PRODIGAL CHRIST:
THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON
IN THE THEOLOGIES OF JULIAN OF NORWICH
AND KARL BARTH

Kendall Walser Cox
Charlottesville, VA

Master of Divinity, Regent College, University of British Columbia, 2006
Bachelor of Arts, Wake Forest University, 2002

A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Religious Studies

University of Virginia
August 2014

Contents

i

ABSTRACT

This dissertation sets Karl Barth's exegesis of Luke 15:11-32 in *Church Dogmatics* IV/2 in conversation with Julian of Norwich's Example of the Lord and Servant in *A Revelation of Love*. I present Julian's story as a gloss on the Parable of the Prodigal Son that prefigures Barth's later Christological interpretation in which he identifies Jesus Christ with the younger son. Drawing on Paul Ricoeur's account of intertextuality, I demonstrate the coherence of such an identification and argue that Julian and Barth discern an overlooked interpretive trajectory arising from the Lukan text itself. Finally, I assess the radical doctrinal implications of their interpretations and consider the significance of parable as a mode of theology that is particularly well suited for Christological and Trinitarian reflection.

"…and a voice said, 'There is one who is good. There is one who can see all without hating.'"[1]

---

[1] Tomas Tranströmer, "In the Nile Delta," *The Great Enigma: New Collected Poems*, trans. Robin Fulton (New York: New Directions, 2006), 62.

INTRODUCTION

> But if I look up and fix my eyes on the aid of the divine mercy, this happy vision of God [on the cross] soon tempers the bitter vision of myself… This vision of God is not a little thing. It reveals him to us… His very nature is to be good, to show mercy always and to spare.
> —Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon 36, *On the Song of Songs II*.[1]

Introduction to the Topic

The eternal Son is the prodigal Son—that is the provocative implication at the heart of Karl Barth's exegesis of Luke 15:11-32, in §64.2 of *Church Dogmatics IV: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*.[2] His Christological reading appears to be unique in the history of the parable's interpretation, and it is particularly unusual for a modern reader such as himself.[3] Yet we find a revealing precedent for it in Julian of Norwich's medieval Example of the Lord and Servant, in Chapter 51 of *A Revelation of Love*.[4] Her example is a gloss on the Lukan parable that recasts the figures of the father and son as a "courteous" lord and "ready" servant. Much like Barth long after her, the distinctive feature of her interpretation is the close connection she draws between the identity of Jesus Christ and that of the fallen or wayward one.

The subsequent body of research sets Julian's example in conversation with Barth's exegesis, showing the striking ways in which her theological retelling of the

---

[1] Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, vol. 3, *On the Song of Songs II*, trans. Kilian Walsh, O.C.S.O. (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1983), 179.

[2] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956-75). Henceforth it will be abbreviated *CD*, referred to by volume title (e.g., *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*), and cited simply by volume/part, page (e.g., IV/2, 21).

[3] Throughout my dissertation, I will refer to this passage as "the Parable of the Prodigal Son" because the story is best known in English by this name. Notably, however, the epithet is absent from the Greek and pushes the story in a certain direction. Barth uses the German title "*Der verlorene Sohn*," which more clearly relates to the other two parables in Luke 15 (of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin) and draws attention to the parallelism "lost and found" that is central to Barth's Christological reading. Julian's "Example of the Lord and Servant" prioritizes neither prodigality nor lostness but accidental fallenness and blindness.

[4] Julian of Norwich, *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love*, eds. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006). Julian's two texts will be referenced as follows: *A Vision* or the Short Text (ST), cited by section (e.g., Sec. 12); and *A Revelation* or the Long Text (LT), cited by chapter (e.g., ch. 52) or chapter and line (e.g., 52.1-2). Where no text is indicated, citations are from the Long Text.

biblical parable prefigures his. Throughout my analysis, I draw three primary points of comparison between the texts under consideration, concerning: 1) their intertextual engagement with narrative-parable, 2) their unusual identification of the lost or fallen son or servant with the eternal Son of God, and 3) the doctrinal implications of this identification. My interest is in how Julian's and Barth's respective retellings of the parable lead them each to claim that, in Julian's words, "God never began to love humankind," because, as Barth maintains, "from all eternity" God makes "the being of this other [God's] own being."[5] In light of the prominent role the Parable of the Prodigal Son plays in guiding them to such a conclusion as well as the remarkable resonances between their interpretations, I think we are invited to consider two further possibilities: first, that Julian and Barth both detect an overlooked trajectory belonging to the text itself; and, second, that parable is an exemplary and enduring theological genre, an irreducible mode of theology that is suited for Christological and Trinitarian reflection.

My central thesis is twofold: 1) Julian's interpretation of the parable parallels Barth's in illuminating ways, and 2) this helps uncover the extent to which the coherence of their Christological identifications of the wayward son or servant figure depends upon the intertextuality of their readings.

Summary of the Dissertation

The first part of my dissertation establishes the methodological groundwork and interpretive framework for my subsequent analysis of Julian's example and Barth's exegesis (in chapters four through six). I attend to issues related to the Lukan parable itself and to parable interpretation and theory more generally. The first chapter begins

---

[5] Julian, *A Revelation*, 53.1; Barth, *CD*, II/2, 121.

with an introduction to the passage commonly known as "The Parable of the Prodigal Son," found in Luke 15:11-32. I provide a brief overview of the cultural significance of the text and the history of its interpretation, highlighting some of the distinctive features of Julian's and Barth's readings by contrast. This gives rise to critical questions about parable as a literary form and its relationship to allegory and metaphor, which I address in the second and third sections of the first chapter.

In the second chapter, I turn to the problem of parable as "metaphorized narrative," appealing to Paul Ricoeur's theory of intertextuality as a basis for understanding the Christological focus of the texts under consideration. Here I am searching for an account of biblical parable that can help explain the propriety and coherence of Julian's and Barth's interpretations of Luke 15:11-32. I note the dense web of shared scriptural references upon which both Julian and Barth draw in their readings. My argument is that their structural and thematic parallels result from this intra-biblical metaphorization of the parable, from overlaying and interweaving it with a certain set figural narratives and images. The first part of my dissertation culminates with a phenomenological account of the form of parable, which arises from the preceding interaction with parable theory, as well as a phenomenological reading of the parable itself. Throughout these first two chapters, I highlight the key structural and thematic features of the parable, with a view to their import for Julian's example and Barth's exegesis, and I indicate a number of the intersecting literary and theological points to be explored in the following chapters.

The second part of the dissertation centers on Julian's interpretation and its theological ramifications. In the third chapter, I examine her example as a creative

theological reconstruction of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The chapter begins with a close reading of her example and its double meaning. In the first section, I show that Julian retells the parable as not only 1) the history of human fallenness and redemption but also 2) incarnation and atonement of Jesus Christ and 3) the eternal "oning" of God and humankind in him. In the second section of the third chapter, I introduce Julian's motif of the "two domes [judgments]," which I consider key to understanding her interpretive struggle with the example and the multiple meanings she finally discerns in it. I conclude by addressing a number of related concepts that are integral to the direction in which her reading leads us.

I begin the fourth chapter by clarifying Julian's presiding image for the atonement as being-in or being-seen-in Christ. For Julian, as for Barth, the atonement refers less to something Jesus Christ does at a point in time in order to ensure salvation and more to the mutual enclosure or indwelling of God and humankind performed in his person. Atonement as being-seen-in-Christ is a double claim about the essence of humanity constituted by Jesus Christ and the revelation of the Triune God accessed exclusively in him. In the latter half of the fourth chapter, I turn to Julian's expansive excursus on the motherhood of God. I argue that the vision of God as triune Mother is prompted by her preceding encounter with the Example of the Lord and Servant. It is continuous with the theological claims she makes there and must be understood in relation to them. In this portion of the chapter, I integrate the phenomenological language of "reduction," introduced in the second chapter, in order to help describe the dynamics at work in the movement of the example, redoubled in Julian's retelling of it, which "leads back to" a

vision of God-in-Christ as *God's* vision of humanity-in-Christ—to an image of God pregnant with Jesus pregnant with humankind.

With the insights gleaned from Julian's engagement with the parable in mind, in the third part of my dissertation, I turn to Barth's exegesis of Luke 15:11-32 and its theological application. In the fifth chapter, I present Barth's exegesis of the Parable of the Prodigal Son and I show how it becomes, for him, the story of reconciliation. The chapter begins by detailing Barth's transition from a "direct" or non-Christological reading of the parable to an "indirect" Christological reading and finally to the possibility of a "direct" Christological reading. In the second part of the chapter, I spell out the implications of Barth's exegesis, showing how comprehensively the narrative of the lost son governs the whole of his doctrine of reconciliation. I coordinate the contours of the story with the various intertexts and scriptural predicates that give rise to his retelling of it as the parable of reconciliation.

In my sixth and final chapter, I address the way Barth, like Julian, narrates Luke 15:11-32 not only as the parable of atonement but also as the parable of election and, finally, the parable of *God*. In this chapter, I attempt to restrict my attention to the way the parable functions dogmatically for Barth rather than reinterpreting some of his most prominent and contested doctrines on their own terms. However, in the first part of the chapter, I include a summary of the distinctive features of his doctrine of election (which binds together reconciliation and the being of God) in order to drawn out the comparison between Barth's "eternal covenant" and Julian's understanding of atonement as an eternal "oning" in God. In the second part of the chapter, I circle back to a feature of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation, namely the notion of divine obedience. Corresponding to the

way Julian's trinitarian interpretation of the parable opens onto a vision of the eternal Motherhood of God, Barth's trinitarian interpretation of the parable must be traced back to his understanding of the eternal super- and sub-ordination of divine Fatherhood and Sonship.

In conclusion, I underline a number of interrelated points embedded in my engagement with the parable and Julian's and Barth's retellings of it. Among the many doctrinal and methodological insights generated at the intersection of these discourses, I note, in particular, 1) Julian's and Barth's shared commitment to what Barth calls "theanthropology," to thinking God and humanity inextricably together, 2) the ethical task inscribed in the notion of the vision of God as being-seen by God in Christ, 3) the value of reading the parable and its retellings phenomenologically and the possibility of understanding parable *as* phenomenology, and 4) the fittingness of the form of parable for theological and, especially, Christological reflection.[6]

Before delving into the material I have laid out, several matters related to background, language, method, and scope warrant attention in advance.

Julian and Barth as Recursive Theologians

A comparison between Julian and Barth is by no means obvious. They are theologians of profoundly different sorts. Julian (ca. 1342–ca. 1416) was an English anchorite and visionary, the first woman known to have written in English, and a contemporary of Chaucer.[7] She spent the better portion of her life enclosed in a small cell

---

[6] Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas and Thomas Wieser (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1960), 9. I address what Barth means by "theanthropology" in the conclusion.

[7] In her autobiography, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Margery mentions her visit in 1415 to "an anchoress…who was called Dame Julian" (A. C. Spearing, xi). See *The Book of Margery Kempe,* trans. B.

attached to the side of a church in the bustling port city of Norwich, where she is thought

to have become a sought-after spiritual advisor.[8] Her rich but extremely compact writings

arise from many years of reflection on a series of "showings" she experienced while

meditating on the crucifix during a life-threatening illness for which she had prayed. (I

will say more about the nature of her writings below.) The Swiss theologian Karl Barth

(1886-1968) was born more than five centuries later. He has come to be known as "the

greatest dogmatic theologian since Schleiermacher."[9] A prolific writer, his incomplete,

multi-volume *Church Dogmatics* alone spans around nine thousand pages. As a post-

Enlightenment Reformed thinker, he appeals more openly to scripture and reason/faith

than tradition and experience/vision as sources for theological reflection.[10] He is skeptical

of mysticism, visions, and indeed religious experience. There is no reason to think Barth

ever read Julian or could have been influenced by her interaction with the parable.

Despite the different religious milieus, ecclesial traditions, and theological genres

within which Julian and Barth work, they have in common that they are both profoundly

recursive, biblical, and systematic thinkers. Both sets of texts under consideration

progress through reiteration and arise from imaginations that are deeply rooted in the

repetitive figural narratives and imagery of the Bible. Denys Turner describes Julian's

---

A. Windeatt (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1985), 77. On the nature of the anchoritic life, see Grace
Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 28-33, 48-49.

[8] It is interesting, however, on a biographical note, that in a letter his son Christopher (June 2, 1951) Barth
tells him he "saw" the plan for his Christology (and the organization of *CD* IV) in a "dream." See Eberhard
Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life From Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976),
377. Busch calls the result an "artistic arrangement." This fact—along with Barth's assertion, "God may
speak to us through Russian Communism, a flute concerto, a blossoming shrub or a dead dog" (I/1, 55)—
thwarts an easy polarization of Julian and Barth with respect to their range of theological resources.

[9] Bruce McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker,
2008)*,* 89.

[10] Of course, these are false dichotomies. Barth's whole theology is a dialogue with an historical tradition
and is, in many ways, supremely occasional. The point is, however, that he does not regard the ecclesial
tradition as having the same authoritative status as it would have had for Julian (and tends to have among
Catholic theologians), nor would he admit private revelation as a source for doctrine.

theology as having a "distinctly spiral" shape: it "moves forward, as one does along a straight line. It constantly returns to the same point, as one does around a circle. The repetition therefore is never identical, for it has always moved on…into higher reaches or greater depth."[11] Similarly, George Hunsinger says of Barth's method, "What first appears like repetition turns out on closer inspection to function rather like repetition in sonata form." This is Barth's way of "alluding to themes previously developed while constantly enriching the score with new ideas." As a result, "The more one reads Barth, the more one senses that his use of repetition is never pointless. Rather, it serves as a principle of organization and development within an ever forward spiraling theological whole."[12]

Janet Soskice observes that this generatively repetitive, spiraling quality is a way of recruiting readers into a movement of thought and that it is something Julian and Barth share in common. According to Soskice, Julian's prose "seeks to" to enclose us as humanity is enclosed in Christ, "'folding' the reader into its purposes in a manner that anticipates the fugal treatment of the Trinity in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*."[13] Although neither of them overtly acknowledges as much, I think it is precisely because of its participatory force that narrative-parable becomes such a fruitful form of theological reflection for both Julian and Barth. I will say more about how parable functions for them and why it is so theologically productive in subsequent chapters.

---

[11] Denys Turner, *Julian of Norwich, Theologian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 4.

[12] George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991)*,* 28. While Barth's theology is systematic or dogmatic, as William Thompson points out, it also has a "meditative form." In fact, he thinks *Church Dogmatics* is "like a continual Transfiguration" See William Thompson, *Struggle for Theology's Soul: Contesting Scripture in Christology* (New York: Crossroad Herder, 1996), 103.

[13] Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 131.

On the Category of "Retelling"

My use of "retelling" and "theological retelling" requires explanation. These terms enable us to bring under a common rubric Julian's creative recasting of the parable in her example and Barth's explicit Christological exegesis as well as his use of the parable as the governing narrative of his Christology. In short, to speak of Julian's example and Barth's exegesis as "retellings" is to signal that: 1) these texts are constructive or generative of new meaning, and 2) what is repeated is not only the content but also, in some way, the form of the parable.

Julian's and Barth's texts might be treated as "*biblical* retellings" on the basis that they recount a biblical story. However, "biblical retelling" is a phrase used in the contemporary study of religion and literature in reference to a specific literary genre. I am employing "retelling" in a broader, more descriptive way, to indicate any repetition of a biblical story in which that story serves as both form and content.[14] In other words, a "retelling" is by definition productive and not merely explanatory or illustrative of meaning. When I specify "*theological* retelling," I am only drawing attention to the fact that Julian and Barth both read the bible theologically—which is simply to say, according to a "rule" of faith: with certain doctrinal commitments already at work and with a view to the way any given passage corresponds to a larger understanding of the revelation of God in Christ. To "read theologically" is, inherently, to read intertextually and, in their cases, canonically. (As will become apparent, despite the modern divide between exegesis and theology, I take for granted, as Julian and Barth evidently do, that, in

---

[14] As Barth says, "It is rare in life to be able to separate form and content." See Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959, 96. Cf. *CD* I/2, 493.

William Thompson's words, "genuine Christian theology is always biblical, and genuine biblical study is always theological."[15])

Often I will use "retelling" almost interchangeably with related terms, such as "interpretation," "reading," "excursus," "exegesis," or "account." This is not to suggest the words mean the same thing but rather to signal that the texts to which they apply function on a variety of levels. Julian's and Barth's interactions with the parable have at least a few dimensions—for example, the strictly exegetical (reconstructing as closely as possible what the text *says*), the hermeneutical (attempting to explain what it *means*, then and now), and the theologically constructive (generating claims about God by situating the parable, intertextually, in its literary and historical context). Arguably, all such dimensions count as "retelling." However, my use of this language is specifically meant to bring out that quality of Julian's and Barth's texts by which they are not merely discourses *about* the meaning of the parable but rather recount the parable itself, repeating both its form and its content in a non-identical way. What is so compelling about their accounts is that, in different ways, they retain the parabolic form in conveying and developing upon the content of the original parable.

This repetition of the narrative form in addition to its scriptural content is clearer with Julian, as she makes use of the medieval genre of *exempla*, which I address below. She rewrites the biblical story on her own terms, recasting its figures, context, and dialogue. In Julian's case what needs to be seen is not so much that her example is a literary "retelling" but that it is also an instance of biblical commentary and constructive theology. By contrast, Barth's explicit interpretation of Luke 15:11-32 clearly takes the form of exegesis, in its modern, critical sense. Yet, I think his engagement with parable is

---

[15] W. Thompson, ix.

properly considered a kind of "retelling" as well for a couple of reasons. First, after he offers a "direct" or plain interpretation of the parable, he ventures a second interpretation in which he retells the whole story again in light of the new relationship established between the figure of the younger son and the storyteller himself. (I will say more about this in subsequent chapters). Second, his rendering of the parable in §64.2 is only part of the story. Barth also employs the language and structure of the parable pervasively to narrate his Christology. Further, in animating the doctrines of justification and sanctification in terms of the of concise mirror-image narratives "the Lord as Servant" and "the Servant as Lord," Barth too recasts the figures in the parable, and in much the same way as Julian.

In summary, in different ways, both Julian's and Barth's retellings "reparabolize" the biblical parable—reanimating its content while also replicating important aspects of its narrative form. What this means (to "parabolize" a narrative) will be unpacked further in the first two chapters, where I will also define other key terms, such as "parable," "metaphor," and "narrative" as well as the phenomenological language of "bracketing" and "reduction."

A Note on Julian's Writing

The nature of Julian's writing warrants several prefatory remarks, as it differs markedly from what is often recognized today as "theology" or "doctrine." Julian's texts arise from a severe illness she undergoes on May 8, 1373, when she is "thirty and a half years old." On what is thought to be her deathbed, as a priest holds up the crucifix for her to meditate upon, all else fades away and the passion of Christ comes to life before her

eyes. Julian beholds what she calls "a revelation of love…made in sixteen shewings" which she records in two texts (ST, Sec. 1). "Showing" is Julian's language not only for these immediate visions but also for the teachings and insights she receives by various other modes—namely, words spoken to her by the Lord and what she calls "mystly" (spiritual or mystical) understanding.[16] Her more concise record of what she sees while meditating on the cross is known as the Short Text, written a decade or more after her illness.[17] Watson and Jenkins, whose edition I will be using in what follows, refer to the Short Text as *A Vision*. After many years of prayerful contemplation, Julian reworks and expands her original insights into the more theologically reflective and sophisticated Long Text, which Watson and Jenkins call *A Revelation of Love*.[18] According to Julian the "showing" of the example does not appear in the Short Text because the "full understanding of this mervelouse example [of the Lord and Servant] was not geven" at the time.[19] Eventually she "had teching inwardly" which helped her recognize and distinguish "all the pointes and the propertes that were shewed in the same time."[20] It is

---

[16] Turner, xi.

[17] The Short Text is thought to have been written some time between the mid 1370s and the mid-1380s.

[18] Textual criticism is a very important topic that I am skipping over altogether. For a description of the manuscripts of Julian's two texts and their histories, see Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, eds. *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*, 2 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978), 1-33; Colledge and Walsh, "Editing Julian of Norwich's Revelations: A Progress Report," *Medieval Studies* 38, 1976, 404-427; Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, 24-43. For a short summary of these issues, see Denise Baker, *The Showings of Julian of Norwich* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), xx-xxi.

[19] Watson and Jenkins, *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, 277. Throughout my dissertation, I rely on Watson and Jenkins' version of Julian's texts. This decision is largely a practical one. Theirs is a "synthetic edition" that already takes into consideration the differences between manuscripts. Watson and Jenkins make a compelling case for a hybrid approach that combines the more original dialectic of Julian's Middle English and the analytic clarity that mark the two primary manuscripts (Sloane and Paris, respectively) (39-40). Further, their modernized spelling as well as the textual notes and critical commentary are a significant help to those who are not already students of Middle English. (For an explanation of this decision and other orthographic issues see 43-49.)

[20] There is disagreement about the revision process and timeline. Colledge and Walsh believe revisions began after 1388 and ended after Julian's writing of the Example of the Lord and Servant. Watson and Jenkins think 1394 is the earliest Julian could have begun reworking her earlier text and they suggest that the revision process lasted until the early 15th c., just before her death around 1416. I will refer to the

this additional "teaching" that occupies her imagination for the interim years between the writing of her two texts.[21] It thus appears that the example is the theological key to the contents of the Long Text and, as "a microcosm for the entire visionary sequence," the insight that prompts her extensive revision of the whole set of showings.[22]

Because Julian refers to the Example of the Lord and Servant, like her other visions, as a "showing" or vision, this raises important questions about its genre. As Denys Turner notes, *A Revelation of Love* as a whole does "not fit comfortably within standard taxonomies of theological genre in her own times," or in ours, "insofar as those taxonomies are limited to categories of monastic styles of biblical theology, scholastic styles of systematic theology, and otherwise to the 'mystical.'"[23] While Julian's writing participates in all of these genres, it is itself unprecedented, eclectic, singular.[24] On account of her extraordinary deathbed experience, Julian is often referred to as a "mystic." But, for reasons to be explained, I lay greater stress on different dimensions of her thought and writing. I approach Julian, in what follows, as 1) a visionary writer, 2) a biblical theologian, and, especially, 3) a systematic theologian. Further, the portion of her writing under consideration must be specifically located 4) in the tradition of Medieval homiletic *exempla*. There is, of course, much more to say about Julian herself—as a vernacular theologian, devotional writer, and a contemporary of figures such as Walter

---

revised version either as the Long Text (abbreviated LT) or *A Revelation of Love* (abbreviated *A Revelation*). According to Baker and Salih, two later "understandings" specifically prompt Julian to revise her Short Text, in 1388 ("love was his meaning") and in 1393 (the Example of the Lord and Servant). See Denise Baker and Sarah Salih, "Introduction," *Julian of Norwich's Legacy: Medieval Mysticism and Post-Medieval Reception* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), eds. Baker and Salih, 3.

[21] On relationship between the ST and LT, B. A. Windeatt "Julian's Second Thoughts: The Long Text Tradition," *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), 101-115.

[22] Kevin McGill, *Julian of Norwich, Mystic or Visionary?* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 81.

[23] Turner, x.

[24] Turner says, "it generates no successors…it neither belongs to nor creates any theological genre" (16).

Hilton, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Richard Rolle, and the "Wycliffite

translators," as well as William Langland, John Gower, and the *Gawain*-poet.[25] But as the

comparison I am drawing with Barth centers on a specific instance of biblical

interpretation and its constructive theological import, it is these four points of emphasis

that I wish to draw out in preparation for chapters three and four. What follows is not

intended to be an introduction to Julian's writing as a whole, but rather to provide an

explanation as to why I regard her (and, indeed, the challenges to regarding her) Example

of the Lord and Servant as scriptural commentary and constructive theology,

commensurate with Barth's theological exegesis of the parable.

First, due to modern associations with the word "mysticism," it may be more

helpful to regard Julian, as Kevin McGill does, as a "visionary writer."[26] Julian's work is

certainly consonant with "mystical theology," as Bernard McGinn describes it.[27] But

popular Jamesian understandings of mysticism in terms of "ineffable experience" of

---

[25] See A. C. Spearing, "Introduction," *Revelations of Love* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), vii. Concerning Julian's relationship to her contemporaries, see Elisabeth Dutton, *Julian of Norwich: The Influence of Late-Medieval Devotional Compilations* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008).

[26] "Mystical theology" properly understood conveys nearly the same meaning as "visionary theology" in McGill's use. See Hunt and Turner. However, while Julian, along with her key English contemporaries, is commonly called a "mystic," this classification, as well as the definition of mysticism upon which it depends, has been problematized in more recent scholarship. For example, Nicholas Watson points out that the academic study of mysticism is a modern rather than a medieval reality (*The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, 7). Writing on the English mystical tradition in late 14th and early 15th c., Watson is not sure Hilton, Rolle, *Cloud*-author, Margery Kempe, and Julian should be treated as mystics and groups them, instead, under the rubric, "vernacular theology." See Nicholas Watson "The Middle English Mystics," *The Cambridge History of Middle English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 544. He connects them with other "socially and politically motivated users of English" such as Chaucer, Langland, and the Lollards.

[27] Bernard McGinn argues that the opposition between experience and theory or reflection is a modern one. But in "mystical theology"—a phrase which predates "the coining of the term 'mysticism' by over a millennium"—the "interactions between conscious acts and their symbolic and theoretical thematizations are much more complex" than commonly recognized. Reflection or interpretation is not merely derivative or "something added on to mystical experience" but rather, "mystical theory in most cases precedes and guides the mystics whole way of life"—which is to say, mystical experience is already theologically informed. See Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism Vol. I, The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, (New York, Crossroad, 1991), xiv.

"union with God" do not correspond to Julian's own account of her "showings."[28] For example, she clearly does not regard them as incommunicable or describe them as incongruous with sensory experience. Nor are her texts mere transcriptions of passive experiences meant for private devotion.[29] The Long Text, in particular, is methodical and cohesive; written for "every Christian," it has a broad didactic scope.[30] While I agree with Denys Turner that we should not "force a contrast between the mystical and the visionary" on account of modern misunderstandings, there are other reasons for shifting focus away from Julian's status as a "mystic" in the case of the comparison I am setting up.[31] For example, 1) it can obscure her insightful scriptural commentary and theological constructiveness, and 2) the material content of the example calls for an examination of her interaction with scripture and the tradition and not simply her devotional pattern, spiritual practices, or "state of consciousness."

According to Grace Jantzen, the classification of women, in particular, as "mystics" functions to keep their religious experience esoteric, individual, and private. In

---

[28] See William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. According to popular modern definitions informed by the work of William James, "a mystic is someone who reports experiences that can be clearly distinguished from normal conscious experience." It is assumed that what defines "mystical experiences" is that they "cannot be adequately described in language, yield knowledge that cannot be achieved by discursive means and…are free from obstructive sensory input" (McGill, 2). For a critique of James' categories, see Grace Jantzen, "Mysticism and Experience," *Religious Studies* 25, 1989, 295-315.

[29] As Janet Soskice says, "Neither version is raw reportage" (*Kindness*, 127). This is because of, in McGinn's words, "the textually and theologically mediated nature of all Christian mysticism" (xv

[30] As A. C. Spearing points out, Julian's initial audience is men and women who want to lead the contemplative life (see ST, Sec. 4), by her Long Text, "she drops this limitation and seems to envisage a broader public of devout laypeople" (Spearing, "Introduction," *Revelations of Love*, viii). This point is easily obscured by the sheer extraordinariness of her visions as well as her occasional self-effacement with respect to the authority of her voice and reasoning. It seems likely that Julian would hide her biblical interpretation for the same reason she hides her theological reasoning. As a laywoman, must present herself as medium, as *mater-ial*, rather than an origin or creator.

[31] Turner says that to do so "on the strength of a Jamesian account of the mystical is to concede too much to that Jamesian account" (29).

15

other words, it is a way of protecting "orthodoxy."[32] At times, Julian herself seems to

participate in this intentional obfuscation of her own engagement with the tradition. She

is well aware of the dangers of writing in the vernacular as a laywoman.[33] As Lynn

Stanley says, Julian's feminine characterization of herself as "unlettered," for instance,

has a "political point, for she places contemplation, rather than authorial strategy, in the

foreground, affording herself the screen she needed to explore alternatives" to established

theological teaching.[34] Baker explains further, "Like the Continental women mystics,

Julian initially authorizes herself as an intermediary between the sovereign teacher, Jesus,

and her fellow Christians; as a woman, she can minister to them only because she is the

medium for a divine lesson"—that is, because there is supposedly nothing of herself in

the teaching.[35] However, although she begins by presenting herself and her experience in

terms of "the dominant commonplace of late medieval devotion," as David Aers

observes, "her distinctive rhetorical strategies actually resist it, unravel it, estrange us

---

[32] Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 24, 242f. See also, Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988). By "orthodoxy," Jantzen seems to mean, in this instance: accepted church teaching.

[33] This is evident, for example, in that in the period between the Short Text and the Long Text she seems to conceal many of her more direct paraphrases of scripture. This suggests her awareness of the ecclesial suspicion of women's writing as well as vernacular translations of scripture. Spearing points out that, over all, "there was a strong resistance to writing and teaching by women" justified by appeals to Pauline passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12 (see Spearing, "Introduction," xvii). For example, during Julian's time, the chancellor of the University of Paris, Jean Gerson, wrote, "the female sex is forbidden on apostolic authority to teach in public…All women's teaching, particularly formal teaching by word and by writing, is to be held suspect unless it has been diligently examined, and much more fully than men's… why? Because they are easily seduced, and determined seducers; and because it is not proved that they are witnesses to divine grace." See Colledge and Walsh, *A Book of Showings*, 151.

[34] For an example of Julian's self-deprecating presentation of herself see ST, Sec. 6. Lynn Stanley, "Julian of Norwich and the Later Fourteenth-Century Crisis of Authority," in *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics and Gender in Later Medieval English Culture*, ed. David Aers (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1996), 109.

[35] Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings: From Vision to Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 7.

from it and, gradually but decisively supersede it."[36] In short, there are a number of ways in which approaching Julian primarily as a "mystic" might cover over her theologically innovative, and indeed authoritative, voice.

McGill's treatment of Julian as a "visionary theologian" better helps us recognize Julian "the teacher." This is less because of what it uncovers about her visionary *experience* and more because of what it tells us about the nature of its *transmission*. The longing to suffer in solidarity with Christ, common to late medieval affective piety and contemplative prayer, forms a significant basis for Julian's experiences as well as her record of them (see ST, Sec. 1).[37] As Denise Baker explains, Julian's practice of meditation involves "an imaginative participation in the events of Jesus' life," which Ewart Cousins has termed a "mysticism of the historical event."[38] Cousins says, "it is more than mere recalling, for it makes us present to the event and the event present to us."[39] Here the lines between vision and text, present and past, immediate and mediated are blurred. Julian's "showings" reanimate the historical passion of Christ, known to her through a variety of oral and visual avenues, including preaching, reading, "popular pious verse," and sacred art.[40] This last source is particularly relevant for understanding what Julian is doing in her own texts.

---

[36] David Aers, "The Humanity of Christ: Reflections on Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*," *The powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture*, eds. David Aers and Lynn Stanley (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 81.

[37] Baker, *Vision to Book*, 34f. For a brief summary of the context of the religious devotion that gives rise to Julian's prayer for "three gifts from God: imaginative identification with Christ's sufferings on the cross, bodily sickness in youth to the verge of death, and three 'wounds' of contrition, compassion and longing for God," see A. C. Spearing, "Introduction," *Revelations of Love*, xiii-xv.

[38] Baker, *Vision to Book*, 44, 47.

[39] Ewart Cousins, "Fancis of Assisi: Christian Mysticism at the Crossroads," in S. Katz *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 163-90, 166-167.

[40] Colledge and Walsh, 85, 87. McGill notes that "The devotional practice of the later medieval period was dominated by the image of Christ's human suffering. Such images proliferated the medieval world of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in stained glass, statuary, paintings, Psalters, Books of Hours and medieval theatre" (67). This forms an important backdrop for what Julian is doing both in her own

According to Colledge and Walsh, Julian's "imaginative awareness [of Christ's suffering] has been formed by" the Franciscan "pious art-objects" with which the churches in Norwich were "richly furnished."[41] Her "visionary episode" closely mirrors the "silent preaching" of late fourteenth century wall paintings.[42] As McGill describes it, "Julian, like her audience, stands before the visions like a viewer before a painting."[43] In the Late Middle Ages, such "visual media"—visual representations as well as their verbal depiction—serve as a form of "communal reading" and "re-reading."[44] In other words, there is a continuum between visual and verbal instruction that hinges upon "reading."[45] Baker observes that "Julian *reads* her vision like a picture," with all "the dramatic and spectacular effects of a motion picture," and, in turn, "the revelations themselves become a 'text' for meditation and, in turn, spur re-visions in both the spiritual and literary senses of the word."[46]

To treat Julian's writing as an instance of "visionary theology," then, draws attention to her "showings" as "didactic images" or "readable pictures."[47] There is much more to be said about the relationship between visuality, literacy (or illiteracy), and

---

visualization and in her representation of it for her readers. He says, "Julian seeks to share her vision through its resonance in the common, accessible and didactic imagery" (74).

[41] Colledge and Walsh, 52-53. They note, in particular, the Vernicle and "medieval crucifixion iconography" (55). See also P. Lasko and N. J. Morgan, eds., *Medieval Art in East Anglia 1300-1520* (Norwich, Jarrold and Sons, 1973).

[42] McGill, 50, 73. Jeffrey Hamburger, in *The Visual and the Visionary*, specifically connects Julian's image of Christ's bloody face to a devotional woman owning the Karlsruhe Psalter (after 1234) and images from Psalm 26 (see McGill, 59).

[43] Ibid., 16. Julian appeals to "the imagery of the Passion and Incarnation that was commonplace to the visual arts and devotional practices of the late Middle Ages." This gives her visions "greater immediacy for her audience" because "there is a commonality between what Julian was shown and imagery that was accessible and familiar to those who had never had a vision" (14).

[44] See Michael Camille, "Seeing and Reading," 32. The medieval viewer would have read what was seen and attempt "to see what was written" (McGill, 86).

[45] McGill, 83.

[46] Baker, *Vision to Book*, 49, 51. Emphasis added.

[47] McGill says, "It is worth remembering that Julian is not shown a vision of God…but a revelation of God's love in the Passion of Christ" (11). McGill, 75, 26.

"communal reading."[48] However, the main point I wish to make in this regard is that Julian's status as a "visionary" is bound up with her role as a "teacher." As a "didactic image" in a culture of "visual participation," her "revelation of love" is anything but private and incommunicable. It is inherently geared toward others—and, as McGill suggests, this calls for a broadening of what counts as "teaching," an activity traditionally prohibited for anchorites and especially women.[49]

Second, in approaching Julian specifically as a "biblical theologian" and commentator, I mean to draw attention to two aspects of her writing: 1) her text reads as gloss after gloss on the Gospel narrative (especially the passion sequence) and throughout she paraphrases and interprets the whole breadth of scripture;[50] and, 2) her showings "constitute" for her a form of "*lectio divina*" (Colledge and Walsh say, "this is especially true of the parable-revelation") which she approaches according to the interpretive distich of Medieval "spiritual" exegesis.[51] Oliver Davies has argued that the relation Julian sets up between her visions and their interpretation parallels the relation within "standard medieval practices of biblical exegesis" between text and hermeneutic and bears strong similarities to the fourfold sense of scripture.[52] This is unsurprising in light of the close relationship between "reading, interpreting, and praying the Bible" and "Christian

---

[48] See, for example, Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1982).

[49] McGill, 35.

[50] Colledge and Walsh note the manifold references to the Vulgate embedded in Julian's text and recommend treating her as "Scripture scholar, Latinist, rhetorician and theologian" (132).

[51] Colledge and Walsh, 132. They write, "Her book is a great monument to the Western monastic traditions of *lectio divina* of which she was heiress; and the learning she had inherited began and continued in the loving, prayerful study and memorization of sacred scripture" (45). Julian's language of "mystly" can be coordinated with what is known in the tradition as the "*mysticus ordo*" or *mystica interpretatio*" (134). I will say more about Medieval "spiritual interpretation" in the first chapter.

[52] See Oliver Davies, "Transformational Processes in the Work of Julian of Norwich and Mechtild of Magdeburg," in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), 39-52.

mysticism," which from its inception has had "a distinctively exegetical character."[53] Turner believes "Julian's compendious use of the word 'see' is best understood" in light of "the medieval practice of scriptural hermeneutics."[54] Julian uses "see" not only to mean "behold" (visually) but also to encompass the whole range of human perception, sensation, and knowledge. In her text, "I saw" often means: "I heard," "I understood," "I realized," or simply "I thought." In other words, there should be no sharp division between the visionary quality of Julian's writing and its status as "spiritual interpretation" of scripture, in Henri de Lubac's sense (see chapter one). At a closer look, Julian's "visions" are shot through with the imagery and narratives of the biblical text. Thus Turner says one remaining task for Julian scholarship is to read her as a "'biblical' theologian,"[55] to learn to recognize her allusions as well as what she makes of them theologically. This is particularly relevant in the case of the Example of the Lord and Servant. (While I am reading it as an interpretation or retelling of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, it will become clear that such an approach is not self-evident. Julian does not announce that she is doing as much, and the textual evidence is concealed deep within the thematic and structural features of the example.[56] My reading in chapter three is intended bring this scriptural connection to the surface.)

---

[53] McGinn, *The Presence of God*, 3. McGinn goes on to explain, "Christian modes of preparing for the direct experience of the presence of God were tied to particular ascetical practices, sacramental rituals, and forms of prayer; but they were also based on the spiritual values, patterns of life, and paradigmatic figures revealed in the scripture and explained by the fathers. The incorporated experience and inherited language that guided the believer toward the divine encounter were fundamentally scriptural."

[54] Turner, 80.

[55] Ibid., 220, n. 2.

[56] I initially commenced the comparison between Julian and Barth strictly on the basis of the structural and thematic similarities between her example and his interpretation of the parable. I was uncertain how closely connected it was to the biblical parable. But it has become increasingly clear that, as Turner argues, Julian's example "is clearly intended to be a gloss" on Luke 15:11-32 (126). Elizabeth Spearing has confirmed in conversation that she reads the passage this way as well. A. C. Spearing's observation that the example "resembles a New Testament parable" is suggestive ("Introduction," xxviii).

Third, in recent decades, Julian has received increasing recognition as a "theologian."[57] For example, in his book *Julian of Norwich, Theologian*, Turner calls Julian's Long Text "one of the great works of medieval theology in any language by an author of either gender" and believes she should be set among her "medieval peers— Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas."[58] According to Turner, Julian's theology "owes something to the styles of both the school and the monastery."[59] He characterizes the medieval "school-based understanding" understanding of "systematic" or "sentence-type theology" as "inferential and linear," moving from premises to conclusions.[60] By contrast, he describes "monastic" theology as more oriented toward life, practice, contemplation, and the vision of God—an orientation that is evident, for example, in the writings of Bernard and William of St. Thierry, both of whom appear to influence Julian.[61] (Anne Hunt draws similar distinctions.[62]) We see, on the one hand, that Julian's text has a "problem-based dialectical style" that is "riddled with sic et non, with theological tensions." In fact, as Turner says, "a major part of the

---

[57] See, for example, Denise Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings: From Vision to Book*; Grace Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*; Joan Nuth, *Wisdom's Daughter: The Theology of Julian of Norwich* (New York: Crossroad, 1991); and Gillian T. W. Ahlgren, "Julian of Norwich's Theology of Eros" *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 5.1 (Spring 2005), 37-53.

[58] Turner, x. Here is he echoing Thomas Merton who claimed of Julian: "she is one of the greatest English theologians… Actually, in Julian of Norwich, we find an admirable synthesis of mystical experience and theological reflection… In a word, Julia of Norwich gives a coherent and indeed systematically constructed corpus of doctrine, which has only recently begun to be studied as it deserves." Thomas Merton, "The English Mystics," in *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Dell, 1961), 140-141.

[59] Turner, 9.

[60] Ibid., 4.

[61] Ibid., 6.

[62] Anne Hunt distinguishes three primary forms of medieval theology: "Monastic theology," she says, is "focused in the interpretation of scripture, exegetical in method, the goal is contemplation, genres: biblical commentary, letter-treatises, written rhetorical sermon (xi). Scholastic theology, is more scholarly, as it is connected to universities, having as its goal: knowledge, understanding, and the demonstration of the rationality of Christian faith. Its common genres are *lectio, disputatio, quaestio,* and *summa* (xi). "Vernacular theology," which mainly flourished among the less educated and women, is "more fluid in style and content." It "includes visionary experiences and their explanation, hagiography, and poetry" (xii). See Anne Hunt, *The Trinity: Insights from the Mystics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press), 2010.

Long Text consists of a single enormously extended 'utrum,' a vast, loosely composed, *quaestio disputata*" marked by alternating assertions and objections.[63] On the other hand, her style is also distinctly "exploratory, reflective, meditative, and above all, vernacular"—"urban," "lay," "demotic."[64] To treat Julian as a "theologian," then, is to recognize that her writing bears the marks of these established theological modes. It is also to acknowledge that Julian is familiar with the ideas and styles of major patristic and medieval theologians, that she is interacting at a high level with (and perhaps also intending to contribute to) this theological tradition. It is to take seriously that she is not merely recounting a personal religious "experience" but making arguments with doctrinal relevance.[65] In her Example of the Lord and Servant, for instance, she is clearly accounting for, and also developing upon, central Christian doctrines such as atonement, incarnation, the hypostatic union, and election. In her example she presents a theology of sin and a theological anthropology while also preparing the way for the sophisticated Trinitarian theology that follows. Her writing is "systematic" not just in the "school-based" sense, then, but also in a broader sense: it reflects the dense interconnectedness of the various components of the Christian faith.

Finally, although Julian calls her example a "showing," it is written in the genre of medieval homiletic *exempla*.[66] An *exemplum*, or example, is a characteristic element in

---

[63] Turner, 11.

[64] Ibid., 14.

[65] For a reconstruction of Julian's intellectual formation see College and Walsh, 36-58. Little is known of Julian's biography on this point, but there is consensus that she downplays her learning. I will not be focusing on the historical genealogy of Julian's ideas or attempting to make claims about specific sources. Instead, in engaging her as a theologian, I will be drawing out the doctrinal significance of the texts in their final form, particularly the example.

[66] The form of the example is already signaled in Chapter 50 when she asks for a "low" and "common" thing. On the nature of Medieval *exempla* see Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). On Julian's use of the form, see Colledge and Walsh, 129, 133. Colledge and Walsh call it a "preacher's

late medieval sermons.[67] It consists of a "parable" or "similitude"—a short metaphorized narrative that *enacts* a moral or theological point, often by glossing a scriptural narrative or theme. According to Larry Scanlon, "this narrative form dominated later medieval culture, particularly in England."[68] The "sermon exemplum," in particular, "appears in nearly every form of serious medieval discourse," and is "employed by clerics to persuade lay audiences."[69] It is so important to the developing lay vernacular tradition because of its "rhetorical status" as a way of appropriating "the textual authority the form had reserved to the clergy."[70] While an *exemplum* is "didactic"—collections of *exempla* are often called "alphabets" (e.g., the *Alphabetum narrationum*) and Julian refers to her example as the beginning of an "A.B.C."—as a form of teaching, it is inherently *performative*.[71] It does not merely confirm power but produces and reproduces it, compelling the assent and imitation of its hearers.[72] Scanlon says medieval examples were thus able to garner "an ideological power doctrine often lacked."[73] By virtue of its form, an *exemplum* constitutes "a narrative instantiation of cultural authority."[74]

What is most salient about this, for the purposes of studying Julian, is that it reminds us that her use of the genre is implicitly a matter of theological and moral

---

exemplum" (133). It is to be distinguished from the "public *exemplum*" not in its form or ability to establish "cultural authority," but in its content. Public examples tend to address matters of "lay authority" (i.e., in the realm of princes and politics) while homiletic examples are more concerned with church ritual as well as sin and virtue (see Larry Scanlon, 70, 81).

[67] Watson and Jenkins, 272.

[68] Scanlon, 3, 57. The *exemplum* is popularized in the vernacular by Julian's contemporary, Chaucer, who draws on it repeatedly in his *Canterbury Tales*. As Scanlon notes, Chaucer's many affirmations of the narrative form within specific tales demonstrates his awareness that "narrative can produce authority from within its own discursive logic; that is, fictively" (243).

[69] Ibid., 57.

[70] Ibid., 4, 138.

[71] See McGill, 81.

[72] Noting the inseparability of its form and content, Scanlon says, "the moral can only be apprehended narratively" (30). "The exemplum illustrates a moral because what it recounts is the enactment of that moral. The moral does not simply gloss the narrative" (33).

[73] Ibid., 31.

[74] Ibid., 26.

authority. The narrative form enables her to conceal her retelling of a biblical parable while reflecting theologically upon it and interacting with prevailing teachings on everything from sin to the atonement to the triune life of God. The nature of *exempla* as narrative enactments helps Julian enfold the imaginations of her readers into an alternative theological vision without explicitly resorting to those modes of writing and teaching prohibited to her.

To summarize: Julian's writing invites us to engage her not only as a mystic and devotional writer, but also as a visionary writer, biblical commentator, and systematic theologian. Her use of medieval *exempla* enables her to retell the Parable of the Prodigal Son theologically, and in such a way that it becomes possible to compare its doctrinal import with that of Barth's exegesis of the parable.

On Taking a "Literary-Narratological" Approach to Barth

Within the field of modern and contemporary theology, Karl Barth's writing does not require the same sort of introduction I have provided for Julian's. But, at the outset, it will be helpful to specify my approach and set the boundaries for my attention to his vast *oeuvre*.

First, although I will be addressing a significant portion of Barth's *Doctrine of Reconciliation*, it is beyond the scope of my project to provide a comprehensive account of his Christology or recount many of the longstanding debates among Barth scholars over matters such as his doctrinal development and divine ontology.[75] My objective in the fifth and sixth chapters will not be to offer original interpretations of Barth's major doctrinal claims. Nor will I have the chance to consider his reading of the parable in light

---

[75] See chapters five and six for sources.

of every other aspect of his dogmatics. I have largely constrained myself to engaging the parable exegesis found in §64.2 in light of his doctrine of election (§32-33) and the first aspect of reconciliation (viz. §59). These are not arbitrary selections, but I also recognize that they are limited. I expect that close attention to other portions of *Church Dogmatics* would shed more light on Barth's exegesis of the Parable of the Prodigal Son with respect to his Christology, soteriology, theology of scripture, and doctrine of God.

Second, since, as I will show, Barth's application of the structure and language of the Parable of the Prodigal Son ranges over his doctrines of election, incarnation, and atonement, I must make a number of judgments and assumptions concerning the content of these doctrines. Most significantly, I do not dispute that, for Barth, "the union of the Son with the man Jesus is pressed back into the divine life."[76] His excursus on Luke 15:11-32 supports such an understanding of his Christology; in fact, Barth's interpretation of the parable becomes almost unintelligible apart from this conclusion. Barth's multi-layered theological deployment of the parable calls into question the tendency to put distance, whether epistemological or ontological, between the historical atonement and the being of God in God's second way of being. It therefore reinforces those interpretations of Barth that emphasize the humanity of Christ and a strong identity between the eternal Son and the human Jesus.[77]

Third, while I acknowledge the ontological import of Barth's Christological identification of the prodigal son, I adopt a more literary or narratival approach, in my

---

[76] Paul Jones, *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 129.

[77] See, for example, Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth. A Paraphrase*, trans. John Webster (London: T&T Clark, 2001), Bruce McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies In the Theology of Karl Barth (*Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), Kevin Hector, "God's Triunity and Self-Determination: A Conversation with Karl Barth, Bruce McCormack and Paul Molnar," *IJST* 7.3 (2005), and Jones, *The Humanity of Christ*.

analysis, as is warranted by the primary texts under consideration.[78] While Barth does not

shy away from scholastic distinctions and definitions, the prominence of "the name" in

his Christology draws attention to another mode of thought—one in which what is

philosophically conceived as "being" or "essence" is accessed and described through the

literary or narratival categories of "character" and "identity."[79] After all, according to

Barth "this Subject [God] is disclosed only in the name of Jesus Christ…it is wholly and

entirely enclosed in Him" (II/25). In a letter to G. C. Berkouwer, Barth remarks on what

this means for his method:

> My intention…has been that all my systematic theology should be as exact a
>
> development as possible of the significance of this "name" (in the biblical sense
>
> of the term) and to that extent should be the telling of a story which develops
>
> through individual events.[80]

---

[78] By "narratival," I mean: having a story-like form (including style, plot, character development, linearity, climax, etc.). By "literary" I mean: employing the devices and figures of speech common to the art of literature (fiction, drama, poetry). In Robert Alter's words "literary analysis" includes "the manifold varieties of minutely discriminating attention to the artful use of language, to the shifting lay of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative viewpoint, compositional units, and much else" (*The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 12-13). Bruce McCormack has pointed out that the "narrative" mode of theology has specifically become associated with "post-liberalism," particularly among Anglo-American Barthians. So I must clarify that, in approaching Barth as I do, I am not intentionally working within (or against) this particular school of theology. While I refer at points to Hans Frei's work with respect to narrative identity, in emphasizing the category of "narrative" as well as the "literary" quality of Barth's scriptural interpretation I am simply following Barth's own "literary-*narratological*" (Hunsinger) method of engaging the biblical text. I am not thereby making coded epistemological claims concerning "(anti)foundationalism" or suggesting the "suspension" of "reality-references." That is another matter altogether. See McCormack's essay "Beyond Nonfoundational and Postmodern Readings of Barth: Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology," *Orthodox and Modern*, 109-165, esp. 113-138.

[79] Throughout my dissertation, I will be using "identity" in a narratival rather than analytical sense. Larry Bouchard's clarification is helpful: "*Identity* is from the Latin for 'the same,' *idem*, as in 'this is identical to that.' But it is more helpful to define it in terms of what a person *identifies with* or that by which one is *named*. Such identifiers usually persist over time, meaning that identity is a mode of continuity-in-change… Identity as *identifying-with* refers to how the self is organized in relation to extrinsic yet internalized matters… Identity is part of how the self persists by being situated with meanings and relations that allow it to transcend itself. Naming symbolizes and helps to establish this persistence." See, Bouchard, *Theater and Integrity: Emptying Selves in Drama, Ethics, and Religion* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 23.

[80] Letter to Berkouwer, Dec. 10, 1954. See Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life From Letters and Autobiographical Texts (*Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 381, n. 205.

"Systematic theology" must be "the telling of a story" because a name can only be narrated. As Larry Bouchard says, "Narrative…is really an enlarged act of *naming* that answers the question, 'Who?'"[81] David Ford thus insists on the "priority of narrative" in the task of theology, saying, "systematic work" is always "in the service of…re-reading" the scriptural story, for "the essence of the matter, however reconstructed, can never be expressed without narrative."[82] In other words, the basic narrativity of the name cannot be substituted for an essence or set of attributes. In Barth's retelling of the name of Jesus Christ all the major doctrinal loci—from creation to covenant to election to reconciliation—converge and refract as non-identical repetitions of the same story. Even "grace," he says, is only "the paraphrase of the name of Jesus" (II/2, 173). This understanding of the essentially "storied" nature of the theological enterprise guides my approach to Barth's retelling of the parable as a retelling of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Finally, and closely related to the preceding point, while my focus is on Barth's exegesis of the parable rather than his scriptural interpretation more broadly speaking, it may be helpful to make a few introductory comments on his handling of the Bible. This is another complicated and substantial topic in its own right, which I will not attempt to address in full.[83] I primarily want to note how integral Barth's scriptural interpretation is to his theological method.[84] This is so much the case that one commentator says, "From

---

[81] Bouchard, 32.

[82] David Ford, "Narrative in Theology," *British Journal of Religious Education* Vol. 4, No. 3 (1982), 117.

[83] See Francis Watson, "The Bible," *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 57-71, as well as authors cited below.

[84] There is much to say on this topic. Most importantly: Barth disregards the stark modern division between exegesis and dogmatics. As Paul McGlasson says, "At least part of Barth's reason for doing extended biblical exegesis in the content of Christian theology was to wage a direct assault on the bifurcation of scholarly work into two such separated disciplines. Theology, for Barth, should again be biblical in a technical, disciplined sense, and likewise should the study of the Bible be disciplined by confessional

beginning to end, Barth's *Church Dogmatics* is nothing other than a sustained meditation

on the text of Holy Scripture."[85] Here again, the centrality of the "name" is of the utmost

importance.

Barth is well known for his "Christocentrism," both theologically and

hermeneutically.[86] However, Barth says, "Sometimes I don't like the word Christology

very much. It's not a matter of Christology, nor even of christocentricity and a

christological orientation, but of *Christ himself*."[87] This is manifested hermeneutically, as

Hunsinger notes, in Barth's expectation "that Jesus Christ is attested, directly or

indirectly, by virtually any biblical passage, whether in the Old Testament or the New.

He therefore read all of Scripture from a center in Jesus Christ."[88] In this sense, Barth's

"theological exegesis" of the Parable of the Prodigal Son is not uncharacteristic for him.[89]

We encounter a similar pattern of reading in his excurses on, for example, Jonah (II/1),

theological concerns." See Paul McGlasson, *Jesus and Judas: Biblical Exegesis in Barth*, American Academy of Religion Series (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1991), 4.

[85] Watson, "The Bible," 57.

[86] In McCormack's words, for Barth "Christocentrism," "refers to the attempt…to understand every doctrine from a center in God's Self-revelation in Jesus Christ… 'Christocentrism,' for him, was a methodological rule—not an a priori principle, but a rule which is learned through encounter with the God who reveals Himself in Christ—in accordance with which one presupposes a particular understanding of God's Self-revelation in reflecting upon each and every other doctrinal topic, and seeks to interpret those topics in the light of what is already known about Jesus Christ." McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 454.

[87] Busch 411, see n. 16.

[88] George Hunsinger, "Introduction," *Thy Word is Truth: Barth on Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), xi.

[89] Phrases such as "theological exegesis" and "reading the bible theologically" are used by multiple commentators in reference to "the organic relationship between exegesis and the theological enterprise" in Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. Mark Gignilliat, *Karl Barth and the Fifth Gospel: Barth's Theological Exegesis of Isaiah* (New York: Fordham, 2009), 3. See also Richard Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 2001) and Mary Kathleen Cunningham, *What is Theological Exegesis? Interpretation and Use of Scripture in Barth's Doctrine of Election* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1995).

Leviticus 14 and 16 (II/2), Isaiah 7-8 (IV/1), the Good Samaritan (I/2).[90] In such cases, "Barth ingeniously discerned parallels in Scripture—both literary and theological—to the narrative of [the] saving history" in Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection.[91] Hunsinger observes that this pattern is marked by "a deep structure" of "affirmation," "negation," and "negation of the negation."[92] As I will show in subsequent chapters, this basic narrative shape is key to both Julian's and Barth's intertextual readings of the parable. It is worth highlighting at the outset that this forms an important point of rapprochement between Julian's medieval, pre-critical or "pre-modern," manner of reading and what Rudolf Smend calls Barth's "postcritical scriptural interpretation."[93]

Despite the fact that Barth is a distinctively "modern" theologian, his exegetical method does not represent a complete breach with the "pre-modern" tradition represented in Julian's interpretation of the parable.[94] According to de Lubac, "the exegesis of a Karl

---

[90] Consider, too, Barth's treatment of figures such as Moses, Joseph, Job, and David—all of whom become "a pointer or type that was somehow reconfigured, restored, and surpassed in Christ," Hunsinger, *Thy Word*, xii.

[91] Hunsinger explains, "Insofar as [other biblical] stories displayed some elements of the same pattern, they could be read as pointing to Christ at the center. They could be taken as attesting to the uniqueness of Christ without losing their essential distinction from him" (xi).

[92] While this clearly echoes Hegel—and Barth admits, "I myself have a certain weakness for Hegel and am always fond of doing a bit of 'Hegeling'" (see Busch, *Karl Barth*, 387)—it is important to remember that Hegel was interpreting (and ontologizing) the narrative structure of Jesus' life attested in the Gospels. This same pattern (of a positive followed by a negative and its overcoming) is also discerned in strictly structuralist accounts of narrative. The concept of "story" itself depends upon mischief—negation. (See chapter two.) This is there in the text itself; it is a fundamentally Christological pattern; and Julian discerns it as well.

[93] See Rudolf Smend, "Nachkritische Schriftauslegung," *Parrhesia: Karl Barth zum 80. Geburtstag am 10. Mai 1966*, ed. Eberhard Busch, Jürgen Fangmeier, and Maz Geiger (Zürich: EVA, 1966), 215-37; and George Hunsinger's essay on Smend's reading of Barth, "Postcritical Interpretation: Rudolf Smend on Karl Barth," *Thy Word*, 29-48.

[94] For an extensive explanation of what it means to regard Barth as "modern" theologian, see McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* and *Orthodox and Modern*. Above all, McCormack says, the meaning "modernity" in Christian theology concerns the rise of "historical consciousness" (*Orthodox and Modern*, 10). He goes onto to add, "Beyond the historicizing tendencies unleashed by the rise of historical consciousness, any truly 'modern' theology will also include the following: an acceptance, in principle at the [very] least, of critical methods for studying the Bible; a recognition of the loss of respect among philosophers for classical metaphysics in all their (Greek) forms; the recognition of the breakdown of the old Aristotelian-biblical cosmology in the course of the seventeenth century; and the acceptance of the necessity of constructing doctrines of creation and providence which find their ground in more modern

Barth" is "reminiscent in many ways of the exegesis of the early Fathers."[95] This is

apparent not only in the specific execution of his reading of the Parable of the Prodigal

Son in §64.2 and his appeal therein to the indirect interpretive methods of patristic,

medieval, and early Reformation theologians (which he uses to chasten the strictly

historical-critical approaches of late 19th c. and early 20th c. Protestantism), but also in his

more extensive practice of "Christological" or "typological" exegesis. Referring to this,

Kathryn Greene-McCreight identifies as "two of the most theologically fruitful aspects"

of the exegetical portions in *Church Dogmatics*: 1) Barth's "reading of the Old and New

Testaments as a canonically interconnected whole," and 2) his "postcritical qualification

of modern criticism."[96] Greene-McCreight explains that Barth reads the Bible as a

"single," "theologically interdependent" text "which bears the communication of the

Holy One." What Barth shares in common with interpreters and theologians "from the

earliest Christian tradition up until the dawning of the Enlightenment," she says, is "a

reading of Scripture that attends to a canonical Rule, or the Rule of Faith."[97] For him, the

unity of scripture grounded in Jesus Christ, regarded in faith as the Word of God, "is a

---

theological and/or philosophical resources" (11). He highlights among Barth's modern traits his
antimetaphysical stance concerning theological epistemology, his neo-Kantianism, his embrace of the
critical study of scripture, his opposition to natural theology and foundationalism, his indifference to
evolutionary theory, and the "historicizing" evident in Barth's later divine ontology and Christology.
McCormack sees as his "own contribution to the European discussion of Barth's relation to modernity," a
demonstration of "the extent to which Kant and the later Marburg neo-Kantianism influenced not only his
earliest 'liberal' theology (prior to 1915) but also decisively stamped his dialectical theology" (see 11-13).
[95] Henri de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, trans. Luke O'Neill (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2000),
77.
[96] Kathryn Greene-McCreight, "The Type of the One to Come:" Leviticus 14 and 16 in Barth's *Church
Dogmatics*," *Thy Word*, 67-68.
[97] Greene-McCreight, 68. By this, Greene-McCreight most basically means that Barth, like the church
fathers, construes the Bible as a drama or narrative unified by the identity of God in Christ. We see this, for
example, in Barth's assertion that "name" governs all scriptural interpretation. See above.

theological reality to be confessed, not a historical judgment to be tested in the fires of criticism."[98]

At the same time, Barth clearly "embraces the fruit of the biblical criticism of the modern period."[99] In fact, Barth did not appreciate the term "postcritical" and saw himself as a thoroughly "critical theologian."[100] His assertion is, rather, that "the critical historian needs to be more critical."[101] Greene-McCreight explains, "In order to deal with the Bible responsibly on its own terms, Barth argued, historical criticism was indispensible but not enough."[102] The reason a historical-critical approach to the study of scripture is "not enough" is that it cannot attend to "the actual subject matter common to both [the biblical writer] and the reader"—the revelation of God in Christ to which the biblical texts testify.[103] Barth maintains that, despite the "concrete humanity" of the Bible

---

[98] Greene-McCreight, 67. This attitude has resulted in accusations of "biblicism." However, Barth is clearly "no fundamentalist," evident in the fact that 1) "he gives ample recognition to error within the biblical text" (see, for example, his comments on the problem of infallibility in I/2, 529f) and 2) "he is no enemy whatever of higher criticism, from which, indeed, he profits all through the exegetical portions of the *Dogmatics*." See Robert McAffee Brown, "Scripture and Tradition in the Theology of Karl Barth," *Thy Word*, 5.

[99] Greene-McCreight, 69. As Barth writes in *CD* §19, "Scripture as a Witness to Divine Revelation," "The demand that the Bible should be read and understood and expounded historically is, therefore, obviously justified and can never be taken too seriously. The Bible itself posits this demand: even where it appeals expressly to divine commissionings and promptings, in its actual composition it is everywhere a human word, and this human word is obviously intended to be taken seriously and read and understood and expounded as such… The demand for a 'historical' understanding of the Bible necessarily means, in content, that we have to take it for what it undoubtedly is and is meant to be: the human speech uttered by specific men at specific times in a specific situation, in a specific language and with a specific intention…" (I/2, 464).

[100] Eberhard Jüngel, *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy* (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1986), 73-74. Jüngel suggests "metacritical" as a better descriptor. As Hunsinger notes, Smend later modifies "his terminology (though not his point) by suggesting that Barth's views" combined "critical," "postcritical," and anti-critical" elements (Hunsinger, "Postcritical," 30).

[101] This famous remark comes from Barth's Second Edition of his *Epistle to the Romans* (8). Barth's reading can be compared to the later "canonical criticism" of Brevard Childs. Childs writes, "I would suggest that it was Karl Barth who has captured the true insights of the Reformers when, in response to Bultmann and his legacy, he argued for a far more radical position regarding the nature of the Bible, namely to be 'more critical than the critics!'" See Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis Fortress Press, 1993), 215.

[102] Greene-McCreight, 68.

[103] See George Hunsinger translation of Rudolf Smend's comments in "Nachkritische Schriftauslegung" (216) ("Postcritical," 30).

(I/2, 464), we must "ferret out the revelation of God from the word of the past," that "will surely know how to speak to present-day life," and distinguish it from "all the historical, theological, and cultural in which it is clothed."[104] While Barth does not follow the patristic and medieval notion of different "senses" of scripture, he believes that the "figurative and prophetic reference" to Christ "is not added on or read into, but ingredient in the verbal sense 'by reason of the fact that the Bible gives us God's own witness to Himself' and 'its word in all words is this Word.'"[105] We see this clearly in his reading of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Although the Christological referent appears tangential at first, Barth finally shows that it is "invited by the text itself" (IV/2, 25). This is not a matter of being closed to historical-critical insights but of being open to "the way the words go" (*circumstantia litterae*, Aquinas).[106] As a result, Barth's approach to scripture is, in Hunsinger's words, "indeed 'naïve'"—but "in a different, more sophisticated way." As Barth says, "Proper exegesis finally presses beyond the many questions to the one basic question by which they are all embraced"—that is, to the question of the identity of the bearer of the Name.[107] His "postcritical" (or *more* critical) theological exegesis constitutes a kind of "second naïveté" (Ricoeur).[108]

---

[104] From a letter to Edward Thurneysen, cited by Walter Lindemann, *Karl Barth und die Kritische Schriftauslegung* (Hamburg-Bergstedt: Herbert Reich Evangelischer Verlag, 1973), 11. In a sense, then, Barth engages in his own project of demythologization.

[105] Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin and Barth Read the "Plain Sense" of Genesis 1 – 3* (New York, Lang: 1999), 175. In other words, it is "within the plain sense reading" that "the figurative and prophetic reference to Christ" is to be found.

[106] As Barth says, "Strict observation obviously requires that the force of a picture meeting us in a text shall exercise its due effect in accordance with its intrinsic character, that it shall itself decide what real facts are appropriate to it, that absolutely no prejudgments shall be made" (I/2, 725). Similarly, "The ill-advised hunt for a historical truth *supra scripturam* [prior to Scripture] is called off in favor of an open investigation of the *veritas scripturae ipsius* [truth of Scripture itself]" (I/2, 494).

[107] Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (New York: Harper, 1957), 53 rev. This is Hunsinger's translation ("Postcritical," 31).

[108] Hunsinger, "Postcritical," 32.

This orientation of the biblical texts to their proper subject matter (the name) and attentiveness to "their actual words and sentences" engenders manifold intertextual resonances and narrative figurations, to which Barth, like Julian, is keenly attuned.[109] The resulting "literary-*theological*" or "literary-*narratological*" quality of Barth's exegesis—which I will draw out in connection with Ricoeur's theory of intertextuality—forms the hermeneutical assumption of my comparison of it to Julian's pre-historical-critical retelling of the parable.[110] While there is much more to be said about Barth's interpretive method as well as his theology of scripture, the aim of these preliminary comments is simply to show that the philosophical and methodological span between Barth's modern exegesis and Julian's medieval interpretation is not as gaping as one might expect. They produce remarkably similar theological retellings of the biblical parable.

Contribution to the Field(s)

In my study of the Parable of the Prodigal Son and Julian's and Barth's retellings of it, four primary fields intersect: New Testament parable theory, phenomenology, Julian studies, and Barth scholarship. This coalescence of disciplines is generative and illuminating in a number of ways. For example, the subtle theological moves Julian is making in her example are amplified when read alongside Barth's systematic and overtly

---

[109] Barth says, "Revelation stands, no it happens, in the Scriptures and not behind them. It happens. There is no way around this in the biblical texts—in their actual words and sentences—given what the prophets and the apostles, as witnesses to revelation wanted to say and have said." From Barth, *Christliche Dogmatik* (Münich: Chr. Kaiser, 1927), 344; see Hunsinger's English translation, "Postcritical" (42).

[110] This is George Hunsinger's terminology. He revises Smend's description of Barth's postcritical scriptural interpretation as "literary-historical," playing up the narrative and theological dimensions of Barth's "historical" focus. He points out that Barth's understanding of "history" is "more complex" than "the one commonly presupposed by modern exegetes." Barth could employ the category of "history" while also "making room for God." We see this, for example, in Barth's ongoing use of the "older more naïve significant" of the concept "history," which he retranslates as "saga" (see, for example, III/1, 80-82; IV/2, 478). Hunsinger compares Barth's insights to those of the literary critic Frank Kermode, saying both pay "close attention to the direct wording and literary structure of the texts" ("Postcritical," 33).

doctrinal engagement with the parable. Similarly, in rereading Barth after recognizing what Julian is doing one gains a better sense of the intertextual coherence of his Christological interpretation of the parable. The great deal that their texts share is owing to the biblical passage itself and suggests that they respond to an otherwise neglected interpretive trajectory authentic to the Lukan parable. As for engaging parable phenomenologically, while this is a fairly novel approach in New Testament studies, it helps explain and support some of the central claims pervading parable theory.

In addition to these instances of cross-pollination among established fields, it is my view that reading the Parable of the Prodigal Son with Julian and Barth prompts us to reconsider parable as a mode of theology and leads to a critical distinction within the field of narrative theology, which I refer to in the conclusion as "parabolic theology."[111]

---

[111] I will return to this in the conclusion. In short, by "parabolic theology" I mean theology in the mode of parable or theology that has a parabolic quality about it. "Parabolic theology" is a phrase that has also been used by Sallie McFague, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975). As will become evident, I am *not* using this phrase in precisely the same way as her. While she too is concerned about the relationship between form and content and alternate theological genres, by "parabolic theology" she specifically means "intermediary theology"—a mode of theology that falls somewhere in between the poetic and the conceptual. I do not contest such an understanding. However, this is not the definition I have in mind. In fact, I am particularly interested in the *irreducibility* of parabolic theology, rather than its intermediary status.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON
AND PARABLE INTERPRETATION

In preparation for my subsequent analysis of Julian's example and Barth's

exegesis, I begin the first chapter by introducing the passage commonly known as "The

Parable of the Prodigal Son" found in Luke 15:11-32. I first briefly overview the history

of its interpretation and highlight some of the distinctive characteristics of Julian's and

Barth's treatments by contrast (section I). This gives rise to critical questions about

parable and its relationship to allegory and metaphor, which I address in the second and

third sections. Throughout this chapter and the next, I note the key structural and thematic

features of the parable, Julian's example, and Barth's exegesis and indicate the

intersecting literary and theological points to be explored in the subsequent close readings

of Julian's and Barth's texts (chapters four through six).

I. The Parable of the Prodigal Son and Parable Theory

The Parable of the Prodigal Son, found in Luke 15:11-32, is one of the most

renowned and celebrated stories in Christian scripture.[1] It has been called "the gospel

within the gospel," "the greatest short story ever told," "the greatest of all Jesus'

parables."[2] Closely related to the preceding parables of the Lost Sheep (15:1-7) and Lost

Coin (15:8-10), it tells of filial waywardness and paternal compassion. The lost son is

---

[1] This well-known parable is found only in Luke.

[2] Jill Robbins, *Prodigal Son / Elder Brother: Interpretation and Alterity in Augustine, Petrarch, Kafka, Levinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 10. See F. Sommer, *The World's Greatest Short Story* and J. E. Compton, "The Prodigal's Brother," respectively. Cited by John Donahue, S.J., *The Gospel in Narrative: Metaphor, Narrative, and Theology in the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 151.

welcomed home with a banquet feast fit for a wedding. Situated within "the travel narrative" of Luke (9:51-19:27), the broader narrative context of the parable is Jesus' departure from Galilee for Jerusalem, where he makes his "triumphant entry" and is later tried and crucified. Along the way, the "tax collectors and sinners," who are "stock-in-trade for the despised,"[3] come to hear Jesus' teaching. But "the Pharisees and scribes" take issue with this saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (15:1-2). In response, Jesus tells the three parables of Luke 15, culminating with the story of the lost son:

> [11]Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. [12]The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. [13]A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. [14]When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. [15]So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. [16]He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. [17]But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! [18]I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; [19]I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" [20]So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

---

[3] Arland A. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 468.

²¹Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." ²²But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

²⁵'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." ²⁸Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" ³¹Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."[4]

This biblical story has become deeply embedded in the Western imagination.[5] There is no shortage of interpretations, retellings, or representations of it. The parable

---

[4] New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Unless otherwise indicated, all scriptural citations that are not embedded in quoted passages are taken from the NRSV.
[5] Of course, elements of this story transcend a specifically Western heritage. Compare to the later Buddhist story of the young man who "left his father and ran away," in the *Lotus* (or *Saddharma-pundarika*) *Sutra*.

served as a particularly popular subject in the visual art of late medieval and early modern Europe. Perhaps most famously, Rembrandt produced multiple versions of *The Return of the Prodigal Son.*[6] In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Prodigal Son Play was its own sub-genre of the English morality play.[7] In more recent stage performance, of particular note is the 1929 ballet choreographed by George Balanchine to Sergei Prokofiev's composition 1957 ballet by Hugo Alfvén. The first known literary retelling is found in Augustine's spiritual autobiography *Confessions*, in which he identifies himself with the younger son, taking the prodigal's narrative as the template for his own conversion.[8] Bernard of Clairvaux similarly crafts an allegory modeled on the parable about the wayward son of a king who is lost and found.[9] Allusions and retellings in modern and contemporary literature include Rudyard Kipling's poem "The Prodigal Son," André Gide's short story *Le retour de l'enfant prodigue*, Henri Nouwen's meditation on Rembrandt's painting in *The Return of the Prodigal Son, A Story of Homecoming*, Elizabeth Bishop's poem "The Prodigal," Ron Hansen's novel *Atticus* which resets the narrative in the American West and Mexico in the late 20th century, and Toni Morrison's novella *Home* about kinship, race, and place in mid-century Georgia.

---

[6] Among other examples in 15th-16th c. visual art, see Rembrandt's self-portrait *The Prodigal Son in the Tavern* (1635-36); Albrecht Dürer's famous engraving of *the Prodigal Son amongst the pigs* (1496-97); Cornelis Anthonisz's *The Prodigal Son Welcomed into the Church* and other woodcuts from the series *The Allegory of the Prodigal Son* (1540s); and Hieronymus Wierix's print (after Maarten de Vos), *The Four Enemies of Righteousness and the Theological Virtues* (ca. 1580), which combines the parable of the lost sheep and the lost son. See *Rembrants, Rubens, and the Art of Their Time: Recent Perspectives*, eds. Roland E. Fleischer, Susan C. Scott (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

[7] E.g., *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*, The Disobedient Child, and Acolastus. [see: Craig, Hardin (1950-04). "Morality Plays and Elizabethan Drama". Shakespeare Quarterly 1 (2): 71.]

[8] See, for example, *Confessions*, I.18 (where we see Augustine's interiorization of the prodigal's departure and return), II.4 (about stealing pairs and the *regio egestatis*/wasteland), III.6 (which compares philosophical texts to husks of swine), and VII.10 (concerning the *regio dissimilitudinis*).

[9] Bernard of Clairvaux, "The Story of the King's Son," *The Parables & The Sentences*, trans. Michael Casey, OCSO and Francis Swietek, Cistercian Father's Series 55 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2000).

Distinctive as these portrayals are, one commonality stands out: the artists tend to identify with the younger son, either in assuming or sympathizing with his perspective—as if answering the parable's call, in Barbara Brown Taylor's words, to "come on, stand here on our side, on the side of human beings."[10]

1. A Survey of Theological and Exegetical Engagement with the Parable

In theological and exegetical engagements with the parable, there is debate at every point—for example, over the parameters of the text, its epithet, its referents and message. Bound up with such issues is the underlying question of *how to read* the Bible, and specifically how to read the parables of Jesus. In what follows, I sketch a few of manifold approaches to the parable in the history of its interpretation before turning to some of the key developments in parable interpretation.

The matter of which text is to be interpreted, if it constitutes one parable or two, and whether the second part of the story is pertinent to the first, is a particularly salient concern, as both Julian and Barth focus almost exclusively on the first part of the story (15:11-24).[11] Barth claims the story of the younger son contains "the real message" of the parable (*CD* IV/2, 21), while Julian simply leaves out any mention of a second son/servant. Bound up with questions over the parables' parameters, not a few scholars, exegetes, and literary theorists also object that the phrase "the Prodigal Son" captures the

---

[10] Barbara Brown Taylor, "The Parable of the Prodigal Son," Lenten Noon Day Preaching Series, Calvary Episcopal Church (Memphis, TN, March 5, 1999). This is Taylor's paraphrase of Gregory of Nazianzus' interpretation of the parable.

[11] Julius Wellhausen speculates that the second part of the parable is not part of the original parable. See Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Lucae* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1904). Adolf Jülicher maintains that it is, although he does not emphasize its significance for the parable as a whole. See Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* 2 Vols. (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1888-99). English translation: Jülicher, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S.H. Hooke (London: SCM, 1972). Debate over this persists.

wrong idea about the narrative's content.[12] That specific epithet is absent from Greek

manuscripts. It derives, rather, from the mention in v. 13 of the son wasting or spending

himself in ζῶν ἀσώτως, variously translated "riotous," "foolish," "wasteful," "loose" or

"prodigal living."[13] It is arguable that the German caption "*Der verlorene Sohn*"[14]

appeals more clearly to the language of the parable (in vv. 24, 32) and, by stressing the

word "lost," underlines the thematic continuity between the three consecutive parables in

Luke 15 and helps us see the sheep, the coin, and the son as analogous figures.

The passage has, consequently, been renamed more than a few times. Some

appellations stress the lostness of *both* sons—"The Prodigal Sons" (David Wyatt) or "The

Parable of the Rebellious Son(s)" (Colin Brown). Others assert the primacy of the

father's character with titles such as "The Pursuing Father" (Kenneth Bailey), "The

Parable of the Father's Love" (Joachim Jeremias, Paul Ricoeur), "The Parable of the

Good Father" (J. G. Lees), "The Parable of the Waiting Father" (Helmut Thielicke),[15]

"The Powerless Almighty Father" (Eduard Schweizer), "The Parable of the Gracious

Father" (Robert Stiein), "The Parable of the Prodigal Father" (Bruce McLeod, N. T.

Wright), "The Father of Two Lost Sons" (Brad Young), or "The Manifestation of the

Father" (Kevin Hart). At least one scholar gets right to the theological point and simply

calls it "A Parable of the Atonement" (Robert G. Crawford).

---

[12] But, again, I will retain the conventional American-English epithet in this work.

[13] This nomenclature may also be rooted in the judgment of the elder son on his brother when he reminds his father than the younger son "wasted" or "devoured" his living or inheritance (Lk. 15:30). As David Holgate's study shows, "the prodigal son" is a common "topos" of Greco-Roman literature, which may be why the title is applied to this parable early on. See Holgate, *Prodigality, Liberality, and Meanness in the Parable of the Prodigal Son* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

[14] This immediately enables readers to see the son as "lost and found," like the sheep and the coin, rather than first of all licentious and profligate. Further, it has the effect of shifting the emphasis from the "conversion" of the younger son to is "being found" by God. Both points indicate obvious trajectories when it comes to differences in theological reflection on the text.

[15] See Helmut Thielicke, *Das Bilderbuch Gottes: Reden über die Gleichnisse Jesu* (Stuttgart: Quell-Verlag, 1957).

While Julian creatively recasts the story in her retelling, as "a wonderful example of a lorde that hath a servant," Barth employs the usual German appellation "The Lost Son." This history of renaming begs the question: what is the "main point" of the parable? To proclaim the good news,[16] to vindicate Jesus' message and actions,[17] to show the loving character of God,[18] to declare the "in-gathering" of the outsiders and penitents,[19] to exemplify repentance,[20] to illustrate the joy of God over the restoration of the lost,[21] to make us aware of the "polar reversal" of first and last in the Kingdom of God?[22] The answers are manifold.

Attending differences over the parable's central focus are, of course, disagreements over how to interpret specific features of the narrative. The two sons, for example, have been taken as illustrations of various ethical, ethnic, religious, and spiritual dualities. While Augustine, and many following him, associates the elder son with Jews and the younger son with Christians or Gentiles, Tertullian inverts the association pairing up Christians ("safe and sound") with the elder and Jews and "heathens" (who "perish") with the younger. As an image of salvation, the older and the younger sons have been interpreted as portraying, respectively, the righteous and sinners, the self-righteous and the humble, the unrepentant and the repentant, the letter of the law and the spirit of the

---

[16] Jülicher, *The Parables of Jesus*.

[17] Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 131.

[18] Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 81-84.

[19] Linnemann, *Parables of Jesus: Introduction and Exposition* (London: SPCK, 1966), 80.

[20] In what is perhaps the most common reading of the parable throughout the early Christian commentaries (e.g., Ambrose, Augustine, John Cassian, and others) up through the present, the younger son is taken as a figure of *repentance*. This runs contrary to the approach we find in Julian and Barth as well as in my own reading to follow.

[21] Donahue, 151. "These parables [in Luke 15] do not simply provide a defense of Jesus' fellowship with outcasts; they speak more of the joy of finding and of being found." Alluding to the same parables, Augustine similarly observes, "God and man rejoice more in the conversion of a great sinner than in uninterrupted piety" (*Confessions* VIII.3).

[22] John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: the Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 73f.

law (Luther). For Calvin, as for Ambrose, the elder son does not represent Jews per se but is a fluid figure for those who are "cruel" and take "offense at the kindness of Christ" being extended to others.[23] Similarly, Jeremias aligns the elder son with Jesus' "critics" and those who "protest" the good news.[24]

Given the historical and literary context of the passage, later scholars move away from the idea that either of the brothers refer to Christians and maintain instead that they represent different kinds of Jewishness or different stages in Israel's history. So, for example, J. Duncan Derret says that the elder brother stands for law-observing Jews while the younger stands for Jews who have fallen away from religious observance.[25] Similarly, N. T. Wright thinks the prodigal son represents Israel in exile.[26] Still other readings set aside the differences between the sons and emphasize the grace of God toward all kinds of sinners. Even among those readers who polarize the sons, many do so under the unifying element of the father's loving attitude toward both. It is generally take for granted that the kind father figure represents God.[27] However, Robert Funk warns against the easy identification of God with "determiner" or "certifier" figures in the parables (i.e., those in authority—the father, the master, judge, etc.). On Funk's structuralist reading, the younger son is the "main character" or "determiner" in the story, making the father and the older brother contrasting "respondents" with whom hearers are

---

[23] John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke* Vol. 1, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol. XVI (Grand Rapids, Baker: 2003), 350.

[24] Jeremias, 130-131. I have encountered the quite opposite reading of the elder son in conversation with a friend who suggested (in part, on the basis of the Christological resonances of "all that I have is yours," v. 31) that the elder son is an imperfect figure for Jesus Christ. Christ is the true elder son who resolves the problem of the younger son's (humanity's) restoration in the household of God by willfully sharing the "inheritance" (a central Pauline metaphor for salvation) belonging to him alone. This makes for an interesting comparison with Anselm's soteriology, in which Jesus receives a reward/ransom which he chooses to pass on.

[25] See J. Duncan M. Derrett *Law in the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005).

[26] N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 126.

[27] E.g., Origen, Tertullian, Augustine, Bernard, Calvin, etc. and, more recently, Jeremias, Young, Donahue, Hultgren, Holgate, and others. Cf. Rabbinic *mašal*.

prompted to align themselves.[28] (Such a position justifies Julian and Barth's focus on the younger son, without necessarily denying the original unity of vv. 11-32 as some other interpreters do.)

In the "spiritual interpretation" of early Christian theologians, such as that of Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine, the parable often figures as a broad paradigm for repentance and conversion.[29] However, the "allegorical" readings of early church fathers moved well beyond main characters and themes, interpreting the smallest details of the narrative as well. While this practice of reading has produced manifold interpretations, which cannot be surveyed here, a selection of Augustine's comments on Luke 15:11f, recorded in *Quaestiones Evangeliorum*, is indicative of such an approach.[30] For Augustine, the prodigal son stands for the overreaching desires of the soul. The distant region into which he wanders indicates human "forgetfulness of God" and the hunger he experiences is a consequence of the fact that he lacks "heavenly bread" (i.e., the Word). The pigs the son tends in his lowest moment refer to "unclean spirits" (or elsewhere, the devil). When the boy "comes to himself" and returns home, the father's going out is compared to the incarnation and his right arm, with which he embraces the son, is said to symbolize Jesus Christ. "The Lord

---

[28] The parable turns on the prodigal and initiates a crisis and opportunity for its recipients: will *you* respond be like the loving father or the begrudging brother? Funk, *Parables and Presence: Forms of the New Testament Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 62f.

[29] "Spiritual interpretation" is Henri de Lubac's inclusive term for the non-literal interpretation of scripture. See section II below. For one example of an allegorical interpretation of the parable, see Tertullian, *Liber De Pudicita* VIII-IX (*PL* 2, 994-999). Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement, and Origen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

[30] Augustine, *Questionum Evangeliorum* II (*PL* 35, 1344-1348).

Himself" is also figured in the fatted calf sacrificed upon the son's restoration while "the best robe," the father's own garment, represents "the dignity that Adam lost."[31]

Up until the beginning of the modern period, "allegorizing" and "Christologizing" a text in this matter was not uncommon. (I will return to what this means in subsequent sections.) Julian, for example, participates in this tradition of reading, as she maps the narrative of creation, fall, and redemption onto the Parable of the Prodigal Son. But in light of distinctly modern, historical approaches to the study of scripture, this method of interpretation gets deemed "eisegesis"—where the play of sound ("I see Jesus") rings particularly true. Christological interpretation is considered reading *into* the text, to be distinguished from "exegesis," or reading out *from* the text.[32] Of course, this is because in a direct or immediate sense, Jesus is absent from the parable.[33] Barth, however, criticizes with few exceptions the tendency in the modern parable interpretation to overliteralize this absence given what takes place between the father and the son: grace.

---

[31] Chrysostom, Ambrose, and many other patristic writers interpret this parable similarly. Although Tertullian inverts the identities of the brothers (equating the elder with Christians and the younger with Jews) and lands on a different main point (namely that it's a story about Christ's relationship to sinful heathens), his interpretation of the parable is remarkably similar to Augustine's *in the details* (see *On Modesty*, Ch. 9). For him too, the father refers to God, the son's wasted property to the knowledge of God, swine to demons, the father's robe to the condition from which Adam fell, the fatted calf to the eucharist, etc. Irenaeus and Origen also interpret the fatted calf as a reference to Christ the sacrificial lamb. See M. F. Wiles, "Early Exegesis of the Parables," *SJT* 11 (1958), 294. Notably, there were early detractors of such a method of reading, including Cyril of Alexandria, who directly challenged not only the tenuous connection between the fatted calf and the savior but even the identification of the elder son with Israel. See Cyril, *Commentarum in Lucum* (PG 72, 802-810).

[32] Robert Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teaching* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1994), 47. Discussing the interpretation of the parables, Stein says, "Origin and Augustine…therefore read into the text (eisegesis) rather than read out of the text (exegesis). They make the parable say something other than what Jesus and Luke intended." We will destabilize the notion that "allegorical" interpreters are not reading "from" the text as well as the idea that authorial intent is the measure of valid engagement with texts in the subsequent sections of chapter one and chapter two.

[33] Although, so is God (only the metonym "heaven" is mentioned). It's curious how the Christological reading is so easily spurned where a theological one is not. In fact, as will become clear in our exploration of allegory and metaphor, it is impossible to categorize a Christological like Barth's as allegorical because nowhere does Christ align easily with a particular character or element. On the other hand, according to Funk, calling the father "God" is still a form of allegorizing.

Barth admires Helmut Gollwitzer's "indirect exegesis" of the parable in which—not unlike patristic and medieval readings—Jesus is "hidden" in the "the running out of the father to meet his son" and "in the kiss which the father gives his son."[34] But, on the whole, Barth fears "more recent Protestant exegesis" in danger of missing "the presence and action" of Jesus Christ in the reconciliation between God and humanity narrated by the parable. He singles out Adolf von Harnack in particular, who, on the basis of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, concludes that "nothing extraneous can interpose itself between God and the soul," including Jesus Christ.[35] But as Eduard Schweizer says, although "Jesus does not appear in the parable" it is "only because it is he who tells it and lives it to the point of death" that "the joy of restoration it recounts become a reality." While it might be claimed that "in the parable 'there is no room left for any mediator between God and the sinner' (Jülicher)," Schweizer maintains, "it is all the more incomprehensible, however, without a mediator."[36] Similarly, Barth insists that we must attend to that which "is not expressly stated but implied in what is stated, and therefore necessary to what is stated." Evoking sacramental language, he draws out an "indirect" meaning given "in and with and under what is said directly." On this deeper stratum of the story, Barth identifies the eternal Son of God with of the prodigal son, saying provocatively, "in the going out and coming in of the lost son in his relationship with the father we have a most illuminating parallel to the way trodden by Jesus Christ in the work

---

[34] Quoted by Barth, *CD* IV/2, 22. From Helmut Gollwitzer, *Die Freude Gottes: Einführung in das Lukasevangelium Vol. 2,* Studienreihe der Jungen Gemeinde, Heft 27-29 (Burckhardthaus-Verlag, 1941), 91f.

[35] Barth is summarizing from von Harnack's lectures at the University of Berlin, *Das Wesen des Christentum* (1899-1900) (IV/2, 22). See Adolf von Harnack, *What is Christianity?* Trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders. Eastford, CA: Martino Fine Books, 2011), 76.

[36] Schweizer, *The Good News According to Luke* (Westminster: John Knox, 1984), 252.

of atonement, to his humiliation and exaltation."[37] Barth asks whether a reading of this kind is "really reading into the text" and implies that it is not only "legitimate" but "unavoidable."[38] (It is the goal of the fifth chapter to show how this is so).

Of late 20th c. and contemporary readings of the parable, N. T. Wright's may be the approach that comes closest to fulfilling Barth's demand for attention to its Christological content and, for that reason, it is worth noting. Wright, like Barth, thinks the tradition before him misses the parable's essential trait. But, for Wright, what has been overlooked is that 1) that the parable retells the story of Israel, and 2) that "dramatically, historically, theologically, the parable fits perfectly into the ministry of Jesus." In telling the parable, "Jesus is the reconstituting of Israel around himself." In his storytelling he claims that what takes place in his life and ministry "is the return from exile…the kingdom of Israel's god." He is claiming "to be the one in and through whom Israel's god is restoring his people."[39] Wright says, the parable is a "highly subversive retelling" of the larger story of Israel. The "main line" of this parabolic retelling is the message that "Israel's history is turning its long-awaited corner; this is happening within the ministry of Jesus himself; and those who oppose it are the enemies of the true people of God."[40] Moreover, not only is the parable a retelling of Israel's narrative, Jesus' symbolic actions themselves renarrate the identity of Israel (e.g., bypassing the Temple system in celebratory feasts). Jesus "interprets his own actions in terms of the fulfillment…of the entire story-line which Israel had told herself, in a variety of forms," namely through the prophets. Wright concludes,

---

[37] Barth, *CD* IV/2, 23.
[38] Ibid., 22.
[39] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 131.
[40] Ibid., 127.

the parable of the prodigal father points to the hypothesis of the prophetic son: the

son, Israel-in-person, who will himself go into the far country, who will take upon

himself the shame of Israel's exile, so that the kingdom may come, the covenant

be renewed, and the prodigal welcome of Israel's god, the creator, be extended to

the ends of the earth.[41]

It is increasingly common in contemporary engagement with the Parable of the Prodigal

Son to encounter phrases such as "prodigal father," which Wright uses, as well as

"prodigal love" and "prodigal God."[42] In such cases, God's prodigality is accessed

through the character of the father—for example, his disregard for convention, honor,

wealth, and security. While Wright explicitly refers to the father in the parable as

"prodigal," it is in fact the Son of God who goes into "the far country." He thus implicitly

aligns the prodigal son with Jesus Christ in his prophetic and redemptive role. In the same

way, for Julian and Barth, the prodigality of God, though indeed expressed in the father's

actions, is supremely manifest in the younger son seen in light of Jesus Christ's solidarity

with sinners.[43] Christ is the *how* of God's prodigality. God is prodigal in love, yes, and

Christ is the prodigality of God.

2. Developments in Parable Interpretation

The preceding sketch is suggestive of the vast array of approaches to the parable

in the history of its interpretation. It also signals the numerous factors at work in the

---

[41] Ibid., 132-133.

[42] Recently popularized in America by Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (New York: Penguine, 2008).

[43] Julian and Barth seem to be the only readers to connect the second person of the trinity specifically with the younger son. N.T. Wright may be an exception. In interpreting the wandering son as Israel in exile, he also understands Jesus as the one in whom Israel's return is accomplished. That would make for an implicit connection between Christ and the younger son.

interpretive process itself.[44] In each reader's attempt to distill the meaning of the parable, we find that decisions are informed not only by exegetical considerations and theological commitments, but also by assumptions about 1) the nature of narrative, allegory, and metaphor (chapter one) and, more specifically, 2) the poetics and hermeneutics of parable (chapter two). Of course, broader historical, theological, and exegetical factors are at play here as well, including debates and commitments pertaining to the Bible as literature and as sacred scripture, the classification of biblical genres, the relationship between New Testament and rabbinic parables, the relationship between early Christianity and first century Judaism, and the rise of various criticisms—historical, redaction, rhetorical, structural, post-structural, canonical, and so on. It cannot be my purpose to address, much less resolve, all of these matters. However, there are several major epochal developments in the interpretation of Jesus' parables that are particularly relevant to the following study.[45]

The first, spanning the "pre-modern" period and defining patristic and medieval exegesis, bequeaths us "the fourfold sense of scripture" and is sometimes reduced to "allegorical" interpretation.[46] (I will examine this history in the following section). Next, parting with the long and varied tradition of "allegorical" reading, the modern consensus following the seminal work of Adolf Jülicher is that parables make "a single point of

---

[44] For a survey of the history of parable interpretation see, among others, Norman Perrin's *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) and Warren Kissinger's comprehensive work *The Parables of Jesus: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press: 1979).

