

Having Faith in History: Critical Empathy in Understanding Medieval Devotion to Christ

I. The Problem

In a review of Jill Mann's book, *Geoffrey Chaucer*,¹ published a decade ago in the journal of record for medievalists in North America, Mary Carruthers remarked that

"I know of no feminist theory current in the literary academy that can make sense of such a profoundly Christian view of suffering [as that described by Mann]. Perhaps there are some feminist theologians who have begun to construct a Christian feminism that will release what seems an impenetrable knot, . . ."

The theologians who could most helpfully respond to Professor Carruthers' concern are neither exclusively contemporary personages nor feminists, although several of them are women. They are figures like John Paul II and Hans Urs von Balthasar, inspired by two remarkable women, Edith Stein in the case of John Paul II, and the Swiss physician and mystic, Adrienne von Speyr in the case of von Balthasar.² Their response to the problem of suffering draws on the Christian belief that limitless giving

¹Published in the series, *Feminist Readings*, at Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1991, reviewed in *Speculum* 68 (April, 1993) 535.

²Edith Stein (1891-1942), Adrienne von Speyr (d. 1967), Thérèse of Lisieux (d.1897), Elizabeth of Dijon (d. 1906), Hans Urs von Balthasar (d. 1988), and Karol Wojtyla (John Paul II, 1920-). Specifically, Mann's interpretation of her texts would have been enriched at pp. 144-146 by the trinitarian theology discussed in the present article. For an exception to the generally unhelpful feminist literature on the topic, including an appreciative assessment of Julia Kristeva on the Virgin Mary, see Ann W. Astell, "Feminism, Deconstructing Hierarchies, and Marian Coronation," in *Divine Representations: Postmodernism and Spirituality*, ed. Astell (New York: Paulist, 1994), 163-176, and her introduction, esp. p. 2. Cf. the essay by Johann G. Roten, "The Marian Counterpoint of Postmodern Spirituality," *ibid.*, 102-128. For a survey of feminist theological literature pertinent to the present topic, see Susan A. Ross, "The Physical and Social Context for Feminist Theology and Spirituality," *Theological Studies* 56 (June 1995) 330-41, and Susan A. Ross and Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Feminist Theology: A Review of the Literature," *ibid.* 327-330. An orientation to Adrienne von Speyr is found in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *First Glance at Adrienne von Speyr* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981). On Thérèse and Elizabeth, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit* [Thérèse of Lisieux, Elizabeth of Dijon] (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992). For an introduction to von Balthasar, see Angelo Scola, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Theological Style*, Ressourcement series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), and, on the present topic, von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. by Aidan Nichols, Ressourcement series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), and Mark A. McIntosh, "A Hagio-Theological Doctrine of God: Hans Urs von Balthasar on Three Carmelites," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 59 (1993) 128-142. For John Paul II on the present topic, see above all the Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris* (1984). For Edith Stein see the various essays on suffering and the Cross in *The Hidden Life: Essays, Meditations, Spiritual Texts*, vol. 4 in *The*

and receiving takes place in the Godhead, and that all life and culture receives existence from this dynamic of giving and receiving. The suffering of Christ is then the supreme example of the inner-trinitarian giving and receiving: the Son actively receives as the Father's gift the mission of redemptive dying, which takes place in the power of the Holy Spirit.³ This dynamic, unique to Christianity, might help us understand especially those on the receiving end, on the suffering end, in medieval society.

Yet just the opposite is happening. Medievalists increasingly ignore the centrality of kenotic, that is, self-emptying, powerlessness in the Christian Middle Ages and unabashedly reinterpret medieval Christian religion in terms of power rather than powerlessness, explaining the sacraments, for example, as magic⁴ or as mere human constructs,⁵ or largely reducing the suffering lauded in the medieval lives of the saints to gendered constructs of lecherous voyeurs.⁶

Modern and postmodern assumptions about power and the social construction of reality seriously impair our discerning ability to understand medieval men and women.⁷ Increasingly, the critical effort to

Collected Works of Edith Stein, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Discalced Carmelite, 1891-1942, trans. Waltraut Stein, 3rd. ed (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1992), for a first orientation.

³See Stephen H. Webb, *The Gifting God: A Trinitarian Ethics of Excess* (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 1996), which discusses Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion on this theme but not the main authors considered in the present study and the mentor of most of them, Henri de Lubac (d. 1991).

⁴Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribners, 1971), which has effectively become the token treatment of early modern (i.e., "Renaissance and *Reformation*") religious issues in many western civilization course syllabi. Thomas professes to avoid simply reducing Christian sacraments to magic (e.g., 46-50), but in the name of "popular perception" consistently applies the term *magic* to Christian sacraments.

⁵E.g., Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁶E.g., Brigitte Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1991). Part of the problem may rest in Cazelle's assumption, shared by many modern scholars, that the Christian tradition is irreducibly dualistic, pitting body against spirit (27, 32, 43). As argued below, no system in which all reality (including both body and spirit) is radically dependent on an omnipotent Creator, can be fundamentally dualistic. Medieval Christianity certainly was not.

⁷Sometimes this results from short-circuiting the painstaking work of becoming familiar with the primary sources of the Christian tradition. In its place, recourse is had to secondary and tertiary works, or scholars settle for completely derivative use of relatively careful, celebratedly seminal works like the earlier writings of Caroline Walker Bynum.

enter the foreign world of the Middle Ages as a Christian world is being abandoned--in the radical form of the well-known argument by Jean-Claude Schmitt, Jean Delumeau, and others that Europe was not Christianized until the early modern era.⁸⁹

⁸The key was the regularization and bureaucratization of both church and secular society in the modern era. In response, John Van Engen has shown how one might assess the degree of Christianization by medieval rather than modern categories. John H. Van Engen, "Faith as a Concept of Order in Medieval Christendom," in *Belief in History: Innovative Approaches to European and American Religion*, ed. Thomas Kselman (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 19-67; "The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem," *American Historical Review* 91 (June 1986) 519-52.

⁹Even some of the more nuanced, primary-source-based efforts to understand medieval gender relations suffer from an inadequate grappling with the ancient Christian theology of power and victimization. See, e.g., Christine E. Gudorf, *Victimization: Examining Christian Complicity* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992) and Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "Jean le Fèvre's *Livre de Leesce*: Praise or Blame of Women?" *Speculum* 69 (July 1994), 705-25, at 725, published in a journal known for its policy of exhaustive documentation in lavish footnotes of the *status quaestionis* for each topic broached. Blumenfeld-Kosinski cites "as an excellent article" Eleanor McLaughlin's rudimentary "Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Women in Medieval Theology," in Rosemary Radford Ruether's outdated but frequently reprinted collection, *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Image, 1974), 213-66. The assertion that medieval theologians thought women were not created in the image of God or were "defective males" has been exposed for an incompetent reading of Aquinas and Augustine (Michael Nolan, "The Defective Male: What Aquinas Really Said," *New Blackfriars* 75 [March 1994] 156-66; Richard J. McGowan, "Augustine's Spiritual Equality: The Allegory of Man and Woman with Regard to *Imago Dei*," *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 33 [1987] 255-264; *idem*, "Misogyny in Augustine and Sexist Scholarship," *University of Dayton Review*, 21.3 [Spring 1992], 85-90) yet the twenty-five-year-old article that gave immense currency to this calumny against Aquinas and Augustine is here cited as the sole authority. For instance, even the fine work of Caroline Bynum assumes that medieval women, unlike men, did not need to convert or invert when encountering God. Whereas men "express imitation of Christ as (voluntary) poverty, (voluntary) nudity and (voluntary) weakness . . . the involuntary poor [including women] usually express their *imitatio Christi* not as wealth and exploitation but as struggle." Citing the first generation of liberation theologians, Bynum interprets self-emptying *kenosis* as a means to power [this is essentially the upshot of Jill Mann's interpretation of feminine suffering in Chaucer in *Geoffrey Chaucer*, e.g., 153, 163], thereby missing the reason men "inverted" or "converted": to overcome pride, a vice equally characteristic of men and women. For the quotation from Bynum, see "Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality," in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 27-51, at 34. See also Ann Astell, "Medieval Women Mystics and Bynum's 'Empowerment Thesis'," forthcoming in *The Contemporary Relevance of Medieval Women Mystics* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 2000), and Nicholas Watson, "Desire for the Past," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 21 (1999), 59-97 (my thanks to Professor Astell for calling my attention to Watson's essay) for critiques of Bynum. To Astell's critique I would add that Bynum seems largely to overlook the centrality of the Mass as *sacrifice* for medieval people and the fact the recipient of Holy Communion receives not merely the body and blood of Christ but Christ's soul and divinity as well. Other scholars are much less careful than Bynum, unapologetically constructing a reductionistic power-politics of "abjection." See Kathleen Biddick, "Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible," *Speculum* 68 (April, 1993), 389-418; David Aers, "Figuring forth the Body of Christ: Devotion and Politics," *Essays in Medieval Studies: Proceedings of the Illinois Medieval Association* 11 (1994) 1-14; with Biddick's response, 15-20. For a much more sophisticated study of late medieval passion piety see Klaus Schreiner, "Fetisch oder Heilszeichen? Kreuzessymbolik und Passionsfrömmigkeit im Angesicht des Todes," *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 20 (1993) 417-61.

Contemporary critical method requires that one seek to understand the people and the period under study on their own terms, i.e., suspending pre-judgment (prejudice) in order to employ what Ricoeur and others have called “uncultivated sympathy,” “predisposing affinity,” and “hypothetical faith” or “conditional faith” toward the phenomena one studies. Anything less than this does not do justice to the dreams, hopes, values, and visions of reality that constituted the person or persons under study--and history at its heart is the study of people and their lives.¹⁰

But what exactly does it mean to have critical or *conditional* empathy? Can one really, personally enter into empathy with another, with a person living today or a person of the past? Do the qualifiers “conditional” and “critical” mean that we maintain control over the process, *appropriating* people of the past--even ever so subtly--on our own terms, or, by becoming totally vulnerable, totally self-donative, can we actually enter into personal communion through our common humanity, enter into true, not merely conditional and critical empathy, with them? How would one know the difference? Indeed, can empathy, real empathy, be *conditional*? Retaining control, retaining power certainly produces a degree of alienation from the person with whom one seeks empathetic communion. Does that alienation, small though it be, vitiate empathy itself? Is “conditional empathy” not another word for limited, partial alienation? Is complete, non-conditional empathy, whether diachronically in doing history or synchronically in personal and cultural relationships today, even possible?

¹⁰We must deal with them as entire persons. Whether studying Martin Luther King or Bernard of Clairvaux, we must have enough self-donative openness to accept them in their uniqueness and originality as well as in their conformity to their contexts. This does not mean that we have to embrace the beliefs and values of Martin Luther King or Bernard of Clairvaux as our own. See Roch Kereszty, “Historical Research, Theological Inquiry, and the Reality of Jesus: Reflections on the Method of J. P. Meier,” *Communio* 19 (Winter, 1992) 576-600, at 584, 586, citing Paul Ricoeur, “Objectivity and Subjectivity in History,” in *History and Truth* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965) 21-40. Despite the common feminist claim that modern men are, by virtue of their gender, incapable of empathetically understanding the lives of medieval women (similar claims are, of course, made by postmodern theorists of postcolonialism, gay and lesbian studies etc.), would not a man holding traditional Christian beliefs in the modern world be better able to develop empathy for a medieval Christian woman than a thoroughly modernized, non-believing, power-based woman?

The Christian response, theologically, would seem to be that the empathy, the *communio* possible with God **ultimately**, can and ought to be unconditional because the Other with whom one enters into union is one's own Creator who created and then redeemed by unconditional self-giving love. If human relations at their ultimate are to be modeled on this union and communion between God and creature, brought to a new, unheard of, unimagined height by the hypostatic union of human and divine nature in the Incarnation and in the spousal union between Christ and the Church, then unconditional empathy, unconditional intimacy, holding nothing back, is possible even in human-to-human relations. Why else would St. Paul offer the union between Christ and the Church as the model for the mystery of marriage?

