TOWARD A ‘BETTER WORLDLINESS’:

ECOLOGY, ECONOMY AND THE PROTESTANT TRADITION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE

GRADUATE DIVISION OF RELIGION IN CANDIDACY FOR THE

DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

CATHERINE KELLER,

PROFESSOR OF CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY,

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE CHAIR

TERRA S. ROWE

DREW UNIVERSITY

MADISON, NJ

MAY 14, 2016

To my parents, Jim, and Mica Joy

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A dissertation on the graceful interdependencies of the world would be incomplete without at least an attempt to recognize they ways the project itself has emerged as the nexus of a multitude of gifts. I'm particularly grateful for the guidance of teachers and mentors who have encouraged me along the way: Gwen Saylor for putting the idea of scholarly pursuits in my head, Norma Cook-Everist for empowering me and so many others to embrace their voice, Jim Martin-Schramm for introducing me to environmental consciousness at Holden Village, and Winston Persaud and Craig Nessan for words of encouragement along the way. John Hoffmeyer encouraged the feminist in me before I had the vocabulary to express it, Chris Boesel cheered on the project and my more confessional moments, and Catherine Keller has consistently provided academic, career, and personal guidance with profound grace while nurturing a unique spirit of collegiality and support among her advisees that, in many ways, embodies the values and aims of her scholarly work. I'm grateful for the conversations and support of many of these colleagues as well, especially: Karen Bray, Jake Erickson, Beatrice Marovich, Sara Rosenau, and Natalie Williams.

I'm especially thankful for gifts my family have given. I'm not sure I would value education and curiosity as I do without the example of my grandfather, Gerald, and his stubborn insistence that his daughters, my mother included, be able to attend the college of their choice along with his sons. And I'm not sure that *he* would have valued education in this way if his older sister Dorothy had not defied her elders by attending high school

even when this was seen as morally suspicious choice for a young woman in small town Minnesota. I am sure I would not be where I am today without the material and emotional support of my parents, Jim and Judi, and my sister, Liesl. I think my dad, who loved numbers and accounting, would have found it amusing that the daughter who dreaded every moment of the math tutoring he insisted on and relished found a way to write two hundred and fifty pages on topics related to finances without employing a single equation. More than anything, though, this work has grown out of the grace, love, inspiration, and support of my partner Jim. Life with him and Mica Joy, our sparkle of dust, has provided the most profound lessons in the ways that grace-filled interdependency can "test and nurture freedom."[1]

[1] Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism and Self* (Beacon Press, 1988), 3.

ABSTRACT

Current entanglements of ecology, economy, and the Protestant tradition demand a fresh analysis. Implications of the Protestant doctrine of grace for concepts of the self emerge as a particularly significant node in need of critical analysis. Late twentieth century research by Protestant theologians, ethicists, and historians demonstrates neglected awareness of the significant social and economic justice implications of Reformation theology. Several scholars thus interpret the Reformers' message of grace as unambiguously liberating from both spiritual and material modes of oppression. This dissertation will nuance this claim in a way that takes seriously economic and ecological justice alongside the complex ways the tradition unfolded, beyond the Reformer's intentions, as interconnected with neoliberal capitalism and pervasive modern individualism. Engaging twentieth century theories of the gift as they generate debates about the nature of the ideal gift and its role in normative conceptions of the self in social, economic, and other-than-human relations, this dissertation demonstrates a consistent tendency among Protestant theologians to presume a unilateral gift structure. This structure entails pernicious ecological implications: separative individualism, commodification, and a view of grace as fundamentally or structurally at odds with ecologically interdependent systems of nature. The proposed alternative is a mode of multilateral giving where the gift may not be capitalized by returning to its origin, and also embraces the ecological exchanges of the world rather than working against them.

Furthermore, this form of unconditioned and multilaterally exchangist giving characterizes one of the more marginalized aspects of Luther's theology: his often scandalous interpretation of the *communicatio idiomatum.* Finally, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's "better worldliness" inspires a model of grace that assumes a mode of being where the exchanges of the world are affirmed and the self only becomes sacramentally, in, with, and through the communication of a multiplicity of divine and creaturely gifts.

INTRODUCTION

> And we don't have to do anything to bring about this future. All we have to do is nothing...All we have to do is *not* react as if this is a full-blown crisis.
>
> Namoi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*

> We are given to understand...that we can do nothing of ourselves...the latter [is] the grace of God.
>
> Martin Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will*

In August 2014 an Op-Ed on faith and climate change appeared in the *New York Times*. Frustrated with the prevalent antagonism between science and faith in climate change literature, author Kristin Dombek describes the bridge she constructed between her old Christian beliefs and her current climate concerns. She describes how she became disillusioned with her childhood Christian faith, how she found new faith in the images and insights of Darwin, and how this new faith is helping her find a way to cope with paralyzing climate change-induced anxiety. It also depends, she explains, on a key lesson she learned as a child and still retains from the Lutheran-Reformed Heidelberg Catechism: how to "belong, body and soul" to something bigger than herself.

Like many people today, Dombek lives with the awareness that her apartment and her neighborhood in Brooklyn, NY—everything she considers home—remains at risk of drowning in a globally rising sea tide. In order to "stay awake, active, [and] useful" rather than frozen by fear and her own insignificance in the face of an incomprehensibly complex and vast shift, Dombek describes the usefulness of a faith woven on the warp of

Darwin's insights and the woof of elements from her childhood faith.[2] Where Darwin taught her to feel in her body the world's "vast and humbling contingency,"[3] her childhood faith taught her to trust in, rather than fear, a sense that her life was "linked to something bigger: that [she] belong[ed], body and soul, to a larger story for which [she was] responsible."[4] She compares these overlapping journeys of faith to learning to float in the ocean. One might easily feel overwhelmed by the power and breadth of the sea, but in order to learn buoyancy she had to develop a sense that her body was part of something bigger and trust that this vast and humbling contingency would hold up in the face of rising tides. This might be a compelling parable of grace for today: a profound and agentially empowering sense of gratitude that acknowledges we belong body and soul to a vast and humbling contingency "outside ourselves" as much as this contingency constitutes a singular sense of ourselves.

Even as we learn to release ourselves in trust to this oceanic inside/outside we become liberated from fear and anxiety to accept responsibility for a story larger than ourselves. However, the theological viability of this parable is not immediately apparent from a Protestant perspective. For the Reformation has bequeathed to us a heritage of doctrinally driven definitions of grace as a mode of gifting depending on a strict separation of inside from outside as well as an opposition of grace to reciprocity, let alone

---

[2] Kristin Dombek, "Swimming Against the Rising Tide: Secular Climate-Change Activist Can Learn from Evangelical Christians," *New York Times,* August 9, 2014.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

responsible action. Where doctrinal commitments have pressed toward defining grace in terms of an inside/outside binary and the rejection of reciprocity we will find an unfortunate resurgence of a formative grace versus nature dynamic. And this binary, as we will see, is met by the particular tendency to unwittingly bolster concepts foundational for the capitalist economy currently mass-producing climate change.

Yet we will also find viable resources within the tradition, particularly in articulating the value of an unconditioned gift, embedded in a web of multilateral interdependencies. Rather than reading gift as the opposite of exchange, this dissertation will argue that this gift, as grace, is free to empower a wider circulation of gifts. Such conceptual shifts might—just might—open toward a better worldliness saturated and sustained by communicating grace.

All we have to do is nothing: grace and climate change

Dombek's reference to the Heidelberg Catechism may be surprising given the Protestant tradition's ambiguous history when it comes to environmental issues. As the dust of the Reformation upheaval settled and solidified into a new orthodoxy, the concept of grace in particular congealed into an exclusive articulation of forensic justification in which God's redeeming activity appeared as an external power over against humanity's passive receptivity. The reformers emphasized a radically Augustinian sense of human sinfulness whereby humans were so deprived of any natural inclination for goodness that we could "do nothing of saving significance, whether we wish to or not."[5] On account of

[5] Martin Luther, "The Bondage of the Will," in *The Annotated Luther, Volume 2: Word and Faith,* ed. Kirsi I Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 180.

the complete lack of human righteousness God's presence and redeeming work could only be conceptualized *extra nos,* outside of us creatures.

The radical depravity of humanity was answered by God's willing self-denial, which bridges the gulf between God's righteousness and human sin by God's entering into created life. According to Luther, the key message of the incarnation of God in Christ is that God is not against us, but for us.[6] So along with the emphasis of God's redeeming work *extra nos* believers were encouraged to find solace in the realization that God and God's redemptive work in the world is first and foremost, for me—*pro me*.

Today a confluence of events and conceptual shifts call into question the value of articulating God's primary redemptive acts in terms of external relations aimed primarily at a humanity abstracted from the rest of creation. Among these changes are the emerging awareness of dynamic, complex, and internally related systems such as global economics and climate change. Raised consciousness of these systems and the way they function has led to increasing skepticism and condemnation of Cartesian-Newtonian world views. Many of these concerns have been highlighted for decades in feminist and ecotheological critical analyses of the Protestant tradition. In briefly sketching such investigations of this influential tradition a recurrent theme emerges around questions of grace and selfhood. As we will see, concerns consistently arise around the ways our understanding of grace shapes our anthropologies and our relations to others—both created and divine.

The annihilated self: Feminist responses to Protestant grace

---

[6] Althaus, Paul. *The Theology of Martin Luther,* translated by Robert C. Schultz (Fortress Press, 1966), 185.

The critical theme of self-construction in relation to concepts of grace received relatively broad attention in feminist theologies—many of which came to influence and be influenced by ecotheology. Daphne Hampson's 1988 essay, "Luther on the Self: A Feminist Critique," remains a classic example of early wave feminist theological critique. Hampson argues that Luther' s theology presumes a certain insecurity because, in grace, the self is de-centered—found only outside itself, leaving a void or a certain lack in the proper place of an organizing sense of self that would contribute to women's agency.[7] For Luther, this sense of the loss of self to God and neighbor becomes even more emphatically expressed. Hampson writes, "'We know that our theology is certain,' says Luther 'because it sets us outside ourselves.' The Christian lives *extra se.*"[8]

The profound feminist challenge posed to Protestant theology is whether it merely glorifies an unhealthy and death-dealing pattern of relationships, particularly for women, by placing the whole weight of the human's relation to God on the loss of self. What's more, this relational dynamic came to describe a particularly dangerous model of love. German scholar Karl Holl, whose work on Luther remains influential to this day,

---

[7] Hampson explains, "…to be a Christian means that one has a radically different sense of oneself, a sense of oneself as being bound up with God and what God is" ("Luther on the Self: A Feminist Critique." *Word and World* 8 (1988): 215).

[8] Ibid., 214. For a Christian to shift the locus of the self to a god who is only *extra se,* she explains, "I must transfer my centre of gravity to one who lives outside myself." Hampson substantiates this point by quoting the following passage from Luther's "Freedom of a Christian": "A Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. To have this new self-understanding is what it means to be Christian" (Ibid., 216). Hampson's question remains relevant: does Lutheran thought glorify—even sanctify—death-dealing pattern of relationship for women? Does it reinforce the sense that the proper role of the woman, like Luther's feminized soul, is to remain passive and shift the locus of itself outside itself. Are women to remain beside themselves in insecurity? Hampson concludes her critique by explaining: "Within the tradition, then there is no sense that the self, secure in itself, can freely exist, in easy intercourse with others. We cannot maintain ourselves; we are insecure," (Ibid., 218).

describes this divine action on the human passive soul as an ideal model of love: "'Love is now understood as a power that does not hesitate to inflict hurt in order to liberate its object from itself and to raise it above itself.' It is this love that is the 'innermost, the deepest reality in God,'(55)."[9] Feminists have consistently pointed to the danger of idealizing such abusive relations when an active/passive binary, implying domination and control, is functioning. As Catherine Keller explains, referring to this tendency more broadly in the tradition, for these theologians "love is a matter of acting *upon,* the action of a controlling, unilateral will."[10]

Rejecting the insecure self, found only outside itself, Hampson does not return to an interior ego but affirms instead the self "achieved in and through relationship."[11] However, in Deanna Thompson's more recent feminist reading of Luther's theology of the cross she offers a crucial counter question to Hampson's emphasis on the redemptive power of relationship for women. She questions whether is it any better to articulate an understanding of women's redemption that lies solely in relationship when society's oppressive expectations of women have been primarily relational. In a society where women are expected to prioritize relational commitments over career opportunities or

---

[9] Holl, "What Did Luther Understand by Religion?," cited in H. Gaylon Barker, *The Cross of Reality: Luther's Theologia Crucis and Bonhoeffer's Christology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 61. It seems important to note that Barker quotes Holl here uncritically—even approvingly.

[10] Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism and Self* (Beacon Press, 1988), 37.

[11] Hampson, 222.

limit themselves to roles of relational care-taking, relationship may appear as further self evacuation rather than redemption.[12]

What these tensions in feminist analysis bring to light is a basic contradiction at the heart of Lutheran thought regarding the self. On the right hand we have the passive self—the feminized passive soul, annihilated by the masculine deity, *extra nos.* By emphasizing God's activity as pure exteriority the Christian self is, as Hampson points out, always insecure since it can only secure a self outside of itself. Here women's traditional roles and postures of passivity are reinforced, even sanctified. On the left hand, and corresponding with Thompson's concerns, our acts of service to one another actively evacuate the self, giving it over to fulfill the needs of others. Here women's overly active modes, self-depleting in their total orientation toward the needs of others, are also encouraged. At the center of the self in both cases is a void—either passively receiving to fill their inherent lack with a masculinized exteriority or actively emptying the self for others.

The modern subject: Ecotheological responses to Protestant conceptions of grace

Ironically, rather than the radical uncertainty one might expect from this passive yet actively annihilated self, ecotheologians suggest that the Protestant self unfolded toward and contributed to the modern substantial subject.[13] As modernity advanced, the

---

[12] See Deanna Thompson, *Crossing the Divide: Luther, Feminism, and the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 105-112.

[13] These critiques come from within the Protestant tradition as well as from without. See Moltmann and Sittler on the self (chapter three), but also McFague and Cobb (below), H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), and Elizabeth Johnson (below), among others.

strong binaries of the Protestant doctrine of grace—Creator and creature, giver and receiver, active and passive, self and other—became enmeshed in Cartesian-Newtonian thought as a modern subject defined over and against every human and other-than-human object. Where the reformers envisioned that the human lay passive before the saving, exterior activity of God, it is more than merely coincidental that the modern human took on the image of this God actively working on the non-human passive and inert world world toward the supposedly redemptive aims of scientific/technological progress and economic growth.

Among ecologically minded theologians, Sallie McFague and John Cobb stand out as exemplary for their early insistence that we engage economic systems as well as ecological concerns. The importance of their insight has only grown with increased awareness of the key connections between global capitalism and climate change. Both also focus their attention on models of selfhood inspired by the Protestant tradition and functioning in current economic systems. McFague, for example, explains that in the "neoclassical economic worldview, two values predominate—the individual and growth."[14] The basic assumption of neoclassical economics is that "human beings are self-interested individuals who, acting on this basis, will create a syndicate or machine, even a global one, capable of benefiting all eventually. Hence, as long as the economy grows, all individuals in a society will sooner or later participate in prosperity."[15]

---

[14] McFague, *Life Abundant: Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 81.

[15] Ibid., 77.

Famously, Adam Smith secured the place of self-interest as fuel for the capitalist engine, explaining, "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we can expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest."[16] Through self-interest, the "invisible hand" of capitalism will work out the greatest good for society: "By pursuing his own interest [the laborer] frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it."[17]

McFague analyzes influences contributing to the anthropology functioning in Smith's economics. She lists "the Enlightenment's central insight: the importance of the individual,"[18] the Newtonian view of the world as an inert machine "with all its parts connected only in external ways,"[19] and the Protestant definition of human sinfulness. Adam Smith took the Protestant understanding of sin as the heart turned in on itself, transformed it into the economic concept of human self-interest and harnessed this as an inexhaustible resource to fuel the capitalist machine. Once put to use in the right system this basic tendency of all humanity could be transformed from our downfall to our collective redemption—a growing economy which would eventually lead to better economic conditions for all.

Along with McFague, Cobb also emphasizes the fact that Adam Smith was merely assuming a Protestant anthropology when he placed self-interest at the heart of

---

[16] Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations,* ed. Kathryn Sutherland (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), Book IV, chapter 2.

[17] Smith, *The Wealth of Nations,* Book I, chapter 2.

[18] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 78.

[19] Ibid., 79.

the capitalist machine. In *Sustaining the Common Good* Cobb describes the capitalist anthropology as the *homo economicus*.[20] This economic human is "the picture of extreme individualism."[21] All relations are purely external. Only commodities exchanged in the market are of interest so that "the gifts of nature are of no importance, nor is the morale of the community of which *Homo economicus* is a part."[22]

Others emphasize the cosmological dualism that became popularized with the Reformation. Elizabeth Johnson, for example, explains that where early Christian tradition integrated God, humanity, and creation, this ancient relational cosmology was set aside during the Reformation. The result of this shift from a relational, yet hierarchical, cosmology was a dualism between God and world with an intensified interest in God's relation to the individual human person. Consequently, Protestant thought emerges as "intensely anthropocentric."[23]

Concerning Protestant theology and concepts of selfhood, ecotheological and feminist critiques converge most clearly on the Protestant doctrine of grace. Both perspectives emphasize the detrimental effects of idealized divine relations as external, unilateral, uncooperative, unreciprocal, and lacking participation. The idealization of

---

[20] John B. Cobb Jr., *Sustaining the Common Good: A Christian Perspective on the Global Economy* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1994). Developed first in Cobb and Daly, Daly, *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994). See sections starting on 85 and 91 of the latter, for example.

[21] Cobb, *Sustaining the Common Good*, 87.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Elizabeth Johnson, "Losing and Finding Creation in the Christian Tradition," in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans,* eds. Hessel, Dieter T. and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Center for the Study of World Religions, 2000), 8-9.

external and dualistic relations unfolds in human economic systems and relations to the other-than-human world as well as between men and women. In Keller's early *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism and Self,* she argues that the independent self defined over and against others in separative and external relations is inherently patriarchal in that it idealizes unilateral and external relations of control and power over. Describing the conception of God readily associated with the doctrine of grace Keller argues that God's action on passive subjects from the outside "is the supreme case of external relatedness. Indeed this is the ultimate separate subject, eternally self-sufficient, immune to the influence of those others whom he has created."[24] Similarly, McFague emphasizes that the predominant economic world view depends on disconnection where "humans are pictured as separate from one another and isolated from the earth; that is, they are only externally related to both."[25] Cobb and economist Hermann Daly point out how this mode of relation is explicitly engaged in the predominant practice among economists of identifying other-than-human creatures and matter as "externalities."[26]

Cartesian-Newtonian legacy

The economic systems and anthropologies implicit in global capitalism also arise from particularly modern concepts. The Reformation initiated remarkable shifts in religious practices, a Catholic Counter-Reformation, major upheavals of war, social reorganization, and political shifts such as state segmentation along religious lines, as

---

[24] Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism and Self*, 37.

[25] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 81.

[26] Cobb and Daly, *For the Common Good,* see, for example, 53 and on.

well as increasing challenges to divinely ordained and exclusive authority. Less than a century later Rene Descartes sparked similarly massive shifts in human anthropology, reason, authority, and conceptions of the natural world. Where the reformers had emphasized grace in terms of purely external relations Descartes refigured the human as only externally related to the other-than-human world. The worldview inspired by Descartes has been a normative characteristic of modern life, but today some of these most basic assumptions about reality and what it means to be human are being called into question. Most of these assumptions place humanity outside of nature in a "proper" position of ruling, ordering, and controlling. In creating the modern human Descartes divorced human creatureliness from other-than-human nature.[27] Before Descartes, Aristotle's definition of humanity still held sway. He defined the human as a rational animal implying humanity shared in the animality of other creatures, but maintained a special ability for rational thought that distinguished the human species.[28] This implied

---

[27] Indeed, many argue that before Descartes there were no humans and animals but creatures ranging from lower level organisms to humans to heavenly creatures. As Biblical scholar Stephen Moore explains, "Prior to the Cartesian revolution in philosophy, there were no 'animals' in the modern sense. There were 'creatures,' 'beasts,' and 'living things,' an arrangement reflected in, and reinforced by, the early vernacular Bibles. As Laurie Shannon notes, '*animal* never appears in the benchmark English of the Great Bible (1539), the Geneva Bible (1560), or the King James Version (1611).' Moreover, the continuum evoked by a term such as 'creature' also included angels and demons, so that premodern humans were part of a complex, multilayered cosmology. Missing was 'the fundamentally modern sense of the animal or animals as humanity's persistent, solitary opposite," (Stephen Moore, "Why There Are no Humans or Animals in the Gospel of Mark," in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect,* ed. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 80-1, citing Laurie Shannon, "The Eight Animals in Shakespeare; or, Before the Human," *PMLA* 124 (2009): 476.

[28] Aristotle, "The History of Animals," in *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classical and Contemporary Writings,* ed. Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald (New York: Berg, 2007), 5-7.

humans were on a kind of continuum of life alongside all other living beings.[29] Humanity shared in animality, with a little something special on top: the ability for reason.

While the human was prioritized in Aristotle's worldview it was fundamentally part of the natural and animal world. Descartes put all of this into question. In his famous *Discourse on Method* (1637) he questioned everything: How do I know God exists? How do I know what I am sensing/experiencing is real? How do I know I exist? While the questioning remains courageous his answer has had unforeseeable consequences for Western European thought. In the end Descartes concluded that the only logical foundation could be that I know I am here, that I exist, because I am thinking. I am the one questioning. If there is thought there must be a being behind this thought. Consequently, he concludes with the famous phrase, *cogito, ergo sum,* "I think, therefore I am" (*Discourse on Method*).

In defining human Being in terms of an ability for self consciousness (*ego cogito ergo sum*) Descartes contrasts this unique human characteristic with the rest of material reality, thus shifting from a cosmic hierarchy of creatures to a binary between human and non-human. In this sense Descartes created the modern animal as well as the modern human.[30] Where humans were associated with thinking, conscious reflection, and response rather than innate reaction all non-human creatures and matter were associated

---

[29] Derrida explains, "Descartes will, with all due rigor, do without his definition of the human in the combined terms of animality and rationality, of man as rational animal. There is in his gesture a moment of rupture with respect to the tradition, a rupture for which Descartes is not given credit often enough..." (*The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wood (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 71).

[30] Moore, "Why There Are No Animals or Humans in the Gospel of Mark," 80.

with machines. This became known as the *bete-machine* (beast-machine) doctrine because it associated non-humans with automatic machine-like moving parts.[31] Where humans responded to external stimuli with consciousness, the other-than-human world simply reacted with natural machine-like impulses.

Inspired by many of these same conceptual shifts, Isaac Newton built on the understanding of the material world functioning in automated, unconscious, machine-like reactions to external stimuli. Newton's physics reinforced the idea that humanity was fundamentally different from the material world because unlike humans, matter was inert, unconscious, and only controlled externally by human will.

The problems with this worldview have been discussed for at least as long as the environmental movement has been around. Indeed, one could argue that all along, even from the beginnings of modernity, there have always been dissenting voices insisting that humanity is in a fully interdependent relationship with nature and that nature exceeds or transcends its machine-like characteristics so readily associated with their use value. Romantic thinkers, nature poets, and Darwinians have long insisted that the Cartesian-Newtonian characterization of the other-than-human world as inert, merely awaiting human definition and use is severely limited.[32] They have long noted that the view of humanity as the crowning achievement of the material world or conceptually divorced

---

[31] Ibid. "This radical reconception of the nonhuman animal," Stephen Moore notes, "was subsequently termed the *bete-machine* ("beast-machine") doctrine for its equation of animals with clocks and other machines with automatic moving parts."

[32] See Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and The Modern World* (New York: Free Press, 1967) on Romantics and nature poets, 93 and on. See also Keller on Anne Conway, "Be a Multiplicity: Ancestral Anticipations," in *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation*, ed. Catherine Keller and Laurel Schneider (New York: Routledge, 2011), especially 83 and on.

from it has deleterious effects on the human spirit as well as the material wellbeing of other-than-humans.

Alternative views of reality and the self

In the present these persistent critiques of modernity are sharpened on the whetstone of social, ecological, and economic crises. Today climate change is evidence for the fact that, as physicist Karen Barad says, "We are part of the nature we seek to understand."[33] In addition, the economic turmoil seems to have heightened awareness of the growing gap between rich and poor. Along with increasing awareness of a direct correlation between fossil fuel dependence, global capitalism, and climate change, conversation around these concerns has created space for more serious criticisms of the global neoliberal economy of increasingly unregulated capitalism. These concerns are intimately related to views of reality, materiality, humanity, and creatureliness that have emerged as responses to harmful aspects of modern thought. Particularly with the advent of the science of ecology and the discoveries of quantum physics conceptions of material reality have shifted from being conceived as structured by isolated atoms or individuals that only relate to and affect one another externally by bouncing off one another to a view of reality emerging through relational, internal interactions of interdependence.

In a recent collection of essays addressing concerns with Cartesian-Newtonian assumptions and proposing constructive alternatives, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost explain that new materialisms and ontologies reject old binaries between subject and

---

[33] Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28.3 (2003): 828.

object which render matter inert and relations external. In these models, matter and reality are thought in ways "that compel us to think of causation in far more complex terms; to recognize that phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems."[34]

Newtonian causality, or linear cause and effect is one particular casualty of non-binary ontologies. Coole and Frost explain, that "forces, charges, waves, virtual particles, and empty space suggest an ontology that is very different from the substantialist Cartesian or mechanistic Newtonian accounts of matter."[35] Where Newton's cause and effect assumed linear time and the inert nature of matter these are fundamentally called into question in relational, ecological, and quantum accounts of reality because they assume separative substances and thus external relations. Such isolated substances may affect another by bumping into it, causing it to react or move in a certain way. However, the interacting partners remain substantially and ontologically the same before and after the meeting.

Substantial consistency and mere external relations allow for predictable outcomes. Newton's insights, for example, make it possible to be able to predict with impressive accuracy the damage a marble will cause when dropped from a fifth story window on a car windshield on street level. There are phenomena at the microcosmic as well as the macro-systemic level, however, that linear causality cannot account for. In cases of dynamic systems like global economics and climate change, for example, we

---

[34] Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Duke University Press, 2010), 9.

[35] Ibid., 13.

cannot simply add up causes and predict the effects. This is not simply a matter of a lack of information, an inability as yet to account for all variables. Nor is it simply a case where "the sum is greater than the parts" because "there are system effects that are different from their parts."[36] Coole and Frost explain, "Because innumerable interactions between manifold elements that produce patterns of organization successively *transform* those elements, it is impossible either to predict outcomes in advance or to repeat an event. Since, moreover, determination within dynamic systems is nonlinear, terminal effects cannot be construed as possibilities that were already latent in some initial moment."[37] In other words, dynamic systems like global economies, ecologies, and climate change cannot be explained in terms of external relations.

As Karen Barad suggests, we are not just talking about the difference between classical causality and complex systems theory. In order to account for a kind of reality that is not simply more complex with more variables than we previously imagined, Barad argues we need a different account of reality: "an alternative meta/physics that entails a reworking of the notions of causality and agency."[38] Building on the philosophy physics of Niels Bohr, Barad suggests a profoundly relational ontology where matter itself emerges in what she calls "intra-action." Barad's neologism is closely related to more commonly familiar concepts of quantum entanglement and complementarity. As Bohr

---

[36] John Urry in Frost and Coole, 14

[37] Ibid.

[38] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke University Press, 2007), 393.

noted in his famous complementarity theory, in taking measurements of an atomic object it is impossible to mark any absolute separation between the object of observation and the measuring tool. Rather than remaining distinct and "objective" in the traditional sense of external relations, the measuring apparatus and the object of observation become entangled so that the measurement is a phenomena of their intra-action rather than an objectively exterior measurement. In other words, in the mere act of measurement the object being measured and the measuring apparatus intra-act.

Barad differentiates intra-action from the more familiar description of relations as *inter*action. She points out that interaction implies there are originally isolated substances that secondarily enter into relationships that can have an effect on their behavior. These relations, however, are still external. Barad's intra-action suggests that we, and all matter, are constituted in and through our engagements. Barad explains,

> "The point is not merely that there is a web of causal relations that we are implicated in and that there are consequences to our actions. We are a much more intimate part of the universe than any such statement implies…There is no discrete 'I' that precedes its actions. Our (intra)actions matter—each one reconfigures the world in its becoming, they become us. And yet even in our becoming there is no 'I' separate from the intra-active becoming of the world."[39]

The same, she demonstrates, holds true for matter itself, thus pushing us beyond mere social ontologies to *material relational* ontologies.

In addition to material causality, the interactive, interdependent, and dynamic view of reality has profound effects on some basic assumptions of what it means to be human, to have a self, and to be responsible. Modern life allows for the illusion of self-

[39] Ibid., 394.

possession, self-awareness, and self-sufficiency. For many of us nature feels distant or at least "outside." In our homes, cities, and grocery stores the nature we depend on is carefully packaged, removing any trace of earth and the ecologies on which they depend.[40] We easily forget the many hands that have toiled, the lives that have been given, and the beings who have flourished through symbiotic relationships.

It is easy to lose track of the fact that the boundaries that seem separated by impervious windows, empty space, or creaturely difference are actually permeable, interrelated and interdependent. We perceive the end of our selves and the beginning of the "other" through the boundary of skin, but these boundaries are anything but sealed. Biologists remind us that our bodies, what we think of as securely "me' and "mine," are actually riddled with others: bacteria, fungi, and other microorganisms. Biologist Donna Haraway reminds us that a mere 10% of what I consider "my" body's cells actually contain human DNA.[41] The rest is held up by communities of microbial "others" who help my body function in a human way. Political science scholar Jane Bennett similarly reminds us that even the crook of an elbow is not merely mine, but a community.[42] Suddenly our bodies emerge less as isolated humans where our redemptive goal is to reach across the moat surrounding our fortress-like humanity to connect with an outside

---

[40] See, for example, Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).

[41] Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 3-4.

[42] "My 'own' body is material, and yet this vital materiality is not fully or exclusively human. My flesh is populated and constituted by different swarms of foreigners. The crook of my elbow, for example, is 'a special ecosystem, a bountiful home to no fewer than six tribes of bacteria," (Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 112).

world and more as ecosystems themselves, as communities within communities, within communities.

We find that even more than being permeable or porous we depend on these communities of others and are constituted in (or intra-act), with, and through them. Recent studies of the microbiome demonstrate that bacteria living in the ecological system of human bodies but lacking our genes make possible basic human functions like digestion and brain function.[43] It turns out that unique Cartesian characteristic, the *ego cogito,* that delineated humanity from the other-than-human world in modernity fundamentally depends on something other-than-human. Religious scholar Whitney Bauman remarks, "At the very center of the self are multiple earth others. At the very core of what it means to be human is the multitude of nonhuman earth others."[44] We quite literally would not be—let alone be human—without the presence, assistance, and gifts of multiple human, other-than-human, and divine others.

Given that our emotional states, thought processes, bodies and material reality rely so fundamentally on the gifts of a multitude of others it seems a shame that our theologies of grace would not account for these gifts as well. So we wonder: What would grace look like if we took a Copernican-like shift and removed humanity from its isolated and central location in the universe? What would it mean for our theological concepts of

---

[43] See the American Natural History Museum exhibit on the micro-biome: "The Secret World Inside You," http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/the-secret-world-inside-you, also, Rob DeSalle and Susan Perkins, *Welcome to the Microbiome: Getting to Know the Trillions of Bacteria and Other Microbes In, On, and Around You* (New Haven: Yale University, 2015).

[44] Whitney Bauman, *Religion and Ecology: Developing a Planetary Ethic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 116.

grace to account for the ways our lives and our beings are so profoundly gifted to us by both creaturely and divine others? What would grace look like if we could no longer assume we were isolated individuals or that an individual could essentially be extracted from the web of relations that not only supports them but also constitutes them? What does *extra nos* mean in an ecological universe where no thing can be said to be absolutely separate or outside relation with others? Or what does *pro me* mean when there is no "me" apart from a community of others? Rather than diminishing the importance of grace might such questions lead us to a radical appreciation of the nature of reality as fundamentally graced?

Eco/nomy

Common disagreements voiced in American politics around ecological concerns often revolve around a central and competing distinction between economics and ecology. Voices supporting ecological care are often charged with prioritizing the health of the natural world over the economic wellbeing of families while those supporting economic sustainability are often accused of shortsightedly prioritizing human wellbeing at the expense of the natural world. But economy and ecology are falsely separated in as much as they are divided along the Cartesian line that is also seen to divide the human from the non-human: agency, choice, will, self-consciousness, rationality, etc. Where this line can no longer be said to hold, we need to start talking in terms of eco/nomy: economy and ecology as an interconnected whole where one is not prioritized over the other.

Where does the category of economy end and ecology begin? Does economy simply end and ecology begin where humans no longer are considered central? Does economy end and ecology begin when the actors are not willfully organizing or managing? It is not enough to simply reverse the hierarchy. Where economy is typically prioritized many eco-conscious voices suggest we reverse the dualism and prioritize ecology, thereby putting economy in a place of secondary importance. Lutheran Eco-ethicist Larry Rasmussen, for example, argues that from the perspective of commodification "earth's economy is a subset of the human economy." By contrast, he argues for the reverse: that "the human economy is everywhere and always a subset of the planet."[45] The spirit of Rasmussen's argument is laudable. But by simply reversing the hierarchy the argument may still be read to assumes a basic dualism between economy and ecology, and thereby of humanity and nature. We cannot say, on the one hand, that the separation of the human from the natural world is a main contributing factor to ecological degradation and then on the other proceed to talk about economy and ecology as if they were two separate realms. When we do so we fail to recognize that the line separating economy and ecology falls on the Cartesian line separating the human from the non-human world.

This logical inconsistency is similarly not yet acknowledged among theologians critical of capitalism's ecologically destructive effects. Among these scholars a common argument against the pervasive power of capitalism is that economy presents a meaning-

---

[45] Rasmussen, *Earth Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 268, citing Brown and Goubin.

making force in competition with religion. Lutheran Liturgical scholar Gordon Lathrop, for example, argues that "When that economy presents itself as a global system—and when monetary values are seen as primary values, the 'bottom line' as the most basic knowledge about anything—then we have arrived at something like a cosmology."[46] This approach is also taken by Douglas Meeks, Paul Chung and Ulrich Duchrow in their texts on religion and economics.[47] These scholars contrast the idolatrous meaning-making structures of economy with true religious belief. Aspects of their critiques are well placed. But by pitting religion against economy in general do we not villianize economy and place it in opposition to God's work in the world? In acknowledging the damaging effects of capitalism we must distinguish our protests of a certain *kind* of economy from the condemnation of economic exchange in general.

Instead of condemning economy *tout court* for its world ordering power in competition with God's world ordering power, we must pause and ask: what difference demarcates between ecology and economy? Why do we raise up and sanctify ecology and villanize economy? Again, my hunch is that we assume economy and ecology are divided along the same line as culture and nature—the line between the human and the other-than-human. Does the line between ecology and economy just reinscribe the human/ other-than-human boundary, thus continuing to place humanity outside of 'nature'? How

---

[46] Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 11.

[47] Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Augsburg Fortress, 1989), Paul Chung, *Church and Ethical Responsibility in the Midst of World Economy: Greed, Dominion, and Justice* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), and Ulrich Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism: Drawn from Biblical History, Designed for Political Action,* trans. Elizabeth Hickes et al. (Utrecht, The Netherlands: International Books, 1995).

would our critiques of the deleterious effects of capitalism change if, in the spirit of getting to the root of the human/nature divide, we refuse to oppose ecology and economy? In acknowledging the damaging effects of capitalism we must surely make clear that we are protesting a certain *kind* of economy and not economic exchange in general.

The question of a dividing line between economy and ecology is more than just semantics. There are material implications of this common assumption. Global environmental advocate Vendana Shiva, for example, argues that "This total disconnect between ecology and economics is threatening to bring down our *oikos*, our home on this planet."[48] What holds economy and ecology together, then, is that they are both systems of interdependent exchange. Both are conceptualized as systems of exchange that either support, create, and sustains life or are oriented toward death and destruction. At their best both remain systems of exchange that can support the flourishing of the world. In this sense, eco/nomy points to the fact that, as biologist Donna Haraway insists, "the one fundamental thing about the world [is] relationality."[49]

In the spirit of analyzing the relationality of the world in a non-dual manner—and so protesting forces in the world that lead toward unsustainable relations—several theologians propose that we retrieve the ancient concept of the world as *oikonomia*. *Oikos*, meaning home, serves as the root for economy, ecology, and ecumenism.

---

[48] Vendana Shiva, *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Crisis* (South End Press, 2008), 104.

[49] Cited in Marion Grau, *Of Divine Economy: Refinancing Redemption* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 8.

Theologian Marion Grau suggests a return to this concept which, she argues, "points toward the inseparability and irreducibility of creation beyond any binary opposition between the human and the natural in which nature would be designated as an 'environment.'"[50] Theologian John Cobb and economist Herman Daly share Grau's concerns and also recommend we think of economics in a more integral way along the lines of Wendell Berry's "Great Economy" which "sustains the total web of life and everything that depends on the land."[51] This integral perspective—whether *oikos* or Great Economy—resists a recurrent relapse into a nature/culture and non-human/human divide where ultimately the other-than-human world is relegated to a resource or "externalities."[52] Cobb and Daly insist that we view "human communities…[as] part of a larger community that includes the other creatures with whom human beings share the world."[53] As such, the "Great Economy" becomes the all inclusive systems of exchange that "sustain the total web of life and everything that depends on the land."[54]

Where economy and ecology are merged, conveying the basic interdependence and relationality of life in the world, we also see that eco-justice and social justice can be seen as one in the same rather than in competition with one another. For over half a century now, ecotheologians have insisted that Christian theology take seriously the

---

[50] Ibid., 10.

[51] Daly and Cobb, 18.

[52] See Cobb and Daly's analysis of economic externalities, cited above.

[53] Daly and Cobb, 18.

[54] Ibid.

interconnected mode of the natural world in our doctrines and theological reflections. More recently, based on the interconnected nature of reality, influential voices are resisting the persistent assumption that ecological concern means one must choose between trees and people—between social justice and ecojustice. Pope Francis' powerful encyclical on climate change, for example, urges a perspective he calls "integral ecology."[55] In doing so he calls for an expansion even of the scope of ecological interconnections. "We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social," he writes, "but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental."[56] The letter highlights the ways in which our most pressing issues of human injustice (racism, colonialism, income disparity, etc.) are also deeply intertwined with ecological injustice.

Pope Francis' argument converges with the case Lutheran ethicist Cynthia Moe-Lobeda has been building for some time for seeing the interconnections of ecological and social justice. She emphasizes the injustice of the fact that those who contribute the least to global warming are likely to suffer first and most profoundly from it. Such injustice is compounded by the fact that these populations are also most likely to be colonized, economically and politically marginalized, non-European peoples. Moe-Lobeda highlights the racialized effects of climate change as well as the symptoms of systemic racism evident in a persistent lack of political will to address climate change. She

---

[55] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015).

[56] Ibid. 94.

describes the slippery nature of systemic violence which allows for it to persist, remaining generally invisible and ignored by those who benefit from it and have the power to change it. Structural violence, like climate change and racism, she explains, involves systems rather than individuals. Many people are involved and most may even remain wholly unaware of the violence or bias of the system in which they participate. "To illustrate," she explains, "my driving a gas-fueled car to work is legal, happens over time, and is connected to the countless people who work in the automotive and oil industries or drive cars, yet are not responsible for the decisions that have created a culture and infrastructure of automobile dependence."[57] Such structural violence transgresses constructed boundaries between human and non-human, social and ecological, economy and ecology.

Mere weeks before the largest climate march in history, "The People's Climate March," in New York City, September 21, 2014, journalist Naomi Klein published *This Changes Everything: Capitalism Vs. the Climate.*[58] Her persuasive book anticipates Pope Francis' integration of ecological, economic and social concerns, and parallels Moe-Lobeda's argument that in addressing the causes of climate change we will also need to address social, political, and economic structures.[59] For Klein, addressing the causes of

---

[57] Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, "Climate Change as Climate Debt: Forging a Just Future," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 36.1 (Spring/Summer 2016), 11-12.

[58] Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014).

[59] Indeed Klein advised Pope Francis as he was writing his encyclical on climate change, *Laudato Si* (see Naomi Klein, "A Radical Vatican?," *The New Yorker*, July 10, 2015, http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/a-visit-to-the-vatican.)

climate change means critically addressing systems that prevent basic democratic principles that would allow for more socially just and egalitarian relations. She argues that if we are to confront the ecological crisis of climate change will will also need to address the fundamentally undemocratic nature of our current global economy.

In order to account for the ways that our mundane daily acts contribute—not just individually, directly, or with linear causality—to ecological and economic, social and other-than-human injustices, a more integrated perspective is in order. But if being human means being part of communities within communities[60] of humans and other-than-humans, how do we account for human responsibility and agency? What kind of shifts in our anthropologies might better account for our inter-dependent relationship with one another and the other-than-human world? Where it becomes apparent that we need an integrated perspective resisting an economy/ecology and human/non-human divide this dissertation will demonstrate that twentieth century Gift theory emerges as a potentially fruitful way of integrating these formerly divided concepts because it can account for a view of reality of continually exchanging gifts between humans and other-than-humans.

Gift theory

While the three main foci of this dissertation—ecology, economy, and the Protestant theological tradition—represent divergent and diverse discourses, theories of the gift provide a methodological bridge of shared vocabulary and analytical tools that

---

[60] Daly and Cobb argue suggest that instead of the *homo economicus*—the economic human—functioning as the primary anthropology of our current economic system, we should see ourselves as humans in community.

can be applied to diverse systems of exchange. Significantly, gift theory also explicitly bring us back to our main theological concerns regarding grace and self construction since these theorists emphasize that the kinds of gift models we engage in and idealize play a key role in shaping our concepts of the human in relation to society, the other-than-human world, and reality in general.

With his 1924 publication, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies,* socio-anthropologist Marcel Mauss initiated twentieth-century interest in the gift as a symbolic economic, moral, religious, and social trope.[61] Mauss' socio-anthropological research was a meta-analysis of field studies in locations where pre-modern social and economic practices were retained. Sociologist Mary Douglas explains that Mauss was motivated to analyze pre-modern gift economies as a way to critique modern utilitarianism and individualism.[62] Mauss argues that in pre-modern societies gift-exchange was not merely an early form of barter economics. Barter is understood as "as a highly rational, purely material, and economic process...which smoothly gives way to the higher convenience of money," but Mauss' analysis of pre-modern societies demonstrates that the reasons for exchange in these societies were not simply utilitarian.[63] By showing that these systems of exchange encompassed all aspects of social life,

---

[61] 1924 was the first publication in French as *Essay sur le don.* The first English translation was in 1954.

[62] Natalie Zemon Davis: "'the spread of industrial and commercial capitalism has meant the spread of alienated relations and objects' relaxing the (allegedly) more neighborly relations of the pre-industrial period and the more personal relations with things." (*The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9, citing James Carrier, *Gifts and Commodities: Exchange and Western Capitalism.*)

[63] John Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given?: Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," *Modern Theology* 11 (1995): 126.

including those we would now distinguish as economic, Mauss concludes that forms and reasons for exchange other than those limited to capitalism, utilitarian, and individualism are possible.

In demonstrating the ways pre-modern gift-exchange societies were not simply less developed precursors to utilitarianism Mary Douglas argues that Mauss' gift economy provides a unique alternative to both capitalism and Marxism.[64] For this reason Mauss,' work continues to spark conversation and interest today. In particular, Mauss' resistance to the utilitarianism and individualism characteristic of capitalism has caught the attention of theologians engaged in issues of economic concern. In addition, his rejection of the idealization of the gift as free of reciprocity or exchange has interested theologians engaged in theological debates about the ideal forms of gift in our theological systems. Both critiques of concepts foundational to capitalism and the idealization of the free gift have attracted Anglo-Catholic theologian John Milbank to Mauss' work. Along with others such as William Cavanaugh and Stephen Long who are also associated with Radical Orthodoxy, Milbank has developed a forceful critique of capitalism based on theological and gift categories. For Milbank different gift structures assume different ontologies. So a reciprocal gift doesn't just indicate the return of a gift object but the return of relation. And where we are concerned not just with the exchange of gift objects but of relation we will see that the reciprocal gift also indicates a shift to a relational and interconnected ontology. Since, with the free gift, neither the gift nor relation is returned

---

[64] Quoted in J. Todd Billings, "John Milbank's Theology of the 'Gift' and Calvin's Theology of Grace: A Critical Comparison," *Modern Theology* 21 (2005): 88.

this gift structure indicates a separative and individualist ontology. In place of an individualist ontology and the sacred/secular, public/private dualism that he argues are uniquely modern and foundational for capitalism, Milbank has constructed an ontology of gift exchange in which the world's exchanges participate in a continual Trinitarian gift exchange.

Even before Mauss' gift economy caught the attention of theologians interested in economic and soteriological exchanges his work had already evoked French philosopher Jacques Derrida's critical response. In 1992 Derrida published *Given Time* where he counters Mauss' rejection of the free gift, arguing that what Mauss describes is not gift but exchange. For anything to emerge as gift, Derrida insists, there must be no reciprocity or return. For Derrida the danger is that a "gift" given with expectation of a return "puts the other in debt [appearing] to poison the relationship, so that 'giving amounts to hurting, to doing harm.'"[65] Even a word of thanks or simple recognition turns the gift to exchange. Where Mauss insists on a definition of gift that can only be given with interest, with the expectation of a return, Derrida suggests that a gift that returns to its origin is annulled. As we will see, like many Protestant theologies of grace, such opposition to exchange leaves Derrida's gift vulnerable to emerging as a transcendent exteriority in relation to the exchanges of the world. And yet, I will also argue that, when read within Derrida's broader project and concerns certain insights will remain key as we seek to construct a counter-capitalist concept of the gift.

---

[65] Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 12.

In the case of Milbank and Derrida, as well as in gift theory more broadly, the focus tends to remain on social and divine gift exchange. But as I have argued, gift theory can account for systems of exchange whether they remain between humans or encompass exchange between humans and other-than-humans. This particular insight is due to ecotheologian Anne Primavesi. Primavesi engages the lively debates around Gift theory in a way that anticipates the aims of this dissertation. Moving beyond the discourse's anthropocentric orientation she applies it to ecological systems and human-other-than-human interactions. Here, fundamental and life-sustaining ecological exchanges emerge as eco/nomic systems. Take, for example, the exchange between humans and trees that happens continually. With every breath humans are in exchange relations with trees: we trade our carbon dioxide for their oxygen. Systems of eco/nomic gift exchange can be seen intimately, as in the exchanges between me and a tree. They can also be seen more globally: think here of carbon cycle. In addition to monetary and ecological economies environmental activist Vandana Shiva suggests we also consider the nature of our carbon economies.

