, which I will address shortly). Even further, we are offered the resources by which to correct that practice through the teaching of vocation within the framework of the narrative offered in worship and the life engendered by it.

Such a life, as I have maintained throughout, is a life of suffering. The Christian life is the *vita passiva*, a life in which the Christian suffers the work of God upon him or her in whatever means God chooses. The life of work, as Luther has written about it, is a life of discipline and a life of punishment. Work is bitter, difficult, and painful. But, that punishment is not meant to bring about an entirely negative experience. As Luther would construe it, in his *Lectures on Genesis*, the suffering caused by work has the larger purpose of leading us to God in this life, and finally for preparing us for the joy we will have in our fellowship with him in the new Heaven and Earth, a sign and glimpse of which we are given on the Sabbath. By leading us to God, work functions like the rest of the experiences of life—God works through work to reprove us, and

through such reproof "we may rid ourselves of our smugness and walk in the fear of God."[52] As Luther implies, suffering in work reminds one that there is no salvation in this world, and one's hope should be in God alone. Thus it is through worship that work finds meaning. Worship is not preparatory for our life in work, but acts in part as work's culmination. The church's cultural captivity to the total work world can only be overcome through faithful worship wherein work is rightly situated as that which leads God's people back to him and receives its meaning from God's use of his people to care for the world through their work. From there flows the proper catechesis of vocation.

Let me reframe this argument a bit. Pieper's argument does not suggest that work is wrong. Rather, Pieper tries to relativize work according to an appropriate model of rest, Sabbath, festivity—in a word, worship. There is much to be appreciated from this, but Pieper's narrative, Catholic as it is, cannot fully help us recover the biblical narrative of the *vita passiva* for understanding vocation. Yet, Pieper's argument remains in many ways consistent with that narrative, even if it places emphasis in different places.

To deploy the Lutheran perspective, it is helpful to reach back to the work of Gustaf Wingren whose articulation of Luther's doctrine of vocation helps us see the connection of vocation to worship a la Pieper, yet helps us see more substantially how vocation fits within the Lutheran framework of the *vita passiva.*

In the critique of Hoover above, we noted the lack of any sense of transformation in his account of vocation. This critique gave way to revisiting the understanding of the Lutheran Confessions on the nature of good works in light of the sanctification that comes from God's work of justification—namely, that such works flow as a result of God's work and are never

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[52] *LW* 1: 209.

purely of our own volition. God has made new creatures. And new creatures can be understood as good trees that bear good fruit.

Wingren's articulation of Luther's doctrine of vocation starts in just this place. And his scheme places vocation within the framework of two kinds of righteousness. He begins by pointing the reader to the fact that, "Good works and vocation (love) exist for the earth and one's neighbor, not for eternity and God. God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does."[53] Here Wingren is bringing to bear a distinction we have already made in a previous chapter. God's work upon man to transform him through killing and making alive involves both his alien and proper work. The work of the law to bring death is God's alien work. The work of the gospel to save and give new life is his proper work. We can also say that the work of God to make alive is also a work that makes righteous. And because being made righteous is fundamentally a work of God and not of man, man is rendered passive, and indeed is made passively righteous. Thus Christians are said to live by faith that God has made them righteous and to trust that he has done so. As a result, they are also led to fulfill God's commandments, which means they will, as the early church clearly did, devote themselves to God and his word, serving their neighbor by seeking his or her good, and respect and honor those who stand in authority over them. This way of life can then be described, not as good works that appear meritorious before God and heaven, but as good works that benefit the neighbor and "the earth." They are, as Lutherans have said, the Christian's life *coram hominibus*, or "before man." Thus, the works which Christians do are not useless. They simply are "not for eternity and God," as Wingren puts it, but for our neighbor because he or she needs them.

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[53] Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 10.

Since we have already acknowledged that the good works of a Christian are still attributable to God as the one who has made this creature good and thus prompts such good works, Wingren helps us to see that vocation is a means for understanding exactly what it means that God is at work through human beings. God chooses to work through means. This is a point we've already highlighted in the last chapter. Here it is no different, only applied in a new direction. Wingren cogently develops Luther's teaching that God's gives various gifts to care for our neighbor and creation, including our very lives but also things to sustain us like food and clothing, as well as a home and a family. Those gifts are put to work by God to accomplish his purposes. "[T]he ceaseless work of the God of creation," Wingren writes, "goes forward through the labors of mankind."[54]

Later on Wingren explains that God is at work through Christians in the form of using them as a "channel." They are his instruments. He writes, "Luther makes it clear that God's own love reaches out to others through Christians as channels. God is present on earth with his goodness when a Christian directs his service downward toward others. God dwells in heaven, but now he is near and working on earth with man as his co-operator."[55] Elsewhere, Wingren explains this idea similarly, but using the concept of a mask behind which God hides. "The concepts of co-operation and masks of God belong together," Wingren says. "in co-operation in vocation, man becomes God's mask on earth wherever man acts. A mask of God is therefore found only in the earthly realm where man labors and does his work for others."[56]

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[54] Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 9.

[55] Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 126.