But wait, there's more! Christianity also claims that the law of unconditional self-donative Gift is written in the heart of every human being, even apart from its final revelation in Christ. If Jesus Christ was indeed the Creator God incarnate, then this universal law has only been reinforced. Thus **unconditional** empathy, unconditional union and communion with God and with Other humans, true communication and understanding, is possible and **conditional** empathy would become another word for a less drastic form of alienation, isolation, failure of communication and understanding. But does a shared human nature permit this sort of understanding of people from the **past**? Is this what Plato (e.g., in *The Symposium*) and other ancients were at least hinting at when they assumed that to know someone (or something) is in some sense to be united with it?

Applied to medieval Europe, the possibility real empathy would mean empathetically entertaining Christian beliefs about Christ's powerlessness on the Cross as a matter of method. Can this be done or must real empathy give way to a merely "critical" empathy that remains fully under the control of the observer, consistent with the poststructuralist disjoining of Text and Meaning and with participant-observer critical methods employed in other disciplines not, in fact, leave us alienated and distant from those we seek to understand?

Our understandings of medieval ideals and practice of hierarchy, dependence, interdependence, receptivity, *courtoisie*, chivalry, and kingship could all benefit from a truly, discerningly (from the same root as “critically”) empathetic understanding of the Suffering-Servant, the Paschal Lamb, the obediently receptive Victim, of Christian doctrine and practice, of such central Christian theological themes as life and redemption as pure gift, with its corollary that humans are expected to be actively grateful receptive beggars, to be generously receptive wombs for God who is Absolute Being and pure Love-Gift. That many who hear these words may recoil involuntarily at *receptive wombs* and *obediently receptive Victim* may indicate how difficult full empathy with medieval Christians is for most of us.

Unless historians and students of literature and religion come to terms with the fact that Christians really believed in redemption through a Victorious Victim, a crucified God-Man, who died in total helplessness voluntarily assumed,¹¹ they will misunderstand the Middle Ages, its preachers and prelates, peasants and princes. We live in a post-Hobbesian world which for the most part knows power and powerlessness, aggression and passivity, as pure and simple opposites. Christian theology centers on redemption through voluntary vicarious suffering of the most hideous kind. Christians eat a sacrificial *victima*, a *hostia*, a holocaust, offered on thousands of altars daily. “Appropriatively” translating the Victorious Victim into a cynical device by which power elites used the “abject victim” idea¹² to keep peasant masses under the lash is naïvely uncritical, unaware of shifts in understandings of power and

¹¹Scholars disagree about whether asphyxiation or heart rupture was the cause of death. Giulio Ricci, *The Way of the Cross in the Light of the Holy Shroud* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1988, originally published Rome: Center of Shroud Studies, 1975, 1988), 55-62 argues for the latter, noting that the Gospel account refers to a loud cry at the very end, which would not be characteristic of asphyxiation; consistent with heart rupture is the separated water and blood flowing from the chest wound. For summaries of the medical evidence, see Werner Bulst, *The Shroud of Turin*, trans. by Stephen McKenna and James J. Galvin (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1957), 56, summarizing the research of Pierre Barbet, *A Doctor at Calvary* (New York: P. J. Kenedy, 1953) and Hermann Mödder, “Die neusten medizinischen Forschungen über die Todesursache bei der Kreuzigung Jesu Christi,” *Der Gottesfreund* 3 (1950) 40-51, and “Die Todesursache bei Kreuzigung,” *Stimmen der Zeit* 144 (1948) 50-59. The remarkable web site, www.shroud.com offers a panoply of research data, both pro and contra regarding the evidence from the Turin Shroud.

¹²E.g., Kathleen Biddick, “Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible,” *Speculum* 68 (April, 1993), 389-418; David Aers, “Figuring forth the Body of Christ: Devotion and Politics,” *Essays in Medieval Studies: Proceedings of the Illinois Medieval Association* 11 (1994) 1-14; with Biddick’s response, 15-20.

powerlessness between medieval and modern worlds. For the purposes of our own battles and conflicts, we may tell each other that we know what was “really going on” among medieval people, as long as we are critically aware of what we are doing--employing the past to fight our battles.¹³ Otherwise we are more naïve than the medieval peasants and priests themselves, who at least explained things in terms of mystery.¹⁴

The *crux* of the hermeneutic problem raised by extreme suffering in stories like that of Chaucer's *Griselda* is how to understand a religion of suffering *kenosis*,¹⁵ a religion of self-emptying, self-giving Victimization, and how to understand the culture which that religion birthed--if one's ideology (feminist theory in Carruthers's case, but the same applies to postcolonial or gay and lesbian theory) is concerned

¹³At a conference celebrating the life of St. Birgitta of Sweden in which I recently participated, discussion following one of the papers turned to the question why Birgitta left Sweden for Rome, where many years later, she died, without having achieved what most people thought were her goals. The conventional answers (to gain approval for the rule for her new religious order, to convince the pope to return from Avignon) being unsatisfactory, speculation among those present turned to various psycho-social explanations. I pointed out that the most obvious and simplest answer was that Christ, in a vision, as laid out in great detail in a previous speaker's handout that everyone had before his eyes, had told her to go to Rome and stay there until he told her to come back to Sweden [Christus loquitur sponsae existenti in monasterio Alvastris dicens: Vade Romam et manebis ibi, donec videas papam et imperatorem et illis loqueris ex parte mea, quae tibi dicturus sum.] (*Revelaciones, Extravagantes*, ch. 8; 1349)]. The scholar who had agonized the most over the inadequacy of all the conventional explanations replied instinctively (loosely paraphrased), “because I think that visionaries see what they already want to see.” Notice how a firmly held presupposition according to which no vision can be authentically supernatural but must always be a case of psychological projection governs the entire process of searching for historical explanation.

¹⁴In Christian theology mystery, contrary to popular perception, does not mean “unknowable” but “infinitely knowable,” i.e., “infinitely comprehensible” rather than “incomprehensible.” One must note that much of the marginalization of Christian beliefs in the contemporary scholarly interpretation of medieval culture goes under the label of “de-centering,” or celebrating “difference.” Yet, upon closer examination, “de-centering” turns out to be a phantom. Rather than “de-centering,” periphery and center have simply changed places. What was once considered grotesque occupies the center of the scholarly imagination every bit as hegemonically as Christian beliefs once did. As long as scholars continue to choose papers to be read at conferences, referee articles for scholarly journals, select and reject books for publication, and weigh in on applications for hiring, tenure, and promotion, Emperor De-centering will turn out to have no clothes, indeed, turn out to be Emperor Neo-Center undisguised, with publishing and tenure decisions made according to the new Center in which the grotesque and formerly marginalized is uncritically valorized.

¹⁵For examples from the monastic tradition, see Jeremy Driscoll, “Gentleness in the *Ad monachos* of Evagrius Ponticus,” *Studia Monastica* 32 (March, 1990) 295-321; Jean Leclercq, “Saint Bernard et la tendresse,” *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 52.1 (1990), 1-15; Robert Thomas, “Le joug agréable, le fardeau léger du Christ d'après les auteurs cisterciens,” *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 37.2 (1975) 250-68; Donato Ogliari, “The Kenosis Theme and Monastic Theology,” *American Benedictine Review* 41 (June, 1990) 209-21.

largely with an empowerment that knows the very word *victim* solely in post-Hobbesean power-conflict terms.¹⁶

The present essay proposes to turn such claims on their head. Far from viewing traditional Christian theology as the problem, the present study offers ancient Christian beliefs about the triune Godhead, creation, incarnation, and human nature, beliefs currently experiencing a remarkable efflorescence among some of the more traditionalist theologians, as a highly promising interpretive marlin-spike to undo Professor Carruther's "impenetrable knot."

¹⁶Such a sweeping generalization about feminist ideology requires at least limited supporting evidence. The vast majority of the books and articles listed in a standard survey of feminist theological writing on suffering operate with precisely such a reductionist understanding of power when they consider theological and scriptural texts. I have taken as my base the survey by Ross and Johnson, "Feminist Theology: A Review of the Literature," note 3, above. Two examples may suffice: Mary Grey insists that "the Pauline expression of living 'in Christ' does not really mean a *loss* of self but a *refocusing of self-consciousness* around a higher center of value," emphasis in original), wherein tenderness replaces individualistic egoism as "an *alternative* ethic of power" and passivity is equated with sinfulness. Despite an avowed desire to avoid imposing modern conceptions on ancient texts, Grey nonetheless cannot avoid casting the worth of women martyrs and saints in terms of power, accomplishment, technique, control, since, in the light of a woman's purported inalienable "right" to abort, "birthing God" becomes the ultimate exercise of power, control-over God. Her insistence on human power vis-à-vis God leads her to reject flatly the central historic Christian claim: "The danger with Christ's once-for-allness is that it has a tendency to 'stop history' and to undermine present relational responsibility, to disempower us from claiming power in relation." See Mary Grey, *Feminism, Redemption, and the Christian Tradition* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990), at 162-63, 164-67, 170-77, 189-91. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza claims that "The notions of innocent victimhood and redemption as freely chosen suffering enable militarist and capitalist societies to persuade people to accept suffering, war, and death as important ideals for which people have died in the past on for which it is still worthy to die. For women, a theology of the cross as self-giving love is even more detrimental than that of obedience because it colludes with the cultural 'feminine' calling to self-sacrificing love for the sake of their families. Thus it renders the exploitation of all women in the name of love and self-sacrifice psychologically acceptable and religiously warranted." Therefore, she concludes, traditional Christian theology must be appropriatively translated (i.e., manipulated) because left untouched it becomes a tool of *powerful* exploitation of women in the modern (*power-defined*) world: "Theological discourses that give an intrinsic religious value to suffering and death must be dislodged from their preconstructed Pauline, Augustinian, Anselmian, Lutheran, or modern Neo-orthodox frames of meaning. Moreover, if feminist discourse on suffering and the cross do [sic] not position themselves within the open space of the empty tomb but remain within the dominant theological frame of meaning, then even feminists will continue to speak of Jesus as the innocent victim or as the perfect liberator who gives meaning to brutalization, suffering, and murder." See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 102, 127. Cf. Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God So Loved the World," *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 1-30, again, summarizing a variety of feminist writers on the topic, and concluding (26-27) that "Christianity is an abusive theology that glorifies suffering. . . . Christianity . . . must be liberated from this theology. . . . Suffering is never redemptive, and suffering cannot be redeemed." See also Eveline Valtink, ed., *Das Kreuz mit dem Kreuz: Feministisch-theologische Anfragen an die Kreuzestheologie--Ansätze feministischer Christologie*, Hofgeismarer Protokolle, 273 (Hofgeismar: Evangelische Akademie Hofgeismar, 1991). R. R. Reno, "Feminist Theology as Modern Project," *Pro Ecclesia* 5.4 (1995) 405-26, offers a broader framework than I am able to provide here.

II. Creation, Giftedness, and Sanctity as Disponibilité

The Jewish and Christian belief in creation¹⁷ means that all created things--food, bodies, art, sexuality, politics, etc.--are gifts given not out of necessity but out of the absolutely free goodness of the Creator. LIFE itself is Gift and the meaning of Gift is grace--an undeserved, unmerited favor. Being is constantly threatened by unbeing; being is constantly sustained by God's absolute BEING¹⁸: in other words, being is pure gift.¹⁹

Unlike the rest of the creatures, humans are capable of knowing (rationally, intellectually, spiritually, affectively) that life is Gift, capable of knowing that they are created. This awareness calls forth a response of grateful reception, thankfulness, blessing (*Eucharist* in Greek). To bless God is to be human, to be *homo adorans*, not *homo sapiens*.²⁰ Sin is then fundamentally an attitude of ingratitude stemming from a refusal to recognize one's origin, a rejection of *communio*, of *communicatio* with the Other to whom one owes oneself.

¹⁷This belief is fundamentally different from the ancient Near Eastern creation myths or the Greek understanding of an eternally existing cosmos.

¹⁸See Kenneth L. Schmitz, *The Gift: Creation*, The Aquinas Lectures, Marquette University, 1982 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1982). The principle is clearly enunciated in, e.g., Athanasius, *De incarnatione*, par. 4-6.

