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Restorying God: Re-Imagining The God of The Bible and Re-Enchanting Our Neo-Secular Selves

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

RESTORYING GOD:
RE-IMAGINING THE GOD OF THE BIBLE
AND RE-ENCHANTING OUR NEO-SECULAR SELVES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

By
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 25, 2016
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

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To those between secularism and religiosity:
May we know the one who is immanent-transcendence
and discover a life of tangible-enchantment.

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ABSTRACT

The Western world has undergone dramatic transformation in the last five hundred years. A premodern world became modern and then postmodern. In the terms of philosopher Charles Taylor, the Western social imaginary—the collection of images and ideas that define human flourishing and guide a populous through daily life—has shifted from one of “transcendent-enchancement” to “immanent-disenchantment.” Christianity, a once singular Roman Catholic Church, is a diversity of denominations that, despite best efforts and intentions, are watching people of all demographic groups join a mass exodus in body, soul, or both from the church. However, one would be mistaken to denounce those leaving as unspiritual. Rather, like their “spiritual but not religious” counterparts, they are seeking a sense of enchantment beyond what they found at church. So how can the Church respond?

Using the quantitative research methodology of autoethnography, Chapter One offers the life of the author as a catalyst to explore a recommended response from the Church toward those leaving as seekers. Chapter Two uses the New Testament’s Gospel accounts to define a Divine Imaginary—images and pictures God uses to describe human flourishing and guide God’s people through daily life. Chapter Three turns to historic interpretations of Romans, a text at the core of many Western theologies, in an attempt to both understand the development of Western Christianity and set the stage for reading of Romans according to the Divine Imaginary. Chapter Four takes a practical turn by exploring homiletics, social action, and the church’s response to trauma as paths to form people according to the Divine Imaginary. Chapter Five combines topics for further study and paths to implement change.

CHAPTER ONE
NECESSARY PRELIMINARIES

Life Between Two Imaginaries

On October 31, 2017, the Western world will celebrate the five hundredth anniversary of the Protestant Reformation as it remembers a then unknown and irrelevant Martin Luther posting his *Ninety-Five Theses Against Indulgences* on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany. Based on the preparatory work this author witnessed during two trips to Wittenberg in the fifteen years prior to the anniversary, it will be an impressive celebration. Simultaneously, it is doubtful the event will hold anything beyond historical significance to those in the once East German city or the post-Christian West. In other words, a night that changed the global landscape and transformed the faith of millions over the coming centuries, is now predominantly a significant historical event with a religious sidebar. The journey of how the West made the rapid transition from a society where life without God was incomprehensible to one where some find the very idea of faith in God untenable is the subject of philosopher Charles Taylor's tome, *A Secular Age*. The exploration, which won Taylor both the Templeton and Kyoto awards for affirming and bettering life's spiritual dimension, uses the concept of the "social imaginary," a blend of images, stories, and ideas that define a society's understanding of human flourishing and create the expectations that allow people to move through life and

make sense of existence. Elsewhere, James Smith describes social imaginaries as worldviews for the heart instead of the mind.¹

Briefly, Taylor demonstrates how, in the premodern age, people perceived themselves as captives of the world. This earth was a place of mystery and enchantment. Natural and spiritual forces were active and threatening. Humans were passive agents seeking to survive in a dynamic world. Hope was only offered by a distant deity who—depending on one’s relationship—might offer protection and blessing in the midst of the chaos. Nine hundred years ago, ideas were planted in the European Renaissance suggesting this view of the world was inaccurate. These ideas began to take root four hundred years later and continued to grow until they bloomed and created the secular West. The transition began as humanity’s self-perception moved from one of captivity to control, with people both recognizing and demonstrating their ability to assert authority over creation. Scientists and philosophers began to study and understand things that once seemed a mystery, stripping away at the creation’s enchantment. With increasing disenchantment, these social leaders started wondering if creation was the appropriate word; a move one step away from concluding that because transcendent gods only served to defend people from an enchanted world, in a world of immanence the Divine is unnecessary. Five-hundred years from “transcendent-enchantment” to “disenchanted-immanence”—from revolutionary Reformer to spiritual sidebar—Martin Luther going

¹ James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 68; Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2003). For more on social imaginaries, see chapter two of Taylor’s, *Modern Social Imaginaries*.

full circle, with his teaching as unknown and irrelevant today as the day it was nailed to the Wittenberg Door.²

For the purposes of this dissertation, this historical background sets the stage for two significant modern realities. First, there is a genuine sense in the heart of millions that something is missing from the “disenchanted-immanence” of secularism. To be clear, this dissertation is first and foremost about those sensing this absence. Second, while the Christian church is not effectively speaking into the void, the world is aggressively doing that very thing through what is best termed not as post-secularism but neo-secularism.³ Both points will be addressed, starting with a general sense that something is missing. In *How (Not) to be Secular*, philosopher and theologian James Smith unpacks Taylor’s work, which identifies secular humans as the “buffered-self,” in that people are theoretically guarded from external forces and autonomously in control of life. At the same time, despite our buffers, most people, while not wanting to reject secularism, are simultaneously unsatisfied with the sterility of pure reason and long for a sense of enchantment, that is, something beyond us that gives life meaning, significance, and purpose. In another work, *Desiring the Kingdom*, Smith argues people long for enchantment because humanity’s anthropology is not fundamentally one of thinking or

² Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

³ Some, including renown philosopher Jürgen Habermas, believe society is now in a post-secular age due to the failure of the modern project as seen through the postmodern philosophical critique. It argues that faith and science need to engage in mutually respectful and beneficial dialogue. However, given the author’s *sitz im leben*, both as a resident of urban Denver and an REI employee, I am convinced that secularists, both those raised within the Church and outside her, while no longer resonating with a secularism of pure reason, are not moving towards God. Rather, they are adopting a new form of secularism that is described here as neo-secular. It is new in that it pursues a meaning and purpose bestowing enchantment beyond pure reason, but remains secular in that it does so without God.

believing as secularism and Western Christianity would argue, but rather humans are primarily lovers. We embrace what we love and in a world of disenchanted-immanence, everything is sterile and fails to ignite passion or desire, leaving little if anything to love. Unable to deny this void and realizing that the Enlightenment's best vision of enchantment⁴ did not hold up to the rigors of daily life, the neo-secular world increasingly offers new forms of enchantment, non-spiritual understandings of human flourishing that seek to capture the heart. Two examples from this author's life come to mind.⁵

The first dates to the fall of 2008. It was a Tuesday morning at 5:30 when I took the twenty-ninth place in line at Denver's Cherry Creek Mall. Over the next three and half hours, a growing number of strangers queued up, often running from the start to the end getting high fives from everyone else in line. On a couple of occasions, the wave broke out, making its way back and forth repeatedly before something, like the delivery of a cooler full of bottled Starbuck's Frappuccinos, broke the momentum. The same momentum break happened when a news cameraman arrived. At one point he asked what had me up so early. "Look at what is happening! You have hundreds of strangers who are instantly friends. We are laughing and celebrating. How many things in life bring people together like this? Why would you not want to be a part of that experience?" The interviewer, not really following my answer, asked about the product we were in line to buy. "I am excited about the release of the iPhone 3S. But really, I could buy that

⁴ The best enchantment pure reason offers simply says, "You no longer need to be afraid of the world around you and you can overcome obstacles."

⁵ James Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 46-47; James K.A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), loc 749-805.

tomorrow without the wait. It's the community and the experience that Apple creates that makes getting up early worth it." A few years later I would hear Simon Sinek explain what I was trying to describe in his TEDx Talk, *Start with Why*. According to Sinek, Apple rarely talks about the specs of their computers and instead focuses on giving people the tools to nurture creation and innovation. They invite everyone to be one of the *Crazy Ones* in their iconic 1987 television commercial. That is a neo-secular vision of meaning, purpose, and significance. That is enchantment. That is why I was up and in line. As a final question, he asked me what I did for a living. I paused before saying, "I am a pastor." The silence at the reality a pastor needed Apple for a sense of enchantment was deafening.⁶

The second experience is more current. While working on my doctoral program, I have worked at Recreational Equipment Incorporated, better known as REI. When I started, there was general acceptance amongst sales staff that REI was no longer cool. When our CEO Sally Jewel was appointed Secretary of the Interior of the United States of America, the cooperative hired Jerry Stritzke to take her place and make REI socially relevant again. Rather than starting with new gear and other products, he began with stories and a slogan. He then identified ways REI could equip people to live that story. Stritzke cast a vision that, "An outdoor life is a life well lived," and brought it to life with a radical retail move. On Black Friday 2015, the busiest shopping day of the year, REI stores and the sales portion of the website closed. As if that was not enough, REI paid their employees to lead a movement of people who rejected shopping so they could

⁶ Simon Sinek, "Start With Why," YouTube, accessed November 22, 2015, https://youtu.be/u4ZoJKF_VuA.

#optoutside. The strategy was brilliant and received over three billion mentions on social media in the first week. According to Stritzke at the Denver Flagship's all-store meeting on November 8, 2015, sixty-seven percent of all retail conversation regarding the busiest shopping day of the year was about a store that would not be open. By way of comparison, Target came in a distant second owning five percent of the conversation. REI captured the imagination of millions by selling a neo-secular vision of outdoor enchantment; and the seventy-seven-year-old cooperative is setting sales records while equipping people to live according to that vision.

With stories like Apple and REI's, it is obvious why Guy Kawasaki titled his best-selling book on launching a new business, *Enchantment*. Truth be told, the number of potential destinations on a quest to fill the enchantment void is countless and often multiple paths will be pursued simultaneously. Some provide an acceptable level of satisfaction; others prove nice, but lacking. Still more vices, especially those that focus on numbing the void rather than seeking to fill it, become entrapping addictions that take life to new levels of both longing and shame. Alongside this vast array of neo-secular offerings stands the Church, immersed in the same social imaginary where Christendom is no longer. The Divine is, at best, seen as optional in the quest for meaning and the very idea of the Divine becomes increasingly implausible. This is a world foreign to Christendom, which held a place of Western power and privilege for over fifteen hundred years. As various Christian denominations seek their voice, the Church generally takes one of two approaches.⁷

⁷ Guy Kawasaki, *Enchantment: The Art of Changing Hearts, Minds, and Actions* (New York: Portfolio, 2011).

First, more traditional branches largely aim to sustain what once was, be it through politics and hoping to legislate a second Christendom, playing according to modern philosophy and trying to prove God (or verify the Bible as a means of substantiating God), or just articulating premodern theological propositions with increasing volume. While as recently as 2002 there was a claim among these traditionalists, specifically through Colleen Carroll's book, *The New Faithful*, that young adults were flocking to conservative Christianity, the reality remains that churches are hemorrhaging members from all demographic groups throughout the United States. In the end, the church's theology, her language, was predominantly developed according to a premodern social imaginary that failed to resonate meaningfully during society's shift toward secularism.⁸ But the conservative response is only one option. The second option, seen in more progressive churches, steps into this new world by adopting social manifestos that resonate with the culture, finding ways to gloss over or dismiss the distasteful parts of Scripture in hopes of making faith more palatable and pursuing a broad inter-faith ecumenism at the lowest common denominator.⁹

⁸ Research pointing to the disconnect between the church's message and everyday people include popular books like David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011); Jim Henderson and Matt Casper, *Jim and Casper Go to Church: Frank Conversation About Faith, Churches, and Well-Meaning Christians* (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2012); and Dan Kimball's *They Like Jesus But Not the Church: Insights From Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007). There is also an emergence of books in a Christian spiritual, but not religious category such as Donald Miller's, *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003) and Nadia Bolz-Weber's, *Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner and Saint* (New York: Jericho Books, 2014); as well as research from both the Barna Institute and the Pew Research Center. Specifically, Pew's May 2015 report on *America's Changing Religious Landscape*, "America's Changing Religious Landscape," May 12, 2015, accessed October 4, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

⁹ Colleen Carroll Campbell, *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults Are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004-05-01).

Yet despite both conservative and progressive efforts—and often because of them—those in a neo-secular age who crave enchantment find the Triune God increasingly difficult to embrace. For those who try, the conservative version ranges from disconnected to distastefully horrifying while the liberal take is at best pointless and at worst impotent. How does this author know what it is like to be one of these seekers of enchantment? I am one of them. And it is important to clarify that I use the present tense intentionally. Like so many others, I have sought and continue to seek. I have spent most of my life on an “enchantment seeking pilgrimage.” Today I find myself somewhat unique in that I am increasingly convinced the answer to enchantment is found in Jesus, but that was not always the case. No doubt my reader notices this dissertation just took an unusually personal turn, and that too is quite purposeful.

This dissertation is not about the nebulous general. It is about the particular. It is not about the masses of people who are searching. Rather, it is about a throng of individuals, each with his or her own stories, struggles, hurts, pains, and longings who are on a pilgrimage. As similar as they might be, to lump them into a collective would be disrespectful. At the same time, to share each of their stories is impossible. Therefore, in this dissertation, the particular will be my story, largely because my story is the one I know best. But this particular is not limited to my story. This is not an autobiography. Rather, it is an autoethnography, wherein my story serves as a lens through which other stories can be accessed, where we can engage in comparison and critique, and, prayerfully, we can encounter Jesus.¹⁰ With that end in mind, let us turn to a portion of

¹⁰ For more on autoethnography and the epistemology of this dissertation, please read *Appendix A: Autoethnography*.

my narrative as it relates to being caught in the cross-hairs of a neo-secular age and the longing for something to fill the disenchanted void.

A Pastor Walks into an Art Gallery

In July of 2005, I found myself as a thirty-one-year-old church planter on the verge of graduating seminary with a call to start a new congregation in urban Denver. I had resources to support me personally but, because I chose to focus on an urban setting, there was no core group or leadership team with whom to work. While I was privately angst-ridden at the high probability of failing and not receiving the praise I craved, publicly I argued this was a good thing because it created the opportunity to start something that did not come with baggage about congregational form or programming. One of the few things I was certain of was that I wanted the new church to be relational, which meant starting with relationships. I turned to the best connection place I knew: MySpace. I tweaked the code on my page until it looked great, gave it a Christian feel without being overly religious, and then started joining Denver-based groups to see who I could meet.

One of my best connections was with an alternative art gallery. The owner was a young woman with tattoos covering much of her body, long hair worn in dreadlocks, a larger-than-life persona, and dreams that exceeded her personality. She had just leased a space and was getting ready to open her gallery, but it needed a lot of work. Given her limited resources, she turned to MySpace to see if she could find people to bring her dream to life. She was asking for physical labor and pickup trucks in exchange for wall space during the gallery's first show. While I was not an artist, I did have a truck and was

willing to paint, so I offered to help without repayment and figured I could use the opportunity to meet people. I even used my connections at a local church to get a scissor lift so we could paint the second level of the studio's outside, a move that drew great praise from the gallery crowd and opened cracked doors even wider.

Over the next few weeks I spent multiple days and evenings working on the gallery and in the process I met a variety of interesting and wonderful people. One was into ancient Egyptian religion. Another was a gnostic. Still another was a blood drinker who saw himself as linked to Judas and therefore cursed because he betrayed Christ. Then there was the rest of the crowd who mostly grew up Christian but left the church and had no interest in going back. That being said, they were open to all kinds of conversations and, because I did not come pushing faith, they were very open to asking me spiritual questions. Perhaps even better for a church planter, I was repeatedly told that that anytime I wanted to use the gallery for an event, I was welcome to it. I had self-professed pagans literally inviting me to make the Gospel tangible in their midst.

What happened? I froze. No event ever happened. I settled for a different church plant setting that fizzled out a couple of years later and, even as those from the gallery kept contacting me, I never followed up. Ultimately, I abandoned the opportunity because I was afraid they would reject what I was equipped to say about God. Truthfully, I had good reason to believe they would. After all, they were asking me questions and finding me approachable because I entered their world in an accepting way. As far as they could see, I would offer something different. It was an expectation I could not meet. All I had were the standard propositions: you are a sinner and your sin makes God angry; you need forgiveness; here are the four spiritual laws; Jesus died on the cross to take your

punishment, etc. I had a message crafted for a world with a different social imaginary and, even if that was the imaginary of Jesus (something I believed then but disagree with today), it did not play well in the art gallery.

I tried one day with a young woman who just opened up and poured out her heart with all the struggles she was going through. Most of her recent life choice would be categorized as sinful. My training told me to point out the sin, share the love of Jesus, and pray for her, but the words were hollow and it felt like I was trying to use a band-aid to cover a severed limb. I truly believed that Jesus did in fact love her; I just had no idea of how to say it in a meaningful way. In the end, I just listened and hurt with her.

Similar encounters happened with others, but this was a community of people who, with few exceptions, had grown up in churches where they saw long-time members bitterly fighting over choir robe styles. They grew up feeling the stares as they arrived in the tattered clothes that Mom's welfare check could afford. They heard the not-so-quiet whispers about their developmentally disabled siblings. They sat in youth groups where the same kids who piously answered questions on Wednesday would be passed out from drunkenness on Saturday. They were told that forgiven sinners are changed and that life looks different on the other side of grace, but what was said and what was experienced did not match. So rather than stay among the hypocrites who pretended the promised transformation was real, they left and found not only each other but a sense of enchantment at the gallery. They formed a community of their own based on ideals that made sense to them. Deep down, I desperately wanted what they were living because it seemed to make so much more sense than what I knew. I might have been a pastor, but

my theological propositions were functionally nonsensical to me as well, and I was searching just as desperately.¹¹

When I would go home from the gallery after hours, or when I would first wake up to an empty apartment, or any other time I could find in between, I was online engaged in the dark side of my pilgrimage to enchantment. Adult chatrooms where strangers from across the globe would come together and talk about sex, relationships, love and life, but mostly sex, were the usual. Every once in a while I would notice someone else from Colorado in the room and it made me wonder how many other locals were seeking and if we could seek together. This could prompt a more targeted search for a while, with Craigslist and dating sites serving as the pilgrimage grounds. These forays, like most of my life's interactions with women, largely resulted in me going unnoticed or rejected and I would drop back into the non-geographic realm.

While I struggled to find anything beyond a momentary thrill, I kept seeking because at an early age I learned to look toward women to find both acceptance and mystery. I knew according to my faith—or at least the faith I professed—that I was wrong, but the guilt of seeking was an emotional itch compared to the gaping indescribably painful wound that drove my quest. Ultimately, my faith was functionally one of me sinning as I sought something of substance then turning to Jesus for forgiveness so the search could resume.

¹¹ Tony Jones offers a resonating account of asking youth group leaders to explain to their students how, “Jesus died for your sins.” works. Tony Jones, *Did God Kill Jesus?: Searching for Love in History's Most Famous Execution* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2015), 6-7.

The Making of Me

How did this happen? How did I end up as a Christian pastor who, in many ways, had stopped looking to Jesus to bring peace to my lamenting soul, but went on teaching, or at least trying to teach, the cognitive propositions that I found so meaningless? Like all of our stories, mine started at birth, and the conditions I was born into are a key backdrop to everything that follows. I am a White male from an upper-middle class American family. I am the very definition of privilege and the repeated beneficiary of a wide range of “social graces,” including a formatively important, although not for the better, sense of entitlement and the accompanying unwillingness to endure hardship. When combined with my high intellect, I quickly became effort-averse. After all, tasks came easy and my performance was reviewed generously. Therefore, if endurance was necessary, from my perspective, something was wrong.¹²

Perhaps I could have worked my way through life without much difficulty if I was more socially astute, but starting in third grade, my classmates identified me as the kid to ostracize. As far as I can recall, it began when I asked a popular girl to go out with me. I was too scared to ask her in person, so I slipped a note that was written in code along with a decoder into her desk. As the day went on I looked for evidence that the note was found and, hopefully, in the process of being decoded. Alas, all my reconnaissance proved fruitless and, as the final bell rang, I wondered what became of my note. As I walked outside, I saw her standing near some friends and I decided to take action. I walked up and made a comment about her receiving a note. She quickly turned my direction and asked, “What do you know about it?” I mumbled something. “You know

¹² Leah Payne, “Ethnicity,” DMin LSF Fall Advance (October 25, 2014).

who wrote it!” I started to quiver knowing I would soon be discovered. “It was you!” That word “you.” I am not even sure if she knew my name. Terrified, I did the only thing I knew to do. I ran.

To this day, I can see myself running with all my might. I went south along the westernmost pod of the school toward the playground before taking a sharp turn east and ducking into an alcove. I had hoped that the girl and her friends who were in hot pursuit might lose me in the after school chaos, but my hope proved frivolous and the alcove that was supposed to be my shelter became my prison. The swarm of girls crowded around me. Laughter sounded like the buzz of angry bees and their pointing fingers might as well have been wasp stingers, mercilessly piercing me over and over again as I tried to disappear into the brick and concrete. I still have no clue how I escaped the assault that day but I would never be free. Rather, from that day forth, I was the lowest rung on the social ladder and the only thing one can do with the lowest rung is step on it. I was the reject. The outcast. The unwanted.

There is no doubt each of my readers could share their own version of this account. It might not involve a girl on a playground, but there are many settings and many assailants. The reader might think of a demanding or absent parent, an abusive sibling, or a condescending teacher. My story is a universal story, it is just the details and what we do in response to the trauma that changes. As for me, when my peers told me I was worthless, I believed them. I quickly learned to hate myself.

Compounding this emotional darkness, my entitlement-based unwillingness to face hardship had me seeking out easy solutions to deal with my internal conflict. The easiest solution that presented itself was also the most permanent. I do not know how

many nights I would sit in my room with my pocket knife out, debating where to cut. Should I do the wrist and, if I do it, should I go across the wrist or up the arm? Or maybe I should plunge the blade into my neck. Would that do the job? As I debated, I would take the knife in my hand and firmly grip it. I would lift my arm and place the tip of the blade against my throat. The sense of sharp steel terrified me and, as much as I wanted to end my life, I found myself incapable of going through with it. So I would put my knife away, write a note that I had prayed to die, and slide it under my hamster's cage so when my mom cleaned out my room she could find it. Then I would get on my knees and beg God to take my life before crying myself to sleep. The next morning, as my eyes opened, my heart would sink as I realized my one wish, my one prayer, had gone unanswered yet again. I would pull the note out from under the cage, destroy it, and get ready for another day of hell on earth, or at least as much hell as you can experience when you are an upper-middle class White kid in America.

Perhaps some would consider it good that I turned to God in the midst of my darkness, even if my wishes were less than holy. I see it as more of a statement on my understanding of God, a view nurtured by my experience at church. My parents are devout conservative Missouri Synod Lutherans and have been since before I was born. I was baptized at a month old. Every Sunday we attended church and Sunday School and at church, week in and week out, we used the same two liturgies to guide our service. Of all the sections, one stands out in my memory. The Confession. For the liturgically familiar, I meant to stop there. I do not remember the confession and absolution, just the confession. "I, a poor miserable sinner, confess unto thee all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended thee and justly deserve thy temporal and eternal punishment..."

Those words haunt me to this day, not only because of what they say about God and what they are supposed to do to the worshipper but because of what they did to me as a child. With my self-hatred already all-consuming, I desperately needed words of love, value, and life spoken into my being. Instead, I had the words of the confession, where God told me I was right. God told me I was worthless and I deserved every bit of mockery I received at school. At this point, most people checkout of church until they are old enough to walk away. Not me. With my self-hate divinely sanctioned, and since God refused to kill me and I was too weak to kill myself, I would confess like I was supposed to and wonder what I could do that would add something of value to my life.

One way I did this was excelling in the spaces where I found some success. First there was Scouts where, after completing everything Cub Scouts had to offer, I went on to become a thirteen-year-old Eagle Scout. My achievements generated plenty of praise and, for moments, life felt less painful. At times, school and achieving good grades also helped fill this void. I also turned to church where I took advantage of every opportunity I could to serve. I was an acolyte, an usher, a Sunday school teacher, a youth leader, and, ultimately, the pastor. In doing so, I discovered that serving, teaching, preaching, and knowing theology resulted in approval that could not only temper my self-hatred for a few moments and getting up in front of a congregation became my space of enchantment. Church had little to do with faith, but a great deal to do with performance-based acceptance.

Yet here in the art gallery, the performance was rejected. I could teach, preach, and share doctrine all night long and in the morning the faces would still be blank because the enchantment they craved was something more than a far off God who is

angry and somehow making things right by killing his Son. I cannot blame them for not wanting that God. Neither did I. After all, that is the God who hated me and then refused to kill me just so he could watch me suffer.

So when the art gallery was silent and the praise did not come, or when the praise was unable to adequately muffle the voices of self-hatred, I found ways to both numb the pain and wistfully seek to ease the rejection of that popular girl in third grade who was the matriarch of my failure with women. Perhaps it began in second grade when a couple older kids snuck a Penthouse magazine on the bus and I caught a glimpse. Sexuality in commercials and advertisements fueled my imaginary. Quiet times in my room during third grade, when I would draw explicit fantasies one of my female classmates who was going out with a boy who tormented me. Looking back, I see how, even as a nine-year-old, I was rooted in the enchantment that flourishing equated with being desired by women. In time, the sick beauty behind this imaginary is that if my quest to be desired failed, if the popular girls never wanted me, the sensations of fantasy would at least numb the shame of rejection for a time. Years after all these convictions were formed, I would leave the embodied bohemian freedom, openness, and vulnerability of the art gallery, and turn on my computer to numb the emptiness, still hoping that my dream of being desired would come true, but somehow knowing this was really about anesthetizing pain. Through it all, the conviction remained that there was something more out there. Something real. Something good. I had no idea where or how to find it, but somewhere deep within, I knew it had something to do with a Jesus I was yet to meet, a Jesus I am just getting to know today.

The Journey from the Preliminaries

Where does that leave our pilgrims who dwell in an age of “disenchanted-immanence,” where everything is tangible and everything tangible can be mastered, yet a yearning for enchantment lingers that is neither tangible nor capable of being mastered? As I sit near the end of this dissertation process and look back to the beginning, I have to say the answer is Jesus, but not as we think we know him. I reject the notion that we try and force history to reverse itself and return to a premodern age where existing theology supposedly works. The same can be said of efforts to reconfigure premodern theology so it can live more acceptably in the present. Both of these ends seek to fit Jesus into the West’s modern social imaginary. Rather, I propose that there is a Divine Imaginary, necessarily contradicting yet fully capable of dwelling in any age with any social imaginary.

The Divine Imaginary is characterized by God embodying immanent-transcendence and calling humanity to lives of tangible-enchantment. In other words, the God of the Bible from Creation to Second Coming, despite human resistance, wants to be seen as holiness that lovingly draws near to a fallen and wounded creation. Moreover, as God comes close, humanity is transformed and invited to reorient loves, thus changing the way life is seen and conducted. That is immanent-transcendence and tangible-enchantment. To make these arguments, Chapter Two will consider the legitimacy of the Divine Imaginary through the lens of Jesus by reviewing the four storylines offered in the four Gospel accounts. Chapter Three will focus on the Divine Imaginary as interpreted in and for a Western world, using the book of Romans as a foundation for exploring the Early Church, Medieval Christendom, the Reformation, and the so-called New

Perspective, before offering an interpretation through the lens of the Divine Imaginary.

Chapter Four will return to our present age and explore embodiment practices aimed at helping the church embrace the Divine Imaginary. Chapter Five will be used to bring loose ends together and suggest further study and methods to implement change.

CHAPTER TWO

JESUS AND THE DIVINE IMAGINARY

Why Begin With Christ?

Contrary to the premodern and modern social imaginaries that Taylor describes as “transcendent-enchantment” and “immanent-disenchantment,” this dissertation argues that the God of the Bible offers a different imaginary for humanity to embrace; one where God is immanent-transcendence and humanity is invited to a life of tangible-enchantment. While the focal subjects of the discussion are those embedded in “immanent-disenchantment” while longing for enchantment, no discussion concerning the nature, identity, or revelation of the Triune God revealed in the Bible can begin without reflecting on the content of Scripture itself. To that end, this paper must review¹³ the Bible to see if the Divine Imaginary proposed is hermeneutically valid. What follows will, in a sense, offers a narrative review of both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament Gospels, but it will be done in an atypical fashion by starting with the Gospels and interweaving the Hebrew Bible.

The rationale for this approach begins with John 5:39-40 where Jesus, after pointing to both John the Baptist and the Father’s witnesses to his testimony, invites the Scribes and Pharisees to also look to the Hebrew Scriptures because they — like John and the Father — testify about Jesus. However, given that previous study of the Scripture had led the Scribes and Pharisees to Messianic conclusions located somewhere other than

¹³ It is important here to note the limited scope of this survey. Given the space allotted, anything more than touching on themes and seeking highlights is simply impossible.

Jesus, this dissertation will heed the wisdom of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who writes, “Only from Christ can we know what the beginning is.”¹⁴ German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg adds further support to this approach with the central theme of his systematic Christology being that God can only be known through the man Jesus. Pannenberg provides additional guidance for the task ahead by arguing that the task must begin with the man, his life, and his teaching about God, each of which are ultimately vindicated and validated in the resurrection.

This paper will, therefore, begin with the four Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each Gospel account, while unique and intended to be read and understood individually, offers a true and collective revelation of Jesus Christ. Moreover, because each of these accounts bind themselves to the Hebrew Bible, they serve as a trustworthy entry point into the interpretation of the text. From the books that Christians typically call the Old Testament, this dissertation will focus on the events of the Creation and Fall, Abraham and the fulfillment of God’s promise through the formation of Israel as a kingdom of priests, King David, and the return from the Babylonian Exile. But first, as a means of highlighting the value of Bonhoeffer and Pannenberg’s suggestion that the knowledge of God must begin with the narrative of the man Jesus, and in keeping with narrative autoethnography and the accompanying grid of the particular, a bit more of my story and specifically the imaginary of God I embraced as a child.¹⁵

¹⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall Temptation: Two Biblical Studies* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 10.

¹⁵ Wolfhard Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man* (Norwich, UK: SCM Press, 2011), loc 564, 765.

Overlord of All Creation

As far as I know, I am the only child to ever skip a grade in Sunday School. It was sometime around second or third grade when I dutifully sat in my chair bored. Instead of tuning out, I listened carefully and quickly corrected the teacher whenever she made a mistake while telling a Bible story. Both my corrections of the teacher and the Sunday School leadership's decision to advance me a grade became a grand moment of performance for me and gave me a sense that I was accomplishing something in the church world. Sadly, my advancement was more a reflection of my ability to remember stories that I had heard *ad nauseum* than any kind of genuine spiritual development.

As I reflect back on my childhood, the only picture of God that seems to describe what I now remember in images and feelings is that of the Grand Clock Maker who set everything in motion and then looked from a distance as humanity ruined the clock. While I know there was more to my spoken profession, as evidenced by a confirmation paper on John 3:16 towards the end of eighth grade, when I think back on the state of my heart, I find Jesus, grace, mercy, and forgiveness were nowhere to be found.