[45] The phases of parable interpretation can be separated and grouped in any number of ways. My version roughly aligns with the basic breakdown offered by Kissinger. See *Parables of Jesus*, xiii-xiv.

[46] See section II, point 2 below.

comparison" and have "the broadest possible application."[47] As Perrin describes this

shift,

> For centuries…the parables of Jesus were treated as allegories;[48] that is, they were
> treated as deliberately mysterious pictures or stories, every feature of which
> referred to something other than itself. In order to interpret an allegory, one
> needed they key to identifying the various elements. The insider, possessing the
> key, could identify the elements and hence grasp and express the meaning of the
> allegory in non-allegorical language. The outsider, on the other hand, did not
> possess the key, and hence for him the allegory remained forever a mystery. A
> parable, Jülicher claimed, was not like this. A parable was a vivid and simple
> picture or story the meaning of which was self-evident to the hearer or reader.[49]

According to Jülicher, instead of concealing its message, parable is meant to "illustrate

(*Veranschaulichen*)." It does so by establishing a *tertium comparationis* or "ratio"

between the *Sache* (subject)—the "real concern" of the parable—and the *Bild* (picture)—

to which the matter is compared.[50] The latter serves to illuminate the former, after which

it becomes dispensable. For Jülicher, the details of the parable should only be treated as

they pertain to the primary point of comparison, which is always a general (ethical)

principle that is basically transparent and universally recognizable.[51] Jülicher says, "The

---

[47] Jülicher, *The Parables of Jesus*. However, in different ways allegorical reading had already come under scrutiny during the Reformation and particularly in Protestant Scholasticism. See Calvin, *Harmony of the Evangelists*, 345.

[48] As will be discussed in the following section, there is a crucial difference between interpreting the parables allegorically and treating the parables *as* allegories.

[49] Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, 92.

[50] Ibid., 94.

[51] Paul Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics." *Semeia* 4 (1975): 29-148, 92. According to Ricoeur, allegory, metaphor, and interpretation all suffer the same fate in Jülicher's work on parable. Jülicher works with three categories of parable: 1) simile (*Gleichnis*), 1) narrative-parables (*Gleichniserzählungen*) (i.e., expanded similes), and 3) example stories (of which there may be only one, the Parable of the Good

pictorial element in the parable is not intended to be *interpreted* but to be *applied*, so that something may be learnt."[52] On this view, "a parable is essentially instructional in nature."[53]

Jülicher's seminal work is soon critiqued by Paul Fiebig and Christian Bugge for disregarding "the ethnicity of parable lore."[54] Fiebig argues that Jesus' parables are closer to rabbinic parables than Greek figures in terms of proximity, chronology, form, and function and points out that both rabbinic and New Testament parables include allegorical elements.[55] Later 20th c. historical exegetes such as Joachim Jeremias and Charles Dodd agree with Jülicher that "allegorizing" obscures the simplicity of the overarching message of the text, but feel that his nineteenth century German liberal approach to the parables fails to take the particularity Jesus' Jewish *Sitz-im-Leben* into consideration.[56] They initiate a shift away from Jülicher's principle of moral application to a more historical-critical approach, giving attention to such issues as composition, redaction, tradition history (*Traditiongeschichte*), and, perhaps most importantly, the eschatological context of Jesus' preaching.[57]

It is Ernst Fuchs, Gerhard Ebeling, and other students of Rudolf Bultmann who effect another major shift in parable interpretation through an interpretive trend or

---

Samaritan). Notably, Jülicher eschews "metaphor" in preference for "simile" because (working with a "substitution" theory of metaphor) he sees metaphor as an opaque trope of language intimately linked to the genre of allegory.

[52] Perrin's translation from Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu Vol. 1*, 83 (*Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, 94)

[53] Ibid., 93. As Perrin points out, this is because Jülicher depends upon Aristotle's account of figurative language in his *Rhetoric* (rather than upon *Poetics*).

[54] Brad Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 21. See Paul Fiebig, *The Parables of Jesus in Light of the Rabbinic Parables of the New Testament Period* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1912).

[55] Jülicher depends upon Aristotle's *Rhetoric* II for his understanding of "similitudes" (i.e., parables).

[56] Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*. Charles Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner, 1961).

[57] See Norman Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969).

movement known as *Hermeneutik* or, in English, the New Hermeneutic.[58] They draw

attention to the importance of language in the work of understanding. In view of

Bultmann's reliance upon a Dilthean hermeneutical model, in which language is an

"expression of life,"[59] a central tenet of the New Hermeneutic is that language does not

just express thought and being; it *constitutes* them. Asserting the radical "linguisticality"

of human existence (Heidegger) and the "performativity" of language, they describe

parabolic speech as a "language-event" (*Sprachereignis*, Fuchs) or "word-event"

(*Wortgeschehen*, Ebeling), in which, in Eta Linnemann's words, "something decisive

happens…through what is said."[60] For Eberhard Jüngel that something is nothing less

than the Kingdom. Following Fuchs, Jüngel claims that "*the parables of Jesus bring the

Kingdom of God into language* [zur Sprache] *as parable*." Decisively breaking with the

prevailing comparison view of parable, Jüngel says the parables are not given as

pedagogical tools to impart information, rather they are meant "to confront us with

ultimacy." Assuming the gains of historical criticism but dissatisfied with its meager

existential import, Jüngel and others thus deem the approach of Dodd and Jeremias a

"historicizing" one.[61] Perrin says the weakness of the "historical-eschatological"

emphasis is the lack of attention to the "parables as texts with an integrity of their own"

---

[58] For a sampling of how this is practiced, see for example *The New Hermeneutic* Vol. 2, eds. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (Harper & Row: New York, 1964).

[59] See, for example, Wilhelm Dilthey, *Dilthey: Selected Writings*, ed. H.P. Rickman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 9, 219f.

[60] The main philosophical influence of the New Hermeneutic, as well as what is subsequently termed "literary-existentialist" interpretation, is Heidegger—namely, his work on the disclosure of being in language. See, respectively, Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, 108; Enrst Fuchs, *Marburger Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1968), 243-245. Cf. "The New Testament and the Hermeneutical Problem," *The New Hermeneutic*, eds. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (Harper & Row: New York, 1964); Gerhard Ebeling, *Wort und Glaube* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1975). English translation: *Word and Faith*, trans. James Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 325-332; and Linnemann, *Jesus of the Parables*, 32.

[61] Perrin's translation of Jüngel (*Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, 117-118). See Jüngel, *Paulus und Jesus* (Tübingen: Morh [Siebeck], 1962), 135-137.

because its "ultimate concern is the message of Jesus as a whole" and not the literary texts *as texts*.[62] This means, it cannot account for "the way the parables function as metaphor."[63] (I will return to this issue below.)

This focus on the nature of language itself as well as linguistic and hermeneutical issues in the Bible in turn spawns greater interest in the literary form of the parables. Kissinger concludes that, as of the 1980s and particularly within American scholarship, the "trend in parable interpretation reflects a decreasing emphasis upon historical, moralistic, and theological concerns and an increasing emphasis upon literary-critical, existentialist analysis of the parabolic speech of Christ."[64] In America, scholars such as Dan O. Via, Amos Wilder, John Dominic Crossan, and Robert Funk advance a "literary-existentialist analysis," in which the parables are treated as independent "aesthetic objects."[65] Borrowing from the insights of structuralism, they deal with the story "as a story," focusing on its "internal dynamics" and "formal meaning."[66] This involves a transition from a rhetorical to a poetic understanding of the parables. They are treated as what Crossan calls "poetic metaphors."[67] Freed from supposed spiritualization and moralization, they become undomesticated, paradoxical, and "almost impossible to live with."[68] Franz Kafka's stories are paradigmatic of this transition from a "traditional" to a "modern" understanding of the form. In "On Parables," Kafka "thematizes the open, irresolute nature of parabolic discourse."[69] For Kafka, the parable form corresponds to the

---

[62] Ibid., 105.
[63] Ibid., 106.
[64] Warren S. Kissinger, *Parables of Jesus*, xiv.
[65] Dan O. Via, *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 151.
[66] Ibid., 153.
[67] Crossan, *In Parables*, *passim*. The relationship of metaphor to parable will be discussed in chapter two.
[68] Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, 200.
[69] Richard T. Gray, *A Franz Kafka Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishers, 2005), 215.

fact that "the incomprehensible is incomprehensible."[70] Parable thus becomes integrally

linked with paradox and incommunicability.

Funk rightly suggests that there are other ways in which this turn to a more

literarily aware handling of the parables parallels the "pre-modern" and "pre-critical"

approaches so frequently dismissed among modern historical exegetes.[71] As Perrin puts

it, the gain of the New Hermeneutic and recent American interpretation is that it allows

"the parable to speak of itself." He claims, "if we can understand the parable as metaphor,

if we can understand the parable as a story, then the metaphor can be the bearer of reality

for us, the story can speak directly to us." Perrin evokes "what Paul Ricoeur calls a 'post-

critical naïveté' with regard to the text" and commends an appreciation of the text's

"*natural* force."[72] In other words, the appeal of the New Hermeneutic and literary-

existential trend is that it does not stumble over the question of how parable continues to

communicate so powerfully from age to age and culture to culture, to the learned as well

as the unlearned. Hence one frequently encounters assertions about the "realism,"

"ordinariness," "naturalness," and even the "secularity" of the parables.[73] Yet, somewhat

counterproductively, such claims can be anachronistic and tend to deemphasize the

Hebrew Bible and the Gospel narrative as the dual context of Jesus' storytelling.[74]

---

[70] Franz Kafka, "On Parables," *The Complete Stories* (New York: Shocken Books, 1971), 457.

[71] Robert Funk, "Forward" to Kissinger's *Parables of Jesus*, v. One of many examples is the way patristic "allegorizing" shares interesting affinities with postmodern reading strategies like reader response theory. Crossan, in his later work, similarly reclaims the tradition of fourfold scriptural interpretation, praising allegory as a form of "polyvalent narration." See Crossan, *Cliffs of Fall: Paradox and Polyvalence In the Parables of Jesus* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 97.

[72] Perrin, 181.

[73] See, among others, Jeremias, 11-12, 19; Dodd, 10; Amos Wilder, *The Language of the Gospel: Early Christian Rhetoric* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 73, 83; Funk sites Lucetta Mowry, "Parable," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* III (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 650.

[74] This is evident in Jeremias, who downplays Jesus' use of scripture. For a clear example of this trend, see Funk, "The Old Testament in Parable: A Study of Luke 10:25-37," *Encounter* 26 (1965), 351-267. Wilder takes a similar position in *Early Christian Rhetoric* (73f). Funk opposes the view of scholars like Harald Riesenfeld and Birger Gerhardsson that, "Jesus drew upon Old Testament imagery in the construction of

In my view, taking a genuinely literary approach means we cannot set aside the dense matrix of scriptural imagery and narrative that informs the parables and, indeed, the whole New Testament. To acknowledge this is not to deny that the stories of Jesus can and do effectively communicate to biblically illiterate audiences. But inasmuch as the parables are "stories drawn from life" (Jeremias, Dodd),[75] they are drawn from *a* life, and one that is not ours.[76] The quality of ordinariness or life-likeness does not necessarily ensure their secularity—by which is meant, their intelligibility and formal impact apart from scriptural content. And, if there happens to be an immediacy to the accessibility of the parables, whether because of their so-called "everydayness" or because of their universal visual imagery, it certainly does not exhaust their meaning.[77] Rather, what Richard Hays says of the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is also true of his storytelling: it is determinatively situated in "the matrix of the *story* of Israel."[78] Interestingly, Julian's medieval retelling and Barth's post-historical-critical exegesis of the Parable of the Prodigal Son both assume as much. The intertextuality of their

---

his parables…in this case it is no a matter of scriptural quotation or allusion, but of dependence upon a common reservoir of images, of references to a system of interlocking images and figures, known and meaningful in and of themselves to the hearer" (253). Funk rejects this position because, "The parable would then depend for its significance on the ability of the hearer to catch the overtones, to supply, as it were, out of his own heritage the body of the image, which alone has the power to let the parable speak." Funk says Riesenfeld thinks "parables make use of a repertory of Old Testament images and motifs in a quasi-allegorical way, with the consequence that the parables of Jesus are not really intelligible to someone not immersed in Old Testament lore." This is perhaps an extreme conclusion—as if the parable is made completely mute without its context. But how could it be otherwise that a background informs interpretive competence? See Harald Riesenfeld, "The Parables in the Synoptic and the Jahannine Traditions," *Svensk Exegetisck Årsbok* Vol. 25 (1960), 37-61.

[75] Many scholars site Jeremias and Dodd's basic thesis. Dodd says, "Each similitude or story is a perfect picture of something that can be observed in the world of our experience…" (*Parables*, 20). Cf. Jeremias, 128, etc.

[76] In other words, they arise in the life of *Jesus*, his contemporaries, as well as his religious predecessors. The question must always arise—*whose* life? Except in a generalized ethical sense, Jesus' life is unintelligible apart from his 1st Jewish setting—that is, apart from his religious identity and scripturally informed practice. Where for Funk the literary approach runs counter to a theological approach, on my view, the theological is literary.

[77] This issue will be discussed further in chapter two.

[78] Richard B. Hays, "Christ Died for the Ungodly: Narrative Soteriology in Paul," *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Dec. 2004), 48-68, 54. Emphasis added.

canonical readings (what I mean by this will become clearer in the second chapter) forms an important point of rapprochement between their "post-" and "pre-" critical handlings of the parable. In this case, it is not the realism, secularity, or independence, of the parabolic text that enables them to speak to one another; rather, I will argue, it is their shared reservoir of biblical imagery, narrative, and allusion.

Given the modern suspicion of spiritual, allegorical, or Christological readings, as well as this related issue of the role of biblical allusion in parable interpretation, two sets of comments are warranted here—first, concerning the relationship between parable allegory (section II) and second, concerning the role of metaphor in theories of parable (section III).

II. Parable, Allegory, and Spiritual Interpretation

In modern and contemporary parable scholarship, Jülicher's sharp distinction between allegory and parable continues to hold sway. In fact, "allegory" is a term that has practically assumed the status of a slur. It is not uncommon to find scholars accusing one another of "allegorizing" in any number of ways and claiming to be less allegorical than their predecessors.[79] Barth, for example, is careful to distance his own creative rendering of Luke 15:11-32 from the allegorical method of earlier figures such as Ambrose. But what constitutes "allegorizing?" Modern assessments of patristic and medieval exegesis in general and allegory in particular reveal widespread confusion concerning both. Further, many of those who denounce allegorizing the parables implicitly engage in some

---

[79] For example, Funk says, "Jülicher's legacy is a trap because he was never able to escape from the allegory he so fervently rejected. For him and his successors parable interpretation is a form of reduced allegory; instead of many points corresponding to a variety of details, there is only one point corresponding to one, or a pair of details." See Funk, "Sauntering through the Parables," *Funk on Parables: Collected Essays* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 2006), 98.

version of it. In this section, I would like to make three clarifications regarding, first, the relationship between allegory and parable, second, the distinction between allegory and allegorical interpretation broadly construed in terms of "spiritual understanding," and, third, the problem of parabolic referentiality.

The reason for addressing these issues here is that, in the context of their respective engagement with scripture, I would suggest that Julian's terms "mistely" and "ghostely" and Barth's term "indirect" may be correlated with what is traditionally known as "spiritual" or "mystical" interpretation—which is not infrequently dismissed as "allegorizing."

1. Parable and Allegory

The relationship between allegory and parable is a complex one. With respect to Jesus' parables and their interpretation, their interrelationship is seen on at least three levels: 1) on the level of composition or genre, 2) on the level of early Christian retellings of the original narratives in the Gospels, and 3) on the level of later recontextualizations and allegorical interpretations of the parables. I will focus on the first level here, returning to the "double-history" of parables afterward.[80]

Allegory and parable have in common that they are both forms of "other-speaking" (from άλλος, "other," and αγορευειν, "to speak in public").[81] They are ways of speaking of something in terms that are in some sense indicative of something else. In

---

[80] Redaction criticism helps us see that the parables as we receive them are already retellings—organized, framed, embedded, commented upon, reinterpreted. If, textually speaking, there is a double history, interpretively, the parables have a triple history—1) Jesus' telling, 2) the Evangelists' retellings, 3) the Church's tradition of interpretation—but that is to say: a manifold history. The parables always come to us through our prejudgments and those of our interpreting communities.

[81] If there is a distinction to be made in this regard, it is this: allegory is a mode of composition that involves "saying something other than it means" (Linnemann, 6), while parable, like metaphor, says what it means using another (figurative) mode.

Henri de Lubac's words, allegory entails "a meaning *other* than the letter, or auxiliary to it, lacking organic relationship with it."[82] Ricoeur makes a similar point with respect to parable, saying, "to call a certain narrative a parable is to say that the story *refers to* something other than what is told; it 'stands for…' something else."[83] Perhaps it is because of this root commonality that so many scholars (as well as most dictionaries) mistakenly refer to both allegories and parables as "extended metaphors."

Etymologically, parable or παραβολή (from παρα, "alongside of," βάλλειν, "to throw") implies comparison. This specific sense of the term is not lost today.[84] Hence biblical and rabbinic discourses that begin with the question "To what shall the matter be compared?" or the statement "The Kingdom of Heaven is like…" have been called "parables" or, almost synonymously, "similitudes." But in the Septuagint and Greek New Testament, *parabolē* is not a fixed literary form. It is used in place of the Hebrew *mašal* and Aramaic *mathla*, which encompass proverbs, riddles, taunt songs, short and long comparisons, wisdom sayings, narrative parables, as well as allegories.[85] This has led historically minded readers like Jeremias to reject the narrow form-critical classifications that clearly differentiate parable from metaphor, simile, similitude, allegory, or illustration. Jeremias, for instance, calls this "a fruitless labor in the end, since the Hebrew *mašal* and Aramaic *mathla* embraced all these categories and many more without distinction." According to Jeremias, "parable" can refer to

> figurative forms of speech of every kind: parable, similitude, allegory, fable,
>
> proverb, apocalyptic revelation, riddle, symbol, pseudonym, fictitious person,

---

[82] De Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, 12.
[83] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 30.
[84] Hultgren, 2.
[85] Donahue, 5.

example, theme, argument, apology, refutation, jest. Similarly, παραβολή in the New Testament has not only the meaning 'parable,' but also 'comparison' (Luke 5:36, Mark 3:23) and 'symbol' (Heb. 9:9; 11:19; cf. Mark 13:28); in Luke 4:23 it should be rendered 'proverb' or 'commonplace,' in 6:39 'proverb;' in Mark 7:17 it means 'riddle' and in Luke 14:7 simply 'rule.

Therefore, he concludes, "to force the parables of Jesus into the categories of Greek rhetoric"—as Jülicher does—"is to impose upon them an alien law." Instead, Jeremias claims to use the term "parable" in his work "in the broad sense of *mašal* or *mathla*."[86]

However, even while acknowledging the ambiguity and fluidity of parable's definition, Jeremias still defaults, as do Dodd and Jülicher, to pitting patristic allegory and New Testament parable against one another.[87] And this seems to have become standard procedure. Dodd, for instance, describes allegories as "mystifications," "veiled revelations," or "cryptograms" that have "to be de-coded term by term," in contrast to parables which are "the natural expression of a mind that sees truth in concrete pictures" rather than in veiled abstractions.[88] Dodd thus follows Jülicher's view of allegorization as "overdone" and "fanciful."[89] In Perrin's assessment of the problem, "the moment the interpreter crosses the line from parable to allegory, the interpretation has become

---

[86] Jeremias, 20.
[87] Ibid., 128. On the relationship between patristic allegorical interpretation and the allegorical associations of Jewish midrash, compare J. Duncan M. Derrett, "The Parable of the Prodigal Son: Patristic Allegories and Jewish Midrashim," *SP* 10, 219-24, and Y. Tissot, "Patristic Allegories of the Lukan Parable of the Two Sons," in *Exegesis: Problems of Method and Exercises in Reading*, eds. F. Bovon and G. Rouiller, trans. D. G. Miller (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1978), 362-409. While Derrett thinks the meaning of Jesus' parables are closer to the allegories of the Midrashic tradition than to "patristic allegories," Tissot rejects the false dichotomy implied in Derrett's position between early "Palestinian" and later "Hellenistic" Christianity.
[88] Dodd, 1, 4, 100 n. 33.
[89] Ibid., 3.

invalid…because it does violence to the integrity of the text as a text."[90] Similarly,

Crossan picks up Ricoeur's claim that, in contrast to parable, "an allegory can always be

translated into a text that can be understood by itself; once this better text has been made

out, the allegory falls away like a useless garment; what the allegory showed, while

concealing it, can be said in a direct discourse that replaces allegory."[91] Funk likewise

refers to allegories as "coded theologies" or "illustrations of a point that could have been

made, without essential loss, in discursive, non-figurative language."[92]

These are not neutral descriptions. Allegory seems to get caught in the crosshairs

of an argument better aimed elsewhere (I will return to this below). I do not mean to

suggest that we do not need a sharper definition of parable, or that we do not have one;

nor do I wish to deny a distinction between parable and allegory. I am only calling

attention to the way latter can be denigrated on the way to elucidating the former, when

the two are in fact closely related.

According to Wright, "the closest parallel to the parables" are found in "the world

of Jewish apocalyptic and subversive literature." They must be understood in the Jewish

prophetic tradition and can be compared to the sayings and parabolic actions of Isaiah,

Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, who not only retell the story of Israel but also attempt to reshape it

through intense "warnings to the nation." Concerning the presence of "so-called

'allegory' forms" in a number of the parables—paradigmatically, in Mark's version of

the Parable of the Sower—Wright says, "this is neither necessarily late nor necessarily

---

[90] Norman Perrin, "Historical Criticism, Literary Criticism, and Hermeneutics: The Interpretation of the Parables of Jesus and the Gospel of Mark today," *Journal of Religion* 52 (1972), 367.
[91] Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 163. Cf. Crossan, *In Parables*, 11. In his later work, Crossan revises this earlier assessment of allegory, praising it as a form of "polyvalent narration" (*Cliffs of Fall*, 97).
[92] Funk, *Parables and Presence*, 30.

non-Jewish, but actually belongs in the most intimate way within Judaism." Jewish

storytelling, particularly in its apocalyptic form, contains what we can only label

"allegories." By this Wright simply means stories with "multiple resonances…in which

different features (a) represent different elements in the 'real' world and (b) evoke a

larger world of story, myth and symbol." Jesus, like the prophetic teller of apocalyptic

allegory, tells stories in which, through various allusive cues, he declares, "what I am

describing is a new exodus, a new world, a new creation"—a new, transformed identity.[93]

Such an account of parable corresponds to the way Julian and Barth each identify Jesus

Christ, through a specific set of histories and narratives, with the figure of the lost son or

fallen servant.

     While Wright's conclusion is that we must give up the distinction between

parable and allegory, in my view, it may still be instructive to point out, as Perrin does,

that Jesus' parables differ from more elaborate allegories in that they require "an

interpretation of the story as a whole, not [*primarily*] an identification of the references

hidden in the figures."[94] Similarly, Eta Linnemann's description of allegory as

"mentioning one thing and meaning another" is valuable. It helps us recognize the value

of allegory as a compositional strategy, used particularly in apocalyptic literature, for

---

[93] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 177-178.

[94] Perrin describes allegory as "a narrative in which the various elements presented represent something other than themselves; essential to its interpretation is the key to the identification of the various elements, and *once its key has been supplied the message of the allegory can be presented in non-allegorical language*" (5). In contrast, a parable "is essentially a comparison whereby one thing is illuminated by being compared to another, and the parable makes its point as a totality" (6). He explains that, in parables, "The lesser known"—i.e., the figures—"is illuminated by that which the parable makes known"—i.e., the overall message. We might say that in allegory it is usually the opposite: the overall message only arises through an accurate decoding of the individual elements. On my understanding, we can treat allegory as a mode of composition in which *the individual elements* of a work (characters, objects, actions, colors, etc.) are *intended* to have *another* meaning or *symbolize* something (often artificially or tangentially) related to them (e.g., an idea, moral, or real-life situation). With this definition, I do not intend to rule out the possibility that is also appropriate to treat visual representations as allegories. (While allegory may be a literary genre, metaphor—in my use—is *inherently* linguistic. It is not appropriate to call a visual symbol, for example, a cross, "a metaphor.")

transmitting complexly "encoded information…intelligible to the initiated."[95] To this

difference I think we can relate another: in many allegories, once the interpretative key

has been supplied the content of the message may be paraphrased fairly directly.[96] I agree

with those who maintain that this is more difficult with the parables, that the content of

the parables resists separation from the narrative form. The only way to fully articulate

the parable's meaning is to retell the story *as a story*. However, I make even these

distinctions tentatively given: 1) the close association between allegory and parable, and

2) the continuum or "sliding-scale"[97] of allegory (Northrop Frye) which ranges from

transparently representative (e.g., socio-political satires) to opaquely paradoxical (e.g.,

the modern parables of Kafka and Borges). Both claims—that the figurative point only

arises from story as a whole and that the non-literal garments of allegory are dispensable

once disclosure takes place—can be overstated. (I will come to a fuller account of parable

itself via a discussion of the metaphorization of discourse, in the second chapter).

2. Allegory and Spiritual Interpretation

      Setting aside the matter of the definition of "allegory," what is essential is that we

not to conflate allegorical *writing* (as a mode of composition) and allegorical *reading* (as

a mode of understanding).[98] There is no organic relationship between "allegory" as a

distinct literary genre and "*allegoresis*" as a certain practice of finding *other* meanings in

texts. So asserting that Jesus' "original" parables are not in fact "allegories" (i.e., having

multiple one-to-one correspondences intended by the author) does not in any way rule out

---

[95] Linnemann, 7. She says, "An allegory cannot…be understood unless one knows not only the allegorical narrative but also the state of affairs to which it refers." It "presupposes understanding."
[96] But the possibility of paraphrase or translation does not necessarily make the literary form "dispensable."
[97] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), 91.
[98] John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is a particularly famous example of allegorical writing.

allegorical *reading*, which, after all, is one of several approaches to scripture (and other

kinds of literature) that may be applied regardless of genre.[99] This first point implies a

second: "pre-modern" scriptural interpretation should not be reduced to the allegorical.[100]

Third, and this will be the focus of this section, much of what is retrospectively classified

as "allegorical" interpretation by modern exegetes includes "typological" and, more

broadly, "figural" interpretation.[101]

 In expounding the multiple spiritual senses or "fourfold" meaning of scripture, de

Lubac highlights the way distinct modes of reading are often integrated in practice and he

thereby undercuts simple divisions between spiritual and historical, figural and literal,

and so on.[102] He recommends the more inclusive nomenclature "spiritual interpretation,"

which may refer to the allegorical, typological or figural, and moral meanings of a text—

that is, any interpretive engagement that is not strictly literal, historical, or direct in the

---

[99] A surprising number of parable scholars confuse "allegory" (as a genre) with "allegoresis." See, for example, Dodd (5), Jeremias (128), Donahue (133, 147-149)

[100] There are already important ancient critiques of the practice of *allegoresis*. For example, fourth and fifth century Antiochenes such as Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom as well as later reformation theologians (Luther, Calvin, etc.) are more concerned about authorial intent and tend to favor historical and literal interprertation.

[101] This is particularly true of scriptural commentary in the patristic period. De Lubac's outline the evolution of spiritual or allegorical interpretation in the Middle Ages might help explain why by the early modern period so many scholars find allegory cloying, arbitrary, or superfluous. According to de Lubac, before the 12th c., "The so-called mystical or allegorical meaning was always considered as the doctrinal meaning par excellence", but from the 12th c. on it is increasingly interiorized and associated with "spiritual fruit" (or piety and morality) (*Scripture and the Tradition*, 49). Thus, by the 13th c., Aquinas is asserting, "From the literal sense alone can arguments be drawn" (e.g., *ST* I, q. 1, a. 10). "Mystical" readings become more private, personal, and therefore also subjective or idiosyncratic (57). After the Renaissance and Reformation, there is an increasing bias against "spiritual" or "theological" reading, a kind of "outdoing the Cartesian spirit" which finally devolves into "the prosaic pragmatism of the 18th c." (60).

[102] The various senses of scripture are articulated in many ways in patristic and medieval Christian thought. To summarize, they include: 1) Historical or literal—which refers to the original sense or the meaning of "the letter," 2) Allegorical or spiritual—involving the typological or Christological as well, 3) Moral or tropological—which has to do with the personal application or interiorization of the text in one's own life, and 4) Eschatological or anagogical—which concerns future or soteriological significance. So, to borrow an example from John Cassian, the fourfold scriptural significance of Jerusalem would be: as the city in Palestine (literal), as the church (allegorical), as the soul (tropological), and as heaven (anagogical).

modern exegetical sense.[103] In Origen's sense, "the mystical" or "spiritual" meaning is

simply that which is not "grasped" with "textual immediacy."[104] According to de Lubac,

for patristic and medieval theologians, the fourfold doctrinal formula can be "reduced" to

"the two fundamental senses." So although Nicholas of Lyra famously distinguishes four

levels of meaning,

> *Littera gesta docet* [The letter teaches facts or events]
>
> *quid credas allegoria* [allegory what you are to believe]
>
> *quid agas tropologia* [tropology what you are to do]
>
> *quo tendas anagogia* [anagogy where you should aim, or what to hope for],[105]

he also distills them into the distich,

> The outer Scripture is the literal sense, which is more obvious, since it is signified
>
> immediately through the words; the inner Scripture is the mystic or spiritual
>
> sense, which is more hidden, since it is designated through the things signified by
>
> those words.[106]

De Lubac explains that the first sense of scripture "is more 'noetic," while "the other is

more 'pneumatic.'"[107] Following Augustine, he says the two senses are "related to each

other" as "the Old and New Testaments"[108]—as promise to fulfillment, shadow to light,

letter to spirit. In Augustine's mantra, "*Novum Testamentum in Veteri est figuratum, et*

---

[103] De Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, 2.
[104] Turner, 81.
[105] The poem is credited to Cassian at the beginning of Nicholas of Lyra's *Postilla* on the Letter to the Galatians. Quoted by Christopher Ocker, "Scholastic Interpretation of the Bible," *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, *Vol. 2: The Medieval through the Reformation Periods*, eds. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 265. See *In Gal.*, 4, 3 (Bible de Douai, 6, Anvers, 1634), 506.
[106] Quoted by de Lubac in *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture* Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 34. See Nicholas of Lyra *Postilla in Cantia Canticorum* (*PL* 113, 29a) and John Cassian *Collationes* 14.8 (PL 49, 964a).
[107] Ibid., 34.
[108] De Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, 85.

Vetus in Novo est revelatum"—"the New Testament is figured in the Old, and the Old is revealed in the New."[109]

In light of this, it is worth observing that much of what is today dismissed as "allegorizing" is more accurately accounted for in terms of figure, type, or even simply allusion, parallel, or metaphor.[110] The word "allegory" is first employed, in a Christian context, by Paul (Gal. 4:22-30)[111] to express a "symbolic transposition" from one history or story to another.[112] The narrative link here is key. This unsettles the typical modern distinction between allegories as artificial or esoteric and parables as "stories *drawn from life*."[113] De Lubac speaks of the transposition of meaning as a "prolongation" of earlier realities, "fulfilling while transfiguring."[114] At points, his description of "spiritual" interpretation is almost synonymous with Auerbach's "figural" interpretation, despite the fact that Auerbach contrasts "the basic historical reality of figures" with "all attempts at

---

[109] Augustine, *Contra adversarium legis et prophetarum*, ed. K.D. Daur (CCL 49:35-131), 1. 17. Augustine expresses the same sentiment when he says, "*In Veteri Testamento est occultation Novi, in Novo Testamento est manifestatio Veteris.*" ("In the Old Testament there is a concealment of the New, in the New Testament there is a revelation of the Old"). Augustine, *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin*, Vol. 11 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1949). English translation: *The First Catechetical Instruction* IV.8, trans. Joseph P. Christopher (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1962). Cf. Pseudo-Chrysostom, *Hom. On Luke*: "The Old Testament anticipated (*proelabse*) the New, and the New explained (*hermeneuse*) the Old" (*PG*, 50, 796). See de Lubac (*Scripture*, 81).

[110] De Lubac says traditional exegesis is concerned with types and figures. "Typical meaning" is sometimes exchangeable with "mystical or allegorical meaning, or even with figurative meaning, as in Pascal" (15-16). However, for him, "typology" is too narrow and too easily confused with "historical." Similarly, following Louis Boyer, de Lubac wants to distinguish Christian spiritual interpretation, which is based on *correlations*, from "organic allegory" based purely on "imaginary symbolism" (44-45). Because of these issues, de Lubac prefers to speak of "spiritual" understanding or interpretation.

[111] Paul says ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα—"these things are allegorized" (v. 24)—when he takes Hagar and Sarah as symbols for the two covenants, the first from "Mount Sinai," bringing forth children for slavery (v. 24), the second, "our free mother" from "the Jerusalem above" (v. 26).

[112] *Scripture*, 11-12. Cf. *Medieval Exegesis*, Vol. 2, 1f. De Lubac argues on the basis of Tertullian and Origen that the Christian allegorical interpretation originates with Paul. See Tertullian on "*allegorica dipositio*" (*Adv. Valentinianos*, c. 1, 177) and its precedence in "the apostle" (*Adv. Marc.*, Bk. V, c. vii, 595). See Origen on "*allegorica intelligentia*" (*In Gen.*, h. 5, n. 5, 64), "*allegoriae ordo*" (h. 6, n. 3, 69), and "*allegorias nostras, quas Paulus docuit*" (h. 3, n. 5, 45), etc.

[113] Dodd, Jeremias, et al.

[114] *Scripture*, 6, 40.

spiritually allegorical interpretation."[115] Figural interpretation, for Auerbach, refers to "a meaning first concealed, then revealed" or the "temporal relation of promise to fulfillment."[116] For example, Paul's assertion that "the law is spiritual" or his construal of Jesus as "the new Moses" are instances in which a figure or type (law, Moses) is redeployed in such a way that it both appeals to and alters "the immediate" (literal, historical, conventional) meaning.[117] In the relation of figure to fulfillment, the one "heralds" the other; the elder serves the younger (Rom. 9:12).[118]

Of course within such language looms the specter of supersessionism.[119] However, de Lubac maintains that the symbolic transposition of allegorical or spiritual understanding is not something Christians do capriciously in order to commandeer Hebrew scripture.[120] Rather, there is already "an almost constant process of spiritualization at work in biblical history." The Hebrew Bible

> never stops reflecting on the events of Exodus; the departure from Egypt, the
>
> sojourn and march in the desert, the conquest of the Promised Land… The
>
> Prophets see in them a perfect type of the great exodus which is to come, of the
>
> final liberation, and of the glory of the chosen people. The psalmists discover in

---

[115] Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. William R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 196, and "Figura," *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 34.
[116] Robbins, *Prodigal Son / Elder Brother,* 2.
[117] De Lubac, 43.
[118] Augustine, *City of God* XX.4.
[119] See, for example, Robbins, 38. Cf. John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2002), 14.
[120] Due to the resonances between them, De Lubac's spiritual interpretation and Auerbach's figural interpretation have both been critiqued for bearing within them a supersessionist bias. See, for example, Jill Robbins on "Figurations of the Judaic" in *Prodigal Son / Elder Brother*. Cf. Kathleen Biddick, *The Typological Imaginary: Circumcision, Technology, History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 5-6. Against "the fantasy of supersessionism," Biddick speaks of the "threat of typological reversibility." But it seems the fluidity of figuration is already accounted for and, indeed welcomed, especially in the tradition of spiritual interpretation. See §3 below.

them the drama of the interior life, which is every day renewed in every

Israelite.[121]

That is to say, a figural movement is already present in the texts prior to Christian

reflection on them.[122] This account stands in contrast to that of scholars such as Dodd.

Dodd does not register the connection between New Testament allegorizing or

typologizing and Old Testament allusion, but associates allegory with Greek mythology

and esoterica which he considers alien to the Jewish imagination. (Consequently he is, in

at least one instance, forced to contradict himself by reducing parables to illustrations.)

According to Dodd,

> The probability is that the parables could have been taken for allegorical
>
> mystifications only in a non-Jewish environment. Among Jewish teachers the
>
> parable was a common and well-understood method of illustration, and the
>
> parables of Jesus are similar in form to Rabbinic parables… In the Hellenistic
>
> world, on the other hand, the use of myths, allegorically interpreted, as vehicles of
>
> esoteric doctrine, was widespread.[123]

De Lubac does not deny the influence of allegory in Greek rhetoric and myth on

Christian reading practices, whether of the New Testament parables or the rest of

---

[121] Ibid., 33. If this is true, it calls into question the popular view in redaction criticism that in framing Christ's speech as they did, the New Testament writers were corrupting the original text with alien allegorical elements, as if symbolism and figuration were not already part of the religious discourse of the day, including Jesus'.

[122] That is to say, allegorizing or typologizing does not begin with Philo and the Hellenistic influence on early Christian writing.

[123] Dodd, 4. Dodd is not the only one to connect allegory, myth, and Greek philosophy. This association is one of the primary reasons so many New Testament scholars wish to eschew allegory—that is, because they conclude "too quickly" there is "an analogy of thought" from the "unavoidable analogy of vocabulary" and believe "they ought to put all Christian allegory into an essential relation of origin and of nature with the doctrines of the intellectual paganism allegorizing its myths" and "with the exegeses of Philo." At that case, "the Bible itself…seems then to become something like a vast myth, dissolved by allegory" (De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, Vol. 2, 4).

scripture.[124] He says, in its "ancient acceptation," allegory "evokes the idea of an analogy which is artificial, elaborately detailed, or the idea of an exploitation of image to develop an idea which is already formed." De Lubac bemoans the fact that, by the 12th c. at least, "such an evocation corresponds only too well to what has in fact become the usage of scriptural 'allegory.'" In other words, the problem is that the practice of spiritual interpretation is sometimes unmoored from biblical history, the person of Christ, and scriptural reference.[125] But that does not mean we cannot also discern the way early Christian interpretation, beginning with Jesus' own reading of scripture, extends a subtle dynamic already at play in the figuralism of Hebrew narrative.[126]

A literary analysis, such as that of Robert Alter, helps bring this dynamic to the surface. In *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Alter argues that Hebrew sacred history is the beginning of "prose fiction" or "fictionalized history," which he says, "is the best general rubric for describing biblical narrative."[127] In calling it "fiction," Alter indicates that the biblical writers employ "conscious artistry" and a "particularizing imagination" in the retelling of history, seeking "through the process of narrative realization to reveal the enactment of God's purposes in historical events."[128] The development of Hebrew storytelling, then, is bound up with a certain view of God (as "the God of history") and humanity (as free and fallen agents). In contrast to the "polytheistic genre" of paganism defined by "ritual rehearsal" and "the stable closure of the mythological world," Hebrew

---

[124] However, de Lubac does offer an alternate genealogy. For a brief comparison of the history of the use of "allegory" in ancient Greek poetry and philosophy vs. in early Christian thought, see de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, Vol. 2, 1-9.

[125] De Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, 12.

[126] In Luke 24:27, it says that "having begun from Moses and from all the prophets" the resurrected Christ "explained" or "interpreted" (διερμήνευσεν) "to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Similarly, it says, "he opened to us the scriptures" (v. 32) and "he opened their minds to understand the scriptures" (v. 45) (literal translation from the Greek).

[127] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 24-25.

[128] Ibid., 32.

literature marks a move toward linear, indeterminate, and liberative accounts of history and human freedom that resemble "life in history" more than the fixed cycles and hierarchies of myth.[129]

In tracing this development, Alter introduces some of "the keys to the conventions" of Hebrew narrative, for example, the use of "type-scenes" or "recurrent narrative episodes" involving a certain set of characters, situations, locations, dialogue patterns, etc.[130] The storyteller plays with a fixed repertoire familiar to its hearers, concisely conveying a message more through omission and novelty than through the narrative structure itself.[131] Alter says, "much of art lies in the shifting aperture between the shadowy foreimage in the anticipating mind of the observer and the realized revelatory image in the work itself."[132] This is a crucial point, and one that is true of the parables as well. The meaning of the story lies in between expectation and realization—as a fulfillment, it is also always a transformation. While Alter certainly would refer to this leap as "spiritualization" (de Lubac) or "figuration" (Auerbach), his description of the repurposing of inherited forms to generate *new* (which is not to say, unrelated) insights is akin to them. Minimally, a better understanding of biblical "prose fiction" leads away from the conclusion that "theologizing," typologizing, or alluding to and refiguring supposedly flat historical "facts" is somehow a later "allegorizing" practice of Christians. The story or history is already multi-referential or multi-intentional—recalling past iterations and inviting new inferences.

---

[129] Ibid., 26-27.
[130] Ibid., 47, 54.
[131] Ibid., 51.
[132] Ibid., 62.

Like "allegory," "spiritual" is a term that is easily misconstrued. Contrary to the

common polarization of the sets Jewish/Law/corporeal and Christian/Spirit/spiritual, the

"spiritual" understanding of scripture lies, above all, in its "incarnate" meaning—that is,

in seeing scripture "transfigured by Christ."[133] In Jesus' person, as in his storytelling, the

history of Israel is represented and refigured. Thus de Lubac says, "the reality of which

the Old and even the New Testament contain 'types' is not only spiritual, but is also

incarnate. It is not only eternal, but is historical as well… *The spiritual meaning*, then, is

everywhere…*first and foremost in reality itself*."[134] Scripture requires "a global

interpretation."[135] For, as Barth puts it, "the shadow of Christ…is everywhere at play in

the history of the (chosen) people."[136] But inasmuch as "the categories used by Jesus to

tell us about himself are ancient biblical categories," he "causes them to burst forth, or, if

you prefer, sublimates them and unifies them by making them converge upon himself."[137]

One might see Jesus as a walking nexus of allusions, a convergence of types and type-

scenes.[138] He offers himself to be read—in light of a particular history, a particular

collection of stories, a particular set of identities. He illuminates them, yes, but they also

illuminate him. (This is consonant with what Wright says about the rootedness of Jesus'

parables in the prophetic-apocalyptic tradition of storytelling.)

---

[133] De Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, 22.
[134] Ibid., xix
[135] Ibid., 22.
[136] Karl Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the Teaching of the Reformation: Recalling the Scottish Confession of 1560*, the Gifford Lectures (London, 1938), 65.
[137] De Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, 7.
[138] If we were looking for a specific instance of a type-scene retold *in* Jesus' himself, we should consider to his interactions with the "woman at the well" in John 4. It bears many of the traits of the familiar betrothal scene that structures, for example, Jacob's encounter with Rachel at the well (see Alter 54f). The fact that Jesus reenacts this scene in his *life* (rather than in his oral story-telling), should not prevent us from seeing his actions as a narrative retelling. If we have trouble making this leap, it is only a testimony to the distanciation of text and life in our culture. At least as many scriptural allusions are made through Jesus' actions as through his speech.

With this account of scriptural interpretation in mind, it may be helpful to revisit briefly Augustine's comments on the Parable of the Prodigal Son in *Quaestiones Evangeliorum*, which I briefly introduced earlier. While Augustine's practice of reading of scripture is undoubtedly influenced by the *allegoresis* of Ambrose and his interpretation of the Parable of the Prodigal Son has Platonic threads, at a closer look, it is apparent that many of Augustine's apparently tangential associations are in fact based on intra-biblical allusions and literary or theological figures that are in no way alien to the tradition he inherits. For example, in his Christological interpretation of the right arm of the father and the fatted calf, these figures are recognized as historical types or even metonyms evoking, more generally, the power of God and the whole ritual system of sacrificial atonement. Similarly, the younger son personifies and points to a number of historical and symbolic events—the fall, original sin, banishment from the garden, captivity in Egypt, the Babylonian exile, etc. The connection between bread and God's Word is hardly tenuous or arbitrary; throughout scripture, to speak of one is nearly always to evoke the other. Likewise, with Augustine's interpretation of the pigs, the relationship between swine and uncleanness or wickedness is prominent in both testaments and common to 1st c. Jews and Jewish Christians alike. In each example, we can see how Augustine's imagination makes these leaps, thoroughly immersed as it is in the symbolic world of the Bible.

This is not to deny that there are manifold cases of interpretation (whether literal or allegorical) that genuinely do violence to the text or ignore its interpretive trajectory.[139] Rather the point is that there is an important distinction to be made between, on the one hand, correlations and parallels arising from literary or historical allusions and figures

---

[139] De Lubac regretfully acknowledges this fact throughout his work on scripture.

and, on the other hand, what is dismissed as whimsical one-to-one allegorizing based on referents foreign to the text.[140] In short, the spiritual meaning of the text is its *theological* meaning: it teaches its readers (what) to believe, do, and hope. And it is significant that the theological is arrived at textually—or more precisely, literarily and narratively. (What this means will be unpacked in terms of "intertextuality" in the first half of the second chapter).

3. "Allegorizing" and the Problem of Parabolic Reference

        Underlying much vitriol about "allegorizing" is a dispute over referents. For some writers, "allegorizing" becomes synonymous with "spiritualizing" (i.e., finding spiritual or soteriological meaning in the parables), while for others it includes "moralizing" (i.e., reducing parabolic discourses to ethical lessons), "Christologizing" (i.e., reading the parables in light of Jesus' life) or simply "theologizing" (i.e., making claims of any kind pertaining to God, truth, or transcendence).[141] We even find scriptural allusions treated as

---

[140] "Correlation" is a better term as it plays up the interconnectedness of elements so fundamental to much allegorical interpretation.

[141] Those who resist "spiritualizing" the parables tend to promote ethical emphases (Jülicher), while those who oppose moral readings point instead to their eschatological significance (Dodd, Jeremias). Donahue calls Luke's eschatological presentation of the Parable of the Great Supper and any Christological reading of the Good Samaritan "allegorical" (133). Crossan takes soteriological readings in general as a form of allegorizing (*In Parables*, 64). Funk in more than one place associates theologizing the parables with allegorizing. See, for example, Frunk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 152. But that this is really a dispute over referents is evident early on. For Dodd and Jeremias, in their break from Jülicher, are as much concerned about "the *content* [he] assigned to the parabolic teaching as they are with the nature of the parable" (Funk, "The Parable as Metaphor," in *Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God*, 148.) They feel that, in the pursuit of "progress" and "moral precepts," the parables get "stripped of their eschatological *import*" (Jeremias, 70, emphasis added). But they simply replace Jülicher's moral application with an eschatological or historical application—which, in the end, is deemed a kind of "historicizing" by Jüngel, who finally sets aside a "thematic" approach to the Kingdom in parables (Perrin, 117—in reference to Jüngel, *Paulus und Jesus*).

symptomatic of "allegorizing tendencies."[142] To what, then, can the parables refer—and how?

In 20th c. parable study, the symbol "the Kingdom of God" becomes determinative for any interpretation of the parables of Jesus.[143] Crossan says the consensus following Dodd is that 1) Jesus' parables are about the kingdom, and 2) this is an "eschatological expression" concerning "world-ending."[144] Norman Perrin clarifies that kingdom is not to be understood as *place* but as *act*, saying, "The Kingdom of God is the power of God expressed in deeds; it is that which God does wherein it becomes evident that he is king."[145] This is said to happen in Jesus' parables themselves. Yet the problem of reference grows more complicated once the connection is made between the parables, the Kingdom of God, and eschatology. What is the *content* of the referent of the kingdom? Is it sheer event or is it also symbol? What sort of symbol—steno- or tensive?[146] A symbol for what—a literal future reign, an ethical dimension, a spiritual reality, a mentality, a mode of being? And, what sort of eschatology are we talking about—consequent or imminent (Weiss, Schweitzer), realized (Dodd), progressive or inaugurated (Jeremias, Cullman)? Should Jesus' eschatology be understood in the

---

[142] Following Jeremias, Funk opposes the view that "parables make use of a repertory of Old Testament images and motifs in a quasi-allegorical way, with the consequence that the parables of Jesus are not really intelligible to someone not immersed in Old Testament lore" ("The Old Testament in Parable," 252). Elsewhere he practically conflates "allegory" and "biblical allusion" (254). But, as Donahue insists, "the 'unpacking' of possible OT allusions or references does not constitute allegorizing" (at least not in its derogatory sense) (12).

[143] It is said that this is what distinguishes Jesus' parables from rabbinical parables. The *illustrand* in Jesus' case is the kingdom rather than scripture or ethics. But we should ask about the relation the kingdom, as it figures in the New Testament, to the construal of God as "the God of history" in the Old. Notably, for Ricoeur, the Kingdom of God is not the "ultimate referent" of the parables, strictly speaking, but only a "qualifier" that parables share in common with other modes of biblical discourse. As a qualifier, it tells us a narrative is a *parable*, that it is thrown alongside *something else*, pointing elsewhere. The ultimate referent of the parables is, according to Ricoeur, human existence ("Biblical Hermeneutics," 34).

[144] Crossan, *In Parables*, 24.

[145] Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 54.

[146] This distinction is drawn by Ricoeur among others. In short, steno-symbols are static (a strict standing in of this-for-that) and tensive-symbols are more complicated and fluid. I come back to this below.

prophetic tradition (Crossan) or the apocalyptic (Wright)? What is the "world" that

"ends"—*this* world as the earth we inhabit or world in the phenomenological sense of a

posture or attitude ("fallingness," "everydayness," etc.) (Funk et al.)?[147] My reason for

raising such questions is to indicate that the way various scholars answer them can

determine what they perceive as "allegorizing" and, further, to suggest that by

"allegorizing" they often really mean: drawing the wrong reference.

Curiously, those who most readily apply the "allegorical" label to interpretations

of the parables as figures for "something else" are also those who have appealed most

consistently to metaphor for understanding parable. But metaphor is an instance of

figurative speech. *As figurative*, we must ask: "figure for what?" Or must we? Finally, as

is evident in much talk about "the kingdom in parable," there is a movement to eradicate

this "for" itself. In the so-called "literary-existentialist" school of American New

Testament scholarship, the kingdom is said to come to speech in parable *as* parable—that

is, as a radically linguistic reality.[148] The figure is not of or for or in reference to

anything. If it is said to be—*that* is "allegorizing." (This is why I will go on to correlate

the suspicion of referentiality with an emotive account of metaphor below.) As Frances

Young says,

> Even the once dominant historico-critical reading…may be regarded as in some
>
> sense allegorical in that it enabled the domestication of ancient texts to modern
>
> apologetic needs… Every critical reading shares something with allegory…every

---

[147] The relationship between the parables and the kingdom is not a central consideration for the proceeding analysis in that, first of all, the Parable of the Prodigal Son is not properly speaking a "parable of the kingdom," and, further, for Julian and Barth, the referent of the parable is not the Kingdom of God *per se* but rather God Godself. If the kingdom were to arise in connection with Julian's and Barth's interpretation of the parable, it would be in Origen's sense of *autobasileia*—the kingdom in person, the kingdom himself.
[148] "Literary-existentialist" is Dan O. Via's term, picked up by Ricoeur and others.

attempt at entering the world of the text, or seeing the text as mirroring our world

and reflecting it back to us, involves some kind of allegory.[149]

In other words, any sort of "mirroring" that implies an outside, a referent, ensnares the

reader in "allegory."

In light of the late modern suspicion of referentiality, it is worth observing how de

Lubac aptly intuits that often this aversion to so-called allegory is in fact an aversion to

the notion that the inner or "spiritual" life of the individual is implicated in the biblical

narrative through the work of the Spirit in the present.[150] For de Lubac, spiritual means

interior; spiritualization means interiorization, or appropriation.[151] The text makes its

claim on the reader's life. Thus the figural or spiritual interpretation of scripture always

marks a "dual passage."[152] While figural interpretation in particular has been criticized

for its totalizing impulse (and, concomitantly, for supersessionism), it is important to

remember that it always involves a double transposition from figure (OT/Law) to

fulfillment (in NT/Christ) in which the fulfillment itself becomes a figure to be fulfilled

(in the interior/soul or church/community)—and so on. In this sense, the figural or

spiritual transfer can be seen as open rather than closed, manifold rather than dualistic.

The "doubleness" does not come to a halt at one point in history. Even a figure fulfilled

asks to be refigured, in another way, again and again, inside and outside the text.

---

[149] See Frances Young, "Allegory and the Ethics of Reading," *The Open Text: New Directions for Biblical Studies?* ed. F. Watson (London: SCM Press 1993), 116-117.

[150] This is a different sort of indeterminacy.

[151] To be clear, it is not as if de Lubac does not see the pitfalls of certain kinds of spiritualizing or the reasons for modern and contemporary aversions to it. On the contrary, just as he cautions against the limits of "scientific methods" and condemns historicism and "pernicious literalism" in the reading of scripture, he also warns us not to reject the gains of historical criticism and denounces a "hasty flight" to "spiritual significance" (*Scripture in the Tradition*, 3).

[152] Ibid., 17, 19.

III. Metaphor in Theories of Parable

A second caveat concerning "metaphor" is warranted at this point as theories of parable have become intertwined with theories of metaphor. Modern and contemporary accounts of Jesus' parables tend to define parable in terms of metaphor. This is particularly true after Dodd, whose definition of parable has achieved broad influence and longevity. For him,

> (1) the parable is a metaphor or simile which may (a) remain simple, (b) be elaborated into a picture, or (c) be expanded into a story; (2) the metaphor or simile is draw from nature or common life; (3) the metaphor arrests the hearer by its vividness or strangeness; and (4) the application is left imprecise in order to tease the hearer into [their] own application.[153]

As this definition is more descriptive than explanatory, it leaves us with some critical questions. In the case of narrative-parables, how can tropes of language be expanded into stories? What is this "strangeness" in the parables? How does metaphor in parable "arrest" and "tease" us into a present application?

To navigate these questions, I will draw on Paul Ricoeur's account of parable. According to Ricoeur,

---

[153] Quite a few biblical scholars draw a sharp distinction between metaphor and simile in order to elevate the former and relegate mere comparison to the latter. But, agreeing with Aristotle, Soskice and Ricoeur note that the main difference between metaphor and simile is grammatical not functional, except in the case of catechresis (that is, the use of metaphor to "name that which has no name.") Otherwise, a simile can often serve the same purpose and have the same effect as a strong metaphor. Likewise, a metaphor can serve as nothing more than a simile without the "like" or "as." The distinction that needs to be made is within the *function* of figurative speech more generally. Where some similes and metaphors have a high capacity for semantic innovation, resisting translation, others have a low one and are more easily paraphrased. We should say the same of other tropes as well as allegory—sometimes the particular vehicle can be tossed after the fact, sometimes it cannot (and these are the cases we're interested in). There is no use in trying to transfer to *a* metaphor the whole burden of language's productive and interruptive capacity. Whether figurative language achieves this is only determined on the level of the entire discourse. See Dodd, *Parables*, 5. Numbers added by Funk for the sake of clarity, *Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God*, 133.

three traits…[are] essential to the definition of the "literary genre" of the parable:
the narrative parable relies on the conjunction between (1) a *narrative form*, (2) a
metaphorical process, and (3) an appropriate "qualifier" which ensures its
convergence with other forms of discourse.[154]

Bracketing the third trait for now, a narrative-parable can be defined most simply as a
metaphorized story. But there is a noteworthy gap between *a metaphor* (Dodd) and *the
process of metaphorization* (Ricoeur). It requires a leap from the realm of the sense of
words or even the semantics of the sentence to the interpretation of longer units of
writing such as stories. If we are to treat parable as a mode of theology, we must examine
how this process of "metaphorizing" or "parabolizing" narratives takes place (chapter
two). Before this, however, I will consider the definition of metaphor itself.

1. Definitions of Metaphor in Theories of Parable

As Janet Soskice has pointed out, "any attempt to rehabilitate metaphor for
critical purposes must battle against the categorizations unwittingly reinforced by
linguistic custom." In the case of the parables of Jesus, we must attend to the linguistic
custom of theologians and exegetes.[155] I will not be able to engage in a comprehensive
analysis of the history of metaphor, thoroughly surveyed elsewhere.[156] I will have to
bypass important discussions concerning, for example, the relationship between metaphor

---

[154] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 33. Numbers added for clarity.
[155] Janet Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 200), 67.
[156] See, among others, I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936);
Philip Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain: A Study in the Language of Symbolism* (Bloomington: Indiana
University Press, 1968); Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary studies of the creation of
meaning in language*, trans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Costello, SJ. (London:
Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978); Frank Burch Brown, *Transfiguration: Poetic Metaphor and the
Languages of Religious Belief* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Janet Soskice,
Metaphor and Religious Language.

and other tropes,[157] the fundamental metaphoricity of *all* language,[158] and the connection between metaphor and metaphysics.[159] The purpose of the following presentation is not primarily to evaluate theories of metaphor, but rather, to highlight a number of the ways assumptions about metaphor inform, sometimes problematically, different approaches to the parables of Jesus.

In modern and contemporary philosophy of language and literary criticism, we encounter a number of distinct presuppositions about metaphor. Attending to these should help us clarify and assess appeals to metaphor in theories of parable.

1) Metaphor is a *semantic* phenomenon—i.e., it occurs at the level of the sentence rather than simply between isolated terms.

2) Metaphor is genuinely *referential* and its referentiality can involve both reality-redescription (poetic) and reality-depiction (scientific).

3) Certain kinds of metaphors contain semantic *innovation* and are therefore untranslatable and/or irreducible.

4) Metaphor is *participatory*; it asks for interpretation.

5) Metaphors are inherently *extendable*.[160]

---

[157] Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 54-66.

[158] As Derrida rightly says, "What is going on *with* metaphor? Well, everything: there is nothing that does not go on with metaphor and through metaphor. Any statement concerning anything whatsoever that goes on, metaphor included, will have been produced *not without* metaphor. And what gets along *without* metaphor? Nothing." See Jacques Derrida, "The *Retrait* of Metaphor," *Psyche: Inventions of the Other* Vol. 1, eds. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth G. Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 48-80.

[159] See Friedrich Nietzsche, "Rhétorique et Langage," trans. P Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Poétique* 5, Éditions du Seuil (1971), 99-142; Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," *New Literary History* 6 (1974), 5-74; and Paul Ricoeur, Study 8, "Metaphor and Philosophical Discourse" in *The Rule of Metaphor*. Ricoeur says Derrida, like Heidegger (who claims "the metaphoric exists only within the boundaries of metaphysics") asserts a "collusion between the metaphoric couple of the proper and the figurative and the metaphysical couple of the visible and the invisible" (347). For Derrida's response to this, see "The *Retrait* of Metaphor," 53f.

[160] This list is a summary and revision of the primary traits of metaphor found in the accounts of Ricoeur and Soskice.

This combination of qualities is meant to rule out two broad misunderstandings of metaphor, both of which are prevalent in parable scholarship. The first reduces metaphor to a procedure of comparison and exchange. The second attributes the power of metaphor to its emotional, non-cognitive, or non-referential impact. Neither adequately accounts for the cognitive significance of metaphorical language or, more specifically, its capacity to generate new vision.

i. Two Inadequate Definitions: the Rhetorical and the Emotive

First, in *substitution* and *comparison* theories, common in the discipline of rhetoric from Aristotle to the late 19th c., metaphor is categorized among "single-word figures of speech" and defined as "a trope of resemblance" involving "improper naming."[161] Notably, then, substitution theories are concerned with "the meaning effect at the level of the isolated word," specifically the proper noun or name.[162] Metaphor-as-substitution involves *deviant word use*: 1) an improper or unfamiliar word is substituted for a proper or ordinary one, or 2) the meaning of a combination of words diverges from their lexicalized senses.[163] In comparison theories, which are closely related, metaphor involves a proclivity for perceiving likenesses in and making comparisons between things.[164] On both views, the metaphor-statement is just as "another way of saying what

---

[161] According to Aristotle, "Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on grounds of analogy" (*Poetics*, 1457 b 6-9). "To metaphorize well (*eu metaphérein*) implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars" (*Poetics* 1459 a 3-8). Aristotle is the one who "defined metaphor for the entire subsequent history of Western thought, on the basis of a semantics that takes the word or the name as its basic unit" (Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 3).

[162] Ibid*.,* 4.

[163] Comparison theory differs somewhat from a basic substitution theory in that it does not treat metaphor as a simple substitution of one term for another but emphasizes the perception of similarities (Aristotle) between non-identical terms. However, literal paraphrase is still thought possible without notable loss in actual content.

[164] Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1413 a; *Poetics*, 1459 a, 3-8.

can be said literally" or "plainly."[165] In other words, the assumption is that metaphors impart no special *content*. They are seen as basically decorative. (Hence the fact that this is sometimes referred to as an "ornamentalist" theory of metaphor.) Metaphor simply clothes the concept, makes it more palatable, accessible, or imaginable. Because of this Aquinas and others herald it as a valuable pedagogical device.[166] For the same reason, however, Locke insists that "plain" speech is preferable. In his assessment, figurative language simply obscures what can otherwise be said more clearly and thus ultimately leads the mind astray.[167]

According to Soskice, the problem with a "substitution theory" or "crude comparison theory" of metaphor is exemplified in "18th century assumptions that figures are mere embellishments or added beauty and that the plain meaning, the tenor, is what alone really matters and is something that, 'regardless of the figures,' might be gathered by the patient reader."[168] But, as Soskice insists, "'regardless of the figures,' one does not have the same meaning at all."[169] This view lives on a questionable dichotomy between literal and metaphorical, logical and poetic, or plain and figurative. But even where a sharp distinction between metaphorical and non-metaphorical language is maintained, in many cases, the substitution of "words proper" (Hobbes) for "the figures" is simply

---

[165] Soskice, 24. With the exception of catachrestic metaphors, which supply a term where there is
[166] Of course, metaphors can be didactic tools. C. S. Lewis distinguishes between the teacher's metaphor—which is a dispensable pedagogical illustration employed for the sake of the student—and the pupil's metaphor—in which the use of language and discovery of reality take place simultaneously, such that the metaphor is inseparable from the concept. Our interest will be in the latter. See C. S. Lewis, "Bluspels and Flalansferes," *The Importance of Language*, ed. Max Black (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1963), 35-50.
[167] Locke says, "all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheats…" See John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: William Tegg & Co., 1849), III.X, 34, 370. Soskice says Locke, like Hobbes other 17th c. empiricists, misrepresents Aristotle as crudely substitutionist) (*Metaphor and Religious Language*, 25).
[168] Soskice, 48; Richards, 100.
[169] Soskice, 48.

impossible.[170] For, inasmuch as "a metaphor suggests a community of relations…its

significance is not reducible to a single atomistic predicate."[171] We can see, then, "how

deeply misguided is the common query, 'But what is X a metaphor *for*?'"[172]

The rhetorical definition of metaphor is residual in much parable scholarship.

Consider the explanation New Testament scholar John Donahue offers at one point:

"metaphor brings together two discrete elements that are united by a point of

comparison."[173] This is typical, even in accounts of parable that simultaneously draw on

contemporary theories of metaphor. But inasmuch as metaphor and parable are defined in

terms of an analogy or comparison between similar terms, they are reducible to

propositions and introduce nothing new to thought. In that case, one might suggest, as

Dodd does, that Jesus simply *substitutes* the figurative expression "When you give alms,

do not blow your trumpet" for its propositional content "Beneficence should not be

ostentatious" (Matt. 6:2).[174] An inconsistency appears in Donahue's definition of

metaphor when he goes on to assert, "what is pointed to by the metaphorical predication

is ultimately beyond the power of language to express" and "cannot be translated into

---

[170] Arguably all language is metaphorical at root. Consider the (verbal and spatial) metaphor in *metaphor*— to transfer or carry-over. Even if that is so, it is helpful to be able to speak in a *qualified* way of a difference between literal and non-literal uses of language, between static steno-symbols and plastic tensive-symbols, between the "language of predication" and the language of poetry (Heidegger), between lexicalized and novel word usage, etc.

[171] Soskice says, "the difficulty with the position of those, like Hobbes, who suggest that we should replace our metaphors with 'words proper' is that words proper do not say what we wish to say." As with metaphor, "relational irreducibility characterizes other forms of figurative speech common to religious writings and is especially noteworthy in the case of parable. Rather than irreducibility being a flaw, it is one of the marks of the particular conceptual utility of metaphor… there is no particular virtue in literal language for literal language's sake; we may need to use metaphor to say what we mean and particularly…when we are seeking terminology to deal with abstract states of affairs, entities, and relations" (*Metaphor and Religious Language*, 95).

[172] Ibid., 48. Emphasis added.

[173] Donahue, 7. Likewise, Hultgren defines a parable as "a figure of speech in which a comparison is made between God's kingdom, actions, or expectations and something in this world, real or imagined" (3). New Testament parable scholarship is replete with similar definitions.

[174] Dodd, 5.

discursive language."[175] Theories of parable are beset by this sort of contradiction due to the difficulty of aligning a (rhetorical or classical) *definition* of metaphor with intuitions of its poetic (or catachrestic) *function*.[176]

The implied premise of Donahue's second claim—that the *epiphor* (carrying over) of metaphor involves more than a comparison or this-for-that exchange (in its *diaphoric* function)—gets at the heart of a recurring debate over how to interpret the parables of Jesus.[177] It is a question of the dispensability of the narrative-picture to the content it "transports." Are New Testament similitudes and narrative-parables temporary stand-ins for certain moral, eschatological, or theological principles? Are they simply illustrative of a concept? Can the parable-form be discarded after its content is extracted?

The work of a scholar like Brad Young suggests the answer to this last question is "yes." His explanation demonstrates the extent to which the disagreement over the illustrative role of parable is interwoven by another disagreement, over whether Jesus' parables are unique or typical. Young, rightly, treats Jesus' parables in light of the broader tradition of Jewish Haggadah, situating them within Rabbinic *mašal* and explicating them through parallel stories.[178] But, in Young's view, the purpose of Jesus' parables, as well as the rabbinical parables of Second Temple Judaism, is straightforwardly to "instruct" and "drive home a point."[179] They impart a lesson or

---

[175] Ibid., 9.

[176] This tension already seems to be there with Aristotle, in the gap between his *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*.

[177] Frank Burch Brown borrows Philip Wheelwright's distinction between the two poles of metaphorical language: 1) *epiphor*, which is "operative when there is an intrinsic, recognizable similarity between the referents of the terms of a nonliteral comparison or identification," for example, Shakespeare's "All the world's a stage;" and 2) *diaphor* "when there is a suggestive juxtapositioning and synthesis of seemingly unrelated and incongruous semantic elements the referents of which can indeed be perceived as belonging together, but primarily by virtue of their having been metaphorically linked," for example, Gertrude Stein's "Toasted Suzie is my ice-cream." See Brown, *Transfiguration*, 27.

[178] Young, *The Parables*, 7.

[179] Ibid., 33.

concept that can be articulated after the story without the story. So, for example, in the case of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, or "The Father of Two Lost Sons," the main point, is consonant with the overall message of the Hebrew Bible: God is like a loving father/master who is ready to forgive any and all who repent.[180] This is more forcefully expressed and more easily accessed through the illustration, but it can also be stated plainly without it, with no loss to the truth of the content.

Crossan agrees with the construal of "the rabbinical figures" as primarily "didactic" in character and confined to teaching settings "associated with a very specific text of Scripture or with a very particular problem in ethical living."[181] But for Crossan, and others, this is precisely what distinguishes rabbinical parables from Jesus'.[182] The parables of Jesus are *not* mainly pedagogical, designed to present information more palatably; rather, they "articulate a referent so new or so alien to consciousness that this referent can only be grasped within the metaphor itself."[183] Accordingly, in New Testament parables, *what* parabolic speech imparts is inseparable from *how* it imparts it. For those who take a position like this, over against what we might call the *illustrative* theory of parable, one way of preserving the indispensability of Jesus' word-pictures or metaphorical narratives is by highlighting their irreplaceable emotional impact.

---

[180] Ibid., 72.

[181] Crossan, *In Parables*, 19

[182] Similarly, Hultgren says rabbinic parables are "primarily exegetical; their purpose is to interpret, clarify, and apply the scriptural tradition" (8). Cf. Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 196), 69; David Stern, "Jesus' Parables from the Perspective of Rabbinic Literature: the Example of the Wicked Husbandmen," *Parable and Story in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Clemens Thoma and Michael Wyschodgrod (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 58. Against this reduction of the rabbinical teaching tradition, see Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

[183] Crossan, *In Parables*, 13. Crossan relies on Jacob Neusner's work on the Pharisaic traditions before 70 C.E. (1971). Rabbinical parables that parallel Jesus' in content originate at a later date and are of synchronic but not diachronic use. Neuser states (against Bultmann) that "paradox is not a dominant characteristic of the Pharisaic-rabbinic sayings and does not occur in stories as the primary vehicle for narrative." But perhaps the more important difference is that the *illustrand* in Jesus' case is the (tensive-symbol) the "Kingdom of God" rather than scripture or ethics. See Crossan, 17-19.

This brings us to a second misunderstanding, characteristic of *emotive* or *non-cognitive* theories of metaphor. This set of approaches to metaphor share with substitution theories the view that metaphor does not communicate new cognitive content. However, according to the emotive or non-cognitive explanation, this is because the import of metaphor is strictly *affective*.[184] The essential work of metaphor is in evoking not thought but feeling. In its association with logical positivism, such a conclusion has been reason enough to deny metaphor any conceptual worth. But for others, the emotional impact of metaphor is not cause for its denigration. In fact, this helps ensure its unsubstitutability—although, again, at the expense of any real cognitive value. In this view, a metaphor itself has no meaning, or no particular meaning; rather, its significance is more akin to "a picture or a bump on the head" than a proposition.[185] Some affective views might be seen, then, as "a form of speech act theory in which metaphor is a phenomenon of the speech situation."[186] Here "what distinguishes metaphor is not meaning but use…for a metaphor *says* only what shows on its face— usually a patent falsehood or an absurd truth" (i.e., its literal sense).[187] No attempt is made to explain how a metaphor might—through a strategy of absurdity—thereby produce an "increment to meaning."[188]

While it may not be fair to summarily categorize under this rubric any of the parable scholars I have surveyed, it is not difficult to see the affinities with those literary-existentialist approaches that associate parable and metaphor with paradox and crisis.

---

[184] For examples, see Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1958), 134-135.

[185] Donald Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," *On Metaphor*, ed., Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1979), 44.

[186] Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 28.

[187] Davidson, 30-31

[188] Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 29.

John Dominic Crossan, for example, heavily influenced by Heidegger, emphasizes the way parable interrupts "everydayness," brackets "world," and reverses expectation.[189] In his later work, such as *Raid on the Articulate* (1976) and *Cliffs of Fall* (1980), Crossan goes further, sloughing off his earlier attention to referentiality itself and calling it "romanticist."[190] He argues that Jesus is "the paradox of God," that Jesus' parables proclaim the Kingdom of God in and as paradox, "turning the aniconicity of Israel's God onto language itself."[191] Thus, in his reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan Crossan argues against Jeremias, Perrin, et al., that this is *not* an example story at all.[192] Rather, in forcing the connection between two opposites—for the original hearers: "neighbor" and "Samaritan" (i.e., enemy)—the "metaphorical point is that *just so* does the Kingdom of God break abruptly into human consciousness and demand the overturn of prior values, closed options, set judgments, and established conclusions."[193] In "struggling with the contradictory dualism of Good/Samaritan," "the inbreaking of the Kingdom" is experienced—*but not comprehended*.[194] Evidently inspired by Derrida's philosophical inflection of Saussurean linguistics, Crossan altogether undercuts the notion that the parables "mean" when he says, "He who finds the meaning loses it, and he who loses it finds it."[195] "Finding," in this case, is experiencing the full weight of absence and indeterminacy. In light of comments such as Crossan's, one biblical scholar objects

---

[189] Crossan, *In Parables*, passim.
[190] Crossan, *Cliffs of Fall*, 67.
[191] Crossan, *In Parables*, 78; *Cliffs of Fall*, 20. In other words, according to Crossan, Jesus rejects representation in language in the same way that the prophets before him rejected images of God and idols.
[192] Crossan, *In Parables*, 57.
[193] Ibid., 65.
[194] Ibid., 66.
[195] See Derrida's lecture "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). Crossan, *Cliffs of Fall*, 101.

that, in certain strains of parable theory, "the impression arises that…salvation comes from metaphor alone!"[196]

Resorting to a "shock and awe" account of figurative language in order to explain its mysterious "extra import," the power of parable's non-referentiality is reminiscent of the metaphorical "bump on the head" of emotive theories of metaphor.[197] Such an approach plays into the dichotomy that either figures of speech are explanatory (substitution) or they simply jolt and incite (emotive). For certain modern and contemporary New Testament scholars, recourse to metaphor and parable allows them to demythologize the truth claims of the text while not disposing of the narratives.[198] They deem Jesus' sayings, in E. P. Sanders' assessment, "striking in *manner* but not especially in *matter*."[199] This sentiment underlies statements such as Funk's: "the language of poetry is centripetal and hence not assertive: it does not affirm anything directly about the external or sensory world."[200] In Soskice's words, those influenced by the New Hermeneutic,

> see the narrative unit (whether that be the story, the parable, or the metaphor) as a "language" or "speech event" and see its importance, *qua* event, in the impact it has on the reader; in its ability to shock, to shatter, and to reshape the "world" in which the reader lives… the imagery is not only misunderstood if taken as reality depicting, but becomes totally misleading, for…"reality is the world we create in

---

[196] Donahue, 11.

[197] The logical trajectory of the non-referential is the non-cognitive for, ultimately, all thought depends upon allusion. As de Lubac says, "In order to be actualized, every though requires an expression which, by analogy or contrast, relates it to some previously expressed thought. Thus allusion is essential to it." (*Scripture in the Tradition*, 11, n. 18).

[198] Soskice, 106f.

[199] E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 7. Emphasis added. Wright (referring to Perrin) quotes Sanders (referring to B. B. Breech and James Scott) (see Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 176, n. 122).

[200] Funk, 117. On the "assertorial" function of metaphor, see Frank Burch Brown, *Transfiguration*, 24.

and by our language"…"the classical mind says, that's only a story, but the modern mind says, there's only story."[201]

Soskice expresses concern over the fact that such an approach easily suppresses the assertorial and reality-depicting potential of metaphorical language. Ricoeur similarly notes that, in contemporary literary criticism (e.g., Roman Jakobson), "we run up against a very strong tendency…to deny that poetic language aims at reality" and to see metaphor as "a privileged instrument for suspending reality by means of the displacement of the ordinary meaning of words."[202] It is possible, however, to engage in a literary analysis of the Bible without sacrificing its descriptive or referential intention.

ii. Interactive and Interanimative Approaches to Metaphor

Against both 1) the emotive or sheerly eventful, and 2) the classical substitution or illustrative view (the two broad misunderstandings we wish to rule out), Ricoeur's account of metaphor fits into a third group of approaches which might be called *interactive* or *tensive*.[203] As I. A. Richards describes it, "when we use a metaphor we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction."[204] A basic feature of this view, then, is that metaphor is thought to result from a tension or conflict between *two things*

---

[201] Soskice, 109. Quoting from Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Salem, OR: Polebridge Press, 1994)*,* 40, 45.
[202] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 83.
[203] My rubric (Substitution, Emotive, Interactive) modifies Soskice's (24f) conflating it somewhat with Ricoeur's in *The Rule of Metaphor* (4f). Sosckice's survey is more detailed and extensive that this. The third ("interactive") approach is one of several that she lists under the label "incremental" (which includes all theories in which metaphor is seen as "an increment to meaning") (29). Because it is the most influential and recognizable of the third set of approaches she surveys, I am focusing on it. Ricoeur groups the theories of I. A. Richards, Max Black, Monroe Beardsley as "interactive." Soskice splits them up, calling Beardsley's approach "controversion" and Black's "interactive." She would probably also class Ricoeur's theory under "controversion" or what Ricoeur calls "tension" theory. To be fair, as compilations of views, these are in a certain sense nobody's positions (especially the first two). However, these summaries display in a limited way the quite diverse range of approaches to explaining what metaphor is and how it works.
[204] Richards, 93.

(thoughts, subjects, referents), on the level of the sentence.[205] But the generativity of semantic conflict is accounted for in different ways. For example, in a *controversion* or "verbal-opposition" approach (Beardsley), metaphor "is discourse that says more than it states, by cancelling out the primary meaning to make room for secondary meaning."[206] Thus the metaphor results from a "conflict of *meaning*" within the modifier itself.[207] This might be called a "two meanings" approach because it assumes the metaphor first suggests a literal meaning which must breakdown in order for the "metaphorical meaning" to arise.[208] Somewhat differently, in Max Black's interactive account, a metaphor is an "expression in which *some* words are used metaphorically," forming the "focus," "while the remainder are used nonmetaphorically," as the literal "frame."[209] We might call this position a "two subjects" approach because Black suggests that there is a principle subject (main referent) and subsidiary subject (better termed: modifier) in every metaphor.[210]

Drawing on Beardsley and Black as well as I. A. Richards, Ricoeur refers to his view as "interactive" as well as "tensive." According to Ricoeur, "metaphor does not exist in itself, but in and through an interpretation."[211] It requires a "twist," it asks us to

---

[205] This shift depends upon a theory of "statement-metaphor" (French linguist Émile Benveniste) which distinguishes semantics ("where the sentence is the carrier of the minimum complete meaning") and a semiotics ("where the word is treated as a sign in the lexical code") (Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 4).

[206] Cited by Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 32.

[207] Ibid., 34. The main problem with this is that, as a formalist argument, it does not account for metaphor as discourse. Instead of considering the entire spoken/written context, it still locates metaphoricity in the isolated terms themselves.

[208] For a critique of this language "metaphorical meaning" or "metaphorical truth," see Soskice, 68f.

[209] Max Black, *In Models and Metaphors: studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), 38-39. In other words, the "focal word" is the word that bears the metaphorical transfer and the "frame" is the context which "imposes a new meaning upon" the focus. For example, in the metaphor "Nature is a temple," temple is the focus which receives an extension of meaning through its interaction with "nature" as the literal context or frame. See Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 39.

[210] Ibid., 43.

[211] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 50.

"*make* sense." The conflict or tension, then, is not simply between incompatible terms, but, more importantly, between two interpretations—one literal and another metaphorical.[212] According to Ricoeur, "metaphor does not consist in clothing an idea with an image" (i.e., substitution) but "rather in the reduction of the shock between two incompatible ideas."[213] The terms of a metaphor create a "semantic impertinence" (Jean Cohen).[214] They constitute a departure from the ordinary rules of predication that looks like a "calculated error"[215] or "category mistake" (Gilbert Ryle).[216] Inasmuch as this semantic clash is a dead-end for literal interpretation it makes way for "the new pertinence that answers its challenge."[217] Thus the breakdown or dead-end of literal interpretation is simply a "de-constructive intermediary phase" between impertinence and new pertinence.[218] In "good" or "living" metaphors "a new extension of the meaning of the words answers a novel discordance in the sentence." Therefore, it cannot be said that all metaphors are merely ornamental; rather, some involve invention. If we are to evoke the role of "resemblance" or "likeness," then, we must point out the way metaphors can and do "institute a resemblance" rather than "simply register one." Tensive metaphors work by "making a kinship appear" when "ordinary vision" would not otherwise perceive one. In that sense, they are inherently participatory, like "the active resolution of an enigma." The "novel rapprochements" that take place in metaphor not only give birth to

---

[212] While Soskice rightly notes that "We cannot imagine that words 'have' meanings in the same way that people have boots or bicycles" (6), Ricoeur is also right that we cannot give up tension on the level of the word because it is still the particular terms that generate the clash (or, as Soskice prefers: absurdity) that indicates a metaphor is at hand.

[213] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 78-79.

[214] Jean Cohen, *Structure du langue poétique* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009).

[215] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 79.

[216] Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 21. This sort of "categorial transgression" is already implied in Aristotle's fourth definition of metaphor (i.e., in the catachrestic function of metaphor by analogy), by which a metaphor helps fill semantic lacunae.

[217] Ibid., 194

[218] Ibid., 22.

"new semantic fields" but also *redescribe* reality. Thus metaphor includes new

information and bears special cognitive significance. [219] And this is what makes metaphor

untranslatable and irreducible to so-called "plain speech" or "words proper." In Frank

Burch Brown's words, metaphor involves "not only a transformation of the ordinary

meanings of the terms employed but also…a transformation of ordinary *thought, an*

innovation in meaning that could only have been *achieved through the specific*

expression employed."[220]

To summarize, in Ricoeur's account of metaphor, the metaphorical process

consists of three predicative stages: 1) naïve (*this is that*), 2) deconstructive (*this is not*

that), and 3) tensional (*this is and is not that*).[221] The metaphorical achievement takes

place only at the end, but is elicited along the way by the discordance between terms and

by the impotence of a literal meaning. The "tensive" quality of metaphor is likewise

threefold, occurring 1) between terms (subject and modifier), 2) between interpretations

(literal and metaphorical), and 3) between the metaphorical statement and reality/life (or

between description and redescription).[222] We will wait to explore this third point below,

in connection with "models."

It is clear that Ricoeur takes "literal falsity" (Nelson Goodman) as "an ingredient"

in metaphor.[223] He, along with his predecessors, has been criticized for this—for

---

[219] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 79-80.
[220] Brown, *Transfiguration*, 27. Emphasis added.
[221] Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 248-256.
[222] Ricoeur discusses this third tension (Ibid., 247); it is also implied wherever he speaks of metaphor in terms of "redescription" or as a "heuristic for thought."
[223] Ibid., 87.

asserting a "split reference" whereby the meaning of a metaphor both (metaphorically) "is" and (literally) "is not" what it says.[224] As Soskice points out,

> just as the alternative to the metaphorical meaning is not the stand-by literal meaning, but absurdity, so the alternative to the reference made by metaphor is not its (shattered) literal reference but no reference at all. The metaphor "the lake is a sapphire" does not refer to some lake and some sapphire too, but simply to the lake which is described as a sapphire.[225]

That is to say, sometimes the literal *is* the metaphorical. For example, according to Aquinas, "the literal sense (*sensus literalis*) of Scripture is its intended sense"[226]—and its intended sense may in fact be metaphorical. He says, "When Scripture speaks of the arm of God, the literal sense is not that he has a physical limb but that he has what is signifies, namely the power of doing and making."[227] This is "literally" true, although conveyed in a figurative way. The same is also the case with "the parabolic sense of a story."[228] It is for this reason that Calvin and Barth both offer as a "literal" or "direct" interpretation of the Parable of the Prodigal Son an interpretation which could otherwise be construed as

---

[224] Ricoeur maintains that the literal interpretation of the copula must breakdown to give rise to its "metaphorical meaning." For critiques of this, see Soskice, 88-90, and Brown, 42-47, 172f.

[225] Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 89.

[226] Ibid., 86. Kissinger similarly describes "Antiochene" exegesis over against "Alexandrian" allegorizing saying "the Antiochenes did not look for hidden meanings in the biblical text but sought to set forth the literal sense intended by the author" (27). But as Hans Frei has pointed out, literal sense as intended sense is not the only *sensus literalis* of scripture. For the three uses of "literal," see Hans Frei, *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, eds. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 102-104.

[227] Aquinas, *ST* 1a. 1. 10.

[228] Thomas Gilby, "The Senses of Scripture," Appendix 12 to *ST*, vol. 1, 140. Similarly, for Dionysius Carthusianus, the literal meaning is *not* "that which is first signified by the literal words" but "what is signified through those things," which is why he says Jacob his deathbed "speaks metatphorically" such that the "literal sense" is not indicated according to the "terms" themselves but through the "things" signified by the terms, "according to their properties and the similarities to that which is principally designated." Dionysius Carthusianus (aka Denys van Leewen), *Opera Omnia*. 42 vols. Cura et labore monachorum sacri ordinis Cartusiensis favente Pont. Max. Leone XIII. Tournai: Pratis, 1896-1935. See vol. 1, 444 and vol. 4. 362-63.

allegorical or metaphorical—that is, an interpretation in which the story refers to the

grace of God toward fallen sinners.[229] For them, to take the parable "on the face of it" as

a story about a first century Palestinian father who had two sons would be unthinkable.

The labels "literal" and "metaphorical," then, are best conceived not as *meanings* but as

modes of communication.

As a corrective to the problematic "two meanings," "dual truth," or "split

reference" position, Soskice has modified the interactive definition of metaphor,

proposing an *Interanimative Theory* in which metaphor is "a form of language use with a

unity of subject-matter" that "draws upon two (or more) sets of associations."[230] She sees

metaphor as "the consequence of the interanimation of words in the complete

utterance."[231] It can be most clearly defined as "*speaking about one thing in terms which

are seen to be suggestive of another.*"[232] In this case, the "tenor" (the subject, e.g., the

lake) is clearly distinguished from the "vehicle" (that which presents it, e.g., the sapphire)

so that the metaphor has only one meaning and referent "which tenor and vehicle

conjointly depict and illumine."[233] This means metaphor is not: *speaking of this and*

---

[229] Unsettling the view of Calvin that he and other reformers were proto-historical-critical exegetes, Barbara Pitkin highlights the similarities reformation and early modern exegesis shares with late medieval interpretation. But she notes that, while medieval commentators were more likely to appeal to the *quadriga* or the idea of a duplex literal sense (Lyra), the difference is that "Calvin and those who adopted a similar program did not seek spiritual senses *beyond* the text but rather spiritual senses *within* the text…and tended to overstuff this single, literal sense with spiritual meanings" (emphasis added). See Barbara Pitkin, "John Calvin and the Interpretation of the Bible," *A History of Biblical Interpretation Vol. 2: The Medieval through the Reformation Periods*, eds. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 347.

[230] "Interanimative" is borrowed from Richards who says, "when we use a metaphor we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word or phrase, whose meaning is resultant of their interaction" (93). Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 45.

[231] Ibid., 45.

[232] Ibid., 49. Emphasis added.

[233] We thereby avoid the idea of "two subjects." For example, in the saying "Man is a wolf," man is the tenor, wolf the vehicle (Ibid., 45). The problem "two meanings" or "two referents" is also bypassed (Ibid., 47). Soskice follows John Lyons and Keith Donnellan in modifying and expanding Frege's sense/reference distinction. On their view, "reference" is "something that a speaker makes on a particular occasion of making an utterances, and not as something made by individual vocabulary terms (lexemes) in isolation"

meaning that (as in substitution); nor is it: *speaking of this and referring to nothing*

(emotive); nor is it even necessarily: *speaking of this* and *that* at the same time

(interactive) or *speaking of it* and *also not speaking of it* (tensive). Metaphorical

language, most inclusively defined, is a matter of speaking of something *through* a

suggestive network of associations borrowed from something else.[234] In this way, Soskice

bypasses the notions of a literal dead-end, semantic clash, double reference, secondary

subject, deconstructive intermediary, etc. She assumes that when we register a metaphor,

we automatically leap over these false starts.[235] (In establishing a definition of metaphor

that could fund a theory of parable, this ellipsis is useful because in parable the various

narratological and interpretive levels are not necessarily opposed in such a way that the

literal or immediate reading self-destructs *in order to* give rise to the extra metaphorical

import.) However, in defining metaphor without recourse to controversion and conflict,

Soskice does not thereby rule out the defining quality of "tension" altogether.[236] Rather, it

is still one of the primary marks of a living metaphor—that it 1) retains its original

---

(52). Meaning is meaning of a complete utterance, not its individual terms. Sense is the "dictionary definition of a lexeme." And denotation is the designation or designated use of words and terms in the world.

[234] I should note that one difference between Soskice and Ricoeur is that she emphasizes the intention of the metaphor-maker whereas Ricoeur assumes that "the text is mute" and emphasizes the work of interpretation in making the text speak again. That is one of the reasons Soskice understands (and perhaps misunderstands) Ricoeur's tensive theory of metaphor as "speaking of this *and* that." Ricoeur's "is"/"is not" is not a matter of authorial intent but a matter of finding another path of reception for an enigmatic text in lieu of its author's ability to intervene and clarify referential intent. Ricoeur thus plays up (perhaps too much) our ability to make mistakes in following the direction of the metaphorical statement. I think Soskice's and Ricoeur's basic understandings of metaphor are not incompatible when we realize that, in sidelining the doubleness of metaphor, Soskice is interested in clearly defining the metaphor-statement as a linguistic phenomenon in which communication happens almost automatically (e.g., in humor), while Ricoeur, on the other hand, stresses the participatory dimension of metaphor. For him, it is not so much that metaphors have a split *reference* as that—in the case of a living metaphor anyway—they must pass through two distinguishable stages of interpretation *when* we stumble over the first/literal interpretation's failure to produce meaning. But, admittedly, Ricoeur's use of Gottlob Frege's distinction between "sense" and "reference" is not always clear and often he uses "meaning" interchangeably with both "sense" and "reference" and occasionally "interpretation" as well.

[235] Frank Burch Brown, agrees that "Ricoeur places too much emphasis on literal falsity and the negative precondition for the metaphoric transformation of meanings" (172).

[236] Tension means something different for Philip Wheelwright and Frank Burch Brown as well.

tension, dissonance, or inappropriateness, 2) cannot be readily paraphrased, and 3) has

not lost its ability to evoke a web of implications based on the founding model.[237] This

third feature brings us to an essential point, one which demystifies how what metaphor

intends is maximal while what it *says* is minimal.[238]

2. Metaphors and Models, Fiction and Redescription

For Soskice, as for Ricoeur, Black, and others, metaphors (linguistic) are rooted in

models (often visual). Drawing on the work of Mary Hesse, Soskice clarifies that in a

model, "we *regard* one thing or state of affairs in terms of another" while in metaphor

"we *speak* of one thing or state of affairs in language suggestive of another."[239] So, for

example, it is not technically accurate to say "'Father' is a metaphor for God." Rather,

fathers, paternity, and parenthood in general, are a *model* for *seeing* God and God's

relationship to humanity. It is speech about God *based on* this model that is metaphorical.

That it to say, the metaphor occurs when we put the image to words and pray, "Our

Father…"

Without being able to expound a theory of models here, it is important to at least

note that the models underlying and fueling metaphorical language are what give

metaphor its inherent expandability and suggestiveness.[240] That is to say, good models,

e.g., the fatherhood or motherhood of God, 1) enable elaboration of the metaphorical

statement—they prompt us "to 'go on,'" and, 2) they suggest previously unrecognized

---

[237] Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 73.
[238] Funk, "Old Testament," 262.
[239] Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 50-51.
[240] Soskice dismantles the notion that metaphors and, more specifically, metaphorical religious language are not referential or reality-depicting by engaging the history and philosophy of metaphor in science (Ibid., Ch. 6). Cf. Mary Hesse, *Models and Analogies in Science* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966) and *The Structure of Scientific Inference* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1974).

possibilities for "seeing as."[241] Models serve as heuristic fictions that incite a redescription of reality. This is so even in the sciences, where

> the use of models…is not motivated by the ability of these models to empirically describe a pure reality. The strength of scientific models lies instead in their ability to break away from a descriptive discourse and provide a possibility to *see "something" as* [or in terms of]*"something else."* Since the purpose of using models in science is to explore reality by establishing new relations in it, the scientific model has a heuristic function in producing new hypotheses and so *discovers new dimensions of reality*.[242]

This pairing of heuristic fiction and reality-(re)description in models helps break down the assumption that referentiality is always absolute or empirically verifiable. In some cases, "reference is possible prior to definitive knowledge."[243] Therefore we need not think of reference as involving "unreviseable description."[244]

Ricoeur proposes that we understand the "fiction-redescription" pairing in much the same way as Aristotle's account of *mythos* and *mimesis*.[245] Taking a "*poetic* approach," he suggests the productivity of metaphor and parable can be accounted for in terms of *poïesis* or "a *mimesis* of serious action by means of a *mythos* invented by the poet." The act of *mimesis* is never strictly imitative in that 1) it is itself an act of

---

[241] Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 51.