¹⁹Examples from the Hebrew scriptures that are relevant to our thematic include Psalms 24, 36, 40, 30, 33, 68 (all according to the Septuagint/Vulgate numbering). See also Rachel Bullington, *The "Alexis" in the Saint Albans Psalter: A Look into the Heart of the Matter*, Garland Studies in Medieval Literature, 4 (New York: Garland, 1991), for one example of the reception of this theology in medieval spirituality.

²⁰I am indebted here to Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973). Although Schmemmann, in his masterful way, is articulating the Eastern Orthodox vision of Christianity, he differs in no fundamental way from the Western or Latin Christian vision, as set forth in the patristic and medieval theologians cited by the contemporary authors referred to above. For a firm restatement of this theology see the recent encyclicals of John Paul II, e.g., in *Veritatis Splendor*, par. 11, 24, 32, 35, 85, or *Redemptor Hominis*, par. 88.

Having embraced Jesus Christ as the ultimate revelation of the transcendent Creator-God, Christians were forced to wrestle with the dynamic of love and giftedness even within God. Based on belief in Christ's resurrection, the early Christians affirmed that the transcendently holy Creator God himself was incarnate in the supposed carpenter's son from Nazareth. The consequence of this affirmation was a realization that freely given created life flows out of a never-ceasing cycle of Love within the inner Life of the *triune* God, out of the interrelationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In this light, Christ's sacrificial and redemptive self-giving give final expression to the ceaseless movement of love-Gift within the Trinity.²¹ The Father gives everything he is to the Son; the Son receives everything from the Father and obeys the sending he has received, even to the point of death on the cross.²² God did not become loving when he created or became incarnate; God *is* loving Giving, because that is what goes on within God, in the Trinity.

Viewed in this light, Christian sanctity would then consist in a relationship of receptive and humble obedience to God, in being absolutely at God's disposal, for which a wealth of medieval illustrations of this principle,²³ including the ninth-century *Heliland*²⁴ and fifth-century letters to the Frankish king, Clovis, could be offered.²⁵

²¹Erich Auerbach notes the centrality of this for Augustine in Erich Auerbach, "*Sermo humilis*," in Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965; New York: Pantheon, 1965), 27-66, at 40-41. John's gospel is characterized by a striking emphasis on this Giftedness, this *missio* of Christ. See Michael Waldstein, "The Mission of Jesus and the Disciples in John," *Communio* 17 (Fall, 1990) 311-333.

²²See the succinct statement by Joyce A. Little, "The New Evangelization and Gender: The Remystification of the Body," *Communio* 21 (Winter 1994) 776-99, at 780-82.

²³Guigo de Ponte, *De contemplatione*, III.3, ed. by Philippe Dupont as Guiges du Pont, *Traite sur la Contemplation*, in *Analecta Cartusiana*, 72 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1985), 268, 270; English translation by Dennis D. Martin in *Carthusian Spirituality: The Writings of Hugh of Balma and Guigo de Ponte*, Classics of Western Spirituality, 88 (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 218-20. From the fifteenth century we have Nicholas Kempf, another Carthusian, equating *patientia* and *mititas*, patience/suffering and meekness. See *De ostensione regni Dei*, ch. 6 (Graz, Universitätsbibliothek cod. 262, fol. 4v, line 5). For an exposition of related themes in Kempf, see Martin, *Fifteenth-Century Carthusian Reform*, 161-68, 324-25, 208-223 and the index s.v. "meekness.". See also Jean Gerson, *De consolatione theologiae*, bk. II, meter 4, in Palémon Glorieux, ed., *Gerson: Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. IV, 172, cf. vol. IX, 211. An English translation by Clyde Lee Miller is available (New York: Abaris Books, 1998).

In contrast, a culture based purely on economics of exchange and relations of power, as many understand ours to be today, precludes genuine receptivity and true gifting. If “gift-giving” establishes merely an unfree obligation to reciprocate rather than to receive as gift and “reciprocate” freely and gratefully, it leads inexorably to the splendid isolation of subjective autonomy.²⁶ This means that physical, intellectual, or spiritual penetration of myself by another constitutes a violent invasion, a loss of

²⁴See especially the scene in Gethsemane (section 57), the passion narrative (section 60-67) and the Sermon on the Mount (sections 16-23). See Otto Behaghel, ed., *Heliand und Genesis* (Halle a. d. Saale: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 159-62, 170-94, 44-69; translated by G. Ronald Murphy, *The Heliand: The Saxon Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 155-58, 166-88, 44-67.

²⁵See William M. Daly, “Clovis: How Barbaric, How Pagan?” *Speculum*, 69 (1994), 619-64, at 632-33, citing three letters in *Epistulae Austrasicae*, ed. Henri M. Rochais, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 117 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1957), 407-411. One excellent example comes from Hugh of Balma, a late-thirteenth-century Carthusian monk writing on contemplation. For Hugh, what the human does is to empty herself, and her active disposing for “mystical union” consists in giving all she has to God and scraping open a womb for God’s Gift. “There are, then, two arms by which the upward movement of the human spirit’s [*mens*] affections is increased. On the one hand, she disposes herself in preparation for the ascent; on the other hand, she calls for the free gift of divine inpouring by which what she already has is made to merit greater and richer rewards. She employs the first arm by the very fact that she does not attribute what she has to herself but redirects everything into praise to the Bestower of all things. In this way she scrapes out a cavity in herself by more truly fighting against herself. As this cavity wells up with divine graces that skip over mountains and hills [cf. Ca 2:8] the humbler places within her are filled by the graces pouring into her. The more capacious the cavity of humility, the more grace she can hold. Now to the degree that any creature acknowledges its source, it denies itself, since the more something created from nothing attributes every good and all existence to its Creator, that much more does it recognize the magnificence of the Creator.” See Hugh of Balma, *Viae Sion lugent* (*The Roads to Zion Mourn*, cf. Lam. 1:4), *via unitiva*, par. 56; ed. by Francis Ruello and Jeanne Barbet, Sources Chrétiennes, 408-9 (Paris: Du Cerf, 1995-96), 128-29; English translation by Dennis Martin in *Carthusian Spirituality*, 128-29. Bernard of Clairvaux refers to the two arms of the soul in *De Consideratione*, V.30, though the two arms are for him “holy love” and “holy fear.” See *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, vol. 3: *Tractatus et opuscula*, edited by Jean Leclercq, H. M. Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1963), 492.

²⁶Stephen Webb, *The Gifting God*, surveys the theological and philosophical controversy over whether a gift can truly be given. In his introduction he notes that the stimulus for his book arose from the widespread cynical assumption among students in his college classes that all “gifts” are given with strings attached, out of obligation. This may owe something to the arguments of Marcel Mauss and others: in gift economies nobles gave gifts that obligated the recipients to receive them and to reciprocate; hence casting doubt on the possibility of truly altruistic gift giving. Whatever may be true of primitive German or Native American societies, Christianity is founded on utterly selfless giving; at issue in the present essay is whether medieval Christendom managed to introduce into a non-altruistic gift economy belief in the possibility of genuinely selfless gifting. Cf. John Milbank, “Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic,” *Modern Theology* 11 (January, 1995), 119-61. For Mauss see *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. by Ian Cunnison (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), cf. *idem*, “Essai sur le don” in *Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris, 1950), 145-279, first published in 1923. For critiques of Mauss and extensions and critiques of his theory by anthropologists, see Maurice Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift*, trans. Nora Scott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), originally *L’Énigme du don* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), and Annette Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-while-Giving* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

autonomous control.²⁷ Gifts can no longer be given because they can no longer be received without hedging, because they can only be "received" by reminding the giver that the meaning of the "gift" lies under the control of the recipient, not the giver, which means that the one meaning the recipient cannot give to the "gift" is that of true gift--in a true gift, the meaning is established by the giver, to be received by the recipient. All that remains is taking, and "communication" becomes naked competition for power.²⁸

In a divine gift economy established by the utterly free Jewish-Christian Creator-God who creates humans in His image, i.e., really free to receive or not to receive, receiving a gift places one in a limitlessly voluntary "obligation" of gratitude to the giver. This removes one's autonomy, since one is *obligated, bound*, by the terms of receiving, to give back. But it does not remove one's freedom and thus does not obviate a relationship of love between Giver and gifted, since *what* one is obligated to is *freely offered gratitude*, which, if it is to be genuine, must be free and not coerced. One is free to be ungrateful, but then one has not really received the gift in the spirit of the giver, if it was a freely, limitlessly freely given gift.²⁹ One *ought* to receive freely, such receiving necessarily yields the relation of gratitude, but one remains free to refuse to receive, hence to refuse to be grateful.

²⁷Thus even if I respond by "giving permission" I still feel violated, because, having embraced autonomy and control as an absolute value, I no longer really know how to "give permission" or to receive without feeling violated. Cf. Angela Scola, "The Dignity and Mission of Women: The Anthropological and Theological Foundations," *Communio*, 25 (Spring 1998) 42-56, for an exploration of themes particularly relevant to contemporary feminist concerns.

²⁸In any form of gift economy, reception of a gift establishes a relationship, establishes community, for the recipient must receive the gift in the spirit of the giver. If the giver is more powerful *and* domineering, intending by his gift to place the recipient in his power and to obligate the recipient unfreely to reciprocate, or if the recipient, having viewed the gift as *necessarily requiring* reciprocation, responds with a form of mental reservation as described above, the relationship established by the gift will be an unfree relationship, a relationship of commerce rather than love.

²⁹In the words of Hans Urs von Balthasar: "Whoever recognizes the giver in the gift knows immediately that the gift can only be utilized and administered in the spirit of the giver. In the original act of giving lies a generosity and fruitfulness to which one can reply only with a correspondingly generous and fruitful stewardship. It is important that the servants see the unity between the gift and the requirement found within it, for the expectation of fruitbearing is part of the generosity of the gift. Servants dare not make distinctions between what is "truly given" and what is "merely loaned". This becomes absolutely clear when we use the parable as a window to view the truth it intends: what God has entrusted to us--our existence, with all its possibilities--is truly entrusted to us, given to us

The emptying of God in Christ (*kenosis*) is precisely this sort of limitlessly freely given gift and it “obligates” to equally limitlessly free gratitude. This is the meaning of “imitation of Christ” in Christian tradition. For Jesus Christ,

“being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a matter of robbery (*rapinam*), but emptied (*exinanivit*) himself and received the form of a servant, being made in likeness of men, and was found in the shape (disposition, enabling quality: *habitus*) of a man. He humbled himself and was made [note the passive voice] obedient even unto death, the death of the cross. On account of this, God exalted him (*exinanivit* becomes *exaltavit*) and gave (*donavit*) him the name which is above all names, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow. . . .” (Philippians 2:6-10)

This self-gift of God in Christ, this *kenosis*,³⁰ is at the same time the exaltation of God on the cross and an extension of the God-Man into the womb of humanity, a theme embedded in medieval imagination, from the poems of Prudentius to the *Dream of the Rood* to Marian devotion: *fiat*, do what you want with me. One finds oneself by expropriating oneself, giving oneself, putting oneself at the disposal of the Other totally, not by appropriating the Other. One finds oneself by utterly and freely giving oneself away, a self-giving to which one is both “obligated” by one’s creation from nothing and by utterly unmerited redemption yet free to refuse.³¹

with such finality that it cannot be taken away again, yet, this gift is a loan to us from the treasury of God (who is all being). From that follows the realization that the gift must be dealt with in keeping with its character as gift.” See “God Is Out of Town” in von Balthasar, *You Have Words of Eternal Life: Scripture Meditations*, trans. Dennis Martin (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 23-24.

³⁰Cf. Jean-Pierre Batut, “The Chastity of Jesus and the ‘Refusal to Grasp’,” *Communio* 24 (Spring 1997) 5-13, and Ogliari, “The Kenosis Theme and Monastic Theology.”