Contrasting my faintly remembered professions of Jesus, I vividly recall one Sunday morning on a Boy Scout camping trip when our Scoutmaster encouraged all of us to spend time in non-defined spiritual reflection. I perched myself on a large moss-covered fallen tree that ran perpendicular to a stream. Looking out over the rushing water and into the forest beyond, I have no idea how much time passed, but I remember having a long and very personal conversation with God about the creation around me and how incredible it was. "God, you are behind all of this," I said looking at the water, plants, and rocks, and listening to the scampering feet of the critters that darted about under the

foliage. Then my thoughts shifted to people, and me specifically. All I could think about was how we were failures, both in our care for the Creation and in the manner we conducted our daily lives. I walked away convicted, broken, and confused, all because my functional theology was limited to a common interpretation of the Creation and Fall accounts that make up the first three chapters of Genesis. While I was not born when he wrote it, I was the reason Bonhoeffer wrote, “Thus the creation story should not be read in church in the first place only from Christ, and not until then as leading to Christ. We can read towards Christ only if we know that Christ is the beginning, the new and the end of our world.”¹⁶ So let us begin exploring Christ, and through him, the rest of Scripture by turning to the Gospels.

Matthew: Jesus as Son of Abraham and David

God’s wisdom deemed to provide humanity with four separate and unique accounts of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. While there is obvious temptation to unify the story as a means of covering up apparent contradictions in the biblical canon, to do so strips away the uniqueness and nuance of the evangelists’ accounts, prompting the reader to miss the very details the author wishes to highlight about Jesus. Therefore, this dissertation will treat each account as an autoethnography of sorts, with each Gospel writer penning his own story of life with Jesus. However, unlike the autoethnography that makes up this dissertation, followers of Jesus believe the Gospel accounts are simultaneously human and divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit leaving the evangelist’s story unquestioned. That being said, Christian disciples are not only invited but expected

¹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall Temptation*, 10.

to challenge human interpretation of the account. What follows is an exploration and interpretation of each Gospel with an emphasis on the nuance each provides. In each case, this author seeks to understand the Divine Imaginary, that is, how God invites us to envision, believe, and make sense of both the divine presence and human flourishing.

In Matthew's opening genealogy, he invites the reader to see Jesus through the lens of the historic people of Israel by binding Jesus to both Abraham and David (Matt. 1:1). Scripture tells little of Abraham before God came to him. Years later, Joshua, the leader of the nation stemming from Abraham's ancestry, identifies Abraham as one who worshipped other gods (Josh. 24:15). But that was before Genesis 12, when God came to the man then known as Abram and told him to leave everything and go to a land that God would reveal, clinging to a promise that, through Abram, God would bless everyone on earth. What would prompt a man to abandon his faith, leave house and home, say goodbye to some family, and set out on a journey that seems perilous? John Bright, for one, proposes various factors including the personal nature of Abram's new faith. Building on Bright's point and in light of this dissertation's proposed hermeneutic, Scripture provides a clue for motive in the way God appears. First, God speaks (Gen. 12:1, 13:14). Then, God appears (12:7, 17:1). Finally, the Trinity fellowshiped (18:1-15). These words imply divine manifestation and suggest that the one who is by definition transcendent becomes immanent. This author proposes that kind of relationship stands behind Abram's transformation.¹⁷

¹⁷ John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 4th ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 101; Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough, *Cosmology and New Testament Theology* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2008), 37.

As the narrative unfolds Abram expresses his understanding that God's blessing must come in the form of an heir (Gen. 15:1-3). God expands upon this vision and promises Abram not just an heir, but an entire nation stemming from his lineage that will dwell in the land of Canaan and will be a blessing to the world (15:4-7 and 17:1-8). God fulfilled that word four centuries later as a nation composed of the renamed Abraham's descendants left Egypt, following a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (13:21-22). While their leader Moses, starting with the appearance of the burning bush (3:1-4:17), had the kind of personal relationship Abraham did, the pillar and cloud stands as a clear expression of immanent-transcendence for the masses. Beyond that, with Moses' return to Egypt, Israel learned their God had a name, *Yahweh* (3:13-15). In Hebrew culture, knowing someone's name meant knowing their character, making them more immanent, even when it is the name of the transcendent God. While the journey that followed was not smooth, three months later the nation of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai where God revealed to them what it means to be the people of God and be a blessing by revealing the identity and nature of *Yahweh* to the nations (19:1).¹⁸

After declaring what he had done for them by bringing them up out of Egypt, God said, "If you faithfully obey me and stay true to my covenant, you will be my most precious possession out of all the people, since the whole earth belongs to me. You will be a kingdom of priests for me and a holy nation." (Exod. 19:5-6). What follows is the giving of the Mosaic Law, which begins with the Ten Commandments (20:3-17) and, excluding the infamous Golden Calf incident (Exod. 31-33), carries through until Israel begins preparing to leave Sinai for the Promised Land (Num. 1).

¹⁸ R. Alan Cole, *Exodus* (Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1981), 20-22.

Christians have historically understood God's law in a variety of ways.

Dispensationalists see it as the way God related to Israel. Others, largely as an attempt to avoid antinomianism as first proposed by Marcion, attempt to divide the Mosaic Law into moral, civil, and ceremonial components, with Christ-followers only called to keep the moral piece.¹⁹ In his Large Catechism, Martin Luther identifies the Ten Commandments and the Law that follows as something only given literally to the people of Israel, but still having value as a moral framework for modern day disciples. What each of these interpretations fail to highlight is the link between obeying the Law and Israel as a kingdom of priests, a nation who is a living and verbal witness to the Divine Imaginary. Again, as Bright explains, the relationship between Yahweh and his people is based on God's elective action in bringing the people out of Egypt. The covenant of the Mosaic Law is a faithful response to God's election. In the terms of this dissertation, Israel's keeping of the Law was not a condition for salvation; it was a means of tangible-enchancement that would reveal Yahweh to the nations. The problem for Israel will be a propensity to leave Yahweh for the gods of the nations.²⁰

Building on Jesus in light of Abraham and Israel, following his lengthy genealogy, Matthew moves quickly through Jesus' birth and early years while being the only evangelist to present the Magi's visit (Matt. 2:12) and the subsequent slaughter of the

¹⁹ While there is evidence of earlier expressions, this approach was largely formalized by Thomas Aquinas. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Paradoxes of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 393-436.

²⁰ Bright, *A History of Israel*, 148-149, Cole, *Exodus*, 144-145, 149; Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 395-396, 425; Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, and Karen et. al., eds., *Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, Dispensationalism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

innocents as Herod seeks to destroy Jesus (2:13). Following Matthew's version of Jesus' baptism and temptation (Chapters 3 and 4), Jesus begins a public teaching ministry in Matthew 5. Given that Matthew already links Jesus to Israel and then specifically to Moses with the slaughter of the innocents (Exod. 1:15-2:10), it should not be surprising that Jesus taught the crowds from a mountain. After all, it was upon Mount Sinai that God gave the Law to Moses so he could give it to the people. Furthermore, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is, in many ways, a reframing the Law of Moses. While Jesus makes it quite clear that the Law and Prophets are not being done away with (Matt. 5:17-18),²¹ their present interpretation, which results in the inadequate righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees (5:20), must come to an end because it is never what God intended. To do this, Jesus highlights a variety of common teachings and repeatedly opens with various forms of the phrase, "You have heard it was said..." Jesus then goes on to offer a corrective interpretation in light of their present misunderstandings (5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, and 43).

Some will view Jesus' corrective in Matthew 5 as an amplification of the Law's demands so people who once thought they could fulfill the Law will now realize that they need grace. Moving a step closer to the thesis of this dissertation, others will argue that Jesus is moving the focus from the letter of the Law to its heart. It is argued here that Jesus is unpacking the way of love, and inviting the hearer to think of the Law, not as something to do, but as a different way of life that is lived because of an encounter with

²¹ These two verses have a variety of interpretations in Christian tradition including Christ fulfilling them so they are no longer applicable, their continued existence for the Jewish people, and belief that the positive application serves to guide correct behavior. This paper disagrees with each of these readings. David E. Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel: One Covenant or Two* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 113.

the one who is immanent-transcendence (5:43-48).²² For example, Jesus discusses the Mosaic law “do not murder” (Matt. 5:21-24). However, rather than stopping his discussion regarding physical murder, Jesus points to the anger behind murder alongside the other negative consequences which divided families and shattered relationships. Jesus does not let the higher demand just sit there weighing down on the hearer. Instead he calls those listening to act when a relationship is torn and seek to mend it. The goal for Jesus is not obedience to a law, but restoration and healing in a world of brokenness. The same thing can be done with the next law, the command against adultery (5:27-30). Here Jesus says that it is not just the act of adultery that is sinful, but rather looking lustfully at a woman other than your wife. This is not because Jesus is aiming for the impossible standard, but because Jesus knows that when a man looks at another woman lustfully, it not only pulls his heart away from his wife, but, if his wife sees it, his looking directly wounds her as well. In other words, for Jesus, the Law comes from the one who is immanent-transcendence, not because that is what people must do to remain in God’s good graces, but because it is the life of tangible-enchancement that flows from being the called out and rescued kingdom of priests. These are the kinds of lives and communal relationships that point to a God of immanent-transcendence. It is being the “salt and light” of the world, which prompts others to “see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven” (5:13-16).

Jesus’ second significant teaching in Matthew 13 is quite different from the Sermon on the Mount. Instead of sitting on a mountain and conjuring images of a far

²² Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 33a, Matthew 1-13* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 83; Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel*, 117, 121-128.

more personal and intimate Sinai, this time Jesus is on a boat with the crowd standing on the shore. Perhaps there is no better place to discuss the dynamics between heaven and earth than while out on large bodies of water; like heaven above, water is mysterious, uncertain, and completely uncontrollable. It was on this same lake that the disciples were certain they were going to drown before Jesus calmed the storm (Matt. 8:23-27).

Moreover, throughout Matthew the divide between things above and things below, between heaven and earth, is not only distinct but problematic. And yet here stands Jesus between the two, bringing them together with parables about the Kingdom.

It is important to note that throughout Scripture, the Kingdom is not a geographic place.²³ Rather the Kingdom is about the rule and reign of God. This helps clarify the problem of things being above and things being below. It is not the geographic distance between heaven and earth, nor that idea that there is a heaven and earth. Rather the problem being addressed is that the rule and reign of God is happening in heaven but not on earth, and God's solution is to reestablish the divine reign on earth through God's chosen people. So, just as ancient Israel was to be a nation of priests who revealed the Kingdom of God to the rest of creation, so now Jesus stands on an image of the divide and teaches what the Kingdom is like through a series of parables that include the generous proclamation of the Kingdom (13:3-9), the Kingdom existing amongst its

²³ While there is certainly a strong emphasis on place throughout the Bible, be it the Promised Land, the Temple, or the New Jerusalem, it is clear from the history of Israel that it is not just about the place, rather, the Word that is proclaimed from the place that gives the physical location its importance.

enemies (13:24-30 and 47-50), its small but powerful presence (13:31-33), and the supreme value of the Kingdom over all other earthly treasures (13:44-46).²⁴

What enables Jesus, who has the same history, ancient texts, and religious practices as the rest of Israel, to relate with the God behind the history, texts, and practices so differently?²⁵ Jesus seems to offer, at least from Matthew's perspective, an answer rooted in how he relates to God and how he invites his hearers to think of God—as Father. For Jesus, the Divine was not someone who was purely distant and transcendent, rather he was the immanent-transcendence of a loving yet strong Father.²⁶ This connection of God as Father is not new. In Exodus 4:22-23, before Moses had left Midian to go before Pharaoh, the Lord instructed him to say, “Israel is my oldest son... let my son go so he could worship me.” Similarly, King David writes about God declaring him a son in Psalm 2:7, which most likely became part of pre-exilic coronations and was only read post-exile in anticipation, until a voice from heaven spoke it over Jesus at his baptism. This connection provides the invitation to explore the other key figure

²⁴ Pennington and McDonough, *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, 31-34; George Eldon Ladd, *Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 20.

²⁵ While it would be easy to point to Jesus' divinity as the answer, this is not something Matthew has made overtly clear outside of the Matthew 1 reference to his birth by the power of the Holy Spirit and the name Emmanuel. Therefore, since the text has not built on this theme, neither shall this dissertation.

²⁶ Patricentrism (“centered around the father”) best describes this understanding. The father is at the center, but rather than his presence being centrifugal and pushing others away (as patriarchy or the “rule of the father” is commonly depicted), it is centripetal and actually draws those around him closer because he is a place of love and security. Andreas J. Kostenberger and David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 94-96.

from the Jewish Bible that Matthew links Jesus with in the opening genealogy, King David.²⁷

Known as the Shepherd King who was called from the fields and anointed Israel's King by the prophet Samuel (1 Sam. 16:1-13), David is the war hero who, amongst other feats, killed the Philistine giant, Goliath (1 Sam. 17) before spending the better part of fifteen years seeking to be faithful to God while awaiting his coronation (2 Sam. 5:3-5). David's first action as king was to reclaim the city of Jerusalem (5:6-10) and promptly bring the Ark of the Covenant back to his capital city (6:1-19). The ark was a symbol of God's immanent-transcendence among the people of Israel. It brought blessing to those who treated it with reverent faith, but would curse those who were faithless. In David's mind, however, this was not enough because while he lived in a palace God was dwelling in a tent (7:2). David intended to build a temple but God had other plans. Coming to the prophet Nathan in a dream, God revealed that, like Abraham, David's name would be made great (7:9) and he would be the first in a dynasty of kings that would stand forever, hearing the words of Psalm 2 spoken over them at their coronation (7:16).²⁸

Jesus deeply embraced this intimate relationship with his heavenly Father and invited his hearers to view God the same way (Matt. 5:16, 45, 48; 6:26-32; and 7:11). Perhaps most importantly, viewing God as Father is central to Jesus' teaching on both worship and prayer, those practices that form and root humanity's relationship with God (6:1-18). This intimate relationship with his Father carried Jesus through the challenges

²⁷ Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 14.

²⁸ Tremper Longman III, *Immanuel in Our Place: Seeing Christ in Israel's Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 50-54; Bright, *A History of Israel*, 191-201.

of temptations in the wilderness (4:1-11). His understanding of God as Father informed his teaching ministry. It was the immanent-transcendence perspective of a patricentric heavenly Father that enabled Jesus to be the true, faithful, and pure Israel who lived a life of tangible-enchancement. His immanent-transcendence perspective of Father also prompted crowds to gather around Jesus and listen to his teaching, which undermined the very religious system the Scribes and Pharisees had come to depend on, prompting them to plot against him (21:45-22:46). We see Jesus' intimate dependence upon his Father as he moves towards his darkest hours. Jesus, praying in the garden, fully aware that Judas is about to betray him, twice asks his Father to take what comes next from him, but like a faithful son, repeatedly says, "Not what I want but what you want" (26:39-42).²⁹

Following his arrest, Jesus' talk of his Father goes eerily silent, but not because Jesus was surprised by his circumstances. Matthew makes it clear that Jesus expected his arrest, abusive trial, execution, and resurrection (Matt. 16:21-23, 17:22-23, and 20:17-19). Jesus even told the Pharisees the only sign they would receive from him was the sign of Jonah (12:38-42 and 16:1-4). His time in the garden revealed a Jesus who dreaded the path before him because it would reveal just how far humanity had fallen from God's way of love. Yet, while Jesus endured his accusers scorn, he remained silent about his Father, even as Jesus' accusers were not. The religious leadership, those passing by, and even the criminals next to him took time to mock his self-understanding as God's Son (27:39-44). Finally, Jesus cried out, but not as you would expect. For the first time in Matthew, instead of looking to his Father, Jesus cries out with a far less intimate, "My God, my God, why have you left me?" (27:46) Rather than feeling the comforting

²⁹ Pennington and McDonough, *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, 30.

strength of his Father, Jesus, the one who lived both as the true Israel, both son of Abraham and son of David, finds himself undergoing the ultimate abuse and humiliation at the hands of those who rejected their call as sons of Abraham. Perhaps the path God called Jesus to take was simply so excruciating that there was no sense of the Father's presence, but he knew David's Psalm when he felt abandoned and so, like David, he too would cling to the evidentially absent God (Ps. 22).³⁰

For the religious leaders, the death of Jesus vindicated their actions, which stemmed from a denial of Jesus' authority to preach what they saw as a new teaching. During his lifetime, Jesus refused to identify his authority (Matt. 21:23-27; 46), but on the first Easter morning, with the sound and trembling of an earthquake (28:2), the Father declared Jesus' message had heavenly authority by raising Jesus from the dead. In the resurrection, Jesus' way of love as the divine understanding of human flourishing is vindicated as the true and authoritative understanding of the Mosaic Law. The Father had not abandoned Jesus. Rather he stood back for a time so a final word could be spoken in and through the resurrection. Jesus is the faithful son of Abraham and the true Israel. Jesus is the true son of David and the eternal king. Jesus' conception of God as immanent-transcendence is how God wants to be known. God calls people to lives of tangible-enchancement that reveal divine love to the rest of Creation. Thus the risen Jesus declares, "I've received all authority in heaven and on earth," before commissioning his disciples to baptize and teach others as he taught them (28:18-20). In Jesus, all people are now invited to leave alternative imaginaries and fully embrace the Divine Imaginary and

³⁰ Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 33b: Matthew 14-28* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 831, 844-845.

the life it offers. Just as the Magi came to see Jesus at his birth, now the people of God are to take Jesus as a blessing to all nations, and as they do, they do so with the confidence that they will never be left alone, because Jesus will be with them always.³¹

Mark: Will You Take the Road Home from Exile?

The previous segment of this chapter reviewed the Gospel according to Matthew, looking for its unique presentation of the Divine Imaginary, that is, how God invites humanity to envision and relate to God-self. The resultant call for humanity to view God as a loving and intimate Father who inspires a life conducted in accordance with Jesus love-centric reinterpretation of the Mosaic Law. The idyllic result is a kingdom of priests who live in stark contrast to the values of this world. The next portion of the chapter takes on an identical task with the Gospel according to Mark.

Like Matthew, Mark opens his Gospel with an invitation to frame what is to come in light of the Hebrew Bible. He writes that the good news of Jesus Christ happened, “just as it was written about in the prophecy of Isaiah” (Mark 1:1). Then Mark quotes the beginning of Isaiah 40, an exhortation of comfort and promise to Israel at a time when they lived in Babylonian exile. How had Israel found itself in this foreign land? Despite the immanent-transcendence of God that was present with the people in the pillar of cloud and fire as they left Egypt, the cloud on Mount Sinai, with the ark, and ultimately Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 8:1-11), Israel continued to look towards other nations instead of God to defend them from regional powers. This and other ways of failing to embrace divinely bestowed lives of tangible-enchancement ultimately resulted in God

³¹ Ibid., 886, 889.

withdrawing his presence from the temple, the coinciding destruction of Jerusalem, and the ensuing seventy years in Babylon. But God's faithfulness is not restrained by human sin. So the prophet Isaiah, after thirty-two chapters of admonishing Israel to return to God, transitions his work and lets Israel know their God is coming to liberate them. While the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile prompted them to believe that God had failed and was no longer worthy of worship, the divine reappearance proves to the whole earth that the God of Israel is the one true God.³²

Mark opens his Gospel with Isaiah's words and uses them to point to the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus. As it was for Israel, so in Mark the anticipated action of God is far more significant than the coming itself. Mark is declaring that something new and powerful is happening. Immanent-transcendence is on the way and a non-geographic exile is about to end. Yet this highly optimistic beginning sits in stark contrast to the final verse of Mark's account: "Overcome with terror and dread, they fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid" (Mark 16:8). This contradiction highlights the reality that, throughout Mark, the good news for many sounds like anything but good news. Much like the author of Jonah — who left the book hanging with a question that readers are rhetorically invited to answer for themselves — Mark invites his readers to decide how they are going to respond to "the good news about Jesus Christ, God's Son" (1:1).³³

³² John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 45; Bright, *A History of Israel*, 269-288; 324-331; Victor H. Matthews, *Social World of Hebrew Prophets* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub, 2000), 144-145.

³³ Jack Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1989), 56; Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, 20 Anv. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 399-401.

What is the “good news” as Mark presents it? Mark invites the reader to view a world of multifaceted enchantment where everything, even the tangible, holds spiritual meaning. This includes the natural world, the demonic, physical health, and religious / social structures. In various ways, Jesus seeks to rescue each of these realms from the power of the devil and, in doing so, invites both those in the narrative and those reading to journey from Exile to the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:1-3 and Isa. 40). Put another way, Mark’s Jesus actively binds Satan and his influence in the world, thus introducing an eschatological age for those who follow Jesus. However, Mark emphasizes that Jesus’ work, which is received by nature, demons, and sick bodies, generates conflict in both the religious and social structures and among Jesus’ followers. This conflict is what ultimately leads to Jesus abandoned on the cross and the women running in fear from the empty tomb.³⁴

Expanding on the previous paragraph, it is critical to consider the responses of various earthly realms to the person of Jesus. First, the natural world, which metaphorically bows at the presence and command of Jesus. This is first seen in Mark’s temptation account where Jesus is at peace with the wild animals.³⁵ Then there are the two storm accounts. During the first, Jesus is asleep in the boat as a raging tempest terrifies even the fishermen, who are part of the twelve (Mark 4:35-41). Certain they are

³⁴ Pennington and McDonough, *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, 45; Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 35, 63.

³⁵ Different interpreters have linked the animals to the danger of the wilderness, allies of Satan in the temptation, and as a sign of Jesus as a new Adam who is at harmony with nature. Given Mark opening his Gospel with a reference to Isaiah 40, a preferred interpretive framework comes from Isaiah 43:14-28 where God sends an army to Babylon to redeem the people so he can make a way for them, including a way in the wilderness where, “the beasts of the field, the jackals and ostriches, will honor me” (43:20). Charles A. Gieschen, “Why Was Jesus With the Wild Beasts (Mark 1:13)?,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (2009): 77-80; Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 35.

about to die, they awaken Jesus and accuse him of not caring. He gets up and orders the waves to be silent. Like the wild animals, the waters know who Jesus is, and the sea stills. Similarly, in Mark 6:45-52, immediately after they witness the miraculous feeding of five thousand, the disciples are in a boat struggling against the waves when Jesus walks on the water to them. Certain he is a ghost, terror overcomes them. Jesus responds by going to them, joining them in the boat, and calming the winds they were fighting. In both accounts, the disciples find themselves perplexed as to who this man is and Mark reveals their hearts were resisting God's ways, a response characteristic of humanity throughout Mark's Gospel.³⁶

Strikingly, while demonic forces also resist God's ways, unlike the disciples, the demons correctly identify Jesus. As early as Mark 1:21-28, before Jesus' authoritative teaching and miracles prompted crowds to gather, a demon Jesus cast out asks, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are. You are the holy one from God." Jesus, as he will in Mark 3:11-12 ordered the demon to be quiet and say no more about his identity. The extent of Jesus' power over the demonic is clearly displayed in Mark 5:1-20 where Jesus casts out an entire legion of demons who, despite their number, tremble at the presence of Jesus. Again in Mark 9:14-29 Jesus casts out a demon that others, including his slow-learning disciples, were unable overcome. Both nature and demons quickly submit to the immanent-transcendence of Jesus.³⁷

³⁶ Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 189-190.

³⁷ Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 38; Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 191.

Just as Jesus had power over nature and demonic forces, he also had power over physical ailments. Early in Jesus' ministry, this is seen with Simon's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-34), who was sick with a fever. It is not unsurprising that Jesus heals her, but the next line demands attention, because she got up and "served them." While there is little detail on what happened after most of Jesus' exorcisms and healings, this one offers a clear and simple image of what should happen next. A healing was typically followed by Jesus ordering silence about what he had done, an order ignored by the man with a skin disease (1:40-45), the man with a legion of demons (5:1-20), a deaf man (7:31-37), and a blind man (8:22-26). Contrastingly, Peter's mother-in-law was inspired to serve, an indicator that that restoration in Jesus is not the end in and of itself; it is a means to the end of taking the exile road out of Babylon.³⁸ To simply "not be possessed" or "not be sick" falls short of Jesus' Kingdom goal because, in the terms proposed for this dissertation, it lacks tangible-enchantment.³⁹

There is one significant healing account previously overlooked because, embedded within it, is an introduction to the social and religious structures Jesus sought to overturn. Mark 5:21-43 begins with Jairus, a leader of the synagogue coming to Jesus asking for his daughter to be healed. Along the way, a woman who had suffered from bleeding for twelve years decides she is going to touch Jesus' clothes and thus be healed. She aimed to accomplish this discreetly, but Jesus felt power leave him as she

³⁸ This resonates with Jesus request that the man possessed by legion would return to his family and the blind man go home and not enter the village. In both cases, societal norms make it difficult to imagine a scenario where their families would need them so they too could take the exile road out of Babylon.

³⁹ Ibid., 144-146.

experienced healing. He halted and asked, “Who touched my clothes?” Trembling, the woman came forward.

Standing in the middle of a large crowd we have two people with Jesus between them. The crowd looks at the two and views them through the community’s socio-cultural values. On one hand, Jairus. As a leader of the synagogue, he is a leader of the community and therefore highly respected and viewed as a righteous man. If anyone deserves time and attention from Jesus, it is he. His daughter, without question, is the one who should be saved. Then there is the woman. Twelve years of bleeding makes her ceremonially unclean. She cannot be touched, so she cannot have children, giving her little value in society. To heighten her worthlessness, everyone else in the community must remain vigilant around her so they can maintain their own cleanliness. Everyone would be better served if Jesus told her to leave and go live among the lepers. Yet Jesus tells Jairus to wait. Mark offers little detail about what happens. We are given no indication whether Jesus touched her or simply spoke with words that carried a tender touch, “Daughter, your faith has healed you; go in peace, healed from your disease.” As this happens, Jairus receives news his daughter has died. Still, Jesus also extends grace to him, going to the little girl and speaking life into her.⁴⁰

This incident serves as a microcosm of Jesus’ attitude toward societal structures, specifically concerning those who lived on the social fringe because of their gender, ethnicity, profession, or religious standing. The practice of spending time with outcasts begins early in Mark as the Pharisees find themselves questioning why Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners (Mark 2:13-17). Jesus’ response is simple as he points to the sick

⁴⁰ Ibid., 197-203.

needing a doctor. By reaching out to the rejected, Jesus is redefining social values. Nowhere is this more potently demonstrated than in his encounter with a Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24-30). Jesus is sitting inside a home. Mark makes it clear that Jesus wanted solitude, but the crowds have made it impossible. Even as he tries to get away, a Greek woman comes in and falls at his feet, begging that a demon be exorcised from her daughter. Socially, there is nothing right about this situation. The woman is dishonorable because of her gender, her ethnicity, and her behavior. But even as Jesus seeks to dismiss her by highlighting his calling to Israel, she remains steadfast, and apparently aware that ultimately, Jesus came for the Gentiles as well. In a great reversal, the master of language allows himself to be shamed by this woman and frees her daughter of the tormentor. The only conclusion left is that, in the Kingdom of God, the social structures of this age, specifically those that oppress the vulnerable and the marginalized, are destroyed.⁴¹

Meanwhile, those in power overtly denounce such changes. The Pharisees first find reason to oppose Jesus for insulting God by forgiving sins (Mark 2:1-12). They intensify their opposition as the social systems they hold dear start to crack. Before Mark concludes his third chapter, Jesus has challenged the practice of fasting (2:18-22), working on the Sabbath (2:23-26), healing on the Sabbath (3:1-5), and what they value in keeping the Sabbath (2:27-28). This culminates with the Pharisees vying to destroy Jesus (3:6). While the overt conflict with the Pharisees disappears for almost four chapters, when it returns, it does so with a vengeance as Jesus reframes the ritual cleanliness rules that serve as the foundation of their definition of holiness (7:1-23). Fighting back, the Pharisees come to Jesus with a series of challenges on divorce (10:1-10) and taxes

⁴¹ Ibid., 203-205.

(12:13-17). When this failed, other religious leaders came and tried to make him say something he would regret concerning the resurrection (12:18-27) and the most important commandment (12:28-34). Not only does Jesus refute all of their challenges, he corrects their teaching on David (12:35-40)⁴² and announces to the disciples that the temple (and by implication the broken religious system built around the temple) will be destroyed (13:1-2). From this point on Mark is clear, when the opportunity arises, those entrenched in the religious and social structures will destroy Jesus.⁴³

But it is not just those who contended against Jesus who were ignorant. Rather, throughout Mark's account, the disciples demonstrate a lack of understanding about the person of Jesus and the impact of the Kingdom of God on societal structures. Mark first reveals this ignorance as the disciples return from their first missionary journey and find themselves standing before a large crowd late in the afternoon in a desolate place (Mark 6:7-13). In the verses that follow (6:35-38) they recognize the hunger of the crowd and suggest to Jesus that he dismiss them so they can go buy food. Jesus counters that the disciples should provide the meal, to which they retort that it would require almost eight months' wages to feed the crowd. The disciples' understanding of provision is apparently limited to "everyone is on their own" or "the wealthy take care of everyone else." Then Jesus asks the piercing question, "How much bread do you have? Take a look." (6:38) If they had trusted Jesus when he sent them out two by two and ordered them to take

⁴² If Ched Myers highly criticized non-traditional interpretation of the widow's mite (Mark 12:38-44) in *Binding the Strong Man* is accepted, it too supports Jesus' desire to undermine religious structures of the day. Myers reads the account not as generosity on the widow's part, but as a religious system that is supposed to care for the least, like widows, but instead now demands temples taxes from them leaving them exploited, isolated, and vulnerable. While his approach certainly resonates with the overall sense of Mark, the broad disagreement with his interpretation is understood. Ibid., 320-322.

⁴³ Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 86-88.

nothing extra with them, the answer would be none. Perhaps there was no trust in Jesus' implied promise that they would be provided for, so there were five loaves and two fish among them. What follows with the feeding of the five thousand (6:39-44) demonstrates Kingdom provision to the crowds and serves as yet another invitation for the disciples to believe.

