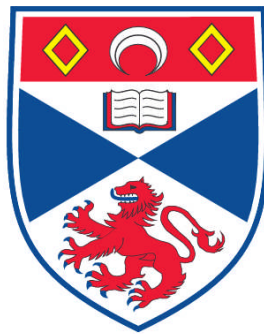


**FAITH AT THE FRACTURES OF LIFE:
AN EXAMINATION OF LAMENT AND PRAISE IN RESPONSE TO
HUMAN SUFFERING WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE
THEOLOGY OF WALTER BRUEGGEMANN AND DAVID FORD**

Andrew Michael McCoy

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St. Andrews**



2009

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**UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS
ST MARY'S COLLEGE**

**FAITH AT THE FRACTURES OF LIFE:
AN EXAMINATION OF LAMENT AND PRAISE IN
RESPONSE TO HUMAN SUFFERING WITH
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A THESIS SUBMITTED BY

ANDREW MICHAEL MCCOY

**TO THE FACULTY OF DIVINITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

**ST ANDREWS, SCOTLAND
APRIL 2009**

Abstract

This thesis explores the role of lament and praise in the respective theological approaches of Walter Brueggemann and David Ford for the purpose of examining how Christian faith transforms human response to suffering.

The first three chapters trace Brueggemann's engagement with Israel's lament psalms, beginning with his observation that their typical dual form mirrors the collective shape of Israel's psalter as well as all biblical faith. Influential interactions with sociology eventually lead Brueggemann to propose faith not simply as response to God's faithfulness, but rather through rhetorical tension maintained between conflicts perceived in aspects of scripture such as praise and lament. We critique this view of irresolvable textual tension for leaving Brueggemann with an unresolved understanding of divine fidelity which obscures biblical expectation that God will respond faithfully to human lament.

The fourth and fifth chapters concern David Ford's consistent engagement with praise and subsequently, Christian joy. His early collaborative scholarship proposes praise as the result of faith in who God is through the suffering person and work of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, continued ethical concerns lead Ford to identify Christian faith as an inextricable relationship between joy and responsibility resulting from "facing" Christ's life and suffering death. We critique Ford for failing to clarify *how* such "facing" is made possible through *who* God is in Christ, rendering faith merely the result of human expression of Christ's example, and thus obscuring any real reason for praise amidst suffering.

Beyond a synthesis of Brueggemann and Ford's respective approaches to lament and praise, the final chapter argues that a trinitarian approach to Christ's atonement is necessary to propose how God confronts both suffering and sin thereby producing faithful human response amidst persistent evil. We conclude by arguing that a trinitarian understanding of praise cannot be proposed apart from either who God is in Christ's atonement or how the atoning Christ is humanly faithful in lament.

Declarations

I, Andrew Michael McCoy, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Date Signature of Candidate

I was admitted as a research student in September 2004 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in April 2005, the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2004 and 2009.

Date Signature of Candidate

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of St. Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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Acknowledgements

I bear no little gratitude at the end of this arduous road towards submission of a doctoral thesis.

Thanks must first go to my esteemed supervisors Jeremy Begbie (now at Duke University) and Trevor Hart of St. Andrews for their help and guidance of this project. Tremper Longman of Westmont College in Santa Barbara, CA also kindly read drafts of my chapters on Brueggemann, and David Ford himself generously entertained me for an afternoon in his office at Cambridge during the earliest stages of my work. Additionally, I owe a very great debt to Dan Allender of Mars Hill Graduate School in Seattle, WA and his matchless wife Rebecca. This project would have scarcely begun apart from Dan's thought and influence and would have faltered in the end without his and Becky's ongoing care and attention.

Many dear colleagues shaped the years and experiences shared by my family and myself in St. Andrews, especially those who worked alongside me in the Duncan room of the Roundel. I will never forget the camaraderie known with Grant Macaskill, Ian Werrett, Casey Nicholson, Allison Connett, Emily Hearn, and in particular, Jeff Oldfield. Nor can I fail to recount with deep affection the many conversations shared amidst the wider St. Mary's community including Cindy Burris, Andy and Stacy Cooke, Chris and Lisa Chandler, Jeremy and Sarah Gabrielson, Matt Jenson, Mariam Kamell, Jen Kilps, Gisela Kreglinger, Reno and Dana Lauro, Suzanne MacDonald and Andrew Rawnsley.

St. Leonard's Parish Church, and the Very Reverend Alan MacDonald, weekly shepherded our family in faith, worship and community, even when our beleaguered household had little to offer in return. We remain humbled by the love shown to us by several St. Andrews families: the Curries, the Fraisers, the Fields and the Irvings. Also, back in the U.S., Cecilia Belvin and the Prayer Ministry Team of Cypress Creek Church in Wimberley, TX, regularly prayed for both our family and this project.

Invaluable friends from my seminary days offered continual encouragement throughout this process, especially Bill Bedell, John Cake and Nathan Ecklund. Most of all, Peter Altmann, while engaged in his own doctoral studies at Princeton Seminary and the University of Zurich, remained my constant support, sounding board and chief source of sanity in dark times. I thank the Holy Spirit, British Telecom and the Internet for keeping our hearts so tightly knit together.

The same sentiments must be expressed for two mentors of mine outside of the academy, Stan Smartt and Steve Sellers. Their irreplaceable influence has kept life close to my theology even as theology has become increasingly central to my life.

Family have been relentless in their care and unflagging in their support. My parents, Mike and Myra McCoy, as well as my wife's, Shelby and Ann Robertson, and everyone in the McCoy and Robertson families have sacrificed much to make this work possible. I also cannot imagine life apart from the constant blessing and challenge of my children Rylan, Lucas, Anna and Nathan, the latter two who arrived to our family in Scotland. Their faces never cease to fill my days with wonder and delight.

Finally, no expression or acknowledgement is equal to the gratitude I feel for Laurel. In moments of great adversity, she has time and again steered my anguish back to lament and praise before our Holy God. Her steadfast love and commitment on behalf of not only our family and me, but also the work herein, has made all possible.

A. M. M.
Blanco Chapel at McCoy Ranch
Kyle, Texas
Easter 2009

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Declarations	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	vi

Introduction	1
---------------------	----------

Chapter 1—Faithful Response to Suffering: The Lament Psalm in Brueggemann’s Biblical Scholarship	6
---	----------

- I. Brueggemann’s Formative Influences
 - A. Form Criticism and the Psalms
 - i. Hermann Gunkel
 - ii. Sigmund Mowinckel
 - iii. Claus Westermann
 - B. The Centrality of Lament for Biblical Faith
 - i. “From Hurt to Joy, From Death to Life”—Brueggemann’s first study
 - ii. “The Role of Lament in the Old Testament”—Westermann’s mature statement
- II. Forming His Own Approach—“The Formfulness of Grief”
- III. The Message of Brueggemann’s New Typology
 - A. “The Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function”
 - B. *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*
 - i. Psalms of orientation
 - ii. Psalms of disorientation
 - iii. Psalms of new orientation
 - C. The concluding message

Chapter 2—Faithful Response or Constitution of Our Faith? The Lament Psalm in Brueggemann’s Developing Theology	35
--	-----------

- I. Brueggemann’s Theology in Transition
 - A. Seeking the Proper Shape of Faith
 - i. Reshaping the Message
 - ii. “A Shape for Old Testament Theology”
 - 1. Structure Legitimation
 - 2. Embrace of Pain
 - iii. The Shape of Faith to Come
 - B. Reshaping Faithful Response to Suffering
 - iv. “The Costly Loss of Lament”
 - v. Rethinking Response both Human and Divine
- II. *Israel’s Praise*: Constituting Faith Beyond Response
 - A. Reconsidering Mowinckel—Socially and Theologically
 - B. The Power of Imaginative Reconstructions

- C. Reconstituting Psalm Function in Rhetoric
- D. Reconstituting Response to God
- III. Transforming Faith and the Reality of God

Chapter 3—Maintaining the Tension or Tension Beyond Maintenance? The Lament Psalm in Brueggemann’s Mature Biblical Theology

67

- I. *Theology of the Old Testament*: Tracing the “Fundamental Tension” of Biblical Faith
 - A. A Metaphor Encompassing Tension—Overview of *TOT*.
 - B. A Subtitle Establishing Tension—*Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*
 - C. A Lament Psalm Focusing Tension—*TOT*’s Central Role for Psalm 88
 - D. Faith *and* God Defined in Tension—The Evolution of Reorientation
- II. Tension Beyond Maintenance: Expressing Expectation of God Amidst Suffering
 - A. The Culmination of Lament in Brueggemann’s Theology
 - B. God as the “Fray”: Dividing Divine Fidelity from Sovereignty
 - C. Faith In Excess of the “Fray”: Human Expression of Suffering and Expectation of Divine Response

Chapter 4—Faith Overflowing: Praise in Ford’s Early and Collaborative Theology

99

- I. *Jubilate*: Ford’s Collaboration with Daniel Hardy
 - A. Theological “Mosaic” of Praise
 - i. Praise in Human Life
 - ii. Praise in Text and Tradition
 - iii. Praise in Christian Existence and the Existence of Evil
 - iv. Praise and the Triune God
 - B. Putting the Theological Pieces Together
 - i. Viewing the Big Picture
 - ii. Deflecting the Reality of Suffering or Reflecting the Reality of Christ?
- II. *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians*: Ford’s Collaboration with Frances Young
 - A. Reflecting God’s Glory: Conceptualizing the Overflow of Faith in 2 Corinthians
 - i. God’s Glory and Paul’s Overflowing Faith
 - ii. Powering the Overflow in Cross and Resurrection
 - B. Beginning to Face the Source of the Overflow

Chapter 5—Facing the Overflow of Faith: Joy and Suffering in Ford’s Mature Theology

135

- I. From Praise to the Joy of Facing Christ
 - A. Joy and Tragedy: Dialogue with MacKinnon and Levinas:
 - i. “Tragedy and Atonement”
 - ii. Atonement Facing Tragedy

- B. Joy and Responsibility: Dialogue with Jüngel and Levinas
 - i. “Hosting a Dialogue”
 - 1. Selfhood
 - 2. Language
 - ii. “On Substitution”
 - iii. Joy, Responsibility and the Face of Christ
- II. Facing Christ as the Human Response to Suffering
 - A. *Self and Salvation*: Ford’s Mature Soteriology
 - i. “Dialogues”: Overview of Part I
 - ii. “Flourishings”: Overview of Part II
 - B. A Responsible Overflow: The Culmination of Praise in Ford’s Theology
 - C. Identifying Atonement as God’s Human Response of Faith Amidst Suffering

Chapter 6—Lament, Praise and the Reality of Christ’s Atonement: Faith as Human Participation in the Trinitarian Response to Suffering **176**

- I. Atonement for Sin *or* Suffering? Revisiting Westermann’s Concern and the Work of Christ as Proposed by Brueggemann and Ford
- II. Confronting Suffering *and* Sin: Faith and the Necessity of God’s Own Human Response in Christ
- III. Examining a Trinitarian Alternative
 - A. Gunton’s Proposal: Praise as Result of Participation in Atonement
 - B. Gunton’s Problem: Suffering and the Question of Participation in Lament
- IV. Participation in Suffering on Joy’s Behalf: Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Praise and Lament

Citation and Selective Consultation Bibliography **201**

Introduction

This thesis examines how Christian faith transforms the human response to suffering. Suffering arises whenever and however humanity must endure that which fractures its very existence. No aspect of human life can escape suffering, whether physical, mental or spiritual. Pain afflicts all, regardless of age, gender, race, nationality, cultural orientation or social standing. Such is the reach of suffering that it can be difficult to separate from the being of life itself. As the American playwright Tennessee Williams reputedly said, “Don’t look forward to the day you stop suffering because when it comes you’ll know you’re dead.”

People of faith, however, believe something more. By its very definition, faith arises as transcendence of humanity and commonly means a reliance on the divine, a trust in someone or something *beyond* human experience. Of course, this reality is made all the more complicated by pain and affliction. “Suffering,” writes Paul Ricoeur, “is a scandal only for those who see God as the source of all that is good in creation.”¹ For Christian faith, which proclaims God’s healing of creation through redemption in Jesus Christ, this scandal is particularly acute.² How can Christianity proclaim redemption *now*, when the end to all suffering is so clearly *not yet*?

An analytical framework for answering this question is precisely what this project does *not* seek to pursue. Despite two millennia of Christian reflection, the problem of producing an adequate theodicy, arguably, remains yet to be resolved. Wolfhart Pannenberg states, “Even from the standpoint of reconciliation and eschatological consummation, of course, it is an open question why the Creator did not create a world in which there could be no pain or guilt.”³ Herein, I assume the existence of faith does not depend upon knowledge of why God allows creation to suffer but

¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology* (trans. J. Bowden; New York: Continuum, 2004), 70.

² Stanley Hauerwas, *Naming the Silences: God, Medicine and the Problem of Suffering* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 78-9, “The problem of evil is not about rectifying our suffering with some general notion of God’s nature as all-powerful and good; rather, it is about what we mean by God’s goodness itself, which for Christians must be construed in terms of God as the Creator who has called into existence a people called Israel so that the world might know that God has not abandoned us. There is no problem of suffering in general; rather, the question of suffering can be raised only in the context of a God who creates to redeem.”

³ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology: Volume 2* (trans. G. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 165.

instead upon how humanity responds to God even when comprehensive answers to the most painful questions of life are not forthcoming.⁴

This thesis is thus particularly concerned with *how* faith arises from *who* God is revealed to be amidst human suffering. Of the relevant theological directions which could have been pursued here, I have chosen to focus on faith as praise and lament. The adoration and adulation of God in praise is central to biblical faith, and not least of all to the joyful New Testament proclamation of God revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Yet the Apostle Paul's exhortation, "Rejoice in the Lord always," can seem difficult to accept at face value in a world where poverty, terrorism, war, child enslavement, catastrophic natural disasters, and global economic crises remain live issues, and all this just in the earliest years of a new millennium. Unsurprisingly, renewed interest in biblical lament and its meaning for Christian faith has surfaced in much recent theology.⁵ With it has come an accompanying concern over triumphalism and problematic manifestations of Christian praise which have contributed far more harm than healing to the world. Therefore, my choice to study these two aspects of faith stems not only from the relationship of both in the text of the Bible and their importance for liturgical tradition, but more pointedly because examining one alongside the other brings into relief the challenge suffering presents for the Church as it daily lives out its confession of God.

I have furthermore chosen to develop these issues with respect to the work of one biblical scholar, Walter Brueggemann of the United States, and one theologian, David Ford of Great Britain. Both have made substantial contributions to contemporary discussion of lament and praise, and both have done so out of an explicit concern over the nature of Christian faith amidst suffering. My research concentrates on how these

⁴ So John Webster, *Confessing God: Essays in Christian Dogmatics II* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 205, "A theology of hope does not hang upon a satisfactory answer to the question of theodicy (satisfactory to whom, and to what ends?), but vice versa: only on the basis of faith's confession of the God of hope, of his ways with the world in the history of fellowship in which we now live and for whose consummation we wait, is it possible to develop anything like a responsible Christian theodicy."

⁵ Examples include John Swinton, *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller, eds., *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); and Carleen Mandolfo, *God in the Dock: Dialogic Tension in the Psalms of Lament* (JSOTSup 357; London: Sheffield Academic, 2002). Two influential works from the decade previous which deal significantly with lament are Kathleen Billman and Daniel Migliore, *Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and the Rebirth of Hope* (Cleveland: United Church, 1999); and Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

theologians understand faith in response to human pain and also how they understand such faith to depend upon God's own response to suffering in Christ.

Brueggemann is one of the most widely read biblical scholars in North America and has published substantially in most areas of Old Testament studies. For the purposes of this thesis, I examine an aspect of his work which I find to be particularly crucial throughout his career: the lament psalm form and its role in the development of his biblical theology. I approach this task through a genetic reading of his early Psalms scholarship which builds towards culmination in his masterwork *Theology of the Old Testament*. That publication is now over a decade old, and while I have not here treated any subsequent writings of Brueggemann, I do not believe his overall views to have changed in any significant way from those articulated in *TOT* concerning lament, faith, and suffering.⁶

Likewise, thesis constraints require choices in dealing with Ford's body of work, especially regarding my omission of his most recent material concerning wisdom and scriptural reasoning. While complimentary to his earlier writings, this work does not significantly develop or alter his position on Christian praise or joy. An argument could be made that the very recent *Christian Wisdom*, which was published late in my research for this thesis, develops his theology of faith amidst suffering through its sapiential application of Job from the Old Testament as well as the cry of Christ from the cross in the Gospel narratives.⁷ Still, lament or praise per se are not the focus, and, more importantly, I do not believe this work changes how Ford understands faith amidst suffering to result from who God is in Christ. His theological approach to that issue comes to maturity through the soteriological concerns of the earlier *Self and Salvation* and is the subject of my fifth chapter.

Now, concerning the work at hand, this thesis can be divided roughly into three parts, beginning with the role of the lament psalm in the development of Brueggemann's biblical theology. The first chapter traces his background as an Old Testament scholar concerned with the Psalms and his early observation that Israel faithfully addresses God in all life experiences, whether sorrowful or joyful, through the

⁶ Recent Brueggemann articles which continue to draw from his previous Psalms scholarship and theological conclusions in *TOT* include Brueggemann, "The Psalms in Theological Use: On Incommensurability and Mutuality," in *Vetus Testamentum* Sup. 99 (2004): 581-602; "Necessary Conditions of a Good Loud Lament," in *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 25 no. 1 (2003): 19-49; and "The Friday Voice of Faith," in *Calvin Theological Journal* 36 (2001): 12-21.

⁷ David F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), see particularly chapters 1 and 3-5.

typical form of the lament psalm. He proposes that this form's two main parts, petition followed by praise, mirror the common shape not only of Israel's psalter but also all biblical faith, including the New Testament proclamation of Christ's cross and resurrection. His subsequent Psalms typology develops how this form practically functions to shape faithful human response to God amidst suffering.

The second chapter studies the evolution of Brueggemann's understanding of lament and praise through the influence of the social sciences upon his theology. As he increasingly finds theological methodology difficult to discern apart from sociological issues, Brueggemann's concept of God evolves, and he begins to understand faith as constituted by human responses such as those inherent to the form of lament. He concludes that faith arises not simply in response to a faithful God, but from how human expressions of suffering and joy constitute our understanding of divine faithfulness.

The third chapter concerns the culmination of Brueggemann's consistent interest in the lament psalm form through his mature biblical theology. His magnum opus, *Theology of the Old Testament*, proposes that all biblical faith must be discerned from the standpoint of rhetorical tension maintained between conflicts Brueggemann finds in aspects of scripture. The lament psalm offers a pivotal example through its typical dual form of complaint and/or petition understood as countertestimony against God and praise understood as testimony in affirmation of God. However, I will demonstrate how this view of unresolvable tension in the text leaves Brueggemann with an unresolved doctrine of God which obscures any Old or New Testament expectation of divine faithfulness. While I appreciate Brueggemann's work to recover a role for lament in Christian faith, I will argue that such faith makes little difference to the suffering of humanity if neither the Bible nor theology can be understood to express the expectation that God will respond faithfully to our lament.

In the second part of this thesis, my focus shifts to David Ford and the development of his theology through a central concern over Christian praise and joy. The fourth chapter starts with Ford's early collaboration alongside Daniel Hardy on *Jubilate: Theology in Praise*. While the authors argue that praise is the essential reality of biblical faith, they also emphasize that praise need not ignore or perpetuate suffering but overflows creation through participation in Christ as God's own faithful response to the sufferings of the world. This overflowing nature of Christian faith is further developed in Ford's subsequent 2 Corinthians commentary authored with Frances

Young. Here, like *Jubilate*, human participation in Christ's person and work is emphasized as Paul's basis for commitment to God's glory even amidst suffering.

As Ford's theology matures he remains concerned that Christian praise should not obscure ethical response. The fifth chapter consequently traces how Ford's approach to faith evolves through his concept of joy in the face of Christ, first introduced in his collaboration with Young. This theological development allows him to address concerns over the traditional view of substitutionary atonement and to identify Christian faith as an inextricable relationship between joy and ethical responsibility resulting from "facing" how Christ lived and died in suffering. Nevertheless, I will demonstrate that by failing to clarify *how* such "facing" is made possible through *who* God is in Christ, Ford risks rendering faith as merely the result of living by Christ's example. *Christian* faith, I argue, has little cause for joyful praise apart from God's atoning human response to suffering on our behalf.

In the concluding sixth chapter, which comprises the third and final section of this thesis, I clarify my concerns over the theology of Brueggemann and Ford in relation to their mutual failure to treat suffering in conjunction with the universality of sin and consequent human involvement in the persistence of evil in creation. I argue that a properly trinitarian understanding of Christ's atonement is necessary to propose how God confronts *both* suffering *and* sin thereby producing faithful human response. I then consider this alternative through Colin Gunton's account of atonement as pneumatological participation in Christ's own human response to suffering. Though I affirm Gunton's ultimate conclusion that the triune God's faithfulness in Christ, mediated by the Holy Spirit, transforms humanity in joyful expectation of praise, I also assert that his identification of Christ's cry from the cross *solely* with human sin problematically obscures the identification of Christ's humanity with the suffering expressed in lament. I conclude by arguing that a trinitarian theology of praise cannot be understood apart from either who God is in Christ's atonement or how the atoning Christ is humanly faithful in lament.

~1~

Faithful Response to Suffering: The Lament Psalm in Brueggemann's Biblical Scholarship

The nature of faith amidst suffering is a consistent concern throughout the development of Walter Brueggemann's biblical theology. This focus develops significantly through his study of the Psalms and particularly through his emphasis on the psalms of lament. His initial article, "From Hurt to Joy, from Death to Life," begins as follows:

The faith of Israel, like all human experience, moved back and forth between the polar moods of, on the one hand, deep anguish and misery and, on the other hand, profound joy and celebration. In this back and forth movement the people of Israel worked out the power and limits of their faith. In the process they also worked out a pattern of rhetoric that shaped their anguish and brought it to expression so that it could be dealt with.

It is the lament that preserves for us Israel's most powerful and eloquent statements of the effort both to survive and to be transformed as a people of faith. The study of lament can provide important resources for our contemporary work of theology and ministry.¹

Here relatively early in his career as an Old Testament scholar, Brueggemann succinctly introduces aspects of both his overall approach to the Psalms and his distinct interest in lament. Not only is he concerned with the response of Israel's faith but also with "all human experience." Not only does he analyze the historical content of Israel's "pattern of rhetoric," but also the "important resources" this pattern offers to contemporary faith. Not only does he examine the transformation of Israel's faith preserved in the form of lament psalms, but also how the form and function of lament may relate to any transformation through faith today.

Still, it is precisely the form of the Psalms and their historical content with which Brueggemann begins. Form criticism and its innovators precede Brueggemann and lay the groundwork for his examination of what Gunkel calls "authentic" faith—

¹ Walter Brueggemann, "From Hurt to Joy, From Death to Life" in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, Patrick D. Miller, ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 67. Originally published in *Interpretation*, 28 (1974), 3-19.

faith which Brueggemann decisively discerns through the suffering and joy expressed in the psalms of lament.²

I. Brueggemann's Formative Influences

A. Form Criticism and the Psalms

As a 1961 graduate of Union Theological Seminary, Brueggemann was fundamentally trained in the proficiencies predominant to the times. Form criticism plays a substantial role in his Th.D dissertation³ and influences his earliest work such as *Tradition for Crisis: A Study in Hosea*.⁴ Unsurprisingly, his first article on lament asserts, "The study of lament is best pursued by the method of form criticism."⁵ The force behind this assertion rests primarily in the influence of Gunkel and subsequent responses and reactions to his seminal work.

i. Hermann Gunkel

Since Gunkel, modern biblical scholarship has focused not only on author and date but also on the relation of text structure to its original circumstance. Gunkel's "method of classifying types of literature based on form, function, and social context," writes James L. Crenshaw, "moves away from the specific to the typical, thus undercutting all efforts to isolate the unique features of individual psalms."⁶ Emphasis on genre and its connection to social settings leads Gunkel to observe that "the Psalms

² "Pure and authentic religion is to be found only where tremendous struggles have been experienced." See Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 33, as quoted by Brueggemann, "From Hurt to Joy," 70.

³ Walter Brueggemann, "A Form-Critical Study of the Cultic Material in Deuteronomy: An Analysis of the Nature of Cultic Encounter in the Mosaic Tradition," (ThD diss., Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1961). An early and undoubtedly significant influence on Brueggemann's particular use of form criticism is that of his doctoral supervisor James Muilenburg, author of the programmatic article, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 1-18. See the discussion of Muilenburg in Walter Brueggemann, William C. Placher, and Brian K. Blount, *Struggling with Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 9.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Tradition for Crisis: A Study in Hosea* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1968). See specifically Ch. 3, "The Prophets and the Covenant Forms."

⁵ Brueggemann, "From Hurt to Joy," 69.

⁶ James L. Crenshaw, foreword to *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, by Sigmund Mowinckel, (trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), xxv. For additional discussion of Gunkel in relation to his predecessors see Gene M. Tucker, *Form Criticism of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 5ff.

tend not to be free and innovative speech, but highly stylized and predictable in form, presumably in traditional societies that counted on the regularity of rhetorical pattern to shape and sustain life in certain ways.”⁷ Gunkel’s subsequent typology of the Psalms produces five major and five minor categories: Hymns, communal laments, royal psalms, individual laments, and individual songs of thanksgiving which comprise the major group while the minor group consists of songs of pilgrimage, communal songs of thanksgiving, wisdom poetry, liturgy and mixed psalms.⁸ Because it would be difficult to conceive of Brueggemann’s work apart from a basic conceptual starting point in form criticism, Patrick D. Miller concludes, “Brueggemann’s work is greatly indebted to and—like all contemporary Psalms scholarship—builds upon Gunkel.”⁹

ii. Sigmund Mowinckel

Brueggemann also engages with the work of Gunkel’s most notable student, Sigmund Mowinckel. Departing from the proposal of his mentor, Mowinckel emphasizes the liturgical shape of Israelite life by theorizing that the varying types of psalms are parts of a greater liturgical whole at the center of Israel’s culture. This is the concept of cult, defined by Mowinckel as “socially established and regulated holy acts and words in which the encounter and communion of the Deity with the congregation is established, developed, and brought to its ultimate goal.”¹⁰ His understanding of Israel’s annual enthronement festival as the primary *Sitz im Leben* of the Psalms allows Mowinckel to effectively establish an emphasis on cult lacking in Gunkel’s focus on form.¹¹ Thus, Brueggemann, from the beginning of his own work, regards Mowinckel’s proposal as liturgically important.¹²

However, Brueggemann is also concerned with the way Mowinckel potentially collapses some of the distinctive particularities of the Psalms. The individual psalms of

⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 279.

⁸ See Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (trans. J. D. Nogalski; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997).

⁹ Miller, “Introduction,” xii.

¹⁰ Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship* (trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 15.

¹¹ “...Gunkel—and after him many of his followers—went only halfway. He often stuck too much to the mere formal registration and labeling of the single elements of a psalm and did not see clearly enough that his own form-historical method demanded that it be developed into a real *cult-functional method*.” See Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, 31, italics original.

¹² Brueggemann, “From Hurt to Joy,” 75.

lament are a pertinent example. As Crenshaw notes, “(Mowinckel) resolves the problem of individual and collective psalms (‘I’ and ‘we’) in the figure of the king, who embodies the whole.”¹³ Thus “Mowinckel sees in the piety of the psalms an expression of temple singers” and not the expression of individuals or smaller groups who have in crisis responded through lament.¹⁴ As a result Brueggemann critiques Mowinckel for too generally classifying the Psalter through one category.¹⁵ Among possible alternatives to Mowinckel, Brueggemann notes particularly the approach of Erhard Gerstenberger.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Mowinckel’s influence on Brueggemann remains indisputable in parts of the latter’s work.¹⁷

iii. Claus Westermann

Aside from Gunkel’s foundational scholarship, Brueggemann’s greatest influence is Claus Westermann.¹⁸ Lament occupies a central place in Brueggemann’s work not merely because Gunkel identifies its distinct psalmic form but also because Westermann identifies lament as *the* defining form of the Psalms. This innovation first emerges through *The Praise of God in the Psalms*, a monograph based on Westermann’s dissertation (of the same name) completed under Walter Zimmerli at Zurich in 1949.¹⁹ Westermann concentrates on the praise and petition characteristic in the lament psalms and derives a programmatic focus, “In this analysis of the Psalms, ‘category’ is primarily neither a literary nor a cultic concept. It is both of these, but only

¹³ Crenshaw, “Foreword,” xxvi.

¹⁴ Ibid., xxvii.

¹⁵ See Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, Augsburg Old Testament Series (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 18, “Scholarly reaction to (Mowinckel’s) hypothesis is twofold. On the one hand, the hypothesis is much too comprehensive and totalitarian, making claims that are too broad and incorporating too many psalms of various kinds into a single action. ... On the other hand, for all its excessiveness, Mowinckel’s hypothesis still occupies the center of the field and still provides the best governing hypothesis that we have. Thus we may permit it to inform our work as long as we treat it as provisional and are attentive to its imperial temptation.”

¹⁶ Gerstenberger as alternative to Mowinckel is first discussed by Brueggemann in “From Hurt to Joy,” 75, “Gerstenberger has argued that the petition is a form of expression used in domestic settings in times of need. As elsewhere, he prefers to understand the texts in terms of the needs, resources, and faith of the small folk community or clan.”

¹⁷ Engagement with Mowinckel (and Brueggemann’s appreciation for his predecessor) develops to a much greater extent in the Brueggemann’s work *Israel’s Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology* (see Ch. 2 below).

¹⁸ Brueggemann is not alone in high esteem for Westermann. See Patrick D. Miller *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 4, “The most important comprehensive treatment since (the Gunkel and Begrich work) is found in the work of Claus Westermann.”

¹⁹ Claus Westermann, *The Praise of God in the Psalms* (trans. K. R. Crim; Richmond: John Knox, 1965); repr. as *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (trans. K. R. Crim and R. N. Soulen; Atlanta: John Knox, 1981).

secondarily. This analysis is determined by the two basic modes of speaking to God: praise and petition.”²⁰ Brueggemann summarizes what results, “Following the form analysis of Gunkel and ignoring the liturgical hypothesis of Mowinckel, Westermann has urged that the lament is the basic form of psalmic expression, and that most other psalm forms are derived from or responses to the lament.”²¹ Westermann not only finds the lament psalm to be the paradigmatic form of the psalter, he also finds this form throughout the Old Testament. “As the language of joy and the language of suffering, praise and lament belong together as expressions of human existence before God. As such, praise of God and lament alike run through the entire Old Testament, from primordial history to apocalyptic.”²²

Westermann’s method influences Brueggemann beyond the level of form. As Miller writes, “Theological concerns come very much to the fore in Westermann’s analysis of the laments when compared with other treatments.”²³ Westermann offers a substantial way of understanding lament function as that which “affirms to and for Israel that they have to do with a God who is powerful and accessible, whose characteristic way of being known is intervention to transform situations of distress.”²⁴ At the start of his own work, Brueggemann credits Westermann for most acutely discerning the “power” of lament through its form:

More than anyone else, Westermann, in *Praise of God*, has seen that the power of the lament form is in the movement from petition to praise and that these must be regarded as two equally important parts in tension with each other, with neither subordinated to the other.²⁵

In Westermann’s analysis of form, Brueggemann’s finds an essential starting place for understanding the function of lament in Israel’s faith. However, this is not all he finds. Westermann also gives Brueggemann a starting place for understanding lament as theologically central to the Bible as a whole.

²⁰ Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 35 *passim*. See also Crenshaw, “Foreward,” xxviii, “Westermann reduces the Psalms to two types, praise and petition, corresponding to the two fundamental emotions, joy and suffering.”

²¹ Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 18.

²² Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 11.

²³ Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 9.

²⁴ Brueggemann, “From Hurt to Joy,” 73. Brueggemann also discusses here the “salvation oracle” proposed by Joachim Begrich in *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*, Tbü 21 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1964), 217-31. Begrich proposes that the two parts of a lament psalm were originally structured around the text of a speech mediating the renewed and ongoing presence of Yahweh and an opportunity for new life on the behalf of the one lamenting.

²⁵ Brueggemann, “From Hurt to Joy,” 74.

B. The Centrality of Lament for Biblical Faith

i. “From Hurt to Joy, From Death to Life”—Brueggemann’s first study

Each of the scholars discussed above—Gunkel, Mowinckel, Westermann, as well as numerous others—are cited in Brueggemann’s initial article on the Psalms. Miller describes “From Hurt to Joy, From Death to Life” as the way in which Brueggemann “works out of the classic form-critical analysis of lament.”²⁶ Westermann’s influence is particularly evident in the title and general direction. The transformative motif of petition and praise consistently unifies Brueggemann’s first reflections on the form criticism which has preceded him.

Also as discussed above, Brueggemann utilizes form criticism not simply as his chosen method for historical study. He is concerned with how Israel’s laments function in present faith, and thus “From Hurt to Joy” begins with a set of functional observations. First, “lament manifests Israel at its best, giving authentic expression to *the real experiences of life*.”²⁷ Second, “Israel unflinchingly saw and affirmed that *life as it comes, along with joys, is beset by hurt*...”²⁸ Thirdly, the laments demonstrate that biblical faith is “*uncompromisingly and unembarrassedly dialogic*. ...Nowhere but with God does Israel vent its greatest doubt, its bitterest resentments, its deepest anger.”²⁹ For Brueggemann the function of lament in Israel’s faith is three-fold: 1) Israel’s faith *expresses experience* 2) Israel’s faith expresses *all* experience, 3) Israel’s faith expresses all experience *to God and expects God to respond*.

Such an encompassing function contrasts sharply with the “one-sided liturgical renewal of today.”

The study of lament may suggest a corrective to the euphoric, celebrative notions of faith that romantically pretend that life is sweetness and joy, even delight. It may be suggested that the one-sided liturgical renewal of today has, in effect, driven the hurtful side of experience either into obscure corners of faith practice or completely out of Christian worship into various forms of psychotherapy and growth groups.³⁰

²⁶ Miller, “Introduction,” xiii-iv.

²⁷ Brueggemann, “From Hurt to Joy,” 67, italics original.

²⁸ Ibid., italics original.

²⁹ Ibid., 68, italics original.

³⁰ Ibid.

Brueggemann further finds that the loss of lament from liturgical and devotional practice significantly effects how faith is understood in the modern church.

So little do our liturgies bring to expression our anger and hatred, our sense of betrayal and absurdity. But even more acutely, with our failures of nerve and our refusal to presume upon our partner in dialogue, we are seduced into nondialogic forms of faith, as though we were the only ones there; and so we settle for meditation and reflection or bootstrap operations of resolve to alter our situation.³¹

Contemporary faith, in Brueggemann's view, has lost the liturgical nerve to honestly address God. "The faith expressed in the lament is nerve—it is a faith that knows that honest facing of distress can be done effectively only in dialogue with God who acts in transforming ways."³²

The comparison of present practice to biblical faith is underwritten by an understanding of lament function. This analysis of function is, in turn, underwritten by the legacy of form criticism. "[A]n understanding of the form will help us understand both how Israel's faith understood and experienced hurt and how it interpreted that hurt in the context of its faith."³³

Therefore a three-fold reflection on form further develops the previous trio on function. First, the initial address of the lament "establishes the dialogic, covenantal context."³⁴ Relying on Begrich's observations about the distinctiveness of Israel's laments, Brueggemann writes, "The speaker establishes the right to expect some action from God; in doing so the speaker does not so much flatter the deity as appeal to previous mutual commitments, which are now recalled and invoked."³⁵ Second, while the lament is a "cry of desperation," Brueggemann also asserts that "characteristically the entire sequence complaint-petition-motivation is to be understood as an act of faithfulness."³⁶ The lament demonstrates faith exactly because "[t]he speaker is helpless and does not doubt that Yahweh can and may transform the situation."³⁷ Third, the form typically ends in acknowledgement of Yahweh's transformation. "The structure of the whole begins in bold confidence even to address Yahweh. It culminates in grateful

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 69.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 70.

³⁵ Ibid. Begrich, in comparing Israel's laments with those of Babylon, finds that Israel's do not require flattery of the deity. See Begrich, "Die Vertrauensäusserungen im israelischen Klagelied des Einzelnen und in seinem babylonischen Gegenstück," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 46 (1928), 221ff.

³⁶ Ibid., 71.

³⁷ Ibid.

trust.”³⁸ Thus lament form functions as an interplay of boldness in address, faithful affirmation, and transformation, and this triad of function is mediated through the typical dual form of petition and praise.

In the fifth section of “From Hurt to Joy,” Brueggemann outlines how the dual form of petition and praise characterizes Israel’s faith as a whole:

The people of Israel perceived their entire existence in the form of petition and thanks. They were aware of distress, but more aware of Yahweh’s powerful deliverance. In the development of their literature of self-understanding, they presented their experience in this form that expressed their central convictions.³⁹

Here Brueggemann lays out “the lament-deliverance relationship as a basic structure of Israel’s faith that is not only prominent in the psalms but runs throughout the Old Testament.”⁴⁰ As evidence, several aspects of Israel’s history (the Exodus, tribal period, Elijah narrative, disaster of 587) are presented. Brueggemann concludes, “Israel’s history is shaped and interpreted as an experience of cry and rescue” which is “a way of self-understanding not different from the theological and liturgical understandings of the Christian community.”⁴¹

Consequently, the sixth and final section connects the praise and petition of lament form to “the actions of Jesus...as God’s mighty saving deeds in response to the cry of distress.”⁴² Brueggemann briefly provides New Testament examples (the cries of the blind, the demon-possessed, Peter in Matt. 14:30) but none more crucial than the cross and resurrection.

Finally, we may suggest that the structure of cry-response that gets expressed as petition and praise dramatizes the movement that came to be experienced by the early church as crucifixion-resurrection. The psalms of lament in their two principal parts of before/after reflect precisely the experience of death and the gift of new life. The church’s resurrection faith is consistent with Israel’s petition and praise, the sure conviction that God hears and sees and acts decisively.⁴³

The response of the church to Christ’s redemption, anticipated in the form of Israel’s faith, is a response through transformation from hurt to joy and from death to life.

Through this first study Brueggemann demonstrates that the encompassing scope of the lament psalm derives from the prevalence of its form throughout the bible.

³⁸ Ibid., 72.

³⁹ Ibid., 77.

⁴⁰ Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 11.

⁴¹ Brueggemann, “From Hurt to Joy,” 82.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 83.

This form of the text presents the transformative shape of Israel's faith amidst suffering: *boldness* in addressing all experience to God as an *act of faith*, and *faithfully expecting and acknowledging transformation*. Israel's lament functions as "a pattern of rhetoric that shaped their anguish and brought it to expression so that it could be dealt with."⁴⁴ The dual form of petition and praise therefore "shapes" Israel's faith around address to God and expectation of God's response. Additionally, Brueggemann argues that the two parts of lament "reflect precisely" the transformation of Christian faith in light of the cross and resurrection. Like Israel, we see in this form the shape of our faith in Christ.

Nevertheless, despite a form and function which anticipate the response to God claimed by the Christian faith, lament seemingly has no function in much contemporary church practice. While each of the previous points above emerge out of engagement with form criticism as refined by Westermann, this last point also arises with Westermann's scholarship, quite literally, very nearby.

ii. "The Role of Lament in the Old Testament"—Westermann's mature statement

"From Hurt to Joy, from Death to Life" is first published with Westermann's "The Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament,"⁴⁵ in the same issue of *Interpretation* which focuses on lament. Here, alongside Brueggemann, Westermann outlines the results of his influential work and makes a definitive call for renewed practice of lament in Christian faith.

Westermann begins by decrying the lack of emphasis on lament in Old Testament studies despite the focus of major scholars (such as Von Rad and Zimmerli) on God's deliverance. The root cause is identified as a certain Western bias and contrasted with soteriology in Israel's scripture:

The Old Testament cannot pin God down to a single soteriology; it can only speak of God's saving acts within a whole series of events, and that necessarily involves some kind of verbal exchange between God and man. This latter includes both the cry of man in distress and the response of praise which the saved make to God.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁵ Claus Westermann, "The Role of Lament in the Old Testament," *Interpretation*, 28 (1974): 20-38.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 22.

Westermann further demands to know why lament has disappeared as a vital part of the Christian faith. "It would be a worthwhile task to ascertain how it happened that in Western Christendom the lament has been totally excluded from man's relationship with God, with the result that it has completely disappeared above all from prayer and worship."⁴⁷ This cannot be because the New Testament forbids it because Westermann knows "of no text in the New Testament which would prevent the Christian from lamenting or which would express the idea that faith in Christ excluded lamentation from man's relationship with God."⁴⁸ Westermann concludes that lament's disappearance results as theological emphasis on sin relegates suffering to an afterthought:

The result of this is that both in Christian dogmatics and in Christian worship suffering as opposed to sin has receded far into the background: Jesus Christ's work of salvation has to do with the forgiveness of sins and with eternal life; it does not deal however with ending human suffering. Here we see the real reason why the lament has been dropped from Christian prayer. The believing Christian should bear his suffering patiently; he should not complain about it to God. The "sufferings of this world" are unimportant and insignificant. What is important is the guilt of sin. ... We must now ask whether Paul and Pauline oriented theology has not understood the work of Christ in a onesided manner.⁴⁹

Out of these conclusions, Westermann issues a call for correction:

On the basis of these observations we would have to decide anew whether the onesidedness of relating the work of Christ to sin alone, to the exclusion of any relation to man's suffering, actually represents the New Testament as a whole and, if so, whether that understanding would not have to be corrected by the Old Testament. A correction of this sort would have far-reaching consequences. One of these would be that the lament, as the language of suffering, would receive a legitimate place in Christian worship, as it had in the worship of the Old Testament.⁵⁰

Such a correction is needed to adequately articulate "a history which ultimately reaches the point where God, as the God of judgment, suffers for his people."⁵¹

This mature statement of Westermann's theology substantiates the direction of Brueggemann's work in "From Hurt to Joy." The centrality of lament throughout the shape of the scriptures is once again emphasized. Westermann, perhaps even more considerably than Brueggemann at this early date, also calls for a correction in contemporary Christian faith. As an elder statesman of Psalms scholarship,

⁴⁷ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 33.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 34.

⁵¹ Ibid., 38.

Westermann's strong words carry the weight of a challenge already implied by his wider body of work. He demands that Christian theology not ignore suffering and its liturgical manifestation in lament.

Nevertheless, in the practicalities of relating ancient form to contemporary function, Westermann's scholarship does not, in Brueggemann's view, properly follow through on this challenge. He later comes to conclude, "Westermann has not explicitly articulated the relational dynamics that go along with the structural elements."⁵² A contemporary function for lament, and with it a renewed legitimacy for lament in Christian faith, never fully emerges from Westermann's analysis of form. The desired correction thus remains significantly unfulfilled.

By contrast, Brueggemann's earliest work on lament already anticipates the undertaking of such a challenge. He believes that "The psalms of lament in their two principal parts of before/after *reflect precisely the experience* of death and the gift of new life" which are known in the cross and resurrection.⁵³ While Westermann highlights the structure of lament as a movement from plea to praise, Brueggemann will focus much more on the theological ramifications of such movement in human experience.⁵⁴ Perhaps, the best early indicators are the respective titles of these two articles presented side by side here. Brueggemann is always indebted to Westermann's formal articulation of the role of lament. But from the very beginning, Brueggemann is concerned not just with the textual form, but with how faith transforms hurt to joy and death to life.

II. Forming a New Approach

Brueggemann's debt to form criticism remains significant. His greatest honor goes to Gunkel as founder and Westermann as paramount innovator. However, in

⁵² Walter Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament" in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 99; repr. from *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36 (1986): 57-71.

⁵³ Op. cit., italics mine.

⁵⁴ Miller, "Foreward," xiii. "Brueggemann is indebted also to Claus Westermann, though the latter is less interested in exploring various human experiences and contexts—particularly the social contexts—in which the dialectic (of praise and petition) operates."

Nevertheless, Westermann does continue to note (but not explicitly develop) the relevance of lament for contemporary culture. Cf. Westermann, *The Living Psalms* (trans. J. R. Porter; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 67, "Suffering is brought to our attention in all sorts of ways in public life, in the media, in many institutions, in demonstrations, so that attention is again being paid to the Biblical psalms of lament and they are being understood once more in their own right."

Brueggemann's estimation, neither scholar adequately addresses that which quickly becomes Brueggemann's primary concern in interpreting the Psalms—connecting faith in ancient Israel to faith in contemporary human life. He explains in *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, “My own effort at Psalm interpretation has been to suggest ways in which Gunkel's normative genre analysis can be related to the immediate dynamics of lived human reality.” In this endeavor he brings Westermann's emphasis on lament to bear. “The major contribution of Westermann for our study is the discernment of a literary dynamic in the movement of the Psalms that corresponds to and gives voice to the dynamic of faith that we know in our experience with God.”⁵⁵ Again, Brueggemann believes that this dynamic “reflects precisely the experience” that Christians know through the cross and resurrection. Therefore, Gunkel's normative analysis combined with Westermann's discernment of plea and praise continues to play a major role in Brueggemann's development, even as Brueggemann works through the practicalities of picking up where he perceives the legacy of form criticism to leave off.

Brueggemann's next article on lament builds upon his work in “From Hurt to Joy.” The first study demonstrated that the typical dual form of lament presents Israel's faith through boldness of address and the expectation and acknowledgement of God's transformation. This form, therefore, has a “shaping” function; lament shapes Israel's faith in response to God even amidst suffering. In “The Formfulness of Grief,” Brueggemann further develops this understanding of function through engagement with sociology.

In considering the interaction of form and function, we are helped by the sociologists who see regularized language as the way a community creates and maintains a life-world...It is this form that *enhances* experience and brings it to articulation and also *limits* the experience of suffering so that it can be received and coped with according to the perspectives, perceptions, and resources of the community.⁵⁶

By relying on sociology to provide a common language, Brueggemann's article proposes ties between what the lament form *did* in Israel and what the form of human grief *still does* today. The goal here is to demonstrate how “the function of the form is definitional.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 18.

⁵⁶ Walter Brueggemann, “The Formfulness of Grief” in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 86; repr. from *Interpretation*, 31 (1977): 263–75.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

As with “From Hurt to Joy,” he begins by stressing three ways in which the function of Israel’s lament is established by its form: “(a) as Joachim Begrich has noted, in Israel there is no attempt to flatter the deity, as there was in Babylon; (b) an affirmative ending is characteristic in Israel; and (c) the God of Israel’s laments may enter the pathos with Israel.”⁵⁸ These observations produce the following conclusions:

Form permits the community to have a different experience: (a) no flattery means that Yahweh can be confronted directly and with bold confidence; (b) the affirmative ending shows it is a believable complaint, focused on fidelity and not primarily on anger; to address Yahweh, even in anger, is to make an affirmation about Yahweh’s character; Gerstenberger has made the important distinction between lament (*Klage*) and complaint (*Anklage*); Israel characteristically complains and does not lament—that is, it expects something; Israel hopes for an intrusion that will fulfill the petition; finally, (c) the pathos of God in response to the trouble of the speaker is a theme not yet seriously explored; God’s response indicates God’s involvement and so makes an important assertion about the character of Yahweh...⁵⁹

Once again faithfulness in both boldness of address and expectation of transformation is at hand. Newly added to the last is the suggestion of God’s pathos, gleaned from Abraham Heschel and noted in the theology of Jürgen Moltmann, as an indication that God involves himself in rectifying human troubles.⁶⁰ The implication of all three is that form indicates the way in which the community understands God, and in terms amenable to sociology, Brueggemann provides a general definition of function, “The function of the form is (a) to give a new definition of the situation, and (b) to get some action that is hoped for because of this peculiar definitional world.”⁶¹

This relationship between form and function is then examined in the sociology of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross who “has observed (and urged) that the grief and death process tends to follow a fairly regular form.”⁶² The five stages of grief proposed by Kübler-Ross—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance—are correlated with and considered in light of lament form. Her example of a chaplain tending to a hospital patient is found analogous to the cry of Israel and the rescue of Yahweh. “In

⁵⁸ Ibid., 86-7.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 87-8. Brueggemann, 87, nt. 13 further describes Gerstenberger’s differentiation between lament and complaint by citing the latter’s article, “Jeremiah’s Complaints,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82 (1963): 405, nt. 50, the lament “bemoans a tragedy which cannot be reversed, while a complaint entreats God for help in the midst of tribulation.”

⁶⁰ Ibid., 87, nt. 11. “Abraham Heschel has introduced the notion of the pathos of God into our awareness (*The Prophets* [New York: Harper and Row, 1962]). More recently the pathos of God and the apathy of modern persons with a technological consciousness have become important to theology. See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 267-90...”

⁶¹ Ibid., 88.

⁶² Ibid.

Israel...[t]he use of the form is an activity in the maintenance of this life-world that has at its center the abiding, transforming presence of Yahweh.”⁶³ Both the role of Yahweh and the dialogue partner in the final two Kübler-Ross stages show that “[t]his form also is a response to the yearning for assurance that the experience is not formless, that there is something that endures outside the experience of loss.”⁶⁴

But this biblical and sociological comparison is not simply parallel. Brueggemann finds the ancient liturgy of Israel to offer no little critique of modern sociology:

The *dissimilarities* are all the more striking: (a) Israel practices covenantal address instead of denial; (b) Israel engages in expectant petition instead of depression; (c) in Israel, the form itself centers in intervention, whereas Kübler-Ross must treat the intervention ambiguously and gingerly because the context of modernity must by definition screen it out; and (d) in Israel, the form of the rhetoric, like the form of the event, is undeniably covenantal. As such, the form serves to set the experience of grief and suffering in a context of covenant, which means that expected transforming intrusion by the covenant partner is a legitimate and intentional extrapolation from the form itself. This of course Kübler-Ross has not found in the parallel form and cannot. Modernity cannot anticipate a “breakthrough.”⁶⁵

Brueggemann later soft-pedals this critique of Kübler-Ross and sociology, emphasizing instead the discernment here of “Israel’s reliance on form.”⁶⁶ However, this reliance is seen to challenge the formlessness of much modern society, an observation beyond the typical results of form criticism. “Form critics might appropriately consider their work not simply as a part of historical research, but as a major issue in the formlessness and antiform mentality of urban technological consciousness.”⁶⁷

By the end of the “Formfulness of Grief,” Brueggemann’s own methodology regarding the psalms has not quite yet taken a recognizable shape, but it does continue to develop significant contours. His use of the sociology allows general connections between the structure and function of language to surface thus giving him new ways to reflect on lament in light of contemporary life.⁶⁸ Westermann’s priority on dual form remains firmly in view as does Brueggemann’s emerging tripartite concept of function. He concludes:

⁶³ Ibid., 93.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 93-4.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 95.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 97.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 96, “While the form is surely liturgic in some sense, it is also to be understood sociologically. The community asserts that life in all its parts is formful and therefore meaningful. Attention to language is crucial for a community’s certainty of meaning.”

This form, with its societal power, is likely not simply one form in a vast repertoire but is one of the constitutive forms of biblical faith. It affirms that the holy God is moved by such address, is covenantally responsive to covenant claims, and that Israel lives by this God's transforming word. Yahweh is not an apathetic God who is either silent or must be flattered.⁶⁹

Lament as a "constitutive form" shapes Israel's faith by affirming who God is to Israel. This is the basis for Brueggemann's conclusion that the function of lament form is not only definitional but "inevitably theological...The form itself defines theological reality."⁷⁰ His priority on the function of lament in Israel therefore theologically critiques the loss of lament in the formlessness of modernity. Here he already begins to advance past Westermann and the tradition of form criticism by bringing the realities of Israel's lament beyond mere "historical research."

What remains to be seen, however, is exactly what Brueggemann means by "theological reality," especially in relation to form. Towards the end of the article he writes, "The form is sufficient for Israel. No speculative probing beyond the form is needed."⁷¹ This follows a few pages after a related statement, "...expected transforming intrusion by the covenant partner is a legitimate and intentional extrapolation from the form itself."⁷² While Brueggemann makes much of this transformation (a transformation which "the context of modernity must by definition screen...out"⁷³), he is not clear as to how it is to be extrapolated from the form itself. Exactly which aspects of the transforming intrusion are definitive and which are speculation? Again, Brueggemann is concerned with not only how the lament expresses Israel's faith but also with how it is involved in shaping that faith amidst suffering. He wants to emphasize that the language of lament describes transformation through its form and that this transformation in some way comes to define Israel's experience. However, he is still struggling to express his interpretation of language which he believes not only describes the extremity of human experience but, in so doing, somehow becomes a means for human transformation.

Unresolved theological issues linger here, especially along the lines of hermeneutics. Consequently, Brueggemann's struggle to move beyond the forms defined by his predecessors to a truly definitive understanding of function takes a

⁶⁹ Ibid., 97.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 96.

⁷¹ Ibid., 96-7.

⁷² Op. cit.

⁷³ Op. cit.

hermeneutical turn when he proposes his own programmatic approach in “Psalms and the Life of Faith.”

III. The Message of a New Typology

In early articles on lament Brueggemann experiments with the implications of form critical analysis but remains largely tied to the analysis of form criticism which he inherits. With the article “Psalms and the Life of Faith: A New Typology of Function,”⁷⁴ Brueggemann offers a “fresh adaptation of that analysis into a new typology.”⁷⁵ The result is his first statement of an innovative way forward in Psalms scholarship which later yields a book-length “theological commentary,” *The Message of the Psalms*. He summarizes the aim of his new approach in the introduction to this latter work:

What seems to be needed (and is here attempted) is a *postcritical* interpretation that lets the devotional and scholarly traditions support, inform, and correct each other, so that the formal gains of scholarly methods may enhance and strengthen, as well as criticize, the substance of genuine piety in its handling of the Psalms.⁷⁶

Brueggemann finds such devotional and scholarly interpretation through the culmination of his previous efforts: a methodology for recovering lament’s function in both critical analysis and contemporary faith practice.⁷⁷

A. “Psalms and the Life of Faith”

This programmatic article begins with what is essentially the pivotal question of Brueggemann’s prior work. “What has been the function and intention of the Psalms as they were shaped, transmitted, and repeatedly used? ...To ask about the function of the

⁷⁴ Walter Brueggemann, “Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function” in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 3-32; repr. from *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 17 (1980): 3-32.

⁷⁵ Miller, “Introduction,” xiv.

⁷⁶ Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, Augsburg Old Testament Series (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 16, italics original.

⁷⁷ Between publication of “Psalms and the Life of Faith” and *Message of the Psalms*, Brueggemann also authors a small book entitled, *Praying the Psalms* (Winona, MN: St. Mary’s, 1982). While this work features an early discussion of Brueggemann’s tripartite Psalms typology, it does not represent a significant advance or differentiation beyond either his earlier programmatic article or his subsequent development of this typology in *Message*. For this reason, and due to limitations of space, this work is not treated here.

Psalms means to move away from direct textual evidence and to engage in some tentative reconstruction.”⁷⁸ Another discussion of modern Psalms scholarship follows, particularly focused by Gunkel’s chief categories of form and setting in life. After also discussing Mowinckel, Westermann and others, Brueggemann concludes the form critical consensus on setting to be “fairly stable” and “in any case firm enough to provide a basis from which to consider the question of function.”⁷⁹

Because function arises in “a convergence of a *contemporary pastoral agenda* with a more *historical exegetical interest*,” Brueggemann for the first time asserts, “Thus the question of function is put as a hermeneutical issue.”⁸⁰ Specifically at issue are the distinctive interpretive realities of the Psalms which Brueggemann discerns not only in reflection on ancient Israel but also through the history of “liturgical, devotional, and pastoral uses.”⁸¹ He thus indicates how he will step out on his own. “In this discussion we hazard the provisional presupposition that modern and ancient uses of the Psalms share a common intent and function even though other matters such as setting and institution may be different.”⁸² Here is Brueggemann’s first stride through a doorway constructed of materials given to him by preceding form criticism and his own proclivities towards contemporary sociology. That which finally joins the structure together is hermeneutics:

The hermeneutical possibility of moving back and forth between ancient function and contemporary intentionality exists because the use of the Psalms in every age is for times when the most elemental and raw human issues are in play. The intended function and resilient practice of the Psalms reflect their peculiar capacity to be present to those elemental and raw human issues.⁸³

Because the Psalms’s “peculiar capacity to be present” is of particular concern, Brueggemann relies not simply on the work of biblical scholars or sociologists but crucially on the hermeneutical reflections of Paul Ricoeur.