Shiva reminds us that global climate change does not indicate a problem with carbon itself. With Shiva's 2009 book, *Soil Not Oil,* the author began to raise awareness about the ways our food production and distribution systems contribute to climate change. In doing so she reminds us that carbon is not the enemy. "We forget that the cellulose of plants is primarily carbon," she explains. "Humus in the soil is mostly carbon. Vegetation in the forests is mostly carbon. It is living carbon. It is part of the life

cycle."[66] Rather than carbon itself, the problem is an unbalanced, unreciprocal, carbon cycle. "Fossil fuel-based industrial agriculture moves carbon from the soil to the atmosphere. Ecological agriculture takes carbon from the atmosphere and puts it back in the soil."[67] In the shift from organic to industrial farming we have fundamentally shifted the carbon cycle on earth. Ancient methods of crop rotation, cover crops, and manure use kept a balance in carbon exchanges between the atmosphere and carbon in the ground. Climate change, then, can be seen as the result of a shift from dependence on "renewable carbon economies to a fossil fuel-based non-renewable carbon economy."[68] In order to address climate change we need to restore a balance through reciprocal gift exchange between the carbon we send into the atmosphere and the carbon that is absorbed into the soil. I suggest we need a paradigm shift from a unilateral fossil fuel carbon economy where "free gifts" are given from the earth without expectation of a responsible return of carbon reabsorbed into the soil. Closing the carbon cycle by returning carbon to the soil and promoting biodiversity rather than synthetic fertilizers will be key.[69] "To move beyond oil," Shiva explains, "we must reestablish partnerships with other species. To

---

[66] Shiva, *Soil Not Oil,* 129.

[67] Ibid.*,* 111.

[68] Ibid., 130.

[69] A key characteristic of industrial farming is synthetic fertilizer use. Synthetic fertilizers not only take an enormous amount of fossil fuels to produce, they also contribute directly to global warming when they produce nitrous oxide. Synthetic fertilizers are composed of nitrogen taken from the atmosphere and "fixed" or combined with Hydrogen (See, Michael Pollan's lucid description of this process in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, 41-7). When the nitrogen is applied to plants not all of it is absorbed. Some runs off into rivers, some seeps into ground water, and some evaporates, combining with O2 to form nitrous oxide. Nitrous oxide is a greenhouse gas 300 times more potent than carbon dioxide ("Overview of Greenhouse Gases," http://www3.epa.gov/climatechange/ghgemissions/gases/n2o.html).

move beyond oil, we must reestablish the other carbon economy, a renewable economy based on biodiversity."[70] Rather than seeing soil as "dead matter, assembled like a machine" Shiva calls for us to see it as a diverse community in reciprocal relation with human communities.[71]

With Primavesi's shift beyond anthropocentric gift exchange, economic and ecological issues, such as the carbon cycle, can be integrated where they are typically divided discourses. Such integrations, however, as we shall see, pose a particular challenge to traditional Protestant concepts of grace which are commonly understood in terms of a free or unreciprocal gift. Where the reciprocal gift assumes a return of relation and thus a relational ontology rather than separative individualism the reciprocal gift will be key part of this project. But where grace is maintained as a free or unreciprocal gift it can only emerge in contrast or opposition to a cycle of gift-exchange as well as a relational ontology.

The task before us: conceptualizing alternative eco/nomies

> I suggest that if we hope to contest effectively the manifold destructive effects of capitalist structures of power, we need to begin by taking an inventory of the location and embodiment of the formations of knowledge and faith that shape theological economies.
>
> Marion Grau, *Of Divine Economy*

---

[70] Shiva, *Soil Not Oil*, 131.

[71] Shiva, "Soil Papered Over," Speech give at the Seizing the Alternative Conference, Claremont, CA, June, 2015.

In rejecting capitalism Milbank promotes a turn to socialism. Indeed, many economically engaged theologians either propose the rejection of capitalism in favor of socialism or like Kathryn Tanner, as we will see, a radical reformation within capitalism. By contrast, John Cobb and Herman Daly stress that the major task facing us today is to come up with alternatives to the binary of either capitalism or socialism. John Cobb and Herman Daly's study of economics and ecology in *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* is unique among theological works dealing with economics in that it is the result of a partnership between theologian John Cobb and economist (and former member of the World Bank) Herman Daly. Cobb and Daly reject both economic systems on the grounds that they are growth based economies which take for granted the possibility and desirability of industrialism.[72] Both systems "are fully committed to large-scale, factory-style energy and capital-intensive, specialized production units that are hierarchically managed."[73] As much as theorists and the general public like to polarize socialism and capitalism, Daly

---

[72] Daly and Cobb, 2. Miroslav Volf echoes this sentiment, emphasizing that "Marx held firmly to human independence so it almost seemed to him a value that lies at the bottom of all values. Because the reality of Go as creator is 'incompatible with human independence he denied the existence of God." Volf continues, "In a text that remained unpublished during his lifetime, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', [Marx] gave an expression to the hear to this rebellion against God: 'A being only counts itself as independent when it stands on its own feet and it stands on its own feet as long as it owes its existence to itself. A man who lives by grace of another considers himself a dependent being. But I live completely by grace of another when I owe him not only the maintenance of my life but when he has also created my lie, when he is the source of my life. And my life necessarily has such a ground outside itself if it is not my own creation." (Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings, e*d. David McLellan, 2nd. ed. (Oxford: Oxford, 2000), 94 in Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Zondervan, 2005)*,* 34-5).

[73] Daly and Cobb, 13.

and Cobb stress that when it comes to ecological implications the two systems simply disagree one which one can better produce and spread the benefits of industrialism.

I suggest there is no more important tasks before humanity in the 21st century than to rethink models of relationship and exchange among humans and between humans and other-than-human matter. This task is also an opportunity for religions to draw on our vast imaginative resources to construct alternate economies, communicate different modes of relational exchange, and articulate a compelling vision of what redemptive, sustaining, and life-giving—indeed grace-filled—relations look like.

With this task in mind this project will proceed in the following manner. The first chapter will analyze arguments about the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism, starting with Max Weber's famous *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* I will outline the reasons for current skepticism among Protestant scholars toward Weber's thesis. But I will argue that where he may have gotten Luther and Calvin wrong his argument resonates strongly with the ways the tradition unfolded. We will also take particular note of a lesser known connection that Weber presciently makes, already in 1905, between the Protestant tradition, capitalism, and fossil fuel consumption.

Several current scholars point out that capitalist practices were already emerging by the time the Reformation came around. Consequently, rather than unsuspecting forefathers of capitalism, these scholars suggest early reformers like Luther and Calvin were actually early critics of capitalism. While valuing the important correctives to traditional Protestant tendencies to avoid issues of economic and social justice, I argue

that interpretations that seemingly purify the Reformers of responsibility with regard to capitalism fail to acknowledge the ways the tradition may have and *may still* unintentionally support a global and oppressive economic system. A more nuanced interpretation of the tradition is needed, not just for historical accuracy but for claiming a sense of responsibility for the system and making appropriate shifts in our theologies.

While Weber's argument is too readily dismissed for historical and theological inaccuracies I argue in Chapter Two that a compelling argument is currently being articulated by proponents of Radical Orthodoxy and Marcel Mauss' gift theory. John Milbank in particular argues that the Protestant concept of grace as a gift free of reciprocity and exchange popularized a dualism between gift and exchange that then made way for foundational concepts of capitalism, specifically: individualism, commodification, and the public/private dualism. While Milbank's argument regarding the detrimental effects of the Protestant concept of grace articulated as exclusive of exchange is persuasive, I will also demonstrate that Milbank falls into capitalizing traps of his own with his particular articulation of the gift that must be redeemed.

Chapter Three shifts from a primarily economic focus to ecological exchange in the ecological theologies of Joseph Sittler and Jürgen Moltmann. Joseph Sittler is widely regarded as one of the earliest ecotheologians, already writing and speaking on the subject in the 1950's—before Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), widely credited with initiating the environmental movement, or Lynn White's "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" (1976), commonly acknowledged as a text that sparked Christian

religious interest in ecological concerns. In the Lutheran Sittler's work I emphasize his early criticism of the Protestant doctrine of grace as anthropocentric and individual. His later work (especially *Essays on Nature and Grace,* 1972) emerges with insights still relevant and remarkable today regarding shifts in grace and corresponding concepts of selfhood. Sittler rejects the separative individual receiving God's forgiveness as pure exteriority. Instead, he constructs an ecological selfhood upheld by a radical sense of gifts given from both God and nature. In this way, from within the Protestant theological heritage Sittler both demonstrates the important interconnections of grace and selfhood while constructing alternatives to both as fundamentally relational, nonlocal, and ecological.

I will also, though, emphasize that where Sittler's work stopped short of fully integrating a similarly ecological doctrine of God, Jürgen Moltmann takes these steps by articulating a Trinitarian, interpenetrating and ecological doctrine of God. Where the Protestant tradition has consistently emphasized the doctrine of redemption over creation Moltmann creatively reinterprets creation as an act of redemption and redemption on the cross as an act of new creation, thus fully integrating and equally emphasizing these doctrine. The ecotheologies of Sittler and Moltmann made significant contributions to address consistent concerns regarding key aspects of Protestant theology. However, I will emphasize that when we analyze these theologies from the perspective of Anne Primavesi's suggestion that ecological reality be conceptualized as gift exchange we find that both Sittler and Moltmann return to the free and unilateral gift in key places.

While chapters one through three articulate the problems facing the Protestant doctrine of grace in relation to an exchangist eco/nomic reality, Chapter Four opens this project's constructive move of articulating a theology of grace that while remaining recognizably Protestant does not revert to or idealize the free, unilateral gift. Chapter Four will approach this task with key support from other Protestant theologies engaged in and responding to Gift theory. There have been many and various responses to John Milbank's gift-exchange and condemnation of the free gift. In introducing some of these responses we will note a consistent tendency again to revert to the gift as a unilateral gesture—even among those who emphasize that some kind of exchange is central to a Protestant theology of grace. However, we will also build off of important insights from these theologians in order to construct a sense of gift that is unconditioned in that it does not circle back to the giver and yet does not exclude continual exchange.

A key insight will emerge in Finnish Lutheran Risto Saarinen and Danish Lutheran Niels Henrick Gregersen's introduction of the differences between unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral gifting. Building on this distinction I will argue that despite their opposing concepts of gift Mauss, Milbank, and Derrida all assume a bilateral gift structure—that is, a model of gifting between a giver and receiver. This gifting structure, and not the non-circular or unconditioned gift in itself, creates an opposition between the non-circular gift and exchange. It also assumes a Newtonian sense of linear causality. The ecologically multilateral gift which Primavesi and Sittler's models seem to intuit, however, can account for non-linear causality while providing a way for the gift to not

necessarily return to the giver and thus continue to circulate and spread more broadly. I will suggest, therefore, that the multilateral gift would have allowed both Derrida and Protestant theologians concerned with economic justice to avoid the gift/exchange dualism while insisting on the counter-capitalist potential of a gift that may not be returned with capital gains for the giver. Consequently, rather than rejecting exchange in order to protest the capitalizing gift, I suggest economically concerned Protestant theologians protest instead accounts of the world and gifting that exclusively maintain Newtonian linear casualty.

Continuing the constructive work, Chapter Five will deal with the key question of the place of exchange within a Reformation concept of grace. While some gift theologians emphasize a clear sense of gift exchange between Christ and the sinner in Luther's soteriological notion of the "happy exchange," I argue that while this language does open the door to a fresh notion of exchange, nonetheless this interchange still, unhappily, reverts to an active/passive binary since it articulates the model in terms of traditional gender relations: Christ the husband/giver and the Christian soul as wife/ receiver. Such active/passive binaries indicate a return to a unilateral gift structure. Rather than the happy exchange I suggest that Luther's particularly scandalous interpretation of the *communicatio idiomatum* offers a remarkable sense of exchange between God and creation such that God is not only giver, but also profoundly receives from the world as well. This chapter will outline the sense in which the *communicatio idiomatum* pervades

Luther's entire theological trajectory, from justification to even economic and social ethics.

This chapter will also highlight the ways that an exclusive sense of grace as an alienable or free gift is and has been challenged from marginal voices within the tradition who insist that Luther has always maintained an important sense of union between giver and gift. The current Finnish interpretation of Luther, in particular, will be highlighted for their insistence that Christ is not just means of grace, the giver of divine gifts, but the ontological presence of Christ united with us is gift itself. Beyond the Finns, though, I will suggest that Luther extends the *communicatio idiomatum* to ethical relations so that a sense of communing relationality emerges between Christ, the self and the neighbor. Here Christ, self and neighbor communicate so intimately that they change into one another. Consequently, I will argue that Luther's *communicatio idiomatum* is also a multilateral gift where non-linear gifts are given in a network of relations and a wider circulation of gifts is facilitated.

In the Conclusion I will demonstrate that German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer extended Luther's *communicatio idiomatum* once more. In Bonhoeffer's extension both a relational ontology and doctrine of God emerge as being-with-others. As such, God is only ever Godself beside Godself in relation to the world. So too, we are only ever ourselves through the communicating grace of divine and creaturely others.

Here a kind of better worldliness begins to emerge where God and world, self and other, economy and ecology communicate in graceful interplay. My hope is that this

project might contribute to a creative reimagining of divine and worldly Protestant eco/nomies. Where grace can be articulated as a sense of being opened to an awareness of the many and various gifts that sustain and constitute my daily life this gratitude may also empower a profound sense of responsibility for the vast ocean of insider/outsiders I am entangled with. Rather than burden or obligation, this sense of responsibility is profoundly freeing since it entails a shift from the isolated self vulnerable to fear and insignificance in the face of vast and complex concerns to a graced self, trusting I belong, body and soul, to a divine and creaturely ocean of inside/outsiders. Just as the reformers intuited.

CHAPTER ONE

PROTESTANT GHOSTS AND THE SPIRITS OF CAPITALISM: ECOLOGY, ECONOMY, AND THE REFORMATION TRADITION

> Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.
>
> —Matthew 11:28-30

> To address the past (and future), to speak with ghosts, is not to entertain or reconstruct some narrative of the way it was, but to respond, to be responsible, *to take responsibility for that which we inherit* (from the past and the future), for the entangled relationalities of inheritance that 'we' are…
>
> —Karen Barad[74]

What does responsibility entail when it becomes clear our most mundane actions —commuting to work, purchasing cheaper products, buying food for our tables, or saving for retirement—contribute to unfathomable economic injustice? What does responsibility involve when it becomes evident that on account of a globalized economic system, every purchase I make, every mode of transportation, and every electronic device I rely on may be tied to the injustice of drought, increasingly extreme weather causing loss of life and livelihood, the rise of oceans and loss of a homeland, and the endangerment of entire

---

[74] Karen Barad, "Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come," *Derrida Today* 3, no. 2 (2010): 264, emphasis added.

species of creatures given life by God?[75] Little wonder we, as a global community, have not been able to look global climate change in the face—its yoke is unbearable.

This chapter will deal with the concept of responsibility—but not yet face to face with climate change. To begin with we will only look out of the corner of our eye, starting with responsibility for a tradition entangled with both the rise of global capitalism and the environmental movement. Theologian Kathryn Tanner opens her analysis of Christian theologies and social justice in *The Politics of God* with reflections on what it means to claim a theological tradition implicated in histories of oppression, enslavement, and land appropriation. In the face of such injustice several options regarding the tradition present themselves, ranging from absolute rejection to carrying on as if nothing ever happened. Tanner communicates the experience of many people who today retain affection and devotion to a particular religious tradition in spite of the fact that they can no longer claim that theirs is the most true, the most ethical, or the most influential. Regardless, the tradition remains mysteriously, but undeniably, *theirs*. Most cannot speak of clear rational reasons for their continued allegiance but may articulate a powerful sense of being claimed or grasped by a tradition, inexplicably captivated by the tradition's ghosts. When, as Tanner writes, "one simply finds oneself believing as one

---

[75] Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda "The pernicious power of structural violence is its ability to remain invisible or ignored by those who perpetuate it or benefit from it. Three factors render it so readily ignored. In contrast to direct violence, structural violence is: generally not criminalized, a process not an event, cannot be traced back to an individual, but rather involves many people, disconnected from each other, who may be unaware of the systemic impact of their actions and who may not be responsible for the decisions that shape their actions. To illustrate, my driving a gas-fueled car to work is legal, happens over time, and is connected to the countless people who work in the automotive and oil industries or drive cars, yet are not responsible for the decisions that have created a culture and infrastructure of automobile dependence." ("Climate Change as Climate Debt: Forging a Just Future," 11-12). See also her *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Economic-Ecological Vocation*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013).

does despite the horrible history of actions perpetuated in the name of those beliefs," one need not choose between either rejection of the tradition or blindness to the counter-ghosts of the oppressed, marginalized, raped, impoverished, and underrepresented who cry out for justice. One may also feel compelled, propelled by hope, to find alternate ways to embody the tradition so that these are demonstrated—or made not to be the "necessary effects" of one's inheritance.[76]

Physicist Karen Barad's use of the verb "entangle" also suggests that even beyond any inexplicable sense of regard for a tradition one may remain yoked with a sense of responsibility to a tradition that—whether or not we accept it—remains our inheritance. Regarding a tradition as an inheritance might also suggest that one way to be faithful *to* a tradition might be working out a way to take responsibility *for* it. On the one hand, a tradition commonly calls for faithfulness to a central message, revered leaders, and original texts. On the other hand, for a tradition to retain the igniting spark of a movement, it seems we must strive just as ardently to be responsible *for* it as we do to remain faithful *to* it.

Here—in the entanglements of inheritance and responsibility—we open into a conversation already over a century in the making about the Reformation tradition and the rise, perpetuation, and explosive growth of global economic systems. Beginning with the famous Weberian thesis on the spirit of capitalism and the Protestant tradition, this chapter will then contrast Weber's interpretation with a recent proliferation of

---

[76] Kathryn Tanner, *Politics of God: Christian Theologies and Social Justice* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), ix.

Reformation scholars who argue that Luther and Calvin offer liberating alternatives—particularly for the poor and oppressed—to capitalistic practices. Such critiques of consumer culture and capitalism are not uncommon in Christian scholarly circles. And yet, they frequently do not adequately examine or acknowledge the ways the tradition has shaped and may be continuing to support the values and ideals on which globalized neoliberal capitalism depends. I will argue that Christians must *both* account for unwelcome ghosts reminding us of the tradition's giving rise to the system of global capital *and* welcome or seek out ghosts in the tradition with a certain prophetic ability to propose alternatives. We live in complex times and the scale of the challenges facing us in both income disparity and climate change compel us to recognize that no one—and no one tradition—can be purified of responsibility for creating the conditions we now face and thereby be excused from putting the influence of the protesting movement behind a push toward sustainable eco/nomies.

A light cloak turned iron yoke

> The Puritans *wanted* to be men of the calling—we, on the other hand, *must be.* For when asceticism moved out of the monastic cells and into working life, and began to dominate innerworldly morality, it helped to build that mighty cosmos of the modern economic order (which is bound to the technical and economic conditions of mechanical and machine production). Today this mighty cosmos determines with overwhelming coercion, the style of life *not only* of those directly involved in business but of every individual who is born into this mechanism, *and may well continue to do so until the day that the last ton of fossil fuel has been consumed*... [C]oncern for outward possessions should sit lightly on the shoulders of [the] saints 'like a thin cloak which can be thrown off at any

> time.' But fate decreed that the cloak should become a shell as hard as steel."
>
> —Max Weber[77]

The legacy of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* indefatigably endures. Toward the end of the twentieth century, nearly a hundred years after it was first published in 1905, the International Sociological Association and New York's Public Library included it their lists of the most significant books of the century[78]—remarkable, given the original publication of the book was met with criticism over historical arguments and continues to be followed by many alternative and more current theories about the beginnings of capitalism. The fact remains, however, that Weber seems to have tapped into an uncomfortable but none-the-less resonant truth—still today referenced in common parlance as "the Protestant work ethic"—to describe something unique about the Protestant inheritance and its now global economic impact.

Raised with a dominating, nominally Lutheran, father and a devout Calvinist mother, Weber's academic talents were recognized early in his life and he had a number of years of impressive academic productivity before penning his most famous work. At the height of his career in 1897, however, his productivity broke down along with his mental health. In letters to his wife Marianne he describes what many today would recognize as the all too familiar symptoms of "the Protestant work ethic": a drive to

---

[77] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism and Other Writings,* trans. and ed. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 120-1.

[78] Kaelber, Lutz, "Max Weber's Protestant Ethic in the 21st Century," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 16.1 (2002): 133-146.

produce, like an inner treadmill so consuming that he had trouble getting peace.[79] In her biography of her husband Marrianne Weber confirms that his illness was the result of long term incessant overwork.[80] After several attempts year after year to find rest from his driving work ethic in tranquil travel destinations during academic breaks his condition worsened until his productive drive broke down. Eventually he lost the ability to sleep, read, write, teach, or generally work.

After about five years and time in a sanitarium Weber regained health. When he returned to his academic work, however, his research showed a marked shift. Sociologist Ivan Szelenyi notes that "[b]efore the nervous breakdown, Weber is an [enthusiastic] pro-capitalist and pro-liberal. His major concern before 1897 is what blocks the development in the eastern part of Germany, and how those forces which block the development of capitalism can be overcome. He's very much a liberal in the sense of Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill."[81] After his breakdown his first major work, *Protestant Ethic* and t*he Spirit of Capitalism,* reveals a new ambiguity in his fascination with capitalism.[82] His interest in the question of what prohibited or supported the proliferation and productivity

---

[79] Marrianne Weber, *Max Weber: A Biography by Marianne Weber,* trans. Harry Zohn (John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1975).

[80] In spite of Marrianne Weber's comments correlating Max's illness with overwork, Ivan Szelenyi attributes his mental breakdown to his complicated relationship with his father, an explosive fight between the two, and his father's death shortly after their fight and before any reconciliation. Ivan Szelenyi, "Weber on Protestantism and Capitalism," Yale University Open Courses, SOCY-151: Foundations of Modern Social Theory, Lecture 16 (Oct 27, 2009), http://oyc.yale.edu/sociology/socy-151/lecture-16, accessed, 6/23/15.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Szelenyi reminds us, "He would always say that capitalism is the only viable system we can live in; modernity has no alternative. But he's beginning increasingly to show the downside of this modernity," Ibid.

of capitalism remains, but after the driving force of his work ethic led to a break in his ability to remain productive—or even present—in society his work reflects the ambiguity of the light cloak turned steel yoke.

Weber's preoccupation with capitalism was not unique or original in his time, but should be situated among a mass of contemporary scholars theorizing about the beginnings of capitalism.[83] Even an historical link between capitalism and Protestantism was not new. The original aspect of Weber's thesis was that capitalism functions as anything but a bloodless or sterile set of official policies. Where Marx argued material economic conditions led to capitalism, Weber argued it owed its genesis not only to economic conditions but to social and religious conditions as well.[84] He was not seeking to substitute an idealist for a materialist interpretation of history, but argued material economic factors were just one of many other independent factors that interacted to create capitalism.[85] Another unique aspect of Weber's thesis was that where other scholars placed the burden (or privilege) of initiating capitalism with the Lutheran tradition, Weber argued that this tradition was too socially conservative to inspire such a societal shift. Capitalism needed a religion that could transform society—this ambiguous honor he grants to Calvinism.

Rather than historical causation connecting capitalism and the Reformation tradition, Weber writes of unintended consequences. Noting the conditions for capitalism

---

[83] Gianfranco Poggi, *Weber: A Short Introduction* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006), 64.

[84] See Rosemary Crompton, *Class and Stratification*, Third Ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2008), 34.

[85] Both Szelenyi and Poggi emphasize these points regarding interpretation.

were not explicit or even consistent with Reformation ideals, he suggests these ideals added to a certain spirit, ideology, or worldview that contributed to capitalism. Weber describes the relation between the material and ideal conditions as an "elective affinity."[86] One did not originate in the other, but their interaction prepared the necessary conditions for capitalism.

Weber also differed from other similarly situated theorists by proposing that the answer to such questions lay not with certain influential or forward thinking individuals but with a group or community ethos created by religious morals and ideals.[87] He intuited that religious views, values, and practices could make and unmake worlds, shaping reality and the way we live, especially our economic practices. Tracing the influences of these values on economic systems became his particular interest. Sociologist and Weber specialist Gianfranco Poggi explains that the German scholar "attends to the ways in which each religion describes and prescribes the individual's position and role in the cosmos, relates her to the Deity, orients her conduct in this world and inspires her perception of her destiny in the afterlife."[88] One's religiously influenced, perceived view of themselves, the cosmos, and their relation to the world and God not only informs religious practices and beliefs but social and economic practices as well.

Over the course of the text Weber lays out basic features of the rise of capitalism. For example, he argues a shift was necessary in attitudes about acquisition: for capitalism

---

[86] A likely reference to Goethe's 1809 novel *Elective Affinites.*

[87] Poggi, 65.

[88] Ibid., 62.

to thrive, wealth accumulation could not be a moral liability. The significance of the Protestant tradition for Weber was that it not only allowed one to regard accumulation of wealth as morally justified, but morally *compelled*. When wealth became morally compelled it no longer remained simply a means to sustain the daily material needs of a person's life but became the ultimate purpose of one's life. In other words, Protestantism provided a necessary link between the ability to gain wealth and a person's moral standing.

Weber explains that the accumulation of wealth also needed to be combined with a shift from monastic to worldly asceticism so that people didn't just make money to spend money. The purpose of accumulating wealth could not be for creating lavish or enjoyable lifestyles. Instead "the strict earning of more and more money, combined with the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life,...is thought of...purely as an end in itself... Man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life."[89] Corresponding to this ascetic attitude, Weber noted that capitalism needed a new sense of rationalism, calculation, and control over every aspect of life. A cost-benefit analysis needed to be applied to every decision to meet the goal of maximizing acquisition.

The Lutheran tradition contributed the necessary shift from monastic to worldly asceticism by emphasizing the importance of day to day work, or *Beruf* (calling, vocation). Daily life, not just religious life, needed to be saturated with spiritual

---

[89] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 53.

significance. This would lead to "the valuation of the fulfillment of duty in worldy affairs as the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume. This inevitably gave everyday worldly activity a religious significance, and which first created the conception of a calling in this sense."[90] Again, noting this connection between capitalism and the Lutheran shift of monastic vocation for the few to holy vocation for all in daily life was not a new argument. Many other contemporary theories about the beginnings of capitalism emphasized the role of the Lutheran Reformation and held it to be the turning point. For example, Poggi reminds us that Marx's *Capital* notes the significance of the dissolution of the monasteries for transforming all believers into monks who would dedicate their lives to their worldly vocations with religious verve.[91] However, Weber shifts this common contemporary argument, noting the significance of Lutheran vocation but ultimately arguing it could not have been the decisive shift. He explains that capitalism could not have risen from Lutheranism itself because it was incapable of promoting the kind of social change Weber believed was necessary. According to Weber's reading, where capitalism demands economic innovation and the opportunity for socio-economic status elevation, Lutheranism promotes tradition and the status quo. The faithful were called to see their daily work as holy, but for Luther this was also a divine sanction of people's economic and political station in society: they were called to serve God in their place—regardless of whether one was a prince or penniless

---

[90] Ibid., 31.

[91] Poggi, 69.

peasant. Since Lutheranism did not encourage this important aspect of the entrepreneurial spirit it alone could not have contributed the definitive shift to capitalism. For this, Calvinism was necessary.

For Weber, Calvin's doctrine of predestination set Calvinism apart from Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism and completed the alchemic formula for capitalism. For Calvin, Weber explains, humanity is split into just two groups: the damned and the saved.[92] No one can know whether they are condemned or redeemed and nothing can be done to sway or influence one's eternal destiny. According to Weber, for Lutherans (and even more for Roman Catholics) the question of one's salvation wasn't set in stone. There was still room for repentance, forgiveness, and the soteriological effect of the sacraments. Calvinism, by contrast, so disenchanted the world that these acts had absolutely no sway over one's ultimate salvation or damnation since the matter was entirely pre-decided.

Beyond what the reformers anticipated or envisioned, this lack of personal power regarding one's ultimate fate was transferred to agency in matters of daily life. For example, Calvinist pastors responded to the insecurity of their parishioners by suggesting that it was "an absolute duty to consider oneself chosen, and to combat all doubts as temptations of the devil, since lack of self confidence is the result of insufficient faith."[93] Parishioners' confidence could be bolstered by engaging in intense worldly activity

---

[92] Weber does not articulate this difference clearly and one might point out that Luther also held onto a doctrine of predestination. For the sake of clarity we might add that Weber is here noting the difference between Calvin's "double predestination" (some are damned, some are saved) and Luther's "single predestination" (some are saved, and we wouldn't dare speculate on the rest because this is God's dominion).

[93] Weber, Parsons translation, 111.

leading to accumulation of wealth: "It and it alone disperses religious doubts and gives the certainty of grace."[94] In other words, people were encouraged to take their worldly success as assurance of God's care for them—ultimately, that they were among the saved. While Lutheranism inspired a shift to holiness in worldy activity, Calvinism added "the necessity of *proving one's faith* in worldly activity."[95]

In addition, Calvinist disenchantment of the world made way for rational calculation. Where decisions were once made under the influence of tradition, religion, or magic they were now made by an objective, distant, rational calculation so that every decision involved a cost-benefit analysis to have the best returns and the greatest acquisition. Such rational accounting spread its control over every single aspect of the person's life so that all decisions were united under the common goal of increasing profit and minimizing loss. This rational calculation combined with and contributed to a new kind of asceticism focused on worldly activity. Inevitably, those who carefully watched and calculated their profits also spent very little of their income. The "inevitable practical result is obvious: accumulation of capital through ascetic compulsion to save."[96]

The confluence of these factors—disenchantment of the world, an accounting logic of gains and losses over all of life, and worldly asceticism, spiritual emphasis on worldly vocation, and the fusion of morality and accumulation—added up to the spirit of capitalism. Weber carefully demonstrates that the emphasis on economic acquisition was

---

[94] Ibid., 112.

[95] Ibid., 121. Emphasis added.

[96] Weber, Parsons translation, 85.

not explicit, intended, or even entirely consistent with official Protestant doctrine. In Poggi's words these are "largely paradoxical (or indeed perverse) effects, for they had a negative impact on the vitality of that [religious] sphere."[97] Weber notes, for example, that John Wesley grasped the precise contradiction of this spirit and its danger to the religious movement that had a hand in inspiring it. Weber cites this quote from Wesley as a concise summary of his argument regarding the relation of the religious values and economic acquisition:

> 'I do not see how it is possible, in the nature of things, for any revival of true religion to continue long. For religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches. But as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches...Is there no way to prevent this continual decay of pure religion? We ought not to prevent people from being diligent and frugal; we must exhort Christians to gain all they can, and to save all they can; that is, in effect, to grow rich.'[98]

Rather than an argument of direct causation the Protestant religious influences created a snowball effect so that eventually the theological and religious factors were not needed—in fact, could even be contradicted as Wesley's quote demonstrates—as the system continued to gain mass and speed. Famously, Weber describes how the Puritan concern for material goods "should only lie on the shoulders of the 'saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment'" but instead became an "iron cage" imposing a driving work ethic whether one ascribed to the religious views or not. Where "[t]he

---

[97] Poggi, 73.

[98] Cited in Weber, Parsons translation, 175.

Puritans *wanted* to be men of the calling," Weber laments, "we, on the other hand, *must be*."[99]

Weber's remarkable reference to fossil fuels in this famous "iron cage" quote has been generally overlooked.[100] But when one begins to examine economic issues from an ecological and not just social point of view the reference seems plainly and stunningly prescient. Not only does Weber tie together the Protestant tradition and the spirit of capitalism, but he notes—at the opening of the 20th century—the significant and ominous role fossil fuels play in this religio-economic dynamic. Reference to the unrelenting character of the spirit of capitalism and the Protestant work ethic seems visionary now even as our fears have shifted from running out of fossil fuels, to fears that our planet's reserves provide more than enough fuel to ignite global destruction.[101]

Luther and economic ethics: Responses to the Troeltschian interpretive tradition

Even today, while the "Protestant work ethic" remains widely acknowledged, a link between the Protestant tradition, capitalism, fossil fuel consumption, and climate change requires a good deal of persuasion and explanation for most people. While this key link has simply not penetrated our collective consciousness, it isn't for lack of effort or compelling arguments. Indeed, John Cobb was making this argument in the 1970's and

---

[99] Weber, Baehr and Wells translation, 120.

[100] Larry Rasmussen is an exception, noting Weber's early connection, in *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[101] See Bill McKibben's essay, "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math," *Rolling Stone,* July 19, 2012.

Sallie McFague in the 1980's.[102] Lutheran ethicists Larry Rasmussen and Cynthia Moe-Lobeda also persuasively address climate change,[103] but the message seems not to have landed broadly enough for institutional reformation. While self-critical connections between fossil fuels, capitalism, and Protestantism have not been widely explored, a growing number of scholars are drawing attention to the economic writings of Luther and Calvin, emphasizing their liberating message for those on the underside of global capitalism today.

In branding the tradition "socially conservative," Weber essentially wrote Lutheranism out of a history of transformative economic practices. None-the-less, today a growing wave of Lutheran theologians and ethicists claim the authority of Luther in their condemnation of global oppressive capitalist systems.[104] Much of this scholarship has been an extension of related 20th century debates about the role and content of Lutheran ethics after WWII. Conscious of the ways Protestant—particularly Lutheran—theology was abused to promote or passively condone Nazi ideals, conversations in Lutheran ethics since the 1970's have focused on challenging misinterpretations of Lutheran doctrine. Countering such misinterpretations, theo-ethicists Ulrich Duchrow, Craig

---

[102] See Daly and Cobb, *For the Common Good,* Cobb, *Sustaining the Common Good: A Christian Perspective on the Global Economy* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1994), and McFague, *Life Abundant.*

[103] Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith* and Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil.* Rasmussen and Moe-Lobeda don't make the argument of a key link between Protestantism, capitalism, and fossil fuels quite as strongly as do Cobb and MacFague, or as strongly as I do here.

[104] Much of this work has inspired and been inspired by the leadership of ecumenical and international councils such as the World Council of Churches and Lutheran World Federation which have taken strong, decisive positions on issues of economic and political oppression.

Nessan, and Paul Chung, along with Reformation church historians Samuel Torvend and Carter Lindberg argue that the Protestant tradition—particularly Luther in their cases (but Duchrow also discusses Calvin)—offers a fundamental critique of exploitative capitalistic practices and a message of economic liberation for the poor and oppressed. This work has highlighted significant oversights in the interpretation of the Reformation corpus and mobilized late-twentieth century Lutheran ethics in remarkably transformed ways.[105]

Lutheran theo-ethicist William Lazareth outlines a history of important conversations about contemporary Lutheran social ethics in *Christians in Society: Luther, the Bible and Social Ethics.* Lazareth points out that much attention has been given the work of Protestant theologian and sociologist of religion, Ernest Troeltsch.[106] Rather than the beginnings of modernity, Troeltsch interpreted the Reformation as fundamentally medieval.[107] He was critical of Luther, reading him as a socially conservative and dualistic thinker, separating the spiritual from the material. Historian Carter Lindberg notes that this reading of Luther was highly influential in Germany, explaining that, "The all too common portrayal of Luther as a conservative ethicist who separated public and private morality, advocated an 'ethic of disposition' and dualistically decreed 'an inward morality for the individual and an external "official" morality' indifferent to social

---

[105] William Lazareth, for example, emphasizes the significance of social statements created by the Lutheran Church in America. William Lazareth, *Christians in Society: Luther, the Bible and Social Ethics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 29.

[106] See Lazareth, 6.

[107] Mark D. Chapman, *Ernst Troeltsch and Liberal Theology: Religion and Cultural Synthesis in Wilhelmine Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 28. Troelstch disagreed with Albrecht Ritschl's interpretation of the Reformation as the beginning of modernity.

structures and institutions stems from Troeltsch's famous work, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches.*"[108] Significantly, Troeltsch and Weber were close friends and the latter relied primarily on the former for his portrayal of Luther in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.*[109]

In the late 19th and early 20th century Karl Holl (1866-1926) defended Luther against Troeltsch's interpretation, igniting a "Luther Renaissance" in Germany. Unfortunately, since Holl's work was not yet published in English during the Social Gospel movement, American readings of Luther remained influenced by Troeltsch through the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr.[110] Indeed, Niebuhr writes of Luther's "quietistic tendencies" and asserts that for Luther "no obligation rests upon the Christian to change social structures so that they might conform more perfectly to the requirements of brotherhood."[111] But Holl challenged Troeltsch's representation based on lack of textual evidence to support his interpretation that Luther was a religious privatist, social conservative, and spiritual/material dualist.[112] Holl's work inspired a movement in Germany to go back to the writings of Luther himself, distinguishing between Luther and the later Lutheran tradition including the Lutheran orthodox movement, Lutheran

---

[108] Carter Lindberg, *Beyond Charity: Reformation Initiatives for the Poor* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 161.

[109] Lazareth, 6.

[110] Ibid., 25.

[111] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man,* 2 vols. (New York: Scribner's, 1964), vol. 2, 192-3, cited in Lindberg, 161.

[112] Lazareth, 6.

Confessions, and even Luther's successor, Phillip Melanchthon.[113] However, Lazareth also notes the "fatal blindspot" of Holl's supporters. For many Germans frustrated to have lost a position of world power and influence due to late industrialization and foreign colonialism the figure of Luther was lifted up through Holl's influence during the crucial years leading to WWII as "a heroic figure...[and] national liberator of the German Volk."[114] Consequently, the "Luther Renaissance" only added fuel to German nationalistic fervor.

In the years of Lutheran ethical identity crisis following WWII evidence mounted to demonstrate that not only was Troeltsch's reading of Luther not textually well supported, but that this spurious interpretation—and not Luther's own teachings—led to crucial dualisms between religion and ethics/politics. Much of this energy has been focused on Luther's "two kingdoms teaching." Some of the major moments in this mass of scholarly work are worth highlighting since this scholarship has directly influenced and flowed into contemporary approaches to Luther and economy.

Influenced by both Paul and Augustine's *City of God,* Luther's two kingdoms teaching dealt with the proper relationship between God and the world, religious authority and the state's, and the church's relation to the world or secular culture. Although the two kingdoms teaching became a defining aspect of the Lutheran tradition, Brazilian-American theologian Vitor Westhelle notes that this was a minor—even

---

[113] See Lazareth, 6.

[114] Ibid., 7.

marginal—element of Luther's thought. What is more accurately a "two kingdoms teaching" only became interpreted as a "doctrine" in the 1930's when dualistic interpretations of the teaching became resources to authorize the church's uncritical support of the state.[115] The prevailing interpretation of the two kingdoms in and leading up to Nazi Germany was a dualism between God/religion/church and world/politics/ethics. Each authority was "God ordained," which was interpreted to mean that the state's power and actions were authorized by God and, since the church and the state represented two separate kingdoms, the church was to keep to its own private and personal "religious" world and not interfere in politics. This framework contributed to the largely passive response of German citizens to Hitler's authority and actions.

In the 1970's German theologian Ulrich Duchrow contributed to a major shift in interpreting the two kingdoms teaching. Lazareth describes Duchrow's work as an "impressive multivolume project that provides an array of documentary evidence, demonstrating how the theological ethics of the Reformation were dualistically distorted in nineteenth-century German Lutheranism both by its reactionary proponents...and also

---

[115] Vitor Westhelle, "God and Justice: The Word and the Mask," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 3 No. 1 (January 2003). Cited in Nessan "Reappropriating Luther's Two Kingdoms," *Lutheran Quarterly,* 29 (2005).

by its liberal critics."[116] Duchrow cites Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch among these distorting liberal critics. Like Holl, Duchrow distinguishes between Luther's writings and later interpretations of the Lutheran tradition, insisting that if there is a dualism in Luther's work itself it is an apocalyptic dualism between good and evil, God and the devil, and not between God and world or church and politics.

Building off of Duchrow's work, American Lutheran ethicist Craig Nessan's reinterpretation of the two kingdoms makes evident the importance of Duchrow's insight. Nessan suggests a translation of *Zweireichen* as "two strategies" rather than two kingdoms because it more faithfully communicates Luther's world view and intention.[117] Rather than upholding two separate realms (God and world) Nessan suggests that in engaging ethical issues in the world today we envision one realm or world with God working through two strategies: one through the church and the other through civil society. Where the previous dualistic model gave divine authority and autonomy to civil orders and thus tended toward political passivity and quietism, Duchrow and Nessan's model emphasizes one world where God is working for the good of all creation. Since

---

[116] "Ulrich Duchrow et al., eds., *Umdeutengen der Zweireichen Lehre Luthers* in 29. Jarhrhundert (*Novel Interpretations of Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingsdoms in the Nineteenth Century,* 1975). The pre-World Wars' extension and subsequent repudiation of this dangerously quietistic legacy is then extensively documented in both Germany and the United States by Ulrich Duchrow et al., ed., *Die Ambivalenz der Zweireichelehre in Luthereischen Kirchen* des 20. Jarhundert (*The Ambivalence of the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms in Lutheran Churches of the Twentieth Century*, 1976), and further internationally expanded in scope in Ulrich Duchrow, ed., *Zwei Reiche und Regimente: Ideologie oder Evangelishe Orientierung*? (*Lutheran Churches: Salt or Mirror of Society? Case Studies on the Theory and Practice of the Two Kingdoms Doctrine*, trans. 1977.) The parallel volume of the project is geared to English readers and discerningly presents the 'American Reformation of Lutheran Political responsibility in the Twentieth Century ' in Karl H. Hertz, ed. *Two Kingdoms and One World,* 1976," (Lazareth, 19).

[117] Nessan explains that, "'Strategy' is a constructive and dynamic translation of the German word, *Regimente,* just as the English term 'regimen' suggests a strategy" (Nessan, "Reappropriating Luther's Two Kingdoms," 311).

God is working in the world for good through two different strategies the people of God too are to be encouraged and inspired to work toward issues of justice and the common good both in the church and through political processes. Rather than withdrawing from the world of politics, Nessan and Duchrow's reinterpretation of the two kingdoms calls for rich engagement in advocacy and political processes, even challenging civil and religious structures when they promote inequality and injustice which work against God's strategic work in the world.

For Duchrow, this dual strategic work in the world has more recently taken the form of an intense concern and interest in economic justice, challenging the authority of global capitalism. In Duchrow's 1994 *Alternatives to Global Capitalism* he challenges the belief, all the more prevalent since the demise of socialism, that there is no alternative to global capitalism.[118] Based on a biblical model he identifies of communities of God in the world, Duchrow concludes that the church today should be a source of resistance and alternative models to political and economic systems of oppression.

Addressing the role of the Reformation in the emergence of global capitalism, Duchrow explains that more recent research on the development of capitalism shows it could not have developed solely on account of the Reformation since the "elements of early capitalism were all there before the Reformation."[119] Understanding that capitalism was already an emerging economic system by the time of the Reformation becomes key

---

[118] Made famous by Margaret Thatcher's slogan, TINA: "There is no alternative."

[119] Ulrich Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism: Drawn from Biblical History, Designed for Political Action,* trans. Elizabeth Hickes et al. (Utrecht, The Netherlands: International Books, 1995), 124.

as Duchrow and others argue Luther was a remarkably early critic of emerging capitalistic practices. Duchrow focuses particularly on Luther and Calvin's writings against usury, Luther's exposition of the ten commandments, and his criticism of emerging monopolist trading and banking companies (Fugger, Wesler etc.) as evidence that the Reformers were indeed already living in and reacting against oppressive capitalistic practices.[120]

Taking cues from Luther's definition of idolatry which includes explicit reference to capital accumulation, Duchrow argues that global economics has become a theological issue not only because of the massive injustices that the system creates, but because capitalism has become a competing religion.[121] He maintains that when the sole goal of an ideology is the accumulation of wealth, it has become idolatrous. In his explanation of the first commandment Luther writes: "What does 'to have a god' mean, or what is God? …A 'god' is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart…Anything on which your heart relies and depends, I say, that is really your God."[122] Duchrow then highlights the way Luther connects his

---

[120]Ibid., 217. Duchrow's reading of the usury writings as anti-capitalist is a departure from previous interpretations which classify these writings as primarily anti-Jewish.

[121] Daly and Cobb (*For the Common Good*), along with Douglas Meeks (*God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) and Scott W. Gustafson (*At the Altar of Wall Street: The Rituals, Myths, Theologies, Sacraments, and Mission of the Religion Known as the Modern Global Economy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015) make similar arguments about capitalism and Christianity.

[122] Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, trans. Charles Arand et al., (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 386.

discussion of idolatry primarily to economic matters: "'Many a person thinks he has God and everything he needs when he has money and property, in them he trusts and of them he boasts so stubbornly and securely that he cares for no one. Surely such a man also has a god—mammon by name, that is, money and possessions—on which he fixes his whole heart. It is the most common idol on earth.'"[123] For Duchrow, the theological implications for the church are immediately applicable to an oppressive capitalist system today. He suggests that in his usury texts Luther was primarily aiming at the emergence of oppressive practices among "big banking and trading companies."[124] On account of Luther's condemnation of these early capitalist practices Duchrow concludes that Luther was an early critic, rather than instigator, of capitalism.

In 2011 Duchrow and Nessan joined with Korean-American Lutheran theologian Paul Chung to co-author *Liberating Lutheran Theology: Freedom for Justice and Solidarity in a Global Context.* United by their appreciation of German-Protestant counter-cultural voices such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and F. W. Marquardt as well as Liberation theology movements, the three scholars move to resolve tension between a tradition of Protestant passivity and Liberation theology's praxis orientation. In continued efforts to counteract the long history of Troeltsch's influence not only among scholars but among the many believers who still today believe that their religious views have no bearing on political and economic structures, the author of the introduction, Karen

---

[123] Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism*, 218.

[124] Ibid., 219.

Bloomquist, explains that the three scholars, "inspired by Luther and others, [provide] strong bases for resisting and developing alternatives to the forces that so massively oppress and exploit human beings and creation."[125] Chung, in particular, states that his hermeneutical strategy is "to consider Martin Luther as a theologian of economic justice…"[126] Here Luther begins to shed the form of a quietistic, spiritual/material dualist, emerging instead as a heroic and prophetic anti-capitalist figure fighting for the poor and oppressed. This is a bold move with admirable current strategic motivations. However, we might begin to wonder about those unwelcome Protestant ghosts who would render such unambiguous portrayals suspect.