In a series of teachings beginning at Mark 9:33, Jesus has to correct his disciples' desire to be the greatest (9:33-37), their attempt to exclude someone casting out demons in Jesus' name because he was not one of them (9:38-41), the dismissing of children from Jesus' presence (10:13-16), and a direct request from James and John that they can be in a position of greatness when Jesus enters his glory (10:35-45). It should be no surprise that, when Jesus is arrested, they failed to see the way of God's Kingdom and run away (14:50-52).⁴⁴

Less than twenty-four hours after the disciples abandon Jesus in the garden, the religious and social structures claim victory over the dead Son of God, crowned by the Centurion's declaration, "This man was certainly God's Son" (Mark 15:39). Historically, most likely due to Luke's positive endorsement (Luke 23:47), the Centurion's words have been read as a confession of faith. But given that the present task only allows Mark's voice, this interpretation must be reconsidered in light of Mark's presentation of the Kingdom. For Mark, any social structure benefiting from the people it supposedly serves is in opposition to the Kingdom. As much as the religious culture built around the Sabbath and Temple was the key structure in Jerusalem, Rome hovered as a perpetual shadow over the region, as evidenced by the Sanhedrin needing Pilate's approval to

⁴⁴ Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 205-209; Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 95-103.

crucify Jesus (15:1-15). Therefore, participation in the power structure of Rome and being a disciple of Jesus are, for Mark, mutually exclusive. Given Mark's unwillingness to reconcile service to both the Kingdom and Rome, and the Centurion's faithfully reporting to Pilate following the crucifixion (15:44-45), it can be deduced that the Centurion did not experience a radical conversion (10:17-31). His statement at the cross, therefore, was not a profession of faith. Instead it was a confession like that of the demons earlier in Mark's account. He correctly affirmed the identity Mark gives Jesus at the opening of Gospel, and continues with the proud but unspoken words, "And Rome killed him."⁴⁵

Contrary to expectations, the situation does not seem to improve with the resurrection of Jesus, instead, the only followers who remained with him, albeit from a distance, during the crucifixion (Mark 15:40-41), were now running in fear at the news of the resurrection (16:8). What is a reader of Mark to do? Mark demands a deeply devoted disciple — one that embraces a Jesus whose vision of human flourishing involves the tearing down the very systems and structures that people are ingrained in from birth. A disciple who allows Jesus to strip so much of what is known and loved in life, and instead of looking to replace it with new positions and power and the glory of the resurrection, welcomes the awareness that just as the religious and social structures of Jesus' age set out to destroy him, so too will they seek to harm anyone who dares to follow him (8:34-38). What exactly this means is unknown, just as the exact meaning of the resurrection is left unknown, but for a Marcan disciple, there is no other way to live, because it is a life spent in intimate relationship with Jesus, who not only proclaimed his message but was

⁴⁵ Ibid., 53-54.; Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 393-394.

vindicated through his resurrection, and is truly the immanent-transcendence who both enables and empowers a life of tangible-enchantment.⁴⁶

Luke: A Second Adam Starting a New Lineage

So far, this chapter has reviewed the Gospels according to Matthew and Mark, seeking what each reveals about the Divine Imaginary—God’s self-revelation in and through Jesus that unveils God’s desires for humanity. Matthew’s brand of immanent-transcendence involves an invitation to embrace a loving Father in the mold not of patriarchy, but patricentry. This place of rootedness under the loving protection of the Father is then expressed through a life of tangible-enchantment devoted to loving others. Mark on the other hand, while still offering a God of immanent-transcendence, focuses on how being in God’s presence strips away everything of this world and replaces it with a desire to engage tangible-enchantment that pursues the broken, the hurting, and the cast aside. Luke, like Matthew and Mark, has his own approach to Jesus’ story.

Luke opens his Gospel account with a series of events that unveil the exceptional nature of Jesus. His birth by the power of the Holy Spirit was foretold to his mother Mary (Luke 1:26-38). John the Baptist, filled with the Holy Spirit even in the womb leaps for joy at the presence of the pregnant Mary (1:39-45) and an angel chorus announced the child’s birth to shepherds (2:8-20). At Jesus’ circumcision and temple presentation, both Simeon and Anna celebrate the birth of the child (2:25-38) and twelve years later he was already leaving others in awe at his understanding of the Torah (2:41-47). These accounts are laced with connections to the history of Israel including Abraham (1:55), Jacob

⁴⁶ Ibid., 401; Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 55.

(1:33), Moses (2:22), and David (1:32 and 2:4). Following Jesus' baptism by John (3:21-22), the evangelist does something unique and offers a genealogy of Jesus going back to the first man, Adam. Adam, along with his wife, Eve, was created to live with the immanent-transcendence of God, who walked in the garden with him (Gen. 3:8). Empowered by God's presence, they engaged in lives of tangible-enchancement by ruling over and caring for the rest of creation (1:28-31 and 2:15). It was a life that ended all too soon.⁴⁷

The Fall began with a simple question, "Did God really say...?" (Gen. 3:1). Adam and Eve's existence centered on the belief that their Creator could be trusted. That he was immanent-transcendence. That a life of tangible-enchancement was in their best interest. So the question, "Did God really say...?" was pointed at a fruit tree but the ramifications were much grander. Adam and Eve were invited to question their entire way of existence. From what the text reveals, it did not take much coaxing before they ate and found their eyes open to a wide range of possibilities and realities. When they heard the Creator walking, the footsteps no longer sounded the same. Their ears distorted the steps and they were compelled to hide from the one they now perceived as distant and disconnected. Moreover, they hid from each other behind fig leaves and pointed fingers of blame. The beautiful life of tangible-enchancement, one that focused on caring for others, was already a distant memory. As Bonhoeffer describes it, they had gone from *imago dei* (image of

⁴⁷ Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 51.

God) to *sicut deus* (as god). Rather than living by the Divine Imaginary, they were now living according to their own.⁴⁸

Given the fallenness of Adam and the celebrated presentation of Jesus, the connection between the two is, at best, confusing. However, the broader context of Luke's genealogy proves helpful. First, it closes by describing Adam as the "son of God" (Luke 3:38), which echoes back to the final words before the genealogy, where a voice from heaven speaks over the just baptized Jesus and declares, "You are my son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness" (3:22). From this, we can assume that Luke intends for the reader to consider the man Jesus, who is about to begin his public ministry, in contrast with Adam. Therefore, it should not surprise the reader that when this second Adam enters the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, the outcome is different and Jesus, rather than becoming *sicut deus* remains *imago dei* (4:1-13).⁴⁹

Returning from temptation Jesus goes to his hometown on the Sabbath, takes the scroll from Isaiah 61, and reads what today's Bible identifies as the first two verses. While these verses are potent in isolation, they also point to the rest of Chapter 61 which reveals a rebuilding and reconstruction of destroyed and abandoned places (Isa. 61:4), identifies post-Babylon Israel as Priests of the Lord (61:5), and announces that future generations will both be known by other nations and recognized as blessed by the Lord (61:9).⁵⁰ In many ways, Isaiah 61 is a reclaiming of Exodus 19 and a recovery of the

⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall Temptation*, 76.

⁴⁹ Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 26-28; 57-58.

⁵⁰ The reader of this dissertation should recognize these points in conjunction with God's promises to Abraham and fulfillment through Israel as seen earlier in this chapter.

Promised Land for Israel. However, Jesus gives it new meaning when he says, “Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it” (Luke 4:21). This fulfillment, while true in the presence of Jesus, is then carried out as Jesus rebuilds and reconstructs in places where sin has brought destruction through a variety of healings and exorcisms,⁵¹ as well as proclaiming God’s forgiveness.⁵² In addition, Jesus begins to form a people to be a new kingdom of priests⁵³ and starts to teach them what life in the Kingdom looks like.⁵⁴

During this season where Jesus travels throughout Galilee, an important insight for the project at hand is the way Jesus invites people to approach him and, by association, the Father. For example, Simon Peter recognizes his sin as he approaches Jesus. Following the leads of Adam who hid (Gen. 3:8), Moses who fell flat on his face (Num. 14:5) and Isaiah who cried out (Isa. 6:5), Simon Peter falls to his knees and begs Jesus to leave him (Luke 5:8). Just as God called out, “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:9), embraced his covenant (Num. 14:19-20), and touches Isaiah with a coal (Isa. 6:6-7), so Jesus tells Peter to fear not. On the surface, this seems like an appropriate exchange. But one must ask if this response is rooted in an imaginary other than one of immanent-transcendence.

When contrasting these examples of confronting God with the one offered by the woman in Luke 7, we see someone who, like the men before her, is fully aware of her sin, but rather than hiding, taking cover, or pronouncing unworthiness, she recognizes the one

⁵¹ See Luke 4:33-41, 5:12-13, 5:17-25, 6:6-10, 7:1-15, 8:26-33, 8:40-56, and 9:37-43.

⁵² See Luke 5:17-25, 5:29-32, and 7:36-50.

⁵³ See Luke 5:1-11, 5:27-28, 6:12-16, 8:1-3, and 9:1-6.

⁵⁴ See Luke 5:33-6:5, 6:20-49, 7:18-35, 8:4-18, 9:10-17, 9:23-27, and 9:46-50.

who forgives and, when she sees him dishonored, gives him due honor. It is a scene that deserves detailed attention. The account immediately follows Jesus' interaction with the disciples of John the Baptist (Luke 7:18-35) and Jesus' subsequent lauding of John before the Pharisees who continue to reject John's message. One of the Pharisees invites Jesus to his home for a meal. According to Kenneth Bailey, if the Pharisee were welcoming a respected guest he would assure foot washing, kiss the guest on the cheek,⁵⁵ and anoint the head with oil. Simon does none of these things, demonstrating his disdain for Jesus. His invitation was not to learn or fellowship, but to insult, and the woman would not have it. While there is no evidence of how, she has heard Jesus' teaching and dared to believe it is true. Simon's response of a sinner touching Jesus reveals the mindset of the day, one where sin cannot come near holiness. The woman however, knows if those rules were ever true, they are no longer. She rushes to his feet to wash them, kiss them, and anoint them. This is not a confession. This is not begging for forgiveness. She confidently trusts that her sin is already forgiven and now she is giving Jesus the honor that is due him; the very honor Simon withheld. While the impulse of sinful humanity is to run, cower, or fear the Divine, the second Adam reveals a different path, one where God draws the sinner close. This will be seen again as Jesus journeys toward Jerusalem.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Or hand if the guest was seen as a teacher.

⁵⁶ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 2:1-21; Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 65-66.

Luke focuses this journey on the Ascension rather than the crucifixion⁵⁷ by opening his travel narrative with the words, “As the time approached when Jesus was to be taken up into heaven, he determined to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). Already the reader is invited to see that, for Luke, the cross and resurrection are a means to a greater end. Projecting forward into Luke’s second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, this end is seen in the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) to empower a new kingdom of priests who follow the second Adam and serve as both witnesses and restorers of the *imago dei*. Further supporting this view is the content of the travel narrative, which focuses on teaching the disciples the ways of the Kingdom. This teaching loosely fits into three categories: 1) the nature of humanity’s relationship with God, 2) what it means to live as a child of God, and 3) how to remain in relationship with God. Each will now be explored using select parables⁵⁸ from the travel narrative with special attention given to nuances that arise from their cultural setting, the first-century Greco-Roman Mediterranean world.⁵⁹

From the moment the Legal Expert approaches Jesus asking, “What must I do to gain eternal life?” (Luke 10:25) it is clear that Luke’s Jesus rejects human performance as a means to salvation. Ironically, this point is often lost in the parable of the Good

⁵⁷ This is true in spite of the fact that two of the three-passion predictions within Luke come just verses before the start of the travel narrative (9:18-22 and 44). Jesus knows he is going to die, but more importantly, he knows he is going to ascend. In Luke-Acts, this becomes the focal point of salvation as Jesus, in the ascension, takes on the divine role of dispensing forgiveness and other salvific benefits. Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 71-73.

⁵⁸ For the sake of brevity, this exploration will focus on select parables that encompass the heart of Jesus’ teaching. It is important to note that all of Jesus’ parables were researched leading to the creation of the three categories represented.

⁵⁹ Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 2, 64-65, 103, 144.

Samaritan, which is part of Jesus' answer to the question (10:30-37). The interaction begins with a question about gaining eternal life and is followed by an accurate summarization of the Torah as calling for the love of both God and neighbor. Recognizing the impossibility of this, the Legal Expert hopes to lower the bar with a narrow definition of neighbor. Jesus responds by greatly expanding the definition in the parable by having an unclean Samaritan showing love to an unclean man who was left on the road for dead. What was already impossible is now incomprehensible, which is the point of Jesus' answer. Nothing can be done to gain eternal life. The Legal Expert would leave with two problems if he had approached Jesus with any level of sincerity. First, the Legal Expert's Torah hermeneutic, which focuses on reading the law as a roadmap to salvation, is wrong. Second, his life objective of gaining eternal life is no longer possible. Further compounding an already complex situation, Jesus tells the Legal Expert to go and live like the Samaritan in the parable, even though it cannot and will not gain him eternal life.⁶⁰

This same objection to the performance mindset is brought to Jesus by a rich man who, by his own testimony has kept the commandments, but leaves Jesus' presence sad because he is called to sell all he has and give to the poor before following Jesus (Luke 18:18-30). In response to his departure, Jesus offers a simple parable about it being easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle than a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. Rightly, those standing by asked, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus replies that it is possible: God can make people right with God. When this encounter is read in light of the

⁶⁰ Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes*, 2:33-56; Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 16th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1990), 229-233.

preceding parable on the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14), where on one side you have the Pharisee proudly standing apart from the crowd because he is superior due to performance that surpasses the commands of the Law while on the other side you have the tax collector who stands at a distance and cries out and asks God to make atonement for him, it becomes even more clear that, for Luke, eternal life is a gift from God.⁶¹

Nowhere is this reality made more clear than the Parable of the Prodigal Sons⁶² (Luke 15:11-32). The parable begins with the younger of two sons doing the unthinkable: he wishes his father dead so he can receive his inheritance and then goes on to shame himself by selling his land. At the same time, the older brother, who should stand loyally by his father, allows everything to happen. The younger son takes his father's money and runs to a far off land where he lives extravagantly until he finds himself out of funds. Through Bailey's analysis, it becomes clear that going broke is the only sin the young man seems to recognize as he hatches a plan to return to his father, become a hired hand who lives in the village as his father's social equal, and, if he does well, will find himself in a place where someday he can make financial reparations with his father. As a side benefit, this plan keeps him out of his brother's house and therefore not consuming resources that are now, after the division of the inheritance, rightfully his brother's. From his perspective, his plan is perfect because it does not require receiving grace. His pride

⁶¹ Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 1:142-170; Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 256-258.

⁶² The author recognizes that historically the title uses a singular son; however, as the following explanation will make clear, both sons are prodigals.

remains intact. For those listening to Jesus, this was the kind of performance-rooted repentance they were taught.⁶³

Given that farmers in first century Israel would live in the village and not on their land, when the young son returned to his father's home, there was no way for him to avoid going through the village. This would be no small task. After all, he had shamed himself and the community by insulting his father and then selling the land. At best, crowds would likely follow the boy, mocking him as he made his way to his father's home and, if the plan worked, then for years to come he could be mocked while living in the village. Given everything that could happen, that is something the young man is willing to endure. But his father has other plans. Instead of allowing his son to be humiliated, the father socially humiliates himself by doing the undignified thing and running through the village so he can meet the boy he sees on the horizon. Then, before an amassing throng could have an opportunity to act or the boy has an opportunity to speak, the father announces restoration of his child's sonship.

While, on the surface, this is inconceivable, it is also problematic for the son, because receiving this grace puts him back under his father's authority and makes him dependent on his brother as well. Furthermore, he is stripped of the opportunity to do something to resolve the inheritance issue. To accept his father's act means to let go of his pride and receive grace; grace that comes with a robe, a ring, and a feast, all of which tell the community that the young man's sin is not to be held against him.⁶⁴

⁶³ Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 1:158-180.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:180-190.

In response, the older brother once again stands by and watches. But this time, he does so from outside the home and refuses to come in. Much like his brother, he too has now dishonored his father and shamed himself. Once again, rather than leaving his son in a place of shame, the father humiliates himself by going to his oldest and offering the same grace the younger just received. Unlike his younger brother, the older son denounces such a gift. He refuses to receive the father and his sonship on the father's terms.

The consequence of Jesus' teaching on eternal life is revealed in the Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24), where a man prepares a large dinner and invites his guests who, one by one, find ludicrous reasons not to attend. Wanting his banquet room full, the master has "the poor, crippled, blind, and lame" (14:21) brought in to the feast and when that is not enough, foreigners are welcomed as well (14:23). In the end, no one who was initially invited attends because they excluded themselves. Given the questions of the Legal Expert and rich man on how to inherit eternal life, as well as the self-righteousness of the Pharisee and the hardheartedness of the older brother, we can see that those outside eternal life are not there because they were rejected, but because they rejected divine love.⁶⁵

While Jesus in Luke is insistent that you cannot perform your way into the Kingdom, there is simultaneously a high price to pay if one is going to live as a child of the Kingdom. No sooner had Jesus set out on the road to Jerusalem than he encountered three people who had yet to deal with the cost of the Kingdom (9:57-62). The first, who sought to join Jesus on his own, came seeking status and security. The second and third,

⁶⁵ Ibid., 1:88-113; 1:190-206.

who were invited to join, included one who wanted to fulfill his sociocultural obligations and one who wanted permission from his family. Each of the three in one way or another was holding on to the present age and, in each case, Jesus makes it clear that the Kingdom demands priority transformation. The same lesson comes through in the Parable of the Rich Fool (12:13-21), who not only allowed his possessions of this age to keep him from the Kingdom, but also allowed them to drive him into a place of cultural isolation.⁶⁶

The often-missed beauty of this Kingdom necessitated reprioritization and life transformation, is that when priorities and resources are reordered towards the Kingdom, they can take on new and greater meaning. This idea is further expounded upon in the Parable of the Obedient Servant (Luke 17:7-10), where faithful service is expected without additional extrinsic motivation or reward. Instead, the servant lives the servant life and takes pleasure in it because that is what servants do. Similarly, residents of God's Kingdom live and take pleasure in a kingdom life because that is what residents of the Kingdom do.

The shift in life is also for those still wrestling with the Kingdom. Here a second look at the parable of the Good Samaritan is helpful. While the primary message of the parable is that earning a performance-based place in the Kingdom is impossible, the parable closes with Jesus admonishing the Legal Expert to love as the Samaritan did, because it is the kind of love at the heart of the Torah (Luke 10:37). By exhorting the Legal Expert to live differently, Jesus invited him to both see the world and read the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 2:22-32; 2:57-73; Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 266-268.

Torah differently. If the Legal Expert read differently enough, it might enable him to see the heart of God.⁶⁷

It is clear from the first two categories of Jesus' teaching during the Lukan travel narrative that both entry into the Kingdom and life in it are challenging. Entry is difficult because it means letting go of the performance approach most innate to humanity. It is relinquishing *sicut deus*, embracing humility, and receiving grace. Life in the Kingdom is difficult because it means living contrary to the world. Therefore, Jesus offers a series of teachings aimed at maintaining and developing our relationship with God. First and foremost, Jesus points to prayer. This begins with the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1-4), which shapes the content of prayer, followed by two subsequent parables on God's faithfulness in hearing the prayers of his children (11:5-13).⁶⁸ A similar parable comes in Luke 18:1-8 with the unjust judge, where Jesus presents the example of an earthly judge without compassion giving into a woman because she keeps bothering him. Jesus then challenges his hearers to consider how much more their heavenly Father will hear them because he is nothing like the unjust judge.⁶⁹

In addition to trustful prayer, Jesus takes current events that were commonly interpreted through a lens of sin and subsequent suffering and turns them into an invitation for self-reflection (Luke 13:1-5). It begins when Jesus hears about some

⁶⁷ Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 2:55; 2:114-126; Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 260-263.

⁶⁸ The first of these parables, The Friend at Midnight, is often misread as a parable on persistence. However, Bailey effectively argues that the question at the beginning expects a negative answer. In the cultural context, nobody would offer excuses like the children being asleep or the doors barred. Rather, this was an issue of the village's honor and, for that reason alone, someone would get up in the middle of the night. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 1:119-133.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:134-141; 2:127-141; Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 271-274.

Galileans Pilate killed and asked if their suffering proved greater sinfulness. He asks a similar question in relation to those who died when a tower fell on them. Both times, he clearly denies the connection, and suggests that his hearers, instead of passing judgment, take a moment to contemplate on their own lives. Given that such an examination will often reveal slow spiritual growth or an area of ongoing struggle in the life of a believer, Jesus offers the Parable of the Fig Tree (13:6-9), bringing comfort by revealing God's patience with those slow to produce fruit while also pressing the importance of growth (13:6-9). With these three key teachings addressed repeatedly, Jesus makes the final ascent into Jerusalem, ready to entrust his followers to the coming Holy Spirit.⁷⁰

For those familiar with Scripture, what happens next is largely predictable. Animosity rapidly develops between Jesus and the Jewish leaders and a plot is hatched to kill Jesus. At this point there are three features to Luke's account that stand out; two because they are unique to Luke and the third because of how Luke frames Jesus as a second Adam. This final point is bound to the release of the prisoner Barabbas (Luke 23:13-25), whose name literally means, "son of the father." Barabbas, who is identified twice as being in prison for his role in a riot and murder, personifies life as the son of the father Adam. Jesus, on the other hand, has exemplified the sonship that Adam abandoned, the sonship of the Heavenly Father. When given the opportunity to choose between two sons, once again the world chooses *sicut deus* over *imago dei*.

The features exclusive to Luke include one of the criminals being crucified next to Jesus repenting (Luke 23:40-42). Perhaps this is one final opportunity for a sinner, like the woman in Simon's house, to approach Jesus with confidence and for Jesus to freely

⁷⁰ Ibid., 74-87.

grant forgiveness. Similar to the criminal's confession, Jesus' words from the cross are different in Luke. In both Matthew and Mark, who have Jesus cry out from a place of abandonment, the Lukan Jesus is at peace as evidenced by the forgiveness he offers those crucifying him (23:34) and his final words, "Father, into your hands I entrust my life" (23:46). Jesus is at peace with the work he has done. There is a confidence in what is to come with the resurrection and ascension. So he embraces the humiliation. He loves and forgives boldly, and he continues to personify *imago dei*.

Luke's post-resurrection account consists of three major movements. First, Jesus opens the disciples' minds to Scripture (Luke 24:26-27 and 44-45). Details beyond using the entirety of the Hebrew Bible, which is now reframed around the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Christ are not offered, but the book of Acts offers possibilities in the Apostles' preaching.⁷¹ Moreover, repentance must be preached and to accomplish that, Jesus commissions his disciples, with the caveat that their ministry is not to begin until the Holy Spirit comes (24:48-49). Finally, Jesus ascends into heaven (24:50-51). Because the second Adam who remained the *imago dei* is now with God, those who follow in his footsteps see God differently because God looks like Jesus. Moreover, those who live as children of the Kingdom are now in the business of establishing human flourishing on divine terms by reclaiming the creation from the *sicut deus*.⁷²

⁷¹ At Pentecost, Peter both cited a prophet (Joel) and two Psalms (16 and 110). Joel was used to connect the ascension with the sending of the Spirit and the Psalms connected the one who did not decay but was resurrected to the eternal Davidic king. In another example, Acts repeatedly points to the sign of hanging on a tree (5:30, 10:39, and 13:39), which stems from Deuteronomy 21:22-23 and embraces the humiliation of Jesus on the cross as part of the Divine Identity, much like the father running to cover the shame of the Prodigal Son. See Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts*, 71-76.

⁷² Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 60-68; Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 35, 46, 72, 109.

John: Jesus Reveals Glory on God's Terms

While the synoptic Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are often treated as virtually identical, it has been demonstrated how, when read independently and aware of nuance they each present a different divine self-revelation. At the same time, while holding to a unique perspective, each presents God as immanent-transcendence. Matthew does so through the terminology of a loving Father. Mark calls for the stripping of attachments to this world that hold humanity in exile. Luke displays a God who engages in self-humiliation by the world's standards because entry into God's Kingdom is based not on performance but receiving divine love. Similarly, each of the three invites God's people to a life of tangible-enchancement. For Matthew, the focus is a life of love. For Mark, it is about reaching out to those most ostracized. Luke invites followers of Jesus to reclaim creation by living in the image of God. Now it is time to turn to John and a fourth perspective on the Divine Imaginary.

The first verses of John invite the reader back to the first verses of Scripture, the creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2. In the secular age of scientific inquiry on the origins of the cosmos, these chapters and the presumed accounts of the material origins of the universe are strongly contested by secularists on one hand and vehemently defended by philosophically modern Christian apologists on the other. Both approach Genesis 1 and 2 from a place of disenchantment, where the world can be rationally understood and explained. As a result, scientists point to physical evidence that debunks the biblical accounts while both Young and Old-Earth Creationists seek to read the physical evidence in light of their perspective while seeking to reconcile the somewhat contradictory creation account of Genesis 2. In the end, the real difference is that the Bible apologists

seek to sustain Divine transcendence while the secularists embrace immanence. The fundamental problem is that Genesis was written in and for an enchanted world and, if the reader wants to read as the author intended, it is necessary to stop and ask if Genesis 1 and 2 were written as accounts of the universe's physical origins. This author offers an emphatic "No!" to such a question and chooses instead to look for the revelation of Jesus within the creation accounts.⁷³

Offering a way forward are theologians like Jonathan Pennington, Sean McDonough, and John Walton who invite the interpretation of Genesis' early chapters from a broader and enchanted cosmological perspective. Ancient cosmologies in the Near East focused on the question of who rules over the cosmos and the ontological question of how humanity was to conduct itself under the authority of the one who rules. In other words, these cosmologies were intended to guide a culture's imaginary.

Genesis 1 and 2 are structurally similar to creation stories from other ancient Near Eastern cultures, however the Bible is very different in how it answers who is in charge and how humans are to live. Unique to the Hebrew text are: monotheism; a good creation; God's establishment of the creation for both Divine and human benefit; and the role of people as God's image bearers who worship the Creator, not by serving the Creator's needs, but by caring for the creation itself. From this perspective, Genesis 1 and 2 are invitations for ancient Israel to embrace the Divine Imaginary, where the God of all creation is immanent-transcendent, speaking the creation into existence (Gen. 1:3) while getting down on bended knee to form Adam out of the soil and breathe life into him (2:7).

⁷³ Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2003), 144; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Later Printing ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Apollos, 1991), 113-114.

Humanity then was to embody tangible-enchantment, wherein the everyday actions of tending the garden (2:15) and ruling over creation imaged the Creator (1:27). Turning back to John, these invitations to ancient Israel are expanded by binding God in Genesis to the Word made flesh in Jesus.⁷⁴

While John 1 connects with a Jewish (and contemporary Christian) audience through the creation narrative, John's choice of the Greek word *logos* to identify the one who became flesh spoke to a broader Hellenized world. Describing the *logos*, fifth century BCE philosopher Heraclitus writes, "But of Logos that always exists, people are uncomprehending ... for although all things happen according to the Logos, they are like people with no experience when they experience words and deeds such as I expound distinguishing each thing according to its nature and pointing to how it is."⁷⁵ In these few words, Heraclitus identifies something eternal that behaves according to a law or rule and is a powerful force in everyday happenings, that is accessible by all yet accessed by few. One cannot help but see how John references Heraclitus' *logos* not just in the use of the Greek word, but in the way the John describes the Word as there in the beginning (John 1:1-2), the author of creation (1:3), and being the source of understanding and light (1:4-5, 9) while simultaneously remaining largely misunderstood and rejected (1:10-11). What John brings to bear that Heraclitus might never have envisioned, is that the *logos* is, a person. Whether starting with the Hebrew creation story or Greek philosophy, John opens his Gospel with the clear message that divine self-revelation (John 1:18) and making

⁷⁴ Pennington and McDonough, *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, 5. And John Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology*, (Warsaw, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 193-195.

⁷⁵ Adam Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers as Theologians* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 32.

sense of humanity's place in the cosmos—categories this work argues are best described by immanent-transcendence and tangible-enchantment—are bound to the glory of God, as revealed in the person of Jesus (1:12-14). Given that this glory is revealed through the seven signs⁷⁶ of Jesus, these signs and how they reveal God's understanding of glory will be the focus of our exploration moving forward.⁷⁷

In the first of the seven signs, Jesus turns water into wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-12). This miracle begins with his mother telling him, "They don't have any wine." While there is debate over what Mary was thinking, it seems most likely that she both knows the true identity of her son and is spiritually astute enough to connect the coming of the messianic Kingdom with wine too abundant to run out (Amos 9:11-13, Joel 3:18, Isa. 25:6). Whatever she had in mind, Jesus hears her words in this framework, referencing that his time had not yet come.⁷⁸ However, Jesus did deem it the right time to offer a sign that would point people to his time, and thus reveals his glory (2:11). However, John makes a clear distinction between human and divine glory. Human glory is seen in the desires of the Pharisees who, according to Jesus, "receive praise (*doxan*)"⁷⁹

⁷⁶ The seven signs were selected over the seven discourses or I AM statements because John invites us to see Jesus' glory, and signs, which even in text, are far easier to see than discourses or statements. For more on Signs in the Gospel of John, as well as the reasoning behind this dissertation's atypical ordering of the signs, please see Appendix B: Signs in the Gospel of John.

⁷⁷ A. J. Swoboda, "Unity and Diversity in Local Church Life," DMin LSF Spring Advance (March 7, 2014).

⁷⁸ This theme of time will reoccur as a reason to not go to the Festival of Booths (7:8), state in the positive as Jesus transitions from his ministry to passion (12:23), and as a part of the prayer he offers before his arrest when he says, "Father the time has come. Glorify your Son, so that the Son can glorify you" (17:1).

⁷⁹ *Doxan* is the Greek word used and is more commonly translated glory.

from each other but don't seek the praise (*doxan*) that comes only from God?" (5:44).⁸⁰

Here John identifies two types of glory, one that focuses on greatness and a yet to be defined divine understanding.

Richard Bauckham explores glory from God's perspective in John in his book *God Crucified*. While looking at John 12:23 where Jesus says, "The time has come for the Human One to be glorified" and John 13:31-32 when Jesus says, "Now the Human One has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify the Human One in himself and will glorify him immediately." Bauckham links Jesus' words to the pending crucifixion as Jesus' glorification event.⁸¹ In the crucifixion Jesus most clearly reveals his oneness with the glory of the Divine Identity. Jesus on the cross defines God. Jesus pouring himself out unto death is God's definition of glory. As Bauckham writes, "The Divine Identity is revealed in the paradox of Jesus' death: his humiliation which is in divine reality his exaltation, his shame which is in divine reality his honour."⁸² Therefore, the revelation of Jesus' glory at the wedding is not in the making of the wine, but the fact the best wine has been kept for last and it too will be generously poured out. It is not by accident that John immediately turns to the cleansing of the temple and Jesus declaring himself the new temple, a temple that will be

⁸⁰ There is a parallel statement in John 12:42-43.

⁸¹ This is certainly not the entirety of Bauckham's argument; rather, it is one piece of a much larger and interweaving matrix that brings his readers to the same conclusions from various perspectives.

⁸² Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament*, 67.

destroyed as Jesus pours out the last of his life's abundant wine before being raised up in three days (John 2:13-22).⁸³

The notion of earthly glory is further undermined by the narrative surrounding what is typically seen as Jesus' second sign, the healing of the official's son (John 4:46-54). The account is bookended by John with references to Jesus being back in Galilee, specifically Cana. The official was most certainly aware of what happened at the wedding as it had been at least fifteen days⁸⁴ and the miraculous news, even if it was only known at first by the servants who carried the jars, only had to travel the fifteen miles to his home in Capernaum. The official seeks out Jesus asking him to come heal his son. Jesus is resistant and tells the man his faith is based on seeing miracles; he sees what looks glorious in human terms and wants that for himself. But that is not why Jesus came and he does not want to reinforce the misunderstanding. The official continues to plead, but rather than go, Jesus gives him a word and insists that he act on faith. The official trusts the word of Jesus over his understanding of the sign and, subsequently, the boy is healed. John makes it clear that Jesus' actions must be understood in light of Jesus' interpretation and, while the signs reveal God's glory, God's understanding of glory is different from humanity's.⁸⁵

⁸³ Ibid., 66-67. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 169-170; R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John: Interpreting Biblical Texts Series* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 82-89; 130-131.