[242] See Berth Danermark, Mats Ekström, Lisselotte Jakobsen, and Jan Ch. Karlsson, *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in the Social Sciences* (New York, Rutledge, 2006), 94. Translated from Bengt Kristensson Uggla, Kommumkation pa bristgingsgrdnsen (Stockholm: Symposion, 1994): 400. The authors of *Explaining Society* correlate Hesse's theory of models with C. S. Peirce's notion of "abduction" (or a mode of inference that is neither deductive nor inductive, that is more redescriptive than explanatory).

[243] Richard Boyd, "Metaphor and Theory Change: What is 'Metaphor' a Metaphor for?" *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 386.

[244] Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 125. This touches upon a much larger discussion of critical realism, which cannot be addressed here. In short, affirming "reality-depiction," in Hilary Putnam's words, means "blocking the disastrous meta-induction that concludes 'no theoretical term ever refers.'" See Hilary Putnam, "Lecture III," *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1979), 37.

[245] Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 244.

interpretation (and therefore already novel), and 2) it can and does produce new vistas onto reality. Parable is not simply a realistic narrative proving a principle or reflecting ordinary life but "a *mythos* (a heuristic fiction) which has the mimetic power of 'redescribing' human existence."[246] In that sense, it seems that parables can come to function as models. So while Soskice is correct about metaphors being *based on* models, Ricoeur, in sometimes referring to a metaphor *as* a model, perhaps misapplies the metaphor-model relationship as Mary Hesse conceives, yet in an illuminating way.[247] As is evidenced by, for example, the extraordinary artistic output in response to the Parable of the Prodigal Son throughout history, a metaphorical story can in turn become a symbol for the imagination and a resource for further elaboration, redoubling the expandability of the root metaphor. It is not just the case, then, that a metaphor (or metaphorical narrative) is *speech* that elaborates on the model; specific metaphors (and metaphorical narratives) also become models that alter our regard. And this is what Ricoeur is most interested in—how, in religious language, a "symbol *of*" becomes a "symbol *for*" (Clifford Geertz)—that is, how we make the transition from image or text to life.[248]

Conclusion

     My goal in exploring this set of issues is not to settle an ongoing debate over terms but 1) to draw attention to how profoundly accounts of metaphor and allegory

---

[246] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 32. A much-abused concept, "*Mimesis*…stops causing trouble and embarrassment when it is understood no longer in terms of 'copy' but of redescription" (*The Rule of Metaphor*, 245).

[247] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 95.

[248] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion Narrative and Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1995), 147. On the difference between metaphor and symbol (as well as analogy, image, etc.), see Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 55.

shape theories of parable, and 2) to prepare the way for the rather unpredictable Christological readings Julian and Barth offer.

Returning to Dodd's widely referenced definition of parable, the preceding comments on metaphor and model provide a substrate for his assertions about the parables of Jesus "arresting" their hearers and asking to be "teased" into new applications. To summarize, there are two general points to keep in mind when it comes to parable (as well as other forms of "poetic" language, in Ricoeur's sense of that word). First, its content is not precisely itself apart from the specificity of the form that bears it. This contention interweaves all that I have said in this chapter about the function of metaphorical language. Second, parable is an instance of language that works on its recipients by inciting or enacting a new vision of reality. This claim requires further development. In the following chapter, I turn to Ricoeur's theory of intertextuality in order to expand its phenomenological dimension. This move, I think, helps us better explain that which is often merely asserted in accounts of parable.

CHAPTER TWO

INTERTEXTUALITY, PHENOMENOLOGY, AND THE PARABLE

The discussion of parable, allegory, and metaphor in the preceding chapter has left open the relationship of metaphor to parable as well as a definition of parable befitting Julian's and Barth's approaches. What understanding of parable, what approach to parable interpretation, prepares us to appreciate Julian and Barth's theological retellings of the Parable of the Prodigal Son? We still have a bridge to build from metaphor to parable, or from the metaphor-statement to the notion of metaphorical *discourse*. So, in the first part of this chapter, I turn to the problem of parables as metaphorized narratives that, through a process of intertextuality breach their own structural enclosure (Ricoeur). In second part of the chapter, I consider the ways the content of the texts under consideration interacts with the form of parable and suggest a supplementary account of parabolic language via phenomenology. I argue that much modern and contemporary parable theory already depends upon phenomenological insights and I offer a preliminary phenomenological reading of the Parable of the Prodigal Son that establishes its thematic contours.

I. Intertextuality and the Metaphorization of Discourse

In addition to the simplicity and rigor of Soskice's account of metaphor, it is because of her treatment of models that I have drawn on her as a touchstone. However, her definition of metaphor itself has one noteworthy shortcoming for our purposes: it

does not readily transfer to parable.[1] While this is not something she discusses explicitly, at the same time, she leaves us with a provocative remark along related lines. Soskice laments the loss of the vitality of biblical imagery in the legacies of literalism and historical-criticism.[2] By contrast she observes that metaphors in scripture "have become more than simple metaphor—they are almost *emblematic*."[3] This is, in part, because

> in Christian theology, [the] repetition of metaphor has often gone hand in hand with typological interpretation and the conviction that certain events in the Old Testament prefigure those in the New. We need not commit ourselves to this tenet of faith to make the essentially literary point that, in ways similar to the allusive techniques of any literary tradition, certain metaphors and models of God's presence and gracious acts, models which often can stand as significant in their own right without historical glosses, have been used and re-used in the central texts of Christianity and in subsequent expositions of those texts. So, to explain what it means to Christians to say that God is a fountain of living water, or a vine-keeper, or a rock, or a fortress, or king requires an account not merely of fountains, rocks, vines, and kinds but of a whole tradition of experiences and of the literary tradition which records and interprets them.[4]

Inquiry into the meaning of recurring metaphors in the tradition, then, would require a "study of gloss upon gloss, use and re-use of the figures that comprise an interweaving of

---

[1] Nor is that her intention. Throughout, Soskice treats metaphor as a trope of language and does not discuss the extension of metaphors into discourse. She is critical of the tendency in New Testament scholarship to conflate metaphor and parable, or at least to not clearly distinguish and coordinate them.

[2] In the search of historical Jesus, "Christians both liberal and conservative" have attempted "to salvage his exact words and acts from the dross of allusion and interpretation with which the gospel writers surrounded them." What they share in common is a literalism that ultimately "equates religious truth with historical facts" (Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 160).

[3] Ibid., 158. Emphasis added.

[4] Ibid., 158.

meanings so complex that the possible readings are never exhausted."[5] This expansive practice of scriptural reading liberates precisely the kind of reuse and refiguration we encounter in Julian's example and Barth's interpretation of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The reservoir of metaphors and models found in the bible—most often rooted in stories—are always already refracted for us, before us, not only in the long history of scriptural use but also through subsequent applications, paraphrases, commentaries, sermons, and retellings.

It is this layering of image, allusion, and interpretation that constitutes the rich intertextuality of New Testament parables and helps us recognize a narrative *as a parable*—that is, as a metaphorized story—and prompts us to carry on the metaphorical process. In light of this, the striking structural and thematic resonances between Julian's and Barth's retellings can be seen to arise from the specific nexus of biblical imagery they share. In both Julian's example and Barth's exegesis, the Parable of the Prodigal Son is filtered through or overlain with: 1) the Genesis 2-3 account of creation and fall, 2) the narratives of Israel's captivity, exodus, and exile, and especially the "Suffering Servant" imagery of Isaiah 40-55, 3) the Gospel story in which "the Word became flesh" (Jn. 1:14), an "offering for sin" (Is. 53:10), even sin itself (2 Cor. 5:21), 4) the event of divine condescension (Phil. 2:6f), and 5) the Pauline Adam-Christ identity (Rom. 5:14f, 1 Cor. 15:22).[6] Recourse to this broader biblical framework is not an instance of capricious "allegorization" or an imposition of an artificial ("ecclesial") template, as might be

---

[5] Ibid., 158.
[6] This selection is not meant to exclude the other biblical allusions and evocations present in their retellings. But we find the biblical elements I have identified are mapped onto one another more explicitly.

argued from a strictly historical-critical perspective.[7] Rather, as Barth maintains, to "do full justice to the passage" itself, to not leave it "under-interpreted," we must also attend to the relationship between the parable and, as it were, *the rest of the story* (IV/2, 22).

In this section, I will provide a basis for this assertion, drawing on Ricoeur's treatment of parable as the *metaphorization* of a *narrative form* in his essay "Biblical Hermeneutics" and his chapter "The Bible and the Imagination" from *Figuring the Sacred*. First, I note the difficulties in moving from metaphor to parable. Second, I reiterate Ricoeur's application of structural analysis for understanding the narrative form of the parables. Third, I describe the metaphorization of narratives in terms of intertextuality and intersignification. All of this extends the necessary groundwork for a phenomenological account of parable that follows.

1. Between Metaphor and Parable

There are a number of discrepancies between metaphor and parable that make the transition between them less than self-evident. First, metaphors take place at the level of a sentence (or phrase) while narrative-parables constitute longer units of discourse. Although Ricoeur argues that "metaphor can occur not only between words but between whole sequences of sentences," an important question arises concerning how to connect "the theory of 'genres,' which rules the narrative form, and the theory of 'tropes,' which rules the transfer of meaning from the story as a whole to the existential sphere to which it is 'applied.'"[8] Second, figurative stories more easily resist the fate of "dead metaphors." In other words, their metaphorical significance does not collapse as readily

---

[7] Insofar as it attempts to dissociate the "original" speech from its interpretation. Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 158.
[8] Ibid., 161; Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 89.

through repetition and familiarization. (On the contrary, this only seems to intensify the symbolic nature of stories.)

Third, if working with a tensive or interactive account of metaphor, it is clear that parable does not involve a tension or conflict between terms nor does it require anything like "literal falsity" or the destruction of the direct or naïve interpretation.[9] Likewise, in light of a non-conflictual or interanimative account of metaphor, we would have to clarify that, by contrast, in parables there may in fact be "two meanings," "two referents," or "two subjects." For, in the case of parables, a literal interpretation rarely returns empty-handed. In fact, it is perhaps definitive of parable that it works on multiple levels—not merely that it conjures multiple associations. The "narrative 'sense'" of parables endures despite the "metaphorical 'referent,'" and the two are not always conflictual. As a result, the tensive or interruptive quality must be relocated between the world of the text and the world we know, or between description and redescription.[10]

Fourth, the metaphoricity of parable does not occur through the interaction or interanimation of particular *terms* but at the level of the whole narrative, the narrative taken as "scenic."[11] In other words, "fictional narratives seem to constitute a distinctive class of metaphorical processes" inasmuch as "the bearers of the metaphor are not the individual sentences of the narratives," or isolated elements, "but the whole structure, the narratives as a whole."[12] More specifically, Ricoeur singles out "plot" as the bearer of

---

[9] Ibid., 93.
[10] Ibid., 94, 95.
[11] Ricoeur borrows this term from Alfred Lorenzer's work in psychoanalysis. See Jürgen Habermas, "Hermeneutics and the Social Sciences," *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*, Ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (New York: Continuum, 2002), 293-319. Gadamer speaks of transference as creating analogous "scenes" (304-305).
[12] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 94.

metaphoricity in narrative parables.[13] (It is largely for this reason that it is worth

rehearsing the gains—and losses—of structuralism, even though it is generally taken for

granted, that it has given way to poststructuralism and deconstruction.)

It is not quite accurate, then, to call a parable "*a* metaphor or simile," as Dodd and

many after him do. Parable is better defined as "the conjunction of a *narrative form* and a

metaphorical process" or "the mode of discourse which applies to a narrative form a

metaphoric process."[14] Even when Ricoeur speaks, as he does, of parable as a "story-

metaphor" he has in mind more precisely "the metaphoric functioning of a narrative"

which involves a circulation of meaning among *discourses*.[15] In understanding this,

something must be said about how to approach 1) the narrative form, and 2) the process

of metaphorical transfer in (and between) narratives.[16]

2. Structuralism and the Openness of the Narrative form

In his analysis of parable, Ricoeur attempts to link structural analysis—which

closes off the text as an autonomous whole—with existential hermeneutics—which

reopens it toward the world. On his account, it seems the main benefit of a structuralist or

semiotic analysis of the parables is twofold.

---

[13] Ibid., 125, 198.
[14] Ibid., 30, 88.
[15] Ibid., 118, 89.
[16] Ricoeur often relies the language of "transfer" which has led some to wonder whether he ultimately falls back on a substitution or comparative account of metaphor. But because, in the case of parables, he describes this transfer as reciprocally impactful for both texts involved, his use is closer to "interanimation"—though on the plane of discourses rather than short utterances. He speaks of "not just the collision between two semantic fields in a sentence a metaphor, but also an intersection between texts, both of which carry their own semantic codes," saying we must "extend the process of metaphorization to the widespread semantic conflicts" that occur among longer discourses in narrative-parables (*Figuring the Sacred*, 161).

Recourse to structuralism is, first of all, a methodological decision "to treat the parable as an autonomous aesthetic object, presenting an organic unity."[17] In other words, it involves a commitment to the *last text*, the canonical text. Without rejecting historical criticism, Ricoeur notes that this is just what it cannot give us—a literary whole regarded as a world of its own. In that sense, the presuppositions of a structuralist or semiotic approach are more akin to literary analysis than "exegesis," in its modern sense. Historical-critical exegesis "disconnects" the parables from one another and from the Gospel in order to examine them in a purified form as isolated "artifacts."[18] In fact, according to Ricoeur, the whole notion of "*a* parable" is a construction of historical criticism.[19] But, more accurately, what historical criticism leaves us is merely *a narrative*. It is unrecognizable as *a parable* as such, for a parable can only be grasped as a parable when it is seen as a *symbolic* narrative—and it is primarily through literary context and intertextual allusion that this is achieved. Assuming the premises of structuralism, the parables must be taken as a "corpus," in the context of the Gospel (and indeed the rest of scripture), with all the late accretions of written composition (interpretation, retelling, reframing—in short: artistry).

Ricoeur does not deny the fact that "segments of 'prose commentaries'" are later "inserted in 'poetic declaration'" or that there are "didactic, apologetic, and dogmatic components" to those commentaries. But, in contrast to historical criticism, which "deliberately severs" the "original kernel" of the supposed "*ipsissima verba* of Jesus" from its literary context, "for semiotic analysis, the incorporation of the narrative and its

---

[17] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics, 37.
[18] Ibid., 105. Ricoeur says, such a continually pared down text "would tend to become meaningless as it becomes 'pure.'"
[19] Ibid., 100.

interpretive commentary into one text is an irrecusable textual fact."[20] Against the

conclusion that these early additions should be discarded as instances of "allegorizing,"

Ricoeur claims that "they are not quite exterior to the text"—not only because they are

given with the last text but also because they "prolong" the text's "productivity," adding

"conceptual elaboration" to the original metaphor or symbol.[21] The goal of analysis, then,

must be "to disclose the isomorphisms between the narrative and the interpretation,"[22]

reading the parables "both *with the help of and against the distortions* provided by this

ultimate context."[23]

      Second, the work of formalists and French structuralists, such as Vladimir Propp,

Algirdas Greimas, and Roland Barthes—as well as the "historico-literary criticism" of

Dan O. Via—bequeaths us a certain set of tools helpful for exploring the *narrative form*

of the parables.[24] It is on the basis of Greimas in particular that Ricoeur is able to argue

that, "the metaphorical power of the parable proceeds from *the plot*, which is to say from

a structural trait of the narrated action."[25] In other words, it is plot structure (rather than

characters or themes) that indicates what the parable "means" or "stands for." (This will

be a critical point when it comes to grasping the coherence of Julian's and Barth's

interpretations of the Parable of the Prodigal Son.)

---

[20] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 158. On the problem of isolating the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, see Wright, *Victory*, 141.
[21] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 35.
[22] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 158.
[23] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 105.
[24] Ricoeur borrows the term "historico-literary" from Via (Ibid., 37f). The structuralist "tools" include, for example, analyses of the component parts of narrative: plot, characters, types, actions, actantiel roles, functions, dialogue, etc.; distinctions between "mimetic modes" (e.g., realistic, epic, etc.); typologies of scenes and narrative sequences (e.g., tragic or comic); the contrast between isotopies (stable elements) and isomorphisms (changing elements); and, perhaps most importantly, the distinction between "surface structures" (chronology of the individual drama) and "deep structures" (achronical structure based on relations between functions).
[25] Ricouer, "Biblical Hermeneutics,"125. Emphasis added.

In classifying stories according to "constant values" instead of subject, motif, or meaning, Propp attempts to do for Russian folktales what Saussure does for language itself (in dividing *la langue* and *la parole* and privileging the former).[26] That is, Propp extends a linguistic model to long units of discourse. He recognizes that "the immediately-given units of the story" are "variable values" (as in instances of speech) and that while "appearances are abundant…the underlying structures are finite" and systematic (as in "the code" of language)[27] So, for example, while characters are manifold, Propp says their "functions" (i.e., their action from the point of view of its significance for the whole plot) are limited. In fact, Propp concludes that underlying the variegated "surface structure" of individual narratives there is a "deep structure" or "depth semantics" reducible to a single meta-folktale defined by a certain succession of functions, namely: mischief—intermediate functions—dénouement/reintegration.[28]

Some of Propp's successors, such as Greimas, retain his "logic of narration." However, because "the system of relations between 'functions' is 'achronical,'" certain French structuralists, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, "reduce even the narration to an underlying combination" or "deep-structure" which undercuts the story's "'chronological' appearance."[29] Ricoeur agrees with Lévi-Strauss that a "formalistic" approach needs to locate its isotopies (or stable elements) in "more primitive structures" than are immediately apparent in the surface narrative. Yet, when we do this, it causes a rift in the "literary-existential analysis" Ricoeur wishes to establish. "A gap" appears

---

[26] Ibid., 39, 52.
[27] Ibid., 40.
[28] Ibid., 43. In other words, Propp thinks the "morphological" thesis (about what underlies the various forms) leads to a "genetic" thesis, but this is not an inevitable conclusion—even when a basic pattern is acknowledged. Ricoeur denies that any proto-parable is discernible in the case of the parables of Jesus taken as a whole.
[29] Ibid., 41, 45, 49. The "syntagmatic sequence" of the narrative is supplanted by "paradigmatic order."

"between the 'inner' structure and the 'outer' existential reference," making it difficult to return from text to world (namely, to *time*). But in several moves, this gap might be closed.[30]

First, the structuralist *method* is to be distinguished from structuralist *ideology*— or what Ricoeur calls the "for-the-sake-of-the-code-fallacy."[31] Ideology perverts method when, for example, we become enamored of "the message *for its own sake*" (Roman Jakobson), or resolve that "the meaning of a narrative is nothing other than the integration of its elements within the closure of its form" (Roland Barthes), or perform a "radical dechronologization of the narrative" with no return to its surface (Claude Lévi-Strauss).[32] In what Ricoeur calls an "ultra-structuralist approach," the narrative becomes a mere "quotation" of its underlying codes. Consider, for example, Barthes' comment that "what happens in narratives is from the referential standpoint actually NOTHING. What happens is language alone, the adventure of language."[33] The problem, then, is that we cannot get outside the system—to concrete referents, to meaning, to temporality, to life.

Second, once the ideological aspect of structuralism is identified, it can be challenged on a number of points. Following Greimas, Ricoeur argues that the diachronical elements of the narrative form cannot be removed entirely. On the contrary, "the 'achronical' structure makes more prominent the 'diachronical residue' of the analysis" and the enduring chronology of the narrative "is secured by all the devises constituting the art of telling, which *unfold, delay, distance and dis-tend* the achronic

---

[30] Ibid., 39.
[31] Ibid., 69.
[32] Ibid., 51-52.
[33] Ibid., 51. Ricoeur is translating directly from Barthes. See Roland Barthes, "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," *New Literary History*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Winter, 1975), pp. 237-272.

structure."[34] Further, it is only through *drama* on the level of the surface structure that

"opposite terms of an achronical pair" (e.g., mischief vs. reintegration) achieve their

powerful "tension." Ricoeur concludes that instead of dissolving the dramatic element,

structural analysis actually "enhances its meaning by contrast with the achronic meaning

of the tale."[35] In fact, Ricoeur suggests that the crucial role of structural analysis is to help

"disclose the diachronic kernel by means of the achronic structure."[36] A methodological

rule of thumb, then, might be: "structural analysis is complete only when it gives *more*

[rather than less] meaning to the 'plot' than does the first naïve reading."[37] In that sense,

Ricoeur's approach is more "dramatic" than "structuralist."

Third, another basis for resisting the enclosure of structuralism is the origin of *text

as discourse*. Ricoeur says, "the way back from code to message" is "the right

understanding of text as text." Texts originate in discourse as an *event* of communication.

The text as discourse is constituted as having "a speaker, a world, and a vis-à-vis." In

handling a text, we must recall, 1) its backwards reference to "a speaker," 2) its forward

reference to "an extra-linguistic reality," and 3) the text as "*communication* with an

audience."[38] Ricoeur says this gets forgotten because people overlook the fact that a

literary genre "is not a means of classification, but a means of production." As a vis-à-vis,

as an act of communication, discourse makes use of a code or system precisely in order to

convey a message.[39] Marking a "complete break" with structuralism at this point, Ricoeur

---

[34] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 49. Emphasis added.
[35] Ibid., 49.
[36] Ibid., 50.
[37] Ibid., 72.
[38] Ibid., 66.
[39] Ricoeur says, this is his "major argument against the structuralist ideology": that "a mode of discourse, a literary genre, is nothing more than a means to produce a singular message, to give a *style* to individual discourses" (69). Against the "ultra-structuralist" position, Ricoeur maintains that "the surface-structure of the 'plot' is not an epiphenomenon, but the message itself (72).

(following Humboldt and Cassirer) reminds us that, "the function of language is to articulate our experience of the world, to give form to this experience."[40] This is not to deny the autonomy of the text but only to subordinate it to the process of *communication*.[41] While, even on the oral level, there is distanciation in exteriorization, "the dimension of the speech-act" and "its triple event character" is not abolished by the actualization of discourse as [written] text."[42] To read is to traverse this distance, to "redo with the text a certain 'line' or 'course' (*parscours*) of meaning."[43] Accordingly, Ricoeur defines the task of hermeneutics as "to identify the individual discourse ('the message') *through* the modes of discourse ('the codes') which generated it as a work of discourse"—*not* vice versa—i.e., "to use the dialectics of discourse and work, or performance and competence, as a mediation at the service not of the code, but of the message."[44] In the case of narrative fiction (e.g., parable), its extralinguistic referentiality is already inscribed in its definition, for—recalling what we have already said about metaphor and model—fiction is "reality remade."[45]

Fourth, Ricoeur speaks of a "generative poetics" (Erhardt Güttgemanns of Bonn) or a "generative grammar" (Noam Chomsky), by which he means, "the set of rules of 'competence' which govern" and capacitate "the 'performance' of specific texts."[46] The strictures of structural codes are precisely "the conditions for producing new narrative

---

[40] Ibid., 81. This presupposes that the unit of meaning is a sentence (i.e., semantics takes precedence over semiotics).

[41] Ibid., 71.

[42] The "triple event character" refers to its having a speaker, world, and vis-à-vis. See above. Ibid., 66.

[43] Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor,* 150.

[44] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 70. Emphasis added.

[45] Ibid., 73. This is a phrase Ricoeur uses often, borrowed from Nelson Goodman. See Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1976).

[46] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 70.

courses."[47] They enable the individual instance of creativity. As Ricoeur says of narrativity in *The Rule of Metaphor*, it is "a rule-governed form of imagination, *encoded*, yes, but authentically *productive* of meaning."[48] Against a certain hackneyed rendering of the Derridian axiom "*il n'ya pas de hors texte*,"[49] Ricoeur argues, "the suspension of the referential function of ordinary language does not mean the abolition of all reference" but rather serves as "the negative condition for the liberation of another referential dimension of language and another dimension of reality itself."[50] In loosening what he calls "the first-order reference of ordinary language," poetic language functions to bring forward "the second-order reference."[51] And this is, paradigmatically, what takes place in metaphorical language.[52] Its bracketing and deferral of direct reference does not result in *no* reference. (The specific ways a text itself issues new courses of meaning will be the subject of the following section.)

In light of these points, we can conclude that structuralism is only "a dead end" when it is used to subordinate the message (individual discourse) to its achronical "underlying 'code,'" when it blocks the "return from the deep-structures to the surface-structures."[53] But that could only be a "dogmatic decision."[54] Inasmuch as *the narrative itself* violates the self-enclosure of the code and the ban on referentiality, "the last level

---

[47] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 151.
[48] Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 151. Emphasis added.
[49] This was first articulated by Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 158. Unlike some of his successors, Derrida's point is not to deny but to destabilize referentiality.
[50] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 83-84.
[51] Ibid., 84.
[52] For Frank Burch Brown, all poetic language is metaphoric.
[53] Ibid., 65.
[54] Ibid., 51.

for structural analysis" betrays itself, in a sense, and brings us to "the threshold of hermeneutics."[55]

3. Metaphorization and Intertextuality

The preceding indications that a text's significance surpasses the constraints of an "ultra-structuralist" analysis are reinforced by a variety of clues to its metaphoricity. The *process of metaphorization* that transfuses the *narrative form* of parables refers to the way a text's meaning is transferred (*metapherein*) from one interpretive site to another. Most basically, to speak of the metaphorization of a discourse (or between two or more discourses) is to affirm that "something *passes* from one text to another."[56] How do we know to interpret a parable as "a parable and not merely a narrative?"[57] What makes us acknowledge that the story has a metaphorical, or "extra," referent? It is in "transgressing its own narrative structure" that "*the narrative metaphorizes itself*."[58] The parables exceed the confines of their narrative structure a number of ways, namely through: 1) the parabolic quality of "extravagance," 2) signs of metaphoricity internal to a narrative, and 3) networks of intersignification within the Gospel as a whole. The second and third indictors constitute a set and will be discussed in connection with "intertextuality."

First, while the "realism" or ordinariness of the parables is taken as a defining feature, Ricoeur says it is only meant to accentuate their "essential trait" which is

---

[55] In distinguishing the narrative as such ("the way in which the narrator *gives* the narration") from "narrative *communication*" ("the way in which the audience receives it"), Roland Barthes inadvertently reinserts referentiality in the discussion. A literary work is given *as* a particular kind of discourse (a parable, proverb, oracle, etc.) and this "as" ensures free recourse to the notion of communication or the transmission of meaning. Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 71, 73.

[56] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 163.

[57] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 97.

[58] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 165. Emphasis added.

"extravagance"—or, "the *extraordinary in the ordinary*."[59] This trait gives the narrative

an "oddness" that simultaneously "invites us to *transgress* the narrative structures" and

indicates that the parables are a "'religious' kind of 'poetic' discourse."[60] We primarily

see it in "the eccentricity of the modes of behavior to which the Kingdom of heaven is

compared" and in "the dénouement of the parables."[61] The peculiarity is not always

readily apparent as the cultural cues are often lost on contemporary readers. But a few

instances may illustrate the point. Consider, for example,

> the extravagance of the landlord in "The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen,"
>
> who after having sent his servants, sends his son. What Palestinian property
>
> owner living abroad would be foolish enough to act like this landlord? Or what
>
> can we say about the host in the "Parable of the Great Feast" who looks for
>
> substitute guests in the streets?... And in the "Parable of the Prodigal Son," does
>
> not the father overstep all bounds in greeting his son? Jeremias says, "love
>
> without limit," but also "shocking" conduct![62]

These symptoms of strangeness or excess tell us "something more" is going on,

safeguarding "the *openness* of the metaphorical process from the *closure* of the narrative

form."[63]

Ricoeur coordinates the parabolic feature of "extravagance" with similar elements

in other modes of biblical discourse, e.g., "transgression" (of the mythical framework) in

proclamatory or apocalyptic sayings and "intensification" (through paradox and

---

[59] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 115. On the realism of the parables see Dodd (21f), Jeremias (12), and Wilder (81).
[60] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 99.
[61] Ibid., 115.
[62] Ibid., 115. See 116f for more examples.
[63] Ibid., 99.

hyperbole) in proverbs.[64] In subtly but strategically outstripping their usual confines, these modes of religious discourse "point beyond their immediate signification toward the Wholly Other."[65] Their role "is to make us see a modality which logic"—to which we might also add: familiarity, "everydayness," literalism, or "the natural attitude"—"tends to pass over in silence, the logical *scandal*."[66] Illuminating the fault between what is expected from and what is executed in a particular form of discourse, a literary analysis—which Ricoeur considers the intermediary step between historical criticism and theological interpretation—gives us space to register the contraventions of an inherited form and grasp their symbolic import.[67]

Second, the *signs of metaphoricity internal to a pericope* tend to be overshadowed by the more obvious transfer of meaning from the broader literary and historical context (addressed below). These fainter indicators include quotations, allusions, structural and thematic parallels, postscripts, comparatives, questions, etc. This sort of thing is especially evident in the "parables of Kingdom" where the process of metaphorization is made explicit through the introductory phrase "the Kingdom of God *is like*."[68] But even in cases where invitations to metaphorize stand outside the original speech of Jesus, Ricoeur is right to say that these cues are not exactly "external" inasmuch as they attempt to "follow" the "direction of thought opened up by the text."[69] Such mechanisms initiate

---

[64] Ibid., 110f. Ricoeur says of Jesus' use of the apocalyptic sayings and the genre of *mašal*, "this form is simultaneously employed, transgressed, and upset by its new usage."

[65] Ibid., 108. Following Perrin, Ricoeur says these modes of discourse may be translated into one another, because they share a common horizon, and he thinks this ensures that religious language is not treated as purely or merely metaphorical (101).

[66] Ibid., 121.

[67] Ibid., 115.

[68] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 149.

[69] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 88, 92.

the "interplay of '*intertextuality*.'"[70] "Intertextuality," a term Ricoeur borrows from

semiotics, concerns "the work of meaning through which one text in referring to another

text both displaces this other text and receives from it an extension of meaning."[71] This

forms another "important corrective" to the self-enclosure of structuralist analysis (as

well as that of historical criticism) because it shows how the text "dynamizes" itself by

itself, how the text itself "makes meaning move, and gives rise to extensions and

transgressions."[72] This is in part because, as Daniel Boyarin says, every text "cannot but

record the traces of its contentions and doubling of earlier discourses."[73]

For example, in the Parable of the Sower (Mt. 13:1-23), the inclusion of a

prophetic quotation from Is. 6:9-10 (LXX) in vv. 14-15 bursts the boundaries of an

otherwise discrete pericope, opening it "in the direction of other texts." Ricoeur says of

this "'*foyer du foyer*'" ("text within the text"), it is "like '*l'écoute d'une autre voix*"

("listening to another voice"). In the mouth of Jesus, the *other* voice, that of Isaiah,

"governs the text from the place of another text" and "indirectly" suggests the presence of

"a 'prophetic ego.'"[74] This makes us ask about the identity of the speaker of the parable,

about the relationship between what is said and the one who says it. Likewise, when a

narrator intrudes through allusive postscripts or "'segment[s] outside the narrative' (*un*

---

[70] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 60. Emphasis added.
[71] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 148. Of course, this is not the only available definition of "intertextuality." According to Daniel Boyarin, intertextuality has three "accepted senses." First, it refers to the fact that "the text is always made up of a mosaic of conscious and unconscious citation of earlier discourse." Second, it means that texts are "dialogical in nature—contesting their own assertions as an essential part of the structure of their discourse." (Boyarin says, "the Bible is a preeminent example of such a text.") Third, "there are cultural codes…which both constrain and allow the production…of new texts within the culture." Boyarin's first sense is closest to Ricoeur's use here. The second insight, drawn from Mikhail Bakhtin's work, makes for an excellent point of entry in analyzing the parables, but is outside the scope of this study. His third sense is very much in keeping with what has been said about structuralism and narrative above. See Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 12.
[72] Ibid., 148.
[73] Boyarin, 14.
[74] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 60-61.

hors-récit) where the listener is questioned," this paradoxically serves to recast identities and roles by first muddling the fixed borders between them.[75] For example, in the Parable of the Tenants (or "Wicked Husbandmen"), "new roles…are created" for the characters inside and outside the parable when the narrator interjects, "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" (Mk. 12:9) and quotes Psalm 118:22-23, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes."[76] In implicating figures outside the narrative itself, we are told that the characters and their roles—master/servant, father/son—"possess a polysemy" and indeterminacy endowed by the specific configuration of the *whole* text. This, in turn, summons refiguration from the original audience and warrants recontextualization from new audiences. Thus both the question and the quotation suggest that we should concern ourselves with something more than a direct or literal reading of the story would otherwise admit. We are impelled to ask, is the owner of the vineyard "the Lord"? What sort of tenants are we? The text begins to assimilate, bracket off, and measure its hearers.

We encounter a similar dynamic at the end of the Parable of the Prodigal Son when, the father says, first to the servants (v. 24) and then to the older son (v. 32), "This my son [your brother] *was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found*." This is precisely what prompts Barth to remark that "if there is any point where we can ask whether there is not finally a direct as well as an indirect christological reference…it is in face of these two verses."[77] The possibility of a Christological reference is indicated here in a number of ways. First, the repetition of the words "lost and found" ensures that the parables of Luke 15 are taken as a set. Jesus offers the three stories of the lost sheep,

---

[75] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 155.
[76] Ibid., 155.
[77] Barth, *CD* IV/2, 24.

114

coins, and son in response to being questioned about his identification with sinners:

"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the

Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man *welcomes sinners and eats with*

them'" (Lk. 15:1-2).[78] In light of this preface, the parable must, on some level, narrate

Jesus' table fellowship with sinners—and must narrate that solidarity *as* a recovery. The

sequence "lost and found" is crowned with "rejoicing" (a key term in all three parables)

and in the third parable a banquet ensues—"let us eat and celebrate" (15:23). This verse

points back to the preface in vv. 1-2 and alludes to a major Lukan motif: the celebration

of the Kingdom of God through feasting with outcasts.[79] Second, the conclusion of Luke

15 foreshadows 19:10, where Jesus says to Zacchaeus, "The Son of Man came to seek

and save the lost."[80] This saying has been called "an aphoristic commentary on these

[three] parables [Luke 15] as well as the entire Gospel."[81] It resounds in the mouth of the

father, but as "another voice." It begs the question Barth poses: "to whom does this all

refer?"[82] Finally, the words "was dead and is alive again" of course bring to mind the

passion sequence—Jesus' own death and resurrection as well as the promise of life-out-

---

[78] In the context of the claim "Jesus is God," this set of parables in Luke 15 form a metaparable about the character of God that completely upsets human/religious assumptions. Contrary to the teaching against fellowship with sinners (e.g., Ps. 1:1; 119:63; Prov. 13:20; 14:7; 28:7), the message of Luke 15 is something like: "God is the one who associates with sinners" or "God's righteousness includes solidarity with the unrighteous." To "stand," "sit," and "eat" with the wicked often means "receive counsel" from them—to be contaminated by them. Eating with outcasts is emblematic of Jesus' prophetic mission to "bring good news to the poor…proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind," to which we are introduced in Luke 4:18 where, as a boy in the synagogue, Jesus was given the scroll to read from Isa. 61:1-2 (LXX)—another telling "*foyer du foyer*." On the symbolic significance of ritual impurity, Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[79] See Donahue, 143-44. Luke, even more than the other Gospels, highlights Jesus' table fellowship with the marginalized (e.g., 5:29; 7:33-34, 36-50; 15:1). We often find meals as the context of Jesus' teaching (e.g., 5:31-39; 7:36-50; 10:38-42; 11:37-52; 14:1-24; 22:14-38; 24:20-49). Meals are also an important theme in the parables, e.g., The Parable of the Great Supper (Lk. 14:16-24) that precedes the three parables in chapter 15.

[80] Compare to Mt. 9:13, where Jesus says, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

[81] Donahue, 150.

[82] Barth, *CD* IV/2, 24.

of-death which it effects and represents. Jesus' reference to himself as the one who seeks

and saves *the lost* aligns his role with that of God—for this sort of thing is "the Lord's

doing." And that designates the ("metaphorical" or "indirect") *who*. But *how*? It is

through Jesus' own lived fellowship and solidarity with "sinners"—which is to say,

through his contamination: in his becoming sin, *his* becoming prodigal. The coupling of

lost/found and dead/alive presents a veritable "Gospel within the Gospel."[83] (But I am

leaping ahead. I will revisit this important point in chapters three through six.)

To return to the methodological point, such internal signs of metaphoricity are

prompts or invitations to loosen, expand, and redefine roles, identities, and actions. They

enable a transfer of significance on a number of levels: from element to element inside

the text, from characters to various segments of an audience outside the text, from

elements within the parable to the speaker of the parable, and (as I am about to discuss

further) from the narrative parable to the larger narratives in which it is set. In short, the

inclusion of such freighted quotations and allusions "designates the meaning vector of the

entire metaphorical process."[84] It tells us "everyone is *more than* they seem to be."[85] It

tells us to look elsewhere for (*more*) significance.

Third, as we saw with Luke 15:24 and 32, these internal signs of metaphoricity—

postscripts, questions, commentaries, etc.—are frequently also instances of narratological

metalepsis that directly and indirectly evoke *the Gospel as the literary framework and

interpretive context the parable*, "anchoring" it "in the weft of the narrative that

---

[83] Donahue, 146.

[84] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 156.

[85] Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 114.

encompasses it."[86] "Networks of intersignifications" or levels of "crisscrossing" between texts are discernible not only 1) within a parable taken in its final form, but also 2) among two or more parables, 3) between the parables and Jesus' other sayings, 4) between the parables and the deeds of Jesus, and, most importantly, 5) between a parable and the Gospel narrative, namely the Passion sequence.[87] For our purposes, attention to this last level is most illuminating.

(Treatment of the parables as a corpus in connection with the sayings and deeds of Jesus cannot be central to my dissertation. I will be focusing instead on the nexus: Parable of the Prodigal Son–Gospel–Salvation History.[88] However, at points I will draw on other parables, sayings, and deeds of Jesus to interpret the Parable of the Prodigal Son, so it is still important to note that together, they "constitute a universe of meaning in which the symbolic potentialities of one contribute by means of their common context, to making the potentialities of another explicit."[89])

Ricoeur insists that acknowledging the interplay between parable and Gospel is a hermeneutical not a "historicizing" decision as it is based on the fact of intertextuality. It is in no way an arbitrary juxtaposition. Again, even if we assume that the last text results from a redactional process, in structuralist and literary approaches, "the question remains whether the *insertion* of the parable within the larger framework of the Gospel

---

[86] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 156. Distinct from the trope in ancient rhetoric, "narratological metalepsis" refers to the porosity between narrative levels and voices, for example between the story proper or *the told* (diegetic level) and the narration or *the telling* (extradiegetic level). Metalepsis is important to storytelling, and to composition and representation more generally, but is especially significant in embedded narratives such as the parables. See, for example, Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method.*
[87] I am combining and revising two different lists from "Biblical Hermeneutics" (102) and *Transfiguring the Sacred* (160).
[88] "Salvation history" is now a freighted term, but I employ it in the most basic sense: with reference to the big picture of God's saving acts in time—i.e., the basic shape of the creation—fall—redemption sequence.
[89] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 157.

contributes to its *meaning* as a parable."[90] In other words, the context is instrumental in

the "parabolization" of the narrative—its transformation from a univocal to a symbolic

and plurivocal story.[91] And this "process of 'intersignification'…remains itself contained

within the boundaries of 'textuality:' it interprets a text *through* another text *within*

another larger text."[92]

　　　The critical procedure impelling us to interpret a narrative as a parable or

metaphorized story is *narrative embedding* (Ivan Almeida). In fact, according to

Almeida, whom Ricoeur follows here, a "narrative-parable" can be defined as "a

narrative recounted by a personage of another narrative that encompasses it."[93] The

parables are "narratives within a narrative" or "narratives recounted by the principal

personage of an encompassing narrative."[94] It has often been noted that the Gospels are

comprised of smaller stories that "represent little Gospels in the larger one" such that

"one can speak of a single farthing of the Gospel (i.e., the widow's mite) as the key to

salvation." Certain parables, for example the Parable of the Prodigal Son, can be said to

"present the larger story in microcosm."[95] But, further, we must discern the way the

embedding of a primary narrative (or parable) in a secondary narrative (or Gospel)

creates a "symbolic interference" that requires the "mutual interpretation" of both.[96] That

is to say, in referring to other texts and stories, an individual parable does not *merely*

refer. The Parable of the Prodigal Son, for instance, does not simply point away from

itself toward the Christ and larger creation-fall-redemption story. Rather, the "relation of

---

[90] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 103.
[91] "Parabolization" is synonymous with "metaphorization" (See Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 161).
[92] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 102.
[93] Ivan Almeida, *L'Opérativité sémantique des récits paraboles: Sémiotique narrative et textuelle: Herméneutique du discours religieux* (Louvain: Peeters, 1978), 117.
[94] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 149.
[95] Amos Wilder, 58-59.
[96] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 105.

intersignification" instituted between the smaller and larger narrative generates "a *new signification*."[97] Through narrative embedding "isolated texts signify something *else*, something *more*."[98]

The details of this "something more" are determined by 1) the structural similarities between primary and secondary texts, and 2) the function of the narrator of the parables in larger narrative.[99] The vis-à-vis of narratives produces a "reverberation of the narrative-parable on the person who tells it."[100] Of course, it is because of the broader Gospel context that parables can even be "*ascribed* to [their] speaker as the one about whom the narrative of the second order…is speaking." It is this "identification of the speaker" that "allows us to speak of the parables as the parables 'of' Jesus."[101] Although it is an elementary point, without taking the Gospel as an interpretive framework, it is difficult if not impossible to say anything about the character of the speaker—and, in that case, the otherwise productive distance between narrator(s) and narrated is squandered.

It is "by the mediation of the Gospel form," that the parables (as well as the other sayings and deeds) of Jesus become connected "with the main topic of the Gospel, the *narrative of the Passion*."[102] Ricoeur says this proximity of parable and Passion is not simply one of "contiguity," rather

---

[97] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 163. Emphasis added.
[98] Ibid., 161. Ricoeur warns of two interpretive errors: 1) reading the primary narrative without reference to its embedded context and 2) failing to consider how the parable might inform the larger story. In their engagement with the Parable of the Prodigal Son Julian and Barth bypass both pitfalls, perhaps more thoroughly than anyone before them—and, in that sense, this is not just an occasion to appreciate the liberality and novelty of their interpretations, but rather, the fact that we have something to learn from them about how to neither over- nor under-interpret scripture.
[99] Ibid., 161, 164.
[100] Ibid., 164.
[101] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 104.
[102] Ibid., 104.

the allegorical interpretation, which most modern historians of the text are so

eager to disconnect from the parable *as such*, is motivated unavoidably by this

symbolic interplay between the narrative of the Passion and the parables. From

now on, the parables are not only the "parables of Jesus," but of the

"Crucified."[103]

That is why Barth cannot help asking about the Christological reference of the father's

words "this my son was dead and is alive."

As with Christ's incarnation (birth–death–ascension) and passion (crucifixion–

burial–resurrection), the prominent structural feature of the Parable of the Prodigal Son

(as well as Julian's and Barth's retellings of it) is the double movement of separation and

reunion: descent and ascent, fall and restoration, going-out and homecoming, *exitus* and

reditus, humiliation and exaltation, desolation and consolation, sacrifice and victory. At

the center of the prodigal son's trajectory lies a certain topography—the pit or pigsty,

Sheol, the grave[104]—which is definitive of the geographical and figurative place: the far

country (*regio longinque*)—the region of unlikeness (*regio dissimilitudinis*), the land of

wandering, the wilderness.[105] This distant land at the heart of the parable stands over

against and constantly evokes the lost paradisiacal home, origin and *telos* of the narrative

---

[103] Ibid., 105.

[104] The multivalence of this topos is evident in the language of Psalm 139:8, "If I go up to heaven, you are there…"—the second half of which is translated variously: "if I make my bed in the *depths*, you are there" (NIV), "…go down to the *grave*…" (NLT), "…make my bed in *sheol*…" (NASB, ERV), "…lay down with the *dead*…" (ISV), …"make my bed in *hell*…" (KJB).

[105] *Regio dissimilitudinis* is Augustine's term (borrowed from Plotinus), found in *Confessions* I.18.28 and VII.10.16. It indicates the post-lapsarian condition of having become "unlike" God. It is closely associated, especially in the later tradition (e.g., Bernard and William of Saint-Thierry), with the *regio longinqua* of Luke 15. See Mette B. Bruun, *Parables: Bernard of Clairvaux's Mapping of Spiritual Topography*, Volume 148 of Brill's Studies in Intellectual History (The Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 188. This locus is both literal (in Genesis: outside of the garden, in the parable: the foreign land) and metaphorical (in both cases: the condition of sin, of having lost/diminished the image of God). Distance means dissimilitude. In contrast, the nearness of Christ (in his going out) is initiated by and is effective because of his likeness to God as God.

circle. It is not primarily the conventional stock characters (father/son, master/servant) that give the story its force and significance; rather it is this double movement in connection with such a scripturally freighted setting. If we can say, "Jesus Christ *is* the prodigal son," it because Christ's character is manifested and determined by his traversing the same circuit—lost and found, dead and alive.[106] His self-identity and his identity with the younger son are indicated (differently) by the same narrative arc.[107] The fallen son/servant[108] "is" Adamic humanity "is" Christ by virtue of the downward/upward and outward/homeward sequence that is transferred and redoubled—belonging specially to the human in Adam, belonging to both the human and God in Christ, and, on Julian's and Barth's readings, belonging eternally to God in God's primordial love for the world in the second person of the Trinity.

The expansion and reassignment of identities initiated through the narrative embedding of the parables in the Gospels suggests "a *specific possibility* of interpretation," the possibility of reading "the proclamation of Jesus as 'the parable of God' *into* the proclamation by Jesus of God 'in parables.'"[109] Ricoeur says we may not set this possibility aside unless we want to disentangle the parables from the Gospel form

---

[106] To clarify, rather than an equation between the fictional figure and a real person (i.e., the prodigal son = the eternal Son), what we have here is more associative: the direction and destiny of the prodigal son mirrors that of the eternal Son (and vice versa). It is the *course* of the younger son (rather than, say, his motives, his "heart," etc.) that tells us something about the second person of the Trinity. The referent of the narrative outside of the narrative shares the same structure/movement *in a certain way*.

[107] Hans Frei's understanding of narrative identity is certainly helpful here. But at issue is not mainly how Jesus is identified *as himself* (i.e., in Frei's words, "is what he *does* uniquely, the way no one else does it") but how he is identified *as another* (in traversing the identical course, differently) (*Theology and Narrative*, 12). Narrating this identity-with-another is not simply a matter of the intention-action of the subject. Julian's and Barth's retellings suggest we know *who* because we know *where*.

[108] Throughout biblical, rabbinic, and medieval homiletic parables there is an ambiguous correspondence between the figures of the "son" and the "servant." On the one hand, they are sometimes interchangeable, or at least fluid—sometimes the servant is like a son to the master or the son works for the father like a beloved servant. On the other hand, some parables highlight the polarity of the roles of son (heir/free and wealthy) and servant (slave/dispossessed) (e.g., Luke 15). In the synoptic gospels, this tension is complicated by the intentional portrayal of Christ, Son of God, as the suffering servant of Israel.

[109] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 105.

into which they are woven. Sheerly on a textual basis then, i.e., on the basis of the fact of "intertextuality," Jesus rightly becomes the indirect or metaphorical referent of the parables.[110] Now the "of" becomes an "about." The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus begin to "reverberate" on the parables as well—and vice versa.[111] In the case of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, this mutual feedback is not simply the result of a narrative *parallel*. Rather, as Julian and Barth retell it, the story of Jesus intersects the story of the prodigal *perpendicularly*. The one who takes the place of the lost is the one who "came to seek and save the lost" (Lk. 19:10). "God retrieves us"—*in Jesus*.[112]

It may be that Julian and Barth in fact read more deeply *from* the text—more *ex*egetically—than do their staunch anti-allegorizing successors. They navigate a way forward between two problematic approaches to parable, both of which exclude reference to Jesus Christ: on the one hand, the notion that parables are simply the poetic vehicles for ethical universals or other abstract principles and, on the other hand, the idea that they merely "break open worldviews" without delivering any material content.[113] The revelation that takes place in Jesus' storytelling, in Wright's words, "is not the unveiling of an abstract truth *per se*, but the disclosure of a subversive and dangerous *message*."[114] In view of what has been said about the metaphorization of narrative (and, indeed, the parabolization of *identity*) through intertextuality, the sort of Christological or

---

[110] Ironically, taking Christ as the *metaphorical* referent gets mistaken for an "allegorical" claim precisely on allegorical grounds, that is, based on the expectation of a one-to-one correlation between figures. But, as I will show, Julian and Barth both resist a simple one-to-one identity between the son and the Son.

[111] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 150.

[112] Eberhard Jüngel, *God As the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One In the Dispute Between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darell Guder (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), 155-157.

[113] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 176. Wright is specifically critiquing Perrin here. He says treating the parables as non-cognitive interruptions (much as we discussed in section III on metaphor) "is explicitly a dehistoricized, deJudaized, existential reading, like that of Bultmann" (see n. 122).

[114] Ibid., 178. Emphasis added.

soteriological reading of the Parable of the Prodigal Son found in Julian and Barth cannot be set aside as a lapse into eisegesis, willful allegorizing, or presumptuous typologizing. The association of the story of Jesus with the story of the younger son is a genuine textual, or aesthetic, possibility—and perhaps even a requirement.

II. Vision and Parable: Toward a Phenomenology of Parable

There are multiple themes at work in the Parable of the Prodigal Son and in Julian's and Barth's retellings of it—love, sin, paternity, sibling rivalry, exile, alienation and self-discovery, inheritance, covetousness, grace, reconciliation, and so on. What my reading of the parable specifically brings to the fore is the tension between servanthood and heirship or, more precisely, between "seeing as" and "being seen as" a slave and as a child/heir.[115] I suggest that we approach the substance of the parable as retold by Julian and Barth through a cluster of phrases: "the vision of God," "the gaze of God," "being seen," and, more specifically, "being seen in Christ." For in the same way that the Psalmist who bemoans "my soul hath been long a sojourner" (119:5-6) counterposes "the place of my pilgrimage" (Ps. 118:54) with "all my ways are in thy sight" (v. 168), Julian and Barth show us that the thematic counterpoint to the younger son's peregrination, to

---

[115] It is important, in the interpretation of scripture, to remember that to say "son" is, first of all, to say "heir." This association is not one that we readily make today, but it underlies and determines, for example, the language of "Son of God" in both Testaments as well as "inheritance" in Paul's soteriology. How would we translate the son/heir vs. slave/non-heir dichotomy in social terms today? There is no replacement for what son/heir and slave meant in their historical and scriptural context, but we could pursue parallels along any number of lines: rich and poor, loved and unloved, citizen and non-citizen, privileged and disinherited, free and imprisoned, and so on. What will be important for my reading (particularly of Julian) is more basically the contrast between God's exaltation of fallen humanity over against fallen humanity's ongoing negative self-estimation. The usual dichotomies break down: not worthy vs. worthless as such (as in the younger son's mind) but deemed beloved and gifted by God (which is not to say "worthy") vs. worthless in one's own self-assessment (which is not to say in fact "worthless"). It is less a question of two states and more of two perspectives or, better, *perceptions*.

his lack of citizenship, family, and place, is not so much the lost home of his (earthly) father (a polar *topos*), but the horizonless scope of God's sight.[116] Within God's purview, the child of God is always foreseen and determined in love, as heir—to be gifted.[117]

For Julian and Barth, what the vision of God as *God's* vision of humanity means is mediated by the identification of Jesus Christ with the prodigal son or fallen servant figure. As we will see, the theme presents itself more immediately and vividly in Julian's narrative since the whole *exemplum* is interspersed with the language of showing, sight, appearance, regard, recognition and blindness. She recounts a vision "shown" to her about the way God sees Christ and humanity enclosed in Christ. This twofold "bodily" and "spiritual" sight (ch. 51) prepares her to "see" with "the eye of understanding" the kinship of God and the motherhood of the Trinity revealed in Christ—and this occupies much of her remaining reflection (ch. 52f).[118] Julian's text, in turn, serves as a

---

[116] I certainly agree with William Thompson's view that "the New Testament is to be read in a psalmodic manner" and that Christology is in some sense "Psalmody" (*The Struggle for Theology's Soul*, 44). I would add to this that—especially bearing in mind the various kinds of bifocality, dialectics, and the oscillations in standpoint found in Julian's and Barth's retellings—it is difficult to return to the Psalms without hearing deeps resonances with the narrative of the prodigal son and its mixture of perennial Judeo-Christian themes: divine sovereignty and faithfulness; the servanthood and heirship of humanity; the covenant broken, kept, renewed; the experience of suffering as the context as well as the contradiction of God's care; human sin, disobedience, and guilt; falling into "the pit" and wandering through the lands; judgment, punishment, and reprieve; election and promise; the polarities of human dignity and depravity; forgetfulness and gratitude; etc.—all of which are superscribed in the life and identity of Jesus Christ.

[117] Of course, there are scriptural passages exhorting us to be servants/slaves of God. However, a different distinction is usually being made in these cases. See, for example, Rm. 6:15-23. We also find a mixing of metaphors (enslaved *and* free/gifted), but it upsets ordinary conceptions of slavery. Even so, I would suggest that, because of the horror of its reality, slavery is not in fact the best metaphor for the divine/human relationship—and certainly not soteriologically speaking. Yet Paul "speaks in human terms," as he says, because of his audience's "natural limitations"—namely, the constriction of their imaginations by slavery to sin (v. 19).

[118] I am quoting from Elizabeth Spearing's English translation here, *Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Divine Love* (London: Penguin, 1998), 125.

performative heuristic, "folding" readers into "its purposes," and incorporating them into God's way of seeing—which, for Julian, is nothing less than salvific.[119]

Barth, like Julian, interweaves the metaphors of clothing, enclosure, and indwelling. For example, he describes "the human essence of Jesus Christ" as "a clothing which [God] does not put off…his temple which he does not leave…the form which he does not lose" (IV/2, 100). Similarly, throughout *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, Barth speaks of humankind as "hidden and enclosed and laid up…in [Christ]" (IV/1, 92). However, viewing *Church Dogmatics IV* as a whole, the force of this theme is most evident in its comprehensive structure. Methodologically, Barth's dialectical approach in the doctrine of reconciliation—where he describes Jesus Christ alternately as *Judge* and *Judged*, *Electing* and *Elected*, the Lord who is *Servant* and the Servant who is *Lord*— reflects and prompts an oscillation of viewpoint from "above" and "below."[120] Barth wants his audience to be able to see from a "standpoint" that, though naturally beyond every human perspective, has in fact come to the human in Christ. Rather than the human eye assuming a new vantage point, it is as if, quite unnaturally, a new vantage point has intervened between the human and the world.[121] This is not a matter of method (or *noesis*) only; the approach is shaped by the subject matter (*Sache*) of theology. In Jesus Christ we have two narratives, a twofold history, and one person, one event.[122] And what

---

[119] Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 131. According to Soskice, Julian's text, like Augustine's *De Trinitate*, "aims not just 'to tell about' something, but to recruit the reader as fellow traveler into the mystery of the love of God."

[120] On Barth's dialectical method, see Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1-20.

[121] This is a more specific instance of Barth's broader understanding of theology as God's view of humanity rather than humanity's view of God.

[122] Hence two further *real* dialectics (of relation): 1) of Adam and Christ (or of the old creation and the new) and 2) of God and humanity (of revelation: veiling and unveiling). See McCormack, *Critically Realistic*, 266-273. These dialectics, evident early on in the second edition to Barth's commentary on Romans, continue to surface in *CD* IV.

takes place in him fundamentally reshapes the way the human is seen, and is to be thought, before God. Supporting Barth's organization of IV/1-2, the prominence of the narrative form and the centrality of his exegesis of the parable help facilitate a bifocality befitting the topic.

This multifaceted theme of sight, seeing, or being seen, brought to the surface of the parable in Julian's and Barth's retellings of it, forms my first reason for venturing a phenomenological reading of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. It is worth revisiting the biblical parable with these specific indications from Julian and Barth in mind. A second reason is the assertion pervading modern and contemporary scholarship that parable somehow interrupts and restructures vision. How do the parables of Jesus so radically reshape the way we see things? This is a recurrent yet inchoate question in theories of parable. In what follows, I will explore these two reasons (points 1-2 below). Then, bringing them together, I will consider whether a "phenomenology of parable" is warranted, and what this might entail (point 3).[123]

1. Being-Seen: a Phenomenological Reading of Luke 15:11-32

The preceding discussion of intertextuality begins to account for the dynamic allusiveness and theological fecundity of a Christological treatment of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. It is meant to help explain the type of reading Julian and Barth offer and to provide support for its intelligibility. Their interpretations both reflect and expand the rich scriptural web of imagery encountered in the Lukan text. However, the

---

[123] In using this language (unpacked below), I am extending the precedent set by Kevin Hart in his essays, "The Manifestation of the Father" and "Phenomenology of the Christ," in *Kingdoms of God* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2014), 115-38 and 139-58, respectively.

intertextuality of the parable does not fully elucidate their retellings of it or, more fundamentally, the power of parable itself. If Ricoeur is right that plot is the bearer of the metaphoricity of the parable and the plot in question is that of Jesus Christ incarnate, crucified, dead, buried, and resurrected *pro nobis*, what remains is for us to consider what the narration and renarration of this same story through and alongside the parable has to do with the situation of the human before God. I have proposed that a thematic clue to the "something more" of the parable (its metaphoricity) is "the vision of God" understood as "God's gaze" (thought soteriologically). At it turns out this may also be a formal or methodological key, not only for understanding the work of parable but also for understanding the responses of Julian and Barth to this particular parable. I do not offer my subsequent engagement with the Lukan text as "exegesis" in the modern sense. Nor is it meant to counter the many rich readings this particular passage has yielded or undermine the polyvalence of the story in any way. Rather, my goal is twofold: 1) to draw out this overlooked theme, in order 2) to establish the textual groundwork for the unusual interpretations Barth and Julian offer us.

In Luke 15:11-32, we encounter the motif of seeing/being-seen most explicitly in the prodigal's return (v. 20). However, it implicitly structures the whole story. As the few key instances of direct speech and dialogue reveal (vv. 12, 17-19, 21-22, 29-32), the younger son's drama begins with and depends upon a certain perception he has of himself, his father, and the nature of their relationship which prompts him to set his sights elsewhere and escape his father's oversight. He relates to his father from within a legal economy of belonging, property, or right. The action begins with the younger son's demand, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me" (v. 12). In

asking for what is his portion of the οὐσία/βίος (property, livelihood, wealth), the younger son disobeys the command to honor one's father and mother (Ex. 20:12, Deut. 5:16). He also, and more forebodingly, symbolically expresses his wish that the father were dead, as customarily inheritance was bestowed only at that point. This reveals something about how the son sees the father. But just as tellingly it begins to show us how the son sees himself. This self-assertion in fact bespeaks his sense of subjection. He wants "to be free of"—what? He denigrates himself in impulsively taking less than his full inheritance and setting off for a "distant" (i.e., Gentile) land where he will not be seen squandering his existence.[124] Toward the beginning of the parable, as toward the end, the father's vision of his son serves as a counterpoint to the son's vision of himself and his father. Rather than holding his son or his property hostage, in granting him his request, the father treats his child as a free individual and—quite unnecessarily—as his legal equal.[125]

After the son depletes his funds and famine overtakes the country, he begins "to go without" (v. 14) and is forced to become another man's "indentured servant" tending a heard of pigs (v. 15).[126] This situation is emblematic not merely of poverty but, more crucially, of ritual impurity. The association with swine is a profound degradation.[127] The story's nadir and turning point consists in the son "coming to his senses" (v. 17), in a

---

[124] Hultgren, 74. "Far country" means "outside of Palestine," i.e., a place where it is impossible to keep kosher (cf. Lk. 19:10).

[125] That is to say, the father is not possessive of his property. He sees it as belonging equally to his sons. Legally, he would have had authority over what was his, but he does not assert his legal right, treating his sons *as if* they had full ownership even while he still lives.

[126] Hultgren, 75.

[127] For example, in the *Mishnah*, raising pigs is prohibited and in the *Babylonian Talmud*, people with pigs called "accursed" (Ibid., 75).

flash of recognition after a period of anaesthetization and blindness. He suddenly sees himself and his condition and, in a moment of intense hunger,[128] he says to himself,

> How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands" (vv. 17-19).[129]

Envisioning the abundance of the home he abandoned, he resolves to acknowledge his sin and openly endure its imagined consequences: his disownment as "son" and demotion to "servant." Here we see clearly that the younger son evaluates himself from within an economy of worth or merit—and, indeed, survival. If he ever saw himself as a "worthy" child, he certainly does not now. Regarding himself as, at best, "one of your hired servants" (ἕνα τῶν μισθίων σου), he situates himself among the day laborers, even lower than the household servants (παῖδες) and slaves (δοῦλοι).[130] He thus conceives of his father's good favor as something earned or, in his case—*spent*. His speech, then, is not a request for forgiveness, much less for restoration. While he professes himself a sinner, a degenerate, it is the sudden awareness of the pointlessness of his destitution that drives him home rather than the hope of relational reconciliation.

---

[128] In Bernard's allegorization of the parable, it is the figure of Fear (rather than hunger) that awakens the lost son and Hope that inspires the notion that he return to his father as a *mercenarius* (Lk. 15:17), which (corresponding to the second step in the ascent to God in *On Loving God*) is inferior to the filial love with which he began and which his father wishes to restore.

[129] It is noteworthy that in his speech the son distinguishes the father from God ("heaven"). Because of this, Eduard Schweizer says "the father is not simply an allegorical equivalent of God." Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Luke*, trans. David E. Green (Westminster: John Knox, 1984), 248.

[130] The latter had stable employment and were considered part of the household. Day laborers had the least reliable income and most tenuous connection to the master's family. For us today, this is somewhat counter intuitive, since day laborers would have had the "choice" to travel from region to region—a fact which we are accustomed to perceiving as "freedom." But, within this cultural framework, it is not mobility or transience but familial security which is desirable.

The father, however, is quite apparently *ready* for his son's arrival—vigilant, expectant, prepared, resolute. For "while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and had compassion for him" (ἔτι δὲ αὐτοῦ μακρὰν ἀπέχοντος εἶδεν αὐτὸν ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐσπλαγχνίσθη) (v. 20). There is much commentary on this word ἐσπλαγχνίσθη from σπλαγχνίζομαι.[131] It means: to have compassion or pity, to feel love, or, more viscerally, to be moved in one's intestines or womb.[132] The term has been called the "dramatic center" of the whole parable. As the central verb, it focuses us on "the father's compassionate nature."[133] But I wish to highlight the use of ἐσπλαγχνίσθη in conjunction with εἶδεν: the father *saw* his son and had compassion.[134] It is sometimes speculated that he must have spent his days squinting down the road, patiently waiting for the boy's return. How else would he happen to have seen him on this particular day and at such a distance? But this is a moment in which the extravagance of the story and its "realism" are disjointed, and in such a way that the disjuncture opens up the narrative and our reading of it in the direction of "something else, something more" (Ricoeur).

---

[131] The term occurs twelve times in the gospels (Mt. 9:36, 14:14, 15:32, 18:27, 20:34; Mk. 1:41; 6:34; 8:2; 9:22; and Lk. 7:13, 10:33, 15:20). See Helmut Koester, "σπλάγχνον," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament VII* (Grand Rapids: Eermands, 1995), 553-555. Except in the parables of the Good Samaritan, Unforgiving Servant, and the Prodigal Son, it is always applied to Jesus or God (namely in the context of healing) rather than other human characters. But in the parables it is still "used in reference to persons who reflect divine compassion" (Hultgren, 24).

[132] Arguably, this word specifically implies the love of a parent, especially of a mother. "Pity" (mentioned so often in Julian's text) and "compassion" (a pivotal term in the biblical parable) have Latin roots that are virtually synonymous and have a strong connection with motherhood in Hebrew: "raham"/compassion is of the same set of consonants as "rahem"/womb.

[133] Holgate, *Prodigality, Liberality, and Meanness*, 53. Holgate refers here to Menken's word study which shows that σπλαγχνίζομαι is the central aortist indicative verb of the 23 indicatives in the parable. See Menken, "Σπλαγχνίζομαι," 108.

[134] Regarding the gospel passages mentioned in n. 10, we also see the "saw and had compassion" link in Mt. 9:36 ("When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd"), Mt. 14:14 ("When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick"), Mk. 6:34 ("As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things), and Lk. 7:14 ("When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, 'Do not weep'"). In the other passages, seeing is implied through proximity. Jesus recognizes those around him, registers their needs, and something is viscerally evoked in him.

Parataxis gathers the action of the father into a single stream, "and while he was still at a distance his father saw him and was filled with compassion and having run he fell upon his neck and kissed him" (καὶ ἀναστὰς ἦλθεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ. ἔτι δὲ αὐτοῦ μακρὰν ἀπέχοντος εἶδεν αὐτὸν ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐσπλαγχνίσθη, καὶ δραμὼν ἐπέπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ κατεφίλησεν αὐτόν) (v. 20).[135] The father sees and pities and runs and embraces and kisses—all at once. His watchfulness, the readiness of his welcome, exceeds the ordinary. Likewise, the father's running toward his son would have been surprising, perhaps even alarming. The movement evokes Esau running to meet Jacob (Gen. 33:3): "it reveals strong emotion."[136] But, where for a younger man that might have been acceptable, it would have been considered undignified for an older man. As one commentator explains, "Fathers in a first-century Near Eastern environment do not run."[137] In every regard, the father's "liberality" is "atypical" of his context and defies expectations of the most favorable welcome a son might have received under the circumstances.[138] Yet this running should not necessarily be interpreted, as it so often is, as an act of forgiveness.[139] Rather, the point is that "the 'way' a man walks 'shows what he is'" (Sir. 19:30). Running reveals the father's humbleness. The lowliness of his movement corresponds to and counteracts the lowliness of the son's condition.

---

[135] Literal translation from the Greek. Re: "fell upon his neck" cf. Gen. 33:4, 45:14, 46:29; 3 Macc. 5:49; Acts 20:37.

[136] Eduard Schweizer, *Good News*, 249.

[137] Donahue, 15.

[138] Holgate's central thesis is that the "primary frame of reference" for the parable is "neither Jewish midrash nor the practices of the patristic church, but Greco-Roman culture (22). He compares the parable to other Greco-Roman narratives which explore the theme of "liberality" by contrasting prodigal and miser characters (26-38). The parable differs from these tales, however, in that "the father…acts quite differently from the way fathers with covetous sons were conventionally portrayed" (55). In very few cases does Greco-Roman literature include such an indulgent paternal response to sons.

[139] For "in the best circumstances," the father would offer words of forgiveness and "a review of expectations" for the son's "probation" (Hultgren, 78).

In the midst of their embrace, the son speaks directly for the third time. He recites the first part of the speech he prepared, but his father interrupts him at "I am no longer worthy to be called your son," before he can complete his plea, "make me one of your hired hands" (v. 21). The son's self-conception is immediately rejected and contradicted in the following verse, first, through the father's ordering the "slaves" (δοῦλοι), with whom the son is thereby contrasted, and then again by the father's inexplicably extravagant hospitality: "The father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate'" (vv. 22-23). Together these symbols (the robe, ring, and shoes) convey the son's "full restoration" as heir.[140] They designate his status as not only a free person but also as *master*.[141] This is so in the strongest sense. The younger son's reinstatement as heir implies that he is bound to inherit a "double portion," as was customarily the birthright of the firstborn (Dt. 21:17).[142] It is these extravagant gestures (vv. 20-23) that give rise to discussions about the prodigality of the *father*. His response is excessive, wasteful, heedless—both with respect to custom (compare to the treatment of a "rebellious son" in Dt. 21:18-21) and with respect to the remaining estate, which he has been given to steward. The restoration of such a son is a

---

[140] Hultgren, 79.

[141] The bestowing of the robe is evocative of several biblical narratives, for example: when Rebecca gives Esau's garments to Jacob (Gen. 27:15), when Pharaoh enrobes Joseph (Gen. 41:42), and Antiochus clothing Philip (1 Macc. 6:15). The ring is a sign of authority, usually given to elder son, which obviously alludes to the many stories of older and younger brothers and the reversal of inheritance or priority. The placing of shoes on someone's feet symbolizes a bestowal of freedom—for a slave lacks shoes—and when the slave places shoes on the son's feet, he acknowledges him as master (Jeremias, Marshall, Bailey, Donahue). See Hultgren, 79, n. 43.

[142] The implication calls to mind other mentions of a "double portion" in the Hebrew Bible, notably Isaiah 61:7.

genuine risk to his own wellbeing, as well as that of the rest of the household.[143] The

father is a bad steward.

On this reading, the first part of the parable does not narrate human repentance

and divine forgiveness, as is commonly thought, so much as two economies and their

attendant values: on the one hand, an economy of "just deserts" (*deservir*—to serve well,

to deserve) and, on the other hand, an economy of uncalculating love—love that always

already comes forward as an embrace *in advance* of deservedness. Both sons see

themselves according to the logic of the former; the father sees both sons according to the

logic of the latter. Thus while most interpretations of the parable contrast the two sons,

we should not pass over certain similarities.[144]

First, just as we find the younger son "in the fields" (εἰς τοὺς ἀγροὺς) (v. 15), so

too we find the elder son "in the field" (ἐν ἀγρῷ) (v. 25). While the younger son has

become the servant of a Gentile pig farmer, the older son has worked his father's land

alongside the family servants and hired hands. Consequently, it is frequently noted that

the elder son is a figure of loyalty and righteousness; dutifully, he remains at home,

serving his father's interests, fulfilling the commandments his brother breaks.[145] But, on

---

[143] This point is rarely made, but the element of "risk" strengthens the connection between this parable and that of the Lost Sheep. The son's gain is also a loss to the father and potentially to others as well. But it is a loss the father counts as gain because of his view of the son's "value."

[144] As Donahue says, "Just as the younger son felt that the way to restore the severed relationship was to become a servant, the older brother maintained it by acting as a servant. Between the dutiful son and the prodigal is a bond much deeper than is visible on the surface" (157).

[145] The older son's words "I have never disobeyed your command" evoke Deuteronomy 26:13 (LXX) and refer back to the Pharisees in the parable's audience (Lk. 15:1). If we were to map Jesus' life onto the parable's characters based purely on the parable's literary context (as a defense of his table fellowship with undesirables), it would look like this: younger son = the sinners with whom Jesus, elder son = the righteous religious leaders who criticize Jesus' association with sinners, the father = Jesus, who welcomes sinners of all kinds, including the self-righteous. It is an unfortunate extrapolation to read the father's embrace of the younger son (i.e., Jesus' embrace of sinners) as a rejection of the elder son (i.e., Jews, law-abiders, etc.). Although, just "as the elder brother is unable to rejoice in the restoration of one who is lost, so, too, the Pharisees and scribes grumble over the reception of 'sinners' by Jesus" (Hultgren, 82), the larger point of the parable is that those who reject the love of God/the father/Jesus do not therefore seal their own

the other hand, the text suggests that both sons are in fact afield, *peregre—per* (through), *ager* (field)—which is to say: wayward, lost, alien.

Second, mirroring the close succession of and contrast between son (v. 21) and slave (v. 22) in the first part of the parable, in the second part, the elder son comes out of the fields (v. 25) and summons one of the servants (τῶν παίδων) (v.26). While the son-servant role is culturally ambiguous, and in fact appears continuous in the sons' self-perceptions, the text subtly distinguishes son from servant.[146] Despite his apparent authority (as master of the servant he summons), the older son sees himself in much the same ways as his younger brother, as another subordinate in his father's household.

Third, this is made explicit in the fourth instance of direct speech in the parable when, confounded and angered by his brother's extravagant reception, the older son says to his father "Look! For so many years I have been *slaving away* for you and I have never neglected a command of yours" (v. 29).[147] He mistakenly complains to his father that he has never been recognized, saying, "you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends" (v. 29). In exclaiming, "Look!" and adding this "for you," the boy expresses distress that the father has not beheld his life, witnessed it, approved of it—even though he chose to live *before* him, unlike the younger one who

---

rejection. The younger son definitively rejects the father, but that has no (negative) bearing on the father's reception of him. In fact, it seems only to intensify the longing of the father for the son.

[146] The scriptural son-servant pairing works on a variety of levels. In certain rabbinical and New Testament parables as well as in comparable Greco-Roman stories, the two are analogous in terms of the *roles* they play, that is, as subordinates to a father-master figure (the *paterfamilias* of the Greco-Roman household codes). Further, throughout the Hebrew Bible, Israel is referred to as a "servant" as well as a "child" or "spouse." Similarly, Moses, whom Christ refigures, is called, quite honorably, "my servant Moses." Servant in this instance is something like a viceroy, one who represents, one who saves on behalf of another. The language of "servant" and "savior" often go hand-in-hand in this way. At the same time, throughout the Old and New Testaments servility is also contrasted with family relation to God. Resolving this tension is not my task. However, I will be playing up the latter emphasis on the opposition between the status of slaves and the status of heirs or, more specifically, the soteriological *transition* from servitude to inheritance (Gal. 4:7).

[147] The NRSV translates δουλεύω σοι "I serve you" but it is better rendered "I slave for you."

fled the father's gaze. It is as if the elder brother is asking, "Do you not see me?" He bemoans that he has not been rewarded for his many years of good service—not, I would think, because he originally expected as much, but because he can only interpret the banquet for his younger brother in those terms.[148] It seems he can make sense of the brother's welcome only within that framework, within an economy of rewards—*and punishments*. Punishment—in the brother's complaint, the notion is silently exerts itself; it is present as an absence, as an unfulfilled expectation (v. 30).

While the younger son addresses the father as "Father" (v. 21), the older son does not do so. Yet, in response, the father calls him "child" (τέκνον), an affectionate term of address.[149] Similarly, while the older son distances himself from his brother, referring to him as "this son of yours" (ὁ υἱός σου οὗτος) (v. 30), the father reminds him of their relation, calling the younger son "your brother" (ὁ ἀδελφός σου) (v. 32). In the face of the older son's anger at the injustice of celebrating his profligate brother's return, his father explains "Child, you are always with me and all that is mine is yours" (πάντα τὰ ἐμὰ σά ἐστιν) (v. 31). With these words the father affirms not only the sonship and heirship of his older child, but also his full and present ownership of the estate. The father's use of the word "all" (πάντα) recalls the younger son's request for "part" (μέρος) of the property (v. 12) and the fact that he accepted less than he would have received had he not departed so hastily (v. 13).[150] This suggests that the younger son does not in fact ask for too much ("all") but for too little ("part")—that his request is less *prodigal* than

---

[148] The older son's mention of "years" of labor suggests that he is measuring the time, that he is keeping count.

[149] Hultgren, 81.

[150] He took only what was quickly convertible to cash (v. 13)—an early step in the direction of self-ruin.

meager.[151] Even more so is this true of the elder son whose accusation of the father "you never *gave me*" (ἐμοὶ οὐδέποτε ἔδωκας) (v. 29) echoes the younger son's demand at the beginning of the story, "Father, *give me*" (πάτερ, δός μοι) (v. 12). The father might have replied, "you never asked," but instead he insists that everything already belongs to him (v. 31), which is to say, "you do not need to ask me." This is yet another sign that the father's view of the son—as "companion" and "co-owner"—is incommensurable with the son's view of himself—as "faithful slave."[152] In his actions and attitude, "The father shatters the self-identity of both sons" defined "in terms of servile obligations."[153]

My reading of the parable will stop short of the most Christologically evocative verses in which the son is deemed "dead and alive" and "lost and found" (vv. 24, 32). I already addressed these briefly in the first part of the chapter and will leave them to be illuminated further by Julian and Barth in subsequent chapters. For now, I will conclude that Luke's parable, in much the same way as Pauline theology (Gal. 4:4-7), opposes the condition of servility to that of being a child of God.[154] While the prodigal's story does indeed evoke other chosen younger sons in scripture—Jacob (Gen. 27:1-45), Joseph (Gen. 37-48), Gideon (Judg. 6:1-23), David (1 Sam. 16:6-13)—it is difficult to claim, from the text, that the welcome of the younger son implies the rejection of the elder son or that there is somehow a "polar reversal" of their destinies. Following the thread of "vision" through the parable illuminates a different polarity: not between the two sons but

---

[151] In this sense, we might play with the Greco-Roman motif of "covetousness" and its attendant prodigal/miser pairing, which Holgate analyzes. Instead of simply aligning the sons younger/prodigal and elder/miser, we have reason to reinterpret the younger son's liberality-gone-awry as a form of meagerness.

[152] Bernard B. Scott says, "Where the son saw himself as a faithful slave, the father views him as a *companion* ('always with me') and *co-owner* of the farm ('all that is mine is yours')." See Scott, *Hear then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 21.

[153] Donahue, 157.

[154] The distinction between servitude and family relation also pervades the words of the Hebrew prophets. For example, Hosea 2:6: "On that day, says the Lord, you will call me, 'My husband,' and no longer will you call me, 'My Baal' [my master]."

between two perspectives or attitudes—on the one hand, the self-assessment the sons share of themselves and, on the other, the loving-kindness of the father toward his children. Such a conclusion prepares us for the theological implications of Julian's and Barth's engagement with the parable, namely with respect to election and redemption.

2. Vision and Conversion Theories of Parable and Metaphor

The power of parable to grant "sight" is at once a claim and a question. It is a familiar assertion in parable scholarship, but one that is often left unexplained and sometimes deemed inexplicable. I propose that a phenomenological account of parable can shed light on the *how* of this dynamic. While the specific vocabulary of phenomenology was not available to Julian and not employed by Barth, I make use of it because 1) a number of its insights and procedures are already at work in their texts, and 2) I think it helps us grasp their meaning. Further, 3) discussions of parable and metaphor from the mid-20th century on are profoundly influenced by Heidegger and the idiom of phenomenology, if sometimes unwittingly. It is this last point that I wish to explore here.

New Testament scholarship is peppered with comments about the way parable and metaphor, as forms of poetic language, impart, suspend, expand, and revise human "vision."[155] For example, it is said to "arrest" its audience through "vividness" or "strangeness" (Dodd), serving as a kind of "shock tactic" (Jeremias) that facilitates "a new apprehension of reality" (Perrin) and "directly conveys a vision of what is signified"

---

[155] "Vision" is metaphorical for non- or supra-sensory perception or "understanding" (which is of course also metaphorical: to stand under). In my view, the dynamics of visual perception are a model for exploring and articulating the way knowledge and, more basically, encounter work. I think too much is made about whether a philosophical or religious tradition reduces perception to vision (Greek/Catholic) or hearing (Hebrew/Lutheran). Throughout scripture, the two are often used in conjunction, analogously, or even interchangeably (e.g., Mt. 13:13-18). This is also true of common parlance. I do not mean to deny that the metaphors one uses—whether based on sight or sound—constrain the horizons of one's imagination. But that is another issue.

(Wilder), making visible a "kinship" where "ordinary vision" would not otherwise perceive it and "revealing" things irreducible to "a clear language" (Ricoeur). Wilder underscores this "revelatory character of Jesus' parables," explaining parables as "revelatory images" or metaphors that provide "an image with a certain shock to the imagination which directly conveys vision of what is signified."[156] Commenting on Wilder's work, Kissinger says "a true metaphor or symbol is…a bearer of the reality to which it refers…Jesus' parables must be understood as bearers of his own vision by the powers of metaphor. Thus parables have the capacity of imparting to their hearers something of Jesus' vision of the power of God."[157] Similarly, Funk, like Crossan, classes Jesus as a "poet-parabler."[158] He says the words of a poet have

> the power to *provoke new sight*, freed from the weight of habituated usage. The term poet is of course used here in a root sense: not just as creator of verse, but as the creator of threshold language opening onto vistas forgotten or world aborning… In this sense, Moses was a poet, Socrates was a poet, Jesus was a poet.[159]

In later work, Funk describes the metaphorical work of parable as a "juxtaposition" that "produces an impact upon the imagination and induces a vision of that which cannot be conveyed by prosaic or discursive speech."[160] In other words, parables, like metaphors, are considered powerful not because they vividly represent what can be said otherwise but because they can "disclose for the first time."[161] As Wright puts it, parable "does not

---

[156] Wilder, 72.
[157] Kissinger, 168.
[158] Crossan, *In Parables*, 17.
[159] Funk, *Parables and Presence*, 17. Italics added.
[160] Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and The Word of God*, 136.
[161] Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 89. Metaphor is necessary when "something new is being talked about," to "name that which has no name" (Aristotle).

'teach,' in the sense of teaching abstract or timeless truth; it *acts*. It creates a new world."[162] Ricoeur similarly says of the metaphorical perception of resemblances, "this seeing" is also a "construction."[163] It unfolds new worlds; it generates the new in the world. There is agreement on this much. But *how*? How does parable induce vision, create anew, and overcome everyday myopia?

Ricoeur accounts for this in terms of the productive tension between the world of the text and the world that we know. For him, the metaphorical transfer is not just semantic; there is a crisscrossing, collision, or conflict between text and world such that the world—the world of our vision—is remade. Others depend upon the language of "focus."[164] The figurative word-usage of parable *refocuses*, becomes a lens for, the way we see something else.[165] It functions "like Alice's looking glass, through which one peers upon a strangely familiar world, where strangeness is suggested by the dislocation and rearrangement of the familiar." Parabolic language can force an indirect or slanted view.[166] As Ricoeur says, the disorientation (the indirection) is for the sake of reorientation. Thus Funk (much like Crossan) takes "the major parables" as "double paradigms or declensions of reality." While, "the first paradigm brings the logic of everydayness to the surface and confirms that logic as self-evident or self-validating," it "is shattered on the second, which disrupts the order of everydayness by reversing certainties or turning things upside down."[167] Parable interrupts and dismantles the

---

[162] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 130.
[163] Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 79.
[164] For example, in different ways: Max Black and Philip Wheelwright.
[165] Wheelwright and Owen Barfield, for instance, both appeal to the language of "focus" (Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God*, 138).
[166] Drawing on Heidegger's distinction, Funk says "the logic of predication looks *at* the phenomenon, the logic of the metaphor looks *through* it" or "*around* it"—i.e., circumspectively (Heidegger). Ibid., 145.
[167] Funk, *Parables and Presence*, 52.

"commonsight" that otherwise "tyrannizes" perception.[168] If parable blinds or shocks,

then, it is only to show.

These descriptions draw attention to the agency of poetic language, with its

capacity to liberate words from "the weight of habituated usage."[169] Parable as "poetic

metaphor," uncovers the blind spots of expectation and foreknowledge and calls the mind

into active participation. Thus, closely associated with its ability to grant "new sight," is

the active "agency" of parable. Perrin paraphrases Rudolf Bultmann's principle, "not

only does the interpreter interpret the text, but also the text interprets the interpreter."[170]

Similarly, following Fuchs, Funk claims, "the parable is not meant to *be* interpreted, but

to interpret."[171] In parable, "the hearer's judgment is precipitated."[172] There is an

inversion of the reading relationship; the reader is read. According to Robert Tannehill,

Jesus' sayings "do not invite contemplation of themselves as objects of value but require

us to contemplate our lives."[173] Crossan compares the parables to different kinds of glass:

some function as windows while others "are mirrors" that "consistently resist our

attempts to turn them into windows" and, through their "reflective opacity," reflect

"instead the faces of those who look upon them."[174] In other words, parable questions its

audience. Kissinger notes a pattern of proclamation and "paranesis" in the parables:

announcing that the Kingdom is at hand, they also ask for a *response* to that reality.[175]

Thus inasmuch as parable bears the reality to which it refers, Wilder says, "the hearer not

---

[168] Ibid., 13, 117.

[169] Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God*, 139.

[170] Perrin, 10. Rudolf Bultmann says, "in the interrogation of a text the interpreter must allow himself to be interrogated by the text, he must listen to its claims." See Perrin 11, n. 17.

[171] Funk, *Language*, 152.

[172] Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (Hendrickson Publishers, 1963), 191f. Quoted by Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God*, 144.

[173] Robert Tannehill, *Sword of His Mouth* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 17.

[174] Crossan, *Cliffs of Fall*, 26.

[175] Kissinger, 169.

only learns about that reality" but actually "participates in it" or—better—is "invaded by it."[176] So Sallie McFague points out that while it is possible to paraphrase the Parable of the Prodigal Son "in the theological assertion 'God's love knows no bounds,'" doing so would actually detract from "what the parable can do for our insight into such love." She says, "what *counts* here is not extricating an abstract concept but…letting the metaphor do its job."[177] The hearer must choose to "unfold with the story" and "be illumined by the metaphor."[178]

Allowing oneself to be interpreted, precipitated, invaded, unfolded by the text entails a kind of *conversion*. Attending the language of conversion is the image of a transition from blindness to sight.[179] De Lubac says, "the entire process of spiritual understanding is, in its principle, identical to the process of conversion. It is its *luminous* aspect."[180] The reader, according to Origen, "ought to pray that the veil be lifted from his heart…to be converted to the Lord; for 'the Lord is spirit;' that he may take away the veil of the letter and open up the light of the spirit…"[181] But this notion of meaning's veiling (by the letter) and unveiling (by the spirit) in scripture is a contentious one, particularly in parable scholarship. One must reckon with the difficult passage in Mark 4: 11-12, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God but for those outside everything is in parables; so that seeing they may indeed see but not perceive, and they may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again, and be forgiven" (Cf. Mt. 13:13-18).

---

[176] Wilder, 92
[177] Sallie McFague,15.
[178] Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God*, 162.
[179] Consider, as a few among many examples, Paul's ordeal on the way to Damascus, Augustine's language throughout *Confessions*, and the words of John Henry Newton's hymn "Amazing Grace:" "I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see." (The hymn is another famous autobiographical retelling of the prodigal's story.)
[180] De Lubac, *Scripture*, 21. Italics added.
[181] Quoted by de Lubac in *Medieval Exegesis* Vol. 3, 25, n. 49.

These words have led some to view the parables as strategies of exclusion, riddles intelligible only to the initiate.[182] On the other hand, others reject the view that parable is, on any level, "a veiled revelation."[183] But, between these two extremes, we might see the opacity or resistance of parabolic language not as a genuine obstruction, a method for fencing meaning, but as a paradoxical aid—like friction for wheels, gravity for structures, exercise for health. The help is *in* the hindrance. Parable as a "veiled revelation" is not an oxymoron, but an invitation to tarry, to pay attention.[184]

3. A Phenomenological Account of Parable

A number of features characteristic of phenomenology are readily apparent in the preceding survey of comments on vision, conversion, interpretation, and the parables. They make their way into recent parable scholarship following, among other routes, the path from Heidegger to Bultmann, Fuchs and Ebeling to later biblical scholars influenced by the New Hermeneutic, or from Heidegger and Levinas to Derrida and Ricoeur through deconstruction and poststructuralism. "Phenomenological hermeneutics" and the

---

[182] For example, while Eugene Peterson and a number of other theologians compare Jesus' parbolizing to Emily Dickinson's telling the truth "slant," literary critic, Helen Vendler, sharply contrasts them. She says, "Jesus' motive is esoteric, while Dickinson's is charitable… Her purpose is not to hide it from those preferring untruth, but rather to mediate it, out of kindness, to those as yet too weak to bear its glare"—"As Lightening to the Children eased / With explanation kind" (Dickinson, 1263). Quite astoundingly, Vendler suggests Jesus' intention is to keep "sinners" on the outside—a claim that runs counter to everything we know about Jesus' life and ministry. See Vendler, *Dickison: Selected Poems and Commentaries* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 431. Cf. Peterson, *Tell it Slant: A Conversation on the Language of Jesus in His Stories and Prayers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008)

[183] Dodd, 4. Dodd Says Mark 4:11-20 is not part of the primitive/Jesus tradition but derives from later apostolic teaching. That is how he explains what he calls the "confused" interpretation of the Parable of the Sower which follows it (4). Cf. Jülicher and others who take an illustrative view of parable.

[184] We might read Jesus' saying in Mark 4, then, according to what Ricoeur has said about the relationship between parables and proclamatory statements and proverbs (see section III). As the "woe to those…" prophecies, its negative indictment is not absolute but rather serves as a goad for stubborn hearts—much like Ezekiel's outrageous behavior or the element of the grotesque in Flannery O'Conner's short stories. O'Conner captures the essense of the "intensification" to which Ricoeur refers when she says, "to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind, you draw large and startling figures. See O'Conner, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux), 34.

"phenomenology of language" make way for "a phenomenology of parable." Setting modern genealogies aside, what is of interest is the way phenomenology as a branch of philosophy clarifies and provides language for certain dynamics and procedures already at work in other disciplines—in this case, in the writing, reading, and retelling of parable. In his essay on Luke 15:11-32, Kevin Hart argues that the parable is both "open to a phenomenological reading" and "is *itself* an example of phenomenology."[185] Much like Linnemann, Funk, Crossan, and others, Hart says the storytelling of Jesus "brackets everyday life and its worldly logic" and leads back to the "divine logic" of the kingdom.[186] That is how it "converts the gaze" and fosters the kind of "counter-experience" in which the reader is read, the interpreter interpreted.

Perduring beneath statements about the power of parable (sampled above) are traces of a technical language originating with Edmund Husserl.[187] The techniques of "bracketing" and "reduction" are especially prevalent. According to Husserl, we tend to "comport" ourselves in or direct ourselves to the world in what he calls "the natural attitude." The natural attitude consists of "extremely firm habits which have never been contravened."[188] Hence Heidegger's language of "everydayness" and the frequent references in phenomenologically-influenced theories of parable to "ordinary perception" and "commonsight." In our mundane or prephilosophical engagement with the world, Husserl says, "we are directed to the 'external world' in a natural manner" and involve ourselves in "positing" and "judging" things. We see things in a kind of predetermined or

---

[185] Hart, "The Manifestation of the Father," 131.
[186] Ibid., 132.
[187] What follows is by no means a summary of the philosophical tradition of phenomenology itself or on its own terms. I am merely drawing out some of the key phenomenological concepts underlying 20th c. accounts of parable in order to 1) display and 2) deepen their significance for reading the parables of Jesus.
[188] Husserl, "Phenomenology as Transcendental Philosophy," *The Essential Husserl: Basic Writings*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 66.

expectable (non-seeing) way—according to common use, need, or prescription. This is a freighted kind of thoughtlessness, for we have "intentional" relationships to everything in which we determine them "for us" in any number of ways. Our unexamined "intentionalities" serve as lenses for our perception of things and for that very reason can obscure or block access to "the thing itself."