A historical example: Community Chests

Complementing the approach of Duchrow, Chung, and Nessan, American Reformation church historians Carter Lindberg and Samuel Torvend have similarly worked to revise interpretations of Luther with regard to social and economic justice. While Lindberg responds only indirectly to the trajectory of the two kingdoms doctrine, both authors maintain an emphasis on responding to the hermeneutical trajectory influentially launched by Troeltsch.[127]

---

[125] Paul S. Chung, Ulrich Duchrow, and Craig L. Nessan, *Liberating Lutheran Theology: Freedom for Justice and Solidarity with Others in a Global Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), vi.

[126] Ibid., 71. Chung's argument here is expanded upon in his more recent publication, *Church and Ethical Responsibility in the Midst of World Economy: Greed, Dominion, and Justice* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013).

[127] Lindberg emphasizes the impact of Troeltsch's interpretation just as Lazareth does. See footnote 35 above.

Particularly in *Beyond Charity: Reformation Initiatives for the Poor*, Lindberg focuses on widely overlooked Reformation sources that demonstrate an unrecognized emphasis on social transformation during the Reformation. In stark contrast to the reading of Luther as maintaining a "nearly monomaniacal concentration upon the cardinal problem of the individual-personal gaining of grace," focusing on the "inner" and the "religious" and ignoring the material and social,[128] Lindberg argues that the beginnings of modern state welfare were rooted in the theological, ecclesial, and liturgical shifts of the Reformation.

Reconstructing the medieval theology of poverty, Lindberg begins by analyzing the theological landscape Luther found himself in. In medieval theology acts of charity were encouraged not for social change, or even genuine concern to alter the conditions of the recipient, but for the spiritual wellbeing of the benefactor.[129] In the 12th century, for example, most authors considered poverty to be a God-ordained position necessary for the salvation of the rich. Since wealth was dangerous to one's salvation an affluent person could atone through charitable acts toward the poor. Poverty was justified as a virtue because the poor retained a position necessary for the salvation of the rich.[130]

---

[128] Ibid., 162, citing Heinz Schiller.

[129] Lindberg does not mention, but it should be noted that St. Francis of Assisi would be a clear exception during the medieval period.

[130] Lindberg cites Giordano da Pisa's 1303/4 sermon as he articulates this understanding of poverty and charity: "God has ordered that there be rich and poor so that the rich may be serve by the poor and the poor may be taken care of by the rich...Why are the poor given their station? So that they rich man might earn eternal life through them,'" (Ibid., 30).

Lindberg paints a portrait of Luther entering the medieval scene as a warrior fighting an economic war on two fronts: against the medieval spiritual economy that kept people in poverty on the one front and against capitalistic practices growing in urban environments on the other. By attacking both the theology of virtuous poverty and growing capitalistic practices Luther provided an important link between "religious and economic mentalities of achievement."[131] Socio-economic shifts came as a direct result of Luther's doctrine of justification by grace through faith, since "'[p]overty and suffering make no one acceptable to God.'"[132] Appropriately, the refrain, "Nobody ought to go begging among Christians," became common among the reformers.[133] Since poverty retained no spiritual value Luther advocated a shift beyond charity—which maintained and reinforced poverty—to social welfare legislation in the form of community chests, which sought to eradicate poverty and the need for begging.

Similarly, in *Luther and the Hungry Poor: Gathered Fragments* Torvend lays an economic lens over a story usually told as purely religious and spiritual both by drawing attention to the economic factors influencing the reformers and by narrating the economic impact of the Reformation. Torvend emphasizes that Luther's unintentional break from the Roman church came not only as a result of spiritual or psychological angst but because he started to ask economic and social justice questions. He cites a Luther one has

---

[131] Ibid., 93.

[132] Ibid., 106. Lindberg credits Gerhard Uhlhorn's work, dating back to 1895, with the basic thesis that Lindberg expands on here that "Luther's rejection of the salvatory merit of good works cut the nerve of indiscriminate medieval almsgiving designed to spiritual benefit the giver, and thereby made possible the development of rational, communal welfare policies that were far more effective in service the poor" (10).

[133] Ibid., 105.

rarely heard: "'Why doesn't the pope, whose wealth today is greater than the richest of the rich, build this one basilica of St. Peter with his own money rather than with money of the poor?'"[134] Luther criticized what he saw as an unjust spiritual economy in which believers were encouraged to gain spiritual capital for themselves rather than pour economic resources into the community where the need was great. The Reformers sought to dismantle these destructive intersections between spiritual and material economies.

Both Lindberg and Torvend highlight the significance—generally overlooked by Reformation historians—of the widespread Reformation practice of addressing social welfare concerns through the creation of common chests in communities. Both scholars highlight one in particular: the Leisnig community chest. This community chest is significant because it was the result of Luther's own vision and was the first to supplement its initial funding (medieval church sources and the sale of church properties) with a community tax when the other sources became insufficient.[135] The ordinance, with preface written by Luther himself, demonstrates how the church institution was to reflect the transformation of the justified person. Just as a person's justification freed them from putting spiritual and material energies toward maintaining their standing before God, freeing them for service to others, so too the economic resources once collected to

---

[134] Samuel Torvend, "Those Little Pieces of White Bread: Early Lutheran Initiatives among the Hungry Poor," *Dialog* 52.1 (2003): 19. Citing Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelican (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-1986), 31:33.

[135] Lindberg, 125.

maintain the church institution itself were now to be collected, stored in the chest, and distributed to meet the needs of the community.[136]

The needs of the community were many. Specifically, the Leisnig chest funded services such as the "maintenance and construction of common buildings such as the church, school, and hospital as well as storing grain and peas for use during lean times."[137] The order also "regulated disbursement of loans and gifts to newcomers to help them get settled; to the house poor to help them become established in a trade or occupation; and to orphans, dependents, the infirm, and the aged for daily support."[138] Wittenberg's parallel social welfare legislation, the "Order of the Communal Purse," provided funds for a doctor with the purpose of providing free health care for those who couldn't afford it.[139] Here also, direct relief was provided the poor and vulnerable through loans or grants including resources for the sick and mentally ill.[140]

The management of the chest was remarkably egalitarian for its time. To prevent corruption a council of ten people was put in charge of stewarding the contents of this chest. This council was to include members from every group of society: two nobles, two city council members, three town citizens, and three peasants. Each group of directors

---

[136] Torvend lists these sources of income as: "hereditary lands, supplementary rents, toll income from church-owned bridges, cash, silver, jewels, rents from chapels, benefices, revenues, stores, income from masses for the dead, perpetual memorials, income from indulgence sales, alms, income from annuities from brotherhoods, and contributions, penances, or fines paid by craft guilds and peasant farmers to the church" (22).

[137] Lindberg, 126.

[138] Lindberg, 126.

[139] Lindberg, 120. The first town doctor in Wittenberg was installed in 1527.

[140] Ibid.

was given a key and four keys were required to open the chest. Consequently, at least one director from each group— noble, city council, common town citizen, and peasant— needed to be present in order to open the chest to distribute goods.[141]

In these community chests sacramental vision informed and flowed into civic responsibility, inextricably linking the two:[142] "Every Sunday, *at the end of Holy Communion and flowing from it,* the directors [of the community chest] were to distribute the congregation's charity from the common chest to all in need."[143] Lindberg and Torvend illustrate how the Reformers maintained a dynamic relationship between the spiritual and material by integrating social/economic justice into worship. Rather than translating *ecclesia* as "church" Luther translated it as "assembly," "congregation," or "community" to emphasize a shift from a hierarchical to a community oriented ecclesiastical structure. When Luther reformed worship life it was to highlight clear connections between religious and social life, making worship the foundation and catalyst for social justice. To do this, Luther recalled patristic sources linking worship and welfare, reinterpreting traditional parts of worship for social action. For example, Lindberg points out that "in interpreting the origin of the 'collect' as a general collection and fund gathered to be given to the poor, Luther may have been aware of patristic sources that linked worship and welfare. If so, these sources may have served as rudimentary models for his development of the common chest concept of social

---

[141] Ibid., 124.

[142] Torvend, "Those Little Pieces of White Bread: Early Lutheran Initiatives among the Hungry Poor," 25.

[143] Ibid., 23.

welfare."[144] By linking the liturgical 'collect' (typically the prayers of the church) with a collection for a community chest, Luther consciously linked liturgical and social reforms.

Beyond the prayers, Luther explicitly aimed to connect the Eucharist to social welfare, exhorting:

> 'When you have partaken of this sacrament [of the altar], you must in turn share the misfortunes of the fellowship...Here your heart must go out in love and learn that this is a sacrament of love. As love and support are given you, you in turn must render love and support to Christ in his needy ones. You must feel with sorrow all the misery of Christendom, all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing. You must fight, work, pray and ...have heartfelt sympathy...For here the saying of Paul is fulfilled, 'Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ' (Gal 6:2).[145]

Where the Eucharist had been turned into a "'mere merchandise, a market, and a profit-making business'"[146] where one could obtain "more 'graces,'" Luther shifted sacramental practice and Christian theology from one chest to another: from the indulgence chest to the common chest.[147] For Luther, this was not merely an individual responsibility, but involved a new form of being in relationship: "'You must take to heart the infirmities and needs of others as if they were your own. Then offer to others your strength, as if it were

---

[144] For example Luther interpreted the 'collect' "as a general collection and fund gathered to be given to the poor" (Lindberg, 103).

[145] Torvend, "Little Pieces," 25.

[146] Torvend, *Luther and the Hungry Poor: Gathered Fragments* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 102.

[147] "Indeed, if Luther's initial alarm over the sale of indulgences by 'indulgence preachers' focused on the 'coin ringing in the [indulgence] chest,' his often treacherous path to reform focused on another chest, this 'common' chest, in which money and goods would be collected through taxation and donation, for the good of the most needy here on earth. The shift between the two 'chests' would be decisive in theology, sacramental practice, and social ethics," (Torvend, "Those Little Pieces of White Bread," 23).

their own, just as Christ does for you in the sacrament. This is what it means to change into one another through love to lose one's own form and take on that which is common to all.'"[148]

For the most part, interpretations of the Lutheran tradition have not recognized the remarkable implications of this porous sense of self: one self flowing into another through love and likewise justification flowing into justice. Despite being "an indispensable resource for evaluating the social effect of Reformation theology,"[149] and a widespread practice during that period, church orders instituting these practices and liturgical reforms have been generally overlooked by historians to the detriment of the reputation and development of the Reformation tradition. By reclaiming these founding documents as important sources for understanding the Reformation movement the disjunction between the social economic vision articulated in these documents and interpretations of Reformer maintaining a "nearly monomaniacal concentration upon… individual-personal gaining of grace" becomes clear.[150]

Inheriting the yoke of the past and the future

These Lutheran ethicists, theologians, and historians all highlight consistent and tragic misinterpretations and mis-representations of the Protestant tradition. Not only an issue of perception from outside the tradition, these readings fundamentally influence the ways in which the tradition come to be embodied in the world. Following Karl Holl in

---

[148] Luther in Torvend, *Luther and the Hungry Poor*, 126.

[149] Lindberg, 161.

[150] Lindberg, 162, citing Heins Schilling.

going back to reread Luther himself and drawing upon new or overlooked sources to reexamine the extent to which Luther and other reformers attempted and were successful at transforming society, they persuasively demonstrate that a focus on individualism and personal gaining grace with disregard for social, economic, and political systems of injustice cannot be maintained.

In reframing the Reformation story—pulling away from personalism and individualism toward the social, communal, and economic—the value of this scholarship is not to be underestimated. In the face of global income inequality and climate change these scholars disrupt a certain determinism from within a tradition, stuck in codified conceptions of what it means to be Protestant, by demonstrating that viable alternatives from within the tradition exist so other ways of embodying the tradition are possible.

Yet I fear the portrait of Martin Luther emerging in the midst of defensive counters to a dominant Troeltschian reading echo Holl's work in another way: Luther has become a rather unambiguous heroic liberator of the socially, economically, and spiritually oppressed. William Lazareth noted the historical ways the heroic Luther figure has, in the past, turned ugly. Luther's ungraceful reaction to the peasants in the Peasant War which led to the death of around 100,000 of the poorest members of society, no matter his motivation, should at least be cause for an acknowledgement of the ambiguity of Luther and his tradition's socio-economic implications. And while we need not worry in the American context about the joining of nationalistic zeal and Lutheran pride (the influence of the Lutheran church is not nearly so broad in 21st century US as in 20th

century Germany), I fear that by portraying Luther purely as a liberative and heroic figure, we may also blind ourselves to the perilous possibility that we perpetuate the very practices we condemn.[151] If we are condemning purely economic systems and practices (as the above scholars mainly do) it is easier to maintain morally pure ground because the Reformer's rhetoric is aimed at greed which is easily relegated to the sin of the wealthy, the "one percent." Adding ecological concerns—particularly global climate change—to our economic critiques dramatically shifts the question of responsibility since most everyone depends in basic ways on fossil fuel-based energy production—the extent to which the reformers could never have conceived. This is not to say all bear equal responsibility, but I would argue that climate change is a sufficiently urgent and complex problem to call for a significant shift in the way issues of economic and ecological justice are dealt with in the Protestant tradition. The urgency and complexity of factors around climate change make portraying Luther as a social justice anti-capitalist hero problematic. If we do not also take note of the ways the Protestant tradition has contributed—even unintentionally or in a distorted form—to the conditions we now find ourselves in we may find that our narratives of the Protestant tradition absolve us of responsibility by allowing us to claim that we've been blameless—outside the circle of liability—from the beginning.

---

[151] Lazareth notes the "fatal blindspot" of Holl's supporters: For many Germans frustrated to have lost a position of world power and influence due to late industrialization and foreign colonialism the figure of Luther was lifted up through Holl's influence during the crucial years leading to WWII as "a heroic figure... [and] national liberator of the German Volk." Consequently, Holl's "Luther Renaissance" only added fuel to German nationalistic fervor (Lazareth, 7).

In the next chapter I will supplement the work outlined here, highlighting the current ecological justice and anti-capitalist implications of Luther's work, by demonstrating that the Protestant tradition today finds itself in an ambiguous position with regard to the rise and perpetuation of global neoliberal capitalism. For now, it is important to emphasize that when defensiveness and arguing from positions of purity become problematic a more subtle and complex approach becomes necessary. Here we can build off of the ambiguities Weber maintains to develop a nuanced approach to questions of the Protestant tradition, economy and ecology.

The strength in Weber's argument and its persuasive potential for today lies in his avoidance of a direct or linear causal argument, pointing instead to the power of religious ideals to make and unmake worlds which may endure to shape economic practices even after the religious characteristics have widely been dismissed. Duchrow and others do well to point out their interpretation of Calvin and Luther as early capitalist critics. These points are indeed an important inspiration for Protestant practices of resistance today. But in the push to overturn Troeltsch's misinterpretations, Weber's insight into a certain affinity between the Protestant tradition, capitalism and fossil fuels has been disregarded as well.[152] Weber rejected the common thesis of the day that Lutheranism led to capitalism because the tradition didn't allow for social transformation: Luther essentially

[152] Duchrow does concede what we have above identified as Weber's more explicit argument that the effects of the Reformation on capitalism were not causal but unintended. Echoing Weber, Duchrow adds, "it is in the dimension of anthropology that the Reformation had unintended effects, supporting capitalist developments. While Luther intentionally rejected early capitalism…his early concentration on the justification of the individual person by faith led to an unintentional reinforcement of bourgeois individualism." (Duchrow, "Property, Money, Economics and Empires," in *Liberating Lutheran Theology,* 167). In light of the urgency of climate change, however, in my estimation even these unintentional effects need to be given more attention than Duchrow does as vulnerabilities within the Reformation tradition.

preserved the *status quo* in his emphasis on Christian vocation in the world. In the larger scope of Weber's argument, rejecting his thesis because it misinterprets Luther is short sighted for any Lutheran scholar critical of capitalism. In this context, arguing that Luther's theology does in fact allow for social transformation turns into a double edged sword. If Lutheranism is not quietist and can lead to social change this only means that Lutheranism contributed to the rise of capitalism just as much as Calvinism. Whether we agree with Weber's historical interpretation or not, the thesis demands attention.

Rather than dismissing Weber, I'd argue that William Lazareth's approach to the legacy of Troeltsch also applies to Weber. "Troeltsch is still a force to be reckoned with, and rightly so," he argues. "Even many of those who have shown him to be completely mistaken about Luther's ethics have had to admit that he was often absolutely right about the reaction ethics of nineteenth-century German Lutheranism."[153] Weber, like Troeltsch, may not have gotten Luther right, but he is often absolutely right about Lutheranism and the ways the Lutheran tradition has been embodied in the world.

Responsibility to *and* for *a tradition*

In spite of wide-spread decline in US mainline Protestant churches the Protestant ethic still has sway over our social consciousness. At the turn of the 20th century Weber's link between the idealization of wealth accumulation and the mass consumption of fossil fuels can only be called prophetic. His narrative of unintended consequences and elective affinities retains a compelling and even prescient edge because it points to vulnerabilities

---

[153] Lazareth, 4.

in the Protestant theological tradition that have found resonance with what have become ecologically and socially oppressive forces.[154]

Such intense ambiguities call for a more complex account of the relation between the reformation trajectory and current eco/nomic concerns. Political theorist William Connolly, for example, also takes a non-linear causal approach to the question of Protestantism and capitalism. Focusing particularly on Evangelical Protestantism in American politics and media, Connolly argues that their complex interactions cannot be explained by arguments of causation but by a certain "resonance" among them. Where causality implies "relations of dependence between separate factors," resonance, by contrast, suggests "energized complexities of mutual imbrication and inter involvement in which heretofore unconnected or loosely associated elements fold, bend, blend, emulsify, and dissolve into each other, forging a qualitative assemblage resistant to classical models of explanation."[155] In other words, especially in the U.S., the Protestant tradition remains today inextricably entangled with current economic values and policy and so demands an approach capable of recognizing ambiguity in the tradition.

There are theological voices too who articulate a more ambiguous trajectory of the Protestant tradition. Jürgen Moltmann, for example, notes both the responsibility and

---

[154] My reading of Weber, above, has been influenced by William Connolly's own thesis on the present day "resonance" between capitalism and Protestant (Evangelical) ideologies (*Political Theory* 33.6 (2005). The differences between the ethos Connolly identifies and that of Weber is also described: "the spirituality [Weber] charts differs in tone from that discerned here. And he believes that once the appropriate institutional structures were installed, a spirituality no longer played such a prominent role in the system" (Ibid., 877). See also Connolly's *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Durham: Duke, 2008).

[155] Connolly, 870.

liberating potential that heirs of the Protestant tradition today face. In *Theology of Play,* a little-known early text, issued before his famous ecotheological work (*God in Creation,* addressed more fully in chapter three) the theologian laments the fact that "the history of life's reformations and revolutions has up to now revealed an irritating paradoxical nature."[156] Where the Protestant Reformation fought justification by works and sought to issue in a new kind of human freedom, the same movement "abolished the holidays, games, and safety values of that society. This led to the establishment of the Puritan society of penny pinchers and to the industrial workday world among the very people who had at first insisted on believing that [humans] are justified by faith alone."[157] In this society people's worth is determined by what they are able to produce and can afford to consume. While the Reformation moved society away from a constraining aristocracy it was replaced with a "meritocracy" which no longer constrains people to social hierarchies but enslaves them to dependence on consumption, growth, and personal achievement.[158] According to Moltmann, the irony of the Reformation legacy is regrettable: "The exploiting society to achievement is a form of institutionalized justification by works. Its objective compulsion to worship the idols of its own achievements is nothing but organized blasphemy. *Justification by works as practiced by the medieval ecclesiastical society was child's play in comparison."*[159] Moltmann's work

---

[156] Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Play*, trans. Reinhard Ulrich (New York: Harper & Row, 1972),10.

[157] Ibid., 11.

[158] Moltmann does not explicitly reference Weber in this text.

[159] Ibid., 51, emphasis added.

also emphasizes that we cannot be prophets purified of responsibility, standing on the outside of the system looking in. We are in the system and whether Luther and Calvin preceded capitalism or were in it and already responded to it, either way, we must account for the fact that the traditions we maintain today contribute to the system. Therefore, if we paint Luther and Calvin as heroic figures it may end up diluting our own sense of responsibility crucial for mobilizing the tradition through playful, constructive reinterpretation in order to contribute to the economic, ecological, and social alternatives we desperately need.

If we are yoked to responsibility through unintended consequences of the Reformation and thus maintain no blameless ethical ground to start from one might reasonably wonder about leaving space for the Christian tradition to retain a prophetic voice. Philosopher of Religion Mary-Jane Rubenstein urges the conversation forward in spite of a lack of pure and blameless prophetic ground. In her essay, "Capital Shares: The Way Back into the With of Christianity," Rubenstein addresses the "profound split" at the heart of the Christian tradition: the fact that Christianity has played instrumental roles in both the *rise of and resistance to* global capital. "In short," she asks, "how are we to account for Christianity's culpability for and resistance to global capital?"[160]

It seems Protestants are not alone in claiming a purified prophetic ground on which to stand. Just as the impulse to hold up Luther or Calvin as liberating heroes does not also account for the capitalizing systems their traditions set in motion, Rubenstein

---

[160] Rubenstein, "Capital Shares: The Way Back Into the With of Christianity," *Political Theology,* 11.1 (2010): 105.

outlines broader conversations than those highlighted above where an alternative to global capital is posed from within the Christian tradition. She notes that these conversations consistently leave out a major complicating factor: "the extent to which Christian universalism has been responsible for the emergence of global capital in the first place."[161] While many would avoid such muddy waters, Rubenstein proposes a way through: "And so once again, we are looking for a condition of possibility that might unsettle the very formation it has produced. Once again we are heading for a deconstruction."[162] One need not be well versed in the details of deconstruction to grasp Rubenstein's point: when there is no pure ground on which to stand, when you are up to your neck in a system that you helped create but now constricts, threatening to cut off the breath of life, you look for a place to trouble the system *from within*.

This may be shaky ground—surely not a foundation—and so will entice our prophetic voices to remain nimble, astute, playful, and even graceful.[163] Calling on the deconstructive work of Jean-Luc Nancy, Rubenstein suggests prophetic space resides with the unrealized potential in Christianity for the dualism-disrupting, auto-deconstructing, inessential essence of "being-with." "It is withness itself to which thinking and practice must return," she urges, describing being-with as "the fundamental

---

[161] Ibid., 104.

[162] Ibid., 115.

[163] See Catherine Keller, "Talking Dirty: Ground Is Not Foundation," in *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth,* ed. Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 63-76.

mode according to which lives and things emerge alongside, by virtue of, up against, and through other lives and things."[164] One might also consider this mode chiefly *ecological.*

As tides rise and wildfires blaze in Alaska while snow falls in Texas climate change may confront us with an unbearable yoke. We also do well to recall that the Christian tradition maintains resources for transforming yokes for the weary into graciously light burdens. Rubenstein describes this yoked reality—being-with—from a theological perspective. It remains to be seen, though, whether this disruptive potential can also be claimed from within the Protestant tradition. The task may be more sticky than it immediately appears since the particular Protestant understanding of grace seems to be tied, as we will see, to separative individualism, commodification, an active/passive binary, and a persistent return to an absolute, nonporous boundary between inside and outside. In particular, it seems grace has been, and continues to be, defined in opposition to exchanges associated with both ecology and economy. Such definitions of grace remain key aspects of the Protestant inheritance; some would say they are the essence of the Protestant message. As we will see in the next chapter, some argue these particularly Protestant characteristics of grace also remain foundational ideals for neoliberal capitalism.

In taking responsibility for that which we inherit we may find ourselves face to face with less than welcome ghosts of the Reformation tradition. We may also be surprised to welcome less familiar ghosts who graciously empower us to look climate

---

[164] Rubenstein, 115.

change in the face and exchange this yoke of burden for a life sustaining, Christomorphic yoke with-others. In the spirit of Luther's eucharistic call to a communal bearing of one another's burdens we might yet find that just as this yoke materializes as ecological it simultaneously emerges as sacramental.

CHAPTER TWO

INHERITING THE FREE GIFT:
ECONOMIC AND ECOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Ask most people to call to mind a gift reminiscence and they will most likely narrate a tale of unwrapping a parcel on a special holiday with a smile and a sense of comfort and belonging. Gifts have incredible power to move us. Even as mundane conventions they can communicate deep affection, appreciation, and gratitude. We rarely consider our gifting concepts, the ways we make sense of them, their ideal forms, and what has influenced us to give when and how we do. The value of Gift theory is that it can elucidate how we give and why. It can give insight into the kinds of ontological, metaphysical, economic, and theological assumptions that shape these practices. We also gain insight into the important, yet often subconscious, power dynamics functioning in our gift practices. If we ask someone to think about their motivations or intentions for giving a gift the reply will mostly likely be that they gave "just because" or "with no strings attached." The commonality of such a response is not arbitrary. In modern Western society we have come to idealize the free gift given without expectation of a return. As such, most people will be hard pressed to describe a connection between their gift practices and economic practices. Particularly where the free gift is idealized these connections may be nearly impossible to intuit since the free gift is defined by an absence of economy and exchange.

This chapter will begin to analyze the ways that our gift ideals, especially including our theologies of grace, influence the ways we relate to other creatures

(including humans) and to God. This will include concepts of selfhood. As we've seen, feminist theologians and ecotheologians have long suggested an intimate connection between our articulations of grace and conceptions of selfhood.[165] In a similar way, Gift theory suggests that the kinds of gifts we practice and idealize affect concepts of the self in relationship to other humans and the other-than-human world. This also implicates our economic models since ideal concepts of gift and assumptions of selfhood play a significant role in shaping our economic activities and systems. In attending to the relationship between the Protestant tradition and oppressive economic systems, therefore, an analysis of gifting structures emerges as a key step.

As Protestant scholars highlight the liberative potential of the reformers' writings on early capitalist practices, Max Weber's thesis on the unintended economic consequences of Reformation theology reverberates from within the tradition through Moltmann's *Theology of Play.* Outlining how generations following the reformers lost track of its pivotal and liberating message, Moltmann emphasizes the "paradoxical" nature of the shift from freedom *from* works through justification to a capitalist driven justification *by* works: by labor, accumulation, and achievement.[166] Yet what Moltmann identifies as a paradoxical or irrational shift, John Milbank singles out as a rational,

---

[165] See Introduction.

[166] "The history of life's reformations and revolutions has up to now revealed an irritating paradoxical nature. The Reformation fought justification by works in the medieval ecclesiastical society with its system of penances, indulgences, and almsgiving on the grounds of a new faith which justified without the works of the law. The Reformation also abolished the holidays, games, and safety valves of that society. This led to the establishment of the Puritan society of penny pinchers and to the industrial workaday world among the very people who had at first insisted on believing that men are justified by faith alone" (Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Play,* 11).

indeed inevitable, consequence of a fundamentally flawed theology of grace. As read primarily through the perspectives of Milbank and other theologians identifying with Radical Orthodoxy, Gift theory demonstrates that Weber's thesis only identifies the tip of a religio-economic iceberg. Where Weber focuses on what might be considered more secondary aspects of the Protestant tradition (the doctrine of predestination and vocation, for example), Gift theory takes the discussion of a link between Protestantism and capitalism directly to the heart of the religious tradition—to its doctrine of grace.

Milbank, William Cavanaugh, Stephen Long and others argue that the reformers helped introduce a new concept of gift through their particular articulation of the doctrine of grace that has become pervasive in modern society. Where previous notions of gift encompassed a sense of exchange, the reformers excised reciprocity from the doctrine of grace and thus encouraged a gift/exchange dualism. According to this reading, the operative dualism then paved the way for concepts foundational for the rise and global success of a profoundly destructive (and heretical) economic system. Global neoliberal capitalism thus emerges as a tragic—yet logical—consequence of the Protestant doctrine of grace.

Ironically, the two portraits—the heroic liberative reformer (highlighted in chapter one) and the inevitably capitalist reformer (outlined by Milbank and others associated with Radical Orthodoxy)—have emerged nearly simultaneously with extremely limited cross conversation or acknowledgement. Even among the growing number of Protestant scholars engaging Gift theory, Milbank's thesis connecting Protestant grace and

capitalism is rarely, if ever, highlighted.[167] In some cases where Gift theory is engaged Protestant theologians and historians proudly and unambiguously wave the banner of the "free gift." In other cases, Protestant theologians take Milbank's critique of the free gift seriously, but often without acknowledging the economic stakes. The arguments of Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy are philosophically compelling and—unlike those of Weber—theologically sophisticated. They call for serious engagement from any Protestant scholar concerned about ecological and economic justice.

One of Milbank's most persuasive arguments is that the Protestant gift/exchange dualism has saturated modern Western society so that it emerges as authoritative even where the dualism's confessional roots would be rejected. The work of Jacques Derrida emerges as a key example. Milbank argues that despite Derrida's decidedly un-Protestant orientation the philosopher uncritically assumes the reformers' gift/exchange dualism. With the help of Derrida's logical rigor the dualism is finally pushed in this reading to its logical conclusion: nihilism. By remaining committed to the purity of the gift without exchange Derrida ends up demonstrating that the gift itself, although highly desirable, is

---

[167] See, for example, Gregory Walter, *Being Promised: Theology, Gift, and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013); Risto Saarinen, *God and the Gift: An Ecumenical Theology of Giving* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005); Hamm, Berndt. "Martin Luther's Revolutionary Theology of Pure gift without Reciprocation," trans. Timothy J. Wengert. *Lutheran Quarterly* 29 (2015); and two volumes of collected essays on the topic, edited by Bo Kristian Holm and others: *Word - Gift - Being: Justification - Economy - Ontology,* edited by Bo Kristian Holm and Peter Widmann (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2009) and *The Gift of Grace: The Future of Lutheran Theology*, edited by Niels Henrik Gregersen, Bo Holm, Ted Peters and Peter Widmann (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005). The most recent contribution with chapters dedicated to Gift theory is by Ted Peters, *Sin Boldly!: Justifying Faith for Fragile and Broken Souls* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).

impossible since even simple recognition of a gift by the donee is a return gift to the donor, rendering the gift an exchange rather than a pure gift.[168]

In spite of a pervasive tendency toward polemics, I find that the critique of Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy remains unavoidable. This chapter will outline a widespread and uncritical dependence in the Protestant tradition on the characterization of grace as a free, unreciprocal gift, followed by an articulation of Milbank's and others' analysis of the ways the free gift is intimately interconnected to three particular ideological foundations of capitalism: separative individualism (through a self/other, inside/outside dualism), commodification, and a view of matter as passive, awaiting human activity. The chapter will also examine Milbank's critique of Derrida, outlining the sense in which Derrida's gift seems to merely interrupt a cycle of exchanges from the outside. Finally though, we will examine what Milbank fails to acknowledge: Derrida's counter-capitalist tendencies in what he calls "general economy." In reading Milbank and Derrida critically together we will find that Milbank's position resonates with a capitalist economy more than he acknowledges and that Derrida's counter-economy may offer important insights of its own for a Protestant re-articulation of an unconditioned gift that is not absolutely opposed to exchange.

Eco/nomy and grace

The Lutheran ethical, theological, and historical scholars highlighted in the previous chapter have focused primarily on issues of socio-economic concern. Awareness

---

[168] See Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money,* trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). More on this below.

is increasing more broadly, though, that any economic analysis must also take into account ecological concerns alongside the social since humans are fully interdependent with and embedded in other-than-human creation. This shift, however, proves precarious for the Reformation theological tradition. Frequently, the story of the Reformation is told in terms of a protest and prophetic rejection of the overly economized, overly exchangist soteriology of medieval piety. In opposing economies in this way the doctrine of grace claims soteriological space outside exchange. This story easily slides into a general opposition of grace and exchange. Opposing grace to economies and exchange is not nearly as precarious if one only attends to economic concerns. However, embracing ecological concerns complicates the Reformation narrative of grace opposed to exchange since ecological relations prove exchangist at the most basic, sustaining levels of life. Consequently, through otherwise admirable concern for economic justice, the old antagonism between nature and grace threatens a resurgence.

Free gift without reciprocity or exchange

Since the publication of *The Gift: The Form and Reason For Exchange in Archaic Societies* in 1924, Mauss' influence has exceeded the bounds of socio-anthropology, sparking important conversations in theology about divine and human gift giving practices. Modern church historian Berndt Hamm's recent essay describing the Protestant doctrine of grace in terms of Mauss' gift theory is a prime example. Like Lindberg and Torvend, Hamm describes the unique aspects of Luther's concept of gift by contrasting it with medieval piety and economic practices. Hamm takes the contrast one step further

though, arguing that Luther's concept of the gift was innovative, unique, and unprecedented. He describes Luther's theology as a "quantum leap" which "developed new criteria for what a gift in its absolute sense really is: a pure giving without the least reciprocal gift, as is only realized in God's gift of grace."[169] Hamm is unrelenting in his characterization of the uniqueness of the Reformation concept of gift, going so far as to claim it was "absolutely never anticipated in the history of religions."[170]

In *The Gift,* Hamm argues, Mauss identifies an ancient and pervasive tendency to assume that every gift deserves and requires a gift in return. Hamm explains that this "primary religious" tendency shaped the history of Christianity from its beginnings but came into heightened focus in the early and late Middle Ages.[171] In this primary religious tendency both God and creatures are bound to continual relations of debt and obligation to one another. As such, there remains

> no such thing as an unconditional gift or grace, no behavior without punishment and no pardon without reparations and atonement. Within this web of religious meaning the relationship between God and the human being is ordered principally according to the rules of a barter economy of gift and reciprocal gift… sacrifice and atonement, merit and reward, deed and sentence.[172]

---

[169] Berndt Hamm, "Martin Luther's Revolutionary Theology of Pure gift without Reciprocation," trans. Timothy J. Wengert, *Lutheran Quarterly* 29 (2015): 150.

[170] Ibid., 139.

[171] Ibid., 128.

[172] Ibid.

Hamm makes clear that Luther's understanding of grace is "free" of exchange, "a pure giving without the least reciprocal gift."[173] For Hamm, then, the Protestant concept of gift, since it was free of reciprocity and exchange, emerged in the world and among religions as unprecedented.

Hamm does not relent in his insistence that Luther and the reformers held steadfastly to the essential character of grace as unreciprocal, uncooperative, pure, and free-of-exchange. He ensures that his audience understands that this unprecedented concept of gift was not a matter of peripheral significance or one point of reform among others for Luther but remained solidly central in all of his reform work.[174] This was also true for other key Reformation leaders:

> if there was a truth criterion of content for theology and church in the reformation of, say, a Luther, Melanchthon, Zwingli, Bucer, Bugenhagen, Brenz, Bullinger or Calvin…then it was the teaching of salvation, under the aegis of a theology of justification, as 'pure gift without a gift in return.' At stake in this statement was the very center and entirety of the Evangelical *raison d'etre.*[175]

For the reformers, Hamm insists, the gift was nothing if not free.

According to Hamm, the radical nature of Luther's concept of gift can best be appreciated by seeing that Luther's understanding of grace was opposed to the two major forms of medieval piety. Not only did Luther reject the medieval piety which outright compared relations with God to economic transactions, he also rejected the piety of

---

[173] Ibid., 150.

[174] Ibid., 126.

[175] Ibid., 128.

medieval thinkers who themselves objected to crass economic comparisons to God's mercy and love, yet still retained some aspect of a reciprocal gift. The first major form of medieval piety compared relation to God with commercial exchange and explicitly used economic metaphors of "purchasing" merit and obtaining "'eternal profit and interest.'"[176] This piety Hamm associates with a theological trajectory influenced by Thomas Aquinas. Assuming the contradiction between Luther's theology and this exchange mentality would be anticipated and self-explanatory for the reader, he suggests Luther went further, also rejecting a remnant of exchange in the theological tradition that most closely influenced him. This second type of medieval piety—associated with the Franciscans, Bonaventure, and Duns Scotus—already resisted crass comparisons to economic practices by emphasizing the radical difference between God and creation and thus the need for humanity to depend on God's mercy and grace. Hamm explains, "without this late-medieval forerunner theologically sharpening the idea of gift in the context of grace…the radicality of the Reformation's theology of gift is unthinkable."[177] And yet, in and of itself it retained enough of "the logic of gift and reciprocal gift (*Do ut des*) and the notions of merit and reward" that it was not "able to disturb the mercantilistic logic" of the time.[178] As an example, Hamm points to Luther's disagreements with Gabriel Biel who did not conceptualize relations with God as "trade

---

[176] Ibid., 132, citing a 1501 letter from Dr. Sixtus Tucher who was seeking to comfort a grieving nun, Caritas Pirckheimer, "by comparing Christian life and death to a profitable commercial business."

[177] Ibid., 134.

[178] Ibid., 130-1.

with a heavenly business partner" but as a "loving relation of gift under the auspices of God's immense mercy, generosity and kindness."[179] Hamm's point is clear: Luther's theology initiated a previously "unforeseeable and unimaginable" break from economy and exchange.[180] Even Luther's "happy exchange" Hamm characterizes as actually "anti-exchange" in that it "runs counter to every sense of an earthly economic exchange as well as of religious logic of an exchange relationship between God and human beings."[181]

Although Hamm is primarily interested in articulating the theological/spiritual implications of the Protestant concept of gift, a basic contrast to medieval economics—even economics in general—remains key to the way Hamm tells the story of the Reformation. The concept of grace as "free gift" remains pervasive among confessional orientations like Hamm's as well as among Protestant theologians and ethicists concerned with economic justice consequences of the message of the Reformation.

As noted in the prior chapter, Carter Lindberg, for example, consistently contrasts Luther's theology with an overly economized spiritual system. He characterizes medieval piety as excessively calculated and too economic, insisting Luther's theology was a rejection of such spiritual economization. This contrast was nowhere more clear in

---

[179] Ibid., 137.

[180] Ibid.

[181] Ibid., 148-9. He argues that the happy exchange is actually "anti-exchange" in the following way: "In this passage, Luther attacks the traditional religious motif of gift exchange between God and human beings, in that he reduces it to an absurdity and thus proves the impossibility of any salvifically relevant gift on the part of human beings. For what Christ receives from each human being and takes upon himself that needs atoning is human sin, that is, the anti-gift *per se.* But what he in return grants the sinner is the gift *per se:* his own eternal righteousness, forgiveness and salvation." Other Reformation scholars such as Piotr Malysz and Bo Holm will contest this interpretation by pointing specifically to this happy exchange as evidence that Luther's theology does not contain a gift/exchange dualism (see Chapter Four).

Luther's message than in his theology of grace: "Luther turned the medieval logic of salvation upside down…Justification by grace alone sharply undercuts the medieval understanding of testaments as human contributions to divine account books of salvation."[182] Contrasting Luther's theology of grace to a specific economic system and particularly unjust economic practices is one thing. However, Lindberg also tends to apply his critique to economic exchange in general, referring to the rejected system as an "economy of salvation":

> Those who occupied a civic world of producing…were fascinated by the idea that earthly treasures could in the end yield heavenly treasures. Contemporaries were engaged in…an 'economy of salvation'…In this regard, religion reflected the culture; in religion as in early capitalism, contracted work merited reward. But as Luther himself paradigmatically discovered, spiritual anxiety and insecurity are not 'overcome by calculation and installment plans.'[183]

In describing the rejected piety as an "economy of salvation" Lindberg is no longer just critiquing particular unjust economic practices, but the basic association of God's redeeming work with exchange.[184]

The "Radicalizing Reformation" movement has recently emerged as one of the more promising interpretive strategies within the tradition, emphasizing justice alongside

---

[182] Lindberg, 97. See also, "Salvation was subjected to measurement. Theology of penetrated by the commutative logic and calculations of marketing accounting. Luther's reversal of the medieval theology of achievement by a biblical theology of grace caught the attention of an anxious citizenry" (Lindberg, 93).

[183] Lindberg, 92-3.

[184] Unfortunately, Lindberg does not note, as Marion Grau, John Cobb, and others do, the important connection between the "economy of salvation" and the ancient theological term, *oikonomia,* which refers to God's ordering and redemptive work in the "household" of creation. By omitting this connection Lindberg and others retain the unfortunate tendency in Protestant thought to separate the doctrines of creation and redemption. Ecotheologians Moltmann and Sittler address this consistent tendency as outlined in chapter three (see Grau, *Of Divine Economy: Refinancing Redemption.* New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 5).

theological/spiritual concerns.[185] However, even here the concept of grace as free gift remains authoritative.[186] The push to "Radicalize" or re-engage the root impulses and values of the Reformation has been intensified by the upcoming observance of the 500th year of the Reformation. A representative of the U.S. branch of the movement explains that aims of the group are toward a call "for repentance and conversion toward a more just society" since, "[t]oo often… God's justification by grace has been viewed only individualistically and detached from the systemic aspects of social justice."[187] Leaders of the movement like Ulrich Duchrow, Craig Nessan, and Karen Bloomquist are clear in arguing that "[j]ustification cannot be reduced to being only a subjective, privatized matter, but needs to be closely connected with the more public pursuit of justice."[188] They outline that these pursuits must include social, racial, sexual, economic, *and* ecological justice. Bloomquist presses further, urging, "As we approach the 500-year observance of Luther's reform of the dominating powers of his time, insights from then need to be considered not only appreciatively but also critically and provocatively in relation to the reigning injustices that are especially evident here and now."[189]

---

[185] On Radicalizing the Reformation movement: "Radicalizing Reformation: A Critical Research and Action Project Towards 2017," http://radicalizing-reformation.com/index.php/en/.

[186] Ulrich Duchrow has been a key instigator, with leadership from several of the other theo-ethicists from Chapter One like Chung and Nessan along with Karen Blomquist who wrote the introduction to *Liberating Lutheran Theology*

[187] Bloomquist, e-mail to the Radicalizing the Reformation group, May 26, 2015.

[188] Ibid. These scholars introduced in chapter one.

[189] Ibid.

In the spirit of considering the tradition "not only appreciatively but also critically and provocatively" it seems important to point out the ways that the "free gift," which Bloomquist later highlights as a "distinctive Lutheran tenet" for its prophetic potential to critique "the works-righteousness pervasive in American society," has and continues to function in support of the economic and ecological world views Bloomquist and other Radicalizing Reformers would themselves condemn.[190] In striving for faithfulness not only *to* the tradition, but *for* it, a critical analysis of the free gift as it relates to capitalist practices remains an important, but neglected project.

Where the Reformation messages of justification by faith and grace are contrasted to Roman Catholic medieval economization the danger is broader than just damaging ecumenical relations. In doing so we risk reinforcing a definition of grace as a rejection of this world's exchanges. Gregory Walter describes the dangers involved succinctly in his analysis of gift theory in terms of Luther's concept of promise:

> The gift that has no relationship to reciprocity or what is already given cannot interact with what comes before the gift, the field into which the gift is given, in any other way than to erase it, trump it, to completely overcome and end that economy. The pure gift does not allow us any interpretive approach to the given except negation, erasure, and interruption. We may signal this problem in theological terms by invoking the tumultuous relationship between grace and nature, or grace and creation.[191]

---

[190] Bloomquist writes, "This is an opportunity to make more public certain distinctively Lutheran tenets, such as how God's grace come to us as free gift (in contrast to the works-righteousness pervasive in American society)," Ibid.

[191] Gregory Walter, *Being Promised,* 40.

When we contrast God's grace to economy and exchange in general—especially without delineating between the many forms economic exchanges take on—we continue to assert that God only interrupts, annihilates or overwhelms the exchanges of the world as a pure exteriority. This is particularly troublesome when we consider that the exchanges of the world are not only economic but natural. From an ecological perspective it is clear there would be no life on earth without exchange; the exchanges of O2 and CO2 between mammals and trees, for example, play a vital role in sustaining life on this planet. Consequently, in the opposition of grace to economy and gift to exchange the oft-repeated antagonisms between nature/grace and creation/redemption re-emerge as persistent problems for the Reformation tradition.

Dangers of the free gift

Ironically, in his most polemical mode John Milbank would whole-heartedly agree with Hamm's thesis that the Reformation played a significant role in introducing an unprecedented understanding of the gift as free, cut off from any form of reciprocity. However, Milbank emphasizes the shadow-side of the free gift. This "modern purism about the gift which renders it unilateral," he explains, is "in part the child of *one* theological strand in thinking about agape which has sought to be over-rigorous in a self-defeating fashion."[192] Milbank refers here to the Protestant theological tradition that, as Anders Nygren explicitly argues in *Eros and Agape,* renders Christian love unilateral

---

[192] John Milbank,"Can a Gift Be Given?: Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," *Modern Theology* 11 (1995): 132.

with passive receivers as opposed to the reciprocity and exchange of desire.[193] While Milbank does not argue on the basis of ecological concerns he does contend that this novel dualism between gift and exchange has been decisive in some of the most destructive aspects of modernity—particularly in the rise and global spread of capitalism.

Milbank suggests aspects of the Reformation have remained influential for modern society and economics even after explicit religious reference has dissipated. Even after religious tenets are set aside the idealization of the gift as free—defined in opposition to reciprocity and exchange—remains powerfully influential in modern social and economic relationships. It will be important then to outline the features of 20th century Gift discourse most pertinent to questions around the articulation of the Protestant concept of grace in relation to economic and ecological relations. In doing so we will find that the "pure" or "free" gift continues to function, shaping foundational aspects of a socially and ecologically destructive system such as commodification, separative individualism, and a sacred/secular dualism.

Milbank and Mauss on gift-exchange

Milbank claims Mauss as an ally in his efforts to reemphasize gift-exchange rather than the free gift. From his studies of pre-modern social and economic practices Mauss concluded that forms and reasons for exchange other than capitalist utilitarianism are possible and, in fact, remain more "natural." Such gift-exchange was always

---

[193] In "Can the Gift Be Given?" he refers primarily to Anders Nygren's *Agape and Eros.* In *Being Reconciled* he includes Kierkegaard—particularly on forgiveness.

relational, never coldly utilitarian. Rather than merely a reflection of social relations, gift-exchange created them.

> What they exchange is not solely property and wealth, movable and immovable goods, and things economically useful. In particular such exchanges are acts of politeness: banquets, rituals, military services, women, children, dances, festivals, and fairs, in which economic transaction is only one element, and in which the passing of wealth is only one feature of a much more general and enduring contract.[194]

More than just a guiding economic principle gift exchange constituted *the society itself.*[195] Milbank identifies this as one of Mauss' critical insights: that "gift-giving is a mode (the mode in fact) of social being…"[196] Gift exchange connected people—even over generations—binding them to each other through the moral principle that a gift given demands the return of a gift after a certain amount of time.[197] This social, community building principle—rather than Smith's anti-social system fueled by self-interest—drives the economy of gift exchange.