The relationship appears compatible from the start. Language and human reality is a primary nexus of Ricoeur’s substantial philosophical work as well as Brueggemann’s psalms scholarship. The latter’s prior emphasis on the lament form of petition/praise thus finds a comfortable fit in the former’s existential schema. “Ricoeur

⁷⁸ Brueggemann, “Psalms and the Life of Faith,” 3.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 6.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 7.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

understands the dynamic of life as a movement, dialectic but not regular or patterned, of disorientation and reorientation.”⁸⁴ This also connects handily to earlier descriptions of lament function through a triad of faithful affirmation, boldness and transformation. The latter gives way to a new statement of Psalms typology, “I propose that the sequence of *orientation-disorientation-reorientation* is a helpful way to understand the use and function of the Psalms.”⁸⁵

While a preliminary discussion of the Psalms as categorized by these three types follows (a much fuller discussion is on hand in *The Message of the Psalms*), Brueggemann spends more time developing this new method in light of Ricoeur. Through philosophical categories which Ricoeur labels hermeneutics of suspicion and hermeneutics of representation, Brueggemann sees a dialectic which is also paradigmatic of the Psalms. “Ricoeur’s model can help in understanding both what is going on in the text of the psalms and what is going on in the life of the user(s) of the psalms, for as Ricoeur argues, it is the *experience of limit* that is important to the *expression of limit*.”⁸⁶ Because Brueggemann observes that “psalms of disorientation and reorientation may be regarded as expressions of limit,” he relates the function of these psalms (defining certain psalms yet again even more explicitly as expressing dislocation and celebration) to Ricoeur’s hermeneutics and concludes that “[t]he two functions, as the two hermeneutics, belong together.”⁸⁷

However, even dialectical ability to express the limits of human experience is not the full nature of language, and this leads to a final gain from hermeneutics—Brueggemann finds language not only describes reality *but also plays a crucial role in creating it*. “Thus this language has a creative function. It does not simply follow reality and reflect it, but it leads reality to become what it is not.”⁸⁸ Accordingly language has two functions in the Psalms:

I should argue (in Ricoeur’s terms of *demystifying and representing*) that the function of the Psalms is twofold. First, the Psalms bring human experience to sufficiently vivid expression so that it may be embraced as the real situation in which persons must live. This applies equally to the movement in the life of an individual person and to the

⁸⁴ Brueggemann, “Psalms and the Life of Faith,” 8.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 9. Brueggemann garners these concepts particularly from the Ricoeur article “Biblical Hermeneutics,” *Semeia*, 4 (1975), 114-24.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 18. Brueggemann cites this language from Ricoeur, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 127.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 24. Brueggemann notes the problem of coordinating this dialectic with his tripartite method, but he suggests a solution. “I have no term to describe a hermeneutic for the ‘psalms of orientation’ reflecting stable life. Perhaps such a view is a ‘hermeneutic of convention’.” (30).

⁸⁸ Ibid., 26.

public discernment of new reality...Second, the language of these poems does more than just help persons to embrace and recognize their real situation. In dramatic and dynamic ways, the songs can also function to evoke and form new realities that did not exist until, or apart from, the actual singing of the song. Thus the speech of the new song does not just recognize what is given, but evokes it, calls it into being, forms it.⁸⁹

From Ricoeur's influence Brueggemann is able, more substantially than before, to propose that the psalms both describe the form of faith and also function to "form new realities" of faith.

Here, a development in how Brueggemann understands human expression and expectation through the psalms of lament begins to come into play. Functional aspects of the form as both expression of suffering and expectation that God responds to suffering move closer together because the human response of linguistic expression itself is understood to be the context in which both arise. Yet, despite the centrality of hermeneutics for his proposal, Brueggemann is not uncritical about the extent to which language *actually* evokes and creates faith:

In utilizing Ricoeur's theory of language, and to relate the Psalms to that tradition of scholarship, we must not proceed without a critical awareness. The discussion of language and hermeneutics has proceeded too much on purely formal grounds as though language per se had evocative qualities. That may be so, but it is not the assumption made here. That is, our formal understandings of language must be informed by the substantive claims made by the content, use, and function of quite *concrete* language. That is, I am helped by Ricoeur's suggestions, but my argument is not about language in general but about the Psalms of Israel in the faith and life of Israel. What gives language its evocative power for Israel are the memories of Israel, the hopes of Israel, and the discernment of the gifts, actions, blessings, and judgments of God at work in their common life. Speech has this power because it correlates with the realities in which Israel trusted. The language itself is not the reality but it is the trusted mode of disclosure of that reality.⁹⁰

Brueggemann seems to clarify here that language, in and of itself, cannot explain the "evocative power" on offer in the Psalms. Another *reality* is at work, (i.e. Israel's hopes, memories, and discernments of God) of which language is merely "the trusted mode of disclosure."

More reflection as to the nature of this reality is not on offer here.⁹¹ This lack of clarification notwithstanding, Brueggemann is clear that language manifests power because it *functions* in certain ways. Through hermeneutics and specifically Ricoeur,

⁸⁹ Ibid., 27-8.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 26.

⁹¹ A possible exception may be on p. 31, nt 81. "As it stands, the proponents of the New Hermeneutic seem uninterested in the actual shape of the new world. The practice of linguistic imagination, however, must be coupled with political and economic realities. ...Imagination is not an end in itself but serves the new concrete human world that is promised and given by God."

Brueggemann's new typology of the Psalms goes beyond previous form criticism to connect psalmic function in the past to faith in the present, founding this connection upon "the ground of the linkage between language and experience."⁹²

B. *The Message of the Psalms*

Work begun in "Psalms and the Life of Faith" is more widely developed by *The Message of the Psalms*, albeit in a particular way. The article is primarily a statement on hermeneutics which bridges the realities of psalm form and function in a way crucially important to Brueggemann's developing typology. The subsequent book, subtitled a "theological commentary," largely assumes the hermeneutics proposed in the article (Ricoeur's considerable influence is only mentioned in footnotes) and on that basis builds out more detailed biblical and theological analysis of Brueggemann's proposal on the Psalms.

As earlier stated, Brueggemann introduces the book as a "postcritical" approach, an effort to join contemporary biblical scholarship with the long traditions of church practice. "That is, we shall try to take full account of the critical gains made by such scholars as Gunkel, Mowinckel, and Westermann, without betraying any of the precritical passion, naivete, and insight of believing exposition."⁹³ Text criticism therefore comes alongside theology. "Specifically there is a close correspondence between *the anatomy of the lament psalm* (which Westermann as a critical scholar has shown to be structurally central for the entire collection) and *the anatomy of the soul* (which Calvin related to his discernment and presentation of biblical faith)."⁹⁴ The function of the Psalms, discerned in light of lament psalm form, provides the way towards correspondence between biblical criticism and theological tradition:

⁹² Ibid., 31. "It likewise makes sense to follow Mowinckel in the notion that the festival of the cult is creative of the very experience it expresses, but now on the ground of the linkage between language and experience. The Psalms reflect the difficult way in which the old worlds are *relinquished* and new worlds are *embraced*." (italics original).

⁹³ Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 18.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 19, italics original. Brueggemann writes previously on p. 17, "(The Lutheran) theological tradition concluded that the Psalms articulate the whole gospel of God in a nutshell. This is also true of Calvin, who was not a man of detached rationality (as he is frequently caricatured), but had a profound piety which sought an adequate and imaginative expression of faith. It is in the Psalms that he found the whole faith of the whole person articulated. He was able to say that the Psalms are an 'anatomy of the soul,' fully articulating every facet of the cost and joy of life with God." Brueggemann quotes from Calvin's preface to his *Commentary on the Psalms* as cited by Ford L. Battles and Stanley Tagg, *The Piety of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978), 27.

To pursue that close correspondence, we shall propose a movement and dynamic among the Psalms that suggests an interrelatedness, without seeking to impose a rigid scheme upon the poems, which must be honored, each in its own distinctiveness. Above all, we intend our interpretation to be belief-full, that is, in the service of the church's best, most responsible faith. The point is to let the text have its evangelical say, to make its evangelical claim.⁹⁵

"Movement and dynamic" are crucial possibilities implied by the hermeneutics of Brueggemann's newly-minted tripartite typology—a typology built to accomplish the recovery of lament which Westermann's work called forth but could never truly complete. Brueggemann's interpretive goal is no less than to underwrite "the church's best, most responsible faith."

The three categories of his typology—psalms of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation—comprise the essential structure of the book. From the outset Brueggemann asserts that these are primarily categories of function discerned in the paradigmatic form of the lament psalm. Harkening back to earlier observations of the power of petition and praise, Brueggemann discerns "*two decisive moves of faith*" throughout the Psalter:

One move we make is *out of a settled orientation into a season of disorientation*... It is that move which characterizes much of Psalms in the form of complaint and lament... The other move we make is a move *from a context of disorientation to a new orientation*, surprised by a new gift from God, a new coherence made present to us just when we thought all was lost... This second move also characterizes many of the Psalms, in the form of songs of thanksgiving and declarative hymns...⁹⁶

Because Brueggemann's three types arise as descriptors of function, he is able to propose why critical analysis and faith practice belong together. "In ordering the Psalms in such a way, I hope to suggest a link between critical study of forms and precritical awareness of experiences of well-being and betrayal, of despair and surprise."⁹⁷ *The Message of the Psalms* thus, in exegetical and theological practice, strives to demonstrate what "Psalms and the Life of Faith" articulates in theory: the hermeneutical link of language and experience for faith.

i. Psalms of Orientation

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 20-1, italics original.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 21.

Well-being is the subject of the psalms of orientation, and Brueggemann believes these Psalms to have both a sociological and an eschatological function. He presents five sub-types—songs of creation, songs of Torah, wisdom psalms, song of retribution and occasions of well-being—and asserts, “The function of this kind of psalm is theological, i.e., to praise and thank God.”⁹⁸ Sociologically, these psalms create for the faith community “a canopy of certitude—despite all the incongruities of life.”⁹⁹ He gleans this insight from Mowinckel. “This is a major gain of Mowinckel’s work on the creative power of public worship. Such worship is indeed ‘world-making.’ These psalms become a means whereby the creator is in fact creating the world.”¹⁰⁰ But this intertwining of text and theology of creation has a downside; “It follows that these psalms may not only serve as ‘sacred canopy’ to permit communal life. They may also serve as a *form of social control*... Creation faith is most usually articulated by the powerful people in society.”¹⁰¹ Brueggemann is ever concerned for possible misuse or even abuse of certain aspects of the text “to justify morally the view that those who do not prosper in the world are those who live outside the parameters and priorities of God’s creation.”¹⁰²

Potentially abusive control is only prevented by also understanding psalms of orientation in terms of eschatological function:

These same psalms provide a point of reference even for those who share in none of the present “goodies,” but who cling in hope to the conviction that God’s good intention for creation will finally triumph and there will be an equity and a Sabbath for all God’s creatures... Such an eschatological note, I suggest, moves the psalm from its original social function of *social construction and maintenance* to this broader more widespread use concerning *transformation* and new creation.¹⁰³

Brueggemann, following Childs here, believes that all orientation in the psalms, including the very orientation of the psalter itself, must be understood

⁹⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 27. Beyond Mowinckel, Brueggemann’s use of the term “sacred canopy” evidences the influence of sociologist Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1967). See *Message of the Psalms*, 180-81, nts. 3-6.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 28, italics original.

eschatologically.¹⁰⁴ Thus Brueggemann writes, “The eschatological and cultic dimensions must be held together or both will be misunderstood.”¹⁰⁵

ii. Psalms of Disorientation

Betrayal and despair are the subjects of the psalms of disorientation. These individual and communal laments touch both “faith moves” at the heart of Brueggemann’s proposal. They express in relation to themselves both the movement from orientation to disorientation and the transforming movement into reorientation. Disorientation also gets the most attention from Brueggemann because these psalms offer “the part of the Psalter that has most been neglected in church use.”¹⁰⁶ It is their significance Brueggemann upholds and their loss which he himself continues to lament:

It is a curious fact that the church has, by and large, continued to sing songs of orientation in a world increasingly experienced as disoriented. That may be laudatory. ...But at best, this is only partly true. It is my judgment that this action of the church is less an evangelical defiance guided by faith, and much more a frightened, numb denial and deception that does not want to acknowledge or experience the disorientation of life. The reason for such relentless affirmation of our orientation seems to come, not from faith, but from the wishful optimism of our culture.¹⁰⁷

The root of Brueggemann’s recovery of lament is his belief that no biblical text or human reality should be neglected. “Thus these psalms make the important connection: everything must be *brought to speech*, and everything brought to speech must be *addressed to God*, who is the final reference for all of life.”¹⁰⁸ This is the lesson of Israel’s faith as expressed in the Psalms. “The remarkable thing about Israel is that it did not banish or deny the darkness from its religious enterprise. It embraces the darkness as the very stuff of new life. Indeed, Israel seems to know that new life comes nowhere else.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ “However one explains it, the final form of the Psalter is highly eschatological in nature.” See Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 518, as cited by Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 181-2, nt 11.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 181-2, nt 11. Ibid., 28, also states that this theological understanding is necessary to proper interpretation. “Thus the very psalms that may serve as *social control* may also function as a *social anticipation*, which becomes *social criticism*. But that requires that we be aware and intentional in our usage and the orientation that we articulate through them.”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 123.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 51.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 52.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 53.

Much as before, Brueggemann emphasizes the shape of Israel's faith in the form of lament. This begins with boldness in address to God. "First, the gamut of expressions employed here never escapes the address of Yahweh."¹¹⁰ All of this speech can and should be directed to Israel's God because "Yahweh does not have protected sensitivities. Yahweh is expected and presumed to receive the fullness of Israel's speech."¹¹¹ The form also presents Israel's faith in expectation of transformation. "Second, though this speech is liberated and expansive, it tends to come to expression in rather consistent and rigorous forms."¹¹² This does not indicate a lack of creativity in Israel, but demonstrates a kind of ordering which generations of psalms readers rely on even in disorientation. "The speech serves in a remarkable way, both to speak about the collapse of all oriented forms, and yet to assure that even in the chaos of the moment there is Yahweh-directed order."¹¹³ From this exposition of lament form Brueggemann makes his consistent conclusion, "Thus the sequence of complaint-praise is a necessary and legitimate way with God, each part in its own, appropriate time. But one moment is not less faithful than the other."¹¹⁴

Brueggemann also evaluates what the transformation from plea to praise means. While the more formal concerns of Begrich's hypothesis are considered, Brueggemann focuses on how the transformative move expressed in the text translates to human experience.

What is clear in the text is that there is a covenantal-theological move from one part of the text to the next. Beyond that, we are engaged in speculation. We do not know concretely how this covenantal-theological move was made. What we do know, both *from the structure of the text* and *our own experience*, is that grievance addressed to an authorized partner does free us. That is the insight behind Freud's theory of talk-therapy, that we do not move beyond the repressed memory unless we speak it out loud to one with authority who hears. In our culture we have understood that in terms of one-on-one therapy. We still have to learn that this is true socially and liturgically. These psalms provide important materials for that learning.¹¹⁵

Here Brueggemann does not allow theological ambiguity over *how* human transformation actually *happens* to obscure his description of the transforming result of the lament psalm form. This is the implication of the social and liturgical learning he calls for; the function of lament in the Christian church should mirror its role in Israel.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 54.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 56.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 58, italics original.

True joy which enriched the life and faith of Israel, and which enriches the life of Israel's descendant, the Church as the Body of Christ, comes not through suppressing sorrow but in its expression unto God. We are "free" to praise God only to the extent to which we bear witness to the suffering and sorrow we experience. Expectation of God's response to suffering which arises from within the form is further tied to human expression of suffering. "It is the honest address to God that moves the relationship to new possibilities of faithfulness that can only be reached through such risky honesty. In the full relationship, *the season of plea* must be taken as seriously as the *season of praise*."¹¹⁶

iii. Psalms of New Orientation

Surprise characterizes the psalms of reorientation, which Brueggemann here labels "new orientation." Through songs of thanksgiving and hymns of praise, these psalms "bear witness to the surprising gift of new life just when none had been expected. That new orientation is not a return to the old stable orientation, for there is no such going back."¹¹⁷ Brueggemann qualifies this description with two methodological factors. "First, one must make an exegetical decision, not always objectively, whether a psalm speaks of old orientation or new orientation."¹¹⁸ He acknowledges that such decisions reflect the "dynamic" nature of a typology based on function rather than form. "Second, it is evident that the psalms of new orientation offer a variety of solutions on a continuum of continuity and discontinuity. The new orientation is seldom utterly removed from the old orientation."¹¹⁹ Brueggemann's methodology attempts simultaneously to encompass all possibilities while emphasizing the extremity of celebration. "We shall see that the experiences and expressions of new orientation are rich and varied, for the newness of the treasure outdistances all the conventional modes of speech."¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 57, italics original.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 123-24.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 125. Brueggemann cites John Goldingay who has insisted that the typology of specific psalms is not static, but may have functioned differently according to context. See Goldingay, "The Dynamic Cycle of Praise and Prayer in the Psalms," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 21 (1981): 85-90, and Walter Brueggemann, "Response to John Goldingay's 'The Dynamic Cycle of Praise and Prayer'," (20, 85-90 1981)," in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 22 (1982): 141-42.

¹¹⁹ Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 125.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Because the surprise of these psalms emerges from the transformation of disorientation, Brueggemann again stresses that the function of reorientation is anticipated in the lament form. “That is, we can have free-standing statements of new orientation for which God is gladly credited, but we will be helped to see that such statements of new orientation always have in their background statements of trouble.”¹²¹ Thus, as he did from the side of disorientation, Brueggemann now reflects on the experience of transformation in light of reorientation.

The break point of the lament form which turns *from plea to praise* is of course a literary phenomenon, but it does not illuminate how we receive the new experience of orientation. It simply gives expression to it. The question of how the move is made is not a literary, but a theological matter. ...No amount of literary form or structure or habit will account for the new experience. Along with *the literary habit* which dominates these psalms comes *the theological experience* of the will and power to transform reality. All these prayers and songs bespeak the intervening action of God to give life in a world where death seems to have the best and strongest way. The songs are not about the “natural” outcome of trouble, but about the decisive *transformation* made possible by this God who causes new life where none seems possible.¹²²

As before, Brueggemann appears to differentiate the experience of transformation from the expression of it. More clearly here he states that “how we receive” reorientation is a “*theological experience*” which differs from a merely literary expression of that experience. Nevertheless, Brueggemann offers no further reflection on the theological nature of transformation other than to continue to emphasize the functional results: “In that movement of transformation are found both the power of life and the passion for praise of God.”¹²³

C. The Concluding Message

Beyond analyzing psalm function in ancient Israel, the typology of orientation, disorientation and reorientation developed in *The Message of the Psalms* connects language and experience in such a way to become, in short, a biblical theology of transformation amidst suffering. The form of the lament and the overall shape of the Psalter convey a distinct understanding of faith amidst the most extreme realities of life, including that reality which most decisively shapes Christian faith—the life, death and

¹²¹ Ibid., 124.

¹²² Ibid., 124-25.

¹²³ Ibid., 128.

resurrection of Christ. In the preface, Brueggemann describes his conclusions accordingly:

My main interest has been theological. I have concluded at the end of the study (and not as a presupposition) that the shape and dynamic of the Psalms can most usefully be understood according to the theological framework of crucifixion and resurrection. By that I do not want to turn the Psalms into a “Christian book,” for I have repeatedly stressed the profoundly Jewish character of the material. Rather, I mean the following...The moves of orientation-disorientation-new orientation are for Christians most clearly played out in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, but not exclusively there. I find Phil. 2:5-11 a helpful articulation of this movement. It can without any forcing, be correlated:

Orientation: “Though he was in the form of God...”

Disorientation: “He emptied himself.”

New Orientation: “Therefore God has highly exalted him...”

I do not understand that in any ontological way and am not interested in Christological speculation. Rather, the life of Jesus, and especially the passion narrative, does portray his life in precisely that fashion, perhaps with special affinity to the liturgical destiny of the king.¹²⁴

As an Old Testament scholar, Brueggemann makes clear he is not simply trying to “Christianize” Israel’s texts, but he still wants to understand their efficacy in Christian theology and practice. He further summarizes his conclusions in the introduction:

The theological dimension of this proposal is to provide a connection among (a) focal moments of Christian faith (crucifixion and resurrection), (b) decisive inclinations of Jewish piety (suffering and hope), (c) psalmic expressions that are most recurrent (lament and praise), and (d) seasons in our own life of dying and being raised. If the Psalms can be understood with these knowing sensitivities, our own use of them will have more depth and significance in the practice of both Jewish and Christian forms of biblical faith.¹²⁵

For Brueggemann, it is these “knowing sensitivities” which operate to make function itself the core reality of the Psalms in the life of faith. The point of joining language and experience via hermeneutics is so that such sensitivities may be understood through the Psalms in a way which then properly applies to *how* biblical faith transforms human existence. Such a move in regards to biblical texts is always one which is theological, and in this sense, *The Message of the Psalms* truly is a “theological commentary.”

Nevertheless, proposing that language expresses transformation through faith, and even proposing that language shapes or evokes human response in transformation,

¹²⁴ Ibid., 10-11.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 21-22.

does not reveal all of the aspects of *how* faith transforms. As Brueggemann writes about the psalms of new orientation, “No amount of literary form or structure or habit will account for the new experience. Along with *the literary habit* which dominates these psalms comes *the theological experience* of the will and power to transform reality.”¹²⁶ An adequate account of how *this* theological experience functions remains yet to be found amidst Brueggemann’s significant study of the Psalms. In the coming chapter, we will explore the ongoing development of Brueggemann’s theology in the light of this concern. The innovations acquired through his Psalms scholarship, derived from his emphasis on lament, will take on new directions as he continues to wrestle with how scriptural expressions of joy and suffering function in faith.

The evolving nature of Brueggemann’s theological method does not, however, undermine the reinvigoration which his typological proposal shoots through veins of contemporary study of the Psalms. Patrick Miller concludes that in Brueggemann “we have a significant alternative to Gunkel’s categories” which may be used by pastors and scholars alike.¹²⁷ Brueggemann’s analysis of the psalms of lament as a typical form which shapes human expression of suffering towards expectation of God’s response becomes the basis for describing how the psalter as a whole functioned in Israel and continues to function in the Christian church today. This allows him to bridge the often wide gap between contemporary practioner and academic by not allowing the latter to reduce the Psalms to relics of history or the former to ignore the relevance of these texts for contemporary faith.¹²⁸

Furthermore, his Psalms scholarship allows Brueggemann the means to powerfully reconnect faith in the Old Testament to that of the New. Bernhard Anderson describes the theological circumstance which confronts all Christian interpretation of the Psalms:

The New Testament, of course, proclaims that God has spoken decisively in Jesus Christ, thereby endorsing the promises made to Israel. But the Christian community also finds itself living in the interim between the inauguration of God’s kingdom and its

¹²⁶ *Message of the Psalms*, 124-25.

¹²⁷ Miller, “Introduction,” xii.

¹²⁸ See H. G. M. Williamson, “Reading the Lament Psalms Backwards” in *A God So Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*, Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen, eds. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003) 4. “I know, for instance, that I am not alone in having found Walter Brueggemann’s essay “Psalms and Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function” to be a shaft of light, penetrating the darkness that had settled over the responsible use of the psalms in personal and pastoral practice after the pall cast by the overly wooden and historicist application of some form-critical approaches.”

final realization, between the first break of dawn and the full light of day. ...Therefore the church knows too the trials of faith that are poignantly expressed in the laments of the Psalter.¹²⁹

For Brueggemann, Christian theology must never forget that faith is lived “in the interim,” a reality which continually necessitates the kind of faith expressed in the psalms of lament. These texts, shaped through the form of petition and praise, demonstrate that *all* human experience, both joy *and* suffering, should be addressed to God and this boldness of expression is as much an act of faith as is the bold expectation that God will respond in transformation. This is first and foremost the message which Brueggemann finds in the Psalms as he strives to articulate how this biblical faith enables transformation from “hurt to joy, from death to life.”

¹²⁹ Bernhard W. Anderson with Steven Bishop, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*, (3rd ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 55.

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A Faithful Response or the Constitution of Our Faith? The Lament Psalm in Brueggemann's Theology

I. Brueggemann's Theology in Transition

The previous chapter traced the development of Walter Brueggemann's theological understanding of biblical faith through his study of human joy and suffering expressed in the Psalms. Specifically, Brueggemann proposes how the typical form of the lament psalm functions to "shape" faith in response to God amidst the most extreme human experiences—a focus which arises relatively early in his career as a biblical scholar, and from the beginning of his significant work on the Psalms.

Over a decade later, around the time *The Message of the Psalms* is being published, Brueggemann is undergoing a period in his life and career which he later describes as a "reeducation" in the field of Old Testament studies. This is not a complete dismissal of previous influences or methods but rather a "new attentiveness" illuminated by further interdisciplinary engagement. He writes, "...in 1985... I was being reeducated in my work, away from a singular preoccupation with historical criticism and toward a new attentiveness to rhetorical and sociological dimensions of interpretation."¹ Perhaps then it is no surprise that Brueggemann seems not entirely settled upon the theological nature of his proposals in *Message of the Psalms*. Nevertheless, his intentions become increasingly apparent as that work and others apply literary theory and the social sciences to theological interpretation. "Rather, I have wanted to use these methods to pursue... matters of epistemology and interpretive theory. Here I am attempting to take the Bible seriously on its own terms and to insist that every part of the text must be taken with theological seriousness."²

Such theological seriousness appears to be at the center of Brueggemann's continued emphasis on the form of the lament psalm and its role in deriving his proposed typology of Psalm function. He finds the form of lament to indicate, in

¹ Walter Brueggemann, "Preface to the Second Edition," *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination and Memory* (2nd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), ix.

² Walter Brueggemann, "Preface to the First Edition," *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination and Memory* (2nd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002; repr. from 1st ed., 1985), xix.

miniature, the shape of faith manifest by “every part of the text” from the depths of sorrow to the ecstatic heights of joy. However, exactly how Brueggemann finds faith to take shape *through* this form remains unclear. Following Ricoeur’s work in hermeneutics Brueggemann regards the language of the Psalms to be descriptive and evocative of reality. To be sure, both the typical lament psalm form and the Psalter as a whole *describe* faith as response to God in bold petition for, expectant hope of, and joyful praise in transformation. In this sense language *evokes* a certain shape of faith—a faith which fittingly responds to God in every experience of life. Yet how does this response arise *through* faith? As *Message of the Psalms* states, “No amount of literary form or structure or habit will account for the new experience. Along with *the literary habit* which dominates these psalms comes *the theological experience* of the will and power to transform reality.”³ Brueggemann has yet to adequately account for this transforming “will and power”. Therefore, the serious theological question which remains is not simply how faith transforms the human experience of suffering, but, crucially, *who makes possible such transforming faith*.

This chapter traces how the social sciences increasingly influence the development of precisely this issue in Brueggemann’s theology. According to Miller, “The Psalms, for (Brueggemann), are not simply ancient texts or routinized elements of a liturgy. As they come to speech, as they are read, they make claims about reality, indeed shape reality in ways more potent and shocking than we usually realize.”⁴ As Brueggemann’s sociological engagement evolves, so does his own theological realization of the evocative function of lament psalm form. At stake is nothing less than his understanding of how response, both human and divine, constitutes the reality of faith itself.

A. Seeking the Proper Shape of Faith

i. Reshaping the Message

Already in the final chapter of *The Message of the Psalms*, which Brueggemann labels a “retrospect,” he begins to indicate the changing direction of his theology. Faith

³ Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 124-5.

⁴ Patrick D. Miller, “Introduction,” *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, xii.

amidst human suffering remains at the forefront as he worries that his own “very selected reading” has not been able to “fully take into account the decisively Jewish character of the Psalms.”⁵ Brueggemann thus reconsiders his previous work through a sociological examination of theodicy.

These concluding comments explore the ways in which the notion of *spirituality* is treated in the Psalms in relation to the issue of *theodicy*. I do not want to schematize excessively, but I suggest that theodicy is a characteristically Jewish concern that may correct or discipline a Christian restriction of the Psalms to privatistic, romantic spirituality. That is, *communion with God* cannot be celebrated without attention to the *nature of the community*, both among human persons and with God. *Religious hungers* in Israel never preclude *justice questions*. Indeed, it is through the question of *justice* that *communion* is mediated...⁶

While noting “[t]he conventional idea of theodicy concerns God in relation to evil,” Brueggemann is not focused simply on “a narrow question about God” but also “the character of God as practiced in the system of values in the social matrix.”⁷

This particular approach to theodicy allows Brueggemann to make connections between the spirituality of his psalms typology and their sociological function in relation to suffering. He notes that while theodicy can legitimate societal structure, any suffering which goes unaddressed by theodicy can bring such structures into question. “A *theodicy of consensus* is operative in every stable society. ...The shift from a *consensus about theodicy* to a *crisis in theodicy* can be identified in every liberation movement that questions the old settled arrangements.”⁸ He then aligns “consensus” with psalms of orientation and “crisis” with psalms of disorientation. The latter provide a necessary function for societal renewal:

What is important in this analysis is that the aim is to “bring into being a new system of meaning for society as a whole.” But a new system of meaning will not come without abrasion, and that is what these psalms offer. A disruptive break with the *theodicy of consensus* is a prerequisite to a new *theodicy of justice*.⁹

This third category of “justice” therefore connects to the psalms of new orientation.

The psalms of new orientation celebrate a new settlement of the issue of theodicy. The crisis is past, and there is again a stable paradigm for social life. Revolutions do not so

⁵ Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 168

⁶ Ibid., 169, italics original.

⁷ Ibid., 169, 170.

⁸ Ibid., 171.

⁹ Ibid., 175.

readily succeed, but in the life of the liturgy, one advances the hunch and hopes that this result will come. The liturgical event is a foretaste of the real settlement.¹⁰

Finally, in exploring sociological connections to theodicy through the Psalms, Brueggemann concludes that he is in fact seeking to contextualize biblical faith in relationship to God. “This does not detract from the conviction that God is powerful Spirit. It does not reduce the Psalms to political documents. It rather insists that our spirituality must answer to the God who is present where the questions of justice and order, transformation and equilibrium are paramount.”¹¹

Despite an analysis of suffering explicitly focused through sociological methods, Brueggemann doggedly remains committed to understanding the theological articulation of faith in the Psalms. Again, his goal is not reduction to mere “political documents,” and he emphasizes the power of God’s presence for the biblical spirituality derived here. But how does God’s presence and power truly shape human faith? This remains a live issue as Brueggemann produces two programmatic articles on theology of the Old Testament.

ii. “A Shape for Old Testament Theology”

The issue of suffering at the nexus of sociology and theology is on hand as Brueggemann proposes that the “question of pain...is the main question of Old Testament faith” in a pair of articles published in different issues of *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* in 1985.¹² Both share the title “A Shape for Old Testament Theology” while respectively proposing aspects of the dual shape emphasized in Brueggemann’s emerging method of interpretation.

Any theology must be bipolar to reflect the central tension of the literature. The bipolar construct I suggest is that Old Testament faith serves both to legitimate structure and to embrace pain. It will be clear that this argument is informed by the work of Westermann, Terrien, and Hanson, but I wish to suggest very different nuances.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 176.

¹² Walter Brueggemann, “A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I: Structure Legitimation,” *CBQ* 47 (1985): 28-46, and “A Shape for Old Testament Theology, II: Embrace of Pain,” *CBQ* 47 (1985): 395-415; repr. in *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992). All following pagination reflects the later publication.

¹³ Ibid., 4.

The reference to Westermann and the necessity of a “bipolar” tension indicate how Brueggemann’s previous emphasis on the dual nature of lament psalm form is becoming a wider factor in his study of the Old Testament. Brueggemann seeks to come to terms with how all of Israel’s scripture expresses faith amidst human tension—tension generated by trying to reconcile experiences as divergent as suffering which provokes petition and joy which evokes praise.¹⁴ As Miller writes, “Brueggemann has taken his place among a number of Old Testament theologians...who understand that the theology of the Old Testament develops not out of a particular central or foundational point but in various kinds of tensions and dialectics.”¹⁵

a. Structure Legitimation

This first article outlines the overall scope of the interpretive issues at hand. As noted above, Brueggemann follows Westermann, Terrien, Hanson and others in a dialectical approach to Old Testament theology. Additionally, he is influenced by what he sees as the opposing approaches of Brevard Childs and Norman Gottwald. His inclination is to join them together dialectically:

Both Childs and Gottwald must be taken seriously. The point is not to choose one to the disregard of the other although holding them together is not easy. With Gottwald, it is important to see that the text has reached its present form and shape by being *in the fray*. These theological claims did not come out of the sky, nor did they have any prior claim to authority; but with Childs, it can be argued that the text as we have it is *above the fray*, the fray of historical interaction and historical-critical analysis. Whereas Gottwald is sociologically relentless, Childs is theologically reassuring. That tension is part of the richness of this faith claim and is also part of its problematic that we must study.¹⁶

Beyond the fact that this tension of “*above the fray*” and “*in the fray*” readily connects to Brueggemann’s dialectical tendencies, it also has a profound effect on how

¹⁴ Of course, Brueggemann does not find lament form, as the duality of petition and praise, to be the only manifestation of bipolar function in the Old Testament. Westermann here is discussed with particular reference to “blessing” and “deliverance.” References to Terrien and Hanson also indicate other dialectical modes of scholarship which influence Brueggemann (see pg. 2 and nt 4). For more elaboration on the convergence of these three scholars see Brueggemann, “A Convergence in Recent Old Testament Theologies,” *JSOT* 18 (1980): 2-18; repr. in *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 95-110.

¹⁵ Miller, introduction to *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text*, by Walter Brueggemann (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), xv. Miller also points out that this concept of dialectic first appears in Brueggemann’s theology via *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1978), 14 and passim.

¹⁶ Brueggemann, “A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I,” 3, italics original.

sociological considerations enter into methodological discussions of theology. Specifically, in seeking the proper shape of Old Testament theology, Brueggemann finds that the “connection” between the sociological approach of Gottwald¹⁷ and the theological assumptions of Childs¹⁸ creates a tension which is ultimately irresolvable. “A careful understanding of the literature shows that we are *not free to resolve* the tension... The Old Testament both enters the fray of ambiguity and seeks distance from the fray to find something certain and sure.”¹⁹

This first article presents the first half of Brueggemann’s proposed dialectical shape—the movement towards structural legitimation in theology. Discussion focuses on the *common theology* articulated by Morton Smith who emphasized the regular pattern of ancient Near Eastern cultures in bolstering the respective claims of their religions.²⁰ Brueggemann finds usefulness in Gottwald’s sociological appropriation of Smith:

Gottwald has taken the elements of Smith’s analysis and expressed them now in terms of his sociological analysis, an element admittedly absent in Smith’s presentation. ...Theological categories are understood to have social and political counterparts so that these statements about God now are also understood as statements about the *misuses of human power* and the *proper use of human power*; that is, the high claims for God are now understood also as high claims for political authority in Israel. ...So I suggest, following Gottwald, that biblical theology needs to reconsider its understandings of God in relation to sociological spin-offs that are implicit in those understandings.²¹

While Gottwald effectively establishes links between sociology and theology, this is yet not enough for Brueggemann. “In a way Gottwald does not press, however, we must know that these matters are genuinely theological issues. ...Gottwald’s argument is largely sociological; that is, he does not address frontally questions of the character of God.”²²

¹⁷ Ibid., 4, “Insofar as this faith enters the fray of Israel’s experience, it reflects the *ambiguity of our experiences* about structure and pain caused by structure. I understand this to be at the heart of Gottwald’s argument that Israel’s sense about God has arisen precisely in connection with the ambiguity and pain of historical experience.” (italics original).

¹⁸ Ibid., 5, “Insofar as this faith makes claims beyond the fray of experience, it offers to the faithful community *a normative standing place* that may not be derived from the common theology but that articulates a normative truth about God not subject to the processes of the articulation. I understand this point to be implied in the canonical position of Childs.” (italics original).

¹⁹ Ibid., 5, italics original.

²⁰ Ibid., 5. “Smith offers a critique of those who work too intently at the distinctiveness of the Old Testament. Smith argues that the structure of belief found all over the Near East and in the Old Testament has a common pattern and varies only in detail from culture to culture.” Brueggemann cites Smith, “The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 7 (1952): 35-47.

²¹ Ibid., 7-8, italics original.

²² Ibid., 8-9.

The character of God is precisely Brueggemann's theological concern. "To do Old Testament theology, however, one must ask not only about Yahweh as a function of social processes but about the character of Yahweh as a *free agent* who has a life and interiority all God's own."²³ Brueggemann remains unwilling to conceive of God as solely a sociological construct and concludes that the dialectical shape which he proposes must be understood as a distinctive theological reality. "The tension is not just in social processes. If theology is to have an integrity of its own, then Old Testament faith is God's ongoing decision about the matter."²⁴

Divine reaction to existing religious structures in the light of human pain thus becomes the way in which Brueggemann finds a dialectical shape to the Old Testament. Precisely at this juncture, he reemphasizes the form and function of the lament psalms.

I suggest that this question of pain, a pain experienced as personal hurt and expressed in the lament psalms and in the public outcry that leads to liberation (cf. Exod. 2:23-25), is the main question of Old Testament faith. ...The issue that Israel and Israel's God (and those who continue this line of reflection) must always face concerns pain—whether pain is simply a shameful aberration that can be handled by correction or whether it is the stuff of humanness, the vehicle for a break with triumphalism, both sociological and theological.²⁵

The cry of pain is the climax across which Brueggemann proposes the theological reality of tension even while understanding it sociologically.

Doing Old Testament theology, however, requires that the issue should be stated not only with reference to social processes. ...So it is to be noted and stressed that the new social movement begins with a cry of pain (Exod. 2:23-25) that is heard, perhaps surprisingly, by this nonimperial God upon whom the cry of pain can impinge. The narrative makes clear that this *pain voiced and processed* is the stuff of this new relationship and this new social experiment.²⁶

God confronted by human pain is the theological nexus from which Brueggemann's sociological possibilities emerge. "The new social possibility depends also upon the remarkable response of this God who takes this hurt as the new stuff of faithfulness. In response, this God makes an intervention in the historical process against the legitimated structures of the day and delegitimizes them."²⁷

b. Embrace of Pain

²³ Ibid., 9.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 18-19.

²⁶ Ibid., 20.

²⁷ Ibid., 20.

This second article begins by connecting the first and second half of Brueggemann's dialectical proposal. Old Testament theology "fully partakes in the common theology of the ancient Near East," and in doing so "[t]his theology provides an ordered sense of life that is lodged in the sovereignty of God, beyond the reach of historical circumstance. It is a way of speaking about God's nonnegotiable governance."²⁸ The "nonnegotiable governance" of God does not, however, imply that all theological issues are settled. Rather, Brueggemann believes that the *structure legitimation* characteristic of common theology must not be understood apart from that which he discerns to be the *embrace of pain*.

My argument, therefore, in this second of two chapters is that Old Testament theology must attend to the embrace of pain as a posture of both Yahweh and Israel. By *embrace of pain* is meant the full acknowledgment of and experience of pain and the capacity and willingness to make that pain a substantive part of Israel's faith-conversation with its God. Such an act of embrace means to articulate the pain fully, to insist on God's reception of the speech and the pain, and to wait hopefully for God's resolution.²⁹

Brueggemann finds that these two realities shape the tension of Old Testament theology which must never be resolved.

The practice of pain embrace *must always be in tension* with the legitimation of structure, never in place of it. ...simply to choose the embrace of pain instead of legitimation of structure as a rubric for theology is romanticism. Israel will have none of that. The tension must be kept alive and visible.³⁰

From the other side, Brueggemann asserts, "Where there is only the legitimacy of structure without pain-embrace, there is only the good news that the system is the solution, whether the solution is in heaven or earth. Good biblical theology...keeps alive the tension that dares not be resolved."³¹

The embrace of pain is centrally expressed through Israel's *lament*. "The laments of Israel, as Claus Westermann has seen, are not marginal but decisive for the faith of Israel."³² Brueggemann prioritizes lament because "in these speeches trouble is presented in such a way that it impinges upon Yahweh. Yahweh is no longer free to be a

²⁸ Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, II," 22.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 26.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 27.

trouble-free God who presides over untroubled legitimated structures...”³³ Instead, *the very character of Yahweh is revised*. “Israel’s laments force God to recharacterization. This act of forcing God to recharacterization is not an unproblematic venture, theologically. It is in deep tension with the reality of God’s sovereign freedom to be whom God chooses to be.”³⁴ *Here rhetoric and theology also begin to come together*. “Although this pattern is a matter of literary interest, it is also a matter of theological marvel and lives in tension with more static theological categories.”³⁵

Through the remainder of the article Brueggemann discusses examples from the text of both Israel and God’s restlessness in and through lament. He concludes by again stressing that “tension must be kept alive in all faithful biblical theology. I do not believe one can say there is a development from one to the other, but there is an ongoing tension, unresolved and unresolvable.”³⁶ Finally, Brueggemann indicates broad theological applications for this tension. “This double focus can be carried through in a biblical theology that probes what structure legitimation and pain-embracing mean for our understanding of God, of Israel, of human personhood, of church, of creation.”³⁷

iii. The Shape of Faith to Come

As Brueggemann traces the theological shape emerging from his study of the Old Testament, it is hard to overestimate the priority he gives to a growing conceptualization of textual dualities in tension.³⁸ Brueggemann, of course, understands such tension to be a key feature of the psalms of lament, and he begins to more explicitly comment upon the sociological function of this aspect in the retrospect to *The Message of the Psalms*.³⁹ In his subsequent “Shape” articles, the categories of “structural legitimation” and “embrace of pain” seem inversely to coordinate with aspects of the petition and praise central to his understanding of lament psalm form, but

³³ Ibid., 29.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 42.

³⁷ Ibid., 43.

³⁸ In another 1985 article he writes, “I submit that the matter of two trajectories in tension is likely to be an emerging scholarly paradigm that will dominate theological exposition for the coming decades.” See Brueggemann, “Old Testament Theology as a Particular Conversation: Adjudication of Israel’s Sociotheological Alternatives,” in *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 140; repr. from *Theology Digest* 32 (1985): 303-25.

³⁹ “But a new system of meaning will not come without abrasion, and that is what these psalms offer.” Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 175, op. cit.

their very inversion indicates an ongoing evolution in Brueggemann's understanding of how the form functions. Whether in the lament psalm form or in the wider overall context of the Old Testament, for Brueggemann, the tension between dualities is becoming as important as the particular response each provides.

This new emphasis on tension gives a different contour to the way Brueggemann understands the shape of Israel's faith. In terms of the lament psalm form, by looking beyond petition and praise understood merely as faithful responses, Brueggemann finds himself better able to track the social aspects of how the need for petition arises in the first place. In the language of his psalms typology, praise can express the surprise of reorientation (also called new orientation), but it can also undergird orientation, that which Brueggemann is now more comprehensively labeling "structure legitimation." The petition becomes expressed when such structures become harmful or hurtful, and this is the move from orientation to disorientation, that which Brueggemann is now calling "embrace of pain." Moreover, Brueggemann is now acutely emphasizing the tension at the root of this particular move so that sociological issues might be clearly identified.⁴⁰

Even as his approach evolves, Brueggemann still appears expressly concerned with the theological amidst the social.⁴¹ As he writes, "The tension is not just in social processes. If theology is to have an integrity of its own, then Old Testament faith is God's ongoing decision about the matter."⁴² Nevertheless, properly understanding "God's ongoing decision" means that any resolution implied by the form of lament cannot ultimately resolve the tension becoming so important for his theology.

Following the lead of Westermann, a number of scholars have now seen that the structure of the lament psalm characteristically moves to resolution of the trouble, to praise, and to a restored, though changed, relationship. This, however, does not argue against embrace of pain, nor does it mute the power of such speech. Rather, it is to

⁴⁰ Only a few years after this present pair of articles, Brueggemann writes, "Israel dared to imagine that such *hurt is a common experience* generated wherever there are skewed power relations." Here sociological models such as those of Gottwald seem to take firmer hold. See Brueggemann, "The Rhetoric of Hurt and Hope: Ethics Odd and Crucial," in *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text* (ed. Patrick D. Miller, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 49, italics original; repr. from *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1989): 73-82.

⁴¹ Miller, "Introduction," *Old Testament Theology*, xiii, states, "The essays and articles collected here, however, reveal that he is an Old Testament theologian also in a broader—although no more important—sense in that he believes that the Old Testament is a *theological* document in every sense of the word. Its subject matter is theological and its appropriation is theological. Brueggemann moves freely back and forth from scholarly and academic writing to the general and the popular. In neither case, however, does he ever fail to life up theological issues in the text or texts before him."

⁴² Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I," 9. See op. cit.

notice that embrace of pain is the only way in which pain can be submitted to God and thus resolved.⁴³

Brueggemann is quick to stress here that his understanding of lament does not allow the second half to unwind the power of the first. Again, in the language of his psalms typology, reorientation does not overrun disorientation. Rather he appears to understand the power of the form to depend upon Israel's initial willingness to risk confrontation with God.

It takes not only nerve but a fresh hunch about this God. The hunch is that this God does not want to be an unchallenged structure but one who can be frontally addressed. Such is the hope of lamenting Israel. The outcome of such challenge is not known in advance, not known until the risk is run to test the hunch.⁴⁴

As in all previous work, Brueggemann consistently demonstrates the brazenness with which Israel makes demands of God.

However, locating the hope in these demands is becoming more complicated. For Brueggemann, hunches and hopes in God initially seemed to be a part of the lament psalm from the very beginning, an orientation to a God who indeed transforms us "from hurt to joy, from death to life." Yet, the *The Message of the Psalms's* retrospect indicates how an evolving understanding of his typological categories parallels an evolving understanding of God in light of human experience:

The format for our presentations of the Psalms has assumed that authentic spirituality, i.e., genuine communion with God, is never removed from the seasons, turns, and crises of life. So the modes of God's presence (and absence) and the quality of communion are very different in times of orientation and disorientation.⁴⁵

Brueggemann pushes this understanding of the divine even further in his pair of "Shape" articles by proposing that "Israel's laments force God to recharacterization."⁴⁶ Such forced recharacterization of the divine may appear to beg the question of how such things as hunches and hopes can even properly arise. Do not hunches and hopes rest on characterizations of the object of hope which have been acquired over time?

Here we should recall how Brueggemann earlier articulated hope in not only psalms of disorientation but also those of orientation.

⁴³ Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, II," 27 nt. 8.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 168.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 29. See op. cit.

These same psalms [of orientation] provide a point of reference even for those who share in none of the present “goodies,” but who cling in hope to the conviction that God’s good intention for creation will finally triumph and there will be an equity and a Sabbath for all God’s creatures... Such an eschatological note, I suggest, moves the psalm [of orientation] from its original social function of social *construction and maintenance* to this broader more widespread use concerning *transformation* and new creation.⁴⁷

Brueggemann’s understanding of orientation through *The Message of the Psalms* already anticipates the type of social concerns encompassed in his newer category of “structure legitimation.” In the earlier work he appears to allow for the possibility of proper hope arising in such orientation. “Thus the very psalms [of orientation] that may serve as *social control* may also function as a *social anticipation*, which becomes *social criticism*. But that requires that we be aware and intentional in our usage and the orientation that we articulate through them.”⁴⁸ But later, as the suggestions of his concluding retrospect are followed through upon in his pair of “Shape” articles, Brueggemann is clear that social criticism is encompassed in his category of “embrace of pain” which only clearly relates to disorientation. This leaves unclear his earlier suggestion that “structure legitimation” might provide the possibility of social anticipation, and therefore social critique.

Perhaps most clear through this particular pair of articles is Brueggemann’s increasing tendency to evaluate theological issues through the lenses of social science. This growing relationship has no little impact on how Brueggemann comes to understand God and faith found in the fray of human suffering and not just above it.⁴⁹

B. Reshaping Faithful Response to Suffering

i. “The Costly Loss of Lament”

The evolution of Brueggemann’s theological methodology continues in this important 1986 article on lament. The purpose is clear from the outset: “I will explore the loss of life and faith incurred when the lament psalms are no longer used for their specific social function.”⁵⁰ As is his custom, he begins with the current state of

⁴⁷ Ibid., 28, italics original.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ As we see in Ch. 3 below, Brueggemann’s festschrift is titled *God In the Fray*.

⁵⁰ Walter Brueggemann, “The Costly Loss of Lament” in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 98; repr. from *JSOT* 36 (1986): 57-71.

scholarship which now quickly yields to critique that “scholars have only walked around the edges of the theological significance of the lament psalm. We have yet to ask what it means to have this form available in this social construction of reality.”⁵¹

This question becomes Brueggemann’s jumping off point for refining theological emphasis on lament through the social sciences.

What difference does it make to have faith that permits and requires this form of prayer? My answer is that it shifts the calculus and *redresses the distribution of power* between the two parties, so that the petitionary party is taken seriously and the God who is addressed is newly engaged in the crisis in a way that puts God at risk.⁵²

Several assertions about how lament constructs reality are already at work here: the “redress” of power, leading to petition “taken seriously,” and God “newly engaged” and “at risk.” Each is developed later in the article but not before Brueggemann posits the conclusion that “[s]uch a speech pattern and social usage keep *all* power relations under review and capable of redefinition.”⁵³ Social realities seem to lead the way for theological definition, and Brueggemann pauses to propose why lament understood in this way is necessary.

What happens when the speech forms that redress power distribution have been silenced and eliminated? The answer, I believe, is that a theological monopoly is reinforced, docility and submissiveness are engendered, and the outcome in terms of social-practice is to reinforce and consolidate the political-economic monopoly of the status quo.⁵⁴

Without lament, Brueggemann finds faith not only off balance but destructive, reinforcing harmful psychological and social realities. He consequently endeavors to mine the fields of psychology and sociology for “two possible gains for the recovery of lament.”⁵⁵

Beginning with psychology Brueggemann establishes the priority of lament in terms of relationship between God and believer. He observes that when lament is lost so is “*genuine covenant interaction*.”⁵⁶ When praise is allowed but not petition, faith loses its proper shape and condones only the existence of a joy which is inevitably false.

⁵¹ Ibid., 101. Brueggemann explicitly refers here to the “understanding of the social power of speech forms” proposed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966). See *ibid.*, nt. 15.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 101-2, italics mine.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 102.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

“Since such a celebrative, consenting silence does not square with reality, covenant minus lament is finally a practice of denial, cover-up, and pretense, which sanctions social control.”⁵⁷

Brueggemann addresses this problem through the “heuristic gain” of object-relations theory and particularly the work of D. W. Winnicott.⁵⁸ In Winnicott’s developmental analysis of the mother/child relationship, Brueggemann finds a parallel to the interaction exemplified by Israel and Yahweh in lament.

We can draw a suggestive analogy from this understanding of the infant/mother relationship for our study of lament. Where there is lament, the believer is able to take initiative with God and so develop over against God the ego-strength that is necessary for responsible faith. But where the capacity to initiate lament is absent, one is left only with praise and doxology. God then is omnipotent, always to be praised. The believer is nothing, and can praise or accept guilt uncritically where life with God does not function properly. The outcome is a ‘False Self,’ bad faith that is based in fear and guilt and is lived out as resentful or self-deceptive works of righteousness. The absence of lament makes a religion of coercive obedience the only possibility.⁵⁹

This “suggestive analogy” illustrates why Brueggemann believes that lament has not only a descriptive function but also an evocative one. Just as a mother’s response to her child creates the possibility for the child to take initiative and thus come to maturity, so does God’s willingness to receive lament evoke the development of “responsible faith.” Lament, as both petition and praise, is a necessary form of response for the faithful to nourish “genuine obedience, which is not a contrived need to please, but a genuine yielding commitment.”⁶⁰

Brueggemann thus begins to clarify the conditions he believes are necessary for faithful response to suffering. The experience of omnipotence plays a critical role in connecting Brueggemann’s analogy between object relations theory and his understanding of lament. Just as the infant must experience omnipotence in relation to

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Object relations theory traces its beginnings to the early 20th century and Melanie Klein’s reactions to Freud’s psychoanalytic thought. While agreeing with the essential dynamics of human impulses proposed by Freud’s “drive” theory of human development, Klein found Freud’s internally-oriented thinking inadequate to describe the nature and influence of external relations upon people. Klein theorized impulses not as objectively isolatable realities, but rather realities rooted in and related to the objects from which they emerge.

Winnicott was one of several theorists who “built on Klein’s vision of an infant wired for human interaction. Yet they also all broke with Klein’s premise of constitutional aggression deriving from the death instinct, proposing instead an infant wired for harmonious interaction and nontraumatic development but thwarted by inadequate parenting.” See Stephen A. Mitchell and Margaret J. Black, *Freud and Beyond: A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 113-14.

⁵⁹ Brueggemann, “The Costly Loss of Lament,” 103-104.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 104.

the mother so must the believer actualize this experience before God. Without the petition of lament God becomes identified as “omnipotent, always to be praised.” This false relating to God leaves the believer with “a false narcissism that keeps hoping for a centered self but lacks the ego-strength for a real self to emerge.”⁶¹ Alternatively, Brueggemann’s analogy suggests “that the God who evokes and responds to lament is neither omnipotent in any conventional sense nor surrounded by docile reactors.”⁶² To underscore this point, Brueggemann even invokes the name of Calvin, “What is at issue here, as Calvin understood so well, is a true understanding of the human self but, at the same time, a radical discernment of this God who is capable of and willing to be respondent and not only initiator.”⁶³

When Brueggemann moves on to sociology he observes that what results through “the absence of lament is the *stifling of the question of theodicy*.”⁶⁴ As with the retrospect in *The Message of the Psalms*, and his previous pair of “Shape” articles, he is not implying here “esoteric” issues of God and evil but “[r]ather, I mean the capacity to raise and legitimate questions of justice in terms of social goods, social access, and social power.”⁶⁵ Brueggemann’s psychological understanding revitalizes the social aspect of lament as a petitionary power against systemic injustice. “Lament occurs when the (systemic) dysfunction reaches an unacceptable level, when the injustice is intolerable and change is insisted upon.”⁶⁶ In particular, Psalm 88 and Psalm 109 exemplify Israel’s method of response to injustice.

The God addressed is either the legitimator and the guarantor of the social process (as in Psalm 88) or the court of appeal against the system (as in Psalm 109). The claims and rights of the speaker are asserted to God in the face of a system that does not deliver. ...In regularly using the lament form, Israel kept the justice question visible and legitimate.⁶⁷

From these psalms as well as examples of cry and rescue in the Exodus narrative, he draws the conclusion that “[w]hile the cry is addressed to Yahweh, it is clear that the cry is not merely a religious gesture but has important and direct links to social

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., italics original.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 105.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 106.

processes.”⁶⁸ In contemporary application Brueggemann finds that “[w]hen the lament form is censured, justice questions cannot be asked and eventually become invisible and illegitimate... The point of access for serious change has been forfeited when the propriety of this speech form is denied”⁶⁹

Finally, Brueggemann’s forays into these two fields of social science propel him back to theology.