³¹This same language of expropriation is central to the system of Hans Urs von Balthasar and other contemporary theologians in the revival of personalist and Trinitarian theology. See Christophe Potworowski, “Christian Experience in Hans Urs von Balthasar,” *Communio* 20 (Spring 1993) 107-17. I have summarized this in a related article, “Trinitarian and Mystical Receptivity: Modern Theory and a Medieval Case Study,” *Theological Studies* 56 (December 1995) 696-708. See also David L. Schindler, “The Church’s ‘Worldly’ Mission: Neoconservatism and American Culture,” *Communio* 18 (Fall 1991) 365-97, with additional citations to von Balthasar’s works. For a thorough summary and expanded exploration of the entire question of the “metaphysics of the person,” see the excellent study by John S. Grabowski, “Person: Substance and Relation,” *Communio* 30 (Spring 1995) 139-163, with copious references to the work of John Zizioulas and others. See also David Schindler, “Modernity,

In short, personhood, based on New Testament and patristic Trinitarian ontology,³² is not statically ontological but relationally ontological--to *be* is to be for and be from--and the relation, being based on freedom, is that of love.³³ A person exists, has being, only in relationship, in love.³⁴ As David Schindler has emphasized in a published conversations with W. Norris Clarke and with George Weigel and Michael Novak, one does not first exist as a person who then reaches out in empathetic relationality, as the classic modern understandings of the self presume, but one always already exists only as a

Postmodernity, and the Problem of Atheism," *Communio* 24 (Fall 1997) 563-579, a summary of the remarkable cultural theology of Luigi Giussani, "Luigi Giussani on the 'Religious Sense' and the Cultural Situation of Our Time," *Communio* 25 (Spring 1998) 141-150, and Giussani's own summary of his book, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997) in Giussani, "Religious Awareness in Modern Man," *Communio* 25 (Spring 1998) 104-140. Indeed, some have argued that Christianity contributed to Western civilization a unique idea of person based on these dynamics of the Christian Trinity: the Son, *qua* Son, is not an independent being. He has nothing of himself. He is totally one with the Father yet distinct in his Sonship relation to the Father. Precisely because the Son "exists in total relativity toward [the Father] and constitutes nothing but relativity toward him . . . they are one." See Joseph Ratzinger, "Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology," *Communio* 17 (Fall 1990) 439-54, at 445; cf. Grabowski, "Person, Substance," and Rowan Williams, "Sapientia and the Trinity: Reflections on the *De Trinitate*," in *Collectanea Augustiniana: Mélanges T. J. van Bavel*, ed. B. Bruning et al. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1990 [=Augustiniana, 40-41 (1990-91)]). I owe the reference to Williams's article to my colleague, Mark McIntosh. So too, for patristic and medieval Christians Word, Logos, ratio (i.e., relation), *communicatio* itself can be some-thing only in being from someone else and toward someone else: a word is existence that is completely path and openness. Christ's doctrine is he himself and he himself is not his own ("My teaching is not *my* teaching" [Jn 7:16]), because Christ's "I" exists entirely from the "you" of the Father (Ratzinger, "Person," pp. 445-47). In consequence, Christianity was able to introduce a unique concept of humility as the basis for its anthropology.

³²One must not forget that the analogical relation by which human personhood mirrors the intra-Trinitarian personhood is one of *maior dissimilitudo*, which means that no matter how much human-to-human empathy or relationality is *like* the personal relations within the Trinity it is infinitely more *dissimilar* to those relations.

³³This is the thrust of Jean-Luc Marion, in *God without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. by Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), originally *Dieu sans l'être: Hors-texte* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1982). See also Paul J. Griffiths, "The Gift and the Lie: Augustine on Lying," *Communio* 26 (Spring 1999) 3-30, with reference, at 17-19, to Marion's *Étant donné: Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997) and *Réduction et donation: recherches sur Husserl, Heidegger et la phénoménologie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1989).

³⁴In the words of Hans Urs von Balthasar, ". . . in God there is absolutely no 'for oneself'; rather, eternal life--absolute life--takes place in self-giving for each other. One might object that one must first be for oneself before one can give oneself up. Not at all: the *self* must be dropped from the *for*. Self exists totally within self-giving. . . . No one owes his own physical and intellectual existence to himself; rather, all exist 'whence'. . . . In creatures, a 'for oneself' exists only as a transition between 'whence' and 'where to'. . . . This implies, because God is God, God's perfecting sovereignty and freedom--exactly the opposite of an object or commodity." See also von Balthasar, *You Have Words of Eternal Life*, 89.

receptive, relational person.³⁵ Thus, for Christian theology, self-donative love, *caritas*, lies at the heart of everything, indeed, the relationship of kenotic love *constitutes* and *constructs* every *thing*. Love, the *caritas* of Creation and Cross, makes the world go round. Gift makes the world go round. Grace makes the world go round. This is the heart of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, for its two cities are in fact two loves (*caritas* and *cupiditas*) that run down the center of every human heart.

III. Popular Perceptions

And now I must address the question I am sure many are asking: was this not a lot of "high theology" known at best to a few speculative and theologically trained minds?

³⁵Summarized most succinctly in David L. Schindler, "Norris Clarke on Person, Being, and St. Thomas," *Communio*, 20.3 (Fall, 1993), 580-92, responding to W. Norris Clarke, "Person, Being, and St. Thomas," *Communio*, 19 (Winter, 1992), 601-18, cf. Clarke's fundamentally concurring response, pp. 593-98 and Stephen Long's and George Blair's responses to the responses by Clarke and Schindler in *Communio*, 21, no. 1 (Spring 1994), 151-190. In a series of major articles and portions of a book critiquing the efforts by Michael Novak, George Weigel, and Richard John Neuhaus to find grounds of *rapprochement* between the founding beliefs of American democratic capitalism, Schindler has claimed that modern individualism starts precisely from the assumption of an essential, autonomous individual who then reaches out (or chooses not to do so) in relationships. See George Weigel, "Is America Bourgeois?" *Crisis*, 4 (October 1986), 5-10; David L. Schindler, "Is America Bourgeois?" *Communio*, 14 (Fall 1987), 262-290; *idem*, "Catholicity and the State of Contemporary Theology: The Need for an Ontologic of Holiness," *Communio*, 14 (Winter, 1987), 426-50; Weigel, "Is America Bourgeois? A Response to David Schindler," *Communio*, 15 (Spring, 1988), 77-91; Schindler, "Once Again: George Weigel, Catholicism, and American Culture," *Communio*, 15 (1988), 92-120; *idem*, "The Church's 'Worldly' Mission: Neoconservatism and American Culture," *Communio*, 18 (1991), 365-97; Mark Lowery, "The Schindler-Weigel Debate: An Appraisal," *Communio*, 18 (1991), 425-38; Weigel, "Response to Mark Lowery," *Communio*, 18 (1991), 439-49; Schindler, "Response to Mark Lowery," *Communio*, 18 (1991), 450-72; Novak, "Schindler's Conversion: The Catholic Right accepts Pluralism," *Communio*, 19 (Spring, 1992), 145-163; Schindler, "Christology and the Church's 'Worldly' Mission: Response to Michael Novak," *Communio*, 19 (Spring 1992), 164-78; *idem*, "The Church's 'Worldly' Mission: Neoconservatism and American Culture," *Communio*, 18 (Fall, 1991), 365-97; Kenneth L. Schmitz, "Catholicism in America," *Communio*, 19 (1992), 474-77; Schindler, "At the Heart of the World, From the Center of the Church," *Pro Ecclesia*, 5, no. 3 (Summer 1996), 314-333. Schindler brought much of this together in his book *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). Richard John Neuhaus replied to Schindler in "The Liberalism of John Paul II," *First Things*, no. 73 (May 1997), 16-21, and "Schindler's Complaint" in "The Public Square" section of the same journal, no. 74 (June-July 1997), pp.72-74. Schindler "Reorienting the Church on the Eve of the Millennium: John Paul II's 'New Evangelization'," *Communio*, 24.4 (Winter, 1997), 728-779, offers a critique of John Courtenay Murray's project to which Novak has appealed for corroboration of his own approach. See also Novak, Michael, "Thomas Aquinas, the First Whig," *Crisis* (October 1990), 31-38.

Not at all. In the first place, the Christian claim that total self-donation, the Law of the Gift, lies at the heart of what it means to be human and at the heart of the cosmos, is claimed not as the unique insight of Jewish and Christian divine revelation but as a fundamental and knowable principle of natural, or general, “revelation,” of universal, natural law. While this may seem preposterous to modern minds, let us reflect for a moment on (1) the universality and naturalness of our response when we believe ourselves to be the recipient of a no-strings-attached gift offered out of the goodness of the other person’s heart; (2) on the universality of our negative response when we realize that someone who posed as our lover or friend who had only our best interests, selflessly, at heart but turns out to have merely been using us to get something for himself; (3) on the admiration felt in all cultures for those who selflessly give their lives for their families or clans or towns or nations and the universal disgust felt at treachery and cowardice; and (4) on the universal human recognition and respect for parents’ acts of loving sacrifice for their children. All of these lend weight to the claim that the Law of the Gift is indeed naturally knowable even apart from divine revelation. Christianity simply claims that Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, is the supreme example, the supreme revelation of what everyone knows deep in her heart.

Moreover, the primacy of self-donative sacrificial suffering was embedded in fundamental images of the Christian story that were central to medieval literature and piety. Mary’s “yes” to God, placing her *body* and person at his disposal (“let it be done to me as you will”) involves an image that is difficult for either men or women to misunderstand.³⁶ It is true, of course, that late patristic and early medieval crucifixes predominantly presented a fully-clothed, triumphant, Resurrected Christ rather than an agonizingly dying one. Yet, even in this guise its fundamental meaning (redemptive vulnerability,

³⁶In an extended article applying Mauss’ and others’ theories of gift economy to the late medieval romance, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Britton J. Harwood, “Gawain and the Gift,” *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 106 (1991) 483-499, fails to note the two points at which the Marian formula is employed, first as a summary of the essence of *courteoisie* and then in an inversion, as an explicit temptation to adultery: “Be it with me as you will” (III.49, 1214-1215); “My body’s yours to use. I give it gleefully! Do with me what you choose: Your servant I shall be” (1237-40). I have analyzed *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in greater detail in “Give and Take in Grail-Quest, Gawain, and Roman Missal: Why Perceval Just Doesn’t Get It,” *Logos*, 4.4 (Fall 2001), 165-203.

anguish, suffering) was not entirely absent.³⁷ To argue that the meaning of the cross to which this clothed Christ was affixed, i.e., the meaning of crucifixion itself, was totally lost on the “masses” seems a far stretch, and the luxuriant growth of medieval devotion to Christ’s Passion confirms that it in fact never was entirely lost on the masses. Perhaps our antiseptic culture and comfortable lives are responsible for the fact that we “read” the early medieval crucifixes as antiseptic and painless. Early medieval people knew well that the triumph of the Cross included the blood and gore, as the speeches of the triumphant yet gory gallows of the *Dream of the Rood* and the poetry of Venantius Fortunatus (ca. 530-600) make clear. Academics who interpret popular piety from the comfort of their university offices must redouble their efforts to let go in order to enter into non-appropriative empathy with the objects of their study.³⁸

³⁷One notes, for instance, Venantius Fortunatus’s sixth-century poem, *Vexilla regis*, in which the Cross is, indeed, triumphant, but precisely because of Christ’s bloody suffering. [Stanza 1] “They bring the standards of the King; / There shines the mystery of the Cross; On which in flesh the Founder of Flesh [*carnis conditor*] / Was tortured on the forkéd yoke [*patibulo*]. [Stanza 2]: “His innards were transfixed with nails [*Confixa clavis viscera*], / His hands and feet they stretched out tight [*Tendens manus, vestigia*]; / To buy us back our share of grace / He hung there as our sacrifice [*Hic immolata est hostia*].” Translation modified from James J. Wilhelm, *Medieval Song: An Anthology of Hymns and Lyrics* [New York: Dutton, 1971], pp. 37-40; partial Latin text in Guido Maria Dreves, *Ein Jahrtausend Lateinischer Hymnendichtung*, rev. by Clemens Blume, S.J., pt. 1 (Leiden: O. R. Reiland, 1909), 37-39; full text in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 88:130ff or Dreves, *Analecta Hymnica medii aevi*, vol. 50, p. 76ff. The same poet’s *Pange lingua Pange lingua, gloriosi proelium certaminis*, still part of the official Catholic liturgy for Good Friday and not to be confused with the poem of similar title attributed to Thomas Aquinas, continues this theme: Stanza 5: “He wailed his woe inside a manger, a baby hidden in its bowels; / The Virgin-Mother wrapped him with a swath of swaddling clothes; / His hands, his feet, his legs she bound with bands that held him tight. [Vagit infans inter arta / conditus praesepia, / Membra pannis involuta / virgo mater adligat, / Et pedes manusque, crura / stricta pingit fascia.]” Stanza 6: “When he had reached the age of thirty, filling out the limit of life, / With free will, born for this very purpose, dedicated to Passion’s way, / He dangled lamblike from the boughs, immolated on the Cross. [Lustra sex qui iam peracta / tempus implens corporis, / Se volente, natus ad hoc, / passioni deditus, / Agnus in crucis levatur / immolandus stipite.]” Stanza 7: “**See the gall and vinegar! whips and nails! the spears and the spit! / Gentle corpse now perforated, setting blood and lymph aflow; / Now see the river laving the soil, cleansing sea and sky and stars.** [Hic acetum, fel, arundo, / sputa, clavi, lancea / Mite corpus perforatur, / sanguis, unda profluit, / Terra, pontus, astra, mundus / quo lavantur flumine.]” Stanza 8: “O faithful Cross, sole noble stem that rises in the groves of green, / No stele bore a flower like yours, nor such foliage, nor such see: / Sweet rod bearing a sweeter burden fastened tightly with sweet nails. [Crux fidelis, inter omnes / arbor una nobilis, / Nulla talem silva profert / flore, fronde, germine, / **Dulce lignum dulce clavo** / dulce pondus sustinens.]”