Mauss also concluded that the commonly idealized version of giving—where gifts are "free," or "a voluntary, unrequited surrender of resources"[198]—is not ideal after all.

---

[194] Marcel Mauss. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies,* trans. W. D. Halls (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 5.

[195] Ibid., 46.

[196] Milbank, *Being Reconciled,* 156.

[197] Socio-anthropologist Mary Douglas explains: "Just the rule that every gift has to be returned in some specified way sets up a perpetual cycle of exchanges within and between generations. In some cases the specified return is of equal value, producing a stable system of statuses; in others it must exceed the value of the earlier gift, producing an escalating contest for honor. The whole society can be described by the catalogue of transfers that map all the obligations between its members. The cycling gift system is the society." (Douglas in Forward to Mauss' *The Gift, viii-ix.*)

[198] Ibid., *vii*.

This emerges as a key point in distinguishing the social effects of free versus reciprocal giving. As Mary Douglas explains, given the function of gift exchange in creating community, a gift defined as "free" also remains free of "mutual ties" and thus "does nothing to enhance solidarity," rendering it a "contradiction."[199] Where Mauss observed that gift-exchange built up relationships, a free gift would fail to contribute to the continual flow of exchanges that construct the society itself. Consequently, the free gift emerges as not just anti-exchange, but anti-social. Mary Douglas explains how Mauss' text belongs to a wider conversation critiquing utilitarianism—the essence of which was the rejection of individualism.[200] In critiquing the idealization of gifting as free and unreciprocal, Mauss offers an important connection to separative individualism, showing its inherent implication in commodification and dependence on gift giving models which exclude exchange.

In gift exchange the gifts given are inalienable.[201] These gifts are inseparable from the giver in the sense that, even as they are given, gifts remain inextricably tied to the giver because they are (in what Mauss calls a spiritual or magical way) imbued with the personhood of the giver. Consequently, in giving a gift one is giving not just a thing, but part of oneself. In a society of gift-exchange a gift given is not a passive object shuttling

---

[199] Ibid.

[200] Ibid., xi.

[201] Mauss does not use the term "inalienable" gifts. This term emerged in later Gift discourse with Annette Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992)
and C. A. Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities* (London: Academic Press Ltd., 1982).

between separative parties. This inalienable quality of the gift drives the basic moral principle of a gift society that a gift once given must be returned. This principle, rather than self-interest in Smith's capitalism, drives the social/economy of gift-exchange.

Where an inalienable gift binds people together in relational ties the alienable gift can be cut off from the giver and thus is never relationally tied to the receiver. With the alienable gift, by contrast, a dualistic separation between "things and persons" is retained. This turns out to be a defining characteristic of modern life. While the separation between persons makes possible modern individualism, separation between things and persons created the conditions for commodification. Persuaded by Mauss' Gift, theory Protestant theologian Piotr Malysz agrees that the gift/exchange binary, "lies at the root of the commoditization and alienation of property in modernity." And since the "exchange of property is no longer a process intimately involving the giver and the recipient, modernity is individualistic."[202]

Where modernity is characterized by the free and alienable gift a basic separation between gift, giver, and receiver is "foreign" to the system of gift exchange. Capitalist systems trade in alienable objects that can be transferred from one person to another without any remaining ties of relationship or debt. Besides being separable from the giver, these gifts are furthermore passive, inert, objects with mere utilitarian value. In a commodity economy what were once gifts imbued with the personality of the giver, weaving the fabric of an interconnected society are now mere passive objects awaiting

---

[202] Piotr J. Malysz "Exchange and Ecstasy: Luther's Eucharistic Theology in Light of Radical Orthodoxy's Critique of Gift and Sacrifice," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60 (2007): 297.

human inscription of meaning as they shuttle between separative parties with no enduring relational ties over time. By contrast, Mauss suggested that in a society of gift economy gifts were imbued with the personhood of the giver which meant not merely the return of an object (a kind of debt), but the return of relation.

Max Weber demonstrated the ways in which the Protestant tradition contributed to the loss of mystery, magic, and the sacred in a world of commodified goods. Many current ecologically or economically concerned theologians lament the loss of the sacred in relations of commodification.[203] However, many also fail to recognize that commodification depends on a particular pattern of relationship, view of the self, and individualist ontology and that these are shaped by an idealization of the free gift. This is a significant insight Mauss adds to Weber's thesis connecting the Protestant tradition and capitalism.

Gift-exchange cannot be differentiated as a society's "economy," but emerges as a "total social fact," encompassing what modern society would distinguish as social and economic relations.[204] "By giving," Mauss explains, "one is giving oneself, and if one gives oneself, it is because one 'owes' oneself—one's person and one's goods—to others."[205] Rather than a group of individuals gift-exchange societies consisted of lives

---

[203] But what we have lost, as Larry Rasmussen reminds us in *Earth-Honoring Faith*, is the sense of the sacred. Max Weber called it disenchantment. Rasmussen further describes it as the loss of the numinous from the common where the "holy is leached from the ordinary, and the mystical is cut away from the everyday. Use, utility, and possession measure all value, just as all are relative to human appropriation and significance. The (human) subject determines the worth of all else, as object…" (264).

[204] Mauss, 78.

[205] Ibid., 46.

"mingled together" and this, Mauss says, is "precisely what contract and exchange are."[206] In illustrating such "intermingling of subject and object," Milbank notes, Mauss essentially "wrote a meditation against Descartes."[207] In place of separative individualism and an atomistic ontology Mauss' work demonstrates that pre-modern societies could be characterized more as interdependent organisms where all are tied to the exchange of these particular sacred things."[208] For Milbank, the originality of Mauss' work lies in the disruption of dualisms between gift and exchange, self and other, subject and object which—through gift-exchange—makes way for an alternative to commodification, individualism, and makes space for something other than utilitarianism to drive human lives and decisions.

Building on Mauss, Milbank characterizes the modern free gift as "strictly formalist and unilateral...as non-compulsory for donor or donee, as not expecting a return, and as indifferent to its own content."[209] Selfless, altruistic, and unilateral, the free gift emerges purified of any reciprocity or exchange. Milbank seeks to dismantle this dualism, showing the gift to be linguistically and conceptually linked to exchange. Since gift-exchange retains both "traces of archaic cultural practices" and "aspects of a

---

[206] Ibid., 20.

[207] Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given?," 133.

[208] Ibid., 127-8.

[209] Ibid., 123.

universal human condition,"[210] the proper theological idealization of the gift transforms our "given social nature which is exchangist" rather than suppressing it.[211]

Milbank demonstrates that without a primary and continual relational exchange anything we might call a "gift" turns out to be anything but. In spite of his anti-feminism Milbank's argument resonates here with feminist concerns. Elucidating the relational dynamics of the free gift, Milbank writes,

> it seems not insignificant that within romantic love an asymmetry of giving, where only one partner gives presents and favors, suggests not at all freedom and gratuitousness, but rather an obsessive admiration that subsists only at a willfully melancholic distance, or still worse a purchase of sexual satisfaction, and in either case the slide of desire towards one-sided private possession.[212]

Here Milbank highlights the power dynamics functioning in the free gift. Where the free gift becomes idealized as the divine gift a new conceptualization of God will also be required, "as a reserve of absolute, infinite untrammeled power and will."[213]

It is important also to understand Milbank's theological motivations in upholding the value of gift-exchange rather than the free gift. Just as for Luther and Calvin, the Augustinian tradition remains decisive for Milbank. However, in Milbank's gift ontology

---

[210] Ibid., 121-2

[211] Ibid., 131.

[212] Ibid., 124. Coincidentally Milbank's decided anti-feminist stance finds common ground with feminist concerns with unreciprocal relations tied to the traditional passive/active binary that characterizes Protestant grace.

[213] Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 48.

he chooses to emphasize what the Reformers deemphasized: the continuous relational exchange of the Trinity. This relational gift-exchange, Milbank argues, is a necessary precursor to the divine unilateral gift which Luther and Calvin made primary. Consequently, the gift is not prior to, but concomitant with relation in a primary Trinitarian gift-exchange. Milbank explains, "For Augustine the *donum* that is the Holy Spirit is not only a free one-way gift (though it is also that), but in addition the realization of a perpetual exchange between the Father and the Son."[214] Milbank argues such continuous relational and reciprocal Trinitarian gift-exchange remains foundational to any kind of unreciprocal gift.

While Milbank leaves room for the possibility of an "offering without return" similar to the gift idealized by the Reformers, he insists that such a gift always remains secondary to a primary and continual gift-exchange.[215] Christianity, he argues, is a successful integration of the free or unilateral gift with reciprocal gifts. The problem with the Protestant Reformation was that it fundamentally altered the integration of free and reciprocal gifts by idealizing the unilateral gift while strongly opposing it to reciprocal giving. Milbank aims to re-define the exemplary or idealized divine gift. Rather than the pure, free or unilateral gift idealized by the Reformers, Milbank argues that the ideal Christian gift is never good "outside the hope for a redemptive return to the self."[216]

---

[214] Ibid., x.

[215] Ibid., xi.

[216] Ibid., 155.

While sometimes in a fallen world we do give sacrificially, without a return, in light of the resurrection a truly Christian theology must insist that "we are always receiving back as ever different a true, abundant life (this is the Gospel)."[217]

The kind of gift prioritized marks more than theological or ecumenical difference. The ideal gift also marks the difference between individualist ontologies (on which capitalism depends) and relational, or gift-exchange ontologies.[218] Trinitarian relational exchange becomes the basis for Milbank's gift-exchange ontology. According to Milbank, divine gift-exchange does not remain within the confines of the three-in-one, for creation itself participates in this relational economy and is upheld by its participation in the continual gift-exchange between the members of the Trinity. In theological terms, since capitalism works against an ontology which is exchangist, and thereby Trinitarian, this particular economic system can only be regarded by Christianity as heresy. Fellow Radical Orthodoxy theologian Stephen Long describes Milbank's position, explaining that

> Capitalism is a Christian heresy because of the loss of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity according to which the world is created through, in, and for participation with God, who is not some bare divine unity defined in terms primarily of will, but who is a gift who can be given and yet

---

[217] Ibid.

[218] "Just as Christianity transform but does not suppress our 'given' social nature which is exchanges, so also Christian theology transforms, utterly appropriates to itself the ontological task, but does not abandon it in suspension, by elevating itself above it…in the name of a purely unilateral (and univocal) gift prior to that circular reciprocity which is, indeed, consequent upon *esse.*" (Milbank, "Can a Gift Be Given?: Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," 131-2). Milbank's gift theory does not engage ecology, but remains firmly in the social and economic spheres.

> never alienated in his givenness. Once the doctrine of the Trinity is reduced to bare divine simplicity, a new 'secular' politics emerges from within Christianity that makes capitalism possible.[219]

This new secular politics also takes on a form of gift/exchange dualism in the opposition of the idealized gift free of compulsion characterizing private life and the compelled contract employed in public life.

The pervasive influence of the "free gift"

According to Milbank's argument connecting the free gift to individualist ontologies and capitalism, more than theological issues are at stake in our conceptions of grace. He demonstrates that the Protestant understanding of grace as the idealized free gift exclusive of exchange has so saturated modern Western society that any secular analysis of ethics, ecological and economic values remains incomplete without it. Even after all theological language is effaced or forgotten the basic logic of the ideal gift remains uniquely Protestant.

The pervasive social influence of the Protestant theology of grace might be rather heart-warming for confessional Protestants if it weren't also bound to such condemning consequences. Milbank finds the "free gift" particularly powerful in modern ethics. By idealizing selfless, altruistic and sacrificial giving modern and postmodern ethics have assumed that a gift in the form of an ethical gesture is best given without any anticipation

---

[219] Stephen Long, *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 259. See "Capitalism as Heresy" (258-260) on Long's interpretation of Milbank on why capitalism is heresy.

of a return gesture. Milbank focuses on Jacques Derrida's and Emmanuel Levinas' "other-oriented ethics," directing particular attention to Derrida's famous analysis of Mauss' gift theory in *Given Time*. Here, Milbank argues, the purism of the modern free gift is taken to its extreme, but logical, conclusion, whereby the possibility of the gift and giving itself is annihilated.

In *Given Time* Derrida laments that in spite of the title of Mauss' book, Mauss never actually arrives at the gift; everything Mauss wrote concerned economy and exchange. Reciprocity, return, exchange, and debt all turn a gift into poison—the fitting translation of the German *Gift*. Mauss' gift-exchange, Derrida argues, "puts the other in debt [appearing] to poison the relationship, so that 'giving amounts to hurting, to doing harm.'"[220] Even a verbal expression of gratitude turns a gift into exchange, since the recognition of a gift acknowledges a good deed and thus reciprocates the gift. Mauss insists on a definition of gift that can only be given with interest, with the expectation of a return. To Derrida, a gift that returns to its origin erases the gift transforming it into exchange. Consequently, according to Derrida, "[f]or there to be a gift, there must be no

---

[220] Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 12.

reciprocity, return, exchange, countergift, or debt."[221] As such, the gift emerges as impossible.[222]

The impossibility of gift for Derrida renders Milbank's thesis on the saturating influence of the free gift, pure of exchange persuasive. After all, Levinas and Derrida clearly would not intentionally embrace such a deeply theological and characteristically Protestant concept.[223] Milbank's thesis also grows persuasive through other, decidedly less philosophically sophisticated sources. One in particular seems bent on inserting itself into this manuscript. The grammar checker on my word processor continues to take exception every time I type the phrase "free gift." It incessantly highlights the phrase, insisting it is a "redundant expression." Apparently "free" is here an unnecessary adjective since gift—*by definition*—is free. The gift/exchange dualism has been written into the code of modern life, thought, and economy. It has been programmed into modernity, determining our basic understanding of gift giving, social relationships, and economic practices—all without ever being recognized as Protestant doctrine. Through the gift/exchange dualism the free gift created the conceptual space for secularism by

---

[221] Ibid.

[222] Derrida does not use the term impossible in the common way—something Milbank does not acknowledge. On "the impossible" see Jacques Derrida, "A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event," trans. Gila Walker in W. J. T. Mitchell and Arnold I. Davidson, eds., *The Late Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) as well as John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (Indiana University Press, 1997)

[223] Milbank summarizes his argument with regard to the Protestant perception of gift, its necessarily self-sacrificial or "other-regarding" ethic and the ethical trajectory of Patocka, Levinas, and Derrida in "Grace: the midwinter sacrifice" in *Being Reconciled:* "In the course of this argument I shall try to show that these received ideas of the ethical, which may or may not permit some play to 'moral luck', all subscribe to a 'sacrificial economy.' …Against this view, which now enjoys wide consensus, I shall argue that a self-sacrificial view of morality is first, immoral, second, impossible, and third, a deformation, not the fulfillment, as Patocka echoed by Derrida claims, of the Christian gospel," (139).

dualistically delineating between the free (private) gift and the constrained, exchangist (public) contract as well as individualism and commodification. These are the necessary conditions for capitalism and all its socially deteriorating effects.

When we assume that a gift, by definition, must be free of the obligation to reciprocate, we also assume an ontology of separability among exchange partners and their gifts. Such alienable gifts make commodified capitalist purchasing practices possible. I can go to a grocery store for milk with no prior connection to the farmers, their cows, or the grocers. In fact, there is very little chance that I will ever even have a face-to-face encounter, let alone a conversation, with the owner of the store. I can purchase milk as a commodity without any remnant relational obligation to the cows, the land, or the farmer. This separability of people from one another and their material "things" is the legacy of the alienable gift.

A second look at Milbank's gift-exchange

Milbank quite persuasively demonstrates the detrimental effects of the free gift. According to Mibank Derrida's concept of gift emerges as the extreme, but logical, extension of a modern gift/exchange binary in *Given Time.* However*,* as Milbank rails against the heresy of capitalism and the nihilism of Derrida's other-oriented ethic, he fails to take seriously the counter-capitalist character of Derrida's gift within the context of Derrida's wider project. Rather than leading toward nihilistic individualism, Derrida's insights may be an important corrective to tendencies that push Milbank's own Trinitarian

gift-exchange toward a growth-centered economy and what theologians Catherine Keller and Marion Grau identify as an idealization of the separative substantial subject and modern colonizing tendencies—all of which would affirm the very capitalistic characteristics Milbank denounces.

Mauss' work piqued Derrida's deconstructive interest by means of its overlapping themes foundational also for Western metaphysics: time, being, and gift. These three themes, Derrida notes, share a particular economy of symbolic exchanges. In Western metaphysics time, being, meaning, and (gift) economy are figured—symbolized—as a circle; their end goal predictably emerges as a return to their origin. Derrida describes this as an Odyssean economy beginning at home, journeying away from home, and struggling to return to one's home origin.[224] One need not be engaged in philosophical discourses to be affected by this symbolic logic. In the *Politics of Deconstruction* Susanne Lüdemann explains, "In this sense, Derrida observes, our everyday language is 'neither harmless nor neutral. It *is* the language of Western metaphysics and carries with it an array of assumptions;' these assumptions are also operative even if one knows nothing about them —even if one is not a philosopher or an academic and has never read a word of Plato, Hegel, Heidegger or Derrida himself."[225] In Derrida's early work he refers to this philosophical system as "logocentrism" and describes how its permeating influence in

---

[224] See Derrida, *Given Time,* 7-8.

[225] Susanne Lüdemann, *Politics of Deconstruction: A New Introduction to Jacques Derrida* (Stanford University Press, 2014), 56-7.

Western thought has trained our concepts so that we desire presence, a center, a foundation, identity, sameness, autonomy, and dominion.

Derrida's project, beginning with *Of Grammatology* and continuing in his late work on the animal, consists in deconstructing hierarchical oppositions that result from a logic dependent on one of the following: presence, center, foundation, etc. Not only does Derrida seek to reverse these hierarchical oppositions, he also demonstrates that the favored term depends on the excluded term for its very definition. Here the favored term is interrupted, infected, or as Catherine Belsey writes, "invaded" by the "other"—the secondary term. For Derrida, the binary between self and other or subject and object that Milbank aligns with Derrida's gift is undermined by the revelation that the self (that which is thought to be self-sufficient) "is produced outside itself."[226] Consequently, Belsey succinctly describes Derrida's much maligned and misunderstood project or "method" of "deconstruction" as an "analysis of the inevitable invasions of the other into the selfsame."[227]

So here we have come full circle, so to speak, since, for Derrida, the selfsame is another term for the circle of the same or a system of exchanges tightly bound so that there is no loss, no gift given without a return to complete the circle. This is the perspective from which Derrida approaches Mauss' gift. He associates Mauss' gift cycle with the circle of the same where every gift is met with a return. Describing Derrida's

---

[226] Catherine Belsey, *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 73.

[227] Ibid.

gift, John Caputo explains, "The gift is an event, *é-venir,* something that really happens, something we deeply desire, just because it escapes the closed circle of checks and balances, the calculus which accounts for everything, in which every equation is balanced."[228]

As we have seen, in spite of vastly divergent ethical, theoretical, and religious concerns, Derrida's unilateral gift disconcertingly aligns with the traditional Protestant conception of gift.[229] Indeed, some of Derrida's language does seem perplexingly close to theological proponents of absolute transcendence. In *Given Time*, for example, he writes, "But is not the gift, if there is any, also that which interrupts economy? That which, in suspending economic calculation, no longer gives rise to exchange? That which opens the circle so as to defy reciprocity or symmetry, the common measure, and so as to turn aside the return in view of the non-return?"[230] If "economy" is implied not just in the exchange of finances or goods but in every exchange—even those necessary for the founding of relationships and our ecosystems—then what kind of interruption does Derrida desire? A welcome intrusion? If it is an intervention by something wholly other, does the gift, as wholly other, transcend the world and all exchanges that make life possible in the world? "Not that it remains foreign to the circle," Derrida writes, "but it must *keep* a relation of

---

[228] Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, 160.

[229] See Catherine Keller's argument in Catherine Keller and Stephen D. Moore, "Derridapocalypse," in *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments,* ed. Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart (New York: Routledge, 2005): "might Derrida's own 'gift' not harmonize, hauntingly, with the triumphant chorale of God's absolutely free and transcendent gift, *charis,* grace, *sola gratia*—a unilateral, pure omnipotence, whether coming from above or from the future?" (203).

[230] Derrida, *Given Time*, 7.

foreignness to the circle..."[231] The gift, it seems, is not foreign to the circle and all those economies that make up our human and other-than-human worlds.

Where Derrida gives comfort with one phrase, however, he seems to undermine it with the next: the gift "must *keep* a relation of foreignness to the circle, a *relation without relation* of familiar foreignness. It is perhaps in this sense that the gift is the impossible."[232] But what kind of bond is a relation without relation? If the gift is related without being related, must it enter the circle by force? For theologians in particular, Derrida's phrasing, while entirely coincidental, may carry extra baggage. Theologian Karl Barth's absolutely transcendent God of wholly otherness also retained some necessary relation to the world of economy and exchange: "In the resurrection the new world of the Holy Spirit touches the old world of the flesh. But it *touches* it as a tangent to a circle, which is, *without touching it.*"[233] Analogously, does Derrida's gift touch the circle of worldly exchanges only as a tangent touches a circle: that is without *really* touching it? How does a touch without touch or relation without relation *materialize*? Given such seeming congruence between Derrida's gift of "relation without relation" and Barth's divine gift of "touch without touch," the ecofeminist issues at stake here are worth stating explicitly: for the sake of a desire for something wholly other, does Derrida himself succumb to a *phallogocentrism* wherein the gift inseminates the world of economic and

---

[231] Ibid.

[232] Ibid., 7. Emphasis added.

[233] Karl Barth, *Der Römberbrief, Zweite Fassung 1922* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1989), p. 6 in Gregory Walter, *Being Promised,* 39. Emphasis added.

ecological exchange from the outside? Protestant theologies such as Barth's have had a problem with nature either interrupted or annihilated by grace. Is it also the case with Derrida's gift?

The association between Derrida's gift and anti-economic/exchange theologies of radical exteriority is tempting indeed. It is, nonetheless, misplaced when we look at Derrida's wider project, particularly his early distinction between general and restricted economy. In his 1978 essay, "From Restricted to General Economy," Derrida builds upon Georges Bataille's insistence on the need for a general economy. Bataille introduces this distinction with questions potentially more relevant today that when first written. Urging a broader application and engagement within economics Bataille asks, "Shouldn't productive activity as a whole be considered in terms of the modifications it receives from its surroundings or brings about in its surroundings? In other words, isn't there a need to study the system of human production and consumption within a much larger framework?"[234] Bataille goes on to contrast this larger understanding of economics with a "restricted economy." This economy is restricted not merely because economic considerations are artificially cut off from environmental exchanges, but also because it is a symbolic economy where space for the difference of loss is excluded and the (circular) return remains inescapable. Such a system cannot abide difference, uncertainty, or anything like "the impossible" that resists calculation.[235] The restricted economy is a

---

[234] Georges Bataille, "The Meaning of General Economy," *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, Vol. 1: Consumption,* trans. Robert Hurley (Zone Books, 1991), 20.

[235] see footnote 58 above on Derrida's use of "impossible."

swirling vortex, sucking everything into its singular aim; no room remains for loss or the unredeemed. Ideally everything finds its meaning, the symbol always hits its mark, and every investment gains a return. As Arkady Plotnitsky explains, "Any restricted political economy, however, be it Adam Smith's, Hegel's, or Marx's, would still be predicated on the value of meaning, and particularly conscious meaning—meaningful investment, meaningful expenditure of labor and capital, meaningful production and conservation."[236] In a restricted economy everything must be utilized, every investment returned, and every profit reinvested to maximize growth.

To resist this restricted circle of exchanges Derrida does not introduce an anti-economy, but suggests, as Bataille does, a counter-economy they call the "general economy." In Derrida's 1978 essay he addresses Smith's economics through Hegel's closed system/circle of absolute knowledge.[237] Here, general economy emerges as a strategy to create some space for the play of difference, uncertainty, and multiplicity by preserving space for loss within the economy. According to Derrida and Bataille, loss is precisely what Hegel's system could not accept. Derrida describes the "force of this imperative: that there must be meaning, that nothing must be definitely lost in death…'"[238] For Hegel, Smith's economic system emerged as the ultimate Christian

---

[236] Arkady Plotnitsky, "Re-: Re-Flecting, Re-Membering, Re-Collecting, Re-Selecting, Re-Warding, Re-Wording, Re-Iterating, Re-et-Cetra-Ing...(in) Hegel," *Postmodern Culture* 5.2 (1995): 20-1

[237] Derrida, *Writing and Difference,* trans., Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

[238] Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve," *Writing and Difference,* 256-7.

economy because it depends on a system of resurrection: ideally every loss is returned and every expenditure capitalized.[239]

Arkady Plotnitsky reflects on the influence of capitalist economics on Hegel, explaining, "Adam Smith's political economy was a major influence on Hegel during his work on *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*...From *The Phenomenology* on, economic thematics never left the horizon of Hegel's thought, the emergence of which also coincides with the rise of economics as a science, which conjunction is, of course, hardly a coincidence."[240] For Hegel, material and religious economies both work "by securing a return on every investment."[241] While Hegel claims to preserve the negative through double negation, Derrida contests that this is just what is lost, since no space remains outside of sublation/capitalization/resurrection.

When no space remains for loss there cannot be room for a more Abrahamic economy of traveling to new lands with no hope for a return home.[242] Derrida the Jew (who can "quite rightly pass for an atheist"[243]) has no space in Hegel's capitalizing/ resurrection economy. So he (with Bataille) makes room for some things to exceed or fall

---

[239] Mark C. Taylor explains, "Derrida, following Bataille, sees in Hegelianism a transparent translation of the foundational principles of a capitalistic market economy." Mark C. Taylor, "Capitalizing (on) Gifting," in *The Enigma of Gift and Sacrifice,* Edith Wyschogrod, Jean-Joseph Goux and Eric Boynton, eds. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 53.

[240] Arkady Plotnitsky, "Re-: Re-Flecting, Re-Membering, Re-Collecting, Re-Selecting, Re-Warding, Re-Wording, Re-Iterating, Re-et-Cetra-Ing...(in) Hegel," 1, cited in Grau, *Of Divine Economy,* 8.

[241] Taylor, 55.

[242] This language of an "Abrahamic" economy is inspired by Caputo's characterization of Derrida's gift in *Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida.*

[243] Derrida, *Circumfession*, 155-6, quoted in Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, xviii.

outside this restricted economy. In this essay, Derrida resists this particular kind of economy with a different ("general") economy, not the aneconomic gift.[244] General economy emerges as the space for difference at the margins of a restricted economy.

So early on Derrida counters one economy with another rather than an exterior annihilation. But is this the case with Derrida's gift in *Given Time*? Further into this text Derrida clarifies: the gift is not a transcendent exteriority. The gift (*if* there is any, he often adds) "does not lead to a simple, ineffable exteriority that would be transcendent and without relation."[245] How is it that the gift, if there is any, might interrupt economy while not remaining exterior to it? Derrida continually returns to Baudelaire's short story, "Counterfeit Money," as he engages the question of the gift and economy. In Baudelaire's story, the narrator's friend makes a gift of a counterfeit coin to a beggar. Derrida notes the true ambiguity of this gift of alms. On the one hand, it may have the effect of simply circulating as a "true" coin, allowing the beggar relief from his poverty. In this case, since the counterfeit coin would have the same effect as a true coin, the difference between them would effectually be none. This result, however, is not guaranteed. For on the other hand, its use could result in the unsuspecting beggar's arrest. In effect, the narrator's friend has interrupted or tainted a closed and trustworthy economy (where every symbol hits its mark) with a measure of indeterminacy which is the mark of the gift itself. Alongside authentic money and inside this economy, the gifted counterfeit coin

---

[244] See Grau's comparison of early and later Derrida on the gift in "Erasing 'Economy': Derrida and the Construction of Divine Economies," *Cross Currents* 52.3 (2002).

[245] Derrida, *Given Time*, 30.

circulates, all the while creating the possibility for something new, unknown, and disruptive from within the circle of the same.

Counterfeit money masquerades as honest currency and thus participates in economy while also disrupting it. Recall the above quotation, now read in a different light: "it must *keep* a relation of foreignness to the circle, a relation without relation of *familiar foreignness.*" Retaining a relation of familiar foreignness, the counterfeit coin interrupts, though not from a purely exterior location. The gift of a counterfeit coin introduces some wiggle room, some play or room for difference into the economy of the same. This play leaves the circle just loose enough to allow for the possibility of something new and different disrupting the circle of the same. *If* the counterfeit coin does protest the circulation by means of interruption, it will not be from outside the economy. The effects of the counterfeit coin come forth from *within* the depths of that otherwise circumscribed circulation.[246] As in a 1960's segregated soda shop counter sit-in strategy, when protestors—like the counterfeit coin—inserted themselves into an oppressive system and with an active passivity waited for the system to collapse from its own vulnerabilities. Such a *contre* / *faire* (against / doing) resists the drilling, pumping drive[247]

---

[246] In "Erasing 'Economy': Derrida and the Construction of Divine Economies," Marion Grau suggests that the differential economy of the early Derrida is an "'economy that is ambiguous enough to seem to integrate noneconomy,'" 365-6 (citing Derrida, *The Gift of Death*) whereas the later Derrida (especially in *Given Time*) desires the gift that is outside of economy altogether. As I have shown above there are indeed phrases in *Given Time* that seem to suggest he desires something that transcends economy. I have intended to demonstrate, though, that this is not where he ends up with his main trope of the counterfeit coin.

[247] Bush's defiant assertion that "We will not do anything that harms our economy," defending his position on the Kyoto agreement, comes to mind here. Cited in Grau, "Erasing Economy," 360.

of *laissez-faire* (let, leave to do) capitalization and production not over and against, but from within.[248]

By proposing a different kind of economy with Bataille, one that abides difference, loss, and the unexpected or the surprise of the impossible, Derrida is clearly not opposing the gift to all forms of exchange—just those modes of exchange that have no room for difference or investments of uncertain returns. Where Derrida claims to desire the gift as if it were "outside" economy, it is primarily the symbolic, commercial, Hegelian, restricted economy he seems to have in mind.

Refusing to recognize the counter-capitalist potential of Derrida's gift proves unfortunate for Milbank project. In ignoring the connection Derrida draws between capitalism and resurrection Milbank creates his own economy of exclusion and capitalized gains. As Derrida strives to make room for uncertainty and difference, we might also add that he makes space for grace as a non-circular gift that might just disseminate rather than turn into a good investment for the giver.

When applied to Milbank's ethic Derrida's critique of restricted economy and the necessary capitalization of every loss hits its mark. "So long as there is loss," Milbank argues, "there cannot be any ethical, not even in any degree...*To be ethical therefore is to*

---

[248] While the prefix *contre* can take the form of a binary opposition—"against"— Catherine Keller's counter-apocalypse and Marion Grau's counter-economy reveal the Derridean-influenced strategy: "To criticize without merely opposing; to appreciate in irony, not deprecate in purity," "it knowingly performs an analog to that which it challenges." (Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 19 and 19-20 respectively.)

believe in the Resurrection, and somehow to participate in it. *And outside this belief and participation there is, quite simply, no 'ethical' whatsoever.*"[249] Milbank's ethic *requires* the confession of Christian orthodoxy. Outside this confession no hope remains for an ethical gesture. Such exclusivism goes to the root of his concept of gift. According to Milbank, the gift is never good "outside the hope for a redemptive return to the self."[250] For him, this is the definition of the Gospel—that we *always* receive back, for to receive back is to participate in the resurrection and the unreturned gift denies the resurrection. Milbank draws his circle of gift-exchange tight: his ethical act must always be a good investment, continually returning to shore up the security of an orthodox self. Where Derrida desires some wiggle room within economy, Milbank is not willing to grant him that hospitality.

In addition to Milbank's failure to recognize the counter-capitalist potential of Derrida's gift, Catherine Keller also argues Milbank does not recognize his own vulnerabilities to separative individualism. Keller affirms the move toward an ontological reciprocity in her essay, "Is That All?: Gift and Reciprocity in Milbank's *Being Reconciled,*" yet offers a caveat regarding Milbank's particular gift-exchange: "Whether Milbank himself breaks out of the trap of the substantial subject remains to be seen."[251]

---

[249] Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 148. Emphasis added.

[250] Ibid., 155.

[251] Keller, "Is That All?: Gift and Reciprocity in Milbank's *Being Reconciled*," in *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to 'Radical Orthodoxy,'* eds. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marion Grau (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2006), 21.

Keller suggests that for all of Milbank's emphasis on participation and reciprocity, in the end his doctrine of God cannot abide the flux and uncertainties of life in and with the world. For him, the relational, reciprocal flow between God and creation only goes so far because of his commitment to a traditional orthodox doctrine of God. This would account for Milbank's careful avoidance of any language of "interdependence," which suggests he is not prepared to think seriously about reciprocity between God and the world. Milbank's ontology of participation, Keller suggests, only reaches into the world "as a supernatural donation, from the transcendent outside, beyond, after all."[252] With an anthropology and ontology of participation in God from the transcendent outside, material relations must follow suit. Keller's analysis demonstrates Milbank's gift-exchange lacks a truly mutual exchange between God and creation and thus reveals he is not yet willing to move beyond the ideal of external relations characteristic of the modern separative subject.

Theologian Marion Grau's postcolonial rendering of the gift strikes a similar tone of skepticism regarding the extent to which Milbank is actually willing to affirm exchange between God and creation. To Keller's assertion of Milbank's inability to avoid the sovereign separate subject, Grau adds suspicion regarding Milbank's "call to resistance against capitalism and globalization."[253] She notes that while Milbank "assumes that ethical exchanges among human agents are reciprocal," he yet reserves the

---

[252] Ibid., 31.

[253] Grau, "'We must Give Ourselves to Voyaging': Regifting the Theological Present," in *Interpreting the Postmodern,* 146.

"true gift" as divine redemption and forgiveness where "God remains only a giver, yet is never a recipient in a gift exchange."[254] The historical/material implications of such a lack of reciprocity become clear when Grau also notes that Milbank remains wholly invested "in a hegemonic sense of 'Western' orthodoxy that is unthinkable without the forces of the British Empire, past and present."[255] By holding to a pure core of Christianity without acknowledging the ways that such orthodoxy supported and was enforced by colonial forces on "native" people who were characterized as passive receivers of the unilateral gift of colonial rule Milbank's own gift ideals are undermined.

In various ways Milbank's form of gift-exchange does not live up to its promise of a more reciprocal counter-capitalist and potentially ecological gift structure. Rather than an alternative it and would merely repeat some of the most deleterious aspects of modernity: growth dependent capitalism, the sovereign modern subject, and Western colonialism. While the critique of the free gift and its connection to foundational aspects of capitalism remains an important insight, an alternative to Milbank's gift-exchange must be explored.

Toward an ecologically exchangist, unconditioned gift

We live in an interdependent world of continual eco/nomic gift exchange. Theologians and religious people are now pressed to reflect seriously on the way we

---

[254] Ibid., 147.

[255] Ibid.

envision divine action in relation to this exchangist world. Is divine grace merely an interruption of the systems of creation which sustain life in the world? How then do we reconcile this with a God who is both creator and redeemer?

In order to resist unjust and consuming economic systems we might say grace is opposed to economy and its exchanges and that in this opposition grace disrupts or protests an unjust system. This seems to generally characterize the approach of many economically engaged Protestant theologians today but the ecological implications, as we've noted, are dangerous. Environmental advocate Bill McKibben has persuasively argued in his reflections on the book of Job that in this age of global climate crisis we humans have become de-creators.[256] In this context do we really want to profess that the work of redemption is de-creational? Can we live with the consequences? Can we survive them?

Rather than opposing grace to economy and exchange the alternative is to argue that grace works by an alternate relational economy and thus makes space for incarnations of grace-filled relationships in the world.[257] Is it possible to articulate an understanding of grace that is characteristically Protestant and not a rejection of economy/exchange but of undemocratic, colonizing, unjust, and unsustainable

---

[256] Bill McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation (*Cambridge. MA: Cowley Publications, 2005).

[257] Drawing on Biblical and patristic trickster figures, Marion Grau's *Of Divine Economy: Refinancing Redemption* is an excellent example of finding ways to disrupt oppressive economic systems through counter economies—that is, though disruptions from within an economic system rather than seeking an overthrow from a transcendent exterior as she argues Milbank suggests (in "We Must Give Ourselves to Voyaging.").

economies? In contrast to Milbank's particular articulation of divine gift-exchange, Keller notes that while grace would be meaningless apart from its unconditionality we may yet affirm a graceful reciprocity that emerges as asymmetrical but interdependent.[258] A key task for us thus emerges: to distinguish between the unconditioned and merely free gift.

Before we can address this task, however, it will be important to address grace and its ecological stakes more directly. In doing so we will arrive at one further confounding fact regarding the Protestant tradition and ecological concerns: in spite of a history of opposing the unreciprocal character of grace to the reciprocities of nature, prioritizing redemption over and against creation, and emphasizing faith as primarily a personal, individual matter, many ecotheologians of various theological traditions indicate that the twentieth century ecotheological movement first began to find its voice in the prophetic, poetic, prose of Protestant Pastor, Joseph Sittler. We have not quite come to any satisfying conclusion with regard to grace and ecology. There is more, yet, to the story.

---

[258] Keller, "Is That All?," 32.

CHAPTER THREE

ECOLOGY OF THE GIFT: THE ECOTHEOLOGIES OF JOSEPH SITTLER AND JÜRGEN MOLTMANN

What do you have that you did not receive?

- 1 Corinthians 4:7

We have no ontological status prior to and apart from communion.
Communion is our being; the being we participate in is communion,
and we derive our concrete selves from our communion.

- Joseph Haroutunian in Joseph Sittler, *Essays on Nature and Grace*[259]

It may be surprising, given the contested and ambiguous eco/nomic track record of the Protestant tradition, to note that many scholars unambiguously acknowledge the ecotheological movement first began to find its voice in the mid-twentieth century with Lutheran pastor Joseph Sittler.[260] Indeed, even for Sittler, the tradition—its doctrine of grace in particular—does not escape criticism. Sittler especially notes the devastating effects of overly personalized models of redemption, including what he calls a "truncated doctrine of grace."[261] Even more than the early date of his ecotheology and his critical analysis of the Protestant tradition, what makes Sittler's work noteworthy is his willingness and ability to rethink the doctrine of grace in terms of an ecological reality. In

---

[259] Joseph Haroutunian, *God With Us* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 148, quoted in Joseph Sittler, "Essays on Nature and Grace," *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics*, Stephen Bouma-Prediger and Peter Bakken, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 174.

[260] See Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Redford Ruether, "Introduction," *Christianity and Ecology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[261] Sittler, "Called to Unity," *Ecumenical Review* 14.2 (1962): 177-187.

addition, Sittler saw from an early point the interconnectedness of concepts of grace and selfhood. As a result, he also constructs an ecological self.

While Sittler did not engage Gift theory his ecological grace, remarkably, can be seen to anticipate current ecotheologian Anne Primavesi's concept of ecological gift exchange. As we will see, this easy confluence seems to be due to the fact that Sittler, unlike most Protestant theologians, articulates grace as concomitant *with* relation rather than a precursor to it. While Gift discourse has maintained a nearly exclusive focus on social, human realms of gift exchange Anne Primavesi's work emerges as a significant exception to this anthropocentric focus. In her essay, "The Preoriginal Gift—and Our Response to It," Primavesi applies Gift theory to ecological exchanges of the world, thereby challenging us to pay attention to gifting structures and idealized gifts within the realm of other-than-human creation.[262] From this perspective life itself—not just human society as in the case of Mauss—emerges through a continual (and constitutive) flow of gift exchanges. Applying Gift theory to ecological exchanges, Primavesi describes the "essential contributions to present gift events made by 'more than' those participating in them now. They include antecedent generations of living beings: all those who, by their lives, their labor, their deaths, their vision, and their patient endeavors have made such events presently possible."[263] Importantly, here gift exchange begins to emerge as a

---

[262] Anne Primavesi, "The Preoriginal Gift—and Our Response to It" in *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*, ed. Laurel Kerns and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007). See also Primavesi, *Gaia's Gift: Earth, Ourselves and God after Copernicus* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[263] Ibid., 218.

network or a web rather than in lines of linear causality from giver, through gift, to receiver.

Primavesi and Sittler articulate a compelling vision of the grace-infused and gifting nature of reality. However, as we will see, where Sittler excels at articulating grace and the self in terms of ecological reality he does not adequately address the key and corresponding issue of God's relation to this ecological and exchangist reality. Where Sittler lacks key shifts in a doctrine of God, theologian Jürgen Moltmann adds compelling and important insights.

Rather than focusing explicitly on grace, Moltmann's key contributions to ecotheological concerns lie in his articulation of ecological and social consequences of a doctrine of God that idealizes separation and self-sufficiency. He also addresses the persistent Protestant divide between creation and redemption by reframing redemption as God's creative moment on the cross and creation as a beginning in and through redemption. Where Sittler highlights the deleterious effects of a Protestant divorce of the doctrine of creation from redemption he does not yet offer a constructive and systematic alternative. Moltmann, on the other hand, successfully reintegrates them and in the process shifts from a doctrine of God as the supreme individualist to a Trinitarian, *perichoretic*, and relationally ecological doctrine of God and creation. In doing so, Moltmann demonstrates that the critiques of individualism and a God/world dualism are critically interconnected. When God is kept apart from creation God becomes the

absolute subject and the world God's object. In this case God emerges as the ultimate separative individualist.

In the work of Joseph Sittler and Jurgen Moltmann themes of grace and self, redemption and creation, and the relation between God and world emerge as key loci for a Reformation tradition concerned with addressing intertwined issues of ecological and economic justice. When analyzed from the perspective of Primavesi's ecological gift, however, this chapter will also demonstrate that at key points both theologians revert to a unilateral gesture that puts their remarkable ecological-exchangist theologies and ontologies at risk.

Sittler's ecological self, radically dependent on grace

Sittler began writing about ecology in a theological context dominated by an unambiguous neo-orthodox presumption of anthropocentrism. The emphasis on human redemption and God's revelation from pure exteriority was so strong it verged on anti-creationism—what Sittler called an "almost proud repudiation of the earth."[264] Even those who may not have been radically opposed to naturalism were fundamentally unfamiliar with basic ecological concepts. Sittler's early students recall audiences wholly unfamiliar with the term ecology.

In spite of a neo-orthodox insistence on God's redemptive action in terms that ended up devaluing creation or opposing it to the reciprocating ways of the natural world,

---

[264] Sittler, "A Theology for Earth" in *Evocations of Grace,* 24. He also writes that he as "felt a deepening uneasiness about that tendency in biblical theology, generally known as neo-orthdoxy, whereby the promises, imperatives, and dynamics of the Gospel are declared in sharp and calculated disengagement form the stuff of earthly life" (Ibid.).

Sittler consistently constructed his ecotheology in terms of grace. He explains he chose grace rather than more obvious choices like a doctrine of creation and its corollary ethic, stewardship, because he needed a theological perspective central enough for the task he had in mind.[265] Grace, he argues, is the only doctrine broad and crucial enough to encompass the necessary scope of environmental ethics.[266] Sittler recognized that an environmental ethic had to move hearts and minds toward transformation and he questioned whether any doctrine other than grace could do that within the Protestant tradition.

However, Sittler also emphasized the doctrine of grace because he identified it to be at the root of the ecological problem. In his famous 1961 New Delhi address to the World Council of Churches Sittler argued that the general lack of interest in the environment and ecology was the consequence of an overly personalized Christology and a correlating truncated doctrine of grace. The Reformers restricted the scope of grace to a personal remedy for a sinful condition, a break in the individual's relationship with God. With grace focused exclusively on the person, the material consequences were disastrous: "Enlightenment man could move in on the realm of nature and virtually take it over because grace had either ignored or repudiated it."[267] Where Christ's saving work is

---

[265] Sittler, *Gravity and Grace: Reflections and Provocation,* Thomas S. Hanson, ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 2.

[266] Bakken explains the strategy of Sittler's theological approach, arguing that "Sittler deliberately cast environmental ethics in terms of highly charged religious doctrine central to Christian, particularly Lutheran, piety—namely grace and christology—rather than in terms of teachings that are less central (but more commonly connected to environmental concerns), such as creation and stewardship," (Sittler, *Evocations of Grace*, 5).

[267] Sittler, "Called to Unity," in *Evocations of Grace,* 43

relegated to human spheres alone, the doctrine of grace fails to account for God's redeeming work in all creation.

Ironically, the very tradition that defined sin as being turned in on the self[268] tragically justified an anthropocentric turn, placing the human at the center of the cosmos, God's interest, and God's redemptive and work. Thus he argues that the very doctrines meant to give life and open up our inward turn closed us off from significant relations and ethical response to other-than-human creation. As a remedy, Sittler reinterprets Luther's Augustinian definition of sin, *incurvatus in se.* Rather than emphasizing this as a description solely of the individual human soul in relation to God, Sittler describes sin as the incurved focus of anthropocentrism and individualism.[269] With Luther and Augustine Sittler maintains that the only fitting cure for the inward turn is the outward turn of grace.

Along with anthropology and a definition of sin, Sittler recognizes that the understanding of grace will also need to be transformed. In the introduction to a collection of Sittler's works, Peter Bakken explains that for Sittler, "the reality of grace is not simply that divine acceptance whereby an individual's sins are forgiven, but a disturbing, even violent energy that is a living and active presence in the whole of creation. It is grace not against or above or identical with nature, but grace *transforming* nature."[270] For Sittler, grace takes on a communing character of "the whole giftedness of

---

[268] *incurvatus in se*: Augustine and emphasized by the Reformers

[269] see Sittler, *Care of the Earth,* 11 and 22.

[270] Peter Bakken, "Introduction: Nature as a Theater of Grace: The Ecological Theology of Joseph Sittler," in *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics*, edited by Stephen Bouma-Prediger and Peter Bakken (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 5.

life."[271] Rather than a mere model of God's concession to human materiality in the bread and wine, Sittler argues that the eucharist should be interpreted as the ultimate model of the unity of nature and grace, the spiritual and the material.

At his most provocative Sittler offers inspiring ecological views of the human, grace, salvation, and Christ. The human is not a static being, grace is not a state, salvation is not individual or merely personal, and Christ's work does not exclude the other-than-human. By his later writings especially, Sittler's view of reality has been fundamentally reshaped so that he understands it to be fluid, interconnected, and constantly becoming.

