The Third Yes: Invitation, Response, and Collaboration in Dramatic Theology

Martha Elias Downey

A Thesis

In the Department

of

Doctoral Individualized Program

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (Theological Studies/Theatre) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April 2016

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL
OF GRADUATE STUDIES

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Martha Elias Downey

Entitled: The Third Yes: Invitation, Response, and Collaboration in Dramatic Theology

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

          Doctor of Philosophy (Individualized Program)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

  Dr. Rachel Berger _____ Chair

  Dr. Gill Goulding _____ External Examiner

  Dr. Jarrett Carty _____ External to Program

  Dr. Mark Sussman _____ Examiner

  Dr. Christine Jamieson _____ Examiner

  Dr. Paul Allen _____ Thesis Supervisor

Approved by   _____
                     Graduate Program Director

_____   _____
                          Dean of Faculty

ABSTRACT

The Third Yes: Invitation, Response, and Collaboration in Dramatic Theology

Martha Elias Downey, PhD
Concordia University, 2016

In this thesis, I position theology and theatre as conversation partners in order to argue that a dynamic, dramatic theology provides a viable and vibrant methodology capable of revealing what Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar identified as the "fire and light" at the heart of theology. This methodology stands firmly on the foundation of revelation through faith, tradition, and reason, but moves beyond this to dramatic encounter and the possibility of participation in the glory of God. At the intersection of theology and theatre I find three Yeses: divine invitation, human response, and divine/human collaboration or *synergos*. Using Balthasar's *Theo-Drama* as a starting point, I engage with both theological and theatrical texts and practices in order to illustrate that the paradigm of gift as well as the aspects of "entering in," movement, and embodied, live action are found in both disciplines. Four different approaches are utilised to illustrate the third Yes of divine/human collaboration: covenant, the *plerosis* of incarnation, theatrical and musical improvisation, and the concept of human interconnectivity in twentieth-century philosophy. Two important texts, the biblical book of Job and Luigi Pirandello's play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, serve as proving grounds for the presence of the third Yes in both theology and theatre. By allowing the dialectic of divine initiative and human responsibility to play out within the context of drama, I seek to make room for a third way, one which is not biased toward either a theology from above or a theology from below, but one which reflects the ongoing dramatic encounter between divine and human actors.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

making me feel at home. My heartfelt appreciation goes out to my friend and fellow doctoral student, Kathryn Sawyer, who let me use her guest room and her car while I was in Notre Dame, and made sure I got the whole UND experience by taking me to seminars, Sunday night mass, and trivia night at the Irish pub.

Thanks to Marc and the competent staff at Montreal Improv who packed more into one workshop than I thought possible, and greatly enhanced my knowledge of theatrical improvisation.

My husband, Dean, was a constant cheerleader and supporter of my work, never once complaining about my erratic hours or my tendency to ramble on and on about whatever I happened to be researching at the time. I am indebted to my extended faith community for their continual prayers and encouragement, especially when the task seemed daunting.

Ad majorem Dei gloriam.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

The Intersection of Theology and Drama

> *Stories present us with gifts. We may choose to manipulate them by skillful interpretive devices, but stories that matter are greater than and outlive their interpretations. The temptation of theology has been to interpret the foundational stories given by religion and then to treat the interpretation as if it were that which was originally given. Perhaps that is what we have grown so tired of in theology and perhaps that is one of the contributing reasons for the return of stories in some quarters of the study of religion.[1]*

My introduction to the thought of Swiss theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, began one winter in the dimly-lit basement of the Theological Studies department at Concordia University. We were methodically working our way through a variety of texts in a graduate class focused on hermeneutics and ecclesiology, and I remember sitting at a brown folding table, papers and notes scattered before me, and experiencing the sensation of discovery and convergence, as if two of my favourite foods had just been combined into one tasty dish. The article we were discussing that March evening was W. T. Dickens's introduction to Balthasar which outlined the Swiss theologian's non-systematic approach to theology. Dickens describes Balthasar's fifteen-volume triptych *(The Glory of the Lord*, *Theo-Drama*, and *Theo-Logic)* as "rambling, repetitive, [and] occasionally contradictory" in nature.[2] My class notes reflected a positive response to this mild critique: "The very untidiness of Balthasar's theology is its beauty."[3] Specifically, I was taken by Balthasar's respect for multiplicity, his refusal to reduce doctrine to a system, and especially his view of divine and human interaction as dramatic engagement.

> *What do theology and theatre have to say to each other?*

My initial attraction to Balthasar, especially his five-volume *Theo-Drama*, led me to wonder about the connection between theology and theatre and whether these two disciplines could be shown to be compelling, compatible partners, each one enriching the other. To clarify, my question had less to do with the history of Christian-themed theatrical presentations or the enactment of biblical stories in the context of church liturgy and more to do with moving beyond

---

[1] James B. Wiggins, "With and Without Stories," in *Religion as Story*, ed. James B. Wiggins (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 19.

[2] W. T. Dickens, "Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Christian Theologies of Scripture*, ed. Justin S. Holcomb (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 203.

[3] From my notes for *Hermeneutics and Ecclesiology*, THEO 604, Winter 2010, taught by Dr. Pamela Bright.

the somewhat scientific or philosophical stance behind much of systematic theology. My hope was that embracing Balthasar's theological dramatic theory might lead me to discover more of the "fire and light" which he believed was at the heart of theology. Since that first encounter with Balthasar, my question has evolved to inquire after a third way, a third Yes which acknowledges both divine initiation and self-revelation (the divine Yes) as well as human experience, freedom, and responsibility (the human Yes) within the context of dramatic encounter. In other words, what does it look like for divinity and humanity to share the stage? And what is the outcome of this encounter? While these questions could be directed toward a study on the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and this event certainly makes appearances in later chapters, my question is not primarily a historical nor Christological one, but a contemporary one. The implications of God taking on human form will serve, in some respects, as a backstory to reveal how the divine/human drama continues to play out.

It is tempting to be pulled toward emphasizing either the divine or the human element of dramatic theology; Balthasar identifies these two elements with the terms *epic* and *lyrical*, respectively. In epic theatre, the standpoint is outside the action, objective. In lyrical theatre, the viewpoint becomes submerged in the story, rendering it highly subjective.[4] Balthasar posits that drama is a middle way, a way of engaging both divine and human characters without the isolation and distance characteristic of an epic stance nor the narrow, self-absorbed nature of a lyrical approach. In trying to avoid an either/or scenario where the two sides never meet, Balthasar introduces a dramatic analogy which allows one to view divine and human characters as members of an ensemble cast instead of competitors vying for the dominant role. Though Balthasar uses theatrical terminology in *Theo-Drama*, it serves mostly as a handmaiden for his theological exposition. It is my belief, and a fundamental assertion of this work, that a more robust engagement with theatre is necessary if one is to unearth the riches which these two disciplines offer each other.

Dramatic art can be traced back to religious rituals where celebrants impersonated divine beings, portrayed divine actions, or enacted forces of nature which they considered sacred. These religious rituals served two purposes: 1) as reminders to worshippers by reinforcing and retelling past events which were central to the religious narrative, such as the birth or death of a hero or

---

[4] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 2*, Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 54ff. Hereafter referred to as *TD2*.

divine being, and 2) as means to highlight and commemorate a present event such as the return of spring or the bountiful harvest. According to drama historian Donald Clive Stuart, religious ritual becomes drama when the lines between reality and representation begin to blur: "Drama hovers on the threshold of existence when, under the stress of religious emotion, the celebrant unconsciously loses his own identity and begins to feel that he is the god or hero or someone closely connected with the god or hero in whose honor the ritual is being performed."[5] In other words, in drama the role and the person become aligned so closely that the actor as well as the spectator does not or cannot easily separate them.

This is roughly what Samuel Taylor Coleridge meant when he coined the phrase "suspension of disbelief" at the beginning of the nineteenth century to refer to the leap of faith the reader makes when the momentum of a narrative is sufficiently compelling.[6] Coleridge, in conversation with his neighbour and fellow poet, William Wordsworth, suggested two elements which provide the necessary environment for this to happen: "the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination."[7] What the two poets sought to accomplish in their writing was to set the reader at ease by being able to identify with the characters and situations they encountered while at the same time piquing the interest of the reader due to the presence of the unknown. The words had to evoke sympathy for the characters and the world created had to be believable, but there also needed to be an element of mystery or originality.

Since that time, this term has been applied to a wider range of media including theatre and cinema, and the focus has come to rest more on the responsibility of the spectator or reader to enter the make-believe world through an act of the will. J. R. R. Tolkien took issue with this term, indicating that a well-written narrative would make no such demand on the reader. He explained: "What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful 'sub-creator.' He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside.

---

[5] Donald Clive Stuart, *The Development of Dramatic Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1960), 1.

[6] The full phrase reads "willing suspension of disbelief for the moment." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, c1817), see chapter XIV. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/6081/6081-h/6081-h.htm.

[7] Ibid.

The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed."[8] Despite a difference of opinion regarding the use of the word, "disbelief," both Coleridge and Tolkien agree that the potency of a good story lies in its ability to bring others into its world, a realm which is both coherent and attractive. While Tolkien preferred literature, with its capacity to create imaginative worlds, to drama, which by necessity is more closely tied to reality due to its reliance on human physicality, his observation that a well-crafted story exists to create a new world for the audience rings true for both genres.

There are several elements which position theology and drama (or theatre) in close quarters.[9] The first relates to Tolkien's insistence that any presentation of a secondary world or alternative reality has to be consistent and desirable in order to be believable. Theology, like drama, asks to be believed not on the basis of facts, but on the strength of its characters and the dynamism of its narrative. It asks for a step of faith, a "suspension of disbelief" if you will, in order that one might enter into the drama and discover not only a new world but a new way of being. It is no coincidence that theologians spend much of their time trying to explain this drama and arguing for its cohesiveness; in large part, they are hoping to render it more attractive. Second, both theology and drama have an episodic organisation similar to most theatre productions in which the action is split into acts and scenes.[10] In theology, this is especially evident in the collection of historic events, traditions, parables, stories, and prophecies found in the Bible. One feature of an episode is that while unique and dynamic, it is also nested within other episodes, in some ways a product of what has gone before and a precursor to what is to come. This nesting structure makes aspects of both drama and theology accessible through vignettes without having to comprehend the whole meta-narrative. Karen Kilby ably illustrates

---

[8] J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," in *Tree and Leaf* (London: Unwin Books, 1971), 36.

[9] Ben Quash concludes that drama draws theology's focus to the following three areas: 1) agency (people dimension), 2) necessary conditions (place dimension), and 3) wider plot (time dimension). To Quash, the central question remains that of freedom. See Ben Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4.

[10] The episodic nature of drama and society is discussed by Nelson N. Foote in "Concept and Method in the Study of Human Development," in *Life as Theater*, eds. Dennis Brissett and Charles Edgley (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1990), 63-72. New Testament scholar N. T. Wright divides the biblical story into five acts: 1) Creation, 2) Fall, 3) Israel, 4) Jesus, 5) the church and eschatology. See N. T. Wright, "How Can the Bible be Authoritative?" *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991), 7-32. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Bible_Authoritative.htm.

this principle when she interprets Balthasar's writings through several key images instead of attempting a summary of his prodigious work.[11]

Third, I believe that theatre and theology, or more precisely, the story which theology interprets, can both be classified as "live action." This infers that the incorporation of Tolkien's necessary elements, consistency and coherence, are always paired with an element of risk stemming from the presence of unpredictability; this uncertainty is what garners excitement in a story. Balthasar equates this dynamic with the interaction between divine and human freedoms. A particular helpful analogy here is that of the stage actor versus the movie actor. Theologian Francesca Murphy draws attention to some important distinctions between the two: "The movie-actor donates himself to the camera, but he does not suffer the give and take of his audience, as theatre actors do. It is the camera and projector which pass on his now disembodied image, as it were, the idea of him."[12] Two principles are at work here. The first has to do with the interplay between actor and audience which takes place in real time, rendering each performance dynamically unique. This idea is easily transposed onto the theological concepts of revelation, reconciliation, salvation, and transformation, all of which could be described as the action of God impacting a receptive, human audience. None of these are single, one-time episodes; each interplay is acted and re-enacted again and again in various eras and places, each time in a slightly different way. The second principle Murphy mentions has to do with being "in the flesh" as opposed to on the screen. In a theatrical performance, the actor's body becomes the medium; there is no cameraman to zoom in for a close-up and no editor to cut out unwanted scenes.[13] Because of this unedited immediacy, the audience is confronted much more directly in a live performance than when viewing a film.[14] The incarnation of Jesus as God in the flesh speaks directly to this dramatic feature.

---

[11] Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 8-9.

[12] Francesca Aran Murphy, *God is Not a Story: Realism Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 64.

[13] "Movies engender literal identification because the synthesizing process of editing is a technological imitation of ordinary human neuronic processes: our minds are constantly editing our sense intake, cutting and pasting our neural reactions into meaningful images. We may fail to notice the structural similarity of melodrama to movie because our notion of melodrama is dominated by the idea that Victorian performance styles were *histrionic*, whereas movies seem naturalistic. But the lifelike absence of stagey exaggeration is an illusion created by the technology. Movie actors do not *project* when they act before a camera; this is done for them, first by the zooming camera lens and then by the editing process." Murphy, *God is Not a Story*, 67.

[14] In a novel which chronicles the observations of a cinematograph operator in the early twentieth century, Luigi Pirandello writes about the transition from acting for a live audience to acting for the camera: "[actors] see themselves withdrawn, feel themselves torn from that direct communion with the public from which in the past

One final aspect of live action that should be noted is its irreversibility; what is done cannot be undone. The scene moves forward without hiatus, and whatever happens on stage, even if it is a digression from the script, becomes part of the performance. Well-seasoned and skilled stage actors are noted for their ability to incorporate malfunctioning props, dropped lines, and audience outbursts without breaking character or interrupting the story. Theology finds itself dealing with similar challenges to continuity and consistency: biblical accounts appear contradictory, factions and disagreements continue to arise within the church, and pressures mount from outside to adjust the biblical story to cultural norms. There are other characteristics shared between theology and drama which could be itemized here (such as the actor's faithfulness to the author's intent), but I trust that the three elements mentioned above provide enough of a foundation to move forward. What stands at the heart of both theology and drama is action and interaction and this, in essence, is what Balthasar devotes five volumes to in *Theo-Drama*.

<center>*Balthasar's Theo-Drama*</center>

Balthasar's positioning of drama and theology as working partners has inspired contemporary scholars in numerous ways, but of special interest here are those who have applied aspects of Balthasar's methodology to their particular field of study in order to glean new insights. For example, Kevin Taylor employs Balthasar's dramatic theology to delve into the question of tragedy in the writings of Thomas Hardy.[15] Samuel Wells acknowledges Balthasar's influence in his book, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*, which utilises key dramatic concepts to serve as guidelines for contemporary ethics.[16] Other scholars such as Kevin Vanhoozer and Ben Quash rely heavily on Balthasar's thought as they explore particular themes;

---

they derived their richest reward, their greatest satisfaction: that of seeing, of hearing from the stage, in a theater, an eager, anxious multitude follow their live action, stirred with emotion, tremble, laugh, become excited, break out in applause. Here they feel as though they were in exile. In exile not only from the stage but also, in a sense, from themselves. Because their action, the *live* action of their *live* bodies, there, on the screen of the cinematograph, no longer exists: it is *their image* alone, caught in that moment, in a gesture, an expression, that flickers and disappears. They are confusedly aware, with a maddening, indefinable sense of emptiness, that their bodies are so to speak subtracted, suppressed, deprived of their reality…" Luigi Pirandello, *Shoot!,* trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 68.

[15] Kevin Taylor, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Question of Tragedy in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013).

[16] Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: BrazosPress, 2004).

in Vanhoozer's case, the subject matter is doctrine and the biblical canon[17] and for Quash, his engagement with *Theo-Drama* relates to the interpretation of history with input from philosophers, poets, and dramatists.[18] Of considerable importance is the sizeable work of Aidan Nichols; his thorough and knowledgeable analysis of Balthasar's thought has made the rambling, intricate nature of the theologian's extensive writings more accessible to contemporary theologians and thinkers.[19]

Helpful in situating Balthasar within other trends in twentieth century theology is Francesca Murphy who critiques narrative theology for its melodramatic and self-referential tendencies and points to Balthasar's *Theo-Drama* as a truer representation of the divine/human encounter which is foundational to Christian doctrine.[20] Her application of dramatic encounter also extends to film theory (specifically regarding the depiction of Christ) where she explores the implications of Balthasar's aesthetics for Christology. Critics of certain aspects of Balthasar's theology include Karen Kilby who finds fault with Balthasar's over-emphasis on a theology from above which, she concludes, portrays the theologian's speculations as authoritative missives reflecting the mind of God.[21] Kilby posits that Balthasar's creative, innovative approach to theology has resulted in a largely uncritical engagement with his ideas. Another critic, Ralph Martin, a proponent of renewal in the Catholic Church, takes issue with both Karl Rahner's and Balthasar's influence on Catholic theology in the past few decades, notably their leanings toward universalism and their break from traditional doctrine.[22]

---

[17] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian* Doctrine (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

[18] Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History*.

[19] Aidan Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad: A Guide Through Balthasar's Aesthetics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), *No Bloodless Myth: A Guide Through Balthasar's Dramatics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), *Say It Is Pentecost: A Guide Through Balthasar's Logic* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), *Scattering the Seed: A Guide Through Balthasar's Early Writings on Philosophy and the Arts* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), *Divine Fruitfulness: A Guide to Balthasar's Theology Beyond the Trinity* (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2007*),* and *A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011). Nichols, who notes that the best way to understand something is to teach it or to write about it, has written these many volumes out of his desire to understand Balthasar better. See Aidan Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), viii.

[20] Murphy, *God is Not a Story.*

[21] Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction.*

[22] Ralph Martin, *Will Many be Saved? What Vatican II Actually Teaches and Its Implications for the New Evangelization* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2012).

Based on this brief survey, it appears that Balthasar's detractors are far outnumbered by his ardent supporters. As a case in point, Rodney A. Howsare and Larry S. Chapp have compiled a series of articles by theologians and scholars all centred on the rather ambitious title, *How Balthasar Changed My Mind*.[23] While a few of the contributors downplay their so-called conversion experience with the person and/or writings of Balthasar, the tone of the book is overwhelmingly positive, almost gushing at points, as the various writers outline the effect the twentieth century Catholic theologian has had on them personally and professionally. That being said, one must keep in mind that rigorous examination of Balthasar's contribution to theology is relatively recent. As scholars continue to converse and engage with the numerous works of Balthasar, I suspect that further critiques will be forthcoming. Hopefully, these will serve to confirm the merit and longevity of his creative approach to theology while providing necessary contextualisation, augmentation, and adjustment, thereby clarifying his theological contributions for future generations of scholars and practitioners.

Hans Urs von Balthasar's approach to theology, a unique conversation between systematics, aesthetics, theatre, and philosophy, stems in part from his experience as a Jesuit novice studying theology near Lyon in France. In particular, the young theologian reacted strongly against the Neo-Scholasticism pervasive in Jesuit schools at the time, a method of study Kilby describes as "a complete, self-enclosed whole … a thought world [which] was tidy, orderly, and in no need of anything."[24] For a young man schooled in music and literature, it was torture. Balthasar wrote about his frustration with what he called "the desert of neo-scholasticism" many years later: "My entire period of study in the Society was a grim struggle with the dreariness of theology, with what men had made out of the glory of revelation. I could not endure this presentation of the Word of God."[25] His determination to right what he saw as the wrongs of Neo-Scholasticism led him to write prolifically in support of a theology characterised by "fire and light."[26] As a result of his reaction against a closed system, Balthasar's work comes across as somewhat dense and untidy; his extensive excurses, unrestrained use of far-reaching

---

[23] Rodney A. Howsare and Larry S. Chapp, eds., *How Balthasar Changed My Mind* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2008).

[24] Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction,* 17.

[25] Quoted in Peter Henrici, S.J., "Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 12-13.

[26] Stratford Caldecott, "An Introduction to Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Second Spring* (2001). Accessed February 15, 2016. http://catholiceducation.org/articles/religion/re0486.html.

references, and a certain meandering style often make it difficult for readers to engage with his thought.

Nevertheless, there is something approaching a system in his unsystematic work and in my opinion, Kilby manages to come very close to describing it successfully without doing it the disservice of dissecting it. She does this by steering clear of condensing Balthasar's work and thereby reworking it into linear, logical form, a virtually impossible and ultimately self-defeating task. Instead, Kilby identifies four central images which appear repeatedly in the Swiss theologian's work, a method of engagement which serves two purposes. First, by focusing on metaphors and illustrations, Kilby provides a way for the reader to trace the various threads of thought woven throughout Balthasar's work. The images hint at an underlying unity similar to the recurring *leitmotifs* found throughout a symphonic piece of music. Appropriately, this approach turns the focus away from engaging with Balthasar on a solely rational, philosophical level and retains the element of mystery which Balthasar insists must be central to theology. Second, Kilby honours Balthasar's intention by not forcing the theologian back into a closed system. By plucking out a few images for inspection instead of attempting a cohesive, overarching summary, Kilby leaves space for Balthasar's work to retain its characteristic untidiness while still making it more accessible to the reader. I draw attention to Kilby's particular treatment of Balthasar because it has some bearing on the methodology of this thesis. In putting forward theology and theatre as conversation partners, it is important to give adequate breathing room to both parties in order to avoid oversimplifying the connections between the two or reducing either discipline. In the following pages, my aim is to avoid squeezing theology back into yet another enclosed system by allowing it to unfold within the spacious realm of the dramatic Yes.

Theatre, Drama, Narrative, and Story

At this point, it seems appropriate to clarify some of the terms which will appear frequently in these pages. It would be unfortunate if any of the ideas in this thesis were misunderstood due to ambiguous terminology. Therefore, in the interest of consistency and clarity, I offer definitions for the terms "theatre," "drama," "narrative," and "story" in this particular context.

1) *Theatre*: The word "theatre" has three primary uses: 1) a building or auditorium which houses performances, plays, or other formal presentations, 2) the world of actors, directors,

plays, and theatrical companies, and 3) a play or other presentation noted for its dramatic quality.[27] A further demarcation of the word is offered by theatre professionals: "Live performances by skilled artists for live audiences, performances that engage the imagination, emotion, intellect, and cultural sensibilities of spectators – at varying levels."[28] The live aspect and the presence of spectators is inherent in the etymology of the word; "theatre" is derived from the Greek verb θεάομαι (*theaomai)* which means to "see, look at, behold."[29] For my purposes, I will be using the word primarily in the sense of a presentation with dramatic qualities which engages the spectator's imagination, intellect, and emotion. Though theatre history spans a vast breadth of forms and styles including shamanistic and religious rituals, Greek comedy and tragedy, Italian *commedia dell'arte*, Japanese kabuki theatre, Shakespeare's innovative use of language, musical comedy, realism and the "fourth wall," *avante-garde* theatre, surrealism, and theatre associated with revolution, for the most part I draw upon the modern, mostly naturalistic understanding of theatre which has been prevalent in the past hundred years or so.[30] While still allowing for the presence of symbolism and expressionism, my use of the word "theatre" in these pages refers to presentations that seek to show the world in a readily recognisable form. This particular notion of theatre, one which puts humanity and the world we live in at its core, serves a practical purpose when associated with theology. Balthasar writes: "For in the theatre man attempts a kind of transcendence, endeavoring both to observe and to judge his own truth, in virtue of a transformation – through the dialectic of the concealing-revealing mask – by which he tries to gain clarity about himself."[31] Theatre, then, incorporates the notions of live action, presentation and performance, spectators, and a mixture of concealing (playing roles) and revealing (exposing truth).

2) *Drama*: This term has a wider range than theatre. For theatre practitioners, drama simply refers to plays in general or the activity of acting.[32] However, in common usage it also

---

[27] "Theatre," at www.oxforddictionaries.com.

[28] Phillip B. Zarrilli, Bruce McConachie, Gary Jay Williams, and Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei, "Preface: Interpreting Performances and Cultures," in *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., ed. Gary Jay Williams (New York: Routledge, 2010), xx.

[29] "*theaomai*," in Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed., eds. F. W Gingrich and Frederick Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 353.

[30] By naturalistic I mean theatre which reflects the human condition and experience instead of creating an unfamiliar, fantastical world.

[31] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 1*, Prologomena*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 12. Hereafter referred to as *TD1*.

[32] "Drama," at www.oxforddictionaries.com; Zarrilli et al., *Theatre Histories*, xx.

encompasses real life situations which carry a heightened sense of emotion, conflict, or excitement: in other words, scenarios which are particularly comic or tragic. When Balthasar speaks of drama, it becomes somewhat of a synonym for action or that which is not static. It seems reasonable to conclude that his emphasis is a reaction against the lofty philosophy and orderly systematic theology he found so distasteful in Neo-Scholasticism. I would like to fine-tune Balthasar's use of the word by suggesting that in addition to being dynamic, dramatic action must invite reaction. It may be poignant or pleasantly predictable, calming or shocking, slow-moving or fast-paced, but it must be action that engages the participants and offers them an opportunity for transformation. In this way, life itself can be said to be a drama, a unique blend of comedy (an upward trajectory) and tragedy (a downward trajectory), of epic (objective) and lyrical (subjective), of initiation and reaction. This broad sense of drama is what I reference when I use the word in these pages.

3) *Narrative*: At least one adherent of a dramatic interpretation of theology, Francesca Murphy, believes that the idea of narrative is somewhat limiting and carries with it certain negative connotations in theological applications. This seems to be, in part, a reaction to a branch of theology which appeared on the scene in the 1970s intending to reclaim the idea of story as a paradigm for God's relationship to the world. The narrative emphasis was itself a reaction to the pervasive adoption of the historical-critical method for interpreting the scriptures which, according to its critics, neglected analogy and imagination as important interpretive tools. According to Murphy, narrative theologians came on so strong with their case for the narrative quality of the Bible that they succeeded in supplanting God with the category of story; the meta-narrative (instead of God) became the subject matter of the biblical texts. Hence the catchy title of her book on the subject: *God is Not a Story*. Her warning is certainly one to be heeded by narrative theologians, but I would like to once again draw attention to Murphy's insightful juxtaposition of film and theatre because it has bearing here.

Film's primary medium is image; because of this (and especially since the introduction of computer-generated images), there is a certain flattening of the characters we encounter through film, characters who are constructed through editing, camera angles, and numerous other cinematic techniques. On the live stage, no such illusions are possible. As Murphy states, "Our bodies are the locus of our unity or singularity; you and I are whole or one because each of us *is* a certain physical space. And so, the stage actor uses her body to make her character a

unity, so as to project an integrated 'stage image' throughout a play."[33] In other words, drama portrayed on the stage is essentially linked with the body and not with image. The only medium the stage actor has with which to project the narrative is her body. This is why theologians such as Murphy insist that drama is live action, not because action is the essence of drama, as Balthasar seems to suggest, but because both action and existence are rooted in the body. The purpose of narrative, then, is to provide a backbone for drama. Of narrative and story, narrative is the more technical of the two, being a representation or a particular way of telling a story. Narrative is closely associated with text (though I would include oral history within narrative as well) and as such, can become the basis for drama or live theatre. It is essentially a way of organizing a story for performance or presentation to others; narrative can be non-linear and selective, but its task is to find a way to connect vignettes or episodes into a unit.

4) *Story*: Scholars and writers have different ideas regarding the relationship between narrative and story. Some see narrative as open-ended and story as closed, a story thus being a subset of a well-crafted narrative which may not offer final closure.[34] It is commonly agreed that a story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. In contrast to a narrative which might offer information through indirect means, a story consists of actual events or direct action. A story can be defined simply as "what happens" without any commentary, judgment, or historical context. One writer notes that story "encompasses all the events, settings, and characters within a story-world."[35] Story, then, is a relatively broad and simple term which makes few claims or demands on form but refers to the presentation of an event or series of events which are bound into one cohesive unit. To sum up, here is how I would contextualize the four terms. When a person wants to tell a story, they fashion a narrative which captures the ideas and characters in an organized manner. From this narrative, a dramatic script can be written which gives voice and embodiment to the story utilising dialogue and action. This script, when performed live in front of spectators, is theatre.

---

[33] Murphy, *God is Not a Story*, 65-66.

[34] Steven R. Corman, "The Difference between Story and Narrative," Center for Strategic Communication, Arizona State University. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://csc.asu.edu/2013/03/21/the-difference-between-story-and-narrative/.

[35] Ingrid Sundberg, "Taking a Closer Look at Story." Accessed February 15, 2016. http://ingridsnotes.wordpress.com/2011/09/14/to-plot-or-not-to-plot-part-2-taking-a-closer-look-at-story/.

Setting the Stage: Methodology

It is important to note that this thesis is not meant to be a substantial critique of *Theo-Drama* but seeks to use elements of Balthasar's theological dramatic theory as a jumping off point from which to place theology in direct contact with theatre. In relation to recent literature on Balthasar, this work is perhaps most closely situated to Kevin Taylor's engagement with the Swiss theologian's ideas. However, instead of using the literature of Thomas Hardy as a conversation partner, I propose a work by Italian playwright, Luigi Pirandello. In contrast to Taylor's focus on tragedy and Christ's descent into death, I will be looking at the concept of gift, a theme which figures prominently in both theological and theatrical applications. The five volumes of *Theo-Drama* serve as a general source for my engagement with Balthasar with specific focus given to "Elements of the Dramatic" in the first volume (*Prologomena*) and "Infinite and Finite Freedom" in the second volume (*Dramatis Personae: Man in God*).

The first Yes (chapter one) focuses on Balthasar's basis for *Theo-Drama:* the generous invitation God extends toward humanity to join in what is essentially God's drama. In casting God in all the primary roles - God the Father as author, God the Holy Spirit as director, and Jesus Christ as the actor - Balthasar showcases his reliance on divine initiative, a theology from above, if you will. While Balthasar insists on divine primacy, it is important to remember that he comes to this position by first addressing human experience in *The Glory of the Lord*. I believe that Balthasar's skew toward a theology perceived from above is a valid one and worth defending to a certain extent, specifically because of its implications for further theological exploration. When human experience and reason are positioned as the primary access points (and the only reliable measuring tools) for theology, the divine subject matter quickly exceeds the grasp of the methodology. There is no doubt that Balthasar was, to some extent, reacting to the influence of modernism when he chose to address beauty and goodness before venturing on to the subject of truth in his theological triptych. This historical context cannot be ignored. However, I believe Balthasar understood the trajectories which starting points can set in motion and, for that reason, was emphatic about landing on the side of primary divine initiative. On the other hand, Balthasar's position tends to place humanity in an overtly passive and underdeveloped role. Balthasar himself realised the conundrum when he wrote, "…who else *can* act, if God is on stage?"[36]

---

[36] Balthasar, *TD2,* 17.

The necessity of establishing parameters concerning divine initiative leads to an examination of the concept of gift in the second chapter. Engaging with the findings of sociologist Marcel Mauss in his careful observance of cultures based on gift exchange,[37] I posit that, within a theological context, the idea of gift is enlarged and expanded from a practice which reflects societal obligations and animates sociological attachments to a concept which points to transcendent attributes such as love, grace, mercy, forgiveness, and sacrifice. According to C. S. Lewis, taking the natural self as the starting point results in an unsustainable position for followers of Christ, putting them at odds with their stated purpose to imitate Jesus Christ.[38] Similarly, when one defines the concept of gift based solely on human experience and cultural practice (as Mauss does), the result is a significantly reduced understanding. Philosopher Jacques Derrida, aware of the incongruence between the concept of gift and its practice, concludes that the idea of genuine gift is realistically impossible, thereby alluding to the transcendent notion of gift. He writes: "An expected, moderate, measured, or measurable gift, a gift proportionate to the benefit or to the effect one expects from it, a reasonable gift... would no longer be a gift; at most it would be a repayment of credit, the restricted economy of a difference, a calculable temporization or deferral."[39] Drawing from both Mauss's observations and Derrida's speculations, I propose that a robust dramatic theology must be grounded in the practice of genuine gift-giving.

The role of gift (in both theology and theatre) quickly becomes apparent in the application. In improvisational theatre, gift is unapologetically placed at the forefront. The first rule of improvisation is "Say Yes – and."[40] Basically, this means that the actor must accept whatever is offered (say Yes) and in response, add her own contribution to the scene (and). If an actor is unable to receive (as gifts) the words and actions offered by other actors, the improvisation inevitably flounders. In theology, gift can be interpreted through a comprehensive view of love, this is, the notions of *agape* (self-giving), *eros* (desire), and *philia* (mutuality).

---

[37] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: the Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990).

[38] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 86-87.

[39] Jacques Derrida, *Given Time I: Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamul (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 147.

[40] My experience is that this basic rule is taught and reinforced at every improvisational training session. For a written version, see David Alger, "David Alger's First Ten Rules of Improv." Improvencyclopedia.org. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://improvencyclopedia.org/references/David_Alger%60s_First_10_Rules_of_Improv.html.

These three elements of giving love ultimately find their fulfilment and expression in the action of God through Christ.

This brings us to the second part of the dialectic: human response (the second Yes). Admittedly, human perception is the chronological starting point for any science, even theology, for we cannot know anything unless it passes through our own experience, understanding, and reason. However, when referring to the first Yes and second Yes, I am not using a chronological designation nor addressing the matter of causation, but speaking of foundational matters, that is, I am establishing a starting point which lays the foundation for all other premises moving forward.

On the matter of starting point, it is helpful to position Balthasar's *Theo-Drama* in relation to Friedrich Schleiermacher's writings, specifically select portions of *The Christian Faith* and his earlier book, *On Religion*, which is often identified as the beginning of modern religious thought or theological liberalism. Schleiermacher, responding to the Enlightenment's emphasis on rationality and science, situates the basis of religion in the realm of sense or self-consciousness. He writes: "The strength and compass, as well as the purity and clearness of every perception, depend upon the keenness and vigour of the sense. Suppose the wisest man without opened senses. He would not be nearer religion than the most thoughtless and wanton who only had an open and true sense. Here then we must begin."[41] Schleiermacher's work occupies a unique position between Romanticism and the Enlightenment, a tension which he harnesses in order to provide reasonable arguments for the experiential nature of religion. Balthasar's distinct proposal of a divine starting point (in part a response to modern liberal theologians) and Schleiermacher's preference for human experience comprise two of the elements which inform the second Yes.

In order to establish a robust human response, it is vital to view divine revelation and divine freedom as constructive, creative functions which serve to open up the necessary space for humanity to exercise true freedom as well. This makes the second Yes more than assent or compliance. Nevertheless, it is obvious that there are limits to human freedom, and the thought of Augustine (emphasizing divine determination) and that of Pelagius (emphasizing human

---

[41] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd.; Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1983), 98.

freedom) illustrate the necessity of embracing both divine sovereignty and human responsibility in dramatic theology.

Having introduced the characters (divine and human) and the *modus operandi* (gift), we now find ourselves at the moment of dramatic encounter when the actors engage with each other. Chapter four addresses the question of whether it is possible for divine and human characters to share the stage in true ensemble fashion. I have chosen the word "collaboration" to describe the third Yes, but, admittedly, it is not entirely up to the task. Therefore, I also employ an expanded definition of the Greek term *synergos* in order to flesh out the idea of loving collaboration. The first portrayal of collaboration is the idea of covenant in the Hebrew Bible, with special emphasis on the inclusion of a divine participant, a feature unique within the Ancient Near Eastern culture. A second model is the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God in human form. As stated previously, this thesis is not an attempt to crystalize a concise Christology, but the incarnation, and most notably the idea of *plerosis,* serves to demonstrate the interaction between divine and human by looking at the synergy of two natures in a single character. The third paradigm is improvisation, both in theatrical and musical settings, which lends the language of *attunement* to the idea of collaborative, dramatic encounter. Finally, three philosophical voices from the twentieth century, Paul Ricoeur, Martin Buber, and Jean-Luc Nancy, round out the portrayal of dramatic collaboration and interconnectivity through their insights into the innate relationality of humanity and the concept of "we." Though by no means an exhaustive treatment of the subject, this chapter offers four vignettes meant to reflect the cohesive but, in some ways, unpredictable "live action" nature of divine/human collaboration in dramatic theology.

In order to put Balthasar's *Theo-Drama* to work and my thesis concerning divine/human interaction to the test, the next chapters focus on two different dramas, one a biblical text and the other a stage play. In both cases, links are made to the three Yeses of invitation, response, and collaboration. In the first example, the biblical story of Job, we find one of the most well-known biblical narratives; portions of the text are frequently used in church liturgies and the book as a whole is prevalent in various theodicies. Numerous adaptations of the classic story (when bad things happen to good people) exist in contemporary culture. Drawing on the biblical text as well as theatrical plays based on the story, I explore the presence of Yes in the context of suffering and address some of the problems commonly identified in the story: the nature of the characters, the roles assigned to divine and human parties, and the ending which seems forced, clashing with

many of our contemporary sensibilities. This chapter serves to illustrate how a dramatic interpretation of scripture can inform and enrich theology by revealing the ultimate outcome of collaboration: through divine vulnerability, humanity becomes a participant in glory.

In the theatrical play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello, we find a direct contrast to the divine, first Yes. In Pirandello's tragedy we encounter a family of characters whose creator refuses to tell their story; in effect, it is a divine No. As a result of this rejection, the characters find themselves caught in the impossible position of having a dramatic story to tell but being incapable of realising it. The character of the Son refuses to enact the tragic role written for him, and in the final scene he exclaims, "I'll have nothing to do with this! Nothing! And that's how I interpret the will of the author who didn't want to put us on the stage."[42] The negations abound in this modern script which dismantles the conventions of theatre in order to showcase human powerlessness. Commenting on the play, Balthasar observes the effect of these refusals: "Existence is negated. The ideal and the real radically cancel each other out."[43] This drama offers numerous theological parallels, especially regarding the relationship between the author/creator and his characters. Pirandello's play creatively reveals the power as well as the limitations of rejection, but its most pertinent contribution for dramatic theology is the effectiveness with which it illustrates the eternal, static moment as the antithesis to dramatic movement and encounter. Some of the insights in this chapter come from research I conducted on a contemporary adaptation of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana. The inclusion of a theatrical production in this thesis serves to establish theology and theatre as genuine conversation partners (which I suggest is a step further than Balthasar goes in his theological dramatic theory) and gives space for theatre to speak and theology to listen.

The concluding chapter summarises the three affirmatives (Yeses) and relates them back to Balthasar and his desire for a dynamic theology, one with "fire and light" at its core. The question remains: has this been merely a theoretical exercise or are there real benefits to be gained from placing theology and theatre on the stage together? I suggest that there are at least two. The first is a fuller understanding of the theological concept of *perichoresis,* a term which

---

[42] Luigi Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, trans. Martha Witt and Mary Ann Frese Witt (New York: Italica Press, 2013), 86.
[43] Balthasar, *TD1*, 246.

applies not only to the societal Godhead but to divine/human interaction as well. The second is a call to action, to embrace "the other" with a resounding Yes. A fitting illustration of this can be found in Miroslav Volf's book, *Exclusion and Embrace*.[44] Volf describes four distinct steps in what he calls "the drama of embrace:" opening one's arms, waiting for a response, closing one's arms, and opening the arms again in a gesture which extends freedom to the other. The ideas of gift, freedom, invitation, response, collaboration, and unity are all present in this simple, dramatic action.

In this thesis, I argue that a dynamic, dramatic theology is possible (and necessary) in the twenty-first century, a theology which stands firmly on the foundation of revelation through faith, tradition, and reason but moves beyond this to responsive action, loving collaboration, and ultimately, the possibility of participation in the glory of God. This pattern, which I believe can be found at the intersection of theology and theatre, I have distilled into three affirmatives (Yeses). By allowing the dialectic of divine initiative and human responsibility to take place within the context of drama, I seek to open the door to a third way, one which is not biased toward either a theology from above or a theology from below, but one which reflects a lively conversation, or better, an embrace, a circle dance, a moving, dramatic encounter.

---

[44] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 140-45.

Chapter 1

The First Yes – Invitation

> *The fullness of what it means to be human resides in our longing for the wholeness that is brought to fulfilment in our falling in love with the Divine Other, who has grasped us first. As Pascal put the matter, we would not be seeking God if he had not already found us.*[1]

At the heart of dramatic theology is the coming together of initiator and responder in a collaborative, covenantal encounter. However, in order to arrive at this dynamic engagement between human and divine, this mutual Third Yes, we must establish certain groundwork. Specifically, it is necessary to differentiate the divine and human roles, to put forth our list of dramatic characters so to speak, before commenting on their interaction. This chapter deals with divine initiative, emphasising the primacy of God in setting the drama in motion. I rely heavily on the thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar for this task. First, his theological dramatic theory serves as a framework for positing the importance of divine invitation as a starting point for dramatic theology. Second, the density of Balthasar's work provides a convenient model for demonstrating how different foundational starting points establish different methodologies and interpretations. The final section of this chapter will deal with the question of passivity, a problem which inevitably surfaces when one employs a theocentric approach where God is viewed as the primary actor and humanity is relegated to the role of audience.

One could trace Balthasar's theological starting point back to his revelatory experience on a Jesuit retreat in 1927 during his doctoral studies. He writes about the abiding impact of that encounter:

> Even now, thirty years later, I could still go to that remote path in the Black Forest, not far from Basel, and find again the tree beneath which I was struck as by lightning …. And yet it was neither theology nor the priesthood which then came into my mind in a flash. It was simply this: you have nothing to choose, you have been called. You will not serve, you will be taken into service.[2]

---

[1] Brian J. Braman, *Meaning and Authenticity: Bernard Lonergan and Charles Taylor on the Drama of Authentic Human Existence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 100.

[2] Hans Urs von Balthasar quoted in Peter Henrici, S.J., "Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 11.

Though previous influences were arguably at play, and these influences become apparent in his writings, this moment is the one which Balthasar identifies as the beginning of his call. The notion of call or invitation is central to Balthasar's theology. One image which he employs to explain this dynamic is that of the early interaction between mother and child. The child's first sense of awareness, an awareness which carries with it the idea of existence as gift, comes through the mother. Balthasar writes: "But just as no child can be awakened to love without being loved, so too no human heart can come to an understanding of God without the gift of free grace – in the image of his Son."[3] The underlying concept of gift will be addressed in more depth in the next chapter, but here we note that Balthasar's emphasis on the primacy of God and God's initiative toward humanity seems to have roots in his own experience. Note that Balthasar's words concerning his call are decidedly passive ("you will be taken into service") instead of actively responsive, and he states that he had no choice in the matter. It seems reasonable to suggest that this pivotal experience which emphasised the primacy and sovereignty of God flavoured his theological viewpoint going forward.

Balthasar's Theology From Above

Balthasar states that, "Only God can express God authentically."[4] In seeking not only to describe but also engage with the Trinitarian God, Balthasar chooses what could loosely be identified as a *theology from above* as his starting point, meaning he attempts to investigate theological concepts from a divine standpoint. However, there are some indications that this might not be the best classification of his stance. By starting with beauty in *The Glory of the Lord*, Balthasar recognises that all knowledge of God is filtered through human experience and interpretation. In a brief article titled, "A Résumé of My Thought," in which Balthasar sets out to reveal the heart of his theology, he writes: "We start with a reflection on the situation of man. He exists as a limited being in a limited world, but his reason is open to the unlimited, to all of being."[5] This statement is closely aligned with the image of a child awakening to encounter in the mother's smile, for it suggests that humanity's self-realisation is found through awakening to

---

[3] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. D. C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 76.

[4] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics,* vol. 1, *Seeing the Form,* trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, eds. Joseph Fessio S.J. and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 615. Hereafter referred to as *GL1*.

[5] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "A Résumé of My Thought," trans. Kelly Hamilton, *Communio* 15.4 (Winter 1988), 468-73.

something or someone greater; it is the realisation that humanity has been granted the gift of existence.

Can one deduce from this that Balthasar is using human experience not only as a source of theology but as a foundational starting point? No, I believe that would be a misrepresentation of his intent. Because Balthasar is all too aware of the trajectory which starting points set one on, his initial focus on beauty is a means of introducing the foundational aspect of encounter. Consider a person gazing at a work of art. The human figure is at the forefront, but one's eyes are soon drawn to the object of the person's attention. Perhaps more precise terminology for Balthasar's theological starting point would be invitation; this idea places God clearly in the active, initiating role but also situates humanity in the constant and cooperative role of responder. Since we are only, always able to view existence through the eyes of the responder, Balthasar's attempt to characterise or define the nature of the divine initiator and recount the drama of divine/human encounter takes one into the realm of hypothesis to a certain degree.

This speculative aspect of theology, an attempt to describe or define the ineffable, creates certain complications for those who practice theology, and Balthasar is no exception. Let me draw attention to three difficulties which arise from Balthasar's use of a dramatic framework in *Theo-Drama*, particularly due to his tendency toward a theology which originates from above. The first is the impossibility of summarizing a divine drama which remains, in large part, beyond the grasp of human knowledge or understanding. Describing the interplay between divine and human characters can only be done from a human standpoint, and while Balthasar acknowledges that there can be "no external standpoint,"[6] his overarching theological dramatic theory often lands on the epic side of things, as if he were a narrator looking on from the outside. Karen Kilby is rather strong in her critique of Balthasar's point of view: "[his] use of the image of the drama, fascinating though it is, seems implicitly to locate him well above all that he speaks of, so that ultimately he is in a position to survey not only all of world history, but all of history in relation to God, and God's own inner life, and describe the whole to us as a single play."[7] Though Kilby overstates Balthasar's stance, her point merits some consideration.

---

[6] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 2*, Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 54-62. Hereafter referred to as *TD2*.
[7] Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 64.

A secondary complication associated with the image of a theatrical play is the demarcations (such as actor versus role and divine freedom versus human freedom) which it brings to the theological forefront. On the one hand, Balthasar manages to straddle seemingly opposite poles (most notably in the incarnation of Christ) with admirable skill by finding unity in the distinctions, but as Ben Quash observes, he seems unable to totally escape his Hegelian debt and resist "theoretical reduction." In other words, a commitment to dramatic unity means that Balthasar sometimes has tendencies to conflate elements which should remain distinct.[8] One case in point: despite Balthasar's commitment to freedom in drama, he is prone to sacrifice the human will to the purposes of the divine will and, according to Quash, assimilates drama into his own theological meta-narrative, thereby rendering the characters as pawns instead of free agents.[9] Balthasar's perceived need to represent the drama in complete form results in downplaying the role of the individual actor in order to serve the mission or the story. Perhaps one could say that Balthasar's theology stumbles when it forces the play metaphor instead of engaging with it as a dialogue partner. As mentioned earlier, both theology and drama must be given some breathing room in order for the interaction to be fruitful.

The third challenge one encounters in Balthasar's use of dramatic and theatrical categories has to do with methodology. In *The Glory of the Lord*, Balthasar states that, "The particular nature of one's subject-matter must be reflected first of all in the particular nature of one's method."[10] When Balthasar writes words on a page concerning the action and immediacy of drama, he is employing a medium which cannot fully deliver the content of his argument; it is too static. A book can be put down and picked up at a later time, but there is no such luxury in drama. Drama is confrontational; it demands to be paid attention to, to be entered into, to be acted out, to be responded to. It cannot be presented as an idea one can consider or ponder at leisure. While Balthasar does resist what Quash identifies as "narrowly 'modern' or Enlightenment modes of reasoning," the theologian's apologetic for *Theo-Drama* remains in the

---

[8] Ben Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 137.
[9] "But the content of his discussion of specific dramas (especially of tragedy) shows a familiar preoccupation with what looks like the subordination of individual characters to the divine will - even, perhaps, their self-immolation - and an identification of this divine will with that of the Christian God. What this shows us is that his belief in a divine realm of glory, beyond all being and bestowing all being, can itself be requisitioned to serve as something like a meta-narrative, to which particular plays are assimilated." Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History*, 138.
[10] Balthasar, *GL1*, 39.

realm of "aesthetic persuasion" instead of dramatic encounter.[11] Balthasar's means of engaging with drama is to offer interpretations of numerous theatrical performances including works by Calderon, Goethe, Schiller, and Shakespeare. These often-times extensive excurses are meant to draw the reader into the action of the theatre and offer an immersion into the divine/human story on an extra-theological level. It never totally succeeds, in my opinion. Instead, it appears that Balthasar seeks to persuade more by sheer volume of words and knowledge than by actual dramatic engagement, perhaps because that is all he has at his disposal. Even though he acknowledges the need for his methodology to reflect his theme, determining that, "we shall only know whether our 'dramatic' approach is fruitful or not by actually going ahead with it,"[12] writing or reading about drama proves to be no substitute for actually getting on the stage.

Nevertheless, I would not conclude that Balthasar fails in delivering a working theological dramatic theory. As he himself suggests, *Theo-Drama* is meant to serve as an apparatus or structure on which to explore and create and not as an enclosed or complete system. What Balthasar does manage to do particularly well is to communicate, through both biblical and theatrical examples, the theme of divine invitation. In fact, as I have already suggested, the idea of invitation seems to be a better assessment of his standpoint than that of a theology from above, which can be seen as too objective or removed from the drama. While Balthasar places the triune God in all the primary theatrical roles (author, actor, director), the drama plays out on a broad and open platform where, due to the generous invitation found in divine initiative, space is made for humanity to be a participant.