According to Husserl, in order to enter "the whole phenomenological region" of thought, the natural attitude and all the intentionalities related to it must be bracketed or parenthesized.[189] He says they must be "put out of action" and "shut off from any judgment about spatiotemporal factual being."[190] This is not to deny or abolish them but to make them visible as factors in the perception and reception of things.[191] In other words, through a "method of parenthesizing" and "judgment-excluding" the relationship I have to an object is phenomenalized; it becomes something I can look at, contemplate— and even suspend.[192] This is part of the "turn to the phenomenological attitude." It requires what Husserl terms "*epochē*:" a suspension or "neutralization" of our naïve intentions. *Epochē* is the preparatory operation "necessary" for the "phenomenological reduction(s)" that render the world "prediscovered" and give access to the structures of consciousness as well as the essences of things.[193] "Reduction" is meant here in the sense of *reducere,* to lead or bring back.[194] In short, "reduction" indicates a "'leading away'

---

[189] Ibid., 67.
[190] Ibid., 65.
[191] Robert Sokolowski says, "From the philosophically reflective stance, we make the appearances thematic. We look *at* wht we normally look *through*." See Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), (50).
[192] Husserl, 65.
[193] Ibid., 67, 65.
[194] Sokolowski, 49.

from the natural targets of our concern" and a "leading back" to "transcendental consciousness."[195]

Transcendental consciousness is that which remains when "the whole world, including ourselves with all our cogitare, is excluded."[196] In other words, Husserl thinks "*consciousness has, in itself, a being of its own"* untouched by the practice of "exclusion."[197] This "phenomenological residuum" can be understood in the broadest sense of the Cartesian *cogito*: it includes not only "I think" but comprises "every 'I perceive, I remember, I phantasy, I judge, I feel, I desire, I will,' and thus all egoical mental processes which are at all similar to them."[198] It is that *something* that remains after bracketing the world—the "I" that experiences, that exists purely as a "dative of disclosure."[199] But something else remains as well. In assuming the phenomenological attitude, "the thing itself" is not discarded but uncovered by way of an "eideitic reduction," or an "intuition" of the *eidos* (essential form) of a thing that endures after all "phenomenological judgment-exclusions."[200] In Sokolowski's words, the eidetic reduction "is concerned not with the experiences and objects that I happen to have but with the eidetically necessary structures of such experiences and objects, as they would hold for any consciousness whatever."[201] The relationships and experiences that "I happen to have," by virtue of the concrete unfolding of my life in a particular time and

---

[195] Ibid., 49.
[196] Husserl, 66.
[197] Husserl writes, "Our concern is to seize upon and to universally characterize this own content of the cogitation in its *pure* ownness by excluding everything which does not lie in the cogitatio with respect to what the cogitation is in itself" (68).
[198] Ibid., 67-68.
[199] Sokolowski, 4. Inasmuch as consciousness is consciousness "of," as Husserl points out, it constitutes the transcendental ego as the "to whom" of the appearance of phenomena.
[200] Husserl, 66.
[201] Sokolowski, 184.

place, have already been suspended so as to lessen interference during reception or contemplation.

Husserl's phenomenology is expressly concerned with the "objectness of objects" or with "the things themselves." What we might call "phenomenological reading" is a more recent development.[202] Jesus' parabolic mode of speech "invites analysis from a phenomenological perspective." This perspective shows that a parable, like a painting, is not the kind of work that, according to Merleau-Ponty, "exists in itself like a thing, but [the kind of] work which reaches its viewer[s] and invites [them] to take up the gesture which it created and…to rejoin" it.[203] In the vein of parable interpretation influenced by phenomenology, little attention has been paid to the epistemological value of a Husserlian transcendental reduction or in an eidetic reduction of the text-as-object. Instead, the emphasis has fallen on the participatory nature of language, on parable as discourse that invites and includes it hearers into its own reality by interrupting and suspending one perspective or mode of perception for the sake of another. "The parable seizes a focal actuality" (consider, for example, the road home in the Parable of the

---

[202] Heidegger's reading of Paul is an early instance. See Martin Heidegger, "Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle," *Becoming Heidegger: On the Trail of His Early Occasional Writings, 1910-1927*, eds. Theodore Kisiel and Thomas Sheehan (Evanston: Norwestern University Press, 2007). Marion's more recent reading of Augustine is also a good example. See Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012). In between Heidegger and Marion, we could identify many phenomenological readings of biblical texts, particularly of the parables. However, they are not performed by "phenomenologists" *per se* and are not usually declared to be "phenomenological readings." But we could label the interpretations of Fuchs, Ebeling, Linnemann, Ricoeur, Crossan, and Funk, to name a few of the scholars addressed here, in this way.

[203] Funk, "Saying and Seeing: Phenomenology of Language and the New Testament," *Journal of Bible and Religion*, 34 (1966), 197-213, 203. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. R. C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 51. The influence of Heidegger is apparent in the insight that aesthetic works have a certain kind of being that differs from "ready-to-hand" objects. Heidegger elaborates Aristotle's "being is said in many ways" (*Physics I*, 185a21-26).

Prodigal Son) and "loosens it from its moorings in 'everydayness' (the 'received' world), in order to descry a new referential nexus."[204]

It is through Heidegger (via Bultmann) that phenomenological analysis is brought to bear on scripture and theology.[205] Heidegger shifts attention from objectness to "being itself" and attempts to disclose "the beingness of beings" as such—contributing to the broad existential (and religious) appeal of his philosophy. More recently, however, we have witnessed what has been called a "theological turn" in phenomenology.[206] In short, a number of phenomenologists have exposed their otherwise strictly immanent or atheistic methodology to theological, ethical, or transcendent concerns. This movement (or more precisely: its translation into English) is somewhat later than and therefore has not had a direct impact on the "literary-existentialist" strain of late 20th c. American parable scholarship discussed above. Yet it shares deep resonances with Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutics, distills many of the insights percolating in contemporary theories of parable, and helps clarify what might be involved in something like a phenomenology of parable.[207]

Three developments evident in the discourses of such figures as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Henry, Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Yves Lacoste, and others are particularly germane to my topic. First, there has been a shift in interest from phenomena,

---

[204] Funk, "Seeing and Saying," 204.

[205] Sokolowski notes that, "No one tried to interpret the New Testament in Husserlian categories, but Rudolf Bultmann tried to do so with the categories of Heidegger" (216). As we have pointed out, after Bultmann, phenomenological categories are broadly disseminated in New Testament studies and parable scholarship in particular through his students Fuchs and Ebeling and their students, such as Jüngel. Subsequently, American scholars such as Funk, Via, and Crossan inherit elements of a phenomenological approach to the parables.

[206] Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn": The French Debate,* trans. Bernard G. Prusak (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 24f, 29f.

[207] Ricoeur is one of the first French scholars to translate Husserl and introduce phenomenology into French philosophy. For an example of the similarity I'm suggesting, compare Marion on the saturated phenomenon with Ricoeur on the excess of revelation.

or the *what* of appearing, to phenomenality, or the *how* of appearing. Attention to the

phenomenality of *objects* has been stretched to include the dynamics of *phenomenality as*

such. This paves the way for discussion of the appearing of that which does not (visibly)

appear. Second, if Husserl (following Kant) seems to have refused this possibility, with

his restriction of "every originary presentive intuition"[208] to the limits of the subject's

intentional horizon, Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty begin expanding

phenomenology to include the "inapparent."[209] Heidegger does so in trying to uncover

the "emergence of presence" in the world, Merleau-Ponty in showing that "the visible is

never pure" but is always overflowing vision and "palpitating with invisibility."[210]

Following this breach in the enclosure of total immanence, we have a series of "third

reductions:" Henry's to "life," Marion's to "givenness," Lacoste's to "liturgy," and so on.

If Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty introduce the invisibility *of the visible*, their successors

make way for *the invisible as such*. Third, bound up with these first two developments is

an inversion of the dynamics of intentionality. While Husserl did much to undermine the

all-constituting ego of idealism, those after him intend to go further. The subject/active

and object/passive relationship is disturbed and reversed, the *cogito* attenuated. The self

becomes purely receptive, receiving even itself in and from encounter with another—

hence the move away from talk about the experience and gaze of the subject toward

---

[208] See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*: First book: *General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F. Kersten (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), §24, 44.

[209] In Heidegger's Zahringen Seminar in 1973, he concluded his reflections by calling for "a phenomenology of the inapparent"— sometimes translated "unapparent." See Martin Heidegger, *Four Seminars: Le Thor 1966, 1968, 1969, Zahringen 1973*, trans. Andrew Mitchell and Francois Raffoul (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 64ff.

[210] See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), ed. Claude Lefort; English trans., *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968). Janicaud comments on the beginning of this turn in Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger (24f, 29f).

phrases such as "counter-intentionality," "counter-experience," a "counter-gaze," and "being-seen."[211]

The theological resonances and openings should be fairly evident and cannot be considered here. My purpose is to connect these developments with the comments surveyed above concerning the way parable works on its hearers. Many scholars ask what a parable, for example the Parable of the Prodigal Son, is "intended to teach" and are "surprised at how difficult this is to establish." However, as Wright points out, "the better question would be: what is the parable intended to *do*?"[212] The Parable of the Prodigal Son illustrates but also *performs* the welcome of God.[213] It displays the servile self-perception native to both sons, not to commend (spiritually or morally) the one instead of the other, but to show both overcome, redefined, and exalted by the loving look of the father—and to invite the audience into that celebratory reception. In much the same way as the viewer of icons is incorporated into the visual surface through reverse perspective, the hearer of parable is drawn into the frame of the story, her expectations, biases, and relationships suspended, her view (of herself and her world) substituted for another. Yet the parabolic reduction of the hearer is not to a "transcendental onlooker" (Husserl), but rather to a "partaker" in the divine perspective or logic.[214] One might call this the "Kingdom." However, in the figure of Jesus Christ we have to do with "the kingdom in person" (αὐτοβασιλεία, Origen)—and not as the embodiment of an ideal, principle, ethic,

---

[211] Jean-Luc Marion, for example, describes the "subject" as a "dative of reception," a "to whom," or a *l'adonné* ("gifted" or "devoted one"), saying, "Not only does [the phenomenon] suspend the relations of subjectivity between the phenomenon and the I but it inverts them. I find myself constituted by the phenomenon, become its witness or beneficiary." See *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002)*, 251.

[212] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 101, n. 63.

[213] As Wright says, "the parables are not merely *theme*, they are also *performance*. They do not merely talk about the divine offer of mercy; they both make the offer, and defend Jesus' right to make it" (176).

[214] Kevin Hart, "Response to Panel on 'The Promise of Phenomenology and Scripture,'" paper presented at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Montreal, Canada, November 2009, 5.

place, mode of being, or even the divine will, but as a double embodiment of *God and sin*. Here the meaning of the identification Julian and Barth draw between the eternal Son and the prodigal son begins to emerge. The kingdom-in-person is the Word made flesh, God humiliated, the Lord as a Servant—that is what Barth calls the first side or problem of the doctrine of reconciliation. The other side of the same reality is the elevation of humankind, the Servant becomes Lord—this is what Julian would have us understand as God's story about humanity, the *real*, "substantial," ontologically definitive story.

In the parable, the way the father sees his sons leads back to the compassionate gaze of God. John of Damascus' description of God (θεός) as the one who sees (θεασθαι) and runs (θεειν) is strikingly well suited to the image of divine providence and love personified in the prodigal son's father.[215] In his humanly impossible vigilance, the father serves as the figure of an "omniseer," that is, as a figure for God, or to use Hagar's formulation: *El Roi* ("the God who sees").[216] Helmut Gollwitzer's identification of Christ with "the running out of the father to meet his son"—with his embrace, kiss, and welcome—proves to be an important step in the direction of the interpretations I will be examining in the succeeding chapters. Christ (the Son) is the going out of God (figured in the loving father) to fallen humankind (figured in the lost son/s). As we will see, this is so on a number of levels. The "son" becomes the "servant" so that the captives (slaves) might be seen, and might *see themselves*, as children and heirs. Bringing these points together, God's omni-seeing—judgment or providence—has the character, *definitively*, of

---

[215] John of Damascus, "Concerning What is Affirmed About God," *The Orthodox Faith IX*, *NPNF* 209, trans. Philip Schaff (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1898). He follows a certain the etymology of "the second name" of God (θεός), suggesting, as Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory the Great and many other patristic and Medieval theologians do, that θεός comes from θεασθαι, "to see," but also θεειν, "to run." (Plato similarly draws this association between "God" and "running" in *Cratylus*.)

[216] Hagar calls God "El Roi" in Gen. 16:13 when God reveals to her a well in the desert to save her and her son, Ishmael (which means "God hears"). She says in response, "You are the God who sees me… I have now seen the one who sees me."

a ready embrace, an advanced welcome, even for those who are "far off." This is that to which the parable "reduces." In Hart's words, what is disclosed in the parable is "divine phenomenality, not an object or being but the invisible coming forward of love itself."[217] The seeing and coming forward of God is not any kind of oversight, any kind of advance; it *is love*. Distinctly, steadfastly, and unequivocally, it has the character of compassion.

The story of both sons should give the reader the (counter-)experience of being beheld by this look, welcomed by this eager embrace. We might deem the ordinary relation of children to parents, specifically sons to fathers in 1st c. Palestine—as well as other immediate familial evocations of the parable for particular persons in other times and places—an instantiation of the "natural attitude" that is meant to be bracketed and excluded in Jesus' storytelling. A certain prejudgment about how sons and fathers or children and parents, ordinarily would behave under such circumstances is, to refer back to Alter's description of Hebrew story, the narrative "expectation" that is left in the lurch by the narrative "fulfillment" of *this* father behaving like *this*. Where, in the Husserlian *epochē*, intentionalities are only temporarily bracketed and effectively remain intact, in what we might call the "parabolic reduction" incited by Jesus' storytelling, the natural attitude is not simply suspended but transformed. When we are released from the grips of the parable, we are not meant to go on in the everyday as if nothing has happened. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the audience is included in the story in/as the sons who see themselves as slaves (of desire, duty, work, family, God)—and that self-perception is not meant to be momentarily parenthesized but thoroughly purged. It is a redemptive reduction, then—one that leads back both to reveal but also to remake.

---

[217] Hart, "The Manifestation of the Father," 135.

(At this point I am beginning to move seamlessly between literary analysis, à la Ricoeur and Alter, and phenomenology. There is no discrepancy here. As Hart says, "Philosophy—talk of *epochē* and reduction—is abstraction from literary practice."[218] The signs of metaphorization and intertextuality that open up the text to other voices are also the literary elements that instigate *epochē* and reduction, the exclusion of judgment, the conversion of the gaze, the counter-experience of being beheld, read, interpreted by the text.)

In Julian's and Barth's theologies, the vision of God is more than a literary theme or methodological strategy. As is so often said, *parable happens*. In retelling—or better: *reparabolizing*—the parable, Julian's and Barth's texts testify to and reenact the performativity of the biblical witness. We are compelled to speak not so much of performing a reduction on the story, but of the story performing a reduction on us. Although Julian and Barth do not use the phenomenological language of "parable as reduction," their concern is not merely what the story *says* but how it enables one to see, to sense, anew. To what does this parable reduce? We have noted the fact that, in New Testament scholarship, "the Kingdom of God" is typically evoked in connection with Jesus' parables—as their referent or qualifier, as what comes to speech in and as parable, as the logic they disclose. In the theological retellings under consideration, however, the parable of the prodigal son leads back to God's *love*—to the fatherly-motherly attitude of God toward humankind and the twofold and indissociable kinship and lordship of God in Christ.[219] We might see this as another way of speaking about the kingdom: the divine economy, as an economy of love. Yet the Parable of the Prodigal Son is not quite a

---

[218] Hart, "Phenomenology and Scripture," 5.
[219] In Julian's language, what is shown to her is divine "homeliness" (familiarity) and "courteousness" (lordliness) (§77).

"Parable of the Kingdom" and, for Julian and Barth, its referent is unmistakably Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Divine Love incarnate. They insist God is not at a distance from God's love: *God is God's love*. Their retellings imply that the parable may be followed back to God Godself. My argument is that the biblical text itself initiates Julian's shift of attention to the Trinity and the motherhood of God and sets the course for Barth's reflection on the relationship between the Son and the Father.[220]

Conclusion

To summarize, the preceding points concerning perception and sight (in the biblical parable as well as in the theories of parable and metaphor discussed), prepare us to recognize the theme "the vision of God" in Julian's and Barth's texts on at least three levels: first, as God's vision of humanity clothed and enclosed in Christ, the true child of God; second, in the way the texts force a certain bifocality upon the reader such that two testimonies, one human, the other divine—sin's "dome" and God's "dome" (Julian), from "below" and "above" (Barth)—are brought into view at once; and third, in the way the parable distills or reduces to the essential character of God as loving-kindness.

---

[220] These shifts in Julian's and Barth's may appear discontinuous with their treatments of the parable, however, they are not doctrinal moves away from the parable but rather into a deeper reflection on it.

CHAPTER THREE

JULIAN'S EXAMPLE OF THE LORD AND SERVANT
AND THE "DOME" OF GOD

Considered in its literary context, Julian's Example of the Lord and Servant is the center of her Long Text, narrative condensation of her theology, and hinge for her trinitarian turn. The example is posed as the answer to her previous doubt about how all could "be well" in light of sin and suffering. This fact has compelled at least one commentator to locate the example's interpretive in the prior revelation (Rev. 13), to read both together as a "teleological theodicy," and to elevate this as the primary theme of Julian's work.[1] The tension between the reality of human suffering and the reality of divine love is certainly a, if not the, keynote in Julian's thought.[2] However, on my reading, the meaning of Julian's example—as a counterexample to prevailing images of God's judgment—only fully unfolds in the succeeding chapters (ch. 52-63) where she expounds the motherhood and intra-trinitarian love of God on the basis of the loving look of the lord toward his servant (chapter four).

In preparation for that conclusion, in this chapter I offer a close reading of the Example of the Lord and Servant and Julian's interpretation of it (in ch. 51-52) in the context of the theology of the Long Text. After recounting the example in detail, in the second part of the chapter I highlight the important motif of "two domes" (judgments) introduced in Chapter 45 of *A Revelation*, which Julian dramatizes in her example.

---

[1] Baker, *Vision to Book*, 85, 89. Baker reads the Example of the Lord and Servant as a revision of the prevailing Augustinian interpretation of Genesis 3 and Romans 5. As opposed to Augustine's "etiological" theodicy, which is concerned with the origin of human sin, Julian focuses on the end: restoration.
[2] Though I think her struggle with the tension is best seen as an expression of Julian's love for God. It is this desire to love God well that leads her to see God's love properly.

I. The Example of the Lord and Servant

As I indicated in the introduction, this particular "showing" is also a masterfully crafted homiletic *exemplum*—simple, vivid, didactic. While "beholding" suggests "seeing" visually, it can also mean "contemplating" or reading. The example serves as a "didactic image" that brings the "book" of Jesus' body to life.[3] Julian beholds, reads, meditates upon her vision like a text—and offers it as a lesson to her "evencristen." As Colledge and Walsh argue, the way she does this demonstrates that she is "thoroughly acquainted with" and "adept in the practice of 'medieval exegesis,'" or what de Lubac refers to as "spiritual interpretation."[4] Julian indicates the vision is "shewed double" (51.3), on two levels, and that it must be read methodically according to "thre propertes" (line 63).[5] In other words, Julian interprets the "parable-revelation" (Colledge and Walsh) according to the various senses summed up in the traditional distich (addressed in the first chapter).[6] This suggests that it bears for her the status of scripture—one clue that it is a retelling of the biblical parable. The distinction in interpretive layers is progressively evident in Julian's interaction with the example.

1. The Example and Its Excess

In Chapter 50, just before recounting the Example of the Lord and Servant, Julian restates the conundrum that occupies her in Chapter 45:

---

[3] Colledge and Walsh modernize "behold," rendering it "contemplate" (132). According to McGill, "A.B.C." examples often represented "the book of Christ's body" as "a source of learning available for everyone to see" (83).

[4] Ibid., 132. On "spiritual interpretation," see the third section of the first chapter.

[5] Watson and Jenkins, 272.

[6] Colledge and Walsh think Julian is quite consciously working in this tradition and would have been familiar with Cassian's distich (134-139).

Goode lorde, I see the that thou arte very truth, and I know sothly [truly] that we

sin grevously all day and be mekille [very much] blamewurthy. And I may neither

leve the knowing of this sooth, nor I se not the shewing to us no manner of blame.

How may this be? (50.6-9)

In other words, Julian is unable to reconcile 1) her own experience of the

blameworthiness of sin, which coincides with "the comen teching of holy church" on the

matter, and 2) her vision in which God assigns no blame to humankind. These "two

contraries"—the reality of sin and the truth of God—fill her with dread because she is

"lefte in unknowing how he beholde us in our sinne" (50.16-17). She longs to know that

God does away with all our sin or at least "to see in God how he seeth it" (line 18).

i. The Example In Nuce

Chapter 51 begins, "And then oure curteyse lorde answered in shewing, full

mistely, by a wonderful example of a lorde that hath a servant." In the showing itself,

which spans lines 6-51, Julian beholds "in bodely liknesse" two figures, a lord and a

servant. She sees the servant standing before his seated master. He is sent out to do his

master's will, but he departs so eagerly and hastily that he immediately falls into a hollow

and is injured in such a way that he is unable to get up. In Julian's words,

The lorde sitthe solempnely in rest and in pees. The servant stondeth before his

lorde reverently, redy to do his lordes wille. The lorde loketh upon his servant full

lovely and sweetly, and meekly he sendeth him into a certaine place to do his will.

The servant not onely he goeth, but sodenly he sterteth and runneth in gret hast for

love to do his lordes wille. And anon [immediately] he falleth in a slade, and

taketh ful gret sore. And that he groneth and moneth and walloweth and writheth.

But he may not rise nor helpe himselfe by no manner of weye. (Lines 6-14)

As Julian sees it, the real crisis for the servant is that, stunned and weakened, he is unable to see the nearness of his lord and be comforted by him. She says,

And of all this, the most mischefe that I saw him in was failing of comfort. For he culde not turne his face to loke uppe on his loving lorde, which was to him full nere, in whom is full comfort. But as a man that was full febil and unwise [weak and foolish] for the time, he entended to [focused on] his feling and enduring in wo [suffering]. In which wo he suffered sevene gret paines. (Lines 15-19)

The pains the servant suffers because of his fall are enumerated here but not yet interpreted. Julian says he suffers: 1) soreness and bruising, 2) the full weight of his body, 3) weakness from the first two, 4) blindness and a feeling of being so stunned that he hardly recalls his love for the lord, 5) the possibility that he may never be able to get up, 6) the experience of being alone, and 7) the difficulty and terribleness of the place where he now lies (lines 20-27).[7] Of these pains, Julian calls the sixth—feeling alone—the most "mervelous," which is to say, the mot painful. This corresponds to her seeing "the most mischefe" in the servant's lack of comfort. The worst aspect of the situation is the apparent separation between servant and lord.

Julian begins to examine this picture for 1) any fault in the servant, and 2) whether the lord "shuld assigne in him only maner of blame" (lines 29-30). She says neither is to be found. First, there is no fault in the servant because, "only his good will

---

[7] The seven pains the servant suffers have no connection with the "seven deadly sins," which Hilton, for example, uses in *The Scale* to describe the fall's impact on the soul. See Watson and Jenkins (274). Rather, according to Colledge and Walsh, the pains allude to the description of the suffering servant in Isaiah (133).

and his gret desyer was cause of his falling. And he was as unlothful[8] [innoncent] and as

good inwardly as he was when he stode before his lorde, redy to do his wille" (lines 31-

33). Second, she sees no blame, for "his loveing lorde full tenderly beholdeth him." The

loving look of the lord has a "doubil chere [expression]." On the one hand, the

"outwarde" expression is one of "gret rewth and pitte." On the other hand, in his

"inwarde" and "more gostly" expression, Julian says "I saw him hyely enjoy [rejoice]"

that he will restore his servant "by his plentuous grace" (lines 34-38).[9]

This second aspect of the lord's gaze is clarified for Julian when "saide this

curtyse lorde in his mening [intent],"

> Lo, my beloved servant, what harme and disses [trouble] he hath had and taken in
>
> my servis for my love—yea, and for his good will! Is it not skille [reasonable] that
>
> I reward him his frey [fright] and his drede, his hurt and his maime, and all his
>
> wo? And not only this, but falleth it not to me to geve him a gifte that be better to
>
> him and more wurshipful [honorable] than his owne hele [well-being] shuld have
>
> bene? And els me thinketh I did him no grace [would not be doing right by him].
>
> (Lines 40-45)[10]

Julian reiterates that it "behoveth nedes to be" (i.e., is good and necessary that) the

"deerworthy [much-loved] servant…shulde be hyely and blissefully rewarded withoute

end, above all that he shulde have be if he had not fallen" (lines 46-49). The servant will

---

[8] "Unlothful" is translated variously as "innocent" and "unhateful," by Watson and Jenkins, and, at times, "ready" by Elizabeth Spearing.

[9] Julian repeatedly describes the double "chere" of the lord/father toward the servant/son as "compassionate" and "rejoicing." These are both central terms in the prodigal son's homecoming in Luke.

[10] This is one of the many passages in which it is clear that the identity of the figure in the example is overlain with that of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah.

be elevated above his initial condition and his suffering itself will be transformed into blessing (line 50).

The vision leaves off here, yet Julian's rumination on it continues for many years. She understands that it is the answer to the desire she expressed in Chapter 50 and earlier in Chapter 45 (discussed below) concerning how God sees humanity in its sin (line 55). Yet for a long time "full understanding" eludes her because, "in the servant that was shewed for Adam" she "sawe many diverse properteys that might by no manner be derecte [attributed] to single Adam" (lines 56-58). In other words, throughout the example, there are signs that the identity of the servant exceeds the identity of Adam. These signs provide clues to resolving the tension between the blameworthiness of sin and the blamelessness of God's gaze, by which Julian is so troubled.

ii. On the Excess of Identity and Julian's Interpretive Method

The confusing overflow of Adam's "properties and conditions" is part of the reason why Julian could not comment on the example earlier, when she recounts her other "showings" in the Short Text. She had not yet worked out the meaning of the doubleness of the servant. Sensing that the "misty example" contains further "privities [secrets]" (line 60), Julian grasps one level of the example ("gostly in bodely liknesse") long before she grasps the other ("more gostly withoute bodely liknes") (lines 3-4).[11] But because she only fully understands the initial sense when she understands the whole, there are already many traces of her second reading within the first.

Julian speaks of three "properties" which help ease her longing to see the problem of sin and blame resolved (line 63f). These three properties are three modes of learning

_____

[11] Interestingly, while the form of the *exemplum* is meant to clarify or illustrate, Julian receives this example more as a riddle. It is her retelling that clarifies it. See Watson and Jenkins, 276.

that overlay the two interpretive levels of the example just mentioned. The first and second modes correspond to Julian's first "gostly" interpretation and the third mode is connected to her second "more gostly" interpretation.[12] She speaks in trinitarian language of the properties or interpretive modes as "thre…so oned" and "thre as one" (lines 67-68, 69), which helps draw out their oblique correspondence with the Augustinian "psychological" trinity of "memory, reason, and will."[13] The first property is "the beginning of teching that I have understonde therein in the same time" (line 64). By this Julian seems to refer to the lesson itself, that is, the showing or example and what she was able to grasp in it at the time she received it. Typically, this first mode of learning is associated with the phrase "I saw" and involves recollection.[14] The second property is "the inwarde lerning that I have understode therin sithen" (line 65) and it concerns Julian's prolonged meditation on and reasoning through the details, especially those that were earlier "indefferent [meaningless]" to her "sight" (line 76). This second, inward teaching or learning is usually attended by the verb "understand."[15] The third property has to do with "alle the hole revelation, fro the beginning to the ende" (line 65-66) and seems to imply comprehensive or systematic reflection on and synthesis of either an individual revelation or *A Revelation* as a whole.

Here Julian makes explicit the hermeneutical process that is already implied throughout *A Revelation*. Recollection represents the text or vision "literally," by the letter or image. Meditation yields a scriptural interpretation, which in the case of the

---

[12] The relationship between the three properties and two levels is unclear. Watson and Jenkins delineate the first (lines 73-102), second (lines 103-227), and third (lines 228f). However, Julian freely slides between them, particularly the first two. This makes sense, since she has already indicated that "theyse thre [propertes] be so oned…that I can not nor may departe them" (lines 67-68).
[13] Watson and Jenkins, 276, notes on lines 68-69.
[14] Ibid., 276, note on line 64.
[15] Ibid., 276, note on line 65.

example, viewed as a retelling of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, proceeds typologically. Finally, as we will see, the deepest or, in Julian's language: "highest," meaning of the example is discovered when she sees that it concerns not only the relationship between God and humanity, but also relations within the Trinity and the inclusion of humanity in the divine life. In other words, with these qualifications (concerning multiple "properties") Julian alerts us to the fact that the scene that plays out is not to be taken on the surface, as having to do with a fictional lord and a servant; it is a metaphorized narrative or parable.[16] It requires a process of uncovering, of sitting-with, of moving up into fuller meaning. This is a distinctly intertextual process. Julian reads and rereads the text of her "showing" canonically. Although the "story-revelation" is initially presented visually, almost cinematically, it must be beheld again and again, "gostly" and *more gostly*," deeper and deeper still (Ps. 42:7).

2. The Example Shown Double

Julian's first mode of insight into the example she calls "gostly in bodely liknesse." It simply extends what she was already able to glean from the example based on her initial encounter with it. Having received "teching inwardly" that she should "take hede to alle the propertes and the condetions that were shewed in the example" (line 74-75), she tells us that the lord who sits in rest and peace is God and the servant standing before him is "shewed for" Adam" (line 85-86).[17] Here in the servant "one man was

---

[16] See chapter two on parables as "metaphorized narratives." A strictly literal reading of the story is of course possible and might have been misleading for Julian's contemporary audience since, as Watson and Jenkins point out, there are many similarities between Julian's example and contemporary Romances (282). Julian may be borrowing from this form, but to tell a different kind of story.
[17] In the following analysis, Julian examines the example according a list of topics that are commonly found in rhetorical manuals (e.g., Cicero's *De inventione* 1.24). She follows the sequence "Who, Where,

shewed at that time" (line 87), which is to say, although she earlier said the servant like

the lord is "shewed double" (line 3), she is only discussing the first manner in which he is

shown here. The purpose of the example on this level is to clarify "how God beholdeth

alle manne and his falling. For in the sighte of God alle man is one man, and one man is

alle man" (lines 87-88)—a clear allusion to 2 Corinthians 15:22 and Romans 5:12. As

such, it is one of the first signals that the identity of the Adamic servant exceeds what can

be said of fallen humanity. Describing all humankind in Adam, Julian reiterates that the

main problem with the servant's falling is in being "turned fro the beholding of his lorde"

so that he could not see that "our lorde commende and aprove…nor he seeth truly what

himselfe is in the sight of his loving lord" (lines 91-95). Julian understands from this that

"only paine blameth and ponisheth" while "oure curteyse lorde comforteth and socurreth

[helps]" (lines 99-100). So this is the initial answer to her question concerning "what

manner [God] beholdeth us in oure sinne" (99).[18]

The text proceeds with a detailed description of the individual elements of the

story—the lord's location and manner of sitting, the servant's location and manner of

standing, their clothing, the colors, eyes, and so on (see lines 103-110)—all of which

reinforce Julian's perception of the lord's "lovely [loving] loking" as gracious, generous,

merciful, and full of compassion (line 109). She states again that the loving gaze of the

lord is a "semely medelur [fitting mixture]" of 1) "rewth and pitte"—which she specifies

is "erthly"—and 2) "joy and blisse"—which she calls "hevenly" (lines 112-114).

Interestingly, at this moment Julian switches, without notice, from "lord/e" to "fader,"

saying the father has compassion ("rewth and pitte") inasmuch as Adam falls, but rejoices

---

What" or, under the topic "Who," "Name, Nature, Manner of Life" and "Expression, Clothing, Gesture,
Action." See Watson and Jenkins, 276, notes on lines 79-84.
[18] In Julian's diagnosis, the problem is not so much the "pains" of the fall, but the blindness to grace.

(has "joy and blisse") in "the falling of his deerwurthy son, which is even with the fader" (lines 114-116). This signals an implicit shift toward the second interpretation of the parable, although the precise doubleness of the servant and the lord suddenly broached here is only drawn out later on. She is clearly beginning to speak of more than the relationship between God and humanity through the figures of the lord and servant. In referring to the "deerwurthy son…even with [equal to] the fader," Julian evokes a Chalcedonian affirmation of the Son's divinity and co-equality with the Father.

i. Julian's Spiritual Interpretation of the Example

In her second interpretation of the example—"more gostly withoute bodely liknes" (line 5)—the lord/father is clearly identified with the first person of the Trinity and the servant/son with Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity. While Julian has been addressing the servant's misstep as a fall into sin and suffering (Gen. 3), now the "falling" of the eternal Son is connected with salvation (Phil. 2). The "merciful beholding" of God (the Father) is manifest in the Son—who "descended downe with Adam into helle, with which continuant pitte Adam was kepte fro endlesse deth" (lines 117-118)—as well as the Spirit—in whom "this mercy and pitte dwelleth with mankinde into the time that we come uppe into heven" (118-119). Julian tacitly appropriates the threefold loving gaze of God thus: the sending of the servant (creating and begetting) to the Father, the falling of the servant into the slade (redeeming) to the Son, and the comforting presence (sustaining) to the Spirit (not yet explicitly mentioned in ch. 51).

As the example illustrates, this salvific and sustaining look is precisely what the fallen servant/son cannot see. Like Athanasius, Anselm, and others before her, Julian speaks of fallenness as "blindness" to "oure fader, God, as he is." Wondering why God

became human, she reasons that, because of human blindness, God must appear "homely [familiar]" (line 122).[19] At the same time, Julian clarifies "we ought to know and beleve that the fader is not man," as if to explain that the incarnation belongs properly to the Son. Rather, she says the lord's appearance as a man sitting on the barren earth indicates that the fallen servant (Adam) is now "not alle semely [not entirely fitting] to serve of that noble office" (line 124). Yet God's "owne citte" and "dwelling place" is meant to be the human soul (line 125). So the "kinde fader wolde adight him non other place [would not prepare for himself another place] but to sit upon the erth, abiding mankinde…till what time by his grace his deerwurthy sonne had brought againe his citte into the nobil fairhede [state of noble beauty] with his harde traveyle."[20] In other words, the lord/father is shown in a barren place because he is waiting patiently for his dwelling among humans to be restored by his son. By the physical details of the lord/father—his billowing blue clothing and darkness of his eyes and face—Julian understands him to be generous and steadfast in the effort to restore the fallen servant/son "by his plentuous grace" (line 136).

Having already initiated the critical shift toward the example's second level of significance (in line 114), Julian proceeds to take note of other hints that the identity of the servant is Jesus Christ, a possibility that slowly comes into view. (These clues only culminate in clear statement about incarnation and redemption in line 181 and following.) For example, she notes the double meaning of the servant's appearance, outward and inward (lines 139f). Outwardly, she sees he is simply clothed, "as a laborer which was

---

[19] Elizabeth Spearing translates "homelyhed" as "familiarity." As A. C. Spearing notes, in Julian's emphasis on the "homeliness" of God, "*homely*" retains "the full emotional resonance of *home* itself, including friendliness, familiarity, intimacy, without the pejorative associations it has in American English" ("Introduction," xix).
[20] According to Watson and Jenkins, this language is alludes to medieval romance narratives of "lost kingdoms." As they point out, the irony in Julian employing this familiar framework is that she is arguing *the* kingdom has never actually been lost (280, note to lines 128-129).

disposed to traveyle" (line 140). What is curious to Julian is that although he is just being sent out for the first time, he already looks like he has been traveling or travailing (the play on this word is suggestive throughout *A Revelation*).[21] She later recalls this image of Christ on earth as if he "were on pilgrimage" (81.5). He is clad in

> a whit kirtel [white shift], singel [thin], olde, and alle defauted [deficient], dyed
> with swete [stained with sweat] of his body, straite fitting [close-fitting] to him
> and shorte [i.e., a peasant's garment]…seeming as it shuld sone be worne uppe
> [worn out], redy to be ragged and rent [torn up for rags]. (51.142-144)

In other words, he is poor, dirty, weary, and unfit for service. Because the servant's clothing is so "unseemly" (line 145), Julian is again confounded by the lord's loving gaze. As if in response to this picture, Julian abruptly turns to the inward meaning of the servant, saying, "in him was shewed a ground of love" and this love between lord and the servant is "even [equal]" (line 147-148).[22]

Of course, the language "ground of love" and "even" [co-equal] implies divinity. Similarly, her reference immediately following this to "the *wisdom* of the servant" (line 149) points to the incarnate Wisdom of God and the figure of the "Suffering Servant" of God (Is. 40-55).[23] But rather than conceptually clarify these points, Julian simply retells the basic trajectory of the example in brief—but also in a different way (lines 149-156). She says the servant's (inward) wisdom is precisely that he perceives the one thing he could do that would bring worship to the lord, so "for love, having no regarde to himselfe

---

[21] According to Soskice, "In Julian's Middle English, 'travails,' carries three meanings: Christ labours with us (gives birth), sorrows with us (shares our travails), and, in doing both, 'travels' with us on our way" (*The Kindness of God*, 151).

[22] The resonance with Augustine's account of the Trinity is pronounced here. The Spirit is the love that obtains between the Father and the Son.

[23] In Colledge and Walsh's analysis, this is Julian's most important scriptural allusion (133). The example narrates the identity of the "Suffering Servant" in Isaiah. Cf. James Walsh, *The Revelations of Divine Love of Julian of Norwich* (London: Burns & Oakes, 1961), 31-32.

nor to nothing that might fall of him, hastely deed sterte and runne at the sending of his

lorde to do that thing" (lines 150-152). The lines read as a gloss on Philippians 2:6-8,

concerning Christ taking the form of a servant, although the significance of the allusion is

not made plain yet.[24] Here Julian simultaneously refers back to line 116 where she

describes the second aspect of the father's gaze: not compassion for the fall of Adam but

rejoicing over the fall of his beloved Son. Although she has achieved fuller insight into

the example at the time of its retelling, she slowly and circuitously leads the reader along

the same path she pursued for many years as she pieced together clues to the "how much

more" of the servant's identity.

Suddenly Julian shares what it is the servant realizes he can do for his lord: "Ther

was a tresoure in the erth which the lorde loved" (line 157).[25] Strangely, she understands

it as "a mete [food] which is lovesom [appetizing] and plesing to the lorde" (lines 158-

159). Perplexing details abound: there is no food or drink to serve the lord, the lord has

only one servant (when a real lord would have had many), and the servant is being sent

out "that he shuld do the grettest labour and the hardest traveyle that is: he shuld be a

gardener" (159-165). So the servant is sent out to toil, till, plant, water, harvest, prepare,

and present the lord with his treasure (lines 164-169). A bizarre description (if the

treasure is humankind), it nevertheless contains allusions that shed light on this amalgam

of imagery. First, the reference to treasure is connected with the kingdom of God (Matt.

13:44). Second, the careful preparation of abundant food and drink suggests feasting—a

---

[24] Paul says Jesus Christ, "though he was in the form of God, / did not regard equality with God / as something to be exploited, / but emptied himself, / taking the form of a slave, / being born in human likeness. / And being found in human form, / he humbled himself / and became obedient to the point of death— / even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:6-8).

[25] This must have been a particularly confusing detail in the example that Julian held back because it did not make sense on the surface apart from her secondary (Christological) interpretation.

prevalent theme in the parables of Jesus (especially in Luke, seen in the Parable of the Prodigal Son and its context in 15:1-2) as well as throughout scripture—for the eschatological union of God and humankind. Third, the specification of the laborer as a *gardener* reminds us of John 20:15, where Mary Magdalene meets the resurrected Christ but mistakes him for the gardener. Julian's description of the gardener and his "travail" evokes many scriptural passages concerning the life giving and sustaining work of God.[26]

These charged details begin to coalesce as Julian wonders "fro whens the servant came." The lord has everything within him, wanting nothing; and there is nothing without (outside) him. Who is this servant, then, who can give something so important to such a lord—and where did he come from? Suddenly Julian articulates for the first time the precise doubleness she has been glimpsing all along. She states,

> In the servant is comprehended the seconde person of the trinite, and in the servant is comprehended Adam: that is to sey, all men. And therfore when I sey "the sonne," it meneth the godhed, which is even with the fader; and when I sey "the servant," it meneth Cristes manhode, which is rightful Adam. (Lines 179-182)

Julian conveys, for the first time, that the servant is also a figure for Jesus Christ—and not just in his humanity but as the second person of the Trinity. In saying so, she is also careful to distinguish Christ's humanity (outward/servant) from his divinity (inward/son), specifying that his "manhode" includes Adam or "alle man" (lines 182, 187) while he is equal to the father in his "godhed."

---

[26] For example: "For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground" (Is. 44:3); "You will be like a well-watered garden" (Is. 58:11); "whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn. 4:14); "neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Cor. 3:7); etc. See also Gen. 2:5, which suggests that tilling the land is part of humanity's vocation.

That the figure of the fallen servant stands for 1) Adam/humankind, 2) the second person of the Trinity, and 3) their union is indicated in the story different ways. For example, Julian says the "nerehed [nearness]" of the servant to the Lord signifies that he is the son (divine) while the son's standing on "the left side" that he is Adam (human) (lines 182-184). Similarly, "by the wisdom and the goodnesse that was in the servant"—mentioned above (concerning line 147f)—"is understond Goddes son" (line 192). But "by the pore clothing as a laborer…is understonde the manhode and Adam, with alle the mischefe and febilnesse that foloweth" (lines 193-194). His white tunic is human flesh; its narrowness is poverty; its shortness is servitude and work; its worn appearance is because of Adam; its flaws and sweatiness show human travail (lines 207-210). But for all these distinctions, Julian insists, in the servant, "oure good lorde shewed his owne son and Adam but one man" (line 195).

ii. A Soteriological Reading

The preceding passage (line 179f) depends upon the Pauline identity of Adam and Christ as corresponding representatives of humanity (Rom. 5) as well as on the logic of Hebrews 2:9-17.[27] In view of this, Julian's example is automatically a *soteriological* example. This sheds light on why so many of the details surrounding the servant "might

---

[27] Hebrews 2:9-17 reads, "But we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, 'I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.' And again, 'I will put my trust in him.' And again, 'Here am I and the children whom God has given me.' Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested."

by no manner be derecte [attributed] to single Adam" (line 58). His overflow of identity

is accounted for in the fact that he doubles as the Son of God. As we will see, this, in

turn, explains the twofold expression of the lord (God)—his compassion (toward human

suffering) and his good-pleasure (in the work of the Son). Summarizing Christ's

incarnation and passion, Julian goes on to clarify,

> by Adam I understond alle man. Adam fell fro life to deth: into the slade of this
>
> wreched worlde, and after that into hell. Goddes son fell with Adam into the slade
>
> of the maidens wombe, which was the fairest doughter of Adam—and that for to
>
> excuse Adam from blame in heven and in erth—and mightily he feched him out
>
> of hell. (Lines 186-191)

Again paraphrasing the Christological hymn of Philippians 2, she continues,

> Notwithstonding that he is God, even with the fader as anenst [with respect to] the
>
> godhead, but in his forseeing purpos—that he woulde be man to save man in
>
> fulfilling the will of his fader—so he stode before his fader as a servant, wilfully
>
> taking upon him alle oure charge [burden]. And than he sterte full redely at the
>
> faders will, and anon he fell full lowe in the maidens wombe, having no regarde
>
> to himselfe ne to his harde paines. (Lines 202-207)

On this level, the "readiness" of the servant belongs to Christ, not Adam, and his hard

pains are salvific, not merely the consequence of sin. His desire, his "ghostly thirst," is to

recover the lost treasure on earth. Julian now sees in the example that in the servant the

Son stands before the Father saying, "Lo, my dere fader, I stonde before the in Adams

kirtel, alle redy to starte and to runne. I wolde be in erth to don thy worshippe, whan it is

thy will to send me. How long shall I desyer it?" (lines 211-213).[28] The picture is evocative of Hebrews 2 where, having been "made lower than the angels" (i.e., human) (v. 9), Jesus says, "Here am I and the children whom God has given me" (v. 13)—which is to say: here I am holding the children of God within my own flesh. Julian reiterates this oneness: "all is the manhode of Crist… Jhesu is all that shall be saved, and all that shall be saved is Jhesu" (lines 218, 225-226). She alludes to such passages as 1 Corinthians 12:12 and Colossians 1:18 when she explains, "For he is the heed, and we be his membris" (lines 218-219). It is apparent, then, that the example illustrates not only the fall but also salvation, incarnation, and the hypostatic union.

The predominant biblical image of salvation to which Julian appeals is of mutual inclusion or enclosure: all humanity re-membered in Christ's body as he "puts on" the flesh. Thus with years of reflecting on and reasoning with the example, Julian's questions concerning how God sees humanity in its sin and how to reconcile the blamelessness of God's gaze with the blameworthiness of fallen humanity find their answer. For "oure good lorde Jhesu [hath] taken upon him all oure blame, and therfore oure fader may nor will no more blame assigne to us than to his owne derwurthy son" (lines 197-199). In becoming incarnate, the second person of the Trinity absorbs the blame of fallenness and assumes the burden that properly belongs to Adam in order to restore all humankind in the eyes of God. That he does this expresses God's pity and gives God great joy. It also brings resolution to the disjunction between Julian's experience of the ugliness of sin and the "loveliness" of the divine gaze: God sees all in and through Christ, who has eagerly assumed "alle our charge."

---

[28] Julian alludes to Mark 13:32: "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Although she is referring to the incarnation at first, by the end of the passage she has shifted her attention to the judgment for which the righteous wait.

3. An Eternal "Oning" in the Trinity

Julian specifically requests understanding concerning the way God sees humankind. However, when she sees Adam in Christ and all humanity in Adam, she also sees Christ's humanity situated within the Trinity. For, as she says, "ther was right noght [nothing at all] betwen the godhede and the manhede" (line 208). It seems Julian receives more insight than she actually requests. What is shown in the example is more than an earthly atonement. After identifying the servant/son with the second person of the Trinity, Julian says, in good Augustinian fashion, "The lorde is God the father; the servant is the sonne Jesu Crist; the holy gost is the even love which is in them both" (line 184-185). She goes on to say, "When Adam felle, Goddes sonne fell. For the rightful oning which was made in heven, Goddes sonne might not be seperath from Adam" (lines 185-186). To claim that Christ falls into Mary's womb *because* Adam falls into sin is one thing; that God's Son falls *when* Adam falls, quite another. This is a crucial insight I will address more fully in the next chapter. What is important here is that Julian comes to understand that the servant's descent into the slade stands for both fall and restoration. In one sense, then, the "doubleness" of the servant simply involves a plurality of reference (Adam, humankind, the individual "soul," Christ). The whole story can be narrated differently with respect to each referent. It can retell the fall as well as kenosis and incarnation. This is a doubleness of *interpretive* layers. But in another sense, the doubleness of the servant depends upon an interweaving of the referents such that the various interpretive strata of the example overlap to produce another story. In fact, it is only as Julian sees them entwined that the different aspects of the servant reveal the meaning of the example. The

two trajectories do not simply parallel one another; they are integrally related. Christ's fall intercepts and redirects Adam's fall. Thus it is not so much that the one narrative tells two stories—concerning the fall, on the one hand, and the incarnation, on the other. The manner in which Julian's interpretation unfolds suggests that these two events must be understood, on another level, as one event, concerning one person (Jesus Christ), taking place at once—*in the Trinity*.

In the tension between the servant's tired appearance and the newness of his mission, Julian beholds Christ as the servant, clad in weary human flesh, standing before the God the father, prior to his incarnation in time. She writes,

> Thus was he the servant, before his coming into erth, stonding redy before the
>
> father in purpos, till what time he wolde sende him to do the wurshipful deede by
>
> which mankinde was brought again into heven. (Lines 200-202)

In other words, Julian becomes witness to an intra-trinitarian event that precedes and governs the "solution" of a temporal atonement. Here she speaks rather modestly of this being a reality "in purpose;" similarly, elsewhere she similarly emphasizes God's "intent" and "foresight." But this "rightful oning which was made in heven" (line 186) takes on more serious dimensions as Julian concludes her second understanding of the example and turns to the third "property" in order to venture an interpretation of the whole.

Julian speaks of the example as "the beginning of an A.B.C.," or a lesson.[29] She revisits, for the third time, the many "previties" (line 231) of the narrative-image, excavating meaning as she goes. Here the Passion narrative more clearly emerges. While

---

[29] As I pointed out in the introduction, collections of sermonic or theological stories used by preachers were also called an "A.B.C." Julian's example is of the type one would find in this sort of collection. An "A.B.C." is also a grammar text, which would have been used for literact. In such cases, the letters were often connected with biblical stories in order to aid memory as well as to facilitate moral education.

she has already indicated that the example concerns the incarnation, she now reinterprets the details in light of the pattern of the Gospel story, drawing out a threefold decent.

She speaks of the fall into Mary's womb succeeded by a further fall into death and finally a going down into hell. Beginning with Christ's conception and incarnation, Julian says the sitting of the father or lord "betokeneth the godhede," God dwelling in rest and peace. The standing of the servant to the left indicates the servant's travail and his unworthiness as fallen. The start or origin belongs to his divinity, while the running or labor belongs to his humanity. The beginning, or leaping up, is from the father, "into the maidens wombe," and the falling is "into the taking of oure kinde." The "grete sore" born in this fall "was oure flesh" (lines 232-239). Julian returns for a third time to the meaning of the servant's attire, reevaluating them in the context of her visions of Christ's crowning, scourging, and crucifixion (lines 246-253).

Christ's death marks an abrupt shift from self-divestment to achievement. At the nadir of his descent, Julian speaks of Christ "yelding the soule into the faders hand, with alle mankinde for whome he was sent" (lines 252-253). She goes on to say "the body ley in the grave till Easter morrow" yet "fro that time he ley never more" (lines 256-257). In both cases Christ's "yielding" is twofold: loss and gain, surrender and victory. At this point we encounter one of several mentions of the harrowing of hell in Julian's text. She says, the servant "beganne furst to show his might" and "raised uppe the gret root oute of the depe depnesse, which rightfully was knit to him in hey heven" (lines 254-256). "Great root" may be a play on words that means "mighty company" and it could also allude to "the root of Jesse," associated with the redeemer throughout the Bible.[30] The latter sense

---

[30] Watson and Jenkins think "root" is a variant of "rout" which refers to a crowd, here those who were kept in hell until Christ's harrowing (286).

can, of course, encompass the former—and this seems to be the case in the following lines, where Julian speaks of the "foule dedly flesh, that Goddes son toke upone him" (in Adam's "kirtle") being cleansed, restored and made "fair and richer than was the clothing which I saw on the fader" (lines 259-262).[31] Christ is the root of that renewed humanity; in him is included a great multitude, symbolized by the "largenesse" of the "garments of salvation" (Is. 61:10) (line 296).

Thus, having discerned in the imagery of her example Christ's multi-tiered descent (incarnation, suffering, death, hell), Julian sees—as if without interval—the servant again before the lord, but now richly adorned and clothed. No longer standing to the left, he sits on the right hand of the father—an unmistakable allusion to, or perhaps translation of, the Apostle's Creed, as well as Hebrew 8:1.[32] Julian sees the servant standing with "a crowne upon his hed of precious richenes" (line 269), and this image evokes her initial vision of Christ, crowned with thorns (in Revelation One). She continues, "it was shewede that 'we be his crowne,'" referring back to Revelation Nine (ch. 21-23), which "was shewed for the joy and the blisse of the passion" (23.10-11).[33] There Julian speaks of "alle the trinite wrought [works or at work] in the passion of Crist" (23.24) and mentions the trinitarian rejoicing over the treasure "wonne…with his hard traveyle" (51.243-244). "Which crowne"—humanity restored—"is the faders joy, the

---

[31] Aelred of Rievaulx has a similar vision of Christ in Adam's tunic (Colledge and Walsh, 16).

[32] In *The Lay Folks Mass Book*, this part of the creed is translated, "Now syttus he on his fadur righte honed in maieste." Heb. 8:1 similarly speaks of a high priest set on the right hand of the majestic throne in heaven. See Colledge and Walsh, 544, and *The Lay Folks Mass Book: the manner of hearing mass, with rubrics and devotions for the people, in four texts, and offices in English according to the use of York, from manuscripts of the Xth to the XVth century*, ed. T. F. Simmons (London: N. Trubner & Co., 1879).

[33] In Chapter 23, Julian speaks of the various ways the passion is shown to her. Four of those modes concern Christ's suffering on earth (and can be identified with the first gaze of the lord, which is marked by pity or compassion and is directed toward fallen humanity). The fifth mode concerns the joy and bliss of the passion, which is invisible on earth but experienced in heaven (This can be identified with the second divine gaze, which is marked by enjoyment and constitutes an insight into intra-trinitarian relations).

sonnes wurshippe, the holy gostes liking, and endlesse, mervelous blisse to alle that be in

heven" (lines 270-271). Humankind is the crown that on earth is seen in thorns and, *at the

same time*, seen in heaven as precious jewels (the great treasure for which the gardener in

the example labors).[34] The full descent of the servant translates—immediately—into the

raising up of humankind. The standing to the right (exaltation) includes and depends

upon the standing to the left (humiliation). They are two sides of the same event.

In a rare application of nuptial imagery, Julian writes, "Now is the spouse,

Goddes son, in pees with his loved wife, which is the fair maiden of endlesse joy" (lines

276-278). But, characteristically, she quickly shifts and blends metaphors, saying, "Now

sitteth the son, very God and very man, in his citte in rest and in pees"—and, concluding

on a trinitarian note—"which his fader dighte to him of endlesse purpose, and the fader in

the son, and the holy gost in the fader and in the son" (lines 279-280). Both images, of

bride and city, capture the motif of "wonning" or being-at-home-with that pervades

Julian's Christology.[35] Here, as throughout her theology, the Trinity is seen to include

humanity and, in some sense, for Julian, this is eternally so.

II. Two "Domes"

In Chapter 45 Julian develops an important distinction that becomes "fundamental

to the argument of Chapters 45-63" and the whole of Revelation 14, especially the logic

of her example.[36] She writes, "God demeth [assesses or judges] us upon oure kindely

---

[34] The mixture of metaphors is logically unsustainable but suits the highly textured and many-layered nature of the reality Julian is attempting to narrate in this one example. Humankind is Christ, his garments, his crown (of thorns and jewels), as well as the treasure on earth or the "mete" (food) for which the lord longs and for which he toils.

[35] "Wonning" can mean dwelling, and some manuscripts render it that way, but, according to Watson and Jenkins, its more specific sense is "being at home" (40).

[36] Ibid., 258.

[created] substance…and this dome is of his rightfulhede [justice]." But "man demeth upon oure changeable sensualite, which semeth now one and now another" and is "medeled [mixed]" (45.1-4). Here as throughout her writing on this matter, Julian's words evoke Isaiah 55:8, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord," and 1 Samuel 16:7, "the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." As Julian later writes, "For otherwise is the beholding of God, and otherwise is the beholding of man" (52.58).

"Deme" is a legal term that, in Chapter 8, Julian applies to divine judgment of the soul at death. "Dome" bears related connotations and, in the passage above (45.1-4), it is explicitly connected to God's justice or righteousness. The modern English "doom" comes from "dome," and "doomsday" from "domesday," or Judgment Day. Similarly, "deming" is related to "daming," which, as a verb, can mean "condemning" or simply "judging," and, as a noun, "judgment" or "perception."[37] Julian's use of these terms stands out against the backdrop of the Judgment Day preaching and imagery of her contemporaries.[38] Consider, for example, the extremely popular mid-fourteenth century English poem, *The Pricke of Conscience*, which reads,

> Alle sal haf [shall have] gret drede that day,
>
> bath gude and ille [both the good and the evil], als we here clerks [clerics] say.
>
> Thar sal be nouther aungel na man [neither angel nor man]
>
> That they ne sal [shall not] tremble for dred than [then].[39]

---

[37] Ibid., 164, 396.

[38] Such discourses reflect a certain kind of reaction to outbreaks of the plague, which struck England five times between 1348 and 1406. Julian's text implicitly counters the common message of clerics and monks that the plague is divine punishment (Hunt, *The Trinity*, 99).

[39] Quoted by Watson and Jenkins, 224.

The tone of these lines, prevalent in Julian's day, is antithetical to her own writing on the "dome" or judgment of God. Her use of "dome" is suggestive of the active or constructive role of judgment plays in perception. It implies the interrelatedness of seeing and assessing without reducing judgment to its negative function.

The way God sees is best exemplified not in the just (punishing) verdict of a judge but in the loving gaze of a kind father (ch. 51). Watson and Jenkins suggest that, for Julian, "God is like a merciful judge."[40] This may be so to a certain extent: *if* figured as a "judge," God is gracious not harsh. However, it is noteworthy that Julian's use of this language actually begins to divest God's "judgment" of its juridical associations. The terms "justice" and "mercy" are depolarized and recontextualized—moved out of the court of law (with its logic of either/or) into a domestic sphere.[41] In Julian's text, words like "judgment," "justice," and "righteousness" are not primarily deployed as legal terms, though that association is prominent in the tradition she inherits. Instead, we find that, in her writing, they typically collocate with "kindness," "mercy, grace," and "love"—not oppositionally but definitionally.

In what follows, I first summarize Julian's description of the two kinds of deeming in Chapter 45. Then, I examine the way this interfaces with claims about "substance," "sensuality," and the "godly will," focusing primarily on Chapters 37, 53, and 57. Finally, I consider whether and how the two "domes" and other related contraries are reconciled for Julian. I conclude that Julian is not simply describing the disjunction between church teaching on damnation and her own experience. Rather, she is setting up

---

[40] Ibid., 164. I agree with Baker that, "in Julian's parable the lord regards the servant as a compassionate healer rather than a just judge" (99).

[41] This is one of the many instances in which Julian's language "spins against the way it drives," to borrow Herman Melville's line (see "The Conflict of Convictions," 1860-61).

her readers to receive her example as an authoritative counterexample to prevailing accounts of salvation and atonement.[42]

1. The "Fair Dome" of God and the "Medeled" Deeming of Humanity

The first of the two "domes" Julian discusses in Chapter 45 is said to proceed from God's "own high endlesse love" (lines 11-12). She describes it as "fair," "swete," and "delectable" (lines 12, 14). For her, it defines the whole revelation in which, she says, "I saw him assigne to us no maner of blame" (line 13). By "alle the fair revelation," Julian appears to have more in view than Revelation 14 only. In Revelation 13 she has already asserted, "as we be ponished here with sorow and with penance, we shall be rewarded in heven by the curtesse love of oure lord God almighty… For he beholdeth sinne as sorow and paines to his lovers, in whom he assigneth no blame for love" (39.29-30). Further, interweaving the accounts of her showings, forming an almost constant refrain, are descriptions of God's kind "chere [expression]" as glad, thankful, loving, piteous, compassionate, rejoicing and so on. This suggests that Julian already has the answer to the question she is asking—or, more precisely, the answer itself has generated the question. Julian's concern is not so much *how* God sees fallen humanity but *how it can be that* God sees humans in this way (in the way revealed to her).

The root of Julian's uncertainty appears to be twofold: 1) she experiences herself (and humankind) as unworthy, and 2) her experience is consonant with the teaching she has received from the church. Together these sources define the other "dome" Julian

---

[42] As discussed in the introduction, the narrative form of medieval *exempla* is inherently linked to the production of cultural and ecclesial authority. See Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*. According to Colledge and Walsh, "The constant tradition, in the East as in the West, is that shame and sorrow for sin are linked with a proper fear of the divine retribution" (128-129). It is this conception of God and the divine-human relationship that Julian undercuts.

describes in Chapter 45. The definitive feature of this second "dome" seems to be that it is of mixed quality and, namely, that it includes wrath. Julian says of human self-judgment, "somtime it is good and esy, and somtime it is hard and grevous" (45.4-5). Inasmuch as human judgment is "good and esy" it participates in God's justice: "it longeth to the rightfulhede [righteousness, justice]" (line 6).[43] But inasmuch as it is "hard and grevous," Julian says, "oure good lorde Jhesu reformeth it by mercy and grace thorow [through or by] vertu of his blessed passion" (lines 7-8). This contrast between the two forms of judgment alludes back to the lines, "For [the workes of our lord] be fulle good, and *alle* his domes [judgments] be esy and swete [easy and sweet], and to gret ees [comfort] bringe the soule that is turned fro the beholding of the *blind deming of man* into the fair, swete deming of our lorde God" (11.27-29, emphasis added). Human judgment is reckoned blind—which is to say: sinful—whereas God sees truly, and thus looks kindly upon the soul.[44] Throughout *A Revelation*, "mercy" and "grace" refer to God's dealings with sin; they reform and reeducate the harsh deeming of fallen humans. Hence Julian's later claim that "I saw no wrath but on mannes perty [part, side]"—for wrath is nothing but rebelliousness and opposition to love and peace (i.e., sin)—but even this "forgeveth he in us," as attested by "his lovely chere of ruth an pitte" (48.5-10).

While it certainly seems that Julian sets up an opposition between the two modes of "deeming," she goes on to declare that they are "accorded [harmonized] and oned [united]" and that both "shall be knowen...in heven without ende" (45.9-10). Her reason for this becomes clear in the following paragraph where she specifies the second form of

---

[43] Julian's claim runs directly counter to the dominant view. As Baker explains, "The fear of such a wrathful judge pervades the medieval preoccupation with penance… the themes of guilt and punishment came to dominate verbal and visual pastoral instruction" (*Vision to Book*, 83).
[44] Blindness is Julian's foremost image for sin.

judgment as "the dome of holy church" (line 15). Throughout her texts, Julian carefully

situates her showings and their interpretation within the church's teaching and denies any

contradiction between them. As she writes in Chapter 9,

> in all thing I beleve as holy church precheth and techeth. For the faith of holy
>
> church, which I had beforehand understonde—and, as I hope, by the grace of God
>
> willefully kept [consciously observed] in use and in custome [according to
>
> practice and tradition]—stode continually in my sighte, willing and meaning
>
> never to receive onything that might be contrary therto. (9.18-23)

Referring to the church's authority, Julian says, "by this dome, methought that me

behoveth nedes to know myselfe a sinner" and that "sinners be sometime worthy

[deserve] blame and wrath" (45.16-18). Yet, she immediately adds: "and theyse two

culde I not see in God" (lines 18-19), again implying a conflict between divine and

human modes of deeming. She proceeds to order the two "domes" or authorities, calling

the judgment of God the "higher dome" and the teaching of the church the "lower dome"

(lines 20-21). Feeling that she "might by no weye leve the lower dome," she is eager to

see how they can be reconciled. She wonders "in what manner…the dome of holy church

herein techeth is tru in [God's] sight" and points forward to the "mervelous example of a

lorde and of a servant" as her only "answere" (lines 23-27).

Julian brings Chapter 45 to a close without an answer as to the compatibility of

the two perspectives. Just before her reflection concludes, she appears to change

emphases completely, saying, "oure kindely [created or natural] substance is now

blisseful in God" (lines 34-35). The mention of "substance" at this juncture prompts us to

revisit the initial contrast Julian draws between divine and human judgment in lines 1-4.

There she says, God judges according to "oure kindely substance" while humans and "mother church" judge according to "oure changeable sensualite" (lines 1-4). The kinds of judgment are thus linked to two aspects of the human. The issue, then, is not simply two ways of seeing, but two things seen.

2. Substance, Sensuality, and the "Godly will"

Julian does not further elaborate the distinction between "substance" and "sensualite" made in Chapter 45 until after the Example of the Lord and Servant. It is the example itself that makes it intelligible to her. The doubleness of the servant revealed in Chapter 51 continues to preoccupy her in Chapter 52 and it forms a preface to the content that follows in Chapter 53, concerning the "godly will," up through Chapter 57, where she loops back to human substance and sensuality. All that Julian says about substance, sensuality, and the will is located in the context of a fairly diffuse discussion of self-knowledge of one's soul that interweaves the whole of Revelations 13 and 14. For Julian, as for Augustine before her and Calvin after, there is no knowledge of the self that is not bound up with knowledge of God. Further, there is no knowledge of God that is not mediated by Christ. (I will say more about this in the following chapter.) I argue, then, that what Julian says of the soul should not be taken in an independent sense but should be interpreted in light of her Christology. Insofar as her anthropology is bound up with her soteriology, it is thoroughly Christological. Julian's reflection on human substance, sensuality, and good will should not be understood as pertaining to humanity distinct from Christ.

i. Julian's Redefinition of Terms

Distinguishing substance and sensuality is not unique to Julian, nor is her reflection on a divided will.[45] As Baker argues, this distinction demonstrates Julian's familiarity with Latin theology and medieval anthropology.[46] Underlying her use of the terms is Augustine's interpretation of Gen. 1:27 in Book 12 of *De trinitate*, where he locates the image of God in the mind (*mens*), which he divides into two parts, associating higher reason or *sapientia* with men and lower reason or *scientia* with women.[47] According to Baker, Julian uses the words substance and sensuality in their Middle English senses as loose translations for Augustine's higher and lower reason.[48] Substance is "a synonym for existence" and simply refers to the fact that humans are created *ex nihilo* and therefore have their being in a participatory sense in and from God.[49] Sensuality refers to the "natural capacity for receiving physical sensation understood as an inferior power of the soul concerned with the body."[50] It is comparable to Augustine's *scientia*. Baker maintains, Julian uses "sensualite" as "the Middle English equivalent for

---

[45] See, for example, Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, trans. John P. H. Clark and Rosemary Dorward (New York: Paulist Press, 1988). Echoing Augustine, he says, "The higher part is compared to a man, for it should be master and sovereign, and that is properly in the image of God, for by that alone the soul knows God and loves him. The lower part is compared to a woman, for it should be obedient to the higher part of reason as woman is obedient to man, and that lies in the knowledge and rule of earthly things [and]…at the same time always to have an eye raised to the higher part of reason, with reverence and fear, in order to follow it" (Book II, 213-214).

[46] She may have been exposed to it through William of St. Thierry's *The Golden Epistle*, which Colledge and Walsh believe to have influenced Julian (45).

[47] Baker, *Vision to Book*, 108-109, 125. For a detailed analysis of this technical vocabulary, see chapter five, "Reconceiving the *Imago Dei*: The Motherhood of Jesus and the Ideology of Self."

[48] Ibid., 129. Denys Turner's more modern (and existential) paraphrase can be seen to reflect the same basic distinction between substance/*sapientia* and sensuality/*scientia*. He says sensuality refers "our being in time and history," "our selfhood insofar as it is inserted into history and time and worldly experience." Substance, on the other hand, refers "our being as created and eternally held in the knowledge and love of God" or "our selfhood insofar as it is in God" (187).

[49] Baker, *Vision to Book*, 119.

[50] Ibid., 193. Quoting from the *Middle English Dictionary*, eds. Hans Kurath, Sherman McAllister Kuhn, and Robert E. Lewis (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1954), 436.

the Augustinian lower reason," in much the same way as Richard Rolle and Geoffrey Chaucer did.[51]

What is marked about Julian's use of this technical language is the way she borrows accepted distinctions but manages to disrupt their usual dualistic and misogynistic interpretations.[52] In the literature with which Julian would have been familiar, substance and sensuality respectively map onto the pairs good and evil, divine and human, spirit and body, and masculine and feminine.[53] William of St. Theirry, for example, renders higher and lower reason in terms of *anima* (soul) and *animus* (spirit) saying,

> The soul [*anima*] is something incorporeal, capable of reason, destined to impart
>
> life to the body. It is this which makes men animal, acquainted with the things of
>
> the flesh, cleaving to bodily sensation. But when it begins to be not only capable
>
> but also in possession of perfect reason, it immediately renounces the mark of the
>
> feminine and becomes spirit [*animus*] endowed with reason, fitted to rule the
>
> body, spirit in possession of itself. For as long as it is soul it is quick to slip
>
> effeminately into what is of the flesh; but the spirit thinks only of what is virile
>
> and spiritual.[54]

---

[51] Baker, *Vision to Book*, 128.

[52] On Julian's reworking of the traditional (sexist) exegesis of Gen. 1-3 that undergirds these concepts, see Sandra J. McEntire, "The Likeness of God and the Restoration of Humanity in Julian of Norwich's *Showings*," *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1998), 3-33. Drawing on Mikhail Bahktin's account of dialogical language, McEntire details "the inner dialogue that Julian undertakes with the dominant discourse" demonstrates "the structure of resistance and revision" (12). This is evident, for example, in the way "Julian appropriates the inferior female body for an image of humanity and its salvation and hereby reverses Augustine's anthropology" (17).

[53] This is but one of many examples of Julian's creative and sometimes idiosyncratic use of phrases, distinctions, and concepts that she would have come across in devotional manuals, in preaching and teaching in the church, and in whatever theological treatises were available to her.

[54] William of St. Thierry, *The Words of William of St. Thierry*, vol. 4, *The Golden Epistle: A Letter to the Brethren at Mon Dieu* 2.4, trans. Theodore Berkeley, O.C.S.O., (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1971), 79.

Sensuality, *anima*, or lower reason is that part of the soul that has dealings with what is

corporeal. Substance, *animus*, or higher reason, on the other hand, has a purely

spiritual—even divine—quality about it. William's teaching recapitulates the common

ancient and medieval association between women and the body (matter—*mater*—

mother), addressed by Bynum among others.[55] It also partakes of a common Neoplatonic

or dualistic prejudice against the body. Where Augustine attempted to maintain the full

spiritual equality of male and female, the connection between women and materiality

invariably belies this, in his own writing and more so in that of his successors, as the

body becomes associated with the "flesh" or sinful nature.

Sensuality is inherently suspect in Julian's theological climate, to say the least.

Perhaps because of the usual dualisms, and the ambiguity of her terms, some of Julian's

commentators are quick to align substance with what Julian calls the "godly" will and

sensuality with the "bestely" or sinful will.[56] However, their relationship is not

straightforward. Julian mentions the two wills in Chapter 37, where she is attempting to

explain how it can be true both that "I shuld sinne" (line 1) and that "we be that [God]

loveth, and endlesly we do that he liketh" (lines 17-18). How can God rejoice in sinners?

Yet she is also unequivocal about the fact that "he loveth us now as welle while that we

be here as he shalle do when we be there before his blessed face" (lines 18-20). She

seems to be suggesting at this point, as she does elsewhere, that the presence of good will

---

[55] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1982) and *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

[56] The relationship between the "godly" will and substance is complicated and ambiguous. There is scholarly disagreement over whether they are synonymous. For example, compare Watson and Jenkins' notes on Chapters 37, 53, and 57 to chapter six in Turner's *Julian of Norwich, Theologian*. Turner rightly cautions that we not draw a precise identity between them. Yet, Julian herself connects them and they function in parallel ways as she reasons through the double reality of human fallenness (in Adam) and exaltedness (in Christ).

is requisite for divine favor. The problem of the divided will is, for her, the problem of intimacy with God. Julian writes,

> For in every soule that shalle be saved is a godly [good] wille that never assented to sinne, nor never shalle. Right as there is a bestely [base] wille in the lower party that may wille no good, right so there is a godly will in the higher party, which wille is so good that it may never wille eville, but ever good. (37.14-17)

These lines resonate with William of St. Thierry's *Golden Epistle* as well as a number of other writers with whom Julian would have been familiar.[57] I would point out that they also echo Paul's words in Romans 7:15-20,

> I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate… For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

In light of this, Julian's occasional confession "I do nought but sin" (see 36.4 and 82.13) makes more sense alongside her insistence on the presence of a good will. There is a gap between desire and ability. That gap is caused not by "me" (one's humanity as such) but by "my flesh" (σάρξ), one's sinful nature (Gal. 5:17). Paul, like Julian, is implicitly affirming the enduring presence of good will in fallen humanity. He speaks of *the good I want* over against *the evil I do not want—but do*. Similarly, there is a sense in which, for him, the true "I" is distanced from the *sin* that *does what I do not want*. On its own, the self is a divided self—and its true identity (good will) is corroded by evil actions in the

---

[57] Colledge and Walsh, 109.

world (cf. ch. 63).[58] This division is related to another: substance and sensuality are bifurcated in the fall. However, it does not seem accurate to say that sensuality *is* the beastly will but rather, the beastly will results from a division in that which was meant to be one.

Significantly, after the example, mention of the lower or "bestely" will drops off.[59] In Chapter 53, Julian only says the "lovely, gracious, shewing" (the example) revealed to her that "in ech a soule that shall be safe is a godly wille that never assented to sinne, ne never shall" but "continually it willeth good and werketh good in the sight of God" (53.7-11). In the following lines, the "godly" or "goodly" will gets linked up with "substance," but a comparable relationship is never directly established between sensuality and the "bestely" will. In this way, Julian eschews the sort of identification William Flete makes, in *Remedies Against Temptations* (14th c.), between the "bestely" part of the soul and the "sensulalite," which he says "is ever incligne downwarde to sin." Yet she coordinates the experience of two "contraries" with the Pauline language of "inner" and "outer" realities in 2 Corinthians 4:16 (see 19.21-27) and she also mentions a higher and lower part, saying we are "full" in our substance and "fail" in our sensuality. Because of this, it would be easy to identify the higher with the spirit (perfect) and the lower with the body (imperfect). However, Julian's text withstands such an interpretation.

She speaks of "oure kinde [natural] substance." This evokes created nature, "oure fair kinde" that Christ assumes in the incarnation. Similarly, she uses the mixed phrase

---

[58] According to Baker, Julian's "conception of the *imago Dei* may be influenced, either directly or indirectly, by that of Bernard of Clairvaux" who "moves the *imago Dei* from the mind…to the will" (*Vision to Book*, 116). This means that, if the real image is located in the will (manifest as a desire for the good) and that is not eviscerated by the fall (as Paul's comments imply), then in "substance," the human is still "godly"—i.e., in God's likeness.

[59] On the "beastly" will, see Watson and Jenkins (98, 260), Baker (*Vision to Book*, 117), and Turner (196).

"oure sensual soule," a pairing that resists the identification of sensuality with the body per se. Moreover, the entire contrast between substance and sensuality takes place within a discussion of the soul, not the relation between body and soul (56.2f). Julian clearly states, "theyse two perties…the heyer and the lower…is but one soule" (55.40-41). Thus, Turner, among others, rightly argues against a dualistic reading of Julian's anthropology.[60] In Julian's treatment of sensuality, it is not regarded the source of sin. In fact, sometimes her use of substance and sensuality parallels "created nature" and "fallen nature," drawing an important distinction between the "natural"—whether pre- or post-lapsarian—and the "unnatural," which vies against the creaturely nature that God creates, loves, and sustains. For example, she writes, "so sothly [truly] as sinne is uncleane, so sothly sinne is unkinde [unnatural]" (63.12-13). In this manner, Julian consistently distinguishes fallen creation from sin and evil per se (as so many theologians and religious teachers, then and now, fail to do, with dreadful consequences for theological anthropology). The third term is crucial.

For Julian, the non-opposition of substance and sensuality is ensured first, on account of creation and, second, on account of incarnation. She says "oure kinde, which is the hyer party, is knitte to God in the making [creation]; and God is knit to oure kind, which is the lower party, in our flesh taking. And thus in Crist oure two kindes be oned" (57.14-16). The complex anthropological implications of such passages have been examined elsewhere.[61] The point I wish to draw out is that both the substance and the

---

[60] Turner, 187, 189. The overlap of substance and sensuality is actual and, on occasion, experienceable (for example, in prayer or in love). As Turner says, "what we most truly are in our historical created existence is what we are in our origin in God" and "what we most truly are is what we most truly desire" (our substance in God) (173-174)

[61] See, for example, Baker's *Vision to Book* and Turner's *Julian of Norwich, Theologian* as well as Kerri Hide, *Gifted Origins to Grace Fulfillment: the Soteriology of Julian of Norwich* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001).

sensuality "knit" humankind into God; neither poses an obstacle to union and reconciliation. Julian says, "our substance is in God," kept secure in each person of the Trinity (57.50, 58.50-53), and the "sensualite" is that which "the secund person hath taken," drawing both parts of humanity into God (57.16, 18). Again, the problem is that fallenness divides sensuality and substance, which are originally one in the prototype of humankind and true image of God, Jesus Christ.[62] Thus, as Watson and Jenkins observe, for Julian, "the 'sensualite' is a more ambiguous, and more positive, aspect of the soul" than it was for Flete and many of her other contemporaries.[63] According to Baker, "Julian's respect for the sensuality is her most important contribution to the theology of the *imago Dei*."[64]

ii. The Proper Christological Reference

While I have simplified what Julian means by substance and sensuality, the terms are polyvalent and deployed variously in different contexts. Given that she draws on Augustine's psychological *vestigia trinitatis* ("oure soule is a made trinite like to the unmade blessed trinite," 55.33-34), she makes a number of amorphous shifts in predication (not all of which have I examined).[65] Yet my primary objective here is not to dispel the opacity of Julian's technical vocabulary on this front. This is not least because it seems to me there are more crucial points being made in and around these enigmatic

---

[62] Turner, 194.

[63] Watson and Jenkins, 260. Hide similarly notes Julian's concept of "sensuality" includes but also exceeds the physical body (84).

[64] Baker, *Vision to Book*, 129.

[65] Despite what I have said, while substance and sensuality typically refer to dimensions of the human soul or of the humanity of Christ, they do sometimes get aligned with, respectively, divinity and humanity or with the figures in the *exemplum*, the lord and servant. For example, Julian says "oure sensualite [humanity], by the vertu of Cristes passion, be brought up into the substance [God/origin]" (56.30-31). But this alignment is not an equivalence. Nor are the pairings divinity/humanity and lord/servant made to correspond to a soul/body polarity. To further muddle any such identification, the lord and the servant get recast as dimensions of the soul rather than the relation between God and humanity (see 52.70f).

claims about the relationship between substance and sensuality and the manner of their union in Christ. Namely, such comments are evidently intended to reinforce everything else Julian is communicating about the atonement. She does not simply launch into a discussion of the two parts of the soul or higher and lower natures; these references are couched within descriptions of God's love and the divine-human union in Christ. We should not lose sight of the fact that her rather elliptical discussion of the will and the two parts of the soul does not deal with humanity as such. In fact, underlying the passages in consideration is the assumption that there is no such thing "humanity as such." In other words, the larger point is that all humankind exists and finds its reality only in and through Jesus Christ.[66]

I would argue that everything said about the "godly" will and true "substance" of the human be read, first of all, in the context of its attribution to Christ. As Julian says, "we have all this blessed will hole and safe in oure lorde Jhesu Crist" (53.13). If it is Christ's, it is humanity's by virtue of their shared "kind." This is, after all, the meaning of the identity of Adam and Christ with all humankind:

> God knit him to oure body in the maidens wombe, he toke oure sensual soule. In which taking—he us all having beclosed in him—he oned it to oure substance, in which oning he was perfit man. For Crist, having knit in him all man that shall be saved, is perfete [complete] man. (57.35-38)

That what is said of humanity is most properly predicated of Christ is evident when Julian comments on the twofold bond between the human and God in "kind" (nature,

---

[66] As Watson and Jenkins comment, "The redemption of humankind is understood as the uniting of the sensuality and the substance in Christ as perfect and collective human being. *Human selfhood thus emerges as incoherent except in Christ*" (304). Emphasis added.

189

creation) and in "grace" (redemption).[67] She explains, "But no man ne woman take this singularly to himselfe, for it is not so: it is general. For it is [true in] oure precious moder Crist, and to him was this faire kinde dight" (62.23-24). Similarly, when Julian claims of human substance or essence, "oure kinde [nature] is in god hole," she is referring to the union of the "lower" and the "higher" "kindes" *in Christ* (57.12). Speaking in the same passage of the "flesh" that "the secund person hath taken" she again adds the qualification: "which kind furst to him was adight [which nature was given to him from the first]" (57.16, 18). Here she seems to be glossing Colossians 1:15-20, regarding Christ as the "firstborn of all creation," who is "before all things" and in whom "all things hold together." In other words, the perfect humanity Julian has in mind is the humanity of Christ. Humanity "as such" is humanity *in Christ*. (As I will show, this is integrally connected to Julian's account of the predestination of the Son.)

More broadly speaking, given the context of this discussion within the rest of her thought (particularly in light of the theme of mutual enclosure, which I discuss below), it would simply be incongruous at this point for Julian to claim humans have anything of themselves independently of the grace of God mediated by Christ. The language of gift and giving interweaves her discussions of creation and salvation. She often reminds her audience that all that is good is from God and that human goodness is participatory. What Julian realizes of her own "longing" or "thurste" for God also applies to the good will: human "longing is a participation in Christ's own longing."[68] Although, at times, Julian's wording suggests that humans possess this of themselves, for the most part she maintains that good will and wholeness is not only *not ours* but it is *not now*. Just as she looks

---

[67] This is a pairing that sometimes corresponds to substance and sensuality, respectively.
[68] Colledge and Walsh, 105. They point out that over the course of her thirteenth revelation, she discovers that her own thirst is included in Christ's ghostly or spiritual thirt.

backward (to its promise in predestination), she also looks forward (to an eschatological reintegration of humanity). Her deferral of the full realization of human being is evident, for example, when she speaks of Christ's "thurste" or "love-longing" to have us "hole in him," for "we be not now fully as hole in him as we shalle be than" (31.14-16). This is wholeness (as "being-in") is originary and teleological—ensured in the "mid" person of the Trinity—but *in medias res*, humans of themselves are "medled," mixed, incomplete. The real identity of humanity in Christ must certainly be one of those realities in Julian's "boke" that she says "is not yet performed, as to my sight"—a truth seen only partially and darkly, known by faith and not yet corroborated by experience (86.1-2).

To summarize: it is important that we approach what Julian says about human substance, sensuality, and good will Christologically rather than strictly anthropologically—and not just Christologically, but soteriologically. It is difficult to make sense of what Julian means by being "knitted," "oned," and "wonned" in God without paying closer attention to the larger picture of atonement communicated in her example (to which I return at the beginning of chapter four).

3. The Example as an "Answer"

Inasmuch as the Example of the Lord and Servant provides the answer to Julian's question concerning the way God sees fallen humanity, it is also presented as the solution to the contradiction between divine judgment and human self-judgment. Julian is alluding to the conflict between the "two domes" (ch. 45) when, in Chapter 50, just before introducing her example, she mentions again "two contraries"—on the one hand, the "teching of holy church" and her "owne feeling" that humans are blameworthy and, on

the other hand, the fact that she "saw oure lorde God shewing to us no more blame than if we were as clene and holy as angelis be in heven" (50.9-14). This set of contraries closely mirrors another: in Revelation 13, Julian acknowledges the teaching of the church that some (many) will be damned and yet she sees no one among the "reproved." She writes,

> And one point of oure faith is that many creatures shall be dampned: as angelis
> that felle out of heven for pride, which be now fendes [see Is. 14:12-15], and man
> in erth that dyeth out of the faith of holy church [those who die outside the
> faith]—that is to sey, tho that be hethen—and also man that hath received
> cristondom and liveth uncristen life, and so dyeth oute of cherite [outside a state
> of charity]. All theyse shalle be dampned to helle withoute ende, as holy church
> techeth me to beleve. And stonding alle this, methought it was unpossible that alle
> maner of thing shulde be well, as oure lorde shewde in this time. (32.33-40)[69]

When we encounter Julian's statements about sin and blame we must also keep in mind her struggle to understand how all can be well if many of God's creatures will be damned. The problem of the two "domes" sheds light on the problem of damnation, and vice versa. But *how* are the two sets of contraries resolved? Julian never teases this out propositionally. Instead, she points to a story about a patient lord and his eager servant— a story that, for all Julian's commentary, still elicits a variety of interpretations.

i. Configuring the Contraries

The precise relationship between divine and human or ecclesial judgment remains difficult to pin down and, because of this, we find a wide range of perspectives among Julian's commentators. For Colledge and Walsh, for example, the *exemplum* enables

---

[69] Watson and Jenkins point out that these are the "traditional categories into which the damned are divided: fallen angels, anyone not a Christian, and wicked Christians" (222). A parallel statement can be found in Hilton's *Scale* 2.3.

Julian to "reconcile" fully the two "dooms" or "domes" through a kind of double vision.[70]

The contradiction between the two domes can be explained in terms of the two realities

of human being—one inward (blameless, substance) and the other outward

(blameworthy, sensuality).[71] According to Colledge and Walsh, Julian initially sees only

the inward reality and its reflection in God's un-blaming gaze. They think Julian is

"aware only of *that other of inwarde endlesse loue and right*" early on but later comes to

see the outward aspect, which includes sin and is worthy of blame. In other words, in

their view, as she matures, Julian begins to see the matter from both sides. Colledge and

Walsh argue that Julian learns to accept "what the church teaches…that we should accuse

ourselves…to a Lord who is loving and merciful."[72] As for the problem of eternal

damanation, the conundrum is resolved when Julian "recalls that in all of her visions of

Christ's Passion she saw none of the reproved, except only the devil himself."[73] Colledge

and Walsh maintain, "this accords exactly with the Church's teaching, which, in

affirming eternal damnation, has never defined that anyone is in hell, except only the

devil."[74]

Turner also argues against those who would pit the two "domes" against one

another. For him, these two "sources" make up "a single, complex, indivisible whole—

---

[70] Colledge and Walsh, 141.

[71] The "sensuality" is not itself "blameworthy," but notions both get linked with the "outward."

[72] Ibid., 141. For evidence for this position from Julian's text see, e.g., Ch. 39. Here, and elsewhere, Julian does commend contrition as beneficial to the soul. However, throughout her writing on this topic, the accent falls on the transition from a sense of unworthiness to worthiness before God.

[73] Ibid., 106.

[74] Ibid., 106. This particular vision (of no one in hell) is certainly compatible with Catholic dogma. As de Lubac and von Balthasar maintain, the teaching of the church is that there is a hell, not that it is populated. However, it doesn't seem Julian is aware of this interpretation as an option. She is evidently convinced the teaching is that some creatures are damned. Further, elsewhere Julian says there is "none harder helle than sinne" and seems to resist altogether the notion that there is an eternal punishment that could compare to what humans already suffer on account of sin (40.33).

her shewings as mediated to her through the teaching of the Church."[75] Turner admits

that "she does not see in her shewings what the Church teaches about the damnation of

sinners, and the Church does not teach what she sees in her shewings about the Lord's

not condemning them."[76] Yet he still contends there can be no disjunction between

Julian's showings and the Church because "Christ *is* the Church."[77] This "resolution"

bears the quality of "paradox," a notion that pervades Turner's reflection on Julian. He

handles the other set of contraries somewhat differently, linking them to the issue of

universal salvation, a common topic in Julian scholarship. Turner interprets Julian's

questions about salvation and damnation through the lens of her paraphrase of Luke

18:27, "That that is unpossible to the is not unpossible to me" (32.42), saying,

> It does not seem right to conclude that, contrary to the teaching of the Church,
>
> God will pull off the "impossibility" of saving everyone. It seems a more natural
>
> reading of what Julian says that the impossibility of which the Lord speaks refers
>
> to her problem of *seeing* how the damnation of many can be made consistent with
>
> God's making "althing wele," that what seems impossible to her is not an
>
> impossibility to God.[78]

However, it seems Turner's solution overemphasizes the "harmony" between Julian's

showings and the church's teaching and, as a result, misses the genuinely constructive

aspect of her presentation of atonement. He concludes, "Julian is certain that many are

damned," when this is precisely that which she doubts.[79] Perhaps Turner is thinking of

---

[75] Turner, 82.

[76] Ibid., 69

[77] Ibid., 72.

[78] Ibid., 107.

[79] Ibid., 181. While Julian's phrasing "all that shall be saved" is cautious throughout, its repetition wherever she speaks of salvation suggests that she sees not merely a few being saved, but many, if not all. The

the isolated lines, "I knew in my faith [the teaching of the church] that they ware accurse and dampen withoute ende, saving tho that were converted by grace" (33.18-19). But what does it mean to be "converted by grace?" Who is not converted *by grace*? And what if the emphasis of conversion is not placed on "repentance"—what is possible for humans—but on "retrieval" (Jesus "came to seek and save the lost"), as in the Parable of the Prodigal Son and Julian's retelling of it?

In contrast to Colledge and Walsh as well as Turner, Watson and Jenkins do not perceive any complementarity or resolution between the "contraries." Instead, they maintain that, "*A Revelation* here [in ch. 32] makes quite explicit the tension between what 'holy church techeth' and what Julian interprets her vision to imply." They point to a parallel passage in *Piers Plowman* that exhibits, in their words, "a similar resistance to orthodox salvation theology."[80] Interestingly, William Langland, like Julian, alludes to Luke 18:26-27: "Those who heard it [Jesus' words to the Rich Young Ruler] said, 'Then who can be saved?' He replied, 'What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.'"[81] Contrary to Turner's interpretation of Julian's gloss on v. 27 (in 32.42), focusing on v. 26 shifts the problem away from the damnation of some to the salvation of any. The impossible possibility here is a matter of how anyone can be saved. (This seems to be a

---

wording is in marked contrast to the typical emphasis on the "few" in most discussions of election in the tradition.

[80] Watson and Jenkins, 222.

[81] "A certain ruler asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honour your father and mother."' He replied, 'I have kept all these since my youth.' When Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich. Jesus looked at him and said, 'How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.' Those who heard it said, 'Then who can be saved?' He replied, 'What is impossible for mortals is possible with God.'" (Lk. 18:18-27)

question Julian implicitly poses throughout.[82] Watson and Jenkins also highlight the

ongoing tension between the two domes in Chapter 45 and following. For example, they

say, "the church's teaching on sin is clearly subordinated to that of the revelation" (see

45.20-21). They conclude that in her restatement of the prevailing teaching on damnation,

cited above (32.33-40), Julian is "following this argument only to cast doubt on it."[83]

What is evident is that Julian herself never fully sees the compatibility between

the two domes, for she defers hope of their ultimate resolution to the end of time (32.46f,

85.9-10)—but that also means she does not rule out the possibility. In the interim, she

turns her attention to subtly reforming the story her readers tell themselves about

themselves (45.7). As Baker argues, Julian manages "the apparent contradiction between

her showings and the church's teaching about God's wrath" by drawing a distinction

between the "inner" and "outer" aspects of human existence.[84] In other words, she

handles the conundrum by making a constructive theological move. She follows the

ecclesial argument not simply to cast doubt on it, but to reframe and rewrite it. She calls

into question "sin's story about itself" (Turner), insinuates that sometimes theology

reinforces this story, and holds up the mirror of the loving look of God. [85] She does this

---

[82] Returning to an issue touched on above, many of Julian's commentators take it for granted that the "godly will" refers to something in the human as such. Denise Baker, for example, associates it with the preexistence of the soul. See Baker, "Introduction," *The Showings of Julian of Norwich*, xv. But, what if we were to read Julian's emphasis on good will through the lens of Jesus response to the Rich Young Ruler: "no one is good but God" (v. 19)? By Julian's logic, good will is necessary for salvation and we have our good will kept whole in God. When she speaks of "oure savior and oure salvation," she says "alle mankinde that is of good wille and that shalle be is comprehended [included] in this part" (30.1-4). This reiterates the Christological point: human wholeness and goodness belong, first of all, to Christ—they are "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3).

[83] Watson and Jenkins, 222.

[84] Baker, *Vision to Book*, 104. Julian's presiding point is that "because humans can see only the outward manifestation of the lower part, or sensuality," it is said to be "appropriate for them to blame themselves for sin." See Julian Ch. 45 and 52. I will demonstrate what this means below.