The ecological self

The depths of Sittler's understanding of grace may yet be hard for many Protestants—trained as we are to assume an original separative self—to swallow. As much-loved as Sittler is in Lutheran theological circles it is not clear that the radical nature of Sittler's self and grace is fully appreciated. Note how Peter Bakken, for example, introduces Sittler's work in the collection, *Evocations of Grace.* Describing Sittler's concept of self and grace Bakken writes, "human interiority is affected by interactions with the world of nature—our 'sense for the world.'"[272] Bakken sees Sittler's understanding of the self as an interior is affected by exterior experiences and relations. I would argue, however, that Sittler is doing something much more radical than reflecting on the effect of the external "environment" on interior selves. Where Bakken seems to yet

---

[271] Sittler, *Gravity and Grace,* ed. Thomas S. Hanson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 3.

[272] Bakken, "Introduction: Nature as a Theater of Grace: The Ecological Theology of Joseph Sittler," 14.

assume the existence of a self before this interaction Sittler acknowledges an affect deeper than the emotional, psychological, experiential, or even existential aspects of natural life. In other words, he is intuiting the ways in which the "exterior" constitutes the "interior." In using language like "constituting" and "transaction" he reflects on the reality that we fundamentally would not be ourselves without these others—and not just our psychic, emotional selves.

This profoundly ecological reality marks a shift from separative, externally relating human agents to relational ontologies based on co-constitutive interactions. Where many relational ontologies only account for human relations there may yet be an original self that secondarily enters into social dynamics and is psychologically shaped in relationship with others. However, an ecological, biological relational ontology such as Sittler's radically shifts the location of relational exchange in relation to the self. Here there is no original self, no original starting place of pure "me." The relational exchanges do not start with human interaction once we are born or once we become self-conscious or rational. From this perspective, we might say that the self is never and has never existed outside gift-exchange with humans, other-than-humans and the divine.

Rather than the substantial individualist self Sittler envisions the self as a collective meeting point of multiple influences and lifeforms. He writes, "human beings 'occur' rather than are amidst their ecological context or web of relations."[273] No thing can be seen to exist on its own or as its own because, "things are what they are, and do

---

[273] Sittler, "Essays on Nature and Grace," *Evocations of Grace*, 153.

what they do, and have the force they have because they are where they are in a vast and intricate ecosystem."[274] Here Sittler has been inspired in part by early twentieth century mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead's compelling alternative to substance metaphysics based on decisive shifts made necessary by the discoveries of quantum physics. Citing Whitehead, Sittler explains that we can no longer assume anything like "simple location" remains possible.[275] Inspired both by recent revelations in quantum physics and nature poets, Whitehead insisted that the idea that some "thing" resides in one place at one time on its own is an erroneous philosophical assumption of modern science. Rather than isolated substances, reality emerges as profoundly interconnected and relational. "In a certain sense everything is everywhere at all times," Whitehead explains. "For every location involves an aspect of itself in every other location."[276] We cannot assume that reality is composed of things like substances that can be said to be firmly fixed in time and space and inherently separable from a field of relational influences. Rather than substances, states, or essential qualities Sittler begins talking about the self as an intersection of multiple gifts and grace in terms of occasions, as the "energy of love."[277]

---

[274] Ibid.

[275] Ibid., 152.

[276] Sittler, *Gravity and Grace*, 44.

[277] "Occasions" of reality is a term Sittler gets from Whitehead. *Evocations of Grace*, 155. On Whitehead and occasions of reality see *Process and Reality,* ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978).

Humans exist, he insists, only in and through communion since no self exists outside a web of relations.[278] Rather than a static substance with delineated interior and exterior the self is a fluctuating "intersection" of multiple organisms and influences. "We are constituted by our transactions with nature," he insists. This self is profoundly, radically, and decisively graced—given from multiple divine and creaturely others. "Selfhood is not simply finding out and clarifying all the potentialities of the self as individual. There is no selfhood that is not at the same time a self existing in the grid of all selves. I have no self by myself or for myself. I really have no identity that I can specify except the intersection point of a multitude of things that are not mine. They have been given to me…"[279]

Sittler recognized these unseen relationships and interdependencies with the human, divine, and other-than-human world as grace. He saw nature as a field of grace, a web in which humans find themselves. In his thought, grace emerges as a mode of connectedness which unites us in communion with God, the earth, and each other so that nature is held up by grace rather than interrupted by it. As a transcendent "energy of love" that works through and with the mundane web of our interdependent connections grace could no longer be seen as a "state." Where simple location is now suspect, Sittler added, grace can also no longer be merely personal. He insists the "location of grace" must now be articulated in terms of "reality-in-relations," meaning that "things are what they are,

---

[278] Sittler, "Essays on Nature and Grace," *Evocations of Grace,* 174.

[279] Sittler, *Gravity and Grace*, 44-5.

and do what they do, and have the force they have because they are where there are in a vast and intricate ecosystem." Where grace is no longer a state he sees it instead in "occasions" as the "energy of love." Consequently, the place of grace is the "webbed connectedness of man's creaturely life."[280]

Sittler's concept of self and grace address consistent concerns with Protestant theologies: that they assume and encourage a God/world dualism and a personal and individualist understanding of redemption and anthropology. As his understanding of grace develops with an ecological ontology it becomes clear that for him, creation is not interrupted by grace, but held up by it. Where sin is interpreted as the turning in of the self toward separative individualism and away from an interdependent and relational reality, the opening of grace emerges as not merely the result of restored relation with a transcendent divine but in and through the gifts of multiple others—both divine and creaturely. Consequently, we might conclude that Sittler (presumably inadvertently) echoes Mauss' key insight that the ideal gift is concomitant with relation rather than its precursor. Just as Mauss insists that the gift coincides with societal relationship rather than preceding them, Sittler similarly shifts grace to cohere with and through ecological relations that can be understood as a web of continual gift-exchange. Indeed, he remarkably affirms Joseph Haroutunian's insistence that in the ecological self we find relationality from the beginning: "We have no ontological status prior to and apart from communion. Communion is our being; the being we participate in is communion, and we

---

[280] Sittler, *Evocations of Grace,* 161.

derive our concrete selves from our communion."[281] No self exists that is not the result of a multitude of gifts.[282] Consequently, we have no self outside of grace, nor before relationship.

Compelling as Sittler's ecological and occasional style remains, one also finds unresolved questions along with inconsistencies and tensions where one would hope for doctrinal clarity. Where his understanding of reality becomes remarkably ecological, it remains unclear how this ecological reality can best be expressed in familiar Christian terms and doctrine. In particular, it also remains unclear how this ecological reality relates to the divine life, specifically a doctrine of God.

Without addressing this key question we are left with a radically altered view of reality, yet suggestions of a traditionally transcendent God. For example, Sittler commonly repeats Calvin's metaphor of creation as a theatre for God's grace which implies some safe distance yet between God and creation. Similarly he also insists at times that this web of connections is a vehicle or stage for God's saving work, but is not itself a giver of grace. Finally, Sittler also suggests the metaphor of God as placenta for the world. While a beautifully unconventional and feminine metaphor, it still (though less-so than "theatre") maintains God traditional place as exterior sustainer.

---

[281] Joseph Haroutunian, *God With Us* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 148, quoted in Joseph Sittler, "Essays on Nature and Grace," *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics*, Stephen Bouma-Prediger and Peter Bakken, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 174.

[282] Ibid., 172.

While Sittler insists on a union of the spiritual and material, the holy and mundane, it remains unclear how or where God is present in, with, and under the world. He consistently regards grace as "inherent in and given in, with, and under the creation," but fails to expound on the ways God is put at risk or becomes vulnerable to the world. Granted, we can assume such conclusions would have put at risk his appeal to an audience in a theologically and religiously anthropocentric landscape. Yet, without such a doctrine of God it seems that articulating a theology of grace in the world may, in the end, be a rather clever way to think ecologically without yet tainting a traditionally transcendent God, thus reserving significant space for the idealization of the unilateral gift.

Moltmann's indwelling divine

Some thirty years after Sittler, Jurgen Moltmann's work can be seen as a resolution of many of Sittler's unresolved tensions. In resisting systematic theological methodologies Sittler also sacrifices doctrinal coherence.[283] This is particularly evident in his doctrine of God. In not focusing on a doctrine of God, this early ecotheologian did not critically examine the God/world relation and thus was not able to extend his ecological reality in a consistent way from the world to the relation of God and world. Moltmann, on the other hand, addresses these concerns by emphasizing an interdependent, indwelling and communitarian divinity. He demonstrates influential connections between a human

[283] He explains in the introduction to his later work, *Essays on Nature and Grace*, that he's found a systematic methodology inadequate for constructing an ecological theology. He suggests instead that our form should be consistent with our content and therefore an ecological theological method is needed.

dominating sovereign subject and the modern doctrine of God which he descries as "monotheistic monarchialism," suggesting instead a perichoretic, Trinitarian God in relation. Moltmann also reconciles the doctrines of creation and redemption—a crucial shift for a tradition that at times verges on anti-creationism in order to emphasize the transcendent, redemptive power of God.

Like Sittler, Moltmann's work is a response to an antagonism between nature and grace in the tradition of the reformers. Moltmann explains that this nature/grace dichotomy, already present in Reformation thought, becomes only further reinforced during the WWII era German theological debates. Here, the theological justification of or resistance to Hitler's rise to power and ideologies were at stake. In debates between Protestants of the Barmen Declaration and supporters of German National Socialism the options for Protestant thought on nature were merely two: either a person supports "natural theology" interpreted as a way of reading God's will in Hitler's rise to power and God's orders of nature in nation and race, or a person assents to a theology of God's Word revealed over and against the natural—including the National Socialist.

Moltmann reflects with regret that even some 40 years later this singular divide remains. His work, *God in Creation,* is an attempt to chart a new path that avoids this unfortunate binary. To address this concern he decides to continue developing a doctrine of the Trinity that is not only social, but ecological in its indwelling character. Moltmann has developed a reputation as a theologian who has helped revitalize the doctrine of the

Trinity by demonstrating its relevance for social and ecological concerns.[284] As Joy McDougall explains, "Moltmann traced the ills of modern Christian theology specifically to the eclipse of its trinitarian understanding of God."[285] Some of these deleterious effects include an apathetic, dispassionate doctrine of God which keeps God detached form the joys and pain of life in the world and a corresponding anthropology that idealizes self-sufficiency and separative relations. In *Trinity and the Kingdom* Moltmann describes the traditional Western Christian doctrine of the Trinity as "monotheistic monarchialism." In Western trinitarian thought the perichoretic, or mutually indwelling, communion of the three persons has been deemphasized in favor of an emphasis on the united power of one God. Where an emphasis on oneness subordinates the three-ness God emerges as a divine monarchical figure with "disastrous consequences for the Christian life of faith" because it has "provided a theological justification for structures of domination and subordination in the familial, political, and ecclesial realms of human existence."[286]

Rather than a single, all-powerful monarch idealizing the absolute sovereign subject and the separative individualist, Moltmann suggests the doctrine of the trinity reveals that God's being is in community. Taking up the Cappadocian idea of trinitarian *perichoresis* Moltmann suggests that in the *koinonia* of the Trinity each person does not stand on their own separate from the others, but interpenetrates and dwells within each

---

[284] Joy McDougall notes, "During the last thirty years no theologian has played a more pivotal role in revitalizing trinitarian doctrine and its implications for Christian praxis than German Reformed theologian Jurgen Moltmann." (*Pilgrimage of Love: Moltmann on the Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6).

[285] Ibid.

[286] Ibid.

other. This is, of course, a claim with powerful social implications. As McDougal explains, "The practical significance of Moltmann's social trinitarian program rests on his bold claim that trinitarian fellowship not only describes divine community but also prescribes the nature of true human community."[287]

In *God in Creation* Moltmann demonstrates the ways in which monotheistic monarchialism has justified domination over other-than-human creation as well by linking the transcendent, monotheistic God to the modern sovereign subject. The traditional doctrine of God maintains God as the absolute transcendent subject. Where God is absolute subject, the world becomes "His" object of creation and redeeming work. If this is the divine ideal—the image in which humans have been made, then they too are bound to recreate this subject/object divide granting themselves the role of subject and actor and creation as passive object.

He contrasts monotheistic monarchialism with an "ecological doctrine of creation" that "implies a new kind of thinking about God."[288] Rather than building from an assumption of absolute distinction between God and world Moltmann shifts to a "recognition of the presence of God in the world and the presence of the world in God."[289] Where other ecologically oriented approaches have emphasized the role of the Son in creation, Moltmann explains, "we shall proceed differently, and shall present the

---

[287] Ibid., 7.

[288] Moltmann, *God in Creation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 13.

[289] Ibid.

trinitarian understanding of creation by developing the third aspect, creation in the Spirit."[290]

Where Sittler fails to address how God fits with an inter-relational, inter-dependent reality, Moltmann's periochoretic God becomes the origin and archetype of all of creation. These created ecological, mutually interdependent, and non-dualist relations reflect their trinitarian and communal creator. Moltmann explains:

> Our starting point here is that all relationships which are analogous to God reflect the primal, reciprocal indwelling and mutual interpenetration of the trinitarian perichoresis: God in the world and the world in God; heaven and earth in the kingdom of God, pervaded by his glory; soul and body united in the kingdom of unconditional and unconditioned love, freed to be true and complete human beings. There is no such thing as solitary life.[291]

Moltmann's alternative to the absolute divine subject emerges as a social, communitarian, interpenetrating, trinitarian doctrine of God—an inspired model of ecological, interrelational, reality: "God in the world and the world in God…All living things—each in its own specific way—live in one another and with one another, from one another and for one another."[292] This changes the emphasis of ideal, divine relationships from detached power-over to dwelling with. The result is a "non-hierarchical, decentralized,

---

[290] Ibid., 9.

[291] Ibid., 17.

[292] Ibid.

confederate theology" that resists any concept of subjectivity as one-sided and dominating.[293]

Such shifts in a doctrine of God and God/world relations reverberate also in Moltmann's doctrines of creation and redemption, reinterpreting and reintegrating them. Rather than a detached sense of God creating the world and then relating to it as pure exteriority he insists that "God creates the world, and at the same time enters into it. He calls it into existence, and at the same time manifests himself through its being. It lives from his creative power, and yet he lives in it."[294] In *God in Creation* Moltmann is continuing the work of reinterpreting soteriology begun in *Theology of Hope.* Here already the theologian resists the personalism and privatism of Protestant soteriologies, arguing the human is not saved from sin outside of history but in and through it. In his ecotheological work, though, he expands this soteriology beyond the exclusivity of human history to all creation.[295]

---

[293] Ibid., 2.

[294] Ibid., 15.

[295] Although there are common themes, commentators also note a drastic shift between these texts. William French, in particular, argues that Moltmann's work in *God in Creation* "calls into question the adequacy of Moltmann's own earlier radical eschatological agenda" in Theology of Hope. French continues emphasizing the anti-naturalism implicit—and at times explicit—in his eschatological focus in *Theology of Hope*: "Where once he challenged us *not* to live in 'the world' as our 'home,' Moltmann now in *God in Creation* shifts direction to hold that the 'messianic promise' is that 'the world should be 'home'" (5). Where once he chainged us 'no longer to live amid surrounding nature,' now he holds that nature is our 'home country,' and that 'society must be adapted to the natural environment' (p. 46). Once he held that 'the recognition that man doe snot have nature but history means an overcoming of all the naturalistic or quasi-naturalistic ways of thinking.' Now he holds that 'theology must free belief in creation from this over-valuation of history' (p. 32)," (80). William C. French, "Review: Returning to Creation: Moltmann's Eschatology Naturalized," *The Journal of Religion,* 68. 1 (1988): 78-86.

Like Sittler, Moltmann points to the problem of the personalization of faith during the Reformation which can be seen as a consequence of limiting the scope of God's redemptive work to the human personal plane. By compartmentalizing faith and science and limiting scriptural interpretation to personal salvation, this tradition limited the potential scope of theological reflection on the ways the human interacts with the natural world.[296] To counter this limited scope Moltmann emphasizes the expansive nature of Christ's work beyond the human sphere. He explains, "the first Christians saw Christ in all natural things and all natural things in Christ."[297] But in a void of soteriological interpretations of creation nature is left vulnerable to use and resource allocation for human aims.

Resisting this personalized, and thus anthropocentric, focus, Moltmann reintegrates creation and redemption, remarkably finding inspiration in Jewish mysticism with Kabbalah rabbi, Isaac Luria, and his teaching of *zimzum*. In developing this teaching Luria was addressing the logical problem of maintaining God's omnipotence and omnipresence, while also insisting that the world is not God. Rather than a divine event of absolute will over creation,[298] Luria explains that creation is the result of the omnipotent and omnipresent God's self-concentration or contraction. The infinite creator

---

[296] Moltmann, *God in Creation,* 35.

[297] Moltmann, "The Resurrection of Christ and the New Earth," in *Resurrection and Responsibility: Essays on Theology, Scripture, and Ethics in Honor of Thorwald Lorenzen,* eds*.,* Keith D. Dyer and David J. Neville (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 54.

[298] Moltmann associates this view with Barth and his doctrine of decrees. Here Moltmann is working to find a mediating position between Barth's doctrine of decrees and Tillich's doctrine of emanation.

pulls back Godself in order to make room for something outside of God. This contraction creates the *nihil* or void of God which becomes space for the creation of the world. So, in creating the world God moves outside of God with the ultimate aim of returning all things to Godself.

Moltmann reinterprets Luria's *zimzum,* applying it to the cross and resurrection. He associates the *nihil* of creation with the *nihil* Christ faced on the cross. Consequently, creation becomes a first act of salvation and redemption which is then repeated on the cross. Moltmann explains, "the nihil in which God creates his creation is God-forsakenness, hell, absolute death; and it is against the threat of this that he maintains his creation in life."[299] Here creation emerges as a first redemption, while redemption on the cross materializes as a new creation. Each is a repetition of the other.

For such a remarkable emphasis on the perichoretic nature of God in relationship Moltmann's insistence on a "fundamental" or "sustaining foundation" for the flux and flow of relationality is jarring. "For only the Spirit of God exists *ex se*"—out of Godself alone—Moltmann asserts. "It is therefore the Spirit," he insists, "who has to be seen as the sustaining foundation of everything else, which does not exist *ex se* but *ab alio et in aliis*," that is, the other from another.[300] Indeed, the world functions in another, from another and God too exists in this manner. However, Moltmann's insistence on the *ex se*

---

[299] Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 87.

[300] Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 11.

of the Spirit throws any exchangist, perichoretic relation *between* God and creation into question.

Sallie McFague's skepticism regarding the truly communal nature of relational trinities such as Moltmann's is relevant here. She expresses concern that in social-communal trinities the "point of the trinity [can still be] protecting God from any dependence on the world."[301] Rather than true God/world relationality God in community within Godself may serve as a way to ensure that God can be community without the world. Moltmann, she explains, does better at ensuring that we do not end with God's relationship to Godself. However, the danger still remains "since he is afraid to allow God any dependency on the world."[302] Despite Moltmann's efforts to disrupt the monarchy of the one God the danger of "a picture of the divine nature as self-absorbed and narcissistic" still remains.[303]

McFague makes a key point here. In order for exchange to appear as such—and not narcissism—there must be interchange across difference. In Moltmann's case, if God only exists out of Godself does the divine only receive in exchange with Godself? For Moltmann, it seems, the gift within God is exchangist, and our world too is exchangist, but there is no receptivity in God from the world. Suddenly the gift is unilateral again. There is communication within God, but only God is communicating with creation—God

---

[301] McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), footnotes, 223. McFague is referring to *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* here.

[302] Ibid.

[303] Ibid.

does not receive communion back from creation. One is left to wonder: is this communion after all?

A return to the unilateral gift?

Both Sittler and Moltmann insist on ecological reality and want to affirm a relational and exchangist God. With Sittler's emphasis on the ecological self and grace within creation rather than interrupting it and Moltmann's interpretation of the cross of redemption as a repetition of the redemption in creation these early ecotheologians take significant strides to address consistent Protestant ecological issues. However, Primavesi calls for our attention to gifting structures within the exchanges of creation. Unfortunately, doing so reveals that at key places these theologians revert to the presumption of a unilateral gift. Mauss and Milbank note the deleterious effects of the free, unilateral gift on social and economic relations. But what effect does the unilateral gift have on ecological systems of exchange? Where we've seen that the free gift also implies an alienable gift structure implying relations of commodification between human agents and their gift "objects," a model of ecological gift exchange demonstrates that the implications for our relation to the other-than-human world are broader yet. To illustrate, take, for example, the mundane case of soil in relation to the unilateral gift.

The liturgical hymn, "Lord Let My Heart," commonly sung before the reading of the Gospel in American Lutheran churches today, explicitly links the human heart to soil:

"Lord let my heart be good soil, open to the seed of your word."[304] Drawing on the Genesis account of humanity formed from humus, the gathered worshipping assembly is weekly reminded of this link that is also yearly enacted in the solemn exhortation on Ash Wednesday to "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return." These rituals and hymns remind us that a shared Jewish-Christian anthropology has long maintained a link between human bodies and soil.

Grounded in an ancient Judeo-Christian hummus/human connection, this hymn also depends on a more recent logic. It relies on the logic that the human heart and soil are linked primarily by a common characteristic: receptivity, passivity, and inertness. The hymn's central metaphor only works if the chanting assembly holds a basic—likely unconscious—assumption that just as the human heart passively awaits God's saving activity, so also the soil remains empty, inert, awaiting human activity to make it redemptively productive.

Global environmental advocate Vandana Shiva demonstrates the material implications of these modern conceptualizations of the human heart, soil, and fossil fuel dependence. In researching the social, economic, ecological and long-term agricultural impact of India's shift to industrial agriculture in the 1960's Shiva was surprised to find soil explicitly described by European agriculturalists as "an empty container."[305] She soon found this metaphor functioning as a basic assumption of the Western modern

---

[304] Handt Hanson, "Lord Let My Heart Be Good Soil," *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Pew Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), Hymn 512.

[305] Shiva, "Soil Papered Over," Speech give at the Seizing the Alternative Conference, Claremont, CA, June, 2015.

industrial agricultural paradigm where soil was seen as "an empty container for holding synthetic fertilisers."[306] The connection between widespread synthetic use and climate change is still relatively unknown. But agricultural innovator and environmental activist Wes Jackson explains: "What wasn't recognized until more recently was the full extent to which agriculture contributed to [climate change]. We now know that land use, which includes agriculture, is second only to power generation as a greenhouse gas emitter, ahead of transportation."[307] In addition to massive amounts of fossil fuels needed to create synthetic fertilizer we now also know that when the nitrogen from synthetic fertilizers evaporates it can combine with oxygen to make nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas three hundred times more potent than carbon dioxide.[308] Paralleling the human heart in common articulations of grace, Shiva notes how in modern Western agricultural practices soil is envisioned as passive and inert, awaiting redemptive and life-giving action from a purely exterior source. Consequently, it seems that where a unilateral or free gift is functioning an intimate link between the human heart and soil can have widespread and devastating effects on the earth's ecosystems.

Rather than a hollow vessel awaiting a redemptive gift from a pure exteriority Shiva notes that ancient Indian farming practices trained farmers to preserve the productive potential of the soil by encouraging the biodiversity of its vast communities of

---

[306] Ibid.

[307] Wes Jackson, "The Land Institute," "Issues" accessed, July 5, 2015, http://www.landinstitute.org/our-work/issues/#

[308] EPA, "Overview of Greenhouse Gases," http://www3.epa.gov/climatechange/ghgemissions/gases/n2o.html

micro-organisms. Shiva explains that these ancient agricultural practices flowed from an understanding of a relationship of reciprocity and mutuality with the land and other-than-human creatures, however small.

From an agricultural perspective, Shiva explains, "biodiversity is the alternative to fossil carbon."[309] Where soils are rich in biodiversity there is no need for synthetic fertilizers. Such biodiversity results from attention to and care for the millions of microorganisms inhabiting healthy, lively, fruitful soil. Shiva reminds us that many ancient agricultural practices saw soil not as an empty container awaiting the saving action of a pure exteriority, but as a living community calling for care and communication.[310] It seems, in other words, that the worldview Shiva articulates remained cognizant of the multiple human and other-than-human gifts we utterly rely on. Rather than effecting merely human spirituality this illustration of the connection of conceptualizations of the human heart, soil, and fossil fuels demonstrates the ways that our concepts of gift (corresponding with models of grace) effect not just our relations with other humans but the ways we seek to work with the other-than-human world to sustain human existence.

In preserving the unilateralism of the gift do not Moltmann and Sittler inevitably end up reinscribing the sovereign self and its external they set out to disrupt? Is this the necessary result of any Protestant ecotheology? One wonders if in Sittler and Moltmann

---

[309] Shiva, *Soil Not Oil*, 130.

[310] Shiva emphasizes that these practices were characteristics of ancient Indian farming techniques in particular.

the Protestant tradition finds its limit—the point at which it can go no further toward exchangist, reciprocal relations between God and creation. Given the rising stakes of climate change, however, it seems necessary now to press beyond economies that originate in a unilateral gesture and so idealize the gift free of exchange.

McFague's insight that exchange must transgress lines of difference will also continue to reverberate through this study of gifting patterns in our theologies of grace and redemption. We will find we need exchange, but more specifically, we need exchange that does not stay within the circle of relative familiarity and sameness, but engages, and thereby honors, difference. Without exchange with and through difference we will find, as McFague does with Moltmann's trinitarian exchange, that God can remain community within Godself and thus still has no need for creation. Creation again emerges as ultimately expendable.

However, in a sense this *ex se*, might yet be redeemed, as we will see in the final chapter. It might be that in giving God is, in a sense, giving out of Godself and so continually beside Godself, only ever Godself out of Godself, with the other in communing communication. But as McFague points out, the specter of the sovereign self remains unless this self can be shown to be interrupted, in a sense, by an other. For this to be the case the divine must truly be able to receive from, be affected by, and truly be-with the world. This kind of exchange certainly cannot maintain any kind of "foundation"—it

is much too shifty, much too "non-hierarchical, decentralized, [and] confederate."[311] Nor can we oppose it to anything like the reciprocity of returned relation. Certainly we would want to avoid the binding reciprocal relations that look more like tit for tat or *quid pro quo*, but as we will find, our options are certainly not limited to either unilateral gifting or bondage to debt.

[311] Moltmann, *God in Creation,* 2, see above.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE GIFT REVISITED:
UNCONDITIONED AND MULTILATERAL

The reach of our daily mundane decisions and actions have never before been so nonlocal. In earlier moments of the ecotheological movement, the interconnectedness of the world could be seen romantically as a redemptive aim toward which God was drawing the world. But today we find that such interconnections, rendering our daily decisions so nonlocal and disproportionately influential, are harder to romanticize. When mundane and seemingly insignificant decisions about what to eat and how to get to work result in disproportionately disastrous and global effects we are forced to acknowledge the risk involved in interconnection. It becomes clear our yoke of interdependence may unfold as our undoing as easily as our redemption. In a world of dynamic systems where effects are disproportionate to causes Newtonian linear space-time causality becomes increasingly suspect. Linear causality fundamentally depends on an atomistic view of the universe where separable individual parts can be broken down into smaller and smaller parts, all relating externally and inertly as in a machine. However, today it is evident that we would not be facing a climate crisis if the world really functioned as isolated atoms in a void or as individuals, each directing their own futures.

Those of us in Western and Euro-American contexts might also observe a kind of connection fatigue as the more oppressive expressions of a capitalist society encourage us

to remain continually plugged into our work, a 24 hour news cycle, and constant availability through social media.[312] Rather than liberation, such interconnection may leave us with an intensified sense of Weber's iron cage-like burden of material possessions.

Where connections increasingly emerge as not merely romanticized connectedness but a basic condition of reality—as a given, so to speak—the task of theology turns toward emphasizing the need for what Catherine Keller has called, "connection that counts."[313] In *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* Keller describes the perils and possibilities of gender relations. For feminists struggling to recall their own sense of self and resist identifying only with the needs and desires of others Keller urges her readers to not settle for a dualistic choice between self and relation. Indeed, she argues,"relation can either foster dependency, or test and nurture freedom."[314] Keller intuits that what women striving for a more defined and empowering sense of self desire is not really less connection but more meaningful, liberating, and transforming connection—not the yoke of patriarchal roles, but of solidarity, symbiosis, and mutual empowerment.

In today's climate crisis where the interconnections of the world seem to hold possibilities for both devastation and redemption the response of women weighed down

---

[312] My thoughts on the risks and underside of connections are indebted to Jenna Supp-Montgomerie's response to Jane Bennett's paper at the 2014 Drew Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquium.

[313] Keller, *From a Broken Web,* 3.

[314] Ibid.

in self-depleting dependencies holds true across gender differences: what we desire is "not less but more (and different) relation; not disconnection, but connection that counts."[315] When we find we are unable to extricate ourselves from inter-dependent relations without denying the continuously unfolding mode of reality, what we need is not freedom from interdependencies, but connections that liberate, that open possibilities for meaningful relation and empowering responsibility. The need for *grace-filled connection* runs deep.

We have outlined the perils of continuing with the Protestant majority tradition to emphasize that grace reveals itself in antagonistic or annihilating relation to the exchanges and interconnections of the world. What then will grace look like if it is not to merely interrupt or annihilate the eco/nomies of the world? Can grace become something like a mode of connection that counts, celebrating interdependence and knitting bodies within bodies into symbiotic communities rather than acting as key mode of the modern separative individual? Through the work of Sittler and Moltmann we have seen characteristics of this understanding of grace begin to emerge. Yet we also noted a persistent tendency to prioritize or revert to the unilateral gift. As we will see, this is the case more broadly as well.

Although connections between Milbank's critique of reformation grace and economics remain widely under-recognized, Protestant theologians have responded extensively to theological aspects of Radical Orthodoxy's critiques. These replies vary

---

[315] Ibid.

widely. On one end of the spectrum Bo Kristian Holm and Piotr Malysz accept Milbank's thesis about the dangers of the gift/exchange dualism, but insist that key Reformation thinkers integrated exchange into the heart of their concepts of gift/grace. Risto Saarinen diverges slightly, upholding the value of the free gift, but arguing that an active/passive binary is not an accurate representation of the dynamic between God and creature. Finally, Kathryn Tanner is the only theologian to deal explicitly with the economic issues at stake. She dismisses Milbank's and others' belief that gift-exchange economies are a viable alternative to capitalistic economies. In introducing these responses we will see that even as theologians sensitive to Milbank's gift-exchange restructure key Christian doctrines around exchangist motifs, the impulse to prioritize a primary unilateral gift that subsequently gives way to exchange remains persistent.

In addition, a remarkably consistent—and, I will argue, unfortunate—consensus has emerged from most Protestant gift theologies. Many uncritically accept Milbank's reading of Derrida's gift as nihilistic. I will argue, though, that, like Derrida, many Protestant theologies of grace aim to disrupt circular giving where the gift inevitably (or, as Milbank recounts, necessarily) returns to its origin. As we have seen with economic theologies of grace many times this impulse is articulated as a rejection of exchange. Yet, I will argue the non-circular gift does not *necessarily* entail an opposition to exchange. Both Derrida's gift and Protestant theologies of grace fall into the trap of the gift/exchange dualism with their non-circular gifts because they make the mistake of assuming what Risto Saarinen and Niels Henrick Gregersen call bilateral gift exchange.

As an alternative, I will suggest the multilateral gift these scholars also introduce allows the possibility of avoiding the gift/exchange binary while preserving the non-circular character of the gift.

What Mauss, Milbank, and Derrida all fail to see is that bilateral gifting assumes linear time-space causality and thus cannot account for the multilateral gift given within a dynamic network or web of relations. As an alternative to a bilateral gift structure, the multilateral gift would have helped both Derrida and Protestant theologians affirm the importance of the non-circular gift without opposing it to exchange. In examining the implications of a multilateral gift it becomes clear that the concerns Protestant theologians respond to in rejecting exchange would be better addressed by protesting linear causality than a flat footed, "here I stand, I can do no other" kind of rejection of exchange. This different gift structure requires an alternate description of reality that can account for internal relations. So, in concluding, we will explore physicist Karen Barad's quantum ontology where material reality itself, and not just biological reality, emerges in what we might identify as a kind of gift exchange.

The unconditioned gift, distinguished from pure, unilateral, or free giving

The possibility of articulating the non-circular gift that disseminates rather than returning to its origin while refusing to reject exchange begins to emerge in Kathryn Tanner's important work on the Protestant tradition and economic ethics. In *Economy of Grace* she acknowledges increasing concerns with antisocial and unjust aspects of

capitalism. Similar to theo-ethicists and historians like Duchrow and Lindberg,[316] Tanner organizes her economic critique around the assertion that a Protestant theology of grace offers a liberating alternative to current economic practices. However, Tanner's methodology demonstrates a key difference from other reformation economics where grace offers a "radical alternative to the present system."[317]

Like many others, Tanner suggests a methodology of comparing grace and economics in the same symbolic system.[318] Yet Tanner's approach emerges as unique since most others compare religion and economics within a theological symbolic system and thus end up shifting away from the impurities of exchange. The result is a predictable contrast between the idolatrous god of economy/exchange and the true God of grace.[319] Tanner has taken the reverse strategy, placing religion and economics in conversation within an *economic* symbolic system. In terms of a gift/exchange dualism this methodological shift is significant as it allows her to avoid repeating this common Protestant binary. As we saw in chapter two, by taking on the language of idolatry these critiques often end up pitting God against money and economics, thereby implicitly reinforcing the idea that grace only interacts with these worldly exchanges as a rejection, interruption or annihilation.

---

[316] See chapter 1.

[317] Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace,* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), x.

[318] Ibid.

[319] examples include Douglas Meeks, Paul Chung, and Ulrich Duchrow.

Tanner's unique methodology allows her to avoid the trap of posing the Christian story of grace against all economy and exchange by suggesting that "the whole Christian story is a vision of economy, a vision of a kind of system for the production and circulation of goods."[320] Where the majority of Christian thought has treated economics as a "second tier of theological concern, an optional addition or supplement to those strictly God-oriented questions that form theology's central domain,"[321] Tanner's methodology demonstrates that "Christianity is every bit as much about economic issues as an account of the way prices are determined by marginal utilities."[322]

A successful avoidance of the gift/exchange, grace/economy binary should not be taken as an indication that Tanner subscribes to Milbank's doctrinal shift toward gift-exchange, however. While Milbank and others affirm gift economy as a viable alternative to capitalism, Tanner remains skeptical. She notes that where inalienable gifts maintain ties in the form of debt between giver and receiver, oppressive relationships, like those the Reformers opposed, remain. If the gift is never cleanly cut from the giver it not only creates relational ties, but a tangle of indebted and obligated relationships. Where objects of exchange are inalienable from the donor "this simply means that gift exchanges turn into explicit loans." She remains particularly concerned that this kind of gift "suggests

---

[320] Tanner, xi.

[321] Ibid., 3.

[322] Ibid., xi.

that gifts are a kind of common property or loan never fully possessed by the recipient."[323]

From Tanner's perspective, all gift-exchange runs on "debt and credit, in which primary obligations derive from the delegation, or holding in trust, of inalienable property."[324] Since oppressive debt is a key aspect of capitalist economy Tanner concludes that gift economy is not an acceptable alternative to capitalism. In fact, Tanner rejects all forms of debt as counter to God's redemptive work. Even in our theologies, she argues, "notions of debt, contractual obligation, loan, even stewardship, should be written out of the Christian story about God's relations to the world and our relations with God and one another, in light of an understanding of grace that is fundamentally incompatible with them."[325] In this way, while avoiding a structural contrast between grace and any exchange, Tanner does insist that grace be fundamentally different from—a kind of protest against—the kinds of exchanges that "presuppose private property and conditional loans or grants associated with inalienable forms of possession."[326] Consequently, Tanner re-writes redemption stories, erasing debt-laden atonement theories and replacing them with a soteriological narrative of God's way of grace fighting to oppose and cancel the tangles of debt that oppress us.

---

[323] Ibid., 54.

[324] Ibid.

[325] Ibid., 56-7.

[326] Ibid., 56.

For the purposes of this project, Tanner's key insight arrives in the form of an insistence that grace as the "unconditioned" gift may be distinguished from "pure," "unilateral," or "free" gifts. The unconditioned gift is not unilateral or pure of exchange since God does not desire debt, but does call for a "proper return."[327] In this case, a proper return means giving a gift forward. Rather than returning the gift vertically to God, God's gift creates givers on the horizontal plane. The gift is unconditioned because God does not give where there is merit, but where there is need, and the proper return is not given back to God but to our neighbors, rendering receivers not passive but empowered givers.[328]

The unconditioned gift disrupts oppressive and antisocial economic systems because it is fundamentally noncompetitive. Tanner's protest grace works in congruence with the principle of non-competitiveness she develops in *God and Creation in Christian Theology* and *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity.* There, Tanner articulates a God/world relation where the two are not in competition such that in order for one to increase the other must decrease.[329] This has been a consistent problem for Protestant thought where

---

[327] Ibid., 69.

[328] "God's giving does not then humiliate us or work to keep us in an inferior's position of debt. God in giving to us does not bring about our debilitating dependency upon God; God does not in that sense seek to give unilaterally, to be the only real giver. God is, instead, eager for us to become givers in turn and is doing everything possible to make that happen," (Ibid., 72).

[329] "This non-competitive relation between creatures and God is possible, it seems, only if God is the fecund provider of *all* that the creature is in itself; the creature in its giftedness, in its goodness, does not compete with God's gift-fullness and goodness because God is the giver of all that the creature is for the good. This relationship of total giver to total gift is possible, in turn, only if God and creatures are, so to speak, on different levels of being, and different planes of causality." (Tanner, *Jesus Humanity and Trinity*, 3) and "Unlike this co-operation among creatures, relations with God are utterly non-competitive because God, from beyond this plane of created reality, brings about the *whole* plane of creaturely being and activity in its goodness," (Ibid., 4).

God's freedom and power is purchased at the expense of human dependence and passive receptivity.[330]

Unfortunately, Tanner's notion of a non-competitive relationship between God and world depends on a reiteration of the Protestant theme of an absolute ontological separation between God and creation: "This relationship of total giver to total gift is possible, in turn, only if God and creatures are, so to speak, on different levels of being, and different planes of causality."[331] In other words, God and world are not in competition because they don't share the same space—they are on different planes of reality.[332] Here, Tanner fails to conceptualize a model of difference that does not rely on separation. God's plane of reality intersects with the world's in soteriological gestures, but fundamentally God and world do not compete with one another because they don't share the same space.[333]

Familiar suspicions regarding the relation between gift and economy or God's presence with the world rise again. While Tanner avoids reiterating the gift/exchange binary on one level, on another level she reintroduces a strict divide between giver and

---

[330] "This non-competitive relation between creatures and God is possible, it seems, only if God is the fecund provider of *all* that the creature is in itself; the creature in its giftedness, in its goodness, does not compete with God's gift-fullness and goodness because God is the giver of all that the creature is for the good." (Ibid., 3).

[331] Ibid.

[332] Ibid.

[333] Miroslav Volf echoes a similar thesis pairing non-competition with separate realms of reality: "It's different with God. True, God is infinitely richer and more powerful than humans. But God and human beings do not occupy the same space. We are not competitors for the same goods…God is incomparably greater—on a completely different plane than we are" (Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Zondervan, 2005), 45-6).

receiver in an effort to assert non-competitive relations where the non-competitiveness depends on the fact that the "goods" are not shareable.

The multilateral gift

Tanner has chosen to address the relation of grace and exchange through explicit engagement with economics. Others engage gift theory with more confessional concerns in mind. Although Piotr Malysz, Bo Kristian Holm, Niels Henrik Gregersen, and Risto Saarinen avoid the economic implications Milbank articulates and leave ecological concerns unaddressed, their specific focus on Luther's theology proves insightful in as much as it reveals a new distinction in gift discourse between bilateral and multilateral gifting.

Among Lutheran theologians who deal with Gift theory no consensus has emerged regarding the applicability of Milbank's gift-exchange to Luther's theology of grace. While Finnish scholar Risto Saarinen remains skeptical about the applicability of

gift-exchange for Lutheran theology, he does suggest that the active/passive binary functioning in interpretations of Luther's justification is misguided.[334]

Polish-American Piotr Malysz and Danish Bo Kristian Holm argue, contra Saarinen, that Luther's theology of justification is more similar to Milbank's gift-exchange than not.[335] Malysz responds to William Cavanaugh's Milbank-influenced essay comparing medieval and reformation eucharistic theologies.[336] Countering Cavanaugh's critique of Luther's eucharistic theology, Malysz argues that for Luther the

---

[334] A Lutheran theologian from Finland, Saarinen has been engaging in ecumenical dialog with the Russian Orthodox church. He notes that the Eastern Christian tradition takes a different perspective on gift-giving that does not result in the need to insist on the passivity of the receiver. The Eastern Orthodox "giver-oriented" perspective avoids these problems and allows for a certain understanding of cooperation between God and humanity in salvation while yet avoiding Palagianism. From this perspective, "giving in general only makes sense when the receiver is in some way active" (Saarinen, Risto. *God and the Gift: An Ecumenical Theology of Giving* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 9). He argues, for example, that no one would would give to an inanimate object. Yet, in the Western tradition with the strong emphasis on the passivity of the receiver there is danger of misunderstanding that God's gifts are for persons and not inanimate objects. The receiver oriented perspective, "has prohibited us from seeing the other side of the coin, namely, the giving that occurs in the process of receiving" (Ibid., 6).

Saarinen argues that the answer to this issue is a reversal in perspective. Rather than viewing the exchange from the receiver's point of view, he argues we should see this act of giving from the giver's perspective. Where the focus is on God as the "eminent giver" the receiver's activity can be seen as "mirroring the abundant giving" (intro to Holm and Widmann, *Word—Gift—Being: Justification—Economy—Ontology*, 11). Consequently, reception is not necessarily passive, but includes "a process of giving and transmitting the gift received" (*God and the Gift,* 3). Saarinen argues a Lutheran theology of justification can embrace this kind of active reception from a giver-orientation.Therefore, he concludes, Luther is "not completely unilateralist in his theology of love, since he admits the moments of reception and circulation" (Ibid., 57-8).

[335] This happy exchange theme also leads Malysz to revisit the question of reciprocal relations between God and humanity. Malysz suggests that Luther allows for an element—admittedly limited and markedly asymmetrical—of interdependence between God and creation. Malysz rejects the common Reformation view of the doctrine of justification that demands humanity's absolute passivity before God and lack of reciprocity. God's own Godliness, he argues, awaits the return of trust and faith from creation. "As Luther explains, 'God has none of His majesty or divinity where faith is absent.'" "What is returned to God is precisely his Godhood ["'not in substance but God in us'"], which is thus shown to be not an abstraction but a reality with a creation-wide impact. As Luther explains, 'God has none of His majesty or divinity where faith is absent,'" (Piotr Malysz, "Exchange and Ecstasy: Luther's Eucharistic Theology in Light of Radical Orthodoxy's Critique of Gift and Sacrifice," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6.3 (2007): 299). In effect, God cannot be God—cannot exercise the essence of the Godhood—without creation. While God justifies the creature, the creature then justifies "God as God indeed" with their faith and newly given ability to be gifts to one another.

[336] Malysz responding to William Cavanaugh, "Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Social Imagination in Early Modern Europe," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31.3 (2001): 585-605.

gift is "inalienable" from the giver so that "there are no individualistic 'boundaries between what is mine and what is thine' here."[337] Malysz argues that Luther's "happy exchange" is a key example of inalienable giving since in this exchange at the heart of Luther's doctrine of justification the result is not just a transfer of goods but a relational union between Christ and the sinner.

Similarly, Holm argues that Milbank's "purified gift exchange" is actually a better description of Luther's doctrines of grace and justification than the "pure gift" and even argues that, from a certain perspective, Luther is more exchangist than Milbank himself.[338] For Holm, the heart of Luther's doctrine of justification is the happy exchange which creates union between Christ and the human. Luther describes this union-creating exchange in terms of a marital relationship. In Luther's "Freedom of a Christian" he uses the metaphor of bride and bridegroom, writing, "It follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil...Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's while grace, life, and salvation will be the

---

[337] Malysz, 301, citing Cavanaugh, 597.

[338] See Holm, "Justification and reciprocity, 'Purified gift-exchange' in Luther and Milbank," *Word—Gift—Being*, 89. Holm accuses Milbank of effectively obscuring reciprocity in the process of purifying gift exchange. Milbank explains that Mauss' archaic gift exchange must be purified of its agonistic characteristics which would lead to dominating relations of indebtedness or competitive giving. In order to purify gift exchange he applies Pierre Bourdieu's standards: the return gift must be delayed (after a certain amount of time) and for it to be a gift it must be a "non-identical repetition." In other words, giving back the same ugly scarf, even 10 years later, will still be received as an insult rather than a gift. Holm argues that employing these two conditions on the gift actually obscure the reciprocity of the gift rather than celebrating it since, for Bourdieu these two conditions served not only to "distinguish gift from contract but also…to blunt our awareness of the gift economy." While Milbank has to resort to conditions that were intended by Bourdieu to obscure reciprocity, Holm argues that a "celebration of reciprocity and exchange can be found at the heart of Luther's doctrine of justification," (Ibid., 100).

soul's…"[339] In terms of the Protestant tradition and gift theory this focus on union between Christ and the human is significant. In "love, giver and gift are identical," Holm writes. "[B]oth partners give identical gifts, themselves, and give them simultaneously."[340] Here Christ both gives and is the gift within a relational exchange rendering the gift alienable because it does not shuttle between two separative parties, but creates community between Christ and the human.[341]

Emphasizing the community created between Christ and the human through gift exchange, Holm takes the metaphor a step further, arguing that this is not only an exchange but a *mutual* exchange—effectively between equals. However, here is where Holm's argument seems to falter. The argument for a relation of mutuality relies on a significant shift Holm notes in the conception of marriage relationships in the thirteenth century. During this time love-poets such as Gottfried of Strasbourg shifted marriage metaphors away from hierarchical relationship toward "the ancient idea of 'one soul in bodies twain.'"[342] This metaphor of unity and mutuality, which was previously used to describe the ideal male friendship, was now used to describe heterosexual marriage. Because of these conceptual shifts in the understanding of heterosexual marriage Holm

---

[339] Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian, 1520," *Luther's Works* 31:351, quoted in Kathryn A. Kleinhans, "Christ as Bride/Groom: A Lutheran Feminist Relational Christology," in *Transformative Lutheran Theologies: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Perspectives,* ed. Mary J. Streufert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 127.

[340] Bo Holm and Peter Widmann, "Word—Gift—Being, Introduction," *Word—Gift—Being,* 12.

[341] This insight, as we will see in the next chapter, will remain a key insight and important departure characteristic of the Finnish Interpretation of Luther.

[342] Holm, "Justification and reciprocity, 'Purified gift-exchange' in Luther and Milbank," *Word—Gift—Being,* 103.

argues Luther's sixteenth century happy exchange should be seen as an expression of mutuality rather than hierarchy.