In order to unpack some of the elements in Balthasar's invitational theology, I turn to a section entitled "Elements of the Dramatic" found in the first volume of *Theo-Drama.* The first question to be addressed is this: What exactly does Balthasar mean by God as author, director, and actor? In Balthasar's theological dramatic theory, the author (Creator God) is the originator, the creative authority behind the story, the one who is responsible for its overall integrity. The author could be said to be "immanent in all the characters" because they are his creation, and yet he stands apart from them.[13] The author's aim is to unveil the secret, or as Goethe says, to "let

---

[11] Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History*, 137.
[12] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 1*, Prologomena*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 25. Hereafter referred to as *TD1*.
[13] Ibid., 272.

the cat out of the bag,"[14] but above all, the author is associated with a quality of magnanimity, making room for an extensive array of characters and forms.[15] Through the drama, the author seeks to open up a horizon to the audience, a horizon which offers meaning and results in an epiphany. The author seeks to give the audience an encounter with reality that is more real than what they experience in their everyday existence.[16] Balthasar writes that, "The author, with his shaping role, stands at the beginning of the whole production triad and ensures that it has an effect, beyond itself, on the audience, that audience which the author has envisaged right from the start and with whom, over the heads of the actor and the director, he has established an understanding."[17] What Balthasar does here is connect the author to the audience at the point of creation, before the audience ever becomes an audience. In fact, it could be said that the author creates the audience at the same time as his play, and in doing so, issues an invitation for the audience to become participants in the development of the story.

The task of translating the ideal into the real, of bridging the gap between the concept of the story and the story as live action, belongs to the director. The director's function is to transpose the author's intent into a live performance which compels the audience to feel and know that, essentially, it is their own story being told. The director guides the ensemble and oversees the interplay of the characters, integrating the vision of the author's script with the abilities of the actors.[18] Balthasar cautions against the author or the director overpowering the freedom of the actor, indicating that "the director is not a conductor and the actor is not a mere musical instrument. The director should devote his energies to rendering himself superfluous."[19] In seeking to be a meeting point between the author and actor, the director must exhibit receptivity and flexibility, patiently guiding the actors toward unity throughout rehearsals.[20] In terms of the triune God, the director translates to the Holy Spirit, the one who guides and teaches, making the divine author's intentions known to humanity via direct presence. This metaphor seems to fall short in one important aspect: in most cases, the director leaves the actors

---

[14] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe quoted in Balthasar, *TD1*, 272.
[15] Balthasar, *TD1*, 274.
[16] "Even when showing life 'as it is', the drama must show how it ought to be and why it appears in such a way, or why things are not as they seem." Balthasar, *TD1*, 262.
[17] Ibid., 279.
[18] Ibid., 298.
[19] Ibid., 300.
[20] Ibid., 300-1.

to their own devices after the play opens. However, if reality is viewed more as a rehearsal than a finished performance, it is possible to extend the dramatic metaphor a bit further.

The actor or player, according to Balthasar, is the one who personifies a synthesis between existence and truth: "On the one hand, there is the sphere of reality, embodied in the audience, to which the actor belongs by virtue of his humanity; and there is the sphere of an 'ideality' that is not directly accessible to this reality and that is presented by the performed play."[21] God as actor, then, is situated at the intersection of ideal and real, truth and form, the intermediary between author and audience. What this entails is the idea of "making things present," rendering a story three-dimensional, embodied, live and in person, and temporal.[22] The actor needs the author and the author needs the actor; both participate in creative acts which imply mutual interdependence as well as freedom. Balthasar describes it this way:

> …there is nothing mechanical about this making-present; it is a creative act for which the poet explicitly and necessarily leaves room in his work, both in terms of the depth of inspiration (the 'higher task') and of the details of gesture, intonation, and so forth. The actor too, in recreating the author's character, is a free creator who, like the author, must conceive and execute his role on the basis of a single, unified vision.[23]

One will recognize something of the author in the performance of the actor and similarly, one should be able to see something of the actor in the role he is performing. Ideally, the actor puts himself, his emotions, his body, his will, and indeed his very soul at the disposal of the work of art, the play. In the process, he issues an unspoken invitation to the audience to validate his representation by accepting it as real. The acceptance of this invitation, this reciprocity of the audience, creates a communion between the actor and the audience.[24] Once again we see that self-giving, this time on the part of the actor, results in a generous invitation for participation. In *Theo-Drama*, the role of actor is exemplified by Jesus Christ in whom divine and human existence cohabit. Seen as a mediator, Christ advocates for the author by rendering the drama into live action for the human audience to witness; at the same time, Christ represents the audience, identifying with their hopes, perceptions, questions, and reactions. The action which originates from the author, is realized through the director, and brought to life by the actor is ultimately on behalf of and for the audience; it is action resulting from selfless love.

---

[21] Ibid., 261.
[22] Ibid., 281.
[23] Ibid., 284.
[24] Ibid., 285.

In light of the above, it might be more accurate to describe Balthasar's theology not as one attempting to represent the divine viewpoint but one intent on describing and affirming the dynamic nature of the divine/human relationship.[25]

Divine Initiative: God as Primary Actor

The first Yes which we encounter in *Theo-Drama* is the divine Yes.[26] In order to understand the impetus behind this particular presentation of divine initiative, we must recognise two tensions or paradoxes which Balthasar works from in *Theo-Drama*. The first is the essential abyss between divine and human which he believes cannot be circumvented and the second is the tension between infinite and finite freedom. These two seemingly irreconcilable quandaries (the first relating to being and the second referring to action) are addressed on several levels in Balthasar's theology. First, in the simple scenario of the child awakening to the mother's smile, we find one existence birthing another existence and one freedom awakening another freedom. One could say that the mother in this image is both originator and initiator. Balthasar writes: "Unless a child is awakened to I-consciousness through the instrumentality of a Thou, it cannot become a human child at all."[27] For him, the essence of humanity (a self-conscious awareness in relation to others) is essentially a response to an outside initiative; it is never fabricated or created from within one's own psyche.

A second level of engagement with these two tensions can be found in Balthasar's Christology which demonstrates the ideal pattern for divine initiative and human response. It is the person of Jesus Christ who bridges the great abyss by possessing both divine and human natures, and the person of Jesus Christ who serves as the perfect example of finite freedom operating within infinite freedom. Ultimately, Christ's finite freedom finds its full expression in surrender to divine freedom and thus becomes a model for the union of the Christian's purpose and will with God's purpose and will. The abyss between human and divine and the tension between infinite and finite freedom set the stage for Balthasar to position Christ as a necessary, mediating character, Christ as a revelatory, *analogia entis* character, and Christ as a unifying character in whom the drama finds its final fulfillment.

---

[25] "…our starting point is always the given relationship between God and man as set forth in biblical revelation…" Balthasar, *TD2*, 229.

[26] Balthasar, *TD2*, 123.

[27] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 3*, Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ,* trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 175. Hereafter referred to as *TD3*.

Let me return to the image of the child awakening to the smile of the mother for a moment. Though the child could be said to be a free participant, not coerced into action in any way, the child's response is nevertheless contingent on the initial invitation (smile) issued by the mother.[28] This is the same line of reasoning Balthasar uses when he writes about finite or human freedom: "Here we have man, both singular and plural, thrown onto the stage, endowed with freedom, condemned to freedom and given grace to exercise it, with the power of becoming what he can on the basis of his own nature and constitution and yet unable to do this outside the divine freedom but only in it and with it."[29] Human freedom, then, is intricately tied to and given its capacity through a first act, a first Yes which is borne out of infinite freedom. In other words, the divine Yes, the Yes of infinite freedom, speaks finite freedom into existence. A closer look at the concept of freedom and especially the terms "finite" and "infinite" might be helpful in teasing out how these two freedoms are inter-related.

At first glance, it might appear that infinite freedom limits itself by making space for finite freedom, or that finite freedom is not worthy of the expansiveness associated with true liberty.[30] However, it is important to note that Balthasar is not speaking primarily about abstract concepts here, but is using the descriptors "finite" and "infinite" to indicate the type of person who exercises freedom. Therefore, an infinite being exercises infinite freedom and a finite being, of necessity, is confined to finite freedom. Because God is viewed as the primary initiator, human freedom is seen as originating and operating within divine freedom, and anthropology is said to find its "full stature" only within the person of Christ.[31]

Religious scholar James P. Carse, in writing about the difference between finite and infinite games, explores some of the same territory as Balthasar does in *Theo-Drama*. Carse observes that, "While finite games are externally defined, infinite games are internally

---

[28] "Finite freedom only exists in the interrelationship of human beings, particularly since each new human being comes about through other human beings and only awakens to 'being human' through the encounter with others, with their freedom and free response. The child arrives with its own freedom; and it is given (by its mother) this other freedom that comes from being in a society with other." Balthasar, *TD2*, 203.

[29] Ibid., 196.

[30] "The concept of finite freedom seems self-contradictory, for how can something that is continually coming up against the limits of its nature (not only of its action) be free? How can it be anything but a prisoner? Nonetheless our direct experience of freedom cannot be expressed in any other way but in this apparent contradiction. For if, in the face of all objections, we still have an irrefutable awareness of our freedom, we are equally aware that our freedom is not unlimited, or more precisely that, while we are free, we are always only moving *toward* freedom." Ibid., 207.

[31] Ibid., 202.

defined."[32] What he means is that something in the finite realm (such as human freedom) must have an external regulator while matters in the infinite realm (such as divine freedom) are free to regulate themselves. This differentiation allows for a type of freedom which has definite limits and is not open to every possible alternative. In terms of human freedom, a person acts within externally set boundaries, however, these boundaries are of the sort which the person cannot naturally control, access, go beyond, or even fathom. Therefore, all finite play is still free play because the freedom which is experienced is in keeping with the nature and ability of the player. A finite human with infinite freedom is simply not plausible.

In contrast, infinite freedom is a freedom which is internally defined and regulated. This freedom is distinct from chaos, a state in which anything is possible and probable. In chaos the choices are endless and there is no discernable pattern. Infinite freedom, however, is characterized by integrity and consistency, for even infinite freedom cannot say Yes and No at the same time. This would not be freedom, it would be confusion. Freedom is closely linked to the idea of *telos*, because in exercising freedom, one's character is revealed. Every choice or act exhibits a definite bias, pattern, or direction. Freedom could be defined as the ability to direct one's energies toward a certain goal.[33] However, true freedom must also include the options of rebellion and rejection, the choice to either embrace or refuse a directive. In essence, freedom becomes an impetus which sets one on a distinct trajectory, every choice directing, and thereby limiting, future choices.[34] It is important to note that Balthasar carefully separates his particular approach to freedom from philosophers such as Aristotle and Descartes who focus on the unfettered will. For Balthasar, finite freedom must always be embedded within infinite freedom, for the connection between the two is key to revealing the nature and character of divine freedom. Referencing Irenaeus, Balthasar states that, "in generosity God gave man his freedom; in forbearance he not only allows him to continue on his erring path but actually accompanies him, supporting him with his Providence, so that all man's error takes place within the realm of

---

[32] James P. Carse, *Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 7.
[33] In a similar vein, Bernard Lonergan references Joseph de Finance in describing the distinction between a horizontal and a vertical exercise of freedom. "A horizontal exercise is a decision or choice that occurs within an established horizon. A vertical exercise is the set of judgments and decisions by which we move from one horizon to another." Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 237.
[34] Balthasar, *TD1*, 255.

divine love."[35] For Balthasar, infinite freedom must never be separated from love, for love is the self-regulating characteristic of the divine.

Balthasar identifies two expressions of finite freedom or what he calls "openness to all being:" the first is freedom as autonomous motion and the second is freedom as consent.[36] Freedom as autonomous motion describes a freedom which reveals the person as self-determining, free in their own willing and choosing. This exercise of freedom allows them to differentiate themselves from others.[37] The second expression of freedom which Balthasar examines is freedom as consent in which a person freely aligns their purpose with another. Instead of being characterized by differentiation from the other, freedom of consent results in what Balthasar calls, "going out of ourselves and into 'the other.'"[38] For Balthasar, the opening of the finite self for the purpose of giving itself over to the infinite Being unlocks the potential latent in human freedom. Words such as "selflessness" and "self-disclosure" can be found in Balthasar's expansion on the idea of freedom as consent, and there is much time spent in teasing out the movement from finite freedom toward infinite freedom, coming from God and being drawn back to God. In *Engagement with God*, Balthasar uses the example of God delivering the nation of Israel from slavery to illustrate the idea that divine freedom, motivated by love, begets finite freedom. He writes:

> [Israel] knows rather that she has been liberated in order that, through her following of the God of liberty, she may enter upon a freedom that is truly her own. The foundation of her choosing, which is God's innate freedom, must correspond with the ultimate purpose of her choosing, namely, that she may participate in the liberty of God himself. Hence all obedience serves as a preparation for freedom.[39]

Balthasar posits that the only way a finite being can comprehend freedom is to see it enacted by another finite being, and thus he brings the subject of the two freedoms back to the person of Christ.[40] Besides establishing God as the initiator and originator (uttering the first Yes) and Jesus Christ as the willing recipient of finite freedom (uttering a responsive Yes), the relationship between God as author and God as actor situates freedom within a social setting.

---

[35] Balthasar, *TD2*, 217.
[36] Ibid., 211.
[37] Ibid., 213.
[38] Ibid., 228.
[39] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Engagement with God: The Drama of Christian Discipleship,* trans. R. John Halliburton (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 15.
[40] Balthasar, *TD3*, 19.

Balthasar holds that freedom cannot be manifested by a single entity; it requires an "other" for it to find expression. Therefore, the model for human freedom functioning within a social dimension stems from a Trinitarian understanding of God. One of the riches to be extracted from Balthasar's dramatic model is his emphasis on community and relationship. True freedom is not freedom for the individual, but mutual freedom enacted within society. Since finite freedom, according to Balthasar, is a reflection of infinite freedom, we can conclude that community and "being-for-another" are first and foremost at the heart of the divine.[41]

The Implications of Starting Point

Balthasar's insistence on the primacy of divine action is necessary if he means to frame a theocentric instead of an anthropocentric theological dramatic theory. The theology and logic behind identifying first cause is perhaps best illustrated by the thirteenth century father of Scholasticism, Thomas Aquinas, who composed five different avenues of reason (ways) which point back to a primary cause, that which we name God.[42] His five ways refer to finding primacy through observing motion, cause, necessity, degree, and design or harmony. Though not scientifically verifiable, Aquinas's five ways serve as a model for how one can, given humanity's limited and temporal status, make reasonable deductions about first causes. A starting point, however, need not always refer to causality or temporality. In some cases, it indicates an initial interaction which sets one on a specific trajectory, and I contend that this type of starting point, an encounter, is at the heart of Balthasar's *Theo-Drama*.

One way to illustrate the importance of starting point is to take Balthasar as a case study. The Swiss theologian's work has a reputation for being notoriously dense and difficult to grasp as a whole, due in large part to Balthasar's purposely unsystematic style and frequent, unedited ramblings.[43] I have already mentioned Karen Kilby's innovative approach which draws attention to significant recurring images in Balthasar's writings. To this I would like to add the

---

[41] Balthasar, *TD2*, 203-06.

[42] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), Question 2: the Existence of God.

[43] Edward T. Oakes observes that "Hans Urs von Balthasar has bequeathed to the world a theology that is extremely hard to assess. Subtle and vast, his theology is also composed of parts so densely and tightly interwoven that no component can be jettisoned, or even much altered, without affecting the whole." Edward T. Oakes, "Envoi: The Future of Balthasarian Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, eds., Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 269. Kilby identifies the following three obstacles to understanding Balthasar: 1) the size of his canon, 2) his indirect style of writing, and 3) his originality. See Kilby, *Balthasar: A (very) Critical Introduction*, 3-4.

observations of two other noted scholars, Aidan Nichols and Rodney Howsare, both of whom are well-versed in Balthasar's work. All three writers suggest different frameworks or keys through which to access Balthasar's thought; their various approaches serve to demonstrate my assertion that the most pertinent characteristic of a starting point, at least for my purposes here, is not its causality (first mover) nor its temporal primacy (begin at the beginning) but the trajectory which it sets in motion. Balthasar alludes to this notion on the first page of his trilogy: "the beginning is … a primal decision which includes all later ones for the person whose life is based on response and decision."[44] He continues, specifying the importance of an adequate theological starting point: "Whoever confronts the whole truth … desires to choose as his first word one which he will not have to take back, one which he will not afterwards have to correct with violence, but one which is broad enough to foster and include all words to follow, and clear enough to penetrate all the others with its light."[45] In this way, Balthasar acknowledges the difficulty of choosing a starting point which is robust enough to serve as a theological and philosophical foundation, flexible enough to allow for future questions and discoveries, and yet characterised by a simple clarity which allows it to pierce through a breadth of subject matter. In the preface to *Theo-Drama*, Balthasar employs the metaphor of a gymnast's apparatus, built for athletes to exercise upon.[46] It is an especially suitable metaphor for a treatise dealing with theological action, because it carries within it two necessary elements: a solid foundation as well as sufficient flexibility for progress. While Balthasar's metaphor lacks sufficient breadth to fully embrace the third element I have identified here (clarity), it is nevertheless another image to assist the reader in understanding the importance of starting point and its implications for trajectory.

I will use these three criteria (foundation, flexibility, and clarity) when evaluating Howsare's, Nichols's, and Kilby's means of interpreting Balthasar. Because an extended treatment of the Swiss theologian is beyond the scope of this thesis (which is meant to be a conversation between theology and theatre inspired by Balthasar's *Theo-Drama*), I will be engaging with their thoughts on Balthasar at some length not only to address the issue of starting

---

[44] Balthasar, *GL1*, 17.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Balthasar, *TD1*, 9.

point, but to provide some additional context for the selections of *Theo-Drama* cited in this thesis.

1) Rodney Howsare on Balthasar

Rodney Howsare observes that Balthasar's approach to the question of Being is centred upon the image of a child first awakening to encounter through the smile of its mother. Though Howsare does not devote much space to explaining the metaphor in his book, *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed,* he goes back to it frequently, noting how the image provides Balthasar with the flexibility to avoid the polarization of either/or and enabling him to draw on both traditional and modern theology, to connect finite and infinite freedom, and to show how comsocentric and anthropocentric approaches must give way to a Christocentric union of subject and object[47] and a Trinitarian model of Being.[48] The image of the mother and child also reflects Balthasar's practice of distinguishing but not separating, a tendency which Howsare connects to Balthasar's goal of wanting to bring the strands of theology together in unity instead of pitting them against each other. What Howsare has managed to pinpoint is that this simple picture of a mother interacting with her child brings clarity to some rather complex existential, philosophical, and theological concepts. Howsare draws out several ontological points which he believes are resident in the experience of the mother with the child:[49] 1) the child knows (and this is not an intellectual knowledge) that it owes its existence to another, 2) the child experiences awakening to Being as joy (the child returns the mother's smile), 3) the child comes to realise that existence is not necessity, but gift (life would go on even if the child were not there), and 4) the child's distinction from the mother is encompassed within a larger relationship, a union of love.[50]

Similar observations were made by psychologist Dr. John Bowlby in the mid-twentieth century when he developed his ground-breaking attachment theory through studying the effects of maternal bonding and deprivation. In fact, Bowlby went so far as to suggest that affectional

---

[47] Rodney Howsare, *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 70-71.

[48] "…since the measure of all things is finally in God, and since God is a Trinity of person in one Being – and this is something that comes out in the explicitly theological second volume [of Theo-Logic] – it should not surprise us that reality itself is structured trinitarian-ly." Ibid., 73.

[49] These differ slightly from those identified by Balthasar himself: "The infant is brought to consciousness of himself only by love, by the smile of his mother. In that encounter the horizon of all unlimited being opens itself for him, revealing four things to him: (1) that he is one in love with the mother, even in being other than his mother, therefore all being is one; (2) that that love is good, therefore all being is good; (3) that that love is true, therefore all being is true; and (4) that that love evokes joy, therefore all being is beautiful." Balthasar, "A Résumé of My Thought."

[50] Howsare, *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 57-58.

bonding is a survival instinct, more primal than the drive for food or sex, and its deprivation is linked to psychological disorders ranging from depression to sociopathy.[51] If the maternal bond is indeed central to human development and well-being, Howsare is right in putting the child's early, positive experience of the mother at the forefront of Balthasar's theology and his analogy of existence (*analogia entis*), thereby suggesting that the metaphor is foundational enough to hold strong throughout Balthasar's trilogy. Howsare makes this point by linking the metaphor to each subject matter of the trilogy: "If, again, we begin with the encounter between the child and his mother and understand Being in this light, we will see that Being appears (the Beautiful), Being gives itself (the Good), and Being speaks (the True)."[52] In addition, Howsare believes that the image is both simple enough to bring clarity to Balthasar's labyrinthine thought process and also flexible enough to apply to the various philosophical and theological subjects Balthasar covers. Based on Howsare's observations, it would appear that Balthasar has carefully chosen an elementary but powerful image which proves helpful in accessing much of his theology. By placing the interaction of mother and child at the heart of Balthasar's theology, Howsare gives a decidedly relational slant to the interpretation of Balthasar's work; this proves to be an especially important concept in *Theo-Drama*.

Another theme to which Howsare returns throughout his introductory treatment of Balthasar is a question posed to Maurice Blondel by one of his fellow students regarding the importance of the person of Jesus: "Why should I be obliged to inquire into and take account of a casual event which occurred 1900 years ago in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire?"[53] For Howsare, this question serves two purposes. First, it illustrates the context in which Balthasar was writing, addressing what Howsare identifies as both the "false objectivism and extrinsicism of the neo-scholastics and the false subjectivism of the modernists."[54] Balthasar's theological choices, when viewed as responses to the rigidity of Neo-Scholasticism and the humanist tendencies in modernism, become clearer, particularly his insistence on the primacy of God and his unorthodox methodology. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the question of the

---

[51] John Bowlby, "Disruption of Affectional Bonds and Its Effects on Behavior*," Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy* 2.2 (Winter, 1970), 77.
[52] Howsare, *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 68.
[53] Ibid., 12.
[54] Ibid., 13.

relevancy of the Christ-event highlights the essential, foundational nature of Christology to Balthasar's entire scheme of theology.

2) Aidan Nichols on Balthasar

Aidan Nichols, our second example, chooses to focus not on a relational scenario but on four words to interpret the works of Balthasar (being, form, freedom, logic).[55] In essence, he takes Balthasar's theology back to the philosophical transcendentals of beauty, goodness, and truth and indicates that Balthasar believes one engages with reality through the senses and particular, concrete experiences.[56] Nichols also makes note of Balthasar's emphasis on reality as a gift, thereby placing humanity in the position of responder instead of creator.[57] According to Nichols, Balthasar sees the transcendentals as bonds between God and the world, and even though each element has its distinct function in Balthasar's theology, his inclusion of the three together in one trilogy demonstrates a commitment to unity and harmony of being. Nichols cites one of Balthasar's favourite sayings, *Die Wahrheit ist symphonisch* (truth is symphonic), to explain Balthasar's choice of structure and theological methodology.[58]

Nichols's second word, form, relates to Balthasar's treatment of aesthetics and his attempt to answer the question of how we receive revelation. For Balthasar, it is through the beauty of creation and through the person of Jesus Christ who is the ultimate expression of revelation. Balthasar borrows his definition of beauty from Aquinas, locating it at the intersection of form[59] and splendour, and has no trouble translating this into the union of human and divine and extending the analogy to Christ's death and resurrection. By viewing these elements (form and splendour) as one instead of two separate entities, Balthasar draws a

---

[55] Aidan Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness, and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

[56] "Balthasar thinks that despite (or is it owing to?) our human perspective, we can succeed in grasping being, the bed-rock of reality, and that we can do so by way of the senses – seeing, touching, hearing, scenting, tasting – these humble, but also fascinating, faculties which, surely, delight more than they repel." Ibid., 1.

[57] Nichols comments on Balthasar's thought: "Reality is more fundamentally a gift to us than it is a construction by us." Ibid., 5.

[58] Ibid., 9.

[59] It is interesting to note that some of Balthasar's writing on aesthetics echoes some of the ideas found in the *Gestalt* (form) theory of perception which was being developed in Germany in the 1920s and onward by Koffka, Köhler, Wertheimer, and others. Though I find no record of Balthasar citing the psychological principles specifically, his preference being theological sources for the most part, his language seems to have been influenced by the ideals and principles of *Gestalt* theory of perception, in particular, the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. See Vicki Bruce, Patrick R. Green, and Mark A. Georgeson, *Visual Perception: Physiology, Psychology, and Ecology*, 4th ed. (Oxford; New York: Psychology Press, 2003), 103-135.

connection between beauty and love, noting that a confrontation with mystery, specifically in something removed from the observer, draws forth wonder, admiration, and even ecstasy.

The third word, freedom, is Nichols's choice for the theme of Balthasar's *Theo-Drama*. As we have already noted, for Balthasar, freedom has two expressions: freedom of determination and freedom of consent. As is to be expected, he finds both in Christ who is not only the actor in God's drama but also the one who consents to a sacrificial self-emptying in order to take on the role of mediator between God and humanity. Freedom, however, is ultimately demonstrated for Balthasar in the Trinitarian relationship, what Nichols describes as the "greatness and liveliness of their loving interaction."[60] Absolute freedom is expressed not only as continuous self-gift within the divine Trinity but in the generous invitation to humanity to partake in the triune life, a life of eternal increase. Nichols's treatment of *Theo-Drama* is more philosophical than dramatic as he traces Balthasar's movement from explicating the analogy of being to describing the analogy of freedom to focusing on the analogy of charity or love.[61] According to Nichols, Balthasar's analogy of being will always find its way to love because for him, existence is ultimately a gift.

Nichols's explanation of the final word, logic, begins with this statement: "Balthasar is not so much interested in absolute reason as in unconditional love."[62] For this reason, Balthasar's treatment of truth involves four aspects: nature, freedom, mystery, and participation. It is this last aspect of participation which lends some insight into Balthasar's perspective of truth. For him, things are knowable because God knows them, therefore all knowing, all truth, and all logic, are simply participation in what God already knows, in God's self-communication. As a result, all truth points toward the transcendent, triune God.[63] Nichols rightly surmises that while these four words (being, form, freedom, logic) might be major themes within Balthasar's work, they all end up, sooner or later, at love.

How does Nichols fare with regard to the three-fold criteria of bringing clarity to Balthasar's work, establishing the foundation of Balthasar's thought, and allowing for flexibility in interpretation? My assessment is that Nichols's concentration on four words does bring a good amount of clarity and focus to Balthasar's thought. As well, Nichols's expansion of each concept

---

[60] Nichols, *Key to Balthasar*, 76.
[61] Ibid., 61-63.
[62] Ibid., 90.
[63] Ibid., 100.

uncovers Balthasar's emphasis on love as a foundational, motivating element in his theology. Where Nichols seems to fall short is in allowing for flexibility; having corralled Balthasar's ideas neatly around four posts, Nichols has managed to summarize and, to some extent, systematize the theologian's purposely unsystematic (traditionally speaking) writings. To say that Nichols is working at cross-purposes to Balthasar would be an overstatement, but perhaps one could say that Nichols is not attentive enough to Balthasar's methodology and therefore, glosses over some of the deliberate, creative excursions scattered throughout Balthasar's trilogy because he views them as inessentials.

3) Karen Kilby on Balthasar

Karen Kilby, our final example of a contemporary theologian engaging with Balthasar (specifically his trilogy), draws the reader's attention to four recurring images: the picture, the play, fulfillment, and the circle. These are worth looking at in some detail because of their value in deciphering Balthasar's work and their unique position in the spectrum of theological methodology. By employing images instead of resorting to summarization or thematic reduction, Kilby succeeds in following Balthasar's lead by incorporating theological aesthetics as method instead of merely treating it as subject matter. This places her work in close proximity to Balthasar's proposal to make beauty the first access point for encounter. It is important to note that I cite Kilby's work primarily to highlight her approach to Balthasar via images and not to incorporate her overall critique of Balthasar which is a bit heavy-handed.[64]

The first significant image which Kilby sees in Balthasar's trilogy is a person viewing a great work of art. This image, which is arguably the focal point of *The Glory of the Lord*, captures two moments which, according to Balthasar, characterise the encounter of beauty: beholding and being enraptured.[65] By using these two ideas, Balthasar seeks to bring Aquinas's *species* and *lumen* (form and splendour) into one scene, inseparable. Balthasar states that "the content (*Gehalt*) does not lie behind the form (*Gestalt*), but within it," thereby identifying content with an interior light or radiance.[66] What Kilby finds significant about this image (looking at a work of art) is how it not only insists on a deep connection between the beholder and the splendour she beholds, but how it demands that the unity between content and form be

---

[64] For a thoughtful, critical response to Kilby's book, see Brendan McInerny, "A View From Above? Balthasar and the Boundaries of Theology," *Pro Ecclesia* 24.4 (Fall 2015), 419-24.
[65] Balthasar, *GL1*, 10.
[66] Ibid., 151.

maintained in order for beauty to remain. She observes that, "If perceiving beauty requires the perception of form, and form essentially has to do with the totality of a work, then an approach to Scripture which systematically pulls the totality apart in order, as it imagines, really to get to the bottom of things, is doomed from the start to miss all that is of most value."[67] While this is clearly in reference to Balthasar's critique of biblical criticism, an interpretive method which was gaining popularity among theologians in his time, it would be a shame to dismiss his emphasis on beauty as merely reactionary. What Balthasar manages to accomplish by utilizing the simple image of a person beholding a work of art is to bring together numerous theological themes such as unity, revelation, faith, grace, experience, witness, and surrender. This defining image also deftly sets a distinct trajectory for the practice of biblical scholarship, philosophy, and spirituality, keeping these disciplines away from the pitfalls of foundationalism and sensationalism. Beauty, as Balthasar's first word, serves him well.

The second image which Kilby identifies is the play. This figures prominently in the second part of Balthasar's trilogy, *Theo-Drama*. The metaphor of a theatrical play offers a way to interpret history as a dramatic story. At the heart of this image (perhaps more accurately termed a performance) is the interplay of divine and human freedom, and specifically, human freedom viewed as a direct result of divine freedom. In using the concept of drama, Balthasar seeks to showcase not only unity, as he does with beauty, but the totality of God's interaction with the world. Because Balthasar sees humanity as being thrust upon the stage of the divine author's play, there are no spectators to this drama. As Kilby observes, "the drama of God's dealings with the world is all-encompassing, sucking everything into itself, making impossible the notion of any place – or indeed any person or any thinking – outside the play."[68] In effect, Balthasar situates world history as a play within a play, the drama of humanity becoming a mere scene in the unfolding drama within the Trinity. Incorporating the image of a divine play proves to be a viable and unique theological approach and yet, it does not come without complications, specifically the fact that human beings, even theologians, can only ever have a very limited understanding of the divine story.

Fulfillment, the third image in Kilby's short list, is more of a writing device than an actual image. It refers to Balthasar's tendency to set out an array of options, all of which fall

---

[67] Kilby, *A (very) Critical Introduction*, 53.
[68] Ibid., 62.

short of adequately addressing a complex theological issue. He then proceeds to present the reader with a concept which encapsulates all the fractured ideas into one overarching theory, bringing them into completion and fulfillment much like a dramatic denouement. A prime example of this appears in the first volume of *Theo-Drama* where Balthasar lists nine different trends of modern theology: event, history, orthopraxy, dialogue, political theory, futurism, function, role, and freedom and evil. Balthasar admits that each "contains something right, even something indispensable,"[69] but concludes that none are adequate to provide a strong theological basis.[70] Balthasar suggests that his theological dramatic theory is the meeting point, the fulfillment, indeed the culmination of these nine theological streams. A few questions arise from Balthasar's proposal. Was this culmination inevitable? Has theology been moving all along towards a dramatic theology? Or has Balthasar cleverly set up a multi-limbed straw man in order to knock it down and build a better version? The answer, I believe, is No on all counts. Though the totality of a theological dramatic theory is no doubt overstated by Balthasar, he does prove it to be a fairly robust apparatus on which to practice a living and lively theology.

Kilby cautions the reader against accepting Balthasar's premise that not only has he managed to identify the limited theological options available, but he has also found the solution which will draw them together into one all-encompassing theological theory. What Balthasar *has* succeeded in doing is to demonstrate a novel approach to theology which bypasses many of the pitfalls found in the rational bias characteristic of modern theology and Neo-Scholasticism in particular. This is due in large part to Balthasar's Christo-centricity which serves as a guiding force throughout all of his works. In reference to his penchant for speaking in terms of fulfilment, Balthasar is not really touting a new methodology but a new way of framing Christology. As mentioned earlier, Kilby believes that at times the theologian oversteps his authority in its application. She states: "…to suppose that all things must be related to Christ is one thing, but to suppose that one can know the relation of all things to Christ is quite a different thing." She goes on to say that, "the strong sense that Balthasar has of Christ as fulfillment of all things seems matched by an equally strong sense of his own capacity to see and describe this universal fulfilling."[71] While this is a valid critique in some ways, it is one which could be

---

[69] Balthasar, *TD1*, 25.
[70] Kilby, *A (very) Critical Introduction*, 62.
[71] Ibid., 81.

levelled at most theologians, Kilby included. We are always speaking of matters beyond our reach. That being said, I believe Balthasar's specific tendency in this regard is perhaps a symptom of occasionally slipping outside the drama into the role of an exterior narrator, or to put it another way, lapsing into epic mode. In an attempt to bring all things together under Christ and establish the unity of truth, Balthasar can wander into ambitious extrapolation. Perhaps his overreaching is also a by-product of his ability as a polymath; whatever the case, at times it does threaten to put the cohesiveness of his work at risk.

It is possible to view the final image identified by Kilby, a radiating circle, as somewhat of an antidote to Balthasar's tendency to overreach. One of the advantages of the image of the radiating circle is that it clearly identifies the centre (for Balthasar, it is ultimately Christ) while at the same time allowing for variance and divergence in theological application and development. This points to an open-ended and generous theology unlikely to fall into the trap of enforcing a closed system, a weakness which I suggest is present in the concept of fulfillment. The rays of the circle run both ways, and for Balthasar this means that all things originate in Christ and return to Christ. As a side note, Kilby places Balthasar's convergence of nine modern theological trends in this category. However, I believe they are better suited to the previous concept due to Balthasar's conclusion that in *Theo-Drama*, "each of them can find what it lacks,"[72] a statement resonant with finality and fulfillment and the suggestion of a closed system.[73] Of particular importance to radiance is the idea that the centre, to some extent, is shrouded in mystery, undefinable and invisible.[74] The person of Christ and the action of the Cross can be identified as central, but they cannot be dissected or definitively explained. Of all the images, the one of a radiating circle seems to best capture Balthasar's commitment to a theology rooted in mystery and freedom. In addition, the circle also provides a way for Balthasar to embrace multiplicity instead of scaling down or even bankrupting certain perspectives or narratives. What the radiating circle does not provide is a strong framework for relating the different rays which are streaming from or moving toward the centre; it merely pulls all things back to the core. This is where the other three images identified by Kilby (picture, play, and

---

[72] Balthasar, *TD1*, 25.
[73] Kilby does admit that the nine theological trends could find a place under the category of fulfillment, however she chooses to utilize them as an example of the radiating circle. Kilby, *A (very) Critical Introduction*, 62.
[74] Ibid., 85.

fulfilment) must step in to provide a frame of reference and some context for relationship between different streams, characters, events, actions, and viewpoints.

I realize that I have taken a great deal of time to introduce the four images which Kilby uses as keys to engage with Balthasar's theology. The reason, I hope, is rather obvious: of the three scholars mentioned above, I believe that Kilby comes the closest to finding a starting point which sets her on a trajectory analogous to Balthasar's. She makes very little attempt at summarization or consolidation or even systematization, but wisely pulls on a few threads which are meant to lead the reader into the rich tapestry of Balthasar's variegated thought, free to explore for themselves. Howsare, through his repeated reference to the scenario of the mother and child, succeeds in setting the reader on a relational, encounter-based trajectory which is robust enough to guide one through Balthasar's themes of beauty, freedom, and truth. However, the simple scenario is rather limited in illuminating specific, complex theological concepts such as the Trinitarian community and the Passion of Christ. His use of a question regarding the relevance of the historical event of Jesus Christ is an attempt to fill in these gaps, but proves to be mostly referential and static, originating outside of Balthasar's work itself and thus providing no compelling impetus into his ideas.

In contrast to Kilby and Howsare, Nichols chooses to focus not on images or scenes which open up to multiple perspectives and foster engagement and fascination (as Balthasar so aptly illustrates with his example of someone gazing at a work of art), but more on delivering a concise treatment of Balthasar's trilogy through philosophical concepts and key words. His summarisation is no doubt meant to be helpful for someone new to the Swiss theologian's works, but Nichols's approach ends up resembling an attempt to contain the prolific theologian instead of opening a door for further investigation. While Nichols, with his "Coles Notes" version of Balthasar, does indeed make the ideas of Balthasar much clearer than the theologian manages to do himself, the beauty and surprise of encounter are mostly lost. If one is to set a trajectory for engaging with Balthasar's work, the starting point must be closely tied to wonder and fascination, remembering that Balthasar chose beauty as his first word, not reason or truth.

The Passivity Problem

Having taken some time to address and illustrate the implications of starting point, I now turn my attention to an issue which arises from Balthasar's choice of starting point: divine initiative. Because Balthasar casts the Godhead in all the primary creative and dramatic roles

(author, director, actor) the only allocation left for humanity is as the audience, a decision which, at first glance, suggests divine exclusivity instead of invitation. However, when one begins to unpack Balthasar's treatment of the role of audience, it becomes apparent that though a heightened view of divine initiative is definitely present, it is not meant to isolate or alienate humanity. Instead, it is meant to emphasise the abundant nature of divine generosity and the extreme lengths to which God goes to include humanity in the divine drama.

Balthasar indicates that in *Theo-Drama*, "man is startled out of his spectator's seat and dragged onto the 'stage'; the distinction between stage and auditorium becomes fluid,"[75] leaving no one excluded from the story. While this (especially the use of the verb "dragged") is strong language and seemingly indicative of a heavy-handed theology from above instead of an interplay of freedoms, one must view this phrase in the context of Balthasar's whole theological dramatic theory. Elsewhere, Balthasar tempers this idea of imposition with gentler references to freedom: "Through the paradigm of life presented on the stage, the spectator is *invited* to fashion his life along the lines indicated by the play's solution; at the same time he is *free* to distance himself from it critically." And later on, Balthasar writes that, "the audience's presence is *not passive* – quite the reverse; if the performance is to succeed, it must be *active*, a *willingness* to enter into the action."[76] Balthasar cites German philosopher and playwright, Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, to reinforce his stance regarding a free audience:

> True art is not concerned merely with some momentary illusion. Its concern is a serious one: it does not wish merely to transport man to a momentary dream of freedom, it wants to make him really and truly free, by awakening a power in him, and by exercising and shaping it, so that he may transform the world of the senses … into a free creation of our spirit.[77]

I am making a case for the invitational and responsive nature of Balthasar's *Theo-Drama*, but his exposition of the topic is not without problems. For instance, in his description of the theatrical dynamic in erotic terms, he states that the stage is "resolute aggression" and the audience is "female, expectation."[78] It is not uncommon for dramatists to associate the stage, especially the thrust stage which is closely affiliated with Shakespearean plays, with similar sexual imagery (stage as male and audience as female). Though the power of the stage is

---

[75] Balthasar, *TD2*, 17.
[76] Balthasar, *TD1*, 306. Emphasis mine.
[77] Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller as quoted in Balthasar, *TD1*, 267.
[78] Balthasar, *TD1*, 306.

acknowledged in these gendered metaphors, the sense need not be one of dominance; the depiction carries an implication of intimacy between the actors onstage and those witnessing the performance. Nevertheless, Balthasar's statement above strikes a discordant note when read in tandem with his writings on finite and infinite freedom.[79] A case could be made that Balthasar is merely citing one viewpoint found in theatre theory, or perhaps his inclusion of this metaphor is partially a reaction to modernist, self-reliant tendencies, but I believe that it does hint at Balthasar's occasional over-zealous characterisation of the divine actor's initiative which results in a lessening of human freedom.

These lapses in consistency notwithstanding, in general Balthasar infuses the audience with considerable potency, despite shutting it out of any performing role, at least initially. Balthasar calls members of the audience to be both spectators in the theatre while at the same time being actors in the "play of existence."[80] In straddling the two realms, the audience becomes aware that the stage, though not equal to real life, is not entirely cut off from the world. Balthasar also refers to the pleasure of witnessing a live, theatrical performance. This pleasure goes beyond the excitement an audience experiences when viewing an aspect of life on display, even beyond the anticipation of encountering meaning in the midst of that experience. Balthasar locates the pleasure of the theatrical audience in the uniting of two elements: self-projection (with the possibility of transformation) and solution (insight). Shakespeare famously wrote that, "All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players."[81] These lines lead into a monologue by the melancholy character, Jacques, in which he describes the seven stages of man's life and compares them to seven acts in a play. Because of its sobering tone and its depressing last line which alludes to the hopeless end of man, "sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything," the speech serves as a sobering reminder of the fate that awaits all human beings.[82] However, its main purpose is to heighten the joy contained in the following acts and ultimately, prove the fool, Jacques, wrong. This famous monologue illustrates the point being made by Balthasar about the audience: it comes not only to witness life in its joys and sorrows but also to feel alive. In order to do this, Balthasar insists that the audience must come to the performance open, responsive,

---

[79] Balthasar, *TD2*, 189-334.
[80] Balthasar, *TD1*, 309.
[81] William Shakespeare, *As You Like it*, Act II Scene VII. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://shakespeare.mit.edu/asyoulikeit/full.html.
[82] Ibid.

and willing to be drawn into the drama. There must be no room for neutral or objective observation, for this would defeat the audience's ability to be carried away to places it might otherwise avoid, places which deeply disturb, places which are painful, or places which urge one toward transformation.[83]

Nevertheless, the openness of the audience is not without qualification. Though not technically an actor on the stage, the audience nevertheless has an active expectation, "hoping to discover itself in this projected form, hoping to find its own tracks – and the excited anticipation of what may be encountered along this road, what will happen wither from without or from above."[84] Balthasar indicates that the audience has various expectations: there is an expectation that the performance will have some sort of effect, there is an expectation that the play will both resemble life and be more than life, and there is also an expectation that the performance will offer a solution or revelation to the audience, be it as simple as the ability to laugh in the face of troubles or as profound as a call to action. Balthasar suggests that, "the performance lets the audience participate … in a way that seems to give it a sense of supernatural insight."[85] At the heart of these expectations is the desire to be changed.

The expectations which the audience brings into the theatre are necessarily accompanied by choices: the audience may judge the performance to be substandard and demonstrate that disappointment by boo-ing, hissing, or leaving the theatre. The audience may choose either to be carried along by the performance or to disengage from it, refusing to believe the story presented by the actors. While an audience sitting in its seats might appear relatively passive and purely receptive, this is simply not the case.

Philosopher Jacques Ranciére insists that listening and gazing are not passive pastimes, and challenges what he believes is an artificial opposition between viewing and acting. "The spectator also acts, like the pupil or scholar. She observes, selects, compares, interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of places."[86] Instead of trying to close the divide between the actor and spectator, thereby making the spectator part of the action, Ranciére suggests that we adjust our perception of the spectator:

---

[83] Balthasar, *TD1*, 306, 309.
[84] Ibid., 261.
[85] Ibid., 310.
[86] Jacques Ranciére, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2011), 13.

Being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. It is our normal situation. We also learn and teach, act and know as spectators who all the time link what we see to what we have seen and said, done and dreamed. There is no more a privileged form than there is a privileged starting point. … We do not have to transform spectators into actors and ignoramuses into scholars. We have to recognize the knowledge at work in the ignoramus and the activity peculiar to the spectator. Every spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor, every man of action, is the spectator of the same story.[87]

What Ranciére so insightfully points out here is that the theatre has overvalued the actor and underestimated the watching, listening spectator. While Balthasar would have the audience of humanity dragged on stage in his theological dramatic theory, Ranciére sees no need to eject the audience from its place. He views the actor and the spectator as two different members of a community, a community composed of narrators and interpreters, of teachers and learners. The theatre is best served by a robust community of actors and narrators as well as spectators and interpreters. The emancipation of the spectator, according to Ranciére, is obtained by blurring the lines between those who act and those who look, and by making the boundary between stage and audience fluid, as Balthasar suggests. This is achieved not by making everyone an actor but by recognizing that spectators are important and vital members of a collective body.[88]

Re-thinking the role of spectator is helpful in offsetting or reframing some of Balthasar's apparent heavy-handedness when it comes to divine initiative.[89] Placing all the emphasis on the authority, sovereignty, and absolute action of God in *Theo-Drama* runs the risk of having divine freedom overshadow human freedom. Therefore, it seems more fitting to reorient dramatic theology around the idea of invitation. What comes to the forefront, then, is a benevolent author offering a grand story, an epic drama, an all-encompassing performance to an expectant, watchful audience, and inviting its participation. Invitation is a forceful concept in many ways, because though it can be refused, it can never be undone, and though it is compelling, it should

---

[87] Ibid., 17.

[88] Ibid., 19.

[89] To be fair, Balthasar does not portray the human subject as entirely passive. Rodney Howsare comments: "Now, for Balthasar, the subject is not simply passive in this process. The subject is clearly spiritually equipped to receive, judge and name the things which appear. Knowing occurs as a result of an encounter between a subject and an object – and their common belonging in Being must always be kept in mind – but what is known is determined by what the object gives of itself. The proper attitude of the subject, then, is not that of grasping or attempting to control the object (which is why Balthasar rejects the modern notion that knowledge is power), but is that of an active receptivity which makes a space for the object to unfold for the subject." Howsare, *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 79.

never be associated with aggression. Every invitation requires at least two parties, the initiator and the responder, but these parties must never be posed as opponents or rivals; invitation cannot be reduced to a power struggle. What lies at the heart of invitation is the idea of gift, not compulsion.

Chapter 2

Is Gift Possible?

> *The name of God is an event, or rather … it harbors an event … An event is an irruption, an excess, an overflow, a gift beyond economy, which tears open the closed circles of economics.*[1]

Before moving on to examine the element of human response, the second Yes, it is necessary to look more closely at the concept of gift which I believe is foundational to both theology and theatre. Dramatic theology must have generosity at its core in order for genuine encounter to occur. More specifically, divine initiative and human responsiveness are meaningless without the presence of self-gift. If there is no benevolent offer from one party to another, their coming together can never escape the dynamics of control and power; in other words, authentic collaboration and community rely on gift-giving. In this chapter, I look at the concept of gift in sociology (Marcel Mauss) and philosophy (Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion) in order to bring some precision to the term before explaining the function of gift in both theology and theatre. I contend that the outward-focused, over-abundant nature of gift is in constant operation behind the scenes in dramatic theology, generating forward motion while resisting self-serving egoism, entropic disorder, and rigidity. One could say that the power of Yes is found in its dynamic and catalytic quality. Yes is an invitation, a gesture of communion, a declaration of intent, and an opening up of possibilities, but all this is true because it is first a gift. It is vital to understand the risky magnanimity of gift in order to fully grasp the potency of the dramatic Yes.

If we take a moment to think about gift-giving rituals in contemporary society, the experience is, for the most part, an impoverished one. Instead of involving genuine, loving generosity, our gift-giving rituals tend to revolve around transactions, expectations, status, and even forms of bribery. Despite this tarnished model of gift, people nevertheless instinctively seem to recognise the difference between good and bad gifts and have some concept of the perfect gift. Russell W. Belk, who researches consumer practices and their relation to material goods, finds six characteristics of the perfect gift revealed in the O. Henry story, "The Gift of the

---

[1] John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: a theology of the event* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 2-4.

Magi." The story tells of a young, destitute couple who give Christmas gifts to each other at great cost to themselves. When the husband presents his wife with jeweled combs for her hair (which she has cut off to fund her purchase for him) and the wife gives her husband a gold watch chain (for a watch which he has sold to acquire his gift for her), they are both left with, for all intents and purposes, useless gifts. And yet, Belk observes, "we are moved by the certainty that each lover has given to the other a pure and perfect gift."[2] This recognition suggests that what is most important in a gift is not the actual, material item, but the intent and symbolic message behind it. How do we recognize or characterise the perfect gift? Belk suggests that the giver's "agapic love" toward the recipient, a concept which has much in common with the Hebrew idea of *chesed* (mercy and kindness based on relationship), is what fuels the perfect gift.[3] "When apagic love motivates a gift, it is not selected and given to communicate a calculated message at all, but rather to express and celebrate our love for the other. It is spontaneous, affective, and celebratory rather than premeditated, cognitive, and calculated to achieve certain ends."[4]

Gift, according to Belk, must be free from conditions and manipulation. Drawing from the story of Della and Jim in "The Gift of the Magi," Belk highlights six characteristics of the perfect gift: 1) Sacrifice. The giver exhibits selfless generosity and commitment to the beloved through their willingness to make an extraordinary sacrifice. 2) Altruism. The perfect gift displays the giver's concern for the recipient's well-being apart from self-serving egoism or utilitarian motivation. 3) Luxury. The perfect gift is not a necessity filling lower-order needs; it falls within the category of extravagance, being a "tangible demonstration of the richness and depth of the love the giver feels toward the recipient."[5] 4) Appropriateness. The perfect gift is unique and specifically suited for the recipient. It reveals that the giver is attentive to the recipient's wishes and desires without being told outright what they are and shows a profound understanding of and empathy toward the recipient. 5) Surprise. A gift that is requested negates its value, Belk insists. The perfect gift is given sans obligation, reflecting magnanimity on the part of the giver. Its spontaneity reveals its altruistic motive. 6) Delight. The perfect gift is something the recipient desires and it brings them delight. Despite being extravagant, it carries

---

[2] Russell W. Belk, "The Perfect Gift," in *Gift Giving: A Research Anthology*, eds. Cele Otnes and Richard F. Beltramini (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1996), 59.

[3] Belk, "The Perfect Gift," 60.

[4] Ibid., 61.

[5] Ibid., 65.

no indication of bribery, expectation, or manipulation. It is entirely outside the realm of a reciprocal transaction, seeking only to bring delight to the recipient, asking for nothing in return.