⁸⁴ This assumes eight travel days to cover the two hundred and forty mile round trip and seven days of the Passover itself. However, travel going this quickly is highly unlikely, especially given the long stop in Samaria (John 4:4-42).

⁸⁵ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 166, 235-239; Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 144-146; Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 89.

Jesus second sign is the healing of a lame man by a pool in Bethsaida (John 5:1-9). For thirty-eight years the man waited to get in the water when something prompted it to stir up and supposedly give it healing powers. Without anyone to carry him, season after season he watched others make it to the pool first. Bypassing the pool, Jesus tells him to get up and take up his mat and walk. Contrary to the official who believed without receiving his request, all evidence of the man at the pool suggests he received his gift and still did not believe. This is first seen when the Pharisees question him about carrying his mat on the Sabbath and then about the man who made him well. He is incapable of reading the sign and discerning who Jesus might have been. Later, after Jesus approaches the man a second time, his response is not one of praise and celebrating the work of God, but letting the Pharisees know Jesus healed him. In turn, the Pharisees come to Jesus questioning his healing on the Sabbath and Jesus interprets the sign as a revelation of his unity with God the Father.⁸⁶

Jesus' argument begins with the Jewish understanding that, even on the Sabbath, God did two things: make and judge. Therefore, Jesus argues he not only has the right to make (John 5:17 and 21) and judge (5:22-30), but the responsibility to do so. Anything less than healing on the Sabbath would be a failure to carry out the very things the Father does (5:19-20). Having laid out the basis for him acting as God, Jesus moves on to defending his unity with the Father. In doing so he points to the testimony of John the Baptist in John 1:19-34 (5:33-35), an even greater witness in his works (5:36), and the witness of the Father who the Pharisees cannot hear because they do not believe the

⁸⁶ Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 150-151; Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 90-91.

Scriptures (5:37-40). Adding one more layer, Jesus goes on to reveal why they do not believe the Scriptures, because they do not have God's love within them and, as previously addressed, they seek the glory from each other rather than God (5:41-44). In light of this, when a counter accusation is brought against Jesus' accusers, it will not be Jesus who brings it, but Moses, who his adversaries claim to follow and trust in, but do not understand (5:45-47). Once again, Jesus and God are misunderstood because they defy the norms of this world.⁸⁷

The third sign, the feeding of the five thousand, is familiar enough that there is no need to recount the narrative (John 6:5-13). What is important to note here is that the crowd identifies Jesus as the one like Moses (Deut. 18:15-18) but, like the Pharisees in Chapter Five, they fail to understand what that means and therefore seek to make Jesus their king. This prompts Jesus to slip away and ultimately walk across the sea as part of the trip back to Capernaum (John 6:14-21). The next day, the still misunderstanding crowd finds Jesus, apparently hoping that the gift of manna has returned (6:25-26). Jesus, on the other hand, does not want to give what Moses gave, but desires to give the bread that sustains beyond a day, the bread of God who gives life (6:27-31). Here Jesus points out the fundamental error of the crowd; they see Moses rather than God as the bread giver and, therefore, they see Jesus as the new Moses instead of the new bread (6:32-48). With the crowd's conceptual framework already incapable of comprehending Jesus as the bread, Jesus adds a final point of confusion by insisting those who wish to follow him must eat his flesh and drink his blood (6:49-59).

⁸⁷ Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 152-153; Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 91-94.

What does the sign of the feeding reveal? As Jesus receives the bread from the boy, he takes it and John makes a point of saying that Jesus gives thanks (6:11). He takes a moment to recognize the gift in his hands that comes from God. He receives that gift and invites others to receive it and consume it so it could both nourish and satisfy them. God calls people to do the same thing with the bread from heaven who, contrary to human understanding, offers his body and allows his blood to be spilled on the cross. Eternal life is then found in taking this crucified bread, giving thanks for it, receiving and consuming it in faith, and discovering that it both nourishes and satisfies.⁸⁸

The fourth sign (John 9:1-7), like the second, is a healing on the Sabbath. Unlike the man at the pool, the man who was blind from birth not only gains his physical sight but, over the course of the narrative, comes to see Jesus' true identity (9:38). The scene begins with a question from the disciples, "Who sinned?" They assume that either this man or his parents did something to offend God and the consequence was his blindness at birth. Jesus quickly moves around their question with a response that is often confusing in English translations, but should read, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned but, in order that the works of God might be revealed in him, we must work the works of him who sent me while it is day."⁸⁹ Jesus then heals the man. His neighbors recognize him as one who was blind but now can see and deliver him to the Pharisees because he was healed on the Sabbath (9:13-15).

⁸⁸ Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 153-164; Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 94-104.

⁸⁹ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 105. This translation offered by Koester, rather than giving the impression God caused the man to be blind from birth so he could be healed by Jesus, links verse four to verse five, making them a unified thought connected by the common phrase *all' hina*.

As with Jesus' disciples, the debate begins over who sinned, with the central conflict surrounding Jesus. On one hand, Jesus is doing a miraculous work that only a righteous man could do, but on the other hand, he did it on the Sabbath, which no righteous man would do (9:16-33). In the end, they cast out the one they know has sinned; the man born blind (9:34). The problem with the debate as with the disciples' original question, is that everyone was so busy asking who the sinner was, that nobody asked, "What is sin?" As Jesus confronts the Pharisees, this is the very question he addresses (John 9:39-41). While humans like to identify actions or conditions that are the basis of sin, Jesus defines sin as blindness to God's self-revelation. To see God and receive God as offered is to be without sin; to reject the one God sends and to insist on living according to your own way is the very heart of sin.⁹⁰

Jesus' fifth sign is the revivification of Lazarus (John 11:38-44), a friend of Jesus' who became ill and died (11:1-14). After conversation with Lazarus' sisters Mary and Martha, Jesus went to the tomb the dead man was placed in four days earlier, had the stone rolled away, and called his friend out (11:38-44). John is quick to declare that some saw what Jesus did and believed in him, but others went to the Pharisees and reported Jesus' actions (11:45-46).

The response of the Pharisees was swift and decisive. They called their council together and identified Jesus as someone Rome would deem threatening. From experience they knew this would result in Rome constricting their oppression of the region and collaterally cost the Pharisees their privileged place in society (11:47-48). The only possible response to save their status is to eliminate Jesus (11:49-53).

⁹⁰ Ibid., 104-109, 174-179.

While there is irony in the Pharisees' response bringing about Jesus' sixth sign—his own resurrection—it is also clear that this sign, like previous ones, was misunderstood. The Pharisees read the signs in terms of Jesus gaining power and a following through miraculous acts. But for Jesus, as he told Mary before it happened, the sign points to him as “the resurrection and life” (11:25-26). As with every other sign, so this one is about revealing the will of the Father: in this case, to give people abundant life both now and in eternity. Further clarifying Jesus' work in contrast to the interpretation of the Pharisees, as their plans unfold, Jesus stands before Pilate and says, “My kingdom doesn't originate from this world. If it did, my guards would fight so that I wouldn't have been arrested by the Jewish leaders. My kingdom isn't from here.” (18:36)⁹¹

The sixth sign, Jesus' resurrection, has already been introduced in connection to the first sign, where Jesus' crucifixion is God's image of glory. God is one who gives, sacrifices, serves, and offers everything for the sake of the world, and that, according to the Divine Imaginary, is what makes God glorious. Moreover, as the fourth sign reveals, to receive God's understanding of glory, despite it being contradictory to the values of this world, is to know God and be without sin. It is in this sense that Jesus, whose death parallels the faith offering of the Passover sacrifice (John 19:31-37) which made believing the blood would provide protection from death (Exod. 12:7, 12-13), is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) Having done everything possible in both his signs and his explanations to reveal the immanent-transcendence of

⁹¹ Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 183-190; Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 116-123.

the Divine Imaginary, Jesus declares, “It is completed.” And he succumbs to death (19:30).⁹²

John is silent about what happens between Friday evening and very early Sunday morning. We do not know if the disciples understood what Jesus revealed in the crucifixion or if perhaps they were too consumed by grief to even consider the implications. The one thing we do know is that no one expected the resurrection and, even when the disciple whom Jesus loved goes into the tomb, finds it empty, and believes, neither he nor Peter understood the Scripture saying that Jesus must come back to life (John 20:8-9). Similarly, Mary finds herself asking anyone, including Jesus who she mistakes for a gardener, where Jesus has been taken (20:2, 13, 15). It is not until she hears him say her name that she recognizes him and even then, Jesus’ response indicates that she does not understand the resurrection and pending ascension (20:16-17). Finally, there is Thomas, who was not there when Jesus first appeared to the disciples as a group and insisted he would not believe until he could not only see but touch (20:24-25). Nonetheless, he believed when he heard Jesus invite him to touch the wounds (20:26-28). Through it all, just what it means that Jesus fulfills the Scripture by rising remains unclear.⁹³

In John’s final sign, Jesus provides the disciples a miraculous catch of fish (John 21:1-6). Immediately, two features of the story make it clear that this is about more than

⁹² Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 621; Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 219-221.

⁹³ Carson, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 639; Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 239-244; Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 68-73.

the catch. First, it is only the second scene in John that takes place near the Sea of Tiberias; the other is the feeding of the five thousand (6:1). Second, when the disciples pull the net to shore, Jesus already has cooked fish and bread waiting for them (21:9). At the same time, Jesus is very intentional about having the disciples *helkyein*,⁹⁴ that is, forcefully drag the net to shore, a word with limited use in the New Testament, but used twice in this scene. Moreover, Jesus also used the word at the same geographic location when he countered the grumbling of the crowds who could not believe he came down from heaven by saying, “No one can come to me unless they are drawn (*helkyein*) to me by the Father who sent me, and I will raise them up at the last day.” (6:44) This is not a great catch of fish; this is a commissioning for ministry, with the disciples’ witness to the crucifixion and resurrection as the tool that Jesus would use “to draw (*helkyein*) all people to myself.” (12:32) Further evidencing this is the reinstatement and commissioning of Peter (21:15-19). Not only is he to be a part of a “miraculous catch” of people, he is called make sure they receive spiritual care, even when it requires his life. Thus John, who spends the bulk of his Gospel revealing a God of immanent-transcendence, concludes with an allusion to lives that embrace human flourishing through tangible-enchantment.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ “To pull or drag, requiring force because of the inertia of the object being dragged.” Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament—Based on Semantic Domains*, Vol. 1: *Introduction and Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 207.

⁹⁵ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 134-138.

The Foundation of the Divine Imaginary

While each of the accounts in the fourfold Gospel is unique, they each affirm and explicate the proposed Divine Imaginary. First, they do this by identifying Jesus as immanent-transcendence. In each of the Gospels, Jesus is brought to trial on charges of blasphemy (Matt. 26:64-68, Mark 14:61-65, Luke 22:67-71, and John 10:31-39). The irony, of course, is that Jesus was in fact, as John emphatically states and the other Evangelists allude to, one with the Father. It is important at this point to note that, for Second Temple Judaism, God was not thought of with a Western mindset that focuses on the divine essence or nature. Rather, God's identity was rooted in questions surrounding what God does. Catherine LaCugna's text, *God For Us*, addresses these different approaches to speaking about God with the distinctions of the divine *theologia*—the inner-workings of God—versus the divine *oikonomia*—the self-revelation of God. Turning back to Richard Bauckham's *God Crucified*, the Divine Identity in Second Temple Judaism was predominantly characterized by God as the singular Creator and ruler. By placing Jesus in these roles, the Evangelists establish his unity with the Divine Identity and therefore make Jesus one with God.⁹⁶

However, other elements of the Hebrew Bible's revelation of the Divine Identity that were less dominant in the Judaism of Jesus' day, specifically God's name and redemptive activity originally seen in the Exodus, were given new meaning in the Gospels. In other words, because we see Jesus in the identity of God, we can now see God in the identity of Jesus; his words, his actions, and most importantly, his death,

⁹⁶ One example of this, which appears in Matthew 22:44 and 26:64; Mark 12:36, 14:62, and 16:19; and Luke 20:42-42 and 22:69, is the use of Psalm 110:1 in reference to Jesus. For more, please refer to chapter two of *God Crucified*. Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 29-42.

resurrection, and ascension. This is where the immanence of the Divine Imaginary is seen, not just in the incarnation, but in what Jesus reveals about the divine nature and God's definition of divine glory. Here Bauckham uses Deutero-Isaiah, which plays a predominant role in each Gospel, and the Gospel of John specifically to identify the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as the new name for God. Moreover, the cross of Jesus becomes God's place of redemptive work. Summarizing, Bauckham writes:

The Divine Identity is known in the radical contrast and conjunction of exaltation and humiliation—as the God who is Creator of all things, and no less truly God in the human life of Jesus; as the God who is Sovereign over all things, and no less truly God in Jesus' human obedience and service; as the God of transcendent majesty who is no less truly God in the abject humiliation of the cross. There are not contradictions because God is self-giving love, as much in his creation and rule of all things as in his human incarnation and death. The radical contrast of humiliation and exaltation is precisely the revelation of who God is in his radically self-giving love. He rules only as the one who also serves. He is exalted above all only as the one who is also with the lowest of the low.⁹⁷

This image of God integrates with the Gospel narratives as explored. God began something in the creation with Adam, something he continued with Abraham, the people of Israel, David, and in the return from the Babylonian exile. In the fourfold Gospel each of these lines is recalibrated and moved forward in the person of Jesus. Moreover, throughout his ministry, Jesus invited an image of God that was more personal than the Creator and ruler of Second Temple tradition. God was the intimate Father in Matthew. God was one with the ostracized in Mark. God was like the father who humiliated himself to cover his son's shame in Luke. God was one who tenderly reinstated Peter

⁹⁷ Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 68-69.

after an abject betrayal. In each account of the Gospel, Jesus' ministry reveals a God of immanent-transcendence.⁹⁸

The story does not stop there because, in each of the Gospel accounts, humanity is invited to be a part of God's restorative work in the creation, be it as a new Israel living out a life of love in Matthew, a people leaving exile and loving those cast aside in Mark, a people reclaiming creation in the lineage of the second Adam in Luke, or those who through a great catch draw people to Jesus in John.

Those who come to see God in Jesus have work to do, work that creates opportunity for a life of tangible-enchancement. Yet the Gospels also make clear that this will not be easy because the opposition is fierce. The power structures of this age, be they religious, governmental, social, or institutional, will not simply give way and allow the Kingdom of God to be made manifest. Moreover, those in the Gospels, even those closest to Jesus, often found themselves struggling with the kingdom they knew and the contradictory and confusing Kingdom of Jesus.

Perhaps most perplexing of all is that somehow the resurrection is central to all of this. Matthew links the resurrection to an affirmation of Jesus' authority. Mark is silent. Luke and John both identify that it was necessary to fulfill the Scripture, but at best allude to the scriptures being fulfilled. As Don Carson writes, "The first disciples hadn't worked out what it meant for Jesus to rise from the dead, this came later with Paul and

⁹⁸ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), loc 123; Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 8-10, 26, 55-56, 63-68, 70-71; Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1993), 2.

his theological developments.”⁹⁹ But Paul was just the first of many to theologize about the Divine Imaginary in the Western world, which is where this dissertation now turns.

⁹⁹ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 639.

CHAPTER THREE

WESTERN IMAGINARIES AND ROMANS

Learning to Read Jesus

Chapter One began with an overview of the past five hundred years of history in the West, with a specific focus on a transformation in the social imaginary; that is, the collection of images, ideas, and beliefs that shape the way people view the world and navigate life. Specifically, using the work of Charles Taylor as a guide, following the Reformation, the Western social imaginary transitioned from one of “transcendent-enchantment” to “immanent-disenchantment.” This change brought about the end of Christendom and left the church in uncharted and uncomfortable territory, with the theologies proclaimed in generations past often lacking the same meaning today. Moreover, this change prompted the creation of two new categories of people. In addition to the dwindling number who hold on to a premodern social imaginary and appreciate their take on historic Christianity, there are now those fully enveloped in a secular age who find no reason for God, and quite possibly deem the Divine dangerous to humanity, as well as those who find themselves bound to “immanent-disenchantment” but crave enchantment.

As a first step towards filling this void, Chapter Two returned to the four Gospel accounts, seeking what can be described as a Divine Imaginary.¹⁰⁰ The result was an invitation to view God as immanent-transcendence, in that the Triune God is always sacrificially coming to humanity to both serve and, often in the eyes of people, engaging

¹⁰⁰ The Divine Imaginary is God’s self-revelation of how God invites humanity to image, think about, and believe in God. When embraced, it will guide the way people see the world and navigate life.

in self-shame and humiliation for the benefit of the world. Yet, even as the divine presence comes near, God is transcendent and transformative, bringing change to the lives of those who recognize grace and do not flee the divine presence. This change results in a life of tangible-enchancement where everyday actions take on new meaning because of the love behind them and the way they reclaim a fallen creation for the Kingdom of God.

This present chapter will press further into the Divine Imaginary by comparing what God revealed in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus with how the church, in various times and places, has explained the work of God. This will be done by examining historic uses of Paul's letter to the church in Rome,¹⁰¹ followed by a more in-depth look at Romans through the lens of the Divine Imaginary. But first, to reconnect the reader with the particular, I offer more of my story as one seeking enchantment in a neo-secular age.

When I arrived at Concordia Seminary - St. Louis in June of 2002, I was excited to hear both during my orientation and from multiple professors that their goal was not to teach us what the Bible says, because that task would take a lifetime. Rather, they wanted to equip us to read the Bible so we could spend a lifetime engaged in interpretation. What followed were three years in the classroom, along with a year in the field, engaged in the exegetical, systematic, historical, and practical disciplines of pastoral ministry. As would be expected at a Lutheran seminary, the exegesis focused on translations that favored a Lutheran interpretation. The systematics studied the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and church

¹⁰¹ While there is debate surrounding the Pauline authorship of Romans, the letter is assumed to be written by Paul himself.

from a distinctly Lutheran perspective. Historical classes were either focused on Lutheran history or used pre-Lutheran history to demonstrate Luther to be in line with historic Christian teaching. Of course, nobody was sure what to do with practical ministry, so those classes were required, but not considered legitimate theology. As a result, when four years of seminary were complete, we knew little of reading and interpreting the Bible, but we had an abundance of both knowledge and practice in making the Bible say what our Law and Gospel Lutheran theology said it should.

Romans proved to be key in proof-texting Luther. Texts like Romans 3:23-24, “All have sinned and fall short of God’s glory, but are treated as righteous freely by his grace because of a ransom that was paid by Christ Jesus.” highlighted the simplistic Law and Gospel formula. Likewise, Romans 5:8 played a similar role in Luther’s theology: “But God shows his love for us, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us.” These, and others, were central to Luther’s discussions on the nature of the Gospel. The ultimate conclusion was that a pastor’s work began with the alien work of God by preaching the law and convicting the sinner of his or her sin.

The fear of eternal damnation was the question at hand and, while there was less of an emphasis on the holiness of God and the wrath that comes when the sinner comes near, the idea was certainly present under the guise of the hidden God. All of this fear was followed up with the proper work of God that supposedly proclaimed the healing balm of forgiveness.

Sometimes the Bible actually cooperated in this preaching method. Most of the time it did not and demanded some level of creativity to put the proverbial square peg in the round hole. Sometimes, like when the text would focus on the sanctified life, no level

of creativity would suffice and, while most chose a different text from the lectionary, the more crass (or loyal as they saw it), would go so far as pronouncing the exhortation to good works, spin it into a law we fail to keep, and then “make everything better” with the announcement of forgiveness. Who cared if the sermon was a complete contradiction with the text; it meshed perfectly with Luther. Even then, I knew that extreme was wrong and I was troubled by passages that did not fit the framework, but I never dared to question Luther.

As I write this, almost nine and a half painful and destructive years after walking across the stage and receiving my Master of Divinity degree, I am finally unafraid to question Luther. Setting homiletical quality and integrity aside for a moment, much of what I learned at seminary confirmed what I sorted out on my own while growing up. God hates me. I am horrible. I am worthless. There is nothing lovely, or valuable, or desirable in me. I can do nothing good. But I should be thankful that, rather than treating me the way I deserve, God decided to unleash all of his anger and wrath toward me on Jesus.

It was the “good news” that I fought to embrace, even as it magnified my self-contempt. In my mind, everything I believed about myself was vindicated by a random line I remember from a book neither I nor Google can find, but I believe is titled *Spiritus Precator*, “Self-hatred comes right before salvation.” My heart told a different story, one the words of Rita Nakashima Brock describe better than I have been able to: “The experience of grace is lodged here, I believe, in a sense of relief at being relieved of punishment for one’s inevitable failings and not in a clear sense of personal worth gained

from an awareness of the unconditional nature of love. The shadow of the punitive father must always lurk behind the atonement. He haunts images of forgiving grace.”¹⁰²

So I kept seeking enchantment while giving lip service to grace that eased my guilt when my seeking led to sin. The end result was a five-year pastoral career that included a failed church plant, the shutting down of an online faith community, two rounds of forced resignation, a public moral failure, a divorce, and doing untold damage to both people and Christ’s church along the way.

I deeply regret the path that brought me here. I have no choice but to hope and trust that God’s healing hands are working to bring new life amid the destruction I left in my wake. But I also need to move forward. To not press on is to let my past have the final word. So I humbly return to my question from the introduction, “Did my theology not resonate in the ‘disenchanted-immanence’ of the art gallery and my own life simply because it was from a premodern age of ‘transcendent-enchantment,’ or did it fail to resonate because it was out of sync with the Divine Imaginary of Jesus?” Today I find it hard to justify anything but the latter. To be clear, I am not blaming theology for the havoc I wreaked. Rather, I believe theology both nurtured and enabled brokenness and more importantly, it failed to offer the kind of healing grace that comes with the immanent-transcendence of Jesus’ Divine Imaginary.

I am not alone in this experience. It is why those in the art gallery had walked away from church to pursue other forms of community and spirituality. And it is what has our pilgrims craving enchantment but finding the church so meaningless.

¹⁰² Joanne C. Brown and Carole R. Bohn, eds., *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 52-53.

How did this happen? How did so much theology become disjoined from the fullness of Jesus' Divine Imaginary? First, that it happened should not be a surprise. After all, as we have seen, the Divine Imaginary was present with Adam and again with Abraham. God voiced it even more clearly with Moses at Sinai and on the road home from the Babylonian Exile. It would appear that, just like Adam in the garden who no longer understood God after the Fall, the history of the Hebrew Bible is perpetual human distortion of the Divine Imaginary, with God constantly seeking to bring human perception back into alignment.

It is no different following the New Testament. Given that the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus is God's final revelatory word to humanity it should not surprise that the principalities, powers, and rulers of this world will seek to distort the message of Jesus. Given the strength of their efforts, it is not shocking that God's people, either individually or corporately, would eventually interpret Jesus' revelation through their own imaginaries.

Perhaps nowhere have misreadings of God's Word occurred more than in the work of Paul. Therefore this dissertation now turns to Paul's Letter to the Romans, believing it is both divinely inspired and rightfully included in Scripture, yet often read through the lens of this age's social imaginaries. Moving forward, this paper will consider examples of how Romans was interpreted in the Early Church, during Medieval Christendom, in the Reformation, and with the New Perspective, each critiqued through the lens of the proposed Divine Imaginary.

Finally, this dissertation will offer an interpretation of Romans in light of the Divine Imaginary. Romans is used for a variety of reasons. Rome is the Western-most

church to which Paul wrote, and therefore written to people who were heavily influenced by the same Greek philosophy that undergirds today's neo-secular West. The emphasis on both Jewish and Greek believers in Rome requires Paul bring thought and language from Eastern and Western worlds together, and therefore serves as a model for bringing a Semitic Old Testament into a philosophically Greek world. For good or for ill, it is frequently cited as a summary of Pauline theology. Finally, at a more personal level, this author needed to work through it as part of healing his soul.

Christus Victor and the Early Church

We turn now to how imaginaries of this world reshape the Divine Imaginary to form a theology for the present age. We first look to the Early Church, when varying levels of persecution marked the first years of Christianity. Claudius expelled Jews, including Jewish Christians, from Rome in 41 CE with the fortuitous consequence of Paul meeting Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth. It is hard to envision a scenario where their time together as tentmakers in Corinth and then on to Ephesus did not allow Paul to gain the kind of familiarity with the church in Rome that would ultimately shape his letter to them (Acts 18:1-3, 18-21). A little over a decade later, Nero tried to blame the Great Fire on the Roman church. In the years following, each Emperor took turns persecuting Christians in his own ways and at varying levels throughout the Roman Empire. The end result is perpetual tension at a diversity of levels between Church and State. At its most relaxed, it was simply two sides claiming different Lords with neither willing to accommodate the other. When the conflict was at its most fierce, property was razed and disciples were martyred for their faith. It is not surprising, especially when combining this conflict with the "transcendent-enchantment" of the premodern social imaginary, that

the first Christ-followers embraced a *Christus Victor* (“Christ as victor”) theological motif; one where the central message of the Gospel is Jesus overcoming Satan, death, and the principalities and powers of this age.¹⁰³

One of the key voices to frame this theology of the Early Church was Irenaeus of Lyons (130-202). Perhaps most well-known for works opposing Gnosticism like *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus also offers a clear theological framework that binds the life of Jesus from incarnation to ascension. Bishop Gustaf Aulen, whose name is referenced in numerous texts as offering the most authoritative work on the *Christus Victor* motif, begins with Irenaeus’ explanation on the purpose of Christ’s incarnation: “That he might destroy sin, overcome death, and give life to man.”¹⁰⁴ This stance was based on the belief that, in Adam, all of humanity was intended to live in relationship with God, but through the sin of Adam, humanity found itself captive to Satan and needing, in Irenaeus’ language, to be recapitulated.¹⁰⁵

Supporting this view of Adam and the need for recapitulation, Irenaeus turns to texts like Romans 5:12-21 and Paul’s contrasting of Adam, who brought sin, death, and Satan into the human experience, and Christ, who overcame those same powers. It is important to note that for Irenaeus, who viewed sin as alienation from God as opposed to immorality (Rom. 1:18-20), these three were ultimately one and the same, as the devil invites sin, sin leads to separation from God, and separation from God is death. For

¹⁰³ Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts*, 118; Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2003), 1, 4.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 19-20.

Irenaeus, this unity allowed evil forces to have both a general captivity over all of humanity, but also a specific incarceration of individuals who freely embrace sin. Turning to Romans 6-8, Irenaeus did not see recapitulation as a single event, be it in the conquering of Jesus or the conversion of the individual from life under Adam to life under Christ. Rather recapitulation was, by the power of the Spirit, part of the ongoing ministry of the church.¹⁰⁶

When analyzed in light of the proposed Divine Imaginary, there are many strengths to the *Christus Victor* approach, primarily the unity of the Father and Son, not only in their work but in their posture towards humanity, revealing some level of immanent-transcendence. Moreover, given the clear movement of humanity from under Adam to under Christ, there is abundant space for lives of tangible-enchancement.¹⁰⁷

Still, there are weaknesses in the *Christus Victor* model. Both Anselm and Abelard in generations to come will argue any theology where Christ needs to gain victory over Satan gives the devil far too much power and, in some way, makes good and evil at best legitimate rivals and at worst equal. As a perceived counter, Irenaeus and other theologians used texts like Romans 3:24 to frame the model under the terms of a ransom paid to the devil,¹⁰⁸ but the ransom was made, not out of necessity but out of God's righteousness and a desire to act justly and fairly with the author of injustice.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 19-25.

¹⁰⁷ Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 119-121.

¹⁰⁸ C.S. Lewis offers an example of ransom theory with the death of Aslan in his book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

¹⁰⁹ Perhaps the cultural tension, which had the church needing to interact with an unjust State pressed for the inclusion of this imagery.

Trying to make sense of this, Origen of Alexandria (185-254), Gregory of Nyssa (330-395), and others decided to press the metaphor, specifically trying to explain God acting justly. The line of thought was that God paid the devil with Jesus for the freedom of humanity but, even if this was done out of propriety and despite the existence of an actual debt on God's part, Jesus now belongs to the devil. However, in the resurrection, Jesus is clearly free once again. How? Perhaps the Father knew he would raise Jesus from the dead but failed to tell Satan when making the deal. Another option involves God realizing that the devil would be like the Canaanites who captured the ark (1 Sam. 4-6), proving unable to hold on to the divine presence of the Son of God. In any case, it is hard to find an explanation where trickery or deception is not employed, which is not only unbecoming and seemingly contrary to the divine nature, but defies the idea of acting justly with the author of injustice. Thus, the conversation comes full circle and the question is once again about the power granted to Satan. While the model does not necessarily contradict the Divine Imaginary; it seems to contradict itself.¹¹⁰

Enabled by the Edict of Milan in 313 and the Christian church rising to a position of power within the Roman State, the perceived need for a Jesus who was victorious over the principalities and powers of this age began to fade. The ransom motif, nonetheless, would remain the primary theological expression for another seven hundred years.¹¹¹ However, less than a hundred years after the dawn of Christendom, Augustine penned his *Confessions* which, in time, would aid in the formation of a new atonement motif.

¹¹⁰ Aulen, *Christus Victor*, 26-28, 30-31; Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 122.

¹¹¹ Two potential reasons for the motif's longevity include the lack of a suitable replacement and the theory finding new traction with the struggle against the barbarians and the fall of Rome.

Augustine's exploration of his own life, heart, faith, and understanding of God, including his laments over personal sin, would aid in establishing a foundation for a new interpretations of Romans that would transform the faith of God's New Testament people to this very day. Strikingly, this approach to faith, which begins with looking inward, matches the philosophical advice of the Stoics including Seneca, an advisor to Nero when Paul wrote his epistle to the church in Rome and who, as it will be argued, was contradicted and corrected by Paul in that letter. But first, the next stop on this historical tour on the reading of Romans brings us to Medieval Christendom.¹¹²

Satisfaction's Emergence in Medieval Christendom

As seen in the previous section, during the early centuries of Christianity, the theological motif was framed as *Christus Victor* because the church was under varying levels of oppression by the State. This began to change with the legalization of Christianity and the worldly conflict between Church and State rapidly dissipated. Over the next seven hundred years, the idea of ransom predominated the understanding of Christ's work. While there were other theological frameworks offered, none of them gained a significant following. This changed with the rise of Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) who interwove his cultural settings into the Bible and offered his theory of satisfaction.