However, Holm does not give persuasive evidence that Luther was familiar with these sources or that they directly influenced his writing. Historical issues aside, we might remain skeptical about the gendered power dynamics at work here. In her essay on the happy exchange Lutheran feminist theologian Kathryn Kleinhans concedes that there is indeed an exchange between Christ and the human in Luther's happy exchange, but what the feminine soul brings to the party only has negative value. "Anything and everything good she possesses she receives from her male partner," Kleinhans notes. She concludes that, "given the gendered language of the contrast between Christ and the believer Luther's nuptial metaphor can easily serve to reinforce both subordination and the negative valuation of women."[343]

Holm deals with this explicit inequality between Christ and the Christian by identifying the exchange as "realized reciprocity": "what is not equivalent in an absolute sense—God and man; righteousness and sin; life and death—and not symmetrical—God can give, human cannot—and therefore not part of reciprocal communication is elevated to equivalence due to participation, elevated to symmetry due to love, and elevated to reciprocity due to God's self giving. And so the divine gift *is* exchange."[344] For Holm, God's gift to humanity is the gift of participatory exchange in the divine life. God gives

---

[343] Kleinhans, 127.

[344] Holm and Peter Widmann, "Word—Gift—Being, Introduction," *Word—Gift—Being,* 12.

the gift of mutual relationship, choosing to identify as equal what is not equal. Therefore, according to Holm, "Luther's use of the marriage metaphor 'creates' equality between God and man."[345]

One wonders at this point if we have arrived at a structure of gift/exchange different from the unilateral gift at all. Isn't the creation of mutual relations a primary gift —and a unilateral one at that? Holm seems to confirm this suspicion: "Human beings are receivers, indeed even 'pure receivers' in a certain sense, but the object received by man and given by God, in Luther's theology, is actually the exchange itself, which according to Luther is beneficial for man and pleasing for God."[346] Despite Holm's efforts, the basic structure of Protestant gifting remains. Here the gift (the creation of mutual relationship —deeming equal what is not equal) remains primary and only secondarily gives way or opens the way for exchange. Holm's blindspot lies in identifying the "creation" of mutuality itself as a gift.

The Protestant tendency to revert to a primary unilateral gift which secondarily gives way to exchange repeats itself again in Niels Henrick Gregersen's otherwise promising and insightful essay, "Radical Generosity and the Flow of Grace."[347] Through most of his essay Gregersen remains impressively cognizant of dangerous power

---

[345] Holm, "Justification and reciprocity, 'Purified gift-exchange' in Luther and Milbank," in *Word—Gift—Being,* 103.

[346] Ibid., 116.

[347] Gregersen, "Radical Generosity and the Flow of Grace," in *Word—Gift—Being.*

dynamics that might turn generosity and grace to domination and control.[348] Indeed, one of his main objectives is "to articulate a doctrine of grace that is generous in a graceful manner, that is, without turning violent."[349] Such sensitivity, a demonstrated willingness to articulate grace beyond the personal forgiveness of sins, and the articulation of multilateral giving are promising indications for a worldly theology.[350] This potential, however, makes Gregersen's ultimate conclusions all the more disappointing.

Gregersen opens by outlining the dangers of dichotomous giving, synonymous with the alienable gift. While Gregersen does not explore economic connections, he does emphasize the interpersonal danger of the dichotomous gift: that our generosity gives without consent and thus slips into domination.[351]

Meaningfully, if inadvertently, for this dissertation's argument, in order to elucidate the importance of giving that does not turn to domination and control Gregersen turns to an historic eco-friendly source: Ralph Waldo Emerson. Gregersen suggests Emerson was the first to point to the problem of dichotomous giving in his 1844 essay,

---

[348] He cites Ralph Waldo Emerson's observation that "Behind generosity lurks a violent and wolfish urge to encompass the world," (Ibid.,127). Gregersen begins by clearly identifying the potential dangers of grace by focusing on the theme of generosity. He cites post-colonial philosopher Romand Coles who writes, "'Indeed, it is difficult to write of generosity today without conjuring up images of the terror wright by a religion that at once place the movement of caritas and agape, giving and love, at the foundation of being and swept across the Americas during the Conquest with a holocaust of 'generosity,'" (Ibid., citing Roman Coles, *Rethingking Generosity: Critical Theory and the Politics of Caritas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1).

[349] Gregersen, 140.

[350] Continuing the above quote he writes that another important task for a doctrine of grace today is to maintain "the principle theological motif that grace is not merely a divine reaction to the sinfulness of man, but essentially emanates from the excess of divine nature itself, rooted in God's eternal love," (Ibid.).

[351] Gregersen also make a connection between separation and dichotomous relations, explaining, "only if a logic of separation takes the lead at the expense of the phenomenon of the gift is a division of giver and receiver tactically assumed, whereby the gift is reified as an encumbering object." Gregersen, 132.

"Gifts." His alternative to dichotomous giving anticipates Mauss' work almost eighty years later. Emerson argues that to be truly generous the giver's gift must not be something separable, but must be a gift of a part of the giver's self. "Rings and other jewels are not gifts," Emerson writes, "'but apologies for gifts. The only gift is a portion of thyself. Thou must bleed for me.'"[352]

Where Mauss emphasizes the power of the gift to dissolve separation (or illusions of separation) between giver, gift, and receiver, Emerson emphasizes the importance of giving in love. According to Emerson, "We can receive anything from love, for that is a way of receiving from ourselves."[353] Love breaks down divisions between "what is mine and what is thine" to the point that a gift truly given in love cannot slip into domination because it is also a gift given from ourselves to ourselves. Gregersen's elucidation is worth quoting at length:

> the redeeming power of love consists in the fact that in expressions of love the donor hands over to the receiver a mutual relationship that makes it possible (even attractive) to receive the gift unreservedly. Giving out of love involves a sharing of the giver ("a portion of thyself") with the other, and receiving love means receiving from within the mutual relationship itself ("receiving from oneself"). In this manner the gap between the giver and the receiver is overcome, at least momentarily.[354]

In a relationship of love a humbling view of the self in interdependent relation to others emerges, resisting generosity's "wolfish urge to encompass the world."[355]

---

[352] Emerson in Gregersen, 125.

[353] Ibid.

[354] Gregersen, 126.

[355] Ibid., 127.

Gregersen suggests that such an emphasis on the redeeming power of love, creating union in gifting relationships, is just what has been underemphasized in Reformation soteriologies. Grace is not just for the forgiveness of sins since grace is limited to a gift with unilateral dimensions when only seen as a declaration of forgiveness. Grace should be much more: "God not only forgives something but actually gives Himself, gives shares in His divine nature so that human beings become 'participants of divine nature.' (2 Peter 1:4)."[356]

Gregersen offers an alternative both to a "logic of separation" between giver or receiver and to Milbank's gift-exchange in suggesting that "in the midst of a *network of relations* and interchanges we might find generous actions that exceed the mere condition of an exchange object."[357] The shift to a "network of relations" depends on work Saarinen offers on Augustine and the gift. Saarinen uniquely differentiates between the unilateral, bilateral and multilateral gifts, noting that the common modern conception of gift giving —even for Mauss—involves a threefold structure: giver, gift and receiver. Where Mauss emphasizes non-binary relations between these three in shifting away from the unilateral gift, Saarinen notes he still remains within a three-fold bi-lateral structure. By contrast, he argues the Christian tradition, "has extended this structure by adding a fourth element, the beneficiary, at least since Augustine's *De Trinitate* argued its validity based on the structure of sacrifice."[358]

---

[356] Ibid., 142.

[357] Ibid., 132. Emphasis mine.

[358] Holm and Widmann, on Saarinen in "Word—Gift—Being, Introduction," *Word—Gift—Being,* 10.

Gregersen notes that cases of bilateral gifting can seldom be identified in social contexts and therefore remain "artificial." He expands on Saarinen's insight, arguing that the human-divine relation should not be seen as bilateral with immediate or postponed counter-gifts since, "the grace of God initiates and facilitates a wider circulation of gifts."[359] As in the case of the beneficiary which is neither giver, gift, nor direct receiver, in some cases "beneficial actions are carried out in complex networks of interchange between, say, agent A, B, C and an unknown number of Ds."[360] Models of divine/human gifting should allow for more than bilateral gifts since a multilateral gift can account for an excessive flow and disseminating distribution of gifts.

We should note that the effect of multilaterism is similar to Tanner's "unconditioned" gift which, as distinguished from unilateral or pure gifts, encourages the gift to continue exchanging. Gregersen explains, "The grace of God initiates and facilitates a wider circulation of gifts. With the gift of grace, human beings receive an impulse to pass on the gifts of grace to other creatures within a multidimensional network of giving and receiving."[361] Overflow is never a precondition for receiving divine generosity. This would only be true in a bilateral gifting scenario, for as the recipient is empowered to pass on a gift given in love and in a multilateral context, "there is no

---

[359] Holm and Widmann, on Gregersen in "Word—Gift—Being, Introduction," *Word—Gift—Being*, 13.

[360] Gregersen, 132.

[361] Holm and Widmann, on Gregersen in "Word—Gift—Being, Introduction," *Word—Gift—Being*, 13.

longer any di-visio or separation that makes it possible to discern what is done by which party."[362]

Unfortunately, in the end, Gregersen's gift relies on the omnipotence of God. When he opens with such sensitivity to concerns about wolfish desires to dominate, the return to omnipotence and a re-prioritization of unilateral power is confounding. By returning to omnipotence—God as unlimited power for and source of giving—Gregersen also ends up reiterating the same old Protestant gift structure: "Through God's unilateral giving, reciprocity is engendered. The pure gift sets otherness free, free to pass on (to the neighbor) and free to give praise (to God)."[363] Once again, the unilateral gift is primary and only secondarily gives way to exchange: "If the beginning of all things is God's radical generosity, and if salvation of all things comes through the flow of grace, then the end of all things is the mutual inherence of God and the world."[364] Gregersen explains the need for omnipotence as a need for God to give without loss. "It is solely almightiness that can truly set free," he argues, "because omnipotence does not lose itself when giving, but precisely actualizes itself as almighty by making its creatures independent as partakers in divine power."[365]

In light of this persistent pattern of reverting to a primary unilateral gift that gives way to gift exchange—even when a theologian expresses the goal of asserting a key

---

[362] Gregersen, 142.

[363] Ibid., 143.

[364] Ibid., 144

[365] Ibid., 142. Gregersen cites Kirkegaard here: "'only omnipotence can retain itself all along as it gives itself away'" (142).

element of exchange at the heart of Lutheran theologies of grace—it seems important to recall that Milbank's argument was not that the Protestant gift denies exchange altogether. Rather, the Protestant gift reversed the *priority* of gifting by making the unilateral gift primary and thus the divinely inspired ideal. Consequently, efforts to reveal simply a reliance on or appreciation of exchange within Protestant theologies of grace fail to get at the heart of the matter if, in the end, they confirm the priority of the pure gift.

The non-circular gift and multilateral gifting

Gregersen's only reference to Milbank's work is in critique of Derrida. Consequently, he misses Milbank's key point on the prioritization of unilateral gifting over exchange. Gregersen also uncritically accepts Milbank's reading of Derrida as a nihilist. In doing so Gregersen misses a key connection between his work and Derrida's. In fact, Saarinen, Holm and Gregersen all assume Milbank's reading of Derrida's gift as nihilistic and thus collectively miss what would likely be clarifying points of connection.

For example, along with drawing upon Emerson, Gregersen also relies on Nietzsche's critique of controlling gift patterns. Inspired by Nietzsche's concerns, Gregersen notes that a world consuming compulsion must be kept in check by reserving space for difference within a community of love. In order to avoid a kind of generosity that might slip into a one-sided demonstration of force or a desire to swallow the world, Gregersen points to Nietzsche's insistence that space be reserved for the other. Generosity entails sharing widely, but in order to remain truly graceful, "some *slack* is needed, to

provide some elbow room for the recipient."[366] For Derrida, as for Nietzsche, the space of loss makes room for the "bad investment" that does not return to its origin—the investor—as is expected in a Western logocentric metaphysics. Instead, the non-circular gift playfully and indiscriminately disseminates to many others.

Gregersen and others conclude that Derrida is a nihilist, which suggests he flatfootedly declares there is nothing in the space where God, meaning, truth, etc. once stood. This would, however, be too determined, too certain for Derrida. Rather than absolute nothingness, the place of loss for Derrida is, as Gregersen himself notes (invoking Nietzsche), the place for wiggle room, play, the space for difference, the other, and a multiplicity of exchanges. This space does not remain stable, but undecidable, as Derrida would say. What will be is not determined by a pure-gift essence, but comes about in the relational interactions that take place at the boundaries between "you" and "I."

Take, for example, the example of the "Holy of Holies" Derrida invokes in his middle-period work, *Glas.* In the Jewish temple the Holy of Holies is traditionally in the center of the temple and interpreted as the place of God's pure, unmediated presence. Biblical scholar Stephen Moore comments on Derrida's reference to this site of what was understood as God's pure presence in the center of the temple. As Moore explains, according to "Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, whose description of the

---

[366] Gregersen, 128. Gregersen only says that these two—self-sharing, communing, generosity and space to respect difference—must be balanced. Gregersen's dismissal of Derrida as a nihilist and "slanderer" of the gift is particularly unfortunate here since Derrida offers a more nuanced model for maintaining unity and difference.

Herodian temple is the most detailed we possess, the Holy of Holies contained 'nothing at all [*ouden holōs en autō*].'"[367] In response, Derrida reflects on the surprise of the "non-Jew when he opens…or violates the tabernacle…and after so many ritual detours to gain access to the secret center, he discovers nothing—only nothingness…The tent of the tabernacle, the stone of the temple, the robe that clothes the text of the covenant—is finally discovered as an empty room, is not uncovered, never ends being uncovered, as it has nothing to show."[368] Nothing, *nihil*: based on a flat reading of this text alone, one could sympathize with those who label Derrida a nihilist and thereby dismiss his work and its applicability for theology. Note, however, that Derrida writes in the last sentence that the emptiness "never ends being uncovered." Such phrasing intimates that his conclusion about the Holy of Holies is not so much a closure of meaning as a different kind of opening of possibilities.

Take, for example, Yvonne Sherwood's reading of *Glas*. The Biblical scholar notes that here the philosopher

> refers to the Torah and synagogue of his past, but he also evokes a sense of the Babylonian Talmud by assembling different and contradictory voices on the same page. Implicitly, in the subtext of his writing, he evokes midrashic ideas and strategies and a style of biblical criticism which has been marginalized by logocentric ideals of empiricism and rationality. When he advocates reading *d'une certaine maniere* ('in a certain way') he seems to

---

[367] Stephen Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives: Jesus Begins to Write* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 38.

[368] Moore, 38, citing Derrida, *Glas*, 49a-50a

> place himself among the rabbis who urged *'al tiqre:* that is, 'do not read it' (i.e., in its conventional form).[369]

Given Sherwood's emphasis on Derrida's playful evocation of midrashic strategies I would argue that Derrida is not interested in finally determining whether there is or isn't a presence. This would only return us to a binary logic (logocentrism or the logic of presence) again. What inspires Derrida is the indeterminate, unresolvable tension—the play—between absence and presence. He says this is where desire begins: in the teasing play between absence and presence.[370] Significantly, Derrida contrasts his view with a centered, substantial, atomistic physics: "For what is discovered here is that there is no nucleus of meaning, no conceptual atom, but that the concept is produced within the tissue of differences."[371] Here Derrida refers to a structure of meaning where presence, much like the gift, emerges within the exchanges between "the tissue of difference." Does this not suggest something like a shift from centered, substantial, isolated gift to a gift that emerges *in exchange*?

In Derrida's early work—a paper presented at Johns Hopkins, which was his first introduction to an English audience—he addresses the idea of the center, certainty, meaning, and truth more explicitly. In "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" Derrida opens by explaining that the logic characterizing Western

---

[369] Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Reading Hosea in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 197.

[370] See, for example, in *Of Grammatology*: "The supplement is maddening because it is neither presence nor absence and because from the start it breaches both our pleasure and our virginity," (168).

[371] Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy," *Writing and Difference,* 267

metaphysics is the logic of centrism. This logic seeks foundations, certainty, and original truths to resist anxiety before the unknown. Derrida then outlines the event in recent history of the loss of this center when interpretations of truth and reality became subject to interpretation themselves. This loss of center he attributes to "the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics," "the Freudian critique of self-presence, that is, the critique of consciousness, of the subject, of self-identity and of self-proximity or self-possession," and to "the Heideggerean destruction of metaphysics, of onto-theology, of the determination of Being as presence."[372]

Derrida concludes that there are "two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play."[373] In other words, there are two basic responses to the loss of centered certainty in, for example, an absolute presence—a determinate meaning—in the Holy of Holies. The first kind of response he aligns with Levi-Strauss' reading of Rousseau where the loss of the center is mourned as the absence of an absolute origin. The second he aligns with Nietzsche who affirms the loss of a solid center of meaning because it provides an opportunity for meaning to be continually produced within the play of differences. Nietzsche's response is a "joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation. *This*

---

[372] Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play," *Writing and Difference,* 280.

[373] Ibid., 292.

affirmation then determines the noncenter otherwise than as loss of the center."[374] These concluding remarks cast suspicion on a dismissive conclusion that Derrida is a nihilist. They suggest that for Derrida the noncenter is not something he mourns because, rather than an absolute loss of a center/meaning, it is an affirmation of the infinite extension of the center where meaning is continually produced. In other words, "The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely."[375] These are not flat footed concluding words suggesting a closure, but a conclusion affirming an opening of possibilities.

This is a key connection between Derrida and Nietzsche's work that Gregersen misses. On the one hand, he affirms Nietzsche's call for space for the other, for difference, as a key aspect of a gift that will not turn to overpowering violence. On the other hand, he labels Derrida a "slanderer" of the gift—seemingly for affirming Nietzsche's same insights. In associating Derrida's work and gift with nihilism Gregersen and others seem to assume the role of Levi-Strauss who mourns the center purely as a loss. In this sense we might agree that Gregersen seems to miss an opportunity by dismissing Derrida's gift as nihilist. Given his stated aims to articulate an understanding

---

[374] Ibid., 292. Suggestions of Derrida's later occupation with the animal and modern Western humanism follow: "There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology—in other words, throughout his entire history—has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play. The second interpretation of interpretation, to which Nietzsche pointed the way, does not seek in ethnography, as Levi-Strauss does, the 'inspiration of a new humanism' (again citing the 'Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss')," (Ibid.).

[375] Ibid., 280.

of grace outside the realm of forgiveness of sins it seems he would have benefitted from a decentered gift extended through multiple exchanges in fields of difference. But, in the spirit of reciprocal giving, let me also suggest that Derrida's gift, particularly as articulated in *Given Time*, would have benefited from Saarinen's and Gregersen's delineation of unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral gifts. It seems that despite the opposing views of Derrida and Milbank on the gift they are joined by a linear understanding of gift practices. While Derrida's gift emerges as unilateral, Milbank's Maussian concept of gift remains bilateral in that it does not account for the gift within a vast network of multilateral exchanges. Both unilateral and bilateral gifting structures imply an assumption of linear causality while the multilateral gift accounts for a kind of gift that does not abide by linear or direct causality. As Saarinen points out, the beneficiary is not someone who directly receives a gift, but who benefits from an indirect gift exchange through both time and space.

A multilateral gifting model would have helped Derrida avoid the trap of a gift/exchange dualism while maintaining the benefits of the non-circular gift. I suggest that both Derrida and Protestant theologians of grace fall into the trap of gift/exchange not because the non-circular gift is necessarily anti-exchangist, but because it is anti-exchange within a bilateral gifting model. In a bilateral gifting structure a gift can only go out from the donor and either return to the donor or refuse to return. If the gift returns the circle is completed and the donor's investment is secured. If the gift refuses to return it stays with the donee as an alienated gift. By contrast, a multilateral gifting structure

allows the gift to be given from the donor where it may continue to be laterally exchanged, that is, without returning to the donor. I'd suggest that a multilateral gift truly accounts for what it seems Derrida was most concerned about in gifting structures: a gift economy that resisted a logocentric, Western metaphysical, Odyssean return to the origin and a gift that disseminates or spreads widely and indiscriminately, that is, without precondition. The multilateral gift would have allowed Derrida the possibility of avoiding a gift/exchange dualism while preserving the non-circular aspect of the gift.

Rather than opposing gift to exchange as Derrida does, I am arguing that the unconditioned gift emerges as the multilateral gift which may or may not return the gift to the origin, but also continually engages in exchange. Like the non-circular gift, it might not be redeemed to the giver. It may not be capitalized, nor is it necessarily nullified or alienated if it does not return. Like Tanner and Gregersen's gift it may disseminate or spread freely by empowering and inspiring further giving. Here gifts are given "in the midst of a network of relations and interchanges"[376] so that resonance with both Sittler's and Primavesi's ecological gifts may also be discerned. A shift away from both unilateral and bilateral models toward a multilateral mode of gift giving where "things are what they are, and do what they do, and have the force they have because they are where they are in a vast and intricate ecosystem"[377] complements Sittler's ecological self, further illustrating the ways this self emerges as constituted by multiple gifts within a web of

---

[376] Gregersen, see footnote 26 above.

[377] Sittler, "Essays on Nature and Grace," *Evocations of Grace*, 153.

relations. We also might recall that Primavesi's ecological gift exchange accounts for the "essential contributions to present gift events made by 'more than' those participating in them now. They include antecedent generations of living beings: all those who, by their lives, their labor, their deaths, their vision, and their patient endeavors have made such events presently possible."[378] The non-causal or lateral nature of this gift applies to both time and space. As Primavesi demonstrates, gifts may be received by beneficiaries wholly outside immediate exchange of gifts but who have profited from a prior exchange. Consequently, it would seem that Primavesi's ecological gift exchange requires a model that makes room for something other than the direct or linear cause and effect characteristic of unilateral and bilateral gifts.

In addition to Primavesi and Sittler, this gift structure seems more in line with Derrida's general economy which maintains its own interconnection with post-Newtonian non-locality. In *Complementarity: Anti-Epistemology After Bohr and Derrida,* literature and cultural theory scholar Arkady Plotnitsky offers an original reading of Derrida alongside Niels Bohr's quantum physics. Plotnitsky describes the influence of quantum theory on Bataille's general economy which, as we noted in chapter two, was taken up by Derrida as an alternative to the capitalizing restricted economy where every sign hits its mark and every investment is returned. Through extensive research and analysis of both Bohr's physics and Derrida's deconstruction Plotnitsky concludes, "one can ascertain not only the general economic character of quantum mechanics, particularly Bohr's

---

[378] Primavesi, "The Preoriginal Gift—and Our Response to It," 218.

complementarity, but also a kind of 'quantum mechanical' and complementary character of general economy. Genealogies of both ideas overlap."[379] Indeed, Derrida's symbols of meaning production suggest a shift from classical atomistic physics when he writes, as we've seen, that he wants to account for the ways the "concept is produced within the tissue of differences" rather than in a "nucleus of meaning" or "conceptual atom."[380]

We are observing a different logic emerging—one resisting clear, defined cause and effect from solid, sovereign, and independent agents. According to Descartes and Newton, material reality is composed of distinct and mostly inner parts that relate to one another only externally. That is, they act only when acted upon so that an effect has a clear cause within a linear timeline. One can see how either unilateral or bilateral gifting structures neatly fit within such a model of reality. Since these were descriptions of physical reality it is not immediately clear that these descriptions would apply to divine giving. Clearly, theological discourse is not physical science and Newton's physics is not a theology. However, Coole and Frost argue, regarding the Cartesian-Newtonian influence on philosophy, that "while scientific theories cannot simply be imported into philosophy, the tropes and rhythms they suggest can transform theoretical discourses."[381] I would suggest that, particularly in this case, the same is true of theology as well.

---

[379] Plotnitsky, *Complementarity: Anti-Epistemology After Bohr and Derrida* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 18.

[380] Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy," *Writing and Difference,* 267.

[381] Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms,* 13.

Rather than exchange in general, it seems that what is really at stake for Protestant theologians is a sense of needing to resist a sense of linear causality between God and humanity and in creaturely relations mirroring this relation. For example, when these theologians reject economics or exchange in general, they often associate these with a calculated kind of exchange: tit for tat, *quid pro quo*, or *do et des*.[382] Therefore, I'm suggesting that they are primarily concerned with disrupting a sense that I do something to get God's reward or that I would act a certain way in order to get God to do something for me—a directly causal gift exchange. But if this is the case, instead of rejecting exchange as an opposition to the divine gift, might such concerns be better addressed by an alternate ontology that could account for multilateral gifts and a self located in and constructed through multi-dimensional dimensional relationships—a self "existing in the grid of all selves…[where] I have no self by myself or for myself [and] really have no identity that I can specify expect the intersection point of a multitude of things that are not mine."[383] In such an ontology reality itself emerges through exchange and internal relations where linear causality loses its descriptive power.

Intra-active gifting

This disruption of direct causality intuited in Primavesi's eco-gift, Sittler's ecological grace, and Derrida's non-circular gift requires an alternate ontology where

---

[382] See, for example, in Hamm, "Martin Luther's Revolutionary Theology of Pure gift without Reciprocation," (see Chapter Two) and Gregersen,"Radical Generosity and the Flow of Grace," *Word—Gift—Being.*

[383] Sittler, *Gravity and Grace*, 44-5.

material relations affect one another internally. As an alternative to Newtonian linear causality and Cartesian dualism between (human) subject and (non-human) object, Karen Barad constructs a relational ontology she calls "agential realism."[384] Trained as a quantum physicist in quantum field theory, Barad and her work embody a refusal to divide knowledge by disciplinary boundaries—particularly between the sciences and humanities—by identifying herself as quantum field theorist, feminist, post-structuralist, and queer theorist. Barad argues that where *inter*action still implies that an original, pure substance or self exists that then subsequently engages in relational exchanges we would better describe our relations with the human and other-than-human world in terms of *intra*-actions. Moving from interaction to intra-action marks a shift from assumptions of human alienability from the world—a relation enacted in modern scientific methodologies. Rethinking the scientific goal of objectivity without assuming separation from the world we seek to know, Barad insists, "'We' are not outside observers of the world. Nor are we simply located at particular places *in* the world; rather, we are part *of* the world in its ongoing intra-activity."[385]

At least since the discoveries of quantum physics a separative view of reality cannot be supported. As Plotnitsky drew our attention to enlightening connections between Derrida's work and that of Niels Bohr, so also Barad engages Bohr's work in significant and constructive ways. Building from Bohr's philosophy-physics Barad

---

[384] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway.*

[385] Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (2003), 828.

explains that the basic structure of reality should not be seen as atoms that bounce off of each other through external relations. Something much more fluid, porous and relational characterizes the "foundations" of reality. Intra-action thus describes the way that all matter—not just human being since it does not depend on anything like self-consciousness or some other exclusive human designation—comes to be. Barad's intra-action takes relational ontology past the boundaries of social or even biological life to the level of sub-atomic materialization.

Barad is rethinking the ontological assumptions that consciously and unconsciously order our worlds, economies, politics, gender relations, sciences, relations with the other-than-human, and more. She challenges a worldview of separative individualism as a key organizing metaphor of modern thought. In other words, she seeks to provide an alternative to

> a worldview that posits the existence of discrete entities that interact with one another in a locally determinate causal fashion, wherein change is the result of one event (the cause) causing another event (the effect) and causes effect the motion of entities moving through space in accord with the linear flow of time. The assumptions that support this view include the following: the world is composed of individual objects with determinate properties and boundaries, space is a given volume in which events occur, time is a parameter that advances in linear fashion on its own accord, and effects follow their causes.[386]

Linear causality becomes suspect because it assumes partners remain essentially and ontologically the same before and after the meeting. Such external relations do not jive

---

[386] Barad, "Nature's Queer Performativity." *Kvinder& Køn Forskning* 12 (2012): 45.

with accounts of reality where "partners do not precede the meeting."[387] In other words, the need for a shift in models comes not just from a newfound complexity of factors affecting a situation or phenomena, but also because parties constitute one another in their relations. As Barad explains,

> future moments don't follow present ones like beads on a string. Effect does not follow cause hand over fist, transferring the momentum of our actions from one individual to the next like the balls on a billiards table… Our (intra)actions matter—each one reconfigures the world in its becoming—and yet they never leave us; they are sedimented into our becoming, they become us. And yet even in our becoming there is no 'I' separate from the intra-active becoming of the world.[388]

Intra-actions do not remain external but cause ontological shifts in the parties involved, affecting the very nature of causality in time and space.

Along with Barad's above list of assumptions that support a view of separative substances we might also include the gift/exchange dualism along with assumptions that constrain grace to separative, personal, individual relations. I'd also suggest that the fact that matter doesn't just interact externally or at a distance might be interpreted as a kind of multilateral gift exchange. Employing the terminology without citing the (Gift) theory Barad writes, "'Individuals' are infinitely indebted to all others, where indebtedness is about not a debt that follows or results from a transaction but, rather, a debt that is the condition of possibility of giving/receiving."[389] For Barad there is no original essential

---

[387] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet,* 4.

[388] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 394.

[389] Barad, "On Touching—The Inhuman that Therefore I am," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 23.3 (2012): 7. See also Barad, "Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come," *Derrida Today 3,* no 2 (2010): 240-68.

selfhood that secondarily enters into social exchange relations. There remains no original starting place of pure human selfhood or materiality that remains outside of, or prior to, intra-active exchanges. The interconnections of exchange remain primary, opening the possibility in the first place of giving and receiving.

The question of the primacy of either a pure gift or exchange is, in short, a question of whether we start as original, essential, substantial selves that then subsequently enter into social exchange relations or if we have always already been relational and therefore in relationships of exchange. Where Moltmann, Sittler, and many others seek to strengthen a sense of human connection with other humans and all creation, Barad takes a different approach.[390] Barad is not striving to articulate how we *make* connections, how we feel less alienated or divorced from our social and ecological communities. For her, connection is a given, part of the fabric of reality. The question then is not how to connect (or reconnect) with the world around us. Where connection is the opening act we cannot simply stop at the acknowledgement that our fates are tied to each other's but we are led on to the next question: *given* this kind of primary relationality what kind of responsibility is called for? The interconnectedness of reality is the opening for the ability to respond since our selves, our consciousness, and our ethical agency only emerge in intra-action. Rather than diminishing ethical agency and responsibility, these multiple meeting points between what is mine and what is thine—entanglements with others—become the knots of relationality though which response/

---

390 Barad, "Deep Calls Unto Deep: Queer Inhumanism and Matters of Justice-to-Come" (paper presented at The Drew University Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquium, Madison, NJ, 2014).

ability—the ability to respond to the other—becomes possible. "What if we were to recognize that differentiating is a material act that is not about radical separation, but on the contrary, about making connections and commitments?"[391] Indeed, what if differentiating is not about separation but "connection that counts"?[392]

Gifting within the tissues of exchange

In defending the free or pure gift do we end up actually preserving something key to the Reformation message, or do we inadvertently sustain Western modern assumptions of the world and reality which are no longer scientifically or Biblically tenable, let alone ecologically sustainable? By insisting on the gift-exchange at the heart of Luther's theology of grace Holm and Malysz suggest an intriguing way forward. Unfortunately, any potentially fruitful alternatives are cut off by gendered power dynamics that reabsorb Luther's happy exchange metaphor into the gift/exchange dualism. With the articulation of a multilateral gift as a mode of nonlocal, nonlinear ecological gifting we have been constructing an alternative to both unilateral and bilateral gifting with their corresponding economies, cosmologies, and ontologies. While the gendered power dynamics of the happy exchange keep it from signaling a potentially fruitful alternate eco/nomic ontology, as we will see, a closely related metaphor may do just that. Rather than hierarchical or separative relations we may find that Luther's interpretation of the *communicatio idiomatum* holds a key for eco/nomic transformative potential from within the tradition.

---

[391] Barad, "Nature's Queer Performativity," 47.

[392] Keller in *From a Broken Web,* see intro above.

We have begun to see just how limiting the solid separative self is in accounting for grace. Rather than deemphasizing the reformers' insights into God's graciousness, the multilateral non-circular gift extends profound implications of grace beyond an anthropocentric world view to our most mundane realities and relations. In the process, a necessary interconnection between the doctrine of grace with a doctrine of creation is reaffirmed. From a relational and ecological perspective where grace emerges "within the tissue of differences" the space of grace would no longer be found in a nucleus—whether human, atomic, or a Holy of Holies—but flowing through the material relational spaces between and within a multitude of creatures who see grace not solely as something that rights their relationship with the divine, but that sustains, inspires, and enlivens by providing alternate life-giving modes of relation.

In some of the most mundane cases, then, it may be undecidable whether certain gifts are divine or creaturely—is our daily bread a gift purely from God if others, both human and non, have contributed, even giving the gift of their lives (yeast!) for it? And yet isn't there something divinely graceful in the fact that all these contributions have assembled/been assembled into a concrete and particular gift that this day sustains our life's work and service? Isn't there something sacred in the tie between what we might call mine and another's, in what I might call "you" and "me," or between what we might traditionally call spiritual and material, the Godly and the worldly?

CHAPTER FIVE

COMMUNICATING GRACE

> This *communicatio* of divine and human *idiomatum* is a fundamental law and the master-key of all our knowledge and of the whole visible economy.
>
> Johann G. Hamann[393]

> I had actually wanted to say something more, to express wider gratitude for the meal we were about to eat but I was afraid that to offer words of thanks for the pig and the mushrooms and the forest and the garden would come off sounding corny and worse, might ruin some appetites. The words I was reaching for, of course, were the words of grace.
>
> Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*[394]

Even in our least confessional moments we seem to desire the means to account for the ways that we have and continue to be sustained—even constituted—by the gifts of others. Perhaps there is a way to give thanks to the creatures who gave their work and lives for our sustenance as a way of also giving thanks to the divine. Perhaps our gratitude need not be addressed to either God or not-God, but could signal an awareness that there is something sacred in, with, and under the digestive-like exchanges of the world in the entanglement of seeming opposites: creator and creature, human and non-human, inside and outside.

We call the table blessing Michael Pollan refers to, as he does, "grace," which seems intuitively fitting but doctrinally unclear. This is at least the case from a Protestant perspective where in "proper" and "serious" theological discourse grace is nearly

---

393 Johann Georg Hamann, *Hamann: Writings on Philosophy and Language,* Kenneth Haynes, ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 99.

394 Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 407.

exclusively aligned with forensic justification. For a tradition known for its distinctive emphasis on grace, at least in its doctrinal expressions, it is not able to account for grace in the world radically enough. However, when taken seriously, the mundane table blessing might just account for a pervasive sense of grace that ties together creation and redemption more properly.

When asked why he consistently returned to a focus on the doctrine of grace Joseph Sittler replied that his motives were both strategic and theological.[395] He understood that this doctrine and its corollary, justification, were the doctrines on which the church stands or falls. This is how the Reformers referred to it, at least, and due in great part to Karl Holl's work, it remains true today. Sittler understood that the church and its leaders would simply not be swayed by anything not deemed as central as the doctrine of justification. So it seems that our basic interconnectedness will not sink in, swaying changes in lifestyle and perspective, unless it can be shown that in this particular doctrine we are basically interconnected and not mere separative individuals.

From another angle, though, it seems momentum is building to complicate this particular monopoly on grace. Niels Henrick Gregersen, for example, points to indications of this momentum. He writes, "the absolution of sins is not the only motif in the Western church's doctrine of grace." Going on to give examples from classic

---

[395] Sittler, *Gravity and Grace,* 2-3.

confessional texts he concludes that "[g]race is not merely an absolution relieving the recipients of the burdens of their past, but also an opening to the future."[396]

Gregersen's interests are aligned with another recently emerging movement in Lutheran scholarship, the Finnish interpretation of Luther. Theologians associated with this movement resist the near exclusive focus on forensic justification with its celebration of God's active work on passive human bodies and souls associated with the unilateral, free gift. They emphasize an aspect of Luther's theology marginalized by later confessional decisions. Where Lutheran orthodoxy developed with an exclusive emphasis on forensic justification and God's active work on the passive human *extra nos*, the Finns argue that Luther also emphasized what they call "effective justification" which depends on God's indwelling presence with the Christian *intra nos*. Consequently, the concept of gift they articulate is inalienable since it is emphasized that Christ both is and gives the gift of grace.

Finnish perspectives have already begun to be voiced in the previous chapter through the work of Risto Saarinen and Bo Kristian Holm. Holm in particular sought to disrupt, as we saw, a perceived gift/exchange dualism in Luther's work by emphasizing Luther's "happy exchange" as an exchangist gift at the heart of Luther's doctrine of justification. We concluded, however, that this particular expression of exchange is marked by power dynamics that bring us back to where we began, that is, with an active/

---

[396] *Word—Gift—Being*, 138. Gregersen points to evidence in the *Confessio Augustana*, article IV where it is stated that human beings are justified in the eyes of God when "taken into grace', that is, not just 'accepted by grace' but drawn into grace." He also points out that in Luther's Small and Large Catechisms Luther "describes the meaning and effect of the Eucharist as comprising both 'the forgiveness of sins' and 'life and salvation,'" (138-9).

passive binary explicitly tied to gender roles and invested in a classical assumption of divine impassibility.

Holm follows a consistent tendency among the theologians we have highlighted to revert to a primary unilateral gift with its exterior relations even after admirable strides to re-emphasize interchange between gifting parties. We demonstrated this tendency in Sittler's work where promising moments remain seemingly tied to a traditional transcendent doctrine of God and in Moltmann's desire to preserve an aspect of God *ex se* —out of Godself alone. Given the consistency of this tendency we have wondered whether we have reached the point beyond which a Protestant concept of grace can go no further.[397]

What still remains to be seen is whether an interaction between God and creation can be articulated from a Protestant perspective as truly relational in the sense that there is not only exchange from God to creation, but also from creation to God. In other words, can God can be moved or affected by creation? In order to explore these questions, this chapter will develop a concept of gift and grace in relation to an alternative reading of Luther. Intimately related to the happy exchange, Luther's interpretation of the ancient doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* (or the communication of properties) suggests a remarkable reciprocity between creator and creature. This interpretation of Luther's reading of the doctrine will emphasize its more marginalized and controversial aspects. Where many (like Moltmann, Sittler, and others) before and after Luther have been

---

[397] See Chapter Three.

willing to affirm a gift from creator to creature, most stopped short of affirming the reverse—that the creator too receives from creation resulting in properties improper to traditionally conceived divinity: vulnerability, suffering, weakness, and even death. Luther, by contrast, insisted this effect/affect must be felt within divinity itself. Unlike the happy exchange, a soteriological concept, the teaching of the *communicatio idiomatum* pervades Luther's entire theological trajectory. This chapter will emphasize in particular the ways Luther takes this ancient teaching and extends it from Christology to soteriology, sacramentology, and even ethics.

In the 20th century Dietrich Bonhoeffer was also profoundly shaped by Luther's extension of the *communicatio idiomatum* and, I will argue, extended it again to encompass an inter-dwelling, interchanging God/world relation. These moves are accompanied by corresponding shifts in gifting structure, such that grace emerges not in opposition to exchange but as that which emerges in, with, under communing relations.

Grace, even from a Protestant perspective, must be communicated as well as declared. Here, communication refers to more than just dialog or a transference of information as would again suggest separative relations where a gift of information is sent from one party across empty space to another. Building from its etymological connections with communion and community, communicating grace emerges as a mode of indwelling interconnection that empowers relations of care and response. Thus, possibility for grace-filled relations emerges through "withness itself," or an ontology of

being-with.[398] Where God and world are not opposed but commune and communicate in a Christomorphic play of unity and difference this mode emerges as sacramental as much as ecological in a turn toward a better worldliness. As such, this expression of grace emerges as proper for a blessing of an interspecies communing table as much as for "serious" theology within the walls of the church.

Early Christian intimations of the communicatio idiomatum

Jaroslav Pelikan explains that the relation between the divine and human as well as between the first and second persons of the trinity give "creedal status" to the "bond between "creation and redemption."[399] As Moltmann, Sittler and other ecotheologians emphasize, however, this bond has not been emphasized enough in the Protestant tradition. Sittler, for example, wrote of a near "repudiation" of creation for the sake of human salvation. Protestant soteriologies have placed strong emphasis on the absolute passivity of the creation to receive the gracious acts of God. This active/passive dualism has consequently meant a strong emphasis on dualistic relations between God and world. As we will see, however, this strict dualism was always held in tension with a soteriology that depended on union and even exchange between God and creation. Luther especially emphasized this soteriology and remained remarkably consistent with it. In contrast with Hamm's articulation of Luther's concept of grace as free gift, unprecedented among the world's religions, let alone the Christian religion, this chapter will demonstrate the strong

---

[398] Mary-Jane Rubenstein, "Capital Shares: The Way Back Into the With of Christianity," see Chapter One.

[399] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition: (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 172.

ties Luther maintained with early Christian soteriologies, especially those following from Athanasius in the Alexandrian school, as antecedents that influenced his theology of grace. We will see that Luther's dependence on this school of Christian thought becomes most evident in his particular articulation of the *communicatio idiomatum*.

First intimations of what emerged as the *communicatio idiomatum* can be found in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch (c. 50 - between 98 and 117), who emphasized both the "oneness of Christ and the reality of his twofold mode of existence."[400] However, Tertullian (c. 155 - c. 240) first addressed the question of the relation between the two natures of Christ, emphasizing that the human and divine characteristics remain distinct in Christ.[401] The traits were, in Tertullians words, "'not confused but conjoined.'"[402] Any mutable characteristic of Christ such as suffering or learning was due to his humanity and didn't alter his divine attributes of immutability.[403] However, as early church historian J. N. D. Kelly points out, "these careful distinctions did not prevent Tertullian from using expressions like 'God allows Himself to be born,' 'the sufferings of God,' 'God as truly crucified, truly died.'"[404] Such language clearly anticipates the *communicatio idiomatum.*

---

[400] J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, revised edition (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1978), 143.

[401] Ibid., 151.

[402] Tertullian, in Ibid., 152.

[403] In this regard Tertullian anticipates the Antiochene position. For church leaders shaped by the Antiochene school of Christian thought, their soteriologies depended on the preservation of God's omnipotence and impassibility. While maintaining Christ's dual nature, then, they emphasized the preservation of difference and distinction between the human and divine natures of Christ.

[404] Kelly, 152.

Augustine (354-430) regards the relation of the two natures as a kind of "mixture" that is yet not a combination of two natures into a new nature. He also insists, like most others through Chalcedon, that this union of natures is particular to the person of Jesus Christ and not a generalizable divine nature united to a generalizable human nature. Around the same time Apollinarius (d. 390) wrote of a "composite nature" in Christ, which patristic scholar Richard Norris suggests is a lesser developed form of the *communicatio idiomatum.*[405] Apollinarius was expanding on the thought of Athanasius (c. 296-373), who arose as an important figure in the Nicene debates with Arius and his followers. Athanasius' soteriology depended on a strong union between divinity and humanity. His famous conclusion to his influential writing *On the Incarnation* is characteristic: "For the Son of God became man so that we might become God."[406] While Athanasius has become famously identified with this divinizing conclusion, he too was relying on the thought of those who came before him. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130- 202), for example, similarly wrote that God "became what we are in order to make us what he is himself" and that "If the Word became man, it was so men may become gods."[407]

Athanasius' soteriology became associated with what became known as the Alexandrian school. By the time the Council of Chalcedon (451) became necessary the Alexandrian school had developed a soteriology and corresponding Christology distinct

---

[405] Richard A.Norris Jr., ed. and trans. *The Christological Controversy.* Fortress Press, 1980.

[406] Athanasius' famous conclusion of On the Incarnation was that the Logos became human so humans may become god—not in the same sense as the Logos, but "by appointment and grace."

[407] Irenaus, *Against Heresies*, Book V, Preface.

from what was known as the Antiochene school. Antiochene Christology relied on an understanding of the Logos coming to dwell in the human Jesus. Where Alexandrians emphasized a soteriology dependent on a union between God and humanity the Antiochene school emphasized the preservation of God's divine characteristics and humanity's human characteristics. Each side held to some level of both union and distinction, so the difference was a matter of emphasis that resulted in different soteriologies and Christologies.

Arguing against the Antiochene position, Cyril of Alexandria insisted that the Logos coming to dwell in a human did not account for the kind of soteriological shift that was needed. Cyril's Christology was a mature articulation of Athanasian soteriology. For Athanasius, the "heart of Christianity" is "the presence of God amid human kind, made human."[408] God's saving work was in the incarnation and it was essential for Athanasius that the Logos suffer and die the death owed by all humanity in human flesh. In this death the debt to God's honor was paid and death itself was overcome. Christ must have been the incarnation of the fullness of God because only the properties of the fullness of God would have saved humanity and made them divine as well.

If God merely came to dwell in human flesh through Jesus, incarnation was inadequate to save more than just humanity. Cyril argues, "how then can he be said to have become the Savior of the cosmos, and not rather [only] of man, as a pilgrim and

---

[408] Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: Vol. 1, The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (San Fransisco: Harper, 1984), 174.

traveler through whom we have also been saved?'"[409] For the Alexandrians, the relation between God and creation could not be adequately expressed as an indwelling. Emphasizing the unity of divine and human, Cyril insisted that the union in Christ is such that both his divinity and his humanity subsist in one hypostasis. The union was 'anhypostatic' meaning that Christ's humanity has no hypostasis of its own.

Such a union concerned Antiochenes who felt that the humanity of Christ became swallowed by the Logos. Nestorius, archbishop of Constantinople, opposed Cyril's hypostatic union, arguing that it "signified a kind of physical or chemical union of two substances—and therefore "mixture" or "confusion" in which the deity of Christ was altered or modified."[410] Indeed, as Norris points out, "'one hypostasis' and 'one nature' were phrases which, for Cyril, signified the fact that the humanity belonged so intimately to the Logos that there was actually only one subject or subsistent reality in Jesus. The one hypostasis and the one nature are the Logos himself."[411]

By understanding Cyril's insistence on the communication of attributes as an expression of Athanasian soteriology it becomes evident that Cyril's position relied on eucharistic doctrine and practice as union with Christ.[412] Cyril's interest was not necessarily the unity of Christ's person itself; he cared about the unity of Christ's person

---

[409] Pelikan, citing Cyril, 234.

[410] Norris, 29.

[411] Ibid., 28.

[412] See Pelikan and Henry Chadwick, "Eucharist and Christology in the Nestorian Controversy," *Journal of Theological Studies* 2.2 (1951): 145-164.

because of the implications for the eucharist.[413] For Cyril, every eucharist is a reincarnation of the Logos.[414] Just as the divine and human were united in Christ, so the believer is united with Christ, and Christ's benefits are communicated to us. Christ's body instills life into our body. If the Logos and his flesh were separable, our unity with Christ and his benefits would be in question as well.