Belk admits that the perfect gift, at least according to his definition, remains an elusive ideal instead of common practice. Nevertheless, he believes that the ideal should inform the donor's underlying motivations and serve as a helpful guide for gift-giving practices. Perhaps the most difficult aspect to accept is Belk's insistence that the giver is free from all self-interest and seeks only to delight the recipient. Ethicist Paul F. Camenisch fills in what might be seen as a gap in Belk's treatment of the ideal. What Camenisch recognises, and some of this is no doubt due to Marcel Mauss's influential work on the topic, is that the relational aspect of gift means that the motivations cannot be as carefully parsed as Belk supposes. In other words, self-interest cannot be totally eradicated from the donor because the nature of the relationship or bond between the giver and the recipient means that it is impossible for them to be completely separated from each other. The desires of lovers are often intricately entwined, and to suggest that the perfect gift divorces these desires instead of bringing them into union is a somewhat ironic result of Belk's definitive shunning of egoism and, one could add, would demonstrate a lack of self-awareness on the part of the ideal donor. In fact, Camenisch makes the bond between the giver and the recipient an integral part of his rather precise definition of gift:

> …a gift therefore will be understood as 1) some value 2) intentionally bestowed by a donor who gives it primarily to benefit the recipient upon 3) a recipient who a) accepts it knowing that it is given as a gift, b) agreeing with the donor that it is a benefit, c) who has no right to or claim upon it and d) who is not expected to pay for it in the future in any usual way (i.e., in no specific way in which roughly equivalent value is returned); and 4) which brings into being a new moral relationship between recipient and donor, part of which consists of recipient obligations to the donor and the acceptance of limits upon the use of the gift.[6]

His fourth point, in particular, contrasts quite noticeably with Belk's insistence that a pure gift is free from obligation or expectation of any sort. Highlighting the bond which a gift forges between the donor and the recipient, Camenisch has no qualms about using words like "obligations" and "limits" to describe what comes into play when a gift is given. While Belk attempts to isolate the perfect gift, Camenisch contextualises it by viewing it as a catalyst for a "new moral relationship." In order to better understand these different approaches to gift (ideal

---

[6] Paul F. Camenisch, "Gift and Gratitude in Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 9.1 (Spring 1981), 2.

and relational), I turn to the works of two seminal thinkers on the topic: Marcel Mauss and Jacques Derrida. In addition, I will incorporate some of the ideas of French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion as a corrective to certain extremes encountered in Mauss and Derrida.

The Relational Gift: Marcel Mauss

French sociologist Marcel Mauss's influential work, *Essai sur le don* (The Gift), originally published in 1925, is liberally cited in articles, chapters, and books written on the topic of gift. This is not without reason. Mauss's second-hand observations of gift-giving practices in what he terms "archaic societies" in Polynesia, Melanesia, and the Pacific Northwest led him to conclude that societal ties are formed through practices of reciprocity and exchange which serve as informal (and sometimes formal) contracts between individuals and groups. Mauss calls this system "total services," indicating that the so-called gift economy provides expression for religious, juridical, economic, familial, moral, and political structures and values.[7] In Mauss's view, there is no such thing as a free gift. He writes: "Almost always such services have taken the form of the gift, the present generously given even when, in the gesture accompanying the transaction, there is only a polite fiction, formalism, and social deceit, and when really there is obligation and economic self-interest."[8] This statement, somewhat contradictory in nature, brings up an important question. If the social practice of generosity is associated with, as Mauss observes, obligation, deceit, and self-interest, can it really be termed a gift?

Throughout Mauss's treatment of the subject, he uses various terms to delineate different aspects of the gift economy practiced in certain regions. In the aboriginal tribes of the American Northwest, *potlatch,* a Chinook term meaning "to feed" or "to consume," is used to describe the highly developed network of rites, political ranking, and economic services which stem from an assumption of rivalry and hostility. What is at stake in the giving of gifts is one's honour, prestige, and authority, and failure to comply with expected contractual obligations regarding gifts brings with it severe consequences.[9] In societies that are not agonistic in principle, other terms reflect the role that gifts play in the economics of the clan. In Samoan and Maori contexts, *taonga* (personal possession) is closely linked to identity of the person, the clan, and the earth,

---

[7] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Halls (Routledge, 1990), 3.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., 7-8.

and because of this, is seen to possess a spiritual power, a *hau*. When *taonga* is given to another person, the *hau* of the person goes with it. For these tribes, the gift is not merely an inanimate object but an animated commodity. Mauss explains: "Even when it has been abandoned by the giver, it still possesses something of him. Through it the giver has a hold over the beneficiary…"[10] The strength of the *taonga's hau* is seen to be so far-reaching that it serves to facilitate the circulation of wealth as goods are passed or traded from one to another until the item eventually lands back in the original donor's hands, having strengthened societal ties through bestowing authority, prestige, and honour as it made the rounds.[11]

While these examples of "total services" seem to have more in common with exchange and transaction than gift, one can observe certain key elements of Belk's "perfect gift" making an appearance. Sacrifice, appropriateness, and perhaps even delight can be found as one reads Mauss's observations of reciprocation and transaction in various archaic societies. While the gift economies which Mauss describes miss the mark on many fronts as true gifts, there is one component, most notably present in the Maoris, which seems of special importance: the idea of *hau* or spiritual animation in the object itself. If one accepts that a gift is more than a material object, more than a symbolic representation, more than a mere tool used to convey the donor's intent, then the gift itself takes on an elevated status. This merit comes not from its monetary value but because of its unique association with the giver. In effect, it carries the giver to the recipient and becomes a bonding agent between them. Mauss observes that in Maori tradition, "[T]o make a gift of something to someone is to make a present of some part of oneself."[12] He goes on to explain how this idea becomes the basis of societal ties: "In this system of ideas one clearly and logically realizes that one must give back to another person what is really part and parcel of his nature and substance, because to accept something from somebody is to accept part of his spiritual essence, of his soul." [13]

---

[10] Ibid., 12.
[11] "All these institutions express one fact alone, one social system one precise state of mind: everything – food, women, children, property, talismans, land, labour services, priestly functions, and ranks – is there for passing on, and for balancing accounts. Everything passes to and fro as if there were a constant exchange of spiritual matter, including things and men, between clans and individuals, distributed between social ranks, the sexes, and the generations." Mauss, *The Gift*, 14.
[12] Ibid., 12.
[13] Ibid.

There are two parts to the concept of *hau* which I have chosen to exclude from the definition of gift because, in my estimation, they appear as distortions instead of central aspects of spiritual animation. The first is the idea that the *hau* of an object is always trying to get back to its place of origin; therefore the recipient is obliged to pass on, exchange, or return the gift (or something seen to be its equivalent). To retain the so-called gift would be to put oneself in opposition to a powerful spiritual force and risk great personal peril.[14] The second is the idea that by giving a gift, the donor is able to exert magical or religious power over the recipient. Because the recipient is thought to accept part of the donor's soul by accepting the gift, the object becomes a medium of control, a means whereby the donor takes up residence in the recipient's life and influences it.[15] In my view, these two aspects suffuse the ritual with occult powers which are at cross-purposes to the intent of gift, serving to enslave and curse the recipient instead of delight or bless them. While I acknowledge that these magical notions are traditionally associated with the idea of *hau*, I believe they are more a reflection of the desire to dominate others through manipulation than an inherent trait of spiritual animation or, for that matter, gift.

Philosophers Jean-Luc Marion and Jacques Derrida argue that Mauss is not writing about gift at all, and his use of the words, gift and exchange, as if they are synonymous (evident even in the title of his book, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*) is highly problematic. I will engage more fully with the ideas of Derrida and Marion in the next section, but I bring up the argument in order to make an important point. The insistence that gift and exchange cannot exist in the same space situates gift, for the most part, outside of relationship. The notion of pure gift tends to force all action to be focused in one direction: from donor to donee. Virtually no room is given for the donee to become, in turn, a donor, because the event would then become an exchange and not a gift, or so the reasoning goes. Admittedly, in most of Mauss's examples, this is indeed the case. Gift and exchange are equated with obligation, and therefore it is no surprise that certain scholars find the two concepts incompatible. However, if the idea of exchange is viewed through the lens of relationship, the reciprocal action then becomes natural instead of forced.

---

[14] While one could interpret this aspect of *hau* as a further expression of benevolence, a recognition that an object cannot be definitively owned, that the creation always returns to its creator, I believe it is mostly a reflection of power dynamics.

[15] The presence of the donor in the recipient's life could be viewed as positive, especially when seen as resonant with the idea of sacrament. However, the negative consequences associated with the ritual (enslaving the recipient to the donor) seem to make this correlation untenable.

Within relationship, an act of reciprocity does not negate a gift as much as it validates the bond. The strength of Mauss's work, I believe, comes from his emphasis on the connections which gift exchange forms between people. One could say that gifts carry the glue which binds primitive societies together. Mauss does not attempt to isolate gifts from gift practices nor does he feel the need to carefully separate pure gift from obligatory exchange. What results is a mixed bag or melting pot, Mauss admits.[16] By allowing the idea of magnanimity to bump up against aspects of economics, religion, and politics, Mauss illustrates that in most societies, these elements are intertwined in a way which fosters mutually beneficial relationships between individuals and groups. In his conclusion, Mauss writes:

> All in all, just as these gifts are not freely given, they are also not really disinterested. They already represent for the most part total counter-services, not only made with a view to paying for services or things, but also to maintaining a profitable alliance, one that cannot be rejected. … We can therefore see where this force resides. It is one that is both mystical and practical, one that ties clans together and at the same time constrains them to carry out exchange. Even in these societies, the individual and the group, or rather the subgroup, have always felt they had a sovereign right to refuse a contract. It is this that gives the stamp of generosity to this circulation of goods.[17]

What Mauss brings to the discussion is the notion that a gift cannot be observed or studied in isolation. Gift-giving practices are always situated within some type of relationship or community, and to dissect the event, separating the gift from the interested parties in order to arrive at pure gift, strips it of its very power to bind people together. There are (at least) three valuable insights one can glean from Mauss's observations of primitive gift-giving practices which are particularly applicable to the topic at hand.

The first is that gifts build relationships and connect people. Mauss, imperfectly to be sure, attempts to show that gifts are more than the sum of their parts. Whenever a gift is given, whenever something passes from one hand to the other and a change of possession takes place, relationship comes into play. The two parties, donor and donee, are connected in a way they were not connected before. Even if the gift becomes an article of contention, such as when the would-be recipient refuses the gift, or in a case where the donor takes back what was originally intended as a gift, the relationship has, technically, progressed. The connection between the donor and donee shifts when a gift changes hands; hopefully, there is an increase in camaraderie

---

[16] Mauss, *The Gift*, 72-73.
[17] Ibid., 73.

and intimacy, but there could also be a move toward antagonism. Whatever the outcome, Mauss's case studies demonstrate that gift-giving changes relationships and ties people together in ways they were not connected before. Commenting on Mauss, Paulette W. Kidder notes that "gift exchange builds long-term bonds of trust among participants."[18] Similar to the idea of invitation discussed in the previous chapter, a gift, once offered, cannot be un-given. This means that no matter how the gift scenario plays out, something is set in motion between the giver and the recipient, and as a result, the relationship cannot remain static.

The second insight I take from Mauss is that gifts are not selfless; they carry something of the giver. This is related to the concept of spiritual animation or *hau* which Mauss describes in the Maori tribe.[19] The gift is not merely a material object moving from one person to the next; the gift bears within it a part of the giver. It may be a symbolic gesture demonstrating the giver's feelings of love, it may be a step toward reconciliation - a peace offering meant to extend forgiveness and a second chance - or it may be a simple token of familial tenderness, such as when a child brings a parent a spontaneous gift of some object they have found or created. The gift is unique in that its transference from the donor to the donee conveys an exclusive message between the two. An identical gift given between two other parties would not confer the exact same communication, because the gift itself is never the message; the real gift is the part of the self which the giver is sending with the gift. The material object becomes a medium through which the donor can give his or herself to the donee.

The idea that a gift should be selfless and disinterested is, for the most part, counter-productive, because holding a gift to this standard eliminates some of the most personal and intimate offerings a donor might make. Gifts which are by nature inextricably linked to the giver are (mis)interpreted as self-serving gestures under this criterion of selflessness, even though they are meant to be vehicles of loving generosity. Items crafted by the donor, personal effects from the donor's collection, photos of the donor, and items which the donor would use together with the donee could be perceived as having selfish or mixed motives. However, I posit that these so-called self-interested gifts are often given with great vulnerability, expressing a desire for closer intimacy with the recipient. These types of gifts are perhaps most easily identified in children who offer others their scuffed toys and indecipherable drawings. A child might also make a gift

---

[18] Paulette W. Kidder, "Derrida and Lonergan on the Gift," *Lonergan Workshop* 18 (2005), 142.
[19] Mauss, *The Gift*, 11-12.

of a rock found in their wanderings or some half-eaten bit of candy. Though it is impossible to declare these childish gifts completely altruistic, one can identify a certain desire to connect with another person in the spontaneous giving of what is close at hand or what is associated with a pleasant experience. In fact, the more an object or item is identifiable with the child, the greater its value as a gift.

Contemporary gift-giving etiquette reflects a similar value. David Cheal observes that when it comes to gifts, money is thought to be too impersonal and therefore inadequate to fully express the commitment and care of the donor.[20] Since a monetary gift is a direct result of the donor's hard work and effort, why would it be considered impersonal? The most obvious response is that money does not bear the donor's mark in a unique way; there is no obvious connection between a hundred dollar bill and the donor. If one is seeking to reinforce the relationship between the giver and the recipient, the gift must be identifiable as coming from a particular donor and intended for a particular donee. This uniqueness is highly valued because it is seen to convey the care, commitment, and concern which the giver has for the recipient, and beyond that, to make the donor more present to the donee, much as the *hau* did for the Maoris.

The third insight found in Mauss's treatment of gift follows closely from the second, and it is the observation that gifts are given in the context of community. Due to the inter-connected nature of relationship, what affects one party in the gift equation ends up affecting the other as well. Therefore, if a gift given by the donor makes the donee happy, the donor will in all likelihood experience an increase in happiness as well. Conversely, a gift which causes distress to the donee will no doubt result in stress for the donor and most likely cause him or her to initiate a plan of action to rectify the disappointing turn of events. To insist that the donor, in order to remain truly altruistic, not share in the joy or disappointment of the recipient, is to deny and repress the connection between the two.[21] This inter-relational dynamic becomes readily apparent in communal settings where gifts given to one person directly or indirectly benefit the family, friends, and perhaps even neighbours of the recipient.

---

[20] David Cheal, "Gifts in Contemporary North America," in *Gift Giving: A Research Anthology*, eds. Cele Otnes and Richard F. Beltramini (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1996), 86.

[21] This has significant implications for the vulnerability present in divine/human interaction. See Chapter 4 on the topic of covenant.

Likewise, when a gift results in misery or conflict, the donee's community will be the first to know. Sherry, McGrath, and Levy, writing about "The Dark Side of Gift," conclude that because of the role gifts play in a social context, they can have a significant negative impact on the individual: "The gift threatens social ties as much as strengthens them. Gifts create internal stress by requiring an examination of the canons of propriety and a negotiation of identity: imputation and resistance of inauthentic versions of the self are critical elements of this stress."[22] In other words, social mores serve to make gift-giving practices a slim tightrope which one must walk with care, careful not to make a misstep. This brings us back to "total services," the archaic gift economies described by Mauss in intricate and complex detail. Here we also find tremendous pressure on donors to convey the correct message through being attentive to the timeliness of gifts, through the extension and acknowledgment of credit which accompanies gift-giving, and through recognition of honour and prestige codes.[23] Pointing out the pressure to conform to social constructs, as Mauss and Sherry, McGrath, and Levy do, serves to reinforce the notion that gifts cannot be viewed solely as binary transactions. We must acknowledge that gifts are always given within social contexts.

The Unconditional Gift: Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion

Having highlighted Mauss's emphasis on the relational aspect of gift, we now turn our attention to the other end of the spectrum: the gift in isolation, free from all attachment. The thought of Derrida is important here not only because of his deconstruction of certain premises associated with gift, but because he provides the dialectic to Mauss's largely uncritical treatment of the concept of gift. Derrida contends that although gift is related to the circulation of goods, it should also be that which interrupts reciprocity. He writes:

> If there is gift, the *given* of the gift (*that which* one gives, *that which* is given, the gift as given thing or as act of donation) must not come back to the giving. … It must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift, by the process of exchange, by the movement of circulation of the circle in the form of return to the point of departure. If the figure of the circle is essential to economics, the gift must remain *aneconomic*. Not that it remains foreign to the circle, but it must *keep* a relation of

---

[22] John F. Sherry Jr., Mary Ann McGrath, and Sidney J. Levy, "The Dark Side of Gift," *Journal of Business Research* 28 (1993), 237.
[23] Mauss, *The Gift*, 35-38.

foreignness to the circle, a relation without relation of familiar foreignness. It is perhaps in this sense that the gift is the impossible."[24]

It is important to note that Derrida makes a distinction between "impossible" and "the impossible." Gift, he insists, is *the* impossible. In this way he seeks to render the notion of gift not merely an impossibility within the economic circle of society, but through the addition of the definite article, Derrida places gift altogether outside the system of exchange, and ultimately, outside time. For Derrida, gift is annihilated or destroyed if there is any "reciprocity, return, exchange, countergift, or debt."[25] When a gift is countered with another gift, Derrida holds, the gift is, in effect, annulled. When the gift results in a debt, the gift becomes a burden instead of a boon. For this reason, the recipient should never give back. In fact, both the recipient and donor should not recognise a gift as gift, because as soon as this becomes a factor, the gift has begun to give back, if not in material form, then in a symbolic equivalent. The gift, when recognised as such, enters into the economic circle and by doing so, is destroyed. Derrida contends that "*the gift as gift ought not appear as gift: either to the donee or to the donor*. It cannot be gift as gift except by not being present as gift."[26] As soon as the gift is acknowledged by the donor, Derrida insists, it gives back, whether praise, approval, gratification, self-congratulation, or some value associated with the giver's generosity.[27] Similarly, as soon as the recipient receives a gift, as soon as they take and keep the so-called gift, they are saddled with a debt. It is a debt of gratitude and an awareness that the donor has now gained some measure of credit with them.

What Derrida suggests is that a perfect forgetting on the part of both the donor and the donee must take place the instant the gift is given. This keeps the gift from becoming an occasion for restitution and repayment. Derrida writes: "From the moment the gift would appear as gift … it would be engaged in a symbolic, sacrificial, or economic structure that would annul the gift in the ritual circle of the debt."[28] What is also at play here is desire or intent. A gift is fuelled by the intent of one person to give something to another. The intent itself, Derrida posits, taints the gift. But without desire, without wanting-to-give, without significance as a gift, is it still a gift? Because Derrida insists that the gift must simultaneously appear and not appear, one can

---

[24] Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamul (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 7.
[25] Ibid., 12.
[26] Ibid., 14.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 24.

understand why he concludes that it is impossible to converse meaningfully about gift. It becomes another name for the impossible.[29]

As far as Mauss is concerned, Derrida concludes that the sociologist speaks of "everything but the gift."[30] All of Mauss's work is positioned firmly within the exchange economy which Derrida maintains destroys the very idea of gift. Derrida and Mauss are obviously speaking about two very different things when they refer to gift. Derrida practically chafes at Mauss's careless juxtaposition of the two words "gift" and "exchange" as if they were practically synonymous[31] and dedicates an entire chapter to exposing the inconsistencies of language and logic in Mauss's work. Above all, Derrida is perturbed by Mauss's thoughtless association of gift with an economic, social system based on carefully measured, culturally dictated give and take. Might I suggest that Derrida's proposal, an ideal notion of gift which renders it synonymous with the impossible, is equally as unhelpful as Mauss's dubious semantics. While Derrida's extreme linguistic precision takes the concept of gift out of the human equation and experience, Mauss paints so widely and freely with his words that the idea of gift becomes largely ambiguous. What both men manage to do is make the notion of gift somewhat meaningless.

Jean-Luc Marion, a postmodern philosopher and former student of Derrida, posits a variation which brings gift back into the realm of the possible. Marion questions the validity of attaching equal value to material and immaterial gains, thus quantifying the benefits of gift-giving. He argues that rendering the act of giving into a simple transaction which can be shown to be part of an exchange economy, where one boon is traded for another, essentially annuls all altruism.[32] Marion suggests that, "if the gift rests on gratuity, sufficient reason owes it to itself to exclude the gift from experience, and therefore from phenomenality: one must render invisible everything for which one cannot render reason – and first of all the gift."[33] Thus, he contends, if all altruism is negated because it stands outside reason, then God is negated as well. Marion points out that the idea of the impossible gift comes from trying to insert gift into a closed

[29] Ibid., 29.

[30] Ibid., 24.

[31] Ibid., 37.

[32] Jean-Luc Marion, "The Reason of the Gift," in *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, eds. Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy, trans. Shane Mackinlay and Nicolas de Warren (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 106-7.

[33] Ibid., 108.

system, an economy of give and take, where both sides of the algebraic equation have to add up; in order for this to happen, the giver as well as the recipient must give a reasonable account for their respective roles. Some of this reasoning is workable, Marion shows, such as when the rich give their surplus goods to a humanitarian agency which distributes items of real value to the poor. The reason of justice is evident in this scenario where some measure of economic equalization is achieved. However, insisting that the gift must be evaluated or approached from within the horizon of exchange and economy drastically reduces the possibilities for engagement with the idea of gift. Instead of beginning from an economic horizon, Marion suggests that one begin with the gift itself.[34]

It is then possible to put forth several scenarios which fall outside exchange such as anonymous donations, an inheritance, and even gifts to enemies which might incur greater animosity instead of any desirable benefit. Marion suggests that, "a gift that is scorned and denied, even transformed into an affront, nonetheless remains perfectly and definitely given; this desolation even makes it appear with a more sovereign force. It is only to an enemy that I can make a gift without risk of finding it taken up in an exchange or trapped in reciprocity."[35] The ultimate gift which falls outside of exchange is the gift which is nothing apart from oneself: one's time, attention, care, and even one's life. Marion recognizes the paradox in this self-gift which has great value and no real value at the same time. "In giving this *nothing*, I give all that I have, because I am not giving something that I possess apart from myself, but rather that which I am."[36] Marion echoes the idea presented earlier in relation to the Maori concept of *hau,* which is that a true gift is one which reflects the desire to give oneself. Marion observes that any object given by a donor to a donee can be judged on a continuum of self-giving. Either the object signifies a denial of the gift of self (giving an object in lieu of the self) or it represents a promise of the gift of self (giving an object as a token of ongoing self-donation).

The most obvious theological example of self-gift is the person of Jesus Christ who represented not only God's love and mercy, but God himself.[37] The gift of God demonstrated through self-sacrifice, that is, Christ's death on the cross, effectuated humanity's salvation. Another aspect of divine self-gift is that of self-revelation. Jesus said, "Whoever has seen me has

---

[34] Ibid., 112.
[35] Ibid., 115.
[36] Ibid.
[37] John 3:16; John 8:19.

seen the Father."[38] A much earlier instance of divine self-revelation can be seen in the encounter between the shepherd Moses and God in Exodus 3. When Moses questions the voice speaking to him from a burning bush and asks for an identifying name, the response given is YHWH, a form of the verb "to be." While there is much discussion regarding the exact nature of the mysterious tetragrammaton and what it says about God, an equally significant point to this story is that the Eternal One gives Moses a name which, in contrast to the more common identifier – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - is entirely self-referential. This form of self-gift transcends the functional notion of God "for humanity" and reveals God "in himself."

In addition to the aspect of self-donation, this story illustrates another dimension of gift which Derrida alludes to when he positions gift outside the realm of possibility. I would like to suggest that one way to interpret the idealism which characterises Derrida's position is to think of gift as unconditional and inexhaustible. The problem, according to Derrida, is that as soon as something is recognised as a gift, it begins the slippery slide into an economy of exchange and obligation between two parties, or at the very least, initiates an inward-facing loop of self-awareness and egoism. What Derrida does not make allowance for is a being who is above self-interest and capable of giving unconditionally. What is impossible for Derrida to imagine is possible with God because God resides outside the human economy. The conditions which Derrida places on gift-giving do not apply when one does not need to exercise forgetfulness in order to engage in genuine altruism or when one exists outside of time. Therefore, if we apply Derrida's conditions for the ideal gift to God, the unconditioned One, it is possible to imagine the unconditional gift.

Crucial to Derrida's notion of gift as "the impossible" are two assumptions: 1) the motivation of the giver is never purely benevolent, and 2) the recipient necessarily incurs a form of indebtedness. Derrida is right in pointing out that giving the ideal gift is virtually impossible in human society, but I believe he is incorrect in assuming that it does not exist at all. As Belk observes, people have no trouble imagining the perfect gift, even if it is not part of their actual experience. Thus, if one were to identify the giver as the loving Creator God who gives generously and unconditionally, and recognise that all those on whom he bestows his benevolence would never be able to repay even a small part of this generoaity due to their inferior status and resources, perhaps we come a bit closer, as Marion suggests, to locating the

---

[38] John 14:9.

concept of gift not so much in the equation, but in the identification of the giver with the gift. If the giver is unconditioned, then the gift is unconditional, the gift being representative of the donor himself. If the nature of the giver is inexhaustible, then the gift is inexhaustible since the donor's character is imbued in the gift. This identification of the gift with its originator takes the idea of gift out of the economy of exchange, and in the case of the Eternal One, out of time as well. The giver, in effect, defines the gift and gives it significance. The gift is nothing if it is not connected to the giver.

A helpful metaphor here is Marion's notion of fatherhood as pure givenness. A father, Marion observes, gives the gift of life without the possibility of any true reciprocity, because a father is "him to whom we [as children] can render nothing."[39] Marion concludes that this makes the title of Father a suitable name for God, making it possible to imagine an unconditioned and unreduced gift coming from a divine, unconditioned, and unreduced nature. To state it positively, the divine self exhibits excess, a generosity within its very being, thereby taking what is in the realm of impossible and making it possible.[40] Marion writes: "To that which gains itself only in losing itself – namely, the gift, which gives itself in abandoning itself – nothing is impossible any longer. Not only does that which does not give itself lose itself, but nothing can ruin (*perdre*, lose) the gift, since it consists in the contradiction even of its possibility."[41] In essence, Marion takes the deconstructive work of Derrida concerning gift (the impossibility of gift) and, out of the rubble of the impossible, constructs an image of gift which unites the superfluous givenness of fatherhood with the impossibility of exchange, revealing its unconditional nature.[42] This brings to mind the familial scenario Balthasar invokes in his theological trilogy, that of a child awakening to love through the smile of its mother. The child receives an awareness of its existence through the mother. The child receives its idea of love through the mother. The child receives an awakening to life outside itself through the mother. Before the child is capable of any reciprocity, she is receiving gift after gift from her mother. What began as the impossible gift

---

[39] Marion, "The Reason of the Gift," 122.
[40] Ibid., 124.
[41] Ibid., 125.
[42] Interestingly, feminist Genevieve Vaughan identifies largess and gift with motherhood, stating that "the logic of gift giving is a maternal economic logic, the logic of the distribution of goods and services directly to needs." Genevieve Vaughan, "Introduction," in *Women and the Gift Economy: A Radically Different Worldview is Possible*, ed. Genevieve Vaughan (Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education, 2007), 7.

with Derrida becomes the possible impossibility in Marion's reference to fatherhood and the unconditional gift in Balthasar's mother/child scenario.

Gift in Theatre

Both Mauss and Derrida allude to the idea that the act of giving sets up a power dynamic. In the exchange economy, the giver is seen as the one who exerts power over the recipient. Both indicate that the act of bestowing a gift on someone means that the recipient is now in the donor's debt, and thus the gift serves to reinforce the difference in social standing between the two or highlight the reliance of the donee on the donor. In some cases, giving a gift to someone can place the recipient in an indentured state, in effect, rendering the donee a servant of the giver. I contend that the presence of power dynamics in societal exchanges not only undermines and upends the idea of gift, but essentially distorts it beyond recognition, stripping it of its original intent. While Derrida recognizes this inequality in gift-giving and its related problems, the distinction, for the most part, seems lost on Mauss. At the heart of genuine gift we find not a play for power nor self-aggrandisement, but an unconditional generosity of the self, evidenced through vulnerability and humility. In order to demonstrate this, I turn to the practice of improvisational theatre. Here one can observe gift-giving and gift-receiving in a controlled and focused environment and the results are, for the most part, consistent and repeatable.

It has already been mentioned that the first rule of improvisation is "Yes , and…" These two small words are weighted with meaning. The first word, Yes, indicates that the actor places herself in receiving mode; she chooses to accept instead of block whatever comes her way in a scene. Though this may seem like a sure pathway to chaos, saying Yes is not an exercise in randomness. This is due to the presence of the second word (and) which refers to the actor's commitment to contribute to the ongoing story and remain faithful to its intent. To reiterate, undergirding the idea of openness and acceptance (Yes) is the actor's awareness of the larger story and her role in it (and). In contrast, the practice of blocking, which is exhibited through tactics like contradicting another actor, refusing or ignoring information, redirecting the story, or simply opting out, tends to negate the sense of trust between actors and renders the story unintelligible.

Improvisational teacher Keith Johnstone observes that "you block when you want to stay in control."[43] Blocking is also an expression of fear: fear that things will go horribly wrong, fear that one will look foolish, or fear that one will get caught in an uncomfortable or dangerous situation.[44] Because improvisation and control cannot co-exist, blocking (negation) will inevitably cause an improvised scene to fall apart. Improvisation is about risk, about learning to incorporate the unexpected, about facing fear head-on, and ultimately, about learning how to tell stories together.[45] Because the actor can only understand the story by being part of it, improvisation becomes a journey of discovery for the players. Once an actor comprehends what the ongoing story is about, she will know how to move it forward and toward what end. If the actor does not grasp the basic narrative, the improvisation will be nothing more than a series of unrelated events strung together.

Essential to good improvisational theatre is commitment not only to the ongoing story but to the community which is creating the story. Improvisation is never about getting a laugh or being clever, though practitioners are often susceptible to prioritising these two elements. Placing the emphasis on individual cleverness inevitably erodes the trust between actors and derails the story. Good actors know how to honour the story and serve their fellow players, in essence, making the other actors "look good" instead of drawing all the attention to themselves.[46]

Let us return to Marion to connect improvisational theatre practice with the notion of gift. When Marion describes the demeanour of the beneficiary, he indicates that, "it is a matter of abandoning the posture of self-sufficiency and calm possession of oneself and one's world."[47] Marion positions humility - the ability to put away self-reliance - as a requisite mindset for

---

[43] Keith Johnstone, *Impro for Storytellers* (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1999), 101.

[44] Samuel Wells states that, "The reason improvisation seems impossible to inexperienced players is that instinctively they spend most of their time trying to avoid being dangerous." Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 104.

[45] Elements of improvisational theatre practice gleaned from Johnstone, *Impro for Storytellers*; Wells, *Improvisation*; a workshop at Montreal Improv, September 27, 2014; and personal experience.

[46] Canadian actor and master improviser, Colin Mochrie, tells the story of auditioning for the USA improvisational television show, *Whose Line is it Anyway?* He first auditioned with the entire Second City cast in Toronto. "We were doing what you're supposed to do in improv, where you're supporting each other and making everyone else look good, so nobody stood out because everybody was doing what they were supposed to do, so no one got cast." A year later he auditioned with a group of strangers in Los Angeles and changed his tactics, doing what he could to get the attention of the producers, and was cast for the show. Colin Mochrie interviewed on *George Stroumboulopoulos Tonight*, S3, Episode 120. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.cbc.ca/strombo/videos/gst-s3-episode-120-colin-mochrie-and-mark-mcmorris.

[47] Marion, "The Reason of the Gift," 128.

receiving and accepting a gift. A correlation could be made between this and Johnstone's notion of giving up the need to control the action and, by implication, the direction of the story. Marion goes on to address the communal aspect common to both gift and improvisation: "Before accepting a gift – which would nevertheless seem easy, since it appears to be a matter of gain, pure and simple – it is necessary first to accept to accept, which implies recognizing that one no longer increases oneself by oneself, but rather by a dependence on that which one is not, more exactly on that which the 'I' in one is not."[48] Here Marion touches on both overarching commitments in improvisation: being a participant in a larger story and becoming part of a community of trust. The improvisational story is crafted by a group of players who give and receive freely, thus building a specific narrative which is unique to that community. In order for the story to be successful (clear, cohesive, and believable), it must not be driven or controlled by one person, but incorporate the voices of the various players in the group. The gifts which the actors give to each other (and ultimately to the audience) are their contributions to the story. Marion's use of the word "abandon" hints at how significant trust and vulnerability are when receiving gifts.

In theatrical improvisation, it becomes apparent that this vulnerability is not restricted to the beneficiary but can also be present in the donor. Anyone who has participated in an improvisation exercise knows the dread which can accompany offering a particular action or piece of dialogue to a group. There is a fear that one's contribution will fall flat, or will be found uninteresting and nonsensical by their fellow actors, or in the worst case scenario, will be blocked. The vulnerability goes both ways in improvisation. In a sense, the other actors hold control over what an improviser offers to the story, for they have the power to either embrace it, include it, and build on it, or to ridicule it, ignore it, and refuse it. Fear can also be present due to the actor's inability to re-do or re-work or re-think any action or word once it has been offered. Johnstone suggests that instead of ignoring fear or pushing it aside, actors should start by acknowledging it, especially the fear of failure. Johnstone makes a direct association between mistakes and learning; he encourages his students to learn how to fail by becoming comfortable, even happy, with mistakes.[49] Similarly, Marc Rowland, a director at Montreal Improv, tells his

---

[48] Ibid.

[49] Keith Johnstone, "Fear & Risk," Interview with Bev Fox. Accessed February 15, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgfXUS0US9Y.

workshop participants that mistakes can be gifts and encourages players to embrace so-called errors and make them part of the story. Johnstone suggests that actors are "performing risky actions in search of a miracle, and you won't get miracles if it's all safe."[50]

We turn back to Marion for his thoughts on the topic of risk. Within the context of gift, Marion places the power as well as the risk within the gift itself. He anthropomorphises the gift, making it an active player in the equation of gift-giving: "It [gift] renders itself in that it abandons itself to its givee, to allow him the act of acceptance. It also renders itself to its giver, in that it puts itself at his disposal to allow the act of giving. Finally, it renders itself to itself in that it is perfectly accomplished in dissipating itself without return, as a pure abandoned gift, possible in all impossibility."[51] By stating that the gift abandons itself to the giver, the givee, and ultimately, to itself to be given as a gift, Marion indicates that the gift relinquishes all control. The gift, in its state of constant availability, runs the risk of not being given, of not being accepted, and of ceasing to exist as a gift, and this is what makes it a true gift.

Marion posits that gifts are given, "without reserve or retreat, hence without condition or measure, hence without cause or reason."[52] While I recognise Marion's description of gift as unconditional and inexhaustible, it is necessary to qualify his third descriptor (without cause or reason). In theory, I agree with Marion's suggestion that gift operates from a "higher reason," a reason intrinsic only to itself.[53] However, he looks no further than the gift itself to find this "higher reason," thus divorcing the gift from the giver. In effect, the gift is in limbo, completely cut off from the giver in order to be received with impartiality by the recipient. This makes the phrase "higher reason" somewhat meaningless due to its lack of sentient subject. Allow me to refer back to Marion's example of God as Father to give substance to his inference that gift has a "higher reason" or larger purpose than itself. The gift is always and only possible because of the benevolence of the giver. If one connects these ideas to improvisational theatre, one could say that the constant presence of "Yes" means that the actors are able to give themselves

---

[50] Ibid.

[51] Marion, "The Reason of the Gift," 130.

[52] Ibid. Marion also says, "Always coming in excess, it [gift] demands nothing, removes nothing, and takes nothing from anybody." Ibid., 133.

[53] Marion goes so far as to suggest that the gift, because it is its own, not subject to an outside influence, could serve as a figure for phenomenology. "…if the phenomenon in the strict sense opens itself in itself and on the basis of itself, welling up from a possibility that is absolutely its own, unforeseeable, and new, then could not the gift offer itself as the privileged phenomenon – more exactly as the figure of all phenomenality?" Ibid, 131.

unconditionally to each other, and due to the possibilities of "and," the story is relatively inexhaustible. The improvised story, though, must not be thought of as a separate entity, without cause or reason; it exists due to the actions of a generous, attentive community of improvisers.

In terms of making links between gift and improvisational theatre, Marion's gift-centric approach proves to be limited; it does not allow for the self-donation of the giver and the necessary elements of relationship and trust which I posit are non-negotiables in genuine gift. Marion's approach also negates vulnerability since the giver and givee never interact with each other; they only make contact with the gift, not the other party. Similarly, beginning with gift instead of the involved parties seems to suggest that the story or drama is of no consequence. There is no narrative to follow because the gift is its own subject, its own phenomenon, its own story, so to speak. Gift becomes an end unto itself instead of a prop or vehicle which allows players to develop relationships and create a unique story. Though it seems that Marion has solved Derrida's problem concerning the impossibility of genuine gift, he has created another problem: that of elevating gift to the role of inanimate subject and doing away with meaningful relationship and ultimately, the need for story. Every gift offered in improvisation, be it a word, a gesture, or a movement, conveys a fragment of meaning which must be discovered and developed by the other players. Gift, in improvisation, is not a self-contained and self-defined phenomenon. What is offered by one member of the community affects the direction of the group from that point forward.

A genuine gift demands that both the giver and the recipient are open to each other, in other words, that they develop a community of trust. Wells explains it this way:

> Accepting…is a practice that builds community by acknowledging, encouraging, and accommodating the other. It recognizes the dependence of all parties concerned upon one another. It requires the sharing of space and implies a continuing conversation about how to go on doing so. It shares time and assumes only the kind of outcomes that can benefit the other. It is not a competition that is about winning and losing.[54]

What Wells is describing here is the optimum paradigm for successful improvisational theatre. As actors abandon self-sufficiency, give up control of the story, and humbly embrace vulnerability, a strong community is formed.

---

[54] Wells, *Improvisation*, 108.

Many of the ideas presented in the previous section resonate with theological concepts, but there are some distinctions to be noted. In theology, gift originates in the divine giver, God. We find gift present in the prolific nature of the creation narrative in Genesis. John Milbank observes that, "God's original, creative donation *is* a kind of throwing away, or pointless excess. But *not* such that it is a gift to 'anyone' (who happens to be there, 'in the street'); rather, in order that there *be* an anyone at all, to receive."[55] In other words, God's abundance and generous excess consists of much more than the gifts given; God's benevolence is so comprehensive that it also brings into being recipients who are relationally capable of receiving and enjoying his gift(s).[56] Similarly, divine generosity is at the core of the expansive covenantal promises made to Abraham and in the generous offering of forgiveness in stories such as Hosea's marriage to an unfaithful prostitute and Jonah's reluctant warning to the people of Nineveh. All of these divine acts of giving are intricately linked to the cultivation of loving relationships. The person of Jesus Christ stands as the supreme example of gift, a divine gesture of personal and costly beneficence without equal. In Christ we have the gift of God himself. Through this self-gift, God re-establishes and renews the covenant with humanity and sets in motion a new expression of a community (ἐκκλησια) of trust and faith.

Central to the divine demonstration of generosity are the ideas not only of trust and love but of mutuality. John Milbank notes:

> As against a logic which would associate a purity of love with unilateral action, it seems not insignificant that within romantic love an asymmetry of giving, where only one partner gives presents and favours, suggests not at all freedom and gratuitousness, but rather an obsessive admiration that subsists only at a wilfully melancholic distance, or still worse a purchase of sexual satisfaction, and in either case the slide of desire towards one-sided private possession. Giving here is most free where it is *yet* most bound, most mutual and most reciprocally demanded.[57]

It is important to note that Milbank is not dismissing unilateral giving in favour of a gift economy and all the obligations which accompany it. He is pointing out that in the context of a loving relationship, *giving to* is always joined to *giving back*. This is quite distinct from the type

---

[55] John Milbank, "Can a Gift be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," *Modern Theology* 11:1 (January 1995), 124.

[56] This is reminiscent of Balthasar's notion of the divine author writing with the audience already in mind, in some sense, creating the audience through his writing.

[57] Milbank, "Can a Gift be Given?" 124.

of exchange Mauss refers to in his sociological analysis of primitive societies, nor is it the tainted, self-interested gift which is so distasteful to Derrida.

Gift-giving within a mutually loving relationship might be said to occupy ground somewhere between the ideal, unconditional gift and the relational gift of self, but perhaps it is more accurate to claim that it transcends both positions. The dynamic of mutual love paradoxically joins together concepts like willingness and obligation, freedom and restriction, and desire and denial. Contrary to the idea of exchange which seeks to maintain a careful equilibrium between two parties, loving mutuality thrives on excess - mutual, reciprocal excess. In referring to the difference between giving love (*agape*) and desiring love (*eros*), Milbank argues that though *giving love* is "above such play" as one finds in a human love relationship, theology must not make *agape* all about sacrifice and thereby extract the mutual desire and reciprocity evident in *eros*. A comprehensive, more holistic view of love is key to defining the theological concept of gift. My thesis here is that the self-giving sacrifice of Christ (*agape*) must always be joined with God's loving, unconditional pursuit of humanity (*eros*) and the generous offer of mutuality, of co-labouring with God (*philia*).

The gift of *agape* is exemplified in the *kenosis* (self-emptying) of Christ.[58] The nature of *agape* is described in the familiar biblical passage found in 1 Corinthians 13: "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends."[59] Though these words are often recited at weddings, it is interesting to note that the actual text contains no mention of reciprocity; the self-giving character of *agape* appears to be in large part unilateral and independent of any response from the recipient. Because of its unconditional nature, *agape* is often identified as ideal love, love that gives its all even when the recipient is unworthy or incapable of a suitable response. In some sense, this manifestation of *giving love* is similar to Marion's depiction of the self-defined gift, with at least one significant difference: in theology it

---

[58] "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself (ἐκένωσεν), taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philippians 2:5-11.

[59] 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a.

is not the gift which discloses itself but God who makes himself known through *kenosis*. In other words, God is the gift.

It is worth quoting Balthasar at some length regarding the implications of God's self-emptying.

> For the Father strips himself, without remainder, of his Godhead and hands it over to the Son; he "imparts" to the Son all that is his. … The Father must not be thought to exist "prior" to this self-surrender that holds nothing back. This divine act that brings forth the Son, that is, the second way of participating in (and of being) the identical godhead, involves the positing of an absolute, infinite "distance" that can contain and embrace all the other distances that are possible within the world of finitude, including the distance of sin. Inherent in the Father's love is an absolute renunciation: he will not be God for himself alone. He lets go of his divinity and, in this sense, manifests a (divine) God-lessness (of love, of course). The latter must not be confused with the godlessness that is found within the world, although it undergirds it, renders it possible and goes beyond it. The Son's answer to the gift of Godhead (of equal substance with the Father) can only be eternal thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) to the Father, the Source – a thanksgiving as selfless and unreserved as the Father's original self-surrender.[60]

There are a few important points to note in Balthasar's description of God's kenotic, giving love. The first is that *kenosis* is inherent in God's triune nature and not a unique feature of the incarnation event. Loving, absolute self-donation, according to Balthasar, is a distinguishing characteristic of the divine nature, the three-in-one and one-in-three. The Nicene Creed describes the Son as "eternally begotten of the Father" and the Spirit as one who "proceeds from the Father and the Son."[61] Though Church fathers have long debated these words and their exact phrasing in order to bring precision to the doctrine of God, might I suggest that the robust mutuality, equality, and "give and take" which Balthasar describes in the Godhead are among the nuances often missed in a simple reading of the Creed. The incarnation reveals a God who is eternally, lovingly, generously kenotic. The incarnation was never a stop-gap measure, not a contingency

---

[60] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 4, *The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 323-24. Hereafter referred to as *TD4*.

[61] I will not be tackling the issue of the *filioque* here. Suffice it to say that the inclusion of the phrase "and the Son" renders a more mutual and reciprocal Godhead which I believe is Balthasar's point and mine as well.

plan, and certainly not a necessity in order to re-establish God's holiness.[62] *Kenosis* is part of the divine essence because God is giving love (*agape*).[63] Balthasar goes on:

> …the Father, in uttering and surrendering himself without reserve, does not lose himself. He does not extinguish himself by self-giving, just as he does not keep back anything of himself either. For, in this self-surrender, he *is* the whole divine essence. Here we see both God's infinite power and his powerlessness; he cannot be God in any other way but in this "kenosis" within the Godhead itself. (Yet what omnipotence is revealed here! He brings forth a God who is of equal substance and therefore uncreated, even if, in this self-surrender, he must go to the very extreme of self-lessness.)[64]

By identifying *kenosis* and self-surrender at the very heart of the immanent Trinity,[65] Balthasar provides us with a theological model for the concept of gift. The always-giving God is also the always-receiving God; the powerful God is also the self-limiting God.

A further point which can be drawn from Balthasar's depiction of the Godhead is that the intent of gift is always directed toward the other, inviting reciprocity. In loving, agapic, kenotic gift, true mutuality is possible. The "distance" which the three-in-one God creates within Godself makes possible human freedom and divine/human covenant. Another distinction (which was already alluded to above) is the inexhaustible nature of divine gift. God holds nothing back and yet God's eternal self-giving never renders him any less than he is.[66]

A second aspect of theological gift is found in the concept of *eros* (desiring love). The most explicit theological text which portrays the passionate pursuit of a lover for his/her beloved is the Song of Songs. Both bride and bridegroom give voice to their mutual desire and love; they call to each other, express their longing to be together, and share affectionate intimacies,

---

[62] In the Middle Ages, the Dominicans and the Franciscans debated whether the Incarnation would have taken place had humanity not sinned. John Duns Scotus (Franciscan) believed that the incarnation was part of God's intention from the beginning. Thomas Aquinas (Dominican) held that the appearance of Jesus Christ in history was a response to sin, necessary for atonement, though he allowed that the Incarnation could have been viewed as the consummation of God's glory before sin entered the world. Both views were eventually accepted by the Church as having biblical support, and therefore within the realm of orthodoxy. See Thomas Aquinas, "The Fitness of the Incarnation," Article III and "The Act of Faith," Article VII, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947). See also Pope Benedict XVI, "John Duns Scotus," in *Great Christian Thinkers: From the Early Church Through the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 301-5.

[63] 1 John 4:8.

[64] Balthasar, *TD4*, 325.

[65] "This primal kenosis makes possible all other kenotic movements of God into the world; they are simply its consequences." Balthasar, *TD4*, 331.

[66] "For since He Whom God has sent speaks the words of God [proclaims God's own message], God does not give Him His Spirit sparingly or by measure, but boundless is the gift God makes of His Spirit! The Father loves the Son and has given (entrusted, committed) everything into His hand." John 3:34-35. The Amplified Bible ©1987 by The Zondervan Corporation and The Lockman Foundation.

extolling each other's admirable qualities: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely."[67]

In addition to passion, *eros* contains the notion of unrelenting pursuit. Though the actual Greek word (*eros*) is not found in the New Testament, the idea of sensual, desiring love can be found in several biblical stories. In the book of Hosea, a prophet marries a prostitute in response to a directive from God. Their relationship is to be a living representation of God's faithfulness to Israel despite Israel's unfaithfulness to God. It is a tale of desire, infidelity, tenderness, and redemption. Though Hosea's wife, Gomer, breaks her marriage vows on many occasions, the continued faithfulness of Hosea eventually transforms their relationship from a master/servant dynamic, where one party dominates the other, to that of husband/wife where love is freely given and received. Hosea and Gomer's marriage trajectory runs parallel to God's ongoing pursuit of the nation of Israel despite its unfaithfulness to the bilateral covenant in which God declares, "You are my people," and Israel responds with, "You are my God."[68] What *eros* brings to the theological concept of gift is the idea that the giver is not a disinterested party; the benefactor actively pursues a relationship with the object of his desire. What is at the fore here is not primarily the posture of self-surrender which we find in *agape* but an unrelenting, passionate commitment to mutual exclusivity and intimacy with the other. In effect, the gift being offered here is worth; the pursuer bestows on his beloved an immeasurable value due to her special and unique significance to him.

A third dimension of theological gift is illustrated by the Greek word *philia* which, of the three words, carries the strongest sense of mutuality. Essentially, *philia* is the bond of friendship, the loyalty of brotherly love, and the companionship and camaraderie between equals. If *agape* is giving love and *eros* is desiring love, then *philia* is collaborating love. A form of the word *philia* is used to describe the love the Father has for the disciples and the love the disciples have for Jesus.[69] *Philia* is also used to characterise true followers of Christ, those who have "love for the Lord,"[70] and employed to describe the love Jesus had for Lazarus and his disciple John.[71] The

---

[67] Song of Solomon 2:13b-14.
[68] Hosea 2. The depiction of Christ and the Church as husband and wife in Ephesians 5 contains both desire and self-sacrifice.
[69] John 16:27.
[70] 1 Corinthians 16:22.
[71] John 11:3, 36; John 2:20.

concept of mutuality or collaboration between divine and human can also be found in the idea of co-working (συνεργέω) when Paul writes that "we are fellow workmen (joint promoters, laborers together) with and for God."[72]

We find mutuality present in the covenant which YHWH establishes with Abram in Genesis. Whereas one might expect a supreme deity to issue unilateral edicts and directives, the establishment of a covenant where both parties have obligations exhibits a surprising amount of parity. Other examples of this divine desire for collaboration are found in stories where mere mortals are negotiating with Almighty God. I will reference but one example.[73] Not long after God rescued the people of Israel from captivity in Egypt, they fashioned an idol, a golden calf to worship, thereby displacing YHWH as their object of desire. As a result of this betrayal, God's anger was kindled and he declared his intent to destroy an unfaithful people. However, Moses pleaded with God to change his mind, to spare the Israelites and give them another chance. According to the account in Exodus, Moses prevailed and God turned away from his destructive plan.[74] The weight given to Moses's words in this exchange has proven problematic for some readers because it seems to bring into question the omniscience and omnipotence of God. However, if this is a God defined by self-sacrifice, a God who places significant value on humanity, a God who is committed to collaboration,[75] this is very much in character. What we have in the concept of *philia* love is the gift of friendship.