³⁸See the tendentious but useful survey by Gerard Sloyan, “The Popular Passion Piety of the Catholic West,” *Worship* 69 (January 1995) 2-28, a chapter from his book on the passion of Christ through the centuries: *The Crucifixion of Jesus: Faith, Myth, and History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); see also Schreiner, “Fetisch oder Heilszeichen” as cited above. The later medieval developments described by Thomas H. Bestul in *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996) point more to a society confused and torn asunder by the traumas of the fourteenth century and thus reflected in its devotional literature (and devotional practices--see Richard Kieckhefer in *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984]) than to texts that themselves construct a violence-torn society. Bestul does not always follow his own post-modern cautions (pp. 23-25) about the

In short, the story of Jesus Christ, as recounted in the New Testament from his enfleshment in Mary's womb to his resurrection and ascension, is a powerful and dramatic one. It was not dependent on post-Reformation systematic catechesis for its communicative force. Efforts to drive an analytical wedge between elite culture and popular culture founder precisely on the topics discussed in this essay: suffering, victimization, martyrdom, as Peter Brown so effectively argued in his book, *The Cult of the Saints*.³⁹ Although the drama of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ may be repellant and religiously incomprehensible to the self-possessed and self-constructing minds of enlightened and postmodern academics,⁴⁰ it was not beyond the imaginative reach of peasants, nobles, burghers, and clerics--as a wide variety of medieval literature attests.

Moreover, sacrificial giftedness and gratitude were central to the Christian Eucharist and its liturgy.⁴¹ For centuries, Christians agreed that the victorious Victim, the Lamb of God, is alive bodily in heaven but also present in substantially and bodily in the Eucharist. *Ecce agnus Dei* meant "here is God," "here is the sacrificial Lamb who is God," "right here, in this apparent wafer"--but only a receptively submissive creaturely spirit could believe what so patently contradicted the senses. Yet it went even beyond this. The Mass was itself a continuation of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice on Calvary, re-presenting the salvific work of Christ on the cross continually.

necessarily non-totalizing nature of the interpretation of his texts. The exclusive focus on the body by Bestul and the postmodern authorities he cites is itself a one-sided caricature of a religion and a religious culture that gave great priority to the soul and to the will, whether in human or divine persons.

³⁹Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

⁴⁰For some reflections on the "vulgar" (in the root sense of the *vulgus*, or common folk) repulsiveness of crucifixes, the vulgar ugliness of crucifixes at least in part because of the ugliness of what they represent: crucifixion, see J. Bottum, "A Suspicion of Snobbery," *First Things* no. 50 (February 1995) 11-13.

⁴¹For a detailed analysis of give and take in the Roman liturgy, see Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 169-273, esp. 238-252.

This receptive and creaturely yet dynamic passibility (not passiveness⁴²) was also embedded in the iconography and narratives of the lives of the saints, from St. Martin of Tours splitting his cloak with his sword and being willing, when accused of cowardice, to face the foe unarmed to St. Francis of Assisi stripping himself naked, from St. Lawrence cracking jokes at his own roast to St. Catherine confounding the professors with her charismatic wisdom.⁴³ Self-donative, kenotic, *caritas* is found on nearly every page of the *Golden Legend*, in the lives of men, women, and children, rich and poor, powerful and powerless.⁴⁴ Perhaps we are puzzled and repulsed by the devotion of Catherine of Siena to the wounds of Christ and by the vernacular romances recounting the gory martyrdoms of female saints⁴⁵ at least in part because we increasingly pay less attention to the self-donative ontology of the Christian Trinity and of the human person created in God's Trinitarian image. And Christians knew about that Trinitarian ontology because of the incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection of the carpenter from Nazareth, not because of airy speculation.

We cannot explore here in any detail the variety of intersections between the covenantal Gift-theology of Judaism and Christianity, beginning with creation and consummated in the new covenant in Christ's body and blood, on the one hand, and the medieval feudal world of intertwining, multilayered loyalties, chivalric romance,⁴⁶ and mystical passions and loves, on the other hand.⁴⁷

⁴²See Martin, "Trinitarian and Mystical Receptivity."

⁴³Which made St. Catherine the patron of the universities. See Albert Lang, ed., "Die Katharinenpredigt Heinrichs von Langenstein," *Divus Thomas: Jahrbuch für Philosophie und spekulative Theologie* 26 (1948) 123-59, 233-50.

⁴⁴See also Bullington, *Alexis*.

⁴⁵Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint*.

⁴⁶Leopold Grill, O.Cist., "Mystik und Höfische Dichtung," in *Spiritualität heute und gestern*, vol. 1, *Analecta Cartusiana*, 35.1 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1982), 115-56.

⁴⁷Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France: Psycho-Historical Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979); *Monks on Marriage: A Twelfth-Century View* (New York: Seabury, 1982). For a summary of revisionist views on courtly love, one that ignores Leclercq's theses, see Eva Willms, *Liebeslied und Sangeslust: Untersuchungen zur deutschen Liebeslyrik des späten 12. und frühen 13. Jahrhunderts*, Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 94 (Munich: Artemis, 1990), vii-xi, 1-57. For a more nuanced, but less recent review, see Douglas Kelly, *Medieval Imagination: Rhetoric and the Poetry of Courtly Love* (Madison: University of

It is, however, worth noting in passing that the medieval idea and practice of hierarchical organization in church and society takes on a new perspective if one realizes that any *person* is always in the middle, always receiving and giving--receiving from and giving account to the givers higher up in the chain, giving oversight and receiving obedience from those lower on the ladder. Whether you are a king, count, cobbler, milkmaid, or queen, you yourself *are* not except insofar as you fulfill your role, your station in life, by being a link, a channel, a transmitter in both directions.

Out of this understanding of self as self-donative relation, as role-playing, station-filling transmitter, came the expectation that a medieval warrior should *in extremis* sacrifice his life for love and loyalty but even short of that, should exercise self-discipline, be gentle yet grave in authority, compassionate, patient, amiable, yet fired with manly zeal for justice, suffer abuse without murmuring for the sake of right.⁴⁸ Out of this came Odo of Cluny's absurdly wimpish and anti-phallic ideal held up to a power-hungry tenth-century world: defending the powerless with swords held hilt-forward, gratefully receiving victory from God and rendering Him all tribute of praise.⁴⁹

Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 14-25, 105-120, and 282, note 23. More attention to Augustine's "gradualism"--the same human ability (*liberum arbitrium*) is involved in both *caritas* and *cupiditas*; the same deed can be good or bad depending on the orientation of the actor toward or away from God--would help students of medieval courtly love immensely. See *Tractates in First John*, Homily II.11; IV.4-5; VII.5, 7-8; IX.10; *On Christian Doctrine*, I.20-21. The monastic practice of *discretio* also offers a paradigm for the polyvalence and ambiguity that so exercises students of medieval literature. See Martin, *Fifteenth-Century*, esp. ch. 4, and Fr. Dingjan, *Discretio: Les origines patristiques et monastiques de la doctrine sur la prudence chez saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1967). See also the recent surveys by Dominique Bertrand, "Bernardine Discernment: Between the Desert Fathers and Ignatius of Loyola," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 36.3 (2001), 325-336, and Edith Scholl, "The Mother of Virtues: *Discretio*," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 36.3 (2001), 389-401.

⁴⁸Martin, *Fifteenth-Century*, 222-23, with critical references to C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals, 939-1210* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985). See also Martin, "Give and Take in Grail-Quest, Gawain, and Roman Missal: Why Perceval Just Doesn't Get It," *Logos*, 4.4 (Fall 2001), 165-203 (available through Johns Hopkins University's Project Muse at <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/logos/v004/4.4martin.html>).

⁴⁹Barbara Rosenwein, *Rhinoceros Bound: Cluny in the Tenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982); Barbara Rosenwein and Lester K. Little, "Social Meaning in the Monastic and Mendicant Spiritualities," *Past and Present* no. 63 (May, 1974), 4-32.

What would happen if, *as a matter of critical academic method*, we empathetically entertained the possibility that the Christian story of Creation and Cross was true, that the all-powerful God was really in Christ dying out of infinite love for his Creatures? What if, as a thought experiment, we empathetically entertained the possibility that this God-Man really was substantially present in what appears to be mere flour and water (and yeast, in the East)? How would that affect our reading of Christina the Marvelous⁵⁰ or Gertrude of Helfta? Medieval saints could not have employed the language of Hans Urs von Balthasar or Joseph Ratzinger to articulate a theology of trinitarian ontology and the human person as pure relation, but they were familiar with that theology's contents from the histories and legends that were culturally constitutive for their world.

Somehow, however, this civilization of *caritas* gave way to one of commerce⁵¹ in which contractual obligations replaced the numinous loyalties of gratitude called into "being" by giving and receiving.⁵² Balance of power, commercial exchange, and aggressive competition eventually replaced the receptive meekness and courtly *mansuetudo* (gentleness, i.e., the root of our word *gentility*) that can be glimpsed in the lives of medieval monks⁵³ and knights and their imitators. Power became a *proprietas*, a

⁵⁰Rachel Bullington shows from the St. Albans' Psalter, which was apparently written for Christina the Marvelous, that our key themes: creation, Trinity, *caritas*, were clearly known to lay people. See Bullington, *Alexis*, pp. 199-204.

⁵¹Georges Duby, *The Growth of the Early European Economy: Warriors and Peasants from the Seventh to the Twelfth Century*, trans. by Howard B. Clarke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

⁵²See Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Sword, Miter, and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in Burgundy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), for an exploration of the meaning and motives for aristocrats' gifts to monasteries.

⁵³Leopold Grill links the *mansuetudo* evident in Hugh of Lincoln's tender care for squirrels and sparrows with the story of Hugh's pet swan, which in turn, Grill links to Lohengrin. See Grill, "Mystik und Höfische Dichtung," 146-53. He is not claiming that Hugh inspired the romance, but that the existing mythography regarding the swan was applied by courtly poets and historians (including the former troubadour become Cistercian monk, Helinand of Froidmont, see p. 125) to Hugh as well as to the Arthurian heroes. I am convinced that we have not begun to scratch the surface of interconnections between monastic readers of both monastic romances (the Desert Fathers stories were monastic "bed-time reading") and secular romances (evidence of manuscripts containing romances in monastic libraries is steadily mounting). See Dennis D. Martin, "'The Honeymoon Was Over': Carthusians between Aristocracy and Bourgeoisie," in *Die Kartäuser und Ihre Welt: Kontakte und gegenseitige Einflüsse*, vol. 1, *Analecta Cartusiana*, 62.1 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1993), 66-99, at 80-82.

technique for the purpose of domination,⁵⁴ rather than a gift to be received, passed on, accounted for. Since Hobbes, if not long before, power--sheer, naked power--makes the world go round, and the conventions of the civil and social contract of our body politic, have, until now, just managed to keep it from imploding. And, as the Lockean social contract--the modern way of understanding limits on power, based on a commercial exchange rather than gift--disintegrates, we are finally seeing what real empowerment looks like.