Anselm's world was one of lords and ladies, knights and surfs. It was a feudal system that depended upon everyone faithfully fulfilling their role. The lords would

¹¹² Aulen, *Christus Victor*, 81-82; John G. Fitch, *Seneca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 88; Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 125; James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy, eds., *Justification: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), loc. 137.

provide protection, the surfs would work the land and pay homage. Both were dependent upon the other. However, as the weaker partner in the arrangement, it is particularly important for vassals to demonstrate values like loyalty and honor. Failure of a surf to do so resulted in dishonoring the lord and the need for some form of satisfaction that would restore the lord's honor.¹¹³

The *Christus Victor* model ultimately viewed the devil as the enemy and, therefore, the one who needed to be addressed through the work of Christ. Yet Anselm saw sin, now viewed in terms of individual morality, as the enemy because it was human sin that dishonored God. According to Anselm, the nature of God synchronized with the values of the age and prohibited the forgiveness of sin unless God's honor was first restored. As a result, there are two objectives at work in Anselm's theology: first is the avoidance of a blanket forgiveness of sin that eliminates any need for consequence; second is the denial of any human capability to accomplish what is necessary for restitution.

The primary interpretation of Anselm's theology involves Christ—who is true God and therefore able to make satisfaction while also true human, and thereby able to stand in the place of humanity—going to the cross. Therefore, functionally, God can make satisfaction for God and humanity is now God's and God's alone.

It is important to note that God does not experience a change of heart towards humanity as a result of Christ; rather, in Christ, God was employing a loophole to get around God's own need for satisfaction. Verses like Romans 1:18-25 serve to heighten

¹¹³ Green and Baker, 127, 129-131.

awareness of personal sin that dishonored God, while Romans 3:23-24 and 5:8 point to Christ making satisfaction for sinners.¹¹⁴

It did not take long for a challenge to arise to Anselm's satisfaction model, as during his lifetime, Peter Abelard (1079-1142) rejected the notion that the Father was somehow bound to the values of Medieval society. In short, the Father could forgive sin if the Father wanted to forgive sin, whether or not divine honor was restored. Moreover, if Adam's sin required the life of Christ, what would serve to propitiate those who killed Christ?

Abelard contradicts the objective atonement of both Irenaeus and Anselm. Instead he proposes a subjective atonement that focuses on changes that take place in the human heart. This occurs as Christ displays the fullness of divine love for humanity on the cross and thereby invites the reorientation of human desires and intentions. Again, Romans 5:8 serves as a text to back the argument, but this time the focus is on the transformative love displayed. As another example, Abelard turns to Romans 8:32-39 with a strong focus on the love of Christ that transforms the passions of humanity so they now honor God and enable people to endure hardships and overcome challenges. Most telling, however, is Abelard's extensive exploration of Romans 3:26 which proved to be the foundation of his atonement theology, even though it blatantly contradicted Paul's rhetoric.¹¹⁵

While Abelard's subjective atonement failed to embed itself in the culture of the day, Anselm's satisfaction model not only resonated in his time, but would become the

¹¹⁴ Aulen, *Christus Victor*, 2, 85-86; Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 129-131; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 64-66.

¹¹⁵ Aulen, *Christus Victor*, 2, 96; William S. Campbell, Peter S. Hawkins, and Brenda Deen Schildgen, *Medieval Readings of Romans* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2007), 6; Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 136-139.

foundation of future theologies that continue to dominate Western Christianity to this day. This is somewhat striking given the fundamental flaws of Anselm's theology. As Joel Green and Mark Baker describe it, "The line from the scant evidence for an atonement message in Jesus' own words to the later atonement theories of Anselm ... is neither straight nor easily drawn."¹¹⁶

With Anselm, the incarnation of the Son is disjoined from the crucifixion, because the only thing that matters is the restoration of the Father's honor. This means the life of Jesus from his birth up until the cross, outside of demonstrating himself as a worthy substitute, holds no significance. Moreover, the resurrection and ascension have no legitimate role, because the satisfaction for sin is made on the cross. Finally, because the model is focused exclusively on the payment of a debt to the Father, there is no action towards the sinful human condition, there is no establishment of relationship between the Father and humanity, and there is no value in participation in the faith community or discipleship. In short, there is no life of tangible-enchancement. All of this stems from Anselm building a model based on his culture and imposing it upon Scripture rather than starting with Scripture and seeking to speak God's self-revelation into his culture.¹¹⁷

In the centuries that follow, Anselm's theology would not only shape Roman Catholic theologians and teaching, but the churches that would break away from Catholicism during the Reformation.

¹¹⁶ Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 45.

¹¹⁷ Aulen, *Christus Victor*, 87; Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 132-133.

Reforming Satisfaction in the Reformation

Building on Chapter Two of this dissertation where God's self-revelation was explored in the Gospels, this third chapter looks at theology throughout history and compares it to the Divine Imaginary. This comparison will allow us to discern whether the primary frame of Christian theology in the West today fails to resonate because it was developed in a premodern age or because it is inconsistent with the Divine Imaginary. Answering this question will determine how to move forward in seeking a Christ-based faith that connects with those pilgrims who are part of a neo-secular world but long for enchantment that remains unfulfilled by the approaches offered by this age. Having already reviewed the Early Church and Medieval Christendom, the next phase of history to address is the Reformation.

The Reformation formally began in 1517 with the nailing of Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses Against Indulgences* on the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg. In time the movement's bedrock teaching would become the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ alone; a theology Luther attributes in the 1545 publication of his Latin writings to his so called "tower experience" in 1519. It was that event where Romans 1:17 and the righteousness of God turned from God's righteous wrath to a variation of Anselm, where God declares righteous those sinners who fall prostrate at the feet of Christ.

Contrasting this view, Aulen believes Luther rejected the theology of Anselm and instead offered the world a far more in-depth version of Irenaeus and the *Christus Victor* motif. The problem with this argument is twofold. First, if Luther proclaimed *Christus Victor* over *Christus Vicar* ("Christ in our place"), then the theologians closest to him—

those whom he knew would carry on his teaching—all misunderstood him by reading and hearing his words through the eyes and ears of Anselm. Second, it would imply that Luther either failed to notice that everyone around him misunderstood him or chose not to correct their error. Considering the astuteness and precision of Luther as a theologian—the man who made an enemy of Erasmus in his polemic work *The Bondage of the Will* and refused to join with Zwingli on political matters over a disagreement surrounding the real presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper—this seems inconceivable. Both realities suggest it is best to assume Aulen is wishfully reading *Christus Victor* into Luther.

At the same time, Aulen’s observation, right or wrong, confirms an important reality, namely, the fundamentals of Anselm were fully woven into the cultural imaginary concerning God. This is true if Luther was preaching Irenaeus and people heard Anselm, or if Luther, as intelligent, reflective, and thoughtful as he was, proved incapable of thinking in terms beyond Anselm.¹¹⁸

While there is nuance in the broader Reformation teachings, a casual approach allows the idea that each of the main branches of Protestantism have the same operative approach to justification. This includes the Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans, and in time Methodists, with John Wesley’s “heartwarming experience” supposedly coinciding with a reading of Luther’s 1545 Preface to Romans that included his “tower experience.” The result was a decision to keep a clear theological distinction between justification and sanctification.

¹¹⁸ Aulen, *Christus Victor*, 101-123; Kathy Ehrensperger and R. Ward Holder, *Reformation Readings of Romans* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2008), 28, 77; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 75.

Michael Horton describes this reformed theology as beginning with a clear teaching on original sin and universal depravity. This sets the stage for the good news of the Gospel as it reveals human failure to keep God's righteousness defined as the Law, subjecting humanity to God's wrath. However, the Gospel, which in contrast to the law is God's righteousness. It is imputed freely and serves not only the forgiveness of sins, but as a propitiation to God. For it is not enough that sins be erased, rather, an angry God must be appeased. Whether it is Romans 1:16-17 which was so influential to Luther; Romans 1:18-32 to demonstrate original sin; Romans 3:21-26 as an initial text on God's grace; or Romans 5:1 which describes the way the sinner should feel upon hearing the Gospel, opportunities to proof text Roman's abound. In the end, because Anselm's basic framework was so embedded in the imaginary of the day, it became almost impossible to read Romans any other way. This recognition extends so far, there are good arguments that John Calvin based his systematic in the Institutes on Romans.¹¹⁹

A critique of this theology will sound familiar and it is fundamentally the same as that of Anselm's, but with an adapted analogy. Medieval Catholic scholar and theologian Thomas Aquinas had advanced Anselm's thought by shifting the motive for satisfaction from a feudal restoration of God's honor to just punishment for sin. This set the stage for satisfaction to enter the courtroom, where the now legal nature of the God-Christ transaction would amplify both the nature of the crime and the intensity of the punishment. Substitution became penal substitution with the Father metamorphosing from one who insisted on satisfaction to one who demanded punishment and retribution.

¹¹⁹ James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy, eds., *Justification: Five Views*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), loc. 189-207; 768, 884.

The Father and Son are disjoined, as there is no longer united purpose since the Father is more concerned with divine honor while the Son aims to save humanity from the Father's wrath. In short, God becomes both enemy and ally.

There is now no doubt that God has become the sinner's problem and the only way to deal with the problem of the Father is the Son. This divides the Trinity with the Father remaining transcendent while the Son becomes immanent. Moreover, this puts the Father in a position of being chiefly concerned with a divine holiness that, as seen in Chapter Two's examination of the Divine Imaginary, does not fit with the very definition of holiness God has revealed. Preaching becomes an act of instilling terror followed by depictions of the crucifixion's gruesomeness as examples of "grace" and "love." This approach to theology, which amplified everything wrong about Anselm, would ultimately be championed by the Princeton Seminary professor, Charles Hodge (1797-1878). His teachings included over fifty-years in the seminary classroom and continue to hold a strong influence in Western theology to this day. Concerning the use of Romans, in the introduction to the 1886 version of his commentary on Paul's letter, a text he describes as his "last and most perfect edition," Hodge characterizes Romans as a systematic theology that clearly articulates the entirety of Hodge's own theology.¹²⁰

Jesus' life, just as it was in Anselm's theology, is disjoined from his crucifixion and the resurrection is often given lip service, as evidence that the Father was pleased by the sacrifice of the Son. Again, little room is left for a life of tangible-enchancement

¹²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed November 9, 2015, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.toc.html>, Part 3, Q46-48; Aulen, *Christus Victor*, 90 and 93; Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 142-150; Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Albany, NY: SAGE Software, 1995), 5.

because forgiveness of sins and propitiation is what the divine drama is all about. Finally, because the primary concern is forgiveness, the sinner remains trapped in a sinful condition and is largely bound to a life of sinning and being forgiven while anticipating the return of Christ and eternal life.

This is not to suggest that various Reformed theologies do not have teachings and even strategies on sanctification, rather (with the possible exception of Methodists) the focus is so clearly set on justification that there is no time or room to address secondary points of theology without beginning to undermine the chief doctrine. When works are brought up they are used as a marker for having received grace but, because they are not intimately linked to the work of the Triune God in the life of the believer, Taylor argues that they ultimately do more to serve humanism than Christianity.¹²¹

Beyond the cultural familiarity of the farm and courtroom, it seems quite reasonable that penal substitutionary atonement gained traction over *Christus Victor* and grew so robustly because the broader world was slowly disenchanting and Satan was no longer an effective enemy. While the original intent was to bring the villain within by focusing on human sin, in time God's holiness proved a much more effective antagonist. However, as the social imaginary drifted from transcendence to immanence, this theology fell on a spectrum that, for many, ran between meaningless and offensive, while leaving others, like the pilgrims of this dissertation, longing for something they know is out there. As a potential solution, a more recent approach to reading Paul is found in the so-called New Perspective, which is where this paper now turns.¹²²

¹²¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 75, 145.

¹²² Beilby and Eddy, *Justification: Five Views*, loc. 789

Reconsidering Judaism with the New Perspective

So far this chapter has explored the Early Church, Medieval Christendom, and the Reformation to see how much interpretations of Romans throughout history are shaped by the imaginary of the age. Each of the perspectives reviewed occurs in a premodern world where the predominant social imaginary could be described as “transcendent-enchantment.” The exploration points to the conclusion that, the more time passes, the less theology is shaped by the Divine Imaginary. Returning to the questions at the beginning of this study, research to this point suggests the primary problem with the church’s theology today is not a changed world where theology no longer speaks to people, but a changed theology that has wandered from God’s self-revelation in Christ. The next step in this journey is to look at a recently developed approach to Paul that was formed entirely in an age of secularism.

James D. G. Dunn is, along with Bishop N. T. Wright and E. P. Sanders, one of the leading proponents of the supposedly “New Perspective” on Paul which has gained greater acceptance in the Christian world over the last thirty years. Advocates of the view argue that the New Perspective is actually the historical teaching of Paul but, because in some ways it conflicts with aspects of both Anselm and the Reformers, it is, in terms of academic discussion, a recent addition to the debate. Essentially, the perspective begins with a fresh take on Judaism that prompts a reexamination of contextual factors that influence Paul’s mission, followed by a new analysis of the “why” behind justification by

faith, and finally an invitation to consider the entirety of Paul. Each of these four points will be reviewed.¹²³

First, the New Perspective challenges the Reformation notion that Second Temple Judaism was a religion of works. This tenet of the New Perspective has already been affirmed in Chapter Two's overview of Matthew, where the Torah was given as Israel's response to God's redemptive activity. E. P. Sanders coined the term "covenantal nomism"¹²⁴ to describe Israel's relationship with the Torah. Stanley Porter further affirms this by pointing to Second Temple Judaism's view that the Torah is followed not because it justifies, but because it is the only appropriate response to God's favor. Finally, Israel's concept of righteousness was based on right relationship, not right behavior. This makes the Torah a means of nurturing relationship, not a basis for judgment. But given that Roman's is often read through a Lutheran polemic of Law as legalism vs Gospel as imputed righteousness, then the New Perspective's correction on the legalism of the Law makes the role of the Gospel unclear. This necessitates a broader reconsideration of Paul.¹²⁵

While one could argue that, as true as covenantal nomism might be, Second Temple Judaism often sounds legalistic, has a post-exilic tension surround the keeping of

¹²³ Dunn, *Justification: Five Views*, loc. 1879-1891.

¹²⁴ Covenantal establishes the nature of relationship between God and his people. It is a covenant relationship that is based on trust, promise, and divine action. Nomism is a verbal form of the Greek word *nomos* or law. Therefore, because of the covenantal relationship, God's people obey the law, or in Israel's case, the Torah.

¹²⁵ Ibid., loc 1939; Donald A Hagner, "Balancing the Old and the New: The Law of Moses in Matthew and Paul," *Interpretation* 51, no. 1 (1997), 24, 26; Stanley E. Porter, *Paul: Jew, Greek, and Roman* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2008), 44.

the Law, treats the Law as a means of staying in God's good graces, and, like any faith, holds a difference between the articulated and lived theology, thus prompting a legitimate confusion on the part of Paul. That being said, such confusion would undermine the entirety of Paul's testimony of his life as a "Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5).

Therefore, reframing the way Paul approaches his Jewishness is the best path forward.

That said, there is a second contextual factor to consider: Israel's view of the nations.¹²⁶

Israel sees themselves as a nation and the rest of the world as "the nations." In Greek, the nations were the *ethnos*; in Hebrew they were the *goyim*. The disparaging undertones classified everybody else as "heathens" or "sinners." It is quite clear from Scripture that the same mentality towards non-Jews was present in early Christians, not only in Paul's message to the churches in Rome and Galatia, but Peter's struggle prior to his vision (Acts 10:1-11:18) and need for a debate at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35). Given this strong influence of the Jewish imaginary on the first Christ-followers, it is not surprising that the idea of engaging in missionary work to the Gentiles was, at first, ludicrous. To make matters more interesting, it was Paul, the former persecutor of a Church that was not Jewish enough, who championed following the Spirit's lead into this wholly unexpected work, which ultimately fulfilled God's vision of the nations coming to Jerusalem to worship God. This is why, according to the New Perspective, Paul preaches justification by faith for all; it serves as the basis for making Jews and Greeks one.¹²⁷

From here the New Perspective takes an interesting turn on how to interpret Paul. The law is no longer the entirety of the Torah, rather, it is those elements that make Jews

¹²⁶ Hagner, "Balancing the Old and the New," 24-26.

¹²⁷ Dunn, *Justification: Five Views*, loc. 1980-2030.

distinguishable from others. It was circumcision, the laws of clean and unclean, and the observation of the Sabbath. The New Perspective sees Paul speaking out against those Jewish believers who wanted to add these boundary laws, in addition to faith in Jesus, for Gentile disciples. Paul countered that the Gospel was freely available to all and any laws added to it, even laws that would promote Christian distinctiveness, would undermine the very nature of the Gospel.¹²⁸

The end result of this reframing of Jewish Christian self-understanding and the mission of Paul is the opening up of what the New Perspective calls “the whole Gospel of Paul”. First, Paul does proclaim justification by faith. He does so in the frame of faith being a trust-based dependence upon God in Christ that forgives a relational, as opposed to moral, sin. Second, Paul followed in the footsteps of Jesus and moved beyond to an understanding of the law that centered on its heart as opposed to its letters, with the essence of the law concentrated in a command to love. Third, as opposed to those who reframe, ignore, or simply deny Paul’s admonitions to do good works because it seems to contradict the Gospel, the New Perspective invites those who read Paul to embrace the tensions while seeking to be faithful to the whole of his teaching.¹²⁹

When evaluating the New Perspective according to a secular social imaginary, it can only be assumed that either a motivation behind the view, or a perk of the different approach, is a Christianity that is kinder to Judaism. There is no doubt this is a value of the secularism and, in one way or another, consciously or subconsciously, influenced the development of the perspective.

¹²⁸ Ibid., loc. 2037-2058, 2079-2086.

¹²⁹ Ibid., loc. 2100, 2129-2130, 2145-2167.

Concerning the New Perspective's relationship to the Divine Imaginary, there are a variety of responses. There is a strong affirmation of the focus on making Jews and Gentiles one, as well as the return to a *Christus Victor* motif when it comes to understanding sin and reconciliation. However, there is a significant concern when it comes to the nature of Second Temple Judaism. There is no question that historically Israel was a people of who were called out by God to be his representatives on earth. They were saved by grace, through faith, to do good works so the world would know Yahweh. However, this history of the Hebrew Bible, as previously argued, is one of Israel falling away from this understanding and embracing foreign gods or understandings of God that were not part of Yahweh's self-revelation.

In Second Temple Judaism, beyond the cunning power plays and moves to protect worldly status, there was a singular focus on God as Creator and Ruler, while largely overlooking the significance of God's name and God's salvific act. It would be wrong to theologially lump early disciples, both because of their proximity to the teaching of Christ and due to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as equivalents to Second Temple Judaism. Their leadership was retaught the Hebrew Bible by Jesus after his resurrection, which undoubtedly reframed the leadership's understanding of the Torah and its relationship to Israel. While this certainly did not filter throughout the whole church, the end point remains that the Torah theology of Early Church Jewish believers most likely ran with something similar to the New Perspective on one side of the scale and Luther's legalism on the other, with the majority of believers somewhere in between. Whatever the case, there was an overwhelming corrective task before Paul. This corrective task will be

highlighted as this dissertation now moves on to an overview of Romans through the lens of the Divine Imaginary.

Romans Through the Eyes of the Divine Imaginary

As previously seen, various uses and interpretations of Romans are based on diverse theologies that adapted alongside social imaginaries. Not only does this leave no clear interpretation of Romans, but one author cited sixteen major motifs. Among others, these interpretations include those by Luther, who approaches Paul as if the Apostle were writing a non-contextual polemic on Law and Gospel and Perriman, who proposes Paul was comforting the saints in Rome as they experienced deep suffering. Ben Witherington argues in his socio-rhetorical commentary that arrogant Gentile Christians were oppressing their Jewish brothers and sisters and needed correction, while the diametrically opposing view of the New Perspective sees Paul countering Jewish believers seeking to impose barrier laws on Gentile disciples. Contrasting all of these, this work proposes that the book of Romans is fundamentally about the Apostle Paul bringing two different groups, each with their own social imaginary, together under the Divine Imaginary.¹³⁰

Why not embrace one of the existent approaches? Luther's, for example, makes little sense contextually and, in the footsteps of Anselm, reads his challenge with Rome into Paul. Perriman's argument is too bound to the theme of wrath and a salvation that comes through Christ's performance. Witherington and the New Perspective both do well

¹³⁰ Jae Hyun Lee, *Paul's Gospel in Romans* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 1; Andrew Perriman, *The Future of the People of God: Reading Romans Before and After Western Christendom* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), loc. 246; Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004): 466.

in rooting their main point in the opening chapters, but both focus on only half the text. In Romans 1-3, Paul gives equal treatment to both Jew and Gentile while they only highlight one. It is this dynamic that forms the basis for this dissertation's approach rooted in the unification of the Jew and Gentile under the Divine Imaginary.¹³¹

In the opening chapter of Romans, variations of the word faith (Gr. *pistis*) leap off the page, appearing six times in the first seventeen verses. The first, as part of Paul's introduction, points to his calling as an apostle with the mission "to bring all Gentiles to faithful obedience for his name's sake" (Rom. 1:5), followed by a statement in verse six that the church in Rome is one example of this mission. At first glance, this is an odd statement because Paul has never been to Rome and therefore had little, if any, influence on the development of the Roman church. However, in the subsequent verses, it becomes clear that Paul sees the faith of those in Rome as lacking and there is a fullness of faith that he hopes to stir up both through his letter and his visit.

The second use of *pistis* comes in verse eight and reveals that news of the faithfulness of the Roman Church has spread throughout the known world. What Paul does not reveal is the nature of the news that has spread or what he is saying when he mentions them while preaching. Given that Paul sees a need to address their faith, it is certainly not a report of pure praise. At the same time, the news is not entirely bad, as in verse twelve *pistis* appears two more times with Paul looking forward to an opportunity for mutual encouragement with the Christians in Rome.

¹³¹ It is important to note now that this will not be a word-by-word or even a verse-by-verse analysis. Rather, it will focus on broad themes and movements in Romans, similar to previous explorations of the Gospels. The significant difference will be the realization that Romans is ultimately an application of God's self-witness in Jesus, so rather than reading with ears open to what God is saying, the reading will focus on how God's self-revelation applies in a specific setting.

The final barrage of references to faith in Romans 1 come in verse seventeen as Paul writes that, “God’s righteousness is being revealed in the Gospel, from faithfulness for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous person will live by faith.’” Or more commonly, that in the Gospel “the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (ESV). While some find the fact that *pistis* can translate as “faith” or “faithfulness” as a point worthy of argumentation, it seems best to allow both senses to rest on a reading of Romans, simultaneously embracing the objectivity of “faith” which keeps the believer fixed on God’s work, and the subjectivity of “faithfulness” which invites perpetual reflection, as valuable in the life of the believer. This dual value will be made clear shortly.¹³²

In light of Paul’s strong early emphasis on faith, the logical question is, “What is the faith that Paul both preaches and on which he needs to align the Roman church?” The answer comes in verse sixteen as Paul points to the Gospel that he is not ashamed of because it is “God’s power for salvation to all who have faith in God.” But power is not the only characteristic God possesses. God also possesses righteousness, which, like power, comes from the Gospel (1:17), and wrath (1:18).

There are three significant questions that must be addressed. First, why does Paul find it necessary to share that he is not ashamed of the Gospel? Second, while based on grammatical patterns, God’s righteousness makes the most sense as a characteristic of God, there are also excellent arguments for translating it as, “the righteousness [that

¹³² Craig S. Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2011), 29-30; Perriman, *The Future of the People of God: Reading Romans Before and After Western Christendom*, loc. 336; Witherington III and Hyatt, “Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” 38-43.

comes from] God,” and even, “the righteousness [that] God [bestows].” Which of the three did Paul intend? Finally, how is the reader invited to understand the wrath of God? Each of these three will now be addressed in order.¹³³

Paul uses the verb “to be ashamed” five time in his letters, twice in Romans and the other three times over eight verses in 2 Timothy 1. In his letter to Timothy, the use of “ashamed” centers on Paul being in prison for the Gospel. While being imprisoned gives reason for being ashamed, and is most certainly deemed shaming to the outside world, Paul exhorts Timothy to not be ashamed because Paul’s chains are for the Gospel (2 Tim. 1:8 and 12). Moreover, Paul extends kind words towards Onesiphorus’ household who repeatedly supported Paul and was also not ashamed of Paul’s chains (1:16). This points to a shift that happens in faith where things that were once shameful cease to be if they are endured because of Christ.

The opposite of this is also true, as in Paul’s use of shame in Romans 6:21, where he points to behaviors the Roman Christians engaged in before they came to faith, behaviors they now consider shameful. Therefore, with reception of the Gospel, Paul identifies a clear change of value structure, resulting in things that were once shameful no longer being so, and things that were once not shameful becoming so. This same reality is also seen in the Divine Imaginary where something that is shameful by the world’s standards—Christ suffering and ultimately dead on the cross—is God’s very definition of glory. Turning back to Paul, it should be expected that what he has to say throughout the rest of Romans will seem shameful to those who have yet to embrace the Divine

¹³³ Frank Thielman, “God’s Righteousness as God’s Fairness in Romans 1:17: An Ancient Perspective on a Significant Phrase,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54, no. 1 (2011), 35-38.

Imaginary, but his words will be the good news of God to those who embrace God's self-revelation.

Moving forward with the expectation that Paul's words will conflict with human nature, we turn to God's righteousness and ask which of the three linguistically valid options is correct? Is Paul inviting the Romans to have faith in God's righteousness, that God declares his people righteous, or that God makes his people righteous? The answer is a resounding yes to all three, with Paul using the remainder of Romans to unpack each in order of importance. First and foremost, God is righteous, but the expected definition and the one Paul points towards are not the same. In the West where Hodge and his penal substitutionary atonement have largely shaped the way Christianity is experienced, God's righteousness is semantically bound to God's holiness and justice. This was also true in Luther's day, as he linked God's righteousness, when not satisfied, to God's wrath. Luther's struggles and his "tower experience" led him to read Paul as saying, "God declares his people righteous." But when read in the context of first century Rome, a very different image of God's righteousness appears.

Frank Thielman offers critical insight in his article, "God's Righteousness as God's Fairness in Romans 1:17." Thielman explores first century Roman uses of righteousness particularly in the context of how everyday people would hear the term. One option, which is convincingly argued as having a high likelihood for the way Paul's audience would have heard him, revolves around fair treatment according to set rules and traditions. When it came to the distribution of food, the message was that the Roman official responsible for distributing food did not discriminate but acted with equality. From this foundation, Thielman argues righteousness in Romans 1:17, when referring to

a characteristic of God, is not associated with God's holiness or sense of justice, but rather, God's equity towards all people. Further substantiating this view as Paul's intent is Origen's commentary on Romans 1:17, written within two hundred years of Paul's original letter, which argues righteousness not as "a distribution of rewards and punishments according to works, but to God's impartiality in distributing salvation to everyone who has faith."¹³⁴

This idea of God's equity towards all certainly goes against human convention. For the Jew it stands in contrast to their entire existence as a people that is built on their exceptionalism by election in the Exodus. For the Gentile it contradicts hostility towards the Jew, be it the broader culture's opposition to monotheism or other reasons that Witherington identifies as part of his socio-rhetorical perspective. The same thing could be said for both Jew and Greek in relation to the barbarians in the West who were a growing threat to their livelihood. Yet this is exactly what Paul argues in Romans 1:18-3:20, where he looks at both Jew and Gentile and identifies how God treats them equally under the law he has made known to them.

Due to theologians who have pressed the limits of penal substitutionary atonement, the idea of God's wrath is popularly familiar. However, it is a faulty familiarity because it is based on the Father needing retribution against those who have gone against his moral code which, as previously demonstrated, is unbiblical and contradictory to the Divine Imaginary. Rather than drawing away from sin, whether it was in the Garden of Eden, with Cain, Noah, or Babel, the God of Genesis 1-11 always came near sinful humanity with grace and opportunity. The same is seen as God identifies

¹³⁴ Ibid., 38-43.

representatives on earth, be it Abraham, Issac, and Jacob, or Moses and the people of Israel. The God of the Divine Imaginary is never too holy to be with sinners. Rather, Paul sets the wrath of God as a second revelation of God that runs counter to the Gospel (Rom. 1:17-18).

In the Gospel revelation, God calls humanity to himself. In the revelation of wrath, God allows humanity to pursue their own devices (1:24), even though God continues calling them until the “day of wrath” when God will give them what they want: an eternity without God (2:5). At this point, the question turns to the forms of the *nomos* that result in God’s wrath towards those Jews and Gentiles who reject the divine call. Typically translated as law, *nomos* holds a much broader linguistic range with the translator’s selection having a significant influence on how Romans is understood. Key possibilities beyond “law” include natural law, the Torah, or the entirety of the Hebrew Bible, with Paul often alluding to multiple options within the span of a few verses or even the same verse.¹³⁵

Paul argues that God responds in accordance with what has been made known. For the Gentile, who only has the natural revelation of God as creator and ruler, the expectation is honor and thanks (Rom. 1:18-21). For Jews however, who know God not only as creator and ruler, but by name and as the benefactors of God’s salvific work, the expectations are greater and revolve around Torah living as a kingdom of priests (2:17-22). Moreover, obedience to the Torah must be out of genuine conviction as opposed to

¹³⁵ Brendan Byrne, “The Problem of *Nomos* and the Relationship with Judaism in Romans,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2000), 294-295; Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament & Contemporary Contexts*, 51; Witherington III and Hyatt, “Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” 47-48, 50.

external presentation (2:28-29). While this might seem disadvantageous to the Jew, Paul heads off the objection by pointing to how much more God has made the divine presence known to the Jewish people, and the advantages that come with being the recipients of God's self-revelation (3:1-8).

While there is difference in the treatment, there is equity or righteousness in God's means of relating with all people based upon the *nomos* as made known. Yet, in spite of equal opportunity for both Jew and Gentile, Paul goes on to write that neither has responded appropriately to the *nomos* (3:9-20), which is why God's righteousness is not limited to equity. The Divine Imaginary necessitates a righteousness "revealed apart from the Law" (3:21).¹³⁶

The verses which follow start Paul's argument that will extend through Romans 5:21 and focus on God's righteousness in the sense of God imputing righteousness on his people. The foundation of Paul's argument begins with the introduction to a new righteousness in Christ (Rom. 3:21-22) that was necessary because sin caused a rupture in the relationship between divinity and humanity (3:23). That tear has now been addressed by Jesus's blood on the mercy seat (3:24-25) so that the divine-human relationship is restored (3:26). The key to understanding Paul's argument lies in how we understand what happened with Jesus on the mercy seat, a translation choice based on Paul's use of the Greek word *hilasterion*. This is the Septuagint's word of choice for the lid of the ark where God would meet with Moses and Aaron would sprinkle blood on the Day of Atonement (Exod. 25:17-22, Lev. 16, and Num. 7:89).

¹³⁶ Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 54; Keener, *Romans*, 43-44; Thielman, "God's Righteousness as God's Fairness," 44; Witherington III and Hyatt, "Paul's Letter to the Romans," 51, 58, 64-68, 84.