What I have sought to show in this chapter is that at the heart of every Yes is the notion of gift. Balthasar's starting point of theology, beauty, is relevant here. In "A Résumé of My Thought," he writes: "A being appears, it has an epiphany: in that it is beautiful and makes us marvel. In appearing it gives itself, it delivers itself to us: it is good. And in giving itself up, it speaks itself, it unveils itself: it is true."[76] Balthasar equates the self-revelation of God with benevolent and vulnerable self-donation. The gift and the giver cannot be separated; the gift is

---

[72] 1 Corinthians 3:9, The Amplified Bible. See also 2 Corinthians 6:1: "Labouring together [as God's fellow workers] with Him then, we beg of you not to receive the grace of God in vain…" The Amplified Bible.

[73] Other stories include Abraham negotiating with God about how many righteous souls (from 50 down to 10) it would take to save Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:16-33) and the account of Moses being commissioned by YHWH to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. Here we find a lengthy dialogue between God and Moses in which Moses questions his ability to do the job and YHWH provides reassurances (concessions?) such as a miracle and a spokesperson to do the talking (Exodus 3-4).

[74] Exodus 32:1-14.

[75] "And the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." Exodus 33:11.

[76] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "A Résumé of My Thought," trans. Kelly Hamilton, *Communio* 15.4 (Winter 1988), 472.

attractive and desirable precisely because the giver is attractive and desirable. We have seen how a genuine gift communicates not only the character but the intent of the giver; in a theological context, this translates to God's desire to be close to humanity, to be not merely a benefactor (*agape*) but a lover (*eros*) and a friend (*philia*). A theological interpretation of gift also incorporates Mauss's observation regarding the relational "stickiness" and mutuality inherent in giving and receiving, and draws on theatrical improvisation to provide a dynamic model of how giving and receiving function to establish a community of trust. Theology acknowledges, along with Derrida, that the ideal gift must be one untainted by egoism and self-interest and embraces Marion's notion that gift (true givenness) is by nature unconditional and inexhaustible, specifically in the notion that God himself is gift in the person of Christ. A gift is the self-expression of the giver, the mediating tool between two parties, and the covenant which binds people together. In the context of the three Yeses, a gift offered is the first Yes of invitation. A reciprocal, second Yes, acknowledges the receipt of the unconditional, un-retractable gift and responds in kind. This interaction between the two parties initiates a mutual relationship where friendship and collaboration are possible, the third Yes.

Chapter 3

The Second Yes - Response

> *God seeks to enter the world anew. He knocks at Mary's door. He needs human freedom. The only way he can redeem man, who was created free, is by means of a free 'yes' to his will. In creating freedom, he made himself in a certain sense dependent upon man. His power is tied to the unenforceable 'yes' of a human being. So Bernard [of Clairvaux] portrays heaven and earth as it were holding its breath at this moment of the question addressed to Mary. Will she say yes? She hesitates ... will her humility hold her back? Just this once—Bernard tells her—do not be humble but daring! Give us your 'yes'! This is the crucial moment when, from her lips, from her heart, the answer comes: 'Let it be to me according to your word.' It is the moment of free, humble yet magnanimous obedience in which the loftiest choice of human freedom is made.*[1]

The first Yes is the invitation which God, the author, director, and primary actor, extends to humanity to participate in the grand drama which God has put into play. It is a true invitation, an offer to participate and collaborate, not a divine decree or coercive compulsion based on superior position or power. It is divine freedom making space for human freedom, and as such, this divine Yes requires a response. While one might think that a secondary, responsive Yes carries relatively little authority or weight in comparison to the first Yes, that the second Yes is mostly passive and compliant, nothing could be further from the truth.

Yes as a response is much more than assent; it is the desire to align oneself with another, to enter their story, or better yet, to create a story together with another. The preceding chapter on gift was meant to lay the groundwork for the second Yes of response, clearly positioning it within the context of gift and not in the culture of exchange. Semiotician Genevieve Vaughan explains, with a good deal of precision, the difference between the two:

> In the logic of exchange, a good is given in order to receive its equivalent in return. There is an equation of value, quantification, and measurement. In gift giving, one gives to satisfy the need of another and the creativity of the receiver in using the gifts is as important as the creativity of the giver. The gift interaction is transitive and the product passes from one person to the other, creating a relation of inclusion between the giver and the receiver with regard to what is given. Gift giving implies the value of the other while the exchange transaction, which is made to satisfy one's own need, is reflexive and implies the value only of oneself. Gift giving is qualitative rather than quantitative, other-oriented rather than ego-oriented, inclusive rather than exclusive. … Its relation-creating

---

[1] Pope Benedict is commenting on one of Bernard of Clairvaux's Advent homilies. Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (New York: Image Random House, 2012), 36.

capacity creates community, while exchange is an adversarial interaction that creates atomistic individuals.[2]

Vaughan's description contains several points of intersection with the observations made in the previous chapter: 1) gift is focused on the recipient and not on the donor, 2) gift confers value on the recipient, 3) gift forges relationships, and 4) gift is oriented toward collaboration instead of competition. It is vital that any discussion of theology and drama maintain the distinction between gift and exchange, careful to avoid blurring the lines between them. If one confuses the two types of interaction, the tendency will be to see invitation and response as an expression of Newton's third law of motion: for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. This would be a serious mistake. An exchange which happens between two persons through dramatic action should never be equated with self-balancing equilibrium. Doing so would negate all possibility of freedom, surrender, and generous, unnecessary, excessive largesse, all of which are present in dramatic theology.

In exploring the idea of response, I will re-visit the importance of starting point, this time from the perspective of the second Yes. This will lead into a look at the implications and limitations of human experience as a source for dramatic theology with particular attention paid to selected writings by Friedrich Schleiermacher. The latter part of the chapter focuses on describing the connection between revelation and responsibility and acknowledging some of the limits of human responsiveness, especially in relation to divine initiative. But first, in keeping with a methodology which recognises that words on a page can only take one so far in describing dramatic action, I offer a brief illustration of the nature of the responsive Yes.

The Second Yes in Action

Keith Johnstone, a specialist in improvisation, writes: "Great improvisers 'go with the flow', accepting that they're in the hands of God, or the Great Moose. Their attitude is the opposite of those 'beginners' for whom improvisation is very difficult and who find the demons on the stage just as threatening as those in life. When a great improviser is inspired, all limits seem to disappear."[3] As part of my research for this thesis, I participated in an improvisational theatre workshop with the intent of experiencing first-hand the dynamic of "going with the

---

[2] Genevieve Vaughan, "Introduction," in *Women and the Gift Economy: A Radically Different Worldview is Possible*, ed. Genevieve Vaughan (Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education, 2007), 2.

[3] Keith Johnstone, *Impro for Storytellers* (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1999), 341.

flow," of participating in the second Yes.[4] Because I have done improvisation in the past and knew what to expect, I was surprised by how much anxiety I felt going into the workshop; those demons of which Johnstone speaks were very real. No doubt the prospect of fairly close interaction with a room full of strangers was the cause of some of the tightness in my chest, but my real fears had less to do with clumsy social interactions and more to do with the actual performance aspect of the workshop. I was afraid that I would freeze when it was my turn to deliver a line or action. I imagined that when every eye turned expectantly toward me, my mind would go blank, I would have nothing to offer, and the scene would be ruined due to my ineptitude. I was also afraid of being faced with a situation which might overstep my personal boundaries and values, making it impossible for me to contribute meaningfully to a scene. The last thing I wanted was to be awkwardly out of sync with the other participants in the workshop. Referring back to the first rule of improvisation (Yes, and…), it is clear that my first fear related to having no "and" to give and my second fear concerned the high cost of saying Yes. In the end, both fears were unrealised. The director of the workshop proved to be very good at his job, moving the group through a natural progression. We began with simple, nonthreatening circle exercises which involved giving and receiving, then moved to more complex versions of the same, then switched to one-on-one dialogues where we engaged in storytelling, and finally ended with everyone playing an impromptu scene with a fellow-actor in front of the whole group. Ten minutes into the workshop I noticed that my fears were no longer an issue because I felt safe with the group. We had all looked each other in the eye, we had all given and received from each other, and we had all graciously accepted each other's mistakes.

As the workshop went on, it became easier and easier to say Yes to whatever suggestion was thrown my way, and there was no hesitancy in trying out different words and actions to see how they would move a scene forward. Several times, when a scene was floundering, the director of the workshop stopped the players and had them try it again from a pivotal point in the action, offering a few helpful suggestions to keep the story's momentum going. The simple exercise of saying Yes again and again over the period of an hour and a half had a profound effect. As I exited the workshop and stepped onto a busy downtown street, I was approached by a man asking for money. This is a common enough occurrence in the city of Montreal, and my usual response is to say a simple, "Sorry," avoid eye contact, and keep moving. However, since I

---

[4] The workshop I attended took place at Montreal Improv on September 27, 2014.

had been saying Yes for the last ninety minutes, I was much more open than usual. Instead of walking by, I stopped, looked the man in the eyes, and stuck out my hand. "Hi," I said, "What's your name?" The man hesitated, a bit taken aback by my forwardness, then shook my hand and told me his name. I asked him about his situation and the reason he was on the street looking for handouts. He told me a bit of his story and said his immediate need was for a shower and some clean clothes. In response, I referred him to a drop-in centre where he could get a meal and some clothes and then offered him a few dollars. As we parted, I wished him well and said I would pray for him. At this point, I realised how out of character the interaction had been for me. I remembered one of the comments made by the director of the workshop. He stated that one of the most enjoyable aspects of improvisation is witnessing those delightful moments when performers surprise themselves in that vulnerable, wide-open place of Yes, a moment like the one I had just experienced.

The Starting Point before the Starting Point

Before we answer the question of what particular role the second, responsive Yes plays in the divine drama, it is necessary to look again at the idea of starting point. For Balthasar, beauty is the access point for a person's first encounter with divinity, the first hint that there is more to form (*Gestalt*) than that which meets the eye. This starting point says something about the Creator (for Balthasar, the emphasis is on goodness), but it also says a great deal about the nature of divine/human interaction. The interaction between a work of art and a human being is not an exchange between equals. The two are not, at their core, the same substance. An encounter with beauty is mysterious, subjective, elusive, convincing yet insubstantial, undeniable yet not provable. It is as if beauty comes to us from another realm, and this is exactly what Balthasar means to imply when he equates beauty with the glory of God. We catch only glimpses of glory, but these glimpses are enough to attract us, enthrall us, and cause us to pursue its source. Balthasar posits God as the originator of beauty and glory, or more accurately, recognises these qualities as part of the divine nature. As mentioned in a previous chapter, Balthasar presents a rather robust depiction of the sovereignty of God. However, positioning God not only as the primary actor but as the ultimate *telos* of all action leaves little room for human expression or input. Balthasar addresses this problem by situating human freedom within divine freedom; in other words, human freedom exists because divine freedom wills it to exist. The subject addressed in this section is not the starting point *per se*, as it was in chapter one, but a revisiting

of the topic from a temporal, human standpoint. In order to do this, we must put aside Balthasar's occasional tendency to view history from a divine perspective and look more closely at the subjective reality of starting point. Perhaps a more accurate title for this section would be *The Starting Point after the Starting Point*, thereby acknowledging divine primacy both temporally and causally while noting that from the perspective of human experience, the first Yes is unintelligible until the responsive second Yes has been uttered. Essentially, the divine story has no meaning for humanity until a human being steps onto the stage and enters the story. Dorothy Sayers puts it bluntly: "To complain that man measures God by his own experience is a waste of time; man measures everything by his own experience; he has no other yardstick."[5] The second Yes, then, is the experiential, human starting point for divine/human interaction.

One way to differentiate this dramatic starting point from other existential starting points is to place them side by side. For my purposes, I have chosen to compare the dramatic starting point of the second Yes with René Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* (beginning with human thought) and Plato's theory of forms (beginning with human imperfection). The contrast between the three starting points will serve to highlight an important distinction which sets dramatic theology apart, and that is its inference that human existence must be thought of as co-existence.

Descartes, during a lengthy eight-year meditation on the nature of philosophy and the basis of knowledge, resolved to isolate truth by distancing it from that which we normally rely on: our senses, reason, and imagination. His exercise led him to the following conclusion:

> But now that I wanted to devote myself solely to the search for truth, I thought I needed to do the exact opposite – to reject as if it were absolutely false everything regarding which I could imagine the least doubt, so as to see whether this left me with anything entirely indubitable to believe. Thus, I chose to suppose that nothing was such as our senses led us to imagine, because our senses sometimes deceive us. Also, I rejected as unsound all the arguments I had previously taken as demonstrative proofs, because some men make mistakes in reasoning, even in the simplest questions in geometry, and commit logical fallacies; and I judged that I was as open to this as anyone else. Lastly, I decided to pretend that everything that had ever entered my mind was no more true than the illusions of my dreams, because all the mental states we are in while awake can also occur while we sleep and dream, without having any truth in them. But no sooner had I embarked on this project than I noticed that while I was trying in this way to think everything to be false it had to be the case that I, who was thinking this, was something. And observing that this truth **I am thinking, therefore I exist** was so firm and sure that

---

[5] Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (New York: Continuum, c1941, 2005), 24.

not even the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics could shake it, I decided that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking.[6]

Of interest to our discussion regarding starting point is Descartes's insistence on rejecting anything which might be susceptible to doubt. Instead of viewing doubt as a natural process in discovering truth (though his method clearly demonstrates it), Descartes seeks to eliminate it, determined to find truth in the *via negativa*, so to speak. The result is that his reliance rests solely on his own thought process and ability to reason; he does not eliminate reason, but only doubt in his reason. From what he concludes is a sure starting point - the ability to think - he then sets out to prove that God exists.[7]

Allow me to introduce the second conversation partner, Plato, before I draw some comparisons between the three different starting points. In "Phaedo," Plato (through the character Socrates) deduces that though we cannot observe absolute qualities such as equality, goodness, beauty, uprightness, and holiness, we know they exist by direct contact, through our senses, with marred versions of them.[8] "So before we began to see and hear and use our other senses we must somewhere have acquired the knowledge that there is such a thing as absolute equality. Otherwise we could never have realized, by using it as a standard for comparison, that all equal objects of sense are desirous of being like it, but are only imperfect copies."[9] Since knowledge of abstract absolutes cannot be explained through sensual experience, Plato links this knowledge to a form of recollection, intimating that the soul knew these things before birth and thus must be immortal. Plato's starting point, human experience of the imprecise and imperfect, leads him to posit the presence of the absolute, the abstract, and the eternal.

A brief comparison of all three views with regard to form, content, and trajectory will serve to highlight the distinguishing marks of the second Yes, the theodramatic Yes.

---

[6] René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, trans. Jonathan Bennett (©1637; 2007), Part 4, 15. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1637.pdf.

[7] René Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy," in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911). *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1996. Accessed February 15, 2016. 1996. http://selfpace.uconn.edu/class/percep/DescartesMeditations.pdf

[8] Plato, "Phaedo," in *The Last Days of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, c1954, 1983), sections 73-77.

[9] Ibid., section 75b.

1) *Form:* In contrast to Plato's segregation of true virtue (ideal form) from what can be observed in the material world (imperfect copies to these ideal patterns),[10] Balthasar insists that form (outward physical appearance) and content (meaning) cannot be severed from each other, for it is the combination of the two which results in beauty or glory. Balthasar holds that in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, we see the ideal union of form and content; in fact, Christ becomes the definition of beauty, a beauty which encompasses the marred physical appearance of Christ on the cross. As a result of this association of beauty with the suffering Christ, Balthasar has no difficulty identifying goodness, truth, and glory in less than ideal forms.[11] In a sense, both Descartes and Plato have a certain disdain for form, finding it necessary to isolate truth from the senses in order to render it pure and beyond doubt. Both philosophers believe that outward form has limited value in discerning truth and virtue. For Descartes, the senses show themselves to be unreliable indicators, so he discards them in his quest for what is true and certain. Plato observes that the senses only have access to what is damaged and defective, thereby presenting us with shadowy, imperfect versions of truth. As a result, Plato also dispenses with the senses rather quickly, relying instead on abstract imagination and what he deduces must be inherent recollection in order to define transcendent virtues in their purest form. In contrast, Balthasar looks to the incarnation of Christ as the archetype for how form and content must be intricately joined in order for truth to be revealed and made intelligible to humanity. Balthasar states that, "If beauty is conceived of transcendentally, then its definition must be derived from God himself. Furthermore, what we know to be most proper to God – his self-revelation in history and in the Incarnation – must now become for us the very apex and archetype of beauty in the world..."[12] Instead of shunning experience in order to arrive at transcendental truth, Balthasar shows that God chooses human form

---

[10] "If all these absolute realities, such as beauty and goodness, which we are always talking about, really exist, if it is to them, as we rediscover our own former knowledge of them, that we refer, as copies to their patterns, all the objects of our physical perception – if these realities exist, does it not follow that our souls must exist too even before our birth…" Ibid., section 76e.

[11] Balthasar believes that God's beauty embraces death as well as life, fear as well as joy, what we call ugly and what we call beautiful. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics,* vol. 1, *Seeing the Form,* trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, eds. Joseph Fessio S.J. and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 56. Hereafter referred to as *GL1*.

[12] Balthasar, *GL1*, 69.

to be the ultimate revelation of divine truth, thereby dignifying form, sensuality, and human experience. The point here is that the second Yes, the human, experiential Yes, leads one to the divine Yes without being negated by it.

2) *Content:* Descartes locates truth, that which is without doubt (what one could call the ultimate content), in his mind, specifically in the action of thinking. As a result, divine content or all truth about God is also limited to what the mind can think about the divine. By placing reason in a foundational position, it becomes the measure for what can be known about God. For Plato, the content of truth is transcendent and abstract and therefore, unattainable and indescribable except through faint echoes from the past. The perfect truth remains essentially uncharted territory because the gap between present human experience and perfection cannot be completely traversed. Essentially, Plato's content remains inaccessible and unknowable. According to Balthasar, the incarnation event, the joining of divine content with human form, renders ultimate truth and perfection not only accessible but immanent. Though humanity may not have the capacity to comprehend divine goodness in its glorious totality, through Christ, something of this totality can be experienced, not as a distant memory, as Plato would suppose, but as present reality. We find this idea of experiencing immanent divine presence in many instances in theology. I cite but two examples here: in the Psalmist's invitation to his listeners: "O taste and see that the Lord is good,"[13] and when we look at one of the names for the messiah, Immanuel, which means "God with us."[14] The appearance of God in human form reveals that divine content or truth is not distinct from the senses nor unintelligible to the senses, but available through the senses. One of the purposes of the second Yes is to reveal the first Yes, thereby making divine nature intelligible to humanity.[15]

---

[13] Psalm 34:8.

[14] Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23.

[15] According to Aidan Nichols, Balthasar's notion of clarity (radiance and brightness) differs from the Cartesian notion of clarity which references clear and distinct ideas. "The brightness of the beautiful is something that overwhelms us, impelling us and enabling us to enter further into the depths of being than the unaided intelligence can venture." Aidan Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness, and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 17.

3) *Trajectory:* By a process of elimination, Descartes finds himself left with his own thoughts as the only reliable evidence of his existence. In so doing, he sets himself on a trajectory of using reason and self-awareness to prove the existence of God.[16] This leaves very little room for God to be more than a projection of human thought and virtually no place for divine mystery to transcend linear reasoning. Insisting that reason is the only reliable source for divine/human interaction results in much of human experience being rejected as useless data, discarded and abandoned because it is considered unreliable and misleading. Plato also advocates this denigration of human experience, positioning ultimate truth out of reach for mere, imperfect mortals. Another problem with Plato's starting point is that it requires one to make deductions by moving from imperfection to perfection; this is a tricky commute. It is highly probable that remnants of imperfection will remain imbedded in any attempts to describe perfection because humanity remains situated within an imperfect context, and our perceptions of perfection will always be imperfect. In contrast, Balthasar's approach is to take a common human scenario, that of a child becoming aware of motherly love, and show that limited human experience is integral to understanding the larger picture. The idea of awakening into the context of a loving relationship leaves room for divine mystery while at the same time valuing human experience, giving place to human reason, and establishing the importance of learning and process. Even an imperfect, immature, child can show love, exhibit goodness, and proclaim truth. For Balthasar, the human starting point is not reason nor an imaginative recollection of perfection, but the realisation that one is part of a nurturing, loving relationship. The second Yes is not an assertion of autonomy and self-will, nor a quest for perfection, nor a search for certainty. The second, responsive Yes is that which makes one a consenting partner in a mutual relationship.

To reiterate, the second Yes consists of entering into the story which the divine Yes has set in motion. However, when seen from within human experience, the second Yes is its own

---

[16] Interestingly, Fergus Kerr observes that Descartes's reasoning apparently backfired. He references Eberhard Jüngel when he notes that "Descartes' attempt to demonstrate the necessity of God's existence by way of establishing the subject's self-certainty has resulted in the 'death of God' crisis. Far from having yet to accept the turn to consciousness, theology has already been nearly ruined by it." Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1997), 8.

starting point; it is humanity's debut. And what exactly is the nature of this debut? As Descartes and Plato so ably demonstrate, self-awareness, reason, and even human experience can lead one to pursue the transcendent. However, I contend that these alone are not enough to thrust a person onto the stage or make them aware of their role within the larger, divine drama. The horizon which opens up through the second Yes is a process. I refer back to my experience in the improvisation workshop to trace the progression.

The first step in my journey toward Yes was self-awareness; I recognised internal anxiety which revolved around past experiences and unrealised fears. This anxiety resulted in a brief self-examination in which I evaluated whether or not my fears had any foundation. I concluded that although most of my anxiety was unfounded, there was indeed a possibility that I would find myself in a few uncomfortable situations during the course of the workshop. This left me with a decision: I could forgo the workshop, or I could proceed with caution, giving myself the option of leaving or declining certain exercises, or I could embrace the element of risk and say Yes to the whole experience, trusting that in the end it would contribute to my overall learning. I chose the third option.

Having made the decision to say Yes in theory, my commitment was put to the test through the various improvisation exercises which required me to practice receiving from others and then giving back to them. Of interest here is the fact that in all the exercises, my role was never that of initiator; I was always responding either to another actor or to a directive given by the workshop leader. Though I was in a constant state of responsive, second Yes, the experience as a whole translated as initiative in my mind. I was constantly thinking, feeling, reasoning, making decisions, and trying to keep pace with what was going on around me. The intensity and speed of the workshop activities required me to be wholly attentive in every situation. Never, for one moment, did I think of myself as passive.

The workshop experience guided me from self-awareness to deliberate action to functioning relationally. A sense of community developed quickly among the participants because every exercise demanded that we interact with each other, communicate with each other, and most importantly, trust each other. Anytime the group failed to deliver in these three areas, the momentum of the exercise inevitably faltered. Scenes in which actors were primarily self-aware instead of community-oriented never completely succeeded, because a self-focused actor either locks others out of the action or disregards the contributions of fellow actors. Watching,

listening, and moving together proved essential to developing a successful, coherent story or scene. Saying Yes meant that I was willing to go where another person led, willing to build on their story idea, and willing to accept a role someone else assigned me. I discovered that it took diligence to constantly refuse the internal No; I had to fight off the desire to maintain control, to protect my sense of autonomy and self-determination. Practicing the responsive Yes gradually changed my disposition from anxiety-ridden to one characterised by openness and generosity. Instead of fear, I felt excitement and enjoyment. Instead of being paralysed by extreme self-consciousness, I was able to enjoy the surprises which came out of collective efforts. Instead of evaluating my own performance, I rejoiced in the successes of the whole group.

The final element of the second Yes became evident only after I left the safe, controlled environment of the improvisation workshop and encountered a stranger on the street. Because of my experience of living in a state of Yes, I was no longer fearful or preoccupied with self-protection. The practice of repeatedly acting out the responsive Yes placed me in a position of openness, and the experience of listening to and engaging with the stories of others became my new norm. Seeing how I could contribute to the story became my immediate task in the workshop, and I began to feel at home in this fluid role. The question was, what would happen to the responsive Yes after I left the confines of the rehearsal space and the workshop's temporary community of trust? Would it translate into the real world, into an encounter with a complete stranger, some might even say, a threatening stranger? Indeed it did, much to my surprise.

To summarise, my practical investigation into the second Yes led me through the following stages: 1) self-awareness, 2) commitment to decisive action, 3) participation in a community and shared story, and finally, 4) engagement with the world outside the community of trust. What my on-the-ground research did not reveal in any substantial way was how the second Yes makes the divine nature (the first Yes) intelligible. In order to address this topic, we turn back to theology and the work of a German philosopher and theologian who sought to straddle the worlds of modern thought and religion.

Theology From Below: Schleiermacher

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834) is often referred to as the father of modern theology. Because he lived during the period of history when the medieval worldview was giving way to what we now identify as modernity, his writings reveal the tension of his time: increasingly, reason was no longer seen as being informed by faith but became the basis for

critiquing faith. Practically speaking, theology lost its influential role as Queen of the Sciences. In contrast to Anselm's "faith seeking understanding," modern thought asked if faith was reasonable at all. As Descartes demonstrates in his writings, the starting point of modern theology and philosophy is, to a great extent, not belief but doubt. One of Schleiermacher's early works, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (1799), addresses the increasing divide between philosophy and religion. Interestingly, his attempt to defend religion by using a more modern approach was interpreted by the church as a "too-strong challenge to received Christian teaching."[17]

Schleiermacher's later work, *The Christian Faith* (1821-22, second edition 1830-31), was an attempt to engage more with orthodox Christian thought and for this reason is the work most often cited by theologians. However, in discussing how the second Yes leads to a revelation of the first, divine Yes, I will primarily refer to ideas found in Schleiermacher's early work, *On Religion*, because it deals more directly with the topic at hand. In the second speech, "The Nature of Religion," Schleiermacher states that, "every activity of the spirit is only to be understood, in so far as a man can study it in himself."[18] Here, it seems, we are clearly able to identify the second Yes leading to a discovery of the first Yes, but is this what he argues? In a footnote, Schleiermacher clarifies that he does not believe religion holds the highest knowledge (he does not distinguish Christianity from other religions here, suggesting that all forms of religion are similar in kind) but that religion's form is always determined by something outside of itself. In essence, he makes a distinction between outward form and true nature, stating that the two are never the same.[19] His writing contains strong hints of Plato's theory of forms, indicating that pure religion can never be experienced. As a consequence, despite his stated effort to unite piety with knowledge, he finds himself caught in an ongoing dualism. He states: "You can only obtain what is original by producing it, as it were, by a second, an artificial creation in yourselves, and even then it is but for the moment of its production."[20] Assuming that true religion can never be

---

[17] Jack Forstman, foreward to *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* by Friedrich Schleiermacher, trans. John Oman (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd.; Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1983), 6.

[18] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* by Friedrich Schleiermacher, trans. John Oman (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd.; Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1983), 25.

[19] Ibid., footnote, 29.

[20] Ibid., 30.

known, he invites the listener to deduce its existence from a feeling, a sensation, or a glimpse of the infinite and good, similar to Plato's recollection of perfection.

To Schleiermacher, all religion is the "endeavour to break through from a lower region to a higher."[21] Whereas the medieval world relied, to a great extent, on Church authority and modern thinkers relied on science and reason, Schleiermacher appeals to another source: self-consciousness or feeling. He later refers to this as "religious affections" in *The Christian Faith*: "The common element in all religious affections, and thus the essence of piety, is this: the consciousness of our absolute dependence, i.e. the feeling of dependence on God."[22] Schleiermacher's desire to unify all religious affection and feeling, combined with his contention that true religion is beyond human experience, makes his argument altogether too vague. Whereas Balthasar's reference to the incarnation of Christ is historical and particular, Schleiermacher's description of the connection between human and divine is so indeterminate that it could apply to almost any experience at all. He writes: "To a pious mind religion makes everything holy, even unholiness and commonness, whether he comprehends it or does not comprehend it, whether it is embraced in his system of thought, or lies outside, whether it agrees with his peculiar mode of acting or disagrees. Religion is the natural and sworn foe of all narrow-mindedness, and of all onesidedness."[23] This lack of clarity, especially regarding the nature of the religious element opened up in the exploration of self-consciousness, causes Schleiermacher to fall short of describing genuine divine/human encounter. Because he is overly committed to human experience, human feeling, and human consciousness as his starting point, he is unable to stretch beyond its confines to reach any intelligible understanding of the divine. As a result, all religious affection remains solidly tethered to human consciousness and never reaches beyond it to the object of its affection, the subject of religion itself, God.

To be fair, a broader reading of Schleiermacher's works, especially concerning the incarnation, reveals a bit more nuance than I am presenting here. In defending Schleiermacher against accusations of speculative theology, James Gordon argues that Schleiermacher believed that, "the general God-consciousness of humanity finds its end – its fulfillment – in Christ's own God-consciousness, which 'in Him was absolutely clear and determined each moment' such that

---

[21] Ibid., 30-31.
[22] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. D. M. Baillie (Edinburgh: W. F. Henderson, 1922), 6.
[23] Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 50.

it is proper to attribute 'a real existence of God in Him.'"[24] The substantive divine presence in the person of Jesus, according to Schleiermacher, the "real existence" so to speak, is communicated into Christian self-consciousness of God through the grace of redemption through Christ. Despite occasional Christocentric statements such as these, several theologians see Schleiermacher's overall starting point as problematic. Bruce McCormack contends that Schleiermacher's writings never concretely establish Christ as the starting point and concludes that Schleiermacher fails "to operate in a consistently christocentric fashion."[25] Thomas Curran finds Schleiermacher's treatment of the Trinity incoherent, arguing that in his writings, "All talk of God 'as He is in Himself', as He might exist apart from our relation to Him, is banished."[26] Similarly, Barth critiques Schleiermacher for making the subject of theology not God in Godself but God only as God appears to humanity.[27]

We find evidence of this cautious ambiguity concerning the nature of God in Schleiermacher's word choices. For much of "The Nature of Religion" he uses the term "World-Spirit" to reference the divine.[28] It appears that this is an attempt to make the discussion of religion palatable to his cultured readers by leaning more toward the inclusivity associated with modern sensibilities and less toward the traditional and particular identification of the divine as the God of Israel, the God revealed in Jesus Christ.[29] Another problematic word choice, at least

---

[24] James Gordon, "A 'Glaring Misunderstanding'? Schleiermacher, Barth and the Nature of Speculative Theology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16.3 (July 2014), 320-21.

[25] Bruce McCormack, "Not a Possible God but the God Who Is: Observations on Friedrich Schleiermacher's Doctrine of God," in *The Reality of Faith in Theology: Studies on Karl Barth*, Princeton–Kampen Consultation 2005, eds. Bruce McCormack, Gerrit Neven (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2007), 115.

[26] Thomas Curran, *Doctrine and Speculation in Schleiermacher's Glaubenslehre* (Berlin, Germany: Walter De Gruyter, 1994), 302.

[27] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. 1.1, trans. G.W. Bomiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 353.

[28] In a footnote, Schleiermacher makes his case for the term: "It should hardly be necessary to justify the use of the expression World-Spirit where I wish to indicate the object of pious adoration in a way that would include all different forms and stages of religion. In particular, I do not believe it can be said with justice that, by this choice of expression, I have sacrificed the interests of the most perfect form of religion to the inferior. On the contrary, I believe, not only that it is a perfectly Christian name for the Highest Being, but that the expression could only have arisen on Monotheistic soil, and is as free from Jewish Particularism as from the incompleteness of the Mohammedan Monotheism which I have attempted to specify in the "Glaubenslehre," § 8, 4. No one will confuse it with World-Soul. It neither expresses reciprocal action between the World and the Highest Being, nor any kind of independence of the World from Him. I believe therefore that Christian authors are justified in using the term, even though it has not directly proceeded from the special standpoint of Christianity." Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 56.

[29] In *The Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher does recognise the unique person of Jesus of Nazareth through whom redemption is accomplished, however the emphasis remains on "the consciousness of redemption" instead of the person of Christ. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 8.

from an orthodox theological standpoint, is found in his comments on the nature of miracles and the relationship between religion and other sciences. He remarks on what he calls the "childish operations of the metaphysicians and moralists in religion," stating that their misunderstanding of revelation discredits religion by causing it to "[trespass] on the universal validity of scientific and physical conclusions."[30] He promises his audience that he is not a party to this confusion concerning the nature of religion, adding that true religion "leaves your physics untouched, and please God, also your psychology."[31] The word which stands out here is "untouched," a rather strong choice considering his goal in these published talks is to reconcile the two worlds of modernity and religion. By using the descriptor, "untouched," he implies that religion does not intrude on scientific principles and makes no claims which require rigorous dialogue between the two disciplines. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that his definition of miracle steers clear of any physical or historical expression. Instead, it is lodged in human consciousness. A miracle is a sign, a wonder, Schleiermacher suggests, purely a "mental condition of the observer."[32] After having emphatically separated the worlds of science and religion, he then attempts to soften the distinction by redefining miracle as a non-particular event: "Every event, even the most natural and usual, becomes a miracle, as soon as the religious view of it can be the dominant. To me all is miracle. In your sense the inexplicable and strange alone is miracle, in mine it is no miracle. The more religious you are, the more miracle would you see everywhere."[33] As always, the truth of the matter, according to Schleiermacher, is to be found in the state of mind.

Schleiermacher locates the starting point of religion in self-awareness. According to him, what is not revealed to human consciousness, what human consciousness cannot think or feel or comprehend, is not part of religion or, for that matter, part of life. Likewise, inspiration, prophecy, and the operation of grace are all resituated to be expressions and experiences of human consciousness; true religion originates in the heart and true belief is defined as knowing that one has these things. Faith is not in some outside person or source, Schleiermacher insists, for this would be a second-hand action instead of an intrinsic virtue. The introspective nature of Schleiermacher's ideas is reinforced when he goes on to dismiss any outside authority on the matter of religious authenticity. "You are right in despising the wretched echoes who derive their

---

[30] Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 72.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 73.
[33] Ibid.

relation entirely from another, or depend on a dead writing, swearing by it and proving out of it."[34] For Schleiermacher, the starting point and the final authority in religion are the same. "You must belong to yourselves. Indeed, this is an indispensable condition of having any part of religion."[35] When Schleiermacher searches for true religion, he begins in conscious awareness of the self and its affections. While this is similar to the starting point of human experience and thought which Descartes, Plato, and Balthasar all utilise in their contemplation of the nature of the divine, Schleiermacher never succeeds in leaving self-awareness to arrive at an awareness of God. God is always intricately tied to what the self feels and thinks and knows, and therefore, human experience remains mired in the slough of self-consciousness and self-dependence. Unfortunately, Schleiermacher's attempt to defend religion to modern thinkers never opens up to a genuine encounter with the divine. For him, the second Yes remains reliant on its own voice and as a result, has nowhere to go but back into itself. What is meant to be a dynamic conversation between divine and human (religion) is reduced to variations or echoes of self-consciousness; in other words, what Schleiermacher leaves us with is a monologue.

I must point out that Schleiermacher's starting point is not the real problem here. It is his refusal to move past his starting point, self-awareness, which prevents him from ever fully engaging in any meaningful discussion on the nature of God. By limiting his understanding of religion to human consciousness, he shuts out any perception of a transcendent being. The dramatic, second Yes is meant to open one up to the existence of the first, divine Yes and to initiate human involvement in the divine drama. In effect, the second Yes is a relinquishing of control, self-centredness, and self-direction.[36] If there is no willingness to move beyond human consciousness as the first and last word in religious experience, there is no possibility for true encounter between divine and human simply because there is no real differentiation; the divine is always interpreted as part of self-awareness, not as a being apart from the self. However, Schleiermacher insists that he has not excluded God from religion: "Seeing then that I have presented nothing but just this immediate and original existence of God in us through feeling, how can anyone say that I have depicted a religion without God? Is not God the highest, the only unity? Is it not God alone before whom and in whom all particular things disappear? And if you

---

[34] Ibid., 75.

[35] Ibid.

[36] The analysis of my experience in theatrical improvisation revealed this same principle, that is, the necessity of moving beyond self-awareness to encounter with the other.

see the world as a Whole, a Universe, can you do it otherwise than in God?"[37] Indeed, there are glimpses of God as Creator in this passage, but a few pages later he concludes with a statement reiterating his reliance on human consciousness: "Yet the true nature of religion is neither this idea nor any other, but immediate consciousness of the Deity as He is found in ourselves and in the world."[38]

This rather selective engagement with Schleiermacher is meant to illustrate the danger in positioning the second Yes as the anchor for the first Yes; thinking along these lines makes for a very limited, human-centric portrayal of the divine. When human self-awareness becomes essentially equated with awareness of God, one is left with no way to escape a closed system which begins and ends with human experience. While I have acknowledged that experientially the second Yes functions as the human starting point, I have tried to make clear that it is meant to be a stepping stone to acknowledging and accepting the divine first Yes. The first Yes is revealed through an expression of generosity, a gift. This in turn requires the responsive, dramatic second Yes to accept what is offered from the divine Other and, by doing so, step into a larger story, a story beyond human experience or consciousness. In Schleiermacher's view, there is no movement from self-awareness to dramatic action; in fact, his closed loop of self-awareness never moves one past the first stage of improvisational practise identified in the previous section. For Schleiermacher, every religious aspect bounces back to self-consciousness and brings us only the ghost of an encounter with the divine.

Revelation and Human Response-ability

Up to this point, the second Yes has, in large part, been defined negatively, distinguishing it from what it is not. It is time for a more constructive approach and for that, we turn again to Balthasar. At the heart of the second Yes is its ability to usher the actor into a new world, a world heretofore unknown to the subject, a world which is unfamiliar territory in many ways, yet ultimately recognisable as the place where human longing is meant to lead. Balthasar states that, "It is not man's love for God that has set before itself an image of God so as to be able by this means to love God better: the image offers itself as something that could not have been invented by man – an image that can be read and understood and, therefore, believed only as an invention

---

[37] Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 77.
[38] Ibid., 84.

of God's love."[39] The world that opens up in the second Yes is not one birthed out of human imagination, but out of divine love. What is revealed to humanity is a love beyond anything experienced in this world. As we have seen, Schleiermacher's refusal to move beyond a human starting point results in his inability to articulate divine love and as a result, he neglects the overall divine story; the human subject remains tethered to imperfect and incomplete human experience instead of moving toward a loving and transcendent relationship with God. Awareness of the greater story, it is apparent, cannot come through human self-consciousness alone; it must come from outside, from revelation.

> God's free revelation of himself in Jesus Christ is an invitation into the realm of an absolute and divine freedom, in which alone human freedom can be fully realized. Nor is this just an invitation, but through God's becoming man in Jesus Christ, which is an example to all of true fulfillment, there is a breakthrough and entry into the sphere of precisely that kind of freedom which is so feverishly sought after by modern man but which, without the revelation of God, he can never otherwise find.[40]

In this short passage from Balthasar, we identify the first Yes of divine invitation (God reveals himself to humanity), the aspect of gift (this revelation is freely given), the dynamic nature of the second, responsive Yes (it catapults humanity into freedom and fulfillment), and of special interest to our purpose here, the necessity of revelation in order to make possible any meaningful movement toward the divine.

Revelation (ἀποκάλυψις) means an uncovering or unveiling, and it is used in the New Testament to refer to God being revealed through the person of Jesus Christ, the Word (λόγος) of God. Implementation of the Greek word λόγος as a name for God incarnate is important not only because of its philosophical implications as a divine animating principle of the universe, but because it is a communicative reference. It implies that there are two parties in dialogue with one another, and that one of them, the speaking party, the one associated with the living λόγος, is the one who is revealing himself. When Jesus refers to himself as the truth (ἀλήθεια), this is another indication that communication or revelation is resident in the divine nature. Balthasar positions truth in a communicative, animated framework when he defines it as a "transcendental property

---

[39] Balthasar, *GL1*, 173.
[40] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Engagement with God: The Drama of Christian Discipleship*, trans. R. John Halliburton (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 6.

of Being, truth which is no abstraction, [but] rather the living bond between God and the world."[41]

German theologian Karl Barth, a contemporary of Balthasar, adds another dimension to the idea of revelation by linking it to reconciliation, thereby placing merciful, loving relationship at the heart of God's communication:

> To the extent that God's revelation as such accomplishes what only God can accomplish, namely, restoration of the fellowship of man with God which we had disrupted and indeed destroyed; to the extent that God in the fact of His revelation treats His enemies as His friends; to the extent that in the fact of revelation God's enemies already are actually his friends, revelation is itself reconciliation.[42]

The motivation and end goal of revelation, according to Barth, is the reconciliation of humanity to God. Revelation is not just an unveiling of who God is, not just data about the nature of God, not just divine self-expression, but self-disclosure meant to draw two parties together in friendship. In essence, it is self-gift motivated by love, self-gift seeking to awaken reciprocal love. We must be careful not to miss Barth's reference to the broken, disrupted communion between God and humanity, for it contextualises the importance of revelation as reconciling agent. This idea of broken communication is similar to what Balthasar calls the great abyss. However, Balthasar refers not only to a severed relationship, but also to the inherent difference between divine and human natures. Both of these factors make meaningful communication and relationship difficult. Revelation is necessary because it can accomplish what the second Yes cannot; it can reveal the divine lover to the beloved. Human self-consciousness is not capable of this task because revelation concerning the divine must originate in the source. Revelation and reconciliation can be received only as an offer (gift) from the divine initiator.

The importance of revelation and, in particular, God as self-revealing and self-disclosing, is closely tied to Balthasar's first word in theology, beauty. Balthasar observes that there are two moments to be noted in the interaction between a person and a work of art (beauty). The first, the act of beholding, does not intimately engage the beholder with the object of adoration. The second, being enraptured, is not a passive stance (despite the passive case of the verb), but rather, the act of giving oneself to beauty. This happens when the beholder surrenders to the radiance of

---

[41] Balthasar, *GL1*, 18.
[42] Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* 409.

beauty's splendour and allows it to effect transformation.[43] While the one gazing at beauty is a distant or objective observer (first moment), the one who is enraptured has entered into communication with beauty by partaking of its gift, a gift freely offered to all who desire to receive it. For Balthasar, beauty, goodness, and truth are all found in God because they are revelations of divine Being. God's self-giving revelation, like any gift, invites a response, an encounter, and a movement, not toward the gift or the work of art, but toward the giver and the artist. Balthasar notes: "For the source is not a thing, nor an abstract truth nor a work of art, but God himself, eternally involved in Christ crucified for my sake and for the sake of the whole world. I myself cannot, in the face of this, stand by as a mere spectator. I am involved, though involved only insofar as I involve myself."[44] Revelation, then, is not only that which comes from the divine, but that which builds a bridge between divine and human. It is important, as Balthasar is careful to explain, not to reduce revelation or λόγος to an abstract, static philosophical or religious concept. Revelation is a "living bond" embodied in the God-man, Christ.[45] Revelation, as we have seen, is closely linked to beauty, relationship, and identification with the person of Christ. A further dimension of revelation implied in all these elements is action. Because divine revelation is rooted in the action of God, human understanding of that revelation is likewise accessed through human action, through responsive acts. "For God's revelation is not an object to be looked at; it is his action in and upon the world, and the world can only respond, and hence, 'understand', through action on its part."[46]

The idea of reciprocal action is not without its challenges. If only God can reveal God, and only God can reconcile the other to God, the potency of the second Yes is brought into question. It seems obvious that humanity does indeed have the ability to respond, but does this response carry any real weight or authority in comparison to the divine Yes? Does the second Yes add anything to the first Yes? Is it possible for there to be a real contribution on the part of humanity to the divine drama, a substantive, dramatic "and" to follow the second Yes? Some of these questions will be addressed in the next chapter which deals with collaboration, but the short answer to all of the above is yes. Balthasar, commenting on the thought of Barth, uses an

---

[43] Balthasar, *GL1*, 10.

[44] Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 46.

[45] Balthasar, *GL1*, 153.

[46] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 1*, Prologomena*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 15. Hereafter referred to as *TD1*.

illustration to describe the connection between revelation and faith, or divine initiative and human response.

> In Christ, the moment of revelation and the moment of faith are fused together, and in their interchange in him, we discover in the truest sense the infinite fulfillment of both in all their implications. We could describe this thought as a kind of hourglass, where the two contiguous vessels (God and creature) meet only at the narrow passage through the center: where they both encounter each other in Jesus Christ. … And just as the sand flows only from top to bottom, so too God's revelation is one-sided, flowing from his gracious decision alone. But of course the sand flows down into the other chamber so that the sand there can really increase. In other words, there is countermovement in the other chamber, but only because of the first movement, the initiative of the first chamber.[47]

This is a helpful image in some ways, but it has its limitations, one of them being its unilateral nature. Though the sand in the bottom of the hourglass is said to increase, to have countermovement, it is nevertheless entirely passive, having no ability to interact with the top half. In order to better reflect human freedom, Hans Boersma takes Balthasar's analogy of the hourglass one step further. "Revelation was primary, was supernatural in character, and did come from above. At the same time, the gift of supernatural revelation through Christ made it legitimate to turn the hourglass upside down, so that nature, too, made its genuine contribution, in and through Christ."[48] This inversion is what is at the core of the second Yes, and what makes it a compelling, powerful response to divine initiative.

Both Balthasar and Barth are cautious never to allow human freedom to exert substantive power over divine freedom; both desire to preserve the sanctity of divine sovereignty. However, both the biblical witness and recorded history point to a scandalous amount of human freedom within divine sovereignty, so much so that in both cases we find anguished pleas for God to intervene and stop the horrors wrought by human hands. How do we reconcile a strong commitment to divine sovereignty with the reality of devastating and destructive human action? The answer lies in how we view revelation. Ben Quash states that, "The Spirit makes history a medium of revelation and not just an interval, or gap, between revelation and its recipients."[49] Quash is not quibbling over Barth's and Balthasar's commitment to view history as a showcase for divine redemption, but noting that history also serves another purpose: it reveals who God is,

---

[47] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 197-98.

[48] Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Thèologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5.

[49] Ben Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 212.

not just through the person of Christ, but through human action. This may be troubling to some theologians because, though the overall arc of the divine drama in biblical accounts undoubtedly positions God as beginning and end, alpha and omega, there is much in the intervening acts which appears to be a clear departure from the divine author's intent. To a great extent, the human actors seem to have derailed the divine narrative. Predictably, Balthasar always points the reader back to the source, insisting that humanity's story is only found within God's story: "Again to be led by faith means to remain in perpetual contact with the source and to have no desire to seek one's own adventure. The greatest adventure after all is God's redeeming action for the world in his Son, and if we follow the Son's course we shall not run the risk of losing ourselves on the slippery paths of self-inverted love."[50] I find little fault in positing a continuous turn to Christ as the focal point of all theology, however, it does serve to render the second Yes, perhaps without meaning to, as somewhat redundant, a barely heard affirmation to what God has already determined from the very beginning. In other words, Balthasar's Christo-centricity could be interpreted as diminishing the responsive, yet revelatory role of creation and humanity. This, I believe, would be a misrepresentation of the divine drama.

If freedom and self-determination are divine gifts granted to humanity, they cannot be token gifts; they must have real creative power. Free agents cannot be pawns in a divine game nor actors with no ability to act. This would make the concept of human responsibility meaningless. The ability to respond to divine invitation must be a true, voluntary response, not an automatic, involuntary reflex which involves no volition. Beginning with the assumption that there is such a thing as genuine human freedom, a gracious gift granted by divine benevolence, we now consider why a robust human response is necessary. I have already made reference to the stages of the second Yes, moving a person through self-awareness, decisive action, participation in community, and engagement with the other. The question here goes beyond what the second Yes looks like to its importance in the divine drama; human response is vital to the divine drama because it is the means for transformation.

The answer can be found by once again referring to the dynamics of theatrical improvisation. Because the second Yes implies that the respondent is a willing participant, freely surrendering her own agenda to the community of trust and her personal adventure to the larger story, there is no imposition of one will over another. Change is not forced but embraced, and as

---

[50] Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 102.

a result, there is not merely external compliance but an internal shifting of priorities and guiding principles. The ability of one actor to make a genuine response to another (freedom) gives rise to several transformative dynamics. The first has already been mentioned, and that is a revelation of the existence and benevolence of the other which opens up a whole new world to the actor. The second is an awareness of the power which genuine, free, creative response carries. This realisation can either result in gratitude and wonder, leading to humble restraint and responsible action, or to a hunger for more power which manifests itself in aggression and self-assertion over the other. In the first scenario, the respondent becomes a functional member of a relational community; in the second, the respondent seeks to take control of the community. There is another possible scenario which technically takes one into the realm of No. One of the expressions of this negation is when the actor recoils from the demands of being a contributor and isolates themselves from interaction (community) as much as possible. In all these scenarios, it is important to remember that once the first Yes has been offered, it cannot be rescinded. A response is required and in fact, cannot be withheld; even a refusal to respond is a response, affecting the relationship between the two parties.

Translating the transformative element of the second Yes into theological language, we first affirm that the responsive Yes is meant to awaken humanity to the divine Yes. A positive response, a second Yes which willingly enters into the relationship initiated by God, is birthed in gratitude and worship and accompanied by cooperative action, often called obedience. Transformation is characterised by self-focused human purpose opening up to and joining itself to divine purpose. Ongoing change is cultivated through growing intimacy between divine and human, made possible through revelation and the indwelling Spirit of God. Barth speaks of it this way:

> The Spirit of God is God in His freedom to be present to the creature, and therefore to create this relation, and therefore to be in the life of the creature. And God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, especially in revelation, is God Himself to the extent that He can not only come to man but also be in man, and thus open up man and make him capable and ready for Himself, and thus achieve His revelation in him.[51]

Barth brings many of the elements of dramatic theology together in this brief quote: the first Yes (being present to the creature through revelation), self-gift (making humanity ready for Himself), transformation (opening up humanity), and intimacy (being present in humanity).