With reference to the psychological issues, ego development is not dependent solely on a “good-enough” mother but on a God whose omnipotence is reshaped by pathos. With reference to social questions, the emergence of justice depends not simply on social structures but on a sovereign agent outside the system to whom effective appeal can be made against the system. Ego-strength and social justice finally drives us to theological issues.⁷⁰

The end result is a theology which strives to hold together God as “omnipotence reshaped by pathos” and “a sovereign agent outside the system.” But the implications of such a theological conclusion seem bound to the social system of human relations as Brueggemann’s final example of Psalm 39 suggests. “This psalm characteristically brings to speech the cry of a troubled earth (v. 12)... The new resolve in heaven and the new possibility on earth *depend* on the initiation of protest.”⁷¹

ii. Rethinking Response both Human and Divine

With “The Costly Loss of Lament,” Brueggemann’s theological understanding of lament as faithful human response to God takes some significant turns. Only two years previously he writes in *Message of the Psalms*, “Along with *the literary habit* which dominates these psalms comes *the theological experience* of the will and power to transform reality.”⁷² Through this later article the theological experience of will and power is reconceived in psychology and sociology derived from the literature itself.

Brueggemann’s intention is to demonstrate that the expressed will of humanity truly has power. Thus, “The new resolve in heaven and the new possibility on earth *depend* on the initiation of protest.”⁷³ But Brueggemann again is not very clear as to the

⁶⁸ Ibid., 106-7.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 107.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 108.

⁷¹ Ibid., 111, italics mine.

⁷² Op. cit.

⁷³ Ibid., 111, italics mine.

nature of this dependence especially if “the emergence of justice depends not simply on social structures but on a sovereign agent outside the system.” His psychological understanding seems to imply that God’s sovereignty needs to be reconsidered so that we understand the power in human response. But then again, as he says from the beginning, lament’s “speech pattern and social usage keep *all* power relations under review and capable of redefinition.”⁷⁴

Theologically speaking, while the function of language has always been an important feature of Brueggemann’s biblical scholarship, language seems to be taking on a different theological role here. If in fact the speech-act of lament can truly redefine *all* power relations, then the form has acquired a new and more powerful function than previously articulated by Brueggemann. Much more clearly than before, *God’s very character seems to be at stake in the evocative function of the lament form*. Still, Brueggemann has yet to clearly arrive at *how* he is holding such things as divine sovereignty and capability of redefinition together. To establish his theological way forward into these social realities, Brueggemann returns to an influence he has largely ignored up until this point—Sigmund Mowinckel.

II. *Israel’s Praise: Constituting Faith Beyond Response*

Two years after “The Costly Loss of Lament,” the social sciences progress further to the forefront of Brueggemann’s psalms scholarship via *Israel’s Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology*. This book examines “how the sociology of the Psalms, the work of the pastoral office, and the competing symbolizations (of liturgy) converge in our present circumstance—in church and society.”⁷⁵ Returning to unresolved social questions which stretch back to Gunkel’s innovation of *Sitz im Leben*, he declares the state of Psalms scholarship to be “resting on a plateau” and pursues a way forward.

Here I have tried to take up the sociological question of the Psalms, to suggest that the Psalms can only be understood and used rightly if we attend to their social interaction and function, not only in their origin but also in their repeated use. My suggestion is that the intent and use of a psalm is never only transcendental (e.g., as praise to God),

⁷⁴ Op. cit.

⁷⁵ Brueggemann, *Israel’s Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), x.

but that it functions characteristically and inevitably in the deployment and legitimation of social power.⁷⁶

Concern over the Psalms' immanent social function leads Brueggemann to reconsider the "generative function of the cult" in Sigmund Mowinckel's hypothesis. A fresh conclusion results: "What counts is that the cult (and therefore, praise, which is our subject) is understood by Mowinckel as *constitutive* and not merely *responsive*."⁷⁷

A. Reconsidering Mowinckel—Socially and Theologically

The liturgical meaning and theological significance of this move is developed in the preface and first chapter of *Israel's Praise*. Brueggemann believes that previous reactions to Mowinckel have missed the point by failing to focus on "the claim that in public worship Israel is engaged in constructing a world in which Israel can viably, joyously, and obediently live."⁷⁸ This action of "constructing," which Brueggemann (following Mowinckel) also terms "world-making," is the essence of what Brueggemann means by "constitutive."

...in what sense is praise constitutive of the world? I am aware that, theologically, such a view is problematic, because it smacks of synergism, wherein the community, or at least the king and priest, share in God's creative work, or indeed, do God's creative work. I do not minimize that problem. But that theological question notwithstanding, the constitutive power of praise is anthropologically and sociologically a most plausible, attractive, and finally, important idea. ...without the cult, that is, a viable community that actively processes the claims of the Psalms, they are only dormant literature.⁷⁹

Leaving particular "theological" questioning aside, Brueggemann asserts the actual power of the Psalms comes through the Psalms being actualized in the community of Israel. What gives life to Israel's world, that which Mowinckel labels "cult," is the "active processing" of the literary and social dynamics springing from the text. Thus, Israel's rhetoric is not responsive to some external reality per se (though Brueggemann does not deny this); Israel's rhetoric constitutes Israel's reality.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise*, ix.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 6, italics original.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 7, italics original.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 26, "I do not resist the traditional theological claim that praise is response to the God that is already there. But dramatically, liturgically, functionally, the world is as it is when we give it authorized speech."

Still, Brueggemann doesn't exactly forsake all theological questioning. While he does not minimize "the problem" of synergism, he also does not believe that either he or Mowinckel is trying imaginatively to conjure a non-intrinsic concept from the implications of the text, and at times he remains circumspect about the whole process.

Notice that Mowinckel is not suggesting that cult *ought* to do this creative work, nor indeed that the cult *ought not* to do this. It simply does. ...The problem is not in the character of the cultic act, but in our poor language that can scarcely say what it is we do and in our poor epistemology that can scarcely know what it is that we do.⁸¹

Despite acknowledging linguistic and epistemological impoverishment, Brueggemann is nonetheless able to determine that it is exactly "the character of the cultic act" which affectively and effectively counts.

Mowinckel would, I believe, say that the dramatic work of worship is instituted, that is authorized and legitimated, by the power of God to do world-making work which is God's work, but which is processed through intentional, disciplined, obedient human action and human speech. It is the process of the authorized word and the legitimated action that decisively shapes and articulates the world.⁸²

Brueggemann speaks of both God's power and God's work here but only to confirm that it is "*the process...that decisively shapes and articulates the world*" (italics mine). Any creative or redemptive synergy between God and humanity is manifest *only* through human action in this process. "'World-Making' is done by God. That is foundational to Israel's faith. But it is done through human activity which God has authorized and in which God is known to be present."⁸³ Response therefore comes to be understood in a constitutive way. "Praise is not a response to a world already fixed and settled, but it is a responsive and obedient participation in a world yet to be decreed and in process of being decreed through this liturgical act."⁸⁴

Brueggemann sees his newly constituted understanding of response as part of "the shift in scripture study from *historical* to *literary*," as well as the epistemological shift in the "valuing of *facticity* to the celebration of *imagination*."⁸⁵ Through this shift the reality of response moves away from description to evocation. "As participants in the constitutive act, we do not describe what is there, but we evoke what is not fully there until we act or speak. The human agent, then, is a constitutive part of the

⁸¹ Ibid., 10.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 12.

enterprise, which means that the shape of reality in part awaits our shaping adherence.”⁸⁶ Theology thus joins sociology, literary studies and psychology as only one of several possible ways to explore reality in the constitutive power of praise.

However, in the section subtitled “Theological Understandings,” he is not quite yet willing to let go of a reality of God constituted *beyond* human action and speech. This discussion starts with the theology of Gordon Kaufman who, according to Brueggemann, concludes, “Responsible theology must therefore be a constitutive act, in which our discernment of God must be reconstituted in wholly new ways.”⁸⁷ While Brueggemann sees this as analogous to his own conclusion, he believes Kaufman overstates his case.

The language Kaufman uses is not without problems. He clearly intends to come very close to the language of the ‘reconstitution of God’ through theological articulation. Taken ontologically, that is obviously a hazardous claim. Taken practically and dramatically, which is in fact how we do theology, each theological articulation intends to render God in a more faithful and more available way.⁸⁸

While emphasizing the practical and dramatic aspects of theology, Brueggemann seemingly goes beyond them here by drawing a christological distinction between himself and Kaufmann.

The other methodological urging of Kaufman, which we may note, is a distinction between the ‘real referent,’ the holy God in actuality who is always unknown and unavailable, and the ‘available referent,’ our imaginative construct of God. Since the real referent, in the very nature of God, is unavailable, the available referent is always imaginative and always a construct.

I do not wish to pursue this aspect of Kaufman very far, because I do not agree with his argument concerning theological reference. Those of us who are more fully embedded in that tradition (which he judges to be inadequate) would affirm that in Jesus Christ, the available referent, the real referent is precisely disclosed. The man of Nazareth is the available referent and gives access to the real referent. And Jesus ultimately is not an imaginative construct. Kaufman is deficient in the christological focus of his understanding of revelation, or as we might say, he is ‘soft’ on the *homoousia* (‘of like substance’) formula. This deficiency is evident in his statement, ‘Hence, if we are to understand the meaning and importance of Christ, we shall first have to get clear what is meant by ‘God’. Precisely the opposite is true. We affirm the centrality of Christ, and in so doing, we get clear on what is meant by ‘God.’⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 23-24.

These noteworthy paragraphs speak with an “essential” clarity about christology in ways rarely demonstrated by Brueggemann, at least in monographs or major works.⁹⁰ But latent essentialism is not nearly as important for Brueggemann as his emphasis that none of this criticism of Kaufmann “practically” affects the deployment of Brueggemann’s constitutive thesis. “Nonetheless, we can learn from Kaufman’s argument that theology is constructive and not merely reiterative. Even for one who accepts the particularity of Jesus as the clue to the real referent, the practical truth is that, even in our discernments of Jesus, we are dealing in important ways with imaginative reconstructions.”⁹¹

B. The Power of Imaginative Reconstructions

The reconstructive power of Israel’s liturgy is what Brueggemann sets out to map over the course of *Israel’s Praise*. He begins where Mowinckel does—in the commonly-labeled enthronement psalms—to demonstrate the given world of Israel’s doxology.⁹² “Israel’s enthronement liturgy is very old, very deep, very weighty, very authoritative. For members of the community, the liturgy is simply present at the outset.”⁹³ Into this tradition new members of the community are born for whom the

⁹⁰ What makes these statements remarkable is that Brueggemann’s methodology, over the course of time, calcifies against any approach which he finds to be theologically “essentialist.” This later forms the substance of his critique of Childs; cf. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 65, “Thus it appears to me that in a practical way, speech leads reality in the Old Testament. Speech constitutes reality, and who God turns out to be in Israel depends on the utterance of the Israelites or, derivatively, the utterance of the text. ...Brevard Childs writes, in his canonical approach, about ‘the reality of God’ behind the text itself. In terms of Old Testament theology, however, one must ask, What reality? Where behind? It is clear that such an approach as that of Childs derives its judgments from somewhere else, from an essentialist tradition, claims about God not to be entertained in the Old Testament text itself. In doing Old Testament theology, one must be vigilant against importing claims from elsewhere.”

⁹¹ Brueggemann, *Israel’s Praise*, 24. Bruce McCormack further expands on the problems of Kaufmann’s position in “Divine Revelation and Human Imagination: Must We Choose Between the Two?” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37 (1984): 431-55, “The tension (contradiction?) in Kaufman’s thought is that he is *both* denying the referential character of God-talk and at the same time, affirming that the symbol of ‘God’ refers to a metaphysically real ground of reality” (441).

⁹² *Ibid.*, 30, “As is well know, Mowinckel places the six enthronement psalms at the center of his thesis on world-making: Psalms 47, 93, and 96—99. He finds in these psalms a liturgic sequence of combat among the gods, victory for Yahweh, entrance and enthronement of Yahweh, and establishment of Yahweh’s rule for the period of kingship proclaimed. That sequence is well established in the common liturgies of the Near East and is appropriated liturgically and affirmed theologically in Israel.”

Brueggemann cites (nt. 4, p. 167) Sigmund Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien*, vol. 2: *Das Thronbesteigungsfest Jahwäs und der Ursprung der Eschatologie* (Amsterdam: Schippers, 1961 [1922]), 3 and passim.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 39.

tradition becomes their own. Here, Brueggemann once again invokes the discerning power of hermeneutics:

This capacity for fresh, imaginative embodiment is what makes hermeneutics so critical in the utilization of liturgy. ...The liturgy has a way of making a historical memory theologically, cosmically, dramatically, grandly significant, so that all the hopes and fears of Israel, from generation to generation, are mobilized, gathered, made present and available in this particular concrete liturgical event. ...The liturgy imposes a pattern of meaning on experiences so that Israel's world is shaped as this world and not some other. This liturgy shapes the world so that the old world of inequity, unrighteousness, and falsity is always being defeated, and Yahweh's new world of equity, righteousness, and truth is always freshly emerging.⁹⁴

As before, hermeneutics allows Brueggemann to attend to the "shaping" function of Israel's liturgy which projects faith from past to future.

Consequently, Israel's doxology shapes up to be "both promise and threat." The threat, of course, arises as the singularity of Yahweh indicates that "other gods and other worlds are excluded from Israel's social horizon and possibility."⁹⁵ By promise, Brueggemann means political, eschatological, and cultic implications which arise as Yahweh is worshipped.⁹⁶ The result is hope. "Thus the doxology is an act of hope. It promises and anticipates a hoped-for world that is beyond present reality. Whenever Israelites sing this doxology, they commit themselves again to that hoped-for world that is sketched in the liturgy before their very eyes."⁹⁷ Brueggemann believes that this analysis puts him into position to properly assess the reality that "the cult does create worlds" in Mowinckel's proposal. He concludes, "A world of justice, mercy, peace, and compassion is created in the imaginative act of liturgy. This is the real world, created in the moment of liturgy, which asserts that every rival claimant and candidate for the real world is false and destructive."⁹⁸

The imaginative process is crucial to reality because all liturgy eventually pushes falsely into ideology and idolatry as the powerful attempt to maintain power. Such power can only be countered by more primal manifestations of worship, the pain and lament of "Doxology inside the 'Claims of Time and Sorrow'."

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 52.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 51-52, "It is political because it mediates a polity for Israel. It summons Israel, and especially the human king (who is Yahweh's agent and regent), to embody in polity, law, and institutions the great theme of the new sovereignty. It is eschatological because it promises something not yet visible, but the hope is certain and settled. It is cultic in that it is an imaginative act which runs out beyond visible reality."

⁹⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 53.

In Israel's *speech of complaint*, Israel's *discernment of God* and Israel's *embrace of reality* converge. Pain must be processed and not denied or siphoned off into guilt. When adequately processed, that is, when God is mobilized, the cry of wretchedness has reason to turn to praise and energy.⁹⁹

Moreover, Israel's ability to process pain counters ideology and idolatry through "counter world-making":

Israel's world-making is counter world-making, counter to the empire and its oppression, counter to the imperial gods and the exploitative ordering of the regime. It is counter to conventional idolatry and routine ideology. Israel's liturgy at its best is not triumphalist, not self-serving of Zion, but it must 'tell among the nations' that there is a new governance in heaven and in earth.¹⁰⁰

Brueggemann finally concludes that the ability to confront false liturgical power with true pain in liturgy is evidence not only of theological action but also human potential. "To 'tell among the nations' is not only a bold theological act but also is a telling among the nations of a new subversive psychology of human possibility and a sociology of covenantal alternative."¹⁰¹

With *Israel's Praise*, Brueggemann forges a bond between theology and social science which makes the two difficult to separate. Both are constituted together in the "faithful act of imagination".

Missional testimony to the nations cannot take place until a new world of social possibility and theological governance is imagined, and that imagining is primarily liturgical. When imagined, the new governance may be enacted. Until imagined, the new governance will not and cannot be enacted. Without that bold and faithful act of imagination, we are consigned to old governances which are predictably idolatrous about heaven and ideological about earth.¹⁰²

Yet the question remains: what for Brueggemann enables such imaginative faith to truly hold "social possibility" and "theological governance" together?

C. Reconstituting Psalm Function in Rhetoric

To summarize, Brueggemann reconstitutes psalm function in *Israel's Praise* via more-or-less a three-fold approach. First, he works through the Old Testament text using a multidimensional method which emphasizes the social sciences. This allows

⁹⁹ Ibid., 142, italics original.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 158.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 158-59.

him to reflect upon Jewish and Christian tradition at many levels of human existence and meaning, not just through the historical criticism or dogmatics which modern biblical studies and theology have often previously favored. Second, tracing the text in this manner allows him to conceive of liturgy as not merely response to *a priori* meaning and identity, but as a way of constituting meaning and identity through human imagination enacted rhetorically. Third, while Brueggemann does not deny (yet!) a real and essential existence of God *a priori*, this type of question (with few exceptions such as his engagement with Kaufman) sharply moves to the periphery in favor of reflection upon more “concrete” issues which Brueggemann sees arising from the text prior to any theological conceptualization. Concrete issues are becoming their own grounds for transforming faith amidst suffering.

An example of this three-fold approach at work is nowhere more apparent than when Brueggemann talks of Christian theology in the context of Israel’s worship. In the chapter entitled, “Doxology at the Edge of Ideology: The King of Majesty and Mercy,” Brueggemann goes beyond the innovations of Mowinckel¹⁰³ to narrate the social interplay between majestic and marginal interests seen respectively in the royal tradition of the enthronement psalms and in texts expressing disoriented voices in Israel at the margins of such tradition. This produces “tension between grand claim and concrete memory,”¹⁰⁴ a tension which bears upon not only Israel’s liturgy but Christian worship as well.

When we move from ancient Israel to Jesus, we still struggle to honor the specificity which is so embarrassing. John, asking for the entire community, wanted to know if Jesus is the one who is to come (Luke 7:18-23). John seems to want a general, certain messianic assurance. But the answer Jesus gives is characteristically a recital of concrete transformations give in narrative specificity (v. 22):

Go and tell John what you have seen and heard:

The blind receive their sight,

the lame walk,

lepers are cleansed,...

the deaf hear,

¹⁰³ Ibid., 56, “Despite his acute discernment, Sigmund Mowinckel does not seem to have noticed that the entire enterprise of the enthronement liturgy reflects the royal establishment and so serves Israel’s own status quo.”

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 67.

the dead are raised up,

the poor have good news preached to them.

Jesus' response keeps Christology very close to concrete transformation. Out of that concreteness comes the world over which Jesus is king. Out of such a reason, the nations are called to praise and trust!¹⁰⁵

Brueggemann finds a particular type of power at work here, one that reveals and remakes and yet is "concrete." But redemption which merely honors narrative specificities is not all Brueggemann means to imply.

This mode of thought, speech, and faith is raw in its power, primitive in its epistemology, revolutionary in its world-making. It is raw in its power because it dares to discern the power of eternal holiness in the moment of hurt needing to be healed. The naivete of such faith did not reflect on transcendence and imminence [*sic*], on *homoousia* ("of like substance"). It knew intuitively and trustingly that the One who heals is the One who reigns over all.¹⁰⁶

At hand is a somewhat subtle but nonetheless key assertion that the fullness of biblical faith is prior to any subsequent theological reflections. This faith not only has "power," and is "revolutionary," but is so because it "dares to discern the power of eternal holiness in the moment of hurt."

Initially, Brueggemann seems to be simply restating an obvious observation about the history of faith. Believers have always understood faith to have power in a moment of crisis and harm, a power that doesn't likely or necessarily include careful theological reflection. By the same token, such power, simply by its immediacy, does not rule out theology derived from more extended and less urgent reflection. Nevertheless, Brueggemann also seems to now be suggesting such power is *the* power of faith, a power established in the daring of discerning rhetoric, and a power which no amount of theological reflection will explain.

This does not stop Brueggemann from later offering his own explanation, appropriate to his own theological style. He suggests that the Christian church must pursue its "proper vocation" through leading the faithful by the example of Israel's "theological warrant" over and against the pain of existence:

To engage in evangelical world-making, our proper vocation, to lead the congregation *back down* from summons to reason is not to lead them back to slogans and formulae of ancient Israel, but to lead them back to their own hurtful experience for which Ancient

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 84-85.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 85.

Israel offers useful forms of articulation. The *pain at the center of praise* has theological warrant in Israel in the cries of hurt, rage, doubt, vengeance, and isolation. Most importantly, they are cries, not buried, not stifled, but cries passionately addressed out of the reality of life.¹⁰⁷

Brueggemann alludes above to pain “not buried, not stifled, but cries “passionately addressed.” And this is precisely the redemptive, transformational dynamic of faith which Brueggemann is trying to highlight. “The situation between Israel and God is transformed because it becomes a situation of speaking and hearing and answering. Because, and only because, the trouble of the psalmist is brought to speech, it is injected into the ongoing life of Israel and Yahweh.”¹⁰⁸ Here, is the crucial reality of rhetoric on which Brueggemann stands; he cannot do otherwise as transformation is “because, and *only because*, the trouble of the psalmist is brought to speech.”¹⁰⁹

So why is it only a page later Brueggemann tells us that such faith cannot explain how transformation happens?

We are here at the irreducible heart of evangelical faith. We do not know how the newness happens. There is something inscrutable and hidden about the ways in which God transforms. God's people are not able to give explanations. But they are capable of testimony about the possibility of new life.¹¹⁰

The close juxtaposition of statements so difficult to reconcile raises questions which increasingly seem to pervade Brueggemann's interpretive moves: How is it that Brueggemann discerns and explains that which he also claims cannot be discerned and explained? How is it that Brueggemann understands *how* the *testimony* of the text *functions*, if “God's people” *are only capable of offering* (but not reflecting upon) that very testimony? How is it that Brueggemann talks of faith in the “inscrutable and hidden” ways of God, and yet offers careful scrutiny as to how faith acts vis-à-vis the uncertainty of the world?

Once again, clear answers to such questions are not on offer. Minimally, we may observe that rhetoric is becoming a means by which Brueggemann both upholds and critiques reality.¹¹¹ Pain is the “concrete” reality which Brueggemann refuses to ignore,

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 133.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 144.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., italics mine.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 145.

¹¹¹ Especially in this particular period of his writing, Brueggemann is developing a methodology which he will later address broadly under the banner of postmodernism. An instructive example is Brueggemann's reflections on Mowinckel's cult in light of subject/object dualism. See *ibid.*, 9, “Mowinckel wants to resist the notion that world-creation in cult is simply a subjective reading of the world that in fact exists

and worship sustains a world which deals with this reality. Language and rhetoric are the means by which Brueggemann commendably asks incisive questions about how the liturgical texts of Israel confront suffering through faith.

Yet, Brueggemann's emphasis on rhetoric also seems to become the theological end in itself which justifies the means. By understanding rhetorical tensions expressed in the text to imaginatively generate truth about human tensions experienced in the world, Brueggemann believes that new realities in God are not merely evoked but also enacted. In this context, the Miller quotation at the beginning of this chapter now begins to make more sense. In Brueggemann's view, the manner in which the Psalms shape reality is indeed "potent" and "shocking". Such is the imaginative power he ultimately perceives is constituted through the Psalms.

D. Reconstituting Response to God

Such power is not finally without limitations. Towards the end of *Israel's Praise* Brueggemann finds a responsive limit to what Israel's praise can constitute.

At the extreme edge of its theological radicalness, however Israel's praise fails. Thus, at the end of our analysis, I have had one other thought about the extremity of praise....Finally, as in Job 38—41, God must do the praise, for none but God finally has a tongue adequate or a horizon sweeping enough to bring the wonder of God to praise....Finally, praise must be utterly disinterested, aimed at nothing other than the reality of God. Israel is never able to do that fully, and so God alone takes up the full doxology which moves beyond utility, beyond manipulation, beyond idolatry and ideology.¹¹²

Eventually Israel's response of faith is inadequate to reality. Not only is there a "reality of God" beyond what Israel can adequately attain, but furthermore, "The overcoming of the alienation in the poem of Job, as in the Psalms, only happens from God side."¹¹³

apart from the cult. ...Mowinckel urges a mode of thought and language which escapes this split of subjectivism and rational positivism. It is my urging that we also must escape both subjectivism and rational objectivism if worship is to have the centrality that we claim for it and which is promised in our theological tradition. It is not a matter of saying that we are in fact subjective rather than realistic, or that we are realistic rather than subjective, but that insisting on such a distinction is a major part of the problem." To whatever degree we find agreement with Brueggemann on this point, we cannot lose sight of the fact that Brueggemann often moves without addressing latent effects of subject/object dualism in his own work, especially in the later development and deployment of his dialectic which we discuss below in the next chapter. (i.e. Brueggemann's understanding of dialectical tension in Christian and Jewish faith as an objectively discernible reality to be maintained subjectively; cf. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 400-3.)

¹¹² Ibid., 154.

¹¹³ Ibid.

While Brueggemann appears to be reaching for a theological reality beyond what he has already proposed, he also asserts that such a reality can only arise as an end to his proposal.

But that is only at the end. All along the way Israel's praise is wrought

- *through* ethical sensitivity
- *through* the awareness of moral coherence
- *through* indignation at injustice
- *through* nery insistence on righteousness in the world

But in the end—only at the end—praise in Israel bursts out of such categories.¹¹⁴

Though hardly ruling an eschatological interpretation out, the meaning of “the end” here is hardly explicit in its eschatology. Rather, it seems to more expressly indicate the teleological function of Brueggemann's constitutive concept. Thus, “I suggest that the danger is that a psalm like Psalm 150 (which has no ‘reason’) will be sung too soon. Israel can join God in full praise only at the end.”¹¹⁵ The yielding which characterizes this full praise can only come about as a result of being constituted in Brueggemann's doxological understanding of reality.

We with Israel speak yielding words to God....But such yielding is possible only after the astonishing credos of transformation have been engaged, only after the hurting laments have been honestly and harshly spoken, only after the surprised songs of thanksgiving have been concretely enumerated. Then Israel may indeed be lost in wonder, love, and praise, may indeed surrender in a way that heaven and earth recognize the surrender to be a triumph. But it is not a triumph the world expects, for there is a yielding. Conversely it is not a yielding the conventional religious world of idolatry and ideology recognizes, for it is a hard, demanding yielding.¹¹⁶

The “astonishing credos of transformation,” “hurting laments,” and “surprised songs of thanksgiving” are the liturgical pathway to Israel's final yielding, a yielding only possible as it is constituted in the enacting work of human imagination.

This recontextualizes Brueggemann's previous scholarship on lament form substantially. Brueggemann writes in his early article the “Formfulness of Grief,” “The form is sufficient for Israel. No speculative probing beyond the form is needed.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 154-55.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 155.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 156-157

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 96-7.

Looking back at this statement from the end of *Israel's Praise*, we see how Brueggemann has developed the “sufficiency” of Israel’s form—sufficiency emerges as the form is sociologically deployed through rhetoric. Yet, Brueggemann also earlier writes, “...expected transforming intrusion by the covenant partner is a legitimate and intentional extrapolation from the form itself.”¹¹⁸ The rhetorical way in which Brueggemann now understands the form’s legitimacy complicates how one can expect a “transforming intrusion by the covenant partner.” The wider theological emphasis seems to have shifted from God’s intrusion *resulting* in the response praise and/or thanks which end the typical lament psalm form. Instead, Brueggemann now appears to be describing relations with God only *after* reorientation has been accomplished and validated through imaginative liturgical enactment. Quoting again from *Israel's Praise*, “We with Israel speak yielding words to God.... only after the surprised songs of thanksgiving have been concretely enumerated.”¹¹⁹ Any reorientation following the disorientation of petition now seems accounted for by the surprising imaginative power of speech rather than a truly surprising God.

III. Transforming Faith and the Reality of God

In the years leading up to *Israel's Praise*, an inversion seems to occur in the theological trajectory which characterized Brueggemann’s initial Psalms scholarship. Rather than examining how faith functions to transform human experience amidst suffering, Brueggemann now appears to be pursuing how human experience amidst suffering functions to constitute faith’s transforming power. Such a change in course alters the theological results: increasingly, *how* scriptural expressions of human experience are rhetorically deployed and then sociologically actualized becomes the basis for determining *who* is behind Brueggemann’s understanding of faith.

The evidence of this change emerges as Brueggemann’s concern over the function of lament psalm form evolves. In “A Shape for Old Testament Theology, II: Embrace of Pain” Brueggemann asserts the following function of lament for faith: “Such an act of embrace means to articulate the pain fully, to insist on God’s reception

¹¹⁸ Op. cit.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 156-57. See op. cit.

of the speech and the pain, and to wait hopefully for God's resolution."¹²⁰ Yet, he later adds, "Israel's laments force God to recharacterization. This act of forcing God to recharacterization is not an unproblematic venture, theologically. It is in deep tension with the reality of God's sovereign freedom to be whom God chooses to be."¹²¹ The evocative power of language seems most powerful here but also raises the question of how the human response of hope "for God's resolution" can come about if Israel's laments so forcefully recharacterize God? Terence Fretheim writes:

Brueggemann claims that Israel's laments and acts of protest to God stand "in deep tension with the reality of God's sovereign freedom to be who God *chooses* to be." But if God's choosing to be, which must include God's willing, already moves beyond a commitment to structure before any lament is heard, then it seems incongruous to speak of incongruity. In other words, there is within God a leaning toward Israel and being for Israel by virtue of the divine purpose and promise...God's decision-making and actions toward Israel and the world will always be informed by that loving purpose and those promises.¹²²

Brueggemann proposes an understanding of God which rests on the tension and incongruity he finds in the biblical text, but his articulation of this rhetorical understanding seems to tend toward theological incoherence. Does humanity respond to the "loving purpose" and "promises" of God or does human response constitute the meaningful character of that love? Granted Brueggemann is wrestling with the difficult hermeneutical issues of such a question, and he seemingly wants to hold both possibilities together even when he risks incoherence. Yet as an interpretive norm he now seems much more ready to go with the latter possibility than the former.

Such is the case in Brueggemann's construal of God in "The Costly Loss of Lament." Brueggemann worries that by losing lament as a practice of faith "we may unwittingly endorse a 'False Self' that can take no initiative toward an omnipotent God."¹²³ Via an analogy between lament form and D. W. Winnicott's theory of object-relations psychology, Brueggemann reasons that God, like a mother ceding initiative to an infant, risks experiencing the power ceded to those who lament. The immanence of this risk derived rhetorically from the form of the text, *over and against* recourse to

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 29. See op. cit.

¹²² Terence E. Fretheim, "Some Reflections on Brueggemann's God" in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998, 24-37), 30, italics Fretheim. For Fretheim's own views on the nature and reality of God see Fretheim, *The Suffering of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), especially Ch. 5, "God and World: Presence and Power."

¹²³ Ibid., 111.

divine transcendence, becomes that which psychologically and sociologically reshapes his understanding of the omnipotence of God.

Reconceiving divine power in reference to human social realities continues to develop substantially in *Israel's Praise*. “‘World-Making’ is done by God. That is foundational to Israel’s faith,” writes Brueggemann, “But it is done through human activity which God has authorized and in which God is known to be present.”¹²⁴ Divine “authorization” here appears to happen through the evocative power of the language of the text which impinges on all reality, divine or human, through rhetoric deployed sociologically. “Because, and *only because*, the trouble of the psalmist is brought to speech, it is injected into the ongoing life of Israel and Yahweh.”¹²⁵ He still retains an inclination towards divine transcendence through circumspection about any transformation to which faith attests; “There is something inscrutable and hidden about the ways in which God transforms. God's people are not able to give explanations. But they are capable of testimony about the possibility of new life.”¹²⁶ Thus Brueggemann still celebrates the move into new orientation, the move “from hurt to joy.” However, if *any* divine transformation can become “abiding order”¹²⁷ and so just another form of structure legitimation or ideology, then can such testimony ever joyfully express *anything new*? Can we really ever come to expect that God is a God who finally responds to human suffering?

In the coming chapter we will see how rhetorical conflict in scriptural testimony becomes the locus of not only Brueggemann’s mature biblical theology but also his understanding of the divine reality at work in faith. Such an approach would never be possible without the growing influence of the social sciences on how he understands the lament psalm to function through faith amidst suffering. Through the self-declared methodological transitions of 1985, Brueggemann writes about his overall organization of Old Testament theology, “The model proposed here does not embrace von Rad’s conclusion that there is no organizing principle, but it asserts that the organizing principle must be found at the interface between theological affirmation and social

¹²⁴ Ibid., 11.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 144, italics mine.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 145.

¹²⁷ *Israel's Praise*, 101-4.

vision.”¹²⁸ As Brueggemann’s concept of biblical faith develops at this interface, with the question of human suffering ever in view, sociology appears to cast a vision which theology must increasingly affirm.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Brueggemann, “Old Testament Theology as a Particular Conversation: Adjudication of Israel’s Sociotheological Alternatives,” in *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 143; repr. from *Theology Digest* 32 (1985): 303-25.

¹²⁹ This despite Miller’s conclusion in “Introduction,” *Old Testament Theology*, xiv, “What is crucial at this point is that literary and rhetorical study is, in Brueggemann’s approach, a tool for a theological reading of the text and not a replacement of it, which it is in some contemporary literary studies of the bible.”

Maintaining the Tension or Tension beyond Maintenance? The Lament Psalm in Brueggemann's Mature Biblical Theology

I. *Theology of the Old Testament: Faith as "Fundamental Tension"*

In just a decade after his publication of *Israel's Praise*, Brueggemann generates more than 20 additional books and collections, an overwhelming swath of articles, and still finds time to finish the 777 pages of his voluminous magnum opus, *Theology of the Old Testament* (subsequently referred to in this chapter as *TOT*).¹ Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal, editors of Brueggemann's Festschrift *God in the Fray*, chart the movement of Brueggemann from the mid-1980's to the 1997 publication of *TOT*.

In two programmatic articles in which he began to sketch out a possible "shape" for Old Testament theology, Brueggemann presented biblical faith in terms of this fundamental tension: on the one hand, one finds affirmations of stability and orientation (what he identifies as "structure legitimation"); on the other hand, one finds the powerfully disruptive and transformative countervoices of chaos and disorientation (what he identifies as "embrace of pain"). This fundamental tension becomes, in Brueggemann's new *Theology of the Old Testament*, the drive behind not only Israel's *faith* but the very inner life of Israel's *God* as well.²

As the previous chapter of this thesis demonstrated, Brueggemann derives such "fundamental tension" from his evolving understanding of Israel's lament psalm form. Thus the following Linafelt and Beal observation: "Such a construal of God has the potential to speak to the core of a human existence that, as Brueggemann has articulated so clearly in his work on the Psalms, is characterized by the constant inbreaking of disorientation."³

In the years which lead up to the publication of *TOT*, Brueggemann's understanding of the lament form has evolved and so has his concept of biblical faith as

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997). For a functionally comprehensive (though still selective) bibliography of publications by Brueggemann up through 1998 see Clayton H. Hulet's diligent collection at the end of the festschrift *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 321-340.

² Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal, introduction to *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (Fortress: Minneapolis, 1998), 5, italics original.

³ *Ibid*, 4.

response to human suffering.⁴ As his work progresses towards this “fundamental tension,” the theological conclusions derived through his Psalms typology of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation have been increasingly influenced by his interdisciplinary engagements with the social sciences. In a related development, he has also granted an increasingly powerful role to rhetoric in his biblical interpretation.⁵ These shifts in his scholarship and in the work of others are eventually labeled “postmodern” by Brueggemann, though he sometimes acknowledges ambivalence about the term.⁶ More important for his own work is how such shifts have brought conflict, dispute and tension to the forefront of his thinking.⁷ Such become the key conceptual

⁴ Over this decade, new material on the Psalms is published by Brueggemann which is not discussed in depth here because this material chiefly adheres to the ongoing dialectical shape of Brueggemann’s theology which shows its most significant manifestation in *TOT*. For sake of space, *TOT* is the focus in this chapter. However, two key articles deserve brief mention. The first article is “The Psalms as Prayer” in Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick D. Miller, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); repr. from *Reformed Liturgy and Music* 23 (1989): 13-26. This extended article ends in a noticeably dialectical fashion, “The prayers of Israel subvert, liberate, and dismantle. The sponsors of this age find themselves helpless before the power of prayer, spoken at the limits of abandonment and insistence, and lived obediently and caringly between those limits” (66). The second article is “Praise and the Psalms: A Politics of Glad Abandonment” in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick D. Miller, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); repr. from two parts in *The Hymn: A Journal of Congregational Song* 43, no. 3 & 4, 1992, 14-19 (Part 1 in no. 3) and 14-18 (Part 2 in no. 4). This article also deals with dialectical themes; see *ibid.*, 117. “Thus basic trust includes both self-abandonment and self-assertion. Praise is a happy settlement that should be taken at full value. It is always, however, a provisional settlement because even such glad praise does not cause either party to forget what it has taken to arrive at this moment.” Both of these articles can be seen as examples of the dialectical theology which is fully developed by Brueggemann in *TOT*.

⁵ Brueggemann publishes on what he labels the psalms of historical recital in *Abiding Astonishment: Psalms, Modernity, and the Making of History* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991). This work is not discussed in depth here because it does not affect the evolution of his psalms typology and is better seen as an example of the developing rhetorical approach which is at maturity in *TOT*. See the introduction to *Abiding Astonishment*, 14, “In the continued reference to and use of the Psalms in the church and synagogue, we are participants in a specific practice of rhetoric which is a particular form of power.”

⁶ See Brueggemann comments on postmodernism in *Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), vii, “I have no zeal about the words ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’ and take them only as a convenient reference for the widespread erosion of what has been most recently seen as ‘given.’ While I am unable to define what is ‘modern,’ like pornography, I think I know it when I see it.” However, Trevor Hart makes the following observation about Brueggemann, “Yet there is in truth little sense of reluctant resignation or of making a virtue out of an unwelcome necessity in this volume. The way in which Brueggemann himself narrates the cultural evolution of the post-Enlightenment Western world leaves a clear impression that (so far as his own particular set of concerns goes) the advent of post-modernity has heralded more benefits and opportunities than it has inflicted collateral damage.” See Hart, “(Probably) The Greatest Story Ever Told? Reflections on Brueggemann’s *The Bible and Postmodern Imagination*” in *Interpreting the Bible: Historical and theological studies in honour of David F. Wright* (ed. A. N. S. Lane; Leicester: Apollos, 1997, 181-204) 182.

⁷ *TOT*, 113-114, “It is astonishing to notice, as the exclusive power of hegemonic reading has waned, how aware we have become in recent decades about the conflictual dimensions of every phase of text and interpretation.”

resources for his exploration of the “question of pain...the main question of Old Testament faith”⁸

This chapter traces the focus on rhetorical tension in *Theology of the Old Testament* as the theological culmination of Brueggemann’s long engagement with the psalms of lament. Theological focus on tension allows Brueggemann to propose a distinct understanding of God not only in the Old Testament but also in the New. As we saw in the previous chapter, Brueggemann concludes from the lament psalms that human initiative impinges upon the person and power of God. Significantly, this impingement makes possible the transforming power of faith by moving God to act faithfully on behalf of suffering humanity. Yet, in what follows, we will see how Brueggemann’s mature theology conceives of God, in sovereignty, as free to choose *not* to respond to such impingement. This proposal ultimately has significant implications for his concept of biblical faith as response to human suffering. We will conclude our examination of Brueggemann’s theology by evaluating this concept along the lines initially set out by his study of lament; can Brueggemann’s theology account for faith in God which sustains amidst experiences of hurt and joy, death and life?

A. A Metaphor Encompassing Tension—Overview of *TOT*.

The tension so central to *TOT* is apparent in the encompassing metaphor guiding Brueggemann’s overall approach—Old Testament theology as a courtroom trial. He writes in the preface:

Alternatively, I have proposed that the coherence required for an Old Testament theology, in a way that hopefully avoids premature reductionism, must focus not on substantive or thematic manners but on the *processes, procedures, and interactionist potential* of the community present to the text. It is for that reason that I have focused on the metaphor and imagery of courtroom trial in order to regard the theological substance of the Old Testament as a series of claims asserted for Yahweh, the God of Israel.⁹

This metaphor underscores Brueggemann’s belief that conflict integrally shapes Israel’s scriptures. “All of these claims share a general commonality but also evidence considerable variation, competition, and conflict.”¹⁰ For Brueggemann, the “truth

⁸ Brueggemann, “A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I: Structure Legitimation,” in *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 18.

⁹ *TOT*, xvi.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

claims” of the Old Testament are “arrived at through incessant engagement” of precisely this kind of conflictual process.¹¹

The work proper unfolds through five major parts introduced first by an extensive two-part historical “Retrospect” tracing interpretive conflict from the Reformation to the Enlightenment and on to postmodernity. Against this introductory sketch of the past and present theological landscape, Brueggemann asserts his first major proposal, “Israel’s Core Testimony.” The starting point here is based in no small part on how earlier study of the Psalms has developed Brueggemann’s understanding of speech:

It is remarkable that the Old Testament does not accent thought or concept or idea, but characteristically *speech*. God is the one about whom Israel speaks. ...In Israel's more intimate practice of faith in the Psalms, moreover, the key activity is speech. It is 'a joyful noise' (Ps 100:1), 'I will sing' (Ps. 101:1), 'I said in my prosperity' (Ps. 30:6), 'To you, O Lord, I cried' (Ps. 30:8). What we have available to us is the speech of this community, which has become text, and which is our proper subject of study.¹²

Subjecting speech to study is exactly what Brueggemann does as he distills the grammatical structure of testimony into four parts, “Thus we have attempted to define the grammar of Israel (full sentences, governed by strong verbs, dominated by the subjects of the verbs who is an active agent, effecting changes in various direct objects)...”¹³ This speech makes “clear to Israel, moreover, that beyond Yahweh, there are no serious candidates for the role of God.”¹⁴ Instead, Israel’s speech defines itself through “the extreme and most sweeping testimony given to Yahweh, namely incomparability.”¹⁵

The particularity and peculiarity of such speech results in Brueggemann’s epistemological priority on testimony in the Old Testament.

For the community and its derivative ecclesial communities that purport to stand with and under this text, the speech is the reality to be studied....We shall be asking, *what* is uttered about God? And this will require us to pay attention to *how* Israel uttered about God, for the “what” of Israel’s God-talk is completely linked to the “how” of that speech.

I suggest that the largest rubric under which we can consider Israel's speech about God is that of testimony. Appeal to testimony as a mode of knowledge, and

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 117-18.

¹³ Ibid., 144.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., see also 206-7, “In all of this variegated, rather disordered picture, this jumble of testimonies, we arrive at the conclusion already considered above.”

inevitably as a mode of certainty that is accepted as revelatory, requires a wholesale break with all positivistic epistemology in the ancient world or in the contemporary world. In an appeal to testimony, one must begin at a different place and so end up with a different sort of certitude.¹⁶

In language more sweeping and decisive than earlier in his career, Brueggemann also maintains a necessity to “bracket out all questions” of historicity, which asks about “What happened?”, and of ontology, which ask about the ‘really real.’¹⁷ In decidedly rhetorical emphasis, Brueggemann willingly leaves all others behind or at least to the side. “[F]or Old Testament faith, *the utterance is everything*. The utterance leads to reality, the reality of God that relies on the reliability of the utterance.”¹⁸

Juxtaposed against Israel’s core testimony is the second part of Brueggemann’s theology, “Israel’s Countertestimony.” Characterized by “cross-examination,” countertestimony forms the opposing pole of a hermeneutical process which emerges, so it seems, in the very structure of the text.

*I propose that the process of cross-examination is required of Israel’s daring testimony, which attests to “mighty acts” whereby Yahweh transforms the world. Moreover, the process of cross-examination seems to go on in the Old Testament text itself, the text being pervasively disputatious. For Israel, everything depends on the adequacy and reliability of its testimony concerning Yahweh.*¹⁹

Brueggemann articulates countertestimony through a threefold spectrum of “*hiddenness, ambiguity or instability, and negativity*,” which indicates that “Israel’s characteristic candor about its life puts its own core testimony in some jeopardy and leaves the truth of the matter still to be adjudicated.”²⁰ Within this spectrum Brueggemann discerns the texts which do the jeopardizing, from the low visibility of Yahweh in the wisdom literature to outright accusations of Yahweh’s failure in texts like the lament psalms. Countertestimony presumes upon Yahweh’s “hiddenness”, “ambiguity” and “negativity” as Israel proposes demanding questions to Yahweh (How

¹⁶ Ibid., 119, italics original.

¹⁷ Ibid., 118. “To inquire into the historicity of the text is a legitimate enterprise, but it does not, I suggest, belong to the work of Old Testament theology.” See also nt. 4 here, “This decision to bracket questions of ontology is parallel to the decision about bracketing questions of historicity. I do not deny that those who speak about Yahweh in the Old Testament had made some judgment about the reality and existence of Yahweh. But the ontology of Yahweh that is available on the basis of Israel’s testimony in the Old Testament is *after* the testimony, based on finding the testimony credible and persuasive. After the testimony, the Old Testament provides a rich statement on ontology.” (italics original).

¹⁸ Ibid., 122, italics original. Concerning the reality of God or any other “reality” outside of utterance Brueggemann adds, “...Israel’s claim of reality is as fragile as an utterance, and *we must be exceedingly wary of flights from utterance to some presumed pre-textual reality*.” (italics mine).

¹⁹ Ibid., 317, italics original.

²⁰ Ibid., 318, 319.

long?, Why?, Where?, Is?). Here, almost all of *TOT*'s initial examples are lament psalms.²¹

As with Brueggemann's understanding of lament, countertestimony is not to be understood outside the faith of Israel. "...Israel's countertestimony is not an act of unfaith. It is rather a characteristic way in which faith is practiced."²² Faith is not simply a product of the text but also reflective of the very character of Yahweh. At the end of his previous section on testimony he writes:

The reason for this unsettlement is not finally—speaking theologically—that Israel speaks with many voices (which it does), or that Israel cannot make up its mind (which it cannot); the unsettling quality belongs definitionally to the character of Yahweh. In my judgment, the texts permit no overall solution, because self-regard and regard for Israel are not, in the end, the same. One might imagine that Yahweh's self-regard is given over completely to Israel's well-being. But Israel's text and Israel's lived experience keep facing the reality that something like Yahweh's self-regard keeps surfacing in demanding ways. This self-regard may emerge as unsurprising moral claim, or it may emerge as a kind of wild capriciousness, as sovereignty without principled loyalty. It is this propensity in Yahweh, Yahweh's determination to be taken seriously on Yahweh's own terms, that precludes any final equation of sovereignty with covenantal love or with pathos.²³

Furthermore, the dispute of countertestimony necessarily redefines the sovereignty of Yahweh to prevent Yahweh from becoming an idol. "...*Israel as witness knows that if Yahweh is not endlessly criticized and subverted, Yahweh will also become an absolute, absolutizing idol*, the very kind about which Moses aimed his protesting, deconstructing work at Sinai."²⁴ Brueggemann concludes that the all persons who claim faith through the biblical texts must maintain the tension of testimony and countertestimony.²⁵

The third major part of *TOT* is "Israel's Unsolicited Testimony" which, within the bounds of Brueggemann's analogy, concerns extra information given to a court by witnesses without the previous solicitation of attorney or judge. Brueggemann's application of this to Israel is as follows:

Any careful consideration of Israel's testimony about God indicates that Israel is indeed an unrestrained witness who will not stop with testimony about Yahweh. Without taking an extra breath, without a pause, in the very same utterance, Israel continues to

²¹ Ibid., 318-21.

²² Ibid., 318.

²³ Ibid., 303.

²⁴ Ibid., 332, italics original.

²⁵ See *ibid.*, Ch. 12 "Maintaining the Tension," 400-03.

talk about many other matters beyond what has been asked. It is these other matters that constitute Israel's unsolicited testimony.²⁶

Such testimony unfolds via those in relationship to Yahweh (whom Brueggemann terms "partners") including Israel, individual human persons, the nations, and creation. Building upon chapters which develop each of these relationships, Brueggemann proposes a "dramatic movement" characteristic of all relationships with Yahweh. "The drama of brokenness and restoration, which has Yahweh as its key agent, features *generosity*, *candor* in brokenness, and resilient *hope*, the markings of a viable life."²⁷ Dramatic pattern suggests metanarrative as Brueggemann tentatively concludes, "I will settle for the judgment that the Old Testament is not a metanarrative but offers the materials out of which a metanarrative is to be construed."²⁸

"Israel's Embodied Testimony," Brueggemann's fourth major category, pushes the bounds of testimony in his courtroom analogy to account more fully for the mediation of Yahweh. "It is daring of Israel to insist on relatedness with Yahweh. But to be specific about that relatedness requires that along with the daring of Israel's utterance, we pay attention, as best we can, to the practices which give the testimony *concrete embodiment*."²⁹ This "embodiment" is not so much an alternative methodological expansion beyond rhetoric as it is an expansion of rhetoric's "operation".

In any case, *the rhetorical mediation of Yahweh in the Bible is not a disembodied, ideational operation*....Thus, I propose, Yahweh is generated and constituted, so far as the claims of Israel are concerned, in actual practices that mediate. The Bible is the product generated by a community, and the source that generates and nurtures the community as it practices Yahweh-in-relation. Thus the question of mediation is not a question of right theology (as in orthodoxy), a great and pervasive theological temptation, but it is a question of the characteristic social practice that generates, constitutes, and mediates Yahweh in the midst of life.³⁰

Here, the sociological implications of Brueggemann's rhetoric come to full maturity. "It has been my wont to say that Yahweh's "natural habitat" is the text of the Old Testament, and there is no Yahweh outside of this text. Now I intend to push behind that textual-rhetorical claim, to say that Yahweh's habitat is *in these practices*."³¹ Modes of

²⁶ Ibid., 408.

²⁷ Ibid., 562.

²⁸ Ibid., 559. For the full discussion of "Materials for a Metanarrative" see pp. 558-64.

²⁹ Ibid., 568.

³⁰ Ibid., 574, italics original.

³¹ Ibid., 576-77, italics original.

mediation are examined in chapters on torah, king, prophet, the cult and the sage, all finally leading to Brueggemann's conclusion, "What I most want to insist on in this connection is that in these actual, concrete social enactments, it is Yahweh, in all of Yahweh's density, who is mediated."³²

Fifth and finally, Brueggemann considers "Prospects for Theological Interpretation" in light of his proposals. The conclusion of these prospects, "Moving toward True Speech," anticipates what is next for Old Testament theology.

Old Testament theology in the future, I have proposed, will be reflection on Israel's disclosing speech that is in a pluralistic context and therefore inescapably disputatious. It is my sense that a community of interpretation that engages in a serious undertaking of Old Testament theology will itself be a community that attends to disclosing speech in a pluralistic context that is inescapably disputatious. I mean by this that Old Testament theology is not simply a detached *analysis* of an ancient practice of speech, but it is *an engagement with* those speech practices, in order to adjudicate what is and what is not "true speech," that is, speech about the truth.³³

The theological import of an "inescapably disputatious" text is what Brueggemann has sought to recover in the practice of the church. "Old Testament theology is, in an ecclesial setting, an activity for the recovery of an idiom of speech and of life that is congruent with the stuff of Israel's faith."³⁴ Finally, the book ends by asserting that "acknowledgement of Yahweh at the center of life (the life of Israel or the life of the world) requires a reordering of everything else."³⁵

B. A Subtitle Establishing Tension—*Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*

The above overview, while brief, attends particularly to the manner in which tension emerges as the guiding force in Brueggemann's understanding of faith. While neither the latter three-fifths of the work nor the introductory two-part retrospect can be disregarded, the dyad of the first two major parts, "Core Testimony" and "Countertestimony," occupies a particular methodological priority in Brueggemann's thought. In dialectical relationship both parts form the driving tension acutely observed by Linafelt and Beal, a tension which corresponds to Brueggemann's earlier articulations of orientation/disorientation, structure legitimation/embrace of pain. These

³² Ibid., 700.

³³ Ibid., 743.

³⁴ Ibid., 747.

³⁵ Ibid.

also correspond to the first two terms of *TOT*'s subtitle, testimony and dispute. Thus, whether it is the "unsolicited" or "embodied" testimony presented in Part III or IV respectively, or the work's potential applications presented in Part V, *Theology of the Old Testament* finds all of its guiding implications rooted in "the processive, interactionist modes of assertion and counterassertion...that together constitute and construe the theological substance of Old Testament theology."³⁶

However, both the subtitle of *TOT* and Brueggemann's earlier psalms typology contain a third term, advocacy and reorientation, respectively. In light of Brueggemann's growing emphasis on the tensions of claim and counterclaim, how should the meaning of such terms now be understood?

In the previous chapter, we examined Brueggemann's increasing desires to allow the sociological understanding of rhetoric which he discerns in the Psalms, at times, to minimize or set aside certain theological concepts. At other times, his understanding of rhetoric appears to critique such concepts outright. This eventually complicates his understanding of God's transformation vis-à-vis the reorientation aspect of lament psalm form. Because Brueggemann comes to conceive of the form itself rhetorically mediating all three aspects of his typology, properly conceiving of the form's transforming intrusion apparently becomes a function of speech *about* God. In such speech, the sociologically deployed rhetoric of disorientation impinging upon orientation comes sharply to the foreground and reorientation becomes less the intrusion of a truly divine reality and more about responding to the transforming function of language and the human imagination.

A decade later Brueggemann's theological application of rhetoric has come to maturity in *TOT*'s concept of *testimony*. Whereas he earlier acknowledged theology which "smacks of synergism,"³⁷ such an observation becomes unnecessary and irrelevant in *TOT*'s established priority on speech. "[F]or Old Testament faith, *the utterance is everything*. The utterance leads to reality, the reality of God that relies on the reliability of the utterance."³⁸ However, while the speech of testimony might seem to be the first order of Brueggemann's reality, testimony does not in and of itself reveal the power of speech. Notice the reality of God alluded to above does not merely rely on the utterance but "on the reliability of the utterance." Such reliability is engendered by

³⁶ Ibid., xiv. See op. cit.

³⁷ Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise*, 7.

³⁸ *TOT*, 122, italics original. See op. cit.

dispute. “But where the truth is at issue and at risk, testimony is given by many witnesses, witnesses are vigorously cross-examined, and out of such disputatious adjudication comes a verdict, an affirmed rendering of reality and an accepted version of truth.”³⁹

Thus the power of speech is not so much in the claims of speech but in the *disputatious process* by which claims are made. Testimony and countertestimony are really not two different entities entirely but more or less two halves of one grand reality—disputation which ultimately comes to define God.

I believe that the root cause of such theological disputatiousness arises from and is sustained by the Subject of the conversation, namely Yahweh, who prizes candor and rejects all deceiving denial. I understand that this is something of a circular argument. But if we are to be theological in our understanding, we are bound to say that no other explanation is important, for finally God-talk must be congruent with the God about whom it speaks.⁴⁰

This is a looping restatement of *TOT*'s previous conclusion that this “unsettling quality belongs definitionally to the character of Yahweh,”⁴¹ which now circles back to confirm that “Jewish testimony relishes the disjunction that disrupts the large claim and that attends to the contradiction as the truth of the matter.”⁴² Brueggemann's circularity produces a rather straightforward conclusion about *TOT*'s subtitle: *testimony* is simply half of *dispute* which is the real theological heart of *TOT*.

But what about *advocacy*? From the beginning of the work, Brueggemann inextricably links the process of testimony and dispute with advocacy.

There seems to be no way out of this competitive, conflictual situation; there are no “answers in the back of the book” to which all will assent—not critical, not classical, not advocacy. Moreover, it is apparent that every such advocacy—whether an admitted one (liberationist), or one in the service of the creedal tradition (canonical), or one in the service of Enlightenment autonomy (critical)—is readily checked and seemingly countered in the treatment of any text by the citation of a countertext, which can most often be identified, or by the offer of a counterinterpretation.⁴³

TOT's proposal of checks and balances is not purely violent in itself, but that which offers a way out of the violence into understanding belonging and relationship. Notice the following Brueggemann language about the dynamic of Israel's speech: “In the disputatious propensity of Israel, rather, core testimony and cross-examination *belong to*

³⁹ Ibid., xvii.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 325.

⁴¹ Ibid., 303.

⁴² Ibid., 325.