In the school of Anselm, Romans 3:25-25 is read as Jesus giving himself as a satisfaction offering on the cross. In the school of Hodge, this is Jesus enduring the Father's wrath on the cross. Both of these interpretations, which focus on changing God's disposition towards sinful humanity, bias modern translations. One example would be the standard version chosen for this dissertation, the Contemporary English Bible, which reads, "All are treated as righteous freely by his grace because of a ransom that was paid by Jesus Christ. Through his faithfulness, God displayed Jesus as the place of sacrifice where mercy is found by means of his blood." Notice the selection of the word ransom, which would indicate to most readers that Jesus' death was a payment that makes grace available. While it is a valid translation for the Greek *apolytrolos*, other translation options point to a slave being set free, delivered, or liberated, none of which necessitate a payment. As another alternative, the English Standard Version chooses all "are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith." Here the emphasis is on a propitiation, which focuses on doing something to either appease someone else—usually a god or gods—or to make them happy. This choice comes with the belief that the mercy seat and what happened there on the Day of Atonement was about doing something to make God happy so he would no longer be angry with the people.

Nowhere in the Hebrew Bible, however, does it outline how the offerings and sacrifices work. Rather, the people of Israel are told what they need to do, how they need to do it, and that thanks is expressed or sin is forgiven in the process. The common assumption is that the sacrifice is offered to God and does something for God but, outside of those offerings where God finds the aroma pleasing, this is all speculation. The

sacrificial practices of neighboring nations would back this speculation as their sacrifices, including human sacrifice, aimed to appease the gods. At the same time, Yahweh commanding his people to do what neighboring nations do seems contradictory to the divine self-revelation. Moreover, the notion that the sacrifice is necessary because Yahweh cannot be near sin has already been demonstrated as scripturally unfounded.

Finally, it is important to consider what Jesus says about the specific practices in the Torah when given opportunity. For example, when speaking to the Pharisees about divorce in Matthew 19:1-9, Jesus counters their claim that the Torah gives them permission to divorce as long as they give a certificate of divorce, with the argument they were only allowed to do so because their hearts were hard and God needed to reign in destructive behavior.

For the purpose of this discussion, it is evident through Jesus that the Torah was given for the people to guide and help them, not as a path for them to please God. The same idea is conveyed in Mark 2:27 where Jesus says, “The Sabbath was created for humans; humans weren’t created for the Sabbath.” If the rules and regulations of the Torah were given to guide the people on how to live, and if Sabbath keeping and assumedly other ritual practices were for the benefit of the people, why not approach the sacrificial system as something, not for God, but for the people of Israel and their faith?¹³⁷

As an example of how the sacrificial system would be for humanity, this dissertation will now consider Romans 3:24-25 in light of Paul’s reference to Christ’s blood on the mercy seat, a clear reference to Leviticus 16 and the Day of Atonement. To

¹³⁷ Jeremiah 7:22-24 also affirms the idea that sacrifices are not for God.

begin, it is important to note that atonement literally means at-one-ment and involves uniting those torn apart or reconciling a relationship. As we have already seen in Romans, sin is not a moral problem but a relational one that creates distance, not between God and humanity, but humanity and God. Moreover, torn away from their creator, humans become disjoined from one another. Perhaps the clearest example is from the first sin in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve, ashamed of their nakedness, hide from God and then attack one another and the serpent out of their own insecurities. God is not the one who has a problem; Adam and Eve do. And their problem is not God. God is the one who has drawn near and, when Adam and Eve hear the Divine footsteps, they pull further away. They cannot envision God coming close and they will not allow it to happen. To make matters worse, shame breeds sin. And addiction. And brokenness. And violence. And everything evil, which is what allows Paul to say that, “sin comes through the *nomos*” (Rom. 2:20). So what does God do for people who are too ashamed to draw near to the one who can heal their shame? God offers a rite of purification that makes sense in their cultural context. God gives them the Day of Atonement.¹³⁸

The Day would start off with Aaron, dressed in special priestly clothes, making two offerings; one for his own purification and the second as a special whole burnt offering (Lev. 1:3-17 and 16:1-4). He would then receive two more goats from the people and cast lots to determine which one would be sacrificed and which one would be the scapegoat (16:5-10). The atonement continues with sacrificing the animal for his own purification and sprinkling the blood on the ark, in the tent of meeting, and on the main

¹³⁸ Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 56; Longman III, *Immanuel in Our Place: Seeing Christ in Israel's Worship*, 79.

altar, before repeating the same process with the first goat from the people (16:11-19).

Finally, the priest brings the people's second goat, lays hands on its head, and confesses the people's sins, thereby placing them all on the goat which is then sent off into the wilderness (16:20-22). After bathing and changing clothes, Aaron closes the day by offering the whole burnt offering on the main altar (16:23-25).

Based on analysis of Leviticus 16 and other sacrifices, Nobuyoshi Kiuchi concludes that the Day of Atonement is a two-part sacrifice that addresses two essential aspects of the people's sin: uncleanness and guilt. The first comes through the sprinkling of blood as an act of purification that cleanses the people.¹³⁹ While the sprinkling of blood addresses Israel's uncleanness, the guilt remains. However, as Aaron sprinkles the blood and cleans the Tabernacle, he also absorbs the sin of the people and takes their guilt upon himself. Then, when he lays hands on the head of the goat, he transfers all of the guilt of the people onto the goat so it can be sent out into the wilderness. The end result is the people see their sin cleansed and literally watch their guilt run into the wild so they now have no reason to not approach the God who wants to dwell among them. Then that evening the whole burnt offering will rise up to God and the aroma will please him because the children of Israel are no longer hiding.¹⁴⁰

Returning to Romans where Paul suggests the cross is a mirroring of the Day of Atonement, it is necessary to ask who played each role. Jesus was clearly the offering for

¹³⁹ While Christians have historically read this as an expiatory sacrifice, the book of Hebrews argues otherwise saying, "If the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkled ashes of cows made spiritually contaminated people holy and clean, how much more will the blood of Jesus wash our consciences clean from dead works in order to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:13-14). Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature Its Meaning and Function* (Sheffield: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1987), 12.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 65, 147-152; Baruch A. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord: A Study of Cult and Some Cultic Terms in Ancient Israel* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1997), 101-102.

the people, as Paul identifies his blood was put forth. But who stood in for the scapegoat? Similarly, who was the priest? Certainly not the soldiers who were crucifying him. No, Jesus took each of these roles himself.

Jesus is the great high priest who did not need a purification offering of his own because he was without sin. Yet, as he offered himself as a sacrifice for the people, his blood sprinkled down on the earth, cleansing the world from sin. As Aaron did for Israel, Jesus absorbed the sin of the world into himself. Finally, just as the scapegoat would be guided out of the camp and into a desolate place where it would be released, so Jesus was taken to the desolation of the tomb and released to death (Lev. 16:21-22).

As Romans 3:25-26 makes clear, God patiently waited for thousands of years but, when the time was right, Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice, not to satisfy or appease a wrathful Father,¹⁴¹ but to cleanse the sin of the world and take guilt forever to the grave. Now, humanity no longer needs to be ashamed and out of compulsion hide from the Divine. Rather, all are invited to approach the God who wants to be in relationship with them. This is the righteousness that comes apart from the *nomos*, yet is made possible by the *nomos* that makes humanity aware of both sin and the need for an imputed righteousness that is given by God's grace. Paul continues to make this argument as Romans progresses, using both Abraham (4:1-25) and Adam (5:12-21) as examples.¹⁴²

At this point it is necessary to pause and remember that Paul is working to take two groups of people with different imaginaries and seeking to unite them under the

¹⁴¹ For those who, for whatever reason, need to use the language of propitiation, it can be turned to Jesus is propitiating humanity to God, not addressing anger or wrath, but undoing the effects of shame.

¹⁴² C. E. B. Cranfield, *On Romans: And Other New Testament Essays* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1998), 17-22.

Divine Imaginary. As a part of Paul's first use of the word "righteousness," it is easy to see how God's equity towards both Jew and Greek would unify them in their standing before God. However, it is difficult to see how using an ancient Jewish sacrifice to explain imputed righteousness accomplishes the same purpose. As a matter of speculation, perhaps Paul's aim was to invite communication between the two sides.

If Witherington is correct and there was a Jewish minority being oppressed by the Gentile majority, then their knowledge to communicate Paul's wisdom lifted them up in the community. If, on the other hand, the church was closer to the New Perspective's vision, where Jews were pressing barrier laws, then Paul would divert their focus from extraneous matters and invite them to talk about what really mattered: Jesus. Either way, the community was lifted up when those who had been on the outside are brought to the center.

Having identified a way to explain the crucifixion by tying it to the Day of Atonement and God's imputed righteousness, Paul transitions to the third use of righteousness from Romans 1:17 by moving from the cross to the empty tomb. Paul argues that in the resurrection God makes sinners righteous, in part, because the guilt Jesus took to the grave was left behind. Therefore, those who are in Christ are now free from the power of sin and bound to righteousness (Rom. 6:1-7:5). The question is how this righteousness is obtained. Curiously, Paul spends all of Romans 6-7 exploring the wrong way, with only a single verse (7:6) devoted to his ultimate answer of life in the Spirit. Why the circuitous route? Both the Jews and Greeks had reason to believe that *nomos* is the key to virtue and, before pointing his audience to the Spirit, he needed to deconstruct their preconceived notions.

From the Jewish side, it is seen even in a proper understanding of the Torah—that is, as a way to live in light of God’s election and salvation. In other words, if God saved Israel through the Exodus and gave them the Torah, then Christ saving them from sin should result in the giving of a new Torah. For the Greek Christian in Rome, the answer is found in the philosophical milieu of the day, which might not have directly touched the life of many Roman citizens, but indirectly influenced the entire city. In the case of Rome at the time of Paul’s writing, the most present influence was Seneca, a stoic philosopher who also served as a key advisor to Emperor Nero.

Seneca taught that all of creation contained an element of god and the best way for humanity to unlock the divine within, was through logic, reason, and contemplation that then turned into a virtuous life. For Seneca, that final piece was essential; thought must turn into action. Self-reflection was done for the sake of self-improvement that would then benefit friends as well as society as a whole.

However, Seneca found this journey difficult. At times his letters would celebrate great moral improvement, only to turn around and speak of ongoing moral struggles or outright failures. He was arrogant, proud, and wanted the powers and wealth that came with being part of Nero’s court. Some even accuse him of breaking away from rationalism and expressing change as something hoped for. One side of the Roman church had over a thousand years of history demonstrating their inability to keep the *nomos*. The other side could hear the rumors that trickled down from the Emperor’s court

that the man who was the leader in teaching moral development was also a moral failure.¹⁴³

Then there was Paul. It cannot be by accident that the *nomos* shown to the Gentiles, as described by Paul in Romans 1, is virtually identical to Seneca's understanding of the *nomos*, right down to the expectation of thanks and praise combined with a moral life. Yet, as Paul has already revealed in Romans 1, humans inherently reject the *nomos*, prompting God to leave them to their own devices. But what about those who, like Seneca, believe "knowledge of sin is the beginning of salvation" and embrace what is made known as a means to nurture virtue within themselves? Or perhaps even better, Jewish Christians who embrace not only the Torah, but God's revelation in Christ and seek to live accordingly? Certainly this kind of devotion to the *nomos* is the key to a life of virtue. Perhaps, according to people, but not according to Paul who argues that even though righteousness is to live according to the heart of the *nomos*, the *nomos* is a danger because of how sin uses the *nomos* to propagate evil, even when that evil is the very thing you do not want to do (Rom. 7:7-24). Seneca himself no doubt resonated with these words, as they mimicked the ones he wrote. Even for those who are in Christ, sin has a way of taking the *nomos* and using it to bring the most faithful followers of Jesus back to a place where they are like Adam or Eve hiding in the garden.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Fitch, *Seneca*, 91-92, 95-99; Aldo Setaioli, "Seneca and the Divine: Stoic Tradition and Personal Developments," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 13, no. 3 (2007), 334, 351-353.

¹⁴⁴ Stanley E. Porter, *Paul and His Theology* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2006), 123., Stanley E. Porter, *Paul: Jew, Greek, and Roman* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2008), 231-238; Aldo Setaioli, "Seneca and the Divine: Stoic Tradition and Personal Developments," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 13, no. 3 (2007), 335; Witherington III and Hyatt, "Paul's Letter to the Romans," (2004), 96.

In contrast to a disciplined pursuit of the *nomos*, Paul points to the unexpected, the *pneuma* or “Spirit.” The Spirit is the new Torah that God uses to bestow righteousness on those who believe. In the Hebrew Bible, only the select few had the Spirit of God come upon them. The majority was reliant upon the laws to guide righteous behavior. But the Torah failed to accomplish what it set out to do, so a greater Torah—the Spirit—was necessary (Rom. 8:1-4).

As Joel prophesied and Peter announced fulfilled at Pentecost, “After that I will pour out my spirit upon everyone; your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. In those days, I will also pour out my spirit on the male and female slaves” (Joel 2:28-29). Paul frames the distinction between the *nomos* the *pneuma* in terms of selfishness versus spiritual, with the idea that even the most disciplined pursuit of the *nomos*, as Seneca discovered and testified to in his letters and as is evident in the history of the people of Israel, will ultimately be driven by what is best for the self. However, when life is driven by the Spirit, which looks toward others, the result is life, peace, and suffering (Rom. 8:5-17).

The work of Gerald Hawthorne in *The Presence and the Power* proves helpful at this juncture. Hawthorne begins with the question of how Jesus was able to live righteously, teach with authority, and do miracles. While the standard response often leans upon Christ’s divine nature, Hawthorne identifies a fundamental problem in that it makes Jesus something more than human.

Hawthorne proposes that Jesus, while being true God, did not act according to his divine nature while on earth, rather, he depended upon the indwelling of the Spirit to guide his living, empower his teaching, and enact his miracles. The consequence is a very

human Jesus who truly knows what it is like to be one of us and models life by the power of the Holy Spirit for us.

When using Hawthorne, who cites Romans 8 twenty-two times, to shape the interpretation of Paul, it becomes clear that this third kind of God's righteousness, first introduced in Romans 1:17, is God sending the Holy Spirit to God's children so they can live by the same Spirit that empowered the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. However, just as living according to the Spirit, which is contrary to the ways of this world, resulted in suffering for Christ, so it will result in suffering for the believer. For this reason, Paul concludes Romans 8 with an explication on suffering and how God brings good from suffering as, according to the Divine Imaginary, it mirrors God's definition of glory. (Rom. 8:18-39).¹⁴⁵

The role of Romans 9-11 often leaves Bible readers and commentators alike on uncertain ground. At one level, it seems as if Paul has finished his rhetorical argument on righteousness, be it the traditional reading where one definition is used or the reading presented here that embraces rhetorical complexity and welcomes all three definitions of righteousness. However, it is hard to read Romans 12:1, "So, brothers and sisters, because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God." With the "so" or often times, "however," as being a continuation of chapters nine to eleven in isolation. Rather, Paul, pointing to the scope of God's mercies seems to insist that the reader is framing what comes next in light of

¹⁴⁵ Gerald F. Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003).

everything from Romans 1:17 forward. But this means that Romans 9-11 must rhetorically fit with Paul's present argument.

The key comes in Romans 9:30-33 where, after a brief exploration of God's history with Israel that, if taken as literal arguments would move from exploration to theodicy, Paul identifies Israel's problem. It is not a failure in God's call or faithfulness. It is not a result of the Israelites not being passionate about their faith. The problem is Israel's failure to live by faith instead of the *nomos*. Since acting by the *nomos* produces sin that ultimately brings wrath, it is now easy to see how Israel went from the people of the Exodus to a people who reject the prophets and trip over the stumbling block of Christ (Rom. 9:33).

As Paul moves through the next two chapters, he continues to share his heart for Israel (10:1-4), his prayer that messengers from God will go to them and be heard (10:14-21), and his hope that, by the Gentiles receiving God's blessings and promises that Israel will be able to hear (11:11-15). Over all, Paul's primary message to the church in Rome, specifically to his Greek audience, is that despite their culture and the traditions of the philosophers, they are not be like the majority of Israel who live by the *nomos*, but instead live by faith and the *pneumas* (11:16-24).¹⁴⁶

Moving into Chapter 12, some would argue that Romans 1-11 is Paul's theological teaching and 12-15 is his practical exhortation. Robert Bryant for example speaks to God's mercies taking root in human lives and, based on 12:3-8, encourages

¹⁴⁶ Craig S. Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2011), 115; Andrew Perriman, *The Future of the People of God: Reading Romans Before and After Western Christendom* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), loc. 2809; Colleen Carroll Campbell, *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults Are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004-05-01), 154-162; Witherington III and Hyatt, "Paul's Letter to the Romans," 220, 236.

disciples to be a part of a church and humbly use their gifts. Others view this section as the ethical piece, a *paraenesis*, where Paul urges those who are committed to the faith to learn the moral principles of Christianity. While talk of ethics often forces Scripture to operate in terms based in philosophy over theology, there is a significant problem for Paul with both of these approaches in that they drive people back to the *nomos*.

Instead of becoming practical or ethical, Paul remains theological. This is seen in the first two verses of Romans 12 as he takes his readers backwards to the beginning. He opens with a reminder of God's mercies as seen in God's equity, God's imputation of righteousness through Christ, and God's Spirit that dwelt in Christ and now is given to all who believe. Paul then draws back to Romans 6:12-19 as he calls on his readers to offer themselves as living sacrifices so God can use human bodies as tools to do what is righteous. The end result is the undoing of Romans 1:28 and the mind that was once given over to sin experiences transforming renewal and becomes able to discern the will of God.

As Paul goes on in Chapter 12, he employs thirty references to ways God's people are to love one another from 12:9-21. He makes clear that this renewal and transformation comes by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is revealed as the means by which God pours divine love upon the hearts of humanity (Rom. 5:5) and by whom God's people have the power to live a new life (7:6). The question then is how is this done? How does one offer their body to God so the Spirit can bring transformation without falling back into life under the *nomos* (9-11)?¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Robert A. Bryant, "Romans 12:1-12:8," *Interpretation* 53, no. 3 (2004), 287-289, Philip E. Esler, "Social Identity, the Virtues, and the Good Life: A New Approach to Romans 12:1—15: 13,"

A grammatical point of interest helps shed some light on the question at hand. Romans 12:2 offers two passive options and an unspoken active possibility. The first passive option is accepting the ways of the world and be conformed accordingly. The second passive option is transformation by the Spirit. The active option is pushing off the ways of the world and purposely pursuing virtue, that is, life under the *nomos*. While Paul disregards the first and third options for his people, the second seems to remain unclear because it does not appear to reveal how to respond to the world. This vagary, however, dissipates with a basic understanding of ancient Greek and Stoic philosophy.

First, the Greeks, whose philosophy, unlike later Roman forms, were not concerned with the nature of right and wrong; they were far more interested in the idea of human flourishing, or in the language of this dissertation, enchantment. In Romans 12-15, this is exactly what Paul is concerned with; he wants the church in Rome to live well (or better yet, live love) together.

According to Social Identity Theory, a modern approach that resonates with Greek philosophy, once someone becomes a part of a group, they start conforming to the group's patterns and behaviors. They also learn the norms of the group which then reinforces the group's social identity. These ideas of human flourishing and social identity reveal the connection between Romans 1-11 and Romans 12-15.

In Romans 1-11 Paul is using a Greek philosophical framework to present a Christian social identity to the church in Rome. Then in 12-15 he is laying out the norms of behavior that, when lived within the community, will reinforce that social identity. While on the surface this sounds like any worldly community, it is essential to remember

Biblical Theology Bulletin 33, no. 2 (2003): 51-52, 60; Philip F Esler, "Paul and Stoicism: Romans 12 as a Test Case," *New Testament Studies* 50, no. 1 (2004): 117.

that this is a community that has—like those living by the *nomos*—pushed off the world, and gathered together so the Spirit can use the gifts of the individuals gathered, to minister to the community as a whole. This is why Paul turns to the community of faith in Romans 12:3-8.¹⁴⁸

Another line of thought comes through the Stoic philosophical tradition, previously addressed with Seneca. Here Paul teases at the Stoic virtues by applying new words with a similar semantic range to both “be reasonable” and “don’t think of yourself more highly than you ought” and sets them in a new context: community. For the Stoics who typically lived in isolation so they could develop their virtue, the idea that a variant of the very virtues they pursued were the key to holding a community together was revolutionary. But Paul was not done, rather, he elevates a new virtue that can only be attained from the Spirit: love.

Paul’s argument becomes that, just as Stoics would practice their virtues, so Christians could practice love that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, would result in increased love. Therefore, he exhorts the church in Rome to gather together as one community and pursue love, knowing that it will both transform God’s people individually and as a community. It will bind them to the one who is immanent-transcendence and will be how they live a flourishing life of tangible-enchancement before the eyes of a watching world.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Esler, “Social Identity, the Virtues, and the Good Life: A New Approach to Romans 12:1–15:13,” 53-56, 59-60.

¹⁴⁹ Esler, “Paul and Stoicism: Romans 12 as a Test Case,” 115-117, 119-120.

Where We Find Ourselves

Chapter One set the stage with a sweeping look at the five hundred years since the Reformation and how society changed from one wherein the idea of not believing in God was untenable to one where many find the possibility of belief incomprehensible even as they seek out some sense of enchantment. Chapter Two used the stories of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to establish a baseline Divine Imaginary, that is an image of how God invites humanity to think about God. The result of the exploration is an image of God as immanent-transcendence who calls people to lives of tangible-enchantment. Chapter Three then traveled with the Divine Imaginary and the book of Romans through history, specifically observing the way Scripture is read and theology has changed over time.

While some, like Robert Webber in *Ancient-Future Faith* and David Bosch in *Transforming Mission*, see these adaptations as contextualizations necessary to reach the culture of the day, this position often demonstrates arrogance as God's New Testament people are unquestionably able to faithfully navigate the troublesome waters of translating God's revelation to the world in a way where ancient Israel could not. What would the prophets of old say if they observed the Church throughout the ages and were asked if she was any more in line with the Divine Imaginary than Israel in their day?¹⁵⁰

As an alternative, when the book of Romans is read through the lens of Divine Imaginary, we see Paul as one who is both fluent in Roman culture while remaining distinct from it. This allows Paul to speak his message about the righteous equity of God,

¹⁵⁰ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 181; Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 13, 43.

the righteousness that God imputes on sinners as Jesus draws humanity back to God, and the righteousness that God brings about in sinners as they are gifted with the same indwelling of the Spirit that Jesus experienced during his earthly ministry.

Each of these ideas, rooted in the Divine Imaginary, are shared by Paul in the language that the church in Rome would understand, but it never requires making Satan an enemy worthy of payment, distorting the heart of the Father towards the creation, elevating the abilities of humanity to love rightly with nothing more than divine inspiration, or more specific to Paul and the church in Rome, use of Stoic philosophy to nurture holy living. In other words, for Paul, the Divine Imaginary does not change. However, the way he explains the ideas and applications of the Divine Imaginary will adapt into the cultural language of his hearers. New metaphors are welcome; new messages are not.

Sadly, over the past two thousand years, Christian teaching has increasingly changed both the metaphors and the message of the divine self-revelation, with the consequence that what God preached often bears little resemblance to the Divine Imaginary. The God who always draws near to fallen humanity to bring restoration is suddenly distant and demanding reparations, if not retribution, before welcoming his alleged children. The God who is self-defined as love suddenly values holiness and retributive justice over grace and mercy. The God who calls forth a kingdom of priests who combat brokenness in their world through lives of tangible-enchancement are suddenly the moral authority, feigning righteousness while proclaiming retributive “love.” Therefore, it is time to return to where this journey began, to a neo-secular age. A

return to the pilgrims who are seeking a sense of enchantment and exploration of how the church can embody the Divine Imaginary in today's Western world.

CHAPTER FOUR

EMBODYING THE DIVINE IMAGINARY IN A NEO-SECULAR AGE

Back to the Start

Chapter One opened with a brief history that brought about two important conclusions. First, even in a secular world, humanity longs for enchantment that provides a captivating image of what human flourishing looks like. Second, while the neo-secular world offers a plethora of images that give people a veritable buffet of enchantment options, the Church is largely picture-less as it offers either a louder or reworked and stripped down version of its premodern theology. What was not immediately clear was whether the Christian options failed to resonate because of the content, how it was delivered, or both. To seek clarity on this uncertainty, we embarked on an autoethnographic journey of discovery wherein the author's life story has hopefully become a connection point for others seeking enchantment in the neo-secular West.

The first question concerning Christianity among secularism focused on the content of the message. This was done in two ways. First, Chapter Two offered an overview of the four Gospel accounts, seeking to understand God's self-revelation in and through Jesus. Repeatedly, God's story is one of God drawing near to fallen humanity and humanity retracting from God, be it individually or corporately through the systems, governments, or religions of this world. However, when humanity hears God's invitation to not fear the divine presence, the experience is one of immanent-transcendence that is transformative and enables humanity to live a flourishing life of tangible-enchantment. As is seen in Chapter Three, this story rarely matches well with the theologies of history. At times the Church has turned Satan from one who tries to woo us away from God to

one who has the power to legitimately claim us as his own. Even worse, the dominant teaching of the past thousand years has God the Father insisting on something ranging from satisfaction to revenge on sinners, making the God who comes in Christ distinctly different from the Father in heaven who Christ ultimately rejoins—an immanent-transcendence shattering dynamic that legitimizes the human desire to flee from the presence of God. To this end, restoring the Divine Imaginary is of primary importance if the Church wants to offer the world the divine image of tangible-enchantment.

As for the effectiveness of the Christian presentation, it could be argued as very successful. Recalling my story, the theology I grew up with left me feeling the weight of sin in hopes I would turn to Christ and be justified by grace through faith. While my reception of grace was certainly debatable at time, the liturgical experience did such a masterful job of placing the weight of sin upon me that it fueled a self-hatred so feral that, as a nine-year-old boy, I wanted to kill myself because it seemed the only legitimate response to my God blessed self-hatred. I am haunted by it to this day. At that level, and given that I remained part of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod for almost forty-one years, it is possible that if the same worship and teaching methodology presented the Divine Imaginary, it too could be received.

My confirmation class suggests otherwise. Picture a sunny, warm, Sunday morning in the Denver suburb of Arvada, Colorado. It is May of 1989. Thirty-four students a few months away from starting high school wore white robes as they stood in front of the congregation at Peace Lutheran Church. As we gave our confirmation vows, we literally swore that we would rather die than give up the Christian faith. Four years later, when those same students were getting ready to leave for college, only three of us

remained at the church. Certainly some moved and started going to a new church; a couple of others might have started going to a different church in the area. But even if three moved and found a new church and three more went to another church in the area, that still means almost seventy-five percent of the students who swore they would die defending the faith left the Church within four years. I was one of the few who did not flee the congregation's theology, formative methodology, or both. It is not a far stretch to say the world is far better than the Church at enchantment, but it does not have to be.

The path forward will begin with a return to the work of Charles Taylor that was foundational to Chapter One. Beginning with an examination of how culture shifted imaginaries from the premodern to modern, and then turning to how—both in theory and in practice—this might be helpful in sharing the Divine Imaginary. Before concluding, there will be two explorations on the role of trauma in changing imaginaries.

Disembedding and Embedding

With a return to the imaginary, we return to Charles Taylor. Taylor's analysis of what brought about a change of the social imaginary from premodernity's "transcendent-enchantment" to modernity's "immanent-disenchantment" proves helpful in identifying how the church can proclaim the Divine Imaginary of immanent-transcendence that propels God's people into a flourishing life of tangible-enchantment.¹⁵¹ In essence, he argues that for generations the premodern Western world was "embedded" in its social

¹⁵¹ *Appendix C: Rethinking Formation* explores how this happens, including an example from rural Nebraska where the younger generation are disembedded by social and mass media, and then re-embedded, not in a rural and largely premodern imaginary, but an urban neo-secular one, even though they continued to live in the country.

imaginary. However, when the philosophy of Descartes and others, along with the scientific breakthroughs of Newton and those like him, began to resonate with everyday people, the soil society implanted itself in started to loosen and the West found itself disembedding. However, this demanded social adaptation so society could take root in a new social imaginary with new structures and practices, new stories and images that once again allow people to make sense of and embody their new everyday life.¹⁵²

The question now becomes, “How does Christianity respond?” Taylor offers a path forward when he points to the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Looking back to Chapter Two’s journey through Luke, the reader will recall that at the end of the parable the Legal Expert could either reject Jesus or recognize that both his hermeneutic of the Torah and his lifelong ambition to earn righteousness were erroneous. In other words, he could remain embedded in the world he knew or he could take up Jesus’ disembedding challenge and step into the new structures and practices that come with following Jesus.

As all four of the Gospel accounts reveal, with Mark being the most forceful about the matter, to be the people of God means remaining rooted in the geographic and cultural place where God calls you, while simultaneously uprooting from its social imaginary and transplanting into the Divine Imaginary which then guides ones self-understanding and life. This is precisely what Paul did in his letter to the church in Rome when read through the lens of the Divine Imaginary.

How does this happen? A closer look at Jesus with the Legal Expert in Luke 10:25-37 will prove helpful. First, it is important to note that up until Luke 9:51, Jesus

¹⁵² Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 156-157, 169-176.

conducted his work in Galilee which was largely comprised of demonstrating his ministry as a fresh fulfillment of Isaiah 61. From that point on, everything was done on the road to Jerusalem, a journey that required at least three days but we can assume took much longer. Whatever the case, Jesus had been active for an extended period of time before the Legal Expert approached him towards the beginning of his journey to Jerusalem. The Legal Expert had time to watch, listen, observe, and question the teachings and actions of Jesus. There was space for the expert to have his imaginary challenged and begin to experience disembedding of his own. If the world is going to notice the Divine Imaginary, it begins with its witnessed embodiment in the lives of Christians.

Having observed Jesus, the Legal Expert finally approaches him and broaches the subject of inheriting eternal life. Jesus might have simply told him the answer or offered a more theological response. Instead, he stepped into the man's world asking, "What is written in the Law? How do you interpret it?" Jesus, while living according to the Divine Imaginary was, as previously seen in Paul, well versed in the popular social imaginary of his day. As the conversation pressed on, Jesus invited the man to envision an alternative way of living, in this case, a way where no one can work their way to eternal life, but also one where love and mercy is extended towards all people. As far as we can tell, beyond Jesus' exhortation to go and be like the Good Samaritan, there was nothing more said. Jesus simply allowed his challenge to sit with the man, giving him the space to decide if he was going to remain embedded in what he knew or if he would take the terrifying step into the unknown and follow Jesus.

What would life had been like if the Legal Expert chose to follow Jesus? Most likely, it would have been very similar to the life of the disciples who, as we have seen,

repeatedly acted as those rooted in the social imaginary of the world they knew, while Jesus slowly, patiently, and perpetually worked to shift their heart's desires towards the Kingdom of God, a task that only began to manifest with the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). Here the work of Smith once again proves helpful, specifically his text, *Desiring the Kingdom*. Smith argues that humans are not primarily thinkers or believers, but are first and foremost lovers. To this end, our problem is not that we are creatures of passion, but that our passions often need redirection. Our problem is not that we love, but that we love the wrong things.