---

[51] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 450.

Before moving on to the next section, let me offer a brief comment on the self-assertive response. Self-assertion is when the wilful respondent (as opposed to the surrendering respondent) seeks to splice the divine giver from the divine gift, grabbing hold of human freedom but refusing divine purpose, thereby setting herself up in competition to the divine. This partial Yes refuses to relinquish self-interested action, and this proves detrimental to the community and eventually, to the self. In theological terms, it is the way of death and not life because it isolates the respondent from the source of life, the Creator. Nevertheless, transformation is evident even in the self-determined respondent, but it has nothing to do with embracing virtues such as love, justice, and mercy which are the building blocks of community. Instead, the respondent chooses attitudes and actions which solidify the distance between herself and the other (both divine and human), seeking to displace or destroy any who would threaten her ability to control her own destiny. The first biblical example of self-assertion is found in Genesis when we read of the wilful responses of Adam and Eve and their choice to part ways with divine purpose.[52] It is interesting to note that both types of Yes (surrender and self-assertion) are costly, though in different ways. The Yes of surrender to divine purpose forfeits self-interest and self-determination whereas the Yes of self-will walks away from all expressions of cooperation which are found in genuine friendship, flourishing community, and joyful participation in the divine drama.

The Limitations of Human Action

The remarkable power of the second Yes, both constructive and destructive, is evident to any student of theology or history. When considering the gift of human freedom and its source in divine freedom, one cannot help but brush up against theodicy. I feel no need to defend the authority and power of Almighty God in the face of evil deeds which humans inflict on each other and on creation; I know that God, if he is indeed Almighty, needs no help from me on this. However, freedom, like any virtue, is done a great disservice if only viewed from the positive, permissive angle without acknowledging the counterbalancing aspect of restraint. My subject here is not pure theodicy (how can a good God allow evil?) but focused on the limitations of human freedom, an issue which is closely related to theodicy but views it from the ground-up, so to speak. I contend, first of all, that it is not necessary to diminish the role of humanity in order to

---

[52] Genesis 3.

heighten the sovereignty and determination of God. In fact, positioning humanity in a restrictive role or placing too much attention on the effects of sin leads to an impoverished view of God, suggesting there is a limit to divine goodness and wisdom. Second, if the human will is truly free, then self-determination must be factored in alongside divine determination. Where there is freedom for human depravity, there must also be freedom for human goodness.

In order to address the matter of human limitation, I suggest that we look through two lenses in the hope that by combining them, we might gain some measure of depth and dimension on the topic. The first is what could be called the best case scenario. This relies heavily on the inherent goodness of humanity and the belief that the link between Creator and creature is the starting point for positive self-determination and conscientious morality. The second, the worst case scenario, posits that humanity is damaged at the core, therefore the natural inclination is to turn and return to the baser things, much like a stone tossed in the air always returns to the ground. These two scenarios are evident in the heated debates between Pelagius (c. 350-418), whose suggestion of a sinless life made possible through grace was condemned by the church, and Augustine (354-430) who prevailed with his doctrine of inherited original sin. My purpose here is not to revisit this age-old debate in any depth, but to cite it as a way of illustrating different approaches to human determination and limitation. In addition, this debate reiterates the impact which starting point has on theological development.

For Pelagius, the starting point is the doctrine that human beings are created in the image of the Creator and inherently good.[53] For Augustine, the starting point is the depravity of humanity through the inheritance of a sinful nature and the resultant great gulf between God and creation. Augustine's belief that (after Adam and Eve sinned) we are all born into sin and carry the curse of condemnation, as well as the compulsion to participate in sin, means that he views the human will as severely hampered.[54] As a result of this impotence on the part of humanity, the

---

[53] Details gleaned from Robert F. Evans, *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1968) and Geoffrey O. Riada, "Pelagius: To Demetrias." Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.libraryoftheology.com/writings/pelagianism/PelagiusToDemetrias.pdf

[54] William E. Phipps summarises Augustine's view regarding original sin: "Adam's disobedience to the divine will resulted in his genitals becoming disobedient to his own will. 'Lust' (*concupiscentia*) was involved in this latter mutiny and Adam was to spread that 'disease' congenitally to his offspring. From the first couple in human history onward, a 'depraved nature' has been transmitted in the semen so that infants are sinful 'by contagion and not by decision.' Humans can no more choose to sin or not to sin than they can choose their parents or their pigmentation." William E. Phipps, "The Heresiarch: Pelagius or Augustine?" *Anglican Theological Review* LXII.2 (April 1, 1980), 126. He references Augustine's works: *Marriage and Concupiscence* 1.7-9, *Unfinished Work Against Julian* 4.98, *Against Julian* 5.14.

saving grace of God and the salvific death of Christ are significantly heightened both in importance and potency. In contrast, the best case scenario (Pelagius) posits that the gift of human free will originates with a good and benevolent Creator. Therefore, the divine will which produces the human will also enables humanity to live a moral life. Pelagius makes clear that it is necessary to draw on both "the good of nature and the good of grace," referencing the work of the Creator as well as the Redeemer.[55] Pelagius has been, and still is, accused of promoting wilful self-determination instead of utter reliance on the grace of God, thereby rendering void the saving work of Christ on the cross. Though Pelagius made clear that he recognised the necessity of divine grace, his message of sinlessness which was meant as a call to authentic Christian living was perceived as a threat to orthodoxy and a divisive factor in the church.[56] Instead of emphasising the great schism between a good God and depraved humanity, Pelagius presents a picture more indicative of attunement between the Creator and the creature. He writes: "We are procreated also without virtue or vice and before the activity of our own personal will there is nothing in man but what God has formed in him."[57] For Pelagius, the nature of humanity is rooted in Genesis 1 and the good Creator and not primarily in Genesis 3 which presents the fallen creation.

It is important to note that both Augustine and Pelagius hold that grace is essential to salvation and the Christian life. For Augustine, grace enables one to overcome the downward pull of inherent sin, the "Adamic mutation" as it were, and through the grace of redemption, human nature is remade.[58] Grace, for Pelagius, is also the necessary element for salvation, but the focus is not so much on freedom from inherent sin, but empowerment for obedience and good works. He writes: "That a man possesses this possibility of willing and effecting any good work, comes from God alone."[59] Perhaps one could align Pelagius's view with the theological idea of common grace, the generous, divine presence which underlies every expression of goodness in creation. Special grace, the action of God on behalf of sinners to reconcile them to himself, appears to speak more to Augustine's concerns regarding humanity's depraved nature.

---

[55] "The Letter to Demetrias," in B. R. Rees, *The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991), 9.1. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/1296.html.

[56] Evans, *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals*; Riada, "Pelagius: To Demitrias."

[57] Pelagius as cited in Phipps, "The Heresiarch: Pelagius or Augustine?" 128.

[58] Phipps, "The Heresiarch: Pelagius or Augustine?" 130.

[59] Pelagius as cited in Alan P.F. Sell, "Augustine Versus Pelagius: A Cautionary Tale of Perennial Importance," *Calvin Theological Journal* (November 1977), 123.

It is easy to see how this debate causes lines to be drawn concerning free will and divine sovereignty. For those who do not wish to call God's determinism into question, the idea of inherent human goodness leading to moral sinlessness seems at the very least impossible and at most, heretical. However, for those who hold God's goodness in high regard and seek to live in that goodness, the belief that humanity is inherently good speaks not of self-determination but of the irrepressible goodness of God. If we refer to the best case scenario, human limitation is identified in acts of sinful self-sabotage, acts which turn one away from the goodness of God which is ever present in generous measure both in human nature and in the saving work of Christ. Human limitation, in the worst case scenario, is seen in the devastating effects which sin has on the world, thereby limiting free will, especially in its capacity to choose good over evil. The worst case scenario acknowledges the power of the grace of God, the work of Christ, and the ongoing indwelling of the Spirit to reconcile us to God, but denies that these can empower us to live without sin, at least in this present life. From the viewpoint of the best case scenario, there is no such restriction: the possibility for goodness is unlimited. As we can see, both perspectives put forth elevated views of divine holiness and goodness, however, the best case scenario also suggests a robust view of human freedom.

History shows us both scenarios: people who seem to have every advantage end up bringing devastation on the world, and people who are up against great odds choose to respond with lovingkindness and generosity. Augustine explains the first by pointing to the infection of sin present in all humanity. Pelagius says that the latter were able to find the good of nature and join it with the good of grace in order to live moral lives. This brings us back to the importance of starting point. Since Pelagius begins with goodness, we can conclude that he expects to follow a trajectory toward more goodness. Since Augustine starts with the assumption of human depravity, he expects continued depravity. When mapping out the divine drama, we must be careful not to use the starting point of our limited perspective, in other words, the second Yes, to define roles, interpret motivations, and delineate the story arc. Wherever we find ourselves on the inherent good/inherent evil spectrum, we can agree that there is inexplicable goodness as well as incomprehensible evil present in humanity. This is the freedom which characterises the second Yes and it must be given full voice. However, we must always remain mindful of the limitations of human action and experience. To use a musical analogy, the second Yes is a harmony, perhaps a counterpoint melody at times, but it has no existence or meaning apart from

the dominant *leitmotif*. Nonetheless, when the two voices come together, the first Yes and the second Yes, a new sound is created. This is what I identify as the third Yes.

Chapter 4

The Third Yes – Collaboration and *Synergos*

> *Audience and actors are not complementary and self-sufficient halves; both of them remain open, expecting some third thing that is to come about in and through both players and the audience. The limitations of both of them open on to an unlimited horizon.[1]*

> *Balthasar shows us that the mystery of being is revealed, that is, made immediately apparent, in and through the mediation of the encounter of particular beings in their simultaneous unity and difference.[2]*

Thus far, I have argued for the primacy and potency of the divine Yes, as well as its ability to release and empower the second Yes. The context of gift has been invoked in order to ensure that loving interaction instead of domination remains at the forefront of the divine drama. On the subject of human freedom, I have attempted to describe a robust capacity for self-determined action while acknowledging that humanity is essentially cast in a responsive role. We now move on to the crux of dramatic theology: the nature of the interaction between divine and human actors as they share the stage.

When we talk about the concept of gift, it is easy to recognise the two roles of giver and receiver, but in the idea of collaboration, the lines between the initiator and the responder are less distinct. Though collaboration (co-labouring) involves mutual exchange, it should not be categorised as a function within the exchange economy. In other words, collaboration does not situate us back in Mauss's primitive model of total services, equating societal obligations with cultural mores enacted through pre-scripted gifts and reciprocations. Instead, collaboration moves the parties forward into new roles. No longer can we clearly identify the one who acts and the one who is acted upon, because in collaboration both parties are on relatively equal footing, sharing a common goal and task.

---

[1] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 1*, Prologomena*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 307. Hereafter referred to as *TD1*.

[2] D. C. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 6.

In the English language, the idea of collaboration is associated with two or more people working on a project together.[3] Since the common usage of the word carries no indication of the loving commitment and trust which I believe is vital to the third Yes, I have chosen to introduce another word, *synergos*, into the discussion to augment the notion of collaboration. *Synergos* is a Greek word used several times in the New Testament[4] in different forms; it is translated as "fellow workers," "fellow helpers," "labourers together," "working together," "co-labourers," and "co-workers." The word is used to refer both to the Lord working with his disciples (Mark 16:20; 2 Corinthians 6:1) and the followers of Jesus working together (1 Corinthians 3:9; Romans 16:3, 9, 21). However, within these biblical contexts, we find many indicators that the co-labourers are much more than work colleagues. Paul writes: "Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life" (Romans 16:3-4a). In a letter to the Colossians, we read: "These are the only ones of the circumcision [Jews] among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me" (Colossians 4:11). Paul refers to a fellow worker, Epaphroditus, in the following way: "my brother and co-worker and fellow soldier, your messenger and minister to my need" (Philippians 2:25) and calls Timothy a "brother and co-worker for God" (1 Thessalonians 3:2). The idea of *synergos* or collaboration in the New Testament is further contextualised by proximity to words like "loyal companion,"[5] "truth,"[6] "good news,"[7] "grace,"[8] "joy,"[9] and the actions of supporting,[10] strengthening, and encouraging.[11] As well, the "co-workers" in the New Testament are exhorted to rejoice together and to serve each other.[12]

In addition to the biblical context of a tightly knit group of believers devoted not only to a common purpose but to each other, I would like to incorporate the meaning of an English

---

[3] "Collaboration," *Cambridge English Dictionary*. Accessed at dictionary.cambridge.org. Interestingly, the word can also be used in a negative sense to refer to someone who cooperates with an enemy to bring about the demise of their country.

[4] Some occurrences of various forms of *synergos* can be found in Mark 16:20; 1 Corinthians 3:9; 1 Corinthians 16:16; 2 Corinthians 1:24; 2 Corinthians 6:1; Romans 8:28; Romans 16:3, 9, 21; Colossians 4:11; Philippians 2:25; Philippians 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; Philemon 1:24; and 3 John 1:8.

[5] Philippians 4:3.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Mark 16:20.

[8] 1 Corinthians 3:9.

[9] 2 Corinthians 1:24.

[10] 3 John 1:8.

[11] 1 Thessalonians 3:2.

[12] 1 Corinthians 16:16; Philippians 4:4.

derivative, synergy, into the idea of *synergos*. Synergy, which refers to "a mutually advantageous conjunction,"[13] reinforces the notion of interrelation which we find in collaboration, but also adds the idea of something new being created when two or more participants join together "to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects."[14] Synergy implies that when two parties come together, they are, essentially, more than two. This echoes the spiritual dynamic found in Jesus's promise to his disciples that, "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."[15] My purpose in referencing the expansive biblical concept of *synergos* (working together), both in divine/human and human/human configurations, and incorporating the idea of synergy, is to infuse the notion of collaboration with a sense of intimacy and commitment which goes beyond that found in the word's common usage. In order to reflect this broader definition, I will use the terms collaboration and *synergos* somewhat interchangeably to refer to the concept of two or more parties coming together in a loving, trusting relationship in order to craft a story.

It must be acknowledged that navigating the ground of divine and human collaboration is complex, even precarious, because any robust theology concerning the character and nature of God exposes the vast distance between the two subjects. One relatively recent approach, relational theology, seeks to bring the divine and human subjects together by invoking a reciprocal framework. Relational theology affirms two key concepts which speak to both aspects of the divine/human relationship. Theologian Thomas Oord articulates the first idea this way: "God affects creatures in various ways. Instead of being aloof and detached, God is active and involved in relationship with others. God relates to us, and that makes an essential difference."[16] Here the emphasis is on the dynamic action of God upon creation which reveals God's immanence to the creature. The second point gives considerable weight to the creaturely side of the relationship, highlighting the effect creation can have on God. Oord continues: "Creatures affect God in various ways. While God's nature is unchanging, creatures influence the loving and living Creator of the universe. We relate to God, and creation makes a difference to God."[17]

---

[13] "Synergy," *Merriam Webster Dictionary*. Accessed at www.merriam-webster.com.
[14] "Synergy," *Oxford Dictionary*. Accessed at www.oxforddictionaries.com.
[15] Matthew 18:20.
[16] Thomas Jay Oord, "What is Relational Theology?" in *Relational Theology: A Contemporary Introduction*, eds. Brint Montgomery, Thomas Jay Oord, Karen Winslow (San Diego: Point Loma Press; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012), 2.
[17] Ibid.

Even though Oord is careful to affirm God's nature as immutable, he nevertheless opens up a rather large spectrum of questions regarding God's omniscience and omnipotence, and more specifically, God's foreknowledge and foreordination of events. Nevertheless, relational theology brings some very important elements to the discussion which are generally missing from divine determinism.

New Testament scholar Scot McKnight affirms a relational theology approach, stating that it "rightly affirms God's vulnerability and the partial openness of the future."[18] McKnight deliberately distinguishes his theological position from one which allows for a changing deity (process theology) by proposing what he calls a "non-process, narrative-based, relational view of God's sovereignty."[19] Relational theology suggests that a defense of genuine divine/human collaboration does not diminish God's ability to intervene in human affairs; however, because God is sovereign over all things, he is sovereign even over his own sovereignty.[20] By choosing to enter into relationship and be intimately involved with humanity, God chooses to be affected by his creation. Relational theology posits that the acts of God toward his creatures are based in overflowing love, not a need to maintain control. Theologian Roger Olson defines divine determinism as a view in which, "all events are traceable back to God who controls history down to every detail according to a blueprint."[21] According to Olson, this results in a God who takes no risks and essentially micromanages historical events and individual lives to ensure that nothing occurs which is contrary to divine will. Human freedom, it seems obvious, can never find full expression in this view. However, relational sovereignty (Olson's term) shifts the focus from control to what Barry Callen identifies as "interactivity or mutuality." Callen goes on to emphasise that the "interaction of the wills of Creator and creature are real."[22] In summary,

---

[18] Scot McKnight, "Relational Theology: Roger Olson," *Jesus Creed: Exploring the Significance of Jesus and the Orthodox Faith for the 21st Century*, April 17, 2013. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2013/04/17/relational-theology-roger-olson/.
[19] Ibid.
[20] "To say that God can't be vulnerable, can't limit himself, can't restrain his power to make room for other powers, is, ironically, to deny God's sovereignty." Ibid.
[21] Roger Olson, "A Relational View of God's Sovereignty," talk given at *Missio Alliance*, Alexandria, Virginia, April, 2013. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2013/04/a-non-calivinist-relational-view-of-gods-sovereignty/.
[22] Barry L. Callen, "John Wesley and Relational Theology," in *Relational Theology: A Contemporary Introduction*, eds. Brint Montgomery, Thomas Jay Oord, Karen Winslow (San Diego: Point Loma Press; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012), 7.

relational theology, according to its proponents, is a way to view God not as a divine being obsessed with power or authority, but characterised by openness and vulnerability.[23]

Though I am not advocating relational theology *per se* nor agreeing to all its propositions, the portrayal of a relational God is foundational to the idea of the third Yes. In order to flesh out the concept of divine/human collaboration or *synergos*, we look first at the biblical concept of covenant and note how the Israelite covenants, unique in Ancient Near Eastern literature, show God leaning toward collaboration instead of control. The second part of the chapter will be devoted to a discussion of the incarnation, divinity and humanity united in the person of Jesus Christ, and the concept of *plerosis* (fullness) as an expression of *synergos*. Next, we turn back again to improvisation, this time both in theatre practice and in music, to explore the dynamics of *synergos* through creative interactivity and mutuality. Finally, I engage with a number of philosophers, particularly Jean-Luc Nancy and his concept of "being-with," as a way of understanding divine/human interaction. Viewing the third Yes from four different angles is not an attempt to fence it in or define its parameters once and for all. Instead, each image or scenario is meant to open up another aspect of the dynamic, dramatic interaction between divine and human actors. Ideally, the four approaches will provide a good deal of clarity concerning the nature of the third Yes while, at the same time, allowing for the breathing room characteristic of genuine dramatic encounter. This chapter is pivotal in that it moves us past unilateral divine action, past human response-ability and experience, and launches us into collaborative interactivity (*synergos*) which is at the core of dramatic theology.

---

[23] Of interest here is the thought of theologian John D. Caputo on divine vulnerability. In his book, *The Weakness of God,* Caputo suggests that God's weakness (demonstrated in part through Christ's *kenosis*) is not merely restraint, but God's very essence. He equates traditional views of God with power structures, God (and theology) being the one at the top of the heap, so to speak. By positing what he calls a weak theology, a theology which reveals the action of God through indirect and often confusing means instead of through definitive creeds and theological enforcement, Caputo shows us a God who, though uncontainable, appears to us in ways which have nothing to do with power and thereby resemble uncertainty. Instead of a theology of causation, he posits a theology of call, what he terms an "unconditional claim" and what I believe is very close to what I have labelled invitation (the first Yes). For Caputo, the idea of weakness opens up the whole concept of God in a way which a strong theology of God cannot, because its focus is not on God having everything turn out the way God wants it to, but on the call to unconditioned compassion, justice, and love. John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A theology of the event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006). See also Ian Leask, ed., "From Radical Hermeneutics to The Weakness of God: John D. Caputo in Dialogue with Mark Dooley," *Philosophy Today* 51.2 (Summer 2007), 219.

Covenant: Faithfulness and Vulnerability

The idea of *synergos* within the divine drama should come as no surprise since dynamic, mutually collaborative movement is at the heart of the triune God (*perichoresis*). Therefore, one could argue that there is evidence of divine/human collaboration throughout the entire biblical witness, from the creation stories to the description of the eschaton. I have chosen to highlight but one example of divine/human collaboration in this section: the Israelite covenants, specifically the Abrahamic and Mosaic agreements. In the examples of covenant found in the Hebrew Bible, we find a God who asks human beings to trust him, and rather surprisingly, a God who places a great deal of trust in humanity as well. As a result, the posture of the divine initiator is not one of maintaining control or exerting domination, but of fostering mutuality and collaboration. In covenant we see a God who would freely bind himself to human beings in an agreement and thereby, choose to be affected by them and their actions. This, as we shall see, was unique for its time. Covenants in the Ancient Near Eastern cultures were basically of two types, promissory and obligatory.[24] A promissory covenant was unconditional, meaning that one party made promises to another party without any demands made on the latter. In contrast, an obligatory covenant implicated some aspect of mutuality, indicating responsibilities on both sides. Some ancient covenants were between unequal parties, such as a suzerainty agreement (obligatory) in which a monarch promised protection and certain benefits to a lesser ruler in exchange for their fealty. Another example of a covenant between disparate parties was a land grant (promissory) by which a wealthy landowner or ruler bestowed a parcel of land in a gesture of gratitude to a loyal subject. This was similar to a patron covenant (promissory) in which a superior party made an oath to take responsibility for the well-being of an inferior party. An example of a parity contract between two equal parties (obligatory) would have been a mutually beneficial trade agreement.[25]

---

[24] M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90.2 (April – June 1970), 184. George E. Mendenhall uses slightly different categories, suzerainty treaties and parity treaties, to distinguish the differences in ANE agreements. Mendenhall defines the suzerainty treaty as a bond of mutual support requiring an oath only from the inferior party. The superior party was bound to commands given by his own superior, the king. In contrast, the parity treaty contained identical oaths for both parties. George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *The Biblical Archaeologist* XVII (September 1, 1954), 55-56. See also Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), especially chapter 3.

[25] René Lopez, "Israelite Covenants in the Light of Ancient Near East Covenants, Part 1," *CTS Journal* 9 (Fall 2003), 106-10.

René Lopez observes that the covenants the God of Israel (YHWH) makes with his people follow the Ancient Near Eastern pattern for the most part, but there are some notable differences. I will point out a few of Lopez's observations which are especially pertinent to the topic at hand. 1) The covenant names YHWH as an active party. ANE contracts were never between a deity and humans; at most, they called on the gods to be witnesses. 2) The punishment for a violation of the covenant is not total annihilation, as in most ANE agreements, but proportionate to the crime. Further, if Israel were to break the covenant, it would not be considered void; instead, there is a promise of restoration after a period of discipline. 3) Contrary to ANE tradition, the blessings are listed before the curses.[26] While Lopez, in agreement with many Hebrew scholars, concludes that the fulfilment of the promises made in the Israelite covenants are contingent on God alone, thereby making them covenants between two unequal parties, I believe that the exceptions show how far the biblical covenants lean toward mutuality, especially in contrast to the covenants of the time.[27] The primary indicator of mutuality is the fact that God inserts himself into the covenant with Israel. Instead of acting as an objective witness or a divine judge, YHWH is the benevolent ruler offering to enter into a reciprocal relationship. The inclusion of merciful discipline and a promise of restoration should the lesser party violate the conditions indicate that the objective of the agreement is not domination but an ongoing, mutually beneficial bond. Similarly, the matter of reversing the order of curses and blessings reveals the overall good will of the dominant party toward the inferior party, comparable to a patron treaty. In contrast to ANE tradition, the tone evident in every part of the Israelite covenants is not that of an overbearing monarch seeking to subjugate his subjects, but the divine king inviting Israel to sit at the royal table.

All things considered, there is an unusual amount of give and take in the ancient biblical covenants, showcasing a more equivocal relationship than that generally found in ANE agreements. Instead of threatening annihilation upon violation of the covenant, mercy is offered

---

[26] Details gleaned from Lopez, "Israelite Covenants in the Light of Ancient Near East Covenants, Part 1" and René Lopez, "Israelite Covenants in the Light of Ancient Near East Covenants, Part 2," *CTS Journal* 10 (Spring 2004), 72-106.

[27] Mendenhall points out, "the relative absence of the *do ut des* type of religion in which man and deity are business contractors in which each agrees to confer a benefit upon the other – the sort of concept which is the foundation of legally binding contracts today," in the Israelite covenants. I believe this in no way diminishes my point about mutuality because he specifically notes the "business" nature of these obligatory contracts while I refer to covenants based in loving relationship. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," 51.

upon repentance. Instead of breaking off the contract when one party fails to hold up its end of the agreement, provision is made for restoration. Instead of many gods acting as witnesses, YHWH, the one God, enters into an exclusive relationship with humanity. Also included in Lopez's list of distinctives is the special allowance given for the oppressed and downtrodden. Offering compassion toward those who have nothing of value to contribute might be interpreted as reinforcing the unilateral nature of the covenant (promissory), but I believe it speaks not so much about superiority or even about patronisation as it does of a God who identifies with the poor, the outcast, and the overlooked. The lovingkindness written into the Israelite covenant is not impersonal benevolence, nor a litany of benefits cited for the purpose of demanding obedience, but YHWH revealing himself as a compassionate, relational God, one who is mindful of the least and the lowliest. One cannot make a case for absolute parity between divine and human parties in the Israelite covenants, but comparatively speaking, they are strikingly benevolent and interpersonal agreements which cast the two parties as relative collaborators, and according to Psalm 25:14, even as friends.[28]

In general, theologians believe the Israelite covenants take the ANE suzerainty agreement as their model, but there are some significant contrasts between the two. The traditional suzerainty treaty, meant to secure mutual support, nevertheless left few, if any, options open to the lesser party. Mendenhall notes:

> [The] vassal is exchanging *future* obedience to specific commands for *past* benefits which he received without any real *right*. Since, to receive a gift without becoming obligated is a prerogative only of the emperor, the actual positon of relative strength – that is, the inability of the vassal to defend himself from overwhelmingly superior power is a fact which deprives him of any ground which would enable him to escape obligation to an overlord who has granted him a boon – frequently of kingship itself.[29]

The Israelite covenants reveal an inversion of the traditional roles of the suzerainty agreement. Instead of the vassal being the powerless, vulnerable party, we find a people to whom the divine sovereign offers a surprising amount of freedom, and by implication, some measure of power. Essentially, this puts YHWH in a vulnerable position, a situation which the ANE treaties sought to eliminate. The suzerainty covenants were drawn up primarily to protect the interests of the king or suzerain, not the vassals. In contrast, the Abrahamic covenant initially requires nothing

---

[28] "The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes his covenant known to them." Psalm 25:14.
[29] Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," 58.

from the lesser party, consisting only of divine promises of blessing.[30] Later on, circumcision is implemented as a sign of the everlasting bond between YHWH and Abraham's descendants.[31] The promises of YHWH contained in the Abrahamic covenant are numerous; their reiteration to subsequent generations testifies to the ongoing commitment of YHWH to the nation of Israel. What seems significant in this covenant are the two key points found in relational theology: God's faithfulness and God's vulnerability.

As mentioned previously, the typical ANE suzerainty agreement placed the vassal or lesser party in a vulnerable position, demanding obedience and loyalty to the monarch. In the Israelite covenant, we find the reverse. Instead of requiring it, YHWH is the one who promises faithfulness, affirming that his words and blessings are true and everlasting. YHWH is also the one who places himself in the position of vulnerability, putting his promised faithfulness in jeopardy by trusting Abram to be the willing and cooperative means whereby great blessing will come to all the nations of the world.[32] A recurring motif of the Hebrew Bible, "You will be my people and I will be your God,"[33] contains two parallel phrases, reading more like a parity agreement than a treaty between two unequal parties. It should be noted that the Mosaic covenant which appears in the book of Exodus, hundreds of years after the initial Abrahamic covenant was instated, contains a significant number of obligations which are commonly referred to as the Decalogue or Ten Commandments. This seems to be a progression in the relationship between YHWH and his people; God has proven his ongoing interest in their salvation, well-being, and longevity (declared in the Abrahamic covenant), and now the second, obligatory part of the treaty is presented. While the list tends to read as demands, especially when taken out of context, the words should be interpreted more as directives meant to orient former slaves to a new way of life within a benevolent theocracy. In essence, the Decalogue asks the people of Israel to emulate the nature of their covenantal God.

The first four directives (some argue that the fifth should also be included in this grouping) have to do with reciprocal faithfulness: the God who has brought Israel out of slavery now asks for their faithful loyalty and worship. It is important to note that in the Israelite covenants, YHWH never asks for anything before he has proved himself willing and able to give

---

[30] Genesis 15.
[31] Genesis 17.
[32] Genesis 12, 17.
[33] Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 30:22.

the same in generous measure. The last six directives concern moral and communal responsibilities, giving the newly freed slaves a model for just and equitable relationships with each other. Since the people of Israel had been in a position of vulnerability for hundreds of years, these communal laws were to ensure that they did not use their newfound freedom to take advantage of others. In other words, the laws were meant to prevent Israel from self-destructive and inequitable behaviour. The Mosaic covenant, then, was given to direct people toward living in peace with God and others, concepts which would have been relatively unfamiliar for the Israelites at that point in their history.

The idea of covenant is important to the third Yes because it embodies the idea of divine and human collaboration, especially through the unique and unusual position in which YHWH places himself by entering into covenant with human beings. To my knowledge, there is no comparison for this type of divine benevolence and vulnerability in the Ancient Near Eastern religions. When YHWH commits himself to blessing Abram and his descendants, and reiterates the promise after repeated breaches in trust on the part of the people of Israel, he puts his divine reputation at stake. This is evident in Exodus 32 when the impatient dissension of the newly freed Israelites causes them to break one of stipulations in the Mosaic covenant immediately after it is given. They ask the priest, Aaron, to fashion an idol of gold so they can worship it as if it were YHWH. This is a violation of the exclusivity clause in the Mosaic covenant. YHWH's response is to threaten annihilation of the people which, according to an ANE covenant, would have been a legitimate response. However, Moses appeals to YHWH's commitment to vulnerability, to be affected by his people, thereby hoping that YHWH would differentiate himself from all other gods of the time. Moses says to God: "Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people."[34] Moses adds a second appeal, this time to YHWH's faithfulness, citing his promises to do well by Israel. "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they

---

[34] Exodus 32:12.

shall inherit it forever."[35] In other words, Moses is speaking YHWH's covenant back to him, calling on him to demonstrate faithfulness and vulnerability even when Israel failed to do so.

The outcome is revealed in the next sentence of the text: "the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people."[36] Moses's success in getting YHWH to reconsider the destruction of an unfaithful and ungrateful people can seem problematic if one is trying to defend the character of an unchanging, omnipotent God. However, when we read the text within the context of covenant, the focus is not the unchanging nature of YHWH, but what kind of covenant YHWH makes with human beings. The dramatic negotiation scene in this story illustrates that YHWH, in contrast to the rulers of the time, has not made a unilateral version of a suzerainty covenant which is meant to serve primarily his own interests. The Abrahamic covenant was YHWH's promise of benevolent faithfulness. The Mosaic covenant was a reiteration of that faithfulness, this time with the added dimension of mutuality, expressed through directives meant to foster human fidelity. Because YHWH had proven himself faithful, he asked for faithfulness in return. Unfortunately, it was not readily reciprocated, but what is truly remarkable is that a direct violation of the directives did not result in voiding the covenant. Instead, we see YHWH taking on a posture of vulnerability, allowing himself to be affected by a human being. When Moses urges YHWH not to forsake the covenant, not to let the Egyptians equate YHWH's justice with malice, and not to walk away from his promises, it is a contrast in covenants. The ANE suzerain would have crushed insubordination. YHWH chooses to demonstrate faithfulness even when his subjects are unfaithful. The covenant YHWH made with Israel is a covenant which reveals a desire for divine/human collaboration, a feature unique among ANE agreements.

Earlier I stated that evidence for collaboration between YHWH and humanity could be found before the Israelite covenants, in the biblical creation accounts. Miroslav Volf, in talking about work and its relation to faith, makes a case for the presence of mutuality (*synergos*) in creation:

> It starts with the statement that there was no vegetation on earth after God created it. Two reasons are given for this: first, God had not yet let rain fall on the ground, and second, human beings were not around to till it. Only when human beings come onto the scene and start working can God's work of creation be complete. God creates, God preserves, God's blessing is enacted, God transforms the world in anticipation of the world to come

---

[35] Exodus 32:13.
[36] Exodus 32:14.

– and in all that, God makes us God's own coworkers. We work with God, and God works through us.[37]

Volf recognises the restraint God exercises in choosing to work with human beings instead of coercing or forcing them into submission. As Volf states, "fundamentally, God is not a demander; God is a giver."[38] The Israelite covenants are first of all generous offers of blessings (Abrahamic), then invitations to mutual faithfulness and joined purposes (Mosaic), and finally, though there is not space to develop it here, promises for the establishment of God's kingdom through human participation (Davidic). All of these covenants point to the ultimate collaboration of God and humanity, the joining of the two natures in one person, Jesus Christ.

The Collaboration of Incarnation

The person of Christ is present in every theodramatic Yes: first as God's Yes (God's self-revelation through the gift of his divine Son), then in the responsive Yes of humanity (through Jesus's humble submission to the Father's divine will), and finally in the third, collaborative Yes (demonstrating divine/human cooperation and *synergos* at its fullest). Though we are focusing on the person of Jesus in this section, it is important to remember that the idea of divine/human *synergos*, and for that matter, all of dramatic theology, must be viewed through a Trinitarian lens. We must always remain mindful that the divine invitation to collaborate is rooted in the loving interconnection and cooperation already present within the Godhead. Balthasar is careful to do this, framing *Theo-Drama* within a Trinitarian context by assigning the roles of author, actor, and director to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, thereby situating all divine/human interaction within the spacious mutuality of the Godhead. As stated in an earlier chapter, dramatic theology is not primarily about a tryst between God and humanity, but about a communal, relational God who invites humanity to engage in the ongoing divine drama, to participate in the circle dance of the *perichoresis*.

In the same vein, Stephen E. Fowl observes how adopting a Christological analogy in scriptural interpretation (the Bible as having two natures, divine and human) can lead to employing methods which place emphasis on historical and cultural contexts in order to unearth divine meaning. The problem, Fowl concludes, is that using human means to access divine truth

---

[37] Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011), 35.
[38] Volf, *A Public Faith*, 26.

will never prove successful. Citing John Webster, he insists that "all doctrines about scripture must begin with and depend upon doctrines about the triune God."[39] This recalibration toward a Trinitarian framework informs how we view revelation, which then becomes "directly dependent upon God's triune being and … is inseparable from God's freely willed desire for loving communion with humans."[40] Fowl's warning on the subject of scriptural interpretation has implications for how we talk about the incarnation. Christ, the living λόγος of God, the revelation of God in human form, must always be joined to the triune God because the relational, communal nature of the Godhead informs God's communicative activity toward humanity and undergirds God's commitment to the same. Similarly, Gerard Loughlin emphasises the primacy of Trinitarian context as key to interpreting the biblical texts as well as understanding the incarnation. He writes:

> God is his own interpreter, but his interpretation is incarnate, concrete and human. The mystery of God's self-interpretation, God's reading of his own story, is that in being given over to human contingency, that contingency is taken up into the mystery of God's triune life. When Scripture as inspired writing is understood in this way its all too human production is expected rather than surprising.[41]

With this in mind, we now turn our attention to divine/human collaboration in the incarnation.

In chapter two on the topic of gift, I briefly addressed the notion of *kenosis,* the self-emptying of God which makes space for humanity to encounter the Godhead, or in Balthasar's terms, God making room on the stage for human involvement and action. Instead of revisiting that concept, I will approach the incarnation through the lens of *plerosis* (fullness). This is not a negation of or counterbalance to divine vulnerability described in the previous section on covenant, but a recognition that without *plerosis*, there can be no *kenosis*. The joining of divine and human natures in the person of Christ should not be viewed as somehow bringing God down to human level, but as an overflow of divine generosity, an expression of *synergos*. Kevin Vanhoozer states that, "Jesus' appearance in history was neither a surprise nor a contingency measure but the result of a joyful collaboration conceived in eternity between the Father and the

---

[39] Stephen E. Fowl, "Scripture," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, eds. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 348.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church, and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 119.

son."[42] The incarnation, then, is to be viewed as an extension of the fullness of the Godhead, a fullness which encompasses all of humanity, not in a pantheistic way, but in a demonstration of God's animating presence in creation (panentheism, if you will).[43]

In situating the locus of beauty and splendour in the person of Jesus Christ, Balthasar recognises that both *kenosis* and *plerosis* are part of God's self-revelation to humanity. To take either one out of the mix impoverishes our idea of God and reveals a decided lack of Trinitarian sensibility, something which Balthasar is careful to avoid. John Webster observes:

> Von Balthasar's theology of the incarnation leads to a particular manner of approaching the doctrine of God. Because Jesus 'fleshes out' or 'bodies forth' the nature of God, his history furnishes the key to the inner relationships of the Trinity. The drama of the incarnation, that is, plays out before the eyes of the world the loving unity between Father and Son in the bond of the Spirit. Thus it is truly the incarnation which lies at the root of Christian belief about the differentiated character of God. The life of God is neither flat nor relation less: rather, it is fully societal, bearing within itself both the pain of separation and the mutuality of love.[44]

What is described here is a God who is able to exhibit distinction without disintegrating into disunity, a God capable of embracing humility, suffering, and even death without inducing a deficiency in divine glory, love, and life. Because of this both/and nature of incarnation, Balthasar insists that the person of Jesus not be viewed as existing in perpetual tension, paradox, or dialectic.[45] The apparent contradictions in Jesus's utterances, especially concerning the kingdom of God (is it at hand or is it to come?) cause Balthasar to conclude that Jesus lives "'proleptically' in both directions."[46] In other words, Christ embraces both a divine understanding of things to come (*plerosis*) as well as a limited human reality (*kenosis*). The Council of Chalcedon in 451 articulated it in these words: "We confess one and the same our Lord Jesus Christ, and we all teach harmoniously [that he is] the same perfect in Godhead, the

---

[42] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 259.

[43] "For in him [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority." Colossians 2:9-10.

[44] John Webster, "Hans Urs von Balthasar: The Pascal Mystery," *Evangel* (October 1983), 7.

[45] "God's incarnation does not occur 'through tension, dialectic, paradox, and contradiction. It is not God, but rather the errors of our manner of thinking about God that are to be blamed if we conceive of the Incarnation in such a way." Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics,* vol. 1, *Seeing the Form,* trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, eds. Joseph Fessio S.J. and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 55. Hereafter referred to as *GL1*.

[46] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 3*, Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ,* trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 92. Hereafter referred to as *TD3*.

same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father in Godhead, and the same consubstantial with us in manhood, like us in all things except sin."[47] Balthasar puts it this way: "Jesus' whole life and work exhibit both things simultaneously: he looks ahead to the reality that will come without fail, and he possesses the peace of the man who unhurriedly performs his tasks each day that is granted to him."[48] In Christ, we find what Balthasar calls the "unique presence" of God with the world which includes both knowledge and ignorance, both power and weakness, both freedom and constraint, and both authority and submission.[49] Christ's two natures, divine and human, are not to be viewed as existing in competition with each other or isolated from one another, but joined in a unity which demonstrates the collaborative, communal oneness of the Trinity.

We see an illustration of this cooperative unity between divine and human when we place two related proclamations of Jesus side by side. While Jesus is in the temple, teaching, he says, "I am the light of the world."[50] In another context where Jesus is speaking to crowds on a hillside, he declares to them: "You are the light of the world."[51] The link between the two can be found in the gospel of John: "He [the Word] was the true light that enlightens everyone coming into the world."[52] As humans, we are first receptive as we accept the light of God, then active as we become light-bearers with Christ. The apparent paradox of the incarnation is that the Son of God, being light, also fully embraces humanity's role in receiving light from God. This only becomes problematic when one tries to view overabundance (*plerosis*) and self-emptying (*kenosis*) as two separate postures. In the context of light, the self-emptying of God through the Son should not be interpreted as a snuffing out of the light, but a receptive stance which aligns the person of Christ with all humanity, acknowledging the source of light and life as God. The incarnation could be viewed as God, in covenant with Godself, showing faithfulness as the Father and vulnerability as the Son, or in terms of light, being the giver of light and glory as well

---

[47] Edward Rochie Hardy, ed., *Christology of the Later Fathers* (London: SCM Press, 1954), 373.
[48] Balthasar, *TD3*, 92.
[49] Ibid., 97.
[50] John 8:12.
[51] Matthew 5:13.
[52] John 1:9. See footnote.

as the recipient of glory.[53] Scottish theologian Peter Taylor Forsyth describes the mutuality in this way:

> God and man meet in humanity, not as two entities or natures which coexist, but as two movements in mutual interplay, mutual struggle and reciprocal communion. On the one hand we have an initiative, creative, productive action, clear and sure, on the part of the eternal and absolute God; on the other we have the seeking, receptive, appropriate action of groping, erring, growing man. God finds a man who did not find Him, man finds a God who did find Him.[54]

The movement of each toward the other is key to understanding the *plerosis* of the incarnation. Not only is God moving toward humanity through Christ, but Christ is moving, in humanity, toward God. It is interesting to note the capital letter in Forsyth's last "Him" which suggests that God finds himself. Whether this is a typographical error or part of Forsyth's emphasis on the interplay and connection of divine and human natures is unclear, but if intentional, it would reinforce his point that the two natures in Christ cannot be neatly spliced. Such a rending would essentially void God's solidarity with humanity.

Forsyth sees the abundance of God as the factor which not only makes Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection possible, but causes the light of the divine nature to spill over into humanity, even to the point of descending into hell.[55] The two movements, divine descent and human ascent, are Forsyth's way of explaining how divine *plerosis,* the self-fulfilment of God, is displayed through kenotic action on the part of Christ. "We have [ascent and descent] in the unity of one historic person, to show that, however inadequate earthly personality is to heavenly, they are not incompatible, and they are capable of the supreme mutual act of love and grace."[56] For Forsyth, the emphasis on fullness is vital because it repositions Christ from a person characterised by limitation and weakness to one who is carrying out the overabundant action of God, moving toward humanity in order that mutual love and cooperation may increase. Forsyth continues: "In the person of Christ we have the crisis and sacrament of divine and human love. Do not let us speak here of impossible contradictions of logic. Let us rather remember here again

---

[53] "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you … I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed." John 17:1-5.
[54] P.T. Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, c1909, n.d.), 336.
[55] Ibid., 334-35.
[56] Ibid., 339.

that the reconciliation of such rational antinomies as God's sovereignty and man's freedom only takes place in the unity of one active person which has equal need of both for full personal effect."[57] The choice of imagery here is noteworthy. Overflowing fullness is the constant state of the Godhead. As a result, God is described not as being, but as always moving, unchanging yet always active. Because activity is central to God's character (and by implication, to dramatic theology), the flow of love, light, life, and truth through the person of Jesus Christ is not an exercise in self-emptying as much as it is a reflection of the fullness of the inexhaustible Trinitarian Godhead. Therefore, uniting divinity and humanity is not a theological conundrum to be solved by reason, but a dynamic relationship to be observed and experienced through the person of Christ.

Balthasar also links the ideas of abundance and self-emptying, making a direct connection between the vulnerability present in divine covenant and the work of Christ as a demonstration of God's transforming love.

> If, however, these [sin and death] are the consequences of the risk which God has taken in entrusting his creatures with genuine freedom (freedom ultimately to deny and to destroy themselves), then ultimately God could only take such a risk if he himself threw himself into the balance, assumed the risk himself, and of himself opened up a way where there were no ways. It is here that the biblical message interposes and proclaims, "God with us", God on our side! It proclaims not only "covenant", which assures us of God's faithfulness, even in spite of our breaches of that covenant and in spite of his just judgments ("If we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself", 2 Tim 2:13 RSV), but a coming over to our side in order to open up a way for us from within our helplessness and hopelessness - yet without in any way overplaying that situation with his omnipotence; without, that is, impugning our freedom in any manner. A way which leads through death into life. Dying freely and obediently, he turns death, the sign of our guilt, into a monument of love.[58]

Both Forsyth and Balthasar insist that loving collaboration or *synergos* is not understood theoretically or reasonably but through action, specifically the act of God becoming human in the historical person of Jesus Christ. This act demonstrates how the *plerosis* of the Godhead makes possible the *kenosis* of Christ by embracing the total experience of humanity while at the same time embodying the fullness of the Godhead. The dynamic category of *movement* instead of the more static notion of *being* is what allows us to more fully comprehend the mutuality and interactivity of the incarnation.

---

[57] Ibid.

[58] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Elucidations*, trans. S.P.C.K. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 55-56.

If we refer back to the tetragrammaton (YHWH), it is interesting to note that the revelation of God's name to Moses invokes a form of the verb *to be.* However, we must also note that subsequent to this interaction between God and Moses, the character of YHWH continues to be revealed through the stories found in Israel's history, through action and movement. The context of human history is where YHWH is made present, is embodied, is made incarnate to Israel and the world. The person of Christ builds on and fulfills the revelation of YHWH in the Hebrew Bible by making YHWH known to humanity in a unique, singular way. Balthasar highlights the *plerosis* of God revealed in the action of Christ, specifically his death on the cross: "He [Christ] does not thereby cease to be himself; indeed he shows precisely through this what he is in himself, what he is and what he can do. God can be dead without ceasing to be eternal life and he can, acting in this manner, prove finally that he is life and love and the goodness and grace which pours itself out in selfless self-giving."[59] Here again, we find the emphasis on action and movement as the means by which divine *plerosis* engenders divine/human interaction and collaboration.

In contemplating the unity of divine and human in the person of Christ, the aspect of overabundance and fullness (*plerosis*), especially for Forsyth and Balthasar, can seem to overshadow the humanity of Christ. I do not believe this is the intent of these theologians nor anyone who espouses what could be identified as a high Christology. The fullness of God is not meant to obliterate the weak and sin-affected nature of humanity, but to permeate it. The divine abundance evident in history, especially in the person of Christ, becomes the means by which humanity can be reconciled to the triune God and become a participant in loving, collaborative *synergos* through generous, energising grace.

Collaboration in Improvisation

The discussion of collaboration and *synergos* thus far has been focused in large part on divine faithfulness, divine vulnerability, and divine abundance. The purpose of this has been to show that collaboration is essential to the societal, triune God; therefore, any invitation from this God is an invitation into collaboration and mutuality. We now turn our attention from describing the parties involved in collaboration to describing the nature of *synergos* itself. We will do this

---

[59] Ibid., 68. See also Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, chapter 5, especially 242.

by looking at improvisational practices, both in dramatic and musical settings, which illustrate the shared giving and receiving of those united in purpose and action.

In his book, *Theology as Improvisation*, Nathan Crawford draws on the practice of musical improvisation to find ways to talk about God and God's interaction with humanity. He states: "My belief is that both theology and improvisation begins [sic] with the desire to be attuned to the other and open to said other, exploring the possibilities for interaction with the other, always keeping open the ways in which the other comes."[60] Musical improvisation does not happen in a vacuum, Crawford notes. It is always bound to tradition and must begin with learning the tools of that tradition, including the classic forms. Once these have been mastered, the musician has the skills necessary for "reorienting and transforming the tradition."[61] When Crawford makes the leap from musical tradition to theological tradition, he is careful not to fence himself in, choosing to be broad enough in his definition of Christianity to include not only the scriptures, but writings which would be classified as orthodox, heterodox, or even heretical.[62] His open posture toward tradition, believing that it is rather fluid and dynamic, reveals his commitment to the open-ended nature of improvisation. According to Crawford, of utmost importance in musical improvisation are the qualities of listening, hospitality, being open to the other, attunement to tradition, attunement to other players, attunement to the audience, and finally, the ability to engage in deconstruction and innovation.[63]

I should mention that Crawford offers a rather substantial critique of dramatic framework, in particular Vanhoozer's use of *Theo-Drama* for reimagining theology.[64] Essentially, Crawford is not rejecting theatre categories as such, but expressing disappointment at Vanhoozer's inability to let God be formless. Vanhoozer, in Crawford's estimation, is overly committed to producing a theological script which leaves him with a constricted idea of God, a God who is bound to revelation through the Bible alone, and a God who can only be experienced through the lens of covenant.[65] I will not comment specifically on Vanhoozer's view of

---

[60] Nathan Crawford, *Theology as Improvisation: A Study in the Musical Nature of Theological Thinking* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 4.

[61] Ibid., 5.

[62] Ibid., 5-6.

[63] Ibid., 93-94.

[64] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian* Doctrine (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

[65] Crawford, *Theology as Improvisation*, 23.

covenant, but will say that Crawford seems overly committed to openness, so much so that one might consider him an open theist. He seems to view the biblical notion of covenant as primarily restrictive instead of acknowledging the mutuality evident in its protective limitations and bilateral promises. Whatever the case, for Crawford, theology is all about getting past the script (and in his case, covenant would be part of a narrow script) to innovation. He does not have any problem *per se* with theatrical models of theology, but has found a very suitable analogy in music, especially the idea of attunement with its auditory overtones.