IV. The Deconstruction of Kenotic Caritas

We have scarcely begun to understand the changes that took place in European culture between the twelfth and the eighteenth centuries--the long transition from traditional to modern culture, with the upheavals of the sixteenth-century at its midpoint. What happened to the Eucharistic wafer-become-Christ's-body does not explain the changes but it may very well serve as a mirror of them.

Late medieval and early modern iconoclasts--from the Lollards to the Anabaptists to the Huguenots--were deliberately rejecting not merely a few popular excesses and superstitions but the fundamental Catholic theology of Eucharistic transformation and propitiatory sacrifice,⁵⁵ and were doing so by taunting people for genuflecting before a piece of bread: how silly, how childish,⁵⁶ how naïve to be

⁵⁴George Parkin Grant, *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969); Jacques Ellul, *La Technique, ou l'enjeu du siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1954), translated by John Wilkinson as *The Technological Society* (New York: Knopf, 1964). See also George Ovitt's critique of Lynn White and others on the interface between Christian theology and the rise of Western technology, "The Cultural Context of Western Technology: Early Christian Attitudes toward Manual Labor," *Technology and Culture* 27 (1986) 477-500.

⁵⁵Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

⁵⁶For a summary of modern Catholic "unless you become like a little child" theologies see John Saward, *The Way of the Lamb: The Spirit of Childhood and the End of the Age* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999).

so easily duped by a human construction, a human invention! Somehow the symbolist ontology⁵⁷ and the underlying metaphysics⁵⁸ that were taken for granted by Catholic faith in the Eucharistic miracle were disappearing. As the gift economy gave way to a more *abstracted* and *constructed* commercial and urban economy, as the conceptual distinction between the medium of exchange and its buying power became ever more clear,⁵⁹ leading to letters of credit and eventually to paper money, so too, more and more people made a sharp ontological separation between sign and signification.

Historians have not adequately realized that the most earthshaking and culturally transformative change with regard to the Catholic Mass at the time of the Protestant Reformation had to do less with the dogma of transubstantiation and Real Presence than with the doctrine of the Mass as a propitiatory salvific sacrifice continuing and re-presenting Christ's historic work on Calvary. Although Protestants themselves disagreed about the nature of Christ's presence, whether real or symbolic, as they also disagreed about infant baptism and the relation of Church and the emerging state, one of the few things all Protestants, from the most extreme Anabaptists to the most "Catholic" Lutherans or Anglicans, agreed about was that the Mass was most emphatically *not* a propitiatory sacrifice.⁶⁰

⁵⁷Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*, translated by Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 99-145 on the symbolist mentality; 162-201 on a new conception of history.

⁵⁸C. S. Lewis, "Imagination and Thought in the Middle Ages," in Lewis, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, collected by Walter Hooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 41-63.

⁵⁹William J. Courtenay, "The King and the Leaden Coin: The Economic Background of 'sine qua non' Causality," *Traditio* 28 (1972) 185-209; *idem*, "Sacrament, Symbol, and Causality in Bernard of Clairvaux," in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Studies Presented to Dom Jean Leclercq*, Cistercian Studies Series, 23 (Washington, D.C.: Cistercian Publications, 1973), 1-26, reprinted in Courtenay, *Covenant and Causality in Medieval Thought* (London: Variorum, 1984); cf. Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition: A History of the Distinction of Absolute and Ordained Power* (Bergamo: Pierluigi Lubrina Editore, 1990).

⁶⁰For the thoroughgoing Protestant rejection of the Sacrifice of the Mass, see Francis Clark, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1960; 2nd ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), and Robert A. Sungenis, *Not by Bread Alone: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for the Eucharistic Sacrifice* (Goleta, Cal.: Queenship Publishing, 2000). Modern Protestant second thoughts about that rejection are found in Jean de Watteville, *Le Sacrifice dans les Textes eucharistiques des premiers siècles*, Bibliothèque Théologique (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1966) [Swiss Reformed] and Gustaf Aulén, *Eucharist and Sacrifice*, trans. Eric H. Wahlstrom (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958) [Swedish Lutheran], Frances M. Young, *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ* (London: S.C.M., 1975) [Anglican]. For revisionist Catholic views see Stanislas Lyonnet and Leopold Sabourin,

With Christ's once-and-for-all sacrifice now circumscribed for Protestants within in a distant rather than present historical event, remembered through the agency of Holy Spirit unction moving the hearts and minds of His faithful, claims for a real, substantial, propitiatory and sacrificial presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the objective efficacy of the other sacraments could only be "human inventions" of a corrupt medieval Church. In other words, the heart of Catholic faith became, to non-Catholics, mere *human constructions* rather than divine *gifts*. Relatively short steps led from this to Enlightened historicism, the "turn to the subject" and the dogma of the social construction of all reality.

Ironically, by weakening the intermediate instances of power in late medieval society (the First and Second Estates of divinely instituted and therefore divinely accountable priesthood and nobility with their curiously unphallic and seemingly, but only apparently "emasculated" celibate and chivalric ideals), the early modern Protestant and Enlightenment iconoclasts left themselves exposed to the naked power of absolutist monarchs and mercenaries, to the naked power of *real* men, men whose monstrosity was now a codpiece.⁶¹ Voluntary obeisance to the Real Presence gave way to forced subjection under the very real War-Phallus of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century monarchs. The tug of war between the bourgeoisie

Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice: A Biblical and Patristic Study, Analecta Biblica, 48 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1970). That the Consecrated Host, the Body of Christ, paraded through the streets in monstrances and venerated in services of Solemn Benediction still carried powerful meaning for early modern Catholics is evident from saints' lives such as that of Pascal Baylon (May 17). (See the relevant dates in twentieth-century editions of *Butler's Lives of the Saints*. For an example of how this piety continued into the nineteenth century, supposedly the heyday of Catholic neo-scholasticism and arid manualistic theology, see the life of Peter Julian Eymard (*ibid.*, Aug. 1; new calendar, Aug. 3). Even Protestant efforts to discredit the Consecrated Host desecrating it illustrate how much power it held for both Protestants and Catholics. See the Martyrs of Gorkum (*Butler's Lives*, July 9). See also John Bossy, "The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200-1700," *Past and Present* no. 100 (February, 1983) 29-61; *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Rites of Violence," in Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 113, 121, 128, 138, 146; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 354. When Protestants refused to doff their caps to a monstrance, when they urinated or stomped on a Consecrated Host, they were still acknowledging the power it did not hold in their construction of its meaning.

⁶¹ See Steven E. Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe*, Studies in Cultural History (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983). Although more research needs to be done, it seems reasonable to suggest at this point that much of what is decried as the patriarchal household has its origins in changes in attitudes toward celibacy and sexuality in the Reformation era. I have suggested some of these in *Fifteenth-Century*, ch. 4 and 6. See also Paul M. Quay, *The Mystery Hidden for Ages in God* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 399ff, esp. 403-412.

and the monarchs eventually ended in favor of the Third Estate, whose members set about to establish the puritannical republic of Reason, in which every authentic person constructed herself in splendidly self-reliant alienation.⁶² The loss of a culture based on genuinely free gift and equally free receptivity has turned social relations of give and take into broad subjection to the manipulative and coercive generosity of the State. Even the *pagan* Gift-economy was based on an anthropology of Giftedness that had far more in common with Christian and Jewish understandings of God, creation, and the human person than with modern freedom-cum-alienation.⁶³

In other words, the Modern Project embraced what the Jewish and Christian tradition considered to have been the Fall into sin and renamed it Progress. The Modern Project's historicism and subjective turn was a fundamental denial of the giftedness of reality, based on an insistence on humanly constructed reality, which is exactly what the late medieval and early modern Protestant iconoclasts accused Catholics of having done--of having *constructed* a bit of flour and water into the Body of Christ. Catholics insisted it was *received* tradition *based on empirically observed historical fact* (i.e., the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, which validated the legitimizing principle of the traditioning process, e.g., direct institution by God himself, in the person of the resurrected Christ, of the apostolic authority guarding the transmission

⁶²Liberalism freed us all to do everything for ourselves and therefore to receive nothing, freed us to compete with everyone and thereby to be obligated to no one, and, in the end, freed us to be alternatively bullied and therapeutically massaged, indeed, homogenized, into the faceless, alienated, and massively dependent masses of the post-modern West. See George Parkin Grant, *Lament for a Nation* (1965; republished Ottawa: Carlton University Press, 1978); *idem*, *Technology and Empire*; Philip Rieff, introduction to Freud, *Therapy and Technique* (New York: Collier, 1963), 8-11, 22-24.

⁶³The issue is not freedom versus oppression: Christianity possesses a very profound understanding of freedom, both God's freedom and human freedom, which sets it apart from all ancient deterministic systems. See, for example, Joseph Ratzinger, "Truth and Freedom," *Communio* 23 (Spring 1996) 16-35. And modern freedom, ironically, has led to the imprisonment of individuals in profound alienation. See John O'Donnell, *Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Outstanding Christian Thinkers series (Collegeville, Minn.: Michael Glazier/Liturgical Press, 1992), 65-77, drawing on Adrienne von Speyr. Most of the encyclicals of John Paul II deal in one way or another with human freedom and dignity against the context of modern misunderstandings of freedom. This renders impossibly ironic the attempts to dismiss the Polish pope as an ignoramus from behind the Iron Curtain who finds Western democracy unfathomable. The best summary is now found in George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Harper-Collins [Cliff Street Books], 1999). Though the theme of a necessary link between freedom and truth runs throughout John Paul's pontificate, see esp. *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), # 31, 37 and *Evangelium Vitae* (1995), # 19-22, 96, and *Witness to Hope*, pp. 12, 141-42, 175-76, 287-90, 334, 382-83, 584-85, 613-17, 654-59, 688-93, 715-17, 846-49.

of Tradition). Patristic and medieval *homo adorans deificandus* somehow had become, in the Enlightenment, *homo fabricator Dei*, man making God after his/her own image

Post-modernism does not really change this. Instead of a Given and Gifted reality to which we have to conform, post-modern Man and Womyn not only make reality conform to themselves but, indeed, find themselves with no choice but to construct all reality from scratch. The wit of post-modernism is to have realized the alienating, disintegrating implications of the historicist, Kantian, and structuralist projects and to have drawn the logical conclusions: if we each construct our own reality in the absence of, or at least absence of real knowledge of, the Noumenal, then we cannot communicate with anyone or anything outside these worlds, and language perforce must deconstruct.

Hence, my Modest Proposal for historical methodology. From all sides we hear calls for imaginative yet critical participation in the worlds inhabited by the people who form the objects of our study. Structuralist analysis of *modern* culture and deconstructionist analysis of *postmodern* culture may be fully appropriate. But critical method requires an imaginatively kenotic approach to *medieval* Christendom, namely, a vulnerable laying aside of our every shred of controlling presuppositions and suspicions, even our postmodern presuppositions about the ubiquity of irreducible self-constructed presuppositions. More discerningly unconditional empathetic belief in history, please, is thus my plea. In the words of Christ to his disciples, astounded at his "hard saying" about unconditional monogamy (Mt. 19:8-12): *Qui potest capere, capiat*— May s/he who has ears to hear, hear.