Here the words of C. S. Lewis ring loud and clear: "It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

To explain this, Smith offers an image where a person's love aims toward a certain end, a *telos*, that fits one's understanding of human flourishing, his or her image of enchantment. According to the Divine Imaginary, sin is then a misaiming of one's love, and the pursuit of a *telos* other than human flourishing empowered by immanent-transcendence and manifesting as tangible-enchantment. This image weaves beautifully with both Paul's approach in Romans 1 and the hiding of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, where sin involves disengaging from relationship with God.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2001), 26; Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 46-57, 77.

How then are misguided passions retargeted? Here Smith simultaneously looks back to Aristotle and forward to modern science and the neuroplasticity of the brain, a biological feature credited with everything from making casual drug use turn addictive to overcoming writers block. The connection point between the two is the realm of habits that guide the targeting of human hearts. Smith's logic is simple: if people embrace embodiment practices that habituate the heart towards the desired target, they will increasingly embrace the accompanying imaginary. Philosopher-mechanic Matthew Crawford offers a similar perspective in *Shop Class as Soul Craft* when he writes:

If we follow the traces of our own actions to their source, they intimate some understanding of the good life. This understanding may be hard to articulate; bringing it more fully into view is the task of moral inquiry. Such inquiry may be helped along by practical activities and company with others, a sort of conversation indeed. In this conversation lies the potential of work to bring some measure of coherence to our lives.¹⁵⁴

Smith identifies two ways an imaginary can be embodied. First, subconsciously claiming an enchantment and purposely participating in routines allows the habit to embed in the subconscious so, in time, the individual impulsively seeks the desired end. My story, as shared up to this point, is largely one of subconscious enchantment. This is also the work of advertisers, the core of nationalism, and something often admired in the life of another. A variant of unintentional embodiment focuses on habits being “caught rather than taught.” These include how someone is raised from childhood, or mimicking

¹⁵⁴ Rosanne Bane, *Around the Writer's Block: Using Brain Science to Solve Writer's Resistance* (Los Angeles: Tarcher, 2012); Matthew B. Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry Into the Value of Work* (Westminster, UK: Penguin Books, 2010), 197; Barry J Everitt and Trevor W Robbins, “Neural Systems of Reinforcement for Drug Addiction: From Actions to Habits to Compulsion,” *Nature Neuroscience* 8, no. 11 (2005): 1481-1489; Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 55-57.

the actions of friends and finding oneself in a habitual routine without realization of the habit and the consequential formation of the heart.¹⁵⁵

The second way to embody an imaginary is purposefully training the heart towards a specific *telos*. Within this framework, providing the structures, practices, stories, and images that allow people to purposefully implant themselves and habituate their hearts in the Divine Imaginary is the task of disciplining communities. This is true not only because people come to the community with a wide array of enchantments they are devoted to, but because society forms around its social imaginary and needs conformity to sustain itself. In other words, those who uproot from the dominant cultural structure will be under constant pressure to rejoin the majority. Therefore, the next step will explore how the church can invite this kind of imaginary embodiment. This will be followed by a call to the church to step into the trauma brought about by many alternative imaginaries.¹⁵⁶

Preaching the Divine Imaginary

Christian communities need to be purposeful in the habituation of God's people towards the Divine Imaginary, both in the sense of forming the heart and keeping it formed. To this end trinitarian worship should be an opportunity for those who want to retrain their desires to do precisely that. There will be many formative acts during the service, be they sacramental, vocal, or relational. Yet one of the most difficult aspects of worship to conduct formatively over informatively is preaching, particularly that done most often as a monologue.

¹⁵⁵ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 58.

¹⁵⁶ Chiara Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 222; Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 58-62, 81-85; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 158.

In *Telling God's Story: Narrative Preaching for Christian Formation*, John Wright offers a homiletical approach that aims to form a kingdom of priests who, because of their faith, see the world differently and responsively act to bring positive change to the world. Wright's approach, which will be reviewed momentarily, follows the example of Jesus with the Legal Expert in that it aims to disembed the hearer from his or her imaginary and invites them to replant in the Divine Imaginary.¹⁵⁷

To understand Wright's approach, it is first necessary to understand a critical distinction between comedy and tragedy. Comedy, whether it is in the theater, at a movie, or on television, ends with a resolution that affirms the viewers' preconceived notions about the world. Things can be troublesome in the middle, but the resolution always confirms the existing imaginary. It is important to note here that dark comedy is also affirmative, just with negative perceptions. To this end, one could say that the worship experience of my childhood was one of dark comedy. Conversely, tragedy forces disruption on the audience and denies the desired resolution. The imaginary portrayed on the stage or screen proves inadequate to explain life. Unable to assure their understanding of life, tragedy leaves the viewers wondering what to do next.

From the perspective of spiritual formation, tragedy is an uprooting event that creates opportunity for transplanting into the Divine Imaginary. Given the highly consumeristic nature of Christianity today, it is not surprising that most preaching is rooted in a positive comedy that seeks to strip away the dramatic tension of Scripture so it not only supports life as it is known but enhances it. After all, to draw people into tragedy

¹⁵⁷ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 137-138; John W. Wright, *Telling God's Story: Narrative Preaching for Christian Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 12.

is to risk making them feel uncomfortable and leave, never to return. The consequence is that supposedly Bible-based preaching becomes nothing more than a value adding variety to popular culture, losing any sense of the distinction that comes with Divine Imaginary.¹⁵⁸

In order to make more sense of Wright's work, let me offer an example of a sermon as comedy and then use the same biblical text and illustrations to reframe the message as a tragedy and an invitation to embrace the Divine Imaginary. Recently, as part of my family's search for a new church home, I attended a Denver area congregation for the first time. The message looked at John 4's story of The Woman at the Well. The pastor opened with a monologue about Robin Williams and continued with the pastor's love for the famed comic while growing up before telling of Robin Williams' difficult private life that included, among other things, drug abuse, alcoholism, and three marriages. The preacher then turned to The Woman at the Well and her life of struggle, one where she had been married five times and was now living with another man. He set the two in comparison to each other and unpacked how they were both searching for something to fill a void in life and that something is Jesus. The preacher then invited those in the congregation to think about how they approach people outside the faith and to share Jesus as the answer to their hurts, be it addiction, materialism, or "looking for love in all the wrong places." Essentially, it was the kind of sermon one could expect; a sermon that would send most listeners on their way feeling good about themselves and perhaps even ready to tell a friend about Jesus.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 33-35, 38-44.

But what if, instead, the preacher started with the woman who was married five times and was living with another man. In our twenty-first century world, our impulse would be to look at her as someone who is either promiscuous or desperately looking for love and convinced that her value lies in a man's embrace. But the first century worked differently. Marriage was not about love or affection, rather, for women, it was largely about survival. To have a hard-working man was to have a home, food, and protection. When a man married a woman, he committed to care for her.

This was not the experience of The Woman at the Well. Rather, five times a man promised to make sure that she was taken care of and five times she was presumably widowed or cast aside as worthless. Maybe she was barren. She demonstrates theological astuteness so maybe she was "too" intelligent and, therefore, embarrassed her husbands. Whatever the case, all they needed to do was present her a certificate of divorce and she was gone. Is it any wonder she was willing to embrace someone who was not willing to commit but was open to help her survive for a season?

The preacher could then ask, "Who in your life do you know who has been discarded?" What is their back story? Is there a woman you work with who everyone belittles behind her back?" Someone trying to cope with the fact that her uncle repeatedly molested her as a child? Is the angry tyrant of a boss that kid everyone used to bully and, finally finding himself in a place of power, is now exacting revenge? Is the "angry Black woman" at the supermarket just exhausted from having to work twice as hard to earn half as much while constantly reminding her sons that despite all the societal messages to the contrary, they can succeed if they work hard? Every day we encounter people in all kinds

of settings and it is so easy to judge them based on casual observance but, without the backstory, what do we really know?

It might seem like a strange connection, but there are others in our society today who have the same sensory experience as those cast aside like the Woman at the Well. Robin Williams was one of my favorite comics growing up. The news of his suicide shocked me. I knew he had issues with alcohol and drugs, but it seemed like somebody who has so much would find a way beyond any pain. When I looked more into the circumstances surrounding his life, I began, as much as I am able, to wrap my mind around depression and I began to realize that this is not just feeling sad, rather, it is a chemical imbalance in the brain that physically impairs the ability to feel joy. While some would be quick to assume Robin was seeking something that satisfied in the drugs, alcohol, marriages, and fame, an understanding of depression tells us that he was, at bare minimum, seeking numbness and ultimately he was seeking death because it was less painful than life. Every day we encounter people in all kinds of settings, and it is easy to judge them based on casual observance but without the backstory, what do we really know?

And that's where Jesus steps in. Here he is, sitting at a well when this Samaritan woman walks up. Cultural proprieties said a conversation should never happen because this creature, no matter what her social standing in the community might be, was both a woman and a Samaritan. Her arrival in the middle of the day indicated that there was more of a story to be told, but Jesus did not press the issue. Instead he did the risky, daring, and unthinkable; he asked her for a drink. When she reacts accordingly, he promises to give her living water, something far more valuable than any of her five

husbands. Given her history with men, is it any wonder she doubts? But the promise stands, even when Jesus reveals that he knows her story in all of its brokenness.

The Bible does not divulge what happened to the woman after she ran back into the town. The nuance of the Greek tells us that she still doubted. And again, who could blame her? What we do know is that Jesus showed interest and in doing the socially unacceptable thing, shook the very foundations of her world and made her begin to question everything she had thought about herself for so long. The preacher could then conclude with an invitation to view Jesus as one who knows and embraces us in our brokenness and invites us to be Jesus to the people in our lives who are cast aside, getting to know and embrace them in their brokenness.

Cultivating the Divine Imaginary

While worship is one means of embodying the Divine Imaginary, another is individual and corporate action. This active embodiment is rooted in meaning manifesting less in what is said and more in what is done. As Crawford says it, “If thinking is bound up with action, the task of getting an adequate grasp on the world, intellectually, depends on our doing stuff in it.” Moreover, enactment is not limited to expressing existing belief, but it also shapes belief, which is why Jesus told the Legal Expert from the Good Samaritan parable “to do likewise,” even though he did not believe in the Divine Imaginary. Finally, for God’s people to be a kingdom of priests and holy nation, faith must be lived out publicly. While individual enactment was touched on in

the previous section's message application, the following is a full story of individual embodiment.¹⁵⁹

As I shared in the introduction, while working on my doctorate, I have also worked at REI in the footwear department. While most people view my job as getting shoes from the warehouse and putting them away when customers are done, I have a different perspective because I know most people have never evaluated their feet. The bulk of customers believe a number corresponding to the length of a shoe reveals the sum total of footwear identification. Occasional customers identify their foot as a two dimensional object with both length and width. In four years, I have never met a customer who thinks of their foot as a diverse three-dimensional object, going into a multifaceted three-dimensional space. As a result, customers perpetually settle for uncomfortable and injury-inducing footwear due to improper fitting. Moreover, customers rarely realize that pain in the ankles, knees, hips, and lower back can be related to their feet. Others are unaware that hiking or running does not mandate losing toenails. Because the Divine Imaginary compels me to care for people and bring healing where I can, when I approach a customer, my goal is to love them by assuring they receive the best fit possible in their hiking or running shoes.

As an example, a few years ago a couple came in looking for shoes for the woman. They were older, perhaps early retirement age. They explained she had recently undergone a medical procedure, enabling her to walk after years in a wheelchair. During those years, his life largely centered on her care. Each week, a family member gave him a

¹⁵⁹ Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, 82, 220; Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 164; Wright, *Telling God's Story*, 9.

day off and he would go hiking. Now that she was learning to walk again, she wanted to join him.

Her doctor had given significant stipulations for footwear. They gave me the physician's list and I asked to look at her feet. I measured them, made observations about the shape, and asked them to wait a moment. I returned from the warehouse with a pair of shoes. When she tried them on, her face lit up. She walked around the department, climbed some stairs, and tested them on our fake rock. Thrilled, they bought the shoes.

About a month later, I noticed her standing in a corner of the footwear department. Between helping other customers, I said hello and she lit up again: "I know you are busy, but I just had to thank you again for the shoes. We have already gone on two hikes and have more planned! Thank you so much!" I smiled. It was a moment of tangible-enchancement. I battled sin in her body and helped bring healing and restoration to her life. Beyond that, it rooted in my own mind that loving my neighbors is the kind of life I want to live.

The challenge with individual acts is the limitation of the effect. While good for the person benefiting and the one serving, it offers only a glimmer of the Divine Imaginary in a world desperately needing to experience an enchanting perspective on God's self-revelation. James Davison Hunter offers a unique perspective in *To Change the World*. After extensively exploring the Scriptural mandate for world changing and the failure of previous faith-based approaches to bring change, Hunter proposes modern day disciples engage in a ministry of "faithful presence" by through lives of affirmation and antithesis.

Affirmation recognizes the mandate to create culture as bestowed with the *imago dei* in Genesis 1; antithesis recognizes that these cultures, even at their best, only partially image the Kingdom of God. Thus, Christ-followers must continually discern within both the Church and world's culture, seeking to identify and oppose anything contrary to the Kingdom. Consequentially the Church becomes a subversive force that seeks to undermine any structure or agenda striving to undermine the Divine Imaginary. These efforts, however, demand more energy and force than any individual can offer, Therefore Christians must band together, becoming greater in their unity, can creating large scale revelations of the Kingdom.¹⁶⁰

For example, on October 31, 1982, the Nehemiah Project broke ground on their first homes in Brooklyn, New York's Brownsville neighborhood. The effort, supported by various local churches and their denominational bodies, community organizers, and, the City of New York sought to build low-income housing that citizens could buy with minimal assistance and no federal support. By purchasing pre-raised land from the city at a minimal fee, using high volume building techniques, and negotiating special property tax agreements, the Nehemiah Project reduced development costs and assured buyers long-term affordable payments. This enabled residents who typically were disqualified from home ownership purchased homes for as little at \$39,000. These same homes resold for up to \$120,000 twenty-five years later, keeping the homes well below market value while providing equity for the original owner. More importantly, some credit the project with keeping Brownsville leaders in the community, enabling a potential renaissance in a

¹⁶⁰ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 231-236.

neighborhood dominated by crime for generations. The first Nehemiah Project development was successful enough that the city allowed the development of an additional housing community in Brooklyn.¹⁶¹

For Nehemiah Project leaders, New York City's culture that made its poorest residence choose between unsafe and demeaning public housing or life on the streets was unacceptable. They were convinced the path to resolving violence in one of America's most dangerous neighborhoods was creating a critical mass of independent home owners, invested enough in the community to instigate an ongoing series of neighborhood improvements that would increase economic vitality and dissuade crime. The Nehemiah Project engaged in antithesis and united to recreate culture and embody the Divine Imaginary.¹⁶²

Traumatic Disembedding

How do the people of God know where to practice antithesis? How is opposition to the Divine Imaginary identified? The Nehemiah Project wisely turned to trauma. As these words are written, on November 13, 2015, the Western world reels from terrorist

¹⁶¹ Anthony DePalma, "The Nehemiah Plan: A Success, But...", New York Times, September 27, 1987, accessed November 17, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/09/27/realestate/the-nehemiah-plan-a-success-but.html?pagewanted=all>; J. Scheff, "East New York's Nehemiah Housing Proving Resilient," accessed November 17, 2015, <http://www.brownstoner.com/blog/2009/10/affordable-hous-6/>; Jason Sheftell, "Spring Creek Nehemiah is an Affordable Housing Success Story in East New York," New York Daily News, July 27, 2012, accessed November 17, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/life-style/real-estate/spring-creek-nehemiah-affordable-housing-success-story-east-new-york-article-1.1123089>; Vitullo-Martin, "Is Brownsville Brooklyn Ready for Its Jane Jacobsian Comeback?," Untapped Cities, January 17, 2013, accessed November 17, 2015, <http://untappedcities.com/2013/01/17/brownsville-brooklyn-ready-for-comeback/>.

¹⁶² Michael Gecan, *Going Public: An Organizer's Guide to Citizen Action* (New York: Anchor, 2004), 13.

attacks in Paris, France. Fourteen years ago, deadlier attacks took place on U.S. soil with the toppling of the Twin Towers and other acts of terror.

In September of 2001, I was a youth worker in Windsor, CA, and I quickly noticed people who otherwise had no interest in church were suddenly open to faith. While the Church's message ultimately failed to connect, it birthed an awareness that trauma is a disembedding experience, and if the Church seeks to share the Divine Imaginary, it must bring an unexpected presence amid trauma. This is true for both large-scale events like terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and even the Space Shuttle disasters, and trauma that occurs at personal level: a family death, losing a job, ending a relationship, or even an arrest. I speak to the last one from personal experience, although my arrest was not the source of trauma.

I did not know the time when I stepped out of the jail and into the cool dark air. It was Thursday, December 9, 2010. Unfamiliar with my surroundings, I followed the long driveway hoping it would bring me to road I recognized as a way back to town. Two weeks earlier my family moved to Bentonville so I could pastor at a local congregation. It would be among the shortest pastorates in history.

The night before, decades of craving enchantment combined with my dark search on the web prompted me to respond to someone offering companionship for a price. I do not know if she was ever real, but when I knocked on the hotel door, three large men lunged at me, pulled me into the room, and handcuffed me. Walking home from my night in jail, I was still largely numb. Part of me wondered how I could cover this up and keep my life of performance on Sunday and self-hatred throughout the week going, but in the end I knew it was impossible. As I walked what I now know is three miles home, I

resigned myself to the reality that everyone would soon know the truth about me. Now everyone had reason to hate me as much as I hated myself. As I finally arrived home, I had no idea the following days would be a disembedding trauma prompting the five year journey behind this dissertation.

I called my denominational official and told him what happened. Even though we had never met, he cleared his schedule and began the drive from Tennessee, just to be present. I also met with the church's Board of Directors before the news could break on local television. While they were disappointed and accepted my resignation, they too were kind and did not show the hatred I deserved. As a student working on a DMin at George Fox, I emailed my cohort and the program leadership with intent of dropping out. They not only responded with kindness, but suggested I withhold my withdrawal, take an incomplete, and finish my coursework during the next semester. I had no idea what to do with this kind of kindness and the best was yet to come.

Since my phone was confiscated as evidence, the next day I took an old phone and had AT&T reactivate it on my account. Almost immediately text messages started pouring in. Friends from around the country checking on me, speaking words of love and grace. My best friend, unaware my phone was confiscated, continued texting after twenty-four hours of silence on my end. The message, "You better not block me out of your life." I learned three friends from seminary spent the night before one of their weddings praying for me. I had no idea how to respond because the treatment I deserved and the response did not match. This trauma-induced love prompted my world to come apart. And that was just the start.

That Sunday, my now ex-wife took our son, Robbie, and left the state. In the darkness of the moment, watching my son ride off and not knowing when I would see him again, I began to return to the only world I knew. I went inside and thought, "If I kill myself, nobody will know for days." By God's grace, I decided to watch football first.

During the game there was a knock at the door. A couple from the church had come to apologize. "Pastor,"—that they would still use that title disoriented me—"We just realized that, most likely, nobody invited you to church today and we are here to say it will never happen again." Not knowing I had a phone, they gave me a prepaid phone and a full supply of minutes so I could stay in touch with Robbie. Then they invited me to their house for dinner the next night. The kindness and the apology shook me. The simple realization that my corpse would be found in short order waylaid my efforts to go back to the way things were.

The blessing continued the next day as my George Fox cohort committed to walking with me. The seminary enacted this pledge by deciding to fly the Assistant Director of my program out to spend time with me and make sure I was okay. More friends texted words of love and encouragement. One friend called to confess his own history of sex-related legal issues, asking if we could pursue healing together. As our call ended, there was a knock at the door as my ride to dinner had arrived. I opened the door but unable to cope with the love expressed, I dropped back onto the couch and unleashed an overwhelmed and angry, "Will you just stop loving me?!" My dinner host sat down beside me, put his arm around me, and simply said, "But we do love you."

As I write this almost five years later, the trauma of unconditional love continues to shake me to my very being. Tears flow anew. Looking back, those are not the days I

embraced the Divine Imaginary, but where divine love dislodged me from the imaginary of my youth and enabled the years since to be a season of reconciling with my past and finally meeting a Jesus who is the immanent-transcendence that invites me to a life of tangible-enchantment.

When God's people step into the trauma around them and bring the Divine Imaginary, it is an uprooting experience that begins to reveal new possibilities for those who are hurting to embed themselves in.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Transplanting After Trauma

As Chapter Four suggested, boldly stepping into trauma is a powerful way for disciples to invite uprooting, but for those entangled in unsatisfactory or destructive alternative enchantment, the work must continue. Simply disembedding fails to create new structures, stories, images, and frameworks necessary for embedding in a new imaginary. Without a genuine opportunity to embrace the new, those ready for transplant will most likely reembed into a broken but familiar world. I battled against hated alternative enchantments for decades, dislodging and resettling time and time again. Over the past twenty years, I pursued every solution I could find in hopes of breaking the cycle of temporary appeasement and anesthetizing my craving for enchantment. I ached to satisfy it in a significant and life-transforming way.

When the Cell Church Movement¹⁶³ was the hottest fad in American Christianity, I was a youth minister. The pastor of a neighboring church and I spent an afternoon together with a Cell Church guidebook on spiritual warfare. We embraced the process, confessed our sins, forgiving them, casting out associated oppressive forces, and prayed for God's Spirit to take up residence in our hearts and minds. Anger, lust, greed, sexual indiscretion, pornography, pride, and a host of other sins were swept out the door. At first

¹⁶³ Patterned after the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea, cell churches have two wings. One is the Sunday worship service and the second is a small group called a cell. The cell is intended to be the source of community, support, and pastoral care with the leader essentially functioning as pastor to the group. Because most cell churches are charismatic in nature, they are strong on both the spiritual gifts and spiritual warfare.

it felt amazing, but the old patterns soon returned with a greater intensity and a heightened sense of guilt that demanded more intense appeasement.

Trying to create barriers, I was an early xxxchurch.com supporter and among the first to download their software. It is not the only guardian software I tried, but like the others, I found a work around or alternative. I attempted other forms of oversight as well. For example, accountability partners always ended up feeling either like the god I knew as a child or the Accuser out to incriminate me. Consequently, I would avoid them, navigate around the important subjects, or just lie and insist everything was alright. I met with Christian counselors while at seminary and after leaving ministry. In both cases a prescribed set of solutions revolved around more prayer and trying harder, solutions the Apostle Paul would categorize as life under the *nomos*. I found a place, a beautiful community called Where Grace Abounds, that invited me to explore many of my hurts, pains, and longings. Yet despite my post-arrest experience, I simply could not wrap my mind around the God of immanent-transcendence that this community embodied. As a result, it was good. It was helpful. But it could have been more, if I allowed it. Instead, I played Adam and continued to hide.

I also stepped outside the Church to see what the world offered. I pursued physical fitness, found myself in the best shape of my life, and felt better until life became hard. Secular counselors tended to be more helpful, but failed to see why faith mattered to me. Depression eventually brought me to a psychiatrist's office where I was diagnosed with Type 2 bipolar disorder, making sense of a long-term struggle that

manifested with short seasons of hypomania¹⁶⁴ where I became a hyper-sexualized superhuman who required little sleep, had the utmost clarity of thought, and outproduced the world's foremost productivity gurus. These days were followed by long bouts of depression that increased in length and intensity as the years passed. In the end, I have read countless books; prayed more prayers than I can begin to imagine; attended conferences and spiritual formation retreats; earned a Master of Divinity degree and, with the final approval of this dissertation, a Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation. For two decades I alternated between self-destruction and delving into the *nomos* to try and solve the problem that is my longing for enchantment.

In August of 2015, as a part of my dissertation research, I participated in a four-day *Story Workshop* led by Dan Allender, a theologian and psychologist who, over the last thirty-years, developed a counseling methodology that steps into childhood stories of trauma and journeys through them to find healing. In preparation, I was required to write and share a story of childhood trauma. I offered the one from the Introduction about a girl rejecting me in third grade. The workshop was a mixture of whole group teaching with Dan as the primary facilitator, followed by small group sessions with six participants and two counselors engaging in individual story work.

By chance, I was invited to participate in a group where Dan was one of the counselors. When I read my story to the group, after a time of others responding, Dan looked at me and very directly asked, "When in your life did you embrace self-

¹⁶⁴ Typical response to bipolar disorder includes images of someone losing control. This manic behavior can manifest as euphoria, overactivity, or delusions. In each case, these manifestations bring about behavior that is harmful to either the person suffering from mental illness or those around them. Hypomania on the other hand, involves the same manifestations, but it is limited in a sense that the behaviors are not usually harmful and often work in favor of the individual with mental illness.

sabotage?” I froze, unsure of what to say. Dan continued, “It took about two sentences from you for everyone here to realize you are unusually intelligent. Therefore, I must assume that you knew she would reject you and that setting yourself up for failure is a reoccurring pattern in your life.” The truth is, he was right. I do not lack successes, but I always find ways to assure any success I have is, at least in my mind, tarnished with failure. I spent two decades justifying my own self-hatred. Once again, I found myself disembedded.

The next morning’s large group session opened with Dan saying, “Let us talk about healing broken hearts.” He began with the brain and a casual overview of how it works. There are two main parts: the neocortex—the section controlling logic and reason—and the limbic system, which operates on images and feelings and serves as the central decision maker. The neocortex largely justifies the decisions made by the limbic brain. Going deeper, Allender identified the two primary regions of the limbic brain—the amygdala, which remains perpetually alert without story or context to guide its responses, and the hippocampus, which uses story to see the beauty in life and invite a relaxed response. When these sections of the limbic brain cooperate, they balance each other out and allow for wise decision making. However, when trauma divides them, the subconscious amygdala can trigger baseless panic or the hippocampus can portray a heartbreaking event as if it were a walk in the park on a warm summer day.¹⁶⁵

This brokenness also creates space for dark spiritual forces to gain a foothold; a place to launch further attacks. In other words, sin breaks the subconscious mind, making the training of the heart far more complex than listening to a weekly sermon or engaging

¹⁶⁵ Allender, “The Story Workshop,” August 21-24, 2015.

in loving acts. It requires intentional space to prayerfully, under the guidance of the Spirit, step into past trauma and use the power of story and the brain's neuroplasticity to rewire the limbic system and bring healing where there is brokenness.¹⁶⁶

That afternoon I sat in a small room for my one-on-one session with the other therapist from our group sessions. I do not remember the flow of the conversation with Abby, but somehow we started talking about me as a problem solver, a fixer. We focused on how so much of my life, including coming to the conference, was about fixing myself. This obsession with fixing myself necessitates that, in my own mind, there is something broken about me that needs fixing.

I did not realize it then, but this reality was interwoven with Dan's observation about self-sabotage. I believed I was broken. The Confession I made every week at church affirmed I was worthless. I spent most of forty-one years not only convinced I was a failure, but believing to be anything more was to defy God. During those years, anytime success reared its ugly head and dared to suggest there was something valuable in me, I had to prove it wrong. I had to demonstrate I was a failure and worthy of my self-hatred. So even as I sought to fix myself, I would sabotage my effort and prove my brokenness. Gently, Abby offered an idea for me to consider: I am not a problem to be solved.

Looking back on it, the idea was not novel. My wife Kiana has tried to communicate that message to me since we first met. A year before, I took hold of it myself and re-labeled a self-improvement paper as a self-acceptance paper. It was a bold and positive step forward, until I turned self-acceptance into another a problem to be solved.

¹⁶⁶ Allender, "The Story Workshop," August 21-24, 2015.

Even as new and refreshing as it felt when I embraced Abby's words, a feeling prompting a joy-filled skip down the Seattle waterfront, upon my arrival home I immediately tried to solve the problem of not being a problem. Yet those words, which echo the grace my wife and others have spoken into my life, sat with me as I pressed into my research and writing for Chapter Two. Somewhere during Luke, the Divine Imaginary took me captive. I wept while typing, struggling to believe the words I wrote were for me. That Sunday at church, as I sang songs of grace and love, claiming them as my own and tears flowed again.

It is not that struggle and challenge have disappeared, but for the first time I feel at peace even when tempted, because self-hatred and the question, "What is wrong with me!" have lost power. Why? Because I am not a problem to be solved!

I am loved by the One who is immanent-transcendence. As a husband, I have the enchanted privilege of loving, honoring, celebrating, protecting, and blessing my wife. As a father, I have the enchanted task of raising up a young man who, if I have anything to say about it, will discover at an early age where real enchantment lies. As an REI employee, I do not sell boots and shoes, I have the enchanted task of fitting technical footwear and loving my neighbors by caring for their safety and health. Through this dissertation, I have the enchanted task of inviting others to join me in this autoethnographic exploration, so together we can reveal the Divine Imaginary to the world. Immanent-transcendence has drawn near and tangible-enchantment abounds.

Where to Go From Here

This dissertation began by exploring how the Western world transitioned from a premodern to modern social imaginary. Most who longingly remember the now deceased age of Christendom understandably see secularism's arrival as negative and respond with attempts to restore society to a world where God was welcome, recreate a past world in the present, or make the Divine more comfortable. Contrary to these approaches, this dissertation has reexamined God's self-revelation in the Bible and reflected on the metamorphosis of the Western Church's way of talking about God over time. Interwoven throughout is an autoethnographic exploration on the implications of modern Christian God talk, done in hope that my journey would serve as a touchpoint for others seeking enchantment in a neo-secular age.

The end result reveals the God of the Bible, from creation forward, as immanent-transcendence. This means a God who draws near to sinful creation with transforming love that redefines life by inviting humanity to live in tangible-enchantment. Immanent-transcendence prompts everyday activities to take on deep significance because they echo the love of God. To simplify it even more, according to the Bible, Jesus invites a faith where God lovingly draws near, prompting new life where the believer lives loved and lives love.

That being said, faith is rarely that simple. Rather, with a plethora of alternative enchantments, formation necessitates purposeful engagement in the formation of hearts towards the Divine Imaginary. Therefore, Chapter Four opened by exploring formation and how, through preaching and social engagement, the church can nurture the desires of human hearts. For others, as seen through the continued autoethnography, the soul work

necessary to disembed the heart from an alternative imaginary is more extensive. Here the church has a unique opportunity to serve in the context of trauma and through exploration of past trauma. The ultimate goal of this work is opening hearts to the Divine Imaginary so God's people can experience immanent-transcendence and live out of tangible-enchantment.

Moving forward, there is more work to be done. In unpacking the divine self-revelation, only five of the Bible's sixty-six books have been addressed with substance. Legitimate questions remain, including how the Divine Imaginary makes sense of incidents apparently contrary to immanent-transcendence.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, while the art of speaking in meaningful metaphors without changing the meaning of Scripture is challenging and easily goes awry, it is necessary to keep trying.