Crawford's idea of attunement, though not perfect, is particularly helpful in identifying the elements found in collaboration. Common to both musical and theatrical forms of improvisation are the ideas of innovation and participation. In fact, according to Crawford, participation is a key access point when it comes to revelation. He contends that, "Participation is the connection with God that makes knowledge of God possible."[66] It is important to note that Crawford is not speaking about a rather passive (or weak sense) of participation, such as the divine attunement all creation participates in by being created by God.[67] His definition of attunement draws on Jewish theologian Michael Fishbane's thought. This includes the notion of understanding the self in relation to the world and its inherent rhythms, interacting with a sacred text to become aware of its pace (in theology, this would refer to the biblical text), and "being ready to hear and do whatever the moment demands – with a heart and mind cultivated by a tradition of value and a life of thoughtfulness."[68] It is apparent that both Fishbane and Crawford are purposefully vague concerning theological traditions and terms, and this is to be expected in a treatise on openness. Since I am not looking to them for theological precision but for insight into collaboration, I will forgo any analysis of their views. The idea of attunement presented by Crawford has much to offer as we unpack the notion of *synergos* present in the third Yes, especially the state of "being aware" and the call to act informed by tradition or the ongoing narrative. I would, however, replace Fishbane's reference to the "need of the moment," which situates attunement in the context of rhythm and time, with the idea of collaborative action situated within embodied dramatic encounter. I believe this lack of incarnational action is the

---

[66] Ibid., 8.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Michael Fishbane, *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 175. Cited in Crawford, *Theology as Improvisation,* 29.

main weakness of musical improvisation as a theological model. However, as stated above, it is helpful in giving us language with which to describe what we might call collaborative technique.

"Being aware" is more than listening.[69] While listening is a necessary posture and attitude when playing music in order to recognise the rhythm, melodic key, and overall arc and movement of a piece, there is an added dimension in "being aware" which involves not only an openness to the complexity of sounds, but an openness to the other (awareness of the community), a recognition of the context (the subtext, text, and ongoing narrative being formed), and a readiness to insert oneself into the action (saying Yes). In other words, "being aware" is what a theatrical improviser is practicing when she builds an impromptu scene with other actors. "Being aware" means that the improviser has begun to identify the storyline of the current scenario, has latched onto a starting point of sorts, and has caught a glimpse of where the drama might lead. "Being aware" is not solely situated in the auditory realm but includes all of the senses as well as an awareness of the self in relation to the larger world and its particular context. Because neither music nor drama are static (and neither is the world), the act of "being aware" is ongoing.

A listener who is attentive to the ongoing *leitmotif* (to switch back to the music analogy) will, at some point, begin humming the tune, or playing along with the melody; in doing so, they become part of the music. When this transition occurs, when one changes from being a passive spectator to an active participant, the third Yes is enacted. No longer is one simply responding to an invitation or replying to a question, but, as illustrated by the musical example, one is contributing to the melodic narrative, adding a unique voice in counterpoint or harmony (or even dissonance) to the other voices, and as a result, changing the sound. To use Crawford's language, because one is attuned to the language of music and has learned the dialogue of the musical tradition, one is able to enter into the song with an appropriate contribution. The idea of ensemble work, both in music and in drama, is key to the idea of collaboration. Whereas invitation and response (and gift, for that matter) can be viewed as having a fairly linear, bi-directional dynamic (such as a tennis match which involves constant back and forth between two players, each one waiting to see what the other will do before they respond), ensemble work

---

[69] Crawford formulates quite a robust definition of listening which roughly overlaps with what I refer to as "being aware," but I am making a distinction between the two. The reason behind this is that listening is more applicable to a musical setting whereas "being aware" is more apropos in a dramatic scenario, drawing on more than the sense of hearing. Crawford, *Theology as Improvisation*, 97-100.

requires a slightly different set of interactions. Instead of competing with the other, there must be a shared ethos and purpose. Though different players in a dramatic exercise will have different ideas of where the story is going or how to structure the narrative, each member of the ensemble must ensure that they are contributing to the collective story and not trying to control it. Working as an ensemble means that every voice must be heard and every player must have a part, and the action can never be valued over "being aware." If action or movement takes priority over communal awareness, the loud, confident voices become dominant while the timid, more passive voices are relegated to the background. When this happens, it is no longer an ensemble and *synergos* has been abandoned.

This is why the idea of divine vulnerability is central to the third Yes. In essence, it is divine attentiveness, restraint, and patience which ensures that the divine story, though originating in the heart and mind of God, is a true collaboration and not a monologue. Theatre dialogue, for the most part, is much like a tennis match: there is a lot of back and forth between different characters with very little overlap. This is as it should be, because several voices all speaking at the same time would be chaotic.[70] For that reason, music is a better analogy to illustrate the harmony of *synergos* and collaboration in which many voices can be heard at the same time, each one distinct to the discerning ear, each one a different timbre and tone, perhaps even in a slightly different rhythm, but all together forming one melodic song. In orchestral music, each part played individually makes little sense, but when all the players join together in one ensemble, each note sounded in the right tone and key and precisely at the right time, the result is a complex yet unified masterpiece. In contrast to classical orchestral pieces which have set scores, improvisational music begins with only a skeleton score or a rudimentary pattern or structure; the challenging task of the musicians is to flesh out the song by first "being aware" and then acting collaboratively in every measure, thereby creating a coherent and intelligible piece of music. When done right, the resulting work is as much a masterpiece as the classical, scripted score, perhaps more so because of the added elements of spontaneity and originality.

The idea of harmony is also useful in thinking about the person of Jesus Christ. We must not picture the divine and human natures as being involved in a tennis match or tug of war or in a back and forth dialogue. The two natures are united in harmony; they sing one song between them; they collaborate in telling one story. Admittedly, this is an incongruence, using the

---

[70] One exception is the Greek chorus which speaks as one voice.

pronoun "they" to describe the person of Jesus Christ. It is also an indication of how inadequate words are to describe true collaboration, and why models such as drama or music are necessary to help us understand dynamic action. Three are one in the Trinity. Two natures are one in Jesus Christ. Many parts become one body in the universal church. Collaboration, *synergos*, and the third Yes are all ways of describing a joining together of many voices, not in unison, not as an unruly crowd, not in chaotic cacophony, not as echoes of each other, but as individuals joining together to create something greater than the sum of their parts. The concept of synergy might seem inappropriate when one of the parties is Almighty God, but it speaks directly to the overabundance, the "more than" nature of God, the *plerosis* of the Godhead. In no way does it indicate that something can be or needs to be added to the divine nature. Instead, it seeks to express how overabundance characterises all that God does, including loving collaboration with humanity.

One final observation should be made concerning the relationship between improvisation, training, and tradition. The improvisational musician immerses herself in a musical environment, listening, playing, practicing, and learning the different forms. Over time, many improvisational musicians develop an "intuitive intelligence" for music, a cognitive sense of where the song needs to go. Due to their constant exposure to music, at a deep, subconscious level, they know what is appropriate to play at the right time. Crawford states that, "This immersion results in a musician who is so entrenched in the music that he stop [sic] playing the music and the music begins to play him."[71] Though it is still improvisation, the accomplished musician will tell you that they do not select what notes to play from an endless array of options; what they play is in response to how, in their minds, the song goes. Observe an ensemble of intuitive, improvisational musicians and you will be able to detect them following the unwritten song together, all sensing what needs to happen next in the musical narrative and playing their instruments accordingly. There is little communication necessary between them because they are all attuned to what I have heard some musicians call "the spirit of the music." This type of collaboration is not simply a result of being attentive to the other musicians, nor simply the result of years of training in the standard jazz forms. The spirit of the song, the narrative of the notes, the overall arc of the music, whatever you wish to call it, is something greater than the musicians themselves, and it guides

---

[71] Ibid., 103.

them in harmony and common purpose to create a song new and unique, yet, at the same time, familiar to them all.

Using improvisational language and metaphors, I have described the third Yes in terms of "being aware," harmony, and synergy. In essence, the third Yes is what happens when participants together become immersed in the music or the drama to such an extent that the story becomes part of who they are as a community. We must, however, be careful not to equate God with story, for God as author is always greater than the divine narrative. As well, the theological concept of a societal, triune God dictates that relationality (and not story or even purpose) must remain at the forefront of collaboration and *synergos*. That being said, the Israelite covenants and the incarnation of Jesus Christ reveal a divine author who chooses to immerse himself in the story, becoming an actor, an initiator (first Yes) as well as a responder (second Yes). It is a vulnerable position, to be sure, but it is also an expression of divine fullness permeating all of creation.

The Collaboration of "We"

From a musical and theatrical improvisation framework (the paradigm of movement and action), we move to a philosophical one (the paradigm of being) to give us additional language to describe the nature of collaboration. In particular, I will be looking briefly at the works of Paul Ricoeur, Martin Buber, and Jean-Luc Nancy. These three voices speak about the interconnectedness of humanity as key to self-understanding, human relations, and ethical action. However, I propose that their insights on the innate relationality of humanity also have profound implications for how we view divine/human interaction and collaboration. I will outline each author's contribution to the subject in brief before adding my own thoughts on the collaboration or *synergos* of "we."

Ricoeur insists that the first personal pronoun, "I," commonly used to communicate a sense of self, cannot be uttered without implying the complementary "you," indicating that reflexivity is imperative to an "integrated theory of the self."[72] In speech acts, therefore, through the introduction of an implied second party, we already see the beginning of a sense of belonging to each other, a "we." Similarly, Ricoeur observes that the actions of an individual person are so linked to the actions of others that studying a human subject in isolation is impossible.[73] For

---

[72] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 41.
[73] Ibid., 107.

example, the beginning and the ending of our lives can only be recounted by others due to the fact that we are not aware of our own emergence into life nor can we fully take in our final exit. Ricoeur's solution to this difficulty is to embrace the complexity of narrative and suggest that we are not the authors of our lives: we are merely co-authors. As a result, the self is obliged to relinquish, or at the very least, share its role as subject. Ricoeur's indirect method, understanding the self through the other, is based in part on the idea that engaging with stories is one of the first ways we make sense of life and develop a sense of "we" or belonging.

Ricoeur's notion of the self evolves to include the field of ethics. The responsible self must recede into the background because the "ethical primacy of the other than the self [is] over the self."[74] A model Ricoeur uses to develop his concept of the ethical aim is that of friendship which incorporates reciprocity, intimacy, and benevolent spontaneity.[75] While equality between the self and the other is established as a prime value of the ethical aim (friendship) and the autonomy of the self is still upheld, personal freedom now comes into tension with self-legislation because the other's well-being must always be taken into consideration. Ricoeur suggests that a misappropriation of freedom (self-assertion without consideration for the other) results in perversion and brings evil into society.[76] In effect, Ricoeur is identifying the discovery of the self with the rediscovery of freedom as a societal order instead of identifying it with the right to individual choice.[77] This concept of "we" bears some resemblance to the African idea of *ubuntu* which Desmond Tutu translates as, "A person is a person through other persons."[78] Tutu contrasts this African interpretation of being human to Descartes's *cogito* (I think therefore I am) by restating *ubuntu* as, "I am because I belong."[79]

One can find the theme of *belonging* running through the works of all three philosophers mentioned above, however it is perhaps most indirect in Martin Buber's book, *I and Thou.* Buber's emphasis on the difference between *I-It* interactions (treating another as an object) and *I-*

---

[74] Ibid., 168.

[75] Ibid., 187-190.

[76] Ibid., 216.

[77] For Ricoeur, the route to self-understanding culminates in what he identifies as the "summoned self." In essence, the self must step aside to recognise a subject greater than itself, a subject whose call defines the self. Paul Ricoeur, "The Summoned Subject in the School of the Narratives of the Prophetic Vocation," in *Figuring the Sacred,* trans. David Pellauer, ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 262.

[78] Desmond Mpilo Tutu, *God is Not a Christian and Other Provocations*, ed. John Allen (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), 21.

[79] Ibid., 22.

Thou interactions (treating another as a subject) can be interpreted as an attempt to draw clear distinctions between two parties. Even though Buber's language tends toward a certain amount of bifurcation, Gregor Smith notes that positioning two parties as equal but separate is never Buber's intent; instead, it is about a meeting of the two.

> For faith is a meeting: it is not a trust in the world of *It*, of creeds or other forms, which are objects, and have their life in the past; nor is it, on the other hand, a reliance on the 'wholly other' God; but it is the meeting with the eternal *thou* Who is both the Other and the Present One. If we stress God's distance from men by asserting His Otherness alone, and do not realise at the same time the truth of His Presence in the relation of the *Thou* to the *I*, we are bound in the end to reduce the idea of Transcendence itself to a subhuman situation, and to take refuge in a paradox, which is not the ultimate paradox, of the impassability of the gulf between God and men.[80]

While Ricoeur's emphasis is more obviously on *belonging*, Buber chooses to use the term *meeting* to convey similar concepts. In distinctly poetic language, he speaks of the human tendency to place people, belief, and even God in the category of *It*, reducing all of these to objects of one's seeking, desiring, acting, etc. As object, *It* is bound and defined by the subject and even by the verb, while *Thou* (as subject) has no bounds.[81]

Buber integrates the ideas of invitation and response, of action and receptivity, in the meeting of *I* and *Thou*. Instead of Ricoeur's "summoned self," we have the *I* being chosen as well as choosing. "The *Thou* meets me. But I step into direct relation with it. Hence the relation means being chosen and choosing, suffering and action in one."[82] Here Buber is using the term, "suffering," as the passive stance of someone who is acted upon. In the meeting of *I* and *Thou*, both invitation and response are present. In theodramatic language, we would say that the first Yes meets the second Yes and together, a third Yes, a relational Yes which is more than the sum of the first two, is the result. In trying to describe this meeting, Buber treads the fine line between unity and distinctiveness which we find in Trinitarian theology, suggesting that this same sort of interconnectivity is possible in the encounter between divine and human. He writes: "In the relation with God unconditional exclusiveness and unconditional inclusiveness are one. He who enters on the absolute relation is concerned with nothing isolated any more, neither things nor

---

[80] Gregor Smith, introduction to *I and Thou* by Martin Buber, trans. Gregor Smith (Scribners, c1937; Mansfield Center, CT: Martino Publishing, 2010), ix-x.
[81] Martin Buber, *I and Thou,* trans. Gregor Smith (Scribners, c1937; Mansfield Center, CT: Martino Publishing, 2010), 4.
[82] Ibid., 11.

beings, neither earth nor heaven; but everything is gathered up in the relation."[83] For Buber, unity and diversity are not opposites; neither are inclusivity and exclusivity. This paradox of partnership is the mystery contained in the third Yes. It is the space occupied by "we," a space which is plural yet unified, where voices come together not in unison but in complex harmonies, where actions exhibit collaboration, intimacy, and trust. Buber also touches on the vulnerability of both *I* and *Thou* when he states that, "You need God, in order to be – and God needs you, for the very meaning of your life."[84] By these words Buber is not making a theological claim about the incompleteness or neediness of God, but acknowledging the generous space which God makes for humanity to have a meaningful encounter with the divine community of "we," the Trinity.

French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy explores some of this same territory, the idea that we are inescapably related to the divine and to each other, in his book, *Being Singular Plural*. He posits that "'we' is always inevitably 'us all,' where no one of us can be 'all' and each one of us is, in turn (where all our turns are simultaneous as well as successive, in every sense), the other origin of the same world."[85] By "other origin" Nancy is referring to what he calls the multiplicity of origin, in other words, how our origin is always linked to the other, and the origin of the other is always linked to us.[86] In this way, origin is outside us as well as inside us and must be seen from several vantage points, hence its multiplicity. This idea bears some resemblance to Ricoeur's indirect self-knowledge which can only be found through the other. Nancy describes this "we" in terms of being-together or being-with, a plural singularity, a direct opposite to alienation.[87] Nancy seeks to blur the lines between how we relate to or access ourselves and how we relate to or access others, suggesting that by nature both the individual and the world are plural, therefore always sharing space, time, presence, and even origin. Nancy critiques theological models of creation which separate Creator from creation, thereby rendering a God so transcendent, so wholly Other, that the divine occupies a sphere totally separate from the

---

[83] Ibid., 78.
[84] Ibid., 82.
[85] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 11.
[86] "*The plurality of beings is at the foundation* [fondment] *of Being*. A single being is a contradiction in terms. Such a being, which would be its own foundation, origin, and intimacy, would be incapable of *Being*, in every sense that this expression can have here." Ibid., 12.
[87] Ibid., 13.

world.[88] This has significant implications for one's view of God. Though I would not join Nancy in stating that there is no Other as such (and therefore no exact differentiation between divine and human),[89] and his position regarding inescapable relationality seems to undermine the idea of a freely offered Yes, his thoughts on the nature of creation are particularly insightful for dramatic theology. He writes:

> One can understand how the creation, as it appears in any Jewish-Christian-Islamic theologico-mystic configuration, testifies less (and certainly never exclusively) to a productive power of God than to his goodness and glory. In relation to such power, then, creatures are only effects, while the love and glory of God are deposited right at [*à même*] the level of what is created; that is, creatures are the very brilliance [*éclat*] of God's coming to presence.[90]

The point I would like to highlight is Nancy's emphasis on creation as the brilliant presence of God's glory and goodness (a demonstration of *plerosis*) instead of a display of dominance and power. Creation, according to Nancy, speaks of the inclusivity of God, and I would extend this to refer to the divine invitation for humanity to be a partaker in goodness and glory. Nancy seeks to divert us away from ways of thinking (theologically and philosophically) which tend toward closed, controlled systems and redirect us toward paradigms which feature dynamic, relational interactions and all the uncertainties which accompany such connectedness. The element of "we," of inclusion, is what Nancy finds in the creation story. It is also what we find at the heart of the Israelite covenants, what we find in the unique person of Jesus Christ, what we find in improvisation, and what is at the heart of the third Yes.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, collaboration is too weak a word for what I am trying to describe in the third Yes. The variety of pronouns used by Ricoeur, Buber, and Nancy reveals the paucity of single words to convey the idea of loving interconnectivity. It appears that a pairing of ideas is necessary to flesh out the concept of collaboration and connection, whether it is *oneself* and *another*, *I* and *Thou*, or the joining of two contradictory words, *singular* and *plural*. To this I have added my own joining: collaboration and *synergos*. I find the plenitude of terms entirely appropriate because it causes us to incorporate multiple concepts, definitions, and analogies instead of trying to reduce the third Yes to a singular, simple idea. In this chapter I used the model of covenant to illustrate the presence of mutuality, faithfulness, and vulnerability

---

[88] Ibid., 15. This is similar to the ideas in Smith's notes on Buber. See page 126.
[89] Ibid., 19.
[90] Ibid., 16-17.

in collaboration. The incarnation was invoked to show how the abundance of *plerosis* encompasses both distinction and unity, allowing two disparate parties to move toward each other into *synergos*. Improvisation provided structure and language to envision this movement toward the other as ensemble work. Philosophy helped us articulate collaboration as the state of being in which we are inextricably connected to the other, so much so that we identify as "we" instead of "I."

The third Yes implicates categories of being and action. The third Yes is multiplicity, complexity, and differentiation, but it is also unity, inclusion, and mutual encounter. Buber writes: "Between you and it there is a mutual giving: you say *Thou* to it and give yourself to it, it says *Thou* to you and gives itself to you."[91] When reading this sentence, one cannot help but notice how out of place and awkward the pronoun *it* is in the context of expounding on the nature of equanimity between an *I* and a *Thou*. The third Yes is a dramatic Yes for a reason: words cannot adequately express what transpires when there is genuine, intimate, loving encounter between persons. More than words, the third Yes is intentional action and genuine reaction, making room for continuity and predictability along with tension and surprise, and fostering the development of relationship while revealing the narrative arc. The third Yes is dynamic, mutual movement which brings with it risk and uncertainty as well as the means for dissonance to become harmony. The third Yes is meant to be the culmination of the divine invitation extended to humanity, an invitation to participate in the goodness and glory of God, first glimpsed in the creation story and ever after on display throughout history. The Third Yes is that moment when the listener becomes a musician, the spectator becomes a participant, and the story becomes richer because another actor joins the ensemble. Dramatic theology is not just another framework on which to hang theological ideas; it is a schema through which the story of God, the divine drama, is enacted. To this end, I now turn my attention from explaining the elements of dramatic theology to engaging with two dramatic texts: the first is the biblical drama of Job and the second is a theatrical play by Luigi Pirandello.

---

[91] Buber, *I and Thou*, 33.

Chapter 5

A Biblical Example - The Book of Job

> *Stories tell us where we are from and where we are going and, thus, who we are.*[1]

More than just a literary sub-category or a theological approach, narrative is how we make sense of the world. Alasdair MacIntyre makes this point in relation to ethics or morality: "I can only answer the question, 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question, 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'"[2] This resonates with the general observation made in the last chapter that a skilled improviser (both musical and theatrical) is always being guided by an awareness of how the song or the story goes. The narratives we tell each other, that we are immersed in within the contexts of our culture and community, become the lenses through which we decipher not only what to do but who we are and, within a theological context, who God, the divine actor, is. This is why the stories contained within the biblical witness (much of the canon is some form of narrative) are key to understanding divine/human interaction, not because they serve up moral imperatives or tell us what to believe, but because they show us the divine/human relationship in action.[3]

In moving away from primarily focusing on the *theory* of the three Yeses to *engaging with examples* of dramatic interaction (within a theological context in this chapter and within a theatrical context in the next chapter), it is necessary to adjust our method somewhat to be more reflective of a dramatic framework. Analysing a narrative requires a different approach from identifying with the characters in that narrative: the first takes an objective stance while the latter requires a certain "entering in" or direct encounter with the story. The importance of this aspect of "entering in" must not be underplayed, for doing so would undermine the very backbone of dramatic theology: the incarnational event of God entering into human experience in the person of Jesus Christ.

---

[1] Andrew G. Walker and Robin A. Parry, *Deep Church Rising: The Third Schism and the Recovery of Christian Orthodoxy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 119.

[2] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory,* 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 216.

[3] Viewing the biblical witness as narrative is sometimes viewed as a weakening of its authority. However, N. T. Wright recognises that narrative is an extremely formative force because it shapes worldview. See N.T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991), 7–32. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Bible_Authoritative.htm.

The text I have selected to serve as a theological case study is perhaps not an obvious choice, but I believe it meets the criteria for robust engagement with theological dramatic theory on several fronts. First, this biblical text resembles a theatre piece in several ways: there is an epic conflict between good and evil, and extended monologues as well as some heated discourses are bookended by a classic prologue and epilogue. Second, it incorporates several viewpoints: we begin with a narrator setting the stage, then we are given access to a divine or otherworldly point of view, after which we enter the action as seen from the main character's perspective, then several secondary characters offer their assessment of events, and finally, we have a direct discourse between God and Job. Third, as one of the earliest biblical texts, it most likely served as a folktale which framed Israel's perception of God and divine/human interaction. Finally, Job has historically been a challenging text to interpret, in large part because its poetic language and dramatic structure do not lend themselves easily to neat systematic theological summaries. I contend that the insights to be gained from the tale of Job are found in looking at the characters' interactions and relationships, not in analysing the words in isolation. In essence, the structure of the text (drama) could be said to supply the content (theology). For these reasons, the story of Job seems particularly well-suited to demonstrate dramatic theology.

In looking at the book of Job, my primary goal is not to analyse the structure, though there will be mention of that, nor to dissect the theological nuances, though I will certainly observe a few, nor to answer the question of why God allows suffering, though I cannot help but offer some thoughts on a matter which takes up a fair bit of space in the text. Important as all those tasks may be, it is not the focus in this chapter. Using the lens of a theodramatic approach, the question to be answered is this: are invitation, response, and collaboration recognisable in one self-contained biblical narrative? To answer this query, I first delve into the dramatic nature of the story of Job, both narratively and structurally, and provide a brief overview of the story. Following that, I address the question at the heart of this chapter: can the elements of theological dramatic theory be found in the biblical text? In other words, is there evidence of the three Yeses, as well as the underlying aspect of gift, within the dramatic narrative of Job? Finally, I identify the theme of glory which I see coming to the forefront in the story of Job.

Job as dramatic script

The book of Job begins with a prologue which introduces the title character as blameless and upright, fearing God and turning away from evil. We are told that Job has seven sons and

three daughters as well as impressive numbers of sheep, camels, oxen, donkeys, and servants, making him "the greatest of all the people in the east."[4] The scene then shifts from Job in the land of Uz to a gathering of heavenly beings, among them the Lord (YHWH) and the adversary (literally *hasattan*).[5] The Lord asks if the adversary has noticed the blameless, upright, God-fearing man Job, and the adversary obviously has, for he is quick to offer his opinion that Job only fears and serves God because God protects and blesses him. The adversary hypothesises that Job would curse God if his good fortune changed. The Lord insists that Job is not as fickle as the adversary supposes and gives *hasattan* leave to have his way with Job's fortune. In short order, Job loses his children, livestock, and servants in various tragedies. Job is devastated, but his response reaffirms the Lord's confidence in him: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."[6] The scene returns to another meeting of heavenly beings, and when the Lord once again asks the adversary to consider his faithful servant, Job, *hasattan* responds that Job's faithfulness is obviously related to his good health. The Lord once again grants the adversary liberty to afflict Job, this time physically. When Job develops sores which cover his whole body, his wife urges him to curse God and die. Job refuses to do so and instead, replies, "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?"[7]

After this, three of Job's friends, Eliphaz, Beldad, and Zophar, appear on the scene to comfort him. After the four men sit in silence for a week, Job cries out in lament, cursing the day he was born. Then one by one the friends speak, each offering extended discourses which argue that the terrible disasters which have befallen Job are because of some great sin he has committed against God. In turn, Job justifies himself against all their accusations, insisting that he has done nothing to deserve this endless suffering. Job's prayer of lament, "Why do you hide your face, and count me as your enemy?" reveals the depth of his pain and his sense of abandonment by God. [8] When Job's comforters accuse him of pride, insisting that he has brought

---

[4] Job 1:3.

[5] Hebrew scholar August Konkel notes that the word *hasattan* is not used as a proper name for the devil in this text, nor can it be equated with the Satan we find in the New Testament. The adversary here refers to a tempter who participates "in terms of a specific test that God allows or initiates." See August H. Konkel, *Job*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, vol. 6 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2006), 33.

[6] Job 1:21.

[7] Job 2:10.

[8] Job 13:24.

these troubles on himself, Job bitterly answers them, "…miserable comforters are you all. Have windy words no limit? Or what provokes you that you keep on talking?"[9] These lengthy dialogues in which Job's three friends insist on his guilt before God, and Job, maintaining his integrity, cries out for vindication, take up a good portion of the book (chapters 4-27).

Chapter 28, a poem on the topic of wisdom, serves as an interlude. After this, Job once again defends himself, and then a fourth advisor, the young Elihu, speaks (chapters 29-37). After Elihu expresses anger at Job's three friends because they have provided no answers, he proceeds to rebuke Job for justifying himself instead of God, reminding the destitute man that God is incapable of perverting justice, and Job is wrong to adopt a posture of self-righteousness. Elihu says: "The Almighty – we cannot find him; he is great in power and justice, and abundant righteousness he will not violate. Therefore mortals fear him; he does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit."[10] After Elihu's speech, the Lord himself speaks to Job out of the whirlwind. The Almighty responds to Job's questions by posing his own queries to the impoverished man. In effect, God changes the subject from injustice to the glory of creation. The Lord asks, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? … When the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?"[11] Job has no answers to the litany of questions God asks concerning the grandeur and complexity of creation (chapters 38-41), other than to confess, "Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. … I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."[12]

The epilogue finishes the dramatic story by going back to the action: the Lord rebukes Job's three friends for their bad advice and wrongful representation of the Almighty and commands them to offer sacrifices while Job prays on their behalf. The Lord also restores all Job's fortunes which include friends, sheep, camels, oxen, donkeys, and seven more sons and three more daughters; in fact, it is said that, "The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning."[13] The text ends with these words: "And Job died, old and full of days."[14]

---

[9] Job 16:2-3.
[10] Job 37:23.
[11] Job 38:4, 7.
[12] Job 42:3-6.
[13] Job 42:12.
[14] Job 42:17.

As stated earlier, my purpose here is not to conduct a thorough analysis of the composition of the book, its reliance on existing folklore, or how it arrived at its present form. This is not an exegetical but a dramatic endeavour. However, a few comments on structure are in order. Jewish philosopher, Horace M. Kallen, believes that the text of Job was originally written as a poetic dramatic tragedy emulating the work of the Greek writer, Euripides (480-406 BCE), and that it was subsequently redacted into a more narrative version when it was added to the biblical canon.[15] Kallen gives several reasons for his claim: 1) the inclusion of a prologue which prepares the spectator/reader for the drama to come, 2) the difference in tone between the prologue and the body of the play, 3) the heterodox nature of the sentiments put forth by the protagonists, especially from the final messenger, 4) the epiphany which redeems an intolerable situation, and 5) the appearance of the *deus ex machina*[16] to conclude the action in the epilogue. Kallen even finds evidence of a Greek chorus, what he calls three "interpolations," woven into the dialogue between the characters, but bearing marked differences from the surrounding dialogue either in their stanzic form or in theme and content.[17] When comparing the book of Job to the writings of Euripides, it is important to note that each writer reflects a commitment to the orthodoxy of his context: in Greek tragedy we find a reinforcement of Greek sensibilities and in Job, this distinctive is adapted to reflect the traditions of the poet's Jewish, monotheistic context. Though not all biblical scholars accept Kallen's rather bold assessment of the connections between Greek dramatic tragedy and the story of Job, most concede that the poetic text contains many dramatic elements.

Due to these dramatic elements in the book of Job and the timeless questions it raises concerning the nature of human suffering, several modern playwrights have drawn inspiration from the story. I will mention four modern treatments of the tale, two of which are relatively faithful to the original in their adaptation of the plot and two which depart rather significantly from the text, especially in their premises. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* (1828-29) is what Kallen refers to as "a sort of Job in reverse" because Faust's testing involves "desires and

---

[15] Horace M. Kallen, *The Book of Job as a Greek Tragedy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1959), 7.

[16] Literally, "God from the machine," this Latin term refers to a dramatic device which uses a contrived event or plot development to miraculously resolve a hopeless situation. See Bruce McConachie, "Case Study: Classical Greek theatre: Looking at Oedipus," in *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., ed. Gary Jay Williams (New York: Routledge, 2010), 91-92.

[17] Kallen, *The Book of Job as a Greek Tragedy*, 26-38.

aspirations" instead of "losses and sufferings."[18] Another plot reversal is that the title character is granted power over his destiny instead of being powerless to change his circumstances. Similar to the book of Job, the play begins with a conversation between Mephistopheles (the devil) and God in heaven, each one wagering that they can influence the title character; God seeks to bring the unhappy scholar, Faust, to a "clearer dawning"[19] and Mephistopheles wants to "lead him gently on the road I set."[20] Faust, who has found knowledge and study to make him none the wiser, is determined to find the true essence of life, so he takes up Mephistopheles's offer of magic powers and, in exchange, squanders away his soul and moral integrity, believing this transaction will set him on the road to ultimate happiness. Despite the protagonist's poor choices and destructive behaviour, he is nevertheless ultimately granted entrance to heaven due to the gratuitous grace of God.[21] In the end, the devil loses Faust's soul as well as the bet he made with God. Though each travel by a different route, both Job and Faust end up destitute and must rely on divine help to rescue them.[22]

The poet Robert Frost penned a short, satirical comedy which purports to be the 43rd chapter of Job, in other words, an addition or afterword to the biblical text's 42 chapters. In Frost's *A Masque of Reason* (1945), the character of God appears to Job and his wife many years after the denouement in chapter 42, and they converse on several topics. It is clear that the play is mostly a critique of modernity's over-reliance on reason and not a theologically robust attempt to bring closure to the story of Job. Nevertheless, when Frost's script gathers all the interested parties (God, Job, the devil) for a group picture, suggesting that the characters are willing to put their differences behind them, it seems to hint at some form of universal restoration.

Despite its comedic tone, or perhaps because of it, Frost is able to land some solid punches on heavyweight topics such as the patriarchal nature of religion and the changing view of evil. Frost's God is portrayed as very human, in the end admitting that the devil provoked (tempted) him to show off and he succumbed. By incorporating a certain amount of weakness

---

[18] Ibid., xi.
[19] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, line 309. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.iowagrandmaster.org/Books%20in%20pdf/Faust.pdf.
[20] Ibid., line 314.
[21] Here Goethe's version differs from earlier tellings of the German folktale, such as Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (1604, 1616), which invariably end with the devil carrying the title character off to hell.
[22] Goethe's *Faust* and the book of Job are both what we might call canonized or widely accepted versions of tales which exist in various forms in folklore.

into the divine character (God thanks Job for being God's emancipator),[23] Frost manages to portray God as a collaborator with Job and with the devil. While this ultimately fails as a sustainable theological proposition, I believe that Frost is bringing some needed correction to the common depiction of God as the power character and Job as the helpless victim, overstated as Frost's version may be. The gist of the divine/human relationship presented in *The Masque of Reason* is evident in the following interchange:

> JOB: I am much impressed
>
> With what You say we have established.
>
> Between us, You and I.
>
> GOD: I make you see?
>
> It would be too bad if Columbus-like
>
> You failed to see the worth of your achievement.
>
> JOB: You call it mine.
>
> GOD: We groped it out together.
>
> Any originality it showed
>
> I give you credit for. My forte is truth,
>
> Or metaphysics, long the world's reproach
>
> For standing still in one place true forever;
>
> While science goes self-superseding on.[24]

The important point here is Frost's suggestion that God relied on Job to make what he calls the "great demonstration" a success. Without Job, there would have been no wager, no struggle between God and Satan, and no affirmation of God's faithfulness. In essence, God put his reputation on the line by trusting that Job would not turn away from him and would not curse him. Frost's portrayal of the divine/human relationship bears some resemblance to relational theology, especially the aspect of divine vulnerability. Frost believes that the relationship is meant to work both ways, in other words, God affects Job, but Job is also meant to have an effect

---

[23] God says: "I had to prosper good and punish evil. You changed all that. You set me free to reign. You are the Emancipator of your God. And as such I promote you to a saint." Robert Frost, *A Masque of Reason* (1945), lines 80-83. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://thevalueofsparrows.com/2014/06/21/saturday-reading-a-masque-of-reason-by-robert-frost-2/.
[24] Ibid., lines 196-208.

on God. What Frost is obviously missing in his afterword is any sense of justice and mercy demonstrated through divine action, specifically, atonement.

Archibald MacLeish's play, *J.B.: A Play in Verse* (1958), takes its story directly from the prologue of Job and sets the whole production in a circus tent.[25] Two vendors, Zuss (God) and Nickles (the devil), overhear a wealthy banker attributing his success to his faithfulness to God. The two vendors make a wager and the title character subsequently loses his children and his wealth. After disaster has struck, three Comforters seek to give him advice, and Nickles and Zuss get in on the action, the first urging J.B. to take his own life, and the latter promising a restoration of his former wealth and happiness if he obeys God. In a departure from the biblical text, J.B. rejects both offers and instead, finds comfort in making a new life with his wife. In essence, he trades faith in God for faith in himself, becoming a modern, self-reliant man.

Finally, I was privileged to view the premiere of a new dramatic interpretation of Job, *The Book of Bob* by Arthur Holden, at Montreal's Centaur Theatre in the winter of 2014. Holden has given us an updated story; the title character is a middle-aged professor whose life unravels through a series of unfortunate events, and God is represented by ten different characters, all played by a young woman. Aside from the familiar premise in which good things go horribly wrong, the play does not remain true to Job's dilemma, in large part because Holden's Bob is an avowed atheist. In the end, it is not a test of fidelity to God (such as we find in Job), nor a tale about choosing sides (Faust's dilemma), nor about becoming one's own person (the choice made by the businessman J.B.). Holden's story ends with the title character humbly making peace with his imperfections.

All four of these theatrical pieces draw their premise (and for the most part, their major plot points) from the story of Job, and yet, each author has modified the story in what could be interpreted as an attempt to make it more palatable. In all cases, the title character is rewritten to be more empowered and not as passive as Job is often perceived to be, and God is trimmed down to be a gentler, kinder, less powerful version of himself, more human, so to speak. The ending is invariably altered from the uncomfortably neat reversal of fortune found in the epilogue of Job to a conclusion which reflects more realistic sensibilities and a view of justice in keeping with the values of each author's time.

---

[25] Archibald MacLeish, *J.B.: A Play in Verse* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958).

For Goethe, Faust's wrong turn at the beginning of the play (selling his soul to the devil) can only be reversed by the mercifulness of God, and God does not disappoint. It has been suggested that Goethe's version of this ancient tale speaks to the rise of industrialism in the nineteenth century and its ultimate cost to the human soul. Of the four plays, Frost's poem has the weakest characterization of God, inverting the power dynamic by making Job the one who helps the divine one to find himself. Parts of the text read almost like a therapy session in which God finds closure for the unfortunate wager made with the devil. At the end of MacLeish's play, J.B. disentangles himself from religion altogether in order to live simply with his wife, a nod to the values of modernity. The most recent of these plays, Holden's *The Book of Bob*, recasts God as a shape-shifter of sorts, appearing through various people in Bob's life, yet avoiding detection due to Bob's avowed atheism. The undoing of the pompous professor has fatalistic overtones and whether Bob acknowledges God or not is, in the end, largely irrelevant. Bob's flaw is that he is blind to his deficiencies, and the small tragedies he suffers help him to be more honest with himself. As a result, he begins to take some responsibility for his actions instead of blaming others. According to reviewer Rachel Levine, Bob is a more accessible character than the ancient Job:

> Bob suffers just enough frustrations to be uncomfortable, but never really descends into despair. He is threatened largely by uncertainty and his own personality. Unlike the superhuman patience of Job, Bob is very real and his sufferings are very real. Each little obstacle thrown in his path is a familiar first-world problem. In consequence, Bob's biggest threats are self-created and he bears full responsibility. If he suffers potential doom, it comes from his own response to the situation. Bob is far easier to relate to than Job ever was.[26]

While one of the measures of a good piece of theatre is how well the audience relates to the characters, it is not the only metric. Levine's assessment seems to be a bit short-sighted in this regard. We may indeed recognise ourselves on the stage, but if the play serves merely as a mirror of our own lives, it does not reveal anything new, only what we already know or at least suspect.

Like Holden's play, the book of Job gives its readers a dose of readily recognisable scenarios in the lamenting, anguished speeches of Job, the simplistic platitudes of the three Friends, and finally, the young Elihu's call to repentance from self-righteousness. However, what the biblical text also does, and which all the adaptations try to downplay, is insist that all human

---

[26] Rachel Levine, "Pushed to the Minimum. The Book of Bob." *Montreal Rampage*, February 13, 2014. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://montrealrampage.com/pushed-to-the-minimum-the-book-of-bob/.

wisdom is inadequate and God does not have to answer to any of us. To a modern reader, the questions God asks Job in chapters 38-41 come across as condescending, bombastic, even sarcastic, and leave one with the uncomfortable sense that this God is a rogue deity, uncompassionate and prone to go off-topic. What kind of God would refuse to give comfort to a virtuous, suffering soul? The effusive, poetic descriptions of the cosmos, the heavens, and an array of creatures reflecting the sovereignty of God might be fitting in a hymn of praise, a psalm perhaps, but as the climax to a lengthy and painful discussion on the topic of theological justice, they seem in bad taste, like kicking a good man when he is down by reminding him who is really in charge.

This is why readers of Job have often found its conclusion unsatisfying, and understandably so. The fact that there is no justification offered for Job's suffering, that theodicy is not the subject of God's speech, is indeed troubling, unless we understand it as a dramatic device meant to tell us something about the relationship between God and Job. What I would like to argue is that through a theodramatc approach to the book of Job, we are able to see the presence of divine invitation instead of divine imposition, we can identify human responsiveness instead of human powerlessness, and we find that divine/human collaboration is evident from the very beginning of the story of God and his faithful servant, Job.

The Presence of Yes in Job

In Robert Frost's poetic addition to the book of Job, we find this interesting exchange:

JOB: I am flattered proud

To have been in on anything with You,

'Twas a great demonstration if You say so.

Though incidentally I sometimes wonder

Why it had to be at my expense.

GOD: It had to be at somebody's expense.

Society can never think things out;

It has to see them acted out by actors,

Devoted actors at a sacrifice –

The ablest actors I can lay my hands on.[27]

---

[27] Frost, *The Masque of Reason*, lines 233-242.

By identifying Job as an actor in a play meant to make a point to society (the tale is often interpreted in this way), Frost tries to soften the blow that Job appears to have been used by God, and without his express permission. In short, Frost seems to suggest that the only way to justify the idea that Job has been a pawn in a cosmic chess game is to recast God as someone who has good intentions but may not always employ the most equitable means to achieve the desired end. However, I would question the assumption that the point of Job's story is to teach the reader a moral lesson or that it is a parable on the theme of unjust human suffering or theodicy as so many theologians suggest.

Scholars have come to different conclusions regarding the main point of the book of Job. Konkel concludes that what Job and his readers receive is "better than a logical solution to the question of theodicy."[28] He believes the story has to do with hope: hope for transformation, hope that "the Creator of all creatures is also their redeemer and that their trust in him will be rewarded."[29] J.H. Walton believes that the book of Job is a guide which tells us "how to think about God in the face of suffering."[30] Walton views the story as a courtroom drama where not Job, but God is on trial.[31] When it is shown that humans lack sufficient information to adequately judge God's justice, the charges against God must be dismissed. In the end, Job is satisfied not with understanding his suffering, but in knowing God better.[32] Stephen Cook, in his reading of Job as a theatrical work, concludes that the book of Job is a polemic against a retributive worldview found in Deuteronomistic historical texts. He writes: "It analysed the prevailing philosophies about providence and concluded that in the raw honesty of confronting the Divine about the apparent injustices and unfairness of the relationship, by articulating despair, anger, disappointment and frustration, one may speak well of God."[33] His point is similar to Walton's in that it places the emphasis on cultivating a proper response to God instead of being able to understand the ways of God.

---

[28] Konkel, *Job*, 241.

[29] Ibid.

[30] J. H. Walton, "Job 1: Book of," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, eds. Tremper Longman III, Peter Enns (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 333.

[31] Criminal defense lawyer Robert Sutherland has written about the legal arguments in Job. Robert Sutherland, *Putting God on Trial: The Biblical Book of Job* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2004).

[32] Walton, "Job 1" Book of," 342.

[33] Stephen Cook, "A Reading of Job as a Theatrical Work," *Literature and Aesthetics* 24.2 (December 2014), 61-62.

In my view, Hebrew scholar Robert Alter presents one of the most perceptive interpretations of the complex drama of Job. He shows how the theophany (chapters 38-41) is a direct response to Job's initial complaint in chapter 3, a "brilliantly pointed reversal, in structure, image, and theme."[34] According to Alter, God answers Job not with direct replies to his queries, but by reframing his assumptions and redirecting his focus:

> Job's first poem is a powerful, evocative, authentic expression of man's essential, virtually ineluctable egotism: the anguished speaker has seen, so he feels, all too much, and he wants now to see nothing at all, to be enveloped in the blackness of the womb/tomb, enclosed by dark doors that will remain shut forever. In direct contrast to all this withdrawal inward and turning out of lights, God's poem is a demonstration of the energizing power of panoramic vision. Instead of the death wish, it affirms from line to line the splendor and vastness of life, beginning with a cluster of arresting images of the world's creation and going on to God's sustaining of the world in the forces of nature and in the variety of the animal kingdom.[35]

With careful and attentive text analysis, Alter deftly manages to avoid two pitfalls common to interpreters of Job: 1) focusing on justifying God's sovereignty in light of the high cost to humanity, and 2) making the text a lesson on how to endure suffering without asking too many questions. I would like to take Alter's observations concerning God's interactions with Job and push them a little further by placing them within a theodramatic context. The insights we find by "entering into" the drama come not from an external viewpoint which seeks to make sense of the overall story, but from the limited perspective of characters within a story. Because God is one of the main characters, this "entering into" or limitation of perspective might, at first glance, appear to be an impossible hurdle to overcome. However, if we approach this as a theatrical exercise, what actors might call "getting inside a character's head" when they are preparing for a role, it becomes possible to immerse oneself in the story with a view to discovering what the characters see instead of trying to make sense of the whole. This limiting of perspective also makes it easier to identify nuances in the characters' dialogues and actions which tend to be overlooked when viewing the drama from a critical distance.

1. The First Yes: Divine Invitation

The first Yes is the divine Yes, so we will be viewing the story of Job from the perspective of the character of God. I should make clear that we are not relying on what other

---

[34] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 120.
[35] Ibid.

characters tell us about God nor are we interested in the actions of any other actors unless they are in direct interaction with God. When it comes to the first Yes, we are solely interested in what happens when God is on stage, in what he actually says and does in the drama, especially in the prologue. After Job is introduced, we have a scene where the heavenly beings gather to present themselves to YHWH, and the first words spoken here, the words which set the direction for what is to follow, come from YHWH. He inquires of the adversary, "Where have you come from?"[36] This is not a question meant to gather information, but more of a conversation starter with a particular goal in mind; it is a question meant to introduce the subject matter which God means to pursue. When the adversary indicates that he has been going to and fro on the earth, God further directs the conversation: "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil."[37] There are several key factors here which reveal God's motivation: 1) God starts a conversation with the adversary, 2) God draws the adversary's attention to Job, his faithful servant, and 3) God speaks very highly of Job, extoling his accomplishments. If we think of this exchange in terms of a sports analogy where two rival coaches are having a conversation, the strategy becomes clear. Why would a coach provoke an opponent by bragging about his star player? It could only mean one thing: the coach is issuing a challenge, confident that he has a winner on his hands. The adversary responds to God's leading statements by attempting to undermine and downplay the strength of Job, suggesting that the man is untried. To use a boxing analogy, the adversary implies that Job's perfect record is due to the fact that he has only sparred with teammates, he has not engaged in a real fight against a legitimate opponent.[38] YHWH does not come to Job's defense because the adversary is right, Job is untested, but more importantly, YHWH has accomplished what he set out to do: the adversary takes the bait and offers to arrange circumstances which will test Job's abilities. YHWH does not hesitate to give the adversary

---

[36] Job 1:7.

[37] Job 1:8.

[38] Gustavo Gutierrez identifies a fighting analogy present in the dialogue between Job and YHWH. "The confrontational attitude continues, but now it is found on the side of God who tells Job to ready himself for the fight: 'Brace yourself like a fighter; I'm going to ask the questions, and you are to inform me.' (38:3). 'Brace yourself' – literally, 'gird your loins' – was a Hebrew expression signifying to ready oneself for a difficult task, for a struggle." Gustavo Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 69-70.

permission to "touch all that he [Job] has," with the caveat that Job himself is not to be harmed. This response makes it quite clear that from the beginning of the scene YHWH is initiating a testing of Job. It also shows us that YHWH is never in doubt about the outcome: he believes Job will come through still blameless and upright, still fearing God, and still turning away from evil.

The sports analogy helps us see that YHWH's actions are not malicious, nor is this a wager based on a whim or for the thrill of the game. YHWH is well-pleased, even proud of Job, and recognises his potential. It would appear that YHWH has a genuine fondness for Job, for he does not desire to put him directly in harm's way. Job is precious to YHWH, it seems clear, but Job is untested; his fidelity has been forged within the safety of a friendly environment. In YHWH we see characteristics of both protective father and tough coach. The coach knows the necessity of challenging someone in order to bring out the best in them. He knows that there is a kind of strength, stamina, courage, and faith which can only be forged through encountering resistance. However, YHWH also knows the dangers of pushing someone too far, and he has no desire to cross that line. Having set the match in motion, YHWH now moves to the sidelines and lets the scenario play out. He knows he must not be seen as too close, must not be protectively hovering nearby, ready to rescue Job as soon as he experiences distress. This would undermine the integrity of the test. In this first scene, the purpose for the trial is not quite clear, but what is certain is that the relationship between YHWH and Job is about to change, and that YHWH views this as a good and necessary progression.

In the next scene with YHWH, after Job has had his riches and his family decimated, the conversation with the adversary is a repetition of the first encounter, only this time YHWH adds, "He [Job] still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason."[39] Though this could be interpreted to mean that YHWH has been tricked by the adversary to do harm to Job, it is clearly just more banter to bait the adversary, to let him think that he has the upper hand. It does no harm to YHWH's strategy to let the adversary assume that YHWH is second-guessing the wager, doubtful about its outcome. YHWH, of course, is not letting the adversary in on his real game plan nor revealing the depths of his compassion for Job. That would be a game badly played. And because this is a drama, YHWH's purposes are also kept hidden from Job, and to some extent, from the reader or spectator. We must wait till the end of the story to gain some insight into YHWH's purpose for testing Job. What we do know at this

---

[39] Job 2:3.

point is that because Job has proven to be such a valiant champion of fidelity in the midst of devastating loss, YHWH has no trouble sending him into the ring again. When the adversary predictably blames his ineffectiveness against Job on YHWH's prohibition against touching Job personally, YHWH grants access to touch Job's physical body, but not to kill him. It is important to remember that for YHWH, Job is never an incidental player in a cosmic wager. The idea behind the wager is not for YHWH to prove himself victorious over the adversary; that has never been in question as far as YHWH is concerned. The adversary merely serves as YHWH's pawn in the testing and transformation of Job. YHWH uses the adversary to distance Job from his reliance on wealth and comfort, both of which have served as mediators of God's blessing, until all he has left is the core of his relationship with God, that which cannot be shaken. It seems that YHWH is inviting Job not only to transformation but perhaps to greater intimacy, but let us see how the story unfolds.