V. A Practical Application

One recent interpretation of medieval devotion to the suffering Christ seems at first glance to have been written by someone with ears to hear and thus to respond to my plea.⁶⁴ Rachel Fulton's

⁶⁴Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (New York: Columbia U. Press, 2002)

massive and award-winning book, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200*,⁶⁵ like Karl Morrison's books on the hermeneutics of empathy and conversion⁶⁶ that underlie Fulton's book,⁶⁷ calls on historians empathetically to embrace what may seem to them a bizarre religious devotion. She avoids the crass appropriation of medieval passion piety described at the outset of this essay, the easy reduction of piety as a means by which the powerful kept the weak under the lash. In the end, however, Fulton also employs at least the language of postmodern *appropriation* rather than genuinely communicative empathy, that is, for her "empathy" seems to become something we do **to** rather than **with** medieval passion *devotés*, perhaps because she presumes that a theology of real Eucharistic sacrificial presence and imitative passion devotion first arose, were first discovered (invented), in the ninth century. My critique of Fulton's book here is intended as a friendly amendment pointing out how much farther the modern and postmodern historian must go if he is to enter truly empathetically into the world of medieval religious devotion. Unless I badly misunderstand him, Morrison explicitly rejects the possibility I am asking us to entertain here,⁶⁸ while Fulton remains slightly ambiguous.

Morrison and Fulton employ relationality, "conversion," and empathy to advance beyond a non-relational, ostensibly totally objective attitude on the part of the historian toward the *object* of his study, and they do indeed advance greatly toward a more empathetic, humane approach.⁶⁹ But the Christian

⁶⁵Note also the partially parallel art history study by Cecelia Chazelle, *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era: Theology and Art of Christ's Passion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁶⁶Karl F. *I am You: The Hermeneutics of Empathy in Western Literature, Theology, and Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). Morrison further developed these themes, with more attention to theological sources, in *Understanding Conversion* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 1992) and *Conversion and Text: The Cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah, and Constantine Tsatsos*

⁶⁷As she acknowledges, pp. 462ff.

⁶⁸See *Understanding Conversion*, preface, pp. xi-xiv, with a reference to his full argument in *Conversion and Text*.

⁶⁹In *I Am You* seems not to have been aware of or chose not to use, the phenomenological work on empathy by Edith Stein and Max Scheler. See Stein's Freiburg dissertation of 1916, published in English as *On the Problem of Empathy*, vol. 3 in *The Collected Works of Edith Stein, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Discalced Carmelite, 1891-1942*, trans. Waltraut Stein, 3rd. ed (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1989), for a strictly philosophical discussion of the phenomenon of empathy, avoiding Christian theological matters entirely. Morrison does refer to

claim goes farther, based on the pure, irreducible relationality of the Trinity expressed in time and space in the utter self-donative relationality of Christ on the Cross, to see empathy and compassion taking place not between two already autonomously existing persons who then go out of themselves into empathetic relation with each other, but rather in a primordial relationality that always already constitutes the very essence of the person because it is grounded in the utterly self-donative relations within the Triune Creator God.

Fulton argues that “imitative devotion to Christ in his suffering, historical humanity and to his mother, Mary, in her compassionate grief,” that “devotion to the crucified God-man” and the effort “to identify empathetically with the God who so emptied himself as to become incarnate from a human woman and to die a humiliating death” *begins* in the ninth century, not vaguely in the eleventh or twelfth century, as Richard Southern famously argued.⁷⁰ It begins with the Carolingian Franks’ effort to convert the Saxons to Christianity (pp. 1-3). This would come as quite a surprise to people like St. Paul and Athanasius.⁷¹ She argues that one of the main stumbling blocks for the Germanic Saxons was belief in the sacrament of the Mass with the claim that Christ was present “in truth” or “historically.” Affective devotion to the suffering Christ accompanies the *new* belief that the historical Christ who hung on the cross was truly present in the Eucharist (10).⁷² Only in the ninth century, at the Carolingian court and in

Stein’s dissertation in *Understanding Conversion* but categorizes her as an “existentialist philosopher,” without taking account of phenomenology and intersubjectivity as a major alternative to Kantian subjectivity.

⁷⁰Richard W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale, 1953).

⁷¹“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, . . .” (Col. 1:24). “Always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies.” (2 Cor 4:10-11), cf. Rom 8:17-18; 2 Cor 1:5-6; Philippians 1:29, 3:10; 1 Pet 4:13. For Athanasius, see *De Incarnatione*, 24-25, 27-29 etc.

⁷²Here, as a non-theologian, she depends on secondary works describing the history of eucharistic and sacramental theology by Gary Macy, Peter Cramer, and Brian Stock, one a historicist-liberal Catholic theologian, the other two postmodern secular students of history and literature. See Gary Macy, *The Theologies of the Eucharist in the Early Scholastic Period: A Study of the Salvific Function of the Sacrament according to the Theologians, c. 1080-c. 1220* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984); Peter Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, c. 200 - c. 1150*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th ser., 20 (Cambridge, 1993) p. 87-109); Stock, *Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 257-59. Fulton has read the primary sources by Ambrose and Augustine but has read them through Macy’s and Cramer’s eyes without a critical awareness of Cramer’s and Macy’s hermeneutic,

the monastery of Corbie, located in the newly Christianized Saxon region, did “the nature of the Eucharist--specifically of the change effected through the consecration of the bread and wine, and thus of *the relationship between the sacramental and the historical body and blood of the Savior . . . itself* become a matter for concentrated theological exposition” (11, emphasis added). She argues that this arose because the “Carolingian project of standardization provoked a new consciousness not only of the liturgy as ritual but also of the discrepancies within the interpretive tradition.” In other words, only in the

philosophical, and theological assumptions. Now, few *historians* can become fully conversant with the intricacies of patristic and early medieval *theology*. But, had she cast her secondary literature net more widely to include some classic works of a generation or two earlier, for instance, Gerhart Ladner’s *The Idea of Reform* (Harvard, 1959), she would have had a warning against following Macy so trustingly: as Ladner points out, the humiliated, crucified, suffering Christ was utterly theologically central especially to western, Latin theology and devotion, in Augustine and from him in the Latin monastic movements, more so than in eastern, Greek theology. This in turn is not surprising, since already for St. Paul, the crucified Christ was a stumbling block for Jews and foolishness to the Greeks (1 Cor. 1). She begins with a purported contrast between Ambrose and Augustine on the sacrament of the Eucharist: the former was concerned with the language to express the means by which change took place in the sacrament, while the latter was concerned with the nature of “symbolic presence” of Christ in the Eucharist. Unfortunately, the topics addressed in the texts from Ambrose and Augustine employed by Fulton here pass each other like ships in the night. “. . . for Ambrose, the operative question was not so much the historical reality of the creative transformation effected in the Eucharist *per se*, but rather the reality of the communicative experience of the sacrament effected in its present human participants: having been reborn through baptism, the catechumens shared in the eucharistic feast, and, if asked how the bread that they brought to the altar *became, or signified*, the body of Christ, they might reassure themselves that ‘it is Christ’s own words that make the sacrament, the words by which all things were made: the heavens, the earth, the sea and all living creatures. . . If the words of Christ have such power that things which did not exist should come into being, have they not the power that things which did exist shall continue in being and be changed into something else?’” (*Judgment to Passion*, p. 10, emphasis added). Here she cites to Ambrose, *De sacramentis*, and to page number in the Botte edition, but, to her credit, attributes the translation to Margaret Gibson’s book on *Lanfranc of Bec*, p. 72. The quotation she adduces is the one that figures prominently in Gary Macy’s cursory survey of patristic authors on the topic. She makes no citation to primary sources for Augustine (where the topic is treated in a wide range of texts), but instead depends on Cramer, Stock, and Macy. Her dependence on secondary literature here raises questions about how centrally her own reading of the Latin texts of Ambrose has figured in the development of her thesis. More problematic is the fact that the quote from Ambrose is concerned with how the change was effected (power of Christ’s words). Whether Ambrose believes in a real, objective presence or not, the quoted portion offers no evidence one way or another. Fulton has supplied a claim about what Ambrose believed about real presence (that it is found essentially in the minds of the communicants, which is a Zwinglian or Oecolampadian interpretation, without showing that Ambrose would have agreed with that. This is a classic case of the abuse of the argument from silence: Ambrose does not say anything in this passage about real presence but does say something about the means by which the Eucharistic miracle happens, therefore, he does not believe in real presence. Fulton then contrasts Ambrose’s concern with sacramental change with Augustine’s purported concern with the manner of Christ’s presence, whether it is symbolic or historically real. “In contrast, for Augustine, the sacrament was *arguably* more symbol than ritual (although neither exclusively), its effect not only to bind the communicants together in charity but also to provoke an act of remembering for the catechumen properly educated in biblical history, the physical elements of the sacrament, like the written words of Scripture, could be read as signs or figures inviting the reader to interpretation and thereby to an understanding of the sacred rite as a commemoration of past deeds, themselves recognizable through interpretation as acts of God’s love. In this way the communicant would recognize himself or herself as redeemed in the story of the God-man. Neither of these fathers was particularly concerned, however, to establish an exact causal identity between the consecrated bread and wine and the historical body and blood.” (pp. 10-11, emphasis added).

ninth century was a purported discrepancy between Ambrose and Augustine finally noticed and resolved in favor of the real, historical, not merely symbolic presence.

The Carolingian bishops, in Fulton's account, wanted people not merely to participate in rituals but to understand them, hence they set out on a process of instruction, made more difficult by the influx of pagan converts "for whom not only the ideal of Christian unity but, indeed, the very fundamentals of the Christian faith--that the world itself was a creature of God, that that same God had become incarnate in human history, that history was a working out of God's love for humanity, that . . . to be saved was to recognize oneself as a participant in this history--were quite simply nonsense, descriptions of a reality that was, in their view, no-reality."⁷³ The Saxon converts had been ritually baptized but the sacrament did not

⁷³For them, differences between Ambrosian "language of sacramental change" and Roman/Augustinian "language of symbolic presence" were either irrelevant or at least not very pressing. On this and related evidence, Fulton believes she has shown that patristic exegesis could support very different theologies of the Eucharist, which is precisely the conclusion reached by the theologically tendentious secondary account on which she depends heavily (*Judgment*, p. 15). I refer here to Gary Macy's surveys of medieval Eucharistic and ordination theology, which have played a significant role in contemporary Catholic church-political agendas. The controversy Paschasius was engaged in can be explained differently: the argument between Paschasius and Ratramnus might largely be a matter of their idiosyncratic and unpatristic use of specific terms (*veritas, figura* etc.). Fulton briefly notes this possibility (16) but then moves on to claim that the *only* way to make sense of Paschasius's emphasis on the spoken word and the physical historical reality of the eucharistic body is to realize he was writing for illiterate Saxons for whom he "translate the written [Frank-accepted] history of the Incarnation into a spoken history of the Word-made-flesh." The route by which she reaches the claim for multiple theologies of the Eucharist serves to illustrate. With regard to the extremely physicalist understanding of Christ's presence in the Eucharist found in the Corbie monk, Paschasius Radbertus's *De corpore* (p. 15), she rejects one possible answer--that he was merely working out of the patristic tradition, that God's power make this otherwise impossible thing possible as represented in her main quotation from Ambrose. Since, she insists, for Ambrose, "the focus of the transformative power of Christ's words as spoken by the priest was not so much the sacramental elements as the human participants in the sacrament" because Ambrose goes on to explain that if the priest used his own words instead of Christ's the catechumens would know that he was referring to their own transformation, not merely that of the bread and wine--which seems to this writer to be a complete non-sequitur. But this premise is crucial to her main point. Between Ambrose and Paschasius, something has changed, she argues: for Paschasius, the participants heard the words of the priest as causing a perceptible change in the elements' effect on themselves because he asserts that those who received unworthily would nonetheless receive the true body and blood--an assumption found both in the New Testament and in patristic authors. Moreover, Fulton notes that Paschasius's opponents were quick to say that the body that is called the mystery of God is not corporeal but spiritual, and because it is spiritual, it is neither visible nor palpable, citing Ambrose: "The body of Christ is the body of the divine spirit." But this is a debate about the sense-perceptibility of the **res**, not about the reality of the presence of the body of Christ. True, if Paschasius was saying that the real historical body of Christ is **sense-perceptibly** present, then they want to set him straight. But is that what he meant? And did his opponents, by saying "spiritual" and non-corporeal mean a Zwinglian or Calvinistic approach in which the historical body is non-sense-perceptibly non-present rather than that the historical body is really but non-sense-perceptibly present? The controversy turned on the use of certain key words in the Latin and everything depends on how one understands them--even attempting to translate them itself is a quagmire. Adducing postmodern performance theory to explain how listeners (readers) of Paschasius understood his exposition of Ambrose's exposition of Christ's words does not, in the end, really help.