In the end, Pope Leo proposed a compromise position that Christ be understood as "one 'person' having two natures, each of which was the principle of a distinct model of activity,"[415] and thus the Council of Chalcedon affirmed Christ had two natures in one person. One nature was consubstantial with God and one with humanity, but the natures were united in one hypostasis. The *communicatio idiomatum* then was a way of articulating the relationship between humanity and divinity in Christ that maintained both union and difference.

The communication of properties did not initially develop as a way of making sense of the immutable, impassible God experiencing suffering, material change, limitation, and even death. It was an integral part of Cyril and Athanasius' soteriology and sacramentology which depended on a profound union between God and the humanity. With an emphasis on the strict separation between creator and creation the soteriological importance of this union and even sharing of God's divinity was seemingly lost in the reformation tradition. However, as I will demonstrate, although it has been

---

[413] Chadwick, "Eucharist and Christology in the Nestorian Controversy," 153.

[414] Ibid., 155.

[415] Norris, 29.

only marginally articulated, this soteriological union was key for Luther. In fact, the *communicatio idiomatum* became a touchstone of the scope of his theology linking everything from justification to economic and social ethics.

The communicatio idiomatum *during the Reformation*

> Luther's economic ethics and his eucharistic theology are inseparable.
>
> Cynthia Moe-Lobeda[416]

> [B]y means of this sacrament, all self-seeking love is voided out and gives place to that which seeks the common good of all. When you have partaken of this sacrament...your heart must go out in love and learn that this is a sacrament of love. As love and support are given you, you in turn must render love and support to Christ in his needy ones...The sacrament has no blessing and significance unless love grows daily and so changes a person that he is made one with the others. In times past this sacrament was so properly used, and the people were taught to understand this fellowship so well, that they even gathered food and material goods in the church, and...distributed among those who were in need.
>
> Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament"

Some of the questions and concerns Cyril and Nestorius expressed remained with the church at least through the Reformation. In the fifth century, Christological debates drew on and were influenced by eucharistic and liturgical practice. Conversely, in the sixteenth century proposed shifts in eucharistic and liturgical practices by the Reformers reignited many of the Christological questions and concerns raised by Cyril and Nestorius. In both contexts controversy intensified around the *communicatio idiomatum.*

---

[416] Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, "Globalization in Light of Luther's Eucharistic Economic Ethics," *Dialog* 42.3 (2003): 252.

To argue that Luther's concept of gift was unprecedented outside of Biblical witness and signifies a break with earlier Christian concepts of gift that rely on exchange fails to recognize the constructive ways he was reinterpreting, repeating, and extending early church thinkers. Rather than rejecting early church models of exchange in favor of a new concept of a pure gift, Luther's theology may be interpreted as a continuation and expansion of these models of soteriological and Christological exchange and union.

The importance of the *communicatio idiomatum* for Luther cannot be overestimated. French Reformation historian Marc Lienhard explains that it is a key concept of Luther's Christology. In a recent essay included in the provocatively titled collection on Luther's interpretation of the *communicatio idiomatum*, *Creator est Creatura,* Oswald Bayer argues that Luther's "Christology is really the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum.*"[417] More than just Christology though, K. O. Nilson argues it is the very heart of his theology because it articulates the relationship between God and creation. "It is the *communicatio idiomatum* by which Luther's whole system of theological thought stands or falls. The *communicatio idiomatum* is not merely a consequence of the unity in Christ, but an expansion of this unity itself and the whole basis on which, according to Luther, life and happiness rests.'"[418] In Luther's "Treatise on the Councils" he gives the *communicatio idiomatum* a place of central importance in the

---

[417] Oswald Bayer and Benjamin Gleede, *Creator est Creatura: Luthers Christologie als Lehre von der Idiomenkommunikation* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter), 23.

[418] Nilsson cited in Leinhard, fn 100, pg 355.

development of the early church christology. "In the sense that Luther intends it," Lienhard explains, "it becomes a kind of touchstone of true theology."[419]

How does Luther intend it? The question of the role of the *communicatio idiomatum* and the proper articulation of it became a locus of debate among the German and Swiss Reformers because of the ways it was employed in eucharistic theologies. Luther expands the doctrine even beyond Christology and sacramentology to his theology of justification and even ethics. Interpreted in this way, his Christology, sacramentology, justification and ethics are unified, a repetition of a Christological theme emphasizing God's entwined relationship with and commitment to the world. Typically, Luther's ethics or horizontal, worldly, and exchangist relations are seen as a secondary consequence of the primary (pure gift) of relation with God. This is a pattern we've repeatedly witnessed from Sittler to Holm and others. Prioritizing a pure gift that gives way to exchange inevitably gives ethics and worldly relations a place of secondary importance behind individual relations with God. However, in light of the central place of the *communicatio idiomatum* (especially in the particular way Luther understands it) in Luther's thought, I suggest that we might see the entire scope of the Christian life and experience as a repetition of a christological theme of indwelling and relational exchange.

Communicating the body of Christ

While Luther famously rejected the interpretation of the mass as sacrifice in the "Babylonian Captivity of the Church" (1520), Reformation scholars note that, by

---

[419] Leinhard, 335.

comparison, the eucharist and Christology were not a locus of controversy and debate between the Lutheran reformers and Roman Catholic representatives.[420] Even the doctrine of transubstantiation was not a point of heavy controversy. Although Luther rejected it, his main objection was merely that it was an inappropriate attempt to explain something that is truly a mystery.

His alternative description of the union between the sacramental elements and the body of Christ is the first place we can see Luther's extension of the *communicatio idiomatum*. Although he expands the doctrine beyond the relation between the two natures as outlined in the Chalcedonian creed, there was precedent for this eucharistic extension in Cyril's thought. Where Cyril based his christology on eucharistic practice and thought, Luther based his eucharistic thought on Christology. Cyril held that every eucharist was a reincarnation of the Logos so that by taking Christ's body in the supper the Logos implants itself in us and makes us incorruptible and immortal. In this way, Cyril's soteriology and sacramentology depended on the unity and exchange of the *communicatio idiomatum,* shared with the believer by taking in the body of Christ so that in the supper Christ's properties are communicated to the believer.

Instead of Christ being bodily present by transubstantiation Luther, like Cyril, extends the *communicatio idiomatum,* arguing that the bread, wine, and water are united

---

[420] For example, Article Ten of the Apology to the Augsburg Confession on the presence of Christ in the eucharist (the Reformer's—mainly Melanchthon's—response to the Catholic reply to the Augsburg Confession) is very short since it mainly expresses agreement between the Lutheran Reformer's position, the Roman, and the Orthodox positions.

to Christ's body through a hypostatic union.[421] Since the elements uniting with Christ's body are not transformed, they remain bread, wine, and water. Christ's body does not take their place but is present "in, with, and under" them.[422] "In the Eucharist, the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are present, but at the same time the substance of the bread and wine that is, not through transubstantiation, but in a hypostatic union of Christ's humanity and the substances of the bread and wine."[423]

While Luther placed a great deal of importance on the sacramental union with Christ's body, the unity of the reformation movement paid dearly for it. While Luther's Christology had not been in question in his debates with the Roman Catholic church,[424] after several attempts to unite, the German and Swiss reform movements efforts fell apart by the mid 1500's, mainly because of divergent views on the eucharist and Christology. At the root of this conflict were different positions with regard to the *communicatio idiomatum.*

Echoing Athanasius' and Cyril's earlier arguments, Luther insisted that by putting in question sacramental union one also put in question the saving union between the human and divine natures in Christ.[425] For Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli, however, the

---

[421] See Luther's "Confession Concerning the Lord's Supper." See also Althaus, 179 on the eucharist as an extension of the c*ommunicatio idiomatum*. Marc Leinhard addresses the parallel of the hypostatic union with the sacramental union (220).

[422] "In, with, and under" became the standard Lutheran position following the *The Formula of Concord Solid Declaration.*

[423] Luther, "Confession Concerning the Lord's Supper," cited in Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 217.

[424] Leinhard, 23.

[425] See Leinhard, 220.

preservation of the sacramental union was a confused mix of spiritual and material realms, attributing spiritual effect to a material act. Zwingli held that the sacraments were a sign of grace, of what was taking place in the soul of the believer, and thus were not a means or communication of grace as Luther held. Luther and Zwingli could never agree to join their reform movements together because Zwingli ultimately rejected the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* altogether as a confusion or mixture of what should be kept completely distinct.

Contemporary theologians and historians point out that Calvin's Christology and sacramentology were much closer to Luther's than Zwingli's.[426] However, when an agreement of unity was signed between the Swiss Calvinist and Zwinglian reform movements the German Lutherans declared any promise of an agreement between the Calvinist and Lutheran movements poisoned. Luther and Calvin agreed that Christ was present in the sacrament and Calvin, like Luther, was concerned that the eucharist create unity between the believer and Christ. The disagreement arose, however, around the question of Christ's bodily presence, and again, the interpretation of the *communicatio idiomatum,* which both reformers maintained.

While Luther would not affirm the sacredness of the flesh in and of itself, his insistence on the believer's participation in and union with the flesh of Christ emerges as a surprising contrast to common modern misperceptions of Luther as someone who shifted Western Christian thought away from a rootedness in material life on account of

---

[426] Davis, for example. Thomas J. Davis, *This is My Body: The Presence of Christ in Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 2008.

his emphasis on an immaterial Word of God.[427] In fact, Luther's understanding of the Word of God is always a fleshly, material, incarnated word. The believer's encounter with Christ is not merely intellectual, psychological, emotional, or spiritual (where spiritual is defined as a rejection of matter), but always with a material, fleshly Christ. As we will see, this emphasis on the bodily encounter with Christ, across both time and space, is a particular consequence for Luther of the communication of properties.

Union with the past, historical flesh of Christ was not enough for Luther. He felt that although the historical Christ and his acts remain essential they must be communicated—both materially and verbally—to the believer in every time and place.[428] In this sense, the Word and sacraments had to be for Luther, as they were for Cyril, a continuation of the incarnation or a prolongation of the body of Christ. Marc Leinhard notes, for example, that "One can say, as Luther does, that the incarnation continues in the sense that God continues to offer himself to us by the physical elements that are the bread and the wine of the Eucharist...These physical elements have certainly not supplanted the humanity of Christ as such, but prolong it in some way, constituting his current way of being present."[429] While such a view of incarnation as prolonged or

---

[427] For example, Wandel, a noted Reformation scholar, continues this misinterpretation *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy*.

[428] "For Luther, the salvation of believers is and remains linked to the flesh of Christ. It is necessary that this be given to them, because in it it alone they find their justification. It is not enough for us to see that it is attested that God saves us, or that we can be content to receive only the benefits of the redemptive work of Chirst accomplished in the past. We must receive Christ himself, Christ with his flesh because it was in his flesh that he accomplished redemption. Everything depends then on the identity between the historic Chirst and Christ present, between Chirst dead on the cross and Chirst who now constitutes my righteousness before God," (Leinhard, 222).

[429] Leinhard, 200.

continued may be marginal to Lutheran orthodoxy, similar comments about Luther's conception of the incarnation and the sacraments are frequent among Luther scholars. Hermann Sasse explains that for Luther the sacrament of the altar is "an extension of the incarnation into our time and into our lives,"[430] while Dawn DeVries explains that the "preached Word not only conveys Christ but continues Christ's living presence in the world."[431] Again, this communication is not just limited to an oral message because, like preaching, Luther considered the sacraments a fleshly, "incarnational event."[432] In such articulations of an extended and prolonged body of Christ we begin to see the particular relevance of the gift that resists linear time and space causality.

Calvin also emphasized union with Christ, but could not accept the bodily, fleshly presence of Christ in the eucharist. In order for Christ's body to be present in the sacrament, in every celebration of the sacrament, as well as, according to scripture, ascended to the right hand of God, Luther insisted that Christ's body—even his *human* body—shared in the omnipresence of God through the communication of attributes.[433] To Calvin, the ubiquitous or omnipresent body of Christ was unacceptable because it sacrificed that which united Christ's body (made it *homoousious*) with the human body

---

[430] Hermann Sasse, *This is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), 153.

[431] Dawn DeVries "The Incarnation and the Sacramental Word: Calvin's and Schleiermacher's Sermons on Luke 2." In *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions,* David Willis-Watkins, and Michael Welker, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 392.

[432] Ibid., 393.

[433] I am using *communicatio idiomatum,* communication of attributes, and communication of properties interchangeably throughout this chapter.

because he understood that the human body was, by definition, limited to the constrictions of time and space.

The key difference between the two reformer's views on the *communicatio idiomatum* lies in whether there is an exchange of properties between *natures* or an exchange of properties in the *person* of Christ. For Calvin, the *communicatio idiomatum* expressed a unity between the divine and human in the *person* of Christ. He maintained the difference between them by insisting that while there was unity in the person, Chirst's divine nature and his human nature remained completely distinct. He rejected, as Joseph Tylenda explains, "any real ontological exchange of properties of one nature to the other."[434] For Calvin, the communication happens only on the level of "a *person*, a *subject* having that nature," but not the "nature itself."[435]

For the sake of clarity, the first generation of theologians after Luther articulated different levels of exchange in Luther's interpretation of the *communicatio idiomatum.* These are useful in explaining Calvin's acceptance of the ancient doctrine and the ways his views diverged from Luther's particular articulation.[436] The first level of exchange, the *genus apostelesmaticum*, was shared by Luther and Calvin. This genus "attributes all the activities of Christ not to only one of the two natures, but to the unique person of the Savior."[437]

---

[434] Tylenda, Joseph N. "Calvin's Understanding of the Communication of Properties." *Westminster Theological Journal* 38, no 1 (Fall 1975): 61.

[435] Ibid., 59.

[436] These are articulated in the Formula of Concord.

[437] Leinhard, 339.

A second level Lutheran tradition named the *genus majestaticum* because Christ's human nature is here considered to have become "majestic" as it is permeated with properties of the divine nature such as omnipresence. This is how, for Luther, the Christian could be united with the true body and blood of Christ across time and space. Lutheran orthodoxy affirmed this genus in the *Formula of Concord,* but Calvin and his followers could not accept it because it lost unity with the defining characteristics of a human body.

It is not well known, Leinhard points out, that Luther himself goes one step further than Lutheran orthodoxy was willing to go in the communication of properties. Where the *genus majestaticum* accepts a communication of attributes from God to the human nature, Luther's insistence on what later theologians called the *genus tapeinoticum* (or genus of humility) suggested a communication of *human properties to the divine*. In other words, while Lutheran orthodoxy limited the exchange between God and creation to God's active gift to passive creatures, Luther emphasized the reverse as well: that God is so united with creaturely life that God cannot be but profoundly affected and moved by it. Leinhard, for example, explains that "one of the characteristic traits of Luther's christology is to envisage a kind of participation in Jesus Christ of the divine nature in human weakness."[438] Luther writes of the sufferings of the human nature being "communicated, attributed, and given to the divine nature." So Luther does not hesitate to insist that "God is born, suckled and bred, sleeps in the cradle, is cold, walks, falls,

---

[438] Ibid., 340.

wanders, wakes up, eats, drinks, suffers, dies, etc.," (Luther, *Table Talk*).[439] This profound and crucial aspect of Luther's Christology and soteriology was thus essentially cut off from the later Lutheran tradition.

Where most others (Calvinists and Lutherans in the tradition of orthodoxy that followed) would want to clarify that God *in Christ* is born, etc. implying that these events are attributed to Christ's human nature, Luther emphasized that where God is, God is fully. This is no divine toe-dip into the pool of creaturehood, but a full and permanent baptismal emersion into the vicissitudes of life in the world. As Piotr Malysz explains (in a different essay from the one dealt with in chapter four), "underlying Luther's variegated Christological reflection was a fundamental and uncompromised insistence on the concreteness of the exchange of properties between Christ's two natures. As Luther saw it, only when taken as concrete—that is, reciprocally holding nothing back—can the togetherness of the natures in Christ's person give adequate expression to his identity as Saviour."[440] The parallels with Athanasius' soteriological exchange whereby God becomes fully human so that humans might become God becomes entirely evident at this point, along with a clear indication that Luther's joyous exchange is merely a

---

[439] in Leinhard, 340-1. See also Thesis four of Luther's "Disputation on the Humanity and Divinity of Christ," "it is true to say: This man created the world, and this God suffered, died, was burried, etc." cited in Paul Hinlicky, "Luther's Anti-Docetism," *Creator est Creatura*, 154).

[440] Malysz, "Review of *Creator Est Creatura: Luthers Christologie Als Lehre Von Der Idiomenkommunikation*, Ed. Oswald Bayer and Benjamin Gleede." *Reviews in Religion & Theology* 16 (2009): 618.

soteriological application of a much more pervasive Christological theme in his theology.[441]

From historical and contemporary concerns to new possibilities?

The extent to which Luther allows for the world to move God in the *communicatio idiomatum* has been an uncomfortable problem for many theologians over the ages.[442] In the *Formula of Concord,* Luther's followers rejected the *genus tapeinoticum* on the grounds that it limited the divine nature and was inconsistent with God's unchangeability. More recently, Jürgen Moltmann explains that in the *genus majestaticum* and *tapeinoticum* Luther went beyond the boundaries allowed by scholastic theology. He then indicates his own discomfort with Luther's articulation by reiterating Calvin's concerns:

> With the help of the notion of the *communicatio idiomatum* one can attribute the human characteristics of suffering and death to the whole person of Christ. One cannot say: Therefore the divine nature can suffer and die, it is only possible to say: Therefore the person of Christ is mortal. One cannot say: Therefore the body of the risen Christ is omnipresent but only: therefore the person of Christ is omnipresent.[443]

Calvin's main concern was to maintain unity between Christ's humanity and human flesh. He describes his view of Luther's *genus majestaticum* and *tapeinoticum* in the *Institutes:*

---

[441] Leinhard notes this connection.

[442] A common critique of Luther is that he is promoting patripassionism or modalism. Marc Leinhard defends Luther's position against claims of patripassionism characteristic of modalism: "In order to distinguish Luther's position from Modalism, Marc Leinhard suggests the term deipassionism to indicate that, in Luther's case, instead of the Father's suffering in Christ, it is God who suffers." (cited in Arnfridur Gudmundsdottir, *Meeting God on the Cross: Christ, the Cross, and the Feminist Critique* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 82.)

[443] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ As the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (HarperCollins, 1974), 232.

> [Christ's] body was swallowed up by his divinity. I do not say that they think so. But if to fill all things in an invisible manner is numbered among the gifts of the glorified body, it is plain that the substance of the body is wiped out, and that no difference between deity and human nature is left. Then, if Christ's body is so multiform and varied that it shows itself in one place but is invisible in another, where is the very nature of a body, which exists in its own dimensions, and where is its unity?[444]

Calvin's concern remains a legitimate question, particularly for those of us with current concerns to emphasize embodiment with relation to divinity. However, in a context where "simple location" is questioned along with linear causality might we be able to affirm that Luther's extendable, repeated, prolongated, even ubiquitous body of Christ suggests not so much an opposition to human bodily existence as a revelation about our own bodies of flesh? Might Luther's "majestic" body of Christ also suggest that the boundaries of our bodies, like Christ's, are perhaps not what they seem? Might it reveal a truth that our bodies, like Christ's—while not unlimited—are composed of the stuff of stars as much as microbes? Does this ubiquitous body reveal something about our selves which cannot be cleanly cut off from "outsiders," that they dwell within us and that the line between what is inside and outside, self and other, is not so much blurred as it is multiplied?[445]

Luther's ubiquitous body of Christ and the *genus tapeinoticum* have been somewhat of a Lutheran orthodox embarrassment. Similarly, the emphasis on union I've highlighted has also been relegated to the margins because it calls into question some of

---

[444] Calvin, *Institutes*, Book IV, ch. 17, cited in Wandel, 162.

[445] This is Derrida's alternative to the single Cartesian line between the human and animal in *The Animal that Therefore I Am.*

the most rigidly maintained marks of later Lutheran orthodoxy: dualisms between inside and outside, self and other, God and creation, activity and passivity. Luther's ubiquitous body, the *genus tapeinoticum* and an emphasis on union have generally been dismissed and filed under "Luther's excesses." Might these margins of Luther's thought and Lutheran orthodoxy now be creative and vivifying resources for contemporary constructive theologies?

Going even beyond Luther, building off his insights, might we let the *genus tapeinoticum* reveal a deeper and more reciprocal sense of exchange between creator and created than Lutheran orthodoxy generally accepts? Might the ubiquitous body of Christ reveal something majestic about creaturely bodies in their interconnectedness and interdependence with all things?[446] Might the prolonged and repeated body of Christ shift our understanding to see that the incarnation of God continues in its prolonged and extended trajectory and is ever new, fresh, and enfleshed for the world? The maintenance of a duality between interior and exterior, *intra nos* and *extra nos*, is continually emphasized in interpretations of Luther's theology of justification. Such questioning of the limit between self and other, inside and outside is anticipated here in Luther's extension or prolongation of the body and flesh of Christ through time and space, his insistence on union with Christ's body in the sacraments, and a scandalous sense of unity-forming exchange between creation and creator.

---

[446] This is a conclusion, it would seem, that goes beyond Luther's thought. I do not argue that he would maintain any majesty of the flesh apart from God. Nor does my constructive proposal maintain any majesty apart from God. The constructive shift I'm arguing for is that the majesty of the flesh would be found with its graced nature, in the ways it is given us through the multiplicity of gifts and exchanges with others, both divine and creaturely.

Communicating justification

In emphasizing Luther's reliance on the *communicatio idiomatum* in his sacramentalogy we have already begun to address the impact of these exchanges on Luther's soteriology. Here the emphasis will shift to union between Christ and the human, an essential aspect of Luther's understanding of salvation by justification that has been deemphasized. As we will see, emphasizing a saving union between Christ and the Christian also results in a fundamental shift in gifting models from alienable to inalienable gifts.

Like the exchange of Luther's interpretation of the *communicatio idiomatum,* union has not been a majority position in Lutheran orthodoxy. Melanchthon, Luther's right-hand reformer, for example, did not accept the extent to which Luther understood the *communicatio idiomatum* as an exchange from humanity to God and, furthermore, resolutely rejected any sense of God's presence or activity *intra nos.*[447] For Melanchthon and the Lutheran orthodoxy which followed him God's work is not primarily in union with the Christian but in God's active work on the passive human, *extra nos*. Increasingly, justification became separate from union and deification so that unity with Christ and the community of believers along with ethics and sanctification became a secondary effect of forensic justification articulated as a unilateral or free gift of grace.

Two historically separate but thematically interrelated minority movements in the Lutheran tradition will be highlighted in this section. In their own ways they have

---

[447] Melanchthon and his followers understood the *communicatio idiomatum* primarily in terms of preaching or proclamation rather than ontological union (see Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 232).

disrupted any assumed break from early soteriologies of exchange and consequently disrupt the Protestant orientation toward increasing individualism with alternative understandings of God's gift. Both Andreas Osiander (16th century) and the recent Finnish interpretation of Luther take issue with the interpretation of justification where any emphasis on God's indwelling presence or union with the human is rejected.

The first movement took place shortly after Luther's death. Andreas Osiander was an important early and active supporter of Luther, present at the Marburg Colloquy where Luther and Zwingli tried to find common theological ground, at the defense of the Reformation before the Roman Catholic Church at Augsburg, and in Smalcald with other reformers. After Luther's death, however, colleagues began to notice what they considered to be significant differences between Osiander's doctrine of justification and Luther's.

Emphasizing Luther's happy exchange as articulated in *The Freedom of a Christian,* Osiander taught that justification "occurs in the marriage of Christ and the believer, the unifying of the believer's soul with the indwelling divine righteousness."[448] However, Melanchthon and his supporters objected to Osiander's emphasis on indwelling grace and instead exclusively emphasized the alien nature of Christ's righteousness outside the human. Current supporters of Melanchthon's interpretation and Lutheran Orthodoxy Robert Kolb, James Nestingen, and Charles Arand explain that "Melanchthon believed that Osiander's placement of saving righteousness within the sinner destroyed

---

[448] Charles P. Arand, James A. Nestingen and Robert Kolb, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fotress Press, 2012), 219.

Luther's position that salvation comes from *extra nos* ("outside and apart from ourselves"), the dependence of faith upon God's external Word of promise, and its saving, life-restoring action in the forgiveness of sins."[449] Concerns were also raised by Osiander's contemporaries that he been too much influenced by his study of Kabbalah and neo-platonism and thus misinterpreted Christ's presence in the sinner substantially, where Luther understood Christ's work as merit from submitting to the will of God.[450] Furthermore, Kolb, Arand, and Nestingen explain that concerns with Osiander's views arose because his interpretation of grace was not limited to the forgiveness of sins.[451]

Kolb and Arand describe the response to Osiander's views as a resounding and unified rejection by Luther's closest and most ardent supporters. Only Osiander's prince, Duke Albrecht (whom he himself had converted) and pastor, reformer, and theologian Johannes Brenz supported him. Brenz argued the conflict was an un-Christian war of words and pointed out that Osiander himself denied he held the positions his antagonists condemned.[452] The controversy grew to the point that a church council was necessary. The resulting *Formula of Concord* addressed the Osiandrian controversy, deciding

---

[449] Arand et al, 221.

[450] See Arand et al., 217.

[451] Arand, 219. "He did little with the central Lutheran concept of the forgiveness of sins since in his view humanity is completed through this indwelling divine righteousness—in contrast to Luther's concept of the restoration of the proper relationship between God and human creatures through the remission of this sin that separates sinners from God."

[452] For example, "He denied that he had ever taught that Christ's sufferings and death were not a part of the sinners righteousness and minimized the substantial theological difference between him and his opponents" (Arand et al., 223).

against Osiander and affirming Melanchthon and other's insistence on forensic justification to the exclusion of any indwelling union with Christ.

In the 20th and 21st centuries concerns similar to Osiander's have been voiced by Finnish Lutheran scholars. Like Osiander, scholars aligning with the Finnish interpretation of Luther suggest that Luther "before Lutheranism" understood that grace was not simply limited to forensic justification and the forgiveness of sins, but also encompassed a sense of indwelling communion with Christ present in faith.[453]

The Finnish interpretation is the fruit of ecumenical dialogue between the Finnish Lutheran church and the Russian Orthodox church beginning in the 1970's. Finnish scholar Tuomo Mannermaa was deeply involved in this dialogue and, as a result of this interdenominational exchange, came to question the dominant German interpretation of Luther's theology of justification and grace. In reading Luther alongside orthodox understandings of *theosis* or deification he came to see a different side of Luther, a side that did not fully depart from or reject patristic notions of salvation as deification. The implications of this shift are significant for current Lutheran thought, particularly in articulating an alternative concept of gift and strengthening the connection between justification and justice, faith and love.

---

[453] The "medium of spiritual existence was not the event of 'forensic justification' but the divine person of Chirst," (Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds. *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 105. Milbank addresses the Finnish Interpretation, but only in a footnote in *Being Reconciled.* While this interpretation would go a long way, addressing many of his critiques, Milbank explains he chose not to address this interpretation because he finds it historically implausible that Luther would have agreed to their interpretation. What he does not make clear, though, is the distinction between Luther's work and the expression of Lutheranism in Lutheran orthodoxy as has been emphasized here.

The Finns are particularly critical of two significant shifts in the history of Lutheran orthodoxy. Unsurprisingly, they are critical of the positions the *Formula of Concord* took on justification and Osiander's emphasis on Christ's presence *intra nos*. They are also critical of the post-Kantian move away from ontology in Lutheran thought. After Kant, reference to ontology in Luther's writings became ignored or explained away. Any sense of union was constrained to an external union with the will of God rather that the being of God so that faith becomes "volitional obedience rather than [an] ontological participation."[454] Where the German-Kantian interpretation suggests Chirst's presence is "just a subjective experience or God's 'effect' on the believer," the Finns would like to re-emphasize the "real-ontic unity between Christ and the Christian."[455]

One of Mannermaa's first clues that a sense of union had been lost in the Lutheran tradition occurred to him while retranslating Luther's phrase from his lectures on Galatians, "'*in ipsa fide Christus adest,*' which Mannermaa translates as "in faith itself Christ is really present."[456] He points out that in a traditional Lutheran forensic interpretation the Christ *pro nobis* (Christ for us) of grace and forgiveness is emphasized while a sense of *Christus in nobis* (Christ within us) is all but lost. As North American scholar Carl Braaten explains in the text that introduced the Finnish interpretation to an American audience, "according to the forensic model of justification, it is *as though* we

---

[454] Braaten and Jenson, ix.

[455] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, MN: Unitas Books, 2004), 46.

[456] Braatnen and Jenson, viii, citing Mannermaa, *Der im Glauben gegenwärtige Christus* (Hannover, 1989).

are righteous, while in reality we are not. But if through faith we really participate in Christ, we participate in the whole of Christ, who in his divine person communicates the righteousness of God." Recalling the ecumenical and patristic roots of this interpretation highlighted above with regard to Athanasius' soteriology, he then adds, "Here lies the bridge to the Orthodox idea of salvation as deification or *theosis*."[457]

One of the strengths of the Finnish interpretation is that it addresses a consistent area of weakness in the tradition. With such a strong emphasis on forensic justification as God's work outside of us to the exclusion of any works of our own the Lutheran tradition has struggled to maintain a robust emphasis on sanctification, becoming holy, and acting with justice. Later reformers, especially Calvin and Melanchthon, distinguish sharply between justification and sanctification. Thwarting a deep presumption of theological history, Mannermaa argues that "at least on the level of terminology, the distinction, drawn in later Lutheranism, between justification as forgiveness and sanctification as divine indwelling, is alien to the Reformer."[458] Rather than separating justification from sanctification and placing them in a hierarchy Mannermaa and others argue that for Luther justification itself encompasses these two aspects: forensic (favor or forgiveness) and effective (gift or participation in the divine life through union with Christ—what is typically considered sanctification).[459] In forensic justification we are declared righteous

---

[457] Braaten and Jenson, viii.

[458] Mannermaa, "Justification and *Theosis* in Lutheran-Orthodox Perspective," in Braaten and Jenson, *Union with Christ,* 38.

[459] Ibid.

by God on account of Christ's work (*extra nos*) and in effective justification we become righteous in our lives through Christ's indwelling (*intra nos*) presence. It is no longer merely "as though" we were righteous on account of Christ, but we really become righteous because justification is no longer just about forgiveness of sins, but participation in divine reality. Consequently, rather than ignoring or deemphasizing sanctification, the Finns argue that Luther fully incorporated it into his concept of justification as the gift of Christ's presence.

In articulating justification in terms of union with Christ the Finns shift the primary concept of gift from the alienable to inalienable gifting. Finnish Lutheran Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen articulates this as a shift from solely focusing on grace as God's declared favor to grace as the gift of Christ's indwelling presence: "It is highly significant that Luther himself—in contradistinction to later Lutheranism—does not differentiate between the person and work of Christ. Christ himself, his person and his work is the righteousness of man. In the language of the doctrine of justification it means that Christ is both *donum* and favor (not only favor as subsequent Lutheranism teaches)."[460] Grace is no longer just God's favor as alienable gift declared on the sinner as pure exteriority. Here Christ both gives and *is* the saving gift because, as Mannermaa continually explains, Christ is truly present in faith. "The favor of God (i.e. the forgiveness of sins and the removal of God's wrath) and His 'gift' (*donum*; God himself, present in the fullness of his

---

[460] Kärkkäinen, "'Christian as Christ to the Neighbor': On Luther's Theology of Love," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6.2 (2004): 107.

essence) unite in the person of Christ."[461] The shift we see here is one from idealizing the alienable gift indicating transaction and commodification to the inalienable gift as Christ who both gives and is the content of the gift.[462]

The Finnish interpretation continues to gain in influence among Lutheran theologians and lay people. Unfortunately, in spite of what might be promising insights applicable to contemporary concerns about the (often gendered) power dynamics in models of justification or the important shift we've been tracking toward relations where an internal/external boundary is disrupted in all relations (divine, human, other-than-human), it quickly becomes clear that, for the most part, they are not aiming toward constructive and creative applications of the tradition for some of our most pressing contemporary concerns. Instead, the Finns are limited by their tone of recovering and reclaiming the "true" or "original" Luther. Consequently, they have been drawn into antagonistic relations with the majority of Luther scholars, who are primarily influenced by a history of German scholarship. As a result, the gift of their interpretation gets distracted by arguments over who has claim to the true and original Luther.

I suggest, instead, that such minority interpretations of Luther emphasizing union would be more productively framed as creative, constructive Lutheran proposals for contemporary thought than as discoveries of the true Luther. In doing so, we would find

---

[461] Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 5.

[462] "Identifying the gifts from God with something unidentical with God emphasizes the forensic aspects of justification and the quadrille of sacrifice. On the contrary, when the gifts from God are understood as aspects of God's self-giving, the ontological aspects of justification are similarly strengthened." (Holm, *Word—Being—Gift*, 109)

that the gift of reformation theology, like the unconditioned gift, is itself an extended communication with the tradition, dispersing through many trajectories rather than a gift that must return to its origin. Such constructive proposals might be aimed at addressing current contextually significant religious, societal, and ecological desires for connection rather than an overwhelming concern for one's personal and individual standing before God.

My critique is that the Finns are not so much wrong in their historical arguments as missing a profound opportunity to connect with current gender and eco/nomic concerns. What seems most provocative in the Finnish interpretation is an as yet untapped possibility to disrupt old assumptions about the kind of self Luther's theology constructs. I see potential to disrupt patriarchal, separatist, static understandings of the self and God. Rather than being defined by what we are not and who we are separated from there is opportunity here to articulate the self according to who or what we are in relation with. Rather than allowing us to trace the modern sovereign subject from Augustinian interiority through Luther to Descartes' *ego cogito* I think the rhetoric of participation in and union with Christ can cause us to pause and look again at the kind of self Protestant theology could create. Instead of a precursor of *ego cogito* I think what we may find is this self same, self knowing, self controlled ego radically put in question by relationship.[463]

---

[463] Cf. Terra Rowe, "Communicating Grace," *Currents*, forthcoming, July 2016.

Communicating with the neighbor

> 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.
>
> John 17:23

> This is what it means to change into one another through love, to lose one's own form and take on that which is common to all.
>
> Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body and Blood of Christ (1519)"[464]

A case for one final extension of the *communicatio idiomatum* in Luther's thought is both possible and particularly significant for our current concerns. This may be the most applicable extension for current concerns, and yet it also seems to be the most unfamiliar. I have demonstrated the ways in which Luther has extended the Christological union from Christology to the sacraments to justification as union as well as forgiveness. In this section I will demonstrate that Luther expands this doctrine further to the ethical relation between the Christian and their neighbor, including economic relations.

As mentioned earlier, a consistent concern in the Lutheran tradition has been the secondary or underemphasized place of ethics in relation to justification. Finnish scholar Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen articulates the kind of integration of Christology, sacramentology, and ethics we are aiming for: "As Christ has given himself to the Christian in the bread and wine, so also do Christians form a single bread and drink as they participate in the

---

[464] Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body and Blood of Christ (1519)," *Luther's Works, Vol. 35*: *Word and Sacrament,* edited by E. Theodore Bachmann (Fortress Press, 1960), 48-73. Emphasis added.

Eucharist. The Christian is bread to feed the hungry neighbor and drink to quench their thirst."[465] While not explicitly aligned with the Finnish interpretation of Luther, Marc Lienhard also recognizes the role of deification in Luther's thought. He argues that the reformer reoriented this ancient theme toward worldly concerns.

> One is not able to exclude entirely the idea that the theme of divinization was present to a certain extent in the mind of Luther. The contrary would have been astonishing when one remembers how familiar he was with the patristic writings. However, it is certain that this theme takes a new turn with him...[O]ne can effectively speak of man's becoming the Word, but for Luther it is less a question of envisaging a communication of the divine life than it is of seeing conformity of human beings with God on the ethical plane...What is important to Luther is less a participation in the divine life than the personification of human beings, their humanization when they again become the image of God by faith.[466]

While Lienhard does not appear to see that "communication of the divine life" or "participation" might actually be a form of "conformity of human beings with God on the ethical plane," it seems Luther himself makes such a connection.

In *The Freedom of a Christian* Luther writes, "Surely we are named after Christ not because he is absent from us but because he dwells in us, that is because we believe in him and are Christs one to another and do to our neighbors as Christ does to us...We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself but in Christ and in his neighbor...He lives in Christ through faith and his neighbor through love."[467] Here Luther clearly connects union between Christ and the Christian to indwelling union between

---

[465] Kärkkäinen, "'Christian as Christ to the Neighbour': On Luther's Theology of Love," 114.

[466] Leinhard, 54.

[467] Luther, "Freedom of the Christian," *Luther's Works, Volume* 31: *Career of the Reformer I*, edited by Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann (Fortress Press, 1957), 371.

neighbors. As in the incarnation and the sacraments, Christ is present, body prolonged or extended in the works of Christians toward those they encounter.[468]

The reverse is also true; Christ not only becomes embodied in the Christian, but in the neighbor one meets as well. Luther explains, "There [in the suffering and needy neighbor] we should find and love God; that is, we should serve the neighbor and do good to him, whenever we want to do good to God and serve him."[469] Note here that the gift of the ethical act to the neighbor is also a gift to God. Here the incarnational communication of attributes between God, Christ, Christian, and neighbor is fully extended. Luther aligns traditionally held vertical relations to God within horizontal relation to created neighbors. He explains, the "commandment to love God is fully and completely subsumed in the commandment to love our neighbor...It was for this reason that he laid aside his divine form and took on the form of a servant so that he might draw our love for him down to earth and attach it to our neighbor."[470] Elsewhere he condenses this collapse of the commandments insisting, "To love God is to love the neighbor."[471]

While aligning vertical relations with the horizontal, worship with ethics, this interpretation also undermines all assumptions of Luther's theology as assuming or creating a separate individual self with alienable possessions. In his Galatians lectures he writes of a noteworthy exchange between Christ, the Christian and the neighbor.

---

[468] See Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith,* "Luther argues that Christ...becomes, as it were, incarnate in Christian's works," 50.

[469] Luther, *WA*, 17, 99, cited in Althaus, 133.

[470] Ibid.

[471] Luther, *WA*, TR 5, 5906, cited in Althaus, 133.

Remarkably, here the exchange with Christ is not free, but creates a particular kind of debt. The gift turns out to be non-circular however, because the debt is not directed back to the donor, but disseminated to the neighbor. Luther encourages the Christian to be so united with Christ that they *are* Christ, not holding individual claim to any divine gifts as personal possessions, but ensuring these gifts continue to disperse.

> We are all equal, and we are all nothing. Why, then, does one man puff himself up against the other, and why not rather help one another? Furthermore, if there is anything in us, it is not our own; it is a gift of God. But if it is a gift of God, then it is entirely a debt one owes to love, that is, to the law of Christ. And if it is a debt owed to love, then I must serve others with it, not myself. Thus my learning is not my own; it belongs to the unlearned and is the debt I owe to them. My chastity is not my own; it belongs to those who commit sins of the flesh...Thus my wisdom belongs to the foolish, my power to the oppressed. Thus my wealth belongs to the poor, my righteousness to the sinners.[472]

Gifts, even and especially those given by Christ, are meant to flow and continue to be exchanged. Christ's benefits can—and if properly used, must be—communicated to ourselves and to our neighbors. What seems to be wholly and most personally "mine"—my righteousness, my morality, my learning—can be communicated from me to another. Just as in Christ's communication of properties where seemingly essential characteristics of God and human are actually communicated one to another, so also one's property, that which is "proper" to oneself (like learning, morality, etc.), is actually communicated from others and can be shared with others. Here it becomes clear that Luther's interpretation of the *communicatio idiomatum* shapes his view of service and ethics, both personal and economic.

---

[472] Luther, "Lectures on Galatians—1519," *Luther's Works, Vol. 27: Lectures on Galatians Chapters 5-6,* edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 393.

Such an articulation of ethics is inextricable from the celebration of communion: "You must take to heart the infirmities and needs of others as if they were your own. Then offer to others your strength, as if it were their own, just as Christ does for you in the sacrament. *This is what it means to change into one another through love to lose one's own form and take on that which is common to all*."[473] No love or work for God exists apart from love or work for the created other. God, self, and neighbor here communicate their attributes— even "change into one another"—so that love of God can only be properly expressed *as* love of neighbor and any act of love for neighbor is an act of love for self and God.

Expanding on Leinhard's suggestion above regarding Luther's reinterpretation of deification, I would argue that Luther's understanding does not mean a departure from the world to be with God, but is found and properly expressed, on account of the incarnation and Luther's particular interpretation and extension of the *communicatio idiomatum*, as a profound commitment to the world. On this account, any love piously expressed to God apart from the world is false. "It was for this reason," Luther explains, "that [Christ] laid aside his divine form and took on the form of a servant so that he might draw our love for him down to earth to attach it to our neighbor. But we let our neighbor lie here and meanwhile stare into heaven and pretend to have great love for God and serve Him greatly."[474]

---

[473] Luther, cited in Torvend, *Luther and the Hungry Poor,* 126. Emphasis added.

[474] Luther, *WA*, 17, 99, cited in Althaus, 133. Also, "God 'teaches us to understand this deed of Christ which has been manifested to us, helps us receive and preserve it, use it to our advantage, and impart it to others, increase, and extend it." (*LW*, vol 36, 366, in Saarinen, *God and the Gift,* 46).

A free, unilateral gift of forgiveness by forensic justification alone simply cannot account for the fluidity and porosity Luther describes between selves, their gifts or possessions, Christ, and created others. For that matter, a bilateral gifting structure would not account for it any better. Where God and neighbor "change into" one another so that a gift given to the neighbor is also an indirect gift to God we see a multilateral and nonlinear gifting structure emerge. Here the gift is given in and through a network of relations between God, self, and neighbor. Where this is the case the multilateral gift facilitates a wider circulation of gifts. Where love of God can only be properly expressed as love of neighbor and acts of love for neighbor are also an act of love for self and God the gifting structure is not directly or linearly causal, but multilateral. Remarkably though, this is a kind of reversal of Saarinen and Gregersen's non-direct beneficiary. In their example the Christian is the beneficiary of Christ's gift of sacrifice, but in Luther's examples God is the indirect beneficiary of gifts between creatures. Such a gifting structure would not be possible without Luther's profound sense of the communicability of divine and creaturely properties.

Rather than a free gift, such a spirituality would be better characterized as an economy for and of the common good, an ecology of mutual interdependence and shared resources that fundamentally calls into question a model of the separative self and the assumed boundaries between you and me, self and other, God and creation, inside and outside. In this divine/worldly eco/nomy goods exchange and dependence—even debt in the form of commitment to others—is produced.

This is not a disruption of exchange from a pure exteriority, nor is it a capitalizing circular gift that must return to its origin in self-interest. The circular gift consolidates goods in the hands of those who already have, restricting us to capitalizing, growth based economics. The non-circular, multilateral gift of this eco/nomy of grace, by contrast, is communicated, disseminated, and scattered broadly with a disregard for efficiency, profit, or gain and an aim toward continual redistribution, flow, and exchange of gifts. As such, Luther's grace emerges as an alternate eco/nomy, one that protests a growth based circulation of goods that can only affirm good investments bringing a return to the donor. Here, grace, that most transforming and sustaining resource, must be communicated, not just declared.

Communicating a "better worldliness"

The twentieth-century brought unprecedented challenges to the Protestant view of God, world, and humanity. In the midst of Germany during WWII Dietrich Bonhoeffer addressed what he called the "failure" of Western ethics that had allowed the Nazi regime to rise virtually uncontested in the land of the Reformation.[475] In particular, he was critical of the interpretation of Lutheran ethics which had divided reality into two realms and consequently handed over the public or civic realm to Hitler: God and world, sacred and secular, personal and public, ecclesial and civc.[476] However, Bonhoeffer also

---

[475] See Bonhoeffer's letter, "After Ten Years," in *Letters and Papers from Prison,* Eberhard Bethge, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1971).

[476] See also the discussion on Lutheran ethics after WWII in chapter one.

recognized this dualistic tendency among theologians who protested Nazi Germany. Consequently, he diagnosed that theology "had arrived at an impasse, oriented either to the world or to the Word."[477] Recently published research on Bonhoeffer's theology and ethics demonstrates that in order to overcome this impasse Bonhoeffer relied on his reading of Luther with particular emphasis on the *communicatio idiomatum* because he felt that Luther was not constrained by choosing either God or world, dogmatics or ethics.[478] The alternative Bonhoeffer proposes is a unified reality, a "better worldliness."[479]

Scholars have long noted the Christological orientation of Bonhoeffer's theology. Even more than his often cited contemporary influences—Barth on the one side and the German liberal theological tradition on the other—H. Gaylon Barker's recent work extensively outlines how Bonhoeffer's theology was pervasively shaped by Luther's Christology. In particular, Barker notes, "[i]t was Luther's understanding of the *communicatio idiomatum* that enabled him to see God as participating in the life of the world."[480] Consequently, in Bonhoeffer's unified conception of reality—with God's profound engagement with and commitment to the world—a better worldliness can be seen as the logical conclusion of a Christology shaped by the *communicatio*

---

[477] H. Gaylon Barker, *The Cross of Reality: Luther's Theologia Crucis and Bonhoeffer's Christology* (Fortress Press, 2015), 38, citing DeJonge, 3-5. Barker notes that "a central task of Bonhoeffer's early theology, from 1927-1933 is the negotiation of this impasse."

[478] Barker, 38

[479] Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 6: Ethics,* Clifford J. Green*,* ed.*,* Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott, trans. (Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 60.

[480] Barker, 103.

idiomatum.[481] In this final section I will demonstrate that Luther's extension of the communication of properties unfolds in Bonhoeffer's work as a "better worldliness" and a relational ontology of "being-with-others."

In Bonhoeffer's early works, *Act and Being* and *Communio Sanctorum*, he demonstrates a commitment to articulating Christian doctrine in relational terms.[482] The significance of Bonhoeffer's early work, especially in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being,* remains under-recognized in Lutheran theology, in spite of persuasive studies to this effect among Bonhoeffer scholars.[483] In particular, Bonhoeffer's work in *Act and Being* seems an important contribution to contemporary Protestant unease with the tradition's emphasis on passive grace and the world's calls for justice. For Bonhoeffer, what scholars describe as a relational or social ontology becomes key for reconciling a Western philosophical opposition between act and being.[484] This opposition is also

---

[481] Barker, 373, fn. 28.

[482] The reasons for this are complex. In *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer is concerned to reconcile act and being. He concludes that where theology and philosophy have seen them in opposition, they can be reconciled when articulated in relational terms.