⁴³ Ibid., 63.

each other and for each other in an ongoing exchange.”⁴⁴ Violence is not constituted by conflict (conflict is consistently a constructive concept for Brueggemann) but rather by the disengaging neglect of sectarianism.

We now recognize that there is no interest-free interpretation, no interpretation that is not in the service of some interest and in some sense advocacy. Indeed, it is an illusion of the Enlightenment that advocacy-free interpretation can exist. Interpretation as advocacy is an ongoing process of negotiation, adjudication, and correction. This means, most likely, that there can be no right or ultimate interpretation, but only provisional judgments for which the interpreter is prepared to take practical responsibility, and which must always yet again be submitted to the larger conflictual conversation. Therefore any adequate interpretive conclusion is likely to enjoy its adequacy only for a moment. Such an interpretive enterprise is a profound departure from the older, long-established hegemonic work of interpretations in which one could enjoy “assured results.” In my judgment, however, faithful interpretation—that is, interpretation congruent with the text being interpreted, requires a willingness to stay engaged in such an adjudicating process and not to retreat to a separated interpretive community.⁴⁵

That which advocates for us at the widest level then is engagement in this “adjudicating process” which constitutes *TOT*’s “Yahweh version of reality.”⁴⁶

Within Brueggemann’s theological inclinations, advocacy and its earlier correlate of reorientation, may yet still depend upon the “transforming intrusion by the covenant partner.”⁴⁷ He writes, “Israel, moreover, understood that the drama of rehabilitation, including the sequence of complaint, petition, and thanks, requires the Holy One, over and against whom the human person in extremis must take shrill and vigorous initiative.”⁴⁸ However, we now see that this Holy One is arrived at, fully formed by, and correctly understood only in the disputatious process of speech.⁴⁹ Dispute itself becomes advocacy and perhaps Brueggemann’s *Theology of the Old Testament* can thus be most aptly summarized by a genitive rendering of its subtitle in reverse: of (the) advocacy of dispute of testimony.

C. A Lament Psalm Focusing Tension—*TOT*’s Central Role for Psalm 88

⁴⁴ Ibid., 317-18, italics mine.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 63, italics original.

⁴⁶ Ibid., xvii.

⁴⁷ Walter Brueggemann, “The Formfulness of Grief” in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 93-94. Originally published in *Interpretation* 31 (1977), 263-75.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 476.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 64, “Yahweh, in the life of the text, is pulled this way and that by the adjudicating rhetoric of Israel. And any theological interpretation must take care not to cover over the process by which the God of the Bible is made available to us.”

Towards the end of *TOT*'s section on countertestimony, Brueggemann more specifically connects his previous work on lament form to the influence it has on his mature theology. In the chapter "Yahweh and Negativity," he examines the psalms of complaint⁵⁰ which he calls "[t]he principal pattern of speech whereby Israel bears this element of countertestimony."⁵¹ After considering examples of these psalms he concludes, "We may notice three elements in the transaction of faith constituted by prayers of complaint."⁵² The first element is incongruity because "*Israel is profoundly aware of the incongruity between the core claims of covenantal faith and the lived experience of its life.*"⁵³ As developed in Brueggemann's typology, such incongruity characterizes the movement from orientation to disorientation. The second element concerns initiative for "*in the psalm of complaint Israel has momentarily wrested from Yahweh the initiative for the relationship.*"⁵⁴ As demonstrated in his article "The Costly Loss of Lament," as well as in other contexts, Brueggemann understands such human initiative as the decisive moment when disorientation impinges upon orientation in the hope of reorientation. This leads to the third element. "*Westermann has averred that the complaints of Israel, without exception, receive a positive response and resolution from Yahweh.*"⁵⁵ Positive response and resolution, of course, corresponds to Brueggemann's concept of reorientation evident in the thanksgiving and praise which most typically ends this psalmic form. The ending is so typical, in fact, as to suggest a different classification and function for the lament form in *TOT*'s scheme. "Westermann has overstated the case, but on the whole the suggestion is correct.... Such a transaction, in normal usage, is a proper and nearly routine way in which Israel's covenant with Yahweh operates. To that extent, laments and complaints are not *countertestimony*."⁵⁶

Yet, Brueggemann takes issue with how resolutely Westermann understands the resolution in the form. "Westermann has failed to note, however, that a few psalms to the contrary do not work according to the normal patterns of covenantalism."⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Here, Brueggemann is working with Gerstenberger's categories as he writes, "It is important to note that these psalms are indeed voices of complaint of judicial protest, and not lamentations, as they are often called. In the psalms of complaint, Israel seeks aid and positive treatment (comfort) from Yahweh, precisely on the basis of extant covenant agreements to which Yahweh is pledged" See *TOT*, 374-75.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 374.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 378.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, italics original.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 380, italics original.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, italics original.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 380, italics original.

⁵⁷ Brueggemann, *TOT*, 380.

Brueggemann points to Psalm 88, “an extreme case and a prime example of a summons to Yahweh that receives no answer.”⁵⁸ This is a demonstration of the furthest reach of Israel’s countertestimony—a complaint psalm with no resolution and thus no adherence to the typical form. “Israel is left with its psalm, always to be uttered one more time, always more shrilly, uttered as an act of profound need, of intense indignation...”⁵⁹ But to this description Brueggemann also adds that Psalm 88 is one “...of relentless, insistent hope.”⁶⁰

Hope in this case comes not from turning aside from Yahweh’s silence, but from the incessant nature of Israel’s complaint. At the conclusion of the chapter on “Yahweh and Negativity,” Brueggemann compares the faith responses of Ecclesiastes and Psalm 88.

The silence [of Yahweh] finally can lead to less energetic, almost phlegmatic obedience; or it can on occasion still evoke strident protest. Thus we take our final consideration of the voicing of negativity from Psalm 88, a very different kind of “limit expression.” Ecclesiastes has lost any passion or impetus to cry out to Yahweh. Perhaps that should be our final word on negativity, for with Ecclesiastes we reach, in one sense, the end of the Old Testament. But such melancholy is unrepresentative of Israel’s faith and even of Israel’s way of negativity. Therefore high-energy protest seems a more appropriate conclusion than low-energy, calculating submissiveness....Ecclesiastes, in its resignation and coping resolve, is a more modern response to the absence and the silence of God, but Psalm 88 is more characteristically Jewish. Ecclesiastes’ countertestimony has a terminus, but Psalm 88 has no end. The cry of the psalm will continue.⁶¹

Ever-continuing, “high-energy protest” turns on possibility and on risk. Despite the reality of silence complained about in Psalm 88, the possibility remains that Yahweh *could* answer. In a telling note, Brueggemann cites Elie Wiesel’s recounting of “one exchange in rabbinic teaching”:

“So long as he cries, he can hope his father will hear him. If he stops, he is lost....”

“Believe me, I have never ceased to cry out....”

“May the Lord be praised...Then there is hope.”⁶²

Hope is always possible in that God may hear and answer, but such hope, in both the above rabbinic teaching and Psalm 88, seems to depend *exclusively* on the one who

⁵⁸ Ibid., 380.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 381.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 398.

⁶² Ibid., 399, nt. 37.

cries out to God; again, “If he stops, he is lost...” Hope arises from a petitioner who, in risky circumstances, is willing to take on the additional risk of complaining to God. Moreover, such action reveals risks for Yahweh. Psalm 88 proposes, according to Brueggemann, that “if Yahweh allows the death of the speaker, Yahweh will lose a witness to Yahweh’s *hesed*....There will be losses as well *for Yahweh*, who will no longer be praised.”⁶³ Thus in Psalm 88, the far end of Brueggemann’s description of countertestimony, hope remains because “Israel, in this version of countertestimony, does not propose to stop now...or ever.”⁶⁴

With this understanding of hope in hand, Brueggemann concludes the discussion of countertestimony with a chapter titled “Maintaining the Tension.” He makes explicit links between the Old Testament and Christian faith but begins by defining biblical tension as *the* interpretive norm:

“The tension between the core testimony and the countertestimony is acute and ongoing. ...Lived faith in this tradition consists in the capacity to move back and forth between these two postures of faith, one concerned to submit to Yahweh, culminating in *self-abandoning praise*, the other concerned to assert self in the face of God, culminating in *self-regarding complaint* that takes a posture of autonomy.”⁶⁵

This results in a dialectic which “requires both centrist and marginated interpreters” and maintains a tension as true for Christianity as it is for Israel despite that in “high claim made through Jesus, the countertestimony of Israel seems to be silenced.”⁶⁶

This is not *TOT*’s first statement on countertestimony and Christian faith. In the introductory chapter to countertestimony (Ch. 8), Brueggemann acknowledges the problem of conceiving relentless dispute within the context of Christianity. “The matter is not so easy for Christian theology. It is not so easy because Christian faith is relentless in the absolute claim it makes for Jesus of Nazareth. ...It is not usual for Christians to engage in theological countertestimony of the claims of their own faith.”⁶⁷ As an avowed Christian theologian, Brueggemann introduces a particular view of christology to resolve this problem:

Christian faith, however, is not without resource. It does have a key access point to this disjunctive enterprise. Christian faith is centered on Good Friday and on the crucifixion, in which we speak of “the Crucified God.” Friday is of course linked to Sunday, and

⁶³ Ibid., 398.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 399.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 401.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 332.

death is tailed by the eruption of new life. But the scar tissue of Friday lingers in the body of Christ, and it protests against every totalizing, triumphalist, and absolutizing ambition. In living in the midst of Friday, Christians reach back as far as the command issued at Sinai against idols. And they reach forward as far as Parisian deconstruction in its Jewishness [here, B is referencing Derrida]. The cross-examination will not defeat the testimony...probably. But it will cause the testimony to be issued in a sobered, trembling voice. It may be more than a play on words that the *cross-examination* is matched to the *cross* of Friday.⁶⁸

The position proposed here clearly relies on the tradition of Luther's theology of the cross, an influence prevalent in much contemporary theology, perhaps none more famous than Jürgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God*.

Even so, Brueggemann stakes out his own ground. He eventually connects his own understanding of the cross and resurrection to the tension so central in *TOT*. "There is a sense that Sunday resolves Friday, that the core testimony resolves the countertestimony...But in our honest reading of the New Testament, and in our honest liturgic reckoning, the Friday of negativity persists to make its claim."⁶⁹ This idea of "honest" New Testament reading, in which the cross of Christ is affirmed as *countertestimony*, leads to the sweeping claim that "the unresolve is as profound in the New Testament as in the Old."⁷⁰ Alternatively, he suggest that Christians should wait through "liturgic reckoning," which he derives from the implications of such a confession as "Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again." He asks, "Is that waiting not in close proximity to the waiting of Psalm 88, which does not doubt, in its persistence and shrillness and stubbornness, that there will be a hearing and an answer?"⁷¹ He follows with an answer to his own question: "Thus Christians, for all the claim of the core testimony of Easter, still wait for resolution very sure, but sure only in hope."⁷²

All of this, of course, has significant implications for how Brueggemann understands the practice of Christian faith.

Thus I submit that in the end, if we keep our Christian confession close to the text and to lived reality, all the communities propelled by this testimony wait together. All wait in the conviction that the core testimony of faithful sovereignty and sovereign fidelity

⁶⁸ Ibid., 332, ellipses and italics original.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 403.

⁷¹ Ibid., 402.

⁷² Ibid.

will defeat hiddenness, ambiguity, and negativity. It is a waiting done in profound hope, but it is nevertheless a waiting.⁷³

Togetherness with other faith communities “propelled by this testimony” is encouraged, and that which seems to unite them is a common conviction derived from a common wait. “The waiting is inescapable because of the unresolved condition of life in the world, an unresolve shared by Christians with Jews and with all others.”⁷⁴ In this hermeneutic of tension, whereby hope as understood through the exceptional lament form of Psalm 88 serves as the rule, Brueggemann concludes that “All wait not doubting, but having nothing in hand except this rich, complex, disturbing testimony.”⁷⁵

D. An Evolution of Reorientation into “Maintaining the Tension”

“Maintaining the Tension” is not merely the conclusion of Brueggemann’s dialectical concept of Israel’s testimony. It also fully manifests how form and function in his Psalms typology has modulated since the article “Psalms and the Life of Faith.” There, Brueggemann was able to offer the following description of reorientation:

Israel has the capacity to exploit the fullness of language in the service of reorientation and new creation. Such a practice affirms that we do not need to be forever reductive, demystifying, critical, and exposing. There is a time when this work is done....Or to move from hermeneutic to the Psalms, Israel must not forever lament, complain, protest, and question. There is a time for affirmation and rejoicing, a time to end the criticism, to receive the gift, and to sing a doxology (see Eccl. 3:2-10).⁷⁶

Later in *The Message of the Psalms*, Brueggemann contextualizes reorientation, labeled “new orientation,” in the “*two decisive moves of faith*”:

One move we make is *out of a settled orientation into a season of disorientation*... It is that move which characterizes much of Psalms in the form of complaint and lament...The other move we make is a move *from a context of disorientation to a new orientation*, surprised by a new gift from God, a new coherence made present to us just when we thought all was lost...This second move also characterizes many of the Psalms, in the form of songs of thanksgiving and declarative hymns...⁷⁷

Thus along with the move into tension comes a resolving move out of tension.

⁷³ Ibid., 402.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 403.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 403.

⁷⁶ Brueggemann, “Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function,” in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Patrick D. Miller, ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 23-4. Originally published in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 17 (1980), 3-32.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 20-1, italics original.

Along with *the literary habit* which dominates these psalms comes *the theological experience* of the will and power to transform reality. All these prayers and songs bespeak the intervening action of God to give life in a world where death seems to have the best and strongest way. The songs are not about the “natural” outcome of trouble, but about the decisive *transformation* made possible by this God who causes new life where none seems possible.⁷⁸

Message of the Psalms concludes, “In that movement of transformation are found both the power of life and the passion for praise of God.”⁷⁹

Over the years leading up to *Theology of the Old Testament*, Brueggemann’s notions of “*literary habit*” and “*theological experience*” increasingly converge as his understanding of these “two decisive moves of faith” evolves. The first movement from orientation to disorientation increasingly becomes defining of faith in a new way. That is, the first movement seems to generate the transforming possibility of the second movement from disorientation to reorientation. Moreover, the second is a result already apparently encompassed by the first. Linafelt and Beal write:

In short, disorientation encompasses both threat and promise, and it is impossible to have one without the other....The refusal to choose constitutes the fundamental ambivalence of God, an ambivalence that is never resolved in some middle-ground synthesis but instead reels back and forth between the two. Walter Brueggemann has understood more than anyone that this tension, this fiercely imagined disjunction, is what drives the life of the divine...⁸⁰

Reorientation, for Brueggemann, effectively becomes about “maintaining the tension” discerned primarily in the Old Testament text but also in the New Testament narratives of Christ’s cross and resurrection. *TOT*’s final chapter states:

That is, in the end, theological interpretation that engages the theological claims of the text must host the testimony in all its oddness, and must be engaged in the practice of the core testimony and countertestimony, in practice and in obedience, in protest and complaint, with its whole life. The phrase “engaged in practice” means for me not only hearing the text, but *living intentionally in response to its proposed world*.⁸¹

This proposed world is one where responses addressed to and from the God of scripture are theologically meaningful and proper *only* as they are understood through Brueggemann’s scheme of core testimony and countertestimony.

II. Tension Beyond Maintenance: Who is God Amidst Human Suffering?

⁷⁸ Ibid., 124-25.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 128.

⁸⁰ Linafelt and Beal, “Introduction,” 4-5.

⁸¹ Brueggemann, *TOT*, 744, italics mine.

A. The Culmination of Lament in Brueggemann's Theology

Having concluded our exposition of Brueggemann's mature theology in *TOT*, we now offer a response to this theological culmination of his long-standing biblical engagement with lament as a response of faith amidst human suffering. To review, we saw in Chapter 1 that Brueggemann's study of lament began with the legacy of form-criticism and the particularly influential work of Claus Westermann. These influences, combined with Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical philosophy, led to the emergence of Brueggemann's new typology of psalm function. The tripartite structure of this typology—articulated through the categories of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation—proposed the function of the typical lament psalm as parallel to the entire Psalter and all of biblical faith. In Chapter 2, we traced Brueggemann's continuing efforts to refine his Psalms typology, and indeed his whole theology, through growing engagement with both social-scientific and rhetorical criticism. Once again lament form played a crucial role as the dialectical categories of “structural legitimation” and “embrace of pain” produced a defining theological shape for Brueggemann's understanding of the Old Testament. Correspondingly, tension between orientation and disorientation in Brueggemann's typology began to emerge as a reorienting of all reality, divine or human, through Brueggemann's increasing emphasis on the power of rhetoric deployed sociologically. Over the course of Chapter 3, we have proposed how the developments of Chapters 1 and 2 become a “foundational tension” in *Theology of the Old Testament*. Rhetoric fully emerges as the provider of theological and social reality in Brueggemann's mature work, leading to his preeminent priority on the utterance of the text. Yet the power of that rhetoric (which Linafelt and Beal call “the drive” behind Israel's faith and Israel's God⁸²) lies in the dialectical shape of Israel's text categorized as core testimony and countertestimony. At the heart of this dialectic is his extended and evolving engagement with the realities of praise and petition in the lament psalm form.

Looking back from the end of *TOT* allows us to see that Brueggemann has never ceased in his intention to recover lament as a resource for contemporary faith. We return

⁸² See Linafelt and Beal, “Introduction,” 5. See *op. cit.*

to the words with which our examination of Brueggemann began—the opening lines of his initial article on lament.

It is the lament that preserves for us Israel's most powerful and eloquent statements of the effort both to survive and to be transformed as a people of faith. The study of lament can provide important resources for our contemporary work of theology and ministry.⁸³

Yet we have also seen how he has gone far beyond merely recovering lament as a *resource*. Brueggemann ultimately has come to ascribe the tension he finds through the form of this text not only to biblical faith but to the very God to whom the Bible attests. *Faith in this God* grounds *Theology of the Old Testament's* central, final claim: “the acknowledgement of Yahweh requires reordering everything else.”⁸⁴ Moreover, acknowledgement of the divine in the Old Testament encompasses “in all its radicality” *any* divine claims made by the New.⁸⁵

Brueggemann has argued that suffering is the main question of Old Testament theology, and his theology has undertaken the task of answering this question through examining *who* the Bible proclaims God to be. Acknowledging *this* God is not only the conclusion of his greatest work but also the very root of Brueggemann's concept of Old and New Testament faith. Through lament, this is the God to whom we respond amidst suffering and from whom we expect a response. Consequently, any theological evaluation or critique of Brueggemann's proposal must follow along a specific theological line of inquiry: *How does Brueggemann's proposal for biblical faith result from who he understands God to be amidst human suffering?*

B. God as “the Fray”: Dividing Divine Fidelity and Sovereignty

Throughout all of his work, Brueggemann continually posits faith as an affirmation of God's transforming response to human suffering. In *TOT* he even attributes a certain “constancy” to Yahweh in Israel's testimony, despite his fundamental assertion that “Israel's knowledge of God is endlessly elusive.”⁸⁶

⁸³ Brueggemann, “From Hurt to Joy,” 67.

⁸⁴ *TOT*, 747.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 302, “...whatever may be claimed for the radicality of God in the New Testament is already present in all its radicality in these Jewish witnesses to the character of Yahweh.”

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 725.

This peculiar world of utterance, with Yahweh at its center, has a quality of constancy to it through time, and it is this constancy that constitutes the material of Old Testament theology. Two features of this constancy are in deep tension....This quality of constancy as both *ideology* and *elusiveness* is a rich interpretive invitation. I suppose, in the end, we must make a crucial judgment about whether ideology or elusiveness has the last word. In my own reading, I find that no ideological statement of Yahweh is finally permitted to prevail, always being undermined by elusiveness...it may be simply that the issue of ideology and elusiveness is the very marking of constancy that belongs to Yahweh who is endlessly responsive and available and at the same time intransigently sovereign. That unresolved, and perhaps unresolvable, issue is precisely what is so compelling and so maddening about Old Testament theology.⁸⁷

This allusion to “constancy” raises an important question: Brueggemann’s commitment to theological irresolution may be undisputable, but does not such a commitment produce a resolution of its own? He apparently *relies on his own certitude* about the text based neither in history or ontology but in the tension of his rhetoric. Different though the certitude of this “idiom” may *appear* to be, it *operates* essentially the same as any other understanding of certitude by proposing universally valid assumptions as applied to any and all situations over time.⁸⁸ Brueggemann is thus able to conclude that his theology is about recovering not just any faith response, but the only viable approach to the correct response and practice of faith which produces certain results.⁸⁹

Such resolution seems manifest even when Brueggemann most acutely proclaims the unresolved nature of biblical faith. A crucial example occurs in the “Maintaining the Tension” section of *TOT*: “All [biblical faiths] wait in the conviction that the core testimony of faithful sovereignty and sovereign fidelity will defeat hiddenness, ambiguity, and negativity. It is a waiting done in profound hope...”⁹⁰ If “conviction” and “profound hope” for the *defeat* of all “negativity” are in “faithful sovereignty and sovereign fidelity” then Brueggemann would seem to argue that biblical faith, far from maintaining tension, *is always already resolved* that God’s faithfulness will overcome such tensions, even from within “the fray.”

The faithfulness of God from within human experience is, of course, the heart of Christian testimony regarding the person and work of Christ. With this in mind

⁸⁷ Ibid., 724.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 746, “For all its variation through time and in different circumstances, there is a recognizable idiom to Israel’s testimony, especially as some texts take great liberties with it. ...The combination of core testimony and countertestimony constitutes the idiom of Israel’s faith. It is, then, this idiom that may be practiced in an ecclesial community of interpretation.”

⁸⁹ Ibid., 750, “Testimony leads reality and makes a decision for a *certain* kind of reality both possible and *inescapable*.” (italics mine). See also ibid., 125, nt. 18. See also Brueggemann, “A Prompt Retrospect,” 319, section IV.

⁹⁰ *TOT*, 402.

Brueggemann proposes three “crucial” distinctives for a christology which takes seriously the concerns of proper Old Testament interpretation:

In any case, three caveats are crucial as one moves from the Old Testament to christological claims. First, care must be taken that Easter does not issue in a Friday-denying triumphalism, or in an easy victory that does not look full in the face at Friday and its terrible truth. Second, it must be borne in mind that the Friday-Sunday dialectic of reconciliation in Christian faith has its complete anticipation in the Old Testament in the mystery of exile and homecoming. That mystery of exile and homecoming dominates the liturgic rhetoric of complaint and response in every period and in every season of Israel’s life. Israel characteristically complains at the trouble given by Yahweh. Yahweh characteristically responds in healing, saving resolution. Third, in the end, from the perspective of the final form of the text, fidelity dominates the vision of Israel. This conclusion is as unambiguous in the faith of Israel as it is in the Easter affirmation of the church. In the Old Testament the God who abandons is the God who brings home to well-being.⁹¹

Given his overall approach in *TOT*, the first two “caveats” are unsurprising. In the first he is concerned, of course, with any Christian triumphalism which might become the basis for the kind of supercessionism which concerns him in the second caveat. He wants us to understand the tension Christians face in their own “terrible truth,” (again, *TOT* later describes the cross of Christ as “countertestimony”) and to understand that such tension is already *completely anticipated* by the Old Testament (especially in, say, psalms of complaint/lament).

The third “caveat” deserves particular consideration here. On the surface, it seems that Brueggemann is simply following his second caveat with still another claim to ward off supercessionism, this time along the lines of God’s fidelity. However, in light of all that we have previously examined—the evolution of Brueggemann’s lament scholarship, the sociological and theological shifts in how he understands his own psalms typology over time, and the overall way in which such changes are appropriated in the rhetorical emphasis of *TOT*—we must now ask how Brueggemann draws conclusions *based* on divine fidelity in either the lament psalm or the person and work of Christ. On his account, *exactly what kind of fidelity can dominate the vision of Israel, and how can such fidelity be unambiguous in either the faith of Israel or the Christian church?*

Ambiguity is how Brueggemann explicitly describes the nature of God⁹² and also appears inherent to the following thesis about the divine: “*The substance of Israel’s testimony concerning Yahweh, I propose, yields a Character who has a profound*

⁹¹ Ibid., 312.

⁹² See “Embrace of Pain,” 43, as Fretheim notes in “Some Reflections,” 27. See also *TOT*, 359-72.

disjunction at the core of the Subject's life."⁹³ We have seen such disjunction in relation to God variously developed over time by Brueggemann in terms of orientation/disorientation, structure legitimation/embrace of pain, above the fray/in the fray, and testimony/countertestimony. In *TOT* all ambiguity and disjunction come to a head under the following proposal for the divine life: "...Yahweh has at Yahweh's core an unsettled interiority of fidelity and sovereignty."⁹⁴ This "unsettled" division of divine fidelity from sovereignty results from two opposing theological conclusions, both of which demonstrate how Brueggemann's understanding of faithfulness, divine and human, has evolved from engagement with lament and his subsequent Psalms typology.

First, *in fidelity, and over and against divine sovereignty, God responds to human suffering when faithfully impinged upon by humanity.* We have seen this again and again in Brueggemann's emphasis on lament. Beyond mere trustworthiness and reliability, divine fidelity "is what it means for Yahweh to be moved to compassion by Israel's petition."⁹⁵ It is comprised of God's "decision to be in a covenant, and the further decision to let this covenant emerge toward pathos."⁹⁶ Covenant is herein defined as "an enduring relationship of fidelity and mutual relationship" which provides God a people and "thus enhance(s) Yahweh's sovereignty."⁹⁷ Yet such covenantal fidelity also operates over and against divine sovereignty for "(t)his relationship of enduring fidelity seems regularly to qualify, if not subvert, Yahweh's sovereignty and self-regard."⁹⁸ Pathos, as we have seen since the article "The Formfulness of Grief," refers to Yahweh's "propensity to suffer with and suffer for, to be in solidarity with Israel in its suffering, and by such solidarity to sustain a relationship that rightfully could be terminated."⁹⁹ Divine pathos also appears to operate against divine sovereignty.¹⁰⁰

Moreover, through covenant and pathos, divine fidelity becomes a conflictual and interactive process which takes lament psalm form as a key archetype.¹⁰¹ It confronts all modern impetus to human autonomy¹⁰², but remains "mutual" by

⁹³ Ibid., 268, italics original.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 459.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 324.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 302., See also *ibid.*, 226.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 297.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 296.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 299.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 301, "It is pathos which preserves the covenant in the face of affronted sovereignty."

¹⁰¹ See Brueggemann, "Prompt Retrospect," 310.

¹⁰² *TOT*, 451.

maintaining the power of human initiative, particularly amidst suffering, to impinge upon God.¹⁰³ This latter is Yahweh's "*fidelity moving toward pathos, humankind...authorized to freedom and initiative*"¹⁰⁴ and manifest powerfully through the human action of petition and complaint.¹⁰⁵ Human assertion, in tension with abandonment to God, is exactly the dynamic of faith which Brueggemann wants to recover within Christian tradition and practice as the anthropological "*counterpart*" to the unsettled nature of the divine.¹⁰⁶ Again, human assertion against God is how faith "*mobilizes*" the power of God's fidelity amidst suffering.¹⁰⁷ So the disorientation of lament can encompass "*both threat and promise.*"¹⁰⁸

Yet beyond the threat of faithful human impingement and the promise of God's fidelity, lies Brueggemann's second conclusion about the divine: *In sovereignty, God can override divine fidelity so that God decides not to faithfully respond to suffering and/or even chooses to perpetrate it.* God's sovereignty accords with orientation and structure legitimation.¹⁰⁹ As such, Brueggemann appears to work from a more traditional assumption that God can condone suffering as just reward for violation of covenant. "The very God whose righteousness is marked by fidelity and compassion is surely the God who shows a recurring streak of self regard...harsh enactments of sovereignty are in defense of Yahweh's legitimate imperium."¹¹⁰

But this is not all his second conclusion entails. *Most important in regard to Brueggemann's proposal*, God, in sovereignty, can also choose *not* to act in covenant relationship but, in fact, *withdraw* from it, apparently even if God's human counterparts in covenant *uphold their end of the relationship*.¹¹¹ Any faithful impingement on our part *may not* result in God's own faithful response to our suffering. Such is the "extreme case" with Psalm 88. "In this text, at least, Israel leaves testimony of radical unresolve, in which the countertestimony is not answered. Yahweh does answer often...but not always."¹¹² Brueggemann is not proposing here that this unresolve occupies the time of

¹⁰³ Ibid., 458, 473.,

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 458.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 473.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 459.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 226.

¹⁰⁸ Linafelt and Beal, 4. See op. cit.

¹⁰⁹ See *TOT*, 233.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 274. See also ibid., 271-2.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 410, "Because this commitment of fidelity to the partner is undertaken in sovereign freedom, it follows that Yahweh can indeed withdraw from the relationship and cancel the commitment."

¹¹² Ibid., 381.

the “not yet.” He is instead decidedly locating this discord in the very nature of the divine.

The challenge of biblical theology for Brueggemann is holding these two conclusions about the divine together. Matthew Schlimm writes:

...Brueggemann does not believe that God tends toward infidelity. He believes that the divine life is fraught with tension and that no one characteristic always prevails, including any that entail fidelity or its loss. ...The following comment summarizes well Brueggemann’s thoughts about divine fidelity: “In the end, Yahweh is faithful, if not all the way through.” God tends toward faithfulness, but is not confined by it.¹¹³

Yet even if faithfulness is God’s “tendency,” Fretheim asserts, “Sovereignty clearly takes priority over fidelity in such formulations.”¹¹⁴ For his part, Brueggemann has earlier stated that God is “*always in the process of deciding*” what kind of God to be.¹¹⁵ Any textual resolution, like the reorienting praise and/or thanksgiving which ends a typical lament psalm, is “*characteristically provisional and tenuous, likely to be unsettled in the next crisis, undone by the next text.*”¹¹⁶ While noting that eschatology “is largely unspecified in Israel’s testimony and enormously open,”¹¹⁷ he elsewhere more provocatively describes the future of Yahweh’s relationship with Israel as “characteristically ominous” because “Israel (and perhaps Yahweh) cannot know how this unresolved tension will be enacted in any particular circumstance.”¹¹⁸

Perhaps most provocative of all, especially from Brueggemann’s own Christian perspective, is his insistence that such tension applies directly to Christian affirmation

¹¹³ Matthew R. Schlimm, “Different Perspectives on Divine Pathos: An Examination of Hermeneutics in Biblical Theology,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69/4 (Oct. 2007): 673-94. Schlimm quotes Brueggemann, *Isaiah* (2 vols.; Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) 2. 154.

¹¹⁴ Fretheim, “Some Reflections,” 31

¹¹⁵ “Embrace of Pain,” 43-44. See also *TOT*, 302, where Brueggemann discusses “texts (which) permit us to watch while Yahweh redecides, in the midst of a crisis, how to be Yahweh and who to be as Yahweh.”

¹¹⁶ *TOT*, 303. (italics original).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 480.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 272. Moltmann, *God and Creation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 81-83, offers an insightful critique (in conversation with Reformed tradition and particularly Barth) which could be applied to this problematic view of divine freedom. “What is fundamentally in question here is whether the concept of freedom of choice can really be applied to God’s eternal and essential liberty. ...What concept of freedom is appropriate to God? If we start from the view of thh (*sic*) point of view of the created being, the Creator appears as almighty and gracious. His freedom has no limits, and his commitment to what he has created is without obligation. But if we start from the Creator himself, the self-communication of his goodness in love to his creation is not a matter of his free will. It is the self-evident operation of his eternal nature. The essential activity of God *is* the eternal resolve of his will, and the eternal resolve of his will *is* his essential activity. In other words, God is not entirely free when he can do and leave undone what he likes; he is entirely free when he is entirely himself” (italics original).

of the person and work of Christ.¹¹⁹ In his “Prompt Retrospect” to *Theology of the Old Testament*, Brueggemann reiterates his claim “that the endless negotiation of core testimony and countertestimony, in Christian mode, takes the form of the dialectic of Friday and Sunday.”¹²⁰ As in *TOT*’s section, “Maintaining the Tension,” the explicit goal here is emphasis on the suffering continued to be confronted by all humanity. Nevertheless, when Christ’s cross is labeled “countertestimony,” it becomes aligned with the division between divine sovereignty and fidelity which Brueggemann finds intrinsic to the biblical text. Thus Brueggemann’s theological emphasis moves beyond the the harsh reality of Christ’s human suffering and death and apparently puts into question even these events as an act of God’s own faithfulness.

C. Faith in Excess of “the Fray”: Human Expression of Suffering and Expectation of Divine Response

From out of the culmination of Brueggemann’s long engagement with the form of the lament psalm, and the related “profound disjunction” which he proposes to constitute the very nature of God, emerges a strikingly divided response to the “question of pain...the main question of Old Testament faith”¹²¹ On the one hand, is the *dependence* of divine fidelity on the human response of faith amidst suffering. Brueggemann’s account of relationship with God not only allows for and invites honest expression of the human experience of pain, but apparently *requires* such expression to move God towards faithful redemption. On the other hand, is the *independence* of divine sovereignty from divine fidelity and therefore any impingement upon that fidelity by faithful human response. Through such a conclusion, the “extreme” countertestimony of Psalm 88 goes beyond simply leaving Israel “with no answer against this reality of experience.”¹²² God is presented as indecisive about faithfulness, and Brueggemann appears to allow that God is *now* not even sure about what is *not yet*.

This divine disjunction is precisely what becomes difficult for even Brueggemann’s theology to maintain. Why? Because crucial parts of Brueggemann’s

¹¹⁹ This concern was made particularly clear to me by my thesis examiner Walter Moberly.

¹²⁰ Brueggemann, “*Theology of the Old Testament: A Prompt Retrospect*,” in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 307-20, here. 320.

¹²¹ Brueggemann, “A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I: Structure Legitimation,” in *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 18.

¹²² *TOT*, 381.

theology *still appear to rely on an unswerving expectation of divine fidelity*. His understanding of worship and ethics appears to function out of Israel's faith in God's fidelity.¹²³ He seems to agree (following Gerstenberger) that the human response of lament depends on "complete" confidence in God's faithfulness.¹²⁴ The future of humanity arises as "peaceable confidence" because of "the faithful sovereignty of Yahweh already known in Israel's core testimony."¹²⁵ According to *TOT*, "Yahweh is in fact the very *substance* of (Israel's) hope" for all which is not yet.¹²⁶

As we have seen such expectation of God's "reliability," held together with the expression of suffering to God, was the basis for Brueggemann's original understanding of lament form function.¹²⁷ Such expectation was integral to his original proposal for the distinctiveness of Israel's faith in lament.¹²⁸ Expectant hope through lament was understood as the distinct result of Yahweh's identity.¹²⁹ In terms of Brueggemann's Psalms typology, expectation is an enduring orientation of faithfulness to a yet-unrealized new orientation. And as *TOT* asserts, through hope, faith finally enables joy. "It is the central conviction of Israel that human persons in the Pit may turn to this One who is powerfully sovereign and find that sovereign One passionately attentive. That is the hope of humanity and in the end its joy."¹³⁰

However, if God, in sovereignty, is not bound to attend to human suffering, passionately or otherwise, then how can such hope and joy arise? How can there be any expectation for such a God to be faithful? As Fretheim observes,

...(Brueggemann's) language suggests that, whatever is said about divine fidelity, sovereignty admits of no qualification by the relationships with Israel and the world into which God has entered. Brueggemann does speak of partial qualifications of divine sovereignty by the divine fidelity in some texts, but these seem not to be hermeneutically significant for the larger biblical picture. Countertestimony finally has just as much standing as core testimony.¹³¹

¹²³ Ibid., 226, "At the center of Israel's liturgical life and derivative ethical reflection, we find the belief that at the core of life is a Presence (not a principle), an Actor and Agent, who is marked decisively by fidelity and trustworthiness. In this affirmation we are near the center of Israel's testimony about Yahweh, and we are near what it is about the Old Testament that is continually compelling and urgent, even in our own time."

¹²⁴ Ibid., 479.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 484-5.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 479.

¹²⁷ Brueggemann, "From Hurt to Joy," 71.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 77.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 83.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 491. See also *ibid.*, 200.

¹³¹ Terence Fretheim, "Some Reflections on Brueggemann's God" in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal eds., (Fortress: Minneapolis, 1998), 33.

A consistent presentation of Israel's "*massive Holy Problem*" would seem then to expose a "terrible awareness" that human suffering may never be resolved, at least by God.¹³² Amidst this irresolution Fretheim finds perhaps the most problematic issue for Brueggemann's theology:

Again, no distinctions are made within the divine will; it is as if love and violence belong eternally together in God (an eternal dualism is close at hand). ...Criteria must be developed to sort out these testimonies, to make distinctions regarding appropriateness among images of God. Without this *all* talk about Israel's unsettling testimony regarding God is called into question.¹³³

By staking interpretive methodology on an approach which allows the meaning of any particular text about God to be undone by any other, Brueggemann cannot avoid the possibility that injustice, abuse and any other violation of faithfulness could well turn out to be part and parcel of God's enduring nature. So even when he speaks of Easter in the light of Good Friday, his priority on divine indecision, while downplayed, still remains: "The cross-examination will not defeat the testimony...probably."¹³⁴ What the Bible tells us to expect about God is that we cannot ever know what to expect.

The nature of Brueggemann's priority on rhetoric now becomes more clear. As Fretheim again observes, "This direction of thought opens up the possibility that the interpreter can decide where and when God is acting faithfully to the divine purpose and promises."¹³⁵ Such decisions constitute faith through ongoing interpretive acts, the social process of human response, over and against ever contradictory experiences of the divine. Fretheim finds the concept of God which results from this process to be "a *postmodern restatement of sovereignty*" but wonders whether Brueggemann "has sufficiently followed through on his own emphases."¹³⁶ Levenson questions how postmodern Brueggemann's approach can truly be:

What we have, in other words, is not really a "pluralistic interpretive context" in the postmodern sense, in which there is no bedrock of truth to which interpretation must either prove faithful or fall into discredit. Rather, we are confronted with something more akin to a capitalistic market place, in which rival interpretations engage in "conflict and competition" until one of them—Brueggemann hopes it will be "the metanarrative of the Old Testament (or of the Bible or of the church)"—emerges triumphant. In spite of Brueggemann's frequent employment of the postmodernist rhetoric of subversion, protest, and plurality, what he actually envisions is more like the

¹³² *TOT*, 311.

¹³³ Fretheim, "Some Reflections," 34-5, italics original.

¹³⁴ *TOT*, 332

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

liberal vision of a public space in which different interpretations compete freely in the firm conviction that through this process the truth will eventually win out.¹³⁷

For his own part, Brueggemann actually states that he is arguing against, among other things, such liberalism.

It is possible to transpose the testimony of Israel about Yahweh...so that Yahweh is made to be so anemic that there can be no conflict. The transposition of this testimony into an innocuous text can take place in many ways, such as the distancing effect of critical study that recognizes everything except the main claims, or scholastic theology that turns elusive testimony into closed system, or what I call “horizontal liberalism,” in which the agency of Yahweh evaporates into social ideology.¹³⁸

Nevertheless, it is hard to see how he has not done the very thing he forswears—a transposition of “the agency of Yahweh” into a type of social ideology defined by rhetorical tension.¹³⁹

When expectation for divine response to suffering can no longer be meaningfully expressed through the lament psalm or the Bible as a whole, and when there can be no true hope in God now for what is not yet redeemed, then little remains beyond how humanity expresses its own rage at the pain of existence. Nowhere does this become more evident than when Brueggemann confesses that he does *not* believe that, in practice, lament and praise function *equally* in his dialectic of biblical faith. The former must be allowed a *functional priority* over the latter.

We must note well that such an act of self-abandonment to Yahweh is dialectically related to an act of self-assertion against Yahweh. Because the two markings, expressed as complaint and as hymn, are genuinely dialectical, one may not give priority to either. In trying to understand how this peculiar Yahwistic dialectic *actually functions*, however, I suggest that *practically and provisionally, priority in the dialectic belongs to the complaining activity of self-regard*. I make this suggestion because (a) in object relations theory this primal experience of omnipotence is pivotal for a self that is adequate to practice covenant; (b) one must have a self in order to yield a self; and (c) Western Christian piety has given this facet of Yahwistic humanness short shrift. I suggest this as a practical matter, but do not want to detract from the more important recognition that, seen as a whole, the two maneuvers of Yahwistic humanness are indeed genuinely dialectical.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Jon D. Levenson, “Is Brueggemann Really a Pluralist?” in *Harvard Theological Review* 93 (2000): 266, italics mine.

¹³⁸ *TOT*, 741-42.

¹³⁹ See Levenson, 269, nt 17, “It is one thing to say that social factors have reduced or eliminated our awareness of certain valuable interpretations (a liberal view). It is quite another thing to say that social factors *exhaustively explain* and thus help deconstruct certain interpretations (a radical view). Though Brueggemann leaves it unclear which of these two very different positions he is taking, he gives the impression that he is closer to the latter, more radical view.” (italics mine).

¹⁴⁰ *TOT*, 478-79, italics mine.

Disclaimers about the conceptual importance of his dialectic aside, the rationale of Brueggemann's approach to biblical faith would ultimately seem to come down to a contemporary sociological priority on human autonomy, at least functionally speaking.

Ironically, no culture has functioned to realize autonomous self-regard more pervasively than the one Brueggemann so often seeks to critique—modern Western society. With nothing but ourselves to restrain doubt, skepticism and suspicion, the practice of covenant becomes merely a reflexive exercise in human self-reliance. There is no reason to believe that it is actually “*Yahweh's* passion” which “will refuse to come to terms with the power of death, no matter its particular public form or its ideological garb.”¹⁴¹ There is no reason beyond self-preservation for humanity not to be resigned to senseless violence and destruction, or to understand lament as anything more than psychological catharsis or a strategy of political power play.¹⁴² There is no real reason for humanity to depend on anything other than its own interpretive autonomy rather than faith in the one true and living God.¹⁴³

Brueggemann's theology eventually falters along the lines where his lament scholarship sought most to succeed—a recovery of the *theological* function of lament for faith. Human expression of suffering and expectation of God's response are critical to how Brueggemann develops the typical dual form of the lament psalm as petition and praise into his tripartite typology of psalm function. His typology is at its most successful in showing how biblical text functions to direct and indeed “shape” faith towards God's response through all human experiences and circumstances. As he writes about psalms of disorientation in *The Message of the Psalms*, “Thus these psalms make the important connection: everything must be *brought to speech*, and everything brought

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 741, see op. cit.

¹⁴² Can the overall interpretive emphasis of Brueggemann support his conclusion *TOT*, 472-73? “Everything depends on mobilizing the *undoubted* power of *Yahweh*. . . . Israel's understanding of complaint and petition rules out any resignation. It also rules out the notion that this action by the troubled person is simply cathartic or . . . a political stratagem to be overheard by powerful people.” (italics mine).

¹⁴³ See James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology* (London: SCM, 1999), 561, “And it is not so clear in any case that Brueggemann has stayed clear of the temptations of the Enlightenment. Nothing is worse, according to him, than *autonomy* (expressly forbidden by *Yahweh*, 556). But then, if so, why is *hegemony* so bad a thing? Because it infringes on the autonomy of others. So autonomy is the basis of the whole set of values after all. (Perhaps Childs perceived this when he said that Brueggemann was ‘a most eloquent defender of the Enlightenment’, a judgement that previously struck me as absurd.)” Barr quotes here from Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 73, “The saddest part of the proposal is that Walter Brueggemann is sincerely striving to be a confessing theologian of the Christian church, and would be horrified at being classified as a most eloquent defender of the Enlightenment, which his proposal respecting the biblical canon actually represents.”

to speech must be *addressed to God*, who is the final reference for all of life.”¹⁴⁴ In this way, Israel’s lament, no matter how boldly or egregiously expressed, is never understood apart from expectation of Yahweh who has delivered Israel before and may always yet deliver Israel again. As the early article, “The Formfulness of Grief” states, “In Israel...[t]he use of the form is an activity in the maintenance of this life-world that has at its center the abiding, transforming presence of Yahweh.”¹⁴⁵

Yet Brueggemann’s problem lies in exactly how he uses the rhetoric of the lament form to turn any human expectation of divine transformation in upon itself.¹⁴⁶ By perceiving a *theologically irresolvable* tension between the expressions of praise and petition, and related categories such as orientation/disorientation and structure legitimization/embrace of pain, Brueggemann proposes God’s sovereignty is unresolved towards God’s fidelity. Thus, lament is no longer merely presented as a faithful response to God accompanied by the expectation that God will faithfully respond. The human expression of lament manifests the dialectical dynamic which Brueggemann now believes to be the only expectation of the divine which the Bible can offer. In his later work, he appears to invert the terms he earlier articulated: more or less, Brueggemann now proposes that the transforming presence of Yahweh has at its center the maintenance (of the tension) of this life-world.

Behind this dialectic, human disorientation becomes the *absolute* orientation of Brueggemann’s theology.¹⁴⁷ Such a conclusion appears unavoidable, because when pressed as to how this dialectic actually functions, the tension finally becomes too much for even Brueggemann to maintain. The practice of biblical faith must rely upon the rhetoric of dispute as raw human determination before the empty sign of covenant, now devoid of the divine faithfulness necessary to underwrite such a relationship.¹⁴⁸ If we cannot depend upon God to respond to suffering, theology can have no legitimacy,

¹⁴⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, Augsburg Old Testament Series (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 52.

¹⁴⁵ Brueggemann, “The Formfulness of Grief,” 93.

¹⁴⁶ Contra his own claim in *TOT* that “it is the promises of Yahweh, in which Israel hopes, which keep this community from turning in on itself, either in despair or self-congratulation.”

¹⁴⁷ Christopher Seitz concludes, “Methodological impasse and crisis and disorder have become in Brueggemann’s hands first-order theology.” See Seitz, “Scripture Becomes Religion(s): The Theological Crisis of Serious Biblical Interpretation in the Twentieth Century,” in *Renewing Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Colin Greene, Craig Bartholomew, Karl Moller; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 55.

¹⁴⁸ Miroslav Volf states, “Covenant may morally structure communal life, but the decisive question is surely *what will morally structure the covenant itself* so as to make it a covenant of justice rather than oppression, of truth rather than deception, of peace rather than violence.” See Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 150-1, italics original.

structural or otherwise, before suffering. Our pain can only be embraced by an anthropological cry against the theological.

For faith to truly function *as faith*, especially in moments of suffering, something must be expected to transcend that which imminently threatens to diminish and destroy human existence. Faith's very existence depends on hope.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, for faith to function *as faith in God*, that which endures must be nothing less than divine fidelity. Without hope in God's faithfulness, human faith in God cannot be sustained.

The embrace of human pain and disorientation is central to the Christian account of faith in Christ, not least of all through the gospel portrayal of Christ's lament from the cross. Yet Christian theology should not endorse a biblical methodology which allows covenant expectation (as claimed by the psalmists) and the particular climax of that covenant through Christ (as claimed by the New Testament writers) to be subsumed into the rhetoric of an unresolvable existential tension—a perspective on faith which claims that true expression of human suffering effectively requires a sacrifice of any hope which exceeds it. As we will examine further in respect to Ford, and especially in our final chapter, this is precisely why Christian theology proclaims the cross not as countertestimony but as God's faithful response through Christ's *atonement*.¹⁵⁰

Nevertheless, in concluding this present examination of Brueggemann, affirming Christ in relationship to human suffering would seem to return us simply to the point of his gravest concern. Note the nature of H. G. M. Williamson's conclusions about the psalms of lament,

...the broader outlook of the psalmists, as indeed of most biblical literature, is ultimately one of praise for deliverance experienced. This is not in any way to downplay the reality with which the writers face the darker sides of human existence; their recall of the past in the lament elements remains as expressive as ever, and they testify to having lived through, not skated around, those situations. But, if the language of Christian theology may be introduced, the passion narrative is read in the light of the resurrection. However imaginatively we seek to recreate the events and atmosphere of Holy Week and Good Friday, we cannot avoid the fact that the testimony on which we rely reaches us from witnesses who are already convinced of the reality of a risen Lord.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Hebrews 11:1.

¹⁵⁰ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 155, "For the narrative of the cross is not a 'self-contradictory' story of a God who 'died' because God broke the covenant, but a truly incredible story of God doing what God should neither have been able nor willing to do—a story of God who 'died' because God's all too human *covenant partner* broke the covenant" (italics original).

¹⁵¹ H. G. M. Williamson, "Reading the Lament Psalms Backwards" in *A God So Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*, Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen, eds. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 14.

The “broader outlook” which Williamson draws attention to here requires excessive, indeed overflowing, expectations. In terms of Brueggemann’s psalms typology, such faith could be described as an orientation to new orientation in Christ even amidst ongoing realities of human disorientation. Yet, must Christian faith, through such “praise for deliverance experienced,” therefore inevitably become a structure for legitimating oppression of the suffering and suppression of cries of pain? With this vital question in mind we now turn to consider Christian praise and joy in the theology of David Ford.

Faith Overflowing: Praise in Ford's Early Collaborative Theology

The centrality of praise for the Christian life of faith is an early concern in the career of Irish Anglican theologian David F. Ford. Following the publication of his dissertation on Barth and narrative,¹ his first major work is a collaboration with his father-in-law Daniel W. Hardy entitled *Jubilate: Theology in Praise*.² This work claims the all-encompassing nature of praise from the very beginning.

When the importance of praise becomes clear, there is likely to be, as with many other significant discoveries, a sense of obviousness, an “of course”. If God is God, then of course praise of God is central. Of course it should be the tone of the whole of life, and of course Christian tradition has always said so. ...Above all, the joy of God needs to be celebrated as the central and embracing reality of the universe, and everything else seen in the light of this.³

Jubilate has remained a prominent theological articulation of faith through praise since its initial publication in 1984, and has recently been reprinted under the new title *Living in Praise: Worshipping and Knowing God*. Ford's other early collaboration, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians*, authored with Frances M. Young, does not deal overtly with praise but is instead a theological commentary focused on Paul's understanding of the glory of God.⁴ However, within this work Ford significantly develops theological aspects of faith and worship first made explicit in his partnership with Hardy.

From the outset, the centrality of praise in Hardy and Ford's theology appears to run methodologically counter to the approach of Walter Brueggemann's biblical theology. As preceding chapters demonstrated, Brueggemann, particularly in light of the Psalms, makes theological claims based upon his understanding of tension between petition and praise in the typical form of lament. This tension is rhetorically formed through the experience of human sorrow impinging upon joy. In turn, we observed that

¹ David F. Ford, *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the Church Dogmatics* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1981).

² Daniel W. Hardy and David F. Ford, *Jubilate: Theology in Praise* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984). Originally published in North America as *Praising and Knowing God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985). Reprinted as David F. Ford and Daniel W. Hardy, *Living in Praise: Worshipping and Knowing God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

³ Hardy and Ford, *Jubilate*, 8 (6), 17 (13). Where applicable to all editions of the work, all following pagination in notes corresponds to the more recent *Living in Praise* followed by pagination from *Jubilate* in parentheses. The original title *Jubilate* is generally used for citations.

⁴ Frances M. Young and David F. Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1987).

such tension itself becomes a reality which theologically impinges upon *every* aspect of the Bible and Christian faith. By contrast, Hardy and Ford propose praise as the primary theological reality of biblical faith.

...praise is the comprehensive activity for man in relation to God. It is to be in each place and time and in every place and time, in each and every activity of man. It is therefore mistaken to limit the notion of praise to those situations where it is explicit, as in the Psalms, and thereby to lose sight of its presence as the essential dynamic of man's relationship with God. For this to 'frame' praise, both as a notion and a complex of activities, by reference to some more primary reality, and thus to delimit the sphere of praise to a place within this reality, instead of understanding that it is the essential dynamic of reality itself. Thus 'framing' of praise is what is done when, for example, the everyday life-world of man is seen as 'reality', and praise seen as something done within that. It is exactly this which the Psalms attempt to defeat, as they make it clear that praise is due always and everywhere. There is nothing, in other words, which stands outside praise.⁵

Here, Hardy and Ford are not responding directly to Brueggemann, but the fundamental difference in their approach is nonetheless clear.⁶ Hardy and Ford constantly articulate reality within praise, and in particular, Christian praise. "After having seen praise in a preliminary approximation in the Psalms...it is important to see the transition which it undergoes in the New Testament, as it is given its primary content by Jesus..."⁷

Yet *Jubilate's* distinct approach to Christian faith is not as far from the theological concerns of Brueggemann as it might initially seem. Beyond his emphasis on the rhetoric of the text, Brueggemann so adamantly prioritizes the tension between lament and praise out of a theological concern for the reality of suffering and evil in the world. As we will see, such concerns are never far from Hardy and Ford even in their resolute emphasis on praise.⁸ While they propose a Christian vindication of God and

⁵ Hardy and Ford, *Jubilate*, "Appendix A," 174.

⁶ Nowhere in *Jubilate* is Brueggemann addressed or cited. *Jubilate's* original publication in 1984 falls before any of Brueggemann's extended treatments on the Psalms such as *Message of the Psalms* published in 1985.

⁷ Hardy and Ford, *Jubilate*, "Appendix A," 175.

⁸ Concerns over faith, human responsibility and suffering already lie just below the surface of the central issues in Ford's earliest work, *Barth and God's Story*. We briefly note here two key examples. First, in Chapter 5, "Election and Rejection," Ford's literary analysis of biblical narrative in relation to Barth's proposal for Judas' election produces the following conclusion: "Barth's bias towards stressing 'objective' atonement and salvation here leads him into an interpretation which is bound to devalue subjective responsibility and faith" (92). Second, in Chapter 7, "The Two Natures of Jesus Christ," pp. 129-32, human suffering comes to the fore through Ford's critique of Barth's literary method of identifying divinity and humanity in Christ. "Barth seems to be making a paradox and 'scandal' where the Gospels have none. He wants to see Jesus' compassion as his action of *kata theon* and also as fully human, but apparently has no way of doing this without seeming to devalue human suffering other than Jesus'. There is no hint of this in the Gospels. It is hard to conceive of any statement which one could put into the stories of Jesus' compassion that would count as evidence that the human sufferings are not superfluous. Barth's method of abstracting the eternal identity of Jesus Christ from the Gospels is

humanity, Hardy and Ford also argue that the renewing of praise in Christ confronts all evil and suffering, including suffering perpetuated through false Christian forms of worship. According to Hardy and Ford, true Christian praise does not ignore suffering but willingly suffers it that praise may abound all the more. The “overflowing” nature of praise, *Jubilate*’s key theological concept, is how Christian faith is known through worshipping a faithful God.

In *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians*, Ford’s collaboration with Young further substantiates his theological understanding of how faith overflows in praise. With Paul’s epistle as a guiding scriptural context, Ford develops his doctrine of God, his christology, and the interrelationship of both in human redemption. Ford also introduces an innovative understanding of the “face of Christ” as means by which to properly propose the overflow of faith *amidst suffering*. This concept grows only more influential as Ford’s theology matures and, as we will argue in the next chapter, also later creates problems for how Ford understands praise to result from Christ’s atoning response to suffering on our behalf.

For now, we begin with the collaboration of Hardy and Ford, and we turn to Brueggemann himself to introduce this generative and abundant “theology in praise.”

I. *Jubilate*: Ford’s Collaboration with Daniel Hardy

A. Theological “Mosaic” of Praise

Brueggemann, a significant proponent of Hardy and Ford’s work together,⁹ states in his own review of *Jubilate*, “...this book is a thoughtful insistence that the core and center of Christian faith is a relation with God that focuses on praise of God that

therefore invulnerable to disproof from passages in those same Gospels. It thus is something with the characteristics of those ‘general concepts’ which he so often attacks. For the trouble with general concepts is that they refuse to be governed by the particularities of the story, and now Barth has made it impossible to understand particularities such as Jesus’ response to human suffering in the way the narrative presents them. ...for I am granting that Barth does wish to affirm genuine human action but fails to prevent the literal sense of a text from being swallowed up by the typological” (130-1).