2. The Second Yes: Job's Response

The narrator first introduces us to Job in the prologue and we discover that he is "one of the greatest of all the people of the east."[40] Job has everything going for him, a large and harmonious family as well as great wealth, evidenced by large numbers of livestock and many servants. The narrator makes clear that the most remarkable thing about Job is not his wealth or stature in society, but that he is "blameless and upright," a man who fears God and turns away from evil. Job is so conscientious about pleasing God that he offers sacrifices on behalf of his children in case they have unintentionally or carelessly cursed God. This shows us that Job's righteousness is not primarily self-righteousness, but a genuine desire for his whole household to be in right standing with YHWH. With regard to the second Yes, we see that Job is already a responder to God, not only acknowledging the divine presence but seeking to align himself with God's goodness and justice. When Job's world falls apart without any warning, tragedy after tragedy visiting his household, killing all his children and ruining his wealth, what effect does it have on his loyalty to God? Does Job's faith prove to be a disinterested faith, a faith which does not look to rewards and punishments to authenticate it? In other words, is Job's Yes to God himself and not merely to the blessings that, up till now, have accompanied that faith? Indeed, this seems to be the case when Job, in mourning after the disasters, speaks these words of

---

[40] Job 1:3.

worship: "the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."[41] Even after his body is ravaged by sickness, Job reiterates his unconditional commitment to YHWH: "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?"[42] However, this Yes becomes quite nuanced in the speeches of Job which follow.

Though Job refuses to curse God, he curses everything about his life, wishing he had never been born, wishing that he could have avoided all this misery. He admits both his ignorance and God's sovereignty when he says, "Why is light given to one who cannot see the way, whom God has fenced in?"[43] Job's Yes to YHWH is absolute, he will never renounce his faith in God, but he will not be silent in his complaint. As Walter Brueggemann observes, "Job never pushes God to nonexistence, for then he would quit speaking and be reduced to silence.… Job keeps believing and speaking."[44] For Job, faith in God is more than the acknowledgement of the existence of the Almighty or agreement with certain doctrines; faith is a posture which orients his whole life toward YHWH. This robust faith allows him to rail against the one ultimately responsible for his circumstances and demand an answer. The speeches of Job's three friends, another trial in and of itself as one by one they accuse Job of bringing this misfortune on himself by sinning against God, cause him to call for an advocate (*goel*), one who will plead his case, one who will vindicate him against his accusers.[45] In contrast to his friends, Job does not believe in a retribution-based God who rewards good behaviour with a blessed life and who punishes wrongdoing with disaster. Because Job believes that God's Yes is unconditioned, Job's responsive Yes is also unwavering. However, Job's Yes has two sides to it: Job both believes in God's justice yet argues against his mistreatment (Yes, but why?), and Job appeals to God both as judge and as mediator (Yes, but help!). In despair, Job admits that he cannot find God and cannot perceive him in his current situation, but he also acknowledges God's presence in his testing.[46] After the three friends have concluded their arguments meant to convince Job that his suffering is a punishment for his wickedness, Job defends not only himself and his integrity, but the righteousness of God who has taken away Job's rights. Job's speeches are filled with this

---

[41] Job 1:21.
[42] Job 2:10.
[43] Job 3:23.
[44] Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 60.
[45] Job 19:25.
[46] "But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I shall come out like gold." Job 23:10.

type of tension: refusing to call God's justice into question, yet questioning the justice of innocent suffering, and insisting on both God's and his own righteousness, despite all appearances to the contrary. What Job longs for is once again to be on the same side as YHWH instead of feeling like an enemy of God. He desires to go back to the time "when the friendship of God was upon my tent."[47]

What we find in Job is a man torn asunder by internal conflict, a man who knows God but realises he does not know God, a man who trusts God yet feels betrayed, a man who will defend God to the death yet cannot seem to get God to defend him (or kill him), a man who does not believe God is retributive yet appeals to God for just retribution, and a man who calls God both friend and persecutor.[48] Job's cries for mercy, for justice, for advocacy, and for vindication are important, but what is perhaps more important is the fact that he will not let God go; he insists that God speak to him. Brueggemann comments: "Job yearns most for an answer, any answer, because he prefers a harsh dialogue to an empty monologue."[49] Job's Yes is found not only in his refusal to curse God, but in his constant complaint which becomes an unceasing prayer.

3. The Third Yes: Collaboration

In order to find the presence of divine/human collaboration, we turn to the final chapters of the book of Job, specifically the speech from the whirlwind (theophany), Job's response, and the epilogue. We are not looking for closure or tidy answers to the questions raised in the story. The tale of Job, like any good drama, does not tie up all the loose ends and leave us with nothing to ponder. At the end of Job's story, there are unsolved mysteries which we as readers are meant to keep mulling over. In the third Yes we are also not looking for one final interpretation; there are several ways to view the interaction between YHWH and Job, and I am offering but one option. In commenting on the book of Job, Mark Larrimore notes that ancient Jewish interpreters believed that, "if a passage could be understood in several ways, it should be so understood."[50] I posit that a theodramatic treatment of the interaction between God and Job is not only indicated by the dramatic nature of the narrative, but because it respects the drama by refusing to reduce it

---

[47] Job 29:4.
[48] Job 29-30.
[49] Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, 60.
[50] Mark Larrimore, *The Book of Job: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 31.

to a moral lesson. In light of this, what does God's answer, which begins in chapter 38, tell us about the relationship between YHWH and Job?

In the theophany, we notice a definite change in focus from the previous dialogue which concerns Job's righteousness and the (in)justice of his suffering. However, the speech from the whirlwind should not be viewed as a total denial of Job's questions. As mentioned previously, Alter notes that YHWH's speech brings back many of the themes mentioned by Job in his initial lament and reframes them. While Job interpreted all of life through the lens of suffering and impending death, God calls him to behold the vibrant, awe-inspiring life evident in creation. The barrage of questions which God asks Job about creation begin like this: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements – surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?"[51] These queries serve to overwhelm Job, showing him his insignificance in light of the magnificence and magnitude of creation, and yet, the very fact that YHWH has entered the conversation and is questioning Job reflects a certain amount of equanimity. G.K. Chesterton observes: "The poet [author of Job] by an exquisite intuition has made God ironically accept a kind of controversial equality with His accusers. He is willing to regard it as if it were a fair intellectual duel."[52] The questions YHWH poses to Job appear by turns belittling, even bullying,[53] and at times sarcastic,[54] ironic,[55] and seemingly angry.[56] But as the questions roll over each other page after page, there is also another tone evident: wonder. Chesterton words it this way: "The whole is a sort of psalm or rhapsody of the sense of wonder. The maker of all things is astonished at the things he has Himself made."[57] God is not merely rebuking Job, but calling him to join the Creator in being in awe, in beholding great mysteries, and in pondering the grandeur of creation. Job's small act of refusing to curse God, noble as it may be, is not ultimately the goal of the test. The invitation of God is for Job to

---

[51] Job 38:4-5.

[52] G. K. Chesterton, introduction to *The Book of Job* (London: C. Palmer & Hayward, 1916), xix-xx. Accessed February 15, 2016. https://archive.org/details/bookofjobwithint00londuoft.

[53] "Gird up your loins like a man; I will question you, and you declare to me. Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?" Job 40:6-9.

[54] "Surely you know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is great!" Job 38:21.

[55] "Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail, which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war?" Job 38:22-23.

[56] "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Anyone who argues with God must respond." Job 40:2.

[57] Chesterton, introduction, xxiii.

join together with him in extolling the glories of creation, a glory which includes lions hunting for prey and war ostriches dealing cruelly with their offspring.[58]

God's strategy, it seems, was always to invite Job to be a partaker in glory, not only catching a glimpse of the incomprehensibility of an intricate and complex creation but also sharing in creation's sufferings. The story of Job has prophetic undertones because his experience of suffering and his cry for redemption are echoed over and over again in the history of Israel, the world, and ultimately, they find their full expression in the passion of Christ. Dorothee Sölle suggests that Job's "call for an advocate, a redeemer, can only be understood as the unanswerable cry of the pre-Christian world, which is eventually given its answer in Christ."[59] Seen in the context of the whole biblical text, the divine invitation for Job to enter into suffering becomes a foreshadowing of Christ as the suffering servant. Paul Claudel writes: "The Son of God did not come to do away with suffering but rather to suffer with us; not to abolish the Cross, but to stretch himself upon it. Of all the special privileges of humanity, God wanted to adopt only this one."[60] To connect glory and divinity with suffering seems contradictory and unreasonable, but it is one of the mysteries which the drama of Job leaves us to ponder. Chesterton concludes that the point of Job's story is that humans are "most comforted by paradoxes,"[61] because he believes that, "The riddles of God are more satisfying than the solutions of man."[62] While there is a certain truth in this, I would qualify Chesterton's statements by suggesting that in the end, Job's comfort has more to do with restored friendship with God than with divine riddles. Larrimore makes a similar observation when he states that, "The suffering Job's questions are not addressed in the theophany. He is."[63] Relationship, not riddles, is the key to understanding the drama of Job. Trust, not mystery, is what we find at the core of Job's restoration.

The epilogue reads very much like a contrived and unnatural attempt at closure, a *deus ex machina*, as Kallen suggests. God rebukes Job's friends for their harsh words and has Job pray

---

[58] Job 38:39-40; Job 39:13-17.

[59] Dorothee Sölle, *Leiden* (Stuttgart/Berlin: Kreuzverlag, 1972), 148. As quoted in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 4, *The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 195. Hereafter referred to as *TD4*.

[60] Paul Claudel, *Positons et propositions* II (Gallimard, 1943), 245. As quoted in Balthasar, *TD4*, 195.

[61] Chesterton, introduction, xxvii.

[62] Ibid., xxii.

[63] Larrimore, *The Book of Job*, 183.

for them. Then God restores Job's friends, his wealth, and conveniently, Job's fertile wife gives him seven more sons and three more daughters. Finally, God grants Job another one hundred and forty years of life which enable him to see four generations of his descendants, a great blessing by Ancient Near Eastern standards. Here is the problem: if we view this as a fitting ending, as a way of fixing everything that has gone before, we revert to a retributive view of YHWH, a God essentially reduced to a system of rewarding faithfulness and punishing evil, the very notion which the whole story sets out to disprove.[64] Let us return to the idea of collaboration to untangle the implications of the epilogue.

In the first Yes, especially in the prologue, we catch a glimpse of collaboration between YHWH and Job, but have no clear sense as to where it might be leading. We know that the relationship is about to change between the two characters, but it is too early in the drama to draw any conclusions. It seems apparent that increased intimacy is definitely a factor in the third Yes, and the part of the text which makes the point (nearly every commentator refers to this as the key to the whole story) is found in Job's response to God's eloquent poem regarding the wonders of creation: "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you."[65] If we tie this epiphany together with the invitation to experience a fuller measure of the glory of God, a glory which is so all-encompassing that it does not shy away from pain and suffering, then we do not have a contrived ending. Instead, we are presented with resurrection, with the same kind of buoyancy described in the theophany, a vitality which cannot be dulled or overcome by death. Instead of a moral lesson about suffering, we have a story which takes its characters from *plerosis* through *kenosis* and back to a more glorious and nuanced *plerosis*. William Blake's illustrations of the final scenes of the book of Job reflect both the *plerosis* of resurrection as well as the intimacy of divine/human collaboration. Larrimore describes Blake's drawings of the events in the epilogue: "Musical instruments that had been hung in the oak tree overhead in the opening scene, judged inappropriate to piety, are being played in the final scene as the company joyously stands. It's a restoration but also a reconciliation of different parts of

---

[64] Though there are definite examples in the biblical text of God rewarding faithfulness and punishing evil, and the epilogue of Job could be interpreted as one of them, we must be careful not to align ourselves with Job's three friends by assuming that this dynamic reveals the full extent of the character of God.

[65] Job 42:5.

life, the restoration of art to worship, creativity to religion. Most striking, Job's face and the faces of God are the same."[66]

<div align="center">*Toward Glory*</div>

At this point it is necessary to take a step back and remember where we have come from. In chapter two, I presented the idea of gift as an underlying, active foundation, the dynamic generator of every Yes. The concept of unconditional gift, the gift which needs no reciprocation, the gift which comes out of overabundance, is what makes genuine Yes possible. Because gift is first exemplified in the divine invitation (the first Yes), we are able to utter the responsive second Yes and give ourselves without reserve to the Divine Giver. Further, because both Yeses are freely given, the result is a genuine collaboration which involves movements of unison and harmony in a symphonic, synergetic flow of mutual love and generosity. The story of Job illustrates the other end of the arc: the drama which begins with gift culminates in glory. Ultimately, Job's laments and pleas are not requests for God to restore the material blessings which have been lost, but for God to show himself, to make himself known. The theophany in chapters 38-41 is God's answer to this prayer. Through unveiling the glories and mysteries of creation, God reveals himself to Job.

The Hebrew word for glory is *kabod,* from a root which means weight or heaviness. In Greek, the word is *doxa*, referring to honour, renown, and reputation. Writing on the topic, Jason Zuidema notes that, "God's glory is a main theme of Scripture. The [Old Testament] associates God's glory, the sheer magnificence of God's presence, with his creation, theophanies, acts of salvation, and judgment."[67] In the drama of Job, we find all these elements: the voice out of the whirlwind brings God's magnificent, weighty presence,[68] the theophany gives us a litany of glorious, divinely creative acts, and the epilogue reveals God's judgment of Job's friends and the salvation of Job. One note of caution: we must be careful not to misconstrue glory as perfection. Commenting on the innocence of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Don Hudson observes

---

[66] Larrimore, *The Book of Job*, 186.

[67] Jason Zuidema, "The Glory of God," in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 476.

[68] Walter Brueggemann comments on the heaviness of the glorious theophany: "The speeches of Yahweh press hard against Job's presumed world and, in the end, destabilize him. Job's security is gone. His pre-eminence has vanished. Job is pressed by the rhetoric of God to reevaluate his place in the world, his role in creation. He is, by weight of the evidence, by the power of the rhetoric, driven to awed submission." Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet,* 60.

that the so-called perfection of this scenario which is closely associated with glorious communion with God's person, also comes with a cost: being largely ignorant of God's world.[69] This is very much the case in the prologue of Job. There is a certain perfection to his life, but there is also a grave ignorance of anything beyond his limited experience.

Glory is what opens up eyes, unstops ears, confounds minds, expands hearts, and silences all other voices. Walter Brueggemann posits that in the book of Job, "Theodicy is overridden by doxology."[70] A glimpse of glory unseats Job as the central character in his own story because he begins to see the larger world and it is, as Chesterton puts it, "much stranger" than he thought it was.[71] It is a world of tragedy, of suffering, of unanswered questions, but also of overwhelming beauty and variety. Don Hudson writes on the connection between beauty and suffering:

> The ultimate knowledge of suffering, which is a loss of innocence, constrains us to fiercely imagine truth, beauty, and goodness just as God did when he confronted the chaos in Genesis 1. God's imagination in the face of chaos resulted in the creation of heaven and earth. Acknowledging the suffering of this world places us every day in the image of our Creator – we can create beauty out of nothing or we can repeat suffering in an endless cycle of destruction. Confronting suffering in our world becomes the fulcrum between ultimate tragedy or redemption.[72]

In the character of Job, we find a man who is brought to that fulcrum, who must decide if a blessed life is found in fulfilling religious obligations and enjoying the wealth found in friends, family, livestock, and servants, or by embracing something more terrifying and beautiful than he ever imagined. It is as if YHWH says to Job, "Because you are my trusted and faithful servant, I will show you my glory. Let me show you the depths of suffering and the heights of blessing, none of which are beyond my comprehension or control. I employ it all to display my glory." Divine glory is not the avoidance of tragedy, but the emergence of a new kind of *plerosis* out of tragedy. Hudson confirms what any avid reader or theatre-goer knows: "Any story worth its salt does not begin until tragedy steals in."[73] When Balthasar makes the death of Christ on the cross the central action of *Theo-Drama,* he is not only recognising the importance of tragedy as a dramatic element, but positioning all human tragedy within the drama of God. One of the problems we have with the book of Job, according to Hudson, is that we believe that God views

---

[69] Don Hudson, "The Glory of His Discontent: The Inconsolable Suffering of God," *Mars Hill Review* 6 (Fall 1996), 22.
[70] Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, 62.
[71] Chesterton, introduction, xxiii.
[72] Hudson, "The Glory of His Discontent," 24.
[73] Ibid., 22.

tragedy the same way we do. We are scandalised by a God who would offer up his faithful servant to be tested through suffering, but this is because we believe that God is isolated from suffering, is Aristotle's unmoved mover, a God void of passion and empathy. Hudson insists that we have a God who participates in our sufferings and invites us to participate in his suffering, specifically that of Christ on the cross.[74]

In John 17 we read the prayer of Jesus spoken just before he voluntarily goes to his death. Though he is aware of the suffering which lies ahead, the overall tone of the text is hopeful and forward-looking, focused on the themes of love and glory. The sharing of these two elements, first between the Father and the Son, and then between the Godhead and Jesus's disciples, takes up most of the prayer. Jesus begins with these words which contain both ends of the theodramatic arc (gift and glory):

> Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.[75]

What the Father has given Jesus, Jesus offers up to the Father to be glorified. This glory also follows the pattern mentioned earlier: *plerosis* (gift coming from abundance) is followed by *kenosis* (self-emptying, suffering, tragedy) which then results in a return to renewed *plerosis* (glory). At the end of the prayer, Jesus turns his concern to the disciples:

> As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.[76]

Lest one think that all this talk about glory is restricted to the world to come, let us look at how Peter, Jesus's disciple, understands the concept of divine glory. He writes to his fellow believers: "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is

---

[74] Ibid., 27.
[75] John 17:1-5.
[76] John 17:21-24.

the Spirit of God, is resting on you."[77] For the early Christians, glory was never separated from suffering; instead, it was seen to shine through suffering, because to share in the sufferings of Christ, in the sufferings of God, was to share in the glory of God.[78] This is because the sacrificial death of Christ was recognised as the supreme act of loving generosity made by a holy God. In the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ, we see gift and glory intermingled, both ends of the arc of the divine drama meeting in one historical event.

In the prayer of Jesus before his death, we observe invitation, response, and collaboration tightly woven together by the frequent use of the words, "one," "in," "given," "sent," and "loved." While the theophany in Job resonates with lofty, heightened imagery of the vast and unimaginable panorama of creation, drawing Job out of his self-absorption, Jesus's prayer uses intimate language and inclusive pronouns to draw all the parties (Father, Son, disciples) together into a verbal womb of love, connection, and shared purpose. In these two examples we see both the expansiveness and the closeness of the glorious drama of God, the epic and the lyrical. God enters into the human story of Job, and by doing so, invites Job to expand his horizons, to step out of naivety, and to know something of the glorious world which God inhabits. God enters into the human story through Jesus, and by doing so, invites humanity to see the *imago dei* in all its glorious weakness and through it, access the divine drama. In Job and Jesus we have a bringing together of what Balthasar identifies as a unity of "the glory of God and the uttermost abandonment by God, Heaven and Hell."[79] Abandonment by God, the very definition of hell, does not have the power to jettison glory from the story; instead, it serves to create a space, a void, which allows the *plerosis* of God to cascade in and redeem all that is lost.

In *The Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis states that the incarnation is indicative of the drama of God evident in the world, a drama which forces us to move beyond reason, a drama full of intricate, winding stories whose rawness and strength strike us at full force. In many ways, Lewis's words are applicable to the drama of Job.

---

[77] 1 Peter 4:14.

[78] The author of the gospel of John associates death and martyrdom with glory when he quotes Jesus's words to Peter concerning his later years. "'Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.)" John 21:18-19.

[79] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics,* vol. 6, *Theology: The Old Covenant*, trans. Brian McNeil C.R.V. and Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, ed. John Riches (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 290.

The story is strangely like many myths which have haunted religion from the first, and yet it is not like them. It is not transparent to the reason: we could not have invented it ourselves. It has not the suspicious *a priori* lucidity of Pantheism or of Newtonian physics. It has the seemingly arbitrary and idiosyncratic character which modern science is slowly teaching us to put up with in this wilful universe, where energy is made up in little parcels of a quantity no one could predict, where speed is not unlimited, where irreversible entropy gives time a real direction and the cosmos, no longer static or cyclic, moves like a drama from a real beginning to a real end. If any message from the core of reality ever were to reach us, we should expect to find in it just that unexpectedness, that wilful, dramatic anfractuosity which we find in the Christian faith. It has the master touch - the rough, male taste of reality, not made by us, or, indeed, for us, but hitting us in the face.[80]

In connecting the drama of Job with the "entering in" of God through the person of Jesus Christ, we come to the crux of dramatic theology: loving collaboration (covenant, *plerosis*, *synergos*) which permeates even tragedy, suffering, sin, and death. Balthasar, in his exploration of Holy Saturday in what he calls "The Final Act" of *Theo-Drama,* interprets the descent of Christ into hell after his death[81] as another expression of love and intimacy. In writing about this separation of the Son from the Father, he cites Adrienne von Speyr: "The reciprocal self-surrender of Son and Father appear 'as something so strong and so good that everything involving separation and suffering and obligation and obedience that is taken up into this is totally absorbed into love, indeed itself becomes love, as if it had never been anything else.'"[82] The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the story of descent (coming from heaven) and ascent (going back to heaven). In the person of Jesus we see God identifying with humanity, even to the point of death (descent), but we also see Christ inviting humanity to take the path back to God with him (ascent).[83] In essence, this is the theodramatic arc of the three Yeses.

Because the drama of Job has so often been interpreted as theodicy, my insistence on a collaborative, relational reading of the story might seem to be a case of imposing a dramatic

---

[80] C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 15.

[81] "Therefore it is said, 'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.' (When it says, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.)" Ephesians 4:8-10. "For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey…" 1 Peter 3:18-20a.

[82] Adrienne von Speyr, *John: The Discourses of Controversy*, quoted in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 5, *The Final Act,* trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 258. Hereafter cited as *TD5*.

[83] Balthasar, *TD5*, 249.

framework where none is warranted. In other words, are the three Yeses self-evident in Job or merely a result of certain presuppositions on my part? I contend that Job is primarily theodramatic and not apologetic in nature because, within the context of the whole of the biblical witness, especially the accounts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, any other reading would be incongruent. Unlike Goethe, Frost, MacLeish, and Holden, we do not need to rewrite the story to empower Job, because God utters an emphatic, empowering Yes at the very beginning of the drama when he states, "There is no one like [Job] on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil."[84] We do not need to defend God in the face of the horrible atrocities such as those which befall the supposedly helpless Job; instead, we are to lament and intercede along with Job, calling for justice and an end to suffering (the second Yes). We do not need to forgive the refusal of God to prevent Job's suffering because in the end, God is the God who "enters in" and is not aloof from his creation. God is the one who responds to Job's cries by showing himself and letting himself be known. God is the one who descends to the dwelling place of humanity and then invites humanity to ascend to the place where God dwells (the third Yes).

The drama of Job brings God into direct contact with humanity within the realm of suffering and death, and in so doing, brings humanity into direct contact with the glory of God. As God enters into the drama of humanity, he invites humanity to enter into the drama of God. The framework of the three Yeses places an emphasis on relationship instead of doctrine or philosophy, and thereby allows the reader to identify the foreshadowing of Christ, the suffering servant, within the drama of Job. It is important to remember that the central figure of dramatic theology is Christ, because he is the action of God in the world. The invitation, then, is for humanity to be united with God through Christ's birth, life, ministry, suffering, death, descent, resurrection, and ascent. This is the drama of God.

---

[84] Job 1:8.

Chapter 6

A Theatrical Example - *Six Characters in Search of an Author*

> *Existence has a need to see itself mirrored and this makes the theatre a legitimate instrument in the pursuit of self-knowledge and the elucidation of Being – an instrument, moreover, that points beyond itself. As a mirror it enables existence to attain ultimate (theological) understanding of itself; but also, like a mirror, it must eventually take second place to make room for the truth, which it reflects only indirectly.[1]*

The drama of Job challenges us to find the presence of divine/human collaboration in a tale of suffering and injustice. At one point in the story, Job wonders if the author of his woes has abandoned him. In the end, we are reassured that God has not deserted Job, but Job's concern is worth considering. What happens when the author abandons his creation, when instead of a divine invitation, we have some form of divine rejection? In other words, what happens when the first Yes is never uttered or when it is recanted?

In 1921, Luigi Pirandello's controversial and highly original play, *Six Characters in Search of An Author*, premiered in Rome. Its subtitle (*Una commedia da fare*) indicates that it is "a play to be made," but the very premise of the piece, that of an author who abandons his characters, means that the action consists mainly of failed attempts to shape a coherent story.[2] The first audience to experience Pirandello's disorienting work lost patience as the play progressed without providing any clearly identifiable, traditional narrative. Its innovative features proved so frustrating to theatregoers that, after the premiere, they took to the streets and rioted, suggesting that the author of such madness might be well-suited to a madhouse.[3] Thankfully, subsequent productions were better-received, and the 1923 French version became a "revolutionary theatrical event" which made it a modern classic and earned Pirandello some fame as a playwright.[4] One of the innovations added by Georges Pitoëff, the director of the 1923 French production, was to "break the fourth wall"[5] of the theatre by having some of the actors

---

[1] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 1*, Prologomena*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 86-87. Hereafter referred to as *TD1*.

[2] Mary Ann Frese Witt, introduction to *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Luigi Pirandello, trans. Martha Witt and Mary Ann Frese Witt (New York: Italica Press, 2013), x.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., xi.

[5] "Breaking the fourth wall" is the term given to the theatrical device which has actors onstage acknowledge the presence of the audience in some way. Commonly associated with modernist theatre, it dismisses the notion of naturalism which, according to dramatist Gerhart Hauptmann, meant writing and performing plays "as though the

descend into the auditorium during the play. Pirandello incorporated a number of Pitoëff's stage directions in later editions of his script, thereby heightening the distinctions between the unrealized characters and the other actors, as well as pushing through the boundary of the "fourth wall" to an even greater degree. It is interesting to note that *Six Characters in Search of an Author* became Pirandello's most revised play, each edition featuring new amendations by the author until his last revisions were published in 1933.[6] In addition, it was common for directors to alter Pirandello's staging, lighting, choice of play being rehearsed in the opening scene, certain actor's lines, and the tableau presented in the final moments of the play. In many ways, the staging of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* seemed to be an exercise in developing a modern, less contrived, approach to theatre and reality.

By 1925, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* had been staged in ten countries and as many languages.[7] A note from a 1929 rehearsal captures the reaction of actors to Pirandello's unconventional play, arguably a view shared by many audiences as well.

> They let themselves be guided along the intricate paths of that weighty and entangled creation, so full of dazzling mental fireworks, imaginative leaps, meditative moments, and fascinating and ingenious theatrical experiments and solutions all suffused by an atmosphere as enticing as sin. The layers of mist slowly thinned out and the first rays of light appeared, flickered, and then shone more brightly. A moment of clarity was achieved.[8]

I reference this background to Pirandello's play, especially the history of its reception, in order to highlight the significant impact of the author's disruptive narrative, a narrative which, like the drama of Job, forces the players as well as the audience to confront their comfortable, tidy constructs.

---

stage did not have three, but four walls." Nathaniel Davis explains: "While direct addresses of the audience have been employed in theater since antiquity, and while the inclusion of metaleptic breaks as formal devices can already be seen in Shakespeare, modern usage of the fourth-wall break first appears in the wake of the realist and naturalist theater of the late-nineteenth century. Only after the standardization of the fourth-wall illusion would its breakage provoke a shock effect upon theatergoers." Nathaniel Davis, "'Not a soul in sight!': Beckett's Fourth Wall," *Journal of Modern Literature* 38.2 (Winter 2015), 86-87.

[6] Jennifer Lorch, *Pirandello: Six Characters in Search of an Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 22.

[7] Susan Bassnett and Jennifer Lorch, eds., *Luigi Pirandello in the Theatre: A Documentary Record* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 55.

[8] Notes from Director Dario NIccodemi, Bassnett and Lorch, quoted in Bassnett and Lorch, *Luigi Pirandello in the Theatre*, 59.

What concerns us in this chapter is the contrast this play provides to the three Yeses of dramatic theology. Instead of an author giving life to characters by telling their story, we have a creator who declines to develop the narrative of six characters beyond the embryonic stage, making them forever rejected characters. The author declares a No instead of a Yes, and the ripple effects of this negative pronouncement are evident throughout the play. To be clear, the rejection in Pirandello's play is not a complete renunciation, for the characters do exist and they have the beginnings of a story between them. The author's rejection is largely of their tragic tale which he deems unworthy of completion. As a result of this qualified rejection, both the story and the ability of the Director and the actors to tell the story are stymied. The audience members, as the 1921 premiere so vividly illustrated, are presented with disruption after disorienting disruption. There is no detectable story arc, as such, and no fitting denouement. Balthasar comments on the effect Pirandello's premise has on the performance's viability:

> Confusion arises because the author rejects the characters of his imagination (which represent real life), that is, he allows them to come into existence only as characters he has *rejected*, and so brings the whole world of performance (the director and actors) to a standstill. … [The characters] completely obstruct the work of the director and the actors, none of whom understand anything of the feud between the author and his characters. In fact, only the author is aware of it; the "characters" suffer it as an incomprehensible and insoluble tragedy.[9]

Both the story of Job and the story fragments of the six characters contain unimaginably tragic events. However, in Job's story we begin with a well-defined character while in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, we are confronted with unfinished characters and incomplete scenes. The result is that the six abandoned characters lack any discernable development and are left to revisit the same melodramatic moments again and again. The price the characters pay for their author's No is high: they are shut off not only from completion but from any possibility of plot advancement or character evolution, at least in the traditional sense.

Those with modern and post-modern understandings of plot - storylines which do not adhere strictly to Aristotle's three unities (time, place, action) but use discontinuity and disruption to explore fissures in society and human nature - may not necessarily agree with my assessment. I should note that by lack of plot advancement I do not mean a lack of purposeful unity on the playwright's part, but a sense that the characters cannot fully realise or tell their

---

[9] Balthasar, *TD1*, 263-64.

story because the author's purpose is to show their paralysis (in particular) and theatre's inability to portray reality (in general).

This chapter serves as somewhat of an anti-thesis, showcasing the adverse impact of No instead of championing the creative possibilities found in Yes. The first part will focus on Pirandello's innovative script and highlight the ways in which the playwright crafts a story fraught with futility by inverting many of the traditional theatrical practices of his time.[10] The second part will examine the power of No within the context of tragedy, and finally, the eternal moment suffered by the unrealised characters will be contrasted to the trajectory established in previous chapters, that is, a movement rooted in the foundation of gift and culminating in glory.

The Play That Cannot be Played

In the University of Notre Dame's 2014 production of *Six Characters in Search of An Author*, the costumes of the rejected characters incorporated patches of fabric which featured smudged words written in cursive script. Director Patrick Vassel collaborated with costume designer Abigail Hebert to create a look for the six characters which evoked the sense of a discarded manuscript, pages which had been crumpled up and tossed aside by a frustrated writer.[11] The asymmetrical, disjointed attire was to be an outward representation of the six characters' incomplete and unresolved scenes which become stitched together, somewhat haphazardly, as the play progresses. One has to admire Pirandello's bold attempt to portray characters who cannot be fully realized, to tell a story which cannot be told, and to mount a play which cannot be played. The entire theatrical experience is one plagued by disruption, and yet, when done well, the play can be poignantly moving for attentive audience members.

---

[10] Gary Jay Williams observes that modern drama "rejected the traditional notions of a compassionate creator at the center of the universe, giving human life order and significance." This, in part, is what we see in Pirandello's characterisation of an author who abandons his characters and leaves them to their own devices. Gary Jay Williams, "Case Study: Modernism in Chekhov, Pirandello, and Beckett," in *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., ed. Gary Jay Williams (New York: Routledge, 2010), 417.

[11] The words on the characters' clothing relate to their identities: the word "coward" appears on the Son's trouser leg, The Girl has "little darling" on her dress, and the Mother, the only character who is assigned a name, has it written on her mourning dress. All the words are scratched out or smeared and the costumes of the six characters are distressed and askew, indicating their rejection by their author, as if they had been tossed in the garbage. The asymmetrical costumes also illustrate how the characters appear distorted when they enter the real world. Notes from interview with Abigail Hebert, Costume Designer, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, University of Notre Dame (2014), November 5, 2014.

Pirandello's script opens with preparations being made for a rehearsal of act two of *The Rules of the Game*, a play which he penned in 1918.[12] The playwright's directions indicate that the backstage area is partially exposed: "Upon entering the theater, the audience will find the curtain raised and the stage as it is during the day, without wings or scenery, almost dark and empty. From the start they should have the impression that this show has not been rehearsed."[13] This dramatic device was not entirely unique in Pirandello's time; similar ideas are evident in the work of Berthold Brecht who sought to keep the audience from substituting the fantasized, theatrical version of the stage for their own reality.[14] While Pirandello certainly implies a critique of "theatre as reality" in his play, I believe that this opening scene is primarily an invitation for the audience to re-evaluate the role of the author. The first actors we encounter are a stagehand and the stage manager, the interaction between the two hinting at the blurring of reality and illusion which is to characterise the entire performance. The play itself is without acts or scenes *per se*, giving one the impression that what is happening is live and, as the playwright suggests, perhaps unscripted.

When six characters mysteriously appear on the set, interrupting a rehearsal, they enter through the house of the theatre.[15] Pirandello indicates that the difference between the actors and the six characters must be clear: "The CHARACTERS should not appear to be ghosts, but rather created realities, changeless constructions of the imagination: thus both more real and consistent than the shifting naturalness of the ACTORS."[16] This differentiation is meant to contrast the pliancy of the actors (their success as thespians depends on it) and the immutability of the six characters. Pirandello cleverly juxtaposes the two by first exposing the audience to actors easily moving in and out of character as they rehearse a play. Subsequently, when the six characters

---

[12] The playwright pokes fun at his reputation for writing somewhat obscure and inaccessible works when he has the actor playing the Director utter, "What am I supposed to do when we're not getting any more good French plays, and we're reduced to putting on incomprehensible plays by Pirandello, deliberately written to grate on actors, critics and audiences?" Luigi Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, trans. Martha Witt and Mary Ann Frese Witt (New York: Italica Press, 2013), 32.

[13] Ibid., 30.

[14] Davis, "'Not a soul in sight!': Beckett's Fourth Wall," 90.

[15] These are the stage directions in Pirandello's script. However, various methods of introducing the characters have been used. In Pitoëff's 1923 French production, they ascended and descended from the stage in an elevator; in a PBS adaptation directed by Stacy Keach and starring Andy Griffith (1976), the characters appear on a monitor in a television studio; in the 1992 film version directed by Bill Bryden, they enter a movie soundstage through a large door, emerging from a bright light.

[16] Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, 34.

make their appearance on the stage, their strangeness is immediately apparent not only in their otherworldly appearance,[17] but in their inability to display any duplicity or distraction; each of the six characters never strays from their own single, narrow vision. The scenes enacted by the six characters take place within the same rehearsal setting as the opening of the play and, as is to be expected, their actions are subject to questions and interruptions from the director and other actors. Yet, the characters respond to these questions and suggestions as characters, not as actors. The story is always their reality, their only motivation; enacting it is not a job, it is their very existence. Because of this, even though they are somewhat single-dimensional characters, they appear more present and more real than the other actors on stage.

The Father, the spokesperson for the six characters, explains that they are looking for an author because, even though they are alive, even though they have been born, their play is yet to be made. He confesses that they are "lost and abandoned" because "the author who created us wouldn't – or couldn't – put us into the world of art."[18] Their desire is to live, and in order to live, the six characters must perform their story. When the Director asks, "And where is the script?" the Father replies, "It's in us, sir. The drama is in us. We are the drama, and we are anxious to perform it just as our inner passions guide us."[19] The characters embody a story, and yet, because they were abandoned by their author before any script could be developed to articulate it, all they can do is play the few scenes suggested by their dominant motivations, scenes which their author envisioned before he discarded the story idea, and along with it, the characters. In the preface to the play, Pirandello notes that he first rejected the six characters because he could find no universal value in their story, but they refused to leave him, coming back again and again, imploring him to describe different scenes in their drama.[20] The playwright

---

[17] Pirandello makes several suggestions concerning the appearance of the six characters: "Whoever attempts to stage this play must use every means at hand to create an effect showing that the SIX CHARACTERS are not to be confused with the COMPANY ACTORS. Positioning the two groups onstage, as indicated in the stage direction, will no doubt help, as will different colors of lighting achieved by appropriate reflectors. But the most effective and suitable way, recommended here, is the use of specially-made masks for the CHARACTERS." Ibid., 34. The suggestion of masks was a later addition after Pirandello viewed Pitoëff's 1925 production which featured mask-like makeup. To my knowledge, despite Pirandello's suggestion, the use of masks never became the norm for staging the play. See Witt, introduction to *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, xii.

[18] Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, 38.

[19] Ibid., 39.

[20] In the play, the Stepdaugher says of her interaction with the author: "I went to tempt him, so many times, in the gloom of his study, at twilight. He would be lying back in an armchair, unable to make up his mind whether to turn on the light or let darkness invade the room – a darkness swarming with us, who had come to tempt him." Ibid., 79.

admits that he was obsessed with them until he finally came upon a way out, a way to present them exactly as he experienced them: characters who were living a life of their own, demanding that an author tell their story.[21]

Pirandello believed that writing the play about the six characters' struggle to be heard brought them to their intended purpose: "By going onstage on their own, and by struggling desperately against each other, as well as against the Director and the actors who do not understand them, they manage to discover the meaning within themselves."[22] That meaning, their *raison d'être*, turns out to be not the enactment of their drama, but the portrayal of an impossible situation in which they are accepted by their author as characters, yet rejected by that same author because of their meaningless drama. Their torment over this state of limbo, a predicament both unjust and inexplicable, is what each character ends up showing the audience. In some ways, this tormented stasis reminds us of the middle chapters of the book of Job where inexplicable injustices and uncertainties threaten to render the story meaningless. However, for the six characters, there can be no escape because there is no end to their story. What we have are six characters who are continuously reliving the fragmented events of the past because they have no future. By showing remnants of a discarded drama, Pirandello tells a tale of defeat, what he calls a "comedy of [the six characters'] vain attempt" to be heard and seen.[23]

The six characters themselves are all victims of tragedy: an abandoned Son who despises his Father, a Mother who is urged by her husband to marry another man and now finds herself a destitute widow, a Father who unknowingly becomes a client of his prostitute Stepdaughter, a Stepdaughter forced into an unfortunate situation in order to support her Mother and siblings, and two young children who succumb to untimely and senseless deaths. As bits of the story are played out, frustratingly incomplete and often interrupted by the Director and actors in the rehearsal, the audience is intrigued and repelled at the same time. We can understand why the author judged their story to be meaningless and discarded it, and yet we feel compelled by the tragedy, drawn to watch it unfold in all its sad, horrific detail. We are by turns mesmerised and repulsed, empathetic and confused.

---

[21] Luigi Pirandello, "Preface to *Six Characters*," in *Six Characters in Search of an Author,* 18-20.
[22] Ibid., 20.
[23] Ibid., 22.

In rehearsals, director Patrick Vassel told the University of Notre Dame cast that if their performances brought the audience to a place of discomfort, they would have succeeded in realising Pirandello's intention to intersperse moments of connection with ruptures in the illusion. This disruptive dynamic was identified in 1925 by theorist Viktor Shklovsky as "defamiliarization." He writes: "The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception."[24] The added difficulty found in art forms is purposeful, according to Shklovsky, because, "Art removes objects from the automatism of perception."[25] In other words, we become habitualized to the customs and practices of our lives, and consequently, become desensitized to what we are actually doing. Shklovsky posits that this habitualization needs to be disrupted in order for people to "recover the sensation of life."[26] This bears significant resemblance to German playwright Berthold Brecht's (1898-1956) notion of *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect) which challenges audience members to view past and present realities from a critical distance instead of merely becoming emotionally attached to the character(s).[27] Making the familiar appear strange causes the spectator to reflect more deeply on what he or she is witnessing and to question previous presuppositions. A crucial feature of the modern era is the shift from faith (one could call it a presupposition) in a divine creator to reliance on critical human reason. This changing view is quite evident in the enforced critical stance of the spectator in Brecht's epic theatre and, to some extent, apparent in Pirandello's portrayal of an absent author.

The audience, then, in addition to viewing the chaos of an unfinished narrative in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, is also meant to be roused from the stupor of habitualized theatregoers through the fracturing of theatrical illusion and disruption of the plot which invokes them to question the choices of the author. At the end of the play, spectators are meant to wonder what really happened, to question if any of it was real or all part of the performance. Just as the six characters haunted Pirandello, they are meant to haunt the spectator even after the show is over. This is the type of awakening which Pirandello seeks to give his audience.

---

[24] Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, eds. and trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 12.

[25] Ibid., 13.

[26] Ibid., 12.

[27] David Radavich, "Wilder's dramatic landscape: alienation effect meets the Midwest," *American Drama* 15.1 (2006), 44-45.

A closer look at some of the dramatic tools Pirandello employs will serve to explicate the effects of the author's No on his characters. First, the abandoned characters find themselves homeless; though they have identities, of sorts, they have no context within which to express those identities. Because their author has refused to listen to them, refused to give them an audience, they are essentially voiceless characters. This is why Pirandello has them burst into a rehearsal where stories are already being formed; the theatre is the context in which their stories can and must be told. Here we can identify a distinct contrast to the beginning of the story of Job which is taken up with a description of the title character's setting. Despite the tragedies which befall Job and his resulting sense of abandonment, we never get the impression that he is unmoored from his context. His complaints and interjections throughout the drama ensure us that his voice is never in danger of being silenced. Job's story, unlike the six characters', is never disrupted to the extent that its completion is in question and its message deemed insignificant.

Second, because the six characters exist as abandoned characters, they are forever caught in stasis, "condemned to endure their condition eternally since they are not, like us, subject to change."[28] This idea of subsisting in an eternal moment will be further developed later in this chapter, but it is important to note that the characters are dependent on the author not only for creation but for ongoing existence. The author's rejection of their story essentially paralyses the characters and arrests their development. Pirandello reflects this paralysis by presenting characters who are capable of only one motivation. Unlike Job, who moves from contentment to disillusionment to anger to repentance, the six characters are forever condemned to live in their unresolved tragic episodes without any respite or evolution.

A third consequence of the author's No is the presence of unresolved conflict and confusion between the characters. This is especially evident between the Father and the Stepdaughter, each of whom recount different versions of the same incident. In the brothel scene, the Father insists that they were interrupted before anything untoward happened, but the Stepdaughter implies that things went too far. Due to the fact that they each view the scene from their primary motivations (for the Father it is remorse, for the Stepdaughter it is revenge) and because they lack an external, written script to guide them, there can be no resolution to the disagreement. There is no author to act as arbiter. In contrast, when we come across

---

[28] Witt, introduction to *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, xvi.

disagreements between the characters in the story of Job, the theophany serves to get the characters back on script, so to speak.

Another rather ingenious example of conflict between the characters is the reluctance of the Son to participate in telling his part of the story. He repeatedly states that he will not "play anything," aligning himself with the intent of the author, and when the Father tries to physically force him to play a scene, the Son responds with these words: "But what is this frenzy that's taken hold of you? He [the Father] doesn't have the decency to refrain from revealing his shame and ours to everyone! I'll have nothing to do with this! Nothing! And that's how I interpret the will of the author who didn't want to put us on the stage."[29] Immediately after these strong words of refusal, the Son is coaxed by the Director into describing the tragic scenario in which he discovers the Little Girl drowned in the pool and witnesses the Young Boy take his own life. The confusion and lack of clarity surrounding these events seem to be directly linked to the reluctance of the Son (and the author) to describe this very tragic ending to the story. I use the term "ending" rather loosely here because the Son's words suggest that it was this event, the double tragedy, which caused the author to reject the story as meaningless and, as a result, abandon the characters. There is no ending *per se*, for here the action comes to an abrupt halt and the characters, the actors, the Director, and the audience are all left in varying states of confusion. The question we are left with is, "What happened?" In the drama of Job, the question is not "What happened?" but "Why did it happen?" Though neither story provides definitive explanations for the multiple tragedies, at the end of Job's story we have a sense that the characters are no longer confused or in torment because the author has provided a way through the tragedy, a way forward. This is not the case for the six characters.

The final dramatic tool which I will mention is the rigidity of Pirandello's six characters. As mentioned earlier, Pirandello noted that the six are in constant struggle: with each other, with the Director, and with the actors. Their rigid stubbornness is a symptom of their unresolved conflict with the author and makes it impossible for any of the actors to play them. It also makes it impossible for them to present their story in a coherent form and, as a consequence, makes it impossible for the Director to finish or even articulate their story. They exist not only as abandoned characters, but as combative characters, engaged in a never-ending struggle to live, to become, and ultimately, to have someone write an ending to their story, thereby releasing them

---

[29] Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, 86.

from their suffering. This was Job's cry as well, that he would be freed from his misery and misfortune. In contrast to the six characters' plea to live, Job believed the only way out of his anguish was to die. The author of his fate, however, chose a more fitting ending to Job's drama: not death but transformation.

The Power of No

The various dramatic tools which Pirandello uses to portray the six characters reveal to what extent the author's powerful No paralyses the characters and the story. However, it is important to differentiate two types of negation. Our discussion up to this point has primarily dealt with the No of abandonment, the kind of desertion which is evident in this excerpt from a letter Pirandello wrote to his son in 1917 about the six characters: "I don't want to have anything to do with them, and I tell them that it's useless and that I don't care about them and no longer care about anything, and they show me all of their wounds. I shoo them all away…"[30] A distinction must be made between this type of No, the desire for one party to have nothing to do with the other, and the No which rejects another party's idea or action, but does not end the relationship; this is the No of redirection. The first No seeks to cut off all contact; the second No is a negative response which nevertheless invites further dialogue. The first rejects the person himself; the second rejects only what the person is doing.

In Pirandello's play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, the author never appears as a character because he has abandoned the story and is no longer part of it. In theory, the author has uttered the No of desertion, though the existence of the play in some ways negates that claim.[31] Similarly, in the story of Job, we have chapters and chapters of silence from the divine author of Job's troubles. However, the fact that Job's prayers seem to go unanswered, or that his requests are denied, or that his justification is never accomplished, does not constitute the No of abandonment because, as becomes obvious in the theophany, the divine author has always been present to the story, listening and watching. Therefore, Job's unanswered prayers are not a sign

---

[30] Luigi Pirandello, "Excerpt from a Letter," in *Six Characters in Search of an Author,* 15.

[31] I realise this is a bit of a contradiction. In writing a play about abandoned characters, Pirandello has in fact not abandoned them, but embraced them. When one takes into consideration that the characters were present to him for many years as an idea for a novel before he wrote the play, and that he spent years after its 1921 premiere fine-tuning the script, the facts belie his insistence that he wanted nothing to do with them. We can surmise that he intuited that his conflicted relationship with these characters would make a good story - a story about an incomplete story. To be precise, Pirandello is not denying the characters their existence, but denying certain theatrical conventions with regard to characterisation.

of abandonment, as he supposes, but the No of redirection, a No within an ongoing dialogue, a No which changes the relationship but does not end it. The fact that Job's drama progresses and the characters are transformed proves that the author has not abandoned the story, even though he remains on the sidelines for much of the narrative. In contrast, Pirandello's script illustrates the No of desertion, and the play itself is an attempt to finally rid himself of the characters by finalising and immortalising their qualified rejection. This is evidenced by a static story which only exists in the past tense: nothing happens that has not already happened, any references to the author are in the past tense, and there is no ongoing dialogue with the author.

A theological parallel to this indifference, this No which was described by Pirandello as "no longer car[ing] about anything," is the vice of *acedia*, commonly translated in contemporary literature as "sloth." The fourth century monk, Evagrius of Pontus, characterised this spiritual torpor or apathy as a demon which "employs…every possible means to move the monk to abandon his cell and give up the race."[32] Pirandello's words, "I don't care about them … I shoo them all away…" capture both the apathy he had toward the characters and his persistent dismissal of them. If we adapt Evagrius's words to Pirandello's situation, taking them from a spiritual setting to a theatrical one, the description of the dramatic No would read something like this: "a dramatic apathy which employs every possible means to move the author to abandon his characters and give up the story." What is unique about *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is that Pirandello seeks to include the audience in his experience of deserting the characters, thereby creating a dramatic irony whereby he accepts the characters, and he asks the audience to accept them, but only as rejected and abandoned characters.

It is a complex and precarious scenario which Pirandello puts forth, one where acceptance and rejection co-exist and where story and non-story play out at the same time. To no surprise, it proved a difficult concept for audiences in Pirandello's time to grasp, and as a result, he continued to adapt the stage directions for many years in an attempt to better portray the characters as somewhat otherworldly, overly dramatic, and one-dimensional. In keeping with the intent of the author to "defamiliarize" the audience by disrupting a familiar setting, subsequent directors have substituted contemporary, melodramatic plays or television shows for the opening rehearsal scenes of Pirandello's very dated *The Rules of the Game.* In the University of Notre Dame production, director and adaptor Patrick Vassel set the play within the context of a

---

[32] Ponticus Evagrius (Evagrius of Pontus), *Evagrius Essentials* (n.p.: Revelation Insight Publishing Co., 2009), 19.

rehearsal for "The Irish Bachelor," a take-off on a student-produced campus reality show. This updated version remained true to Pirandello's original intent by offering the audience a setting which not only invoked a sense of familiarity but also invited ridicule, especially concerning its unnatural and contrived nature. When the six characters interrupt the rehearsal of a poorly enacted sentimental scene, thereby unmasking the hypocrisies of modern entertainment, the audience is meant to welcome the intrusion.