[85] Turner, 99. Although, for some reason, Turner never seems to acknowledge that Julian repeatedly aligns "sin's story" with the "church's story," contrasting both with "God's story."

implicitly in her Example of the Lord and Servant and more directly in her instruction

concerning self-knowledge, which corresponds to the message of the example.

ii. Genuine Self-Knowledge vs. Sinful Self-Accusation

Instances in which Julian appears to agree with the human "dome" or the teaching

of the church typically take the form of a question ("How could it be that…?") or are

posed conditionally ("Methought..."—implying, "but now I'm not so sure.") This

rhetorical feature permits Julian an "exploratory" approach while also enabling her to

avoid contradicting the church explicitly.[86] At the same time, she uses scriptural and

theological evidence from the tradition to add nuance or advance a new perspective. Her

inquiry around blame, wrath, and accusation is paradigmatic of this method.

In a certain sense, Julian's inability to see wrath in God is not out of the ordinary,

given the established teaching on divine impassibility with which she would have been

familiar. Her problem with divine wrath could simply be seen as a logical extension of

the then-accepted view that God does not suffer the "passions."[87] However, by the same

move, animating God's gracious judgment as she does in her example, Julian decenters

the prevailing narrative about salvation in which the satisfaction of divine anger plays a

key role as well as its pastoral application in the lives of practitioners.[88] Similarly,

through what appears to be "mere" devotional instruction, Julian takes on the larger

soteriological issues underlying her concerns about the "two domes." As in her example,

in the context of her teaching on self-knowledge, she directly asserts neither that the two

manners of beholding are reconciled nor that reconciliation is impossible. Rather, she

---

[86] Ibid., 14.
[87] Watson and Jenkins interpret Chapter 31 of *Revelations* along these lines.
[88] For example, Anselm's assertion in *Cur Deus Homo*, in the mouth of Boso, that "the wrath of God is nothing but his desire to punish" (Ch. VI). Anslem, *Opera omnia*, ed. Francix Schmitt, O.S.B. 6 vols. (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1936-1961), 2:54. See Baker, *Vision to Book*, 101.

turns her attention to reforming the common theological view (connected to the "lower dome") by slowly infusing it with her own. A few passages shed light on her revisionary approach.

In Chapter 46, for example, Julian attempts to abide the instruction of "holy church" to "know thyself"—which she has already specifically connected with knowing one's sinfulness (45.16-17). Here she once again distinguishes "two manner of beholdings"—one concerning God's love and human salvation and the other belonging to "the comen teching of holy church" (46.13-16). On the basis of the second, lower judgment, Julian says, "methought it behoved nedes [it seemed necessary to me] to se and to know that we be sinners and do many evilles…wherfore we deserve pain, blame, and wrath" (46.21-23).[89] But, then—as if to say, "contrary to what I mistakenly assumed"— she writes "notwithstanding alle this, I saw sothfastly [truly] that oure lorde was never wroth [angry] nor never shall. For he is God, he is good, he is truth, he is love, he is pees" (lines 24-25). In other words, in this first instance, the discipline of self-examination and confession ultimately leads her back to "God in fulhed of joye" (line 4).

A few dimensions of this shift from the knowledge of one's sinfulness to the knowledge of God's rejoicing are emblematic of Julian's approach to the topic. First of all, throughout her writing, God is good and *therefore* not wrathful. She says, "For I saw truly that it is against the properte of his might to be wroth [angry], and against the properte of his wisdom, and against the properte of his goodness" (lines 26-28). This is something I will address at length in light of Julian's account of the atonement (in chapter four). Further, it is as if Julian is seeing the whole situation from God's perspective. She

---

[89] The word "methought," here and elsewhere in Julian's writing, has the effect of undermining what she is about to say. It does not constitute an assertion so much as a stage on the way to understanding.

says, "betwen God and oure soule is neither wrath nor forgevenesse in his sight" (lines 30-31). Julian thus implicitly aligns her perspective with that of God. It seems strange, then, that having disputed ecclesial teaching on sin and claiming divine insight Julian could conclude, "now I yelde me to my moder holy church, as a simpil childe oweth [ought to]" (line 41). But, third, this is a common pattern in Julian's thought: it proceeds by looping back on itself—questioning, repeating, repairing, assenting. Given the "spiral" shape of her thought, it is difficult to make out whether it comes to rest, and where.[90] This is strategic.

In a related passage, Julian teaches that, "It longeth us [is proper for us] to have thre manner of knowing":

> The furst is that we know oure lorde God. The seconde is that we know ourselfe, what we ar by him in kinde [as created] and in grace [as redeemed]. The thirde is that we know mekely what ourselfe is, anemptes [as regards] our sinne and anemptes our febilnes. (72.43-45)

While, in this second example, the awareness of sin is integral to self-knowledge, again, there are a number of important nuances in Julian's teaching that distinguish it from the view of divine wrath and punishment that she is attempting to reshape. Notably, in this passage, as throughout her writing, Julian strongly differentiates human nature (kind) from sin. She recommends to her "evencristen" that they not view themselves only or primarily as sinners but, first, as they are loved by God (for that is what Julian means by knowing God: knowing the love of God), second, as they were meant to be and truly are in Christ, and lastly, as they are in their fallen state. Even in this "third manner of knowing," the self is not simply equated with its sinfulness (cf. 52.59 cf. 52.60). The

---

[90] Turner, 4.

lesson corresponds closely to Julian's prior teaching that, although "unnethes the creature semeth ought to the selfe [the creature scarcely seems of any value to itself]," it should "beknowen [recognize] that [it] is made for love" (44.15-16).

In the preceding examples, Julian moves from apparent contradiction to apparent affirmation. In a third passage, her comments lead in the opposite direction. Throughout Chapter 77, it sounds as if she retracts her prior assertions and concedes that the "lower dome" may be right about condemnation and punishment. The whole passage follows closely the content of other instructional manuals on the matter of self-accusation and ascesis (77.11-39).[91] She begins,

> Than is this the remedy: that we be aknowen of oure wrechednes and fle to oure
> lorde… And se we thus…"I knowe wele I have deservede paine, but oure lorde is
> almight, and may ponish me mightly; and he is all wisdom and can ponish me
> skillefully; and he is alle goodnesse, and loveth me tenderly." (lines 11-15)

Here the main stress falls on words like wretchedness, punishment, and pain. The confession that this is "deserved," seems to be justified in the subsequent paragraph on "penance." But, again, we see Julian's persistence in pointing back to *God's* perspective, reminding her readers that while God "can" and "may" treat humans otherwise God is *in fact* good and therefore loves tenderly (lines 14-15). In what follows, she softens the ascesis of hard "penance" to "meek [humble] accusing," insisting that "he [God] seyeth: Accuse not thyselfe overdon mekille [much too much]…" (77.27-28).[92] She goes on to explain that, in God's view, the "wo" of life is already enough suffering and should not

---

[91] Cf. *Ancrene Wisse* Part 5 on the practice of self-accusation. Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991).
[92] This is said in the context of "false dread," which I will return to in the fourth chapter.

be compounded by "the sin of self-accusation" (line 30).[93] (This is not to suggest Julian downplays the reality of sin. This point is, rather, she gets "humility" right as the mean between self-denigration and pride. Humility is not self-excoriating, but trusts that God is like a loving parent who will always view the prodigal child with compassion and welcome her home. (I will return to this theme in the following chapter.)

While, at the beginning of this passage, Julian refers to the knowledge of one's own "wretchedness" as the "remedy" (line 11), by the end she has revised this: "the remedy is that oure lorde is with us" (line 34). And not only that—the remedy is seeing the triune rejoicing of God in the passion and knowing that Jesus is "keping us and leding into fulhed of joy" (i.e., into the life of God) (lines 34, 38). Reading passages such as these in light of the Parable of the Prodigal Son and Julian's retelling of it, the presiding message seems to be that while the prodigal son's confession—"I am no longer worthy to be called your son…"—is indeed "deserved," his father's economy is patently not one of (sinful) "just deserts" but of (divine) grace and "glad giving." As such, his "rejoicing" and hospitable welcome forms the true and ultimate word, the word by which the son's self-presentation must be measured.[94] In other words, for Julian, "wallowing" is portrayed as "idolatrous;" it is predicated upon a false image of God.[95]

In short, self-blame is only "appropriate" in a very ambiguous way. The picture she paints is one in which 1) humans are indeed sinful and it behooves them to recognize that they are in need of God's grace, but 2) because of their sin, they accuse themselves

---

[93] Watson and Jenkins, 364.

[94] As will be addressed in chapters five and six, this differs markedly from Barth's use of the younger son's confession throughout §74. Despite the fact that election and reconciliation override sinful humanity's self-assessment, Barth considers the son's view of himself an "obedient" one. Julian, in stark contrast, is suggesting that conformity to God means accepting God's gracious view of the human situation and abandoning humanity's own economy of merit.

[95] Turner, 105.

too harshly and focus inordinately on their own littleness and fallenness.[96] Thus to say it

"longeth [belongs]" to *fallen* humankind to judge itself in this way is not necessarily to

condone it. Inasmuch as it may be genuinely fitting, it only leads back to grace; and,

inasmuch as it is a symptom of sin, it is contradicted by grace. Julian thus disconnects the

practice of self-accusation from over-literalized anthropomorphic characterizations of

God as punishing and angry and consigns such traits to sinful human judgment. And this

is an artful way of calling into question the whole theology of atonement that typically

undergirds such devotional instruction. We see that, in her view, the greater spiritual

obstacle is not sin but "a sinful theology of sin."[97]

Like the Example of the Lord and Servant, Julian's later teaching related to self-

knowledge, confession, and contrition only reinforces her earlier assessment of "wrath."

She claims "either it [wrath] cometh of failing of might, or of failing of wisdom or of

failing of goodnesse, which failing is not in God, but is in oure party [is on our side],"

and concludes, "For we by sin and wretchedness have in us wrath" (48.7-9). As Baker

translates Julian, "I saw no wrath but on man's side, and [God] forgives us that."[98] Wrath

(and, concomitantly, the expectation of it in God) is deemed an expression of sin, another

human weakness that is met by God's pity and mercy. Julian's final statement on the

matter of the contrary "domes" is this: "For in the beholding of God we falle not, and in

the beholding of oureselfe we stonde not… but the beholding of oure lord God is the

---

[96] I in no way mean to associate "littleness" and sin—on the contrary, such an association precisely arises
from the judgment of the sinful "dome." "Little" is a key term in Julian's example of a hazelnut (Ch. 5) and
it appears throughout her writing as an expression of the contrast between human beings and God. But for
her, human littleness or lowliness never translates into insignificance. It is not used to put humans in their
place but to highlight the amazing attentiveness of God, even toward what is so small.
[97] Turner, 103.
[98] Baker, 106. See Julian, LT 48.

higher sothnes [truth]" (82.24-26)[99] That is to say, human judgment does not see what

God sees on account of the atonement in Jesus Christ: the truth—"the previtees which

now be hid to us," the "dome" in which "it is wele" (85.9-12).

Conclusion

       Throughout the Long Text, and particularly as she retells the atonement in her

example, Julian draws on common devotional and theological tropes and terms only to

employ them otherwise or reinvest them with different meanings. For example, by

repeatedly defining words such as "righteousness," "judgment," and "justice" in terms of

mercy, goodness, and love, Julian uses an accepted vocabulary to reorient her reader's

perspective. Through such repetition, her text reconditions expectations so that words

once used to indicate one thing evoke something else in the reader's imagination. This is

quite intentional on Julian's part. It is seen, for instance, when she first overtly contrasts

the two domes. There she says "oure good lorde Jhesu reformeth" human self-judgment

"by mercy and grace thorow [through] vertu of his blessed passion" (45.7-8). Two

paragraphs later (line 26), she points forward to the Example of the Lord and Servant, to

"the glorious asseeth" whereby Christ has "made welle the most harm" ("Adams sinne")

(29.9, 13, 4). In other words, Julian identifies the atonement, which she retells in her

example, as the story that "reformeth" the lower dome. Appealing to Jesus Christ as the

one who manifests the higher judgment of God to which all human judgment is subject,

Julian enacts and participates in this reformation of the lower dome (of doctrine).

Significantly, this theological revision proceeds by way of scriptural reiteration and

---

[99] As McGill paraphrases: "we cannot…stand in our own sight. In the sight of God however we do not and cannot fall but are safe and secure" (*Julian of Norwich: Visionary or Mysic?* 113-114).

interpretation. Julian maps the Gospel narrative onto the Parable of the Prodigal Son and coordinates both typologically with key intertexts—namely, the story of creation and fall in Genesis 1-3, the "Suffering Servant" imagery of Isaiah 40-55, the Christological hymn of Philippians 2, and the Adam-Christ identity of Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15.

To summarize: Chapter 51 should not be approached simply, or even primarily, as a solution to the discrepancy between the church's teaching on judgment and Julian's vision in which there is no blame or wrath in God, even though Julian herself sometimes speaks of it this way. It functions as systematic, theological counterexample to prevailing accounts of divine love and goodness, specifically in relation to the atonement. In that sense, enduring tension, rather than full accord, persists between the theological picture Julian presents and the one that predominates around her. She poses many questions in the chapters prior to Chapter 51 concerning, among other things, why God permits sin, the problem of evil, how all shall be well, and the church's teaching on salvation and damnation. All of them are said to be "answered" in the Example of the Lord and Servant. But, in a sense, none of them are answered, at least not straightforwardly. Instead, Julian gets a glimpse of a more comprehensive picture of the divine-human relationship and this draws her attention to a broader horizon. What she beholds exceeds even her own expectations.

CHAPTER FOUR

ATONEMENT, THE MOTHERHOOD OF GOD,
AND JULIAN'S RETELLING OF THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

I have proposed that we approach the Example of the Lord and Servant as a

Christological and soteriological counterexample.[1] I do not mean to suggest that it is not

appropriate and instructive to read Revelation 14 (and, specifically, Chapter 51) as a

"teleological theodicy," as Baker does, to take it as guidance for contemplative prayer, as

Colledge and Walsh do, or to highlight its conceptual paradoxes along with Turner.

However, it seems to me, the substrate of these other interpretive possibilities is a

theology of the atonement coordinated in a very particular way with a trinitarian account

of predestination. All that Julian says about prayer, the soul, sin, judgment, and so on is

fundamentally grounded in her systematic understanding of the union of God and the

human in Jesus Christ. This is easily overlooked since, while Julian is keenly attuned to

the parameters of Chalcedonian Christology, her account is more imagistic, narratival,

and indirect than many theories of atonement.[2] The vividness of her highly visual

depiction of the reconciliation revealed and accomplished in the passion of Christ can

sometimes distract from its own incisive theological claims. But this "distraction" is itself

of theological import. While it may be owing to her contemplative practice that Julian

gravitates toward such cinematic description, the effect is that it focuses her hearers on a

face, a sequence of actions, a relationship, a history. It enacts the point: Grace is not

abstract. It is a name, a person. "Grace is God," as Julian says—not an idea (63.8).

---

[1] For a detailed reading of how Julian's soteriology differs from the prevailing Anselmian position, see Denise Baker, *From Vision to Book* (92, 100-106).

[2] As seen, for instance, in her dual emphasis on the Son as the head of humanity, "clad in Adam's kirtle," but also "even with" (consubstantial with) the Father.

In what follows, I begin by drawing out Julian's understanding of the atonement in terms of a twofold being-seen-in-Christ. In this first section, I reiterate and elucidate certain aspects of my preceding presentation of the example (ch. 51) and the two "domes" (ch. 45). In the second section, I proceed to look at how Julian's retelling leads directly into her trinitarian reflection on God as mother. As the center point of Revelation 14 (spanning ch. 41-63), it is what prompts her excursus on God's triune motherhood (ch. 58-63).[3] In view of the phenomenological insights generated at the end of the second chapter, I argue that Julian's example, as a repetition of the parable, performs the reduction on its witnesses, purging and converting the gaze, and ultimately leads back to the "office" or "condition" of motherhood.[4] Her account of the atonement in the example is shown to be continuous with this subsequent insight into divine motherhood. Throughout, the crucial thematic link is the "lovely loking" of God (59.109), which is identified as the "higher dome" in Chapter 45, narrated in the example, and later redescribed through the mother/child relationship.

I. Atonement and Mutual "Beclosure"

Julian's retelling of the parable pulls our attention in two directions at once, "back" to an eternal atonement in God and "up" into the motherly life of the Trinity. What is beyond the scope of my focus here is the remarkable "forward" movement of Julian's thought, initiated by her enigmatic vision of the momentous eschatological deed

---

[3] Colledge and Walsh, 112.

[4] In chapter two, I engaged Paul Ricoeur's theory of intertextuality, teasing out its underlying phenomenology, which can be traced back to Heidegger and Husserl. I built on this foundation by providing my own phenomenological reading of the Parable of the Prodigal Son as a preliminary example of parable as phenomenological "reduction." This reading signals a set of themes that I pick up in my later readings of Julian and Barth, namely the image of reconciliation as being-seen-in-Christ.

God performs in the future (32.19f, 36.8f). The primary reason for this fairly significant

omission is that I want to highlight the way the reassurance that "all shall be well" is

rooted as much in what has already happened, in an eternal "oning," as in what will

happen, in an ultimate "great deed." All *is* well—in God's eyes—on account of the

atonement performed in Jesus Christ.

This most famous of Julian's sayings—"Alle shalle be wele, and alle shalle be

wele, and alle maner of thinge shalle be wel"—resounds throughout Revelations 13 and

14 (27.10-11; cf. 31.2-4, 34.20-21).[5] The immediate context of this particular permutation

of her maxim is a discussion of the "behoveliness" (fittingness or necessity) of sin. When

Julian ventures the hypothesis that all *would have been* well had humanity not sinned, she

is answered by the lord, "Sin is behovely [fitting], but alle shalle be wele…" (27.9-10).

At other points, the claim that all shall be well is connected to a great deed (or deeds) at

the end of time (32.19f, 36.1f). However, the maxim is also found situated within

discussions of salvation and, more specifically, "the glorious asseeth [atonement,

reparation]" (29.9f). Its truth is shown in and guaranteed by the "asseeth-making [act of

reparation]" of Christ, which—glossing the "how much more" of grace (Rom. 5:20)—

Julian describes as "more wurshipfulle for mannes salvation withoute comparison than

ever was the sinne of Adam harmfulle" (29.10-13).[6] In other words, the promise of

"shalom" is specifically confirmed in Julian's "showings of compassion" (31.42) (Rev.

13-14), which build up to and are distilled in the Example of the Lord and Servant as a

---

[5] In Julian's writing, the maxim lacks the triumphalistic ring it might take on when removed from its context. "Shalle" should not simply be translated into the future tense, "will." It is more like "must," which has the force of an imperative (carrying a sense of necessity) while also expressing the quality of hope, which is always defined by uncertainty (or at least awaits fulfillment). According to Hunt, this saying "effectively translates the Hebrew *shalom*" (*The Trinity*, 103). If this is true, it may figure as a blessing.
[6] Julian seems to be referring to the same passage when she says, "And so much oure mede [reward] is the more for we geve him occasion by oure falling" (39.38-39).

renarration of the atonement.[7] The end must be well because of 1) the beginning, this particular beginning, in which God is shown *already* "oned" with humankind, and 2) the compassionate character of God manifest in God's motherly attitude toward creatures.[8]

A series of images related to being-in-Christ form a special point of access to Julian's account of atonement. In what follows, I address the two primary dimensions of this being-in: humanity-in-Christ and God-in-Christ. I highlight Julian's description of humanity seen, enclosed, borne and clothed in Jesus Christ (point 2) as well as her claim that the triune God is phenomenalized and accessed only in Christ (point 3). It is artificial, however, to separate the two sides, for Julian's prevailing description of the divine-human relationship involves reciprocal "beclosure" (point 1).

1. The Theme of "Beclosure"

The "answer" to Julian's stated conundrum—"some are damned…all shall be well"—is a narratival reframing of the problem that renders Adam as "alle man" as Jesus Christ. In other words, the "solution" points to an identity, an identity within an identity. It is not a proposition but a story, not an equation but a complex character. It is given as a picture, a montage of events and features juxtaposed and woven together. As Julian carefully combs through the details of the example, the mutual enclosure of God, Christ, and humanity emerges as a prominent motif.

Julian repeatedly refers to God as the one in whom "all" are "enclosed" or "beclosed." Likewise, Augustine's *interior intimo meo* resonates throughout her writings. She closely paraphrases him, for example, when she says, "God is more nerer to us than

---

[7] According to Hunt, Julian's saying "all shall be well" "effectively translates the Hebrew *shalom*" (103).
[8] This is also an implication of Kerri's Hide's reading of Julian's account of the atonement (110).

oure owne soule" (56.9). While this mutual being-in becomes the explicit theme of Julian's last showing, it already permeates Revelation 14. Julian says, "our soule wonneth [dwells] in God. Our soule is made to be Goddes wonning [dwelling place]; and the wonning of our soule is God" (54.7-8). Evoking 1 John 3-4, John 1:14, and John 17, Julian plays on the words "oning" (uniting) and "wonning" (dwelling), indicating that union takes place through the dwelling-in-and-with of God and the human in Christ. God is humankind's home, and vice versa. "'We be all in him beclosed.' And he is beclosed in us" (57.44-45).[9] This relation, established "in the beginning" and manifest in creation, is recapitulated and deepened through the incarnation.

2. Atonement as Being-Seen-in-Christ

Reflecting on her initial vision of the bleeding head of Christ, which manifests the "homely loving [intimate love]" of "our good lord," Julian says,

> I saw that he is to us all thing that is good and comfortable to oure helpe. He is oure clothing, that for love wrappeth us and windeth us, halseth [embraces] us and all becloseth [wholly encloses] us, hangeth about us for tender love, that he may never leeve us. And so in this sight I saw that he is all thing that is good. (5.1-5)

The whole meaning of the ensuing passion sequence, for Julian, is connected to her perception of Jesus as the clothing that completely surrounds her—wrapping, winding, embracing, enclosing. This language of being clothed in Christ derives from an important

---

[9] This being-at-home-with-and-in one another is probably the most accurate sense in which there is nothing "between" human substance and divine substance. In a rather controversial passage, Julian writes, "thus is the kinde made rightefully oned to the maker, which is substantial kinde unmade, that is God. And therfore it is that ther may ne shall be right noughte between God and mannis soule" (53.38-40). Turner has argued against the suggestion that Julian is an auto-theist based on the claim that she cannot see a difference between human and divine substance (175f). Similarly, I think her comments are not ultimately indicative of a divine-human union of substance but of wills.

set of scriptural metaphors for the reality of atonement, salvation, and reconciliation. (See, for example, 1 Cor. 15:22, 2 Cor. 2:17, Col. 1:27, 2:7, 2:10, Gal. 3:27, and Eph. 2:10, among many other passages.) The image of salvation and forgiveness as a garment (signaling personal and social identity) or shelter (evoking home and protection) is common throughout the Hebrew Bible as well (e.g., Is. 61:10). Related metaphors portray God dwelling in God's "city," another form of enclosure. As evidenced in the prior chapter, this particular web of imagery is pronounced in Julian's example and comprises a (if not *the*) primary figure for atonement in her work.

Recall Julian's interpretation of the parabolic servant or fallen one. She describes the Son of God "afore the fader in Adam kirtle [garment]" (which stand for Adam's flesh), saying he "stode before his fader as a servant [Phil. 2:7]" and, "wilfully taking upon him alle our charge [burden]," he "fell full lowe in the maidens wombe" (51.206-207). Julian describes the doubleness of the servant before God: "In the servant is comprehended the seconde person of the trinite, and in the servant is comprehended Adam: that is to sey, all men" (lines 179-180). "Comprehended" means "grasped" or "known"—and, in this sense, Julian simply communicates that she recognizes both the Son of God and all humanity signified in the figure of the servant. Yet it also means "encompassed" or "circumscribed"—which is forms a stronger claim: the servant (Jesus Christ) *contains* humanity along with the second person of the Trinity. Christ and humankind are *seen* in the same figure another because they *are*—ontologically—in-and-with one another. Julian explains: Christ "falls into" a "taking of our kinde," "for love," and, in so doing, confirms that he "made mannes soule to be his owne cite [city] and his dwelling place" (lines 124-125).

Julian's use of "oning" and "wonning" is integrally bound up with her depiction of Christ as the representative or head of humanity. She says, "he is the heed, and we be his membris" (lines 218-219) (see 1 Cor. 12:12). In him humankind is incorporated—embodied, gathered together, and taken up into the Trinity in Christ, set "before [the lord] in himselfe present [into his own presence]" (line 176). Julian thus claims, "alle is the manhode of Crist [all people are (in) Christ's humanity]" (line 218). For, paraphrasing Paul, "in the sighte of God alle man is one man, and one man is alle man" (lines 88-89). This "one man" is Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, "in whom we be alle enclosed" (53.27). Just as Christ assumes, and indeed becomes, human flesh (Jn. 1:14), humanity in turn "puts on" Christ (Rom. 13:14). He clothes himself in humanity and humanity in himself. On Julian's account, then, the atoning relationship between Christ and the human is clearly one of reciprocal enclosure—or, more accurately, the being-in-one-another of Christ and humankind *is* the atoning relationship.

If atonement as "beclosure" is to be construed as an "exchange" or "substitution," it must be of a distinctly perichoretic sort. Putting the emphasis on being-in—borne-in, seen-in, sheltered-in—enables Julian to describe the atonement in a way that is less mechanistic or technical and more organic or relational than many juridical (substitutionary) construals. While it sometimes goes hand-in-hand with legal and economic language in Julian's text (e.g., "deem," "rightfulhede," "again-buying"), evoking clothing and enclosure plays up the narrativity of juridical metaphors and pushes the issue of identity and character to the fore. Particularly when addressing the question of blame, Julian relies on the language of "assignation"—which is functionally synonymous with "imputation" but also connotes a more personal sense of character

ascription. In stressing the way clothing and shelter designate, ensure, and construct

identity and relationship, the concept of substitution is not simply supplanted but

expanded. Substitution or exchange becomes more than a simple this-*for*-that, a strict

trade of discrete subjects or statuses. For Julian, it involves a complication or

incorporation, of identities, histories, and attributes: this-*in*-that, and vice versa. The

atoning incorporation into and being enveloped by Christ is inherently transformative.

We see this in that the overtones of Julian's account of the atonement are "medicinal"

rather than "forensic."[10] The reidentification of humanity in Christ is healing, from the

inside out (indwelling) and also from the outside in (putting-on).

In other words, the way Julian talks about God seeing humanity in Christ is

distinct from any account in which God sees Christ instead of the human. The overall

effect of her depiction of the atonement as being-seen-in does not present Christ as a

shield, veil, or lens—something that blocks, overlays, or merely filters. Instead, her use

of the language of being "in" Christ implies an inextricability of the sort we find in

Adam's first words in Genesis, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,"

or, to use the biological maternal analogy Julian prefers: "our savioure is oure very

moder, in whome we be endlessly borne and *never shall come out of* him" (57.40-43).[11] (I

will return to this image below.) The point I wish to make here is that it is not the case

that God's judgment meets Christ *instead of* humans. Rather, God sees *both at once*, as

one person, like a woman "with child."

---

[10] Baker points out that, in contrast to Bernard's litany of pains from sin, in her example, "Julian articulates the servant's suffering in medical and psychological rather than forensic terms" (*Vision to Book*, 98). The same can be said of the servant's redemption, particularly inasmuch as his stumbling doubles as the "fall" or condescension of Christ. Baker goes onto claim that "in Julian's parable the lord regards the servant as a compassionate healer rather than a just judge" (185).

[11] Emphasis added.

This coordinates with what has already been said about the "dome" of God. The doubleness of the parabolic servant (divine/human, sensual/substantial, inner/outer, goodly/sinful) is indeed reflected in the divine gaze. But the divine gaze is not double in the same way that human judgment is. While the latter is alternately easy and harsh (and perhaps each at the wrong time), divine judgment expresses one thing—love—in two modes—compassion and rejoicing (which, we should note, are both pivotal terms in the Parable of the Prodigal Son). The divine bifocality that corresponds to the "beclosure" of the atonement is not to be mistaken, then, for a polarity of grace and damnation, love and hate, election and reprobation. It is not a medley of pity and blame (as, for example, in Augustine, Anselm, and Calvin).[12] The two sides of God's "tender" look, as Julian recounts it, are pity toward human suffering and bliss over the restoration of humanity in Christ (see chapter three).

2. Trinity and Eternal Election: Seeing God in Christ

Bound up with this theme of being-(seen-)in-Christ is a claim about the revelation of God in Christ. Just as true humanity is constituted (and revealed) in Christ, for Julian, true divinity is revealed (and constituted?) in Christ. What Julian is saying exceeds an assertion about the historical atonement per se. She is also asserting that the suffering love of Christ is a portal into the intratrinitarian love that is the divine life. When she witnesses "the servant fall" and "in the same time" her "understanding" is "led into God" (52.40-41), she sees that "the trinite is comprehended in Crist" (57.16-17)—and, further,

---

[12] On the relationship between Julian's example and an Anselmian understanding of the atonement see Baker, *Vision to Book* (100f) and Turner (126), as well as: Edmund Colledge, *The Medieval Mystics of England* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961)**,** 21, 87, and, Joan Nuth, "Two Medieval Soteriologies: Anslem of Canterbury and Julian of Norwich," *Theological Studies* 53 (1992), 611-645.

that "God began never to love mankinde" (53.21). In Julian's various descriptions of beholding God in Christ, three interrelated claims need to be teased out: first, it is Jesus Christ who reveals the Trinity; second, in so doing, he also displays the love of God for humankind; and, third, this love—and, in some sense, humanity as well—is *eternally* included in the Trinity.

     i. The Trinity in Christ

Julian's long text is peppered with affirmations of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God, the Trinity, and the Father. Reading Julian's showings, one is quickly absorbed in her intricate world of thought and hardly notices the extraordinary fact that what begins as a supposedly descriptive account of visionary experience culminates with a sophisticated Christology and theology of the Trinity. In her Long Text, Julian prefaces her first vision (of the suffering of Christ crowned with thorns) by stating that this sight "comprehends and specifies" the Trinity. She says it encapsulates much of what is to follow in subsequent showings concerning the incarnation and the "oning" between God and humankind (1.3-7). Beholding "the garland of thornes…pressed on [Jesus'] blessed head" and "the red bloud trekile downe…hote and freshely, plentuously and lively," Julian remarks, "Right so, both God and man, the same that sufferd for me," and claims, "it was himselfe that shewed it to me, without any meane [intermediary]" (4.1-5). She continues by affirming that "the trinity is God, God is the trinity" and alerting her readers that "this [the Trinity] was shewed in the first sight and in all" (4.7-11). In other words, Julian wants us to know from the start that her graphic showings of the visceral suffering of Christ 1) concern the incarnation and hypostatic union, 2) are *self*-revelations of God, and 3) are intrinsically triune. Hence the hermeneutical principle that follows, "For wher

Jhesu appireth the blessed trinity is understand, as to my sight" (4.11): the Trinity is understood wherever Jesus appears.

We find similar logic at work when Julian, referring specifically to the enclosure of the Father in the Son in the ninth showing, she says, "I saw in Crist that the father is" (22.11). She witnesses the "werking of the father" that "Crist shewed" her: "that he geveth mede [reward] to his sonne Jhesu Crist" (lines 9-12). She goes on, "We be his blisse, we be his mede, we be his wurshipe [honor], we be his crowne" (lines 17-18). In other words, what she sees is salvation and, in it, the cooperation of Father and Son. Similarly, in the tenth revelation, when Jesus shows his side, Julian says it is "as if he had saide: 'My darling, behold and see thy lorde, thy God, that is thy maker and thy endlesse joy. See thin owne brother, thy savioure. My childe, behold and see what liking and blisse I have in thy salvation, and for my love enjoye with me" (24.11-14). Jesus' body figures as a gate, a portal into the divine life, where what is beheld is the love of humankind and rejoicing over its salvation.

Julian is careful to maintain throughout that all three persons of the Trinity are involved in the suffering love of Christ and active in the work of salvation. She says, for example, "Alle the trinite wrought in the passion of Crist," even though she appropriates the suffering of the passion to "the maidens sonne" (23.23-24). Where she addresses the same showing in the short text, Julian refers to God as the "blissedfulle trinite of oure salvation" in which "the fadere is plesed, the sone is worshipped [glorified], the haly gaste likes" (ST, Sec. 12).[13] Julian exhibits this strong sense of the perichoretic unity of the persons of the Trinity throughout her writing. She often clarifies that when she says "God," she means "Trinity," and this is true even when she speaks of the divinity of

---

[13] Watson and Jenkins, 89.

Christ. Of course, that is not to say she suggests that the Trinity per se is incarnate in Christ. However, she never gives the impression that the second person works alone or is alone involved in the divine-human union that takes place in him. In other words, she constantly alternates her stress on appropriation and unity. Thus, when Julian writes that in the incarnation, "God is knit to oure kind," she adds, "the trinite is comprehended in Crist," before assigning the incarnation specifically to "the secund parson" or "mid person" of the Trinity. In short, while she upholds the orthodox view that only the Son is incarnate, she also emphasizes that all three persons are implicated in "oure flesh taking" (57.15-18). (I will return to this in the third point below.) In fact, Julian later extends the triad most commonly applied to the persons of the Trinity directly to "moder Jhesu," saying "he is almighty, all wisdom, and all love" (61.33).

An important implication of these passages is that Trinity is accessed through the economy of salvation—and not otherwise. Julian's recognition of and reflection on the Trinity depends upon the suffering love of Jesus reanimated in her visions.

ii. The Meaning is Love

Julian's phrase "love is oure lordes mening" becomes a hermeneutical principle akin to Augustine's *regula caritatis* for reading found in *De doctrina christiana*.[14] She wants her readers to know that, whatever she has written, its truth is hemmed in at every point by love.[15] This much should be evident from the start—after all, the text commences, "This is a revelation of love…" But it may be that Julian felt the need to

---

[14] Augustine writes in *On Christian Doctrine*, "Whoever thinks he understands divine scripture or any part of it, but whose interpretation does not build up the twofold love of God and neighbor, has not really understood it. Whoever has drawn from scripture an interpretation that does fortify this love, but who is later proven not to have found the meaning intended by the author of the passage, is deceived to be sure, but not in a harmful way, and he is guilty of no untruth at all" (1.36.40).

[15] Where Augustine emphasizes the "double" love of God and neighbor, saying humans do not need instruction to love themselves, Julian maintains a triple love throughout. She thinks humans need to hear that they are loved and much of her teaching is oriented toward getting people to see themselves as such.

reiterate this throughout and especially in conclusion in order to set up guardrails for her readers (as if to warn, "lest you go looking for something else, nothing other than this is to be found here"). As intricate, strange, dense, and even apocalyptic as Julian's prose can be at times, as it turns out, there is nothing willfully codified about it. Her intent is not to obscure some deeper message that requires strategic excavation. She wishes the meaning to be plain. That is not to say her showings do not require diligent interpretation (on her part and ours), but Julian thinks their content and purpose is unambiguous. As she writes in a well-known section from the last chapter of her long text,

> And fro the time that it [the revelation] was shewde, I desyerde oftentimes to witte [know] that [what] was our lords mening [intention]. And fifteen yere after or mor, I was answered in gostly [spiritual or intellectual] understonding, seyeng thus: "What, woldest thou wit thy lordes mening in this thing? Wit [know] it wele, love was his mening. Who shewed it the? Love. What shewid he the? Love. Wherfore shewed he it the? For love. Holde the therin, thou shalt wit more in the same [Hold yourself in this and you shall know more of the same]. But thou shalt never wit therin other withouten ende [you will never perceive anything else in it for all eternity]." (86.13-16)

In this passage, Julian tells us that: 1) God's own authorial intent in all her showings is love, 2) what is given to her is a *self*-revelation of Love ("Who shewed it the? Love"—which is to say: God), 3) the purpose of the showings is to communicate love (which she specifies in terms of the gifts of light, comfort, and joy), and 4) there is absolutely nothing else to be gleaned from the showings but this (by implication, she will have the joy of knowing this love for all eternity).

"Love" is the Lord's meaning. As is so often the case, the repetitive use of the word begins to erode *its* meaning. What does Julian want us to understand by "love?" From the beginning of the Long Text, love has a special relationship to goodness and goodness is, in turn, understood primarily in terms of caregiving and nearness. We see this, for example, in Julian's initial description of Christ clothing humanity with himself (5.1-5 above). The passage begins and ends with the attribution of the word "good" to Christ. Its meaning is concretely filled out in the middle by his comforting and caring action (he "wrappeth…windeth…halseth…all becloseth" and "hangeth about us"). This purpose of this action is twice affirmed as "for love" and "for tender love." The bond is such that "he may never leeve us." At the end of her revelation, she tells us,

> And I sawe fulle sekerly [very surely] in this and in alle, that or [before] God
>
> made us he loved us, which love was never sleked [quenched], ne never shalle.
>
> And in this love he hath done alle his werkes, and in this love he hath made alle
>
> thinges profitable to us. And in this love oure life is everlasting." (86.17-20).

These lines further elucidate what is meant by "love." It becomes clear that love is defined in terms of what it *does*. Love desires (and is never slaked). What love desires is the beloved and the good of the beloved. Love lends life. It comforts and restores. Love does what is good and this doing is constant and reliable. It transforms what is bad into "profit" on behalf of others (Rom. 8:28).

Julian's usage of "love" is plainly linked to what God has in fact done in the history of creation and redemption. Hence her chief triad for the persons of the Trinity is "Maker, Keeper, Lover." This is particularly well illustrated in the image of the hazelnut

(5.7-13). The conclusion of Julian's final chapter simply recapitulates this earlier example. In Chapter 5, she says,

> [God] shewed a little thing the quantity of a haselnot [hazelnut], lying in the palme of my hand as me semide [it seemed to me], and it as a rounde as any balle. I looked theran with the eye of my understanding, and thought: "What may this be?" And it was answered generally thus: "It is all that is made." I marvayled how it might laste, for methought it might sodenly have fallen to nought [perished] for littlenes. And I was answered in my understanding: "It lasteth and ever shall, for God loveth it. And so hath all thing being by the love of God."
>
> In this little thing I saw three properties: the first is that God made it, the secund is that God loveth it, the thirde is that God kepeth it. But what is that to me? Sothly [truly], the maker, the keper, the lover.

In this passage, Julian offers a theology of creation. She describes creaturely being as contingent, borrowed; it has life only by God's grace. In a sense, Julian is merely repeating the common teaching of scripture and the church that creation is actively sustained by God at every point. But in her reflection on the hazelnut, she specifies that this action is the foremost expression of God's *love*: God grants life—that is love; God watches over, sustains, and restores—that is love. In other words, God is not at all construed as a disinterested or distant life-source. God, as Maker and Keeper, is Lover—a lover that *longs* for the beloved. This desire, thirst, or longing of God is another recurrent motif in Julian's work and, significantly, she locates its origin prior to creation (86.18). (I will return to this point in a moment.)

To summarize, then: in Julian's use of the word, "love" signifies being-with and caring-for. Love, by definition, draws near and takes care.

iii. Eternal Atonement in the Trinity

Julian describes God's love for "all that is made" as pre-temporal or eternal. Speaking of Christ's passion, she says this "love was without beginning, is, and shall be without ende" (22.40). In the final lines of her long text Julian reiterates this point, asserting that, "In oure making we had beginning, but *the love wherin he made us was in him fro without beginning*, in which love we have oure beginning" (86.20-22).[16] Her *Revelation* is peppered with similar affirmations, particularly throughout Revelation 14. Of course, if it were otherwise, in Thomas Aquinas' words, "it would follow that something would come anew into the Divine Mind,"[17] which cannot be the case given the simplicity and eternity of God. In this sense, there is nothing particularly novel about Julian's assertion that God's love for the world is eternal. However, where she pushes further than her predecessors is, first, in her oblique narration of election and predestination in Christ through the example and, second, her apparent inclusion of humanity *in the Trinity* throughout the Long Text.

Immediately following the Example of the Lord and Servant, Julian gives an account of election in Chapter 53. Referring to the "rightful knitting and endlesse oning" through God's "awne good will in his endlesse foreseeing purpose," Julian comments, "God began never to love mankinde… righte so the same mankind hath be [been], in the forsighte of God, knowen and loved fro without beginning in his rightful entent [providence]" (53.17-18, 21-24). According to Baker, "rightful knitting and endlesse

---

[16] Emphasis added.
[17] Aquinas, *ST*, IIIa, q. 24, a. 1.

oning" is Julian's language for "predestination."[18] Because of the vividness of her

imagery, and her frequent repetitions of phrases like "endlesse oning," Julian's view of

predestination is suggestive of what might be called an "eternal atonement" in God and

yields an affirmation of divine self-election on par with that of Barth.[19]

Julian revealingly locates the at-one-ment of Christ and "alle" in the Trinity,

eternally, through election:

> God, the blisseful trinite, which is everlasting being, right as he is endless fro
>
> without beginning, righte so it was in his purpose endlesse to make mankind;
>
> which fair kind [human nature] furst was dight [assigned to] the second person.
>
> And when he [Christ] woulde [desired it], by full accorde of alle the trinite, he
>
> made us alle at ones [all in an instant, or all in one]. And in our making he knit us
>
> and oned us to himselfe, by which oning we be kept as clene and as noble as we
>
> were made. (58.1-6)[20]

When Julian says "or God made us he loved us," she echoes Ephesians 1:4, "He chose us

in him before the foundation of the world."[21] She conceives of human election as election

through Christ.[22] Again, this is in line with "the teaching of mother church." As Aquinas

---

[18] Baker, *Vision to Book*, 111f.

[19] As in Psalm 139:13, "For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb," "knitting" is associated with human procreation, one of Julian's primary images for creation and redemption as well as all other forms of union with God, including predestination.

[20] I am following Watson and Jenkins' interpretation in putting "Christ" in brackets following "he" (306). Although one might expect "God" to be the subject here, they argue that the context suggests otherwise (see the following sentence). This reading suits Julian's Christology more generally as well. She highlights the role of Christ as creator throughout her writing.

[21] Aquinas quotes this passage in *ST* Ia, q. 23, a. 4. He points out, choseness presupposes love in the order of reason. Julian may also have in mind a passage like 1 Peter 1:20, "He [the lamb of God] was destined [chosen, known] before the foundation of the world but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake."

[22] Baker thinks Julian understands the order of election and predestination after Peter Lombard's summary of Romans 8:30: "preadestinando non existentes, vocando aversos, justificando peccatores, glorificando mortales [by appointing beforehand the nonexistent, by calling those who turned away, by justifying sinners, and by glorifying mortals]" (*Vision to Book*, 114). See Lombard, *In Epistolam ad Romanos 8:30-32* (*PL* 191.1451). Aquinas too clearly distinguishes election and predestination, but reverses the order (for

writes, "by one and the same act God predestinated both Christ and us."[23] However, while Aquinas restricts the predestination of the Son to his humanity, Julian's comments given the impression of an "endlesse oning" of humanity and God in the second person of the Trinity that pertains, first of all, to God Godself.[24] Her language insinuates that *the second person of the Trinity* is predestined eternally, destined not only to become incarnate but also to designate humanity in himself, within the triune life, from before the foundation of the world.

It would be out of keeping with the tone and content of Julian's reflection on predestination to speculate, as Aquinas does, "If Christ were not to have been incarnate, God would have decreed men's salvation by other means."[25] Instead, we find her reasoning that "Goddes sonne fell" "when Adam felle" because of this *prior* "oning…made in heven," by which "Goddes sonne might not be seperath from Adam" (51.185-186). Julian does not speak of the predestination of humanity in Christ as an idea, in terms of a prior "plan of salvation" (which could have been worked out differently). Rather, predestination is an ontological bond between Adamic humanity and Jesus Christ that consists in God's assignment of humanity to Godself in the person of the Son. Christ, for Julian, is predestined not to fulfill a task that could be performed otherwise but to be in himself "all in all"—to *be* the reconciliation of God and the world

---

him election precedes predestination, and both depend upon love). Aquinas says: "The reason of this is that predestination, as stated above (a.1), is a part of providence. Now providence, as also prudence, is the plan existing in the intellect directing the ordering of some things towards an end; as was proved above (q.22, a.2). But nothing is directed towards an end unless the will for that end already exists" (see *ST* Ia, q.23, a.4). However, I will use the terms without drawing a sharp distinction between them, because 1) Julian uses neither word and the words she does use correspond only loosely to either, 2) where they appear in the Greek NT the meanings are usually similar if not interchangeable, and 3) Barth uses them interchangeably.

[23] Aquinas, *ST* IIIa, q. 24, a. 4.

[24] Aquinas writes, "we must attribute predestination to the Person of Christ: not, indeed, in Himself or as subsisting in the Divine Nature, but as subsisting in the human nature" (Ibid., a. 1.).

[25] Ibid., a. 4.

(2 Cor. 5:19). Echoing Colossians 1:15-17—"He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation, for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth…He is before all things, and in him all things hold together"—Julian writes, "And by the endlesse entent and assent and the full acorde of al the trinite, the mid person wolde be grounde and hed of this fair kinde [human nature] out of whom we be all come, in whom we be alle enclosed, into whom we shall all wenden [go]" (53.25-28). The temporal atonement derives from and reinstates this eternal atonement.[26] The divine-human union in the incarnation has the quality of a repetition.[27] It echoes an occurrence that has already taken place in second person of the Trinity.

This understanding of predestination is of paramount importance for Julian's argument that God is without blame or anger, which is connected to the contrariness that bothers her in Chapter 45 and following. Despite the intense focus on the human suffering of the servant, her example provides an *answer* to her question about how God's beholds fallen humanity not so much as a retelling of human sin and divine grace,

---

[26] This calls into question Turner's claim that Julian is "unable to make any sense of the Incarnation…except as a response of the divine love and compassion for the predicament of fallen humanity" (209). "Response" is contingent. For Julian this "oning" is preordained. She does not describe the incarnation primarily as a solution to a problem. Nor does her language suggest that election, fall, and atonement are simply willed all at once. She goes father than this. The atonement in time arises from and is always already included in the eternal atonement—and not as an idea but as an ontological bond. The incarnation is not, first of all, a response to fallenness; it is not preordained as one of any number of possible solutions to sin (Aquinas); it is inscribed in the eternal love of God, in God's eternal will to dwell with and in humankind. The fall is a *felix culpa* for Julian. As horrific as Julian understands human sin and suffering to be, she believes the fall is a necessary and even positive part of the divine-human union in at least two respects. First, it provides the conditions for the appearance and recognition the love of God. Second, grace and mercy in some sense constitute a deepened intimacy between God and the world and an increase in God's good pleasure in creaturely reality.

[27] We have a modern Catholic precedent for this sort of reasoning in the trinitarian theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, trans. Aidan Nichols, O.P. (San Fancicsco: Ignatius Press, 1990) and Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* Vol. V, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatiat Press, 1998). His notion of Ur-events in God that are recapitulated in time is influenced by Hegel and Barth. It seems like Julian is saying something similar in speaking about the atonement as an eternal and inward happening in God that "wants" to be achieved outwardly—e.g., her claim that grace and mercy (i.e., world/time) are better than unrealized love is interesting in this connection.

or even incarnation and crucifixion, but as an account of election (which I am referring to as "eternal atonement"). Here Julian does not sideline the second half of Ephesians 1:4, "he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world *to be holy and blameless before him in love*." Election goes hand-in-hand with blamelessness. It is "an ontological relation between the elect and the Trinity for all eternity that precludes their damnation." In the words of Romans 8:20, "For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be made conformable to the image of his Son; that he might be the firstborn amongst many brethren."[28] In Julian's view, the nature of the familial relation is such that those who are in Christ are no more objects of blame than Jesus himself.

iv. Inclusive Patterns of Trinitarian Language

In so radically maintaining the primordial identity between Adam and Christ in her construal of predestination, Julian—how deliberately I do not know—appears to locate the humanity of Christ within the Trinity eternally. Whether and to what extent Julian would say this is always already the case, her vision is so comprehensively fixed on the conjoined love (eternal) and grace (temporal) of God in Christ that, even when it is "led into God," she does not behold a strategy for salvation but humankind, beloved, cradled, *at home* within the second person of the Trinity—as one. This message is reinforced not only by her overt assertions that humankind is endlessly "knit" into God but also by certain patterns in her trinitarian language. Two are particularly noteworthy:

---

[28] Baker, *Vision to Book*, 111. According to Baker, this is the scriptural warrant for Julian "integrating the doctrines of predestination and the *imago Dei*." Roman 8 (vv. 1, 31-35) also undergirds Julian's teaching on predestination in Chapter 53f. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus… If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ?"

First, as Julian proliferates triads corresponding to Father, Son, and Spirit, their

actions and attributes, and human likeness to the Trinity, she often adds on a fourth (and

sometimes fifth) item to each series.[29] For example, "The trinity is our maker, the trinity

is our keper, the trinity is our everlasting lover, the trinity is our endlesse joy and our

blisse, by our lord Jesu Christ and in our lord Jesu Christ" (4.8-10). It is easy to pick out

the Trinity of maker-keeper-lover, a traditional trinitarian pattern. But what are we to

think when the enumeration does not stop there? Is the addition of "joy and bliss" just a

tag, a rhetorical flourish? One possible interpretation is that the fourth term refers to the

union, perfection, or love of the trinitarian persons. It indicates something like

completion, abundance, or harmony. However, it is typically the case that the terms

taking fourth place are keyed to the economy of salvation in Julian's writing. Bliss and

joy are associated with mercy and grace, words that, in turn, point to God's relationship

to what is made (e.g., see 59.1f).[30] If the fourth term stands for "unity," it is not the unity

of the persons in and for themselves, but the unity of God and humankind. In my view,

then, when we see words such as "enjoy" appended to a trinitarian sequence of naming,

we are meant to interpret them as a placeholder for humanity (sometimes Christ's,

sometimes general), as an indication that "our fair kind" is incorporated into the Trinity.

A second telling pattern is embedded in the first: for Julian, it is always "our"

maker, keeper, lover; "our" mighty, wise, good God; "our" father, mother, lord. Julian

rarely, if ever, refers to the Trinity apart from its relationship to humanity or, more

specifically, to herself and her fellow Christians. Many times she tells us her

---

[29] Significantly, these triads do not always follow the ordering Father—Son—Spirit. Further, some of the triads referring the trinitarian persons are also applied to one person at a time. The effect is a stronger sense of perichoresis. While Julian knows the tradition of appropriation, she makes creative use of it.
[30] Cf. 23.1f. Mercy and grace are also connected to sensuality and fallenness.

"understanding" ascends into the godhead, yet she never sees God *in se*, self-contained, apart from creation. She always sees abundance, a desire for another that spills over— hence her pattern of exceeding the third term. Similarly, more often than not, Julian's trinitarian grammar pertains to creation itself. While she is explaining that humanity is knit into the Trinity, her language is knitting the Trinity into creation. She speaks, for example, in triads of being, increasing, fulfilling (58.25), nature, mercy, grace (lines 26-27), might/father, wisdom/mother, love/lord (lines 28-29), and so on.

All that I have said in the preceding sections serves to preface Julian's transition into a rather abstruse excursus on the motherhood of the Trinity immediately following her Example of the Lord and Servant. While, on the surface, Revelation 14 and the succeeding chapters might appear to move in different directions, my hope is that highlighting the themes of mutual enclosure and the "lovely loking" of God in Julian's presentation of the atonement will make the profound continuity between Chapters 51-52 and Chapters 58-61. The former consists of a narrative "showing" while the latter is more abstract and systematic. Yet even in this conceptual clarification of her retelling of the parable, Julian's language is persistently relational. She does not abstract from the fundamental bond between God and humans in Christ. Instead, she shifts from one set of relational terms (father/son, lord/master) to another (mother/child). How the second set evolves from and develops upon the first is the subject of the following section.

II. "Reduction" to the Motherhood of God

Julian's exposition of the example in Chapter 51 presses into Chapter 52, which begins,

> And thus I saw that God enjoyeth [rejoices] that he is our fader, and God enjoyeth that he is our moder, and God enjoyeth that he is our very spouse, and our soule his loved wife. And Crist enjoyeth that he is our broder, and Jhesu enjoyeth that he is our saviour. (52.1-4)

It is here that Julian mentions the motherhood of God for the first time, a concept that is missing in the Short Text and is thus essentially tied to her revisions and the Example of the Lord and Servant that prompts them. My argument is that Julian's trinitarian excursus on the motherhood of God is in no way disconnected from the narrative that precedes it. Rather, the example distills or "reduces" to Julian's perception that "as verely as God is oure fader, as verely is God oure moder" (59.10). In fact, these chapters could be read as an extended meditation on the homecoming of the lost son, where home is figured in maternal terms as the womb and bosom of God. As Julian goes on to say, "And thus to se this overpassing noblete [the great exaltation of humankind in the atonement], was my understonding led into God in the same time that I saw the servant falle" (lines 40-41). These lines are reminiscent of her earlier claim that "when Adam felle, Goddes sonne fell" (51.185). In the condescension of the Son, Julian receives more than an answer to her question about sin and blame. Her insight exceeds her expectation: her understanding is "led into God" through the incarnation and atonement. The servant's "fall" opens up the divine life. There Julian sees an eternal "oning" in which "the redemption and the againe-buying of mannekinde" is rooted (53.18-19). However—and for precisely the same reasons—*there* she also sees the motherhood of God in Christ.

The introductory passage of Chapter 52 (the conclusion of the Example) provides us with a few important signposts for what follows in Chapters 53-63 (on the Triune

motherhood of God). First, beginning "and thus" indicates that the ensuing reflection on the Trinity corresponds to the content of the Example of the Lord and Servant in the preceding chapter. As Colledge and Walsh note, "the opening paragraph of chapter 52…appears to be the *culmen contemplationis* of the parable."[31] It also serves as the hinge between Julian's example and her excursus on the motherhood of God. It is precisely the example that focuses her on God's maternal quality. Second, this passage signals Julian's preference for intimate kinship titles when describing the divine-human relationship. Reminiscent of Gregory of Nyssa's "mutually corrective" analogies for the Trinity, Julian's proliferation of such terms without regard to their apparent exclusivity points beyond the specifically human limitations of these models to the comprehensiveness of God's nearness and love.[32] (I will revisit to this point below.) Third, Julian highlights through repetition that God "rejoices" in these intimate bonds to humankind. References to delight, rejoicing, enjoyment, bliss, and love are conspicuous wherever Julian speaks of God's attitude toward salvation. This one of the ways Julian accentuates, throughout her treatment of atonement and predestination, the "heart," "desire," or "longing" of God rather than the "mind," "power," or "decreeing" of God. She effectively declares: God does what God does because of who God is (wisdom and love), not just because God can (might).[33] Several paragraphs later, Julian mentions God's rejoicing again, saying of the lord's "chere," "mightely he enjoyeth in his falling, for the hye [high] raising and fulhed of blisse that mankinde is to come to, overpassing

---

[31] Colledge and Walsh, 139.

[32] See Sarah Coakley, "Introduction—Gender, Trinitarian Analogies, and the Pedagogy of *The Song*," *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 3.

[33] Here again we see that Julian stresses the will or desire of God—which is embodied and defined in Jesus Christ—more so than mind or might—which might otherwise lead to abstraction about God's absolute power apart from its concrete demonstration in the atonement.

that we should have had if he not had fallen" (52.38-40). God delights in the "falling" of the Son because it results in the homecoming and exaltation of humankind.[34]

In what follows, I attend to the issue of gendered theological language before addressing the connection between God's "kindness" and motherhood in Julian's naming of God. I then summarize and interpret Julian's discussion of the motherhood of Christ and of the Trinity in the context of her theological tradition. Finally, I follow up on my preliminary claim about the vital relationship between the example (ch. 51-52) and Julian's trinitarian reflection on divine motherhood (ch. 58-63).

1. Gendered Theological Language and Its Function for Julian

Julian's creative interaction with the traditional gendering of God has been the subject of much scholarly interest, and rightly so. The priority she—a medieval English laywoman—so freely grants divine motherhood in her final chapters indeed warrants amazement as well as analysis. Yet it is not within the parameters of this particular project to consider in depth the various assumptions about sex and gender embedded in Julian's naming of God. Nor will I be able to trace the history of biblical and theological fatherhood language or make a case for more inclusive naming. I should outline at the outset, then, a number of the observations and presuppositions undergirding my understanding of the import of God's "motherhood" for Julian.

i. Basic Presuppositions about Gendered Theological Language

The application of the title "mother" to God and, especially, Christ would not have been unfamiliar to Julian. In a sense, what she does is firmly in keeping with the

---

[34] This is why in this passage, as throughout her long text, Julian construes the fall as a *felix culpa*, a matter addressed by many of her commentators. See, for example, Baker (*Vision to Book*, 86) and Turner (214).

tradition. However, she would also have been aware that God (as well as the self) is *primarily* figured in masculine terms. So her apparently deliberate divergence from this pattern is undoubtedly meaningful. But when attempting to make out the precise meaning of any particular use of maternal language for God there are a number of parameters to keep in mind.

First, we should not forget that the cultural significance of Julian's language is not immediately self-evident to modern readers. The words "mother" and "father," like "woman" and "man," are fluid terms. They do not bear exactly the same associations at all times in all places. Gendered images can often take on idiosyncratic connotations as well. These are based on the personal experience of the writer, as is evident in some of Julian's characterizations. In other words, one should be cautious in drawing conclusions based on present day experience about what a fourteenth-century figure means by "mother."[35]

At the same time, second, in view of the ordinary physiological givens of sex, there are certain gender associations that are intelligible to practically all readers—for instance, the bodily self-giving of a mother in the nursing of her child. This example is analogous to, say, religious metaphors based on the sun, a physical phenomenon with which nearly all humans are familiar. Although it is an emotionally evocative image, strictly speaking the "nursing mother" is more of a biological fact than a psychological insight, hence its (near) universality apart from the culturally specific gender markers attending it. (Implied here is the critical distinction between "gender"—as socially

---

[35] See Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 7.

constructed—and "sex"—as biologically determined—as well as an awareness of their practical overlap and reciprocal influence on one another.[36])

Third, gendered language is rarely, if ever, neutral. It bears the impress of a patriarchal "social imaginary" that is inherently misogynistic.[37] The dynamics of sex and gender are caught in a system of hierarchical dualism that is difficult to efface from thought and language, even for those who wish to subvert this system. Thus the mere addition of feminine titles for God does not by itself dismantle dominant biases and may even reinforce them in certain ways.[38] This is certainly true of Julian's writing. For example, in feminizing the caregiving of God she at once elevates women and reinscribes a social pattern in which women are subordinated to certain roles and spheres of influence.

Fourth, gendered language for God, whether masculine or feminine, is fundamentally anthropomorphic and metaphorical. That is to say, when we call God "father" or "mother," we are drawing on certain dimensions of the realities of women and men as a model for imagining and speaking about something else (see chapter one, concerning the function of metaphor). Julian clearly understands both that God transcends sex and gender and that these creaturely traits are in some way applicable to the Creator.

---

[36] On this, see, for example, Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 8 and 24-48.

[37] The studies on this connection are manifold. Caroline Walker Bynum's comment on the comprehensiveness of the problem in the religious milieu in which Julian would have found herself is emblematic. "The misogyny of the later Middle Ages is well known. Not merely a defensive reaction on the part of men who were in fact socially, economically and politically dominant, it was fully articulated in theological, philosophical and scientific theory that was centuries old. *Male* and *female* were contrasted and asymmetrically valued as intellect/body, active/passive, rational/irrational, reason/emotion, self-control/lust, judgment/mercy and order/disorder. In the devotional writing of the later Middle Ages, they were even contrasted in the image of God—father or Bridegroom—and soul (*anima*)—child or bride" (*Fragmentation and Redemption*, 151).

[38] See Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Female Nature of God," *Concilium* 143 (1981), 66.

Fifth, as there is no way around the fact that, in Ricoeur's words, "the symbol gives rise to thought," there are at least two intrinsic goods involved in breaching a hegemony of masculine imagery with imagery drawn from women's bodies and experience: 1) a theological good: it subverts the idolatrous tendencies of an over-literalized imagination, reminding us that, in Julian's words, "the fader is not [a] man" (51.23); and, 2) as the other side of this, an ethical good: it dignifies the reality that women as well as men are *capax Dei* and *imago Dei*, that "men" in general are not closer to God, more suitable for representing God, or in any sense more like God than "women" in general (an important fact exclusively masculine naming invariably conceals).[39]

Finally, and most importantly, we must avoid falling into the sort of easy gender binarism in which—whether for prejudiced or critical reasons—one might regard Julian's turn to the motherhood of God after renarrating the Parable of the Prodigal Son, with its all masculine cast, as a conceptual or thematic rupture. Such an assumption would be antithetical to the integrity of Julian's text as well as broader trends in medieval women's writing. It is my view that Julian's teaching on the motherhood of God both consolidates and expands the theological contents of the example. This perspective dovetails with the findings of Caroline Walker Bynum that female writers in the high and late Middle Ages were significantly less likely than male writers to use feminine and masculine imagery in dichotomous ways.[40] In shifting from the pairings lord/servant or father/son to

---

[39] See Ricoeur, "Conclusion: The Symbol Gives Rise to Thought," *The Symbolism of Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) and "Fatherhood: From Phantasm to Symbol," *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, trans D. Ihde (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974). Cf. Soskice's chapter "Calling God 'Father'" in *The Kindness of God*. Taking "the Song of Moses" (Deut. 23) as paradigmatic, Soskice writes, "Both paternal and maternal imagery are given in quick succession, effectively ruling out literalism, as does the equally astonishing image of God as a rock giving birth" (79).
[40] Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 165. For a number of reasons, when referring to God or the self, women writers are more inclined "to fuse male and female images" and are less averse to "role reversal" than their male counterparts (186, 170). In other words, even if female writers tacitly accept a

mother/child, Julian is elucidating, nuancing, and intensifying rather than overturning the divine-human relationship as she has already described it in her retelling of the parable. In other words, I think we should not be so preoccupied with the *gender* evocations that we miss the gender *evocations*. (The same must be said when encountering paternal language for God in scripture and theology.)

While there is much more to be said about gendered theological language, I will only able to treat textual issues related to sex and gender in passing. Julian's text abounds invitations to reflect on this nexus of issues. In what follows, these will be signaled but must often remain unanalyzed.

ii. The Motherly "Kindness" of God

Julian's application of relational titles to God depends upon a basic non-opposition of gendered terms such as father and mother, brother and sister, or spouse and child. We see this in a variety of interrelated ways, for example, in 1) her focus on kinship titles, 2) her multiplication and mixing of names and trinitarian descriptors, 3) the prominence of the word "kind" in her thought, and 4) her non-gendered translation of the Tetragrammaton. Such patterns of naming help bring into focus the theological context of Julian's maternal language for God and its function in declaring God's "kindness."

First, as Janet Soskice stresses, to understand the full significance of Julian's invocation of God as "mother," it must be grasped as "the centre-piece of a theology configured by *kinship*."[41] Soskice argues that what Julian achieves with "mother" is what "father" is meant to accomplish in scripture. She distinguishes "three registers" in such "biblical anthropomorphic titles:" 1) "those appropriate to offices of *governance*, for

hierarchical dualism of male and female, there is a gender fluidity found in their texts that contrasts the dominant (masculine) theological tradition in which difference is stressed.

[41] Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 126. Emphasis added.

instance, where God is Lord, King, and Judge," 2) "those related to offices of *service*, in which God is Shepherd, Watchman…Servant" or "Teacher" (which fits into either of the first two categories) and 3) "those representing the offices of *love*—Father, Brother, Son, Spouse, Lover."[42] This last group, the "offices of love," "are the most intimate, because they are all…kinship titles"—which is to say, because they are mutually implicating: "if I am your kin, then you are mine." Thus to say that "God is our Father, or Christ our brother, is…to make a strong claim not only about God but about us."[43] Soskice concludes, then, that, "the principal reason why the biblical writings are so dependent on gendered imagery…is not because its writers were so very interested in sex, or even hierarchy as subordination, but because they were interested in kinship."[44] This is true of Julian's writing as well; it is for the very same reason that she emphasizes the quality of motherhood.

Second, Julian avails herself of the rich array of names, figures, and metaphors for God in scripture and in the theological tradition she inherits: friend, lover, spouse, lord, trinity, father, mother, brother, son, servant, nurse, grace, wisdom, love, and so on. She draws on traditional triads for Father, Son, and Spirit such as might (power), wisdom, and goodness (54.21) or kind (nature), mercy, and grace (59.29), while sometimes reordering or reassigning some of the terms, as in goodness, kindness, and grace (59.11-12). She also generates her own formulations, such as life, love, and light or "mervelous homelyhed," "gentille curtesse," and "endlesse kindhede" (83.4-5).

Third, "kind" is perhaps the most conspicuously recurrent word in Julian's theological vocabulary. She assumes the usual Middle English senses: natural or essential

---

[42] Ibid., 1. Emphasis added.
[43] Ibid., 2. Soskice writes, "Once one has a brother or a sister, one *is* a brother or a sister."
[44] Ibid., 4.

(adj.); kind, nature, or kin (n.).[45] When she uses phrases like "kind love" (60.4) or "my kind mother" (61.40), the meaning of "kind" differs from its contemporary sense (as niceness, friendliness, considerateness, and so on), although such connotations are not wholly absent. The word draws attention to the essentially relational point of the titles. In fact, in Julian's thought, "kind" becomes the constant, such that the relational predicates actually figure secondarily, as instances of how God, who is "kind unmade" might also be, in Augustine's words, "more inward to me than my most inward part."[46] Julian characterizes the divine-human relationship as a "natural" one. While maintaining the otherness of God's being, she sees no gulf between creator and creature on account of this difference. In a way that prefigures Eberhard Jüngel's inversion of Aquinas' analogical configuration—"a still greater similarity…in the midst of a great dissimilarity"—for Julian, God who is most high is her nearest kin.[47] (And, as we saw earlier, "nearness" is central to Julian's definition of love.) If motherhood figures more prominently than other relational analogies, it is largely because it is seen to best embody the naturalness of divine-human kinship that is the focal point of her work. In her mind, the "kindness of motherhood" is closest, surest, safest, and dearest (60.12).

Fourth, this relentless insistence on God's essential relationality to humans is particularly striking in Julian's creative gloss on the Tetragrammaton (Ex. 3:14) as "I it am." In Revelation 12, Julian tells us, "Often times oure lorde Jhesu saide,"

I it am, I it am. I it am that is highest. I it am that thou lovest. I it am that thou likest. I it am that thou servest. I it am that thou longest. I it am that thou desirest.

---

[45] Ibid., 5.
[46] Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.6.11.
[47] See Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 288.

I it am that thou meneste [intend]. I it am that is alle. I it am that holy church

precheth the and techeth thee. I it am that shewde me ere to the. (26.4-8)

Rather than treating God's self-naming before Moses as a statement of absolute being, "I

am that is," Julian retains the highly particular relational character of the utterance as it

appears in Exodus: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac,

and the God of Jacob… I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I

have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and

I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that

land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey…" (3:6-8). In the

same way, she personalizes it in her own devotional situation—"I it am that *thou…*"[48]

In view of her hermeneutic *wherever Christ appears the Trinity is understood*, it

is not surprising that putting these words in Jesus' mouth transforms them into a

trinitarian epithet, as is more readily apparent in the "I it am" statements that follow in

Chapter 59.

I it am, the might and the goodnes of faderhode. I it am, the wisdom and the

kindnes of moderhode. It I am, the light and the grace that is all blessed love. I it

am, the trinite. I it am, the unite. I it am, the hye sovereyn goodnesse of al manner

[of] thing. I it am that maketh the to love. I it am that makith the to long. I it am,

the endlesse fulfilling of all true desyers. (59.11-16)

It is remarkable how, in both passages, Julian carefully avoids gendering her translation

of the divine name, even when it is applied to Jesus. In conjunction with her assertion "as

---

[48] Three times, God uses some variation of the following while addressing Moses, "The Lord, the God of
your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed
to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of
Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites,
a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:16-17).

verely as God is oure fader, as verely is God oure moder" (line 10), using "it" rather than

"he" upholds the orthodox point that, while both sexes are included in the image of God

(Gen. 1:27), God transcends such creaturely traits. Both sets of "It I am" statements also

reinforce one of Julian's central assertions: God is as deeply within the soul as

comprehensively surrounding it—an affirmation that goes hand in hand with the

language of kinship.

To summarize: Julian's ascription of motherhood to God is part and parcel of her

claim that the kindness (nature) of God is kindness (kinship, love). (What this means will

be unpacked in subsequent sections.)

2. The Motherhood of Christ and the Motherhood of the Trinity

While Julian uses the names "God," "Crist," and "lord" with the greatest

frequency, of the additional names she draws upon, "moder" bears the greatest

significance. Of course, speaking of "mother Christ" or "mother God" is not unique to

Julian. Bernard McGinn locates her "in the Anselmic tradition of devotion to the

motherhood of God in Christ."[49] However, what is peculiar about Julian's description of

God-as-mother is 1) it is not simply one image among many but, rather, the culmination

of her vision of God, and 2) it is not exclusively applied to Christ but to the whole

Trinity. Despite the many precedents for maternal language for God, until Julian, it

remains a relatively "minor" theme among medieval theologians.[50] Further, when the

quality of motherhood is evoked, it usually pertains to Christ or, occasionally, God.

While Julian offers an intricate analysis of the motherhood of Christ, she also makes a

---

[49] McGinn, *Christian Spirituality* Vol. 3 (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), 282. See Anselm's prayer 10 to St. Paul, *Opera omnia* 3:33 and 39-41.
[50] Ibid., 168.

unique contribution in explicitly extending maternal language to the Trinity.[51] Her

writing marks an unprecedented development in the concept on both fronts.

i. Maternal Associations in Medieval Religious Writing

Recent scholarly interest in feminine and maternal language for God tends to

focus on its use in women's writing in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. But, as

Bynum notes, after the patristic period, it first reappears in twelfth century works by men

and is especially popular among Cistercian monks.[52] There is no reason, then, to assume

the motherhood of God is a specifically "feminine insight."[53] Instances of feminine

language for God in the Middle Ages are found in the works of Anselm of Canterbury,

Peter Lombard, Stephen of Muret, Bernard of Clairvaux, Aelred of Rievaulx, Geurric of

Igny, Isaac of Stella, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Gertrude the Great, Adam

of Perseigne, Helinand of Froidemont, William of St. Thierry, Mechtild of Magdeburg,

Marguerite of Oingt, Richard Rolle, William Flete, Catherine of Siena, Bridget of

Sweden, Dante Alghieri, Thomas Aquinas, and Margery Kempe, among others.[54] Often

these writers draw from scriptural precedents such as Deuteronomy 32:11, 32; Isaiah

49:15, 66:13; Matthew 23:37; and John 16:12, as well as the personification of Wisdom

as a woman in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Prov. 8).

Images of God nursing, caring for her children, gently chiding, and giving birth

reflect an increasing emphasis in the high Middle Ages on the approachability of God

---

[51] Colledge and Walsh, 154.

[52] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 111-112. Bynum undercuts the assumption that "such a devotional tradition is particularly congenial to women and therefore must have been developed by or for or about them."

[53] Ibid., 140.

[54] This is a partial selection of Medieval writers from a list compiled by Bynum (Ibid.). There are, of course, patristic examples as well, including Gregory of Nyssa as well as Augustine.

and, hence, an affinity for earthy and relational imagery.[55] Such language is especially linked to the humanity of Christ, but is also driven by affirmations of the creation of humankind in the image of God and connected to union with God in the Eucharist. While feminine imagery is deployed differently by women and men, as well as early and late medieval authors, there are a number of generalizations that can be made about its broader significance within the context of medieval spirituality.[56]

There are three basic "stereotypes" concerning women and, particularly, mothers that Bynum discerns "in spiritual writers from Anselm to Julian."[57] The first has to do with women's generativity and self-sacrifice in procreation. According to medieval medical theories, "the female in some sense provides the matter of the foetus, the male the life or spirit."[58] As a result, the bodily suffering of women in labor becomes a fitting symbol for Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Second, motherhood is specially connected with love, tenderness, and—especially—*compassion*. "Mother-love" is construed as "instinctive and fundamental." This is why Bernard uses *mater* to contrast *magister*/*dominus*, redefining the authority of abbots in terms of care. He frequently describes the mother as "one who cannot fail to love her child."[59] The assumption here is that a father or lord may or may not express such love while a mother does so almost automatically. Third, there is a strong link between mothering and nurturing or nursing. Given the connection in medieval physiology between breast milk and blood, the breasts

---

[55] Ibid., 129. Bynum explains that such language reflects an "increasing preference for analogies taken from human relationships, a growing sense of God as loving and accessible, a general tendency toward fulsome language, and a more accepting reaction to all natural things, including the physical human body."
[56] Bynum provides an analysis of the associative nuances in writers of different sexes and from different periods (Ibid., 162, 173).
[57] Ibid., 131.
[58] Ibid., 133, n. 80.
[59] Ibid., 116. Cf. Bernard's commentary on the canticle.

and wound of Christ are often "interchangeable" symbols of his life-giving sacrifice.[60]

Similarly, Christ figures maternally in the Eucharist, as the one who feeds his children

with his own body and blood. Thus, as Bynum concludes, "the female parent seems to

have been particularly appropriate to convey the new theological concerns, more

appropriate in fact that the image of the male parent if we understand certain details of

medieval theories of physiology."[61]

These common associations are evident in Julian's writing as well. For example,

in her teaching on substance and sensuality, Christ figures as mother in a double sense—

in creation (nature, birth) and recreation or incarnation (grace, rebirth) (59.32-33). She

makes an explicit connection between Christ's life-giving passion and women's labor,

saying "in the taking of oure kind [nature] he quickened [conceived] us, and in his

blessed dying upon the crosse he bare [bore] us to endlesse life" (63.25-26). Similarly,

she speaks of "oure very moder Jhesu" who "bereth [bears] us to joye," "sustaineth us

within him," "traveyled [labored] into the full time," to "suffer the sharpest throwes [birth

pangs] and grevousest paines that ever were or ever shalle be" (60.16-19). In such

passages, Julian echoes the gendering of Christ's humanity as feminine in her religious

milieu (see 58.32-36). Second, like other writers, Julian seems to select the term

"mother" because she thinks, of all the models of human relationship available, "the

moders service is nerest, reediest, and sekerest [surest]" (60.12). She refers to Christ's

"moderhed of kind [natural] love, which kinde love never leeveth us" (lines 1-4),

explaining that that God never fails to have compassion and will let her children fall but

---

[60] On the "wound" in medieval writing see Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages" in *Fragmentation and Redemption* (181-238).

[61] Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 132-133. Significantly, milk was thought to be reprocessed blood. Throughout late medieval spiritual writings we find an intuitive connection between the pierced side of Christ, milk, blood, water, "honeycomb" (Ps. 18:11), and hiding in "the cleft of the rock" (Song 2:14).

not perish (lines 29-31). Mother God understands the needs of her "deerwurthy children" and oversees them "full tenderly" for this is "the kinde and condition of moderhed" (lines 44-45). In other words, for Julian, as for Bernard, a mother is one who cannot help but remember and care for her children; it is her very "nature."[62] Finally, Julian also connects the breast of the nursing mother with the wounded side of Christ, saying, "Jhesu, he may homely lede us into his blessed brest by his swet, open side, and shewe us therein perty of the godhed and the joyes of heven" (lines 34-35). Similarly, she compares the mother who "may geve her childe sucke her milke" with the eucharist, saying, "oure precious moder Jhesu" who "may fede us with himselfe" through "the blessed sacrament that is precious fode [food] of very life" (lines 57-27).

It is evident, then, that Julian relies on many of the same connotations as her predecessors and contemporaries. Her use of maternal imagery is firmly rooted in this broader tradition and would have been familiar to her readers.

ii. Christ's "Office" of Motherhood

Motherhood only emerges as Julian's central model for conceiving of God and God's relationship to humankind after the soteriological example in Chapter 51. Unsurprisingly, then, it is closely connected to the atoning work of Christ described there. In her recurrent Trinity of father, mother, and lord, "motherhood" is specially "inpropred [appropriated]" to the second person (59.34-36). Julian writes,

> I beheld the werking of alle the blessed trinite, in which beholding I saw and
> understode these thre propertes: the properte of faderhed, and the properte of
> motherhed, and the properte of the lordhede in on God. In oure fader almighty we

---

[62] Of course, these assumptions warrant critique. I am merely describing the associations Julian brings to the terms she employs.

have oure keping and oure blesse, as anemptes oure kindely substance, which is to

us by oure making fro without beginning. And in the seconde person, in wit and

wisdom, we have our keping, as anemptes oure sensuality, oure restoring, and

oure saving. For he is oure moder, broder, and savioure. And in oure good lorde,

the holy gost we have oure rewarding and oure yelding [payment] for oure living

and oure traveyle, and endlessly overpassing alle that we desyer in his mervelous

curtesy of his hye, plentuous grace. (58.15-24)

In this passage, as at other points in Chapters 53-63, Julian maps the "properties" of

fatherhood, motherhood, and lordship onto familiar triads such as power, wisdom, and

goodness/love or creation, redemption, and grace (cf. 58.47-52). She also develops her

own assignments, such as: substantial keeping and blessing (Father), sensual keeping,

restoring, and saving (Son), and rewarding, yielding (giving), and surpassing expectation

(Spirit). While Christ is not only "oure moder sensual" but also "oure moder

substantially" (lines 31-32), fatherhood is typically keyed to "kind" or substantial

creation and motherhood to mercy and grace (see lines 37-46).[63] In other words,

motherhood is appropriate to the Son on account of the atonement.

The quality of motherhood "longeth" to the Son and is specially appropriated to

him largely for the reasons already discussed in the preceding section. But Julian also

makes several interesting constructive moves here: First, while in patristic and medieval

theology, the roles or "offices" of Christ are identified as "king, prophet, and priest"

(Aquinas), Julian speaks instead of "the very office of a kinde nurse" (61.56) and "the

---

[63] The work of the Spirit is absorbed into the property of motherhood at this juncture. Julian seems to be saying the Spirit performs the motherhood of Christ.

service and the office of moderhode" (60.9).[64] Again we see that, invoking Christ as mother, Julian supports a cumulative depiction of the "kindness" or kinship of God through the humanity of Christ. "Mother" effectively translates and encapsulates what is meant by Jesus' royal, prophetic, and priestly roles.

Second, Julian's soteriology combines the images of heirship and rebirth. As Soskice observes, Julian's "originality lies in her alignment of Paul's language of atonement as fraternal kinship (Christ, the firstborn of many brothers), with the second birth imagery of the gospels" (which is maternal).[65] Motherhood and brotherhood are often paired (and, at times, they are synonymous) in her description of the work of salvation. She calls Christ "oure moder, broder, and savioure" (line 21). Evoking a certain set of scriptural passages, she integrates the images rebirth and heirship (see, e.g., Jn. 1:10-13 and Eph. 1:3-6). In Soskice's words, "Julian's theology of 'at-one-ing'…is grounded in the biblical insight that through Christ, believers become the *kin* of Christ, either adoptively or by new birth." In an unusual conflation of biological relations, Julian implies that it is precisely *as* the firstborn among many siblings that Christ is mother of all—for "alle is the manhode of Crist" (51.218). The humanity of all others is derived from his own, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh (Gen. 2:23).[66] Motherhood, like brotherhood, is a way of saying: shared humanity, shared life. It reinforces the language

---

[64] The *munus triplex Christi* is an important doctrine in Reformation and Reformed theology, associated with Calvin in particular. The *munus duplex* of priest and king is thought to be more common in medieval theology; see Barth's remarks on the matter (*CD* IV/3.1, 5f). However, Christ's threefold role of prophet, priest, and king derives from patristic thought (it is used by Justin Martyr, Jerome, and Chrysostom among others) and is found in medieval theology as well. Aquinas, for example, writes, "Christ was to be king, prophet, and priest. Now Abraham was a priest…(Gn. 15:9)… He was also a prophet, according to Gn. 20:7… Lastly David was both king and prophet." (*ST* IIIa, q. 31, a. 2; cf. q. 22, a. 1).

[65] Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 144-145.

[66] These words which Adam speaks to the woman in the garden are, first of all, a statement of kinship, identity, solidarity: this is my very self, my very other. The same sentiment animates the conflation of sibling and spouse in Song of Songs 4:9. Julian, like many spiritual writers before and after her, entwines these relations drawn from human families to produce a comprehensive picture of utter kindredness.

of "beclosure" and graphically exemplifies salvation as *incorporation* into the body of Christ. Imaging Christ as "mother, brother, and savior" thus goes hand-in-hand with other vivid illustrations of being-in-and-with. For example, Julian describes the "updrawing" of humanity into Christ saying, "in which thurst [desire] he hath drawen his holy soules that be now in blisse. And so getting his lively mebris [living members], ever he draweth and drinketh, and yet him thursteth and longeth" (75.4-6). Julian plays on the word "draw" which, in this case, either indicates simply that God brings those souls into Godself or, more viscerally, that God "takes a draft of" them.[67] Similarly, in one of Julian's most dramatic passages about being in Christ, she describes Christ gladly looking into his own pierced side: "ther he shewed a fair, delectable place, and large inow [enough] for alle mankinde that shalle be saved to rest in pees and in love" (24.3-4). Clearly playing on the association between Christ's wound and womb, images like this fuse Christ as firstborn son/brother and Christ as mother.

Third, the convergence of motherhood and brotherhood in her thought reflects the way Julian tightly interweaves the doctrines of predestination, creation, and redemption, all of which come under the common designation: atonement. The "office of moderhode" (60.11) is assigned primarily to Christ, then, not because it is strictly temporal and embodied or fundamentally inappropriate to the Father and Spirit but because 1) in him there is an intensification of the motherhood of God (he is mother *twice*—in creation and in recreation), 2) he is the one who reveals and provides access to the motherhood of the Trinity, and 3) as the eternal firstborn he is the preeminent instance of the mutual enclosure that, for Julian, constitutes atonement.[68] In short, it is the second person who

---

[67] Watson and Jenkins, 358.

[68] Of course, *as* appropriated, any quality is shared, due to the perichoretic unity and the simplicity of God.

manifests and embodies the motherly "kindness" of God, hence the christological focus

of Julian's maternal naming of God.

Closely related to this point, fourth, although the Middle English "kind" usually

denotes nature, essence, type, or kin, in Julian's writing it becomes nearly "synonymous"

with "good."[69] That Julian defines goodness in terms of love and love in terms of care

and nearness has already been established above (see LT, ch. 5 as well). Strengthening

the link between kind (essence) and kind (good, loving), Julian equates God's motherly

quality with the "kinde [natural] goodnes of God," saying

> God is kind [good] in his being: that is to sey, that goodnesse that is kind
>
> [essential], it is God. He is the grounde, he is the substance, he is the same thing
>
> that is kindhede [being], and he is very fader and moder of kindes [created
>
> natures]. (62.9-12)

Julian, as so many theologians before her, is asserting that, "God is the one who is"—

God is ground, substance, being. But, as in her handling of the Tetragrammaton, she is

simultaneously filling in the content of God's being—God's kindness (essence) is

kindness (goodness/love).[70] Elizabeth Spearing thus translates "kind" not simply "nature"

but "kindly nature."[71] This shows that Julian is not speaking of some sheer, undefined

divine essence, but an essence that is determined by and *as* goodness and loving-kindness

(χρηστότης and φιλανθρωπία, Titus 3:4). The identity between good and God is so

---

[69] Watson and Jenkins, 318.

[70] The point explicated in the following lines is contained *in nuce* in the first sentence, in which, we have an *inclusio* (God…god) structured as a *chiasmus* (God…being…goodness…god).

[71] Cf. Colledge and Walsh, 611, n. 13. Interestingly, the Wycliffe Bible translates this passage "when the benignity and humanity of our Saviour God appeared…" *Philanthropia*, love of humankind, is simply translated "humanity." Not too differently, Julian uses "fair kind," i.e., humankind, to designate the goodness of human nature in a number of places. That is to say, "kind"—whether divine or human—seems to have positive connotations even without the qualifiers "good," "fair," and "loving." Reference to "the humanity of God," then, fundamentally implies the goodness of God.

complete that Julian can invert the order of predication: what is essentially good—"it is God" (line 10). As she goes onto assert, "Thus is kind and grace of one accorde: for *grace is God*, as unmade kinde is God" (63.7-8).[72] It is in the motherhood of Christ that this is revealed: "When the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us…according to his mercy, *through the water of rebirth* and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:4-5). This goodness, loving-kindness, and grace—it is God's "kind."[73]

In other words, the motherhood of Jesus is not just a matter of the brotherhood of salvation but—as such—it is also the revelation of God's very nature. It is appropriate, then, to speak of the Triune God in maternal terms as well.

iii. The Trinity as Mother

While Julian's reflection centers on "moder Crist," there are a number of clues that she also wants her readers to see the Father and Spirit in this way.[74] First, toward the end of Revelation 14, Julian references the motherhood of all three trinitarian persons quite directly:

> I understood thre manner of beholdings of motherhed in God. The furst is grounde of oure kinde making. The seconde is taking of oure kinde, and ther beginneth the moderhed of grace. The thurde is moderhed in werking, and therin is a forthspreding by the same grace, of length and brede, of high and of depnesse without ende. (59.37-41)

---

[72] Emphasis added.

[73] This is a particularly provocative claim in light of modern debates of the relationship between the immanent and the economic Trinity. Julian, like Aquinas, is clear that grace is bound to the economy of salvation. It is bound to time, fallenness, sin, and human redemption. When she says "grace" she means the works of God *ad extra*. At points like this, it seems Julian is suggesting God's (self-)manifestation in God's works *is* God's being. That would be quite radical given her context.

[74] For a more detailed analysis of the motherhood specifically of Christ see Baker, *Vision to Book*, 107-134.

Throughout Julian's texts, "kind" is typically associated with substance, creation, and the Father, incarnation and grace with the Son, and the "spreading forth" of the grace of Christ with the Spirit. While she distinguishes the properties of fatherhood, motherhood, and lordship (ch. 58f) in the paragraphs immediately prior, she now transitions rather suddenly to the motherhood of Father, Son, and Spirit.[75]

Julian maintains a certain trinitarian ordering in the mission of salvation: "oure fader willith, oure mother werketh, oure good lorde the holy gost confirmeth" (lines 24-25). Although these lines might seem to present a picture in which the Father alone wills while the Son and the Spirit simply implement his will, it is important to remember that Julian 1) repeatedly affirms the unified counsel of trinitarian persons in the decision to create and redeem humankind, and 2) often singles out the self-reflexive deciding of the Son, for example, as when she says, "in oure very moder Jhesu oure life is grounded in the forseeing wisdom of himselfe fro without beginning" (63.23-24). The accent of 59.24-25 falls less on the anterior willing of the first person and more on the visibility or palpability of the action of the Son and the Spirit: they phenomenalize the shared divine will and fold humankind into it. It is possible, as Baker notes, that Julian "uses the phrase *forth spredyng* to translate *diffusa* in Rom. 5:5: 'The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost who is given to us.'"[76] She describes the "moder Crist" working integrally with "the thurde person, the holy gost" as "grace werketh with mercy"

---

[75] Baker, among others, assumes these three manners of beholding all apply to Christ, given the context. But I agree with Colledge and Walsh that Julian is speaking of the motherhood of the Trinity. This is apparent in the way she maps the forms of motherhood onto a triad that she repeatedly uses for the persons of the Trinity in their traditional ordering and numbering, viz. kind, incarnation, and grace, or creation, redemption, and grace. Julian often uses "mercy and grace" or "grace and mercy" without regard for the order when she is speaking of the work of the Son and the Spirit. She makes it clear that it is the same work. But "forthspreading," or the dissemination of grace, is assigned is a more limited way to the Spirit. This makes sense as Julian understands the Spirit as "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom. 8:9).

[76] Baker, *Vision to Book*, 194.

(58.38, 41-43). The Spirit extends the work of Christ, spreading it forth in the hearts of believers.

If the outgoing sequence of God's work in the economy of salvation is Father–Son–Spirit (as in 59.24-25), the way back is ordered Spirit–Son–Father or, as we will see, mother–mother–mother. This brings us to a second direct reference to the motherhood of the Trinity, in which Julian says, "we be brought againe, by the motherhed of mercy and grace [Son and Spirit], into oure kindly stede where that we ware made by the moderhed of kind love [Father], which kinde love never leeveth us" (60.1-4). The motherhood of mercy and grace (Son and Spirit) leads back to the motherhood of kind love (Father). It is not simply the case that God is father (as the Father) *and* mother (as the Son). Rather, the Spirit enlarges the motherhood of the Son "tille alle his deerwurthy [much-loved] children be borne and brought forth" (63.19-20) and leads back to *the motherhood of God the Father*. Thus, the prayer Jesus teaches Julian to pray begins, "My kind moder [Father], my gracious moder [Son], my deerworthy moder [Spirit]…" (61.40-41).

Third, there is a pronounced moment in which Julian predicates motherhood of God by way of supereminence, indicating that she sees "mother" as more than a metaphor for God in Christ.[77] She writes, "This faire, lovely worde, 'moder,' it is so swete and so kinde in itselfe that it may not verely be saide of none, ne to none, but of him and to him that is very mother of life and of alle" (60.39-41). While she is speaking about Christ here, she continues, "To the properte of moderhede longeth kind love, wisdom, and knowing; and it is God," which again makes clear that she predicates motherhood of Christ's *divinity*. The quality of motherhood would not necessarily be extended to the Father and Spirit as well if it were only applied to the son by virtue of his

---

[77] Watson and Jenkins, 312.

incarnation and passion, which, as Julian sees it, belong to his sensuality or humanity. Julian, however, plainly conceives of the Son's motherhood as an attribute of his divinity as well, and therefore common to all three persons of the Trinity. But not only that, she also appears to count motherhood, in much the same way Aquinas does fatherhood, a divine perfection rather than an image drawn from life, predicating it of God by way of supereminence.[78] This view of the divine name "Mother" seems to be the logical outworking of the comprehensiveness of her insistence that humankind is eternally loved and borne in the second person of the Trinity.

Finally, that the motherhood of God exceeds that of the Son is plainly signaled by the context of these chapters following the example. The motherhood of the whole Trinity is already implied in Julian's earlier teaching on atonement. There, as I have argued, her leading motif for union with God is being-in-and-with one another—God in the human in God—a condition most vividly exemplified by a pregnant body. Julian tells us that this "beclosure" or mutual "indwelling" is the subject of her final revelation (Rev. 16). The theme thus forms bookends for her more straightforward teaching on divine motherhood in Chapters 58-63.

3. The Motherly "Dome" of God and the Example of the Lord and Servant

Given the biological, theological, and cultural associations Julian and many of her contemporaries attach to motherhood, it emerges as the highest and deepest relation of

---

[78] See Aquinas, *ST*, Ia, q. 13, a. 6. Julian does not offer a theory of language, so we must be careful not to make too much of this point. Perhaps she regards motherhood as a model for theological metaphors and is only indicating here that it makes for the *best* model (moving from creature to God). However, she does say motherhood should be predicated of God first and foremost, which constitutes a reversal of the order of predication (moving from God to creature) on par with Aquinas' assertion that fatherhood is predicated of God by way of supereminence. As per my introductory presuppositions, I think both motherhood and fatherhood are models drawn from life that generate good metaphors for conceiving of God, but God is neither father nor mother in any unequivocal sense.

kinship in her theology. However, in my view, there is another salient reason it becomes

Julian's predominant model for God's relationship to humankind in Christ: it aptly sums

up the depiction of God's loving gaze in the Example of the Lord and Servant.[79] In

Julian's text, the image is produced by the narrative and can be read as a commentary on

it.[80] Again, Julian is not simply saying God is father (Father) *and* mother (Christ). Rather,

the point is precisely that *as* a good father or a good master, God is a mother. The

lord/father in the example comes to include or be included in the divine quality of

motherhood, such that "mother" serves as an umbrella term for father and all the other

relational terms Julian employs (brother, lover, spouse, lord, and friend).