“take” because the Saxons had not yet translated the ritual into reality. Alcuin, an Anglo-Saxon in the employ of the Frankish court, and the Franks realized that they had to “translate their religion into terms that the pagans could understand” not merely force them into a ritual (18-19).⁷⁴ In Fulton’s view, the Saxons are still bound by a naive belief in empty ritual, whereas the Franks have moved on to a more sophisticated performance theory: belief in real, objectively efficacious ritual and sacrament. The challenge for the Frankish clergy was to a “catechetical translation of ritual into narrative, of liturgy into history--specifically so as to prevent its translation into magic, or out of history into myth” (19). And the burden of the rest of the book, then, is to show how affective, imitative entry into Christ’s suffering helped along this strikingly postmodern process of translation.⁷⁵

In other words, only in the context of the first stages of conversion to a sophisticated and literate, constructed, understanding of how words perform and evoke reality could and did the claim that the Body present in the Eucharist is the same historical body that hung on the cross arise. The Eucharistic presence debate thus becomes an “artifact” of the Saxons’ conversion to Christianity. That loads a lot of freight onto a reconstruction of one moment in history, if from it one is then going to argue that the entire later history of imitative devotion to the crucified Christ arises here. The fallacy is to assume that the ancient Saxons would have struggled with the idea that water could change them as much as second naïveté modern people struggle with it.

True, to a postmodern mind the translation of ritual into narrative, liturgy into history, is a challenge: if one has already reduced the Christian sacraments either to magic or to mere symbolism and the Christian story to projection and myth. But the ninth-century Saxons had been through neither the Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment, nor the Linguistic Turn. Might they not relatively easily have

⁷⁴The reference here is to the canard of the baptism of Clovis’s followers in the river at sword point. See Daly, “Clovis: How Barbaric, How Pagan?”

⁷⁵Along the way Fulton adds the medieval Christian’s struggle to enter into imitative, affective appropriation of Mary’s co-passion, co-suffering with Christ, which developed historically alongside the affective devotion to Christ’s suffering, as an object of study.

accepted the objective sacramental efficacy of pouring water over their heads accompanied by sacred ritual words and viewed it neither as runic magic ⁷⁶ or New Age mythologizing?⁷⁷

The empathy of Fulton's project seems to be not so much empathy with Christ and Mary or their medieval *devotés* as empathy with the medieval person's **struggle** imitatively to empathize with Christ and his mother. Yet, as the first part of this essay has argued, Christians have actually been genuinely empathizing with the suffering of Christ, not merely agonizing over empathizing, since the time of Sts. Peter and Paul, and many traditional Catholics, Evangelical and Fundamentalist Protestants, and charismatic Protestants and Catholics appear to believe that they are able to do the same today--⁷⁸ to the disgust of many onlookers, as the furor over Mel Gibson's *Passion*, the latest in a long line of Christian aids to imitative passion devotion, suggests. That a film whose dialogue is in Aramaic and Latin should arouse such anger suggests that even modern people are not entirely incapable of genuine and naïve, not merely critical and conditional empathy.

Fulton finds the struggle of medieval folk imitatively to empathize with Christ's suffering fascinating and worthy of a big book because elite modern minds have largely lost the capacity to do this. Rather than simply, dare one say, naïvely, go back to entertain empathetically classic Christian belief in the way the ancient and medieval Christians did, she helpfully explains to fellow moderns and

⁷⁶See *Judgment*, pp.48ff. where Fulton's thesis becomes clearer: for the Saxons writing, drawing from runic assumptions, was magical, so, unless the Frankish clergy could bring home to them a new, Christian view of Scripture, they would continue in their magical assumptions.

⁷⁷In short, Fulton, without realizing it, reads the debates from Berengar to Zwingli to Calvin to Lessing to Ricoeur and Derrida back into the ninth century. Of course we (post-)moderns have trouble not reading these sources with those questions in mind, because our minds are divided, enlightened, made subtle, second-naïvetéed. But that is all the more reason why we ought to be especially on guard against doing it--our greater critical acumen, our second-naïveté ought to help us not to naïvely assume that pre-modern folk had the same hermeneutic problems we have. Perhaps they did. But how would we know?

⁷⁸Examples include devotion to the Stations of the Cross; physical imitations of the Crucifixion during Holy Week, particularly in the Philippines and among Hispanics in the United States and elsewhere; devotion to Padre Pio and other twentieth-century stigmatics. Consider, for example, the story of how the main biographer of Padre Pio, a Lutheran, stumbled on to the Calabrian stigmatic as a college student: through reports about the Bavarian stigmatic Theresa Neumann in the popular press. See Bernard Ruffin, *Padre Pio: The True Story*, 2nd ed. (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1991).

postmoderns, with the aid of Karl Morrison, Gary Macy, Brian Stock and performance theory and hermeneutics, how this astounding feat might have been managed. Such a book undoubtedly needed to be written for Fulton's fellow academics. But this underscores the gulf existing between university academics and common folk today. The book seems to say, "my, what marvelous devotion these people had to the crucified Christ and his suffering Mother! How can we, to whom devotion itself has become a doubtful category, something to be explained away since the Enlightenment either as primitive projection of the psychological needs of ancient naïfs or as the gender, class, or race projections of power groups (postmodern), how can we take this devotion seriously?" Fulton should be soundly commended for taking it seriously. But have we taken it seriously enough if we approach only via postmodern critical hermeneutic theory? Too harsh a judgment on the contemporary Academy? Consider Fulton's own concluding words in the appendix. *Qui potest capere, capiat.*

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Appendix: Illustrative Texts and Commentary

”What did it mean to pray to such a creaturely artifact, to the Mother who was herself a made thing of her Son, to the Maker who was himself--**depending on one’s point of view**--either an artifact of his (purported) creatures or the author of his own re-making as a man? Again, Augustine is most suggestive here, in his explanation of the moment when the catechumen may be said to convert--when in listening to the catechist narrate the history of salvation, the catechumen recognizes himself or herself in that history and knows herself or himself to be ‘loved by Him whom he fears’ and so ‘[makes] bold to love Him in return.’ Conversion, much like devotion--or, rather, devotion as we have seen it reflected through the exercise of exegesis, particularly exegesis of the Song of Songs--was an exercise of recognition of self in history; it was an incorporation into history, specifically into that history narrated in the text of Scripture, a history, as Augustine would have it, of love told with love, lovingly adapted to the understanding of the beloved. It was, as we have seen again and again in our reading of the liturgies, commentaries, and prayers, a finding of oneself in history, **or, rather, in story--a making of self** as profound as the making of the world, for what did it mean for a human soul to recognize itself in the history of salvation if not to recognize its making as part and parcel with the Creation of the world?” (Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2002], 468-69, emphasis added)

“‘History,’ or so the Philosopher once said, ‘describes the thing that has been, and [poetry] a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars.’ And yet, it is arguably only through empathy, **through a reading of the ‘singulars’ of history as themselves a part of one’s own story as a human being**, that we may come to a realization of those universals of ‘graver import’ with which we as philosophers and theorists have of late been most intimately concerned: with what it means to have a self, and what it means **to compassionate another human being**.” (469)

“the moment of empathy will itself always already be an act of interpretation, **for we cannot become one with the authors of the texts any more than the medieval commentators could themselves become one with the Holy Spirit** whom they believed to be the true author of the scriptural texts” (470, emphasis added).

Exactly what I would claim that the medieval author thought **is possible** Fulton says is **impossible for us and was impossible for medievals**. The Christian medieval author believed precisely because one could become one with Christ in the Holy Spirit (through baptism, incorporation into Christ, into adopted Sonship to the Father), because one could really, truly, historically become one with Christ in the Eucharist, so too human beings could truly become one with each other without losing individuality, e.g., in the Great Mystery of marital one-flesh described by St. Paul in Ephesians 5.

For the modern/postmodern mind, the one apparently comes at the cost of the other (union with the Other requires surrendering individuality) so all one can have is individuality--appropriating the Other, the text etc. as one makes oneself, the stronger taking over the weaker’s individuality.

”if we do not attempt this hermeneutic leap [of empathetic, interpretive appropriation], there will be no possibility for us of understanding the motivations of those whom we recognize as historical agents--the people whom we can glimpse, however imperfectly, through the physical, material, and textual traces that they have left us of their passions and lives. To take this leap, **to attempt**, however imperfectly, **the refiguration in our understanding of the** configuration given through **narrative of the prefigurative action of the past** (the terminology here is, of course, Paul Ricoeur’s), is neither historiographically presumptive nor critically naive but quintessentially *human*: it is to acknowledge

both ourselves and others as simultaneously agents and sufferers of that past; it is to acknowledge that the writing of history is itself an act of compassion as much as it is an act of observation and dispassionate analysis. To refuse this leap is a refusal not only of participation but also of understanding; moreover, it is a refusal of self as potentially mutable, of the possibility of conversion in the encounter with an Other, for what is conversion if not the willingness to look at the world through another's eyes, to see through the lens of another's reality--and to accept it, if only momentarily, as one's own?" (470)

One must ask whether the conversion referred to here an actual entering into, being transformed by the Other (after an utterly self-donative emptying of self), or a **taking** of the other into one's own, making it subject to oneself, appropriating it? If the former, it is classic Christianity (= Ricoeur's first naïveté?); if the latter, it is modern and postmodern and takes place always already only within one's already constructed self which can at best be remodeled ("refigured") by the already existing self, not by the Other. One does not, in the latter scheme, give oneself over into the hands of the Other, really give oneself over, to be remade by Him; one is still making oneself and using the other, controlling the other. If one retains artistic control, poetic license, over the Making of Self in this manner, does one really see through the other person's eyes or merely through the other person's eyes as always already under the subjective appropriation of one's Self?

I would like to think that Fulton means the former. Perhaps she simply seeks to claim both. I suspect the proof rests in the question studiously avoided in her book, as indeed it must be avoided by all who wish to be considered true scholars today: Does a divine Other infinitely greater than all the rest of us, truly exist and is He knowable and, precisely as our Creator, capable of drawing all of us into genuine personal communion, leaving us free, indeed, but free only to refuse, not free to construct, control, to make ourselves? In short, in the Christian economy, one is free to refuse one's Maker and thereby unmake oneself, or to accept, by totally letting go, by total self-donation, by entering into self-emptying suffering, the Maker's making and remaking of us. This is the real leap, from a (medieval) Christian saint's perspective. Fulton has brought us to the edge of the precipice, to a point where the Rankean and Enlightenment "objective" historian refused to go (preferring to operate from a safely impersonal position well back from the edge). She has brought us to the precipice. The question is what the precipice overlooks: is our leap of empathy a hop into a relatively shallow ditch that permits us to retain fundamental control over ourselves as we jump or is it a leap into the utter abyss of the One who made the cosmos? The Christian claim is not merely that one must have the courage to leap into the Abyss that is the *Deus absconditus* whose immensity was fully revealed on the Cross but that human-to-human intimacy and communication requires a similarly vulnerable leap into the abyss of the other, holding nothing back, giving up oneself totally. Is that what "empathy" means for Morrison and Fulton? My claim is that that's what it meant for medieval Christians, and that at the very least it was visible in crucifix and in the lives of the saints they employed as models.

Can one make such a hermeneutic leap conditionally? If not, does that mean that knowledge of those who made it is forever barred to those who cannot or do not make it? Is perhaps the first hermeneutic leap required of the historian the frightening leap of entertaining the possibility of such a totally self-emptying leap into the abyss of real knowledge of other persons in the past or in the present? In other words, does our shared humanness permit modern and postmodern people to know, really, people from the past (or other persons of the present) or are we forever barred from true knowledge of the Other, past or present?

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