The consequences of the dramatic No are not entirely negative, for Pirandello skillfully employed it to critique the theatre experience of the early twentieth century, a time when plays were characteristically melodramatic and "well-made," featuring "a clear exposition, complications and resolutions, [and] often a happy ending."[33] The purpose of the theatre at that time was largely to transport the audience to a world of magic, and to that end, it showcased popular actors and actresses who performed, or one could say, over-performed, in "operatic fashion."[34] In general, theatre functioned as larger-than-life entertainment, seldom offering a commentary on society or imitating real life. In *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Pirandello uses a meta-theatrical approach (a play within a play) to strip away the believability and illusion of the theatre and, in a clever reversal, renders his characters more believable than the actors. Theatre historian Bruce McConachie observes that, "By showing how the actors utterly fail to embody and perform the reality of these characters, Pirandello critiques the general failure of the stage to represent reality."[35] While Pirandello's play maintains a high level of theatricality, especially the mysterious appearance of Madame Pace, the brothel owner, who orchestrates the fate of the Father and the Stepdaughter, the script ends with a plea for reality.[36] In some ways, this could be taken as Pirandello's admission that he was unable to achieve it through these particular six characters, nevertheless, he puts this call for authenticity to good purpose. Using a *via negativa* approach, Pirandello shows us that in contrast to the indifferent author, he would have his audience exhibit empathy and compassion, and in contrast to his stymied characters, he would have his audience changed.

---

[33] Witt, introduction to *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, xvii-xviii.

[34] Ibid., xvii.

[35] Bruce McConachie, "Modernism in Drama and Performance, 1880-1970," in *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., ed. Gary Jay Williams (New York: Routledge, 2010), 393.

[36] The Father's final lines are: "What do you mean, fiction? Reality, ladies and gentlemen, reality!" Pirandello*, Six Characters in Search of an Author*, 88.

By showcasing abandoned characters and rupturing the illusion of the theatre, Pirandello gives the audience a glimpse of his own experience as a playwright. The author's failure and the characters' tragedies are the tools whereby Pirandello seeks to redirect the audience to what one would call "good theatre." He incorporates substandard acting, undeveloped characters, unbelievable tragedies, and disrupted narratives to increase the audience's desire for authenticity. As mentioned earlier, Pirandello's unmasking of the hypocrisy of theatrical productions of his time has some parallels to Brecht's critique of capitalism through the introduction of epic theatre. Basically, Brecht presented stories in a way which encouraged detached reflection instead of emotional engagement, believing that this would spur the audience into political action.[37] The call for action and change was affected through negative means by exposing the spectators to characters who were trapped or made unfortunate choices. Though the characters learned nothing, the audience was expected to gain understanding by watching their tragedies.

Perhaps a bit of clarification regarding the difference between tragedy in a dramatic context and tragedy within a theological context is required here. It has been said that there is no real drama until there is tragedy, but we must be careful about making the same assumption in theology, that is, making tragedy a *necessary* part of the story by positing that the light of goodness (God) is only visible due to the contrasting shadow of darkness (evil). If this were true, then on its own, goodness would have little substance or character and we would be left with an essential dualism. The crucial word here is "necessary," meaning that evil can never be seen as a requirement for good to exist. Balthasar is quick to condemn this binary, denying that "the divine drama only acquires its dynamism and its many hues by going through a created, temporal world and only acquires its seriousness and depth by going through sin, the Cross, and hell."[38] According to Augustine, evil should be viewed as *privatio boni* (the privation of good), meaning that it is always contingent on good. Similarly, tragedy within dramatic theology is not essential or necessary, but contingent. Therefore, we find sin, evil, and suffering occupying significant space within theology not because they are required elements, but because they are settings for the redemptive action of God.

---

[37] Bruce McConachie, "Theatres for Reform and Revolution, 1920-1970," in *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., ed. Gary Jay Williams (New York: Routledge, 2010), 431-32.

[38] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 4, *The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 326. Hereafter referred to as *TD4*.

Aristotle, referencing specific Greek dramas, theorised that tragedy showcased the best of humanity while comedy revealed the worst.[39] In Greek tragedy, the suffering and calamity common to human experience were, for the most part, portrayed in the lives of the illustrious, the respected, and the aristocracy. Juxtaposing privilege, power, and wealth with fatal character flaws and tragic events served to heighten the dramatic impact of the story. Larry Bouchard posits that at the heart of Greek tragedy is the notion of a "wicked God," what Ricoeur calls a "predestination to evil," which makes even the most privileged in society vulnerable to inexplicable tragedy.[40] Ideally, the nature of tragedy is to highlight what Gary Jay Williams refers to as "human potential under duress."[41] This could certainly be said of the drama of Job where the title character's resolve to trust God is severely tested. However, there is a vital difference between classic tragedy (which relies on a form of transcendent or outside evil) and tragedy within a theological context. Instead of tragedy climaxing with the undoing of the main character, the divine drama climaxes when tragedy itself is undone through the death of the main character, Jesus Christ. Because the divine drama is situated within a transcendent good as opposed to a "predestination to evil," the ultimate tragedy (the death of God in the form of Christ) is not a true tragedy. While classic tragedy showcases human courage and endurance, the divine drama reveals the humility of the transcendent God through divine participation in human suffering, thereby forever uniting death with resurrection, *kenosis* with *plerosis,* and tragedy with comedy.

This chapter deals primarily with dramatic tragedy and not much reference is made to tragedy within a theological context. Pirandello's play is a compelling example of dramatic tragedy because it not only portrays the undoing of its characters, but enables us to peek behind the scenes and observe the primary No. Though not a perfect example, mainly because it does not illustrate an absolute rejection, but a rejection after the characters have already been brought into existence, it nevertheless reveals how dependent the characters and the story are on the author, the creator, to sustain them. Though it could be said that the six characters achieve independence apart from the author, it is obvious that theirs is a very limited, narrow type of

---

[39] Aristotle, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument*, trans. G. F. Else (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 376.

[40] Larry D. Bouchard, *Tragic Method and Tragic Theology: Evil in Contemporary Drama and Religious Thought* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 4.

[41] Gary Jay Williams, "Plautus's plays: What's so funny?" in *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., ed. Gary Jay Williams (New York: Routledge, 2010), 126.

existence. Since they are not capable of evolution or growth, the characters are restricted to reiterating every word and action without variation, all dictated by their primary motivations. Similar to Augustine's view of evil as privation of good, the dramatic No could be described as an absence or withdrawal of Yes. Because of this lack of substance, it can be difficult to describe or demonstrate the dramatic No without first imposing a positive. Pirandello certainly had to grapple with this problem, especially in a medium as dynamic as the theatre (which relies heavily on the forward motion of Yes), but by first creating the six characters before abandoning them, he succeeded in developing a narrative capable of illustrating the dramatic No.

The Eternal Moment

One of the reasons Pirandello's script works so well dramatically is because he introduces the audience to a lengthy narrative loop which only reveals itself as insular and closed at the end of the play. What we find at the core of each character is a trajectory toward self-destruction, but the real tragedy is that the destruction never comes to an end and is never completed because it is continually happening in the present moment. The incorporation of an elongated eternal moment for each of the six characters is a brilliant choice on Pirandello's part because it allows him to pit two features of live theatre against each other. While employing the forward motion of narrative which is essential to drama, he undermines this movement by turning the starting and ending points of that narrative (which normally indicate to the audience that what they are witnessing is nested within a larger story), into a prison from which the characters cannot escape. In other words, what we see and hear on stage, the scenes which the characters describe and enact, are the only scraps of the story which exist. Because their author has abandoned them, there is very little back story for the characters to draw on and no future to imagine beyond their stage appearance.

The six characters each have different torments related to their primary motivations. The Father is plagued by relentless remorse which plays out, strangely enough, in a sense of responsibility to find an author to tell the story of his shame. He hopes to be vindicated, but in actuality, the telling of the story casts him in a bad light; in the end, he resorts to trying to justify his actions, pleading for understanding. The Stepdaughter, equally intent on having the story told, is set on getting revenge and uses her sexuality to gain leverage over the Father (and over the Director); however, that same sexuality is what traps her and renders her powerless in Madame Pace's establishment. The Son, fuelled by contempt, desires to distance himself from

the other characters and actually attempts to leave the stage, but he is bound to the others by their shared story and cannot exit. Though he refuses to enact his part of the story, he is compelled to narrate the tragic deaths of his two step-siblings. The Mother, lacking any awareness of herself as a created character, is overcome by sorrow, forever in mourning for her two children, and the two youngest characters remain mute and passive, silenced by their eternal status as children who were tragically killed.

When the Director admits that he is confused by the characters' refusal to enact the last set of unfortunate events which have supposedly already occurred and are in the past, the Mother laments:

> No, it's happening now. It happens all the time! My suffering is not over, sir! I am alive and present always, in every moment of my suffering. It always renews itself. It's always alive and present. Those two little ones. Have you heard them speak? They can't speak any more, sir! They still cling to me to keep my suffering alive and present, but they, for themselves, no longer exist! And this one (indicating the STEPDAUGHTER), sir, ran away, escaped from me, and is lost, completely lost…. If I still see her here, it's just for that reason, always, always, only for this: to keep renewing, alive and present, the pain that I suffered for her as well![42]

The Father, though pleading for vindication, is nevertheless aware that he will never be rid of his guilt, for the Stepdaughter is on a parallel, relentless quest to make him pay for his indiscretion. He explains this to the Director: "The eternal moment, as I told you, sir! She (indicating the STEPDAUGHTER) is here to seize me, to immobilize me, leave me eternally hooked and suspended on the pillory in that unique fleeing and shameful moment of my life. She can't stop it and you, sir, can't really spare me from it."[43] As the Father indicates, the eternal moment of each character cannot be stopped nor can it be altered. Pirandello calls the six characters immutable, "changeless constructions of the imagination."[44] They are forever frozen in the discarded state in which their author left them.

Pirandello's depiction of the tragic, eternal stasis reminds one of Dante's portrayal of unending torment in *Inferno,* where those who "without hope … live on in desire."[45] It also brings to mind certain biblical references to the relentless agony awaiting the devil, the false

---

[42] Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author,* 73-74.
[43] Ibid., 74.
[44] Ibid., 34.
[45] Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy – Inferno*, trans. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Josef Nygrin, 2008), 24. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.paskvil.com/file/files-books/dante-01-inferno.pdf.

prophet, and the beast: "they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."[46] It should be noted that the eternal moment can also be depicted in a positive light, and Dante and the author of the book of Revelation provide a contrast to their descriptions of endless suffering with equally vivid representations of eternal joy and gladness which await the righteous in the presence of God.[47] This is where the similarity to Dante's *Comedy* and John's Revelation ends. The contrast to the eternal, tragic moment in Pirandello's play is not eternal bliss, but dynamic, forward-moving action rooted in collaboration or *synergos* (the third Yes). Balthasar notes the lack of dramatic collaboration when he observes that the characters in Pirandello's play "stay in their monologues which lack relationship and hence reality."[48] One of the reasons for the characters' invariability is their inability to forge tenable relationships with each other; there is little meaningful dialogue, little back and forth, essentially no dramatic offer and response. Instead, they are each consumed and entrapped by their own, primal impetuses, and as a result, are unable to let anyone else (the actors) interpret their story. Balthasar describes the No of the characters this way: "this refusal to be interpreted by others, although they do not know it, is only the converse of the author's refusal to give their ideality (their existence merely in the mind) a concrete aesthetic form on the stage."[49] The No of the author is directly reflected in the six character's lack of agency and the subsequent lack of cooperation between the characters and the actors, the Director, and each other.

Another way to highlight the eternal moment is to compare it to what is known as the Hero Journey. In his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell offers a common language or way of speaking about the human story that supersedes time and culture.[50] Essentially, the Hero Journey is a developmental paradigm often used as a template in film,[51] theatre, and fiction in which the main character moves through three basic stages: separation, initiation, and return. The would-be hero leaves his or her present world, undergoes some form

---

[46] Revelation 20:10.
[47] See Dante's *Paradiso* which brings the author to the abode of God, and the description of the New Jerusalem, the city of God, in Revelation 21-22.
[48] Balthasar, *TD1*, 247.
[49] Ibid., 263.
[50] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c1949, 2004).
[51] George Lucas cites Campbell's book as being influential in his creation of the *Star Wars* saga. See Lucas O. Seastrom, "Mythic Discovery within the Inner Reaches of Outer Space: Joseph Campbell Meets George Lucas – Part I," October 22, 2015. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.starwars.com/news/mythic-discovery-within-the-inner-reaches-of-outer-space-joseph-campbell-meets-george-lucas-part-i.

of transformation or enlightenment by encountering various challenges and setbacks, and returns home to share the fruits of their adventure. These three stages equate roughly to the beginning, the middle, and the end of a story. The beginning involves the call to adventure, sometimes an initial refusal (the reluctant hero), and the crossing of a threshold into the unknown. The middle consists of various trials and tests, encounters with adversaries, and a supreme ordeal which results in a reward. The ending begins with the road back which involves further pursuit by adversaries, a final ordeal which results in death and resurrection of some kind (transformation), and finally, the arrival of the hero to deliver the reward or elixir to the people.

The trajectory of the Hero Journey is nowhere to be found in Pirandello's play about six abandoned characters. Due to the suspension of the story in a never-ending loop, there is no progression from beginning to middle to end. The few scenes acted out by the characters appear to be situated somewhere in the middle of the story, rife with unresolved conflict. None of the tension is resolved, there is no identifiable transformation in any character, and therefore, no hero. The play ends abruptly, leaving the audience disoriented by the lack of closure.[52] Even the Director finds himself right back where he started. At the end, he expresses his frustration: "Ah! Nothing like this ever happened to me! They made me waste a whole day! … What more can be done? It's too late to start the rehearsal again."[53] There is plenty of dialogue and a few bits of interesting action which take place during the course of the play, but in effect, nothing happens. Pirandello has essentially written a story which is not a story, at least according to Campbell's paradigm.

A second comparison can be made, this one between Pirandello's eternal moment and the theodramatic arc. I refer here specifically to the movement, outlined in earlier chapters, from a foundation of gift to participation in glory. Because Pirandello's characters lack a wholehearted primary Yes, the creator's Yes, the characters never experience the generosity of gift, never receive what Jean-Luc Marion describes as the unconditioned and unreduced gift exemplified in the father, and never fully awaken to the joy of existence which Balthasar identifies in the

---

[52] In the performances I attended at University of Notre Dame, November 2014, this phenomenon was readily observable. When the lights came up on an empty stage at the end of the play, there was a nervous silence, soon broken by discreet whispers (Is that the end?). Many audience members glanced around the theatre, hoping for an indication of what was expected of them. Director Patrick Vassel chose to deliberately delay the curtain call after the last lines were delivered in order to let the audience experience the discomfort of Pirandello's drama. When the cast finally came onstage to take a bow, the sense of relief in the audience was obvious.

[53] Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, 88.

infant's recognition of the mother's love. The theodramatic arc which begins with gift and ends in glory is best illustrated in the metanarrative of the biblical texts which begin with creation, lead us through generations of conflict, chaos, war, and death, swell into redemption and salvation with the introduction of Jesus Christ, continue with the Holy Spirit's empowering and unifying of the early church, and climax in joyous celebration of the glory of God as all things are made new. This is mirrored on a micro, temporal level in the life, death, and resurrection of the person of Jesus Christ. In the birth of Jesus we see the gift of life given and received, the glory of God already present in humble weakness. In the ministry of Jesus, we see gifts of healing and miracles bringing the glory of God to earth in limited measure. In the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross, the salvific moment, we see the suffering of God split open the barrier which separates humanity from divine glory. In the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the gift of life is restored and we catch a glimpse of the great glory to be revealed when the kingdom of God comes in all its fullness.

Pirandello shows us the eternal moment, a tortuous, never-ending, restricted moment. The divine drama shows us eternal *movement*, an overflowing of divine generosity which reveals the beauty of God as it moves from glory to glory. The writer to the Corinthians states it this way: "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit."[54] Unlike Pirandello's characters who remain imprisoned in their tragic vignettes, incapable of moving on, the journey (one could even say, the Hero Journey) presented in dramatic theology sets humanity on a trajectory which begins with the gift of freedom, blossoms into loving, transformative collaboration, and ends with the ongoing revelation of glory.

---

[54] 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Conclusion

The Implications of Yes

> *It therefore becomes evident that a conversion or a social revolution that actually transforms consciousness requires a traumatic change in a man's story. The stories within which he has awakened to consciousness must be undermined, and in the identification of his personal story through a new story both the drama of his experience and his style of action must be reoriented. Conversion is reawakening, a second awakening of consciousness. His style must change steps, he must dance to a new rhythm. Not only his past and future, but the very cosmos in which he lives is strung in a new way.*[1]

Much more could be said concerning the insights theatre and theology offer each other, but as stated early on, my goal here has not been to frame a detailed dramatic theology; much of that work has already been done by Balthasar. My purpose throughout these pages has been to take up Balthasar's invitation to perform some exercises on the apparatus he erected in *Theo-Drama* by putting theology and theatre on the stage together. The Three Yeses (affirmatives present in both theology and theatre) are the means whereby I introduce the characters in dramatic theology and outline their actions and motivations. The first Yes reveals the divine character in the initiating, creative role and serves to open up the drama to human participation. In order to indicate what type of story is being told, the idea of gift is employed to clearly designate the divine drama as loving action "for the other" and remove obligation, manipulation, and dominating control from the vocabulary of the theodramatic Yes. The second Yes focuses on the awakening of humanity to its role in the drama and recognises the tension which arises when divine and human characters share the stage. Most importantly, the second Yes draws attention to the process whereby humanity becomes aware of the divine Other. We catch a glimpse of the third Yes, the dramatic synthesis which results when divine and human actors come together in collaborative action, in the biblical concept of covenant. Ultimately, the third Yes is expressed in the person of Jesus Christ, the union of divine and human natures in one person. In the collaborative third Yes (*synergos*) we can identify the concept of gift (the beginning of the dramatic arc) on full display and also observe humanity's participation in divine glory (the culmination of the dramatic arc). While the chapters examining the three Yeses are mostly

---

[1] Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39.3 (September 1971), 307.

theoretical in nature, chapters five and six represent a more pragmatic engagement of theology and theatre. The first example, the biblical narrative of Job, allows us to observe the dramatic collaboration between God and the title character, especially when viewed through the lens of a divine invitation to glory. The second example, Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, showcases the consequences of an author's desertion; the characters and the story are paralysed because the presence of No eliminates any possibility for forward movement.

At this point, the question could be asked: what have we learned from placing theology and theatre on the stage together? In other words, what is the result of this exercise in theological dramatic theory? Though there are undoubtedly more, I will identify two benefits which arise from this endeavour and serve to reinforce the themes of movement and "entering in" which are central to dramatic theology. The first is a fuller understanding of *perichoresis*, the interconnectivity which characterises the Godhead and has implications for divine/human interactions, and the second is an increased awareness, for both theologians and dramatists, of a call to action - the action of coming together (embrace).

Perichoresis

The theological term, *perichoresis*, has been briefly mentioned in previous chapters, but perhaps a bit of background will make the connection between it and dramatic theology (specifically the third Yes) more obvious. Alister McGrath describes *perichoresis* as that which "allows the individuality of the persons [of the Godhead] to be maintained, while insisting that each person shares in the life of the other two. An image often used to express this idea is that of a 'community of being,' in which each person, while maintaining its distinctive identity, penetrates the others and is penetrated by them."[2] It is important to note that the early Greek fathers, namely Gregory of Nazianzus and Maximus the Confessor, used the term to refer not exclusively to the Trinity (its common usage today), but also to the two natures of Jesus Christ as well as the ultimate unity between God and creation.[3] The Greek word *perichoresis* literally means "rotation" or "circle dance,"[4] and can be interpreted as a double movement: "There is real human movement toward God; human beings enter and affect God and God enters people and

---

[2] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 50.
[3] Verna Harrison, "Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35.1 (January 1991), 53.
[4] Jerry C. Doherty, *A Celtic Model of Ministry: The Reawakening of Community Spirituality* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 74-75.

transforms them."[5] While the movement is seen as mutual, Maximus notes that there is a particular order to it: God moves first and the person responds to the divine offer or invitation.

The analogy of a dance is helpful here because it takes us beyond the realm of words into the world of movement. Anyone who has taken dance classes which involve partnering is aware of the dynamic between the person who is in the role of *lead* and the dancer who is referred to as the *follow*.[6] The *lead* is the one who is responsible for initiating the movements of the dance and guiding the *follow* through different transitions. The responsibility of the *follow* is to be attuned to the signals given by the *lead* and to respond with energy and creative movement, giving back to the *lead* as much as they receive. A good *lead* responds to the *follow's* movements by incorporating their partner's steps and adjusting for their abilities, thus making it a truly collaborative effort. The first movement, the extension of the *lead's* hand, issues an invitation to the *follow* to participate together in a dance. When the *follow* takes the hand of the *lead*, a connection is established which allows the *follow* to be attuned to the subtle signals of the *lead* and, equally, allows the *lead* to respond to the *follow's* feedback and suggestions. As the partners dance together, we observe moments when both the *lead* and the *follow* add creative, spontaneous elements. These spontaneous elements create a synergy as the two dancers, inspired and spurred on by each other, begin to anticipate the next moves. In effect, the two begin to move as one. Even though one dancer is easily distinguishable from the other, together they portray a sense of unity and flow which, similar to the experience of improvisational musicians, transcends their individual contributions. The image of the *lead* and the *follow* flowing together in patterns of harmonic tension and synchronisation provides us with a fitting model for the third Yes.

The theological dramatic theory described in these pages is rooted in this idea of collaborative movement, the circle dance of *perichoresis*. The first Yes reveals a social God who is committed to relationship within Godself and, as an extension, with all of creation. The second Yes is the *follow* taking the offered hand of the *lead* and thereby becoming a partner in performing the narrative of a collective, dramatic creation of movement. The interaction between the two parties, the constant Yes moving back and forth between the *lead* and the *follow*,

---

[5] Ibid., 74.

[6] The description of the *follow* and the *lead* is primarily based on Swing Dance, but the details are applicable to many other styles as well.

expressed through tension, compression, and leverage all while maintaining a constant, mutual point of balance, is the fluid, collaborative third Yes. It is interesting to note that skilled dancers are usually trained in both *lead* and *follow* roles and can switch effortlessly between the two, able to initiate or respond as the situation requires.

What I have sought to present in these pages is the idea that theology is indeed active and dynamic, more filled with "fire and light," as Balthasar would say, than readily evident in many systematic or constructive theological writings. The challenge is to find appropriate and fitting ways to express this reality of activity or movement, this circle dance of *perichoresis*, within theological settings. I contend that the dramatic arts provide us with the necessary vocabulary, imagery, and practices to better reflect the dynamism of a societal God who invites loving collaboration with creation.

Yes as Embrace

The second benefit which I see stemming from the interaction between theology and theatre is the emphasis on purposeful action in relation to others. In his book, *Exclusion and Embrace*, Miroslav Volf addresses the subject of how we engage with the other. As is evident from the title, he juxtaposes the idea of putting distance between ourselves and those we consider "the other" with the notion of embracing "the other," of coming together. He divides what he calls "the drama of embrace" into four stages.[7] Act One is *opening the arms*. He states that, "Open arms are a gesture of the body reaching for the other. They are a sign of discontent with my own self-enclosed identity, a code of *desire* for the other. I do not want to be myself only; I want the other to be part of who I am and I want to be part of the other."[8] These words express the loving motivation of gift and generous self-disclosure which drives the first Yes. More than just desiring the other, open arms also create a space for the other, a void which begs to be filled. Open arms are an invitation without condition and, like the extended hand of the lead dancer, an expression of desire, indicating that the first person wants to enter the space of the second.

Act Two, according to Volf, is *waiting*. As described in the chapter on gift, the first Yes has nothing to do with coercion or manipulation. It is an offer extended in freedom meant to perpetuate more freedom. In order for embrace not to become an invasion of the other person's space, there must be a halting of action which offers the power to choose, to say Yes or No, to

---

[7] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 140-47.
[8] Ibid., 141.

the other. In all likelihood, we have probably experienced an embrace from an overzealous hugger who has no appreciation for boundaries. Volf discerns that the invitational, first Yes respects boundaries, acknowledging that the embrace will not happen without the response and full cooperation of the other.

In Act Three, the responder moves into the open arms to accept the offer of embrace and we witness the *closing of the arms*. The two parties are now unified yet still distinct, pressed up against each other, but still separate beings. They are both freely engaged in giving and receiving. Two sets of arms are in action, closed on the other, indicating the presence of mutuality and reciprocity. "Though one self may receive or give more than the other, each must enter the space of the other, feel the presence of the other in the self, and make its own presence felt."[9] Since Volf is describing embrace from the initiator's perspective only (the first Yes), he does not distinguish the second Yes from the third Yes but collapses them into one action. Nevertheless, he makes careful distinctions between a healthy, mutual embrace and a lack of differentiation either through assimilation or self-retreat. "In an embrace the identity of the self is both preserved and transformed, and the alterity of the other is both affirmed as alterity and partly received into the ever changing identity of the self."[10] The dramatic principles of "entering in" and movement are powerfully present in Volf's description of the closing of arms in embrace.

Volf identifies Act Four as *opening the arms again*, reinforcing the undergirding motivation of generosity and the importance of freedom within loving interaction. The two parties are not made one in the sense of disappearing into each other; the integrity of each person is upheld when they come together. Embrace does not result in "we" becoming "I" and individual identity being erased. The opening of the arms affirms the freedom and unique identity of the other and also restates the desire for the other's presence; the invitation is extended again as the arms open, waiting for the other to return. In the letting go, the drama of embrace creates an ongoing movement similar to the circle dance of *perichoresis*. There is freedom to come and go, to be transformed by loving connection and interaction while the self remains intact and distinct.

---

[9] Ibid., 143.
[10] Ibid.

Volf's description of the drama of embrace bears a remarkable similarity to the dance dynamics described above: "This movement is circular; the actions and reactions of the self and the other condition each other and give the movement both meaning and energy."[11] Both images (dancing with a partner and the drama of embrace) allow for a lack of symmetry as well as a certain amount of disproportion within the interaction. The beauty and integrity of these expressions depend on it, to some extent. When a child embraces a much larger adult it requires gentle accommodation from the adult and an extension of the child's arms to their limit. Likewise, an unbalanced pairing of an experienced *lead* with a novice *follow* will result in the *lead* simplifying their moves while the *follow* attempts to respond appropriately to unfamiliar cues. Both parties stand to benefit when each brings their unique identity to the collaboration, freely sharing their space with the other, willing to be transformed by the encounter.

Fire and Light

One could say that theology is the study of fire and light because its divine subject matter is referred to as "a consuming fire"[12] and one of the New Testament writers tells us that, "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all."[13] Balthasar does not specify exactly what he means by the "fire and light" which he sees burning at the heart of theology, though his reference to "the glory of revelation" and his engagement with aesthetics, drama, philosophy, and mysticism gives us some indication of what he might consider essential to a more dynamic theological approach. My application of Balthasar's *Theo-Drama* brings the elements of movement and "entering in" to the forefront of theology. In the circle dance of *perichoresis* we see the presence of movement and in the drama of embrace we have a picture of "entering in." The story arc which I have outlined in these chapters, a trajectory which begins in gift (every Yes is a gift) and ends with participation in glory, depends on the ongoing movement of the central characters as the divine enters into human space (incarnation) and humanity enters into divine space (glory). Though I have deemed it necessary to parse the three Yeses, in reality they are meant to flow into one other through dramatic dialogue and movement.

It is important to remember that the story arc, from gift to glory, is not an entity unto itself, but a reflection of the divine character. Playwright Will Dunne states that "the character is

---

[11] Ibid., 145.
[12] Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29.
[13] 1 John 1:5.

not something added to the scene of the story. Rather, the character is the scene. The character is the story."[14] We must not lose sight of this dramatic principle in the study and application of theology. Francesca Murphy contends that God is not a story, meaning that God is not subject to the category of story. To this I would add that the divine/human drama is not a prescribed, predetermined script found in the biblical text; the divine/human drama is essentially found in the living λόγος, the person of Jesus Christ. Drama reminds us that when we position character and relationship at the centre of theology, it is possible for the script to remain open, to some extent, to interpretation, fluid and flexible because it is based on the character and nature of God, not on a specific, fixed outcome. I am not proposing an adoption of Open Theism here, but in applying dramatic theory to theology, we must allow for the development and creative expression of the characters as the story unfolds. The drama must remain alive, progressing as it moves us toward encounter with God; it must not merely show us a catalog of ideas about God.[15]

The story arc (from gift to glory) could also be described as a movement from creation to revelation. Because the story is defined by the action and movement of the triune, societal God, a God who not only creates the drama (movement) but "enters into" it and invites us to "live and move and have our being"[16] in him, the divine drama, like any good story, involves the progressive unveiling of its characters. Balthasar observes that the theatrical play is similar to Christian revelation because it seeks to unite actor and spectator, to make revelation incarnate.[17] The story arc is the means by which the actor and spectator come together; what begins as a gift (the creation of a story for an audience) ends with the transformation of the audience into actors, awakened to a new world and a new way of being.

The call to action which comes out of dramatic theology is a call to reorient our lives, to move toward encounter both with God and with our fellow human beings. It is a call to enter fully into our own human experience by entering into the divine drama. Gerardus van der Leeuw views dramatic art as "one of the most noble forms of the great human art of comprehension, of placing one's self 'inside another.' To find all men in yourself, that is the secret. And that is not

---

[14] Will Dunne. *The Dramatic Writer's Companion: Tools to Develop Characters, Cause Scenes, and Build Stories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), xvi.

[15] Stratford Caldecott, "An Introduction to Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Second Spring* (2001). Accessed February 15, 2016. http://catholiceducation.org/articles/religion/re0486.html.

[16] Acts 17:28.

[17] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 1*, Prologomena*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 265.

only the secret of drama, but also the secret of forgiveness and of love."[18] Philologist Erich Auerbach recognises the call to "enter in" present within the biblical texts, a feature unique among ancient literature. "Far from seeking, like Homer, merely to make us forget our own reality for a few hours, it [the world of Scripture] seeks to overcome our reality; we are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history."[19] Auerbach goes on to indicate that the involvement of YHWH in the mundane existence of the people of Israel, the Almighty God entering into the human experience of this ancient tribe, causes a dramatic unity within the story. "The sublime influence of God here reaches so deeply into the everyday that the two realms of the sublime and the everyday are not only actually unseparated but basically inseparable."[20] In theological terms, Auerbach is finding evidence of *perichoresis*, of the interpenetration of embrace, in the stories of the Hebrew Bible, and this results in an invitation to reorient our lives to the divine drama.

Dramatic theology is also a call to acknowledge the freedom of the divine author and to creatively exercise our own freedom as actors within the divine drama. This freedom comes at a cost to both parties, but to compromise either freedom would result in undermining not only the integrity of the story but the commitment of the author to generate freedom, not restrict it. Author Madeleine L'Engle observes: "…all we need to do is read a novel by a writer who is a manipulator, who controls characters, denies them their freedom, to realize that (no matter how terrible life can sometimes be) we do not want a dictator God."[21] Therefore, a commitment to a dynamic, dramatic theology must include a commitment to a free creator and director, for without this, humanity would not be a free agent either. Both divine and human actors must be free if they are to contribute in any meaningful way to the drama, for without freedom, a call to action has no substance.

Dramatic theology infers an ongoing narrative. The void created by the opening of the divine arms (the first Yes) is always before us. The call to action, to enter the space of the divine other, to respond with our own affirmative, forward movement (the second Yes) is always beckoning. The possibility of creating a beautiful, collaborative circle dance as part of a loving

---

[18] Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art,* trans. David E. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 102.

[19] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: the representation of reality in western culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, c1953), 15.

[20] Ibid., 22-23.

[21] Madeleine L'Engle, introduction to *The Mind of the Maker* by Dorothy Sayers (Continuum, c1941, 2005), xx.

community (the third Yes) is always present. The dramatic Yes is much more than a spoken word; it is a movement of the whole person toward another person, and in this ongoing interaction between characters, the drama continues to unfold.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alger, David. "David Alger's First Ten Rules of Improv." Improvencyclopedia.org. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://improvencyclopedia.org/references/David_Alger%60s_First_10_Rules_of_Improv.html.

Alighieri, Dante. *Divine Comedy – Inferno.* Translated by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Josef Nygrin, 2008. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.paskvil.com/file/files-books/dante-01-inferno.pdf.

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Poetry.* New York: Basic Books, 2011.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae.* Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947.

Aristotle. *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument.* Translated by G. F. Else. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957.

Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: the representation of reality in western culture.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, c1953.

Balthasar, Hans Urs von. "A Résumé of My Thought." Translated by Kelly Hamilton. *Communio* 15.4 (Winter 1988): 468-73.

----------. *Elucidations.* Translated by S.P.C.K. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998.

----------. *Engagement with God: The Drama of Christian Discipleship.* Translated by R. John Halliburton. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986.

----------. *Love Alone is Credible.* Translated by D. C. Schindler. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004.

----------. *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics,* vol. 1, *Seeing the Form.* Translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. Edited by Joseph Fessio S.J. and John Riches. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982.

----------. *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics,* vol. 6, *Theology: The Old Covenant.* Translated by Brian McNeil C.R.V. and Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. Edited by John Riches. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991.

----------. *The Theology of Karl Barth.* Translated by Edward T. Oakes. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992.

----------. *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 1, *Prologomena.* Translated by Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988.

----------. *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 2, *Dramatis Personae: Man in God.* Translated by Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990.

----------. *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 3, *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ.* Translated by Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992.

----------. *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 4, *The Action.* Translated by Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994.

----------. *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,* vol. 5, *The Final Act.* Translated by Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983.

Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. 1.1. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975.

Bassnett, Susan, and Jennifer Lorch, eds. *Luigi Pirandello in the Theatre: A Documentary Record.* New York: Routledge, 1993.

Bauer, Walter. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd edition. Edited by F. W Gingrich and Frederick Danker. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Belk, Russell W. "The Perfect Gift." In *Gift Giving: A Research Anthology,* edited by Cele Otnes and Richard F. Beltramini, 59-84. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1996.

Boersma, Hans. *Nouvelle Thèologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Bouchard, Larry D. *Tragic Method and Tragic Theology: Evil in Contemporary Drama and Religious Thought.* University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989.

Bowlby, John. "Disruption of Affectional Bonds and Its Effects on Behavior." *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy* 2.2 (Winter 1970): 75-86.

Braman, Brian J. *Meaning and Authenticity: Bernard Lonergan and Charles Taylor on the Drama of Authentic Human Existence.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008.

Bruce, Vicki, Patrick R. Green, and Mark A. Georgeson. *Visual Perception: Physiology, Psychology, and Ecology*, 4th edition. Oxford; New York: Psychology Press, 2003.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989.

Buber, Martin. *I and Thou.* Translated by Gregor Smith. Scribners, c1937; Mansfield Center, CT: Martino Publishing, 2010.

Caldecott, Stratford. "An Introduction to Hans Urs von Balthasar." *Second Spring* (2001). Accessed February 15, 2016. http://catholiceducation.org/articles/religion/re0486.html.

Callen, Barry L. "John Wesley and Relational Theology." In *Relational Theology: A Contemporary Introduction*, edited by Brint Montgomery, Thomas Jay Oord, Karen Winslow, 7-10. San Diego: Point Loma Press; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012.

Camenisch, Paul F. "Gift and Gratitude in Ethics." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 9.1 (Spring 1981): 1-34.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, c1949, 2004.

Caputo, John D. *The Weakness of God: a theology of the event*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006.

Carse, James P. *Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility*. New York: Free Press, 1986.

Cheal, David. "Gifts in Contemporary North America." In *Gift Giving: A Research Anthology*, edited by Cele Otnes and Richard F. Beltramini, 85-97. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1996.

Chesterton, G. K. Introduction to *The Book of Job*, ix-xxvii. London: C. Palmer & Hayward, 1916. Accessed February 15, 2016. https://archive.org/details/bookofjobwithint00londuoft.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, c1817. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/6081/6081-h/6081-h.htm.

Cook, Stephen. "A Reading of Job as a Theatrical Work." *Literature and Aesthetics* 24.2 (December 2014): 39-62.

Crawford, Nathan. *Theology as Improvisation: A Study in the Musical Nature of Theological Thinking*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Crites, Stephen. "The Narrative Quality of Experience." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39.3 (September 1971): 291-311.

Corman, Steven R. "The Difference between Story and Narrative." Center for Strategic Communication, Arizona State University. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://csc.asu.edu/2013/03/21/the-difference-between-story-and-narrative/.

Curran, Thomas. *Doctrine and Speculation in Schleiermacher's Glaubenslehre.* Berlin, Germany: Walter De Gruyter, 1994.

Davis, Nathaniel. "'Not a soul in sight!': Beckett's Fourth Wall." *Journal of Modern Literature* 38.2 (Winter 2015): 86-102

Derrida, Jacques. *Given Time I: Counterfeit Money*. Translated by Peggy Kamul. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Descartes, René. *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*. Translated by Jonathan Bennett. 2007. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1637.pdf.

----------. "Meditations on First Philosophy." In *The Philosophical Works of Descartes.* Translated by Elizabeth S. Haldane. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911. *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1996. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://selfpace.uconn.edu/class/percep/DescartesMeditations.pdf

Dickens, W. T. "Hans Urs von Balthasar." In *Christian Theologies of Scripture*, edited by Justin S. Holcomb, 202-19. New York: New York University Press, 2006.

Doherty, Jerry C. *A Celtic Model of Ministry: The Reawakening of Community Spirituality.* Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003.

Dunne, Will. *The Dramatic Writer's Companion: Tools to Develop Characters, Cause Scenes, and Build Stories.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Evagrius of Pontus. *Evagrius Essentials.* (n.p.): Revelation Insight Publishing Co., 2009.

Evans, Robert F. *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals.* New York: The Seabury Press, 1968.

Foote, Nelson N. "Concept and Method in the Study of Human Development." In *Life as Theater*, edited by Dennis Brissett and Charles Edgley, 63-72. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1990.

Forstman, Jack. Foreward to *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* by Friedrich Schleiermacher, translated by John Oman, 3-7. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd.; Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1983.

Forsyth, P.T. *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, c1909; n.d.

Fowl, Stephen E. "Scripture." In *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, edited by John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, Iain Torrance, 345-61. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Frost, Robert. *A Masque of Reason*. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://thevalueofsparrows.com/2014/06/21/saturday-reading-a-masque-of-reason-by-robert-frost-2/.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Faust*. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.iowagrandmaster.org/Books%20in%20pdf/Faust.pdf.

Gordon, James. "A 'Glaring Misunderstanding'? Schleiermacher, Barth and the Nature of Speculative Theology." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16.3 (July 2014): 313-30.

Gutierrez, Gustavo. *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*. Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987.

Hardy, Edward Rochie, ed. *Christology of the Later Fathers*. London: SCM Press, 1954.

Harrison, Verna. "Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers." *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35.1 (January 1991): 53-65.

Henrici, Peter, S.J. "Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life." In *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and* Work, edited by David L. Schindler, 7-43. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991.

Hillers, Delbert R. *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969.

Howsare, Rodney. *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London; New York: T & T Clark, 2009.

Howsare, Rodney A. and Larry S. Chapp, eds. *How Balthasar Changed My Mind*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2008.

Hudson, Don. "The Glory of His Discontent: The Inconsolable Suffering of God." *Mars Hill Review* 6 (Fall 1996): 21-34.

Johnstone, Keith. "Fear & Risk." Interview with Bev Fox. Accessed February 15, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgfXUS0US9Y.

----------. *Impro for Storytellers*. London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1999.

Kallen, Horace M. *The Book of Job as a Greek Tragedy*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1959.

Kerr, Fergus. *Theology After Wittgenstein*, 2nd edition. London: SPCK, 1997.

Kidder, Paulette W. "Derrida and Lonergan on the Gift." *Lonergan Workshop* 18 (2005): 139-53.

Kilby, Karen. *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction*. Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2012.

Konkel, August H. *Job*. Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, vol. 6. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2006.

L'Engle, Madeleine. Introduction to *The Mind of the Maker* by Dorothy Sayers, xv-xxiv. New York: Continuum, c1941, 2005.

Larrimore, Mark. *The Book of Job: A Biography*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Leask, Ian, ed. "From Radical Hermeneutics to The Weakness of God: John D. Caputo in Dialogue with Mark Dooley." *Philosophy Today* 51.2 (Summer 2007): 216-26.

Levine, Rachel. "Pushed to the Minimum. The Book of Bob." *Montreal Rampage*, February 13, 2014. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://montrealrampage.com/pushed-to-the-minimum-the-book-of-bob/.

Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001.

----------. *The Problem of Pain.* New York: HarperCollins, 1996.

Lonergan, Bernard J. F. *Method in Theology*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1971.

Lopez, René. "Israelite Covenants in the Light of Ancient Near East Covenants, Part 1." *CTS Journal* 9 (Fall 2003): 92-111.

----------. "Israelite Covenants in the Light of Ancient Near East Covenants, Part 2." *CTS Journal* 10 (Spring 2004): 72-106.

Lorch, Jennifer. *Pirandello: Six Characters in Search of an Author.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Loughlin, Gerard. *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church, and Narrative Theology.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory,* 2nd edition. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.

MacLeish, Archibald. *J.B.: A Play in Verse.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958.

Marion, Jean-Luc. "The Reason of the Gift." In *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, edited by Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy, translated by Shane Mackinlay and Nicolas de Warren, 101-34. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.

Martin, Ralph. *Will Many be Saved? What Vatican II Actually Teaches and Its Implications for the New Evangelization*. Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2012.

Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift: the Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies.* Translated by W. D. Halls. London: Routledge, 1990.

McConachie, Bruce. "Case Study: Classical Greek theatre: Looking at Oedipus." In *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, 2nd edition, edited by Gary Jay Williams, 88-96. New York: Routledge, 2010.

----------. "Modernism in Drama and Performance, 1880-1970." In *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, 2nd edition, edited by Gary Jay Williams, 388-424. New York: Routledge, 2010.

----------. "Theatres for Reform and Revolution, 1920-1970." In *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, 2nd edition, edited by Gary Jay Williams, 425-56. New York: Routledge, 2010.

McCormack, Bruce. "Not a Possible God but the God Who Is: Observations on Friedrich Schleiermacher's Doctrine of God." In *The Reality of Faith in Theology: Studies on Karl Barth*, Princeton–Kampen Consultation 2005, edited by Bruce McCormack and Gerrit Neven, 111-39. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2007.

McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999.

McInerny, Brendan. "A View From Above? Balthasar and the Boundaries of Theology." *Pro Ecclesia* 24.4 (Fall 2015): 419-24.

McKnight, Scot. "Relational Theology: Roger Olson." *Jesus Creed: Exploring the Significance of Jesus and the Orthodox Faith for the 21st Century*, April 17, 2013. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2013/04/17/relational-theology-roger-olson/.

Mendenhall, George E. "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition." *The Biblical Archaeologist* XVII (September 1, 1954): 50-76.

Milbank, John. "Can a Gift be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic." *Modern Theology* 11:1 (January 1995): 119-61.

Mochrie. Colin. Interview on *George Stroumboulopoulos Tonight*, S3, Episode 120. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.cbc.ca/strombo/videos/gst-s3-episode-120-colin-mochrie-and-mark-mcmorris.

Murphy, Francesca Aran. *God is Not a Story: Realism Revisited*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Being Singular Plural*. Translated by Robert D. Richardson. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000.

Nichols, Aidan. *No Bloodless Myth: A Guide through Balthasar's Dramatics.* Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000.

----------. *A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness, and Truth*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.

Oakes, Edward T. "Envoi: The Future of Balthasarian Theology." In *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar,* edited by Edward T. Oakes and David Moss, 269-74. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Olson, Roger. "A Relational View of God's Sovereignty." Talk given at *Missio Alliance*, Alexandria, Virginia, April, 2013. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2013/04/a-non-calivinist-relational-view-of-gods-sovereignty/.

Oord, Thomas Jay. "What is Relational Theology?" In *Relational Theology: A Contemporary Introduction,* edited by Brint Montgomery, Thomas Jay Oord, Karen Winslow, 1-4. San Diego: Point Loma Press; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012.

Phipps, William E. "The Heresiarch: Pelagius or Augustine?" *Anglican Theological Review* LXII.2 (April 1980): 124-33.

Pirandello, Luigi. "Excerpt from a Letter." In *Six Characters in Search of an Author,* translated by Martha Witt and Mary Ann Frese Witt, 15. New York: Italica Press, 2013.

----------. *Shoot!* Translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.

----------. *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Directed by Stacy Keach. KCET/Hollywood Television Theater, 1976. Film.

----------. *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Directed by Bill Bryden. British Broadcasting Corporation, 1996. Film.

----------. *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Directed and adapted by Patrick Vassel. University of Notre Dame, 2014. Theatre.

----------. *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Translated by Martha Witt and Mary Ann Frese Witt. New York: Italica Press, 2013.

Plato. "Phaedo." In *The Last Days of Socrates,* translated by Hugh Tredennick, 97-183. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, c1954, 1983.

Quash, Ben. *Theology and the Drama of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Radavich, David. "Wilder's dramatic landscape: alienation effect meets the Midwest." *American Drama* 15.1 (2006): 43-61.

Ranciére, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator*. Translated by Gregory Elliott. London: Verso, 2011.

Ratzinger, Joseph (Pope Benedict XVI). *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives.* Translated by Philip J. Whitmore. New York: Image Random House, 2012.

----------. *Great Christian Thinkers: From the Early Church Through the Middle Ages*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011.

Rees, B. R. *The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers*. Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/1296.html.

Riada, Geoffrey O. "Pelagius: To Demetrias." Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.libraryoftheology.com/writings/pelagianism/PelagiusToDemetrias.pdf.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

----------. "The Summoned Subject in the School of the Narratives of the Prophetic Vocation." In *Figuring the Sacred*, translated by David Pellauer, edited by Mark I. Wallace, 262-75. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

Sayers, Dorothy L. *The Mind of the Maker*. New York: Continuum, c1941, 2005.

Schindler, D. C. *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*. Translated by John Oman. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd.; Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1983.

----------. *The Christian Faith*. Translated by D. M. Baillie. Edinburgh: W. F. Henderson, 1922.

Seastrom, Lucas O. "Mythic Discovery within the Inner Reaches of Outer Space: Joseph Campbell Meets George Lucas – Part I." October 22, 2015. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.starwars.com/news/mythic-discovery-within-the-inner-reaches-of-outer-space-joseph-campbell-meets-george-lucas-part-i.

Sell, Alan P. F. "Augustine Versus Pelagius: A Cautionary Tale of Perennial Importance." *Calvin Theological Journal* (November 1977): 117-43.

Shakespeare, William. *As You Like it*. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://shakespeare.mit.edu/asyoulikeit/full.html.

Sherry, John F. Jr., Mary Ann McGrath, and Sidney J. Levy. "The Dark Side of Gift." *Journal of Business Research* 28 (1993): 225-44.

Shklovsky, Viktor. "Art as Technique." In *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, edited and translated by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, 3-24. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965.

Smith, Gregor. Introduction to *I and Thou* by Martin Buber, translated by Gregor Smith, v-xii. Scribners, c1937; Mansfield Center, CT: Martino Publishing, 2010.

Stuart, Donald Clive. *The Development of Dramatic Art*. New York: Dover Publications, 1960.

Sundberg, Ingrid. "Taking a Closer Look at Story." Accessed February 15, 2016.
http://ingridsnotes.wordpress.com/2011/09/14/to-plot-or-not-to-plot-part-2-taking-a-closer-look-at-story/.

Sutherland, Robert. *Putting God on Trial: The Biblical Book of Job.* Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2004.

Taylor, Kevin. *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Question of Tragedy in the Novels of Thomas Hardy.* New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013.

Tolkien, J.R.R. "On Fairy Stories." In *Tree and Leaf,* 11-70. London: Unwin Books, 1971.

Tutu, Desmond Mpilo. *God is Not a Christian and Other Provocations*. Edited by John Allen. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011.

Van der Leeuw, Gerardus. *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art.* Translated by David E. Green. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion and Authorship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

----------. *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

Vaughan, Genevieve. "Introduction." In *Women and the Gift Economy: A Radically Different Worldview is Possible*, edited by Genevieve Vaughan, 1-38. Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education, 2007.

Volf, Miroslav. *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good.* Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011.

----------. *Exclusion and Embrace*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.

Walker, Andrew G. and Robin A. Parry. *Deep Church Rising: The Third Schism and the Recovery of Christian Orthodoxy.* Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014.

Walton, J.H. "Job 1: Book of." In *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings,* edited by Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns, 333-46. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008.

Webster, John. "Hans Urs von Balthasar: The Pascal Mystery." *Evangel* (October 1983): 6-8.

Weinfeld, M. "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90.2 (April – June 1970): 184-203.

Wells, Samuel. *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids: BrazosPress, 2004.

Wiggins, James B. "With and Without Stories." In *Religion as Story*, edited by James B. Wiggins, 1-22. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

Williams, Gary Jay. "Case Study: Modernism in Chekhov, Pirandello, and Beckett." In *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, 2nd edition, edited by Gary Jay Williams, 417-24. New York: Routledge, 2010.

----------. "Plautus's plays: What's so funny?" In *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, 2nd edition, edited by Gary Jay Williams, 126-32. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Witt, Mary Ann Frese. Introduction to *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Luigi Pirandello, translated by Martha Witt and Mary Ann Frese Witt, ix-xxi. New York: Italica Press, 2013.

Wright, N. T. "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991): 7–32. Accessed February 15, 2016. http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Bible_Authoritative.htm.

Zarrilli, Phillip B., Bruce McConachie, Gary Jay Williams, and Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei. "Preface: Interpreting Performances and Cultures." In *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, 2nd edition, edited by Gary Jay Williams, xvii-xxvi. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Zuidema, Jason. "The Glory of God." In *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, edited by Glen G. Scorgie, 476-77. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.