⁹ *Jubilate*’s recent reprinting as *Living in Praise* quotes Brueggemann on the back cover, “I have been fed and led for a very long time by this book. ...In this offer of a ‘taxonomy of praise’ they move easily back and forth between biblical tradition and contemporary context.” Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 478, nt. 56, cites “the theological significance of praise” in Hardy and Ford. Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment*, 78, nt. 77 declares that *Jubilate* discerns “counter-modes of knowledge...quite in contrast to the autonomous modes of scientific and imperial knowledge.”

‘perfects perfection’ of God and transforms the one who praises.”¹⁰ He concludes that the book, “demands hard work. But I am convinced it is now the proper work of serious believers. It has been a long time since I have read a book that so displaces the categories of my thought and work.”¹¹

Other reviewers have similar reactions to the proposal and structure of *Jubilate*. Diverse but similar descriptors for *Jubilate*—difficult but new,¹² “unusual mix of resources,”¹³ “uneven”¹⁴—all demonstrate a style which Brueggemann aptly labels not simply an argument but a mosaic.

This is not an easy book. At times, the argument seems disjointed, perhaps because the book tries to do too much. And the themes are treated in rather odd configurations, so that there is not a sustained cognitive argument but rather the presentation of a mosaic in which the argument is pieced together from a rich and surprising diversity of materials. It is not a book that can be read, but it must be studied and pondered.¹⁵

The analogy of piecing together a mosaic complements the authors’ own description of their process of writing,¹⁶ yet as Brueggemann observes above this does not make *Jubilate* an easy book. The nine chapters in the original edition are followed by two substantial appendices suggesting the many further directions the author’s themselves were unable to incorporate into the main body of the book.¹⁷ Working through the argument requires seeing the many different theological slivers presented as *Jubilate*’s “condensation of ideas, its patterns of thought, and its ways of approaching the Bible, tradition, the Church, poetry, philosophy, science, history, ethics and ordinary living.”¹⁸ Patterns do emerge, but they are not always concisely offered or organized. To

¹⁰ Walter Brueggemann, review of Daniel W. Hardy and David F. Ford, *Praising and Knowing God*, *Theology Today*, vol. XLIII, 1 (1986): 99-100.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹² Cyril S. Rodd, review, *The Expository Times* 96 (Jan 1985): 98.

¹³ Charles M. Wood, review, *Modern Theology* 2 no 4 (Jl 1986): 366-67.

¹⁴ Alan Dunstan, review, *Theology* 88 (S 1985): 411-13.

¹⁵ Brueggemann, review, 99.

¹⁶ Hardy and Ford, *Living in Praise*, “Preface to the Second Edition,” vii, “The book was written slowly, with much discussion of drafts and revisions, and even before its first publication we were unable to disentangle what each of us had contributed. Any attempt to give an account of a seven-year conversation was always hopeless, but we aimed at something like a distillation. We hope that the style gives some sense of the sustained intensity of those years of engagement with the interplay of worshipping, thinking and living.”

¹⁷ Both the original publication of *Jubilate* as well as the North American publication of *Praising and Knowing God* contain an “Appendix A: The Systematics of Praise” and “Appendix B: A Review of Relevant Literature”. These appendices are omitted from *Living in Praise* and replaced by an epilogue subtitled “After Twenty Years.”

¹⁸ “Preface to the Second Edition”, *Living in Praise*, vii.

understand what cements this variegated theology together requires a careful look at how these patterns of praise are presented.

i. Praise in Contemporary Life

Jubilate begins by asserting that praise is an essential part of human life. Not only is praise a “universal human experience,” but also “people do the most extraordinary things and make all sorts of sacrifices in honour of what they praise.”¹⁹ Perhaps the clearest definition of praise is offered in *Jubilate*’s first appendix: “...praise is a comprehensive activity which ‘composes the spirit to love (Coleridge), and does so by integrating man’s capacities and his being by bringing them into a right relation with its object.’”²⁰ That said, Hardy and Ford are quick to acknowledge that while this universality of praise crosses all human contexts, their explicit focus is to articulate praise in the Christian mode. In turn, they aim to provoke interest from, and not argument with, those outside of Christian faith. “For those who do not praise God, but are curious, we hope that they may have a glimpse of what happens beyond the border battles.”²¹ This style of theology, one which is not defensive or critical of non-Christian positions is characteristic of both Hardy and Ford’s work over the course of their respective careers.

Their starting place locates praise as part of a contemporary “twin explosion” alongside knowledge of God. While the past century’s “critical and constructive intellectual activity in relation to Christianity and other religions” has exploded knowledge, praise has exploded through such things as the renewal of liturgy and prayer, Pentecostalism, embracing of diverse cultures, and the creativity stemming from new media.²² In the authors’ own creative process this twin explosion has been central.²³ As a result, they aim “to make a constructive statement of one way of

¹⁹ Hardy and Ford, *Jubilate*, 1 (1).

²⁰ Ibid., Appendix A, 155.

²¹ Ibid., 2 (2).

²² Ibid., 3-4 (3).

²³ *Living in Praise*, “Preface to the Second Edition”, vii, “A core question that came up repeatedly was about the relation between on the one hand, prayer, worship, meditation, contemplation and a life that tries to respond to a loving God with love, and, on the other hand, the stretching of the mind in understanding, discernment, knowing and wise judgement.”

understanding and affirming Christianity by concentrating on the themes of praise and knowledge.”²⁴

The study of praise and its relation to knowledge begins in earnest with the second chapter. Praise has a “strange logic” according to Hardy and Ford. “To recognize worth and to respond to it with praise is to create a new relationship. This new mutual delight is itself something of worth, and enhancement of what was already valued.”²⁵ Furthermore, such logic stretches toward the infinite and towards a concept of overflow, which Hardy and Ford find analogous to the nature of freedom and creativity. “This new order and overflow of order (what we later call non-order) is a realm of freedom yet definiteness, creativity yet precision (the agony of finding the right word or note), and it aims to celebrate the best by both discerning what it is and letting it overflow in surprising new ways.”²⁶ Thanks is the companion of praise in this overflow,²⁷ which the authors place within their understanding of healthy human identity. “The operation of the logic of thanks and praise can be noticed in most good personal relationships. It is explicit perhaps rarely, but it is the essential structure of respect, personal worth and identity.”²⁸

For Christianity, as for Judaism, the overflowing logic of praise finds its center and origin in a self-affirming God. Thus the act of praising identifies God to us, but only by first identifying us in God.

Through it all runs the strange experience of faith: what seems like oneself finding God is seen in retrospect to be recognition that one has already been found by him; and one’s knowledge of God is wrapped up inside being known by him. Praise brings this to its extreme. All that one has and is, all one’s energy, freedom, imagination and thought are tested and stretched in adoration of God; yet this supreme effort only rings true as it acknowledges that God is its initiator and inspirer²⁹

God as the basis of human participation in faithful worship in turn brings knowledge, making praise and knowledge of God inextricable.³⁰ For this reason, praise should play a powerful role in recovering the vitality of God in current culture. Hardy and Ford

²⁴ Ibid., 1 (1).

²⁵ Ibid., 8 (6).

²⁶ Ibid., 9 (7).

²⁷ Ibid., 10 (7). “Just as praise perfects perfection, so thanks completes what is completed.”

²⁸ Ibid., 10 (7-8).

²⁹ Ibid., 12 (9-10).

³⁰ Ibid., 13 (10). “This is another basic feature of praising God: there is no simple sequence of recognition of God followed by expression, but expression can lead the way, and often recognition happens in the very act of expression. There is a knowledge of God that can only come in praising him. ... Faith in God is an experience that lives and grows by praise. There is continual spiral reinforcement: praising God helps us to appreciate what one is praising him for.”

emphasize the centrality of God in “...an attempt to evoke a life which can take many forms but whose essence is that it lets God be God for us, in thought, feeling and practice.”³¹

Four modes of praise are proposed as functioning in two pairs: word and sacrament, and spontaneity and silence. The first pair “represent two basic ways in which we relate to reality and are shaped by it: by language, and by our ability to appreciate and use things.”³² In sentiments similar to Brueggemann, Hardy and Ford find that language “is not only a means of communication with others. We are intimately formed by it... A large part of our reality (memory, values, intentions, knowledge, laws, government, culture, religion) is constituted by meaning and most of that is embodied in language.”³³ Thus “[i]n the Christian church word-centred praise...focuses on the contents of the Bible, on preaching to stir response to the ‘word of God’, on prayer, and on psalms or hymns gathering all of this into praise.”³⁴ Word is paired with sacrament which means most broadly “the taking up of any aspect of the material universe into being a sign or symbol of its Creator.”³⁵ It is hard to underestimate the importance of this idea for Hardy and Ford. “A great deal of this book is about the sacramental in this wide sense. ...The sacramental concern is to enter into God’s way of using and enjoying his world.”³⁶ However, the authors also prioritize the narrower, traditional sense of sacrament. The eucharist, even above baptism, is “the most distinctive Christian act of praise. ...This is the explosive nuclear centre whose Spirit powers all praise, and at the centre of this nucleus is the death and resurrection of Jesus.”³⁷ The connection of word and sacrament, particularly in light of Christ’s life and death, occupies the center of Hardy and Ford’s proposal. Christians “remember a history with the vital difference that the main character of this story is believed to be alive, present and communicating his life and words.”³⁸ This remembrance demonstrates “the praise of word and sacrament inextricably interwoven.”³⁹

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 18 (14).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 18-19 (14).

³⁵ Ibid., 21 (17).

³⁶ Ibid., 22 (17).

³⁷ Ibid., 23 (18).

³⁸ Ibid., 23 (18).

³⁹ Ibid.

The pairing of spontaneity and silence makes a “disturbing contribution” which those who might otherwise overemphasize word and sacrament ignore at their own peril.⁴⁰ Spontaneity is associated with “the stirring of the Holy Spirit” characteristic both of the early church and contemporary charismatic movements.

What is offered is not an alternative to word and sacrament but a new life and power to both of these, with an atmosphere that actualizes the ‘logic of overflow’ in various ways: in the expectation that God will act and speak, in the freedom to express adoration in a wide range of bodily as well as verbal behaviour, in the physical contact between the worshippers (kiss of peace, handshakes, holding hands, laying-on of hands), and in the exercise of various gifts.⁴¹

Hardy and Ford are particularly warm to Pentecostalism which they see as “recovery of the authentic Christian impetus of praise” which “[a]t its best...is distinctive by being able both to use pattern and dispense with pattern.”⁴² They label this dynamic “the jazz factor”⁴³ which analogously references the improvisatory style of that music and anticipates a concept Hardy and Ford later develop called “non-order.” Unlike the familiar opposition of order to disorder, non-order is generative yet threatening because of its apparent openness. “This is a threat to much of the tradition, perhaps most of all because it demands trust both in God and in the worshippers as a group: anything might happen when freedom is granted; but if it is not, some of the most liberating and relevant activity of God is excluded.”⁴⁴

Silence is the fourth and final mode of praise, and its pairing with spontaneity is not accidental.

Often the two go together, and in world Christianity there are signs that just as the old divisiveness over word and sacrament is being healed in many Churches, so the difficulties over the relation of the charismatic to the contemplative are being solved in groups and individuals that value both.⁴⁵

Silence has its most significant manifestation in early Quakerism, but it also has roots in Eastern and Western monasticism. Such traditions benefit the contemporary church.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 24 (18).

⁴¹ Ibid., 25 (19).

⁴² Ibid., 25, 26 (20).

⁴³ “The jazz factor” is of particular interest to Brueggemann’s understanding of praise in *Theology of the Old Testament*, 478, nt. 56, “Hardy and Ford...speak of praise as the ‘jazz factor’ of the Christian life. The image is a suggestive one, for it bespeaks the fact that life rooted in biblical faith, Jewish or Christian, in generous surrender (a) has a regular cadence to it, (b) pushes forward into newness, and (c) allows for newness and radical variation amid the reliable cadences.”

⁴⁴ Ibid., 26 (20).

⁴⁵ Ibid., 26-27 (21).

“This has worked like an underground stream down the centuries, penetrating and nourishing the Church far more deeply and widely than its usual hiddenness might suggest.”⁴⁶ In the more recent charismatic movements Hardy and Ford find a substantial “convergence on the value of the interplay between silence and spontaneity.”⁴⁷

In conclusion, *Jubilate*’s multifaceted introduction to praise suggests a rather straightforward theological result:

The theological point in this is simple: God is free and one cannot make rules for how God may speak and act. Yet the complementary point is that God is faithful and consistent, the sort of God who takes part in liturgies as well. The further perspective that embraces both these is that God is above all to be praised, and is well able to guide individuals and communities as regards how to do so.⁴⁸

Freedom and faithfulness of God are clearly theologically central to Hardy and Ford’s proposal about praise. Moreover, both are clearly understood by the authors as being subsumed in a “further perspective” that God is “above all to be praised.” The theological nature of this further perspective is not yet exactly clear (i.e. how is such a perspective acquired?), but functionally it seems to suggest a certain human receptivity towards God being God on humanity’s behalf. Indeed, the authors add that praise’s “keynote always is to let God be God and to celebrate this, and it draws on the basic human capacities of speech, use of things, spontaneity and silence.”⁴⁹

Hardy and Ford aim to come to terms with how human experience can be understood in relation to this articulation of praising God.

What idea of ‘experience’ can contain all this? A dynamic notion of experience is needed which can cope with constant development and openness while at the same time continually grasping afresh its basis and principles. Finding God and letting God be God changes a person’s experience in cumulative ways. There is a constant but non-coercive making and re-making of the self in community, a new proportioning and energizing that at each stage opens up to further transformations.⁵⁰

The freedom and faithfulness of God are here joined by the human experience of “development and openness” and “basis and principles.” Correspondingly, there is a constant experience of “further transformations” which encompasses all of human experience via the praise of God. In other words, praise remains primary. “This developing experience, which we view from the perspective of the praise of God,

⁴⁶ Ibid., 27 (21).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 29 (23).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

embraces intellect, will, feelings and imagination, as well as the social and corporate dimensions of life.”⁵¹

A “further” theological perspective on the praise of God in human experience is thus the goal of *Jubilate*. The abundant use of words such as “overflow”, “developing”, “constant”, and “continual” strongly imply that “further” indicates a generative experience of praise which Hardy and Ford aim to describe. As they set out to explicate the theological nature of this generativity, they commence with two respective studies of how praise in the past affects the present through biblical text and tradition.

ii. Praise in Text and Tradition

Scripture, for Hardy and Ford, is a product of praise. “Our own key to interpreting it...is as a book primarily related to God and written by people who were engaged in praising him.”⁵² Praise underwrites the original production of Scripture through “the supreme attempt to acknowledge to God what was most fundamental for the community: God and God’s activity.”⁵³ This God-centeredness yields the “perfect” perspective from which textual-transmission transpires:

Praise is therefore the perfect vantage point on the whole, and contains in essence the characteristic patterns and structures informing the community. These are likely to have been the ‘deep structures’ through which the identity of the community was shaped over many years. ...Add to all this the process of writing, collecting, testing, sifting and editing that went into the formation of the canon of Scripture as it slowly accumulated... In each generation the tradition was learnt and modified in the context of praise of God, and knowing God was inseparable from praising him.⁵⁴

The net theological results are once again clear: praise and knowledge of God inextricably bound together in the community of faith.

Having thus grounded interpretation in praise the authors inquire about “the heart of all this praise.” In terms of human experience they propose “two key acts: recognition and respect.” These acts are then considered in three biblical contexts: the letter to the Philippians, the Gospel of Mark, and the Psalms.

Philippians exemplifies the praise of God in Christian existence. “[A] mature expression of (Paul’s) faith in concentrated form...it shows the transformation of an

⁵¹ Ibid., 29 (23).

⁵² Ibid., 31 (24).

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 31, 32 (24, 25).

existence taken up into the praise of God.”⁵⁵ Of particular note is the biblical contextualization of Christian existence as joy which confronts suffering. “The whole Letter reinforces this message that praise and joy are not optional extras in faith, but its very life, and that it is possible to grow in them through suffering (1:29f) as well as blessings.”⁵⁶ Nothing elucidates this better than the early christology of Philippians 2:1-11 which “locks together the new content of Christian praise with the conduct of ordinary relationships.”⁵⁷ In the desire for completion of his joy, Paul calls for “an ethic of active recognition and respect which is the interpersonal counterpart of the praise of Christ.”⁵⁸ This requires “a new sort of mind” which is given to believers as the “privilege of taking part in God’s own way of life.”⁵⁹ To underscore this, Hardy and Ford quote Philippians 2: 5-8:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.⁶⁰

The reality which Paul lives and promotes every day is the reality of joy in the crucified and risen Christ. This other-directed, God-centered reality is the context of praise. Commenting on Philippians 4, Hardy and Ford write, “The otherness of God is here stated absolutely, but not as a threat or discouragement in the use of the mind. Rather, rejoicing in the Lord and appreciating his glory is the only safe context for full and free intellectual and emotional life.”⁶¹ Faith is also characterized by joy regardless of circumstances. “Praise, joy in the Lord, is the mediation through which (Paul) faces ordinary life and suffering.”⁶²

The christological reality described in Philippians is, according Hardy and Ford, “the same transformation that Mark makes the pivot point of his Gospel, the new astonishing form of God’s glory in the world. It becomes the content of a praise, initiated by God, that is to be the supreme activity of all people.”⁶³ Unsurprisingly,

⁵⁵ Ibid, 33 (25).

⁵⁶ Ibid., 33-34 (26).

⁵⁷ Ibid., 34 (26).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 34 (27).

⁶¹ Ibid. 38-39 (30).

⁶² Ibid, 39 (30).

⁶³ Ibid., 34-35 (27).

Hardy and Ford's examination of Mark focuses on the generativity culminating from the suffering and subsequent glory of Christ:

In the way he has told his story, especially in the transfiguration sequence and in the events from the Last Supper through Gethsemane to Easter, Mark has portrayed a network of relations which he wants to imprint on all Christian praise, preaching and discipleship. Crucial to that network is appreciation of the glory of Jesus as suffering and resurrected Messiah.⁶⁴

Hardy and Ford stress the reality of Jesus at the center of Mark's narrative. "Above all, (Mark's) grasp of the dazzling event with which (his narrative) ends is meant to encourage his readers to live from this new reality and never to accept its domestication or to dissociate it from *ekstasis*."⁶⁵

Hardy and Ford conclude their biblical exploration with a return to the Old Testament and the Psalms. Their work here focuses mainly on situating praise in the developmental theory of Israel's cult. Less explicitly theological ground is covered as the section makes a general survey of how Old Testament liturgy evolved into post-exilic Judaism and eventually early Christianity. Nevertheless, in sentiments akin to Brueggemann's more substantial work on Psalms they write, "...the Psalms are classic expressions of the lively intensity of praise of God. They offer above all a vehicle for realistic but jubilant joy in God, taking up the good and the bad into a faith that always (even if it takes a struggle) results in praise of God."⁶⁶ This concludes their brief examination of both testaments which demonstrates that "...the Bible shows praise of God to be the heart of Old and New Testament communities."⁶⁷

Tradition, according to Hardy and Ford, is dynamically united through time with the work of the biblical writers. "This unity flows essentially from the continual relating of everything to God."⁶⁸ Their chapter on Christian tradition continues the theme of praise rooted in God, this time emphasizing the aspects of the church which emerge from a distinctly Trinitarian understanding. The authors suggest, "the most important question is: who is this God? The answer of the Christian tradition is a surprising one: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The focus and inspiration of all praising and living is God the Trinity."⁶⁹ An extended analogy immediately follows

⁶⁴ Ibid., 46 (36).

⁶⁵ Ibid., 47, (36).

⁶⁶ Ibid., 48 (37).

⁶⁷ Ibid., 59 (46).

⁶⁸ Ibid., 60 (47).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

whereby trinitarian thought is seen to permeate the work of Dante in a way similar to the development of trinitarian doctrine in the history of the Church itself. "...the Trinitarian pattern for thinking of God pervades the *Divine Comedy*. It is the 'deep structure' of his understanding of reality, but one which (as in most good psalms) is presented in a variety of mediated ways. The same is true of the whole Christian tradition."⁷⁰ Hardy and Ford note the benefits of this "deep structure," including the crucial contribution of the Trinity in negating idolatry, but their pronounced emphasis is reserved for the "positive" aspects of the Trinity.

What was the positive contribution of the doctrine of the Trinity? Praise is, among other things, a form of thinking, and aims to 'think God' as adequately as possible. The Trinity gives the logic of Christian praise, the way one thought or concept follows from another and coheres with all the others. It is not just a string of implications, it is a whole 'ecology.'⁷¹

This ecology calls for radical theological reconsideration which goes beyond "Judaism or Greek philosophy or a combination of these" in rethinking the person of God, who is now reassessed in light of Christ. "What was thought to characterize God alone—new creation, universal lordship, ultimate salvation, and the receiving of worship—was now identified also with the person and activity of Jesus Christ."⁷² Such rethinking also includes the Spirit. "Further, the Holy Spirit was experienced not just as the energy of worship but as the generative thrust of every act that honoured God. It was not an impersonal impulse but the presence of God."⁷³

The remainder of the chapter explores and expands upon the implications of trinitarian doctrinal development through varied contexts including the early church, the implications of the cross in Luther's theology, and the 20th century influence of Pentecostalism. Of particular note is Luther, for it is in his theology of the cross that Hardy and Ford claim a "corrective" grounding which gives Christian praise an ethical edge. "(Luther's concept of grace) is defined through the crucified Christ. The ethics and Christian living that flow from this are described again and again as a matter of gratitude before God..."⁷⁴ While the wide-ranging exploration here foreshadows ideas

⁷⁰ Ibid., 67-68 (53).

⁷¹ Ibid., 71, (56).

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 72 (57).

⁷⁴ Ibid., 81, (64).

better developed in later chapters, the work at hand repeatedly stresses all aspects of praise tied together through “the master theme: God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”⁷⁵

iii. Praise in Christian Existence and the Existence of Evil

Having surveyed the influence of text and tradition, Hardy and Ford return to their present theological concern of linking praise of God to the human experience of that praise. Again, like Brueggemann, both authors are ever concerned for how their theology impacts the life of the Church; consequently, the chapter “Basic Christian Existence as Praise” is, according to the authors, “the central chapter and in many ways the book pivots around it.”⁷⁶ They begin by provocatively comparing Christian existence to “a laugh,” a metaphor suggested by the poetry of Patrick Kavanagh who “calls the resurrection of Jesus ‘...a laugh freed for ever and ever.’”⁷⁷ Once again, the implication here is a generative one. “Part of the logic of laughter, poetry and praise is that of intensification and overflow. ...The resurrection of the crucified Jesus Christ is this logic at the heart of Christianity.”⁷⁸ The generativity of this logic is what creates the further theological perspective Hardy and Ford find through praising God. “The basis of Christian existence is not just a basis. It is also an environment of abundance created through this overflow of life, and giving reason for praise in all situations. If this is basic reality then all of existence can be thought through in the light of it.”⁷⁹

Practically speaking, the authors aim “to trace a pervasive pattern and possibility for ordinary life that the perspective of praise illuminates.”⁸⁰ The “master key” of praise is considered in light of two concepts briefly introduced in the earlier chapter on scripture—recognition and respect. “The plea for recognition and affirmation is heard from cradle to the tombstone,” is “intrinsic to our identity,” and elucidates the nature of human dignity which “embraces ‘human rights’ but is far wider.”⁸¹ The “heart of human dignity is the free respect given by one person to another, recognizing their otherness, their distinctive life, the irreducible pluralism of being persons in relation.”⁸²

⁷⁵ Ibid., 89 (70).

⁷⁶ Ibid., 90 (71).

⁷⁷ Ibid., 92 (73).

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 92-93 (73).

⁸⁰ Ibid., 93 (74).

⁸¹ Ibid., 94, 95 (74, 75).

⁸² Ibid., 95, (75).

For Christian identity this connotes “dying to self,” taking up the cross of Christ, and becoming a servant. “The nerve-centre of our identity is aimed at by the call to follow Jesus on his way to the cross.”⁸³

Here, Hardy and Ford’s alignment of praise with cross and resurrection moves in a direction which Ford will build upon in his subsequent work. The understanding of the cross in *Jubilate* has an emphasis on exteriority, which Ford later develops in interaction with the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and others, as ethical responsibility rooted in the suffering death of Christ. In this context, the otherness of Christ’s death is a testament to the respect for otherness offered humanity even in its sinful condition.

The crucifixion of Jesus is the summary of God’s respect for creation. This is God’s speech expressed in suffering. He lets people be themselves, lets them have their freedom even to be wrong, to ignore him and to show disrespect to the point of killing. This is met not with counter-force but with a willingness to go through the final destructive experience and so respect the power that has been given to the world. The resurrection is not a simple reversal of this or a way of giving in, a few days late, to the taunt: ‘Come down from the cross.’ It is the overcoming of evil and death in a way that utterly respects but also judges and shows the limits of the world.⁸⁴

Hardy and Ford’s juxtaposition of God’s respect for humanity with God’s judgment of humanity is illustrative of their desire to situate human freedom in the purview of God’s costly redemption. Unlike Brueggemann’s mature work, there is no division of divine fidelity from sovereignty here: “(God) is prepared to follow through to their limits the negative consequences of his genuine, respectful participation in history.”⁸⁵

The chapter closes with reference to the life and martyrdom of Dietrich Bonhoeffer as an example of a particular Christian “self” engaged in the realities of Christ’s redemption. “Bonhoeffer’s way is of constantly renewed recognition of God in all complexities and agonies of living, and an accompanying liberation from concern for oneself.”⁸⁶ His example puts into practice what Hardy and Ford mean in theory. “The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the ultimate standpoint for Christian praise, and there we find an event and person that relativises all differences in maturity, achievement and capacity.”⁸⁷

The scope of redemptive transformation is expanded upon in the following chapter, “Evil, Suffering and Death.” Shame, not sin, is introduced as the key

⁸³ Ibid., 96 (76).

⁸⁴ Ibid., 101 (79-80).

⁸⁵ Ibid., 102 (81).

⁸⁶ Ibid., 111, (87).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

experiential reality, not in ignorance of the latter but because shame “is not just a moral experience, and it is more comprehensive than guilt.”⁸⁸ Right shame calls us back to the true state of things before God, while wrong shame corrupts right shame and destroys the joy of self praising God. Christ is the decisive response to both. “The crucifixion itself was the climax of shame, in which its many dimensions focused...The New Testament pivots round the sequel to this. In the perspective of shame, the resurrection does what is most needed: it vindicates.”⁸⁹ The cross and its vindicating resurrection then transform the identity of those who worship Christ.

So shame is opposed from the inside by suffering it, embodying it, and going to the roots of it as perversion of respect. The result is a new object of respect and boasting, Jesus Christ. This transforms the meaning of shame and liberates it for the two basic Christian activities of worship and witness. Not to be ashamed of Jesus Christ becomes the central mark of identity of the Christian Church.⁹⁰

Boasting in Christ is contrasted with a false solution to shame—stoicism. “Stoics avoid the ravages and abyss of shame at the cost of the possibility of joy. Their world is marked by order and imperturbability in face of disorder, but they miss what we have called the reality of overflow.”⁹¹

In presenting Christ as an alternative to stoicism, Hardy and Ford call “for a new concept in the description of both good and evil,” which relates back to laughter as “not order, nor is it disorder: our term for its ‘non-order’.”⁹² Shame’s perversion of this combination can only be overcome, once again, by the saving work of Christ.

Affliction itself is, in our terms, the worst perversion of good order and of non-order together. Jesus meets it with a further dimension of non-order, of overflow: he suffers it for others, identifies completely and gets sucked in. ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ is the result.⁹³

⁸⁸ Ibid., 112 (89).

⁸⁹ Ibid., 117 (93).

⁹⁰ Ibid., 119 (94).

⁹¹ Ibid., 120 (95).

⁹² Ibid., 121 (96). Hardy and Ford observe a reality beyond common sense order, which they align with the goodness of God, and oppose to the mere disorder manifested in sin. This goodness expands beyond the positive ordering of rule and law towards the realm of play, as well as aspects of art and creativity and laughter which they find to be “a free overflow, not reducible to one meaning or truth, a sequence of odd sounds pouring out, often spreading from one person to another, creating a new atmosphere and producing all sorts of unpredictable results” (124). These are the characteristics of non-order, but they do not undermine the goodness of order. Rather praise as a reality of goodness “likewise is a combination of order and non-order.”

⁹³ Ibid., 123-124 (98).

What ultimately creates the overflow here is the resurrection. “In the vindication of the resurrection this becomes the essence of the new free order.”⁹⁴

Vindication of God in light of evil brings the themes of this chapter together. After considering evil from the side of both sufferers and perpetrators, Hardy and Ford lay the problem before God via a discussion of theodicy. Calling the issue “necessarily inconclusive,” they reflect on common propensities and problems of any theodicy before concluding the following:

If it is granted that evil is a possibility in a world where freedom is valued, the answer to evil must be in the possibility of a free response to it that genuinely meets and overcomes it. ...In other words, God needs to be vindicated by God, and theodicy will depend on recognising this justification.⁹⁵

Hardy and Ford believe the above to be the best understanding of theodicy in light of Scripture, as seen particularly through the Psalms⁹⁶ and the New Testament.⁹⁷ Moreover, they stress the centrality of God in confronting evil:

The vehemence of this rejection of God and the energy put into creating alternatives to faith in him overflow and spread in ways that cannot be stemmed, *except by a knowledge of God that is embodied in a way of life which comprehensively affirms him* in the face of evil and hatred and is taken up into the free overflow of praise.⁹⁸

Unlike Brueggemann’s proposal, recognizing the problem of evil in light of the explicit vindication of God in Christ does not, for Hardy and Ford, ignore the problem. “Rather, it places the cross and continuing discipleship at the centre of faith which lives in a world of evil but fights it with confidence in a crucified and risen Lord.”⁹⁹

iv. Praise and the Triune God

“The final three chapters,” write Hardy and Ford, “take complementary perspectives on God, roughly corresponding to God as Trinity.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ Ibid., 124 (98).

⁹⁵ Ibid., 130-131 (104). Rodd, review of Hardy and Ford, 98, notes, “The authors are not entirely happy about producing a theodicy, but the form that they develop is an extension of the freewill defence.”

⁹⁶ Ibid., 131 (104). “Vindication of God by God is the source of the Psalmists’ hope and praise, appearing in nearly every Psalm, and especially in the depths of suffering.”

⁹⁷ Ibid., 133 (105). “In the New Testament the theme of vindication is concentrated in Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. ...Praise of God celebrates God’s self-identification through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.”

⁹⁸ Ibid., 133-134 (106).

⁹⁹ Ibid., 134 (106).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 5 (4).

The first of these is entitled “Knowing God.” Here the focus lies on God as Creator who “both creates and respects what is created,” and as Christ who, through cross and resurrection, enables our response in knowledge and praise.¹⁰¹ Such knowledge of God, contra allegations of projectionism, is about stretching the imagination, a transformation at the root of trinitarian understanding.

If (Christ’s) crucifixion and resurrection are taken as the event ‘than which none greater can be conceived’ this is another way of expressing what was central to first Christians: the ultimate eschatological nature of what happened. It is an event embracing affirmative and negative, but not in equilibrium—the cross is taken up into the new life in overflow, while persisting in its critique of all escapism, idolatry and projection. The new event is recognized and responded to ‘in the Spirit’.¹⁰²

For Hardy and Ford, the cross and resurrection and the subsequent ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit become “the criteria of knowledge of God, the points of greatest clarity” shaping the fullness of Christian witness and granting primacy to the story of Christ as revealed in the New Testament.¹⁰³ This is the basis for all knowledge of God which is then related to the world and “spread by telling its story.”¹⁰⁴

The particular story of Christ is central to the penultimate chapter “Jesus is Our Praise.” Here the cross and resurrection are seen to “explode” into the generative realities of Christian praise through the Spirit.

The crucifixion, seen as the will of God in the face of evil, shows the double-bind that God himself is in when dealing with evil. There is the classic Zen dilemma in which the master tells the pupil that he will beat him with his stick if he does a certain action and will also beat him if he does not. People put God in a similar position. ...*The crucifixion can be seen as God’s way of taking the stick of the problem of evil, and also taking responsibility for all that it involves.* But unlike the Zen solution, which merely reverses the master-pupil relationship and keeps the relationship of authority (though Zen too can go beyond this), *this exchange in the crucifixion transforms the relationship itself. The resurrection shows what it is.* There is something beyond the double-binds and paralyzing vicious circles of evil. *It brings a new shared responsibility between God and man,* offering all and demanding all within an ecology of freedom, blessing and praise...*The new sharing between God and man explodes from the resurrection,* with its double focus on the glorified Jesus and his sending out others round the world. The energy and life of this sharing is the Holy Spirit, and the message it carries is ‘Jesus is our praise’. The risen Jesus is beyond the dilemmas of disunity and the paradoxes of evil, and moves freely in the Spirit, liberating from the double-binds.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 144 (114).

¹⁰³ Ibid., 152-153 (121).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 154 (122).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 161, 162 (128, 129), italics mine.

That sharing which “explodes from the resurrection” results in continual outward manifestations of praise corresponding to a new Christian responsibility toward the world.

Resurrection is God’s way of referring back Jesus to the world...It is not a neutral, amoral fact about what happened to a corpse. It climaxes the pattern of responsibility between man and God. God takes responsibility for everything, the resurrection is an initiative of God alone, but he gives back a new responsibility. For the disciples the resurrection was an experience of joy and vocation together. There is the joyful freedom of complete forgiveness and acceptance in the welcome of Jesus, and the *limitless responsibility* of mission to the whole world.¹⁰⁶

Hardy and Ford bring to fruition here their transformative theology of praise. Joy becomes inextricable from outward action, a “vocation” of “limitless responsibility” established in the praise of Christ, crucified and resurrected. And nowhere is the transformative power of this praise more evident than in how it presently witnesses to the past in open anticipation of the future.

Thus “Praise and Prophecy” is the subject of *Jubilate*’s final chapter concerning the overflowing nature of faith sustained in ongoing Christian life. Prophecy is a dynamic, human discernment of God which becomes manifest as the Holy Spirit makes possible human life in hope.¹⁰⁷ The Spirit also integrates the overflow which, in contrast to the tension of Brueggemann’s theology, defines Hardy and Ford’s conclusions about human response to suffering in the light of God in Christ. “The gospel is that all sin, evil and suffering, all need and want, can now be seen in the perspective of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in which God acts in such a way that the realistic response is joy.”¹⁰⁸

B. Putting the Theological Pieces Together

i. Viewing the Big Picture

Throughout *Jubilate* numerous themes present themselves and then reemerge in new contexts. If we continue to follow Brueggemann’s suggestion of treating the work

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 158, 159 (126), italics mine.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 185 (147), “The Holy Spirit in the Church produces that mature, tested hope which Paul describes, oriented towards the ultimate hope of sharing God’s glory. It is a lively movement with three basic dynamics which have also emerged in the previous chapters: the overflow of praise to God, offering him everything; the overflow of love in a community that shares in the Holy Spirit; and the overflow in mission to the world. ...The prophetic signs of our times are that Christian praise, community and mission are being integrated in new ways.”

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 190 (150).

as like a mosaic, then on the “surface” the text is inconsistent and irregular in terms of consistent word use and meaning and the multiple semantic layers tacked on to many thoughts and ideas.¹⁰⁹ However, viewing a mosaic also requires stepping back from the details of the surface to see the whole, an activity intended to bring integration to seemingly disparate parts. By the end of *Jubilate*, certain theological themes can be consistently found to connect the authors’ wide-spread examination and application of praise.

First is the “economy of praise” proposed through an ever-widening circle of relation to God. Praise, worship and, by extension, joy which results from Christian faith are the guiding influences throughout the course of this work from the initial paradoxical statement that “Praise perfects perfection.” Methodologically, praise is oriented by the infinite expansion of God towards creation, something which becomes more evident through *Jubilate*’s first appendix.

As we concluded earlier, God is self-same in his expansion, and is so (a) by positing a direction for his expanding perfection and (b) by originating that from perfection which has already come to be; this is what establishes the activity of God in an economy of praise. Now the nature of such praise is not to be distant, alienated from that which it has originated. Therefore, even as God expands, as an ‘expanding circumference’, he remains close to all that he has previously originated in the history of creation, retaining its direction and movement by continuing to establish ‘space’ for it to be itself and ‘moving’ it to its true being.¹¹⁰

The “movement” articulated here suggests praise is an activity whereby God becomes more manifest as humanity becomes more human. However, Hardy and Ford adamantly assert the initiating of this activity has its exclusive origin in an already perfect God. “Thus, the economy which is in God is that of an inner distinction in God which posits a direction for his expanding perfection, and it can be characterized as an economy of praise, one which establishes the character of God as praise.”¹¹¹ This “inner distinction in God” is not so much the distinct focus of *Jubilate*; more central is the proposal that such a distinction moves toward and through humanity. Thus, Hardy and Ford add that

¹⁰⁹ Wood, review of Hardy and Ford, 367, “While the criticisms generally have merit...the constructive alternatives on the whole are only very sketchily suggested. ...This is true as well of some of the book’s more central themes, where the rationale for some of the choices made could stand to be more explicit.”

¹¹⁰ Hardy and Ford, *Jubilate*, “Appendix A”, 164. The language here is not without certain difficulties, e.g. the phrase “originating that from his perfection which has already *come to be*” (italics mine). Such wording could appear to assume God as a finite being, something which Hardy and Ford do not seem to otherwise suggest, but something perhaps inadvertently suggested by their language here.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

“...for this to regenerate humanity, God’s economy of praise would actually have to become operative in man, displacing that which undermines it.”¹¹²

This constitutes the second pervasive theme in *Jubilate*’s theology. Hardy and Ford unceasingly relate God’s economy of praise to humanity through the cross and resurrection of Christ.¹¹³ Atonement in Christ is clearly proposed as God’s response to human suffering. Christ’s person and work reverses the offense of humanity through a closeness which is in fact an “inside” job, atonement of incarnational proportion. Hardy and Ford assert that evil is “opposed from the inside by suffering it, embodying it, and going to the roots of it as the perversion of respect...This transforms the meaning of shame and liberates it for the two basic Christian activities of worship and witness.”¹¹⁴

Nevertheless, most central to *Jubilate* is how these two above themes come together in the ongoing experience of human life, or more specifically, “the inner movement of God’s relationship with man through the life of praise.”¹¹⁵ This third theme is described as nothing less than life-affirming, life-sustaining overflow. “The basis of Christian existence is not just a basis. It is also an environment of abundance created through this overflow of life, and giving reason for praise in all situations. If this is basic reality then all of existence can be thought through in the light of it.”¹¹⁶ Again, such an overflow is made possible through and characterized by the cross and resurrection.

If (Christ’s) crucifixion and resurrection are taken as the event ‘than which none greater can be conceived’ this is another way of expressing what was central to first Christians: the ultimate eschatological nature of what happened. It is an event embracing

¹¹² Ibid., 165.

¹¹³ Ibid., 166-67, “What is it then which reverses the offence, and completes the reconstitutive act in Jesus? It is the persistent presence of the expanding perfection of God, now shown to expand even through its own defeat and to remain closer than ever to man, even in his materiality, in doing so. As the life and death of Jesus were the expanding closeness to man of the economy of God’s praise, despite the restrictions placed on this by man, so the resurrection was the supervening of the economy of praise over its contradictions. If the death of Jesus had been offensive to God, notwithstanding the fact that Jesus had reversed the blaming by which he was crucified, this offensiveness was itself taken away by God’s own praise given material form in the resurrection of Jesus, and those who crucified him were returned to praise in place of the blame which was due them.”

¹¹⁴ *Jubilate*, 119 (94).

¹¹⁵ Hardy and Ford, *Jubilate*, “Appendix A”, 170. This purpose is declared as Hardy and Ford evaluate *Jubilate* in comparison to Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life* (London: Epworth, 1980). Wainwright’s work, in Hardy and Ford’s view essentially fails “to establish the inner movement or ‘grammar’ of God’s relationship with man.” (169). On the next page they continue, “So, by comparison with Wainwright’s book, we have attempted to explore the inner movement of God’s relationship with man through the life of praise, and allow that to show how worship operates, and knowing and behaving (including their doctrinal and ethical form) arise. We also make that movement the criterion for the examination of Christian materials, and for a systematic theology.”

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 92-93 (73).

affirmative and negative, but not in equilibrium—the cross is taken up into the new life in overflow, while persisting in its critique of all escapism, idolatry and projection. The new event is recognized and responded to ‘in the Spirit’.¹¹⁷

The theological inner workings of “overflow” are briefly sketched out here: the cross is “taken up” into the new life of the resurrection, overcoming the destructive overflow of evil, suffering and death. The Holy Spirit provides the modes of recognition and response, modes which are “essentially practical” for the human condition.¹¹⁸ Practically speaking such recognition and response are necessary conditions to confronting evil.

The vehemence of this rejection of God and the energy put into creating alternatives to faith in him overflow and spread in ways that cannot be stemmed, *except by a knowledge of God that is embodied in a way of life which comprehensively affirms him* in the face of evil and hatred and is taken up into the free overflow of praise.¹¹⁹

The free overflow of praise is a God-given, God-generated reality of faith which, in the power of the Spirit, “lives in a world of evil but fights it with confidence in a crucified and risen Lord.”¹²⁰

ii. Deflecting the Reality of Lament or Reflecting the Reality of God’s Faithfulness in Christ?

At first glance, connections between Brueggemann’s work and *Jubilate* may not appear obvious. The former always works with the issues of contemporary biblical studies in mind, whereas Hardy and Ford write from an overtly theological perspective. Brueggemann’s scholarship often examines the relationship between praise and lament, while lament is hardly an explicit issue in *Jubilate*. The only such discussion involving a lament text occurs fittingly though briefly, in Chapter 6, “Evil, Suffering and Death,” where Hardy and Ford discuss suffering and the Psalms.

The Psalmist continually cries out against the ‘enemies’ who thrive on slander, fear, violence, deceit and the perversion of goodness and trust. He often recognizes his own

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 144 (114).

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 133 (106), “Evil’s historical particularity is met on the cross, and evil’s dynamic, spreading overflow through history is met by the Spirit of the resurrected Lord. It is an answer to evil that is essentially practical, taking the form of a call to live in this Spirit and follow the way of the cross, trusting in the vindication of God by God.”

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 133-134 (106), italics mine.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 134 (106).

sin and need for repentance, but beyond that is in no doubt about the evil that shapes the state of the world.¹²¹

The chapter later proposes the specific implications of laments such as Psalm 69.

Vindication of God by God is the source of the Psalmists' hope and praise, appearing in nearly every Psalm, and especially in the depths of suffering....The theodicy of the Psalms is one of complaint, questioning and passionate protest, but all this is embraced by a faith in God as vindicator in spite of all appearances, resulting in a theodicy of praise.¹²²

Despite the brevity of such a discussion on complaint and lament, Hardy and Ford's theology surfaces a valuable perspective for interacting with Brueggemann's concerns over praise, particularly in the light of theological issues which arise in his emphasis on lament. *Jubilate* affords us a context in which to push Brueggemann's pressing theological question. Is Hardy and Ford's position so subsumed "under the aegis of Easter joy" that they fail to properly engage "Saturday issues even on Monday?" Does their understanding of the overflow of praise simply deflect the suffering and sorrow of lament or could it actually reflect how such sorrow is taken up into the reality of God's faithfulness in Christ?

To be sure, *Jubilate* unceasingly emphasizes that reality itself is praise in and through God. Brueggemann comments upon this in his review:

Their orientation is in a classical philosophical direction that is aimed at the objective reality of God in God's own self. Thus they speak about "perfection" in God. My own biblical orientation would be to speak about God's fidelity as the center of our life with God, but it is precisely perfection rather than fidelity that belongs to the heart of the argument, for they want to make a statement about the sheer reality of God, apart from those who are invited to praise.¹²³

At the time of this writing, Brueggemann's own work has yet to come to maturity. As we have seen, he later strongly critiques this understanding of reality¹²⁴ while also complicating his own view of divine fidelity by separating it from divine sovereignty.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Ibid., 115 (91).

¹²² Ibid., 131 (104).

¹²³ Brueggemann, review of Hardy and Ford, 99.

¹²⁴ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 64, 65, "Our intellectual inheritance has characteristically preferred "being" to rhetoric, and therefore has assumed that metaphysics is a much more serious matter than is speech. That outcome is that issues of God are foreclosed before disputatious utterance rather than in and through disputatious utterance....The issues are exceedingly difficult, but we must at least recognize that what has passed for an essentialist or realist position has in fact been the attempt of hegemonic speech that sought to silence all alternative utterance."

¹²⁵ See Ch. 3 above.

Beyond his dedication as an Old Testament scholar, Brueggemann is keenly concerned that theologically prioritizing praise can and will become ideologically destructive by producing faith which cannot or will not account for voices which lament suffering. “It is my judgment that while the Old Testament can make assumptions about and claims for what is real, it is unable and unwilling to do so by way of silencing countervoices.”¹²⁶ He is most concerned for this tendency in the history and practice of Christian theology. For him, the only alternative is a view of biblical faith where God arises in the endlessly disputatious rhetorical tension of texts such as praise and lament. A view of faith which can never ultimately affirm God’s faithfulness, apparently even in Christ’s cross and resurrection.

However, for all of their theological prioritization of the praise of God as true reality, Hardy and Ford hardly seem to be “silencing countervoices” but rather reconceiving “Christian communication”:

Yet the very conception of much Christian communication has been questionable. It has often presented the good news in functional terms: it is useful for meeting needs, crises, limitations or other problems. It has been a gospel that fills gaps in one’s life, or repairs things that have gone wrong, or is essentially practical in a host of ways. The seductiveness of this is that there is indeed good news for every problematic situation and person. The flaw lies in its missing the free praise of God, the generosity, the foolish abundance far beyond all need and practicality. The gospel is that all sin, evil and suffering, all need and want, can now be seen in the perspective of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in which God acts in such a way that the realistic response is joy. Even beyond this, it is the joy of love between us and God, the ultimate mutuality and intimacy.¹²⁷

Hardy and Ford pull no punches in asserting that “*all sin, evil and suffering...can now be seen in the perspective of the resurrection*” (italics mine). Through God’s self-expression in the person and work of Christ, human reality is truly made anew. Yet the very way in which God’s faithfulness overflows into human experience also shapes the nature of Christian expectation.

Recognizing and responding to this God inevitably leads to evangelism and mission as acts of love and celebration, longing for others to share in something whose delight increases by being shared. Yet expressions of praise easily become overbearing and triumphalist, and so does evangelism. When this happens, there is a contradiction of the message. The history of evangelism is extremely painful, full of examples of the message being falsified by the way it is spread. The crucifixion of Jesus is the only essential guard against this. It contradicts all glib praise and preaching. It continually demands the repentance, reconversion, suffering and even death of the evangelist. ...The temptations of Jesus show the classic traps of evangelism—use of worldly

¹²⁶ Brueggemann, *TOT*, 65.

¹²⁷ Hardy and Ford, *Jubilate*, 189-90, (150).

incentives, spectacular events and manipulative power. The alternative is the way of the cross, from which the true ethic of evangelism springs: an ethic of radical respect which refuses any coercive communication, preferring to suffer and die; but which also refuses to compromise on what is communicated.¹²⁸

The praise of God refuses coercive or manipulative action through faith in the cross as “the true ethic of evangelism.” The overflowing power of God in Christ does not lead to praise which refuses suffering but desires instead to identify to the furthest extent with the suffering of the cross. Thus the cross “guards” against triumphalism not by failing to express God’s victory in Christ, but by reshaping human expectation of salvation through the sufferings of Christ for the sake of communicating and manifesting the praise of God. As quoted previously, Hardy and Ford understand the cross as “an event embracing affirmative and negative, but not in equilibrium—the cross is taken up into the new life in overflow, while persisting in its critique of all escapism, idolatry and projection.”¹²⁹

Furthermore, praise manifests the abundance of God as not simply flowing within the church but overflowing from God out into the world via the Holy Spirit. This produces important consequences for how faith responds to the world:

God is already ahead of all evangelism, carrying on his mission in the world, and this adds further dimensions to the ethic of respect. It means that the abundance of God is poured out way beyond the boundaries of the Church, and a vital task is in discerning this abundance and accepting it with joy. There is no Christian triumphalism in a theology of the all-sufficiency and abundance of God. More often than not, respectful discernment will demand drastic changes of heart and mind, as for Peter with his own traditions. Christians are only beginning to glimpse the comprehensive repercussions of this in relation to the various sciences, other religions, philosophies and ways of living.... But without the right content and mode of affirmation of God the horizon is lacking within which all that can take place.¹³⁰

Faith functions as a doxological “horizon” of understanding which, for Hardy and Ford, is ultimately established christologically. “The crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ is therefore at the heart of the method as well as the content of Christian mission.”¹³¹

Jubilate refuses to articulate praise outside of Christ. Thus praise, understood as the fullness of divine and human reality, cannot merely function as the theological counterbalance to lament. Though, on an explicit level, they hardly deal with lament in relation to praise, Hardy and Ford nonetheless account for the reality of suffering so

¹²⁸ Ibid., 190 (150-1).

¹²⁹ Ibid., 144 (114). See op. cit.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 191 (151).

¹³¹ Ibid., (151-2).

acutely expressed through lamentation addressed to God. By understanding praise particularly in relation to the cross and resurrection of Christ, Hardy and Ford discern the shape and movement of faith through God's own human self-expression, the dynamic which they so often label as the overflow of praise. They then demonstrate that this overflow in human experience, made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit, neither finds itself overrunning suffering in a destructive triumphalist sense nor, contra Brueggemann, purely remaining in tension with suffering. Neither of these options adequately account for the vindicating sacrifice and eschatological hope made manifest in Christ. Only in the horizon of the cross *and* resurrection can praise in relation to suffering finally be understood.¹³² And it is only in this christological sense that Hardy and Ford propose that praise can be expected to overflow the darkest of human realities even now in the present. Again as *Jubilate* concludes, "The gospel is that all sin, evil and suffering, all need and want, *can now be seen* in the perspective of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in which God acts in such a way that the realistic response is joy."¹³³

II. *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians: Ford's Collaboration with Frances Young*

A. Reflecting God's Glory: Conceptualizing the Overflow of Faith in 2 Corinthians

Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians, a theological commentary coauthored by Ford and Frances Young a few years after *Jubilate*'s first publication, further develops Ford's conceptualization of the overflowing nature of faith through Christian praise. While one Pauline epistle serves here as the central theological guide, conclusions similar to those presented in Ford's work with Hardy quickly emerge from this scriptural context.¹³⁴ Moreover, 2 Corinthians also allows Ford to introduce the "face of

¹³² Ibid., (105-6). "In the New Testament the theme of vindication is concentrated in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. ...God involved with evil, suffering and death in such a way that their terrible reality is recognized and more than adequately met. The resurrection is not a containment or a reversal or a denial of this reality; it is the revelation of the one person who goes through them in God's way and creates an alternative."

¹³³ Ibid., 190 (150), italics mine.

¹³⁴ Ford also later underscores the importance of joy in 2 Corinthians (particularly in relation to Paul's authority) in his 1998 presidential address to the Society for the Study of Theology published in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53, no. 1 (2000): 58-9.

Christ” as a new and innovative concept for properly understanding the overflow of faith first discerned in *Jubilate*.

i. God’s Glory and Paul’s Overflowing Faith

Ford and Young begin with Paul’s commitment to God’s glory,¹³⁵ which is the apostle’s focus through either joy or suffering, even when the latter is his own.

So Paul is afflicted, oppressed, persecuted, bearing everywhere in his body the killing of Jesus. But this is the means of communicating life. His very sufferings prove that the life he has is not his own but that of Jesus. His vocation is to play out over and over again the death and resurrection pattern. And the purpose is to absorb affliction, destruction and death, to fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, so as to communicate power, life, the Spirit. It is for the sake of the Corinthians; its purpose is the overflow of grace into more and more people, causing an overflow of thanksgiving to God’s glory (4:15). Once more Paul is picking up the language and themes of his previous discussions, and the principal drive of his mission is encapsulated in phrases pointing not to worldly success but to the glory of God in worship.¹³⁶

While the above words are attributed to Young,¹³⁷ several themes are characteristic of how Ford comes to theologically tie together Christian identity in joy and worship, suffering and responsibility. First, Paul’s identity, his very “life,” is found in identifying with Christ. Second, Paul’s responsibility, his “vocation,” is found in repeatedly living out the pattern of Christ’s death and resurrection. Third, the purpose of this living into “affliction” is to manifest the “overflow of grace” which generates “an overflow of thanksgiving to God’s glory.” Fourth, Paul’s entire motivation is summarized as the “glory of God in worship.” Young and Ford’s interlinking of each of these aspects of Pauline theology is consistent with how Ford’s other work talks of Christian identity in terms of a generative circularity. Worship overflows into manifestations of sacrificial suffering along the lines of Christ death and resurrection so that grace and thanksgiving may again overflow to the glory of God.

Young further finds a parallel between the overflowing faith of Paul’s example and the Psalms. “So with the confidence of the Psalmist...and reinforced by the power

¹³⁵ The introduction states that 2 Corinthians, “...is about two closely related things. One of these, is the glory of God, the other is the reputation of Paul. Crucial to the whole is the relationship between [*sic*] these two themes, and perhaps it is no accident that the Greek word *doxa* means both reputation and glory.” See *Meaning and Truth*, 12.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 7, “What follows has emerged from work in which both of us have been involved at every stage. ...However, Chapters 1-4 are attributable to the pen of Frances Young, and Chapters 5-9 to that of David Ford.”

of the resurrection of Jesus, Paul refuses to be daunted, in spite of everything that happens to him.”¹³⁸ Though this confidence is being fulfilled in and through Christ, it also aligns present Christian existence with the shape of faith seen throughout Israel’s psalter. “Paul is struggling to outline the paradoxical double existence of the believer. He has seen the desperate prayers and joyful confidence of the Psalmist through the spectacles of his apocalyptic perspective, and identified with them.”¹³⁹ As with the faith of the psalmist who earnestly and vigorously petitions God with “desperate prayers,” Paul’s faith is directed in all circumstances toward God who does and will deliver.

His mission is not an obvious triumph. Yet in another sense the weakness and suffering through which Paul communicates life, are themselves a testimony to the fact that his mission is entirely grounded not in his own strength or qualifications, but in God’s commissioning and the all-sufficiency of God’s power. It is the eschatological promise already partially experienced through the Spirit, anticipated in the resurrection of Christ, which puts the whole thing in proper perspective.¹⁴⁰

Thus Young is able to conclude, “Faith in God is fundamental, as it was for the Psalmist.”¹⁴¹

ii. Powering the Overflow in Cross and Resurrection

In the later chapters of *Meaning and Truth*, Ford builds upon Young’s work by further linking it with a notion of overflow tied to faith in Christ’s cross and resurrection. The chapter titled “The Economy of God: Exploring a Metaphor” states, “Most economies are characterized by their ways of coping with scarcity, but Paul’s

¹³⁸ Ibid., 130. Young develops her understanding of Paul and the Psalms in Chapter 3, “The Biblical Roots of Paul’s Perceptions” and specifically the subsection “The Importance of the Psalms” (pp. 63-9). Space does not allow for a full and careful treatment of how Young works through the textual issues. However, the following extended quote demonstrates her own perspective on the importance of the Psalms for Paul: “We have already noted that in 2. Cor. 1 the language of the *berakah* is reminiscent of the language of the lament Psalms. Now, however, it becomes possible to see how profoundly this self-understanding underlies everything Paul has said and is going to say. It would be impossible to prove close literary dependence. But the impact of reading the Septuagint (Greek) versions of the Psalms with the Greek text of 2 Corinthians in mind is quite extraordinary. Paul would no doubt have been raised on the Psalms in the synagogue, though he may have used the Hebrew in that context. Be that as it may, the language of the Psalms seems to have got into his bloodstream, and putting the Greek texts side by side makes this evident.” (64).