[56] Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 137. It is important to note that Wingren uses more than one sense of mask here. He also says here that, "Natural occurrences such as storms and thunder, or sun, or rich harvests are also God's masks, behind which his wrath and his love are hid."

Following from this, we ought to note that the worship of a Christian consists in part that he or she simply fulfills the calling given them by God. As St. Paul writes, "Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him (1 Corinthians 7:17).

Further, we should also point out that worship gives way to a proper catechesis of vocation in that the Christian life, as *vita passiva*, Christians are taught about their work. As the people who have been created by God through his word, in his act of coming and speaking to them through a preacher in his chosen location of the church, Christians first suffer God's visitation, encounter, and transformation through his chosen earthly vessels and means. In that transformation, God makes them a part of his people and in so doing casts them back out into the world to be once again the very means through which he operates and by whom others might suffer his visitation. The new life of the Christian in the world carries on in worship and service of God. Gustaf Wingren describes this new reality aptly:

> When the demand of vocation and of neighbor is laid upon the old man, he is made amenable. These sins (wrath, envy, greed, laziness, etc.) are repressed and give place to a gentle and patient new man, who receives his life from God's hand. In daily activity baptism is realized as a daily repentance. Thus the Christian is both old and new man, not only in relation to God's judgment, God's forgiveness, but also in his encounter with vocation and neighbor. He is still the old man, insofar as the encounter irritates him, and the new man when the encounter takes place with inner calm and joy.[57]

Later Wingren describes exactly how work (and works) should be understood in the life of the Christian who lives according to the biblical narrative rather than that of the total work world.

> When man believes, there is no law in the conscience but Christ. Therefore works do not aim at supporting faith or the religious life. Faith is already complete and needs no support from any Christian living, for Christ is perfect. Works have an utterly

[57] Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 55.

> different significance. One's neighbor does not possess all he needs; he is in need of one thing or another, of counsel and strength. There is a task for good works, a reaching down to the earthly situation.[58]

And that reaching down is exactly how God works. Through man, God acts in and upon the world. Through service to neighbor humans serve also God. And thus they rightly live a life of worship. In worship man is made to undergo the work of God so that in Christ man can accomplish the work of God.

To conclude, what this properly biblical teaching of vocation offers to the church is the chance to set work in its proper place, and in addition, to see a proper place for rest. Indeed, God calls human beings to vocations wherein he makes certain demands of them. Their lives are not to be for themselves. What Christians gain from being properly catechized into the rich doctrine of vocation as part of the biblical narrative for their lives is that they ought no longer to feel obligated to meet the demands of the workaday world. No longer are they required to live with a sense of anxiety about rest since the moral imperative of work that is definitive of the spirit of capitalism ought no longer to hold for them. Their allegiance is not to the moral imperatives of the culture of total work, but to God. They can live in trust that their works are used by God to fulfill the needs of others. All that is required is that they live the life God has assigned to them and to faithfully serve where God has called (1 Corinthians 7:17). They can trust him for all that remains; not only for their own provisions, but that he might be using their lives in his plan to care for all others.

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[58] Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 108–9.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

In the previous pages I have argued for an account of the church that recognizes and helps her move beyond captivity to contemporary culture. My argument construes the church's practices as operating according to a different narrative than its own. That captivity has resulted in an eclipse of the church's own narrative found in the Scriptures. The church's captivity has resulted in practices that the church believes are faithful, but in fact, are not. They are, even if the church has been unaware of it, forming the church's members to be something other than Christian. It is my hope that in these pages the church now has a helpful tool for discerning its own cultural captivity. As a community, the church's relationship with culture and other communities is an ongoing negotiation. In these pages I have addressed three areas in which the church is culturally captive, areas of negotiation that have ceded to the culture and are in need of correction within the church. My account of the church, following from its authentic narrative, has offered constructive possibilities for the church in recovering its own faithful living. Specifically, the church must hear the enduring word of God—the word that kills and makes alive, through which God chooses, makes, and forms his people. In order for God's people to recover faithfulness to God and find freedom from captivity to culture, the church must suffer God's work. In so doing, the church's ongoing practices will subsequently fulfill their teleological end in forming God's people faithfully. This dissertation, to the extent that it raises a critique of the church's life, might be understood as a moment of confrontation with God who is always calling his people to faithfulness.

Throughout this dissertation, a few questions have been implied that I have been unable to address. Either they would have taken the reader too far afield from the main task, or they require their own substantial study, perhaps in the form of a book or dissertation. Two of those stand out enough to be raised here. Both of these are openings worthy of further pursuit.

In chapter 4, I raised the issue of how the language of dogmatics focused on the generic individual. This language has been handed down to us at least since the beginning of the Reformation, first in confessional documents, and following in the writings of theologians and dogmaticians. The dogmatic articulations that focused on the individual are helpful for understanding theology in the way that Luther conceived of it—that is, as the study of the relationship between God and the sinner whom he justifies. But as I argued in chapter 4, the individualistic language has resulted in a lack of focus on the context in which the individual meets God—the community of the church.