To this end, developing a framework based on the Divine Imaginary that provides a creative frame, built to simultaneously invite those engaged in the hermeneutical task to explore possibilities while keeping them based in divine revelation, would be exceedingly helpful. Then there is the question of the overwhelming task this presents: In a Christian world built on the root of Anselm, how is the Divine Imaginary made known? Perhaps today's Gentiles are those longing for enchantment and God is calling them to reveal the One who is immanent-transcendence to the world.

¹⁶⁷ Examples include the Golden Calf (Exod. 32), God ordering the destruction of Jericho (Josh. 6), and the Ananias and Sapphira incident (Acts 5:1-11).

A Return to the Art Gallery

Years ago the eccentric art gallery closed and its community scattered. There is no way to go back but, after disembedding from old imaginaries and reembedding in the Divine Imaginary of immanent-transcendence and tangible-enchancement, how might things at the gallery have been different? I envision guiding those at the gallery who looked to me for a different take on Jesus to a photo on the wall, one captured in urban Detroit. The black and white coloring has no effect on the portrayal of dreary sky. The ominous clouds mirror the feel of the scene on the ground. Buildings on either side of the picture are dilapidated. The fence between them is mostly fallen. On one upright section “GOD” is painted.

I would explain: we all have stories and experiences that mirror the dreariness of the black and white void of the abandoned urban core. Perhaps you would like to share yours? Going a step further, I believe there is something in our human nature that echoes throughout society telling us that when life is bleak, God wants nothing to do with us. When we are victims of circumstance, shame tells us God blames us. When the choices we make sabotage life, guilt screams God cannot come near. When were you certain God abandoned you?

There are two ways to see this picture, captured in Detroit. One affirms what we already believe but the other is God's self-revelation in the Bible. God is there, painted on the fence. God does not flee sin, shame, and brokenness; God stands in the midst of all kinds of evil and invites us to draw near. That is immanent-transcendence.

But God does not stop there. Imagine a community of people gathering together to bring healing to what is broken in the picture. Can you see the dilapidated buildings

renovated? Envision the fence rebuilt and encasing a playground. Picture children climbing down the fire escape stairs and into the two buildings' collective backyard, where they play and intermittently help their parents tend a community garden. That is tangible-enchantment. A black and white place that felt like death, is now full of color and life. The one thing that remains is at the center, painted on the fence, is the enchanting "GOD" revealed in the Divine Imaginary.

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APPENDIX A

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

As the elements of the word suggest, autoethnography brings together an autobiography with ethnography by interweaving narrative with theory and using the lens of self to view the world as it is known and cast a vision for a better future. An autoethnographer embraces the reality that both the author and the reader bring a story that shapes their assumptions about the way life is and the way it should be. The goal of the author is to make each reader not only pause and reconsider their assumptions, but to reshape his or her understanding of the world. In return, the reader must be invited to respond to both the author's story and conclusion, even to the point of offering a counter narrative that discredits what one deems a false story, and set out on an alternative path towards a vision of an idyllic society. However, if the reader stands in agreement with the author, his reconsideration ideally spurs action that will lead everyone towards the author's vision of a more utopian world. To this end of inciting change, the evocative holds privilege over the cognitive in autoethnography.¹⁶⁸

In the previous paragraph three points give traditional qualitative researchers reason to pause and question autoethnography as legitimate research. First, is the belief that an individual's story can serve as a lens through which broader cultural realities can

¹⁶⁸ For an exploration of autoethnography beyond what is presented here suggested resources include: Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2009); Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Autoethnography*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2013); Carolyn Ellis, *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2003); Diana Raab, "Transpersonal Approaches to Autoethnographic Research and Writing," *The Qualitative Report* 18, no. 21 (2013); Sarah Wall, "Easier Said Than Done: Writing an Autoethnography," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 7, no. 1 (2008).

be viewed. Second, the focus is on initiating a moral and ethical transformation rather than revealing previously unseen truth. Third, is the privileged place of the evocative. Each of these three beliefs held by the autoethnographer is rooted in the same stream of continental philosophical thought that undergirds this paper's perspective and argumentation. Each will be explored in turn.¹⁶⁹

First, autoethnography's conviction is that an individual viewpoint can serve as insight into the broader culture. Before continuing, it is necessary to discuss the notion of culture itself. Spiritual autoethnography expert and professor Dr. Heewon Chang offers a helpful framework by identifying two broad views of culture. One approach views culture as something that exists outside of people and imposes its will upon them. When taken to the extreme, this approach denies individuals any sense of personal identity, because who they are, what they believe, and how they live is bound to their cultural grouping.

At the other extreme, people create culture because culture's origin is within human minds. When this view is taken to the extreme, any sense of the communal is taken from culture and each individual essentially becomes a culture of one. Interestingly, the Enlightenment simultaneously embraced both extremes, with the individualistic side embraced (at least for themselves) by the dominant White, Western, Christian males, who then impose the binding cultural perspective on groups like women, non-Whites, and those who lived on the social fringe. This reality continues today and can be heard

¹⁶⁹ Continental philosophy stands in contrast to analytical philosophy. Common themes among continental philosophers include a broader epistemology than just the natural sciences, placing a high value on context, and seeking to understand the human subjectivity in the experience being described. (A. C. Grayling, *Philosophy 2: Further Through the Subject*, Vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 665.)

whenever the media speaks about the Latino Vote, Women's Interests, or the Black Community, as if Hispanics, women, and African-Americans are a singular voice when it comes to their politics, interests, or inter-relations. Postmodernity offers a corrective to this assertion of cultural dominance and perspective by calling everyone to the middle, where they are not modernity's autonomous individuals or bound by cultural shackles, but rather, malleable and reliant extensions of a community.¹⁷⁰

As a result of everyone being in the middle of Chang's continuum, we find an individual with unique thoughts, feelings, physicality, and experiences, who is simultaneously shaped by and lives out of a broader community with a cultural identity, ideology, and history. When these traits of the community are brought together, they are known as myths, which mythology expert Joseph Campbell defines as a system of beliefs that help people make sense of life and live well. These myths, which are an element of the social imaginary, do not offer a true representation of what is, but are helpful ways of explaining reality. Therefore, when a person grows up in a community or multiple communities, they are exposed to and shaped by one or more myths and their life becomes a reflection of them. This makes it possible for individuals to look into their own story, and the stories of others within their mythological community, and see the broader culture.¹⁷¹

Second is the goal of transformation. This argument is bound to the previously argued beliefs that myths serve as a helpful but not accurate means of explaining reality

¹⁷⁰ Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 17-21.

¹⁷¹ Joseph Campbell, *Thou Art That: Transforming Religious Metaphor* (San Francisco: New World Library, 2013), 2-5; Chiara Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 201.

and that an individual serves as a reflection into one or more cultures. Holding these beliefs together, when a story is shared, anyone who has a connection to the author's mythological community can re-examine their story in light of the author's narrative and, based on the community's feedback the author is able to gain a greater understanding of their own story.¹⁷²

Any time two or more ideologies are brought together, there will be elements on each side characterized as helpful for making sense of reality and others as less helpful or even harmful. Ideally, these transactions serve as myth correctives, drawing out what is helpful and disregarding other elements. This process leads everyone toward increasingly helpful mythologies that allow for a better understanding of life and how to live it well. As noted above, this is a purposeful element of autoethnography and is built into the reader-response element—both for the reader who might have their myth modified, or for the author, whose story might be deemed misleading or even false and need to be re-evaluated.

But transformation is not limited to the refinement of individual stories within a mythological community, rather, there are times when myths fail to transmit clearly, so what has been helpful to previous generations proves largely unhelpful or even damaging to the next. This is especially true when there has been radical change like the rural to urban shift or the rise of new technology like mass media and social media. Both of these situations illustrate how myths need correction, be it in the stories themselves or how they are transmitted. This correction is the point of autoethnographic transformation.

¹⁷² Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 48-49.

Those rooted in Christendom find this idea unnerving for two reasons. First, according to the descriptions above, Jesus seems to offer one myth among many and second, that the Church's teaching, her doctrine, is in need of correction. Responding to the first, it is true that Christianity (as a whole, or even groups within Christianity), are categorized as myths. However, to call Jesus vision one myth among many is not to say that it is untrue or that all myths are equally valid. Rather, it is to say that, along with other perspectives, discipleship in its various forms aims, in part, to help people make sense of life and live well. As for doctrine being corrected, there are a number of realities that point to this need for correction in either the myth itself or the transmission of it. One would include the wide array of books unpacking the messages non-Christians receive from the church and those offering an unconventional Christ-based spirituality.¹⁷³

Another reality that identifies need for correction is the diversity of dogmatic stances taken by various Christian bodies. After all, by modern standards, if the Church had it right, there would be no theological or denominational differences. Finally, if this is not enough, as Stanley Grenz points out in his introduction to postmodernism, modernity itself is essentially a variant of the Christendom myth that centers on divine order which, as theologian William Placher effectively argues in *The Domestication of Transcendence*, tames God. To this end, Christian traditions rooted in modernity are deeply in need of community-based mythology correction. This will allow for a fresh examination of Scripture and church practice in light of how current mythologies are effectively or

¹⁷³ See the previously mentioned *Jim and Casper Go to Church*, *You Lost Me*, *Un-Christian*, and *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*. Expanding on the previously mentioned *Blue Like Jazz* and *Pastrix*, one describes itself as “nonreligious reflections on Christian spirituality,” while the second is tagged as “the cranky, beautiful faith of a sinner and saint.” Both have made it to the *New York Times* Bestseller list.

ineffectively transmitting the Gospel of Jesus to both those in the church and the world. Such a task is one of the goals of this dissertation.¹⁷⁴

Third, and perhaps the most disconcerting methodological concern, autoethnography elevates the evocative over the cognitive. Argumentation for this point will ultimately offer an autoethnographic epistemology that highlights the use of the evocative for purposes of transformation. But first it is important to review deconstructionism and its effect on epistemology. This review starts with postmodernity's rejection of the modern perspectives and definitions for objectivity, reason, and truth. Instead of arguing that truth is evidentially discernible, autoethnography identifies all truth claims as a performance where, behind what is presented, there are unspoken values driving the presentation and seeking to sway the hearers.

In making this claim autoethnographers lean on philosophers like the distinguished Jacques Derrida and his deconstruction of the modern notion of knowing and certainty. He identifies supposedly definitive conclusions as one possible interpretation of the information, typically the one held by those in power. His contemporary Michel Foucault, who reveals the danger within the modern view by arguing that a quest for knowledge is more about control than truth, would go on to identify truth claims as an act of violence towards the minority.

Where modernity, based on its own terminology and definitions, reacts harshly to this postmodern possibility, it is important to note that, for both Derrida and Foucault, these acts of deconstruction are not an attempted power coup that aims to substitute their

¹⁷⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 45; William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking About God Went Wrong*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 3.

definition of knowledge in place of the modern version. Rather it is a call to recognize that objectivity does not exist and there is no means or method to discern what is unbiased, but true. This is not a rejection of the rational, but it is a call to recognize that there is more than just the rational.¹⁷⁵ Contrary to popular misunderstanding, this is not a denial that there is truth! Rather, it is a denial of truth's unlimited accessibility.¹⁷⁶

For many within Christianity this deconstruction of truth causes great concern because, at least on the surface, it prompts questions about the claims of one who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). However, as James Smith makes clear in his highly accessible monograph, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism*, Derrida's treatment of texts is only a problem if we embrace a modern perspective on truth and knowledge, a perspective that stands contrary to the narrative of Scripture where different people repeatedly see identical events in different ways based upon their subjective reception of divine revelation.

Similarly, Foucault invites disciples to be aware of the messages delivered by the world. When Jesus followers see advertising, entertainment, news media, and education as tools of cultural formation, they will see acts of power and violence committed against themselves and especially their children as it forms them in ways contrary to the Gospel. This new awareness could and should serve as a necessary catalyst to offer a reactive

¹⁷⁵ The reader should notice that these philosophers hold similarities to the people this dissertation is about. They are philosophical pilgrims.

¹⁷⁶ Antje Jackelén, "Science and Religion: Getting Ready for the Future," *Zygon* 38, no. 2 (2003), 219; James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 38; Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 132-133.

counter-formation, something that resonates with the heart of this dissertation.¹⁷⁷ But it can only happen if those in the Church are willing to look beyond their bias toward modernity and accept that there is something to learn from those who critique it.¹⁷⁸

However, even if the modern bias is let go (or at least letting go is played along with), there needs to be something on the other side of the postmodern epistemological critique. “Not modernism” is not a productive answer. Specifically, for the purposes of this paper, it needs to return to the use of the evocative in autoethnography.

So what is the postmodern basis for knowledge? Truth might not be fully accessible, but it is also not completely disguised, so there must be some postmodern sense concerning what is true. After offering a sociohistorical overview of epistemology, John R. Hall identifies two interwoven trends. First, he points to the establishment of “local epistemologies” where those in the community develop and agree upon principles of knowing and implement them in research and discovery. The second trend centers on interrelationships between a diversity of epistemologies and how what is researched and discovered in light of knowing as we know and believing as we believe is shared and used as the basis for ongoing engagement and enhanced learning. In other words, the local groups become our cultural group or groups and the broader body serves as a source of mutual correction, much like the transformation individuals ideally experience through autoethnography.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ While this work offers two brief touch points, Smith’s text offers a more thorough treatment on both the postmodern philosophers and how they can unintentionally serve the church.

¹⁷⁸ Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism*, 48-49, 105-106.

¹⁷⁹ John R. Hall, “Epistemology and Sociohistorical Inquiry,” *Annual Review of Sociology* (1990), 329-347.

For the purpose of this paper and a distinctly Christian autoethnography, I propose a local epistemology that begins with experience, moves to reflection, and concludes with a humble conviction, with Scripture serving as a dialogue partner both during the author's reflection and as part of the community response to the author's humble conviction.¹⁸⁰ Each of these three elements will now be explored, starting with experience.

Because modernity placed a value on broadly shared principles, it valued quantity over quality, or perhaps more accurately, generality over uniqueness. As a result, when gathering data, the goal was to gather enough information that the unique elements became so minimal that they were no longer influential and could be statistically removed. As a result, nuance is lost. However, when it comes to story, nuance is everything. Not only are different people going to notice different things, but their mental state, the amount of sleep they had the night before, memory triggers from sights, sounds and smells, and countless other variables including those that are beyond cognitive awareness, play into how two people can be a part of the same event and yet have two radically different experiences.¹⁸¹

As an example, a number of years ago I wrote a since deleted blog post that discussed my need to draw attention to myself. I will share more later when I discuss my formative experiences, but for now let it suffice that, for a wide array of reasons, including perceived pressure at home to excel academically, I am a performer who seeks to draw attention to my performance. My parents who quietly followed my blog saw the

¹⁸⁰ This approach was developed while reading Frederick Ferre's *Knowing and Value: Toward a Constructive Postmodern Epistemology* and my work is highly indebted to his work.

¹⁸¹ Frederick Ferre, *Knowing and Value: Toward a Constructive Postmodern Epistemology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 269-277.

post and asked my younger brother about academic pressure. He had no idea what they were talking about. Contrary to my portrayal, he found the home we grew up in to be one of grace and love even when performance was average.

So, which of us has the accurate portrayal of our childhood home? Both of us do. My brother was an average student. He worked hard, did his best, and brought home grades that matched his ability and was embraced. I on the other hand took advanced placement classes, ignored my homework until the last possible moment, and, at least in high school, never applied myself. I had great grades, but my effort did not match my potential. My parents' parenting philosophy included celebrating us when we did our best, and challenging us when we did not live up to our abilities.

What stuck from my teen years was me being pushed to try harder and reach my potential. I was certain that legendary football coach Vince Lombardi's line, "If better is possible, good is not enough." was initially spoken to me. While there are obviously more factors in my example, it offers a simple illustration of why personalized experiential nuance is so essential. To not understand what is unique is to not understand the experience, and to not understand the experience is to be incapable of cultivating transformation.

That being said, nuance is not always self-evident, even to the person who has lived the experience. Once life is lived, the author must reflect on what happened, determine what is most important, and decide how to share their story with others. While the sharing cannot be a complete disconnect from historical events, it is also important to note that the author's focus cannot and will not be a simple timeline. From the perspective that any telling of history is a performance interpretation, autoethnography

recognizes that when an author offers a supposedly real account of their life, what they are really offering is a text that represents their perspective and their nuance.

As a result, the story told is valued not because of its historical accuracy, but because of the memories, accounts, pictures, and feelings that reveal the effect of what happened in the life of the storyteller. In other words, Derrida is turned inward and the subjectivity of the individual, both in their self-understanding and their perspective on the events that shaped their life, is both normalized and seen as a valuable element in the process of learning and discovery.¹⁸²

But just because the author's reflection, memories, and experiences are identified and shared, it does not mean the nuance is safe. Rather, the writing process must be undertaken carefully because words on a page are not simply value-free black marks on a white surface. Instead, those who read them come with their own thoughts, images, and ideas about what those words mean. This is where the limitations of everyday language come in to play, because typical phraseology is not helpful when trying to communicate something new or when there is a conflict over meaning.

The challenge of autoethnography is not to convey the meaning that readers bring with them, but the nuanced meaning of the author's story. Authors need to not only carefully identify selected memories that are useful in conveying nuance, but take advantage of the unordinary language of the evocative so they can present what the events mean in a way that is "true in experience but not necessarily true to experience."¹⁸³

¹⁸² Chiara Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, 203-204; Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Autoethnography*, 2-28.

¹⁸³ Denzin. *Interpretive Autoethnography*, 54.

The imagery, passion, and intensity of evocative language is what lifts the author's nuance to the surface and allows it to overcome the reader's preconceived ideas concerning the text on the page. Therefore, if autoethnographic narrative is going to be told effectively and draw the reader into the effect of the author's experience, the story must be told in a way that evokes in the reader so they can take part in the author's nuance as if it was their own.¹⁸⁴

Once life is experienced and the resultant stories are cultivated and presented in a way that highlights the author's nuance, it is time for a humble conviction concerning the truth statement presented. It is a conviction because the author genuinely holds it to be true. But it is a humble conviction because the story, like any autoethnographic story, needs to be shared with the broader mythological community with the expectation that there will be affirmation, clarification, and correction. The story is not the final word. The understanding of what happened is neither conclusive nor final.

Rather, they depend on different interpretations to challenge, shape, and clarify the narrative. This includes different interpretations by the one offering the account, whose story should change as autoethnography brings about transformation. Events that held one meaning at one point in an author's life take on a new meaning when reconsidered at a later date. In other words, the story changes and what is known changes as a life is experienced, reflected upon, and held with humble conviction. All of this goes to say that what can be expected from autoethnography is a mixture of crafted storytelling and thoughtful cultural analysis that aims to foster rich conversation and prompt change at an individual or cultural level.

¹⁸⁴ Ferre, *Knowing and Value*, 305-327.

APPENDIX B:

SIGNS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Tradition states John points to seven signs coinciding with Jesus' seven I AM statements and seven dialogues. However, the research of Andreas J. Köstenberger reveals only six of the seven are uncontested. When seeking a seventh for rhetorical significance, Kostenberger identifies criteria including the sign being a public work of Jesus, identified by John as a sign, and not necessary miraculous but imbued with significance pointing to Jesus as the revelation of God's glory. Despite arguments otherwise, these criteria do not work, coming either into conflict with events he classifies as a sign or with the text of John itself.

For example, the healing the official's son (John 4:46-54) cannot be considered public. Also, the healing of the man by the pool (5:1-9) is not identified as a sign, rather Kostenberger needs to connect it to a general reference to signs of Jesus two chapters later (John 7:31). What then should be made of John 20:30 where "Jesus did many other miraculous signs." While the "other signs" are not recorded, the grammar assumes "other signs" come after present signs. The closest labeled sign is the revivification¹⁸⁵ of Lazarus in John 11. It seems far more reasonable that the present signs were simply not always labeled as such.

Backing this claim is the context of 20:30, where the next verse restates that John records signs "so that you will believe" (20:31), and in the previous verses, Thomas

¹⁸⁵ Revivification is chosen over resurrection because Lazarus died again, and therefore, his return to life was something less than the resurrection of Jesus and of all flesh at the end of the age.

confesses faith in the resurrected Jesus (20:28). Finally, while it is not necessary for John to identify a sign, every place in the Gospel of John where a sign is either clearly identified¹⁸⁶ or asked for,¹⁸⁷ there is a miraculous element. Of special interest is the reference to John the Baptist in 10:41 who does not do any signs, but performed many acts of baptism that were literally drenched with divine significance.

Kostenberger is however correct that the significance of the sign is more important than the miracle. As Craig Koester argues, signs are part of a broader category of symbols, with symbols serving as a bridge between heaven and earth that reveal divine realities to a fallen world, and a sign being a symbol that is miraculous in nature.¹⁸⁸

What is the appropriate criteria to identify the seven signs? First, it must be a work of Jesus done before an audience that can serve as a witness to what happened. Second, it must be a miraculous in nature, but come with a clear message that the miracle itself is not what is most significant. Third, the sign will be easily misunderstood and need additional explanation because the communicated divine reality is contradictory to the ways of this world.

With this framework in mind, the seven signs used here will partially deviate from tradition on the identification of the signs. The first sign contains two miracles, turning

¹⁸⁶ See John 2:11, 4:48, 4:54, 6:2, 6:14, 6:26, 7:31, 9:16, 11:47, 12:18, and 12:37.

¹⁸⁷ See John 2:18 and 6:30.

¹⁸⁸ Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*, 2-4, 11; Andreas J. Köstenberger, "The Seventh Johannine Sign: A Study in John's Christology," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5 (1995), 87-95.

water into wine (John 2:1-12) and the healing of the official's son (4:46-54),¹⁸⁹ with the second miracle serving as part of the narrative explanation of the sign. The second sign is the healing of the man at the pool (5:1-9). Third is the feeding of the five thousand (6:5-15). While many traditional accounts include Jesus walking on the water, it is not misunderstood or needing proper explanation, but serves to facilitate the discussion of the mass feeding. The fourth sign is the healing of the man born blind (9:1-7), followed by the revivification of Lazarus (11:1-44). The sixth and seventh signs, which do not appear on most lists but more adequately meet the criteria established are the resurrection of Jesus (20:1-9) and the miraculous catch (21:1-14).¹⁹⁰ The resurrection fits the definition of a sign as established in that it is an act of Jesus¹⁹¹ that is miraculous with a meaning beyond the sign itself that demands explanation. The sign is unique in that no explanation is offered.

¹⁸⁹ The author recognizes that John identifies in 4:54 that the healing was Jesus' second sign, however the focus is on two miracles happening in the region, not the establishment of an official order of Jesus' signs in the Gospel. The numbering of signs is part of human interaction with John's account, therefore there is no compulsion to see John as giving us an authoritative numbering of the first two signs.

¹⁹⁰ Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John*, 21,154; John Hutchinson, *Our Lord's Signs in St. John's Gospel* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1892); Andreas J. Kostenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ, the Son of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 332; John Marsh, *The Gospel of St. John* (Westminster: Penguin Books, 1968), 65; Bruce M. Metzler and Michael David Coogan, eds., *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 373.

¹⁹¹ In John 2:19 when the Jewish leaders challenge the cleansing of the temple, Jesus responds, "Destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up." Jesus being the force behind his resurrection is also seen in 10:18 when Jesus, speaking about his life says, "No one take it from me, but I give it up because I want to. I have the right to give it up, and I have the right to take it up again. I received this commandment from my Father."

APPENDIX C:

RETHINKING FORMATION

While the final chapter focuses on embodying the Divine Imaginary in a neo-secular age, the work presented is nonsensical without the proper theoretical foundation for spiritual formation. This is true because the entire tone and focus of the conversation can hinge on one's philosophical perspective.

Outside of Roman Catholicism, most Christian bodies in the West were born and matured during the Renaissance and Enlightenment.¹⁹² Thus, the modern mindset, built upon the foundation of Descartes', "I think therefore I am," and Newton's laws of physics, has a strong influence on how these churches understand formation. In addition to placing high value on logic, reason, and structure, the modernist viewpoint leans towards compartmentalization. This creates space for spiritual formation that is distinct from physical, mental, and emotional formation and generally consists of the highly cognitive disciplines of systematic theology and Christian Education.

It is the kind of thinking that allowed discipleship to be turned into the doctrine and Bible history confirmation classes I took as a Lutheran sixth, seventh, and eighth grader. It is the kind of thinking that naively allowed my congregation to assume that, because I had (at least in theory) memorized Luther's Small Catechism and knew Bible

¹⁹² While specific dates for the beginning and end of cultural movements are impossible to pinpoint, the Renaissance and Enlightenment, with overlap, cover the Fourteenth to Eighteenth Centuries. During that time, Christianity saw the emergence of, among others, Lutherans, the Reformed Church, Mennonites, Anglicans, Calvinists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Amish, Quakers, and Congregationalists.

history, that she had fulfilled her duty to teach me everything Jesus commanded (Matt. 28:20).¹⁹³

A different perspective is available to us: one that comes on the heels of and in response to modernity, beginning with the 19th century's Friedrich Nietzsche and expanding to a wide array of thinkers in the 20th Century. Among other things, this responsive perspective undermined Descartes' glorification of the mind and sees epistemology expanding far beyond Newton's narrow scope of the physical sciences, even going so far as to embrace subjective realms such as experience and emotions. Moreover, this counter-perspective, rather than viewing the world around us as mechanistic and running unbiased without consideration for context, demands that realities including geography, history, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality all be recognized as an essential part of the human experience, and thus human formation.

In this view, which is popularly described as postmodernism¹⁹⁴ both because it is after and in opposition to modernism, spiritual formation can never be limited to just the mind absorbing a prescribed amount of systematic theology and Bible history. In fact, in this view there cannot be such a thing as solely spiritual formation. Rather, formation concerns the whole person and all of life plays a part in one's holistic formation.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Paul D.G. Bramer, "Christian Formation: Tweaking the Paradigm," *Christian Education Journal* 4, no. 2 (2007), 253-254; Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 2-3.

¹⁹⁴ The term "popular" was chosen to describe postmodernism both because it is frequently used and because it is common, despite the fact that has all but disappeared from academic circles. (S. Matthewman and D. Hoey, "What Happened to Postmodernism?" *Sociology* (2006), 530.)

¹⁹⁵ Arthur Asa Berger, "The Day the World Changed: A Pomo Primer," *Society* 49, no. 4 (2012), 318; Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 5-7; Matthewman and Hoey, "What Happened to Postmodernism?" 530, 536.

While some suggest that the idea of holistic formation only applies to those raised in a postmodern age because they learn differently, it is better to view recent philosophers as critics who identify realities that previous generations overlooked because of their cultural philosophical milieu. To that end, they are not offering a new approach but a corrective to modernity's errs. This does not deny that mass and social media have changed the way we receive, process, and respond to information, be it in data collection and group analysis, the level of honesty in communication because of social implications, or simply being overwhelmed by the amount of information and a lack of ability to filter and process it. Still, this does not change the basic reality that human beings are holistic creatures and are therefore formed holistically. For example, from 1993-1997, I worked on my undergraduate degree at what is now Concordia University in rural Seward, Nebraska. During these years, I experienced a diluted taste of what life in America used to be.¹⁹⁶

According to the 1910 United States Census Bureau seventy-two percent of the population lived in rural communities. Historically, rural communities are those with the most social capital—they have the relational networks necessary for an integrative and unified formative experience. To some degree, I was able to see this while going to school. Through practicums, student teaching and other opportunities, I visited a number of the even smaller towns surrounding Seward. I quickly learned that each defined itself by its ethnic heritage and its dominant faith tradition. The result was that German

¹⁹⁶ Bramer, "Christian Formation: Tweaking the Paradigm," 354; Ling Feng, et al., "Competing for Attention in Social Media Under Information Overload Conditions," *PLoS ONE* 10, no. 7 (2014): 1-13; Joachim Kimmerle, et al., "Learning and Collective Knowledge Construction With Social Media: A Process-Oriented Perspective," *Educational Psychologist* 50, no. 2 (2015): 120-137; Huaye Li and Yasuaki Sakamoto, "Social Impacts in Social Media: An Examination of Perceived Truthfulness and Sharing of Information," *Computers in Human Behavior* 41, (2014): 278-287.

Lutheran boys grew up with German Lutheran girls in German Lutheran towns. As they did so, the church, looking at the world through the lens of modernity, believed that confirmation classes were key to their German Lutheran formation, but overlooked the everyday impact of these boys and girls witnessing their German Lutheran parents and grandparents, their German Lutheran uncles and aunts, and the entire German Lutheran community around them embodying for them what it meant to be German Lutherans in rural Nebraska. Not surprisingly, generations had embraced the life they witnessed and were raised into as their own. But that is no longer the dominant story for American youth.¹⁹⁷

Going back to the United States Census Bureau statistics, when seventy-two percent of the nation was rural, most young people simultaneously experienced a modern approach to formation (seen here in confirmation) and a more holistic approach (daily life in the community), with both approaches moving them towards the same end. But by the year 2000, the numbers were essentially flipped and only twenty percent of Americans lived in rural areas. Today, the vast majority of young people grow up without that consistent and unified community, but instead spend their days encountering a widely diversified collection of formative influences. Moreover, as outside influences penetrate the few remaining rural communities, the formative model they depended on for generations is gradually disintegrating.

I can still hear the old men in Seward's Corner Cafe complaining about the kids and pointing to the pastor whose confirmation class they believed was coming up short... and that was just a generation raised on MTV before the ubiquity of the internet or the

¹⁹⁷ Tim Keller, "Christianity and the Creative Age," 2006.

dawn of social media. Despite modernity's claims or imprints on society that compartmentalized people and prompted ignorance concerning what was really happening, people have always been holistically formed.¹⁹⁸ The deeply disconnected and diverse climates of urban and metropolitan areas, along with the saturation of rural communities with mass and social media, both of which increase people's exposure to a wider variety of formative influences, have simply invited us to open our eyes to this ever-present reality.¹⁹⁹

All that being said, postmodern philosophy is not alone in identifying formation as holistic. When speaking specifically about Christian spiritual formation, Jesus defines the Greatest Commandment as loving God holistically, with all our body, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). Contextually, Jesus frames his words so that loving God can only be evidenced by love for neighbor manifested in a very physical, tangible, and, according to some—including those he was speaking against—non-spiritual way. Given that there is only all-of-life formation, disciples need to talk about how to craft our lives so as to be formed toward the right Spirit. Here James K. A. Smith correctly questions, "To what end is one being formed?" Better yet, in light of this exploration so far, perhaps the question should be, "What imaginary is being formed?"²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ At this point, it is clearly seen that this author will argue from a stance where postmodernism is not fundamentally about deconstruction. Rather, the deconstructionist techniques will reveal revisions or reconsiderations, largely stemming from the modern project. (Antje Jackelén, "Science and Religion: Getting Ready for the Future," *Zygon* 38, no. 2 (2003), 221.)

Some call this "a constructive or revisionary postmodernism." (Frederick Ferre, *Knowing and Value: Toward a Constructive Postmodern Epistemology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), xvi.)

¹⁹⁹ Bramer, "Christian Formation: Tweaking the Paradigm," 356.

²⁰⁰ Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 317-319; James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 18-19.