¹³⁹ Ibid., 132.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 133.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

vision is of more than enough of the central resource.”¹⁴² The central resource here is the God revealed and made known through Christ, a resource which Ford, following Paul, labels as overflowing.

The theme of abundance and overflow runs all through the letter. Paul describes the intensification of both suffering and blessing initiated by Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection.

For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow onto us, so through Christ even the encouragement we receive is overflowing (1.5; cf. 7.4; 11.23).

There is no steady equilibrium here, no careful regulation of limited goods. The basic fact is ‘the extraordinary (surpassing) grace of God’ (9.14).¹⁴³

Described in terms of “surpassing” grace, it is nonetheless an ongoing “exchange” economy. “This is an economy of abundance at the heart of which is an exchange that requires to be re-enacted in appropriate ways in new circumstances if the abundance is to be shared properly.”¹⁴⁴

Ford expands on how the “sharing” in this economy happens in his final chapter “God and 2 Corinthians.”¹⁴⁵ This develops in a pair of subsections, one dealing with power and God and the other discussing the face of Christ.

First, God’s power, understood along Pauline lines,¹⁴⁶ is the heart Ford’s economical concept of overflow.¹⁴⁷ Ford critiques theological approaches which have “the tendency to ascribe to God power and freedom which contradicted all weakness and contingency, and an absoluteness and immutability that seemed to rule out mutuality and real involvement in history.”¹⁴⁸ Instead, he argues that the cross “wages

¹⁴² Ibid., 172. In David F. Ford, *The Shape of Living: Spiritual Directions for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 144, Ford credits Hardy with the initial suggestion to develop this “economic” metaphor in 2 Corinthians.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 172.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 174.

¹⁴⁵ N. T. Wright’s review calls this “the crowning chapter... The chapter argues, among other things, that ‘the face of Christ’ is for Paul the key to a whole new way of seeing the world, a new ontology and epistemology.” See Wright, review of Frances M. Young and David F. Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians*, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 No. 2 1990, 273-5.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 240, “Paul’s gospel relates power and weakness differently. It is not that he simply replaces power with weakness. Rather, both are reinterpreted through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 241, “Paul’s straining with ordinary language underlines his basic conviction that the new creation must primarily be communicated as testimony to events, both in the gospel and in his own life. But the events themselves identify afresh who God is and in particular they embody the relationship of God to Jesus Christ. So it is concepts not only of power or knowledge that are being transformed but of God, too.”

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 242.

war on ways of seeing God that have not passed through the inconceivable, this death. To insulate God from weakness, suffering, sin, poverty and death is no longer possible.”¹⁴⁹

Moreover, God’s power in Christ’s resurrection, while revealing the vindicating glory of God, does not contradict Ford’s understanding of God’s contingency:

Christianity has always been tempted to interpret the resurrection in the sense of a happy, victorious ending through which God sets everything right from the outside. This can lead to the sort of triumphalism that Paul met in Corinth and dealt with in 1 Corinthians by such downright statements as: ‘For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified’ (1 Cor. 2.2). Likewise in 2 Corinthians it is easy to see how the nature of God’s power is at stake in Paul’s authority, and how the main threat is to conceive power and success in terms that divorce the resurrection from the content of crucifixion. Resurrection is not simply a reversal of death, leaving death behind it. The resurrection does differentiate God from death—his life, sovereign creativity and power are vindicated decisively and his transcendence and provenience demonstrated. But the differentiation happens through an event which identifies God, including all those attributes afresh. The directness of the attribution of resurrection is inseparable from the indirectness of the cross.¹⁵⁰

Ford’s aims to deal simultaneously with what he sees as the connected problems of Christian triumphalism¹⁵¹ and concerns over God’s contingency.¹⁵² His approach answers both issues by redefining God in an irreversible narrative order which yet resists linear reduction. “The Christian solution is to characterize God through a story whose climactic events defy any simplistic linear description (as if one could have the ‘result’ of the resurrection without the continuing content of the cross), but resists any

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 245. Here, Ford also lists contemporary theological influences on this view. “In this century one recalls Bonhoeffer’s final explosive prison writings after a lifetime of intensive thought and action. In Britain there has been the awkward challenge of the theology and life of P. T. Forsyth, and, in a more philosophical mode, the agonizing of Donald MacKinnon over the need for a Christian realism that does justice to the crucifixion. In contemporary Roman Catholic theology the massive corpus of Hans Urs von Balthasar pivots around the day Jesus was dead, Holy Saturday; while the liberation theologians work through with more political relevance the implications of freedom and a God characterized through a crucified liberator. Asian theology has been particularly attentive to ‘the pain of God’ and its meaning for a continent that includes the prosperity of Japan and the poverty of many other countries. And back in European protestantism, in Tübingen, one of the most influential faculties of theology, two of the professors, Eberhard Jüngel and Jürgen Moltmann, have made ‘the crucified God’ central to their work.” (245-6).

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 246-47.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 247, Ford follows Kierkegaard’s *Training in Christianity* to propose “the fundamental problem with Christendom in terms of a wrong relation of crucifixion and resurrection. Christendom, Christianity triumphant, wants to start with the resurrection, and does not see that the resurrection is only reached through the cross. It conceives God in an idolatrously direct way, and believes that he can be acknowledged apart from going the way of the cross: the happy ending is the good news.”

¹⁵² Ibid., Ford explains such concerns as follows, “The order of the gospel story is irreversible and its contents are cumulative. In a God who ‘will be who he will be’ is it not possible to conceive of order? If he identifies himself through contingent history is he not allowing the sequential nature of time to be part of his being? Yet such a linear identification is also unsatisfactory, as it seems to submerge God in contingency.”

elimination of the order.”¹⁵³ Ford is thereby able to conclude, “The abundance and overflow of God’s economy are represented through a historical transcendence that never ignores or bypasses the negativities.”¹⁵⁴

Second, Ford’s reflection on the power of God leads to the introduction of his concept of Christ’s face in the light of 2 Corinthians 4:6.¹⁵⁵ Several extended quotations are necessary to elucidate Ford’s meaning. He starts by introducing this as the only concept which can bring together the events of God in Christ.

The face of Christ represents the subject of the events of crucifixion and resurrection. It transcends paradox but yet inconceivably holds together suffering, sin, death and God. These have to be thought together, according to this gospel, but there is no concept or image that can do it except this name and face.¹⁵⁶

Christ’s face allows theology to go “beyond a functional understanding of the gospel events,”¹⁵⁷ thus identifying these events as the reality of human faith.

In the light of this face the Christian meaning of contingency and freedom becomes clearer. It is a face that has been shaped through the contingencies of history and bears their marks. Its way of transcending them has been to undergo them. Now too it does not have a life separate from contingencies: a living face represents continuing sensitivity and responsiveness to events and people. ...Faith is living before the face of Christ in free thanks, prayer and praise, and ministry in this *parrhēsia* overflowing in speech and life.¹⁵⁸

God’s glory as “shared” through Christ is thus the overflowing nature of Christian identity in faith.

All of this questions our use of the concept of ‘identity’ referring to God, Christ and ourselves. If identity implies something self-same, with a permanent centre and discernible boundaries, then that is adequate. If God’s glory in the face of Christ shows who God is, and if this glory is shared with us in a way that ‘transforms us into that self-same image, from glory to glory’ (3.18), usual notions of identity need to be transformed too. This ‘self-same image’ denies any individualism or autonomy in being a person, but constitutes identity in a new way, through being part of God’s sharing of

¹⁵³ Ibid., 247.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 248.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 248, “...the central verse 4.6 condenses the theology of God in the letter, while also offering the letter’s most distinctive idea for identifying God.”

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 249.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 250. It leads us beyond a functional understanding of the gospel events. We cannot be content with speaking of God doing something through these events. We have to speak also of the person of Jesus Christ and then to follow through the implications of this face which could be both dead and the revelation of God’s glory.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 250, 251.

his own glory. This changes the very idea of the boundaries of self in favour of concepts such as coinherence, exchange, mutual indwelling and living for others.¹⁵⁹

Ford goes further to suggest that as “the face of Christ shows who God is,” our own faces become freely “responsible” in how we are to “face” others:

Above all, the new identity is summed up in the face, which is at once the mark of unique personality and the embodiment of receptivity to others. The welcome of the face is not a threat to other selves but is the supreme sign of the possibility that we can live in free, non-competitive mutuality. Yet this is a freedom that is in its very essence responsible, because it only exists face to face with the other who continually puts the self in question and calls us to live responsively.¹⁶⁰

Furthermore, Ford links this theological idea of “facing” to the philosophy of Levinas,¹⁶¹ a connection which we examine further below.

Ford’s “final move must take us through this philosophy into the heart of theology again.”¹⁶² The direction is a trinitarian one, not only discussing the “negative” theological rule derived from doctrine of the Trinity (“never refer to God in one way without intending also each of the others”) but offering a “positive” one as well: “Positively, the being and transcendence of God are expressed in three ways. The negative rule is turned around to become: always identify God through Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and intend this even when only one is mentioned”¹⁶³ He lastly reflects on how his chapter on God’s economy and his chapter on God’s power and the face of Christ “converge from different angles in questioning the boundary between the economic and the doxological Trinity.”¹⁶⁴ This allows him to conclude that God’s glory is “the dynamic of transformation in Christian life and it is intrinsically social to be participated in through a community of those who reflect it together....Above all, it is a

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 251-52.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 252.

¹⁶¹ Ford, at this point in his career, offers the following theological application of Levinas. “Levinas traces language, responsibility, ethics and reason to the plural reality of the face to face. ...God therefore represents, negatively, a critique of any understanding of reality (ontology) that unifies it by ignoring the ultimate pluralism of the face to face, and, positively, the priority of ethics over ontology. This links up with our concern above to bring general concepts of God into line with the gospel. God has supremely been used as a totality, an idol of necessity and omnipotence, and the absolutist ideas of deity continue to have seductive power, both among believers and others. Paul’s focus on the face of Christ gives a good lever for shifting this deadweight, and Levinas’ thought is an example of the way a whole understanding of reality, including thorough treatment of philosophical problems, might be supportive in this.” See *ibid.*, 254-55.

¹⁶² Ibid., 255.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 257.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 259.

glory imprinted so utterly with the face of Christ that it is wrong to conceive of any other sort of God ‘in himself’ behind or apart from it.”¹⁶⁵

B. Beginning to Face the Source of the Overflow

Meaning and Truth displays many of the developing aspects of Ford’s theology. Aligning themselves with Paul’s epistle, Young and Ford find God’s glory as both the purpose and power of worship in faith; *doxa* fittingly correlates with doxology.¹⁶⁶ Glory is divinely self-imparted yet also participated in by humanity through the self-revelation of God in Christ. Chapters authored by Ford explore *how* such participation is made possible, and, as in *Jubilate*, he proposes such participation to be the overflow of a new economy of abundance which unites God’s faithfulness in Christ to human response. “The initiative of God is clear throughout...but the whole letter is a plea for an active response to Paul and to God. The letter embodies the union of the two.”¹⁶⁷ Human faithfulness is thus made possible through *who God is in faithfulness* and, more specifically, *who God is in faithfulness amidst suffering*. Ford finds this epistle to demonstrate emphatically that Christ has transformed all expressions of power and weakness by transforming all expectations of God.

Drawing a contrast with Brueggemann is again helpful here. Young particularly notes the influence of the Psalms on Paul and, like Brueggemann, finds the honest faith of the psalmists compatible and anticipatory of Christian faith. Unlike Brueggemann, however, Young and Ford do not propose God’s power, in sovereignty, to be at odds with God’s faithfulness to respond to the suffering of the world. Rather, these authors follow Paul in concluding that divine power has been redefined in God’s atoning for all sin and suffering in Christ, a redefinition which does not override the expression of faith found in the psalms of lament but includes it.

Still, what continues to concern Ford is *how* Christ’s atoning person and work *actually* transforms human life in faith. This focus lies behind Ford’s introduction of the face of Christ as the key image for faith.¹⁶⁸ Because the face can be “both dead and the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 259.

¹⁶⁶ See Ibid., 13-14, for Young and Ford’s defense of the centrality of *doxa* for the entire epistle.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 238.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 13.

revelation of God's glory,"¹⁶⁹ Ford believes this is the *only* concept which can hold the crucifixion and resurrection together.¹⁷⁰ This provides the logic for his conclusion, "If God's glory in the face of Christ shows who God is, and if this glory is shared with us in a way that 'transforms us into that self-same image, from glory to glory' (3.18), usual notions of identity need to be transformed too."¹⁷¹ Ford finds God's glory is shared not in spite of suffering but exactly because of the suffering which God undergoes.

Ford goes on to explicitly question theology which does not allow for exploring "contingency" in God. Yet ascribing divine contingency in the light of the cross is still not, in and of itself, sufficient enough to answer exactly *how* contingency empowers such sharing through faith. What does it mean "to face" *this* face and how is such "facing" enabled? Even if God is free to be contingent in the way Ford espouses, Ford must still further explain *how* such divine freedom *is shared* in and through Christ.

At this point, we should note how the face of Christ appears to transform reality in Ford's work here. At one point he unabashedly prioritizes the essential and encompassing claim of the gospel.

But the substructure of all of these events [in 2 Corinthians] is the narrative of the gospel, pivoting around the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This alone is specific enough, and its resists incorporation in any wider framework or being subsumed within any general scheme of reality. It is making an open bid to *be* the framework, to challenge all available schemes of reality in the name of the new creation, and orient all thinking by that. The universality of the claim comes from the fact that God is seen as intrinsic to the events of the gospel and to its continuing eventfulness. The gospel is in turn crucial to the identification of God.¹⁷²

Yet, when explicating Christ's face as transformation of reality, he states:

...the history of theology, philosophy and other disciplines shows how the gospel can energize the attempt to follow through as broadly and rigorously as possible its implications in many directions. Our immediate question is what understanding can begin to do justice to the face of Christ. ...We now draw the most embracing conclusion: what is at stake is the *most fundamental* conception of reality, often called metaphysics or ontology.

So what ontology is consonant with a theology of the face of Christ? Of contemporary philosophers Emmanuel Levinas has contributed the most to the above discussion.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 250, op. cit.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 249, op. cit.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 251, op. cit.

¹⁷² Ibid., 240, italics original.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 253-4, italics mine.

While Ford is eager to embrace a vigorous theological understanding of how the cross and the resurrection overflow into all human existence, the surpassing reality of God's faithfulness in Christ seems significantly and, at this point, uncritically, embedded in the philosophy of Levinas.¹⁷⁴ The face, which for Levinas represents the immanence which theology and philosophy have so often wrongly deemphasized in favor of ontological transcendence,¹⁷⁵ becomes Ford's face of Christ, which "revolutionizes...all reality."¹⁷⁶ Moreover, it is this concept of face which appears to undergird Ford's trinitarian conclusions.¹⁷⁷ When Ford, citing Barth and Rahner, collapses all understanding of the immanent (Ford uses the term "doxological") trinity into the economic, his justification for doing so is not evidenced in engagement with those theologians but insisted upon because "the glory of God is none other than that in the face of Christ."¹⁷⁸

Such unsettled issues in the conclusions of *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* reveal that Ford's theology is still a work in progress, albeit progress moving in a specific direction. Ford argues for joyful praise while striving to account for concerns we have examined with regard to Brueggemann and lament. Alongside both Hardy and Young, he proposes that the praise of Christian faith only happens by being *united in* God's own faithful human response amidst suffering; this is why *Jubilate* asserts, "Jesus is our praise."¹⁷⁹ By the power of the Holy Spirit, this union produces an overflow of human participation not only within the divine life but also out into human experience "in such a way that the realistic response is joy."¹⁸⁰ But the joyful reality of Christ's person and work is not grounds for responding to suffering by ignoring or perpetuating

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 255, "God has supremely been used as a totality, an idol of necessity and omnipotence, and the absolutist ideas of deity continue to have seductive power, both among believers and others. Paul's focus on the face of Christ gives a good lever for shifting this deadweight, and Levinas's thought is an example of the way *a whole understanding of reality*...might be supportive in this." (italics mine).

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 254-5, Ford summarizes as follows, "Levinas traces language, responsibility, ethics and reason to the plural reality of the face to face. ...God therefore represents, negatively, a critique of any understanding of reality (ontology) that unifies it by ignoring the ultimate pluralism of the face to face, and, positively, the priority of ethics over ontology. This links up with our concern above to bring general concepts of God into line with the gospel."

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 250

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 255, "For 2 Corinthians this raises the vital question of how 'the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Christ' is related to the later development of the doctrine of the Trinity. ... We have started from this face and now come to consider the conception of God as Trinity."

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 260.

¹⁷⁹ *Jubilate*, (136), italics mine, "'Jesus is our praise' expresses the union and its two sides. He is our praise because he himself is to be praised and is identified with God in what he does and is; because he embodies the ultimate sacrifice of praise to God; and because he is ours, in solidarity and mutuality with us. And being for us, he constantly generates fresh initiatives and action, and his life is shared in particular ways..." See also, "Appendix B", 176, "In other words, it is through the movement of praise from God through Jesus, that God is God for man, and man is himself."

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 190 (150).

lamentable realities. Indeed, Ford and Young argue “[t]he abundance and overflow of God’s economy are represented through a historical transcendence that never ignores or bypasses the negativities.”¹⁸¹

The coming chapter will explore how Ford continues to work out this overflowing reality of faith amidst the “negativity” of human suffering. The particular interrelationship of joy with ethical responsibility, as well as the philosophy of Levinas, will become pivotal for Ford as he continues to develop his face of Christ concept. Yet this development would not be possible apart from his central emphasis on praise. As the recent epilogue featured in *Living in Praise* states,

In this context, praise is ‘perfecting perfection’, following the one—Jesus—by who God serves others in their need and *releasing* through the Spirit the infinitely intensive identity of God in the dynamics of the world. This is the importance of praise in today’s world.¹⁸²

Such is the priority on praise of God as it remains throughout the theological development of David Ford.

¹⁸¹ *Meaning and Truth*, 248.

¹⁸² Hardy and Ford, *Living in Praise*, “Epilogue: After Twenty Years,” 202.

Facing the Overflow of Faith: Joy and Suffering in Ford's Mature Theology

I. From Praise to the Joy of Facing Christ

David Ford's collaborations with Daniel Hardy and Frances Young continue to generate a theological trajectory guiding much of his subsequent work. As Ford's focus on praise overflowing from faith matures, however, Christian joy emerges as the pivotal concern. *Jubilate* already lays the groundwork for this development by asserting the inextricable relationship of praise to joy: "Above all, the joy of God needs to be celebrated as the central and embracing reality of the universe, and everything else seen in light of this."¹ Joy, for Ford, is the integral nature of all praise of God, and by the same token, praise is how joy is faithfully made manifest. His later work *Self and Salvation* (examined in detail below) cites Ricoeur's view that "in praising one rejoices over the view of one's object set above all the other objects of one's concern."² In turning his attention to Christian joy, Ford is not turning away from praise but rather more deeply examining how praise arises through faith, and distinctly through faith in Jesus Christ.

Hardy has offered his own summary of Christian joy which, while not written in explicit collaboration with Ford, nonetheless serves as a succinct introduction to the direction which Ford's later work follows. In an article appearing in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, Hardy proposes joy as an emotion but also adds that in Christian and Jewish understanding, "joy denotes a deeper affirmation of God no matter what the circumstances. Scripture testifies that joy in this way is not just an expression or event of a Christian but is to be characteristic."³ Yet this characteristic nature does not simply ignore suffering. "In favourable situations, (joy) appears as exultation and healing. Where there is vulnerability and sorrow it still appears, but

¹ Hardy and Ford, *Jubilate*, 17 (13).

² Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, Mark I. Wallace, ed. (trans. D. Pellauer; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 317, as quoted by David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999), 98.

³ Daniel W. Hardy, "Joy," *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, A. Hastings, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 354.

adversity alters its character to self-giving, trust, perseverance.”⁴ For Hardy, Christian joy is always to be understood within the activity of worship which necessitates action on behalf of others from within itself.⁵ As his article concludes, “Thus the joy of (Christian believers’) common life in the world is the social counterpart of their praise of God, both attracting and guiding others to the true meaning of joy.”⁶

Ford’s ongoing work continues to explore exactly how the joy of praising God overflows in and through Christian faith and out into the world. This focus, as we argued in the previous chapter, allows Ford to consider the joyful nature of faith while also taking seriously the type of theological concerns with lament and suffering raised by Brueggemann. From the beginning, Ford pursues praise in the light of knowing Christ in both the suffering of the cross and the joy of the resurrection; *Jubilate* concludes, “The crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ is therefore at the heart of the method as well as the content of Christian mission.”⁷ Through *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* this christological method and content begin to be brought together in Ford’s concept of the face of Christ. To reflect the realities of both cross and resurrection in faith, Ford asserts “there is no concept or image that can do it except this name and face.”⁸ Levinas, the preeminent Jewish philosopher of ethics and “the face,” also emerges as an important conversation partner in Ford’s thought.

Nevertheless, as the face of Christ comes to define the joyful and ethical locus of Ford’s theology, the decisive nature of Christ’s atonement in response to human suffering will become much more difficult to discern. This chapter attends to Ford’s mature work with this concern in mind and ultimately presses the question of how his proposal for Christian praise and joy can be understood to overflow from God’s *own* human faithfulness through Christ.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Hardy incorporates ethics and worship together in Chapter 2, “The Foundation of Cognition and Ethics in Worship” of his work *God’s Ways with the World: Thinking and Practising Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 7-8. “Instead of seeing worship either as the most intensive expression of a faith arrived-at, in which the issue of truth is suspended, or as a free approach to mystery, we shall see worship as that special and primary activity which incorporates truth in its activity, and thereby defines and effects a reality which exemplifies this truth. Cognition, as we will see, finds its proper placing and methods within worship as it participates in the movement of truth and exemplifies it in the understanding of reality. Ethics likewise participates in the movement of truth, but does so through bringing about the proper form of reality as such, particularly in the realms of nature and society. Thus, worship is the central means whereby human beings are called to their proper fullness in society and the world.

⁶ Hardy, “Joy,” 354.

⁷ *Jubilate*, 191, (151-2).

⁸ *Meaning and Truth*, 249.

A. Joy and Tragedy: Dialogue with MacKinnon and Levinas

i. “Tragedy and Atonement”

Issues of atonement are close at hand as Ford begins to develop his face of Christ concept more fully through interaction with the scholarship of his doctoral supervisor, Donald MacKinnon. The latter’s theology consistently emphasizes the need to understand resurrection joy in light of the tragic elements of human existence seen acutely in the cross. MacKinnon summarizes this approach in an influential essay titled “Atonement and Tragedy”:

...I wish to ask the question whether in fact the theme of the work of Christ may not receive effective theological treatment when it is represented as tragedy. This I say remembering the supreme significance of the resurrection, but also continually recalling the extent to which in popular apologetic understanding of the resurrection has been deformed through its representation as in effect a descent from the Cross, given greater dramatic effect by a thirty-six hour postponement.⁹

In Ford’s contribution to MacKinnon’s 1989 festschrift, he titles his own paper “Tragedy and Atonement” calling the combination “one of MacKinnon’s main themes.”¹⁰ Here, Ford brings his concern for Christian joy into dialogue with MacKinnon while also using 2 Corinthians, a set of Helen Gardner lectures, and the philosophy of Levinas to clarify and contribute to the conversation.

Ford first recaps his conclusions about 2 Corinthians, as “full of references to the joyful and the painful contingencies of Paul’s ministry...this reaches its climax in Paul’s account of what he learnt about God’s own involvement in contingencies: ‘my power is made perfect in weakness’ (12:9).”¹¹ Though aware of the many metaphors often used to describe the atonement, Ford believes 2 Corinthians emphasizes economic exchange centered in the person and work of Christ.¹² He then frames his work within the context

⁹ MacKinnon, “Atonement and Tragedy” in *Borderlands of Theology and other Essays*, London: Lutterworth, 1968, 100.

¹⁰ Ford, “Tragedy and Atonement” in *Christ, Ethics and Tragedy: Essays in Honour of Donald MacKinnon*, Kenneth Surin, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 118. Ford’s essay originated as a spoken presentation given at a conference in MacKinnon’s honor held on 22-25 July 1986 at St. John’s College, Cambridge and has also been recently reprinted in Ford, *Shaping Theology: Engagements in a Religious and Secular World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 211-24.

¹¹ “Tragedy and Atonement,” 119.

¹² Ibid., 120, “The generative event in this economy is the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ characterized as an exchange which enables a new economy of exchanges.” Also ibid., 122, “Through economic metaphors and also in many other ways this letter attempts to do justice to the crucified and risen Christ.”

of a MacKinnon comment on the epistle¹³ which leads to the following line of inquiry: “Yet one question that the letter prompts one to ask MacKinnon is whether he has done justice to the joyful note of abundance. Paul describes himself and others as ‘sorrowful, yet always rejoicing’ (6:10); can MacKinnon’s emphasis on tragedy fully affirm the second half of the paradox?”¹⁴

Moving on to reflect on Helen Gardner’s concept of tragedy,¹⁵ Ford asserts that the “pivotal issue is the relation of Crucifixion to Resurrection” which is by no means “untragic.”

Indeed, I want to argue that 2 Corinthians show the tragic being taken into a transformation which sharpens rather than negates it, while yet rendering the category of tragic inadequate by itself. ...The case is as follows. Paul is acutely aware as MacKinnon of the dangers of a triumphalist understanding of the Resurrection. ...The Resurrection is not simply the reversal of death, leaving death behind it. Paul “carries in the body the death of Jesus” (4:10): the Resurrection message has sent him even more deeply into contingency, weakness and suffering. It is atonement whose power is to allow him to stay close to, even immersed in, the tragic depths of life.¹⁶

Because of Christ’s atonement, Ford finds a new purpose in tragedy: “to communicate the Gospel.”¹⁷ While Ford asserts that Paul’s Gospel still “fits” Gardner’s definition of tragedy, he acknowledges its seeming incoherence in light of Paul’s joy. “Paul draws continual comfort from his joint membership in Christ with others who share both his joy and his suffering. Is it not the case that suffering taken up into this mutual comfort and even rejoicing can hardly be called tragic?”¹⁸ However, the possible abuse of this mutuality is exactly why Ford believes the tragic remains relevant.¹⁹ He concludes,

¹³ Ibid., 122, Ford cites MacKinnon, “Atonement and Tragedy,” 80. “(2 Corinthians’) background is ontological; what Paul speaks of is not something that he records as ‘the contents of his consciousness’, but a sense of his mission and its significance that he has won through daring to see it in the light of the Cross. ...And yet, because all is under the sign of the kenosis, the final note is of a radical self-abandonment.”

¹⁴ Ibid., 122.

¹⁵ Ford draws here from Gardner’s T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures of 1968 on ‘Religion and Tragedy’ published in Gardner, *Religion and Literature* (London: Faber 1971). See pp. 113-18.

¹⁶ Ibid., 123.

¹⁷ Ibid., 123, “Here is the clue to the new possibility of tragedy. The Gospel is the new contingency. It relativises all the old contingencies of suffering and death. But it does not end the contingency; rather it intensifies it terrifyingly.”

¹⁸ Ibid., 124-5.

¹⁹ Ibid., 125, “The focusing of what one might call Paul’s concept of the tragic around the Gospel means that the community called into being through the Gospel is also subject to the threat of tragedy. Indeed, it is almost as if in Paul’s dramatic conception of history the spectacle of the people of God, whether Israel or the Church, is what chiefly evokes his pity and fear. ‘The corruption of the best is the worst’, and he is acutely aware of how the greatest glory is also the place of greatest responsibility and temptation. MacKinnon, coming after nearly 2000 years of Church history, has even more appalling evidence that the Gospel, far from making the category of tragedy less important, both illuminates new ways in which it is relevant and makes possible new forms of communal evil.”

“There is again a heightening or deepening of the tragic even as its ultimate content is transformed by the Gospel.”²⁰

The nature of the Gospel’s transformation therefore is a central issue. “But now we have to ask about that transformation. As MacKinnon says...tragedy has to be used but not allowed to dominate or obscure the uniqueness of what is here. What is this uniqueness?”²¹ Ford answers this question via his concept of the face of Christ, which he again bases in 2 Corinthians 4:6²² and then applies to MacKinnon’s concerns:

Could this be one way of beginning to develop the ‘radicalized and transformed’ notion of the contingent that MacKinnon suggests is required by christology? This face has been through historical contingencies, it is not separable from them yet also not reducible to them. It has also been dead. Yet it is seen as the manifestation of the glory of God, so that in future the glory of God and this death cannot be thought of without each other. It has also been raised from death, and represents the unity beyond paradox of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. The face of Christ calls for christology as well as soteriology.²³

Ford further believes that the face of Christ can help reconceptualize eschatology. “If the ultimate is recognized in a face, we glimpse a way out of the dilemma of eschatology which so often seems unable to conceive of history without also seeing it as predetermined. The face of Christ is definitive, but it does not predetermine.”²⁴ Nevertheless, Ford anticipates a MacKinnon question, “but what sort of face is this face?” He consequently specifies that “This face is heard of and anticipated, but not yet seen face to face; it is unsubstitutably identified...by the events of the Crucifixion and Resurrection; it fits no category short of the glory of God...that of the complete prevenience of the God who said ‘Let light shine in darkness’...”²⁵ This face, which is historically unsubstitutable yet seemingly does not predetermine history, is that which does justice to the tragic through providing “a resolution which does not fall into triumphalism or cheap joy when it enables the overflow of thanks and Paul’s ‘always rejoicing’.”²⁶

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 125-6.

²² Ibid., “That verse could inspire a whole systematics, but the phrase I want to explore is ‘the glory of God in the face of Christ’.”

²³ Ibid., 126-7, Ford’s note here references MacKinnon’s chapter “Philosophy and Christology” in *Borderlands*.

²⁴ Ibid., 127.

²⁵ Ibid., 128.

²⁶ Ibid., 127.

Mirroring his move in *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians*, Ford then asks, “What sort of metaphysics can do justice to the ultimacy of a face?”²⁷ The answer is once again Levinas who “has the same Jewish roots as Paul’s writings” and “criticizes ontology for often attempting to conceive the unity of being as some sort of totality of which it is possible to have, at least in principle, an overview.”²⁸ This is exactly the type of overview which MacKinnon wishes to avoid.²⁹ So Levinas operates as chief architect for Ford’s metaphysics of face; “...Levinas traces the discontinuity, the pluralism, not only to the sharpness of the tragic but to the face, which can express joy as well as agony. And in the face of Christ I see a manifestation of Christian eschatological hope: for a non-tragic outcome of history which yet does full justice to the tragic.”³⁰

ii. Atonement Facing Tragedy

Against the backdrop of his mentor’s tragic emphasis, Ford’s understanding of joyful faith amidst suffering becomes more distinct. By situating his previous work on 2 Corinthians within MacKinnon’s concern for “the interrogation that the tragic must be allowed to conduct in theology,”³¹ Ford reveals the terms upon which he will seek to advance the state of a question which is continually a priority in his developing work. As previously, Ford’s inquiry concerns the unique transformation offered in the person and work of Christ and accomplished through both the suffering of the cross and the joy of the resurrection. But out of the shadow of MacKinnon, we can see Ford striving to cast this uniqueness in a different, yet unceasingly sympathetic, light.

The question symbolized by Paul’s phrase ‘sorrowful, yet always rejoicing’ has been raised about MacKinnon’s way of relating tragedy to the Gospel. I have defended him against any simplistic accusation in these terms, such as Paul’s opponents in Corinth might have made, but a question remains. How do we identify the *inadequacy* of tragedy as a genre through which to understand the Gospel whose climax is the

²⁷ Ibid., 128.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 129, “I suggest that there is here [in Levinas] a metaphysics which meets the demand MacKinnon makes, at the end of his chapter on ‘The Transcendence of the Tragic’ in his Gifford Lectures, for an ontological pluralism which is not atheist and which, by holding to the significance of the tragic, is protected against, ‘that sort of synthesis which seeks to obliterate by the vision of an all-embracing order the sharper discontinuity of human existence’.” Ford cites from MacKinnon, *The Problem of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 135.

³⁰ Ibid., 129.

³¹ Ibid.

Resurrection joy, but without falling into the traps which MacKinnon has so insistently pointed out?³²

It is not simply that Ford wants to be able to explain Christian hope as “a non-tragic outcome of history which yet does full justice to the tragic.”³³ He also wants to explain how such an outcome transforms the faithful here and now.

Besides MacKinnon, a comparison with Brueggemann’s work is helpful here. Ford is proposing that the joyful testimony of Christian faith cannot be understood simply in tension with the tragic realities which Brueggemann discerns through the rhetorical disorientation and countertestimony expressed in lament. Ford is rather trying to explain the *new orientation* which is true of Christian faith: a *resolution* to the sin and suffering of the world which has happened in Christ, and a resolution which now *overflows* out and into the world through the Holy Spirit. However, Ford refuses to let go of the problem which either Brueggemann or MacKinnon express, in their own respective ways, concerning all that is still not yet and leads to abusive manifestations of Christianity which ignore or perpetuate the lamentable and tragic realities of the present. Precisely for the purpose of confronting this concern Ford’s face of Christ concept begins to occupy the central locus of faith in his theology. As with *Meaning and Truth*, he continues to allude to this concept as properly taking into account both divine freedom and contingency; thus Christ’s face is conceived as “a definitive consummation of history without also seeing it as predetermined.”³⁴

Nevertheless, if Christ provides human history with “a non-tragic outcome” and “a definitive consummation,” then *how does the atoning person and work Christ not, at*

³² Ibid., 126, italics original. Brian Hebblethwaite further explains how Ford’s approach differs from MacKinnon’s: “But the question before us at the moment is whether these failures, tragedies and horrors are ultimate, irredeemable facts, and the people involved in them for ever unforgivable, unchangeable and unresurrectable. Only if this is so can tragedy be said to be an absolute and final fact of human experience. I submit that Christianity is a faith which necessarily contradicts that view—not by attempting to diminish the horror of the tragic, nor by trying to reduce it to appearance or subsume it into a monistic whole, but by preaching a Gospel of redemption whereby the world’s sorrow will be turned into joy and the inevitable sufferings and travail of the present phase of God’s creative purpose will give birth to a glory beyond compare. That must mean a glory in which both victims and perpetrators (the former made new and whole and the latter transformed and forgiven) participate. Such a consummation may or may not occur. But Christianity is committed to faith that it will occur. It is in that sense that I cannot concede to MacKinnon the ineradicability of the tragic. Another way of making the same point would be to suggest that David Ford’s insistence on the ‘sorrowful yet always rejoicing’ quality of 2 Corinthians 6.8 has to be, and can only be, spelled out eschatologically, and that the eschatological fulfillment of redemption will be such as to deprive all tragedy of finality.” See Hebblethwaite, “MacKinnon and the problem of evil” in *Christ, Ethics and Tragedy: Essays in Honour of Donald MacKinnon*, Kenneth Surin, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1989), pg. 143.

³³ Ibid., 129, op. cit.

³⁴ Ibid., 127, op. cit.

least in some important sense, predetermine? Even if history is not viewed as simply static or closed in atonement, does not Christ, in consummating history thereby determine its cast and shape *eschatologically*? While Ford asserts that the face of Christ is “the counterpart of a new history of freedom and responsibility,” the implications of this connection come to rest not on any particular view of atonement or eschatology. Instead, the philosophy of Levinas once again appears as the best metaphysical approach to the christology and “trinitarian structure” of a verse such as 2 Corinthians 4:6.³⁵ Through Levinas, Ford now begins to sharpen his focus on how faith confronted by the face of Christ provides “a resolution which does not fall into triumphalism or cheap joy when it enables the overflow of thanks and Paul’s ‘always rejoicing’.”³⁶

B. Joy and Responsibility: Dialogue with Jüngel and Levinas

Ford’s engagement with Levinas expands in the middle part of the 1990’s through two key essays bringing the philosophy of Levinas in contact with the theology of Eberhard Jüngel. Like MacKinnon, Jüngel is an influence on Ford from his student days, and *God as Mystery of the World* figures significantly in Ford’s thought.³⁷ Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than in how Ford consistently strives to bring the positions of Jüngel and Levinas together. Through mutual examination of these two very different scholars Ford explores the interrelationship of joy and human responsibility in faith. At the center of this relationship remains Ford’s developing concept of Christ’s face.

i. “Hosting a Dialogue”

Ford publishes the first of these essays concerning Levinas and Jüngel in a work dedicated to the latter, and though well aware of the differences between their respective positions, he believes, “the number of shared concerns suggests they are ideal conversation partners.”³⁸

³⁵ Ibid., 128.

³⁶ Ibid., 127, op. cit.

³⁷ See Ford, “Hosting a Dialogue” in *The Possibilities of Theology: Studies in the Theology of Eberhard Jüngel in his Sixtieth Year*, John Webster, ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 23.

³⁸ Ibid., 24.

The differences lead off through examination of Levinas's concern over theology and his preference for an a-theological description of divinity focused through the concept of the face. "The face is for Levinas that which confronts us with what is uncontainable and infinite, a summons to responsibility that is the trace of a God beyond being."³⁹ By "doing philosophy" in relation to the face, Levinas avoids theology which:

...thematises or objectifies what it should not; it is mythological, or suggests that there is a divine drama in progress in which people are participants, often unwittingly; it suggests that it is possible to participate directly in or have cognitive or emotional access to the life of God; it finds intrinsic links between human nature and the divine; it tends to confuse creation with causality or to conceptualise creation in ontological terms; it makes ontology absolute, with God as supreme being and therefore inevitably totalitarian; it argues analogically from the world to God; it signifies God in terms of presence, action, efficacy in the world; above all, its alliance with ontology conspires against doing justice to an ethics which resists the assimilation of the other person to oneself and one's overview, and which finds in the face to face an unsurpassable imperative directness and immediacy.⁴⁰

Ethics thus becomes Levinas's "first philosophy"⁴¹ which "is developed into one of preserving the ambivalence of all talk of God in the interests of its ethical significance."⁴²

Ford then argues that Levinas's stereotypes of theology cannot apply, at least fully, to Jüngel. "Levinas's basic contention, that theology embraces God in a thematisation, a 'said', that objectifies God within 'being' in the mode of presence, is not applicable to Jüngel for several reasons."⁴³ Ford proposes five—Jüngel's "concern for the unobjectifiable mode of address"; his "refusal of any overarching concept of being"; his "radical notion of absence in...concepts of God"; the particular way "the word of the cross" functions in his theology; and his "concept of analogical talk of God"—that should not allow for an immediate Levinassian dismissal of Jüngel.⁴⁴ Yet, Ford finds that Jüngel stereotypes as well, along the lines of revelation. "He sees a decisive difference between himself and Levinas lying in Levinas's contention that the proximity of the other person is the condition of possibility of God's word and proximity."⁴⁵ Levinas's imperative ethics can only indicate anthropologically, but

³⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 27-28.

⁴¹ Ibid., 25.

⁴² Ibid., 28.

⁴³ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 30-33.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 33.

“Jüngel’s indicative is a coming of God to the world in the living, dying and raising up of a human being which interrupts the world so that the world becomes a parable of God.”⁴⁶

Ford distills the differences between Levinas and Jüngel down to the particularity of revelation. “Jüngel’s pivots around a person and event, a ‘something’ of history; Levinas’s consistently refuses that sort of particularity”⁴⁷ Yet, Ford also suggests that “Jüngel seems to have misread the structure of Levinas’s notion of revelation.”⁴⁸ Noting the influence of Barth on Jüngel, Ford cites Graham Ward’s proposal about the similarities in Barth and Levinas’s concept of revelation.⁴⁹ This leads to the following observation:

Jüngel seems to have missed the way in which saying (or the face) as a trace of the Infinite in Levinas refuses any claim to primary subjectivity; there is a concern, which takes many forms of expression, to refer it to what is “otherwise than being”, and his extremes of “abusive” language could be seen, not as a movement from the world to God but as an attempt to avoid the ever-renewed danger of idolizing any particular event or person in history.⁵⁰

Calling Jüngel’s assertions about the structure of revelation “a relatively crude criterion,” Ford instead points to “the main difference between the two: Levinas’s rejection of the primary focus of Jüngel’s testimony in the singular incarnation of God.”⁵¹

Ford believes the positions of both thinkers should be reconsidered in light of the other without simply producing “a crudely confrontational result.”⁵² Levinas, for instance, “does suggest a form of particularity in answer to the question: Where is God?”⁵³ However,

The contrast, of course is in the nature of the location. Each is “most concrete” and each finds God in what is human. Each also offers a positive answer which is “beyond the alternative of presence or absence”, but for Jüngel this is in the crucified and risen Jesus, while for Levinas it is the trace of the Infinite in the face, or saying, of the other person.⁵⁴

⁴⁶ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ward, “The Revelation of the Holy Other as Wholly Other: Between Barth’s Theology of the Word and Levinas’s Philosophy of Saying,” *Modern Theology* 9/2 (1993): 159-80.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 34.

⁵¹ Ibid., 35.

⁵² Ibid., 37.

⁵³ Ibid. 34.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 36.

Levinas is questioned because “Above all, is Levinas’s imperative of infinite responsibility for others actually sustainable by anyone at all? Levinas seems to say that it does not have to be; Jüngel is speaking from faith that it has been.”⁵⁵ Jüngel’s, on the other hand, is probed by Levinas’s “attractive alternative” to christology.

It is a vision comparable to some of the approaches currently being canvassed in order to live with pluralisms of various sorts, stressing both ethical convergences and respect for otherness. In this complex of responsibilities, what worries Levinas most about the cross-centered position identified with Jüngel is that, somehow, Christianity involves a shifting of responsibility on to that man on the cross, and an infinite pardon which encourages irresponsibility.⁵⁶

While Ford acknowledges that “agreement is not the only aim of conversation, especially between two such extreme statements,” he proceeds to focus the conversation on the two areas which “promise the deepest engagement”: the self and language.⁵⁷

1. Selfhood

Similar to his own earlier reflections on praise in *Jubilate*, Ford finds in Levinas that “enjoyment is given quite a basic role in the constitution of the self.”

Enjoyment is more fundamental than intending, representing, reasoning, freedom, theory and practice, or any psychological state: “enjoyment is the ultimate consciousness of all the contents that fill my life—it embraces them.” We do not know “being” first in some neutral state, or as needed for living, but rather through enjoyment or pain, as object of enjoyment or not.⁵⁸

Yet, otherness for Levinas “cuts across enjoyment, questions the self, and is unassimilable. The approach of the other in the face is an ‘epiphany’, a ‘revelation’, summoning to responsibility in an asymmetrical relation, not dependent on reciprocity or equality but on ‘looking up’ to the other.”⁵⁹ Ford points to how Levinas’s later work supports this claim along the lines of prophecy and witness. “Levinas’s claim is an address by him which testifies to ‘the other in the same’, and vulnerably exposes his own psyche in this extravagant attestation. And the self that witnesses is described in

⁵⁵ Ibid., 38.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 38-9.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 40, Ford’s quotes from Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (trans. A. Lingis; Pittsburgh: Duquesne University, 1969), 111.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

terms of ‘substitution’, being a hostage for the other, responsible even for the other’s responsibility.”⁶⁰

Jüngel’s concept of selfhood, of course, centers in faith not ethics because “[t]he thinking of faith ‘sets reason in movement’, but without any certainty that is self-grounding.”⁶¹ But Ford endeavors to show the “essential passivity” of Jüngel’s faith “is linked to responsibility for others in a way reminiscent of Levinas on desire, passivity and responsibility.”⁶² This would support Ford’s contention that “it is possible to see each being enriched by mutual engagement.”⁶³

How can such “extreme” thinkers be mutually enriched? Ford proposes “One might speculate what Jüngel’s theology would look like if the face of Christ were as integral to it as the death of Christ.”⁶⁴ For Ford this means examining weaknesses in Jüngel’s understanding of the body, birth, and death. Were Jüngel to be critiqued by Levinas on the last,⁶⁵ Ford believes Jüngel would answer based on his theology of love.

If Jüngel were to reply that love has in his thought the pivotal role that the good does in Levinas’s, the discussion would need to shift to Jüngel’s definition of love. “Formally judged, love appeared to us as the event of a still greater selflessness within a great, and justifiably very great, self-relatedness. Judged materially, love was understood as the unity of life and death for the sake of life... We shall proceed on that basis of the full form of love... in which a loving I is loved back by the beloved Thou.”⁶⁶

Yet, Ford still argues that Jüngel has “not yet taken account of a contemporary ‘master of suspicion’” who “would suspect that there is here an integrating through the notions of event, unity and dialectic which amounts to a ‘totality’ that sacrifices radical separation and ethical otherness.”⁶⁷

Therefore, “Substitution raises perhaps the sharpest issue of all” between Jüngel and Levinas, with the latter offering “at least two possible lessons.”⁶⁸ First, Ford

⁶⁰ Ibid., 42, Ford’s quotes from Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (trans. M. Nijhoff; Boston: The Hague, 1981), 149.

⁶¹ Ibid., 42, Ford’s quotes from Jüngel, *God as Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism* (trans. D. L. Guder; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), 167.

⁶² Ibid., 43.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 45, “Put bluntly, it seems that Jüngel’s ontological notion of death would draw the reply from Levinas: you have not given goodness its proper priority; you are repeating a fundamental error of the Western philosophical and theological traditions; and the consequences of giving a pivotal position to death rather than goodness means that you have compromised the ethical content of your thinking.”

⁶⁶ Ibid., 45, Ford quotes from *God as Mystery of the World*, 314ff., 317.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 46, 45.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 47.

proposes that Jüngel see Levinas as “a fellow extremist who urges him to follow his Christological extremism through into his anthropology.”⁶⁹ Jüngel’s definition of love “does not measure up to the extremism of his Christological and trinitarian thought,” and Ford suggests following the example of Paul Ricoeur. Though noting the appreciation Ricoeur has for Jüngel, Ford observes, “it is striking how much Ricoeur has learnt from Levinas about the self. One might predict a similar fruitfulness for Jüngel if one of his ‘people’ were Levinas...”⁷⁰

Ford now returns to question Levinas on selfhood in light of Jüngel. The “principal issue” is joy. “Might it be that that rich conception of enjoyment could, in being opened up to responsibility by the appeal of the other, be transformed into joy in the other?”⁷¹ Jüngel is helpful here because his “appreciation of joy goes deep. It is, of course, linked with faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but his basic theological analysis of it rings true with Jewish traditions of rejoicing in God.”⁷² Showing how Jüngel links joy with his fundamental concept of God as “more than necessary,” Ford suggests that Levinas might reconsider the severity of his proposal. “It sometimes seems that Levinas is still so bound negatively by his reaction against ‘onto-theology’ and its totalizing ontology that the only alternative he can confidently pursue is one which is severely practical.”⁷³

2. Language

Considerations of selfhood give way as Ford then points out the “great deal of energy thinking about language” in both Jüngel and Levinas. Ford’s questions follow the same issue of particularity as before but this time the inquiry is mainly directed towards Jüngel.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 48. Ford anticipates the direction of his later work in *Self and Salvation* as he cites Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (trans. K. Blamey; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992), 25, and writes, “There are several indications of convergence between Ricoeur and Jüngel on the self, perhaps the most important of which with regard to Levinas is their concern with differentiations in one’s self-relatedness, summed up in the title of Ricoeur’s work.” See also p. 57, nt. 127, “For a recent treatment of the theme of testimony which is aware of both Jüngel and Levinas, see the discussions of ‘attestation’ in Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*...”

⁷¹ Ibid., 49.

⁷² Ibid., 49-50.

⁷³ Ibid., 51. Ford also points out here Levinas’s insistent consideration for “horror of the Shoah” seen most explicitly in his dedication to this memory in *Otherwise Than Being*.

So the dynamics of language in relation to God are linked to love and both are understood in christological and trinitarian terms. Here, too, Jüngel has maintained his primary difference from Levinas, whose talk of God likewise pivots around a central focus, ethics between people. There is the possibility for a long debate between them here, but I want to ask just one big question of Jüngel, in line with what has already been said of love: does this do justice to otherness?⁷⁴

After specifying how both thinkers raise concerns over classical conceptions of analogy, Ford wagers his own proposal for bringing the two together:

Might there yet be another alternative? My concern is to offer a Christian development of Jüngel which learns from Levinas. Might an analogy of joyful obligation be conceivable? This would develop Jüngel's 'advent' in terms of facing, substitutionary responsibility and joy. In all the great difference between God and humanity there would be even greater joy in and responsibility towards the other. This would be God's joy and responsibility capacitating that of humanity. It might even lead to a more sympathetic assessment of traditional theological language's principle that 'God is always greater'. That would be placed in its primary context of the language of worship.⁷⁵

Through worship itself Ford finds the need to expand upon language of God because "[t]he resulting version of the analogy of advent might affirm that, for all the great definiteness of joy and responsibility in testimony before the God who comes, there is even greater potential for improvisation in truthful praise and goodness."⁷⁶

Ford concludes this essay by calling for an improvisation on Jüngel's language of love. "Jüngel's material definition quoted above was that love is 'the unity of life and death for the sake of life.' On this one might improvise: love is the unity of joy and substitutionary responsibility for the sake of joy."⁷⁷ This definition potentially brings Christian worship into alignment with Levinas's concerns. "...this is a love which allows for the feasting of friends and may even find its exemplary embodiment in eucharistic worship. That is, of course, very far from anything Levinas concludes but nevertheless he makes a critical contribution to it."⁷⁸

ii. "On Substitution"

⁷⁴ Ibid., 53.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 54.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 55.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 56.

This 1996 essay appears as a chapter in an edited work dedicated to the ethics of Levinas and is described as a “companion piece” to “Hosting a Dialogue.”⁷⁹ After recapping Levinas’ continual dismissals of theology, Ford wonders again whether or not Jüngel’s theology warrants such a verdict. The specific focus here is Chapter 4, “Substitution,” in Levinas’ *Otherwise than Being* compared with Jüngel’s understanding of justification by faith. As with the previous article, Ford’s method proceeds by questioning both of his dialogue partners in the light of the other’s work.

Levinas’s concept of face is at the heart of questions for Jüngel. Ford finds a “most fascinating” development when examining Jüngel’s theology in light of Levinas’s “particularizing of death.” Ford proposes that the “absolute singularity” which Jüngel reserves for Christ’s death should be modified, at least in how it is understood as universally applicable. “The totality of a generalized death is by Levinas given the sense of each face (Levinas’s notion of ‘approach’ is linked to that of ‘the face’) which appeals to me to be responsible, and that is at the very least is a valuable supplement to Jüngel’s ‘death’...”⁸⁰

Levinas’s concept of face therefore suggests reconsideration of Jüngel’s “great emphasis on God alone being the one who can fully substitute for others.”⁸¹ Jüngel affirms Vogel’s critique of Bonhoeffer’s “position with many similarities to that of Levinas, linking a radical notion of human responsibility with substitution.”⁸² Ford consequently critiques this critique:

It is this contrast that helps focus on critical questions to Jüngel. If he has a non-competitive concept of divine and human freedom, why not a similar concept of substitution? Is Vogel’s alternative between general anthropological framework and christological uniqueness appropriate? Even if it is, is substitution the right concept through which to identify that sort of uniqueness?⁸³

Ford believes theology must necessarily come to terms with Levinas’s critique of any language which obscures “the appeal in the face of the other person.”⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Ford, “On Substitution” in *Facing the Other: The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, Sean Hand, ed. (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), see nt. 3.

⁸⁰ “On Substitution,” 36.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.* Ford cites Jüngel, *Theological Essays II*, John Webster, ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 153ff.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 37, “Levinas’s linguistic practice stands as a rigorous ascesis which is especially adept at alerting his readers to our near irresistible temptation to settle for thought and expression which gives us more clarity, control and security than are just...and which reduces our exposure to (and obsession by) the appeal in the face of the other person.”

Questions for Levinas gravitate towards his marginalization of worship and the problematic implications of his thought even within his own religious tradition.

Jüngel, however, can conceive a joy as extreme as Levinas's responsibility... Can one responsibly have both? For Levinas this is by no means just an issue with the Christian Jüngel but also within Judaism. The question it puts to him is perhaps the largest of all, if one grants his main concern for substitutionary responsibility. Levinas's thought can be seen as one of the most perceptive exposures of idolatries in late modernity, including those in the thematizings of theology. But its constriction is suggested by its limited willingness to do justice to the positive counterpart which, perhaps, is required all the more by such a devastating 'hermeneutic of suspicion': the praise, thanks, confession and intercession that are, for example, complexly represented by the Psalms. Can idolatries be safely rejected if one does not run the risks of true worship?⁸⁵

Ford's allusion to the Psalms is all the more appropriate as he further questions Levinas's refusal to "even call God 'You': only 'He' ('Il') is permitted, and only then on the most severe conditions."⁸⁶ This contrasts with Jüngel, who following Barth, finds the petition of God "is the ground of Christian ethics."⁸⁷ Because Jüngel's ethic is "basically one of commanded prayer" he challenges Levinas's "veto on God as 'an alleged interlocutor'."⁸⁸

Levinas is also questioned on the uniqueness of his "other." Ford cites Gibbs' comment that "Levinas's 'other' is 'strangely undetermined, is almost formal, in its concreteness. This face is anyone we meet, is any other, but is archetypically a poor person, one who is hungry'."⁸⁹ Ford concludes that Levinas's concept still seems to push toward particularity as does Jüngel "whose differences...are glaring but who is obsessed with a uniqueness traced in one particular face."⁹⁰

iii. Joy, Responsibility, and the Face of Christ

Having now examined Ford's arguments in both essays, a momentary return to Ford's concluding remarks in "Hosting a Dialogue" becomes beneficial. Here, Ford offers several celebratory "toasts" which include the following:

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 40. Ford cites Levinas, "Prayer without Demand" in *The Levinas Reader*, Sean Hand, ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 227-34.

⁸⁷ Ibid. Ford explains that "Karl Barth was startled by his own conclusion that invocation of God, especially in petition, is the ground of Christian ethics. ... For Jüngel, as for Barth, God's embracing command is to call on God. Jüngel's ethic is therefore basically one of commanded prayer."

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid. Ford citing Robert Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1992), 183.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 41.

To a Christian theology which can bring together conceptualities focussing both on “event” and “face”. This has similarities to talk about the “work” and “person” of Christ but a theology learning from Jüngel and Levinas would need not only to explore these concepts in relation to Jesus Christ...but also to the trinity...

To a conception of substitution in Christian theology which has passed through the rigours of Levinas’s conception of it without failing to think through death in relation to God.

To a conception of the human self and of love in terms of facing, substitutionary responsibility and joy.⁹¹

The above not only finalizes Ford’s “culminating intention” to “propose this toast to Jüngel while remaining responsible before the face of Levinas—and of God.”⁹² These conclusions also essentially summarize Ford’s refinement of his theology through the two Jüngel/Levinas essays.

For our purposes, working backwards through these “toasts” proves an effective manner of analysis. As in the earlier essay in dialogue with MacKinnon’s work, Ford proposes faithful human identity as joy which does not ignore suffering. The respective concerns of Levinas for ethics and Jüngel for faith, while significantly divergent, are focused by Ford towards this common goal. Specifically, he unites the “indicative” human agency expressed in Jüngel’s joy arising out of substitutionary atonement with the “imperative” otherness expressed in Levinas’s concern to relegate joy, powerful though it may be, to substitutionary responsibility.⁹³ Ford argues that the ethical implications of Christian atonement can then be reassessed in a way “which has passed through the rigours of Levinas’s conception.”⁹⁴ Moreover, this renders an “improvisation” on Jüngel’s understanding of love: “the unity of joy and substitutionary responsibility for the sake of joy.”⁹⁵ Jüngel’s original locutionary structure (“unity...for the sake of”) is not the only signification here; Ford now finds helpful resources to express what he is trying to capture in his earlier critique of the “*inadequacy of tragedy*”

⁹¹ “Hosting a Dialogue,” 58.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹³ “On Substitution,” 35, “But at the very least Levinas’s rethinking of the imperative might stimulate Jüngel to question how shot through with the imperative is the Christian indicative, above all in the ‘do this’ of the Last Supper and the obedience of Gethsemane. To rethink the Christian story with such Levinassian concepts as election, vocation, kenosis, responsibility for others, expiation and persecution might not only refocus Jüngel’s concept of the imperative but also the notion of what is to ‘correspond’ to all faith.”