[483] Marsh, Green, Frei all emphasize the significance of Bonhoeffer's two dissertations (AB and SC) for the development of his later, more recognized work in *The Cost of Discipleship, Letters and Papers from Prison,* and *Ethics.*

[484] Clifford Green, *Bonhoeffer*: *A Theology of Sociality* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 83, for example, describing Bonhoeffer's point of view in *Act and Being*: "God is reveals as present to us in the world—God's being is being-in-relation-to-us. This is the meaning of the incarnation: God with us, and God for us. If this is so, it follows that human existence is also fundamentally relational. to be a human is to be a person before God, and in relation to God. The relation of individual persons to each other, and relations between human communities of persons, has this theological understanding of God and human existence at its core" (Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 2: Act and Being,* Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. ed., H. Martin Rumscheidt, trans. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996)*,* 114-5). Green also cites Charles Marsh on this point: Bonhoeffer offers a "'christological description of life with others [which] offers a compelling and unexpectedly rich alternative to post-Kantian models of selfhood—to conceptions of the self as the center of all relations to others." (Marsh cited in Green, "Human Sociality and Christian Community," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer,* John W. de Gruchy, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 115.

clearly at work in the Protestant tradition, as can be discerned from Moltmann's particular framing of the key liberating potential of Luther's theology of grace. In *Theology of Play* Moltmann summarizes Luther's intervention in theology as a rejection of Aristotelian metaphysics where doing (acts, *habitus*, practice) can lead to being. Where Luther's argument is summarized as an emphasis on (passive) being that cannot be attained through activity or practice this interpretation suggests the reformer supports a radical distinction between act and being. Binaries between justification and justice and even grace and exchange follow along this same divide. Therefore, a thesis such as Bonhoeffer offers in which act and being are reconciled *from a Lutheran perspective* would seem to be a feat worthy of note and replication.

In *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer seeks to make an intervention in dialectical theology. Bonhoeffer notes this school's overemphasis on God's act of revelation as an act over and against the world, suggesting God's freedom is freedom *from* the constraints of the world: a unilateral action par excellence. Bonhoeffer argues that key insights from both transcendental philosophy (emphasizing act) and ontological philosophy (emphasizing being) must be integrated in our theologies. Following Heidegger's integration of act and being Bonhoeffer argues that being in the abstract is meaningless and can only be articulated concretely as "being in..." He argues for an interdependent relationship between act and being where there is "never being without act and never act without being."[485]

---

[485] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 159.

The key to this interdependence is the social category Bonhoeffer introduced in his first dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio,* whereby all theological aspects are reinterpreted assuming a social or communal ontology.[486] A fundamentally social or relational nature of his ontology becomes clear in the following quote: "The individual exists only in relation to an 'other'; individual does not mean solitary. On the contrary, for the individual to exist, 'others' must necessarily be there."[487] For Bonhoeffer, there is no existence that is not in relation to others. In the preface to *Sanctorum Communio* he writes, "The more this investigation has considered the significance of the sociological category for theology, the more clearly has emerged the social intention of all the basic Christian concepts. 'Person,' 'primal state,' 'sin,' and 'revelation' can be fully comprehended only in reference to sociality."[488] For example, he takes Luther's insight into the nature of human sinfulness, articulated as the heart turned in on itself—*cor curvum in se*—and interprets it, as Joseph Sittler later would, as separative individualism.[489] Bonhoeffer constructs a view of reality such that he can argue that when

---

[486] "By introducing the sociological category, the problematic of act and being--and with it the problem of knowledge--is stated for theology in an entirely new manner." (Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being,* 113).

[487] *Sanctorum Communio*, 32, cited in Green, "Human Sociality and Christian Community," 115.

[488] Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 1: Sanctorum Communio: A Theology Study of the Sociology of the Church,* edited by Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009)*,* 13.

[489] On Sittler, see Chapter Three of this dissertation. Clifford Green describes Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the *cor curvum in se* with ample reference to *Act and Being* in the following way: "The man with the 'autonomous self-understanding' who considers himself capable, by his own knowing, of finding the truth about human existence and placing himself in that truth, has the following characteristics. hiss an autonomous I, understanding himself from himself and by his own power. His existence, consequently, is isolated and individualistic. His being and thinking are imprisoned, caught in his own system, closed in upon himself; his fundamental orientation is that of the *cor curvum in se.*" (Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality,* 78.)

one sees oneself as self-reliant and fundamentally autonomous or disconnected from relationship with others one is in a state of sinfulness—not merely as a matter of morality, but because one is in denial of reality.[490] Bonhoeffer disturbs Protestant active/passive binaries when he reinterprets faith in terms of the social category as an *act* of turning out from the individualist self toward Christ and the other. The proper sense of act, then, is always "'in relation to' that never comes to rest."[491] Such a definition presupposes a proper sense of human being which is always "in relation to something beyond themselves."[492]

From the incurved self to a 'better worldliness'

Rather than emphasizing the otherworldliness of religious transcendence Bonhoeffer reinterprets religious experience in terms of his understanding of the incurved self. He argues that when we talk of transcendence what we transcend is not the world, or material relations, or even just the self, but the *incurved* self. Consequently, encounters with those the self would identify as "other," as different, become not only ethical, but sacred as well since it is through such encounters that we meet the limits of our self will and are forced to turn out from ourselves and our own desires. The transcendence of self orientation becomes a mark of divinity—a characteristic of God reflected in creation. "God's transcendence is not remote otherness or absence, God's otherness is embodied precisely in the other person who is real and present, encountering me in the heart of my

---

[490] For Bonhoeffer, especially as articulated in *Ethics*, Christ is the nature of reality.

[491] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 42f, cited in Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality,* 81-2.

[492] Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality,* 81

existence."[493] Bonhoeffer can confidently declare then that the, "'Thou of the other man is the divine Thou. So the way to the other is also the way to the divine Thou, a way of recognition or rejection.'"[494] Here we see a direct application of Luther's insistence that God and neighbor change into one another so that our acts of love to neighbor are the proper expression of love for God. Rather than otherworldliness, divinity is experienced in and through our worldly encounters; only in the midst of our worldly relationships do we encounter God.

In encountering the other, turning out from our isolated selves, we also experience divine transcendence because "the God we meet is 'the one-for-others' the one 'for us' (*pro nobis*)."[495] Bonhoeffer takes Luther's Christological orientation around the *communicatio* and argues that God's very "essence" or mode of divinity is in the act of communication, in giving, *pro me.* Remarkably, Bonhoeffer takes the *pro me*—one of the most individualizing doctrines of the Reformation tradition— and turns (or curves) it inside out.[496] Bonhoeffer articulates this shift in his Christology lectures which he gave shortly after writing *Act and Being.* Luther and the reformers insisted that Christ and the incarnation reveals that God is not against us, but for us. This life-giving message ultimately became individualizing, though, as it shifted the focus away from a grand

---

[493] Green, "Human Sociality and Christian Community," 124.

[494] Bonhoeffer, *Communio Sanctorum,* 47 cited in Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2005), 19.

[495] Rasmussen, "The Ethics of Responsible Action," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer,* edited by John W. de Gruchy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999)*,* 218.

[496] Paul Santmire says the anthropocentric readings of scripture are mainly a result of the reformation focus on '*pro me*' the importance of particularity.' (*Nature Reborn: The Ecological and Cosmic Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000)*,* 31).

cosmological creator God to God's acts as they impact me, my life, my salvation—how God feels about *me.*[497] Bonhoeffer's interpretation of this *pro me* shifts the emphasis back to an ontological statement about not just me and my relationship with God, but who God and Christ are and what this means for the world, our perception of reality, and how we are to ethically respond to reality.

For Bonhoeffer, the "essence" of Christ is a relational *pro me* that is only possible in an encounter with an other: "Christ is Christ not as Christ in himself, but in his relation to me. His being Christ is his being *pro me.*"[498] Bonhoeffer continues, explaining that Christ's being *pro me* is not a property, possession, or aspect of Christ. Christ's being *pro me* is, he says, an "ontological" statement. To think of Christ in Christ's self, apart from any other reality or relationship, is impossible as Christ *pro me* can only be thought of "in the community" as the one-for-others. He concludes, "it is not only useless to meditate on Christ in himself, but even godless."[499] Consequently, Christ "the center" can be no stable solid center since it is continually and multiply de-centered in relationship, in being-for-the-other.[500] Bonhoeffer scholar Larry Rasmussen explains, "Christ can be thought of only in relational terms. 'Being-there-with-and-for' is the manner of his existence and

---

[497] See Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 18.

[498] Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center,* trans. Edwin H. Robertson (Harper San Fransisco, 1978), 47-8.

[499] Rasmussen, *Reality and Resistance,* 18, citing *Christ the Center*, 47-8.

[500] John F. Hoffmeyer offers this insight of the de-centered nature of Bonhoeffer's Christo-centrism. Hoffmeyer, "Multiplicity and Christocentric Theology," in *Divine Multiplicities: Trinities, Diversities, and the Nature of Relation,* edited by Chris Boesel and S. Wesley Ariarajah (New York: Fordham, 2014).

presence. Bonhoeffer can thus say that Christ exists 'as community'...which is to say, God's very being, too, is relational."[501]

Here God is no Being, nor pure act since God's only being is in the act of being-for-others.[502] This view of God is simultaneously a profound statement about God's mode of gifting since God's being, God's divinity, and God's "essence" are only properly divine in the act of being given. God embodies the out-turned heart in God's relation to the world and in Christ as the person-for-others. God is only truly God in the act of giving God's being to the other, to the world. Consequently, God is only God outside of Godself, beside Godself, in relation to the other. Giving is not just something God does. God gives (act) because this is who God is (being) so God's being can only be maintained in the act of giving God's being.

In his later works, when his life has taken a more worldly turn, Bonhoeffer develops this Christological communication as "worldliness," thus voiding any sense that as a Christian one must make a choice between God and world. Countering the predominant Lutheran "two kingdoms" ethic, he insists that there are not two kingdoms or realms of reality but, on account of the reconciliation of the incarnation, there is only one realm, one reality in which the world and God cohere. For example, Bonhoeffer writes, "As reality is one in Christ so the person who belongs to this Christ-reality is also whole. Worldliness does not separate one from Christ, and being Christian does not

---

[501] Rasmussen, "The Ethics of Responsible Action," 216.

[502] This is one of the findings of his early work, *Act and Being*. Only later, in the writings collected in what would be *Letters and Papers from Prison*, does he fully apply this as God Being-for-others.

separate one from the world. Belonging completely to Christ, one stands at the same time completely in the world."[503]

Bonhoeffer articulates a relation between God and the world where the two are neither wholly identified, nor dualistically detached. He saw that differences, such as those between God and world, do not separate so much as enhance one another. He compares this to the role of polyphony in music: undivided, yet distinct, entangled, the differences do not blur or blend together but enrich one another. He notes the beauty with which Chirst and community, Christ and peace, Christ and David, "divine and human nature," love of "God and [God's] eternity" and "earthy, erotic love" "communicate with consummate ease in a Christological interplay."[504]

"Worldliness," Bonhoeffer insists, does not mean accepting the world as it is, but striving for a "better worldliness."[505] He explains, "This is what I mean by worldliness, taking life in one's stride, with all its duties and problems, its successes and failures, its experiences and helplessness. It is in such a life that we throw ourselves utterly in the arms of God and participate in his sufferings in the world and watch with Christ in

---

[503] *Ethics*, 62. "It is a denial of God's revelation in Jesus Chirst to wish to be 'Christian' without being 'worldly' or to wish to be worldly without seeing and recognizing the world in Christ," (*Ethics*, 57).

[504] Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 151. The reference here is subtle, but in including "Christ and David" Bonhoeffer indicates here that he would also include inter-religious difference—a potent expression for him during a time of Jewish oppression and injustice at the hands of those who claimed to be followers of Christ.

[505] "In the name of a better Christianity Luther used the worldly to protest against a type of Christianity that was making itself independent by separating itself from the reality of Christ. Similarly, Christianity must be used polemically today against the worldly in the name of a better worldliness; this polemical use of Christianity must not end up again in a static and self-serving sacred realm," (*Ethics*, 60).

Gethsemane."[506] Worldliness is participation in the suffering of God in the world. As the suffering of the world is communicated to God, so also the suffering of God may be communicated to the Christian.

The extension of the *genus tapeinoticum* is noteworthy. While the *genus majestaticum* holds for the communication of Godself with creation—expressed by Bonhoeffer as God's giving *pro me*—the *genus tapeinoticum* suggests that the world communicates itself—including suffering, weakness, loss, etc.—to God. Bonhoeffer's God, like Luther's, is a "suffering God"[507] whose very mode of being is in giving, *pro me.* God suffers not because God has evacuated Godself, but because the sufferings of the world have been communicated to God.

Here we find an alternative articulation of Moltmann's *ex se* where the Spirit alone exists out of itself in contrast with all other relations *ab alio et in aliis,* the other from another. In Bonhoeffer's work, inspired by Luther's communicating relations between God and creation, God out of God's self is not a measure of self-sufficiency and independence but of profound interdependence and relationality. While Bonhoeffer may not explicitly articulate this, a clear logical consequence of his articulation of God's mode of gifting is that without an other who is gifting partner God could not be properly

---

[506] Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner of God* (later republished as *Letters and Papers from Prison*), 166-7, 169, cited in Ronald A. Carson, "The Motifs of *Kenosis* and *Imitatio* in the Work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, With an Excursus on the *Communicatio Idiomatum," Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43.3 (1975): 551

[507] Rasmussen, *Reality and Resistance,* 17. Emphasizing the suffering of God should not be taken as a glorification of suffering, but an echo of Luther's particular understanding of the communicatio idiomatum whereby the exchange between God and the world is not unilateral but bilateral. That God participates in the suffering of the world should not exclude the possibility that God also participates in the joys of the world.

Godself.[508] Here God's mode of being out of God's self fundamentally depends—as McFague's critique of Moltmann called for—on a profound encounter with difference. Here God's only essence emerges as an in/essential mode of relationality.

Both Bonhoeffer and the Finns emphasize that a defining characteristic of divinity is in a particular mode of gifting. In Bonhoeffer's emphasis on God's mode of gifting we find resonance with the Finns' emphasis that God both *gives* and *is* the gift. Recall that the Finns argue that "according to Luther the divinity of the triune God consists in that '[God] gives' and what [God] gives is ultimately [Godself]."[509] That God gives and is the gift suggests an inalienable gift between two or more parties who are united in the midst of their preserved differences. Where the Finns argue that Christ's work cannot be separated from Christ's person, that in faith Christ is present and that Christ is and gives the gift, Bonhoeffer makes a parallel argument in emphasizing that God's act and being must be reconciled. Bonhoeffer reconciles these in terms of giving: God's being is in giving and what God gives (act) is God's being. God's gifting mode of being is in being-with. Yet, while Bonhoeffer does not explicitly articulate Christ-in-me as the Finns do, this indwelling presence seems to be a necessary consequence of his reconciliation between act and being where God's being is in giving and what God gives is God's being. We would note, then, that if being-*with* is truly *being*-with and not holding something back that would put this in question, then being-with also implies being-in. In such

---

[508] Malysz suggests something similar in "Exchange and Ecstasy."

[509] Braaten and Jenson, *Union with Christ,* 10.

communicating interplay of act and being justification can no longer be opposed to justice, just as grace cannot be the antithesis of exchange because the gift God gives is no alienable object, but the communication of Godself to creation.

What neither Bonhoeffer nor the Finns emphasize is that where God's divinity is in God's giving Godself in relation, then the defining characteristic of divinity depends on something other than God. God is utterly intra-dependent in communicating relation, rendering the world utterly indispensable, even for God. Yet, this sense of God's being dependent on something outside Godself does not account for an unstable or pure annihilation of being, but an alternate mode of being-in-relation. Milbank is critical of "other-oriented ontologies" because they are self-depleting, leading to nihilism and the loss of self, God and meaning. However, I would argue that such a relational or other-oriented ontology as Bonhoeffer articulates is only a self-depleting nihilism if it is trapped in an individualist ontology. Just as Bonhoeffer found that act and being are only opposing concepts in an individualist ontology so also the self being-with-the-other is only self depleting in an individualist ontology with unilateral or bilateral gift exchange relations. Where the self is not an isolated individual, but a self located and constituted through a web of multilateral gifts, however, there is no isolated self-same bottom to deplete to. Rather than a pure isolated self or loss of self, what emerges is an alternative mode of being, a transcendent, sacramental, Christomorphic, being-in-with-and-through relation with others.

This relational mode of being suggests an understanding of grace which emerges from within entangled relations with the world, not apart from them. Moving toward this "better worldliness" Protestant insights about the nature of grace may again find new life and relevance in a world of eco/nomic beauty, uncertainty, and conflict. When we consider that we are ourselves only in, with, and through others in a web of multilateral divine and creaturely gifts, then this relational mode of being and giving may open toward a worldliness that is simultaneously ecological and profoundly graced.

CONCLUSIONS

TOWARD A 'BETTER WORLDLINESS'

Christians, it seems, are in critical need of a better worldliness. Perhaps it is more to the point to say the world needs this economically and politically influential group of human beings to be able to embrace passionately an inextricable connection between faith and world. This is not a challenge to take lightly. Centuries of Christian ways of "belonging not to the world," a spirit specifically infused in predominant models of grace and its interconnected modes of selfhood, must be revised or differently embodied.[510] Rather than being pressed to decide whether they belong body and soul to Jesus or to the vast contingency of the world we might foster a sense of belonging body and soul to the world *and* to God.

So what particular resources can faith offer as we begin to face the frightening contingencies of climate change? In examining the Protestant tradition and its broad and compelling influence on Western modern culture and economies we have come to see that the doctrine of grace and the gifting models thereby implied present a particularly important locus of analysis. What might grace look like in the midst of the challenge of altering vast economic systems and ecological relations? I have suggested that grace might take the form of a profound sense of gratitude. A sense of gratitude, like Michael Pollan's desire to say table grace, expresses the ways we are indebted to the many

---

[510] John 17. See Jürgen Moltmann's interpretation of what John's Jesus is referring to with regard to the world: "The people who would like to see [God's kingdom] as belonging to the next world always point to Jesus' saying that 'my kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:36). But in doing so they are overlooking the fact that this is a statement about the origin of the kingdom, not its place…If it is the kingdom of the creator God, then it embraces the whole of creation, heaven and earth, the invisible side of the world and the visible side too," (Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 20).

creaturely and divine others who make our life and actions—even our being human—possible. I would also suggest, as Dombek intuited, that this sense of gratitude might not merely comfort or reconcile, but may also kindle a sense of responsibility for these vast communities who simultaneously are "me" and exceed "me."

In learning to float on a rising tide within an ocean of interdependent relations we have begun to articulate a different way of relating to the world and an alternate way of envisioning grace in relation to the world. We have explored the challenges such an articulation of grace might face, particularly from a Protestant theological perspective. Noting in particular the ways a definition of grace as free, unreciprocal, and opposed to exchange exceeds its theological bounds, we have seen how it affects our relation to the exchanges that sustain the world. We noted the heightened predicament that such a definition of grace finds itself in when we consider the conditions of climate change. These conditions challenge even those we would otherwise stand side by side with as they resist oppressive economic systems. When these protests depend on a logic opposing grace to economic exchange they unwittingly align grace with an interruption or even annihilation of the ecological exchanges that sustain the world. So we have insisted on resisting the continual recurrence and idealization of the original unilateral divine gift. Rather than accepting this as essentially characteristic of Protestant thought we have articulated an alternative: the gift of grace not as unilateral but as unconditioned, in the sense that it may refuse a capitalizing return to its origin. Additionally, we have seen that

in a multilateral, ecological gifting structure this gift would continue to disperse, sparking a wider exchange of gifts rather than an opposition to exchange.

Where a gift emerges as free of reciprocal returns it remains isolated and individualistic, cut off from the ties that create human and other-than-human communities. Early on, therefore, we wondered if a yoked ontology of being-with would be able to find root in reformation soil. In tracing the trajectories of marginal voices in the tradition we have noted strains from Luther to Osiander to the Finns to Bonhoeffer ready to sustain a robust relational ontology of being-with-others. In the process, grace models and gifting ideals significantly shift from an alienable gift—a commodified object—free to shuttle between separative subjects, to a communing Christomorphic gift given in with and under the vast multilateral ecological web of continual gift exchange.

Grace, here, is not some gift-object passed between discrete parties, nor—as unconditional—does it depend on pre-conditions. Where the gift might not return to its origin grace is the occasion—no state suggesting simple location—that allows for a different kind of encounter, a kind of love given with the understanding that it may not be a good investment that will necessarily return to the giver. Even as one always hopes for reciprocity, grace is not given with the condition of a return to its origin.

Grace emerges as a possibility *within* an entangled relationality rather than opposed to it when see ourselves as gifts to others and from others—as fully embedded in a multilateral web of continual gift exchange. Grace, though, is not the same as interconnection. Where interconnection is a given rather than a goal or a norm it may just

as easily effect our undoing as our salvation. For better and worse we humans are part of the nature we seek to know, and too often to control, and use[511]: climate change presses the reality of this fact upon us. As awe-inspiring as our interdependence may be, it can turn on a dime to poison.[512] Entangled reality leaves us incredibly vulnerable to short-sighted and self-interested acts—vulnerable, that is, to the consequences of a maintained illusion of separative individualism.

Where grace emerges as embedded in an eco/nomic web of multilateral gift exchange so too does the self. In classical Christian thought from Augustine through Luther and Calvin grace has been articulated as an opening of the self curved in on itself. As the remedy for a human tendency toward self absorption and ego-centricity grace has been aligned with an opening and emptying out of the self. However, as we noted in the introduction, this mode of selfhood has tended toward a dangerous self evacuation. In addition, the strong and exclusive emphasis on God's grace *extra nos* has encouraged a rigid inside/outside dualism corresponding to an equally rigid passive/active binary. Given rising awareness of an ecologically interdependent reality, can people today still imagine that their selves are contained in a pure interior opposing an exterior? More to the point: should they be persuaded of this when such dichotomies continue to support a view of a separative, individualistic self?

---

[511] Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2003, vol. 28, no. 3: 828.

[512] Derrida notes that the German word for poison is *Gift*

Milbank and others aligning with Radical Orthodoxy also critique the self-negating other-orientation of Protestant grace and ethics. Clearly a more relational ontology of continual gift exchange is necessary to counter the separative individualism and commodification of the free gift, but Milbank's self-affirming ethic exposes the vulnerability of gift-exchange to growth dependent economics. In order to interrupt the economic ideologies fueling climate change both the purely other-interested, unconditioned gift *and* Milbank's circular gift that must return to its origin must be challenged.

We should also note, however, that only an isolated, self-contained individual is in danger of pouring her whole self out. Such self negation can only function if the self is an isolated, self-same island in the first place. For the self to be negated there must be a self-contained, isolated bottom to get to. If the self is always already embedded in an ocean of otherness there is no self-contained bottom to the self because the opening and other orientation only pours out as it lets in.

Therefore, what if the spirituality that problematically praised and desired the no-self could be constructively articulated as a shift away from the self/no self dualism to a multiplied self embedded in a web of multiple relations and riddled with otherness? In other words, as Catherine Keller intuits, reflecting on the mysterious overflow of our planetary relations, "the no-thingness appears to be the very site of the intricately

interconnected whole."[513] With communicating grace, the movement is not only a force for emptying by giving or losing ourselves. It can also be something that opens up the self to more profoundly realize and acknowledge my self's dependence on the other in order to be myself. Embedding the self in a relational ontology or ecology suggests that the opening of grace is not merely for pouring out, but for filling up as well—allowing the other in, so to speak. Being-for-others, in other words, does not merely mean turning away from self or emptying the self but turning to interdependence and the ways we are entangled with the world and others. Rather than getting erased wouldn't this self get multiply figured, multiply sourced, and multiply gifted? In other words, wouldn't this be an eco/nomic self? Refusing the persistent lure of the sovereign, individualist, self—*incurvatus in se*—the opening of grace transforms us into gifts for others by taking in, not refusing, the multiplicity and exchangist nature of the gift, meeting it with courage, love, and the similarly given ability to respond.

When grace does not circle back to the giver it is an opening event, simultaneously opening the self to the others who have always already been there and initiating our readiness to respond with care. Never outside of entangled relations, but always within them, grace gives space for others to be more than extensions of my own interests. Where grace is the experience of being opened by and to the multitude of others (divine, human, and other-than-human alike) who are gifts to us we are freed for

---

[513] Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible,* 145. Also: "The nothingness of the 'knowing nothing' is not a neat nihil of names but a chaotic multiplicity, an overflow in excess," (*Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 75).

Christomorphic relations to these others. Freed to "change into" or be "little Christs" to one another, we may be sacramentally in-spired toward right response (not just any response) for the flourishing of all.[514] When grace is recognized as an opening to, with, and through the divine and creaturely gifts which continue to constitute my self we also affirm the reformer's insights that the possibility of ethics or responsibility opens only through grace.

In rejecting a view of the human transcending and separate from the world's exchanges the modern ethical individual whose relational entanglements are only liabilities must also be challenged. As biologist Donna Haraway notes, "response and respect are possible only in those knots"[515] between self and other, human and other-than human, and we might add, God and creature. Being responsible is not a matter of removing oneself to make decisions or observe from above the world. We can neither know nor be responsible by removing ourselves to stand outside the world—they are only possible in, with, and through the world. Or as Barad reminds us, "in our sensibility we are exposed to the outside, to the world's being, in such a way that we are bound to answer for it."[516] Not everyone who is entangled will be responsible. But our ability to respond with care and grace to another is also only possible through our entangled relations and not apart from them. Where grace deepens a sensibility of the outside,

---

[514] These are Luther's terms in "The Freedom of a Christian": "change into" and being "Little Christs" to one another. See Chapter Five of this dissertation.

[515] Haraway, *When Species Meet,* 42.

[516] Barad, "On Touching," 226.

inside it may indeed be a revelatory gift as we muster the courage to address the vortex of factors contributing to climate change.

It is important to also address responsibility with the gifts we inherit in the form of traditions. How best do we accept the gift of an inheritance in the form of a tradition? Do we respond most gratefully by preserving and protecting it in its "original" form? What then is the original form? These are the kinds of unending arguments and unanswerable questions Finnish theologians invite by insisting they have discovered an authentic or original Luther. I suggest that in accepting the gift of our inheritance we must not only be accountable *to* the Protestant tradition, but responsible *for* it.

Derrida's interpretive insight is key here. In *Of Grammatology* Derrida notes that in traditional criticism commentary on a text has only ever protected it. In embracing Nietzsche's embrace of play within rather than Rousseau's mourning of the loss of certain and centered meaning, Derrida invites us to open a text—or in this case, a body of texts—for new interpretations rather than protecting a text by digging for an original meaning or intention.[517] If we lay claim to or self-identify with a tradition we will find we must protect it as a matter of self-preservation. But if we are claimed by a tradition and sometimes feel we have no compelling rational reason to continue to claim it, save for a presumably grace-filled experience of continuing to be claimed by it, then we must dare to approach readings playfully and not just preserve and protect them. In other words, I'm suggesting we might receive the gift of a tradition like any other gift and that our

---

[517] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158.

interpretation of that tradition should follow our economy of grace: just as we resist gift economies where the gift must return to the donor, so we should also resist interpretations of the Protestant tradition that *must* return to an origin. They certainly *may* return with some playfulness but in a spirit of grace it seems the tradition would be most faithfully continued if our interpretations themselves resisted incurved, self-preserving tendencies. This is not intended to indicate a departure or erasure from texts and voices that have been and continue to be meaningful, nor does it imply a disregard for history or responsible scholarship. It would, however seem to be a fitting contribution to the tradition and its communicated economy of grace to open texts more creatively, constructively, and critically to address some of the most pressing issues we as humans—not just people of faith—face today.

The Reformation inspired massive social, economic, political, and religious shifts 500 years ago. Today it appears that the climate-challenged world needs shifts of this same scale and broader. The practical implications of this articulation of gift are significant and widely untapped in contemporary American expressions of the churches inspired by these events. If God's mode of saving and life-giving activity emerge primarily in exchanges that create community in communion with Christ's body, then our churches can no longer theologically or ethically afford to limit grace to the forgiveness of human sins. If God's work appears not as anti-exchange but in community-building exchanges, then our congregations are not called primarily to self-preservation, nor to engage their communities with mere acts of philanthropy and charity. In a spirit of grace-

filled gratitude or the very gift of creation communities of faith are called to engage global economic systems and, on a local level, envision alternative economies that work toward practices to build up community rather than exclude, alienate, or degrade the natural world—including other humans. As we look to the next 500 years my hope is that we might communicate a message of grace that disseminates inspiration for reimagining social, economic, political, divine, and ecological relations.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Althaus, Paul. *The Theology of Martin Luther.* Translated by Robert C. Schultz. Fortress Press, 1966.

American Natural History Museum, "The Secret World Inside You," http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/the-secret-world-inside-you.

Arand, Charles P., James A. Nestingen and Robert Kolb, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of the Book of Concord.* Minneapolis: Fotress Press, 2012.

Aristotle. "The History of Animals." In *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classical and Contemporary Writings,* edited by Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald, 5-7. New York: Berg, 2007.

Barad, Karen. "Deep Calls Unto Deep: Queer Inhumanism and Matters of Justice-to-Come." Paper presented at The Drew University Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquium, Madison, NJ, 2014.

_____. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning.* Duke University Press, 2007.

_____. "Nature's Queer Performativity." *Kvinder & Køn Forskning* 12 (2012): 25-53.

_____."On Touching—The Inhuman that Therefore I am," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 23.3 (2012): 206-23.

_____. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28.3 (2003): 801-31.

_____. "Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come." *Derrida Today* 3.2 (2010): 240-68.

Barker, H. Gaylon. *The Cross of Reality: Luther's Theologia Crucis and Bonhoeffer's Christology.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015.

Braaten, Carl E. and Robert W. Jenson, eds. *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.

Bakken, Peter. "Introduction: Nature as a Theater of Grace: The Ecological Theology of Joseph Sittler." In *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on*

Ecology, Theology, and Ethics, edited by Stephen Bouma-Prediger and Peter Bakken, 1-19. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000.

Bataille, Georges. "The Meaning of General Economy." *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, Vol. 1: Consumption.* Translated by Robert Hurley, 19-41. Zone Books, 1991.

Bauman, Whitney. *Religion and Ecology: Developing a Planetary Ethic.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Bayer, Oswald and Benjamin Gleede, *Creator est Creatura: Luthers Christologie als Lehre von der Idiomenkommunikation.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Belsey, Catherine. *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

Billings, J. Todd. "John Milbank's Theology of the 'Gift' and Calvin's Theology of Grace: A Critical Comparison." *Modern Theology* 21 (2005): 87-105.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. "After Ten Years." In *Letters and Papers from Prison,* edited by Eberhard Bethge. New York: Macmillan, 1971.

_____. *Christ the Center.* Translated by Edwin H. Robertson. Harper San Fransisco, 1978.

_____. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 1: Sanctorum Communio: A Theology Study of the Sociology of the Church,* edited by Clifford J. Green. Translated by Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.

_____. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 2: Act and Being,* edited by Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. Translated by H. Martin Rumscheidt. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

_____. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 6: Ethics,* edited by Clifford J. Green. Translated by Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott. Augsburg Fortress, 2005.

Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* edited by John McNeill. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960.

Caputo, John. *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida.* Indiana University Press, 1997.

Carson, Ronald A. "The Motifs of *Kenosis* and *Imitatio* in the Work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, With an Excursus on the *Communicatio Idiomatum." Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43.3 (1975): 542-53.

Cavanaugh, William. "Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Social Imagination in Early Modern Europe." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31.3 (2001): 585-605.

Chadwick, Henry. "Eucharist and Christology in the Nestorian Controversy." *Journal of Theological Studies* 2.2 (1951): 145-164.

Chapman, Mark D. *Ernst Troeltsch and Liberal Theology: Religion and Cultural Synthesis in Wilhelmine Germany.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Chung, Paul. *Church and Ethical Responsibility in the Midst of World Economy: Greed, Dominion, and Justice.* Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013.

_____, Ulrich Duchrow, and Craig L. Nessan, *Liberating Lutheran Theology: Freedom for Justice and Solidarity with Others in a Global Context.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011.

Cobb, Jr., John B. *Sustaining the Common Good: A Christian Perspective on the Global Economy.* Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1994.

Connolly, William E. *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Durham: Duke, 2008).

_____. "The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine." *Political Theory* 33.6 (2005): 869-886.

Coole, Diana and Samantha Frost, eds.. *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics.* Duke University Press, 2010.

Crompton, Rosemary. *Class and Stratification*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2008.

Daly, Herman E. and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.

Davis, Thomas J. *This is My Body: The Presence of Christ in Reformation Thought.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.

Derrida, Jacques. "A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event." In *The Late Derrida.* Edited by W. J. T. Mitchell and Arnold I. Davidson. Translated by Gila Walker, 223-43. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

_____. *The Animal That Therefore I Am.* Edited by Marie-Louise Mallet. Translated by David Wood. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.

_____. *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money.* Translated by Peggy Kamuf. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

_____. *Of Grammatology.* Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

_____. Derrida, *Writing and Difference.* Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

_____ and Geoffrey Bennington, *Circumfession.* Translated by Geoffrey Bennington. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993.

DeSalle, Rob and Susan Perkins. *Welcome to the Microbiome: Getting to Know the Trillions of Bacteria and Other Microbes In, On, and Around You.* New Haven: Yale University, 2015.

DeVries, Dawn. "The Incarnation and the Sacramental Word: Calvin's and Schleiermacher's Sermons on Luke 2," in *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions,* edited by David Willis-Watkins, and Michael Welker, 386-405. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999.

Dombek, Kristin. "Swimming Against the Rising Tide: Secular Climate-Change Activist Can Learn from Evangelical Christians." *New York Times,* August 9, 2014.

Douglas, Mary. Forward to *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies,* by Marcel Mauss, vii-xviii. New York: W. W. Norton, 1990.

Duchrow, Ulrich. *Alternatives to Global Capitalism: Drawn from Biblical History, Designed for Political Action.* Translated by Elizabeth Hickes et al. Utrecht, The Netherlands: International Books, 1995.

EPA. "Overview of Greenhouse Gases." http://www3.epa.gov/climatechange/ghgemissions/gases/n2o.html

French, William C. "Review: Returning to Creation: Moltmann's Eschatology Naturalized." *The Journal of Religion* 68.1 (1988): 78-86.

Godabout, Jacques T. and Alain Caillé, *The World of the Gift.* Translated by Donald Winkler. Montreal: McGill/Queen's University Press, 1998.

Gonzaelz, Justo. *The Story of Christianity: Vol. 1, The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation.* San Fransisco: Harper, 1984.

Grau, Marion. "Erasing 'Economy': Derrida and the Construction of Divine Economies." *Cross Currents* 52.3 (2002): 360-70.

_____. *Of Divine Economy: Refinancing Redemption.* New York: T & T Clark International, 2004.

_____. "'We must Give Ourselves to Voyaging': Regifting the Theological Present." In *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to 'Radical Orthodoxy,'* edited by Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marion Grau, 141-160. New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2006.

Green, Clifford. *Bonhoeffer*: *A Theology of Sociality.* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999.

_____. "Human Sociality and Christian Community." In *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer,* edited by John W. de Gruchy, 113-33. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Gregersen, Niels Henrik. "Radical Generosity and the Flow of Grace." In *Word - Gift - Being: Justification - Economy - Ontology,* edited by Bo Holm and Peter Widmann, 117-44. Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2009.

_____, Bo Holm, Ted Peters and Peter Widmann, eds. *The Gift of Grace: The Future of Lutheran Theology.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005.

Gregory, C. A. *Gifts and Commodities.* London: Academic Press Ltd., 1982.

Gudmundsdottir, Arnfridur. *Meeting God on the Cross: Christ, the Cross, and the Feminist Critique.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Gustafson, Scott W. *At the Altar of Wall Street: The Rituals, Myths, Theologies, Sacraments, and Mission of the Religion Known as the Modern Global Economy.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015.

Hamann, Johann Georg. *Hamann: Writings on Philosophy and Language,* edited by Kenneth Haynes. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Hamm, Berndt. "Martin Luther's Revolutionary Theology of Pure gift without Reciprocation." Translated by Timothy J. Wengert. *Lutheran Quarterly* 29 (2015): 125-61.

Hampson, Daphne. "Luther on the Self: A Feminist Critique." *Word and World* 8 (1988): 334-43.

Haraway, Donna J. *When Species Meet.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Haroutunian, Joseph. *God With Us.* Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965.

Hessel, Dieter T. and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds. *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Hoffmeyer, John F. "Multiplicity and Christocentric Theology." In *Divine Multiplicities: Trinities, Diversities, and the Nature of Relation,* edited by Chris Boesel and S. Wesley Ariarajah, 234-51. New York: Fordham, 2014.

Holm, Bo Kristian and Peter Widmann, eds. *Word - Gift - Being: Justification - Economy - Ontology.* Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2009.

Irenaus, *Against the Heresies.* Translated by Dominic J Unger. Paulist Press, 2012.

Jackson, Wes. "The Land Institute," "Issues." Accessed, July 5, 2015. http://www.landinstitute.org/our-work/issues/#

Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. "'Christian as Christ to the Neighbor': On Luther's Theology of Love." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6.2 (2004): 101- 117.

_____. *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification.* Collegeville, MN: Unitas Books, 2004.

Keller, Catherine. *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World.* Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006.

_____."Be a Multiplicity: Ancestral Anticipations." In *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation*, edited by Catherine Keller and Laurel Schneider, 81-102. New York: Routledge, 2011.

_____. *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

_____. *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism and Self.* Beacon Press, 1988.

_____. "Is That All?: Gift and Reciprocity in Milbank's *Being Reconciled.*" In *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to 'Radical Orthodoxy,'* eds. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marion Grau, 18-35. New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2006.

_____. "Talking Dirty: Ground Is Not Foundation." In *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth,* edited by Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller, 63-76. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.

_____ and Stephen D. Moore. "Derridapocalypse." *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments,* edited by Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart, 189-208. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Kelly, J. N. D. *Early Christian Doctrines.* New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1978.

Klein, Naomi. "A Radical Vatican?," *The New Yorker*, July 10, 2015, http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/a-visit-to-the-vatican.

_____. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014.

Kleinhans, Kathryn A. "Christ as Bride/Groom: A Lutheran Feminist Relational Christology." In *Transformative Lutheran Theologies: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Perspectives,* edited by Mary J. Streufert, 123-34. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.

Lathrop, Gordon. *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

Lazareth, William. *Christians in Society: Luther, the Bible and Social Ethics.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001.

Lindberg, Carter. *Beyond Charity: Reformation Initiatives for the Poor.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

Lüdemann, Susanne. *Politics of Deconstruction: A New Introduction to Jacques Derrida.* Stanford University Press, 2014.

Luther, Martin. "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body and Blood of Christ (1519)." *Luther's Works, Vol. 35*: *Word and Sacrament,* edited by E. Theodore Bachmann. Fortress Press, 1960.

_____. "The Bondage of the Will." In *The Annotated Luther, Volume 2: Word and Faith,* edited by Kirsi I Stjerna, 153-258. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015.

_____. "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper." In *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, edited by Timothy Lull, 26-32. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012.

_____. "The Freedom of a Christian." In *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, edited by Timothy Lull, 386-411. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005.

_____. Luther, "Freedom of the Christian," *Luther's Works, Volume* 31*: Career of the Reformer I,* edited by Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann. Fortress Press, 1957.

_____. "The Large Catechism." In *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.* Edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert. Translated by Charles Arand et al. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000.

_____. "Lectures on Galatians—1519." *Luther's Works, Vol. 27: Lectures on Galatians Chapters 5-6,* edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007.

Lutz, Kaelber. "Max Weber's Protestant Ethic in the 21st Century." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 16.1 (2002): 133-146.

Mannermaa, Tuomo. *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

_____. "Justification and *Theosis* in Lutheran-Orthodox Perspective." In *Union with Christ,* edited by Karl Braaten and Robert Jenson, 25-41. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.

Malysz, Piotr J. "Exchange and Ecstasy: Luther's Eucharistic Theology in Light of Radical Orthodoxy's Critique of Gift and Sacrifice." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60 (2007): 294-308.

_____. "Review of *Creator Est Creatura: Luthers Christologie Als Lehre Von Der Idiomenkommunikation*, Ed. Oswald Bayer and Benjamin Gleede." *Reviews in Religion & Theology* 16 (2009): 618-622.

Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies.* Translated by W. D. Halls. New York: W. W. Norton, 1990.

McDougall, Joy Ann. *Pilgrimage of Love: Moltmann on the Trinity and Christian Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

McFague, Sallie. *Life Abundant: Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001.

_____. *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987.

McKibben, Bill. "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math." *Rolling Stone,* July 19, 2012.

_____. *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation.* Cambridge. MA: Cowley Publications, 2005.

Meeks, Douglas. *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989.

Milbank, John. *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon.* New York: Routledge, 2003.

_____. *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

_____. "Can a Gift Be Given?: Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic." *Modern Theology* 11 (1995): 119-61.

_____. "The Gift and the Given." In *Theory, Culture & Society* 23 (2006): 444-7.

Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia D. "Climate Change as Climate Debt: Forging a Just Future." *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 36.1 (Spring/Summer 2016).

_____. "Globalization in Light of Luther's Eucharistic Economic Ethics." *Dialog* 42. 3 (2003): 250-6.

_____. *Resisting Structural Evil: Love As Ecological-Economic Vocation.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ As the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology.* HarperCollins, 1974.

_____. *God in Creation.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

_____. *Jesus Christ for Today's World.* Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995.

_____. "The Resurrection of Christ and the New Earth." In *Resurrection and Responsibility: Essays on Theology, Scripture, and Ethics in Honor of Thorwald Lorenzen,* edited by Keith D. Dyer and David J. Neville, 51-58. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009.

_____. *Theology of Play.* Translated by Reinhard Ulrich. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

Moore, Stephen. *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives: Jesus Begins to Write.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

_____. "Why there Are no Humans or Animals in the Gospel of Mark." In *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect,* edited by Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner, 71-94. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011.

Nessan, Craig. "Reappropriating Luther's Two Kingdoms." *Lutheran Quarterly,* 29 (2005): 302-11.

Niebuhr, Reinhold. *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation,* vol. 2. New York: Scribner's, 1964.

Norris, Richard A. Jr., ed. and trans. *The Christological Controversy* Fortress Press, 1980.

Northcott, Michael, *A Political Theology of Climate Change.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013.

Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition: (100-600).* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.

Peters, Ted. *Sin Boldly!: Justifying Faith for Fragile and Broken Souls.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015.

Plotnitsky, Arkady. *Complementarity: Anti-Epistemology After Bohr and Derrida.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994.

_____. "Re-: Re-Flecting, Re-Membering, Re-Collecting, Re-Selecting, Re-Warding, Re-Wording, Re-Iterating, Re-et-Cetra-Ing...(in) Hegel." *Postmodern Culture* 5.2 (1995).

Poggi, Gianfranco. *Weber: A Short Introduction.* Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006.

Pollan, Michael. *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals.* New York: Penguin Press, 2006.

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home.* Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015.

Primavesi, Anne. *Gaia's Gift: Earth, Ourselves and God after Copernicus.* New York: Routledge, 2004.

_____. "The Preoriginal Gift—and Our Response to It." In *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth,* edited by Laurel Kerns and Catherine Keller, 217-32. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.

Radicalizing Reformation. "Radicalizing Reformation: A Critical Research and Action Project Towards 2017." http://radicalizing-reformation.com/index.php/en/.

Rasmussen, Larry L. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance.* Louisville: John Knox Press, 2005.

_____. *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

_____. "The Ethics of Responsible Action." In *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer,* edited by John W. de Gruchy, 206-25. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Rowe, Terra S. "Communicating Grace." *Currents,* forthcoming, July 2016.

Rubenstein, Mary-Jane. "Capital Shares: The Way Back Into the With of Christianity." *Political Theology,* 11.1 (2010): 103-119.

Saarinen, Risto. *God and the Gift: An Ecumenical Theology of Giving.* Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005.

Santmire, H. Paul. *Nature Reborn: The Ecological and Cosmic Promise of Christian Theology.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000.

_____. *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985.

Sasse, Hermann. *This is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959.

Sherwood, Yvonne. *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Reading Hosea in the Late Twentieth Century.* New York: T & T Clark, 2004.

Shiva, Vandana. *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Crisis.* South End Press, 2008.

_____. "Soil Papered Over," Speech give at the Seizing the Alternative Conference, Claremont, CA, June, 2015.

Sittler, Joseph. "Called to Unity." *Ecumenical Review* 14.2 (1962): 177-187.

_____. *Essays on Nature and Grace.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972.

_____. *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics*, edited by Stephen Bouma-Prediger and Peter Bakken. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000.

_____. *Gravity and Grace.* Edited by Thomas S. Hanson. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005.

Smith, Adam. *The Wealth of Nations.* Edited by Kathryn Sutherland. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008..

Szelenyi, Ivan. "Weber on Protestantism and Capitalism." Yale University Open Courses, SOCY-151: Foundations of Modern Social Theory, Lecture 16 (Oct 27, 2009), http://oyc.yale.edu/sociology/socy-151/lecture-16, accessed, 6/23/15.

Tanner, Kathryn. *Economy of Grace.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005.

_____. *Politics of God: Christian Theologies and Social Justice.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992.

Taylor, Mark C. "Capitalizing (on) Gifting." In *The Enigma of Gift and Sacrifice,* edited by Edith Wyschogrod, Jean-Joseph Goux, and Eric Boynton, 50-74. New York: Fordham University Press, 2002.

Thompson, Deanna. *Crossing the Divide: Luther, Feminism, and the Cross.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.

Torvend, Samuel. "Those Little Pieces of White Bread: Early Lutheran Initiatives among the Hungry Poor." *Dialog* 52.1 (2003): 19-28.

Tylenda, Joseph N. "Calvin's Understanding of the Communication of Properties," *Westminster Theological Journal* 38.1 (1975): 54-65.

Volf, Miroslav. *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace.* Zondervan, 2005.

Walter, Gregory. *Being Promised: Theology, Gift, and Practice.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013.

Wandel, Lee Palmer. *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Weber, Marrianne. *Max Weber: A Biography by Marianne Weber.* Translated by Harry Zohn. John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1975.

Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism and Other Writings.* Translated and Edited by Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells. New York: Penguin Books, 2002.

_____. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* Translated by Talcott Parsons New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958.

Weiner, Annette. *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Westhelle, Vitor. "God and Justice: The Word and the Mask," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 3.1 (2003).

Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality,* ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne. New York: The Free Press, 1978.

_____. *Science and The Modern World.* New York: Free Press, 1967.

Zemon Davis, Natalie, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.