I want to raise a further issue here, one that I cannot sustain in this space, but only suggest because it seems to be a tendency and warrants further consideration. Is it possible that the individualistic language of reformational dogmatics, present even in the writings of conservative Protestants up to the present, is having an effect on the nature of Christian practices in the American church? More pointedly, is it possible that the individualistic language that is given to the theologian and the pastor to describe the nature of Christian experience in the church in some sense effectively excludes consideration of the communal context in which such practices occur? Put another way, I am concerned that popular or common theological forms of practice and communication (first order theology) are generally indistinguishable from second order reflections on them.[1] By that, I mean at the very least, that the imagination formed within the

[1] This issue of individualism in practice resulting from individualism assumed in theological reflection has been well pointed out by those who argue for the privatizing forces inherent in the Constantinian synthesis of

practice is more reflective of the way the dogmatic presentation of the practices construes the practices within language. If the Lord's Supper is described in dogmatic texts using an individualistic framework, church leaders who foster practice in the Supper will inevitably foster that practice individualistically because the language available for use in describing the practice to those whom they lead can only be found in the dogmatic tradition (with its texts) they have inherited. Their people will participate in the Supper as if it is just a moment between themselves and God. Participation in the Supper is but one example of my concern here. One could expand this to the entire liturgy surrounding the Supper, and take note of how the practice of passing the peace has lost its meaning of being a moment wherein Christians are sure they are reconciled to one another before attending to the Lord's Table. The point is that they are eating and drinking *together*. Instead the practice has simply become a moment to greet each other, to say "hello" or to welcome a guest. The sense of community that should be building in the liturgy itself is lost because the meaning of the Supper for which the liturgy exists has come to center only on the individual and his or her standing before God (namely, has one "discerned" the body and blood correctly—the focus is on a propositional belief). Following from a focus on one's standing, the teaching about the Lord's Supper further emphasizes that the individual receives the gifts of God, namely grace, forgiveness and strengthening of faith. Again, contra Luther's very broad, generous, and communal understanding of the Supper noted in chapter 4—which follows from his understanding of baptism—the focus is only on the individual and his or her vertical relationship with God. In raising this point, one might easily be able to think of other practices

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Church and nation/state/world. For example, Joel Okamoto highlights how baptism became a privatized practice because it lost its political significance when the Church no longer distinguished itself from the world. The so-called "post-Constantinians" are arguing therefore for a recovery of the Church as culture or as *polis*, unique from the world in which it resides. Such a recovery, as they see it (and I agree), will allow for the political forces inherent in the Church's practices to again have an effect; that is, the practices will first of all be understood as communal, and then characteristic of a particular community—the people of God. See Joel Okamoto, "Locating 'Baptizing

that tend to perpetuate a sense of individualism in the church. The question at issue here is, could this phenomenon result from how the dogmatic tradition has come to us? In an age where individualism is already widely recognized and often sharply critiqued, is the church not further emphasizing individualism through practices that are described and construed using the individualistic language inherited from dogmatics? Has the emphasis on the individual in dogmatic texts shaped the Christian imagination, as formed through Christian practices, to be individualistic? If this position can be sustained, then it seems that the church must find ways of resisting the compound of the invasive individualism of American culture as well as the individualism inherent in its own tradition.

A second issue emerges from the MacIntyrian framework with which I have been working in these pages. Given that the church as a community is constantly negotiating its relationship with other communities through a relation of conflict with those communities and their traditions, it is worth exploring the nature of how the church comes substantially to be influenced by the world. Indeed, missionaries and cultural anthropologists have been interested in such concerns for the last century. But their focus has been rather narrow, centering on the interaction of one specific culture with another. In our flattened, globalized society, this question is presenting itself to us ever more urgently and in new ways. In the global villages and glocal contexts the 21st century world, the members of the church are inevitably members of multiple communities at the same time. Thus the members of the church are in(ter)volved with the church and any number of other communities at the same time, each perhaps vying for allegiance but at the very least fostering a certain way of being in the world that is potentially in conflict with the life that would be fostered by the church. This phenomenon is worth a great deal of exploration,

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Community' in Traditional Dogmatics," unpublished paper, 2001.

and some scholars are helping us think through this, like Graham Ward, Charles Taylor, James K. A. Smith, James Davison Hunter, and others, but more work is needed. Such work would be of great benefit for the church in the ongoing negotiation of its own identity, the performance of its own narrative, and the passing on of its own tradition in our changing world which, by all accounts, seems to be changing faster than ever. No doubt, the problems of cultural captivity upon which I have focused here can be accounted for by the massive changes experienced in the 20th century. The church would be wise to anticipate greater ones in the 21st, and in fact, to assume we are already unwittingly undergoing some. A greater cultural discernment that is not only critical of the church's context but also able to give ameliorative suggestions to the church for faithfully embodying its life in the world is imperative.

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"Candy Machine God, or, Going to Church without Going to Church: Millennials and the Future of the Christian Faith," in *Missio Apostolica* (forthcoming, 2013).

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Current Memberships in Academic Societies

American Academy of Religion
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