In other words, the property of motherhood characterizes the lord or father figure

as well as the servant or son figure. Of course, it is readily apparent how what has already

been said about the motherhood of the Son maps onto the servant in the example—his

readiness to serve, his self-sacrifice, his bodily "traveyle" and labor (51.129).[81] The

fraught relationship between kenosis and femininity is certainly at play here.[82] Yet there

are a few indications in Julian's text that she is simultaneously recasting the lord or father

as mother—and in a way that undercuts many of the assumptions and polarities that

define the mother/father distinctions she otherwise assumes from her culture and

tradition.

---

[79] The addition of the example utterly redefines the long text. As Watson and Jenkins' commentary shows throughout, Julian is constantly looking forward and backward to the example when she rewrites her revelations. It becomes her lens for interpreting many other passages in the long text. For "motherhood" to sum up the example is for it to sum up the whole *Revelation*.

[80] As Soskice notes, mothering images appear "after and largely by way of what Julian calls the 'wonderful example' of the Lord and his servant" (*The Kindness of God*, 143).

[81] One of the primary Middle English senses of "trauayl" is "pains of childbirth, labor" (*MED*, 3f). Julian retains this maternal sense when she speaks of the servant/son being sent to travail, travel, or labor "in the erth" for the lord's treasure (humankind). Cf. A. C. Spearing "The Subtext of *Patience*: God as Mother and the Whale's Belly," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29.2 (Spring, 1999), 293-323, 310.

[82] On the complexities of this association, see Sarah Coakley's essay "*Kenōsis* and Subversion: On the Repression of 'Vulnerability' in Christian Feminist Writing" in *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002).

i. The Homeliness and Courtesy of God (a Translation of Phil. 2:6-8)

Two adjectives Julian favors when referring to God are "homely" and "courteous." They form a pair (4.15, 26.3). "Homely and courteous" becomes a way for Julian to talk about things like the immanent-transcendence of God, the greater similarity between God and the creature in the midst of a great dissimilarity, the union and distinction of divinity and humanity in Christ, the attitude of love and reverence warranted by God's presence, and so on.[83] Taken together, this pair helps her vividly describe a God who is, on the one hand, "kind" (kin), fully at home with and immanent to humankind, but who is also, on the other hand, "kind unmade"—"above" and "beyond" creaturely reality: transcendent.

Julian refers to God's "homely loving" (5.2) and frequently speaks of the "homelyhede" or "homeliness" of God (7.35). In her Middle English use, "homely" means familiar, intimate, plain, or homey.[84] It is connected to the word "comfortable" (comforting) and both indicate nearness and tender care. Homely is especially used to describe God's love and, like "kindness," it has familial overtones. According to Watson and Jenkins, "to treat people in a 'homely' way is to treat them as equals."[85] God's desire to be intimate and familiar with humankind is central to Julian's message. Homeliness coordinates with motherhood in rather obvious ways.[86]

If "homely" evokes a domestic context and intimacy among equals, "courteous" brings to mind a courtly setting and its attendant social order. "Courteous" goes hand in hand with the term "lord," which Julian uses throughout her writing and which figures

---

[83] For more on the definitions of and relationship between "homely" and "courtesy," see Joan Nuth, *Wisdom's Daughter*, 74.
[84] These connotations are retained in British English today.
[85] Watson and Jenkins, 136.
[86] In the medieval world (and until quite recently), the home was the place of birth (as well as death).

particularly prominently in the Example of the Lord and Servant as well as the earlier

example of solemn king and poor servant (7.27-35). "Curteyse" (courtesy) connotes

courtliness, politeness, and generosity of the sort a good lord would have toward his

subordinates. It is the way in which a superior graciously condescends to an inferior

without making her feel inferior.

In the same way that the title "Lord" is applied to God and to the Father, but also

to the Son and the Spirit, "courtesy" is not strictly appropriated to one person of the

Trinity. However, in a number of places, it is specifically connected to the condescension

of Christ and his suffering love. This illuminates Julian's meaning. She includes an

exemplum about a glad or courteous giver in which she alludes, as she often does, to

Philippians 2:6f. Describing Christ, Julian says, "the curtesse gever setteth at nought alle

his cost and alle his traveyle (labor)" (23.32-33). "Courtesy" becomes a way of speaking

about the loving condescension or kenosis of God in Christ.[87] Similarly, when Julian

refers to "oure curtesse lorde" in Chapter 40, she describes him as forgiving, "of fulle

glad chere," "with frendfulle [friendly] welcoming" (40.9-10). His wish is for his "dere

darling" (Julian) to "see" his "loving" and know his grace and mercy (lines 10-14).

Divine courtesy does away with blame and compassionately regards humans as

"children" (28.28-30). After the Example of the Lord and Servant, Julian says, "For oure

lorde God is so good, so gentil [honorable], so curtesse that he may never assigne defaute

[fault] in whome he shall be [to whom he shall] ever blessed and praised" (53.5-6). God's

---

[87] Of course, "condescend" is not used in its popular contemporary sense ("show feelings of superiority; be patronizing"). Precisely the opposite. To condescend is to *be* superior but show no signs of regarding oneself as superior, such as showing disdain for inferiors. I am using condescension in its etymological sense as to descend (*descendere*) with or together (*con*); or, more vividly, in the Greek: συναπάγω, to be identified with (συν) and lead away (απάγω) (Rom. 12:16). Theologically, "condescension" specifies the divine posture of downward mobility or ταπεινοφροσύνη (lowliness of mind, humility) (Phil. 2:3, 6f).

"honor" or lordliness is expressed in raising up the lowly, not in lording it over them, in forgiving, not in finding fault. What her *exempla* figuring a king or lord exemplify is the "grete homelyhede" of God: God's highness is manifest in a kind of lowliness.

While, in Julian's writing, the language of courtesy is closely linked to lordship and fatherhood (positions of elevated status), it is also extended to motherhood (61.36). In fact, rather than assigning courtly imagery to Father God and homely imagery to Mother God, as one might expect given medieval conventions around gender, "mother" becomes Julian's leading image for the courteousness of God. After her example about the courteous giver, she goes on to describe the gladness of the lord (Christ) as he looks into his wound and sees an ample space for all (24.1f, see above). (This link between the wound and womb of Christ is an early presaging of her later development of the mother/child theme.) In his enactment of courtesy, Christ refers to Julian as "my darling…my childe" (24.12-13). Here, as in the example in Chapter 51, the courteousness of the lord is that he does not treat his subordinate like a servant but like his own precious child. This picture is filled out in a passage that also illustrates the motherly attitude or "lovely loking" of God (see below).

ii. The Example of Mother and Child

In the same way as God's motherhood epitomizes God's homeliness and courteousness, the gaze of the mother is paradigmatic of all that Julian says in Chapter 45 and Chapter 51 about the loving look and unblaming judgment of the lord or father. These themes coalesce in a number of places, particularly in two parallel passages in which Julian considers the proper human attitude toward God's graciousness, using parental imagery to explain the relationship between love and fear or reverence. There is

an appropriate human courteousness toward God that corresponds to but is qualitatively different from God's courteousness toward humankind. However, it is patently not a kind of servility.[88] Julian maintains that "fear" is appropriate in the face of the properties of God's fatherhood and lordship, while "love" is appropriate to the property of God's goodness (74.20-21). Here, as throughout her *Revelation*, she avoids describing God as in any way wrathful or "dreadful" (compare to my discussion of "self-accusation" and the "two domes" at the end of chapter three). In these lines she merely offers pastoral guidance for humbly approaching God in one's sinfulness. She rules out unholy and excessive forms of dread and commends what she calls "reverent drede" (line 27).[89] Yet instead of mapping motherhood onto goodness and leniency, as one might expect because she has linked fatherhood to "fear," Julian says, holy fear (i.e., reverence) "maketh us hastely to fle fro alle that is not goode and falle into oure lordes brest, as the childe into the moders barme [bosom]" (lines 29-30). These lines echo an earlier passage in which, recommending contrition in the penitential process, Julian explains that "oure curtesse moder" does not wish "that we flee away, for him were nothing lother [less pleasing]" but "that we use the condition of a childe" (61.36-37). The "reverent dread" Julian describes is that of a "meke childe" crying out to its mother for help and asking for mercy when in distress (lines 39-41). In other words, this "fear" is in fact a form of trust—trust in God's open embrace. And what the child is actually "afraid" of, in our common use of that

---

[88] Julian describes believers in heaven as "courtiers" (Watson and Jenkins, 358).

[89] She enumerates four manners of dread in much the same way as other Middle English devotional texts (for examples, see Watson and Jenkins, 354). Holy "dread" is her way of talking about human "courteousness" toward God, which corresponds to God's courteousness toward humans. But it does not take on the contemporary connotations of "dread" at all. Explaining the integration of love and fear, Julian says, "And thus we shalle in love be homely and nere to God, and we shalle in drede be gentille and curtesse to God, and both in one manner, like even" (73.39-40). In other words, as Julian clarifies elsewhere, although we shall be close to God, we shall not be disrespectful.

word, is "all that is not good" (i.e., *not* God) (74.29). As Julian clarifies, that in the face of human frailty and sin, God "useth the condition of a wise moder"—"be we seker [we are certain of this]"—and "he wille [wants] then that we use the properte of a childe, that evermore kindly trusteth to the love of the moder in wele and in wo" (61.43-45-46).

In the preceding chapter, Julian describes "the kinde and condition of moderhed" as a "debt" that God assumes toward humanity (60.24). This debt is defined by self-giving and availability. To "use the property of a child" is to make the debt reciprocal, to take on the corresponding attitude. The debt or attitude is "true loving." Julian writes, "I sawe that all oure det [debt] that we owe by Gods bidding to faderhod and moderhod is fulfilled in trew loving of God, which blessed love Crist werketh in us" (lines 53-55). (She may be alluding to Ex. 20:12 here: "Honor your father and mother.") In other words, what is owed is not the slaving of the elder brother or the prodigal son's meager request to become a hired hand. The dialectic of love and reverence described above is subsumed by "the debt of love," the "true loving" that alone fulfills what is owed to God. Both the divine and the human debts are pictured in bodily terms, emphasizing physical proximity—the mother offers her very body and the child takes physical shelter in her arms (60.17, 23, 25, 33, etc.) As in the "suttel knot" passage (53.50f), this is one of the many places where Julian vividly depicts the welcoming embrace of God with such palpable language that the reader is made to feel God's longing, nearness, and care. As she says, "he wille have alle oure love *fastened* to him" (60.52).[90]

As with the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Julian's example of "a wise mother" reframes the divine-human relationship in terms of parenthood. Here homely and

---

[90] Emphasis added. Julian seems to echo Augustine: "*Embrace the love of God, and by love embrace God*" (*De Trinitate* VIII.8.12). The language of "fastening" and "binding" is both erotic and familial.

courteous are not dichotomous terms, nor are fatherhood and motherhood. They do not counterbalance one another (as "justice" and "mercy" are sometimes made to do). On the contrary, they are integrally related. Both are used to describe God's undividedly generous and unblaming attitude toward fallen humanity. And, for Julian, the two coincide most perfectly in a mother's love, for all of the reasons discussed above. The mother's treatment of her children (ch. 61, 74) constitutes another example of the way God views fallen humanity. We might call this the Example of Mother and Child. It further illuminates the Example of the Lord and Servant in Chapter 51.

iii. Return to a Motherly Father

It follows that Julian interprets the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son *as a mother*: at once lordly and homely, courteous and lowly, chiding and embracing. This brings to mind Rembrandt's famous depiction of the prodigal son being embraced upon his return. Rembrandt paints the father's arms in two distinct manners: the left hand appears more stereotypically "masculine"—strong, calloused, firm—while the right hand is more stereotypically "feminine"—soft, gentle, open.[91] In the same way, Julian presents a "motherly father," as Jürgen Moltmann describes God.[92] The mother/child pair figures as the fullest embodiment of the message of the Example of the Lord and Servant as well as that of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, which it retells.

In other words, the trajectory of the shift in pairs from lord/servant to father/son in Chapter 51 is confirmed and extended in Julian's turn to the "office of motherhood" and "the condition of the child." The mother Julian portrays is like a gracious lord or a loving

---

[91] See Henri Nouwen's reflection on Rembrandt's painting in light of the parable: *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

[92] Jürgen Moltmann, "The Motherly Father: Is Trinitarian Patripassionism Replacing Theological Patriarchalism?" *God as Father?* eds. Johannes-Baptis Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 52-53.

father. She teaches her children to see themselves (and others) as children, and not as slaves. It is servility ("servile dread"), as much as anything, that Julian is attempting to rout out in her pastoral guidance about how to approach God meekly, respectfully, and trustingly in prayer. Self-knowledge is preeminently the knowledge of being regarded by God as a beloved child. *Nosce te ipsum*, "know thyself," takes on a variety of meanings in medieval contemplative writing.[93] Often it is used, as Julian uses it in Chapter 45 in reference to the "dome" of "holy church," to put the human in her place: know that you are a sinner (as discussed in chapter three). In view of early disputes over the Delphic precept γνῶθι σεαυτόν, are we to think Julian means, "know that you are not [a] god" (as Apollo is said to have intended it) or "know your true, ideal self—the soul" (as Plato interprets it)?[94] Julian's sense of self-knowledge seems closer to the latter. For Julian, as for Augustine, "all knowledge is mediated by self-knowledge and…self-knowledge is itself mediated by the knowledge of God."[95] To know oneself, for her, is to know one's "substantial" self, held eternally in God, mirrored perfectly in Christ's eternal humanity, loved from without beginning. According to Julian's instruction, the awareness of one's "feebleness and blindness" (sin), which is beneficial for a variety of reasons, should never diminish this sense of being, first of all, a beloved child—in fact, in her view, sin itself functions redemptively to facilitate this realization.

Although the self is still in some sense divided—*simul justus et peccator*—in another sense it is not, and not simply because the "true" or "substantial" self constituted

---

[93] Watson and Jenkins, 262.

[94] The injunction is interpretation in numerous other ways as well. See, for example, Eliza Gregory Wilkins' dissertation, *"Know Thyself" in Greek and Latin Literature* (University of Chicago Libraries: 1917), 60f.

[95] Charles T. Mathewes, "Augustinian Anthropology: *Interior intimo meo*," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer, 1999), 195-221, 195.

in Jesus Christ is *justus*. In itself, the "soul" is split—but before God? This is not so. Recall, the "dome" of God is unified; the two "cheres" or expressions of God are both love, in two modes—pity and delight, compassion (Lk. 15: 20) and rejoicing (vv. 24, 32). If God is not divided in God's deeming and God determines the reality of humankind then, in a sense, despite the fact of sin, humans have no right to see themselves otherwise. Even inasmuch as self-knowledge includes the knowledge of one's sin, that too points to one's status as a beloved child. Who am I? "*We* be Cristes children" (54.29).[96] The self is integrated in God's gaze. God's motherly regard is determinative of human reality and for the divine-human relationship. Thus, for Julian, to "come to oneself," in the language of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, is to anticipate God's unchanging motherly love, for that is what defines humanity.

As in the three parables of Luke 15, Julian suggests God's searching love is not only not diminished but actually *heighted* by the lostness of the beloved. So too is the mother's rejoicing increased when her children "flee" to her.

Conclusion

To summarize: the Example of the Lord and Servant in Chapter 51 serves as a progressive lens that brings into focus at once: 1) the historical atonement that takes place in the incarnation of God in Christ, and 2) what must be seen as an *eternal* atonement that takes place in the Trinity. The Grace revealed in and *as* Jesus Christ leads Julian into the heart of the Trinity, such that she can claim "grace *is* God." It is precisely her new insight into the Example of the Lord and Servant that generates the excursus on the triune motherhood of God that follows it.

---

[96] Emphasis added.

Julian's subsequent description of the mother/child relationship defines, rather than dislocates, the father/son relationship of the biblical parable and the lord/servant relationship of Julian's example. As her understanding is "led into God" through the parabolic retelling, what she beholds is the quality of divine motherhood. It emerges for her as the most appropriate and comprehensive model for visualizing the mutual enclosure of humanity and divinity in creation, incarnation, and salvation, as well as for communicating love itself. It most perfectly displays a "condition" that always already includes the possibility of another. Motherhood, the preeminent image for the reality of atonement narrated in the Example of the Lord and Servant, exemplifies both the compassionate look of the Father and the self-giving readiness of the Son. In combining new birth language with the notion of heirship and fraternal kinship, Julian forms her soteriological claim: Christ as brother is mother of all. And, given her Christological hermeneutic, Christ's motherhood reveals the motherhood of the Trinity.

As for the "condition of a child," in the New Testament, sonship means heirship. Heirship is a, if not *the*, leading scriptural category for envisioning salvation, particularly for Paul. Julian deploys the theme of heirship in such a way that the emphasis falls less on the bestowal of economic inheritance (a cultural practice that would be less immediately meaningful for women in her time) and more on the physical comfort and ever-presence of a nurse or mother. What Julian makes of rebirth and heirship is a fruitful instance of the way a reader—say, a "woman reading as a woman"—can, through intertextual illumination, faithfully seek out meaning in a particular scriptural model for God when the original metaphor is culturally bound, socially exclusive, or simply defunct. In this and related ways, a shift in content certainly does take place in Julian's

interpretation of the parable and, concomitantly, her conception of God. This is worth

exploring further using the tools of critical theory, particularly those of gender studies.

Yet, even in light of such considerations, I think the shift in question is a matter

expansion rather than dislocation.

Given its resonances with her example, the primary impact of Julian's move to

feminine imagery is an intensification and deepening of the familial bond between God

and the human described in scripture and in the theology with which she would have

been familiar. Importantly, the conditions of parent and child are mutually implying. The

kindness/kinship of God implicates humanity, inexorably: God—as a parent, sibling,

lover, friend, spouse—is never without a child, sibling, lover, friend, spouse.

CHAPTER FIVE

BARTH'S INTERPRETATION OF THE PARABLE
OF THE PRODIGAL SON AS THE PARABLE OF RECONCILIATION

In remarkable ways, Julian's Example of the Lord and Servant prefigures Barth's

exegesis of the Parable of the Lost Son as well as the doctrinal ramifications of

identifying the second person of the Trinity with the wayward son. In what follows, I

touch upon a few of the primary similarities between their interpretations. My main

objective is simply to set in conversation these highly resonate yet otherwise unique

constructive theological developments on the well-known story of the prodigal son. The

point here is not merely that there happens to be an interesting parallel between the two

but that uncovering the precedent of Julian's example suggests Barth's exegesis is not

symptomatic of an arbitrary or tangential Christologizing of the story. Rather, the identity

of Jesus Christ with the fallen and wayward one emerges as an interpretive trajectory

belonging to the biblical text itself. The cogency of such an association is apparent when

the passage is appropriately contextualized in its encompassing narrative and, especially,

when its structure is coordinated with the referential nexus of scripture upon which both

Julian and Barth draw. My presiding argument, then, is that the creative theological use

to which Barth puts the parable is actually invited by the story itself, that it constitutes not

a flagrant reading *into* but a careful and attentive reading *from* the text.

For Barth, as for Julian, the parable comes to narrate atonement or reconciliation

as well as eternal election and, in some sense, the very essence of God. In light of this

fact, my reading of Barth inevitably touches on some of the main doctrinal loci of *Church

Dogmatics*—namely, incarnation, reconciliation, election and predestination, revelation,

and the doctrine of God. It is beyond the scope of my dissertation to analyze him at length on any of these points, to argue for particular interpretations of these doctrines, or to critically engage in the multifaceted debate over his Christology and theological ontology. That is not to say these concerns can be set aside. It is my view that understanding what Barth does with the parable reinforces certain interpretations of him and calls into question others. Thus I will signal my assumptions and conclusions in this respect where they inform my reading. However, my task in what follows is not to argue for a certain interpretation of Barth's theology as a whole but simply 1) to unfold his Christological interpretation of the prodigal son narrative, setting it along Julian's, and 2) to indicate the various theological levels on which this narrative works for him, as for her.

In the first part of this chapter, I lay out Barth's excursus on the Parable of the Prodigal Son as it is found in §64.2 (IV/2, 21-24). This portion is primarily descriptive, although, throughout, I am implicitly making the claim that the logic of Barth's twofold interpretation parallels and is helpfully illumined by Julian's. The second part of chapter reiterates Barth's retelling of the Parable of the Prodigal Son as the parable of atonement. I contextualize his exegesis within *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, focusing especially on the shape of the two complementary paragraphs "Jesus Christ, the Servant as Lord" (IV/2, §64) and "Jesus Christ, the Lord as Servant" (IV/1, §59). What I aim to show in this part of the chapter is 1) that Barth uses the language and structure of the parable to narrate his Christology, and 2) that, in his intertextual-theological engagement with the

parable, a certain set of scriptural predicates yields the association between Christ and the parabolic son.[1]

I. Barth's Exegesis of the Parable of the Prodigal Son in §64.2

Barth's exegesis of Luke 15:11-32 is located in the small text of IV/2, "The Homecoming of the Son of Man," within the larger paragraph "The Exaltation of the Son of Man" (§64). Barth refers to this section of *Church Dogmatics* as "the decisive center" of his Christology (IV/2, 105). It is here that Barth turns to what he calls the "second problem of the doctrine of reconciliation" (sanctification). The first problem of the doctrine of reconciliation (justification) is addressed in IV/1, where Barth has already employed the allusive caption "the Way of the Son of God into the Far Country" (§59.1). I will return to the broader contextual significance below. For now, I would like to restrict my attention to what Barth tells us about the parable in his explicit exegetical engagement with it in §64.2 (21-24).

Although he provocatively situates his treatment of the parable at the turning point of *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, Barth begins by offering a reading that is non-Christological. His initial approach to the parable gives express attention to its rendering

---

[1] To be clear, my interest in Barth's *inter*textuality is not to be confused with the "*intra*textual" understanding of Barth that McCormack describes in his essay "Beyond Nonfoundational and Postmodern Readings of Barth" in *Orthodox and Modern*. Based on George Lindbeck's comments in "Barth and Textuality," McCormack defines "intratextual theology" as "without reference to God, the world, history, metaphysics—anything outside or beyond the text" (133). See Lindbeck, "Barth and Textuality," *Theology Today* Vol. 43, No. 3 (Oct. 1986), 362. On the other hand, Kathryn Greene-McCreight uses "intratextual" in reference to Barth's *exegesis* to indicate that "it is the text which governs the interpretive process rather than historical-critical reconstruction" (Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram*, 202). However, the important point is, an *inter*textual approach (following Ricoeur) emphasizes the coordination or crosspollination of meanings within texts without ruling out the extra-textual reference that brings centripetal force to such meanings. Barth is clearly a "realist" in McCormack's sense, as are the biblical writers. This fact should not call into question "narrative theology" (as it seems to do for McCormack, 113, n. 9). Rather, that the proper Subject of theology is a Name and a History (not an abstract Nature) warrants recourse to narrative logic (and by the same token, *name* and *history* signal a extra-grammatical reality-reference).

in the tradition and echoes a fairly common interpretation of its meaning. Barth says that, in a "direct" (*direkt*) sense, the parable "speaks of the sin of man and the mortal threat which comes to him in consequence, of his repentance and return to God, and of the overwhelming grace with which this one who turned away and then turned back to God is received by Him" (IV/2, 21). In other words, at the beginning of his excursus, Barth acknowledges that the most immediate reading of the parable can yield no more than a generic claim about divine grace. He concedes, here, that "a direct christological interpretation" would only produce a "strained interpretation" (or an "over-interpretation," *Überinterpretation*) (21). In what follows, I trace Barth's account of the biblical passage, distinguishing and relating the two interpretive layers he discerns, before going on to consider the arc of the Christological interpretation of the story he ultimately embraces.

1. Barth's "Direct" Interpretation of the Parable

Barth's preliminary reading situates the parable in its literary context, from which he derives the "parabolic reference" to sinful humanity. He exegetes the Parable of the Lost Son "in concretion of the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin" (21). Consequently, Barth takes for granted that Luke 15:1-2 provides a referential backdrop for the whole narrative picture. The message of the parable is "with a view to the 'publicans and sinners who come to Jesus and hear Him, whom He receives…and with whom He eats—in contrast to the scribes and Pharisees, who seem to shun Him for this reason." Barth has no trouble mapping the identities of the latter onto the elder son and the former onto the younger son. The son who goes into the far country represents the

lost Jesus came to seek and save (Lk. 19:10) while the elder son portrays the righteous

who are in need of repentance (Lk. 15:7).[2]

Barth acknowledges that the scriptural passage contains within it two parables—

the story of the younger son's relationship with the father (vv. 12-24) and the story of the

elder son's attitude toward the father and the younger son (vv. 25-32). This fact has led

some to speak of "The Prodigal Sons" or to call it "The Parable of the Father's Love." By

contrast, Barth insists that the "real message" is located in first of the two parables.[3] He

says the story of the elder brother who will not rejoice in his lost brother's homecoming

"has only the significance of a contrast in relation to the main statement of the passage."

According to Barth, the "main statement" of the story is twofold. It, first of all, concerns

the "turning away and turning back" of humanity "in relationship to God." Barth is

particularly attuned to the double movement of the younger son's narrative. In leaving

home, he "takes his inheritance," "wastes his substance in riotous living," exiles himself

from his father and makes himself an alien and a slave. In his homecoming, he is

welcomed, celebrated, and restored again as child and heir. Second, the quality of the

son's reception upon his return tells us that "there is not only no diminution but a

---

[2] Throughout *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, Barth uses "lost" to stand in for flesh and fallenness. The word gathers together the whole history of humankind, wayward, alienated, distressed. This is evident, for example, in §59, as at many other points. Barth says "lost" sums up "the situation of Old Testament man," of exile, wilderness, the desert-land and desertedness (Deuteronomy 32). In other words, it describes "a history of suffering" (IV/1, 1730174). All of this is evoked in the image of the younger son in an alien (Gentile) land, in the pit, in the pigpen.

[3] In contrast to many scholars, such as Joachim Jeremias and Luke T. Johnson, Barth sees the younger son as the "main character" of the double parable. Robert Funk's structuralist reading (discussed in my first chapter) provides illuminating support for this claim. While many have read this as a story primarily about the father, in Funk's analysis the younger son is the "determiner" of the narrative while the father and the elder son are two "respondents." In an unusual inversion or conflation of roles, we have in the younger son not only the "determiner" (who is usually the authority figure in NT parables, e.g., a father/lord) but also the "recipient of grace" (who is usually one of the respondents). This analysis of the parable's literary structure makes for an interesting pairing with Barth's interpretation when it is read in light of his doctrine of election: the prodigal Christ is both Judge (in the authoritative position) and Judged (in the dependent position). See Funk, *Parables and Presence*, 50.

supreme heightening and deepening of the fatherly mind and attitude of God towards

him." In this initial reading, Barth pays special attention to 1) the double movement of

son's journey, and 2) what the quality of his return reveals about the father's (God's)

attitude toward the son (humankind). These two elements open onto an indirect plane of

interpretation.

2. On the Way to an "Indirect" Indirect Interpretation

Barth goes onto to reiterate that we cannot gather "more than this…directly in the

passage." But, perhaps more importantly, we should emphasize that we cannot say less.[4]

That Barth has gone as far as he has in this first reading is a significant achievement for

his subsequent reading. In addition to claiming that the parable narrates divine grace,

Barth has also insisted that it is of a piece with the preceding parables. This fact alone

opens the text up in a number of directions—namely, toward the world in front of the text

(Ricoeur). Barth takes for granted that the three parables of Luke 15 cohere as a whole

and are therefore inter-referential, that these are the parables *of Jesus*, that the parabolic

referents stand outside the text (sinners and righteous), and that the life of Jesus

"reverberates" (Ricoeur) upon the text. (In other words, it is Jesus' actual behavior, his

life, his action and personality that prompt the whole story-telling episode). This takes

Barth a long way toward an intertextual expansion of the story's meaning.

Following the cracks as paths emerging, quite legitimately, from his "direct"

exegetical groundwork, Barth suggests that even "if there is the danger of a strained

---

[4] The "literal" (or direct) reading for Barth, then, is not a matter of "letter" but of intention or intended referent. As for Aquinas, the "literal" sense of a metaphorical story parable is metaphorical or parabolic (Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 86). The question here is only whether the metaphor can be extended further.

interpretation, it is also possible not to do full justice to the passage"—to give a "sub-interpretation" (*Unterinterpretation*)—and "to miss what is not expressly state but implied in what is stated, and therefore necessary to what is stated" if we do not attend to "that which is said indirectly" (IV/2, 21-22).[5] For Barth, as for Julian, there is an excess in the narrative that cannot be explained or contained by a "first blush" reading. The implication within the text is in fact necessary to its meaning. Barth infers that this is what many of his predecessors were after in their flawed attempts to connect this story about grace with the actuality of grace in Jesus Christ.

Before venturing his own indirect reading, he surveys a number of the efforts of those before him to identify the "presence" that is "not expressly stated in the parable." He points two different kinds of interpretations. First, to the "category" of "that which is said indirectly" in the parable, Barth assigns Augustine, Christoph Starke (18th c.) and Ferdinand Christian Baur (19th c.). Their readings are "indirect" because they draw a connection between three figures or groups: 1) "the lost and re-found younger son," 2) "the sinful but penitent *'am ha'aretz* ['people of the land'] of publicans and sinners,"[6] 3) and "the election, calling and redemption of the Gentile world" ("in contrast to Israel as revealed in the elder brother") (IV/2, 22). What makes such interpretations indirect is that

---

[5] In a couple of places, the translators render Barth's "Unterinterpretation" in terms of not "doing justice" to the text. See *KD*, 22, 23. "Überinterpretation" is similarly translated as "strained interpretation." What Barth means by this pairing is clarified when he goes onto to describe our need, with respect to the analogical or indirect identity of Christ with the younger son, to "not say more" but also to "not say less" (24). In other words, Barth does not want to overstate his Christological reading to start, as if it is a direct or obvious interpretation. But he also does not want to understate what the text itself is suggesting on the basis of its own context and "signs of metaphoricity" (Ricoeur), e.g., vv. 24, 32. This is what he seems to mean: between the "strained" or overeager interpretation and the "unjust" or meager interpretation—the interpretation that listens to the indirect identity the text itself provokes.

[6] The ambiguity of the phrase *'am ha'aretz* is significant to the rest of Barth's exposition. It means "people of the land" and has a variety of applications. It can simply stand for the land of Israel, but more often it is used to refer to ignorant or uneducated (rural) Jews, Jews who fail to observe Torah (e.g., Jn. 7:49), as well as (and particularly in the plural, "peoples of the land or lands") to Samaritans, non-Jews, or Gentiles. In this instance, Barth seems to have in mind the social caste of uneducated and unobservant Jews as well as Gentiles. As an undesirable fringe identity, the former points to the latter.

"there is no explicit mention of this relationship" among the three groups. But what warrants the connection is the way *'am ha'aretz* functions elsewhere in the New Testament, particularly in Luke where it has a "very pronounced universalistic" drive. In other words, Jesus' inclusion of outcast Jews points to the inclusion of Gentiles and the whole world. In view of this fact, Barth asks whether this mapping of the salvation of the Gentiles onto the identity of the younger son is in fact "really read into the text."

With this question, Barth begins to complicate and undermine his own working distinction between direct and indirect interpretation. He still maintains that the connection "is not there" in "direct exegesis;" yet he also suggests that "we cannot really expound the text" without considering what is given "in, with and under what is said directly." This sacramental "in, with and under" appears to be Barth's way of speaking about the fact that the story is animated by another story, that the embedded narrative is not self-contained and therefore not self-explanatory. Through it, within it, "another voice" (Ricoeur) surfaces, directing the story outward, transgressing its structural parameters. Remarkably, the text initiates this *directly*: the direct (strictly exegetical) reading is precisely what opens up the indirect (intertextual) reading. The latter, therefore, cannot be brushed off as an ideological imposition.

The indirect method of reading Barth identifies in Augustine and others gives rise to a second more specific type of interpretation. He says, "the question also arises whether we have not to take form the text, in the same indirect way, a christological content." Here again, Barth softens the distinction between direct (or literal) and indirect (or typological) reading, saying "it does actually contain this [Christological content]—

although not explicitly."[7] Barth denounces the sort of non-Christological treatment of the parable one finds, for example, in Adolf von Harnack's *The Essence of Christianity*, where, on the basis that Jesus is not mentioned in Luke 15, "it is hastily concluded…that not the Son and the atonement accomplished in Him but only the Father and His goodness belong to the Gospel preached by Jesus Himself." Instead, Barth commends Helmut Gollwitzer's Christological interpretation of the parable in *Die Freude Gottes* (*The Joy of God*), claiming it is not merely legitimate but it is actually unavoidable.

Summarizing Gollwitzer's Christological exegesis, Barth writes, "In the parable, then, Jesus is 'the running out of the father to meet his son.' Jesus is 'hidden in the kiss which the father gives his son.' Jesus is the power of the son's recollection of his father and home, and his father's fatherliness and readiness to forgive." Barth suggests that Gollwitzer can render Jesus present in the story in this way because he interprets the passage in light of its setting-in-life described in Luke 15:1-2. The parable renarrates and defends Jesus' practice of "eating with the publicans and sinners." Further, it presents that action as "a fulfillment" of "the blessing of sinful Israel," rather than "the coronation of righteous Israel." Barth's explains,

> Not the theory of a Father-God who self-evidently and consistently pardons, but the miraculous actuality of this act of God, is the non-explicit but indispensable presupposition of the happening between God and man which is envisaged in the relations between father and son described in the parable.

In other words, Barth's contention is that only abstraction, only generalization, can yield a non-Christological reading of the parable. Given "the non-explicit but indispensible"

---

[7] Again, Barth denies that this is a kind of eisegesis. He claims the text itself suggests the meaning that so many modern historical-critical readers wrongly consider "allegorical."

history presupposed by the speech (the history of the parabler and his audience), it is impossible for this little narrative to close itself off to the details and actuality of grace as it is achieved in his life. Barth insists such a conclusion is in no way "allegorical." Rather, it is simply the result of expositing the text in the context of the rest of Luke and with a view to the larger New Testament message. Barth's claim that Christological exposition "does justice to what is there in light of [the text's] background, i.e., it expounds it from its context," correlates with Ricoeur's description of "narrative embedding." The text does this to itself, by itself.

While Barth embraces Gollwitzer's "method," he is not entirely happy with the content, primarily because he thinks it still overemphasizes "the action of the father" by deriving "reference to Jesus Christ" only from him. Barth says this "destroys the essential balance of the parable," the fulcrum of which, he has already told us, is to be situated in the journey of the younger son. Contrary to many scriptural commentators, Barth's analysis is rooted in the view that "the main figure in the story is the younger son who leaves his father and is lost, but returns and is found again."[8] He thinks over-accentuating the father is an "error" common to "more recent Protestant exegesis," and he wishes to go further than Gollwitzer in refocusing our attention on the action of the son instead.

3. Barth's "Indirect" Interpretation

Partway through his treatment of the parable, Barth commences a new exposition. He says he hopes it can display "the presence and action of the Son of God, and therefore of the atonement accomplished in Him, in what takes place between God and

---

[8] According to Funk's structuralist position, addressed in the first chapter, the younger son is the hinge, the "determiner" of the narrative.

[humankind] as indicated in the parable" (IV/2, 23). Barth states once again that this cannot be "demonstrated" immediately from the text. He is critical on this point of patristic allegorical readings, such as that of Ambrose of Milan, which he thinks too closely identify Jesus with figures and details in the parable (such as the fatted calf that is slaughtered).[9] At the same time, Barth intends to draw an "analogy" between Jesus Christ and the lost son of the parable. He says that while this cannot be a "simple equation," nonetheless, we cannot "do justice" to the parable

> if we do not see and say that in the going out and coming in of the lost son in his relationship with the father we have a most illuminating parallel to the way trodden by Jesus Christ in the work of atonement, to His *humiliation* and *exaltation*. Or better, the *going out* and *coming in* of the lost son, and therefore the *fall* and *blessing* of [the human], takes place on the horizon of the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus Christ and therefore of the atonement made in Him. It has this as its higher law. It is illuminated by it.[10] (IV/2, 23)

These lines provide at least two signposts for Barth's second retelling of the parable. First, in shifting between the language of "parallel" and "horizon," he signals the enclosure of the one trajectory, that of the lost Son, within the other, that of the eternal Son. In other words, we should not look primarily for similarities between the lost son and Jesus Christ, but for the ways in which the latter overtakes and encompasses the former. Second, the precise points of analogy are delimited to "going out and coming in" (form) and "humiliation and exaltation" (content). In mentioning humiliation and

---

[9] Presumably he has in mind Ambrose's *Expositionis Lucam* VII (*PL* 15, 1846-54).
[10] Emphasis added.

exaltation in connection with the parable, Barth echoes what he has already said in connection with John 1:14 (to which I return in the latter part of the chapter).

Barth's renarration of the parable falls into three paragraphs corresponding to the chronology of the story (IV/2, 23-25). First he addresses the going out of the lost son/eternal Son (vv. 11-16). Then he turns to the homecoming of the son/Son (vv. 17-24). Finally, as a kind of epilogue, he considers the story of the elder son (vv. 25-32).

i. Going Out

Barth recounts the parable a second time, interweaving his initial conclusions with a new Christological interpretation. Starting with the going out of the son, he paraphrases the parable:

> the son comes with his greedy and arbitrary demand, takes his inheritance from the hands of his father, makes his way into a far country and wastes his substance in riotous living…and then suffers want in the famine which comes on that land, being glad at last to feed on the husks which do not belong to him, but to the swine which he is charged to keep. (23)

Barth calls this portion of the narrative "the way of [humankind] in its breaking of the covenant with God." This is the "going out" that belongs to sinful humans. The breaking of the relationship with God is seen in concentric circles: "lost Israel," the "publicans and sinners" of the Third Gospel, and Gentiles. All of these groups are in some sense "the lost son"—rebellious, disobedient, self-destructive. As such, they cannot be easily mapped onto "the way of Jesus Christ," the obedient Son of God who keeps and does not break the covenant with God.

How can these figures function as a "parallel" for Jesus Christ then? Barth says, "the way of the latter [Christ] *is* in fact the way into the far country of a lost human existence."[11] His journey into the far country is

the way in which He *accepts identity and solidarity* with this lost son, unreservedly *taking his place*, *taking to Himself* his sin and shame, his transgression, as though He Himself had committed it, *making* his misery *his own* as though He Himself had deserved it, and all this in such a way that the frightfulness of this far country, the evil of the human situation, is revealed in its full depths only as it *becomes His* situation, that of the holy and righteous Son of God.[12] (23)

In other words, the wandering of the lost son and the Son of God are "parallel" only in a structural sense (fall and incarnation). For Barth, as for Julian, it is more accurate to say that the story of Jesus Christ intersects or crosses the story of wayward humanity. In fact, it not only intersects but intercepts and redirects it. The way of Jesus Christ is "like" that of the lost son only in the sense that it "*is*" the way of the lost son. It becomes it; it takes over that other history, rewriting it from within. As Augustine says, "*per ipsum pergimus*

---

[11] Emphasis added.

[12] Emphasis added. These lines are highly evocative of Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians 3:13, a verse Barth frequently references. Speaking of Christ "being made a curse for us," Luther says: he "hath and beareth all the sins of all men in His body…He received them…and laid them upon His own body…He was found and reckoned among sinners and transgressors… a companion of sinners, taking upon Him the flesh and blood of those who were sinners… We must wrap Christ, and know Him to be wrapped in our sins, in our malediction, in our death, and in all our evils, as He is wrapped in our flesh and blood…He beareth the sins of the world, His innocency is burdened… a suffering Christ, who took upon Him to bear the person of all sinners… to overcome…the wrath of God in himself…to take away the curse in Himself." Luther repeatedly stresses the burdening of Jesus Christ, in his very person and body, that results in the "happy change" by which "we being now clothed are freed from the curse…" In his exegesis of this verse, Luther, like Julian and Barth, appeals to the suffering servant of Isaiah (upon whom the Lord has "laid the iniquities of us all," Is. 53:6) as well as 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Philippians 2:7. See Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, trans. Erasmus Middleton (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Classics, 1979), 164-172.

ad ipsum [through him we travel to Him]."[13] It is in this sense that the prodigal son's story takes place on the "horizon" of the history of Jesus Christ.

In highlighting that Christ "accepts identity and solidarity" with the lost son, takes his "place," assumes his "sin," "shame," "transgression," and "misery," and fully indwells the "human situation," Barth alludes, as Julian does, to 2 Corinthians 5:21, which proves to be a defining intertext in Barth's Christological interpretation of the parable. It clarifies what Barth has already said about what it means for the Word to take on human "flesh"—not just the human form, but fallen humanity: sinful, dead, perishing, *lost*.[14] As he goes on to explain,

> The Word became flesh—not just [human], but the bearer of our human essence, which is marked not only by its created and *unlost* goodness but (in self-contradiction) by sin, so that it is a perverted essence *and lost* as such. If His human essence were sinless as such, how could it be our essence? How could He really be our Brother at this decisive point? How could there be any solidarity with us in our lostness? Would it not mean that the Son of God had become the Son of Man but had not as such taken to Himself our sin and guilt? But if He had not done that, how could He have taken them away, as He has done? He did in fact bear them.[15] (IV/2, 92)

---

[13] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIII.xix, 24.

[14] Again, the connection between flesh and lostness is prevalent in Barth's thinking. He says, "'Flesh' in the language of the New (and earlier the Old) Testament means man standing under the divine verdict and judgment, man who is a sinner and whose existence therefore must perish before God, whose existence has already become nothing, and hastens to nothingness and is a victim to death. 'Flesh' is the concrete form of human nature and the being of man in his world under the sign of the fall of Adam-the being of man as corrupted and therefore destroyed, as unreconciled with God and therefore lost" (IV/1, 165).

[15] Barth continues the thought: "But He bore them without sin. 'Without sin' means that in our human and sinful existence as a man He did not sin. He did not become guilty of the transgression which we in our human essence commit. He bore an alien guilt, our guilt, the guilt of all men, without any guilt of His own. He made our human essence His own even in its corruption, but He did not repeat or affirm its inward

The "the fatal journey of the lost son," the "pit" into which the Son readily enters, is not

merely human embodiment but, necessarily, the embodiment "stamped by human sin."

Christ's humanity always has "this twofold sense" (IV/2, 25).

In view of the comprehensiveness of Christ's assumption of the lost son's

identity, Barth thinks it is fitting to invert the order of reference. For him, it is not quite

accurate to say the prodigal son points to Jesus Christ. Rather, he reflects him, and only

faintly so. Barth says, the way of the lost son in the parable

> is only a sorry caricature of the going out of the one Son of God into the world as
>
> it took place in Jesus Christ, of the humiliation in which, without ceasing to be
>
> who He is, but in the supreme exercise and expression of His Sonship and deity,
>
> He became poor for our sakes (2 Cor. 8:9).

Before continuing with Barth's retelling of the parable, it is worth clarifying a few points

about what has been said thus far.

First, Barth is sometimes criticized for sidelining the reality of other human

beings in his relentlessly all-encompassing account of the humanity of Christ.[16] Calling

the lost son a "sorry caricature" of Jesus Christ is one of many moments in *Church*

Dogmatics that might corroborate such a criticism. However, as the succeeding points

indicate—even if Barth's rhetoric along these lines sometimes suggests otherwise—the

objective is decidedly not to diminish the human, but to communicate the extremity and

---

contradiction. He opposed to it a superior contradiction. He overcame it in His own person when He became man. And we can and must say that He overcame it at the deepest level by not refusing to accomplish the humiliation of the Son of God to be not only a creature but a sinful creature, to become and be the bearer of human essence in its inward contradiction, to repent as such, to become the friend of publicans and sinners, to suffer and die as a malefactor with others" (IV/2, 92, emphasis added).

[16] It can particularly appear to be the case in Barth's earlier writings that he suggests "a view of divine heteronomy in which there is no place for free human agency." Daniel L. Migliore, "Commanding Grace: Karl Barth's Theological Ethics," *Commanding Grace: Studies in Barth's Theological Ethics*, ed. Daniel L. Migliore, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2010), 3.

conclusiveness of Christ's rooting out of the unnatural, the evil, the sinful from human reality. Second, phrases like "taking his place" and "poor for our sakes" give away that the outward/downward movement of the eternal Son teleologically signals and includes the restoration of the lost son in the parable (who, again, stands for Israel, outcasts, Gentiles, and all of humankind). They foreshadow the homecoming of the lost son that always already glimmers on the horizon of the going out of the eternal Son. Third, Barth echoes his treatment of John 1:14 (§64.2) and his description of the "Lord as Servant" (§59) in linking humiliation specifically to the *divinity* of Jesus Christ. Where, historically, *exinanitio* and *exaltatio* are both related to Christ's humanity, Barth assigns the former to Christ's divinity and the latter to his humanity and, by extension, all humanity in him.[17] (I will say more about this in the second part of the chapter.)

Interestingly, right after reiterating that the lost son merely caricatures the Son of God, Barth goes on to make a more positive assertion. He quietly slips in the rather charged statement: "As away from the heights to the depths, from home to a far country, it is analogous to it. It is similar for all its dissimilarity, like the being of Adam in relation to that of Jesus Christ: τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος ['the pattern of the one to come'] (Rom. 5:14)." Again, the structural points of analogy are confirmed: "going out and coming in," "humiliation and exaltation." What is remarkable about this statement is the addition of the word "being." The analogy is not simply formal or narratival—it is *ontological*. Between the *being* of Jesus Christ and the *being* of Adam, there is similarity in the midst of dissimilarity.[18] Both preveniently determining the narrative arc of humankind (as the

---

[17] See Paul Jones, 125. This revised set of references corresponds to the language of "Electing God" and "Elected Human" used in §33.

[18] Barth's relationship to the *analogia entis* is a much-debated topic. See the more recent reprisal of the old dispute between Barth and Erich Przywara: John R. Betz, "Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the

pattern) and retroactively overriding it (through the cross), the humanity of Christ forms and re-forms the story—and, with it, the identity and "essence"—of humanity as such.[19]

ii. Homecoming

Having already signaled that the first movement contains the second *in nuce*, Barth resumes his retelling of the parable, closely paraphrasing the biblical passage. As his summary of the parable makes clear, the son's homecoming consists of two distinct moments. It begins with his "coming to himself" in the far country. As Barth glosses the passage,

> the lost son comes to himself among the unclean beasts with whom he associates, remembering the well-being in his father's house which he has exchanged for this imminent death by hunger. He resolves, therefore, to return to his father with a confession of his fault and a request to be received at least as a hired servant (*Tagelöhner*). In execution of this resolve, he sets off on his way.

Analaogy of Being," *Modern Theology* 21.3 (July 2005), 367-411 and 22.1 (Jan. 2006), 1-50; Kenneth Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant Partner," *Modern Theology* 23.4 (Oct. 2007), 598-616; and Keith L. Johnson, "Reconsidering Barth's Rejection of Przywara's *Analogia Entis*," *Modern Theology* 26.4 (Oct. 2010) 632-650. What is clear in this passage, and throughout *Church Dogmatics*, is that inasmuch as Barth "comes around to" an analogy of *being* (and not simply an *analogia relationis* and an *analogia fidei*), it is, in Kenneth Oakes' words, "ruthlessly Christological" (605). It therefore fundamentally differs from Przywara's account (in which the *analogia entis* is creational). This is because, as Adam Neder explains, "there exists no independent relationship between God and creation apart from Jesus Christ." Neder, *Participation in Christ: an Entry into Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (Louiseville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 30.

[19] The atonement in Jesus Christ is a "history in which our own history takes place" (IV/3.1, 183). Barth addresses the nature and extent of Jesus' embodiment of the history of Israel and the world in multiple places, e.g., see his description of Christ's *munus propheticum* (IV/3.1, §69.2). As Frei explains, in Jesus' story "we get a cross section of the whole history of events that together make up the people of Israel. He is, in effect, a climactic summing-up of that whole story. The crucial events that happened to Israel at large and constituted Israel as a people happen on a small scale to Jesus, but in such a way that there is now a completion or fulfillment of what is left incomplete in Israel's life." Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: the Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 131.

This is the first moment. It has a certain tone—shame, resignation, resolve, a modest hope for nothing more than survival. His intention is abruptly interrupted. "But" (δὲ)—this is the hinge of the younger son's return in v. 20, as well as in Barth's paraphrase of it.

> But [*aber*] the father sees him afar off, and has pity on him, and runs to meet him, and falls on his neck and kisses him—and all this before he has even uttered his confession and request, let alone proved them by corresponding actions of amendment. And beyond all this the father gives the order to clothe the one who has returned with the best robe and a ring and shoes, to bring and slay the fatted calf, and there is a great feast with music (lit. "symphonies," v. 25) and dancing, which annoys the elder son so terribly as he comes home from his conscientious labours. (IV/2, 23)

Reiterating his first, direct reading, Barth calls this the "way back" of lost humanity, as 1) it "turns again to God in repentance and sorrow, sincerely and therefore without claim, eagerly and therefore resolutely," and 2) it is "received and accepted again by [God] without hesitation or reservation" because it "belongs" to God (23). Here Barth, like Julian, highlights the fact that all the double movement of going out and coming in, of being lost and found, actually generates "an even greater joy." The rejoicing and celebrating in the parable (vv. 23, 24, 32) reinforces the reality that the return the father spontaneously bestows upon his son is of an utterly different kind than the return the son sets out to "execute" for himself. The son's homecoming is marked by an asymmetry that is precisely the opposite of what is expected.

As he turns to his indirect or deeper reading of this portion of the text, Barth reiterates that, just as there is no direct identity between the going out of the lost son and

the going out of the eternal Son, "there can be no simple equation of this way with that of the exaltation of Jesus Christ" (24). However, he goes on to say,

> The way of Jesus Christ is primarily and properly the way to [humankind's] home which is not lost but remains, not closed by open: the way to fellowship with God; the way on which Jesus Christ precedes all others as a King who draws them after him to share his destiny; the way to the end of which Jesus Christ Himself has already come, so that this home of theirs is already visible and palpable to those who still tread it.

This passage forms a complement to Barth's earlier allusion to 2 Corinthians 5. Just as Christ assumes in himself and even becomes the way of lost humanity, he is also in and of himself the way of found humanity. Because he is the former, he is the latter.

The roles of priest and king meet in this passage, at the vertex of the parabola formed by the Son's "going out" and "coming in." Becoming sin (as the priest who makes self-sacrifice), Jesus constitutes the path home (as the king who redistributes his portion to all). That home is "fellowship with God"—which, despite everything, despite exile, waywardness, and every other kind of lostness, is not itself lost but always "open." This home is Christ's destiny, and therefore humankind's destiny. It is his rightful inheritance, and therefore the inheritance of all in him. Moreover, Christ himself *is* that home, that fellowship, that reconciliation, that double portion, not merely the path to it.

Rather than clarifying how and why he comes to make the leap from parable to speaker, from the way of the lost son to the way of the eternal Son, Barth moves in the other direction (from speaker to parable), asking, "What is the redemptive return of the lost son as seen from this standpoint?"—that is, from the standpoint of Jesus Christ as the

way home, the king who shares his destiny. It seems that Barth once again downplays the

strength of the parallel he draws when he says "the redemptive return of the lost son" is

"only a feeble reflection of the entry of the one Son of Man into fellowship with God as it

took place in Jesus Christ." Again he claims, it is no "more than a copy, an analogy, a

type" (IV/2, 24).

At this point, it is worth inquiring as to why Barth is so redundantly circumspect

in making this association. Several related considerations are to be flagged here. First,

Barth is careful to distance himself from "allegorical" readings (by which he means

readings that artificially separate form and content) and he is evidently concerned that his

Christological interpretation could place him in that camp (IV/2, 22).[20] In assiduously

avoiding the assertion that the parabolic figure "stands for" the Son, Barth may be trying

to protect himself from such an accusation. Second, the language of "echo" and

"shadow" is bound up with his account of reconciliation, in which the humanity of Jesus

Christ is utterly determinative of human reality, such that the latter can be regarded as

derivative of or included in the former. For Christ is the "firstborn of all creation" (Col.

1:15).

A third point is closely related. As Barth goes on to say, while the figure in the

parable cannot be more than a copy, echo, or type, *nor can it be less*. It garners all of its

meaning from the pattern of the one who *has* come. Barth says,

> It cannot be more because what he himself is and does and experiences on this
>
> way back can only be a very little thing in relation to that of the one Son of Man,
>
> and even this very little does not lie within the range of his own possibilities, as

---

[20] By "allegorical" Barth seems to mean idealized, ahistorical, abstract, or merely symbolic. His primary
concern is that it might be a kind of dehistoricizing or demythologizing of the Christ event (see IV/1, 337).

though even temporarily he could set himself even in the most perfect fellowship with God.

At the same time, we must remember,

It is also not less because the little that he is and does and experiences is *carried* and therefore *capacitated* by the great and original and proper being and action and experience of the one Son of Man, being *empowered* by the fact that in Him it is a wonderfully complete reality.[21]

Taking these two sentences together, a few point insights are worth emphasizing: 1) While, grammatically, the antecedent to this "no more" and "no less" is the lost son of the parable, Barth clearly has in mind fallen humankind as well. Recall, the identity between the parabolic figure and various people groups was already established in his "direct" reading. Humanity's identity with the lost son does not require the qualifications he makes concerning Jesus Christ's identity with the lost son. What Barth communicates about the relationship between the lost son and the eternal Son can also be applied to the relationship between lost humanity and the humanity of Jesus Christ. 2) "No more" and "no less" are two sides of the same coin. Hence Barth's oscillation between, on the one hand, disclaimers that seem to undercut the parallel he is making and, on the other hand, more forceful assertions than a direct reading of the text would otherwise allow. This is actually a way of gaining ground for a larger claim: the narrative-parable is derivative of another story—and so much so, that we are forced to regard the parable of the prodigal son as *the* parable of reconciliation (as I will discuss further in the second part of the chapter). This is perhaps the chief reason why earlier Christological readings of the parable do not suit Barth: they cannot be seen as versions of the original template; they

---

[21] Emphasis added.

simply import discrete Christological references in connection with minor details in the story. 3) In the context of the encompassing narrative, there is no viable explanation for the homecoming of lost humanity apart from the "being and action and experience of the one Son of Man." On Barth's telling, this story is not (first of all) a story of repentance.[22] Like the Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin that precede it, it is a story of being lost and found. Of itself, lost humanity cannot repentant; it cannot restore fellowship. Its homecoming, its reconciliation, is wholly "capacitated" by another. For Barth, the fact of Jesus Christ is the *sine qua non* of every human return to God. That is why the "parallel" between the lost son and the eternal Son eventually breaks down. The latter must cross the former.

Finally, inculcating in his readers the view that the lost son is "only" a copy, Barth opens up a new perspective on the parable, one that ensures we locate it within the whole history of God and humankind which culminates in Jesus Christ. In other words, in apparently minimizing the being of the lost son in relationship to the being of Jesus Christ, Barth shores up his soteriological reading. In light of this, his reading is not only not allegorical (whether in the traditional or pejorative sense), it cannot really be called typological either (even though that is the term Barth uses), for the chronology runs the other way (not as scriptural figure to Christological fulfillment). Yet, methodologically speaking, it is not the case that Barth arrives at this conclusion because he comes to the passage with a rigid Christological premise that simply will not allow the text to set its own bounds (as he is sometimes accused). Instead, and more fundamentally, it is because he reads intertextually. His reading practice verifies his stated concern about how to "do

---

[22] When addressing the human response to grace, Barth does appeal to the parable in a more conventional fashion as a story of conversion or repentance (§74, *passim*). But since the material content of reconciliation of objective, the subjective possibilities of the story are not evoked here.

justice" to, to not "under-interpret," the passage. In order to not glean too little from the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Barth insists, we must face and not avoid the presence of Christ given "in, with and under" the story he tells. With this, Barth has married the ethical, sacramental, and hermeneutical. He has placed the onus on non-Christological readings to defend what he considers an irresponsible oversight and hermeneutically unjust reticence. In the end, Barth does not in fact attenuate the relationship between the lost son and the eternal Son at all, as the surface of his rhetoric can sometimes suggest.

iii. Clues from the Second Parable

As Barth tells us in his initial interpretation of the parable, story of the elder brother, the second parable within the parable, primarily functions as a foil for the story of the lost son. However, when he revisits this portion of the parable, it becomes clear that it is in fact a crucial element for at least two reasons: 1) it clarifies the character of the father's love, and 2) the concluding verse in the second parable forms an illuminating parallelism with v. 24 at the end of the first parable.[23]

Barth equates the elder brother with the scribes and Pharisees, taking it for granted, based on the literary context, that in Jesus' original intent the former fictionally narrates the character of the latter. According to Barth, the elder brother, and by extension the scribes and Pharisees, form two points of contrast with the younger son, and by extension the publicans and sinners. First, the older son does not share the younger's trajectory (going out and coming in). Second, his reaction to his brother's homecoming reveals that he does not understand the love of the father, namely that it is only increased by the "twofold movement" of being lost and found. Barth says, "He

---

[23] Barth's exegesis puts this saying in v. 28 and v. 32, but in the NRSV, as well as other English translations, the saying to which Barth refers is found in v. 24 and v. 32.

failed to understand, therefore, the fact that in His grace God is the God precisely and exclusively of the man who makes this twofold movement" (IV/2, 24). On Barth's interpretation, this picture of the older son's character is meant to shed light on the scribes and Pharisees "in front of the text" (Ricoeur) who do "not reject merely a distasteful doctrine of sin and forgiveness" but also the revelation of God Godself as well as the essence of humanity. For God elects to be the God of lost humanity (what this means will be discussed in the next chapter). In this same decision, humanity is determined from eternity as humanity elected and preserved for fellowship with God. In other words, the problem is not just that the elder brother, like Jesus' dissenters, are averse to the gratuitousness, and even injustice, of the father's gracious reception of the son. The greater issue is that refusing the actuality of grace means rejecting 1) the concrete love of God in Christ, and 2) the reality of humankind as beloved in Christ. To deny this story about a son who was lost and found, is to deny Christ's own loving action and, concomitantly, the good news that by grace, God and humanity are united in an eternal fellowship that is ultimately deepened and strengthened by the historical process of covenantal rupture and reconciliation.

So, the elder son is by no means a dispensable foil for his younger brother. Instead, Barth maintains, "this elder brother will finally bring Jesus to the cross, not merely because Jesus said about God and the sinner what is said in this parable, but because [Jesus] is the man in whom what is said in this parable…is actuality" (24). The problem, then, is *not* that the story tells of a distant "Father-God who self-evidently and consistently pardons," which is offensive to the righteous (22). What gives the whole parable its force is that, embedded in the ministry of Jesus, it identifies *this* individual

(the storyteller) as the one in whom God's grace is revealed. According to Barth, "What puts this figure [the elder son] so terrifyingly into the shadows is that it is a personification of the conflict against the actuality of the God-man." What the elder son opposes is none other than Jesus Christ (Grace). This story decisively insinuates itself into the world in front of it—and in such a way that it helps effect what it describes: the going out and coming in of the Son of God.

This brings us to the second reason the inclusion of the elder son's story is in fact a crucial element. In light of Barth's recognition of the embeddedness of the parable within Luke 15 and within the whole of the Gospel, the life of Jesus cannot help but "reverberate" on the parable, and vice versa. Barth is attuning his readers to this when he turns to v. 32, "the final saying of the father to his elder son which forms the conclusion of the parable." As the King James Version, the English translation used for Barth's quotation of the verse, reads: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found" (v. 32). This concluding statement parallels the words of the father to his servants when he orders them to prepare a feast upon his younger son's return: "Let us eat and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost (had gone off, disappeared), and is found" (v. 24). Barth comments,

> If there is any point where we can ask whether there is not finally a direct as well as an indirect christological reference, and therefore need of a christological exposition, it is in face of these two verses, of this 'my son' and 'thy brother,' of this dead man who as alive again, of this lost man who was found, of the rejoicing which rings out in these words.

We must ask, "to whom does this all refer?" It is precisely at this point that "another voice" breaks into the text, transgressing its narrative enclosure, yielding meaning in excess of its own elements. Dead and alive again—is this not "almost too strong to be applied…to the lost son of the parable"? (24-25). Barth does not "press the point." Nor does he have to. For an "*in concreto* christological exposition" is "invited by the text itself" (25). So much so that "even the most cautious exegesis of the parable" must be able to account for the meaning of these startlingly evocative parallel verses. Ultimately claiming much more than a structural-narratival similarity between the far journeys and homecomings of the lost son and the eternal Son, Barth concludes with a strong *a posteriori* justification for venturing his Christological interpretation. What is surprising is that, while in the second paragraph he only proposes an "indirect" reference to Christ, now he does not hesitate to suggest it must be "direct" as well. So much for his repeated disclaimers about not being able to "demonstrate" this from the passage. As Barth quips between his quotations of vv. 24 and 32, "Yes, this is also in the text."

4. A Parable of Retrieval

Although Barth speaks of a *parallel*, it is clear in his exposition, as in Julian's, that the two interpretive planes *intersect* at critical points. On his reading, the parable does not in fact tell two separable stories—one about God and humanity in general and another about Jesus Christ. Nor is it quite a matter of one story with two meanings, one literal and the other metaphorical. Rather, the narrative layers interpenetrate one another, become knit together, such that that the second level figures as the *how* of the first. In his direct exposition of the parable, wayward humanity is met immediately by God's grace.

But "Barth's premise is that *grace is not a thing*."[24] In its actuality, it is none other than Jesus Christ himself. Strictly speaking, humankind as such does not return to God, and certainly not on its own.[25] The eternal Son follows the lost son into the far country in order to bring humankind back to the Father in his own homecoming, in himself: "No one comes to the father but through me" (Jn. 14:6).

Like the parables of the Lost Sheep (Lk. 15:3-7) and the Lost Coin (Lk. 15:8-10), which precede it, this is a parable of *retrieval*.[26] While Barth's surface reading of the parable is based on a pattern sin and repentance, his deeper engagement emphasizes pursuit and retrieval instead. There seem to be at least two theological reasons for this shift in emphasis. First, like the sheep in the first parable, once lost, humans are incapable of finding their way back on their own. The distance is insurmountable. (Hence the parallelism of being found and being made alive again—the latter one certainly cannot do for oneself.) Second, finding one's own way back is simply not a requirement of grace. What Barth later says in §64, in his excursus on miracles, sheds light on this:

> In these stories it does not seem to be of any great account that the men who suffer as creatures are above all sinful men, men who are at fault…who are therefore guilty and have betrayed themselves into all kinds of trouble. No, *the important thing about them in these stories is not that they are sinners but that they are sufferers*. Jesus does not first look at their past, and then at their tragic present in the light of it. But *from their present He creates for them a new future. He does not ask, therefore, concerning their sin*. He does not hold it against

---

[24] Adam Neder, 49.

[25] For Barth, only derivatively can we speak of an individual or collective recognition and experience of this return—*materially* insignificant to reconciliation, it is not part of his interpretation of the parable at this juncture. See §74 for Barth's use of the parable in connection with the Christian life.

[26] See Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 155-157.

them… The truth is obvious…that the evil which afflicts mankind is in some sense a punishment; that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). *But there is no trace of this consideration* in the miracle stories.[27] (222-223)

The human counterpart of sin is repentance, but the divine counterpart is grace (seeking and finding). Barth is critical of what he sees as an overemphasis in Reformed theology on repentance because it overlooks the real "power" of the Gospel "as a message of mercifully omnipotent and unconditionally complete liberation from φθορά [destruction], death and wrong." Barth asks, "How could Protestantism as a whole, only too faithful to Augustine…orientate itself in a way which was so one-sidedly anthropological (by the problem of repentance instead of by its presupposition—the kingdom of God)" and miss the issue of "humanity itself"—which is precisely God's concern in Christ (233). What we must see learn to see in the parable is that "God retrieves us."[28] After all, it is "while he was still far off" that the father sees and has compassion on the son (Lk. 15:20).

Within each of the three "lost and found" parables in Luke 15, the larger claim of the Gospel reverberates. So while, in Barth's double interpretation of the wayward son, the parabolic going-out is divalent—1) the fall and fallenness of Adamic humanity, and 2) the condescension (or what Julian calls "courteousness") of the Son of God—the homecoming is in fact singular: it takes place in Jesus Christ alone. For Barth, we can only make sense of the homecoming of the younger son in light of this actuality.

---

[27] Emphasis added. This shows that Barth, like Julian, combines 1) a Pauline-Augustinian position regarding the nature and consequence of sin with 2) an affirmation that God addresses humans not primarily as guilty sinners but as sufferers oppressed by a mutual enemy. The sentiment underlying Barth's remark about the way Jesus regards humans is remarkably similar to Julian's: "For he beholdeth sinne as sorow and paines to his lovers, in whom he assigneth no blame for love" (39.29-30)

[28] Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 155-157.

II. *The Parable of Reconciliation*

The fourth volume of *Church Dogmatics* is strewn with evocative statements such as "the reconciliation of sinful and lost [humanity] has, above all, the character of a divine condescension, that it takes place as God goes into the far country" and, more pointedly, "The event of atonement and the actuality of [humanity] reconciled with God can be described by those who know it only in the words of Lk. 15:2: 'This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them'" (IV, 168, 83). Barth sees the Parable of the Prodigal Son as a thumbnail of all the doctrinal elements of reconciliation. It dramatizes what is otherwise distilled into Christological and soteriological categories. In fact, we could view the whole of *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* as, in Alas Lewis's words, a "monumental and imaginative reconstruction of Christology upon the scaffold of the Prodigal Son narrative."[29] My aim in what follows is to demonstrate as much.

That the Parable of the Prodigal Son is, for Barth, the parable of reconciliation is signaled in at least four ways: 1) by its location (within *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, between IV/1-2), 2) by being prefaced by and coordinated with John 1:14, which, in Barth's view, contains the entirety of reconciliation *in nuce*, 3) by the fact that Barth chooses the language and structure of this particular narrative to frame and explicate the whole of his Christology, and 4) by the network of scriptural references that pervades these portions of *Church Dogmatics*. It is difficult to tease these elements apart as they are integral to one another. Nonetheless, in the first part of this section, I begin by addressing the immediate context of Barth's exegesis, which in turn reflects the embeddedness of the parable in the encompassing narrative structure of the Gospel. I then

---

[29] Alan Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: a Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 192.

highlight the way in which the prodigal's story encapsulates the meaning of *vere homo*, *vere Deus* and I show how the contours of the parable map onto a particular set of classical terms related to the person and work of Jesus Christ. In the second part of the section, I identify and unpack a number of the key intertexts that undergird Barth's alignment of Christological and parabolic elements.

1. The Parable as a Thumbnail of Reconciliation

It is on the cusp of his account of the humiliation and self-giving of God (justification) and the exaltation or restoration of the human (sanctification), that Barth turns to the Lukan parable. At the beginning of IV/2, Barth states that

> When the whole of this subject [the twofold material content of reconciliation] is
> before us, we can hardly fail to think of the New Testament which in every
> age…has always been valued by the Church (with all kinds of different
> interpretations) as central to the whole New Testament and especially the
> Synoptic tradition. I refer to the so-called parable of the Prodigal Son, the son
> who was lost [*verlorenen*] and was found again [*wiedergefundenen*] (Lk. 15:11-
> 32). (IV/2, 21)

While Barth asserts that "we can hardly fail to think of" the lost son at this juncture, as I indicated in the first chapter, this connection is in no way self-evident to many if not most of the parable's interpreters. The story on its own, excerpted from it canonical context, does not suggest a Christological vision of reconciliation at all.[30] It is only when we

---

[30] In other words, a historical-critical reconstruction of the "original" text, which pries it away from its setting in Luke's proclamation of the Good News, cannot yield a genuinely theological interpretation.

coordinate it with a certain set of scriptural intertexts that the alignment of their narrative trajectories prompts the connection that Barth, like Julian, forges.

Most notably, Barth introduces and frames his whole exposition of the parable in terms of John 1:14.[31] The parable is retold as an extended reflection on the more compact account of reconciliation: "the Word became flesh," which Barth calls "the center and theme of all theology," "the whole of theology in a nutshell."[32] Prefacing the parable, he says of the Johannine verse, "if we put the accent on 'flesh,'" the verse is "a statement about God." We claim that "without ceasing to be true God…God went into the far country by becoming human" in God's second "mode of being as the Son—the far country not only of creatureliness but also of corruption and perdition" (IV/2, 20, rev.). On the other hand, "if we put the accent on 'Word,'" John 1:14 becomes a statement about the human. We claim that,

> without ceasing to be human, but assumed and accepted in his creatureliness and corruption by the Son of God, the human—this one Son of Man—returned home to where He belonged…to fellowship with God…to the presence and enjoyment of the salvation for which He was destined. (IV/2, 20, rev.)

Barth goes on the say this "going out" of "the Son of *God*" and this "coming in" of "the Son of *Man*" constitute the "one inclusive event" of the atonement that "took place in Jesus Christ" (IV/2, 21). Barth further appeals to Ephesians 4:9f and the inextricability of Christ's descent and ascent, which he connects with the double movement of the parable.

---

[31] Barth similarly links John 1:14 with Luke 15:11-32 in his *Dogmatics in Outline*, where he paraphrases it: "Into this alien land God has come to us" (109). He also addresses this verse at length in I/2, §15.2. While this portion of IV/2 constitutes a development on his earlier comments (given the ontologically relevant discoveries of II/2), it is clear that in §15 he already sees it as a condensed narration of the hypostatic union. Or, rather, he sees the dogmatic concept "very God and very man" as a mere "description" of what he regards as "the central New Testament statement" found in John 1:14 (I/2, 132).

[32] In a letter to B. Gherardini, May 24, 1955 (Busch, 380-381, n. 196).

In short, this passage shows how seamlessly Barth merges the language of the Parable of the Prodigal Son with that of John 1:14 and of the Gospel story more broadly.[33] While such an alignment is not exclusive to this portion of *Church Dogmatics*, it is most pronounced in *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, throughout IV/1-2 and especially in §59 and §64 taken together. In these paragraphs, Barth consistently links the contours of the polyvalent Lukan narrative with classical terms and schemas for Christ's "being and history."[34] In other words, offers his Christology in the register or mode of the parable. In addition to 1) the *unio hypostatica* or *vere homo et vere Deus*, Barth relates elements of the younger son's story to 2) the doctrines of justification and sanctification as well as revised accounts of 3) the *munus triplex Christi* and 4) the *status duplex*.

First, to reiterate: Barth sets up his exegesis of Luke 15:11-32 by treating John 1:14, which he takes it as the briefest narrative condensation of the hypostatic union or "the two elements in the event of the incarnation"—Christ's humanity and divinity (IV/2, 20). Immediately after his excursus on the parable, he returns to what he calls his "main theme," that Jesus Christ is as *vere homo* as he is *vere Deus* (25). He goes onto say,

> The doctrine of the two natures cannot try to stand on its own feet or to be true to
> itself. Its whole secret is the secret of Jn. 1:14—the central saying by which it is
> described. Whatever we may have to say about the union of the two natures can
> only be a commentary on this central saying. (IV/2, 66)

---

[33] One reason this pairing of John 1:14 with the Lukan parable (read as having a Christological reference) is significant is that it enables Barth to hold together the dialectical tension between the synoptic and Johannine pictures of Jesus Christ. See Hunsinger, "Introduction," *Thy Word is Truth*.
[34] In line with his actualist ontology, Barth refuses to treat person and work separately and prefers the language of "being and history" or "event."

Here he is only making explicit that which is implicitly signaled by the context of his exegesis within §64.2: what is being narrated in both the Johannine verse and the Lukan parable is nothing other than the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Second, in Barth's soteriological reading, the parable also narrates the *duplex gratia* of justification and sanctification. The doctrine of justification is retold in terms of the Son's "far journey" (IV/1), the doctrine of sanctification in terms of the Son's "homecoming" (IV/2). His double movement rewrites the whole history of Israel and the world, once and for all, and constitutes the final truth of the human, judged and exalted, before God.

Third, and closely related to the double grace of salvation, in his treatment of the *munus triplex Christi*, Barth orders Christ's offices priest—king—prophet (respectively corresponding to IV/1, IV/2, and IV/3). Notably, in so doing, he diverges from Calvin's pattern prophet—king—priest (which, he otherwise says, "comes closest to our own reconstruction") (IV/3.1, 5). But it is the *munus duplex* or "union in opposition" of priest (the lamb slain) and king (the lion of Judah) (Rev. 5:5), more commonly evoked in the early and Medieval church, that occupies Barth in IV/1-2.[35]

Fourth, Barth maps the double movement of the parable (or the servant becoming lord and the lord becoming servant) onto what is discussed in Reformed and Lutheran Christology as the *status duplex*, or two states of Christ, while upsetting the order of reference (in keeping with his exposition of Jn. 1:14) (IV/1, 132). On "the older Lutheran" account, the two states, *exinanitio* (humiliation) and *exaltatio* (exaltation), 1)

---

[35] See CD IV/3.1 (5f) for Barth's account of the development of the *munus duplex* into the *munus triplex*. Because Barth's interaction with Luke 15:11-32 primarily concerns the twofold material or "objective" content of the doctrine of reconciliation (IV/1-2) and he does not attend to Christ as prophet or "Mediator" until IV/3—and, concomitantly, the "subjective" realization of reconciliation on the side of humans—I am leaving aside his treatment of the third office for now.

both belong to Christ's humanity, 2) correspond respectively to his crucifixion and resurrection, and 3) are thus ordered successively.[36] By contrast, for Barth, humiliation and exaltation, 1) correspond respectively to the divinity and humanity of Christ, 2) are both rooted in the event of the incarnation, and 3) are thus two sides of the same event (see IV/1, 106; IV/2, 110).[37] Barth's primary "innovation" here is that he interprets the states "strictly together, as two perspectives on a single reality, the doctrines of Christ and the atonement."[38] Equally significant, however, is his "crucial switch of reference."[39]

Weaving together these classical themes in a new way, Barth specifies that the sacerdotal "going out" or abasement of justification belongs to God and the royal "return home" or exaltation of sanctification belongs to the human. In other words, the two states align with the first two offices, of priest and king: Jesus Christ is a priestly (self-sacrificial) king, or in Barth's language, "the Judge Judged." The offices are, in turn, aligned with the two sides of reconciliation, justification and sanctification. Barth thus returns such doctrines as the *duplex gratia*, *munus duplex*, and *status duplex* to their shared narrative root by mapping them onto the Parable of the Lost Son. The simple syntax of John 1:14 indicates the oneness of the reality upon which this set of doctrines "comments"—for "the Word became flesh" does not suggest a going out, on the one hand, and *then* a return, on the other. It is "a single action," not "two different and

---

[36] Barth also notes the Reformed version of the doctrine, which differs in that the object of the two states is the divine Logos rather than the *humanum* of Christ (see IV/1, 133). In both cases, Barth's concern is that they do not capture the cooperation of divine and human action in the unified person of Jesus Christ.

[37] To offer but one of many examples, Barth says in §58, "we have not spoken of two 'states' (*status*) of Jesus Christ which succeed one another, but of two sides or directions or forms of that which took place in Jesus Christ for the reconciliation of man with God. We used the concepts humiliation and exaltation, and we thought of Jesus Christ as the servant who became Lord and the Lord who became servant. But in so doing we were not describing a being in the particular form of a state, but the twofold action of Jesus Christ, the actuality of His work: His one work, which cannot be divided into different stages or periods of His existence, but which fills out and constitutes His existence in this twofold form" (IV/1, 133).

[38] Hans Vium Mikkelsen, *Reconciled Humanity: Karl Barth in Dialogue* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2010), 151; Lewis, 192.

[39] Jones, *The Humanity of Christ*, 125.

successive actions." While Barth employs the language of "exchange," both in his paragraph on John 1:14 and in connection with the parable, he does not have in mind any mechanical or symmetrical this-for-that. He says, "in its literal and original sense the word ἀποκαταλλάσσειν ('to reconcile') means 'to exchange'" (21). Yet, this is not simply a matter of the man Jesus in the place of other humans, but of the Son of *God* in the place of humanity. Throughout Barth's account, the cross belongs, first of all, to God (IV/1)— and that means "victory" for humankind (IV/2).[40] That the Lord (God) becomes Servant (incarnate) (§59) means that the Servant (Christ and humanity in him) becomes Lord (restored to fellowship with God) (§64). That the *Word* becomes flesh means, quite directly and inexorably, that the creature is brought home, embraced in Christ.

To clarify this, the chart below coordinates the principal dialectics and pairs relevant to the content of reconciliation in IV/1-2 in connection with the parable.[41]

Structural Elements of the Lukan Parable (IV/2.2):	The Going Out of the Prodigal Son	The Homecoming of the Prodigal Son
Johannine Accent:	The Word became *Flesh*	The *Word* became Flesh.
Standpoint and Direction:	Above to below	Below to above
The Twofold Material Content of Reconciliation:	The Lord as *Servant* (IV/1)	The Servant as *Lord* (IV/2)
Ontological Emphasis:	Divinity of Jesus Christ	Humanity of Jesus Christ
Person:	Son of *God*	Son of *Man*, Jesus of Nazareth
Office:	Priest	King
State:	Humiliation (of God)	Exaltation (of the human)
Soteriological Emphasis:	Justification	Sanctification
Subject/Object:	Electing God (II/2) Reconciling God (IV/1)	Elected Human (II/2) Reconciled Man (IV/1)
Scriptural Image:	Lamb of God	Lion of Judah

---

[40] This is the principal claim of §59: "Because He is the servant of God, He is the servant of all men, of the whole world... He is the man in the parable who when invited to a wedding did not take the chief place but the lower (Lk. 14:10), or even more pointedly (Lk. 22:27) the One who serves His disciples as they sit at meat, or even more pointedly (Jn. 13:1-11) the One who washes their feet before they sit down to meat… *The true God*—if the man Jesus is the true God—*is obedient*" (IV/1, 165; emphasis added).

[41] My chart leaves out Christ's third office (*munus propheticum*), which Barth treats in IV/3. For a more comprehensive outline of Barth's Christology, see Jones, *The Humanity of Christ*, Appendix 1, 266.

Again, it is crucial to Barth that we not mistake these distinctions as component parts or consecutive moments. As he says, while transitioning from the first to the second problem of reconciliation, "in the turn which we have now to execute there can be no question of seeing a new thing, but of seeing the old in a new way. We have not to consider a second thing, but the first one differently" (IV/2, 5).[42] The form of the narrative-parable enables precisely this sort of bifocal approach. Adam Neder observes, "the most conspicuous, innovative, and brilliant feature of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation is his determined attempt to retranslate the whole of it into a history."[43] It is precisely through the story of the lost and found son that Barth is able to retell the "twofold movement" (*Doppelbewegung*) of this history (IV/2, 7), to look out from both "christologico-soteriological standpoints" as though at once (IV/3.1, 6).[44]

To summarize: while there is much more to be said about Barth's Christology on its own terms, my goal in this section has simply been to show that Barth engages traditional Christological categories by integrating them with the language and narrative structure of the Parable of the Prodigal Son.[45] As I attempt to demonstrate in the following section, the exact content he gives both the classical schemas and the meaning of the parable depends upon the intertextuality of his scriptural interpretation.

---

[42] Immediately preceding his excursus on the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Barth explains the content of John 1:14 with that of Eph 4:9f: "Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth. He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens that he might fill all things" (21). Throughout IV/1-2, Barth collects and coordinates biblical passages like this that reflect 1) the downward/outward and upward/homeward movement of reconciliation as well as 2) the intrinsic teleological ordering of the to (i.e., pointing to the essential "so that" of the divine descent).

[43] Neder, 39.

[44] For Barth a strong theology of the cross gives rise to a theology of glory. They are two sides of the same.

[45] In addition to the more prominent distinctions I have already noted, Barth's retelling of the parable could also be mapped onto his reinterpretation of other doctrines I cannot treat here, such as the *communicatio idiomatum*, *communio naturarum*, *communicatio gratiarum*, *communicatio operationinum*, and *participatio Christi*. The *logos asarkos* and Barth's *anyhpostatic/enhypostatic* Christology I will address briefly below.

2. Intertextual Predication and the Christology of the Parable

What warrants and brings coherence to Barth's alignment of Christological and parabolic elements? How can he so freely embellish and intertwine the story of the lost son with that of the eternal Son? Although Barth readily employs the technical language of the classical tradition and is keenly attuned to historical-doctrinal developments, he also builds up his Christology in another way: by stockpiling and coordinating scriptural predicates. Attempting to re-dynamize the "static" metaphysical language of the tradition—for example, by sidelining "two natures" language in favor of a "historical thinking" of the "two sides or directions or forms of that which took place" in "the common *actualization* (*Gemeinsame Verwirklichung*) of divine and human essence" (IV/1, 133; IV/2, 113, 116)—Barth focuses his readers on the multifaceted identity enacted by Christ and narrated in scripture.[46]

As we have seen, framing the parable in terms of John 1:14 firmly embeds it in the Gospel story as a whole. In identifying the Gospel as its encompassing narrative, Barth sets the content of the parable on the horizon of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. This structurally justifiable move (see chapter two) opens up an interpretive trajectory that very few commentators have noticed. However, Barth's Christological rendering, like Julian's, depends upon other key intertexts as well. Backtracking a little, the stage is set in §59.1. In the first part of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation, key intertexts for the parable include Romans 5:14f, 2 Corinthians 5: 21, Isaiah 53:10, and most importantly Philippians 2:5f. I do not mean to argue that these are the only important references, but

---

[46] In Paul Jones' words, Barth "effectively discards the language of 'nature' in his mature Christology" (*The Humanity of Christ*, 28). For similar reasons, Barth is wary of the language "the God-man (θεάνθρωπος)," saying it "obliterates the historicity of the subject" and "obscures "the event of the co-ordination of the two predicates" (IV/2, 115).

simply that, taken together, they provide us with the intertextual support Barth's

Christological approach to the parable requires.[47] (These scriptural connections are

implicit in the chart above. They also comprise an interpretive nexus similar to the one

that gives rise to Julian's example.) I turn to these passages now, briefly addressing their

significance for Barth's interpretation.

For Barth as for Julian, the alignment between Jesus and the younger son in the

parable largely depends upon the Adam-Christ identity of Romans 5 (and 1 Cor. 15).

Inasmuch as the prodigal son represents fallen humanity, we can identify him as Adam.

As we saw, this is something Barth already assumes in his "plain" or "direct" reading of

the text. However, if we identify the son as "Adam," we must also say that all that he is

and does has been recapitulated by Jesus Christ. This fact alone raises the question as to a

relationship between the parabolic son and the eternal Son. That is the first point of

significance in taking Romans 5 (as well as 1 Cor. 15) as a key intertext.[48] The second

concerns the "how much more of grace" that Julian and Barth both emphasize. "The free

gift is not like the trespass" (Rm. 5:15). There is an asymmetry, a surplus. In justification,

there is no simple economy of exchange, tit-for-tat. Jesus does more than mirror Adam,

the symbol of wayward humanity. It is for this reason, as much as any other, that Barth

cannot simply equate the prodigal son with Christ. As in Julian's retelling of the parable,

the identity of Jesus Christ contains but also exceeds that of prodigal humanity.

---

[47] Barth's writing is shot through with wide-ranging scriptural references from both testaments, making it difficult to isolate any one set of passages as primary. Yet certain texts do standout, either because of the frequency of their occurrence or because their logic determines an overarching theological point.

[48] Speaking of the way Jesus retells the story of Israel and the world in himself, Frei observes that "In Luke, Jesus' identity is signified in terms of Adam, in whom Israel, humanity, and God are all directly connected. Luke's procedure is reminiscent of Paul's bringing together the first with the second Adam, who is Christ (Rom. 5:14, 1 Cor. 15:21-22)." In view of this observation, it is arguable that the gospel narrator has precisely this nexus of identities in mind when recounting Jesus' parable in 15:11-32. In that case, perhaps Julian and Barth are picking up on this in their own coordination of these passages.

It is crucial for Barth that becoming the "second Adam" implicitly entails assuming sinful human flesh, and so comprehensively that we can say Christ becomes "sin itself" (2 Cor. 5:21). Again, it is important to note that he defines "flesh" as "the concrete form of human nature and the being of in his world under the sign of the fall of Adam—the being of man as corrupted and therefore destroyed, as unreconciled with God and therefore lost" (164). He says, "In 2 Cor. 5:21 we have it in a way which is almost unbearably severe: 'He (God) hath made him to be sin who knew no sin… He was made a curse for us, as Paul unhesitatingly concluded from Dt. 21:33 (Gal. 3:13)" (164). That is what it means that, "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). In view of this passage, Barth draws the strongest possible connection between Jesus Christ and the human fallenness and waywardness. This "becoming sin" is intimately linked to this word "compassion," which is so central to the Parable of the Prodigal Son.[49] This is apparent, for example, in Barth's excursus on the σπλάγχνα of God and the man Jesus (IV/2, 184f). Commenting on the verse, "But when [Jesus] saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd" (Mt. 9:36, cf. Lk. 1:78, 15:20), Barth says, of this word ἐσπλαγχνίσθη,

---

[49] Barth makes the connection between compassion, substitution, and the Parable of the Prodigal Son more explicit in *The Humanity of God*, where he says, "In this divinely free volition and election, in this sovereign decision…God is *human*. His free affirmation of man, His free concern for him, His free substitution for him—that is God's humanity… Is it not true that in Jesus Christ, as He is attested in the Holy Scripture, genuine deity includes in itself genuine humanity? There is the father who cares for his lost son, the king who does the same for his insolvent debtor, the Samaritan who takes pity on the one who fell among robbers and in his thoroughgoing act of compassion cares for him in a fashion as unexpected as it is liberal. And this is the act of compassion to which all these parables as parables of the Kingdom of refer. The very One who speaks in these parables takes to His heart the weakness and the perversity, the helplessness and the misery, of the human race surrounding him…takes them to his heart and sets Himself in their place." Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas and Thomas Wieser (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1960), 51.

The expression is a strong one which defies adequate translation. [Jesus] was not only affected to the heart by the misery which surrounded Him—sympathy in our modern sense is far too feeble a word—but it went right into His heart, into Himself, so that *it was now His* misery. He took it from them and *laid it on Himself…* He Himself *suffered in their place…* Jesus had made [their cry] His own.[50] (IV/2, 184)

The compassion of God in Christ is by no means a form of disinterested mercy. It is fundamentally self-implicating. Compassion means: laden with an alien burden—in the place of and for the sake of another (here: the ὄχλοι). Taking the masses "into his heart" in this way, Jesus embodies the whole history of humankind—perishing. He refigures the people of God enslaved and wandering in the desert, Israel in exile, the Psalmist going down into the pit, the Jewish boy in Gentile land wasting away feeding pigs. He stands under their "curse" (Gal. 3:13) as its "Bearer" (e.g., 92).

Jesus takes up this burden as the "head," as the representative and servant of the people—that is, as the servant of God. When Barth says, "the New Testament describes the Son of God as the servant, indeed as the suffering servant of God," he is clearly alluding to Isaiah 53, which serves as another important interpretive lens throughout his doctrine of reconciliation (IV/1, 164). Jesus Christ is preeminently the "servant" who "has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases…was struck down by God…wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities…oppressed…like a lamb led to the slaughter…like an offering for sin" in order to bear many "offspring" and "make many righteous" (Is. 53:5-7, 10-11). Barth frequently merges the language of Son and Servant.

---

[50] Emphasis added. Compare to the parallel passage in Barth's exegesis of Luke 15:11-32 (IV/2, 23) cited above and the note on Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*.

This is apparent in his decision to address the doctrines of justification and sanctification under the headings "The Lord as Servant" and "The Servant as Lord" as well as his recourse to the Christological triad: servant, friend, child (e.g., 94-95, 99). He explains further, "there is at least one stratum in the tradition, still maintained in the 2nd century, in which Jesus Christ (Mt. 12^{18}; Ac. 3^{13}, ^{26}; 4^{27}, ^{30}) is not called υἱός [son], or rather this concept is given a particular nuance in reminiscence of David and the Servant of the Lord (Is. 53) and He is called the holy παῖς θεοῦ [child or servant of God]" (IV/1, 194). As I have pointed out, the son-servant relationship is ambiguous in scripture (e.g., Gal. 4:1) (see chapter two). One the one hand, the meaning of sonship is heirship; it is essentially antithetical the kind of servanthood that involves captivity, enslavement, or abjection (e.g., Gal. 4:7). On the other hand, inheritance involves assuming responsibility for something or for another and is therefore its own kind of service and self-giving. Barth tends to stress the latter sense, particularly in his later construal of the human vocation in terms of obedience and service (§74).[51]

Although he more readily employs the pairing Judge/Judged in his discussion of justification, it is significant that Barth also relates the sonship and the servanthood of Christ in vividly sacerdotal terms. This is particularly true in reference to Isaiah 53 which Barth coordinates with the picture of reconciliation found in 2 Corinthians 5. The main content of the Son's servanthood is his self-offering. He is the priest who stands in as the sacrificial lamb. As Barth says, earlier servant figures such as Moses, David, Jeremiah,

---

[51] Barth overwhelmingly defines the second person's sonship in terms of his servanthood or subordination. However, at times, he does acknowledge the first sense, describing sin as bondage, slavery, or subservience (IV/2 93, 384, 405). In fact, the servanthood of the Son really depends upon this understanding of the condition of the flesh as a kind of abject slavery. What is troubling is that Barth seems to conflate the identity of the Son with his becoming a "slave to God" and "obedient to death." I will return to this problem in chapter six.

the Psalmist "and, above all, the significant figure of the Servant of the Lord in Isa. 53" are "projected shadows of the one Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (172).[52] So while it is true that Barth tends to maintain the continuity between the son and servant roles, the ambiguity between them is also indispensible to his Christology. Jesus Christ is not simply a servant in the sense that we call monarchs and rulers "servants." He is not simply a filial "right-hand-man." He is "a *slave*" (II/2, 605)—in the worst possible sense and in such a way that he assumes all that is hostile to the glory of his deity as the Son of God and the dignity of his humanity as a child of God. In this way, he is servant both because and despite of his identity as *vere homo et vere Deus*. That is what it means that he takes on "flesh" and becomes "sin." "He is the Owner and Bearer, the Representative and Lord of [*this*] life"—that is the manner in which he is the suffering servant of Israel (IV/2, 375; see also IV/1, 29-30). And that is why his "reign" is concealed in the degradation of his death. This slavery is solidarity; it is identity; it is, finally, a compassionate *substitution*.

In all of this, it is apparent that the logic of Philippians 2 undergirds Barth's account of reconciliation and overlays his reading of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. In fact, much of IV/1 reads as an elaboration of the content of the first part of the Christological hymn. As Barth glosses the passage:

> "He emptied (ἐκένωσεν) Himself (that is, of His divine form: He renounced it)
> and took the form of a servant" (v. 7); and again, "He humbled (ἐταπείνωσεν)
> Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (v.8). In

---

[52] At similar many moments Barth appeals to Isaiah 53, as when he claims Christ "fulfills [God's] judgment by suffering the punishment which we have all brought on ourselves" (IV/1 252).

the words of Paul Himself: "He who was rich became poor" (2 Cor. 8:9). In Heb.