⁹⁴ “Hosting a Dialogue,” 58.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

to allow for “the overflow of thanks and Paul’s ‘always rejoicing’.”⁹⁶ Overflow happens when *all* is “for the sake of joy.”

But what of thinking through death in relation to God? MacKinnon’s concerns are hardly left behind.⁹⁷ After subjecting Jüngel’s focus on death to Levinassian critique, a new priority on the face of Christ emerges.⁹⁸ Preposterous though such a theological Levinassian derivative as “Christ’s face” might be to the philosopher himself, Ford moves beyond this obvious objection largely on the basis that Levinas “thematizes” in a way which his philosophy cannot uphold. Overall, Ford is not concerned with philosophical victory;⁹⁹ he is merely trying to sustain a Christian theology which yet still captures the benefits found in Levinas’s “attractive alternative” to Jüngel’s christology.¹⁰⁰

And what Ford believes the face of Christ to sustain is significant. Conceptually, the joining of “face” and “event” present Ford with the means to use the language of both Levinas and Jüngel to express the person and work of Christ. Ford wants to ensure that any substitution associated with the event of Christ as God’s atonement cannot be grounds for irresponsibility when facing suffering. At issue here is the way in which Christ’s work should be understood objectively to transform human existence. Ford asserts, “Levinas’s striving for a language that can signify what is ‘otherwise than being’ might in relation to theories of atonement in Christian theology, go behind the unsatisfactory alternatives of ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’.”¹⁰¹ Thus, Ford moves toward aligning Jüngel’s historically Lutheran concern with sin and more objective understanding of the person of Christ with the ethical concerns Ford believes are subjectively valorized in Levinas’s concept of face. This does not mean Ford wants to do away with the uniqueness of Christ’s atonement, but he does want to rethink how

⁹⁶ “Tragedy and Atonement,” 127, op. cit.

⁹⁷ “Hosting a Dialogue,” 57, nt. 126, “I find an example of a Christian discourse which comes nearer to an incorporation of ‘unsaying’ and, partly due to that, also expresses the interrogative and even tragic significance of the incarnation, in the works of Donald MacKinnon. Ford cites “Tragedy and Atonement” in the following note.

⁹⁸ “Hosting a Dialogue,” 43, “One might speculate what Jüngel’s theology would look like if the face of Christ were as integral as the death of Christ.”

⁹⁹ The following quote from Jüngel ends “Hosting a Dialogue,” 59, “There are disputes in which the desire to win is prohibited from the outset, but out of which the freedom of understood closeness to each other can emerge as something new.” Cited from *God as Mystery of the World*, 193.

¹⁰⁰ Ford sees these benefits as follows: Levinas “must count as an attractive alternative to Jüngel’s Christian ‘scandal of particularity’ centered on the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It is a vision comparable to some of the approaches currently being canvassed in order to live with pluralisms of various sorts, stressing both ethical convergences and respect for otherness.” See “Hosting a Dialogue,” 38.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

atonement should be understood in relation to the human response of faith. Ford says much when he critiques Jüngel on Vogel, asking, "...is substitution the right concept through which to identity (christological) uniqueness?"¹⁰²

Questions left open about "a non-competitive concept of divine and human freedom"¹⁰³ beg to be worked out, as Ford rightly indicates in his toast, on not only a christological level but a trinitarian one as well. In *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* Ford affirmed the necessity of refusing to identify any one of the trinity apart from the other two. God's contingency was also asserted in reference to the suffering of Christ. But these essays offer no substantial development of how such concepts describe the Trinity *in se*.¹⁰⁴ For example, Ford does not clarify how the Son, amidst suffering, "faces" the Father and how the Father "faces" (and/or does *not* face) the Son on the cross. Who is the Holy Spirit as God in this person and event?¹⁰⁵ Even more notable considering Ford's concerns, is the relative absence of discussion concerning Trinity as God *pro nobis*. This is especially apparent in contrast with Hardy and Ford's work in *Jubilate*. Appendix B of *Jubilate* asserts, "...it is through the movement of praise for God through Jesus, that God is God for man, and man for himself."¹⁰⁶ Concerning sin, Appendix A is even more explicit that for the person and work of Christ "to regenerate humanity, God's economy of praise would actually have to become operative in man, displacing that which undermines it."¹⁰⁷ Both the reality of sin and God's act *on behalf* of humanity seem to move to the background as Ford's concerns over substitution and atonement surface and any clear role of the Holy Spirit seemingly recedes. Again, in *Jubilate*, Ford and Hardy write, "The new sharing between man and God explodes from the resurrection.... The energy and life of this sharing is the Holy Spirit..."¹⁰⁸ While it

¹⁰² "On Substitution," 36, op. cit.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ An arguably small exception is the future direction suggested parenthetically in "Hosting a Dialogue," 58, "(might those three-faced Russian icons of the trinity, and the whole Eastern orthodox tradition of trinitarian thought, have a new contribution to make to the perennial debate about threeness and oneness if mediated through the unlikely combination of Levinas and Jüngel?)."

¹⁰⁵ Such trinitarian issues are critical to how Jüngel sustains "a positive answer which is 'beyond the alternative of presence or absence'." See Ford, "Hosting a Dialogue," 36. Jüngel, *God as Mystery*, 379, states, "The Trinity of God implies, within the horizons of the world, the self-differentiating of the *invisible* Father in heaven from the Son on earth, *visible* as man, and from the Spirit who reigns as the bond of unity and love between the invisible Father in heaven and the visible Son on earth and who produces in an *invisible* way *visible* results in us. The Holy Spirit is thus both the relationship between Father and Son which constitutes the life of God and their powerful turning to man who is drawn in this way into the relationship of the Son to the Father. As Holy Spirit, God is mystery of the world."

¹⁰⁶ "Appendix B," 176.

¹⁰⁷ "Appendix A," 165.

¹⁰⁸ Hardy and Ford, *Jubilate*, 162 (129).

is clear in these later essays that Ford proposes his “face of Christ” concept to account for “God’s joy and responsibility capacitating that of humanity,”¹⁰⁹ it remains unclear exactly *why* God necessarily does this capacitating and *how* it happens not only through the Son but also through the Father and Holy Spirit.

Finally, though Ford’s dialogue with Levinas has significantly developed through these essays, and though some important issues still remain unclarified, the emphasis appears much the same as his earlier work in 2 Corinthians and the essay for MacKinnon. Ford is quite willing to allow Levinas’s “absolutising of the ethical” to interrogate theology, but he also continues to strive for a theology centered upon the overflowing nature of faith which he has always found characteristic of praise and joy. As we noted previously, developing such an approach has the benefit of accounting for Christian joy, while also taking MacKinnon’s concerns for the tragic aspects of life into account, *and* further engaging the type of theological issues which this thesis has examined in relation to Brueggemann and lament. The key, for Ford, to proposing how Christian joy properly sustains amidst suffering appears to lie in working out how humanity becomes identified in the person and work of Jesus Christ—an issue which receives its most substantial examination and development in Ford’s *Self and Salvation*.

II. Facing Christ as the Human Response to Suffering

A. *Self and Salvation*: Ford’s Mature Soteriology

Ford publishes two smaller monographs in the later 1990’s both of which draw substantially from his previous scholarship. One is a popular book about Christian spirituality; the other, an introductory work on theology.¹¹⁰ However, it is *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* which provides the most significant context for development in Ford’s theology since *Jubilate*.¹¹¹ As Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge, Ford is fittingly chosen to author the first publication in

¹⁰⁹ “Hosting a Dialogue,” 54.

¹¹⁰ David F. Ford, *The Shape of Living: Spiritual Directions for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997); and Ford, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999).

¹¹¹ Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999). Significantly, Hardy is described in the first page of the acknowledgements as the “theological midwife of the book.” (xi).

the new Cambridge Studies of Christian Doctrine which seeks to “practise theology in the fullest sense of the word.”¹¹²

Self and Salvation begins with an introduction which discusses both the scope of the book and its style. The former is wide, indeed. “Salvation is not really one doctrine at all in most works of Christian theology. It is distributed...in fact, through all topics. This all-pervasiveness gives it a potentially integrating role, but also risks overwhelming vastness.”¹¹³ Integration of varying ideas and influences well describes the encompassing theological style of Ford who, like MacKinnon, highlights the interrogative.¹¹⁴ This leads to a series of six defining questions (The heart of Christian identity? An accessible salvation? A key image? Conceptual richness? Practical fruitfulness? A defensible theology?) that form the “interrogative field” into which Ford develops his two-part proposal. Part I consists of dialogues developing his previous work with Levinas and Jüngel as well as introducing the mediating voice of Paul Ricoeur. “The result is my work’s central idea: the worshipping self, before the face of Christ and other people, in an ‘economy of superabundance’.”¹¹⁵ Part II explicitly develops the concept of “worshipping self” in various contexts, none more central than in the cross and resurrection of Christ.

i. “Dialogues”: Overview of Part I

Indicating a culmination of the central image in much of his previous work, *Self and Salvation*’s first chapter is titled “Facing” and begins, “We live before the faces of others.”¹¹⁶ While Ford’s introduction indicates that the face is “not a usual focus for salvation,” he intends to demonstrate that the face deserves “at least a minor role alongside others in the tradition.”¹¹⁷ After meditating on the human face in various aspects of existence, including our relation to our own face and how we “face” others,

¹¹² Cited from back cover of *Self and Salvation*.

¹¹³ *Self and Salvation*, 1.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2, Ford asserts from the outset, “Theology, like other intellectual disciplines, is pervaded by the interrogative mood.” Cf. Ford, “Tragedy and Atonement”, 129, which cites Kenneth Surin’s description of MacKinnon’s preference “for an interrogative, as opposed to an affirmative, mode of theological discourse.” See Surin, “Christology, Tragedy and Ideology”, *Theology* 89 (July 1986), 285. Curiously, *Self and Salvation* makes no explicit mention of MacKinnon, but as the above demonstrates, his influence can be seen throughout.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4. Ford also states here, “Undoubtedly the image that has gone deepest and is most pervasive in this book is the subject of the meditation in chapter 1, facing.”

Ford underscores the “dynamics of ‘facing’” to be described. “ ‘Facing’ helps to avoid the wrong sort of fixations on the face as an ‘object’. It embraces the face in activity and passivity, purpose and temporality, loneliness and reciprocity.”¹¹⁸ Mirroring previous reflections on the face, Ford clearly intends to expand on how this dynamic emerges at the core of Christian faith. Towards the end of the chapter he offers what amounts to a programmatic statement:

Christianity is characterized by the simplicity and complexity of facing; being faced by God, embodied in the face of Christ; turning to face Jesus Christ in faith; being members of a community of the face; seeing the face of God reflected in creation and especially in each human face, with all the faces in our heart related to the presence of the face of Christ; having an ethic of gentleness (*prautes*) towards each face; disclaiming any overview of others and being content with massive agnosticism about how God is dealing with them; and having a vision of transformation before the face of Christ ‘from glory to glory’ that is cosmic in scope, with endless surprises for both Christians and others.¹¹⁹

Through words which tie together previous interests from *Jubilate* to 2 Corinthians to his engagements with MacKinnon, Levinas and Jüngel, Ford sets out his agenda to demonstrate facing as the central locus for how salvation transforms human existence through God in Christ. Principally, he will do this by bringing together that which has always been a chief concern: the joy of Christian faith united with human ethical responsibility amidst suffering. Therefore, before ending the chapter with Dante, Ford asserts *Self and Salvation*’s guiding imperative: “But for the joy of that celebration to be holy it needs to have come by way of sharing food with the hungry and being liberated from the idols that distort the dynamics of our praising, knowing and desiring.”¹²⁰

Levinas, whose work “pervades these pages more than any other thinker,”¹²¹ is the first of Ford’s three dialogue partners. Ford begins by building his previous examinations of joy in Levinas for whom “the personality of the person, the ipseity of the I...is the particularity of the happiness of enjoyment.”¹²² Within enjoyment, Levinas finds the emergence of the self as radically separate,¹²³ a separation which integrally accompanies the even more radical Levinassian notions of relationality and responsibility. Because of this, Ford even goes as far as to assert that “Levinas’s

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 23.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 25.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., xii.

¹²² Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (trans. A. Lingis; Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 115, as quoted by Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 34.

¹²³ *Self and Salvation*, 35, “For Levinas enjoyment is uniquely my own, individuating; it produces the radical separation of an ego at home with itself, with interiority and solitude.”

philosophy of enjoyment is *as radical and intense* as his philosophy of responsibility.”¹²⁴

But Ford, of course, also sees the particular way in which responsibility materializes as the defining pole of Levinassian thought, something which occurs as Levinas accords materiality to responsibility itself via his lauded conceptualization of *face*. As with enjoyment, the face indicates a crucial separation within the thought of Levinas. Unlike with joy, however, this separation acts as ground to a fundamental relationality. “The separation of the face to face is never subsumed in a totality. There is no overview or adequate idea of ‘the face to face, the irreducible and ultimate relation’.”¹²⁵ Such relation in turn elicits responsibility. “The face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation which no ‘interiority’ permits avoiding.”¹²⁶

Crucially, Ford notes a dissonance between the extremity of enjoyment in Levinas and the primacy of responsibility. “There is a tension between, on the one hand, a Kantian tendency to detach ethical imperatives from pleasure, interest and desire...and, on the other hand, what I take to be the logic of his conceptions of enjoyment and desire.”¹²⁷ With this in mind Ford makes a critical turn via the question, “Why should enjoyment in some form not be intrinsic to the derivation of responsibility?”¹²⁸

To this end the next chapter introduces Jüngel as a theologian of both joy and resistance to idolatry. Ford finds Jüngel’s *God as the Mystery of the World*, particularly interesting because Jüngel does not propose God as necessary but rather as “‘more than necessary’ (*mehr als notwendig*).”¹²⁹ This allows for the excess of joy and desire described by Levinas while also approaching the Levinassian emphasis on relationality and responsibility.¹³⁰ Ford employs the ideas of Jüngel and Levinas to mutually challenge each other in a way which “the extremism of Levinas seeing ‘me’ substituting for all confronts Jüngel’s extremism of seeing ‘Jesus Christ’ substituting for all.” This

¹²⁴ Ibid., italics mine.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 37, Ford’s quotes from Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 295.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 37-8. Ford’s quotes from Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 201.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 42.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 55. Ford quotes from Jüngel, *God as Mystery of the World*, 24.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 58, “Each (Levinas and Jüngel) is ‘most concrete’ and each finds God in what is human. Each also offers a positive answer which is ‘beyond the alternative of presence or absence’; but for Jüngel this is in the crucified and risen Jesus, for Levinas it is in the trace of the infinite in the face, or saying, of the other person.” See also op. cit., “Hosting a Dialogue,” 36.

leads to a proposal of “a substitutionary self, defined by radical responsibility, and also Jesus Christ dying for all.”¹³¹

However, in his concern “to offer a Christian development of Jüngel which learns from Levinas,” Ford has yet to truly address responsibility as derivative of joy. To do so, Ford must address worship and its negative perception within much philosophy.

Levinas sympathises with Kant’s ethical belittling of worship and is deeply sensitive to the multifarious critiques that can be applied to such practices as the praise, lamentation, thanks, confession, intercession and petition addressed to God in the Psalms. He relentlessly rules out ways in which the ethical purity of responsibility might be compromised or its rigour ameliorated.¹³²

While the disregard for worship arises from a different focus within Kant’s thinking than from Levinas,¹³³ Ford correctly notes that the span of Western thought connecting the two thinkers shares a common tendency—the distrust of worship as truly definitional upon human identity and relationality. As Levinas explicates a relationality emerging simultaneously as responsibility, his conceptualization of identity struggles at best to find its center in joy. Ford responds with an acute interrogative which pervades the heart of his work. “The logic of excess in relation to the infinite is for Levinas embodied only in responsibility. But might there be another way of maintaining the purity and overflow of responsibility through an excess whose primary dynamic is that of worship.”¹³⁴ Though this position risks vigorous Levinassian critique, Ford asserts “that responsibility before the other needs to do justice to joy, and may not rule out full worship in faith.”¹³⁵

At this point, Ford has come as far as his earlier work on Levinas and Jüngel, at times directly quoting from these essays, albeit with more development. Nevertheless, he aims to go further in *Self and Salvation* towards a fully developed concept of Christian identity. In this endeavor he welcomes Paul Ricoeur as his third dialogue partner in whom “we find the sort of concept of self required by a definition of love as

¹³¹ Ibid., 68.

¹³² Ibid., 81.

¹³³ For Kant, human reason ultimately functions, in terms of Levinassian language, as the totality in which worship may be disregarded—an approach which Levinas would hardly consciously condone in his own originating emphasis on alterity. David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 75, describes Levinas under the category of the “ethical sublime” which is “Kantian, that is, only insofar as it concerns a kind of categorical imperative, though certainly not one that emanates from the ‘moral law within’ or the power of reason to legislate for itself.”

¹³⁴ Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 81.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 81.

‘the unity of joy and substitutionary responsibility for the sake of joy’.”¹³⁶ Not only is Ricoeur’s work “in line with the discussion of Jüngel and Levinas,” but Ford sees him “salvaging the ethical priority of the other while affirming a self-esteem that incorporates benevolent spontaneity, receptivity and recognition.”¹³⁷

Ford notes the emphasis on testimony in all three thinkers before concentrating on Ricoeur’s work in *Oneself as Another*.¹³⁸ Here the thought of Levinas is modified “in the direction of a more differentiated concept of self embracing both self-effacement and self-esteem...”¹³⁹ The key notion is as “an exchange between esteem for myself and solicitude for others” which is developed in the book’s seventh study.¹⁴⁰ This exchange “authorizes us to say that I cannot myself have self-esteem unless I esteem others as myself. Becoming in this way fundamentally equivalent are the esteem of the *other as a oneself* and the esteem of *oneself as* an other.”¹⁴¹ Through the eighth and ninth studies Ricoeur then “affirms the universality of Kant’s ethic of obligation” yet eventually suggests a modification in Kant which Ford terms “a face-oriented ethic.”¹⁴² Ricoeur’s position can consequently be described as “a Levinassian appropriation of Kant—with one major difference. ...and the difference from Levinas is in the account offered of recognition at the heart of the self.”¹⁴³ Ford quotes the following from Ricoeur:

Recognition is a structure of the self reflecting on the movement that carries self-esteem toward solicitude and solicitude toward justice. Recognition introduces the dyad and plurality in the very constitution of the self. Reciprocity in friendship and proportional equality in justice, when they are reflected in self-consciousness, make self-esteem a figure of recognition.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁶ Ibid., 92.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 91.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 83, “Jüngel, Levinas and Ricoeur all, in various ways, make testimony a constitutive dimension of selfhood, and it also pervades Christian worship.” Ford goes on to discuss Ricoeur’s interaction with Levinas and Nabert, quoting the following from Ricoeur, “is it forbidden to a reader, who is a friend of both Nabert and Levinas, to puzzle over a philosophy where the attestation of self and the glory of the absolute would be co-originary? Does not the testimony rendered by other actions, other lives, reciprocal to the divestment of the ego, speak *in another way* about what testimony, according to Levinas, unsays?” See Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (trans. K. Blamey; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 126, as quoted by Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 84.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 89.

¹⁴⁰ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 193f., as quoted by Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 91.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., italics original in Ricoeur.

¹⁴² *Self and Salvation*, 92-93. “Like Levinas, Ricoeur takes with radical seriousness the threat of evil, and especially of violence, and the need for imperatives and prohibitions of Kantian radicality in order to reply to it. But also like Levinas, Ricoeur wants to pluralise Kant’s general notion of humanity. He finds an inadequate notion of otherness in Kant, and the particularizing idea of the face responds to this lack” (93).

¹⁴³ Ibid., 93.

¹⁴⁴ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 296, as quoted by Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 93-4.

This reflection is contextualized by the tenth and final study, titled “What Ontology in View” where Ricoeur describes self and otherness in terms of three “passivities” of flesh, other people, and conscience which are “*the attestation of otherness.*”¹⁴⁵ Here, Ricoeur works out an interiority which critiques Levinas yet appropriates his concerns¹⁴⁶ resulting in the culminating idea of “*being enjoined as the structure of selfhood.*”¹⁴⁷ The “final reservation for Levinas” consists in a concluding aporia that “[p]erhaps the philosopher as philosopher has to admit that one does not know and cannot say whether this Other, the source of injunction, is another person...or my ancestors...or God—living God, absent God—or an empty place.”¹⁴⁸

Ford now introduces his concept of worshipping self by pointing to how Ricoeur tentatively moves “beyond the aporia” in his more religious and biblical writings. Language emerges here which is very similar to that of Hardy and Ford in *Jubilate*. Selfhood in worship “operates according to a ‘logic of superabundance’, which is the logic of love. The primary discourse of love (Ricoeur) sees as praise, ‘where in praising one rejoices over the view of one object set above all the other object’s of one’s concern’.”¹⁴⁹ Such language of course also links with Jüngel’s theology, but by utilizing Ricoeur’s “enjoined” structure of identity, Ford posits a human identity where praise and joy also manifest awareness of Levinassian concerns.

Read like this, a worship of God which is alert to its own unceasing need for accompanying critique and suspicion might be understood as the most encompassing and formative “practice of self” in line with Ricoeur’s philosophy. ...The self is posited by God in community without that necessarily being a dominating heteronomy. Likewise there is no “shattered cogito” in fragmentation, but there can be a complex gathering of self in diverse relationships...before God who is trusted as the gatherer of selves in blessing.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ *Oneself as Another*, 318 as quoted by Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 94.

¹⁴⁶ *Self and Salvation*, 95, “The main problem he finds with Levinas is the radical concept of the exteriority of the other person, the ‘hyperbolic’ separation of the other from the self. Levinas unnecessarily binds the identity of the same (*idem*) to a concept of ontology as totality, he fails to distinguish the ‘self’ from the ‘I’, and he therefore ends up with a dissymmetry between self and other which amounts to a lack of relation and to the sterility of interiority. As a corrective Ricoeur sees the other as analogous to ‘me’ and even intrinsic to my identity through self-esteem which does not equate ‘self’ with ‘I’. In Levinas there is no return from the other to self-affirmation in the mode of self-esteem and conviction. This converges with my development of Levinas’s concept of responsibility so as to embrace joy.”

¹⁴⁷ *Oneself as Another*, 354, italics original, quoted by Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 96.

¹⁴⁸ *Oneself as Another*, 356, as quoted by Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 97.

¹⁴⁹ *Self and Salvation*, 98, quotes respectively here from Ricoeur, “Ethical and Theological Considerations of the Golden Rule”, 300, and “Love and Justice”, 317, both in *Figuring the Sacred*, Mark I. Wallace, ed. (trans. D. Pellauer; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

¹⁵⁰ *Self and Salvation*, 99.

Therefore, Ford sees Ricoeur pressing towards a “concept of self appropriate to...worship,” but one that Ricoeur himself “does not work out.”¹⁵¹ Ford concludes the first half of *Self and Salvation* by pointing to exactly how he will work out his concept of the worshipping self—in light of the face of Christ.¹⁵²

ii. “Flourishings”: Overview of Part II

From these dialogues Ford transitions “to explore human flourishing in some of its richest forms” as the context in which to connect identity and salvation before the face of Christ. He begins with “Communicating God’s abundance,” a chapter structured around an interrelated examination of Ephesians and Psalms. Observing “transformative communication” in the epistle, Ford asks, “To what does this communication testify?”¹⁵³ His answer is the abundance of God which he finds communicated through the use of *pleroma* throughout Ephesians. The context and application of *pleroma* indicates nothing less than that a “radical culmination for members of the church in a new location and content of selfhood.”¹⁵⁴ The abundance of this identity is first and foremost communicated in Christ. “The testimony to Jesus Christ in Ephesians pivots, as in the rest of the Pauline tradition, around the death and resurrection of Christ, which will be recurring themes in later chapters of this book.”¹⁵⁵ This christological focus generates two subsequent developments. First, “a new humanity which is already a reality in Christ,” and second, “a distinctive interrelation” of this already to all that is not yet in Christ.¹⁵⁶ Ford establishes the link between now and not yet through understanding *pleroma* as “an abundance already there but also endlessly generative. ...It is better conceived through the notion of overflow linked with *pleroma*. In linguistic terms it is found in such notions as blessing, praise and thanks.”¹⁵⁷

Such endlessly generative abundance is then related to the psalter through Ford’s concepts of a “singing self” and the “‘I’ of the Psalms.” “The ‘I’ has God intrinsic to its

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 104. “The glory of God in the face of Christ is Paul’s testimony in response to Ricoeur’s final aporia...” Ford here cites the development of verse 4:6 in *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians*. On p. 102 of *Self and Salvation*, Ford cites Ricoeur’s discussion of 2 Cor. 3:18 in “The Summoned Subject in the School of the Narratives of the Prophetic Vocation” in *Figuring the Sacred*, 267f.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 113.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 114.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 114.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 115.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 115.

identity through worship: the one before who it worships is the main clue to its selfhood.”¹⁵⁸ Therefore the “I” of the Psalms “is most comprehensively constituted through the activity of God. It acknowledges God’s past activity (or laments God’s inactivity) and it awaits God’s future activity.”¹⁵⁹ As more generally related to Christian identity this means “[o]ne’s own self is constituted in relationship to all others who sing the Psalms, but there is a special relationship to Jesus Christ” which is interpreted through the death and resurrection.¹⁶⁰ This “special relationship” has trifold implications which again recall the concerns of Brueggemann’s work on the Psalms. First, believers should acknowledge the “key interpretive factor” of christological interpretation of the Psalms throughout Christian history. Second, Ford substantiates his concerns for responsibility in the “radical implications for a community which faces Jesus on the cross crying out through the Psalms.”¹⁶¹ Third, theology must address the “realism” indicated by Christ upon the cross.

Finally, Jesus is said to have ‘sung a hymn’ at the Last Supper before going to Gethsemane (Mark 14:26). But he did not sing on the cross. His ‘loud cry’ from the cross is the extremity of speech, beyond talk and song. It resonates with the anguished laments of the Psalms and with the cries of sufferers down the centuries. It is one way of relativising the ‘singing self’, guarding it against any sense of sentimentality or lack of realism about the sort of world we inhabit. Ephesians shows this realism by concluding with an inventory of armour for ‘the evil day’ (6.10ff).¹⁶²

A “realism” which faces “the ‘high’ christology and ecclesiology of Ephesians”¹⁶³ is Ford’s ultimate goal.

The high ecclesiology is a double-edged weapon for any Christian triumphalism because it means the church is the first to be judged by this ethic of love and abundance. If this were to happen according to the criteria of Ephesians the result would be devastating for a great deal of what the church has done and continues to do in its exercise of power and its forms of communication. The meanings of triumph, domination, power and strength are being redefined through this ‘new human being [*kainos anthropos*],’ (2.15).¹⁶⁴

For Ford, the redefinition and reconciliation of the Church “turns on the character of the one this community is testifying to and being conformed to.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 128.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 128.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 129.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 132.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 133.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 132.

The title of the next chapter, “Do this”, moves from scripture to tradition and Ford’s understanding of eucharist. The Lord’s Supper is not mere tradition but a practice “that from the beginning of the church...has been intrinsic to its identity.”¹⁶⁶ The tie to worship in this identity is essential to eucharist. “It is hard to overestimate the importance for Christianity of the fact that the eucharist, a pivotal locus of its identity, is a corporate practice rather than, say, an ethical code, a worldview, a set of doctrines, an institutional constitution, a book or some other distinctive feature.”¹⁶⁷ By developing a notion of “eucharistic habitus,” Ford is able to center identity-forming considerations in the Last Supper and its correlation to the cross. “The Last Supper is where this knot is decisively tied. It looks to the culmination of Jesus’s obedience in death and commands a sharing in his body and blood.”¹⁶⁸ Throughout this chapter Ford explores themes such as apprenticeship, repetition, and the differing text of the Johannine “improvisation,” but all is restated and refocused in Christ. “...the utterly essential matter for thought is indicated by the distinctive nature of the eucharistic habitus. Because it is oriented to Jesus Christ and to others the main energies of thought must be directed towards Jesus Christ and others.”¹⁶⁹

Self and Salvation’s central way of explaining faith’s orientation is through facing the face of Christ which receives its most thorough development in the two subsequent chapters. First, “Facing Jesus Christ” begins by outlining the issues inherent to such an innovative concept. Because many modern systematics have “offered doctrinal frameworks which are ‘good enough’” to support his constructive position, Ford briefly highlights just one—the christological grammar of Ingolf Dalferth who explicitly identifies Christ as “the resurrected crucified one.”¹⁷⁰ Ford affirms Dalferth’s

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 137.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 140.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 146.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 165.

¹⁷⁰ Ingolf Dalferth, *Der auferweckte Gekreuzigte. Zur Grammatik der Christologie* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) 1994). Ford translates (*Self and Salvation*, p. 171, nt. 7) *Der auferweckte Gekreuzigte* as “The Resurrected Crucified One.” Ford, 169, states, “Dalferth traces the interconnections between the ‘resurrected crucified one’ and questions of creation, anthropology, history, salvation, ecclesiology and eschatology, and he analyses the ‘grammar’ of these relations as irreducibly trinitarian. I see his achievement as a sensitive summary of the most important thrust of twentieth-century Christian systematic theology.”

“personal-trinitarian thinking”¹⁷¹ but aims to proceed beyond it by “also attempting to contribute to a reconception of the personal.”¹⁷²

Ford then identifies two possible theological problems for this facing concept: vagueness and domination. The first is seen not as problem but as essential:

What is the overall significance of this pervasive theme of the facing of the risen Jesus Christ for the problem of vagueness? ...this facing is identified with the facing of God. This in turn means that it is a face which relates to every face. Any vagueness is not so much because of abstraction or generality but because of the utter particularity of this face’s relating to each face. ...In this way vagueness is by no means something to defend it against: to be vague...is intrinsic to its reality. The overwhelming diversity and intensity of these relationships is part of the meaning of transformation ‘from one degree of glory to another’ (2 Cor. 3.18).¹⁷³

In his affirmation of vagueness, Ford does not ignore Christ’s historical reality,¹⁷⁴ but he does stress that Gospel testimony aims “not just to give interesting historical information but to enable living before this face as the face of the risen Jesus Christ.”¹⁷⁵

The problem of domination is more acutely proposed. “The question is whether universal relating must mean imperialism: might there be a non-coercive form of universality.”¹⁷⁶ Ford immediately turns to Levinas but now has resources to relate his philosophy back to theology. “When such an ethic is critically related to the thought of Jüngel and Ricoeur as they bear on Jesus Christ the result is a universality which can be related to this one face. It is possible to imagine this face relating limitlessly in a non-coercive way.”¹⁷⁷ Ford gives substantial weight to the social and political issues Jesus confronted in his life. However, he concludes this chapter by pointing “to the only place from which suspicion about his being a dominating face can be decisively answered: the crucifixion.”¹⁷⁸

The second of the two key chapters on christology is thus titled “The face on the cross and the worship of God.” Ford believes the “dead face of Christ” has been “an

¹⁷¹ *Der auferweckte Gekreuzigte*, 303, as quoted and translated in *Self and Salvation*, 170.

¹⁷² *Self and Salvation*, 170, Ford sees himself moving beyond Dalferth because, “...as most of his energy in soteriology is spent on the discussion of sacrifice he does not develop the model in fresh ways.” Ford, 209, furthermore finds that the “weakness in (Dalferth’s account) is its failure to do justice to the physicality that sacrifice makes unavoidable. In his concern for the word of the cross, for the activity of God through Christ and for Christ as a corporate person Dalferth does not reckon with the bodily particularity of the dead Jesus and the continuing importance of this, represented in his face.”

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 175-6. Ford later (p. 180) adds, “as the glorious face of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, it is not so much vague as superabundant in its reality as relating to God and to all people.”

¹⁷⁴ See *Ibid.*, 177, nt. 10, for a list of New Testament historical scholarship from which Ford draws.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 184-5.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 190.

obvious neglected focus” in theology. To recover this focus he first surveys the use of *panim* in the Old Testament, concentrating on the Pentateuch, the Psalms and prophecy. He then provides the book’s most explicit account of cross, resurrection and the relationship of both to worship. All is done in context of the face of Christ. Because of the centrality of this chapter to the theological proposals of *Self and Salvation*, we shall forego detailed examination until evaluation below of Ford’s overall position.

Self and Salvation concludes with three chapters designed to give specific examples of how this theology is actualized. Two exemplars of the worshipping self are presented: Thérèse of Lisieux and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Music, along the lines of polyphony, is a particular issue in his discussion of Bonhoeffer, and Ford widens his scope to consider the arts more generally in his flourishing conclusion based on the concept of feasting. This is the culmination of “the joy of the saints” as that which “is the simplest summary of the reality of selves being saved. Their joy is in God and in what delights God.”¹⁷⁹

B. A Responsible Overflow: The Culmination of Praise in Ford’s Theology

Self and Salvation brings to fruition Ford’s consistent effort to propose the overflowing nature of Christian faith amidst suffering. By bringing the work of earlier essays on Levinas and Jüngel together in dialogue with Ricoeur, Ford strives to fully ground human identity in worship through facing the face of Christ. The resulting “self” worships through an excessive joy arising from God’s faithfulness in Christ which cannot be understood apart from the sufferings of the cross. MacKinnon’s influence, while never made explicit, remains implicitly ever near. As the chapter on the eucharist states, “The Last Supper was a meal in the face of death. ...The remembering is false if it is not connected with entering more fully into the contingencies and tragic potentialities of life in the face of evil and death. There can be no quick leap across Gethsemane and Calvary.”¹⁸⁰ Ford in no way strays from an awareness of “joy destroying evil” and the fact that Christians “wrestle with reality at its darkest points

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 266.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 147.

and still testify to the joy of God.”¹⁸¹ In sentiments similar to Brueggemann, Ford finds the psalms of lament to be potent expressions of this struggle.

These are cries from the heart, open questions which cannot be made impotent by remarking that they often coexist with or develop into praise and trust. Lament and radical interrogation of God regarding salvation maintain a persistent and untamed element of protest, doubt, bewilderment and even despair in the heart of the prayer of the tradition. This becomes a keynote of the stories of Jesus’s crucifixion.¹⁸²

Ford, like Brueggemann, remains anxious to acknowledge the disorienting aspects of human life which continue to persist.

Unlike Brueggemann, however, Ford does not simply correlate the self-abandonment he associates with the joy of praise in a dialectic with the self-assertion of lament. In his response to Jüngel’s concept of love Ford writes:

Nor is the dialectic of selflessness and self-relatedness adequate. It is linked to the conception of the ‘full form of love’ as a loving I being loved back by the beloved thou. This must not be contradicted, but is it adequately ‘full’? Jüngel’s own concept of joy might urge him towards some concept of community as the full (and certainly the biblical) form. Joy is perhaps not best seen in terms of selflessness and self-relatedness (though they would be part of the definition), nor in the quantitative language of comparative ‘greatness’. Something further is needed which might do justice to the Psalms, to the eucharist, to the arts, to feasting and dancing, and to Dante’s *Paradiso*; but perhaps one should refrain from a formal definition.¹⁸³

Since *Jubilate* we have traced Ford’s articulation of the need for “something further” to describe that which overflows through Christian faith.¹⁸⁴ Now we see that overflowing nature of praise in *Jubilate* culminates in the excessive joy which Ford proposes in *Self and Salvation*. Furthermore, such joy finally cannot be seen to override ethical responsibility amidst suffering because *this* excessive joy overflows ethically *through faith*.

This is the implication of my reformulation of Jüngel’s definition of love as the unity of joy and substitutionary responsibility for the sake of joy. The celebratory excess of non-necessary joy in God is part of the ‘ecology’ of responsibility before God. ...I am

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 266.

¹⁸² Ibid., 199.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 80.

¹⁸⁴ Hardy and Ford, *Jubilate*, 27 (21), “The theological point in this is simple: God is free and one cannot make rules for how God may speak and act. Yet the complimentary point is that God is faithful and consistent, the sort of God who takes part in liturgies as well. The further perspective that embraces both these is that God is above all to be praised, and is well able to guide individuals and communities as regards how to do so.”

arguing that responsibility before the other needs to do justice to joy, and may not rule out full worship in faith.¹⁸⁵

Through this “full worship in faith” Ford connects human identity and salvation together in Christ.

By proposing the “face of Christ” as the leading image around which to explain how Christian faith transforms life, Ford does not intend his innovation as a break with theological tradition. Rather, this is exactly the style in which Ford attends to scripture and tradition: he redescribes long-held beliefs through new concepts and reaffirms cherished confessions through inventive and imaginative language.¹⁸⁶ Yet, his theological reconceptualization of Christ as God’s faithfulness to humanity, *the* one for “testifying to and being conformed to,” remains not unintentionally, vague. Vernon White writes:

The theological method by which Ford proceeds is not always transparent...the most explicit statement of it is on p. 166: ‘It has been my intention neither to develop a concept of self independently of Jesus Christ and then relate this to him, nor to attempt to read a concept of self out of some description of Jesus Christ...’ Ford would not be perturbed if this leads to the charge of ‘vagueness’: he positively embraces an appropriate ‘vagueness’ of the face of Jesus Christ in its relating to God and all humanity’ (p. 167, n. 1).¹⁸⁷

As White notes, Ford appears to welcome this hazy approach, and *Self and Salvation* asserts, “This worshipping self...is deprived of *any* overview of itself...”¹⁸⁸ One could easily ask how such a “self” could then be capable of identifying itself, even in the careful interplay of *idem* and *ipse* which Ford notes in Ricoeur. But then again the exercise of exhaustively pursuing theoretical connections between the conceptual and contextual does not produce the defining criterion at the heart of Ford’s work. Instead, as Vanhoozer writes, “Ford does seem to assume a minimalist metanarrative that enables him to navigate his way through the discussion. The criterion for such discrimination, at least for Christians, is the person and work of Jesus Christ, through

¹⁸⁵ *Self and Salvation*, 81.

¹⁸⁶ David F. Ford, “Salvation and the Nature of Theology: A Response to John Webster’s Review of *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54/4 (2001), 561, “Aquinas and Barth, for example, did not only comment on scripture and tradition: they daringly took on extraordinarily broad theological responsibilities in their situations. Our task is not only to comment on what they and the rest of tradition have said but also to something analogous to what they did.”

¹⁸⁷ Vernon White, review of David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*, *Epworth Review*, 26 no. 4 (1999): 94.

¹⁸⁸ *Self and Salvation*, 128, italics mine.

whom Ford discerns a radically hospitable God.”¹⁸⁹ Hospitality is an important clue here. Ford’s concern about overview is not about having a broad and guiding view of God, it is about the belief that one has the broadest view, *the* guiding view.

However, because of this concern, precisely discerning Ford’s own view of salvation through Christ now becomes all the more important. Ford never really offers a clear definition of what he means by salvation, despite all of his soteriological innovation.¹⁹⁰ His view of sin as a human problem necessitating salvation also receives little development.¹⁹¹ Instead he emphasizes that the person and work united through the image of “face of Christ” is both encompassing and inclusive; in other words, the person of Christ encompasses in such a way as to include. Vanhoozer aptly describes Ford’s “prime methodological imperative” as “thou shalt not commit extremism.”¹⁹² This means the atoning work of Christ’s person transforms the means by which Christian community includes others.¹⁹³ In this sense, the response which results from faith in Christ is extreme by not being extreme. Such overflow happens not by overriding but by encompassing; therefore, all are invited to the feast. Ford’s final goal is nothing short of a “metaphysics of feasting” which overcomes any *exclusion* of worship by Levinas through *including* his ethical concerns in all that the worship of Christ *encompasses*.

For this metaphysics the danger to which Levinas alerts us is that of a new totality. Feasting, however, allows for his ethical pluralism of being. There can be no overview of all those encounters and conversations, but the feast can enact the union of substitutionary joy in the joy of others with substitutionary responsibility.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, review of David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2 no. 3 (2000): 355-61; (359).

¹⁹⁰ This point was first made clear to me in conversation with Trevor Hart.

¹⁹¹ Ford acknowledges on page 7 of *Self and Salvation*’s introduction that “[m]any of the questions that can be raised about my position come more directly within the scope of other volumes in the series. I have been particularly helped by A. I. McFadyen who has been writing a volume on sin...” See McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Still, of the ten occurrences in which Ford mentions sin in the remainder of the book, none significantly deal with his constructive position, with the possible exception of the following affirmation of Bonhoeffer: “In [Bonhoeffer’s] thought about...the unacceptability of using human sins, weakness and existential limitations to show the necessity of Christian faith, Bonhoeffer affirms a God who allows full human freedom and responsibility—and therefore maturity.” See *Self and Salvation*, 256.

¹⁹² Vanhoozer, review, 358.

¹⁹³ For example *Self and Salvation*, 133, “The church envisaged in Ephesians sustains human dignity without excluding anyone; its ethic of reconciliation faces religious, racial, cultural and household issues.”

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 271.

Though Ford is never ambiguous that that this union is enacted by Christ, what remains murky is how this “enacting” is *actually realized* in Ford’s christology. William Placher puts it well, “I’m clear what kind of life Ford wants Christians to live—a life of hospitality, especially to the poor; a life of worship—to sum it up, a life of love. I’m also clear...that Ford believes Jesus offers more than just an example. But I’m unclear about the manner of that ‘more’.”¹⁹⁵

That more, ultimately, can be no small issue for Ford’s theology or the concerns of this thesis. In contrast to Brueggemann’s theological proposal of faith as tension derived from the expression of lament, we have examined how Ford, through praise and joy, consistently strives to articulate the overflowing nature of Christian faith (praise as the perfecting of perfection, “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing,” excessiveness arising “for the sake of joy”, the generativity of “full worship in faith”, the abundant “metaphysics of feasting”). From *Jubilate* onward, Ford has also unceasingly drawn theological connections between any proposed overflow of faith and the cross and resurrection of Christ. The importance of clarifying the soteriological approach presented by *Self and Salvation* should now be apparent, for indeed Ford’s own concerns have come to depend upon it.¹⁹⁶ If we are not transformed by how God faces suffering and sin through Christ *on our behalf*, then what reason do we have to believe otherwise about Christ than Levinas?

C. Identifying Christ’s Atonement as God’s Human Response to Suffering

¹⁹⁵ William Placher, review of David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*, *Christian Century* 116 no. 23 (1999): 823.

¹⁹⁶ The concluding section of a relatively recent reader on Jesus edited by Ford and Mike Higton states, “At the beginning of the twenty-first century the question arises again: who will Jesus be? ...Of one thing, and perhaps one thing only, we can be certain: in this century as in the centuries before it, many millions will encounter the face of Christ, and will find themselves compelled to come to terms with it.” See Ford and Higton, eds., *Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 523. A similar priority on the face of Christ (and similar dependence on the work in *Self and Salvation*) is on hand in Ford, “Apophysis and the Shoah: Where was Jesus Christ at Auschwitz?” in *Silence and the Word: Apophysis and Incarnation*, O. Davies and D. Turner, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 185-200. Reprinted in Ford, *Shaping Theology: Engagements in a Religious and Secular World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 225-41.

A significant burden for Ford's mature work is to demonstrate why the "the face of Christ" provides a necessary alternative to Levinas's own philosophical concept of "face."¹⁹⁷ The *particularity* of Christ, in suffering and death, appears crucial.¹⁹⁸

This face as dead matter is like a "black hole" for all familiar and comforting images of this event. It sucks into it other reality, represented in the inexhaustible stream of metaphors, drawing on every area of creation, and their conceptual elaborations. ...If this dead face of Jesus is intrinsic to salvation, then there is needed a radical critique of concepts of salvation which major on ideas of mutuality, reciprocity, interpersonal consciousness or communication, including 'facing'.¹⁹⁹

All human concepts of salvation (even Ford's own) are unable to escape such critique because *all* human possibilities appear to vanish into the vacuum of Christ's demise. Any overflow "for the sake of joy," at least here, seems to come about *only* through divine action to save.²⁰⁰ As such, this very particular human face "holds open" the possibility of atonement, a "true universal."²⁰¹

Nevertheless, through reflection upon Christ's dead face, the influence of Levinas upon Ford also becomes acutely focused.

I developed Levinas's concept of substitutionary responsibility in dialogue with Jüngel, Bonhoeffer and Ricoeur. That can now be brought to bear here. The dead face resists any notion of substitution which is about replacement of the one substituted for and which sponsors irresponsibility. Instead, it represents the full person of Jesus Christ, but in an absence which demands a comparable responsibility. It signifies simultaneously the ultimate carrying out of responsibility and the complete handing over of it. Before this dead face one can recognize both someone who gave himself utterly for God and for us, and also the fact that being dead is not a matter of doing anything for us: it is being dead for us, being absent for us, being one who creates by his death a *limitless* sphere of responsibility for us.²⁰²

Here we can also detect the influence of MacKinnon's concerns for tragedy and atonement. Over and against "any notion of substitution...which sponsors

¹⁹⁷ *Self and Salvation*, 8, "Neither Levinas nor Jungel offers a satisfactory account of the worshipping self..." See also *ibid.*, 71, "In other words, while of course recognising major unresolved issues, is it possible to envisage a Levinnasian Christian theology?"

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 205, "...the face of the dead Christ, in the context of testimony to his life, death and resurrection, is the Christian touchstone for love and power."

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, "But this is full death for Jesus, and there can be no immanent continuity across it. The only continuity is the corpse with this dead face, awaiting a resurrection which...*is utterly due to God* giving life in body, mind, spirit." (italics mine).

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 206, "The dead face therefore holds open the answer to this question: might the particularity of this face, dead before God, be the true universal? ...Or, more precisely, might death itself be transformed by this person undergoing it?"

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 206, italics mine.

irresponsibility,” Christ dies not as “not a matter of doing anything for us.” Instead, the result which matters for Ford is “limitless” human responsibility.

Ford’s mature theology, as it turns out, produces a concept of “facing” Christ which is very hard to distinguish from Levinas’s own expressions of messianism. For both, human ethical responsibility is the result of God’s “being absent for us” or in Levinassian terms “transcendence to the point of absence.”²⁰³ For both, such responsibility becomes preeminent before a face.²⁰⁴ For both, such responsibility is the reason for critique of Christian substitutionary atonement.²⁰⁵ Of course, these similarities could be understood as the accomplishment of Ford’s goal to unite the best of Levinas and Jüngel; “I want to argue for a substitutionary self, defined by radical responsibility, and also for Jesus Christ dying for all.”²⁰⁶ Ford’s note on this point further makes clear he is not trying to argue against Levinas’s Jewish witness.

Yet the problem simply comes down to this: Levinas is arguing *against* Christian witness. Levinas can tell us why his messianic expectation *is not* Christian.²⁰⁷ Can Ford tell us why his view *is*? *Why is it important that Jesus Christ is the one who dies for all?*

To be sure, Ford consistently holds to the “superabundance” of God’s faithfulness in Christ; following discussions of the dead face, he is quick to acknowledge “the resurrection as an event than which none better or greater could be conceived.”²⁰⁸ But for all of his considerable stress on this “God-sized” vindication, we struggle to see how Ford understands human responsibility to overflow from more than simply exemplifying Christ’s sacrifice. Again Placher writes:

²⁰³ See Levinas, “A God ‘Transcendent to the Point of Absence’: Friday, May 21, 1976,” in *God, Death, and Time* (ed. Jacques Rolland; trans. B. Bergo; Stanford: Stanford University, 2000), 224. “...God is not simply the first other but other than the other [*autre qu’autrui*], other otherwise, other with an alterity prior to the alterity of the other person, prior to the ethical compulsion to the neighbor. And transcendent to the point of absence, to the point of his possible confusion with the agitation of the *there is*” (italics original).

²⁰⁴ See Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence* (trans. Michael B. Smith; New York: Columbia University, 1999), 104. “There is, in the face, the supreme authority that commands, and I always say it is the word of God. The face is the locus of the word of God. There is the word of God in the other, a nonthematized word.”

²⁰⁵ Levinas clearly leaves no room for any Christian understanding of substitutionary atonement. See Levinas, “Messianic Texts,” in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism by Emmanuel Levinas* (trans. S. Hand; London: Althone, 1990), 89. “The fact of not evading the burden imposed by the suffering of others defines ipseity itself. All persons are the Messiah.”

²⁰⁶ *Self and Salvation*, 68.

²⁰⁷ Levinas, “Messianic Texts,” 90. “Messianism is therefore not the certainty of the coming of a man who stops History. It is my power to bear the suffering of all. It is the moment when I recognize this power and my universal responsibility.”

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 210.

I believe that we can take on such responsibility joyfully only because we know that we will be forgiven our mistakes—in what Calvin called Christian freedom—and that it is Jesus' life, death and resurrection that makes that confidence possible. I think Ford believes that too. But, while he is suspicious of a good many traditional concepts of substitutionary atonement, I'm not sure what he has put in their place.²⁰⁹

On this issue, Ford's mature theology lacks clarity which appears in his earlier work:

Resurrection is God's way of referring back Jesus to the world...It is not a neutral, amoral fact about what happened to a corpse. It climaxes the pattern of responsibility between man and God. God takes responsibility for everything, the resurrection is an initiative of God alone, but he gives back a new responsibility. For the disciples the resurrection was an experience of joy and vocation together. There is the joyful freedom of complete forgiveness and acceptance in the welcome of Jesus, and the *limitless responsibility* of mission to the whole world.²¹⁰

Jubilate's proclamation of Christ is not difficult to differentiate from that of Levinas. Exactly because "God takes responsibility for everything" humanity is therefore enabled to become newly responsible for "mission to the whole world." *Jubilate* also appears more clear on the necessity of God's confrontation in Christ with human sin which is "opposed from the inside by suffering it, embodying it, and going to the roots of it as the perversion of respect..."²¹¹ Thus, who God is in Christ produces the overflow of responsibility "for the sake of joy."

Self and Salvation instead draws heavily upon Ricoeur to develop further how such overflow happens. But on the above issues Ricoeur is really not of much help, even if agreement is found with the critique of Levinas offered in *Oneself as Another*. Such critique still cannot overcome that which ultimately underlies it: Ricoeur's own inclination toward Hegelian reliance on a trinitarian economy made *fully* present and manifest *by* humanity's power to actualize its own identity as faith's rationale.²¹² To

²⁰⁹ Placher, review, 823.

²¹⁰ *Jubilate*, 158, 159 (126), italics mine.

²¹¹ *Jubilate*, 119 (94).

²¹² Paul Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction* (New York, Columbia University, 1998), 152, "The proclamation: 'It is true; the Lord has risen' (Luke 24: 34) seems to me in its affirmative vigor to go beyond its investment in the imaginary of faith. Is it not in the quality of this death that the beginning of the sense of the resurrection resides? ...It is here that, perhaps once again pressured by the philosopher in me, *I am tempted, following Hegel, to understand the resurrection as resurrection in the Christian community, which becomes the body of the living Christ*. The resurrection would consist in having a body other than the physical body, that is to say, acquiring a historical body. Am I entirely unorthodox in thinking this?" (italics mine). John Milbank provides a nuanced response to such Hegelian "temptation" regarding the result of Christ's death in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 184, "Here one should certainly reject [Hegel's] idea that a fully rational presence can finally grasp all aesthetic content, but at the same time one should not ignore what can be salvaged from Hegel's attempt to conceive of a work of the Holy Spirit that is more than mere application of the work of Christ. What is vital is his pneumatological reformulation of the problematic of atonement." See also

whatever degree we find the identity of one human self as and in another, Christian faith has no resources to conceive of something like this interpenetration of identity apart from sharing in the overflow which is the divine atonement in the incarnate Christ, made possible not by the spirit of humanity itself, but by the power of the Holy Spirit sustaining the Godhead *even* as the Father allows the suffering of the Son. Furthermore, Christian faith traditionally believes a lot more about what happened between the cross and Pentecost than Ricoeur himself can acknowledge.²¹³

Properly proposing *this* overflow—herein meaning how humanity shares in resurrection and the defeat of evil, sin and suffering as the most improbable result of the cross—has always taxed the Christian imagination. This is exactly what has led Ford to the synecdoche of Christ's dead face.

Death is where the category of historical action fails.... And in meditating on the transition from death to resurrection imagination fails too. So the dead face is an imaginative sign of the unimaginable. I found thinking about the dead face the most demanding part of the book.²¹⁴

In imagining the unimaginable, Ford is looking to find Ricoeur's "icon that is not an idol," the image of Christ's person which transforms us into that same image.²¹⁵ But if Christ's death is truly "not a matter of doing anything for us" then this image only becomes at best the supreme pattern of human sacrifice. Such a rendering of Christ's face hardly takes us beyond Levinas.²¹⁶ Nor does it adequately address the reality of human unfaithfulness and irresponsibility in sin. Instead, it leaves Ford struggling to provide a clear account of how faith *actually overflows* human experience in any kind of discernible excess or superabundance. Why? Because the manner in which Ford consistently criticizes substitutionary atonement, developed with MacKinnon in the background and Levinas to the fore, undermines any expectation of God's own self-expression of human faithfulness through Christ. We can hardly imagine why human

Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993), 147-48.

²¹³ *Critique and Conviction*, 154, "This brings me to say that I do not finally know what happened between the Cross and Pentecost. ... I know nothing of the resurrection as an event, as peripeteia, as turning point."

²¹⁴ "Response to Webster," 570.

²¹⁵ Ricoeur cited by Ford, *op. cit.*

²¹⁶ Michael Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*, 162, "This is perhaps as far as we can go with Levinas. The person of Jesus serves as an example of what the human is and is called to be; the proximity and presence of God in the world can only be articulated in terms of the neighbour and the responsibility and justice which this provokes."

responsibility is for “the sake of joy” if Christ’s death has simply rendered such responsibility the “limitless” condition of human existence.

For atonement to have any meaning as the response of a faithful God to the suffering of humanity, Christian theology must always argue that there is more to the cross than *how* it meets the eye.²¹⁷ John Milbank writes,

Under the dispensation of death, we only see gift via sacrifice, but the genuine sacrifice, supremely that of the cross, is only recognized as such in so far as it is the *sustaining* of joyful, non-reactive giving, by a hastening of death as the only way of continuing to give despite the cancellation of gift by death.²¹⁸

This appears to be the kind of “recognition” Ford’s work strives for—a presentation of christology as overflowing the death and destruction of sacrifice without perpetuating the very problems which make this sacrifice a necessity. Ford’s facing concept, in this sense, rightly depends on recognizing *how* God acts for humanity in Christ.

However, Ford never adequately addresses how this recognition itself is necessarily realized through *who* God is for humanity in Christ. This finally requires an expression of both human and divine identity in atonement which is less vague and elusive than that to which Ford clings. *Self and Salvation* asserts that, “the Father also faces the Son, the transformative overflow of which is the Holy Spirit,” but never goes on to explain why *this* facing and *this* overflow really matter.²¹⁹ Without a more developed and integrated account of God as trinity than what Ford gives there is little way to expect that “facing the face of Christ” is anything more than our own response to suffering.²²⁰ For we are ultimately left to confess the cross and resurrection as little “for

²¹⁷ George Lindbeck, “Atonement & the Hermeneutics of Intratextual Social Embodiment” in *The Nature of Confession*, Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, eds. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1996), 221-240 (238), “...we need to remember that the atonement message, though necessary, is not a sufficient condition for *overflowing* fruits of faith and works of love. There are ways of preaching that message which foster a narrow love of a little Jesus. The history of the church is full of such distortions, and while these are by no means only in the West, it is there that most of us are chiefly aware of them. Cross-centered medieval piety and later Protestant conversionism affirmed that there is no forgiveness of sins apart from Christ’s death on the cross, and yet also often fell into the Pelagian trap of speaking as if the reception of that forgiveness were made possible only through one’s own *ethical*, religious or emotional good works.” (italics mine).