5:8, "He who is the Son learned obedience in what He had to suffer." (IV/1, 165)

Barth prefers the language of "condescension," "humiliation," and "obedience" to that of

"kenosis." (This choice appears to be related to the various associations that accrued to

"kenosis" in a certain vein of "kenotic theology."[53]) It is also clear that he parallels the

"self-emptying" of Christ with terms such as servanthood, humility, obedience, poverty,

and suffering. Summarizing the point, Barth writes, "God is not proud…he is humble"

(IV/1, 159). What is most important about this, in connection with his Christological

interpretation of the parable, is Barth's insistence that the form of the servant does not

contradict or constrict the form of God but is precisely a function of it.[54] In this sense, his

construal of kenosis diverges from 17th-19th c. Neo-Lutheran and Reformed treatments of

it.[55] It is worth quoting him at length on this point.

---

[53] Barth will not restrict the meaning of Phil. 2:7-8 to Christ's human nature, as do those who uphold the *extra Calvinisticum* or an absolute *logos asarkos*. However, he also opposes the view of the "modern 'kenotics'" that "self-emptying" involves "a partial or complete abstention not only on the part of the man Jesus as such but on the part of the Son of God, the Logos Himself, from the possession and therefore the power to dispose of His divine glory and majesty, a κένωσις κτήσεως…the idea of a self-limitation of God in the incarnation (or, to put it in the categories of the so-called doctrine of the attributes, the possibility of a *genus tapeinoticum*)" (IV/1, 182). Calling attention to the 17th c. debate between the schools of Giessen and Tübingen, Barth explains that, "adopting a statement of Martin Chemnitz the Giessen party taught a genuine κένωσις χρήσεως, an at any rate partial abstention by the man Jesus, in the *exinanitio*, from the use of the majesty imparted to Him. Jesus Christ *regnavit mundum*, but *non mediante carne*, only *qua* Logos, only in the power of His deity. But in Tübingen, following J. Brenz, there was taught a far more subtle κρύφις χρήσεως, an abstention by the man Jesus in the *exinanitio* only from the visible use, a *retractatio* and *occultatio* of the revelation of His power, or positively, a majesty of the Son of God which is, in fact, exercised and operative and actual, but concealed." The problem is heightened in the late 19th-early 20th c. "alternative" of Gottfried Thomasius and "the more extreme" Wolfgang Gess: "a partial or complete abstention not only on the part of the man Jesus as such but on the part of the Son of God, the Logos Himself, from the possession and therefore the power to dispose of His divine glory and majesty, a κένωσις κτήσεως" (183). Just as Barth is concerned about any construal of the *communicatio idiomatum* in which Christ's humanity is divinized, he is wary of any version in which Christ appears dedivinized.

[54] This is just another way of saying: God is "the one who loves in freedom" (*CD* II/1, 257).

[55] In Coakley's assessment of kenotic Christologies, we can discern six distinct historical interpretations of what the kenosis means for the relationship between two natures of Christ: 1) a temporary "relinquishing" of "the divine powers that are Christ's by right" (of which Martin Chemintz's position seem to be a variant) (11); 2) a "pretending" to relinquishing divine power while retaining it (based on Barth's description, John Brentz could be located here); 3) a "choosing *never to have* certain (false and worldly) forms of power" (Coakley considers the Giessen school a variant of this type, although, for them, kenosis is specifically

It was not to [Christ] an inalienable necessity to exist only in that form of God,

only to be God, and therefore only to be different from the creature… He was not

committed to any such "only." In addition to His form in the likeness of God He

could also—and this involves as once a making poor, a humiliation, a

condescension, and to that extent a κένωσις—take the form of a servant. He could

be like man… he had this other possibility: the possibility of divine self-giving to

the being and fate of man. He had the freedom for this condescension, for this

concealment of His Godhead. He had it and He made use of it in the power and

not with any loss, not with any diminution or alteration of his Godhead. That is

His self-emptying. It does not consist in ceasing to be Himself as man, but in

taking it upon Himself to be Himself in a way quite other than that which

corresponds and belongs to His form as God. His being equal with God, he can

also go into the far country and be there, with all that involves. And so He does go

into the far country, and is there. According to Phil. 2 this means His becoming

man, the incarnation. (IV/1, 180)[56]

"Self-emptying" or "self-giving" is thus defined in terms of an assumption, a "taking it

upon Himself to be Himself" in another way. Inasmuch as it is a "renunciation" it is a

renunciation not of being God but of *only* being God. It means the freedom to be God and

be an-other too, to be "more than" God alone. This taking on of another form, the form of

---

"operative" in the human rather than the divine nature) (11, 17); 4) a "*revealing*" that divine power is
inherently "humble;" 5) a "taking on" of human reality "but without loss, impairment, or restriction of
divine powers" (Hilary, Cyril and Alexandrian interpreters of Chalcedon); and 6) "a temporary retracting
(or withdrawing into 'potency') of *certain* characteristics of divinity" during Christ's incarnate life
(Thomasius and other late 19th-early 20th c. Lutheran and British kenoticists) (18-19). See "*Kenōsis* and
Subversion" in *Powers and Submissions*, 3-39. On the basis of the following passage—which is
representative of Barth's view—it seems Barth, like Hilary and Cyril, could be situated within Coakley's
fifth type since he maintains that kenosis is a *divine* (rather than strictly human) work that involves
ontological gain rather than loss.
[56] Emphasis added.

the human, is Barth's definition of (the "pre-existent" Christ's) divine "self-giving." And, as he would have it, this "humility," this ability, is not "alien" but "proper" to God (193). It belongs to Christ to be equal with the Father (divine) not despite but because of his ability to identify with the prodigal son (human). Barth goes on to say, "we learn that the *forma Dei* consists in the grace in which God Himself assumes and makes His own the *forma servi*" (187).[57] In other words, the form—which, for Barth, is to say: the essence— of God *is* grace.[58]

Acknowledging what a "scandal" and "offense" it is for human understanding to accept the mystery that "for God it is just as natural to be lowly as it is to be high, to be near as it is to be far, to be little as it is to be great, to be abroad as it is to be at home" (192), Barth repeatedly maintains that, "We have to hold fast to this without being disturbed or confused by any pictures of false gods" (187). Against the human conception of a "lord"—"furnished with sovereignty and authority and the plenitude of power, maintaining and executing his own will"—Barth points to the obedience of Christ in Gethsemane (163-164). He goes onto make the provocative assertion that, "there is a humility grounded in the being of God," in the "obedience" of the Son (193).[59] All that is

---

[57] Notably the word κένωσις appears only once in the Bible. Therefore, as an exegetical rule, Barth is absolutely right to avoid defining it on its own terms (as "emptying) and to discern its meaning, instead, by reference to other closely related passages.

[58] Barth makes multiple comments to this effect in II/1. For example, "grace is the very essence of the being of God. Grace is itself properly and essentially divine… God Himself is it" (II/1, 356) and, "His whole being…is simply grace" (358). The claim about grace as a divine perfection is radicalized in Barth's reworking of election in II/2.

[59] What Barth means by the "obedience" of the Son can only be mentioned glancingly here. On one level, "obedience" is just one of the ways Barth translates "kenosis" and thus avoids certain meanings otherwise attached to that word. But, on a deeper level, in order to make his theological claim that the *forma servi* belongs to the *forma dei*, Barth (in)famously resorts to a theory of divine obedience in which the relationship between first person of the Trinity and the second person of the Trinity is analogous to the relationship between God and the human Jesus. As Barth writes, there is "in the twofoldness of the existence of man a reflection of this likeness of the inner life of God Himself…the inward divine relationship between the One who rules and commands in majesty and the One who obeys in humility and

implied in this freighted claim must be left until the final chapter. For now, it will suffice

to observe that Barth's main claim is that condescension is not foreign to deity; it is not

an infringement on but a manifestation of it.

What I want to draw attention to at this juncture is the way: 1) Barth consistently

appeals to the language of the Parable of the Prodigal Son in order to narrate the descent

or humility of God expressed in Philippians 2 (e.g., see 158, 164, 168, 180, 203); 2) the

kenosis (Phil. 2:7) or "far journey" of the Son (Lk. 15) is coordinated with becoming

flesh (Jn. 1:14), being the second Adam (Rom. 5), becoming sin and a curse (2 Cor. 5:

21, Gal. 3:13), being the suffering servant (Is. 53), and so on; and 3) in Barth's view,

"[God] is His own master in such a way that He can go into the far country," and

genuinely become lost humanity without thereby losing himself (204). The composite

content of the passages I have noted above (esp. Rom. 5:14f, 2 Cor. 5, Is. 53:10, and Phil.

2:5f) fills out what Barth means by "condescension" and "humiliation" with "the

concrete biblical form of these qualities and of God Himself" (II/2, 135). Again, it is clear

from his interpretation that he does not apportion this lot to the humanity of Christ but to

his deity. Atonement is not a matter of the substitution of the perfect humanity of Jesus

for sinful humanity. It is matter of God Godself in the place of the sinner, the wayward

servant, the fallen son—or, to use Barth's language: the Judge Judged (§59.2). He puts it

graphically,

> The Almighty exists and acts and speaks *here* in the form of One who is weak and
>
> impotent, the eternal as One who is temporal and perishing, the Most High in the
>
> deepest humility. The Holy One stands in the place and under the accusation of a

---

is identical with the very different relationship between God and one of His creatures, a man (IV/1, 203). I
will address Barth's arrival at this conclusion in chapter six.

sinner with other sinners. The glorious One is covered with shame. The One who

lives forever has fallen prey to death. The Creator is subjected to and overcome

by the onslaught of that which is not. In short, the Lord is a servant [*Knecht*], a

slave [*Sklave*].[60] And it is not accidental. It could not be otherwise. (IV/1, 176)

God is revealed as the one who enters into the pit, the pigsty, the grave. Of course, this is

only one side of the Christological hymn. The other is more fully developed in IV/2

where Barth turns to Christ as the "royal" and exalted one (Phil. 2:9f). However, the first

always already contains the second as its *telos*. God's "taking to [Godself] the radical

neediness of the world" is the same as "reversing its course to the abyss" (213). As Barth

summarizes the passage using the language of 2 Corinthians 11:7, "I abase myself that ye

might be exalted" (189). There is no divine "lowliness" for its own sake; it is essentially

oriented to this "so that."

Conclusion

While I have touched on some of the main claims of Barth's Christology, I have

not been able to address their historical background or a whole host of doctrinal

implications.[61] My goal, instead, has been to show how his use of the language and

narrative structure of the Parable of the Prodigal Son maps onto his doctrine of

reconciliation. I have also highlighted the intertextual network most crucial to supporting

the sort of Christological reading of the parable Barth, like Julian, offers. In other words,

---

[60] Where the word *Knecht* could refer to the status of a (paid) laborer and is used to translate various senses of "servant" in the Bible, *Sklave* is the German word used for the kind of slavery we associate with 17th-19th c. colonial slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. See *KD*, IV/2, 192.

[61] For treatments of Barth's Christology, see George Hunsinger, "Karl Barth's Christology, Its Basic Chalcedonian Character," *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 200), 127-142; McCormack, "Karl Barth's Historicized Christology," *Orthodox and Modern*, 201-234; Neder, *Participation in Christ*; and Jones, *The Humanity of Christ*.

I have focused on the narratival confluence of Christological affirmations in Barth's presentation of reconciliation. While such an approach, in many ways, leaves the matter muddier (than do classical schema and definitions), in other ways, it sharpens our attention to Barth's methodological insight concerning the essentially "storied" nature of the *name*.[62] What holds the various antithesis of Christology together is, in Hunsinger's words, "not a concept but a name, not a system, but a narrative." For Barth,

> Whatever might be said over and above this Name could only be a form of broken or dialectical discourse. No system could possibly contain it. The Name…meant an end to metaphysical business as usual. It was an irruption of the new aeon into the old, and the old could not contain it. This Name was the event that could not be transcended, but transcended and embraced all things. The bearer of this Name was not determined by them, but they by him. (xviii)

Given the subject matter, "historical thinking" is thus "the fitting mode of description."[63] The "narrative commitment" that attends what Robert Jenson refers to as the "absolute priority" Barth places on "Jesus' existence" draws attention to and suggests the theological irreducibility of categories such as story, history, identity, and, of course, what has come to be known as "narrative identity."[64] The person and work of Christ are

---

[62] See, for example, IV/1, 157-158.

[63] Neder, 61.

[64] Coakley, "*Kenōsis* and Subversion" in *Powers and Submissions*, 3-39. On the basis of the following passage—which is representative of Barth's 25. Robert Jenson, *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (New York: the Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969), 72. On "narrative identity," see Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (31) and Paul Ricoeur "Interpretive Narrative," *Figuring the Sacred* (185). Frei and Ricoeur differ in many respects. However, they both maintain that a personal character or identity must be narrated. When Ricoeur speaks of "narrative identity" he means that "To answer the question 'Who?'…is to tell the story of a life." Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol. 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 246. Similarly Frei ties "identity description" to the "narrative account" of an individual's life (*The Identity of Jesus Christ*, 58).

not thought as abstract "things" but "*in concreto*" as enacted identities: Adam, Israel, the suffering servant, the lost son—retold.

My thesis is that the Lukan parable—and not simply narrative per se—enables Barth to make a range of complex Christological claims and coordinate multiple scriptural predicates, all at once. I will say more about this in my conclusion, but in short, I would suggest that approaching the twofold content of reconciliation and the complex ontological reality of Jesus Christ through the Lukan narrative-parable is not incidental for Barth. It enables the doctrinal bifocality he is after, for the narrative form capacitates the telling of two histories as one history and two identities as one identity. At every point, he avoids any generic claim about the humanity and divinity of Christ. He is supremely concerned with *what kind of* God and *what kind of* human. He thinks the character of both is only (or at least best) accessed and retold through the concrete story or history (*Geschichte*) of reconciliation. For Barth, "God is the *reconciling* God and man is *reconciled* man" (IV/1, 158).[65] The radicalness and specificity of this actuality is perhaps nowhere more evident than in his account of election (II/2), apart from which the precise association he makes between the prodigal son and the eternal Son is less remarkable, and also less intelligible. It is to this matter that I turn now.

---

[65] Barth is interested in affirming, "not that God is a person, but the particular person He is" (II/1, 296).

CHAPTER SIX

ELECTION AND REVELATION:
THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON AS THE PARABLE OF GOD

It is readily apparent that Barth's Christological excursus on the Parable of the

Prodigal Son exceeds the parameters of a strictly soteriological reading. To see Jesus

Christ following after prodigal humanity, in salvific solidarity with the lost "son," is not a

strain once we recognize the structural resonances in the scriptural images and narratives

with which Julian and Barth overlay the parable. What is startling in their retellings is not

that the "fall" of Christ succeeds humanity's but that it is said to coincide with, or rather

precede, it—an assertion that ultimately pushes atonement back before creation into the

doctrine of God proper. In what follows I show that for Barth, in extraordinarily similar

ways to Julian, the Parable of the Prodigal Son comes to narrate not only 1) reconciliation

(the second part of chapter five), but also 2) election (the first part of chapter six) and

finally, 3) revelation—or, God Godself (the second part of chapter six). In other words,

Barth implicitly presents the Parable of the Prodigal Son as not merely a "parable of the

kingdom" but the parable of God Godself. For, in his words,

> the heavenly Father, His kingdom which has come on earth, and the person of
>
> Jesus of Nazareth are not quantities which can be place side by side, or which cut
>
> across each other, or which can be opposed to each other, but they are practically
>
> and in effect identical. (IV/1, 161)

Echoing Origen, Barth says, "In this self-giving"—in this far journey, the atonement in

time—"He was the kingdom of God come on earth" (IV/2, 184).

As Barth's doctrine of election (§32-33) undergirds his soteriological interpretation of the parable, I begin this chapter by briefly recapping its most distinctive features. I argue that insofar as the Parable of the Prodigal Son narrates reconciliation, for Barth, it also narrates election. This leads to the conclusion that *God* is eternally the prodigal one, an inevitable outworking of Barth's assertion that "reconciliation is revelation" (IV/3.1). The story of the lost son, then, is ultimately the story of God. To explain what this means for Barth, I circle back to §59.1 and the issue of a "divine obedience" (*göttlichen Gehorsam*) in the second part of the chapter.

Throughout, we see the way in which parabolic form enables Barth to integrate the doctrines of God, revelation, election, reconciliation, incarnation, and election in one concise account. This is something to which I return in the conclusion.

I. Prodigality and Election

In Barth's exegesis of Luke 15:11-32, the way of the Son of God corresponds to the way of the younger son in the parable on at least three levels. First, the most prominent connection is the twofold structural or motional parallel of a "far journey" and "homecoming," which I have emphasized thus far. According to Barth, Christ further relates to the narrative of the younger son's trajectory as (1) the way itself and (2) the one who precedes on the way.[1] These additional dimensions are already signaled in Barth's comments on John 1:14 immediately preceding his exegesis of the parable. Recall, in that paragraph, he calls Christ "primarily and properly *the way* to that home of man…the way

---

[1] Using the plurivalent "way" (*Weg*), Barth reminds us that the peregrination of the younger son is not only a matter of waywardness and alienation. It also evokes, more positively, holy pilgrimage (which Julian mentions), obedience to God, the "royal way" of Numbers 20-21, the narrow entry of the kingdom, the imitation of Christ, and so on. There are different ways of going-through-the-land (*per-ager*).

to…fellowship with God." Further, on this way, "He *precedes* all men as a King who draws them after Him."[2] Christ is the guide and also the path. He is the first on the circuit outward and homeward and he constitutes that circuit in himself. It is for this reason that we must see the story of the "refound son" as only a "reflection," "caricature," or "shadow" of the eternal Son and his journey. Jesus Christ follows, but only inasmuch as he precedes—not in the fact of his being only, but in this quality of his being: his prodigality. How? According to the logic of election. God does not become prodigal by an historical accident, as an afterthought or a response to creation gone awry. God wills from before time to be prodigal in love, to be *the* original prodigal in and as the eternal Son, the second person of the Trinity. That is why Barth says of the Lord's servanthood: "It is not accidental. It could not be otherwise" (IV/1, 176). For God has always already sought out humankind, has always already "made the being of this other His own being" (II/2, 121). [3]

1. The Doctrine of Election and the Original Prodigality of God

This is undoubtedly an unusual way of framing election and predestination. In fact, it constitutes, in Paul Jones' words, a "revolutionary refashioning of the doctrine of election" in §33, apart from which it is difficult to understand the force of his

---

[2] Emphasis added.

[3] The connection between the Parable of the Prodigal Son and Barth's refashioned doctrine of election is all the more striking in that the dynamic between the prodigal son and his elder brother evokes the story of Jacob stealing Esau's birthright, a story which is commonly cited as evidence for the sort of Calvinist double predestination Barth specifically rejects ("Jacob I loved, but Esau I have hated," Mal. 1:3, Rom. 9:13). Instead, for Barth, the younger son represents, on one level, the history of Israel, Israel in exile, disobedient Israel. But, precisely for that reason, the younger son also symbolizes, on another level, outcasts of all kinds, even gentiles. Becoming prodigal, Jesus Christ takes on both identities as the dual facets of human sin ("pride" and "sloth").

identification of the prodigal son with Jesus Christ.[4] As at many other points in *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, the "Christocentrism" of Barth's excursus on the parable is, in Bruce McCormack's words, directly "a function of his doctrine of election."[5] Before outlining its distinctive features, the limitations of my treatment of the topic warrant a caveat.

i. Bracketing Debates Over Divine Ontology

The meaning of Barth's reconstruction of election is the source of much scholarly conflict, and for good reason. A great deal is at stake here, namely the being of God. As I indicated at the outset, while I cannot entirely sidestep metaphysical concerns, I am attempting to temporarily bracket a certain set of debates in order to bring out a different focal point. What Jüngel calls "the christological question of the significance of the *finite* being of Jesus Christ, and therefore, of the *death* of Jesus Christ for the being of God" has been and continues to be examined in great detail by a growing number of scholars.[6] At issue is whether God's self-determination in election and incarnation "constitutes" God's triunity or in some way entails a "transformation" of divine being.[7] While, on my

---

[4] Jones, *The Humanity of Christ*, 38.

[5] McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern*, 87.

[6] Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming*, 3. For two positions on the one side, see George Hunsinger, "Election and the Trinity: Twenty-five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth," *Modern Theology* (2008) Vol. 24.2, 179-198; Paul Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity* (London: T&T Clark, 2002); and Paul Molnar, "The Trinity, Election, and God's Ontological Freedom: A Response to Kevin Hector," *IJST* 8.3 (2006), 294-306. For related positions on the other side, see, for example, Bruce McCormack, "Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology," ed. John Webster, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Kevin Hector, "God's Triunity and Self-Determination," 246-261; and Paul Jones, *The Humanity of Christ* (especially chapter two).

[7] As Paul Nimmo concisely articulates the problem, "If the incarnation of Jesus Christ is thus constitutive of the being of God in eternity, then, it must be the case that, for Barth, in a formulation made famous by Bruce McCormack, the act of election logically precedes the triunity of God." Nimmo, "Election and Evangelical Thinking," *New Perspectives in Evangelical Theology: Engaging with God, Scripture, and the World*, Tom Greggs, ed. (London: Routledge, 2010), 34. I am bracketing this matter for several reasons: 1) is beyond the scope of my topic to treat all the attendant ontological issues at length; 2) others have already done so better than I could here; 3) by its nature, the matter falls outside the purview of the narrative (or parabolic) frame I have assumed because 4) when we limit our attention to who God is, rather than what

reading, Barth's exegesis of the parable reinforces his definition of the divine decree, in

II/2, as a "self-determination" of God in God's second way of being, I am downplaying

ontological considerations of how this "works." To enter that discussion would require

protracted attention to questions concerning, for example, God's aseity, immutability,

eternity, and temporality, among other issues. So I am setting aside the important topic of

whether or how the Son's assumption of human flesh has a "retroactive" impact on his

eternal being and many of the attendant questions about what this would mean for Barth's

configuration of the so-called "immanent" and "economic" trinities.[8] By the same token,

I am not considering, as is so often the case in classical doctrines of God, what or who

God is apart from God's decision in favor of fellowship with the world.[9] And I take

Barth's lead here. Instead, I have, more modestly, set out to show that (and how), in

Church Dogmatics, the Parable of the Prodigal Son narrates not only reconciliation but

also—and *therefore*—election. My wish is to keep a presentation of what this means for

Barth's theology as descriptive and textually-grounded as possible. My focus is on what

Barth, through this particular narrative-parable, is trying to say about divine *character*,

---

God is, the metaphysical questions about self-constitution are sidelined. "Who" concerns character, personality, identity—and, for Barth, these can only be narrated. The "God" of which we speak is not any God, much less an abstract "divine nature," but, Barth is very clear, it is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Israel incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. This "is" defies any counterfactual or hypothetical description of God apart from God's love for the world revealed in Christ.

[8] For this view see especially, Bruce McCormack, "Grace and Being." In Paul Jones' interpretation, "[Barth] undertakes a thoroughgoing integration of his doctrines of God and Christ, whereby God's sovereign elective act—God's extreme love for humanity, realized by way of the incarnation—*transforms* God's eternal being" (*The Humanity of Christ*, 65, emphasis added).

[9] To do so would be to depend on, inadvertently I assume, a counterfactual and thus, ironically, still involves construing God's being anthropomorphically—in terms of the past ("was"), a hypothetical ("would have been"), and/or temporality or spatiality ("before"). A major criticism, from the side of "perfect being theology," of the view that the atonement (election and incarnation) have a retroactive "effect" on the being of God is that this implies "change" in God, which is thought to be an anthropomorphic misunderstanding of deity. But Barth's point is precisely that the notion of an abstract "supreme being" who cannot freely self-determine for relationship with the world is an idolatrous constraint imposed on theology. According to Barth, God has elected a real relation with the world in the second person of the Trinity (see, for example, II/2, 6-7).

rather than divine being (if that is indeed something else).[10] Of course, as the

parenthetical remark suggests, a narrative or parabolic approach of this sort may pose

questions, and perhaps challenges, for theological ontology. (That is something I will

revisit in the conclusion.)

Limiting my approach in this way is not simply a matter of not having more to

contribute to or not wanting to rehash the ontological debates over Barth's Christology. It

can also be seen as a matter of playing up and putting into practice his own assertion that

theology must begin and end with the particular name and (hi)story of Jesus Christ (II/2,

4). His "name is not merely a cipher"—it is the thing itself (IV/1, 21). Barth commences

§59 with the striking assertion that, "The atonement is history [*Geschichte*]. To know it,

we must know it as such. To think it, we must think of it as such. *To speak of it, we must*

tell it as history. To try to grasp it as supra-historical or non-historical truth is not to grasp

it all" (IV/1, 157). This is so because, "To say the atonement is to say Jesus Christ. To

speak of it is to speak of *His* history… For *He is the history* of God with [humankind]

and the history of [humankind] with God" (158).[11] Precisely the same can be said of

election, for it "is the sum of the Gospel. It is the content of the good news which is Jesus

Christ" (II/2, 10). Barth's account of Christ asks to be read as an exposition, or an

expository retelling, of the biblical narratives (all of which are, in Barth's hands: Gospel).

He clearly trends away from the metaphysical language "two natures in one person"

---

[10] According to Jüngel, this choice of accent is consonant with Barth, for whom God's will comes to define
God's essence (*God's Being is in Becoming*, 6). Like Jüngel, Hans Theodor Goebel notes a shift in
emphasis from *CD* I, on God's "ability," to *CD* II, on God's "will." (This is an interesting similarity with
Julian, who treats all that God "might" and "can" do as hypothetical, contrasting the naked "power" of God
with what God *has* actually done—"loveth tenderly"—which reveals God's "heart." See my fourth chapter
and Julian's Long Text, 77.11-15). Goebel, "Trinitätslehre und Erwählungslehre bei Karl Barth: Eine
Problemanzeige," *Wahrheit und Versöhnung: theologische und philosophische Beiträge zur Gotteslehre*,
eds. Deitrich Korsch and Harmut Ruddies. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerg Mohn, 1989), 147-
166. Cited by Jones, *The Humanity of Christ*, 64, n. 15.
[11] Emphasis added.

toward something more like "two (hi)stories in one name."[12] The essential narrativity of the subject matter—this name, this "twofold (hi)story"—elicits theology in the mode of retelling.[13] And that, I would suggest, is precisely what Barth offers in his "imaginative reconstruction of Christology"—and predestination—"upon the scaffold of the Prodigal Son narrative."[14]

ii. The Basic Shape of Election

Barth's articulation of election in *CD* II/2 is remarkably distinctive.[15] It constitutes a profound shift in approach to the biblical concept and cannot be addressed at length here. However, at the risk of oversimplification, I would like to draw attention to several of the most salient features of Barth's account. My aim in doing so will be 1) to explain why he regards election as central to the doctrine of God, 2) to show that it constitutes, for him as for Julian, an "eternal atonement" in God, and 3) to trace how the contours of the Parable of the Prodigal Son Barth map onto the "narrative" of election.

---

[12] Barth speaks of Jesus Christ as the twofold history of God with humanity and humanity with God (IV/1, 158). See Jones, *The Humanity of Christ*, 66, and Neder, *Participation*, 34. Although Barth's ontology is thoroughly actualized, he still retains the basic pattern of Chalcedonian Christology. This, too, is a much-debate aspect of his theology. Some scholars believe Barth's Christology remains thoroughly Chalcedonian. See George Hunsinger, "Karl Barth's Christology, Its Basic Chalcedonian Character," *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 200), 127-142. However, a basic assumption of my reading is that, in Christological retelling of the parable (or parabolic retelling of Christology), Barth progressively moves away from the language of "one person in two *natures*" toward something more like "two histories in one name." As Jones argues, Barth "effectively discards the language of 'nature' in his 'mature' Christology" (*The Humanity of Christ*, 28). I intentionally use the word "pattern" here to signal not the language of *physis* but the tensive relationship established in the twofold history of Jesus Christ by the four Chalcedonian adjectives *inconfuse*, *immutabiliter*, *inseperabiliter*, *indivise* (unconfused, unchanged, inseparable, indivisible). These do not drop out even in view of the strong "identity" Barth draws between Jesus Christ and the second member of the Trinity. For a helpful reassessment of Chalcedon as "horizon," "boundary," or "pattern," see Coakley, "What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does it Not?" *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*, eds. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall SJ, and Gerald O'Collins S.J. (Oxford, 2002), 160.
[13] As a particularly overt affirmation of the narrative identity of Jesus Christ, Barth says, "Thus the existence of the man Jesus…coincides with the history of God Himself" (IV/2, 336).
[14] Lewis, 192.
[15] In regards to the doctrine of election, as with the rest of *Church Dogmatics*, we must remember that, "Barth has not simply taken over unchanged *any* doctrinal formulation of the ancient or the Reformation churches. He has reconstructed the whole of 'orthodox' teaching from the ground up. It is not the case that he simply tinkered with the machinery" (McCormack, *Orthodox*, 16).

First, and most significantly, Barth comes to believe that election is only intelligible in light of Jesus Christ, who is himself the concrete revelation of the will of God. For this insight, he is indebted to Pierre Maury's paper on election in 1936, which prompted him to revise his doctrine as it had been laid out in §18 of the *Göttingen Dogmatics*. Barth integrated Maury's central thesis that: "Outside of Christ, we know neither of the electing God, nor of His elect, nor of the act of election."[16] Barth comes to reject any presentation of the doctrine as an abstract principle or *decretum absolutum* that has priority over or meaning apart from the gospel. He says it is "a concrete decree," having as its content a "name," a "person." "This decree is Jesus Christ," therefore "it cannot be a *decretum absolutum*" (158).[17] In Barth's view, the Christological reference must determine the details of the doctrine at every point. Election is not to be thought of as "secondary" or "supplementary" to the revelation of God in Christ (89-90).

Second, for Barth, election means "self-election." It is a "decision" (*Entscheidung*) God makes with respect to Godself and it demonstrates that God is the "lord" even of God's own being. In other words, "the primary object of election is not humankind but God."[18] That God is "the One who loves in freedom" is a recurrent claim throughout *Church Dogmatics* (II/1, 257). Based on his exposition of Exodus 3:14, Barth says God is "*free also with regard to His freedom*, free…to use it to give Himself to this communion and to practice this faithfulness in it, in this way being really free, free in Himself" (303).[19] In other words, "the concept of being is measured by the concept of

---

[16] Pierre Maury, "Erwählung und Glaube," *Theologische Studien* 8 (Zurich: EVZ, 1940), 7. Quoted in English by McCormack, *Critically Realistic*, 457.

[17] Barth rejects the notion found in Calvinist theology and the Canons of Dordt of predestination as an absolute decree of God that has a "self-sufficient" basis outside of or before Jesus Christ.

[18] McCormack, "The Sum of the Gospel," *Orthodox and Modern*, 57.

[19] See II/1 §§28-31 on God's lordship or freedom with respect to God's own being. Jones says of Barth's treatment of Ex. 3:14, "Crucial to Barth's presentation is his construal of decision (*Entscheidung*) as an

God," rather than vice versa.[20] This assertion is later translated into the language of the parable: "He is His own master in such a way that He can go into the far country" (IV/1, 204).[21] Against the view that God is absolutely unconditioned, Barth holds up "the picture of the Son of God who is self-conditioned and therefore conditioned in His union with the Son of David" (II/2, 134). Election, then, is God's free self-specification or "self-constitution" as the Covenant-partner, Lord, and Shepherd of humankind (54).

Third, this implicitly means Christ is not merely the object or means of executing election, but, as the Son of God, he is also the *subject* of election.[22] It is not enough to consider Christ "the most illustrious *example*" and "the brightest *illustration* of predestination and grace," as Calvin does, following Augustine.[23] In that case, Christ becomes "only" and "organ which serves the function of the electing will of God, as the means toward the attainment of the end" (65). However, "the electing of the Father and that of the Son are one and the same;" the "self-ordination" of God is the self-ordination of the Son (89). That is to say, Jesus Christ is also the electing God, the active subject of election whose existence is productive rather than merely illustrative of its meaning.

---

ontological category descriptive of God's capacity for, and enactment of, self-definition… God decides on God's character" (*The Humanity of Christ*, 68-69). This ontological claim sets the stage for the highly particular content of the divine self-definition presented in II/2, especially in §§32-33.

[20] Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming*, 78. God is not an Unmoved Mover, but the Self-moved Mover. See *CD* II/1, 268.

[21] In Jüngel's paraphrase of the central claim of II/1, "God's primal decision to go into the far country is certainly not a decision forced upon [God] from the far country, not something *foreign to* [God], but [a] *free* decision" (Ibid., 15).

[22] The distinctive trouble with "the older Protestant tradition" is that "we cannot fix our gaze and keep it fixed on Jesus Christ, because the electing God is not identical with Christ but behind and above Him, because in the beginning with God we have to reckon with someone or something other than the οτος of Jn. 1:2…a decision of the divine good-pleasure quite unrelated to and not determined by Him" (II/2, 110). Contrary to the view of election as a "principle which has priority over the person and work of Jesus Christ, so that Jesus Christ is to be understood as the mighty executive organ" of the divine decision, Barth maintains that Jesus Christ is both the subject and the object of election, electing God and elected human (IV/3.1, 175).

[23] Calvin, *Institutes*, Bk. II, Ch. 17, 476 (emphasis added).

Fourth, election means nothing other than grace. For Barth, "election" is always short for "the election of divine grace" (from Rom. 11:5, ἐκλογὴν χάριτος) (9-10). It is, all the way through, an expression of God's basic and unalloyed loving-kindness toward humans (see §30, where he addresses the meaning of "grace" at length). As Barth says, "What takes place in this election is always that God is *for us*" (25, emphasis added). Election is "in favour of this other" (10), to its "advantage" (121). Its goal is fellowship (*Gemeinschaft*) with the other (121). Thus, election is not "neutral," but has the definite character of love, of "good-pleasure" (134, 157). Barth understands "the original ordination of [humankind] to salvation and of salvation for [humankind] as the meaning and basis even of the divine creative will" (IV/1, 19). It "is grace, loving-kindness, favor" (II/2, 28). It has the character of "self-giving" (121). It is thus "the Gospel *in nuce*" (14).

Consequently, fifth, election can be regarded as a "double predestination" only in a very peculiar and limited sense. According to Barth, the root problem with the traditional presentation of predestination is that "the divine election and the divine rejection came to be spoken of as inter-connected divine acts similar in character and determination," as "a double divine decision from all eternity…with two parallel sides" (16).[24] Barth rejects the kind of "double predestination" in which the elect and the reprobate are conceived as two classes of humanity, the one eternally loved and the other eternally condemned. Instead, Barth claims that election "is not a mixed message of joy and terror, salvation and damnation. Originally and finally it is not dialectical but non-dialectical" (13). There is no "equilibrium" between God's "Yes" and "No" (134). He

---

[24] Barth says "We cannot be too soon, or too radical, in the opposition which we must offer to the classical tradition" (13). He specifically calls out Augustine and the Reformers because, for them, "predestination means quite unequivocally double predestination" (17). Likewise, Barth rejects what he calls Calvin's "fatal parallelism of the concepts of election and rejection" (see *Institutes*, III, 21, 5).

says, "it is altogether Yes" (13). And this "Yes" is "without any if or but, without any afterthought or reservation, not temporarily but definitively, with a fidelity which is not partial and temporal, but total and eternal" (31). Barth can say this precisely because predestination is indeed "double" in a different sense, that is, with respect to its primary referent: Jesus Christ, who is both the electing God and the elected human (162).[25] It is not an either/or for humans, but a both/and for Jesus Christ. He is himself the "double decree." In him, God elects reprobation, the negative side, for Godself—"refusing to let it be our foreordination in any form," leaving no remainder (166, 172). "It is God Himself who is rejected," and for strictly that reason "predestination is the non-rejection of the human" (167 rev.). As McCormack says, reprobation is "a moment on a way which God goes with His people; a way whose goal is election."[26] The end is "implicitly" that it may never be the "portion" allotted to humanity or any segment of it. As Barth glosses Romans 8:1, "There is no condemnation—literally none" (II/2, 167). Thus he is able to maintain what Calvin cannot, that "there was no divine predisposition towards evil, but only 'a divine predisposition towards salvation (election)' for *all* lost [humans]."[27]

That is to say, sixth, there can be no *decretum generale* that is not rooted in the prior election of Jesus Christ (78). Election is only ever election "in him," in the same sense that salvation is salvation "in him." He is the first among the elect, not as the beginning of a series, but as the one who gathers and represents all others in himself. In

---

[25] In §32, Barth focuses on undermining the equation of election with the traditional version of "double predestination." He emphasizes the divine "Yes" in this portion of II/2, without much mention of an attendant "No." In §33, however, Barth affirms a "double decree," but only because by this point he has invested it with a new meaning. Under the heading "double decree" and "double predestination," Barth treats the "passive" and "active" determinations of Jesus Christ. Reprobation receives greater attention here, but it is assigned wholly to Christ rather than a certain segment of humanity.
[26] McCormack, *Critically Realistic*, 457.
[27] Busch, 442.

Barth's succinct definition, "In the beginning with God was this One, Jesus Christ. And that is predestination" (II/2, 145).

Seventh, in view of this, it goes with out saying that Barth's version of predestination is decidedly *supralapsarian*.[28] This means the election (and reprobation) of Jesus Christ precedes creation and fall as God's "*first* thought and decree" with respect to the world. Barth presses this point further than his supralapsarian predecessors by including election in the doctrine of God, not as God's first act but, again, as God's own self-electing. In Paul Jones' words, "God elementally intends the incarnation."[29] In fact, this is so thoroughly the case for Barth that we can say God's "intention to attain genuine companionship with humankind is basic to God's being."[30]

Finally, this primal "self-ordination" and its manifestation and fulfillment in creation and incarnation do not detract from or contradict God's glory. Rather, "It is in being gracious…that God sets forth His own glory." The election of grace "is how the inner glory of God overflows." (121). Barth thus refrains from opposing God's righteousness and mercy, God's being *in se* and God's activity *ad extra* and *pro nobis*,

---

[28] The central question in 17th c. Reformed debates over the object of predestination is this: When we say that God from all eternity elected (or rejected) humans, was God thinking of *homo creabilis et labilis* (humanity yet to be created and to fall) or *homo creatus et lapsus* (humanity already created and fallen)? Supralapsarianism is the position that God forms creatures for salvation (or damnation) *before* the creation and fall of the world. In this case, God's confrontation with evil and sin is not a "later and additional struggle in which God is dealing with a new and to some extent disruptive feature in His original plan. On the contrary, it must be thought of as an element in that original plan itself" (II/2, 128-129). Barth names certain Calvinist exponents here (e.g. Beza, Bucanus, Comarus, Maccovius, Heidanus, and Burmann) but does not appear to have Calvin himself in mind. He thinks it is unclear whether Calvin really develops a supralapsarian position, although he certainly made statements that could be taken in that direction (127). Over against supralapsarianism, infralapsarians maintain that the object of election is created and fallen humanity. This becomes the dominant view at the Synod of Dort. Barth relies on Turrettini to express the important distinction in infralapsarianism: it does not regard reprobation as an original intent in creation. Rather "man is the object of the eternal predestination precisely in the situation in which God knows him as the one whom He will encounter in time" (131). It is argued that, otherwise, predestination would appear neither just nor merciful. Barth's own position is emphatically supra- rather than infralapsarian. However, its character differs markedly from its 17th c. antecedents in that 1) Jesus Christ is the proper object of election and reprobation, and 2) he does not give equal weighting to election and reprobation (140).
[29] Jones, *The Humanity of Christ*, 84.
[30] Ibid., 126

God's freedom and love, divine glory and human glory.[31] In being faithful to the covenant with Abraham, Israel, and Isaac, God is also being perfectly faithful to Godself.

As Barth summarizes all of this in the précis of §32, "The doctrine of election is the sum of the Gospel" (II/2, 3). It is the "best" word because it tells us that "God elects humanity," that "God is for humanity" as "the One who loves in freedom." Election "is grounded in the knowledge of Jesus Christ" and, by the same token, "It is part of the doctrine of God"—for "originally God's election of humanity is a predestination not merely of humanity but of God Godself." The doctrine has as its "function" that it "bear basic testimony" to the fact that "eternal, free and unchanging grace" is "the beginning of all the ways and works of God." Barth thus thoroughly rejects the prevailing premise that "election" refers to a two-pronged decision God makes with respect to the salvation and damnation of certain individuals (whether before or after creation and fall). By contrast, for him, election is fundamentally a matter of the identity and character of the second person of the Trinity. The divine decree is a person—and it is a relationship. It is a matter of God's "basic" or "primal" decision to be united with humanity in the most intimate way, whatever the cost (25).

2. Parable and Decree

There is significantly more to be said about the details and function of Barth's doctrine of election, however, my primary interest here is in the relationship between his doctrine of election and Barth's later exegesis of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. In

---

[31] As Barth says in *The Humanity of God*, "How could God's deity exclude His humanity, since it is God's freedom for love and thus His capacity to be not only in the heights but also in the depths, not only great but also small, not only in and for Himself but also with another distinct from Him, and to offer Himself to him?" (49)

important ways, Barth's Christologically-grounded doctrine of election prefigures his retelling of reconciliation through the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The language of the parable and the trajectory of Barth's interpretation of it are already present in II/2 where, for example, Barth asks, "Who is the Elect? He is always the one who 'was dead and is alive again,' who 'was lost and is found' (Lk. 15:24)" (124). He goes onto say,

> as the beginning of all things with God we find the decree that He Himself in
>
> person, in the person of His eternal Son, should give Himself to the son of man,
>
> the lost son of man, indeed that He Himself in the person of the eternal Son
>
> should *be* the lost Son of Man. (157)

Becoming the "lost son" is one of the primary images Barth uses for the content of the divine decree, tying its content as closely as possible to that of reconciliation, particularly as it is retold via the parable. In what follows, I draw out several related points with a view to a comparison between what Barth is doing with the parable and the theological ramifications of Julian's example.

First, election and reconciliation are so effectively borne by same narrative because they are interpenetrating doctrines. The basic integrity of the two is evident throughout II/2 and IV/1-2. It is seen, for example, in that Barth moves seamlessly between the pairings "Reconciling God"/"Reconciled Man" and "Electing God"/"Elected Man;" he describes election as an "eternal covenant" and regards this covenant as "the presupposition of reconciliation;" he frequently refers to "the eternal decree" in terms of the Son's "journey into the far country;" and he speaks of the exaltation of "the Royal Man" as the fulfillment of God's eternal self-determination in election for fellowship

with humankind (e.g., IV/1, 22, 158-159, 170, etc.).[32] (See the chart in chapter five.).

Barth further confirms the cohesion of election and reconciliation quite explicitly when he says things like the doctrine of election is the "mystery of the doctrine of reconciliation" (II/2, 89) or "the grace and work and revelation of God has the particular character of election" (IV/1, 170). Likewise, the point is made when Barth claims, "*The doctrine of election is the last or first or central word in the whole doctrine of reconciliation*… But the doctrine of reconciliation is itself the first or last or central word in the whole Christian confession" (II/2, 88).[33] Barth nuances the relationship between election and reconciliation—the former is oriented toward the latter, which holds the secret to its truth. As the preceding passages suggest, this is because the subject matter is always, in his words, "the doctrine of the election *which took place in Jesus Christ*" (II/2, 89, emphasis added). That "which took place" is twofold—in the beginning (Jn. 1:1) and in the flesh (Jn. 1:14). And the two are the same. (John 1:1-3 governs election, for Barth, in much the same way that John 1:14 condenses the whole of reconciliation.[34])

Second, in Barth's doctrine of election, as in his doctrine of reconciliation, the Son's becoming lost, his taking on of the wayward one's identity, is specifically paired with the term "condescension" (throughout §§32-33). In both portions of *Church Dogmatics* (II/2 and IV/1-2), the downward/outward and upward/homeward structure of the parable is overlain with the language and logic of Philippians 2. I have noted that Barth himself avoids using the word "kenosis" for particular reasons. However, for him, election figures as a kind of eternal self-giving in the trinity—one that contains and

---

[32] In fact, according to Busch, Barth considered titling his doctrine of reconciliation "the doctrine of the covenant" (377).
[33] Emphasis added.
[34] See, for example, II/2, 92.

grounds the temporal kenosis of incarnation and the cross.[35] Linking the terms "election,"

"grace," and "love," Barth speaks of the ἐκλογὴν χάριτος as a "movement" and "primal

history," which he calls "the form of the deepest condescension" (9-10). He says, for

example, "It is love which is merciful in making this movement, this act of

condescension, in such a way that in *taking to itself* this other, it *identifies* itself with its

need, and meets its plight by *making it its own concern*" (10).[36] And, "this self-

identification is identical with the decree of His movement toward man" (91-92). God

"ordains that He should not be entirely self-sufficient as he might be. He determines for

Himself that overflowing, that movement, that condescension" (10).

Barth is unambiguous about the fact that this downward or other-ward movement

of love defines and is defined by the second person of the Trinity. As Barth states at the

beginning of his exposition of election, "Jesus Christ is indeed God in His movement

toward [*Zuwendung*] [humanity]… Jesus Christ is the decision [*Entscheidung*] of God in

favor of this attitude or relation [*Verhalten*]. He is Himself the relation" (7). This circuit,

the Son's kenotic "journey into the far country" and "homecoming," is eternally

contained in the Triune life, in the form of the divine decree or, what is the same, in the

form of the identity of the second person of the Trinity. Jesus Christ is himself this

decision, this movement-toward, this comportment or act of relating. In other words, for

Barth (at least from II/2 on), the *logos asarkos* is always the *logos incarnandus* (the Word

to-be-incarnate).[37] In other words, even as "the human nature (body and soul) of Jesus

---

[35] See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale* and *Theo-Drama*.
[36] Emphasis added.
[37] Concerning the distinction and relationship between the *logos incarnandus* and *logos incarnatus* in Barth's theology, in contrast to that of his 17th c. Reformed predecessors, see McCormack, "Grace and Being," *Orthodox and Modern*, 184-187. In short, after II/2 and certainly by IV/1, for Barth, the Son is not "the Logos *simpliciter* (the abstract metaphysical subject)" but the one who has always already designated himself for atonement (229). Cf. IV/1, 181.

only came into existence at a particular point in time," for Barth, "God qua Son is never

not humanized."[38]

Already implied these first two points is that, third, election involves—or rather

is—a kind of "eternal atonement."[39] This is true for Barth as for Julian. In Julian's words,

predestination is the "rightful knitting and endlesse oning" in which God "knit us and

oned us to himselfe" (*A Revelation*, 53. 18, 58.5-6). "Knitting" is procreative language,

tied to embodiment. It is suggestive of incarnation within the Trinity. In the same way,

for Barth, the "atonement" is not primarily a matter of a task Jesus performs at the end of

his earthly life, like a cog in the machine of salvation.[40] Barth's whole account of

predestination combats such an understanding of incarnation and atonement. He says,

"*Salvation is* fulfillment…of being…being which is hidden in God, and in that sense

(distinct from God and secondary) *eternal being*" (IV/1, 8).[41]

Atonement is Jesus Christ. He is the at-one-ment of God and the world in

himself.[42] If Jesus Christ is the "form of it as well as the content" and the "he" of the

atonement is "God in God's second way of being," then the atonement "takes place" *in

God* (IV/1, 137).[43] It is there "in the beginning, in His primal decision, in Jesus Christ, at

---

[38] McCormack, "Grace and Being," 187. Jones, *The Humanity of Christ*, 148.

[39] Jüngel speaks of this as an "eternal covenant" (*God's Being is in Becoming*, 89), clarifying what Barth means by "primal relationship" (*CD* II/2, 52).

[40] I do not mean to perpetuate a false dichotomy here. In view of Barth's actualist ontology, inasmuch as the atonement is something Jesus Christ does, it is who he is. His actions are not accidental to his essence. That is the point.

[41] Emphasis added.

[42] This claim is, in part, a byproduct of the fact that Barth attempts to think the person and work of Jesus inextricably together.

[43] There are two major issues I have glossed over in this sentence. First, Barth prefers the language "mode of being" or "way of being" to "persons" to describe the members of the Trinity. His concern is that we might imagine God in terms of the modern conception of persons. Second, Barth's understanding of the personal union of Jesus Christ is close to Cyril's, rather than Nestorius'. In other words, the proper subject of the hypostatic union is not the human or the human and God together but strictly: the eternal Son of God. As he explains, "The unity of God and man in Christ is, then, the act of the Logos in assuming human being" (I/2, 162, see also 165). Barth upholds the ancient doctrine that Jesus' humanity is *enhypostatic* and

the place where alone He can be known as God" (II/2, 92). This is "grace"—that God is Godself and another. As Barth says,

> It is a relation *ad extra*, undoubtedly… It is a relation in which God is self-determined, so that the determination belongs no less to Him than all that He is in and for Himself. Without the Son sitting at the right hand of the Father, God would not be God. But the Son is not only very God. He is also called Jesus of Nazareth. (7)

In grounding election in the actuality of reconciliation, he moves away from the classical doctrine of "no real relations" in God (6).[44] The divine relation to the world is mediated in and through Jesus Christ who "is Himself the relation" (7). The relation, therefore, is as real as the second person of the Trinity, for they are the same. In Paul Nimmo's summary of the point,

> Jesus Christ is…the second member of the trinity, not just in respect of God *ad extra*, but also in respect of God *ad intra*. There is no mode of existence in God above and beyond and before God's gracious election, because it is in the very act of election that God freely determines the essence of God in eternity to be for humanity in Jesus Christ.[45]

---

anhypostatic. As McCormack explains this, "*Anhypostasis* makes the negative, antiadoptionistic point that this human 'nature' had no independent existence alongside the Word. *Enhypostasis* is the positive corollary. It says that this human nature acquired its existence in the existence of God, in the mode of being of the eternal son" (McCormack, "Karl Barth's Historicized Christology," *Orthodox and Modern*, 211). See, for example, I/2, 163f and IV/2, 91.

[44] Barth does this without compromising the freedom and self-sufficiency of the divine life. In fact, rather than jeopardize these traits, Barth's move is to radicalize them: God is so free with respect to God's being that God can establish this relationship to the world *within* Godself. For Barth, God's being does not have rules that can override God's own desire for fellowship with another.

[45] Nimmo, 34. Robert Jenson similarly explains that, for Barth, "God is not a thing but an *event*. And the event which is God is exactly the event of Jesus' self-giving to his fellows" (72).

Barth puts it straightforwardly in *The Humanity of God*, "In Him [Jesus Christ] the fact is once for all established that God does not exist without [humankind]… In this divinely free volition and election, in this sovereign decision…God is *human*."[46]

All of this indicates that, fourth, what the parable recounts, in Barth's retelling of it, is the primordial prodigality of God in God's "second way of being." Jesus Christ is— as the divine decree, the going out of God, the eternal atonement, the real relation *ad extra*—the original prodigal one. He is this not first of all as "the second Adam," but as the firstborn of all creation (Col. 1:15), in fact, not even first of all as the firstborn of all creation, but as the creator who "in the beginning" wills fellowship with creation in himself (vv. 16-19). The prodigal son's trajectory is a shadow of the eternal Son's kenotic self-ordination to establish this relation. That "depth"—the far country, the pigsty, pit, the valley of death, Sheol, exile, the desert, alienation, the region of unlikeness, sin, fallenness, flesh—is inscribed in the identity of God in God's second mode of being. That is why Barth can say Christ "precedes" the younger son on his way out, that he is "the way home" and, moreover, is himself the very embodiment of that home (IV/2, 24).

Barth speaks of this, the election of grace, as risk and hazard. In the beginning, the Son of God "gave Himself up…hazarded Himself" (II/2, 161, cf. IV/2, 401). The English word "prodigal" bears the negative connotations of "reckless," "wasteful," "wayward," and "imprudent," especially in its connection with the New Testament parable. Yet, from the Latin *prodigus*, it also means "lavish." To call divine love prodigal is to point out its extravagance, its bountifulness. (Thus when commentators on the

---

[46] Barth, *The Humanity of God*, 50-51. This is an important passage that clearly links election, incarnation, divine compassion, substitution, and the Parable of the Prodigal Son (see 51). One can certainly reject the claim, on various grounds, that God is in some sense eternally human (e.g., Molnar), but it is difficult to argue this is not what Barth is saying given so much textual evidence.

parable talk of the "prodigal" father, they emphasize the abundance and gratuity of his grace.) Significantly, Barth's theological retelling retains both senses of the word, even with reference to God. God's becoming lost and prodigal does not preclude the sense of cost, danger, and even foolhardiness. The fact that God "compromises" and "burdens" Godself in choosing to establish a relationship with humanity is central to Barth's understanding of grace. Alluding to the Prodigal Son, in his comparison of Jesus to the Good Samaritan, Barth describes atonement as "something unnecessary and extravagant, binding and limiting and compromising" (IV/1, 158). He goes so far as to say God is "affected," "disturbed," "harmed," and "assaulted" (IV/2, 401).

Barth's redeployment of the parable thus highlights that God's own prodigality is regarded in human terms as kind of "foolishness." According to the golden mean of "liberality," "prodigality" and "miserliness" are polar vices.[47] In Augustine's words, "Prodigality [*effusio*] shows, as it were, the shadow [*umbra*] of liberality; but you [God] are the most supremely rich bestower of all good things" (*Conf.* II.6). Throughout his account of election, Barth contrasts the wisdom of God in grace with the limitations of the human imagination (e.g., II/2, 22, 33). He insists that humans could not "invent" a God like this, who "does not hold aloof" but comes so near as to be implicated in the course of the world (IV/1, 158). Barth's retelling thus presses beyond Aquinas' claim that *ille est maxime liberalis*; rather God is *overly* liberal—prodigal, reckless, imprudent by all human accounts.[48]

---

[47] Holgate's analysis of the Parable of the Prodigal Son in terms of this Greco-Roman topos is illuminating (see chapter two). The father figures the virtue of liberality (free-handedness), while the elder son represents the vice of miserliness (close-handedness) and the younger son the vice of prodigality (overreaching). In view of this ethics, Barth unmistakably sets God on one side of the spectrum, reinforcing his point that the wisdom of God is foolishness to humans. God's grace is not perfectly or absolutely liberal, but so far as we can see, it is overly liberal.

[48] Aquinas, *ST* Ia, q. 44, a. 4.

Finally, returning to an earlier theme—the compassionate look of the parabolic father—I want to highlight Barth's use of *Verhalten*, which his translators render "attitude or relation." Barth repeatedly refers to Jesus Christ the *Verhalten* and *Zuwendung* of God—God's manner or comportment, God's being-toward, God's way of regarding humankind (*KD*, II/2, 4-7). As Barth writes in his *Dogmatics in Outline*,

> In this one [person] God sees everyone, all of us, as through a glass. Through this medium, through this *Mediator*, we are known and seen by God… Before His eyes from eternity God keeps [us], each [of us]…in this One; and not only before His eyes but loved and elect and called and made His possession. In Him He has from eternity bound Himself to each, to all. (91)

Somewhat along the same lines as Gollwitzer's interpretation of the parable—in which Jesus Christ is the "running out" and the "kissing" of the father—we might say, on Barth's reading, Jesus Christ the "seeing and having compassion" of the father. He is God's being-toward-and-for the lost son reflected in the father's patient and compassionate gaze. He is that compassion in person, that "desire…to *take from* them [the masses] their misery and *take* it *to* Himself" (Mt. 9:36) (IV/2, 185).[49] As I noted earlier, for Barth, compassion—God's essential comportment or bearing—is by definition a kind of substitution. To have compassion is to (desire to) take the place of the other, to bear the other's suffering. It consists of an assumption, an "enburdenment" (II/2, 172, 206, etc.).[50] It is a "taking away" only as a "taking to" and "taking up" (219). Thus

---

[49] Emphasis added. On this, see Paul Jones, "The Heart of the Matter: Karl Barth's Christological Exegesis," *Thy Word is Truth: Barth on Scripture*, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 173-195.

[50] Jones uses the words "enburden" and "enburdenment" in reference to Barth's claim that, in Christ, God takes on the burden of human flesh and divine judgment. It is a way of speaking about substitution: Christ's enburdenment "disenburdens" humankind. See *The Humanity of Christ* (43, 163, 209, 236). Barth's

Barth insists God's disposition or orientation in the Son is not neutral or unconditioned. The quality of God's regard is "certain" and "definite" (*bestimmt*)—and, recalling Barth's discussion of predestination, it is non-dialectical. God's looking is thoroughly gracious—and costly; it goes straight "to the heart" (IV/2, 184).

However, this point of emphasis raises a question in light of Barth's comments on "wrath," the divine "No," or the "negative side" of predestination. At one point Barth says "the verdict of God to which faith subjects itself is two-sided" (93). It is a verdict which disowns and renounces" but also "recognizes and accepts" (94). So is it "altogether Yes" or is it somehow still a "Yes and No"? (Barth suggests both). And if it is really "altogether Yes," then why does Barth see judgment, punishment, and wrath where Julian does not? His apparent equivocation here has nothing to do with any "hidden decision," "obscurity," or "twofold mystery" in the divine will (II/2, 156, 147), about which Augustine and Calvin (and, on Barth's reading, even Aquinas) are forced to speculate.[51] To reiterate his revision of "double predestination," Barth is only ever referring to a "No" (to sin) that is derivative of and subsumed by God's more basic "Yes" (in Christ). It is a "No" strictly in the service of a "Yes." Or, as Jüngel puts it, the dialectic between the two "is not sealed up as a paradox but broken open teleologically: 'God wills to lose in order that [humans] may gain.'"[52] God "willed to make good" human rebellion "not by avenging" but by "interposing" Godself (IV/2, 227), by "bearing the inevitable wrath and perdition" that *otherwise* would have "destroyed" God's chosen covenant partner (II/2, 166). In this way, "God makes Himself responsible for the one who became an enemy,"

emphasis on Christ's laying upon himself the burden (or in Julian's language, "charge") of sinful humanity echoes that of Luther, in his commentary on Galatians.

[51] See II/2, 16-17.

[52] Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming*, 92. As Jüngel says "*Praedestinatio gemina* [double predestination]…is *praedestinatio dialectica* [dialectical predestination]." Cf. II/2, 162.

assuming all of the "consequences," including "rejection and death" (124). Therefore, "in so far…as predestination does contain a No, it is not a No spoken against [humans]" (166).

Reminiscent of Augustine's description of what happens when desire encounters an obstacle to its fulfillment, Barth speaks of "wrath" as the "consuming fire of God's love."[53] He cites Isaiah 54:8 several times: "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on thee saith the Lord they Redeemer."[54] Reprobation is the merely underside and byproduct of God's faithful pursuit of fellowship with the human other. It is "borne by God" in Christ; it is destined to pass away (194). Barth says, "This is what is involved in the self-giving of God. This is the radicalness of God's grace" (194). The compassionate exchange—exaltation for humiliation—"goes to the heart" of God. It is God's "definite attitude," elected and embodied in the Son, in his "condescension," his taking "the form of a servant," his becoming "the lost son."

3. A Different Set of Correlates

I have paid little attention here to the more common Christological and soteriological language of "justification," "substitution," "judgment," "satisfaction," and so on. I have not addressed all that Barth does say precisely along these lines, for example under such headings as "the divine verdict" and "the Judge Judged." Of course, implicitly the subject matter is the same. However, I have attempted to draw attention to

---

[53] Barth says, "The divisive No of the wrath of God, which is the consuming fire of His love, lay on the old man, destroying and extinguishing him," but "God Himself" is the "old man," "God Himself had to come down, to give Himself, to sacrifice Himself" (IV/1, 400-401).

[54] This is the English translation used in II/1 (373, 415) and IV/1 (537).

a different set of correlates—"condescension," "movement toward," "direction," "overflowing," "going out," "compassion," "far journey," "self-giving," "taking the form of a servant," "becoming lost," "relation and attitude," "taking up," "at-oning," and so on. Rhetorically and conceptually, the effect of this language lends a liveliness to the doctrines of reconciliation and election that reinforces Barth's insistence that both always be rooted in their Christological reference—in a person, a life, a name, a relationship. As Barth has pointed out, these can only be narrated, as story or history (*Geschichte*). In meeting the subject matter with an appropriate form, Barth is better able to resist the reification to which the Reformed doctrine of election has traditionally been prone and more clearly align its content with the historicity and narrativity of reconciliation. My aim, then, in accentuating these words and phrases, instead of others, is 1) to show the extent to which Barth relies on the language and structure of the Parable of the Prodigal Son in both II/2 and IV/1-2 (largely due to the combination of scriptural references through which he filters the parable), and 2) to highlight the intrinsic dynamism and narrativity of Barth's understanding of doctrines like predestination and justification.[55]

I should also note that, while Barth's exegesis of the Parable of the Prodigal Son comes at the beginning of his exposition of sanctification, or the "exaltation" (Phil. 2:9) of the human, I have concentrated on the downward/outward trajectory because this is how Barth presents election (primarily as a primordial descent or self-giving) and because the movement already points to, and in a certain sense contains, the

---

[55] At multiple points, Barth clearly states that he is attempting to "actualize" the more "static" language of the tradition, to better reflect that its Subject is a "history" and a "name"—which is to say "dynamic." See, for example, IV/2, 106-107.

upward/homeward as its purpose and end.[56] Of course, this is where the linearity of the

narrative-parable begins to break down. While in one sense, the double movement of

"lost and found" reflects the temporality of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus

Christ—which does indeed proceed as a sequence of events—in another sense, the

identity of the Son "in the beginning" preempts the historical order as an eternal

atonement, laden with all that will unfold "in the flesh." (That is why election is so

fittingly called "the Gospel *in nuce*.") On the other hand, this is no shortcoming on the

part of the form of the parable. In fact, it is perfectly in keeping with the parable *as a*

parable that it be used to tell the double story of reconciliation and election, both in turn

double stories of humiliation and exaltation, the same grace in two distinct registers.

II. Reconciliation is Revelation[57]

      That the Parable of the Prodigal Son, as the parable of reconciliation and election,

is "the parable of *God*" is the logical end of all that has been said. If reconciliation is the

fulfillment and confirmation of election (IV/1, 195) and election is essentially a matter of

---

[56] That is not to suggest that justification/humiliation and sanctification/exaltation can be conflated. Barth is clear about this. Drawing on the language of Chalcedon, he describes the two sides of reconciliation as "indissoluble" but not "interchangeable" (IV/2, 503).

[57] This phrase is central to Barth's treatment of Christ's *munus propheticum* (IV/3.1, 8, 38, 182). But it also sums up a whole network of claims running throughout *Church Dogmatics*.[57] "Reconciliation as revelation" echoes 1) Barth's pervasive epistemological assertion that the truth of God is accessed only through Jesus Christ (38). As Barth says, Christ "Himself is the 'epistemological principle'" (IV/1, 21). In him, God genuinely becomes an "object" (IV/3.1, 217) or phenomenon for human understanding and Barth is able to sidestep Kant's relegation of "God" to the category of *noumenal* or unknowable in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. As Jüngel puts it, that "the prophetic office of Jesus Christ discloses his being in his work of reconciliation as a speech-event" is "Barth's staring-point for overcoming the 'subject-object' schema" (*God's Being*, 14, n. 1). Concomitantly it is 2) an ontological affirmation: the grace of God in Jesus Christ is the essence of God Godself (II/1, 351). Thus it is also 3) a claim about the nature of reconciliation: Jesus announces the twofold material content of justification and sanctification as he enacts and achieves it (and this announcement is none other than the self-announcement of God) (IV/3.1, 8, 38f). Finally, it is 4) applicable anthropologically in that in reconciliation, in Christ, we have the true disclosure of humanity— in its creatureliness, sinfulness, and transformation (e.g., IV/2, 384, IV/3.1, 106-107, 182, etc.)—as well as the absurd reality of evil and "nothingness" (*das Nichtige*).

God's self-determination to reconcile with the world (II/2, 88), then what takes place in the parable between the father and son (as grace) is God's own "self-attestation" and "self-demonstration" (IV/3.1, 11, 48). The doctrines of election and reconciliation become integral to Barth's concept of God's essence.[58] For him, electing and reconciling are not just things that God does; they reveal who God is and, in some sense, determine or constitute God's very being.[59] The precise doctrinal and ontological ramifications of such a contention are not my concern here. Rather, I only want to point out that—given Barth's interweaving of election, reconciliation, Trinity, and revelation—it is unsurprising that the Parable of the Prodigal Son, as the parable of atonement and election, appears on a third theological plane as well, as the "narrative" of the triune being of God. Jüngel, for example, assumes as much when he paraphrases Barth's divine ontology by saying, the "precedence of God in his primal decision shows that God's being not only 'proceeds' on the way into the far country but that God's being is *in movement* from eternity. God's being is moved being…moved by *God*."[60] Similarly, as Eugene Rogers says of Barth's trinitarian theology, "In the Trinity the Father is eternally sending the Son and receiving him back, the story of the Prodigal collapsed into a single, integral movement."[61] But how, exactly, does this "narrative" play out intra-trinitarianly? What is the meaning of the Son's "far journey" for the divine life?

---

[58] According to McCormack, this would be clearer had Barth rewritten his doctrine of God after the discoveries of II/2.

[59] Again, this is a point of contention among Barth scholars. But there is consensus among a certain set of interpreters that the self-determination of divine election is in some way ontologically relevant for God (although there are differences in terms of the manner and extent of this self-determination). See especially Jüngel, Balthasar, McCormack, Hector, Jones, et al.

[60] Jüngel, *God's Being*, 14-15.

[61] Eugene F. Rogers Jr., *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 198.

335

In keeping with my own (phenomenological) reading of the parable (chapter two) and treatment of Julian (chapter four), I want to consider that to which Barth's retelling of the Parable of the Prodigal Son "leads back." To what ultimate vision of God does it "reduce?" What does it mean that the good news of election and reconciliation narrated through this story *is* the revelation of God, as Barth maintains? In a certain sense, an answer has already been supplied in my presentation of Barth's engagement with the parable. To reiterate, the story points to a divine compassion so deep and visceral that it prompts a pursuit, a substitution and exchange, wholly benefiting and in favor of the lost. It tells us that "God's eternal will is [humankind]" (II/2, 179), that the human condition was taken "right into [God's] heart" (IV/2, 184). As Barth puts it so unambiguously in *The Humanity of God*, "the truth of *God* is loving-kindness towards [humans]…and nothing else."[62] This assertion is a gloss on Titus 3:4, ὅτε δὲ ἡ χρηστότης καὶ ἡ φιλανθρωπία ἐπεφάνη τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν θεοῦ, translated literally: "when the kindness and love-of-humankind of God our savior appeared…" Jesus Christ is the appearing, the phenomenalizing, of God's basic *philanthropia*. For Barth as for Julian, the truth of God is God's grace: God's loving-kindness towards the world. This is what it means that God "antecedently" elects to be the Servant in and as the second person of the Trinity. Jesus Christ—prodigal Lord. This is the essence of the parable, the essence of God. And yet that is not exactly the extent of the matter for Barth.

Barth's application of the language and structure of the parable to his understanding of the Trinity is less readily apparent than in his treatments of reconciliation and election. It is absent from his discussion of revelation and trinity in the first volume of *Church Dogmatics* and receives little explicit attention in connection with

---

[62] Barth, *The Humanity of God*, 52.

his doctrine of God.[63] Where it appears is §59 (IV/1), "The Obedience of the Son of God." This portion of *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* is not just an exposition of the justificatory work of Jesus Christ, the first part of the twofold movement of the incarnate Son. Rather, it constitutes a development on the doctrine of the Trinity presented in I/1. Although Barth's stated topic is the reconciliation of God and the world in Jesus Christ, it is clear that he does not restrict himself to reflection on the economy of salvation. At key points he broaches reflection on the immanent Trinity, most notably, in §59.1 where he proposes the *theologoumenon* of "divine obedience." Here he addresses the anterior conditions within God for the Son's actions in the economy. In narrating the downwardness upon which God eternally decides in God's second mode of being, Barth is also narrating the intra-trinitarian relations that he thinks enable this movement.[64] To understand what the Parable of the Prodigal Son means for God Godself, then, we are sent back Barth's presentation of the divine basis for the Son's "journey into the far country."

1. From Loving-Kindness to Obedience Defined as "Subjection"

Barth's explanation of God's "attitude" in election (§§32-33) and justification (§59) sets forth a very particular picture of the relationship between the first and second persons of the Trinity. According to Jones, the description of the Son in IV/1 "tenders a Trinitarian amplification of the doctrine of election outlined in *Church Dogmatics* II/2"—

---

[63] In the first volume of *Church Dogmatics*, there are very few references to the lost or prodigal son and most of them are applied anthropologically. However, in one interesting passage Barth intimates the direction of his later exegesis of the parable, where he says, "We hear of a lost son: 'this thy brother was dead and is alive again' (Lk. 15:32). Who can that be?" See §16 of I/2 (216). In the second volume, explicit references to the "lost son" show up about a half a dozen times in connection with statements about Christ.

[64] This is why, when assessing the way Barth configures the immanent Trinity and economic Trinity, commentators must deal with this portion of *CD*.

and, by extension, of Barth's doctrine of God.[65] Here Barth explains the content of election in terms of a "humility grounded in the being of God"—a "divine obedience" (*göttlichen Gehorsam*) (IV/1, 193, 196). When he says, "The way of the Son of God into the far country is the way of obedience," he has in mind not simply the human life of Jesus but an "obedience which takes place in God Himself" (192, 195). Barth extrapolates from the identity between the eternal Son and the man Jesus that there must be "an above and a below, a *prius* and a *postorius*, a superior and a junior and subordinate" that "belongs to the inner life of God," that obtains between Father and Son (195, 201). The one is "origin," the other "consequence" (209). Barth goes so far as to say, God's "divine unity consists in the fact that in Himself He is both One who is obeyed and Another who obeys" (201). This is what he Son elects when he elects his election by the Father.[66]

Why "obedience" and why "*divine* obedience?" Barth lands on this concept for a whole complex of reasons, among which we might take special note of these. First, there is a precedent in the scriptural narrative that he takes as norm and touchstone. Obedience and disobedience are prominent concepts or actions in the drama of creation, fall, and salvation. Barth frequently describes sin in terms of disobedience and salvation in terms of obedience.[67] More specifically, Philippians 2:8 ("obedient to death") and Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane that "not my will, but thine be done" (Lk. 22:42, cf. Mk. 14:36, Mt. 26:39, 42) are passages to which Barth consistently appeals in his description of divine

---

[65] Jones, *The Humanity of Christ*, 9.

[66] See Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming*, 88. If Barth really means that *this* (divine unity through sub- and supra-ordinance) is what the Son elects in election, then McCormack is right, it would be incoherent for Barth to speak of the Trinity "before" this act of self-determination.

[67] This is so from the very start of *Church Dogmatics*. See Barth's description of Christ as the "second Adam" (Rom. 5), in which he is already coordinating his salvific "obedience" with his refusal to grasp after the form of God (Phil. 2) and those opposing it to Adam's sin in the mode of "pride." (I/2, 157).

obedience.[68] They sum up, for him, the entire network of scriptural predicates and identities addressed in chapter five—especially, the Adam-Christ relationship so central to a Pauline account of reconciliation as well as Barth's retelling of the parable. In the garden of Gethsemane, we have a poetic mirroring and rewriting of the disobedience of Adam and Even in the garden of Eden. In Hans Frei's words, "in all four Gospels and in the other writings of the New Testament, it is the motif or quality of obedience that is stressed in regard to the person of Jesus."[69]

Second, this whole history of obedience and disobedience is directly attributable to the *eternal* Son, for in Barth's view, "the true God" is "identical" (*identisch*) with "the lowly and obedient man Jesus of Nazareth" (199). This is so by virtue of 1) his personal simplicity as the Son, and 2) the *communicatio idiomatum* between his divinity and humanity.[70] Third, Barth believes that "divine obedience" is a necessary conclusion if we want to avoid treating reconciliation as "the kind of economy in which [God's] true and proper being remains hidden behind and improper being, as being 'as if'" (198). His aim is, as Jüngel's says, to rule out "the opposition between a *deus nudus* and a *deus incarnatus*,"[71] and to affirm that, in John Webster's words, "the one whom we encounter in salvation is God as God truly is."[72]

---

[68] He says, "We remember again the prayer in Gethsemane, and also the fact that in Phil. 2:8 His ταπεινοφροσύνη [lowliness of mind or humility] is explained in terms of a becoming obedient, and in Heb. 5:8 His suffering in terms of a learning of obedience… Rom. 5[19] tells us unmistakably that through the obedience of one many shall be made righteous, and in 2 Cor. 10[5] Paul shows us that it is his aim to bring every thought captive to the ὑπακοὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ [obedience of Christ], an expression which surely has to be understood as a *Gen. sub.* as well as a *Gen. obj.*" (IV/1, 193-194) Among related passages, Barth also quotes John 10:18, "No man taketh it [my life] from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father" (166).
[69] Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, 112. Frei calls "obedience" the "clue to his identity."
[70] For an explanation of Barth's reworking of the doctrine, and its connection to the *communio naturarum*, see Jones, *The Humanity of Christ*, 134-135.
[71] Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 53.
[72] John Webster, "Translator's Introduction," *God's Being is in Becoming*, xii.

I want to add to these points a textual explanation of Barth's choice, already intimated in the second part of the previous chapter. Not only in his excurses on kenosis but also throughout *The Doctrine of God*, "obedience" typically collocates with the phrases "self-emptying" and "self-humbling" (IV/2, 193). It specifies them. *Gehorsam*, it seems, becomes a kind of shorthand for the content of Philippians 2:7-8. Christ—"who, though he was in the form of God" (v. 6) was "found in human form" (v. 7)—

> v. 7 *emptied* himself (ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν)
>
>> having *taken the form of a servant* (μορφὴν δούλου),
>>
>>> having been made (or born) in human likeness, and…
>
> v. 8 *humbled* himself (ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν)
>
>> having become *obedient* (ὑπήκοος) to death
>>
>>> even to death on a cross.

"Obedient to death…" forms a parallelism with "having taken the form of a servant…" that concretely fills out the meaning of the Son's servanthood and incarnation. Interpreted as a rhetorical climax—and, correspondingly, the nadir, the deepest depth, of Christ's downward movement—this final term does not merely reiterate but crowns and completes the antecedent main verbs and their clauses. It focuses us on the lowest point of Christ's self-abasement—"*even* death on a cross."[73]

Having a textual as well as a theological basis for prioritizing the word, it seems Barth lets "obedience" govern what is meant by "kenosis." *Gehorsam* helps him handle a concept that he thinks causes theological confusion, namely by preventing any

---

[73] Note that, in this passage, *death* is fact the nadir, rather than obedience. It is also significant that the "obedience" attributed to Christ who was in the form of God but took the form of the servant is obedience *to death* rather than *to the Father*. Barth, however, conflates the two.

appearance of ontological diminution.[74] It altogether shifts our attention away from abstract considerations of "being" to concrete descriptions of "act." It more vividly depicts the character of Christ's "far journey" than a word like "condescension," which, taken alone, risks leaving a purely formal impression or inviting scripturally remote speculation about how divine lowliness "works." It steers us clear of questions like "*What is emptied in Christ's self-'divestment?'*" and orients us toward the actuality of his existence as witnessed in the Gospels. The culmination of the parallel verses in "death on a cross" corresponds the climax of the Gospel narrative. "Obedience unto death" is therefore peculiarly tied to the course and *telos* of Jesus' life as well as to the salvific undoing of human fallenness and its consequences (Rm. 5:12-19).[75] In short, *Gehorsam* is language that concretizes the character and extent of Christ's self-giving. It both sums up and sets the scriptural boundaries for reflecting on what is meant by the less determinate terms "self-emptying" and "self-humiliation."

Barth's decision to give priority to "obedience," while understandable for these reasons among others, also raises some pressing questions. Should "obedience" really be elevated over the other parallel "kenotic" terms in the Christological hymn? Does it become a presiding concept that crowds out equally important descriptors of Jesus Christ? Can the word adequately imply the teleological orientation of humiliation toward exaltation (IV/2)? Should it be extended to the eternal Son with little to no analogical or metaphorical qualification? Is "divine obedience" in fact a necessary claim in view of Jesus of Nazareth's submission of his will to that of his "father" in the Garden of

---

[74] See my discussion of "kenosis" in chapter five.

[75] The connection with Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane is significant. Barth does not leave it at "obedience [submission] to death" but, in view of Jesus' submission ("not my will but yours be done"), it becomes "obedience *to the Father*." For a detailed treatment of Barth's excursus on Gethsemane, see Jones, *The Humanity of Christ* (229f) and "Karl Barth on Gethsemane," *IJST* 9.2 (2007), 148-171.

Gethsemane? Or is Barth overliteralizing a limited human model for God? Why is it this specific action gets reified into a "ranking" and "ordering" of persons and relations? Does that undermine the actualism that otherwise prompts the application of obedience to God? Is Barth using *Gehorsam* to redefine the Son's procession, his "being-posited" (I think he must be) and, if so, why is he not more transparent about this (see IV/1, 209)? One could go on. But perhaps the most urgent as well as revealing set of concerns centers on the character of the human model(s) for obedience upon which Barth draws.

As he puts it:

there is… in the twofoldness of the existence of man a reflection of this likeness of the inner life of God Himself… the inward divine relationship between the One who rules and commands in majesty and the One who obeys in humility and is identical with the very different relationship between God and one of His creatures, a man. God goes into the far country for this to happen… But… He does not do it apart from its basis [*Grund*] in His own being, in His own inner life. He does not do it without any correspondence [*Entsprechung*] to, but as the strangely logical final continuation of, the history in which He is God. (IV/1, 203)

If the ethical implications of radicalizing such hierarchical language were not readily apparent, Barth explicitly coordinates the superordination of the Father and subordination of the Son with certain social roles and relations—namely, between fathers and sons and between men and women (especially husbands and wives). This has lead Jones to suggest that there is a "dimension" to Barth's "presentation of the Son's obedience" that "must be adjudged ethically and doctrinally injurious" because it involves a "crude hierarchicalism." Barth's relational analogies "expose" his "incorrigible sexism" and

have a "corruptive influence" on his theology.[76] It is not clear that these analogies are in fact detachable from Barth's theology as a whole. His theological imagination is so deeply rooted in a certain conception of order that we cannot consider his choice of comparison here anything but decisive. It tells us precisely what he means by the Son's subordination.

Barth's application of "obedience" to the Son's eternal relationship to the Father depends upon a certain understanding of human sons and fathers. He admits that in employing the title of "Son" we are merely drawing an "analogy," which is defined by "similarity in dissimilarity" (III/2, 324, IV/1, 209-210). For example, he says, "What we call 'Son' points in the right direction, but does not reach the fullness of what is here in question," and, "The history in which God is living God in Himself can only be indicated and not conceived by our terms son and father and spirit" (209-210).[77] However, Barth thinks "we have no better term[s]." And his pinpointing of the analogical similarity is highly telling. He recommends "Son" precisely on the basis that

> it can convey the natural determination [*die natürliche Bestimmung*] of a son to
>
> subjection [*Unterordnung*] to a father, the self-evident presupposition that a son
>
> owes obedience [*Gehorsam*] to a father, the mutual relationship revealed in what
>
> a father can expect and demand of a son and also in the way in which a son has to
>
> respect the will of his father. (209)[78]

---

[76] Jones, *The Humanity of Christ*, 212-213.

[77] Because there are dimensions "the term cannot bring out," it is "true but inadequate" (IV/1, 209-210).

[78] Barth defines "obedience" (*Gehorsam*) in terms of "subjection" (*Unterordnung* or *Abhängigkeit*) in multiple places (e.g., IV/1 96, 98). As he says in his discussion of election, "In what Jesus does everything is genuine obedience, real subordination, even subjection [*Unterwerfung*]—not at all the self-exaltation of man to the throne of God, but very definitely the work of a servant, indeed a slave [*Sklave*] of God, which takes place in a relationship to God in which God gives the orders and man submits, a position which cannot therefore be reversed" (II/2, 605). That the irreversible ordering of one *over* the other is the

Now, this is a curious feature to foreground as *the* point of the filial analogy. Is "subjection" really a "natural" and "self-evident" relationship between sons and fathers? And, even if it were, would it therefore be commendable? Perhaps if Barth has in mind small children and their caregivers. However, in that case, "subjection" and "compliance" (*Fügsamkeit*) would serve merely as a temporary means to a more fundamental end: the protection and care of a child as yet incapable of self-sustenance and safe judgment. It would not be a definitive or enduring "determination" in the relationship—for children grow up; they become peers. Further, in a human model, the burden of "self-giving" falls to the parent, rather than the child. So "obedience" as "subjection" could no longer comprehensively translate divine "self-giving." At most, it would be an instance or mode, and not necessarily the most obvious one.

At any rate, it seems Barth does not have in mind "parents" and "children" in general (and certainly not "mothers" and "daughters") but specifically "fathers" and (grown) "sons." These familial terms are obviously invested with cultural and personal import of which he is not particularly critical. We should inquire why, in taking this model, he would accentuate "subjection" or "subordination" rather than, say, "dependence" or "care." Why reduce the relation to power or order rather than "loving-kindness?" Which is more essential to encounters between parents and children? On what basis could we accept *Unterordnung* as the most accurate point of similarity in the dissimilarity between trinitarian persons and human fathers and sons?

Similar issues appear in Barth's mapping of patriarchal gender roles onto Trinitarian relations. He draws an *analogia relationis* in which superordination,

---

definitive point of analogy between human father/sons and the divine Father/Son is reinforced when Barth discusses the "*quasi* fatherly character" of other forces (e.g., kingdom, unbelief, the devil, etc.) (IV/1, 210).

precedence, disposing, and initiative are assigned to the man and subordination,

subsequence, compliance, and receptivity to the woman.[79] Expounding a complementary

ordering of the sexes, Barth writes, "Man speaks against himself if he assesses and treats

woman as an inferior being, for without *her weakness and subsequence* he could not be

man. And woman speaks against herself if she envies that which is proper to man, for *his*

strength and precedence are the reality without which she could not be woman" (III/2,

287).[80] There are a number of illuminating critiques of Barth's view of women and

insightful correctives to his gender binarism, which do not need to be rehearsed again

here.[81] My purpose in drawing attention to Barth's problematic analogizing on the basis

of gender and sex is merely to set it along side his related comments on fathers and sons

---

[79] Elsewhere Barth extrapolates, "The disjunction and the conjunction of man and woman, of their sexual independence and sexual interrelationship, is controlled by a definite order… They stand in a sequence. It is in this that man has his allotted place and woman hers… Man and woman are not an A and a second A whose being and relationship can be described like the two halves of an hour glass, which are obviously two, but absolutely equal and therefore interchangeable. Man and woman are an A and a B, and cannot, therefore, be equated. In inner dignity and right, and therefore in human dignity and right, A has not the slightest advantage over B, nor does it suffer the slightest disadvantage… Yet the fact remains-and in this respect there is no simple equality—that they are claimed and sanctified as man and woman, each for himself, each in relation to the other in his own particular place, and therefore in such a way that A is not B but A, and B is not another A but B… A precedes B, and B follows A. Order means succession. It means preceding and following. It means super- and sub-ordination" (CD III/4, 168-169). Barth calls this, "the rule which is valid both in and outside love and marriage" and claims that "the only alternative is disorder." Unsurprisingly, Barth aligns man with God/Jesus and woman with Israel/church (III/2, 310-311).

[80] Emphasis added.

[81] See especially Jason Springs, "Following At a Distance (Again): Gender, Equality, and Freedom in Karl Barth's Theological Anthropology," *Modern Theology* 28.3 (July 2012), 446-477; Lisa P. Stephenson, "Directed, Ordered, and Related: The Male and Female Interpersonal Relation in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*," *SJT*, Vol. 61 no. 4 (2008), 435-449; and Katherine Sonderegger, "Barth and Feminism," *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 258-272. See also Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Woman's Jesus Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 70-75; Clifford Green, "Liberation Theology?: Karl Barth on Women and Men," *Union Theological Seminary Quarterly*, Vol. XXIX (Spring/Summer, 1974), 228-229; Timothy Gorringe, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 200-207; Paul Fiddes, "The Status of Woman in the Thought of Karl Barth," *After Eve*, ed. Janet M. Soskice (London: Collins Marshall Pickering, 1990), 138-153; Alexander J. McKelway, "Perichoretic Possibilities in Barth's Doctrine of Male and Female," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Vol. 7 no. 3 (1986), 231-243 (see esp. 290); Clifford Green, "Karl Barth's Treatment of the Man-Woman Relationship: Issues for Theological Method," *Reflections on Bonhoeffer*, eds. Geoffrey B. Kelly and C. John Weborg (Chicago, IL, Covenant Publications, 1999); and Cynthia Campbell, "Imago Dei Reconsidered: Male and Female Together," *Journal for Preachers*, Vol. 4 no. 2 (Lent 1981), 9-14.

in order to point out that these are dual instances in which Barth selects culturally

unstable and ethically dubious—yet, in his mind, essentially illuminative—points of

analogy.[82] While he claims to have Christological grounding in both cases, as Jason

Springs has shown, the fact that "freedom" is the "root and crown" of Barth's own

Christologically-inflected "I/Thou" anthropology actually undermines the sort of

hierarchical ordering between family members that Barth otherwise asserts.[83]

Needless to say, Barth's statements about sons and women have a decidedly

authoritarian ring, and this should prompt us to observe the ways his assumptions about

human power relations implicitly shape his construal of divine power relations (rather

than vice versa, as he claims). Setting aside the ethical implications of Barth's comments,

his analogies seem to disclose a vision of God in which God the Father is a benevolent

overlord and God the Son is an eternally subordinate subject, servant, or slave. In other

words, the larger problem may be not simply the analogies themselves but, more

profoundly, Barth's definition of the Son's obedience as eternal subjection or

subordination. To be clear, at issue is not a whether it is fitting for there to be something

like "kenosis," submission, or vulnerability in God or, for that matter, between humans.[84]

Nor is it question of whether obedience is an authentic dimension of the existence of

Jesus Christ.[85] Rather, the reason for concern is the precise content, basis, and priority

Barth gives the term.

---

[82] Barth seems happy to keep the logic of Paul's Christianization of the Greco-Roman household codes in tact. Following passages like Ephesians 5:20f, he aligns children, women, and slaves (see esp. IV/1, 189).
[83] Spring, "Following at a Distance," 469. Reading Barth against Barth, Spring considers what "a Christocentric account of gender equality" would look like (467).
[84] Again, see Coakley's essay "*Kenōsis* and Subversion" in *Powers and Submissions*, 3-39.
[85] T. F. Torrance, among others, maintains as much without converting this incarnational fulfillment into an intra-trinitarian basis.

3. Rethinking the Son's Subordination: Questions and Problems

There are plenty of charges that might be, and have been, leveled against Barth's later presentation of the Trinity (in §59) in terms of classical trinitarianism.[86] For a number of reasons, this will not be my primary tack. Most notably, many difficulties arise when attempting to apply the more traditional aspects of the trinitarian apparatus with which Barth works in I/1 to his description of the Trinity §59. For example, it is not clear that Barth's early definitions of "appropriations" and "perichoretic unity" (which he borrows from Aquinas) are compatible with "divine obedience" attributed exclusively to the Son.[87] Instead of assessing this aspect of Barth's thought from within a classical trinitarian framework (as valuable and illuminating as that certainly may be), I simply

---

[86] We see this in Molnar's concerns in "The Obedience of the Son in the Theology of Karl Barth and Thomas F. Torrance," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 67.1 (Feb. 2014), 50-69. He feels Barth "conceptually introduces a hierarchy into the divine being," "blurs the distinctions between processions and missions," and "seems to confuse the order of the inner trinitarian relations with the being of the persons of the Trinity" (61, 64). (I address the latter two concerns, which I think express misunderstanding of what Barth is doing, in the note below.) Molnar rightly observes that "*perichoresis*…is virtually missing at this point in Barth's analysis" (i.e., in §59) ("The Obedience of the Son," 64).

[87] This is a problem so long as it is conceived as the Son's obedience "to the Father" and not, say, God's self-giving "unto death." The eternal obedience of the Son appears to be a case in which *opera trinitatis ad extra non sunt indivisa* (the external works of the trinity are *not* indivisible). Christ's obedience, as Barth speaks of it and as an essential feature of incarnation, cannot be appropriated to one person as that which is "common to all." Why is this? Obedience is directly grounded in election, as a temporal kenosis that corresponds to that primal kenosis. Election is the beginning of God's *opera ad extra*. But, as Jüngel points out, "as the beginning of all the ways and works of God's election of grace is not only an *opus Dei ad extra* [external work of God] or, more precisely, an *opus Dei ad extra externum* [external work of God directed outwards]; it is at the same time an *opus Dei ad extra internum* [external work of God directed inwards]" (*God's Being is in Becoming*, 83-84). It is a decision that "affects God." In this case, we must see election as overlapping with divine processions, as Kevin Hector argues. If obedience belongs to the mission of Jesus Christ, it can only be specially appropriated to him as what is *not* common to the other persons of the Trinity if it becomes a characteristic of divine relations (rather than essence or persons, which are the same)—that is, if it is regarded as a feature of the Son's procession from the Father. Barth thus appears to retain some classical rules of trinitarian thought while disregarding others. On his own terms, there is no reason to accept the tools of the tradition unless they cohere with the biblical narrative. The question, then, can only be whether the rules he continues to employ—namely: 1) the grounding of distinction between persons in relations (i.e., through processions) (Aquinas) and 2) the movement from missions "back" to processions (Augustine)—is "in accordance with the biblical testimony" (II/2, 18). If not, what justifies Barth's recourse to processions (without giving the doctrine the same overhaul he gives everything else)? It seems to me he links up a classical account of processions with a radicalized notion of divine obedience without indicating that he is doing so or explaining why. The only thing the two have in common is logical hierarchy. That is not enough of a basis—and, again, this seems to betray a problem of imagination.

want to highlight several considerations, arising from Barth's own work, that call into question his grounding of election and reconciliation in the subservient posture he attributes (exclusively) to the Son. Without being able to unpack all of the attendant ontological implications, I mention the following array of concerns with a view to comparing the trinitarian trajectory of Barth's retelling of the Parable of the Prodigal Son with that of Julian.

First, the content Barth draws from his relational analogies seems to contradict some of his other (better) remarks on divine power and love. While he tends toward a lively oscillation between power and weakness, freedom and submission, divinity and humanity, lordship and servanthood, and so on, this flattens out in his comments on sons/fathers and husbands/wives.[88] This counters the predominant pattern of his mature writings, in which we find a carefully dialectical presentation of God's freedom in self-giving. On the whole, Barth resists opposing or fixing terms related to super- and sub-ordinance in the divine economy, as we so often find them in a human economy. For example, incarnation and crucifixion are interpreted as the power of God, as a capacity and a struggle, rather than a lack or stoical resignation (e.g., IV/3.1, 180, 196-197). Similarly, Barth insists on an exchange or reversal, according to God's grace, in which God (primary) is made low in order that humans (secondary) are made high. While human sanctification involves discipleship or "conformity" as a proper creaturely mode of correspondence to God (e.g., IV/2, 93), the "overlordship" of God is best understood

---

[88] If one were to accept the biblical metaphor in which male/female relations in some way mirror divine/human relations, as Barth points out "even Paul does…" we would want to remind Barth that "even Paul" gets that, in the scenario of mutual submission described in Eph. 5, the heavier burden of "laying down his life" falls to the man/Jesus/God rather than to the woman/church/humanity. ("He" leads, yes—but the way to death. As problematic as the Christianized household codes are, Paul's social analogy retains a strongly tensive relationship between lordship and servanthood.)

as the grounding and confirmation of human freedom, rather than what Barth sometimes

describes in terms of subjection or subjugation (e.g., III/3, 146, IV/2, 578-579). [89]

Appealing to New Testament passages concerning the poverty of God (1 Cor. 1:25, 2

Cor. 8:9), Barth speaks of the "transvaluation of all values" in Christ's preference for the

poor, the weak, the sinner (IV/2, 169). The one who is rich (God) becomes poor (human).