²¹⁸ John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 228.

²¹⁹ *Self and Salvation*, 214.

²²⁰ Webster, “Review of Ford,” 553, labels Ford’s approach “a description which concentrates largely on Christianity as a form of human life or religion, and only secondarily or derivatively it is concerned with God *in se*.” In “Response to Webster,” 572-3, Ford asserts that *Self and Salvation*’s first chapter reference of Dante’s *Paradiso* “sensitively transcends the split between God *pro nobis* and God *in se* about which Webster is worried.” Even if this addresses Webster’s concern (surely doubtful!), I find it unlikely to serve as an effective way for Ford to differentiate the Christian God from the transcendence of the divine

us” besides an example which simply validates the ethical priority Levinas maintains over worship in general and Christian faith in particular.²²¹

in Levinas (cf. “A God ‘Transcendent to the Point of Absence’,” op. cit.), which is exactly, I argue, Ford’s task in accounting for Christian faith through the face of Christ.

²²¹ Ford, “Response to Webster,” 573. “...if the glory and freedom of God *in se* are in fact clearly indicated in the opening meditation and elsewhere, then it is appropriate for a theology of salvation to get on with its proper task. That task is seen in the book as not a doctrine of the Trinity but dealing with God for us, and salvation in human reality—including morality and experience.” Again, in line with Webster, this is my concern: exactly how *clearly* has Ford indicated the glory and freedom of God *in se*? Without this clear indicative, how well can Ford move on with the “proper task” of “dealing with God for us”?

Lament, Praise and the Reality of Christ's Atonement: Faith as Human Participation in the Trinitarian Response to Suffering

Our final chapter pursues a two-fold goal. We will further clarify problems identified in the respective theological approaches of Walter Brueggemann and David Ford, and we will also keep in mind their insistent concern over human suffering as we begin to articulate a way forward beyond their proposals for faith as lament and praise. Up to this point, we have largely focused on the issues with respect to the theologians individually, identifying the unique role which lament and praise plays in the developing thought of both. We have seen Brueggemann approach the problem of suffering through biblical scholarship on the lament psalms and argue that human pain is the main question of Old Testament theology. Lament as it characterizes scriptural testimony of suffering subsequently influences his theological account of Israel's God and the New Testament proclamation of God in Christ. Alternatively, Ford begins with the theological centrality of praise in response to God's faithfulness to redeem creation through Christ. His expectation that faith "overflows...for the sake of joy" is subsequently proposed in relationship to the suffering which faith cannot ignore but, indeed, "faces" in the New Testament accounts of Christ crucified, dead and buried.

These two proposals shape our examination of faith amidst suffering through the interrelationship of two particular concerns: first, the theological nature of the biblical relationship *between* lament and praise, and second, *how this relationship relates* to the suffering person and work of Christ. While we have seen Brueggemann's proposal primarily as a development of the first concern, and Ford's primarily as a development of the second, both issues clearly come into play by bringing the work of these two theologians together. Examining Brueggemann's aim to recover lament as a Christian *expression* alongside Ford's aim to articulate praise and joy as a central *expectation* of Christian faith parallels the textual relationship proposed by Brueggemann's earliest scholarship on the typical dual form of Israel's lament psalms.¹ Likewise, though we have drawn a theological contrast between the *tension* of faith which Brueggemann eventually derives from this biblical form and Ford's own emphasis on Christian faith

¹ See Brueggemann, "From Hurt to Joy," 71, 77, and 83.

overflowing in praise and joy, we also consistently observe that both understand the passion and resurrection of Christ to manifest their respective approaches to faith.

Our previous critique of Brueggemann and Ford has thus focused on how both propose that human response to suffering is transformed by God's response to humanity through Christ. This chapter further clarifies this concern by briefly revisiting the work of Brueggemann's predecessor, Claus Westermann, to illustrate how lament and praise relate to the way in which theology construes Christ's person and work. We then develop the implications of Brueggemann and Ford's mutual failure to treat suffering in conjunction with the universality of sin and consequent human involvement in the persistence of evil in creation. We argue that a trinitarian understanding of Christ's atonement is necessary to propose how God confronts *both* suffering *and* sin thereby producing faithful human response. We consider this alternative in conversation with Colin Gunton's account of atonement as pneumatological participation in Christ's own human response to suffering. Though we affirm Gunton's ultimate conclusion that the triune God's faithfulness in Christ, mediated by the Holy Spirit, transforms humanity in joyful expectation of praise, we also assert that his identification of Christ's cry from the cross *solely* with human sin problematically obscures the identification of Christ's humanity with the suffering expressed in lament. We conclude by arguing that a trinitarian theology of praise cannot be understood apart from either who God is in Christ's atonement or how the atoning Christ is humanly faithful in lament.

I. Atonement for Sin *or* Suffering? Revisiting Westermann's Concern and the Work of Christ as Proposed by Brueggemann and Ford

As noted in our first chapter, Brueggemann's initial article on lament appears alongside Westermann's programmatic "The Role of Lament in the Old Testament" in the same 1974 issue of *Interpretation*. Westermann there argues that the New Testament does not exclude lament from Christian faith, and he critiques theology which emphasizes Christ's atonement for sin all the while ignoring ongoing human suffering.

...in Christian dogmatics and in Christian worship suffering as opposed to sin has receded far into the background: Jesus Christ's work of salvation has to do with the forgiveness of sins and with eternal life; it does not deal however with ending human suffering. Here we see the real reason why the lament has been dropped from Christian prayer. The believing Christian should bear his suffering patiently; he should not complain about it to God. The "sufferings of this world" are unimportant and

insignificant. What is important is the guilt of sin. ...We must now ask whether Paul and Pauline oriented theology has not understood the work of Christ in a onesided manner.

...On the basis of these observations we would have to decide anew whether the onesidedness of relating the work of Christ to sin alone, to the exclusion of any relation to man's suffering, actually represents the New Testament as a whole and, if so, whether that understanding would not have to be corrected by the Old Testament. A correction of this sort would have far-reaching consequences. One of these would be that the lament, as the language of suffering, would receive a legitimate place in Christian worship, as it had in the worship of the Old Testament.²

We have observed that Brueggemann's consistent engagement with Israel's lament throughout the development of his biblical theology pursues the very type of correction called for by Westermann. Yet suffering in Christian theology also remains an evident concern throughout the development of David Ford's work, particularly in reference to his engagement with the New Testament. While Westermann above criticizes Pauline theology for one-sidedly emphasizing the problem of sin over suffering, Ford's 2 Corinthians commentary with Young presents Paul's image of the face of Christ as a central christological proposal for confronting suffering.³ Westermann's above concern about faith which must bear "suffering patiently" and "not complain to God about it" is also at hand as Ford's article for MacKinnon's festschrift reflects on the life of Paul as "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing."

Indeed, I want to argue that 2 Corinthians show the tragic being taken into a transformation which sharpens rather than negates it, while yet rendering the category of tragic inadequate by itself. ...The case is as follows. Paul is acutely aware as MacKinnon of the dangers of a triumphalist understanding of the Resurrection. ...The Resurrection is not simply the reversal of death, leaving death behind it. Paul "carries in the body the death of Jesus" (4:10): the Resurrection message has sent him even more deeply into contingency, weakness and suffering. It is atonement whose power is to allow him to stay close to, even immersed in, the tragic depths of life.⁴

The atonement theology offered here is not a refusal to face ongoing human suffering, but, as Ford goes on to develop in *Self and Salvation*, exactly the opposite; "...the face

² Westermann, "The Role of Lament," 33, 34.

³ Young and Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians*, 249, "The face of Christ represents the subject of the events of crucifixion and resurrection. It transcends paradox but yet inconceivably holds together suffering, sin, death and God. These have to be thought together, according to this gospel, but there is no concept or image that can do it except this name and face." See also Ford's comments on p. 245, the cross "wages war on ways of seeing God that have not passed through the inconceivable, this death. To insulate God from weakness, suffering, sin, poverty and death is no longer possible."

⁴ Ford, "Tragedy and Atonement," 123.

of the dead Christ, in the context of testimony to his life, death and resurrection, is the Christian touchstone for love and power.”⁵

Clearly, neither Brueggemann in his emphasis on lament, nor Ford in his priority on praise and joy, downplay or evade human suffering in either their account of scripture or their understanding of Christ. Yet our focus has also remained on how both propose suffering to be transformed by God’s faithfulness through Christ’s person and work. Westermann, despite his critique, does not entirely lose traditional concepts of atonement as sacrifice or divine judgment of sin from view; his article on lament concludes that renewed biblical understanding of suffering in Christian theology is necessary to articulate “a history which ultimately reaches the point where God, as the God of judgment, suffers *for* his people.”⁶ Our scrutiny of Brueggemann and Ford has ultimately focused in on precisely this issue: how do both understand *the necessity of Christ as God’s own faithful response to suffering on our behalf?*

On the one hand, the nature of divine faithfulness has emerged as our concern with Brueggemann’s proposal. His early lament scholarship builds on Westermann’s observation that biblical faith takes shape in human expressions of suffering characteristically followed by human praise and/or thanksgiving for divine response. As his theology matures he argues that the rhetorical tension between these dual aspects does not simply function to shape human experience in faith. Instead, Brueggemann concludes that the form reveals an irresolute nature within God and the possibility that the sovereign God of scripture may be unresolved in fidelity towards creation. We have argued that this complicates how the Old Testament can be meaningfully understood to express the expectation that God *faithfully responds to lament*.

This interpretive approach makes Brueggemann’s theological understanding of the New Testament even more problematic. He asserts that “the unresolve [*sic*] is as profound in the New Testament as in the Old,”⁷ and the basis behind such a claim lies in his biblical interpretation of Christ’s passion. “There is a sense that Sunday resolves Friday, that the core testimony resolves the countertestimony...But in our honest reading of the New Testament, and in our honest liturgic reckoning, the Friday of negativity persists to make its claim.”⁸ Brueggemann here goes beyond merely

⁵ Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 205.

⁶ Westermann, “The Role of Lament,” 38, italics mine.

⁷ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 403.

⁸ Ibid.

accounting for the gravity of Christ's dereliction and crucifixion; he actually describes the gospel narratives concerning the cross as "countertestimony," the same concept with which he classifies aspects of scripture as human rhetoric *against God*. Such an understanding, we have argued, obscures any understanding of Christ's atonement *as atonement* and makes it difficult to understand the New Testament on its own terms, as surprising, even shocking, testimony expressing what God is doing *within* the suffering work of Christ *to redeem humanity*.

On the other hand, Ford's theology proposes divine faithfulness through Christ, especially amidst suffering and death, as that which explicitly generates Christian joy and praise of God. While Ford never acutely focuses on lament, his treatment of praise in relation to suffering can be readily joined with Westermann's biblical observation that the New Testament does not exclude lament from Christian faith and with Brueggemann's own biblical scholarship on lament. Nevertheless, our concern with Ford lies in how he understands faith to arise through God's own expression of human faithfulness in Christ. By Ford's account, the innovative presentation of Christ's person through his face leaves vague the nature of his work. We have thus argued that Ford struggles to explain why Christ faith "overflows" in praise and joy amidst suffering because he does not articulate clearly what Christian faith should expect as a result of the person of Christ facing suffering and death *for us*.

While neither Brueggemann nor Ford fail to describe christology in terms of suffering, we have found the former's theology of lament to present an inadequate account of how God in Christ suffers *with us*. The latter's theology of praise and joy has been proposed to overcome this problem, but we have still found that Ford presents an inadequate account of how God in Christ suffers *for us*. We will now further develop both of these problems in their mutual misunderstanding of Christ's person and work in atonement. Notably missing from Brueggemann and Ford's respective accounts of faith is any significant notion of God's own confrontation in Christ with evil which humanity is finally unable to face within, and not just without, itself. Even as both may be seen to address Westermann's concern about suffering, their proposals appear to invert the problem in relation to sin: theological priority on the suffering of Christ for Brueggemann and Ford now threatens to overshadow and obscure any notion of Christ's work on behalf of sinful humanity. For both, atonement for sin more or less takes the place which Westermann finds suffering to occupy often in earlier Christian

formulations of atonement, that which is “unimportant and insignificant.” How then does this affect how both understand faith to transform human response in lament and praise?

II. Confronting Suffering *and* Sin: Faith and the Necessity of God’s Own Human Response in Christ

We have observed in previous chapters that Brueggemann and Ford tend to account for the transforming person and work of Christ subjectively, in relation to human experience and as a moral example. Christian faith is thus portrayed as more or less the result of *how* humanity responds to the *person* of Christ, whether by following him to “maintain the tension” found expressed in the lament psalms or “facing the face of Christ” for the sake of joy. The suffering, death and resurrection of Christ is construed as example or pattern, and in Brueggemann’s case, the person of Christ as God *with us* in faithfulness becomes obscured while for Ford, the work of God in Christ *for humanity* remains significantly unclear.

Colin Gunton, whose trinitarian theology we examine in more detail below, presents an alternative view in his work *The Actuality of Atonement*. He argues that these kinds of accounts obscure a proper understanding of God and humanity in relationship to evil and suffering. He reflects on the issue alongside the theology of Anselm and MacKinnon.

In his ‘Subjective and Objective Conceptions of Atonement’...Donald MacKinnon argues that the crucial weakness of subjective theologies of the atonement is that they trivialize evil. Anselm has a similar point with his ‘Have you not considered how great is the weight of sin?’ (*Cur Deus Homo* I, xxi). Although Anselm’s may, as has been remarked already, appear to be a rather quantitative way of putting the matter, it draws attention to the fact that the human condition is too enmeshed in evil to be able to be restored by its own agency. Forgiveness is not, therefore, simply a matter of omnipotence: something God can do simply because he wants to. A mere declaration changes nothing. ...The point could be reinforced by a discussion of the concept of sin which is implied in any of the three metaphors of atonement, although it is done most easily by a reference to the discussion of the demonic. On such an account, sin is slavery, and slavery is not abolished by appeals to follow a good example.⁹

⁹ Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (London: T&T Clark, 1988), 159. Gunton cites MacKinnon, “Subjective and Objective Conceptions of Atonement,” in *Prospect for Theology: Essays in Honour of H.H. Farmer*, ed. F.G. Healey (Welwyn: Nisbet, 1966), 167-182.

Gunton demonstrates that the problem of evil which Christ's atonement addresses is one in which the seriousness of suffering in the world cannot be separated from human perpetuation of suffering in sin. In this sense, atonement is first and foremost understood to reconcile the disruption of relationship between creation and Creator thereby becoming the means for a new, redeemed creation. "By virtue of both truths, that the problem is one that we cannot solve and that our being clean and free and upright is the gift of the creator, there needs to be a recreative, redemptive divine initiative in which the root of the problem, the disrupted personal relationship, is set to rights."¹⁰

Gunton also asserts that both of these truths—the gift of God's faithful response in Christ and its incarnational necessity on behalf of our own human unfaithfulness—become obscured when the issue of suffering overtakes the focus of atonement.

On the one hand, it tends to reduce atonement to theodicy: as if the problem is not human offence and sin, but the evil for which God is in some sense responsible.... On the other hand, it calls attention away from the fact that atonement is also a human act, an act, that is, of the incarnate Son whose life, death and resurrection realise, in the Spirit, a human conquest of evil which those who come to God through him may subsequently share. To place the weight on a suffering God deprives the incarnate Son of his proper work...¹¹

Over and against that which he calls the "perils of the current fashion" regarding suffering and christology, any theology of atonement, for Gunton, must approach the problem of evil primarily by proclaiming who the triune God is for humanity in Christ, who we are in sin, and how redemption of the latter is a result of the former.¹²

The above two-fold critique parallels our previous concerns about the respective christologies of Brueggemann and Ford in relation to suffering. For Brueggemann, human pain and God's response to it are central issues of biblical theology,¹³ and we have traced how his method for interpreting scriptural rhetoric produces an eventual conclusion that "ambivalence" is the theological reality which "drives the very life of the divine."¹⁴ In this context any meaningful expectation that God responds faithfully to

¹⁰ Ibid., 160.

¹¹ Gunton, "Atonement and the Project of Creation" in *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 192.

¹² Gunton, "Epilogue" in *Becoming and Being: The Doctrine of God in Charles Harshorne and Karl Barth* (London: SCM, 2001), 225.

¹³ See Ch. 2 above, Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I," 19, "The issue that Israel and Israel's God (and those who continue this line of reflection) must always face concerns pain..."

¹⁴ Linafelt and Beal, "Introduction," *God in the Fray*, 4-5, "In short, disorientation encompasses both threat and promise, and it is impossible to have one without the other.... The refusal to choose constitutes

lament seems to collapse, as does New Testament affirmation of the work of Christ on the cross as faithful divine response for all suffering. Both instead function as *countertestimony* against God, with the complaint of lament becoming obscured as *faith in God*, and the cross becoming obscured as *God's universal atoning response*. However, a very problematic kind of theodicy could be said to emerge in atonement's place: if the cross can be interpreted as something other than divine faithfulness through the humanity of Christ, then there is little reason why it might not be a countertestimony of God's responsibility for human suffering.

On the other hand, Ford's concept of "facing" Christ in suffering and death emerges as a critique of substitutionary atonement in the light of his concern that Christian worship not be divided from ethical response to the world. Atonement as a human act thus results not distinctly from who the triune God is in the incarnate Christ but rather from accounts of this perspective (i.e. Ford's dialogues with Jüngel and, to a much less developed degree, Dalferth) and accounts of philosophical ethics (i.e. Ford's dialogues with Levinas and Ricoeur) presented in dialogue on *equal ontological ground*. Therefore, Ford's own theological footing, by his own intent, and especially in regard to Christ's person, is unavoidably unstable, a deliberate choice to be vague about the nature of God's work in Christ rather than risking any overview which might be perceived to be dogmatic and thereby, on Ford's account, undercut human responsibility to follow Christ's example.

Nevertheless, we could anticipate Brueggemann and Ford's respective responses to such critique. Brueggemann's objection would likely arise from the interrelationship of scripture and theology. Can a more theological account of scripture allow the text to truly "testify" and "speak," or does it merely silence and cover over the unsettling reality of God which Brueggemann believes to be a "certain... and inescapable" result of his approach to biblical interpretation?¹⁵ Kevin Vanhoozer's recent proposal on Christian doctrine shows why such a question presents a false choice:

Brueggemann is partly right: we cannot get "behind" the biblical discourse, to history or ontology for instance, to "check and see" if what the text says corresponds to the way God is outside the text. Where he...goes wrong is in treating the biblical text as human

the fundamental ambivalence of God, an ambivalence that is never resolved in some middle-ground synthesis but instead reels back and forth between the two. Walter Brueggemann has understood more than anyone that this tension, this fiercely imagined disjunction, is what drives the life of the divine..."

¹⁵ Brueggemann, *TOT*, 750, "Testimony leads reality and makes a decision for a *certain* kind of reality both possible and *inescapable*." (italics mine). See also *ibid.*, 125, nt. 18.

testimony only. Happily, we need not choose between God as an abstract idea and God as a pattern of cultural practice. An alternative conception, drawn from [Vanhoozer's] previous theo-dramatic analysis of the gospel, sees God as a communicative agent. It is God's triune speech and action that generate Israel's (and the church's) practices, and not the reverse. *Furthermore, God himself is a member of the linguistic community that includes Israel and the church.* This is not at all to say that God is an "object" in our world; God is not a being that can be encompassed by space and time. But this does not mean that God cannot exercise speech agency. When God speaks, he is present as the one who transcends (is ontologically distinct from) the world order.¹⁶

Notably, the divine ontological distinction made by Vanhoozer here is similar to a point Fretheim makes about Israel's God in his own critique of Brueggemann.¹⁷ Without theological or doctrinal "criteria" for distinguishing between the various biblical portrayals of God, "*all talk about Israel's unsettling testimony regarding God is called into question.*"¹⁸

For his part, Ford might argue that his "facing" concept already encompasses a proper theological priority on the work of Christ's suffering for humanity: "Any vagueness is not so much because of abstraction or generality but because of the utter particularity of this face's relating to each face."¹⁹ However, what appears to govern the particularity at work here is not so much the triune God's incarnation as the human Christ but rather the relationship of Christ to every human particularity. Discussion of atonement thus shifts from divine initiative to human response without much accounting for how the latter is made possible by the former in faith; again, "to be vague (in the sense of eluding definitions which try to avoid the richness of its infinitely particular relationships) is intrinsic to its reality."²⁰ So, when Ford explains the confrontation of suffering and death, sin and evil in terms of humanity related to Christ, we do not know, *beyond the presentation of Christ's particular human example*, why this atoning relationship is really necessary or what it means. As Ford writes, "God is free to take an initiative in order to lead us into worship from our side. Jesus is God *in a way which*

¹⁶ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 99, italics original.

¹⁷ See op. cit., Ch. 3 above, Fretheim, "Some Reflections," 27, "The biblical God is transcendent *within* relationship (never 'above' it); the God active 'in the fray' and 'embracing pain' is so engaged as the immanent *and* transcendent one. The goodness of God is revealed precisely in *that* God wills—once and for all...to enter into the fray and *by the way in which* God embraces the pain: steadfast in love, faithful to promises, and unwaveringly willing the salvation of Israel and world." (italics original).

¹⁸ Ibid., 34-5.

¹⁹ Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 175-6.

²⁰ Ibid., 176.

tells us how to worship God. He embodies the facing of God and the facing of humanity.”²¹ We finally can’t know why *embodiment* is more than *exemplification* here.

Again, what is missing in both Brueggemann and Ford is any real notion of human sin as a problem or complication for human faith response as lament or praise. Gunton stresses that atonement cannot be proposed “at the cost of denying subjective and exemplary implications,”²² but he more precisely argues that “without prefacing, for example, the exhortations to follow Jesus with a theological account, expounding his saving significance on the basis of which imitation is *reasonable* (Rom 12.1 again), the imitation hangs in the air.”²³ This issue surfaces in the work of Patrick Miller, Brueggemann’s frequent editor and himself a noted expert on lament, though he clearly aims to account for Christ’s own lament in relationship to suffering *and* sin.

When the New Testament hears the laments in Jesus’ voice, this is not simply a prophetic and messianic move. Something even more fundamental is going on. For what it means is that all the cries for help that have come forth and still come forth from human lips, all the laments that we have uttered and will utter, are taken up in the laments of Christ. ...the lament opens to us not only the meaning of the *person* of Christ. The lament is also critical for understanding *the work of God* in Jesus Christ, for it is our chief clue that Christ died not simply as one *of* us but also as one *for* us, both *with* us and *in our behalf*. As we hear our human voice of lament on the lips of the dying Jesus, it now becomes crystal clear: Jesus dies for our *suffering* as much as for our *sins*.²⁴

Miller, unlike Brueggemann, does not tend to shy away from explicitly affirming divine faithfulness through Christ’s humanity as it has traditionally shaped Christian theology. He also appears more explicit than Ford on the nature of Christ’s atonement for sin all the while still emphasizing Christ’s confrontation with suffering. Even so, the problem arises when Miller employs a concept very familiar to Ford to explain how Christian prayer takes suffering seriously through lament.

As the lament becomes the voice of Christ, therefore, three things happen that now shape our own prayer:

1. In his own praying, Jesus exemplifies the depths of despair and forsakenness and also the profoundest and simplest trust that hands over one’s life and story, one’s suffering and hopelessness, into the hands of God...
2. But to hear these prayers now in the voice of Christ radically transforms our suffering and changes its face. The face of suffering for us is now the face of

²¹ Ibid., 214, italics mine.

²² Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 157.

²³ Ibid., 158.

²⁴ Miller, “Heaven’s Prisoners: The Lament as Christian Prayer,” in *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square*, Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller, eds. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 15-26, here 20, 21, italics original.

Christ. It is no less real for us than it was for him. But he has walked that way before us and walked that way for us. So we do not ever walk that way alone...

3. And if I see now the face of suffering not simply in a mirror but in the face of Christ, it is now not my own suffering that I see. It is the suffering of the other. So finally Christ teaches us a new mode of crying out, a crying out in behalf of others.²⁵

In discussing the face of Christ, Miller argues that Christ goes “before us” and “for us,” in a way which “transforms” how we face suffering. Yet, exactly like Ford, Miller leaves unclear how Christ actually faces suffering *for us*, except to argue that transformation comes through our experience of his mutuality and moral example (“Jesus *exemplifies...*”; “Christ *teaches...*”). If sin truly complicates how we offer lament and praise to God, then Miller’s theology does not adequately explain how God, in being *with us* in Christ’s sufferings, now makes it possible *for us* to follow Christ’s example on behalf of a suffering world. So while Miller moves beyond Brueggemann and Ford by hinting at a necessary conception of Christ’s atoning action in terms of both suffering *and* sin, nevertheless, Miller does not adequately work out how atonement for both impacts ongoing human response in faith.

III. Examining a Trinitarian Alternative

A. Gunton’s Proposal: Praise as Result of Participation in Atonement

In addressing the types of theological problems we see in the proposals of Brueggemann and Ford (and also Miller above), much contemporary theology has taken up the task of reaffirming Christian faith, in both doxological and ethical response, as the result of the triune nature of God.²⁶ Gunton’s theology of atonement provides a particularly relevant example because his emphasis on atonement for sin proposes Christ’s suffering and death not simply to be a forensic or legal transaction, but the means of participation in a trinitarian transformation of humanity so that all creation may praise the Creator. This approach allows him to consider human response to suffering in relation to the problem of sin, and so we will briefly outline his position in order to contrast it with our concerns over Brueggemann and Ford.

²⁵ Ibid., 22-3.

²⁶ See Christoph Schwöbel, “Introduction: The Renaissance of Trinitarian Theology: Reasons, Problems, Tasks,” in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays of Divine Being and Act*, C. Schwöbel, ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 1-30.

Much of Gunton's work on atonement develops his observation that any one biblical metaphor for the work of God—conceived as victory, judgment, or sacrifice—in and through the person of Christ—conceived as human substitute, representative, or example—can be overstressed unless each of the metaphors are properly understood to “operate with a double focus, on both God and the world.”²⁷ To speak of faith *in* Christ then is not simply to speak of a possible human response to God; it is a theological reality necessarily made possible by who the triune God is in faithfulness.

In what sense, then, does it follow that God in such a way causes us to be what and who we are? The question arises because to say that Jesus is our substitute (albeit as also our representative) is to say that through him God re-establishes our life in its orientation to its promised perfection. The directedness of our life is now determined not by slavery, lawlessness and pollution, but by grace: by the pull of the Spirit to completion rather than the pull of sin to dissolution. ... So it is in general: the Spirit is God enabling the world to be itself, to realise its eschatological perfection.²⁸

God's atonement for all evil, wrought upon the Cross in Christ the Son, is a reality in which sinful humanity *participates* through the power of the Holy Spirit. This participation is the means by which atonement can be both particular and universal,²⁹ and lived out concretely in the eschatological existence of the church.³⁰

Gunton argues that this trinitarian priority on human participation in Christ's atonement for sin does not ignore the ongoing reality of evil in the world. He acknowledges that participation in Christ is not only pneumatological but also eschatological in nature, and so we do *not yet* experience all suffering, sin and evil to cease.

There is, to be sure, a sense in which Jesus is the climax of a definitive and final victory. Our place really is taken, so that we stand in a new relation to God. *But it does not follow, as we have seen, that there is a magical transformation.* The past is not so much wiped out as made into the basis on which a transformed style of living may take shape. The church is the place given by God to be the living space of this new formation, but there can be no suggestion that the inherited weight of evil simply disappears. Because it remains to bedevil the present, *it has to repeatedly be laid aside.*

²⁷ Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 160.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 170, “It is the function of God the Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, to *particularise* the universal redemption in anticipation of the eschatological redemption. All the metaphors we have considered are in some way or other concerned with the creation of space in which the creation has room to breathe and expand, to move in freedom to its appointed end. They are specifications of the way in which the universal atoning work becomes real.”

³⁰ *Ibid.*, “The church is called to be that midpoint, the realization in time of the universal redemption and the place where the reconciliation of all things is from time to time anticipated.”

The church is therefore, it can be argued, no more inherently immune from failure than any other human institution or society.³¹

However, the problem of persistent evil now, apparent even in the church and its history, is precisely why the human response of faith must be understood pneumatologically, as participation *already* in God's redemption in Christ which is not yet fully manifest.

One response to the situation would be that things are so bad that nothing can be done about them. In one sense, that is right: the body can be healed only by the Spirit's blowing upon dead bones and clothing them with new flesh. But to appeal to the Spirit is also an invitation to hopeful thought and activity.³²

Gunton asserts that atonement must be construed as a pneumatological and eschatological interplay of each of the metaphors for Christ's person and work in order "to show how the reconciliation between God and the world achieved on the cross may take shape in a God-given community ordered to that purpose."³³

How does this reconciliation *actually* take shape in and through the Church? The Holy Spirit makes possible renewed living, amidst all ongoing evil, through mediating the victory, judgement and sacrifice accomplished in Christ's own humanity.

The victory of Jesus stands behind; its final revelation lies ahead. It is the gift of the Spirit to enable anticipations of the final victory to take place in our time. The Spirit works not by some automatic or "magical" process, but uses *means*—earthly, this-worldly means like the humanity of Jesus—to make God's kingdom real among us.³⁴

Christ's humanity, the means for God's justice on our behalf, is the basis for God's victory; "[b]ecause [Christ] has undergone judgement for us and in our place, we may undergo it as a gift of life rather than a sentence of death."³⁵ The sacrifice by which God's justice is satisfied in the humanity of Christ then becomes the means by which the Spirit transforms human response to suffering in faith. "To enter the church is therefore to enter a form of community in which the vicarious suffering of Jesus becomes the basis for a corresponding form of life, one in which the offence of others is borne rather than avenged."³⁶

³¹ Ibid., 175, italics mine.

³² Ibid., 177.

³³ Ibid., 177.

³⁴ Ibid., 179.

³⁵ Ibid., 185.

³⁶ Ibid., 190.

The result of this trinitarian approach to atonement is nothing short of the Christian life of praise. “In one sense, the church has nothing to do but praise, when that word is used to characterise not just the particular acts we call worship, but a whole way of being in the world.”³⁷ Along these lines, Gunton affirms Hardy and Ford’s work in *Jubilate*³⁸ and turns to the Psalms to illustrate the primacy of praise.³⁹ Yet a trinitarian understanding is ultimately necessary. Why? Because, if praise

is not to appear to evade the reality of evil, it must be construed christologically. God hears the world as praise in Christ, by virtue of his sacrifice. The church’s praise is true worship when the Spirit empowers it to offer the first fruits of the redeemed creation to the Father, in water, bread and wine, and, more generally, in word and music.⁴⁰

Such is what it means to articulate “the eschatological unity of nature and grace, realised in the atoning sacrifice and celebrated in the church’s worship.”⁴¹

B. Gunton’s Problem: Suffering and the Question of Participation in Lament

Even in such brief overview, Gunton’s theology demonstrates why a trinitarian approach to atonement provides several advantages in proposing how Christian faith results from God’s faithfulness in Christ. First, he avoids undue stress on the theological aspects of any one traditional view of atonement (as with the exemplarism emphasized by Brueggemann, Ford and others) by taking into account each of the metaphors expressed through biblical testimony to the person and work of Christ. Second, he aims not to “evade the reality of evil” in either sin or suffering by articulating the interplay of

³⁷ Ibid., 200.

³⁸ Ibid., 201, “The centrality of praise both for theology and for the life of the church has been spelled out recently in Daniel Hardy and David Ford’s *Jubilate. Theology in Praise* (1984). Some of their opening remarks indicate that praise is the very word for the human response to the atonement. “Praise is...an attempt to cope with the abundance of God’s love.” (p. 1). “Praise perfects perfection” (p. 6). It has already been remarked that when we explore the death of Jesus with the assistance of the language of sacrifice we come to the heart of the being of God, to his perfection. . . . From one point of view—christologically—the sacrifice is perfect, complete, once for all. All that is needed for salvation has been done. But from another—pneumatologically—in the praise of word and life that perfection awaits perfection.”

³⁹ Ibid., 202, “The scriptures and particularly the Psalms, are witness to the way in which the whole of creation shares in the praise of God. It would be a grave mistake, a sign of a captivity to outmoded mechanistic views of the universe, to dismiss such expressions as fanciful and primitive. . . . It is the church’s calling, as the community of praise, to share in the creation’s liberation from the bondage to decay so that it may obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. Our worship is incomplete unless it offers to the creator, from the midst of our demonised world, the firstfruits of the creation liberated to praise its Lord.”

⁴⁰ Ibid., 203.

⁴¹ Ibid.

the metaphors through theological reflection on God's faithfulness as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Third, by properly relating the testimony of scripture and the theological reality of the Trinity, Gunton brings into focus the necessity of understanding all human response of faith as pneumatological participation in Christ's own humanity. This final point, while inextricable from the previous two, bears the most relevance for our critique of Brueggemann and Ford while still allowing for a theological framework which beneficially incorporates their important concerns in relation to suffering. The significant advantage of a trinitarian perspective is to proclaim not only how God confronts evil *for us* in Christ, but to explain how that past work for us, through the power of the Holy Spirit, becomes precisely the human faithfulness which remains *with us* amidst our present sinfulness and suffering. Beyond the problematic tension defining Brueggemann's biblical interpretation and the vague face of Ford's theology, participation explains how faith clearly may be understood to "overflow...for the sake of joy." The Spirit's mediation of Christ's vicarious humanity truly gives rise to the resulting Christian life as praise: "true worship when the Spirit *empowers* it to offer the first fruits of the redeemed creation."⁴²

Nevertheless, Gunton also points out that our participation in Christ is not merely pneumatological but eschatological as well. The *full* redemption of creation now clearly remains *not yet*, and in apparent contradiction to any understanding of faith as life lived in the proclamation of praise, the church not only continues to suffer in and through its proclamation but also often seems bound to the perpetuation of suffering through the very reality of this practice. We have seen this issue drive much of Brueggemann and Ford's concern over Christian response to suffering. Therefore, if "God hears the world as praise in Christ, by virtue of his sacrifice," then must not we also ask about how God hears the laments of the world, especially in view of Gospel accounts of Christ's own lament from the cross? Is our participation in Christ through the Spirit only about responding to God in praise, or does it also renew our understanding of faith as lament?

⁴² Op. cit., italics mine. Worship as the human response which results from atonement is insightfully explored by Trevor Hart, "Atonement and Worship," *Anvil* 11 no. 3 (1994): 203-14, here 212. "In Christian worship there is *anamnesis*, an act of recollection in which the boundaries between past and present are somehow transcended, and the same Christ who was crucified and raised once for our redemption, and the same Spirit in whose power he was crucified and raised, make themselves present in the Church's midst in transforming power."

Gunton's approach to this issue is problematic, but not because his theology simply ignores suffering. He writes the following about Christ's utterance of Psalm 22:1 appearing in the passion narratives of Matthew 27 and Mark 15:

...Indeed, simply to leave the matter with a statement that God shares our suffering runs the risk of affirming suffering, making it in some way the will of God. The point of the exercise, rather, is to remove suffering from the creation, not to affirm it or establish it as in some way a necessity for God or man. This priority of redemption is undermined, if not actively subverted, by any breach of perichoresis; any suggestion that there is a rift in God. It seems therefore that the so-called cry of dereliction should not be seen in such terms, but as the final episode in the incarnate Son's total identification of himself, through the Spirit, with the lost human condition. Most simply, it is the cry of an Israelite expressing the self-distancing of that people from God as the result of their sin, the completion of Jesus' identification with Israel in his baptism.⁴³

Gunton obviously disavows christology focused through a lens of divine pathos, and he directs the focus of this interpretation of scripture towards sin. Yet Gunton cannot simply be accused of reaffirming the concern that Westermann proposes about Christian theology. Again, the latter argues that lament is lost from faith practice when Christianity promotes the following position: "Jesus Christ's work of salvation has to do with the forgiveness of sins and with eternal life; it does not deal however with ending human suffering."⁴⁴ By contrast, Gunton's read of Christ's lament explicitly argues atonement for sin *as the means by which to take the end of suffering most seriously*. Removal of suffering is "the point" of God's redemption of creation through Christ.

Complications in Gunton's interpretation instead arise more implicitly, amidst what he makes explicit about the work of Christ's person as both divine and human. In Gunton's eagerness to avoid the "so called" dereliction of the cross, *Christ's identification with human suffering also appears to go missing*. As he interprets Christ's lament, Gunton explicitly affirms Christ's identification through the Spirit *only* with human *sin*, and here, specifically, Israel's sin. Again, the theological significance of this move could be overplayed and hasty charges of docetism can be denied just as quickly by referencing Gunton's discussion (only pages before) of "the particular calling of the Son to suffer, in obedience to the Father's will."⁴⁵ Neither should we understand Gunton to find Israel uniquely sinful in a way in which the Church or any other part of creation is not. Still, the conclusion that Christ merely identifies with sinful human

⁴³ Gunton, *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 132.

⁴⁴ Op. cit.

⁴⁵ Gunton, *Act and Being*, 127.

“self-distancing” through expression of this Israelite lament creates problems along both of these lines, in terms of lament’s biblical form and its relationship to the particularity of Christ’s human suffering.

First, Gunton’s interpretation of the question of Christ’s lament obscures its meaning as an expression of faith. This point is easily made with reference to Brueggemann’s biblical scholarship on the Psalms. He observes that the typical lament form, of which Psalm 22 is representative in this case, manifests an explicit concern with sin far less regularly than with suffering.⁴⁶ This is not to deny the reality of sin, even as confessed in some of the Psalms, but rather to say that the complaint of Israel’s lament should not be interpreted primarily as an expression of “self-distancing” but as a faithful plea amidst the experience of calamity or distress over which the speaker of lament may have little or no control. In turn, God’s faithful response to rectify this suffering is most often the express reason for the praise and thanksgiving which typically ends Israel’s lament. Against this biblical backdrop, Gunton’s view of lament from the cross, and his apparent repudiation of it as an expression of dereliction, is hardly adequate as an explanation of “the completion of Jesus’ identification *with Israel*.”⁴⁷

The second complication follows from the first, for now we can trace how deemphasis on Christ’s identification with human suffering results from Gunton’s misconstrual of the lament itself as simply a result of sin rather than an expression of faith. Of course, the real concern leading to this misconstrual is theological; as we have seen, Gunton critiques views of atonement which do not relate a proper sense of divine resolve against suffering to Christ’s own “particular calling” to suffer on behalf of humanity. By emphasizing the work of Christ in identification with human sin, Gunton thus strives to avoid what he sees as more problematic issues at hand when Christ’s cry is understood as the result of God’s abandonment of Christ’s person. While

⁴⁶ Psalm 22, specifically in relation to aspects of suffering, is cited several times amidst categories for types of lament in Brueggemann’s initial article “From Hurt to Joy,” 70-1. *Message of the Psalms*, 20, also explicitly states that “*psalms of the innocent sufferer* more directly apply to Jesus than *psalms of penitence*” (italics original). Brueggemann’s later work tends to follow Lindström to argue “that many of the psalms which voice trouble and suffering do not acknowledge—indeed do not even hint at—sin or guilt. Thus, while taken seriously, sin does not and cannot function as the great moral explanation for all troubles. See “Sin” in Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 196-7.

⁴⁷ In a note, Gunton recounts a story from Philip Yancey of a Rabbi describing Jewish perception of Christ’s cry from the cross as “the death cry of yet another Jewish victim.” Yet Gunton’s note still does nothing to explain Christ’s cry in terms of Israel’s lament and as not simply the result of sin but also an act of faith amidst suffering. See *Act and Being*, 131, nt. 31.

Moltmann appears as the target of critique here (cf. “any suggestion that there is a rift in God”),⁴⁸ this is also a problem we have noted in Brueggemann’s mature theology and his assertion that “Friday is the day of countertestimony in the Christian tradition, centered in Jesus’ recital of Psalm 22.”⁴⁹ Yet a recent essay of William Stacy Johnson⁵⁰ proposes, much more along the lines of Brueggemann’s earliest work, that exactly because Christ cries a psalm of lament, his experience of suffering is transposed into a biblical context where its raw expression is bound to an expectation that God will respond in deliverance.⁵¹ Divine abandonment consequently should not serve as theological explanation of the cry.

In this one cry, by which divinity is revealed in humanity and humanity redeemed in divinity, all other cries take on a new and urgent significance. Precisely because God did *not* abandon Jesus in his time of trial, we come to see that God draws near in grace to all who are poor, weak, defeated, or lost.⁵²

By bringing together biblical understanding of Israel’s lament with theological affirmation of Christ’s person and work, Johnson’s proposal both retains the heart of Gunton’s concern over divine abandonment while overcoming his misrepresentation of lament primarily in terms of sin. Johnson demonstrates that Christ’s cry should also be interpreted as both faithful identification *with human suffering* and unmitigated divine resolve *to save from suffering*.

From these two previous points we may finally conclude that Gunton’s view, as it loses sight of Christ’s cry in identification with suffering, also loses sight of this particular lament as a human response of faith in which we continue to participate

⁴⁸ See critique of Moltmann’s interpretation of Christ’s cry as divine abandonment in Gunton, *Act and Being*, 126-7. See also idem., *Christ and Creation: The Didsbury Lectures*, 1990 (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1992), 86-88, and idem., “The Being and Attributes of God: Eberhard Jüngel’s Dispute with the Classical Philosophical Tradition,” in *The Possibilities of Theology: Studies in the Theology of Eberhard Jüngel in his Sixtieth Year*, John Webster, ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 15.

⁴⁹ Brueggemann, *TOT*, 401.

⁵⁰ William Stacy Johnson, “Jesus’ Cry, God’s Cry, and Ours,” in *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square*, Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller, eds. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 80-94.

⁵¹ Like Gunton, Johnson’s critique focuses on Moltmann but gives much more direct attention to the specificities of lament. See Johnson, 81, “That Jesus is invoking a psalm here seems to make little difference to Moltmann, who thinks he hears in this cry an assertion that God is absent. For Moltmann, Jesus’ statement is construed not so much through the genre of biblical lament, in which God is still presumed to be present and able to save, as through the lens of modern atheistic protest. ...but the prayer in Psalm 22 is one that receives a definite answer. For both the psalmist and the evangelist, God is a God who saves the righteous. This theology of deliverance is written into the very structure of the psalm.” Cf. Brueggemann’s earliest essay on lament, “From Hurt to Joy,” 71, “But characteristically the entire sequence complaint-petition-motivation is to be understood as an act of faithfulness. That act is premised on the reliability and accessibility of God, on a vision of the way the world is supposed to be and is not.”

⁵² Johnson, “Jesus’ Cry, God’s Cry, and Ours,” 90.

amidst our own suffering and that of others. Johnson, on the other hand, concludes that “Just as God hears our cries in Jesus Christ, so too by the Spirit’s power are we called to hear the cries of one another,” but he does not (and perhaps, to be fair, because in a brief essay he simply cannot) expand on why the Spirit’s role to mediate Christ’s human lament in faith is so necessary. When this is left out, the risk for Johnson, like Ford and his concept of “facing the dead face of Christ,” becomes a description of Christ’s sufferings merely as example which humanity is responsible to follow. Gunton’s trinitarian perspective on atonement, as we have seen, could provide the theological resources to address this in terms of participation in Christ’s humanity, but again he does not identify Christ’s lament as God *with us* amidst suffering through a decisive act of human faith. When this goes missing, Gunton’s risk is of another kind: he expects praise to result from our participation in the triune God’s *already* accomplished work *for us* without explaining how that participation also makes possible faithful human expression to our experience of all which is *not yet*.

IV. Participation in Suffering on Joy’s Behalf: Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Faith as Praise *and* Lament

The eschatological nature of the Christian life ultimately provides the most important impetus for a proper understanding of the two interrelated concerns which have framed our examination of faith as human response to suffering. On the one hand, both Christian scripture and tradition joyfully affirm that God has already acted to redeem us in Christ and that indeed this redemption will be made fully manifest in the future. On the other hand, all human life continues to suffer the tensions of existence amidst evil, and faith bereft of any language for this experience will not provide hope now for what is not yet. Yet as we indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the question for *Christian* faith is not simply how the human expression of these realities takes shape in biblical lament or praise, but also how the relationship of both is made possible by God’s *faithfulness for* and *with* humanity in Christ. Precisely for this reason, we have examined Colin Gunton’s approach to atonement as an example of a trinitarian alternative to the christological difficulties we find in Brueggemann and Ford. We have seen that proposing atonement through the faithful act of the triune God can explain Christ’s work *for us* as the human faithfulness which, in the power of Holy Spirit,

remains *with us* amidst both present suffering *and* sinfulness. Gunton rightly points out that this is why praise now results from Christian faith, but, as we have also argued, his construal of Christ's cry on the cross solely in terms of the "self-distancing" of sin fails to follow through upon the implications of Christ's human identification with the suffering of Israel in lament.

Therefore, in drawing together the issues presented and examined by this thesis, we are finally arguing that *the praise and joy so defining of Christian faith in both scripture and tradition must be understood to result not only from who God is in Christ's atonement but also from how the atoning Christ is faithful in lament*. To be sure, the New Testament proclaims the cross *not* as a *countertestimony*, but to use instead Brueggemann's psalmic categories, as a decisive *new orientation* of all creation in the faithfulness of the triune God which the psalmists themselves only anticipate. Still, this proclamation is inextricably *oriented* to our participation through the Spirit in the suffering and death of Christ.⁵³ Christian faith thus lives not from ignorance or perpetuation of present *disorientation*, but, as Miller observes in terms so similar to Ford, from the reality "...that suffering has a different face because the one whom we call Lord has gone through it for us and with us."⁵⁴ Like Ford, but with greater trinitarian clarity than in his conclusions in *Self and Salvation*, we are contending that Christian faith emerges as "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" through an "atonement whose power is to allow [us] to stay close to, even immersed in, the tragic depths of life."⁵⁵ Yet we are also arguing that in order for trinitarian theology to overcome Gunton's own concern not to "evade the reality of evil" through Christian praise, we must take lament seriously as a form of faith truly made possible and necessary by Christ's person and work.

We offer three conclusions which we believe Christian theology should consider in addressing faith amidst all which fractures life. First, *faith in Christ should not be understood as a choice between biblical lament and praise*. Brueggemann's early

⁵³ See Richard Hays, "Reading Scripture in Light of the Resurrection," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, E. F. Davis and R. B. Hays, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 216-38, here 234-35, "In the time between Jesus' resurrection and parousia, therefore, the church lives under the sign of the cross while awaiting the consummation of God's promises. Thus the New Testament and the Old Testament are closely analogous in their eschatological orientation and in their posture of awaiting God's deliverance in the midst of suffering."

⁵⁴ Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 324.

⁵⁵ Ford, "Tragedy and Atonement," 123.

biblical scholarship on the Psalms, despite the problematic theological turn it takes as his career develops, effectively presents lament not as an affirmation of suffering itself but rather as an affirmation of God's relationship to those who suffer. The Old Testament regularly portrays Israel as those who boldly express even their darkest experiences to Yahweh *and* as those who also expect faithful divine response. Christians, in turn, find that this very type of faith is taken up by Christ as he acts to confront all human suffering upon the cross. Far from an outmoded or irrelevant Israelite liturgical practice, or a collapse of Christ's human faith,⁵⁶ lament manifests a true confession amidst suffering of relationship with the God revealed in scripture.

In this light, the function of lament in Christian faith may indeed be recovered as called for by Westermann, but on the basis of different biblical conclusions about God than those eventually arrived at by Brueggemann. In contrast to the latter's mature theology, establishing lament as faith is not to deny the priority of joyful proclamation which characterizes the New Testament's affirmation of God in Christ and subsequent eschatological hope. Nor is it to deny the centrality of praise found in the theology of Ford and articulated with trinitarian precision in the theology of Gunton. Lament is hardly incompatible with these aspects of Christian faith. Gunton, for example, writes:

The test of the church's form of life, accordingly, is not whether it merely preaches against contemporary idolatry and lies, but whether, first, its manner of proclamation truly reveals things for what they are, idolatrous perversions of God's good creation; and, second, it develops a way of being in the world in which they are seen to be in the process of defeat.⁵⁷

While Gunton here again emphasizes acknowledgment and confrontation of sin, we may also observe that the terms of this "test" of faith closely parallel Brueggemann's initial articulation of Israel's lament psalm form and its function. Lament allows the real experience of suffering in pain, confusion, doubt, and alienation to surface in the context of faith; in other words, "a proclamation truly revealing things for what they are." John Swinton recently writes, "the task of the practice of lament is to produce a form of character that can live with unanswered questions, not through repression or denial, but by expression and active acceptance of the reality of evil and suffering and

⁵⁶ As Bultmann suggests in "The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus," in *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ*, C. E. Braaten and R. A. Harrisville, eds. (New York and Nashville, 1964), 15-42, here 24.

⁵⁷ Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 183.

the love of God in the midst of it.”⁵⁸ Exactly by shaping expression of all human experience towards expectation that God faithfully responds to suffering, lament does not contradict praise but rather allows time and space for the anticipation of God’s faithfulness to emerge precisely when it seems least likely. Nowhere does God’s faithfulness seem less likely, as Christian tradition has routinely noted, than at the scandalous cross of Christ. Yet here is where the tradition stakes all of its expectations, in that which N. T. Wright trenchantly calls God’s “strange victory” and that which Luther before him labels *revelatio sub contrario specie*.⁵⁹ As Alan Lewis writes in his theology of Holy Saturday, “Faith in the wisdom of such folly, hope despite the worldly grounds for seeing only hopelessness in Christ’s cross and grave, are perfectly compatible with feelings of physical or psychological distress...and as in Christ’s own case, with the experience of spiritual exhaustion and godforsakenness.”⁶⁰ Biblical lament is consequently inextricable from Christian praise amidst suffering because that praise is offered to a God whose own atoning response to evil includes biblical lament.

Nevertheless, Christ’s participation *with us* amidst human suffering is not the only reality at hand in his person and work at the cross nor the reason which finally brings creation to praise. Thus our second conclusion: *faith as either lament or praise depends on how God is understood to act in Christ to overcome all evil, both in human suffering and human sin*. The theological import of gospel testimony to Christ’s cry of Psalm 22 should not be ignored and, as we have seen, has often been used to underwrite calls for the Christian church to follow *this* example of Israel’s lament. This chapter, however, has particularly developed the problem of Brueggemann and Ford’s respective concerns over faith’s response to suffering to the neglect of an account for the triune God’s atonement in response to sin. Both the Old and New Testaments, despite noteworthy differences, clearly proclaim the evil at work in suffering not as something which simply happens in creation but as a reality in which all of creation is destructively involved. In contrast to Brueggemann’s concept of faith as “maintaining the tension” and Ford’s emphasis on human responsibility before “the face of Christ,” Gunton

⁵⁸ John Swinton, *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 113.

⁵⁹ Miller, “Heaven’s Prisoners,” 20, notes that “one Luther scholar has aptly translated (Luther’s) words, ‘finding God in the last place we would reasonably look.’” Miller cites Timothy Wengert, “‘Peace, Peace Cross, Cross’: Reflections on How Martin Luther Relates the Theology of the Cross to Suffering,” *Theology Today* (2002): 205.

⁶⁰ Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 430.

stresses the reality of human tension which results from the intrinsic human inability to respond faithfully. We have argued that this reality cannot be ignored in relation to either praise or lament, and if we are honest about sin both as described in scripture and as experienced in the world, it becomes difficult to avoid the fact that the petition and praise which characterizes Israel's typical lament psalm is a simultaneity which humanity regularly fails *to maintain* before God. We too often live one reality without the other, either expressing suffering in myriad ways apart from any hope in God or joyfully proclaiming divine faithfulness while refusing any honest expression of human pain. Acknowledging the reality of sin does not absolve the church from following the liturgical pattern found in Israel's psalms or from truly "facing" Christ's example proclaimed in the New Testament; rather, we are contending that theology of the church or its scripture cannot ignore why all humanity, even when seemingly innocent in the face of suffering, fails to exemplify this faith in the first place.⁶¹

A Christian theology of atonement becomes truly *praiseworthy* only if all evil is understood to be confronted by God's faithfulness in Christ and truly *meaningful* only if that once-and-for-all act becomes the consequent means for faithful human response even amidst present suffering. In emphasizing a trinitarian approach, we have argued that Christ's faithful humanity *for us* is crucial to how we respond to Christ in humanity *with us*. Atonement, as Gunton's theology proposes, redeems and transforms not just by offering Christ as a human example to follow but by enabling us to do so through pneumatological participation in Christ's own human faithfulness. Still, beyond Gunton, we are arguing that this participation necessarily makes possible not only praise in faith but also lament as faith amidst suffering. In a real sense, we praise Christ who in suffering *hopes* the human hope which we refuse when we pervert what is now by denying all that is not yet, when we rage to the point of exhaustion against a God whom we cannot really believe raises the dead. Moreover, Christ *cries* the cries we refuse to express when we pervert what is not yet by pretending all is well now, when our own effort to fulfill eschatological reality exhausts us to the point of rage over our consistent failure to prevent God from having to suffer and die on our behalf. The Spirit in this

⁶¹ Here we find much agreement with Miroslav Volf's analysis of sin and the status of victims in Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), Chapter 2 "Exclusion," 57-98.

way works to shape in us through the work of Christ the precise function Brueggemann proposes for the form of Israel's psalms of lament.⁶²

Therefore, third and finally, *the reality of God's faithful suffering with us in Christ, as God's own self-expression for us in redemption, necessarily shapes our expectation for Christian praise amidst ongoing evil in creation.* We can and should agree with Ford that faith in Christ, exactly "for the sake of joy," inextricably unites praise of God and human response to suffering. Yet we should also disagree with Ford that theological articulation of this unity benefits from trading a clear understanding of atonement for emphasis on our own unlimited human responsibility to "face" Christ. Triumphalism, and all destructive forms of false joy which properly concern Ford, cannot be avoided by risking a vague identification of God's own humanity in relation to our sinful identity. This is because all triumphalism is not the mere exchange of ethical responsibility for enthusiasm but rather a destructive delight in anything that appears to respond to the terrors of the world *apart from repentance of our own refusal to face suffering faithfully as Christ does*—in identification with the cries of all who suffer and in expectation that God does and will bring suffering to an end. Affirming the triumphant God's victory in atonement thus means rejoicing in a triumph of an entirely different kind, *and* not one which merely consigns Christian faith to a response of retreat into otherworldly mysticism or impotent passivity amidst the activity of evil.⁶³ In conclusion, by speaking of repentance, we are arguing that the Holy Spirit's conviction upon our hearts to turn away from sin and to turn to God in praise never comes apart from the conviction to turn to God in faithful sorrow over our own sin and suffering and that of all creation.⁶⁴ More directly, we are arguing that Christian faith means the Spirit places upon us the active power and calling not only to heed the words of the epistle to

⁶² Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, 398, states, "In their literal prayers, private and public, in their sacraments and ordinances, in every liturgical moment of their cyclical calendar, and in all their deeds outside the sanctuary consequent upon and corresponding to what they do within it, Christians participate in Christ, himself the Great High Priest. Eternally he shares humanity's infirmities as fellow sufferer, and as victim he endures re-crucifixion at their hands. He intercedes for their healing with the Father and pleads their case as advocate, and sends to comfort them the Spirit whose own beseeching, groaning, wordless prayer lifts their pain into the heart of the divine community when their own lips fall dumb in despair and numb bewilderment."

⁶³ See Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope Against Hope* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1999), 201, "The fact that we cannot bring something about or render it possible in and of ourselves does not mean that its possibility will be established while we stand by and watch. This may sometimes be true, of course; but more often than not we may confidently expect that, while the Holy Spirit will do for us that which we cannot do for ourselves, he will nonetheless do it in and through us in ways which involve our full and free participation."

⁶⁴ Cf. 2 Corinthians 7:10.

the Romans (12:15, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep”) but also to proclaim hope both for those who weep but cannot rejoice and those who rejoice but cannot weep.

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