So were we to draw an analogy from gendered familial terms such as father/son and

husband/wife onto the divine/human, it seems rather more likely, according to Barth's

own logic, that downwardness (poverty, kenosis, obedience) would belong to

father/husband and upwardness to the child/wife.[90] It is worrisome, then, that the

directional tension slackens and the polar reversal of "wealth" and "poverty" stalls out.

This happens when the "lowliness" of God is 1) strongly localized in one person, and 2)

linked to stringently hierarchical human models.[91]

Second, and closely related to the concerns already expressed about the analogies

upon which Barth relies, although he knows better than to imagine that the "Father" is "*a

father*" and that the "Son" is "*a* son," at times his application of the titles appears over-

literalized, static, and even univocal—for example, when he speaks of the Father as "one

who commands" and the (eternal) Son as "one who obeys."[92] Barth not only draws the

wrong point of analogy, he draws it too directly. Regarding the specific point of analogy,

---

[89] Barth does speak of the "compulsion" of Grace. But never a "mere compulsion." Never an abstracted structure of subjection, an end in itself. The life-giving "compulsion" of Grace is a means for combating the "hellish compulsion" of sin and death and establishes the human, grants genuine freedom, which is so much more than the freedom of "self-deciding." See IV/4, 578-579.

[90] In other words we would have what Rosemary Radford Reuther calls "the kenosis of *patriarchy*" (*Sexism and Godtalk*, 137). That Barth does not follow his own logic in this direction is indicative of the extent to which his social imagination interferes with the radical truth he himself uncovers.

[91] Some critics have suggested that, with reference to human relations, Barth overemphasizes the ordering of relations at the expense of perichoretic unity and this unfortunately reinforces hierarchy in the *analogia relationis*.

[92] At least, he is not a son of "a father"—though he may genuinely be a son of a mother.

if he were in fact deriving the meaning of "son" from the biblical witness, especially from the example of Jesus Christ, and relied less on a certain cultural conception of sonship, the main accent could not possibly be "obedience" construed as "subordination" (being-under)—and, indeed, "slavery"—but rather: "heirship" (being-gifted). On my reading, that is precisely the message of the Parable of the Prodigal Son (see chapter two). To say "son" is finally to say "heir," "gifted one"—*beloved*—not "slave" (as the elder son sees himself) or "hired hand" (as the younger son sees himself) (cf. Gal. 4:7). Insofar as Jesus Christ does "subject himself" (to God as *to himself*), it is a moment on the way, a means to an end. This is fundamentally in the service of claiming his rightful "inheritance," his "crown"—humankind—and it is only ever with a view to being "a King who draws [others] after him to share his destiny" (IV/2, 24).[93] Although Barth goes on to portray Christ not only as Servant but also as *Liberator* (IV/1-3, *passim*), his role in liberating humanity is ultimately traced back to his status a slave of the Father.[94] (As for drawing the analogy too directly, I return to this problem below.)

Third, *Gehorsam* appears detached from its concrete manifestation and goal in the economy of salvation when Barth reflects on it as a structure of the divine life itself. This is problematic on Barth's own terms. As McCormack notes, this seems to be a "lapse" in Barth's "concentration:" "even after his mature doctrine of election was in place, he continued to make statements which created the space for an independent doctrine of the Trinity, a triune being of God which was seen as independence of the covenant of

---

[93] This "so that," this inherent purpose and *telos*, is pivotal in nearly all of the verses to which Barth appeals (2 Cor. 10:1, 11:7; Phil. 2:6f, 4:2; Eph. 4:9, etc.).

[94] Ironically, then, the soteriological claim of liberation depends upon a primordial ontological enslavement, one that is never overcome. Slavery rather than liberation is situated at the heart of God, between the Father and Son. But could it not be the reverse?—that, if one is to continue with the presupposition of divine processions, the generation of the Son is described in terms of making space, granting freedom and otherness?

grace."[95] Molnar observes something similar, although from a very different perspective, when he points out that Barth sometimes asserts "simply that the Son fulfills his subordination and the Father his superiority, without clearly and consistently stating that what is fulfilled [in obedience] is God's salvific purpose and activity *for us*."[96] This issue of "fulfillment" (*Vollzug*) is critical; and it may offer a solution to the problem. On those occasions when Barth speaks of divine obedience disconnected from its economic reference, when he slips into "free-floating talk of the 'eternal Son,'" he loses the proper teleological ordering of covenantal-election and reconciliation.[97] The Son *becomes* "sin," a "slave"—and only to fulfill a "so that..." To say this purposeful economic subjection is taken up into the triune life in the identity of the Son is quite another thing than to make his being "a slave of God" the ground for the whole unfolding of the salvation drama. As Adam Neder notes, for Barth, "Reconciliation is the *fulfillment* of the covenant between God and humanity."[98] That means, certain elements of the economy of salvation—for example, obedience to death and the slavery of the flesh—should be seen teleologically, as the "fulfillment" rather than the "basis" of the temporal atonement (IV/1, 203). T. F. Torrance argues, "there are…elements in the incarnate economy such as the time pattern of human life in this world [i.e., obedience] which we may not read back into the eternal

---

[95] McCormack, "Grace and Being," 193. McCormack makes this point on the way to his argument that "the words of God *ad intra* (the trinitarian processions) find their ground in the *first* of the works of God *ad extra* (viz., election)" (194). However, it is not necessary to conclude that God's triunity arises from the divine decision to appreciate the "inconsistency" he observes in Barth's thinking (see, for example, IV/1).

[96] Molnar, "The Obedience of the Sod," 63. I share Molnar's observation, although not the basis for his concern. He worries that this "implies a need on the part of God for fulfillment" and threatens God's freedom. In other words, he thinks Barth is being metaphysically imprecise, but not maintaining enough distance between the immanent Trinity and economic Trinity. By contrast, I think the problem is that dissociating from direct reference to the *pro nobis* is abstraction and speculation. Barth suddenly talks as if there is a "before" or "above" reconciliation, which he otherwise avoids doing. That is why McCormack considers such statements a "lapse" into substantialist or non-actualist ways of thinking.

[97] See n. 94 of this chapter. McCormack, "Obedience and Grace," *Orthodox and Modern*, 194.

[98] Neder, *Participation in Christ*, 42. Emphasis added.

Life of God."[99] This "not reading back" of everything does not have to entail any "gap" between God's being *in se* and God's action *pro nobis*. On the contrary, it only means that there is a distinction between the fulfillment or consequence and its basis or ground—that their "correspondence" (*Entsprechung*) (IV/1, 203) does not destroy their distinction and ordering.[100] (If Barth himself did not think in terms of such a distinction and ordering, he would not bother discussing the intra-trinitarian configuration that generates the Son's temporal obedience in the first place.)

The point is that Barth's specific teaching on divine obedience runs counter to his broader presentation of salvation in which "election and obedience are related to one another as ground and consequence."[101] While is much disagreement over how he relates the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity and to what extent he collapses missions and processions, what is clear is that the way Barth usually orders election/covenant and reconciliation contradicts the unexplained reversal of reasoning that undergirds his assertion concerning eternal subordination (in §59.1). Why does he seem to make the consequence into the ground? It may be argued that this is a radical wedding of economy to immanence, but from another angle precisely the opposite appears to be the case: it begins to look like a retreat into abstraction about intra-trinitarian preconditions.

---

[99] T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (London: T&T Clark, 2001), 109.

[100] If, for Barth, the being of humanity can genuinely "correspond" to the being of God (in faith) while remaining utterly ontologically distinct, then there is no reason why the being of God could not genuinely "correspond" to Christ's solidarity with and compassionate substitution for sinners without being collapsed into it. Barth appeals to unity-in-difference (analogy) at almost every point—except here. The subjection to death, the slavery of the flesh from which Christ came to liberate humankind, somehow gets translated into a relation of eternal trinitarian subordination. Even if one endorses a hierarchical view of the Trinity, there is a critical distinction to be drawn between the slavery to evil and nothingness that Jesus Christ undertakes in order to overcome and his unchanging deference to "the will of the Father." (Otherwise, Barth is left with the same problem that faced Calvin: a divine Father who wills evil.)

[101] Neder says this specifically of the election and obedience of humans in Christ, however, as analogous, the same can be said with regards to Jesus Christ (18).

Fourth, and closely related, even if one posits a structural or relational analogue or antecedent for Jesus' human obedience in the second person of the Trinity (as, say, Hans Urs von Balthasar goes on to do, with his notion of *Urkenosis*), there is no reason the pre-temporal and temporal terms should become identical.[102] It is just as reasonable that the temporal obedience of the Son be antecedently rooted in something *other than* an eternalized version of obedience (for correspondence is not identity).[103] While Barth, as well as some of his defenders, suggests the eternality of the Son's divine subordination is a necessary assertion, this seems patently false in light of not only the teleological relation of election and reconciliation but also the nature of analogy and identity. To be analogous and to be identified (in a narrative sense) is not, after all, to be univocal or identical (in an analytic sense). The analogue or antecedent of the Son's far journey could be (and, I would suggest, clearly is) love, rather than subordination. To give oneself, to subordinate oneself—that is a legitimate capability (and "consequence") of love that does not define or exhaust its basis (or "ground") in love. It is a fulfillment (temporal) of love (eternal); love cannot be simply reduced to it. There is no clear reason why Jesus Christ's earthly subjection (which, we must not forget, is not simply to "the Father" but to sin and death as well) must derive from and point back to a comparable relational subjugation within the Trinity. Economic obedience, as fulfillment, has its grounds elsewhere than in itself. (There must be a reason we say "God is love" and not "God is obedience.")

---

[102] In my view, the "obedience *to the Father*" that we see in Gethsemane is to be appropriated to the humanity of Christ in such a way that its intertrinitarian correlate is a self-election of "obedience *to death*" (Phil. 2). In this way, there is no appearance either of 1) a disconnect between the history of Jesus and the history of God or 2) a distinction between the wills of the first and second persons of the Trinity.

[103] "Conformity," "correspondence," and even "identity" (again, construed narratively, A = not A) are concepts in Barth's writing that are all marked by a structure of analogy—i.e., by similarity in the midst of dissimilarity. That being the case, there is no clear reason why "obedience" should become a matter of simply identity (understood analytically, A = A).

Fifth, bound up with the issue of how we are to understand the eternal antecedent that accommodates Jesus Christ's revealed relationship to the Father is the issue of how related descriptors might be rightly applied to God.[104] Although I have suggested that temporal obedience can be faithfully grounded in something other than an eternalized version of the same, it may certainly be argued that the danger is not using the word "obedience" itself, but forgetting that the thing that is being talked about (divine self-giving) is distinct from the thing of which the terms are suggestive (subordination understood humanly). In the case that we must speak of "obedience" in God—what can this mean? Does Barth get the analogical similarity and dissimilarity in the terms "son" and "obedience" right? In my view, he mistakes one of strongest points of dissimilarity between the divine Father/Son and human fathers/sons for the primary similarity. Compounding this problem, he seems to forget that he is (only) talking about one thing in terms that are suggestive of another (Soskice). Does Barth deliberately take the term non-metaphorically or non-analogically on account of the identity between the Son and Jesus Christ?[105] It can seem that way at times, but this would run counter to his overt statement that even "Son" is an insufficient analogical descriptor. If we are to speak of the Son's "obedience," it should be understood in a certain way—and perhaps kept in quotation marks. This brings us back to the issue of drawing the father/son analogy too directly.

---

[104] We must still consider what "obedience" can (and cannot) mean for a *divine* existence in distinction from a human existence, for the life of Jesus Christ as he "exists in the manner of God" rather than as he "exists in the manner of [human flesh]" (IV/3.1, 39). How does God participate in the obedience of the Son's incarnate life? How does God "experience" God's own voluntary descent to death? As subjection? As the relinquishing of one will for the sake of another? As a son blindly obeying a father because he's naturally "subsequent" and "secondary?" It seems unlikely. This disjunction between the connotations of the adjective and the variability of its meaning when attached to God reinforces the sense that Barth is overliteralizing from a specific social model of sons/fathers.

[105] We have to remember that "identity," here, is narratival and not logical. It is not $A = A$ but specifically $A = not\ A$. A narratival identity is not of things that are similar but of things that are dissimilar.

In addition to the problem of content (subjection rather than heirship or love), the analogy breaks down at other points as well, raising the question of how we can meaningfully predicate "obedience" of God. What can it mean, for example, in view of the unity of the divine will? It is incoherent to speak of the eternal Son (even conceived as the *logos incarnandus*) submitting to the eternal Father's will, as if that could ever be something other than his own. Yet Barth's comments on sons clearly define obedience as subjection to the will of another, namely to that of *a father*. Even if one radicalizes the identity between Jesus of Nazareth and the second person of the Trinity, as Barth does, he certainly would not posit two *divine* wills.[106] While he affirms *dyothelitism*, that is a Christological point about the two wills of Jesus Christ, as divine and human, not of the first and second members of the Trinity.[107] For the most part, Barth rightly stresses the reflexive quality of the Son's humiliation—it is *self*-ordination, *self*-election, *self*-determination, *self*-humiliation, *self*-emptying. However, this crucial affirmation weakens when the Son's obedience is rendered intra-trinitarian (eternally "to the Father") and converted from consequence into ground. In II/2, the Son's election is described as self-election to election by the father (to a human life and identity that entails subjection), but by IV/1 it seems that "obedience" supplants more reflexive terms and gives the appearance of an eternal ordering of wills (plural) and a static hierarchy of persons.

---

[106] Throughout volume one of *Church Dogmatics*, Barth emphasizes that God is a single subject and worries about "Eastern" conceptions of the persons as three agents or will centers. But does Barth's later trinitarian imagination betray a similar sense vision of trinitarian persons? In the context of his rejection of the 17th c. notion of a "covenant of redemption," Barth asks, "Can we really think of the first and second persons of the triune Godhead as two divine Subjects and therefore as two legal Subjects who can have dealings and enter into obligations with one another? This is mythology, for which there is no place in a right understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity as the doctrine of the three modes of being of the one God" (IV/1, 65). Yet, this is precisely the sort of arrangement Barth's description of the Son as "one who obeys" and the Father as "one who commands" (203).

[107] See IV/1, 163f, 194. This gets tricky, because Jesus Christ *is* the second person of the Trinity. But Barth himself makes the distinction. He is not merely talking about the *human* will of Jesus Christ submitting to the eternal father, but his *eternal* will as the Son.

Finally, in all of these considerations, the most important question for us is this: which, in Barth's view, is more basic to the *character* of God—that the eternal Son subjects his "will" to that of the Father or that from all eternity God elects not to be God without the human other? In contrast to Julian, Barth's theological retelling of the Parable of the Prodigal Son as the parable of reconciliation, election, and revelation leads him to the former rather than the latter. The parable itself and the passages through which Barth filters it actually resist such a reduction of love to servility.[108] In view of the parable, as it is coordinated with the logic of the Christological hymn, obedience is neither the origin nor the telos of the Son's trajectory but only the means or path (self-giving) and nadir (abject slavery). The beginning is "towardness" (*Fügsamkeit*), yes, but the "towardness" and "movement" of God to humankind (love). The end is the raising up of humankind (also love). Yet Barth distills both to the towardness of Son to Father—and, in that sense, the direction of the Son toward the world (love) appears to be subsumed in what happens within the Trinity in God's self-positing (209-210). On the whole, Barth otherwise seems to *want* to interpret the humanity of Christ as revealing God's primordial love of another, but at certain points he faces us with the question: must we finally distill the reconciling love of God to the subsequence, subordination, and obedience of Son to Father?

If we stop short of the *theologoumena* of eternal subjection, we see that this conclusion may be in conflict with Barth's own methodological principle. Contrary to his assertion that if we do not uphold a divine subjection we risk the appearance of a God

---

[108] Apparently Hans Frei would disagree. His argument supports what appears to be Barth's understanding of obedience as more basic than loving-kindness: "In the pattern found in Isaiah and also in the gospel narrative, the focus of obedience is, of course, God… there is no single clue—not even love—to unlock the character and deportment of Jesus in the Gospels. As the governing motif of Jesus' life, love is far more nearly an indirect than a direct focus of his behavior. His love is a function of his mission, but his mission is to enact the salvation of humanity in obedience to God. Love is subsidiary to that mission" (*The Identity of Jesus Christ*, 83-84). However, it does not seem that Frei would, on this basis, "lapse" (McCormack) as Barth does into metaphysical talk (e.g., of processions).

behind God, from another vantage point it appears that Barth is the one who is moving beyond revelation in order to reflect on "God *in se*." Over against the common theological fixation on God's abstract "personhood," Barth says, "everything depends on the statement that God is the One who loves" (II/1, 296). Perhaps the same point needs to be made with respect to his own preoccupation with a pre-temporal "ranking and ordering" in the Trinity. For all his criticism of Calvin's "speculative" teaching about a hidden and split will of God, of "the fatal glancing aside at an election which takes place behind and above Christ in the hiddenness of God," Barth's own teaching on *göttlichen Gehorsam* might betray a similar inclination (II/2, 17-18, 70).

3. Revelation of Love: Divine Motherhood or Divine Sub-Ordinance?

My reason for mentioning the preceding nexus of problems is that the path Barth ends up forging is illuminatingly contrasted with that of Julian. Even if, for Julian, the parable communicates something about intra-trinitarian processions and relations, focusing on the "motherhood" of God allows her to maintain to the end that, "God never began to love humankind." For her, motherhood is not a human model comparable to or substitutable for fatherhood. It carries a theological meaning that fatherhood on its own cannot. It is not as if Julian appeals to motherhood as a proto-feminist who merely wants to remind the world that women are *capax Dei*, just as men are. The decisive theological function of the image of Christ as mother is that it prevents her from abstracting from the reciprocal relationship between God and the world established and sealed in the eternal "oning" of God and humanity in Jesus Christ.

"Mother" is not simply a feminine counterpart of "Father." Rather, it supplements and expands what is meant by God's paternity. On the one hand, eternal motherhood contains nearly all that one would otherwise communicate via the language fatherhood: that God is origin and creator, sovereign lord and provider, sustainer and nurturer, and so on. On the other hand, what the image of a father specifically cannot convey is the mutual indwelling of God and humankind in the atonement, the reality of humankind enclosed in Jesus enclosed in the Trinity from before the foundation of the world. In addition to the implicit anatomical analogy (of a pregnant female), Julian resorts to the language of motherhood because she deems human mothers a better model of the visceral (womblike) care and compassion (σπλάγχνα) that defines the response of the "motherly father" in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Interestingly, the primary point of dissimilarity in the analogy, where it most clearly breaks down, actually strengthens the power of the image to communicate Julian's vision of God—"oure very moder, in whome we be endlessly borne and *never shall come out of* him" (57.43). The analogical breakdown only ensures our comprehension of the impossible fact: God the Son as the eternally pregnant one. The point here is not that Julian simply makes better use of kinship analogies than Barth but that she selects and deploys an analogy that is resistant to further reduction. That is to say, motherhood better enables her to hold the line of God's self-revelation.

Julian's insight into the Triune motherhood of God is hemmed in by the "endlesse oning" and "knitting" of humanity into God. But Barth's theory of the eternal subordination of Son to Father—while indeed rooted in his understanding of election and the *logos asarkos* as the *logos incarnandus*—extends beyond the appearing of the divine *philanthropia* revealed in Christ. It becomes a speculative basis, then, a theorizing about

what is manifest that arguably distracts from and is only tenuously related to what is manifest. In other words, juxtaposed with Julian's reduction to motherhood, the trouble with fatherhood and sonship language in the hands of Barth is that, at times, it appears to lead him away from a basic affirmation of the eternal loving-kindness of God to a more basic filial obedience, to a structure or ordering of superordination and subordination that has only tangential power to evoke God's love for the world (Jn. 3:16). Of course, the revelation of the love of God is precisely what Barth intends to *explain* in taking the path that he does.[109] However, the content of his description of obedience casts doubt on whether that is what he achieves. Is the point that "God is human" or that the second member of the Trinity is subject to the first? By pressing fatherhood and sonship past an affirmation of kinship and love to an arrangement of super-ordinance and sub-ordinance, Barth risks losing the clarity and radicalness of his assertion in *The Humanity of God*: "the truth of *God* is loving-kindness towards [humans]…and nothing else."[110]

Conclusion

      In view of Julian's transition from the Son's far journey to his divine motherhood, we might play up the fact that for Barth "obedience" means, more vitally, "enburdenment." Jesus Christ is "Bearer" (e.g., I/2, 156; IV/2, 73, 106, 396; IV/3.1, 40, etc.). Why not follow the obedience of Christ back to this intra-trinitarian apportioning of economic responsibility instead? Why not simply stress this assumption itself, rather than

---

[109] His attachment to the word "obedience" is Barth's attempt to not look away from the biblical narrative, to keep to the concrete life of Jesus Christ that is wholly in "conformity" with and "submissive" to the will of "the Father." However, it can be seen as a form of abstraction in the sense that he appears to become preoccupied with order or power between persons of the Trinity. (For large swaths of his reflection the focus shifts away from the fact and meaning of the eternal atonement between God and the world in Christ to the dynamics). "Obedience" loses its ability to evoke "world"—inclusion and mutual enclosure.
[110] Barth, *The Humanity of God*, 51-52.

explain it through a theory of divine ordering and ranking?[111] Why not accept the fact

itself instead of looking away from it for some more basic precondition? We would do

well to keep this "ladenness," this glad "readiness" (another key term for both Julian and

Barth) in view when we hear "divine obedience," if we do not want to strip the latter of

its primordial connection to the "overflowing" love that generates "the humanity of God"

in which God eternally rejoices (Lk. 15:32).[112] It is worth reiterating Soskice's assertion

in *The Kindness of God*: "the principal reason why the biblical writings are so dependent

on gendered imagery…is not because its writers were so very interested in sex, or even

hierarchy as subordination, but because they were interested in kinship."[113]

In sum, my point is that it is possible to deploy the parable as both Julian and

Barth do, to narrate reconciliation, election, and "the history in which God is God" (IV/1,

203), without reducing the significance of the eternal Son's identity with the prodigal son

to a version of slavery basic to God.[114] Even in Barth's own thought, there are resources

that deter us from such a vision of intratrinitarian love. But Julian's image of God

pregnant with Jesus pregnant with humanity more effectively bars the way back to some

more originary vision of the relationship between Father and Son without the world.

---

[111] Barth stops here in *The Humanity of God*, where he addresses the downwardness of God without positing the Son's eternal subjection or subordination. He simply says, "How could God's deity exclude His humanity, since it is God's freedom for love and thus His capacity to be not only in the heights but also in the depths, not only great but also small, not only in and for Himself but also with another distinct from Him, and to offer Himself to him?" (49). In other words, it may be possible for him to claim that the "going out" of love is proper to God's being without resorting to relations of sub- and super-ordination.

[112] Barth speaks of Jesus Christ as the readiness of God to be known (II/2, §26). Thinking of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the readiness of the Son to journey into the far country is mirrored in the readiness of the father to receive his son (lost humanity), to look on him with compassion. Jesus Christ is that eager awaiting and looking-upon. Julian's example stresses the initial eagerness or readiness of the servant to do his lord's will. It is that eager leap-up which lands him in the ditch. The eagerness is primarily assigned to Christ, as the second Adam who obeys in following the first Adam into the pit of human blindness.

[113] Soskice, *Kindness of God*, 4.

[114] To be clear, if the human life of Jesus is taken up into the Trinity, then we must indeed affirm that there is obedience, slavery, and, in some sense, even sin, *in God*. But "in God" is a different claim than "proper to God." What is proper to God is that this history of fallenness can be freely assumed (in order to be overwritten). But that does not make its contents identical with their basis in the divine self-giving love.

CONCLUSION

As the parable of atonement, of election, and indeed of God's own essence, the Parable of the Prodigal Son is preeminently the parable of *grace*. Atonement is grace. Election is grace. God is grace. That is the conclusion to which Julian's and Barth's theological retellings of the parable lead us. The reconciliation of God and the world in Christ is the grace by which humanity sees God in Christ, is seen by God in Christ, and also sees itself seen by God in Christ. This points back to the election of grace, itself an *eternal* atonement—an "endlesse oning" (Julian) or "eternal covenant" (Barth)—in which God "hazards" Godself for the sake of fellowship with another and elects, as the Son, to go into the "far country" of lost human existence. It reveals that this compassionate "going out" and self-giving, this "courteous homeliness," is who God is, is God's "kind."

One is reminded of the lines from *Babette's Feast*: "See! that which we have chosen is given us, and that which we have refused is, also and at the same time, granted us. Ay, that which we have rejected is poured upon us abundantly. For mercy and truth have met together, and righteousness and bliss have kissed one another!"[1] In grace, God is extravagant, prodigal, and, by all human accounting: a foolhardy steward. God gives the prodigal child what she requests and, when she loses it, gives it to her all over again. Nothing is held back from the child who stays at home either, even when she protests the generosity of God.[2] God gives—and keeps giving.[3] This is the divine economy, *God's* housekeeping. For, in Bernard's words, "His *very nature* is to be good, to show mercy

---

[1] Isak Dineson, *Babette's Feast and Other Anecdotes of Destiny* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 40. From General Lowenhielm's speech.

[2] On Julian's and Barth's reading, there is no way to figure the elder son as the reprobate.

[3] This is the central insight of Kathryn Tanner's theology, e.g., see her discussion of "God's kingdom of unconditional giving" in *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 65.

always and to spare."[4] "Grace is God," writes Julian (63.8). Barth similarly concludes, "grace is the very essence of the being of God. Grace is itself properly and essentially divine…God Himself is it… His whole being…is simply grace" (II/1, 356, 358).

In Jesus Christ—the "mid-person" of the Trinity (Julian), God in God's "second way of being" (Barth)—the eternal prodigality of God is manifest. On the way to this conclusion, I began by laying the groundwork for engaging parable or metaphorized narrative in general and the Parable of the Prodigal Son in particular in the context of Julian's and Barth's theologies (chapters one and two). I then set Barth's Christological exegesis alongside Julian's example (the first portions of chapters three and five) and, finally, I showed their theological applications of the parable on three planes: reconciliation or atonement, election, and divinity or triunity (the second portions of chapters three and five in addition to chapters four and six). Throughout, I have argued that Julian's creative interaction with the Parable of the Prodigal prefigures Barth's, that his later reading also helps shed light on hers, and that both invite us to consider the intertextual nexus of biblical images and narratives that legitimately produce such a Christological reading *from* the Lukan parable.

Reading Julian and Barth together uncovers many other sites for comparison and contrast. For example, in light of their interpretations of the parable, it would be interesting to consider further their pre- and post-historical-critical scriptural reading practices, the character of divine judgment or "deeming" (as wrathful and/or restorative), the origins and impact of gendered language and images for God, the relationship between narrative and concept in theological method, "unnature" as a third term in the interplay of nature and grace, the ordering of salvation before creation and its relationship

---

[4] Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon 36 in *On the Song of Songs*, 179. Emphasis added.

to the universalistic scope of Christ's recapitulation of Adamic humanity, the question of what the concept of processions can mean or where it can be located in view of the eternal identity of Son with humankind, the ambiguous son/servant motif in scripture and its significance for assessing theological renderings of the terms, the doctrinal implications of conceiving divine love as eros (Julian) instead of agape (Barth), and, especially, the various ethical and anthropological applications of their Christological interpretations of the parable.

In conclusion, however, I am simply going to draw out four threads that have been interwoven in the preceding chapters. The first two concern the specific doctrinal and ethical implications of Julian's and Barth's Christological renderings of the parable. The second two are related to parable as a form of theology.

I. Theology as "Theanthropology"

In offering the Parable of the Prodigal Son as the condensation of the whole of the Gospel and, indeed the whole of theology, Julian and Barth resist separating the thought of God from the thought of salvation, and therefore from the world, humanity, and sin. In view of her "wonderful example of a lorde that hath a servant," Julian explains how Christ's human life, being "knit" to him, forms a knot "so suttel…that it is oned into God" such that that humankind itself be "knit in this knot, and oned in this oning" (53.30). Julian construes the at-one-ment between God and humanity in Christ as one of dwelling together and indwelling one another, of being-at-home-with-and-in one another. A "suttel knot" is a "love knot"—a nuptial symbol—but it is also a paradox, puzzle, or

mystery.[5] This elemental "oning" of humanity into God is an act of love that scandalizes thought. Theology attempts to get behind it to God alone and apart. However, as Barth says in *The Humanity of God*, theology can no longer be the "doctrine of God" only; it is always "theanthropology," the doctrine of God and humanity together.[6] Why? First, God cannot be thought alone or apart because Jesus is the primary *medium* of the revelation of God and, further, *is* himself the revelation of God. (This is a basic assertion of both Julian's and Barth's readings.) Second, the human can no longer be thought alone or apart from God because the humanity of the human is defined in this one who is also with God in the beginning. Third, both are bound together in that what Christ reveals is the *humanity of God*—or, in Julian's language, that God's kindness (essential nature) is kindness (kinship or fellowship with humankind).

Of course, Julian and Barth make these points from within different ontological frameworks. Julian works within a Neo-platonic substantialist or essentialist ontology, Barth within a post-Hegelian actualist ontology. Julian seems to affirm something like an *analogia entis*, a substantial bond and likeness between God and humankind by virtue of creation—hence her free use of the language of kinship.[7] Incarnation only reinforces and elevates the creational bond. Barth would be wary of the kind of substantial union by virtue of creation that Julian describes. Yet he translates what in her theological milieu is spoken of as "mystical union" or "participation in God" in terms of "covenantal *fellowship*."[8] Fellowship, being-at-home-with, is "in the beginning" for Barth, as kinship

---

[5] Watkins and Jenkins, 294.

[6] Barth, *The Humanity of God*, 9.

[7] At the same time, it could be argued that she does not make her analogy on the basis of creation strictly speaking since she clearly does not understand creation apart from the Son's own incarnation. In that sense, her account of the relationship between God and humanity is as utterly Christological as Barth's.

[8] While Barth acknowledges that a "mystical vocabulary…can hardly be avoided," when it comes to our participation in the dying and rising of Christ (I/1, 222), he tends to mistake mysticism as having to do with

is for Julian. Despite their different ontological resources, their resulting visions of the primordial divine-human relationship are richly resonant.

The thoroughness of their commitments to theology as "theanthropology" is evident in that even in reflecting on the Trinity "before the creation of the world," they do not (or, at least, aspire not to) envision God without humanity. As Barth maintains, "at no level or time can we have to do with God without having also to do with this human" (IV/2, 33, rev.). For "God alone is God. But God is not alone." We must "proceed from the simple fact that in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, God and [humanity] *meet*, and therefore are really *together*." In fact, Barth says, "we have to use an even stronger expression than this, and speak of God being *one with* humanity."[9] In Jüngel's paraphrase, there is "no non-human God."[10] Thus the methodological premise of "theanthropology" helps protect the ontological claim—God and humankind are eternally "knit" together in Jesus Christ—and, concomitantly, its soteriological assurance: humans are "oned" into God in this "oning," "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). As Spearing says of Julian's image of the Son crowned with the humanity with the Father, "At the very centre of Julian's vision is a God inseparable from man and woman: transcendent in some sense, yes, but unable to set aside the bodily kinship he has chosen with his creatures."[11] Trying to think God and humanity apart threatens the very fabric of grace

---

"an indefinable and ultimately unknown divine somewhat, which stands over us" (*Outline*, 89). For an extended treatment of this theme in Barth's thought, see Neder, *Participation in Christ*. For an analysis of the Christological basis of Barth's understanding of the *analogia*, see Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth."

[9] Quote by Busch, 280, n. 85. From Barth's 1937-1938 Gifford Lectures IV.1-2, "The Knowledge of God and the Service of God."

[10] John Thompson, *Christ in Perspective: Christological Perspectives in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1978), 102. Extending Barth's train of thought, Jüngel uses the phrase "keine Meschenlogiskeit Gottes," in *Unterwegs zur Sache: Theologische Bemerkungen* (Münich: Christian Kaiser, 1972), 384.

[11] Spearing, "Introduction," xxxi.

and gives rise to such "dark speculations" as are evident, for example, in the older

Augustinian-Reformed variety of supralapsarian double predestination that Barth rejects.

Unsurprisingly, theological conundrums arise when speaking of God's love for

humankind as "basic," "primal," or originary. (We see this, for example, when Barth is

pushed to assert the Son's eternal subordination and when his detractors, distinguishing

too sharply between the immanent and economic being of God, risk splitting the

personhood of Christ.) However, despite the attendant ontological complications,

"theanthropology" can still serve as a methodological limit. Minimally, Julian and

Barth's conviction that the God we are given to know is never without (this eternal love

for) the world sets up two significant guardrails for theological reflection, namely: 1) it is

a distraction to consider God strictly *in se* (even if one suspects there is such a thing), and

2) to be human is fundamentally to be seen by God in Christ as a beloved child. The first

guardrail does not necessarily imply an apophatic move (although one could take that

route); rather, it only requires an intentional bracketing off, or at least a decentering, in

dogmatics, of the question of who or what God is apart from God's revelation in Jesus

Christ.[12]

II. Being-Seen-in-Christ as Ethical Imperative

With respect to the second "guardrail," theanthropology bears ethical import as

well. In her "two domes" motif as well as her Example of the Lord and Servant, Julian's

concern with how God sees is bound up with the desire to learn to see as God sees. She

wishes to reeducate human vision with respect to itself, to help it see itself as God does,

---

[12] I think this includes a bracketing off many of the solutions we find to the question of "how" God can become human "without changing," particularly if these solutions involve speculating about a more original basis in God than the loving-kindness that has appeared in the savior (Titus 3:4).

through the eyes of love and not rejection. This requires a thorough reimagining of fallen

humanity before God. The Example of the Lord and Servant, as well as her subsequent

reflection on the inclusive love of the Trinity, provides a new image for meditation.[13] As

Julian presents it, this re-visioning is not optional—it is not simply unnecessary to see

oneself judged guilty—rather it is an essential moment in reconciliation—it is no longer

permissible to see oneself through the lens of sinful human judgment.[14] Included in the

antidote to sin is the exclusion of any self-judgment that contradicts God's gracious

judgment.[15] So at the heart of Julian's text there is more than a logical contradiction

between human sin and divine love. There is something given in addition to the hope of

an eschatological resolution in a mysterious "great deed." Salvation, for Julian, is not all

present blindness and eschatological delay. There is an imperative, something to do, or

rather to receive: a new vision of being human, one mediated by the "otherwise

beholding" of God's providential, benevolent judgment. For Julian "to see spiritually" is,

in McGill's words, "to see from within the body of Christ, as the locus of all there is in a

place where all can be incorporated." It is only from this inclusive perspective that the

human "is capable of seeing itself as Christ sees it," as it really is.[16]

---

[13] This is particularly clear in light of Julian's background of affective spirituality and the practice of meditation on the suffering of Christ. The Example of the Lord and Servant is the narrative impress of the cross, an interpretation of it, and a new picture upon which to focus.

[14] In between plague outbreaks, Julian would have been familiar with the religious argument that the symptoms of sickness are an outward sign of sin and should be received as a deserved punishment. Against this sort of simplistic theodicy (in which God is justified through victim-blaming), Julian argues not only that visible suffering is *not* a sign of divine wrath but that God does not vindicate Godself on humanity at all. See Baker, *Vision to Book*, 83f.

[15] In my view, Julian implicates the church's theology in the perpetuation of sinful self-accusation.

[16] McGill, 89.

Not unlike Julian, Barth's understanding of election and atonement leads him to describe faith as not believing in one's own rejection.[17] This undertone can be obscured in Barth's account of human vocation, which lays a heavier stress on obedience, service, and discipleship.[18] In a number of ways, it appears that Julian and Barth move in opposite directions here.[19] However, as Barth writes in his doctrine of election,

> faith in the divine predestination as such and per se means faith in the non-rejection of [humanity], or disbelief in its rejection. [Humanity] is not rejected. In God's eternal purpose it is God Himself who is rejected in His Son. The self-giving of God consists, the giving and sending of His Son is fulfilled, in the fact that He [God] is rejected in order that we might not be. (II/2, 167)

This is the basis for any human response to God. God's definitive word to humans is: "In Jesus Christ, thou, too, art not rejected—for He has borne thy rejection—but elected" (322). As I have noted, concepts like wrath, judgment, punishment, accusation, and so on figure much more prominently in Barth's rhetoric and theology than in Julian's. At the

---

[17] Barth commends self-accusation at multiple points as the appropriate attitude of the human before God. While Barth offers a fuller picture of sin (as pride, sloth, and falsehood) than is common for pre-21st c. (privileged, male) theologians, he is still fairly preoccupied with prideful human assertion (even in his discussion of sloth). This corresponds to his emphasis on human fault. Julian does not deny the reality of sin or human responsibility for it, but her tone is more pastoral. She assumes her audience practices self-accusation, perhaps even to an unhealthy degree—hence her attention to the fact that "beloved" is first and last word of God toward the human. This is a difference of accent and one that may be explained by things like social situation, gendered experience, and prevailing theological attitudes at specific points in history.

[18] Throughout §74, Barth relies on the narrative of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, but this time not to describe the Son's gracious rewriting of human history. Instead, applying the story anthropologically, he actually commends the younger son's confession to the father ("I am not worthy…") as proper to his fallenness as well as his humanity. Obviously, this reading of the parable runs counter to the one I offered in chapter two. It also poses a problem for Barth's own thinking about the divine establishment of human agency as well as his understanding of humanity as co-humanity with Christ. For a criticism of Barth's difficult finally affirming the goodness of human action and even obedience see Neder (86).

[19] While Julian moves from the pairs lord/servant in the example to father/son in God to mother/child between God and humankind, Barth moves from the father/son in the parable to a structure of lord/servant in God as well as between God and humankind. These trajectories are telling. Barth translates sonship into subjection while Julian renders the servant a beloved child. There are multiple similarities in the ways they describe the appropriate human response to the condescension of God, but their difference in emphasis is palpable.

same time, over against the caricature of Reformed theology in which God is "everything" and humanity is "nothing," Barth insists that in Christ we have "the glory of God *and* the glory of humanity."[20] Inasmuch as God sees all people in Christ on account of the atonement, he says, "we may, and should, understand ourselves as seen by God in Him."[21] We must continue to affirm that "sin cannot and does not change our fundamental nature as beings that are essentially loved."[22] That means believing the ultimate word of God's grace that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ (that is—*all*).

Conformity to the will of God is conformity to the "vision" of God, which is to say, to God's perspective, or "counter-perspective," on human beings.[23] The ethical outworking of the atonement as being-(seen)-in-Christ requires reimagining oneself (and others) beheld by God as a beloved child, as the father in the parable sees his son. It is on *this* basis that gratitude, openness, as well as a certain kind of service and obedience are appropriate human responses to God's lordship and "summons" (Barth).[24] Julian's and Barth's texts appear to be crafted to effect this re-visioning, and this draws attention to the fact that ethical formation is intrinsic to the writing and reading of theology. I have

---

[20] Barth, Lecture IV.1, "The Knowledge of God and the Service of God."

[21] Barth, *Outline*, 91.

[22] Kenneth Oakes, "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth," 611. See *CD* III/2, 319.

[23] Of course, on the surface of it, Barth's own "divine command" ethics shows little (material) similarity with what I am saying here. I am only noting that, *formally*, his assertion "the eternal will of God is humankind" (II/2, 167) bears ethical import and could be taken in the direction I am suggesting. As Barth's editors remark in the preface to II/2, "The chapter on the divine command follows naturally from that on election, for the predestinating will of God is necessarily His will for the object of His love. Here then, in his doctrine of God, Barth lays the foundation for a theological ethics covering the whole area of man's freedom and self-determination as one called to be a covenant-partner of God. In virtue of the election of grace, his existence is not left to itself, but adopted and assumed into the existence of God in Jesus Christ. A general ethics is impossible, because it attempts to ignore the election of grace. It can be attempted only in a sinful self-isolation from God" (II/2, vii). But in Julian's assessment, it is sin itself, or a sinful theology of sin, that causes us to image the divine-human relationship in terms of subjection or "bondage." *That* would be the "general ethics," that has not perceived the particular quality of God's "deeming" in Christ.

[24] The keyword "summons" pops up throughout *Church Dogmatics*, but see, for example, III/2.

mentioned that Julian's text in particular unfolds as a performative heuristic, enfolding its readers into another way of seeing themselves. (As I indicated in the introduction, this is a definitive feature of the narrative form of the form of *exempla* with which she works.) The same can be said of Barth's theology. In both cases, the use of the narrative form is integral to the effectiveness of their recruitment of readers into a new theological vision of reality. As Thompson remarks in connection with Barth's use of "theological narrative," this

> brings out the dimensions of wresting, of pulls and counter-pulls, quite well. It is a more originary literary form, remaining close to the rich texture, the *eros,* of human existence. It also combines, in varying degrees of energy, participation and distance in a manner quite appropriate again to Incarnation and redemption. As we follow along the path of the plot, as we must in narrative, we actually experience the temporal drama. We are drawn into it… We participate, in other words. But participation is not simply identity. Participation also presupposes distance and difference from the event and the characters. We must make a response, experience our own pulls and counter-pulls, decide to follow along or resist.[25]

Thompson observation underlines 1) the participatory force of narrative, and 2) its appropriateness to the subject matter of Christology. This recalls certain claims about parable that arose in the first couple of chapters, which I shall revisit in the final sections below. For now, I simply want to note the inherently ethical nature of such textual participation and Julian and Barth's apparent attunement to this. Their theological

---

[25] W. Thompson, 90.

retellings of the parable (perhaps like any good instance of theology) have a parabolic quality about them. I will clarify the nature of this parabolic quality in what follows.

III. Parable as Phenomenology

I have integrated the phenomenological language of bracketing and reduction into my analysis because, as I argued in chapter two, 1) it is already latent in so much parable scholarship, and 2) it illuminates the dynamics of reading or hearing the parables. Parable is a narrative form that prompts a conversion of the gaze.[26] Its metaphoricity takes place between the text and the world (Ricoeur), between the thumbnail-of-a-story and its lived reception.[27] It belongs to parable that it illuminates a gap between expectation and fulfillment (Alter) and invites its hearers into a space where their prejudgments, and habits may be "contravened" (Husserl). In other words, it integrates those before the text into its world, reversing the order of perception and exposing the reader or hearer. In this sense, I would suggest, parable functions like a *narrative icon*.

Inverting ordinary pictorial perspective, it protrudes into the world in an incisive way. Rather than drawing viewers into an enclosed spectacle (/\), the perspectival lines of a painted icon run the other way (\/). The center of the icon thus appears to take aim; it forms the point of a gaze, a gaze that issues as a counter-judgment and also call.[28] As

---

[26] This is not exclusively true of parable. Other narratives and visual forms can have the same effect. What is peculiar to parable is its density or compactness. To speak at all, it must say more than it is saying. Because of this, it is more clearly an instance of metaphorized narrative, or rather it explicitly asks to be metaphorized in the direction of the world. Again, by "metaphorized" here I only mean the narrative is made to speak of one thing in terms that are suggestive of another (Soskice). Far from belittling the (plan or "literal") import of the story, this is how the story grows.

[27] As I pointed out in chapter one, this "lived reception" is a matter of the "spiritual meaning" of the text (de Lubac) which often gets dismissed as "allegorizing" (Funk *et al.*) but the impulse belongs to the text itself (Ricoeur).

[28] Concerning a phenomenology of the icon, see the work of Jean-Luc Marion, for example, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), esp. chapter one, "The Idol

before the icon the viewer is viewed, so before the parable the reader is read, questioned, constituted. This phenomenon is utterly common to the reading or viewing experience; phenomenological language simply helps us understand it.[29]

The Parable of the Prodigal Son provides a paradigmatic case in which the form of parable—its ability to generate a counter-gaze—corresponds neatly with the content of the parable—its narration of two economies of value and their attendant perspectives. At the center of the story we encounter the compassionate gaze of the father (v. 20), directed toward both sons, a hospitable affirmation that they are "no longer slaves but children and if children then heirs" (Gal. 4:7). In this parable, the "natural attitude"—which I have identified as the sons' servile self-perception—is narrated only in order to be bracket and excluded, to clear space for the counter-perception of God which emanates from the "seeing and having compassion" of the parabolic father.

In addition to the preceding points, another reason I have drawn upon phenomenology as a resource is because 3) it helps clarify the nature of Julian's and Barth's engagement with the parable as a kind of performative re-parabolizing of the

---

and the Icon;" *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), esp. chapter five, "The Icon or the Endless Hermeneutic;" and *The Crossing of the Visible*, trans. James K. A. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004). Marion notes that due to its inversion of pictorial perspective, the icon shows a gaze that "sees more than is seen" and thus "looks at, outside of the icon and in front of it" the one in prayer [*orant*] (*Crossing the Visible*, 22).

[29] In addition to the examples from parable theory given in the first two chapters, consider the description of the "word of God" (the Hebrew Bible) in Hebrews 4:12, as "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow…able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Specifically with respect to aesthetic experience, the final lines of Rainer Maria Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo," come to mind: "…for here there is no place / that does not see you. You must change your life." From *Ahead of All Parting: The Selected Poetry and Prose of Rainer Maria Rilke*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Modern Library, 1995). Tomas Tranströmer often alludes to such inversions of the gaze, for example, in his poem "The Crossing-Place"—"I get the idea that the street can see me"—and "Prelude"—"Two truths drawn nearer each other. One moves from the inside, one more from outside / and where they meet we have a chance to see ourselves. / He who notices what is happening cries despairingly: 'Stop! / Whatever you like, if only I avoid knowing myself.'" From *The Great Enigma: New Collected Poems*, trans. Robin Fulton (New York: New Directions Publishing), 144, 3. As Marion says, selfhood consists "more originarily" in an "I am affected" than in an "I think" (*Being Given*, 250).

biblical text. In re-parabolizing the story, in reanimating it as "other-speaking" and making it speak otherwise for us again, Julian and Barth recreate the parenthesizing and focusing effect of the parable as they each encounter it. Julian and Barth each bracket off in their retellings of the parable a range of theological conventions concerning human and divine being—for example, that the two might be thought apart from one another or, what is the same, apart from the history of Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection. Not only do their expansive theological retellings reveal the specific work of the parable on their own thinking about God, they also repeat that work on another level, leading their readers back to the loving-kindness of God—the "courteous" and "motherly" Lord, the Lord who serves. For Julian and Barth, the Parable of the Prodigal Son is a parable of "the kingdom" inasmuch as it is a parable of *God*, the kingdom in the person of Jesus Christ (IV/2, 184). The parable is "about" God's love, yes, but as they retell it: *God is God's love*—God is Grace.[30]

IV. Parable as Christology: Toward "Parabolic Theology"

Julian's and Barth's engagements with the Parable of the Prodigal Son encourage us to see that New Testament parable is itself a mode of theology, and one that is especially suited for Christological discourse. Its form corresponds not only to "what" Christ is (divine and human) but also to what he does (atonement and reconciliation), to that sequence of action (crucifixion-resurrection) in which, in Frei words, he is "most of all himself."[31] Narrative-parable—especially in the hands of theologians like Julian and Barth—commends itself as an appropriate and perhaps even irreducible form for

---

[30] See Julian (63.8) and Barth (II/1, 356, 358).
[31] I put "what" in quotation marks because the point is precisely *not* to think of Christ as two "whats." Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, 2.

communicating the meaning of Jesus Christ and the atonement.[32] This is so for several

reasons:

First, parable allows us to speak of two things at once and as one. This is

extremely helpful when it comes to narrating the hypostatic union. (And it is absolutely

brilliant that Julian and Barth both intuit this without feeling the need to explain as

much.) The form of parable frees us from having to try to talk out of both sides of our

mouths at once—something that seems to bother Barth earlier in *Church Dogmatics*,

where he says,

> It is impossible to listen at one and the same time to the two statements that Jesus
>
> of Nazareth is the Son of God and that the Son of God is Jesus of Nazareth. One
>
> hears either the one or the other or one hears nothing. When the one is heard, the
>
> other can be heard only indirectly, in faith. (I/1, 180)

I would suggest that Barth's later use of the parable form constitutes a methodological

discovery that enables him to, at least partially, overcome the "onesidedness" of

theological propositions he describes here (181). It facilitates a bifocality befitting the

subject matter and capacitates the narration of multiple histories, identities, and realities

in one *concretum*.

In this speech form we have an apt parallel to the ontological reality of

incarnation and atonement.[33] (I will say more about this momentarily.) This is remarkably

advantageous in Barth's case, since he deliberately supplants talk of (static) being or

---

[32] Again, parable, even realistic narrative-parable, is be distinguished from narrative *per se* in that it is inherently metaphorized or dynamized in the direction of significations beyond the text. In this sense, any narrative and in fact any history can *become* a parable.

[33] As Gerhard Ebeling claims, "The Parable is the form of the language of Jesus which corresponds to the incarnation." See Ebeling, *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung: Eine Untersuchung zu Luther's Hermeneutik* (2nd ed., Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962), 108.

nature with talk of (actualist) history. Retelling the person and work of Jesus Christ through a parabolic or metaphorized story—and not just any story, but one told by Jesus, embedded in the encompassing Gospel narrative, reverberating within his life—enables Barth to retain the logic or pattern of Chalcedon while minimizing the language of *physis* and maximizing a sense of the eventfulness of divine and human cooperation in Jesus Christ.

Second, as an inherently excessive or productive form of speech, parable is uniquely capable of narrating the "how much more" of grace. As I pointed out in my first chapter, the comparison (*parabola*) made in a narrative-parable involves a substitution or exchange (*metaphora*)—but one that is unavoidably catachrestic, rather than synonymous or proportionate. Parable, as a metaphorized narrative or narrativized metaphor, is not simply a matter of redescription and comparison and is never strictly substitutable for so-called "words proper" or propositions.[34] As Ricoeur, Jüngel, and others are quick to point out, there is an aporia or "misappropriation" at the heart of metaphorical predication and this is not a deficiency but precisely that which enables language to articulate "new dimensions of reality," *more than* was previously actual (thus granting priority to the category "possibility").[35] In view of this, grace (content) and parable (form) go hand-in-hand. Intuiting as much, both Julian and Barth coordinate the excess of the lost son's

---

[34] Ricoeur speaks of parable as "metaphorized narrative." Jüngel means approximately the same thing when (somewhat less precisely) calls parable "an extended metaphor" and metaphor "an abbreviated parable." Jüngel thinks the only difference is that "a parable narrates while metaphor coalesces the narrative in a single word" (or name). But a "narrative structure is also immanent in the metaphor," if we understand metaphor as "the epiphora [transfer] according to analogy" (Ibid., 289-290). This may shed light on Barth's regard for the "name" of Jesus and its intelligibility only through narration.

[35] To reiterate the findings of the first chapter, Soskice disagrees with the assumption that metaphors are primarily a mode of comparison or redescription using two known referents. She asserts instead, "the interesting thing about metaphor, or at least about some metaphors, is that they are used not to redescribed but to disclose for the first time" (*Metaphor and Religious Language*, 89). Metaphor not only communicates what "words proper" (Hobbes) cannot but also produces new referents. There is much more to say about this linguistic phenomenon. See, for example, Jüngel's excursus on analogy, metaphor, and parable in *God as the Mystery of the World*, 281f.

identity with Romans 5:20 and the beneficial asymmetry of the "exchange" of grace.[36] As

the "much more" of the meaning of the parables invites inquiry, so too the divine

disproportion between transgression and grace implicates us through wonder.

Third, extrapolating somewhat from Julian and Barth, we might also point

specifically to the analogy structure of parable as a feature that commends it for

articulating the similarity in the midst of difference of the Word made flesh. In view of its

"analogy-structure," Jüngel suggests parable corresponds to "the certainty of a God who

is human in his divinity."[37] Perceiving that Barth's later concern about the *anologia entis*

is that it does "not do justice to the difference" between God and the world precisely

because it overlooks "the *nearness* of God," Jüngel inverts the analogical rule of a

"greater dissimilarity in so great a likeness," rooted as it is in the theory "the divinity of

God excludes humanity" which Barth rejects.[38] On the basis of the atonement, he asserts

instead, "a still *greater similarity* in the midst of a great dissimilarity." The generative

identity-in-difference of (inverted) analogical language intimately corresponds to the

actuality of God's greater nearness to the human other in Jesus Christ.[39] While Julian is

not thinking hermeneutically in quite the same way, this point is consonant with the

tensive image that emerges in her work, given: 1) her occasional inability to "see" any

difference between God and the "soul," and 2) her motif of "wonning"/"oning" or

---

[36] Julian, 29.10-13; Barth, IV/1, 68, 82. Ricoeur and Jüngel both make this theological link with the form of parable.

[37] Jüngel understands metaphor (including parable) as analogy by *epiphora* or transfer. But metaphor is not, as Soskice points out, exactly the same as the "middle-way" of analogy. The primary difference, as she sees it, is that analogy can be a "literal" form of speech and typically "stretches" usage between known quantities whereas metaphor as "figurative" speech based on a "model" establishes new uses that have the power to create new referents (Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 66). Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 289, 280.

[38] Ibid., 280. On Barth and the *analogia entis* see chapter five, note 19.

[39] For Barth as well as Jüngel the identity between God and the human in Christ does not obliterate but preserves difference. Jüngel writes, "Identity in the sense of the removal of every differences knows nothing of nearness…Identity as the ending of distance without nearness is the establishment of absolute distance" (Ibid., 288). The "identity" they (and I) have in mind is clearly narratival not mathematical.

dwelling-in-unity, where "dwelling" is clearly a being-with or being-inside predicated upon irreducible difference.

It might be inferred from the preceding points that parable is simply a linguistic form that is conveniently fitted to the content of incarnation and atonement. However, a fourth reason parable is particularly fitting for Christological discourse is, as Jüngel claims, "one can and must say Jesus is *the parable* [Gleichnis] *of God*."[40] The assertion that Jesus is "a parable" might mean any number of things, and its coherence is not self-evident.[41] Two interrelated points bring definition to the sense in which Jesus may rightly be called "the parable of God."

The phrase draws attention to 1) the way *a life* itself can become a kind of "other-speaking" (see chapter one): a life, a history, a person can become or produce a "text" in which one thing is articulated in ways that are suggestive—and even reformative—of something else. Of course, this means that, against the common historical-critical division between the speech and life of Jesus, we must understand parable theologically not only in terms of a genre of fictional story telling but also in terms of a life lived. There is no clear line between story and life. This is not simply because of the basic narrativity of human existence and the structure that is brought to a life in its retelling. It is also because, conceived as craft, it already involves some measure intentional construction

---

[40] Ibid., 288-289. As Jüngel says here, "The *son* is the *personal parable of the father*."

[41] While I generally agree with Soskice's understanding of metaphor and the problems of simply extending it to parable, I disagree with her assertion that calling Jesus the "parable of God" is incoherent for the reasons enumerated below (See Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 56). This possibility is ruled out by the premise that metaphors and parables are linguistic realities. Soskice thinks it is a category mistake to refer to a non-verbal reality, such as an image or person as "a parable." However, as the Word of God, Jesus Christ is in fact to be regarded as a speech act. That's precisely the point for someone like Jüngel: the person of Jesus Christ is the *verbum dei*. On that basis, even a strictly linguistic definition of metaphor and parable may be applied to him. He can actually be understood as a "parable" in a literal way. As the Word he is God's self-interpretation, God's story about Godself, and it happens to be a twofold story—which is to say, fundamentally parabolic. (I also happen to think things can be understood "as metaphors" metaphorically. That only involves speaking of things as though they have those qualities otherwise usually restricted to linguistic instances. I see no trouble with that.)

and authorship.[42] One may parabolize one's own life—symbolically, as did the Hebrew prophets, or definitively and ontologically, as God does in Christ.[43] For this reason, Ricoeur is absolutely right to reject the critical separation between Jesus' speech—from which the parables are taken as the most "authentic" tradition—and his life—which is analogously crafted as a story, a retelling, a kind of "other-speaking."[44] Jesus "curates" or "crafts" himself, offering his very life as an iconic reimaging and textual retelling. In himself, he represents and rewrites a certain story—that of the identity of the people of God—by way of another medium: that of his own being and action. In this same lived retelling, a similar dynamic is at work on another level. As God's "self-interpretation" (Barth), Jesus is also God's speaking otherwise about Godself, God's "commandeering" of a wholly other (human) medium to communicate the divine reality.[45] He is the *verbum dei* in—and as an alien form.

That is to say, to speak of *Jesus* as "a parable" is also 2) a way of articulating the ontologically irreducible *doubleness* of his existence. Jesus Christ is the "twofold (hi)story" of God with humanity and humanity with God. The prevalence of these categories—narrative, history, event, action, and identity—in Barth's theology has been recognized and developed upon for many years now.[46] While much contemporary

---

[42] See, for example, Alisdair MacIntyre on the narrative of a life and "co-authorship" in *After Virtue:* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2007), 213.

[43] See CD IV/3.1 on the similarity and dissimilarity of Jesus and the prophets (and on the prophetic role of Israel as a whole).

[44] Think, for example, of Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well. Is this "only" history? Is it not also a type-scene and thus a lived parable? Are the triple parables of lostness in Luke 15 not embedded in what must be seen as the parable of Jesus' prophetic and highly symbolic eating and drinking with sinners?

[45] Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming*, 26.

[46] See, for example, Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, Harper and Row, 1957); David Ford, *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the "Church Dogmatics"* (Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lan, 1981); George Hunsinger, "Beyond Literalism and Expressivism: Karl Barth's Hermeneutical Realism," in *Modern Theology* 3 (1987), 209-223; David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975); Ronald F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as*

"narrative theology" implicitly assumes as much, it is worth underlining again that the

"narrative identity" of Jesus Christ recounted in the Gospels is specifically marked by a

certain twofoldness, by a paradoxically integrative movement in two directions at once.

This "double movement" (*Doppelbewegung*) is unified in a name, which can only be

narrated. We might speak, then, not simply of "narrative theology" but more specifically

of "parabolic theology." This is what I think we find in Julian's and Barth's theological

retellings of the parable. In reenacting both the form and content of the story, they keep

clearly before us that Jesus' own history has an intrinsically parabolic character—the

divine and human, thrown alongside one another, inextricably so.

If narrative theology enables us to say, "Jesus is his story," *parabolic theology*

stresses that in Jesus' story he is himself *and* another; God is God *with* and *as* another;

we our ourselves on through another.[47] Thus, in contrast to the notion of authenticity

upon which defenses of the absolute singularity of Jesus' identity depend, parable forces

us to consider not the question of being oneself (*autos*) but of not quite being oneself, of

clothing and identifying oneself otherwise, of being seen and known otherwise, of

becoming another.[48] It was not an "an inalienable necessity" for Jesus Christ

> only to be God, and therefore only to be different from the creature… He was not
>
> committed to any such "only." In addition…He could be like man…he had this

---

Narrated Promise (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985); Kathryn Tanner, "Theology and the Plain Sense," *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation*, ed. Garrett Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); and Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, eds., *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

[47] Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, 42.

[48] See Frei, I certainly do *not* wish to deny this claim (about Jesus' singularity) or the oppose arguments that support it. I only point out here that parabolic theology might help us articulate something else, which is not included in the usual emphasis of narrative theology on unrepeatable personal identity. We have a certain paradox in the person of Christ, the unsubstitutable substitution.

other possibility…in taking it upon Himself to be Himself in a way quite other than that which corresponds and belongs to His form as God. (IV/1, 180)

Correspondingly, humanity finds itself outside itself, "comes to itself" when performed aright in and by this other's twofold story.

Jesus' own parabolic speech is thus derivative of and must be understood from his being as the self-communication of God.[49] This brings us back to the function of parable as phenomenological reduction. It is Jesus himself who leads back to the triune love of God—to our Mother, as Julian see it, or to the obedient Son, on Barth's account. In Julian's language, "to se this overpassing noblete" in the parable—that is, of the Son's power or lordship expressed "courteously" in his "homeliness" and nearness—"was my understanding led into God" (52.40-41). As Barth says, we find God where *God* "has sought us," and God "seeks us," the lost, "in His Word"—by becoming, in him, "lost and found" (II/1, 11). Jesus' life is to be read as told—as the story of God Godself—and in such a way the communication is indispensible to the communicated. For his reality is fundamentally implicated in what he discloses (hence the binitarian and ultimately

---

[49] I realize that the "*self*-revelation" of God can be seen as a peculiarly modern concept, of which there is little evidence before German Idealism and particularly Hegel. However, it is not as if it is the case that prior to Hegel there was no notion of God's revelation in Jesus Christ as *self*-disclosure and *self*-giving, as the presentation and communication of God's very being, will, heart, mind, and so on. Self-revelation is broadly used by Hilary of Poitiers (*On the Trinity*, VII, 16) and Pseudo-Dionysius ("Divine Names," XIV). Bonaventure speaks of God manifesting Godself (*Sentences* 16.1.1) and, of course, contemplation of the beatific vision includes the idea (e.g., Aquinas, *De caritas* 13). Self-revelation may be inferred from Aquinas' claim that "it belongs to goodness to communicate itself" (and hence the "fittingness" of the incarnation) (*ST* P. 3, Q. 1, art. 1). Calvin considers all revelation self-revelation or self-disclosure (e.g., *Institutes* I, V.1). Admittedly, the concept of *revelation in Christ* is more prevalent than the phrases like "self-revelation." But consider the logic of Julian's text: moving from the cross, to the Son's relationship to the Father, to the love of the Trinity. Jesus Christ does not simply lead away from himself, as if he were the medium for some other message. He *is* the message. He leads into God; and he is there in, with, and as God. God shows love and *is* the love that is shown. If revelation is not *self*-revelation, what is it? It is the revelation of God's saving decree/will (i.e., God's love). But what is the connection between God and God's will or between God's will and its execution in Jesus Christ? Is God God's love? Does the *manifestation* of God's love in fact communicate that *God is love*? In many "pre-modern" theologians there is evidence of a strong identity (if not necessarily to the same degree or via the same philosophical apparatus) between subject and content. Even in scripture, we have to reckon with the close relationship between the Word and the being of God.

trinitarian trajectory of theological reflection on Christ's identity). This raises the question of whether regarding Jesus as the history, story, or parable—that is, the *name*—of God may better correspond to the subject matter than metaphysical accounts of the hypostatic union and traditional interpretations of the Chalcedonian language "one person, two natures." Julian's example and Barth's exegesis point toward the same "pattern" of claims about *who* Christ is.[50] At minimum, the irreducibility of narrative-parable—which I think we encounter in both Julian's and Barth's engagement with the form—suggests that abstract or purely conceptual forms of theological reflection have an epexegetical rather than essential status.[51] As Barth himself says, classical categories are merely commentary on the Gospel condensed in the narrative nutshell "the Word became flesh" and its reiteration in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.[52]

---

[50] Sarah Coakley, "What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does it Not? Some Reflections on the Status and Meaning of the Chalcedonian View," *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*, eds. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall SJ, and Gerald O'Collins SJ, 160. For further discussion, see chapter six, note 12.

[51] *Pace* Hegel's ultimately negative assessment of "representation" in religion, sublated on the way to a fully actualized and concretized "concept" in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion Vol. III: The Consummate Religions* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998). See Barth on classical Christological categories as mere commentary on the condensed narrative of John 1:14 (IV/2, 66).

[52] See I/2, 132. Barth follows through with Calvin's purported but unachieved intention to bracket the question "What is God?" and focus on "what *sort* he is" as revealed thorough God's works (*Institutes*, I.III.2, my italics).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources, Karl Barth

Barth, Karl. *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik.* 4 Vols. in 13 parts. München: C. Kaiser/Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1932-67. ET: *Church Dogmatics*. Trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-75.

⸺ *Christliche Dogmatik.* München: Chr. Kaiser, 1927.

⸺ *Dogmatics In Outline.* Trans. G. T. Thomsom. New York: Harper, 1959.

⸺ *The Epistle to the Romans*. Trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns. London: Oxford University Press, 1968.

⸺ *The Humanity of God*. Trans. John Newton Thomas and Thomas Wieser. Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1960.

⸺ *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the Teaching of the Reformation*. Trans. J. L. M. Haire and Ian Henderson. The Gifford Lectures. Aberdeen, 1937-1938.

⸺ *The Word of God and the Word of Man*. Trans. Douglas Horton. New York: Harper, 1957.

Primary Sources, Julian of Norwich

Baker, Denise, trans. *The Showings of Julian of Norwich*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005.

Colledge, Edmund, and James Walsh, S.J. eds. *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*, 2 vols. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978, 1-33.

⸺ *Julian of Norwich: Showings*. Trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, S.J. New York: Paulist, 1978.

Spearing, Elizabeth, trans. *Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Divine Love*. London: Penguin, 1998.

Watson, Nicholas, and Jacqueline Jenkins, eds. *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and A Revelation of Love*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006.

Aers, David. "The Humanity of Christ: Reflections on Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*." *The powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture*. Eds. David Aers and Lynn Stanley. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996.

Ahlgren, Gillian T. W. "Julian of Norwich's Theology of *Eros*." *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 5.1 (Spring 2005), 37-53.

Almeida, Ivan. *L'Opérativité sémantique des récits paraboles: Sémiotique narrative et textuelle: Herméneutique du discours religieux*. Louvain: Peeters, 1978.

Anslem of Canterbury. *Opera omnia*. 6 vols. Ed. Francix Schmitt, O.S.B. Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1936-1961.

Ambrose of Milan. *Expositionis Lucam* VII. *Patrologia Latina* 15. Ed. Jacque-Paul Migne. Paris: Migne, 1844-1855.

Aristotle. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse.* Trans. George A. Kennedy Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

— *Poetics.* Trans. Malcolm Heath. New York: Penguin, 1997.

— *Physics*. Trans. David Bostock and Robin Waterfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*. 61 Vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Auerbach, Eric. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Trans. William R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953.

Augustine of Hippo. *Confessions.* Trans. Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

— *Contra adversarium legis et prophetarum. Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* 49. Ed. K.D. Daur. Belgium: Brepols, 1985.

— *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin*. Vol. 11. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1949. ET: *The First Catechetical Instruction* IV.8. Trans. Joseph P. Christopher. Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1962.

— *On Christian Doctrine*. Trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997.

— *The Trinity*. Trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. New York: New City Press, 2007.

— *Questionum Evangeliorum* II. *Patrologia Latina* 35. Ed. Jacque-Paul Migne. Paris: Migne, 1844-1855.

Baker, Denise. *Julian of Norwich's Showings: From Vision to Book*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Baker, Denise, and Sarah Salih. "Introduction." *Julian of Norwich's Legacy: Medieval Mysticism and Post-Medieval Reception*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *Mysterium Paschale*. Trans. Aidan Nichols, O.P. San Fancicsco: Ignatius Press, 1990.

— *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, Vol. V: The Last Act. Trans. Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatian Press, 1998.

Barthes, Roland. "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative." *New Literary History*, 6.2 (Winter 1975), 237-272.

Beardsley, Monroe. *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1958.

Bernard of Clairvaux. *On the Song of Songs II*. Vol. 3. of *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux.* Trans. Kilian Walsh, O.C.S.O.. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1983.

— "The Story of the King's Son." *The Parables & The Sentences*. Rrans. Michael Casey, O.C.S.O. and Francis Swietek. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2000.

Betz, John R. "Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analaogy of Being." 2 Parts. *Modern Theology* 21.3 (July 2005), 367-411, and 22.1 (Jan. 2006), 1-50.

Biddick, Kathleen. *The Typological Imaginary: Circumcision, Technology, History*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.

Black, Max. *In Models and Metaphors: studies in Language and Philosophy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962.

Bornkamm, Günther. *Jesus of Nazareth*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 196.

Bouchard, Larry. *Theater and Integrity: Emptying Selves in Drama, Ethics, and Religion*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011.

Boyarin, Daniel. *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Boyd, Richard. "Metaphor and Theory Change: What is 'Metaphor' a Metaphor for?" *Metaphor and Thought*. Ed. Andrew Ortony. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Brown, Frank Burch. *Transfiguration: Poetic Metaphor and the Languages of Religious Belief*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983.

Bruun, Mette B. *Parables: Bernard of Clairvaux's Mapping of Spiritual Topography*. The Netherlands: Brill, 2007.

Bultmann, Rudolf. *History of the Synoptic Tradition*. Trans. John Marsh. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1963.

Burnett, Richard. *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief Period*. Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 2001.

Busch, Eberhard. *Karl Barth: His Life From Letters and Autobiographical Texts*. Trans. John Bowden. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Jesus as Mother*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1982.

— *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*. New York: Zone Books, 1991.

Calvin, Jean. *Institutes of Christian Religion*. 2 Vols. Ed. John T. McNeill. Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006.

— *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke Vol. 1*. Vol. XVI of *Calvin's Commentaries*. Grand Rapids, Baker: 2003.

Campbell, Cynthia. "Imago Dei Reconsidered: Male and Female Together." *Journal for Preachers*, 4.2 (Lent 1981), 9-14.

Chadwick, Henry. *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement, and Origen*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966.

Childs, Brevard. *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. Minneapolis Fortress Press, 1993.

Coakley, Sarah. "Introduction—Gender, Trinitarian Analogies, and the Pedagogy of *The Song*," *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.

— *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002.

— "What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does it Not? Some Reflections on the Status and Meaning of the Chalcedonian View." *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*. Eds. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall S.J., and Gerald O'Collins S.J. Oxford, 2002. 143-163.

Cohen, Jean. *Structure du langue poétique*. Paris: Flammarion, 2009.

Colledge, Edmund, and James Walsh. "Editing Julian of Norwich's Revelations: A Progress Report." *Medieval Studies* 38 (1976), 404-427.

Colledge, Edmund. *The Medieval Mystics of England*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961.

Cousins, Ewert. "Fancis of Assisi: Christian Mysticism at the Crossroads," in S. Katz *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983. 163-190.

Crossan, John Dominic. *Cliffs of Fall: Paradox and Polyvalence In the Parables of Jesus*. New York: Seabury Press, 1980.

— *In Parables: the Challenge of the Historical Jesus*. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.

— *Raid on the Articulate: Comic Eschatology in Jesus and Borges*. New York: Harper & Row, 1976.

Cunningham, Mary Kathleen. *What is Theological Exegesis? Interpretation and Use of Scripture in Barth's Doctrine of Election*. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1995.

Danermark, Berth, et al., *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in the Social Sciences*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Davidson, Donald. "What Metaphors Mean." *On Metaphor*. Ed. Sheldon Sacks. Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Davies, Oliver. "Transformational Processes in the Work of Julian of Norwich and Mechtild of Magdeburg." *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992. 39-52.

Dawson, John David. *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2002.

De Lubac, Henri. *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*. Vol. 2. Trans. Mark Sebanc. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

— *Scripture in the Tradition.* Trans. Luke O'Neill. New York: Crossroad, 2000.

Derrett, J. Duncan M. *Law in the New Testament*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005.

— "The Parable of the Prodigal Son: Patristic Allegories and Jewish Midrashim." *Studia Patristica* 10, 219-24.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

— "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

— "The *Retrait* of Metaphor." *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*. Vol. 1. Eds. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth G. Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. 48-80.

— "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," *New Literary History* 6 (1974), 5-74.

Dilthey, Wilhelm. *Dilthey: Selected Writings*. Ed. H.P. Rickman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Dineson, Isak. *Babette's Feast and Other Anecdotes of Destiny*. New York: Vintage Books, 1988.

Dionysius Carthusianus. *Opera Omnia*. 42 vols. *Cura et labore monachorum sacri ordinis Cartusiensis favente Pont*. Max. Leone XIII. Tournai: Pratis, 1896-1935.

Dodd, Charles. *The Parables of the Kingdom*. New York: Scribner, 1961.

Donahue, John, S.J. *The Gospel in Narrative: Metaphor, Narrative, and Theology in the Synoptic Gospels*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988.

Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Dutton, Elisabeth. *Julian of Norwich: The Influence of Late-Medieval Devotional Compilations*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008.

Ebeling, Gerhard. *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung: Eine Untersuchung zu Luther's Hermeneutik* 2nd ed. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962.

— *Wort und Glaube*. Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1975. ET: *Word and Faith*. Trans. James Leitch. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963.

Fiddes, Paul. "The Status of Woman in the Thought of Karl Barth." *After Eve*. Ed. Janet M. Soskice. London: Collins Marshall Pickering, 1990. 138-153.

Fiebig, Paul. *The Parables of Jesus in Light of the Rabbinic Parables of the New Testament Period*. Tübigen: Mohr, 1912.

Ford, David. "Narrative in Theology," *British Journal of Religious Education* 4.3 (1982), 115-119.

Frei, Hans. *The Identity of Jesus Christ: the Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013.

— *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*. Eds. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957.

Fuchs, Enrst. *Marburger Hermeneutik*. Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1968.

— "The New Testament and the Hermeneutical Problem." *The New Hermeneutic*. Eds. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. Harper & Row: New York, 1964.

Funk, Robert. *Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology*. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.

— *Parables and Presence: Forms of the New Testament Tradition*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982.

— "Sauntering through the Parables," *Funk on Parables: Collected Essays*. Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 2006.

— "Saying and Seeing: Phenomenology of Language and the New Testament." *Journal of Bible and Religion* 34 (1966), 197-213.

— "The Old Testament in Parable: A Study of Luke 10:25-37." *Encounter* 26 (1965), 351-267.

Gignilliat, Mark. *Karl Barth and the Fifth Gospel: Barth's Theological Exegesis of Isaiah*. New York: Fordham, 2009.

Gilby, Thomas. "The Senses of Scripture." Appendix 12. *Summa Theologiae* Vol I. (Ia. I). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Goebel, Hans Theodor. "Trinitätslehre und Erwählungslehre bei Karl Barth: Eine Problemanzeige." *Wahrheit und Versöhnung: theologische und philosophische Beiträge zur Gotteslehre*. Eds. Deitrich Korsch and Harmut Ruddies. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerg Mohn, 1989.

Gollwitzer, Helmut. *Die Freude Gottes: Einführung in das Lukasevangelium*. Vol. 2. Studienreihe der Jungen Gemeinde, Heft 27-29. Berlin: Burckhardthaus-Verlag, 1941.

Goodman, Nelson. *Languages of Art*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1976.

Gorringe, Timothy. *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Grant, Jacquelyn. *White Women's Christ and Black Woman's Jesus Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989. 70-75.

Gray, Richard T. *A Franz Kafka Encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishers, 2005.

Green, Clifford. "Karl Barth's Treatment of the Man-Woman Relationship: Issues for Theological Method." *Reflections on Bonhoeffer*. Eds. Geoffrey B. Kelly and C. John Weborg. Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1999.

— "Liberation Theology?: Karl Barth on Women and Men." *Union Theological Seminary Quarterly* XXIX (Spring-Summer 1974), 228-229.

Greene-McCreight, Kathryn. *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin and Barth Read the "Plain Sense" of Genesis 1 – 3*. New York: Lang, 1999.

— "The Type of the One to Come:" Leviticus 14 and 16 in Barth's *Church Dogmatics*." *Thy Word is Truth: Barth on Scripture*. Ed. George Hunsinger. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012. 67-85.

Habermas, Jürgen. "Hermeneutics and the Social Sciences." *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*. Ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer. New York: Continuum, 2002.

Harnack, Adolf von. *What is Christianity?* Trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders. Eastford, CA: Martino Fine Books, 2011.

Hart, Kevin. "Phenomenology of the Christ." *Kingdoms of God*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014. 139-58.

— "Response to Panel on 'The Promise of Phenomenology and Scripture.'" Paper presented at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting. Montreal, Canada. November 2009.

—"The Manifestation of the Father." *Kingdoms of God*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014. 115-38.

Hays, Richard B. "Christ Died for the Ungodly: Narrative Soteriology in Paul." *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 26.2 (Dec. 2004), 48-68.

Hector, Kevin. "God's Triunity and Self-Determination: A Conversation with Karl Barth, Bruce McCormack and Paul Molnar," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7.3 (2005), 246-261.

Hegel, G. W. F. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Vol. III: The Consummate Religions*. Ed. Peter C. Hodgson. Berkley: University of California Press, 1998.

Heidegger, Martin. *Four Seminars: Le Thor 1966, 1968, 1969, Zahringen 1973*. Trans. Andrew Mitchell and Francois Raffoul. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003.

— "Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle." *Becoming Heidegger: On the Trail of His Early Occasional Writings, 1910-1927*. Eds. Theodore Kisiel and Thomas Sheehan. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

Hesse, Mary. *Models and Analogies in Science*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966.

— *The Structure of Scientific Inference*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1974.

Hide, Kerri. *Gifted Origins to Grace Fulfillment: the Soteriology of Julian of Norwich*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001.

Hilton, Walter. *The Scale of Perfection*. Trans. John P. H. Clark and Rosemary Dorward. New York: Paulist Press, 1988.

Holgate, David. *Prodigality, Liberality, and Meanness in the Parable of the Prodigal Son*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.

Hultgren, Arland A. *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* . Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

Hunsinger, George, and William C. Placher. *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Hunsinger, George. *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

— "Election and the Trinity: Twenty-five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth," *Modern Theology* 24.2 (2008), 179-198.

— *How to Read Karl Barth: the Shape of His Theology.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

— "Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character." *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*. Ed. John Webster. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 127-142.

— "Introduction," *Thy Word is Truth: Barth on Scripture*. Ed. George Hunsinger. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012. xi-xxi.

— "Postcritical Interpretation: Rudolf Smend on Karl Barth." *Thy Word is Truth: Barth on Scripture*. Ed. George Hunsinger. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012. 29-48.

Hunt, Anne. *The Trinity: Insights from the Mystics*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010.

Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. *First book: A General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*. Trans. Fred Kersten. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998.

— "Phenomenology as Transcendental Philosophy." *The Essential Husserl: Basic Writings*. Ed. Donn Welton. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Janicaud, Dominique. *Phenomenology and the "Theological Turn:" The French Debate,* trans. Bernard G. Prusak. New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.

Jantzen, Grace. *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*. New York: Paulist Press, 2000.

— "Mysticism and Experience." *Religious Studies* 25 (1989), 295-315.

Jenson, Robert. *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future Seen in the Work of Karl Barth*. New York: the Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969.

Jeremias*, Joachim. *The Parables of Jesus*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963.

Johnson, Keith L. "Reconsidering Barth's Rejection of Przywara's *Analogia Entis*." *Modern Theology* 26.4 (Oct. 2010), 632-650.

John of Damascus. "Concerning What is Affirmed About God." *The Orthodox Faith IX*. Vol. 9 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. 2nd series. 14 Vol. Tans. Philip Schaff. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004.

Jones, Paul. *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics*. London: T&T Clark, 2008.

— "The Heart of the Matter: Karl Barth's Christological Exegesis." *Thy Word is Truth: Barth on Scripture*. Ed. George Hunsinger. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012. 173-195.

Jones, Serene. *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000.

Jülicher, Adolf. *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*. 2 vols. Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1888-1899. ET: *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S.H. Hooke. London: SCM, 1972.

Jüngel, Eberhard. *God As the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One In the Dispute Between Theism and Atheism*. Trans. Darrell Guder. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983.

— *God's Being is in Becoming: the Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth: a Paraphrase.* Trans. John Webster. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

— *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy*. Trans. Garret E. Paul. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986.

— *Paulus und Jesus*. Tübingen: Morh [Siebeck], 1962. ET: *Word and Faith*. Trans. James Leitch. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963.

— *Unterwegs zur Sache: Theologische Bemerkungen*. Münich: Christian Kaiser, 1972.

Kafka, Franz. "On Parables." *The Complete Stories*. New York: Shocken Books, 1971.

Keller, Timothy. *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*. New York: Penguin, 2008.

Kempe, Margery. *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Trans. B. A. Windeatt. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1985.

Kissinger, Warren. *The Parables of Jesus: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography*. Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1979.

Koester, Helmut. "σπλάγχνον," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament VII*. Grand Rapids: Eermands, 1995. 553-555.

Kurath, Hans, and Sherman McAllister Kuhn and Robert E. Lewis, eds. *The Middle English Dictionary*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1954.

Lewis, Alan. *Between Cross and Resurrection: a Theology of Holy Saturday*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Lindbeck, George. "Barth and Textuality," *Theology Today* 43.3 (Oct. 1986), 361-376.

Lindemann, Walter. *Karl Barth und die Kritische Schriftauslegung*. Hamburg-Bergstedt: Herbert Reich Evangelischer Verlag, 1973.

Linnemann, Eta. *Parables of Jesus: Introduction and Exposition*. London: SPCK, 1966.

Luther, Martin. *Commentary on Galatians*. Trans Erasmus Middleton. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Classics, 1979.

Lombard, Peter. *In Epistolam ad Romanos 8*. *Patrologia Latina* 191. Ed. Jacque-Paul Migne. Paris: Migne, 1844-1855.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2007.

Marion, Jean-Luc *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.

— *God Without Being*. Trans. Thomas A. Carson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

— *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*. Trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud. New York: Fordham University Press, 2002.

— *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*. Trans. Jeffrey Kosky. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012.

— *The Crossing of the Visible*. Trans. James K. A. Smith. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

Mathewes, Charles T. "Augustinian Anthropology: *Interior intimo meo*." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 27.2 (Summer, 1999), 195-221.

Maury, Pierre. "Erwählung und Glaube," *Theologische Studien* 8. Zurich: EVZ, 1940.

McAffee Brown, Robert. "Scripture and Tradition in the Theology of Karl Barth." *Thy Word is Truth: Barth on Scripture*. Ed. George Hunsinger. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012. 3-19.

McCormack, Bruce. *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

— *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.

McEntire, Sandra J. "The Likeness of God and the Restoration of Humanity in Julian of Norwich's *Showings*" *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*. Ed. Sandra J. McEntire. New York: Garland, 1998.

McFague, Sallie. *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.

McGill, Kevin. *Julian of Norwich, Mystic or Visionary?* New York: Routledge, 2006.

McGinn, Bernard. *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*. Vol. 1 of *The Foundations of Mysticism*. New York: Crossroad, 1991.

— *Christian Spirituality*. Vol. 3. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991.

McGlasson, Paul. *Jesus and Judas: Biblical Exegesis in Barth*. Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1991.

McKelway, Alexander J. "Perichoretic Possibilities in Barth's Doctrine of Male and Female," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, 7.3 (1986), 231-243.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Le visible et l'invisible*. Paris: Gallimard, 1964. Ed. Claude Lefort. ET: *The Visible and the Invisible*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968.

— *Signs*. Trans. R. C. McCleary. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964.

Merton, Thomas. "The English Mystics." *Mystics and Zen Masters*. New York: Dell, 1961.

Migliore, Daniel L. "Commanding Grace: Karl Barth's Theological Ethics." *Commanding Grace: Studies in Barth's Theological Ethics*. Ed. Daniel L. Migliore. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.

Mikkelsen, Hans Vium. *Reconciled Humanity: Karl Barth in Dialogue.* Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2010.

Molnar, Paul. *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity*. London: T&T Clark, 2002.

— "The Trinity, Election, and God's Ontological Freedom: A Response to Kevin Hector," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8.3 (2006), 294-306.

— "The Obedience of the Son in the Theology of Karl Barth and Thomas F. Torrance," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 67.1 (Feb. 2014), 50-69.

Moltmann, Jürgen. "The Motherly Father: Is Trinitarian Patripassionism Replacing Theological Patriarchalism?" *God as Father?* Eds. Johannes-Baptis Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981.

Mowry, Lucetta. "Parable." *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* III. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962.

Neder, Adam. *Participation in Christ: an Entry into Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics*. Louiseville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Rhétorique et Langage." Trans. P Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy. *Poétique* 5. Éditions du Seuil (1971), 99-142.

Nimmo, Paul. "Election and Evangelical Thinking." *New Perspectives in Evangelical Theology: Engaging with God, Scripture, and the World*. Ed. Tom Greggs. London: Routledge, 2010.

Nouwen, Henri. *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Nuth, Joan. "Two Medieval Soteriologies: Anslem of Canterbury and Julian of Norwich," *Theological Studies* 53 (1992), 611-645.

— *Wisdom's Daughter: The Theology of Julian of Norwich*. New York: Crossroad, 1991.

O'Conner, Flannery. "The Fiction Writer and His Country." *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux.

Oakes, Kenneth. "The Question of Nature and Grace in Karl Barth: Humanity as Creature and as Covenant Partner." *Modern Theology* 23.4 (Oct. 2007), 598-616.

Ocker, Christopher. "Scholastic Interpretation of the Bible." *The Medieval through the Reformation Periods*. Vol. 2 of *A History of Biblical Interpretation*. Eds. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.

Paul Ricoeur. "Fatherhood: From Phantasm to Symbol." *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, trans D. Ihde. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974.

— *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1995.

— *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976.

— *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*. Tans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Costello, S.J. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978.

—*The Symbolism of Evil*. New York: Harper and Row, 1969.

— *Time and Narrative, Vol. 3*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Perrin, "Historical Criticism, Literary Criticism, and Hermeneutics: The Interpretation of the Parables of Jesus and the Gospel of Mark today." *Journal of Religion* 52 (1972), 261-275.

— *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976.

— *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.

— *What is Redaction Criticism?* Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969.

Lasko, Peter, and Nigel J. Morgan, eds. *Medieval Art in East Anglia 1300-1520*. Norwich, England: Jarrold and Sons, 1973.

Pitkin, Barbara. "John Calvin and the Interpretation of the Bible." *The Medieval through the Reformation Periods*. Vol. 2 of A *History of Biblical Interpretation*. Eds. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.

Putnam, Hilary. "Lecture III." *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*. London: Routledge, 1979.

Richards, I. A. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936.

Riesenfeld, Harald. "The Parables in the Synoptic and the Johannine Traditions." *Svensk Exegetisck Årsbok* 25 (1960), 37-61.

Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Ahead of All Parting: The Selected Poetry and Prose of Rainer Maria Rilke*. Trans. Stephen Mitchell. New York: Modern Library, 1995.

Robbins, Jill. *Prodigal Son / Elder Brother: Interpretation and Alterity in Augustine, Petrarch, Kafka, Levinas*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Robinson, James M., and John B. Cobb, Jr. *The New Hermeneutic*. 2 vols. Harper & Row: New York, 1963-1964.

Rogers, Eugene F., Jr. *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1999.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. "The Female Nature of God: A Problem in Contemporary Religious Life." *Concilium* 143 (1981), 61-66.

Sanders, E. P. *Jesus and Judaism*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985.

Savage, Anne and Nicholas Watson. *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*. New York: Paulist Press, 1991.

Schweizer, Eduard. *The Good News According to Luke*. Trans. David E. Green. Westminster: John Knox, 1984.

Scott, Bernard B. *Hear then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989.

Simmons, T. F., ed. *The Lay Folks Mass Book: the manner of hearing mass, with rubrics and devotions for the people, in four texts, and offices in English according to the use of York, from manuscripts of the Xth to the XVth century*. London: N. Trubner & Co., 1879.

Smend, Rudolf. "Nachkritische Schriftauslegung." *Parrhesia: Karl Barth zum 80. Geburtstag am 10. Mai 1966*, ed. Eberhard Busch, Jürgen Fangmeier, and Maz Geiger. Zürich: EVA (1966), 215-37.

Sokolowski, Robert. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Sonderegger, Katherine. "Barth and Feminism." *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*. Ed. John Webster. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 258-272.

Soskice, Janet Martin *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

— *Metaphor and Religious Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Spearing, A. C. "Introduction." *Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Divine Love*. New York: Penguin, 1998.

— "The Subtext of *Patience*: God as Mother and the Whale's Belly." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29.2 (Spring, 1999), 293-323.

Spring, Jason. "Following At a Distance (Again): Gender, Equality, and Freedom in Karl Barth's Theological Anthropology." *Modern Theology* 28.3 (July 2012), 446-477.

Stanley, Lynn. "Julian of Norwich and the Later Fourteenth-Century Crisis of Authority." *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics and Gender in Later Medieval English Culture*, ed. David Aers. University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1996.

Stephenson, Lisa P. "Directed, Ordered, and Related: The Male and Female Interpersonal Relation in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61.4 (2008), 435-449.

Stern, David. "Jesus' Parables from the Perspective of Rabbinic Literature: the Example of the Wicked Husbandmen." *Parable and Story in Judaism and Christianity*. Eds. Clemens Thoma and Michael Wyschodgrod. New York: Paulist Press, 1989.

Tannehill, Robert. *Sword of His Mouth*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.

Tanner, Kathryn. *Economy of Grace*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005.

Taylor, Barbara Brown. "The Parable of the Prodigal Son." Lenten Noon Day Preaching Series. Calvary Episcopal Church, Memphis, TN. March 5, 1999.

Tertullian. *Liber De Pudicita* VIII-IX. *Patrologia Latina* 2. Ed. Jacque-Paul Migne. Paris: Migne, 1844-1855.

Thielicke, Helmut. *Das Bilderbuch Gottes: Reden über die Gleichnisse Jesu.* Stuttgart: Quell-Verlag, 1957.

Thompson, John. *Christ in Perspective: Christological Perspectives in the Theology of Karl Barth*. Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1978.

Thompson, William. *Struggle for Theology's Soul: Contesting Scripture in Christology*. New York: Crossroad Herder, 1996.

Tissot, Yves. "Patristic Allegories of the Lukan Parable of the Two Sons." *Exegesis: Problems of Method and Exercises in Reading*. Eds. F. Bovon and G. Rouiller. Trans. D. G. Miller. Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1978. 362-409.

Torrance, T. F. *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons*. London: T&T Clark, 2001.

Tranströmer, Tomas. *The Great Enigma: New Collected Poems*. Trans. Robin Fulton. New York: New Directions Publishing, 2006.

Turner, Denys. *Julian of Norwich, Theologian*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

Vendler, Helen. *Dickison: Selected Poems and Commentaries*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Via, Dan O. *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967.

Walsh, James. *The Revelations of Divine Love of Julian of Norwich*. London: Burns & Oakes, 1961.

Watson, Francis. "The Bible." *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*. Ed. John Webster. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 57-71.

Watson, Nicholas. "The Middle English Mystics." *The Cambridge History of Middle English Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 536-565.

Webster, John. "Translator's Introduction." *God's Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth. A Paraphrase.* London: T&T Clark, 2001.
Wellhausen, Julius. *Das Evangelium Lucae*. Berlin: G. Reimer, 1904.

Wheelwright, Philip. *The Burning Fountain: A Study in the Language of Symbolism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968.

Wilder, Amos. *The Language of the Gospel: Early Christian Rhetoric*. New York: Harper & Row, 1964.

Wiles, M. F. "Early Exegesis of the Parables." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 11 (1958), 287-301.

Wilkins, Eliza Gregory. *"Know Thyself" in Greek and Latin Literature*. Diss. Chicago: University of Chicago Libraries, 1917.

William of St. Thierry. *The Words of William of St. Thierry*. Vol. 4. Trans. Theodore Berkeley, O.C.S.O. Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1971.

Young, Brad. *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation.* Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998.

Young, Frances. "Allegory and the Ethics of Reading." *The Open Text: New Directions for Biblical Studies?* Ed. F. Watson. London: SCM Press, 1993.