FAITH IN MY BONES: AN EXERCISE IN ETHNOGRAPHIC THEOLOGY

By

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Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the

Graduate School of Vanderbilt University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Religion

August, 2011

Nashville, Tennessee

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For the members of our Sunday night “Topics in Theology” classes…

especially, Ritchie.

And for the members of First Baptist Church, Nashville…

most of all, Tyler.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Perhaps it is rare for a dissertation to bear traces of one's parents as explicitly as does mine. My dad, a former boxer, taught me how to throw and land a punch before Wacquant ever stepped in a ring. And my mum's cameo in chapter five affirms what I have long known to be true: I would not be who I am if you were not the woman you are. My first thanks are thus due to Andy and Chantal. You might not have drilled into me that a girl can do anything a boy can do had you known I'd become a theologian and Baptist minister! Your support in both endeavors has been a gift, and I am thankful for it.

No one in my world is as fiercely loyal, giving, and loving as my sister, Danielle. Each time this project has fallen apart, you've been on the phone, helping me gather up the pieces to keep going. You're my BFF for whom I'll always check the box. Thank you for being both my sanity and my heart.

Each project like this is indebted to a line of teachers who contributed to its scholarly shape: Alison McQueen ignited the aesthetic sensibilities that continue to undergird my theological projects. John Robertson convinced me on to the path of theological study when I didn't quite know where I was going and taught me to trust my instincts. Siobhan Garrigán uncovered and nurtured a theological voice I didn't know I had and introduced me to the ethnographic study of concrete practices. Serene Jones nurtured some of the craziest, unconventional theological whims with which I have experimented. I am grateful to each one of you. Thank you!

I am aware that the gift of dissertation advisors is not to be taken lightly and in this regard, I have been immeasurably blessed. Ellen Armour, Ted Smith, Graham

Reside, Paul Dehart, and John Thatamanil have each offered crucial guidance and encouragement throughout my time at Vanderbilt. Graham, thank you – warmly – for both your intellectual and emotional support throughout this project. Ted, no one has ever read my work with such rigor and generosity. I am humbled by your dedication, and hope that I can be half the teacher you are.

I really won the adviser lottery with Ellen. There is no scholar with whom I would have rather taken this journey. And I am not sure if there is anyone at Vandy with whom I have laughed harder. Advising meetings with you are consistently fun, even as you challenge me to push myself to and beyond the limits of what I thought I could do. I continue to marvel at the subversive delight to your ordination charge for me, just as I marvel with delight at the gift you have been to me in these past five years. Thank you.

First Baptist Church, Nashville: I don't want to leave. Thank you, Boling/Vaughn Sunday School class for putting up with this crotchety, doubt-filled theologian for these past few years. And thank you to my Sunday night classes, simply for being awesome. I have learned so much from all of you guys. I am deeply grateful to Pastor Frank and those who served on my ordination committee, as well as each hand that made it through the line that day in May when you named me, "Rev." In all its strengths and weaknesses, FBC has taught me what church is and can be. And I am blessed for it.

Thank you to The Lilly Foundation for my Theology and Practice fellowship, which made the timely completion of this project possible. The T&P Program has been more formative for me than I imagined possible. I am honored to be a member of its inaugural class, and am deeply grateful for all the members of "Team Awesome" – Jin,

Angela, Sean, Kate and Asante. I own a special debt of gratitude to Kate Lassiter, with whom I have learned that when all else fails, we just have to "make it work!"

Travis Ables and Steve Jungkeit both read this dissertation and offered feedback that was both insightful and challenging. Travis, whether it's about God, tv, music, films, or some other life-defining topic, our conversation always takes me into a deeper sense for the richness and complexity of life. Steve, the ways of thinking theologically that we have hammered out together on forest paths and in far-flung cities have brought me immense joy. I am grateful, both of you, for your friendships. Thank you.

And finally, Tyler, how do I thank you? Tyler, more than anyone, has come to understand the particular ways in which I long to live deeply in the place where mind, body and spirit connect. He has read multiple drafts of this dissertation, always offering crucial revisions, while finding ways to keep me honest, both to my community and to myself. Tyler has mixes me drinks and makes me dinner at the end of hard days. He has an uncanny knack for a well-timed "habitus" joke. And in the midst of all these gifts, he understood that I had to dedicate this work to someone else, which is why I could not resist splitting the dedication between you both. If I can be half as much help to you in this process five years from now as you have been to me in these past five years, you'll be laughing, my love. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

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INTRODUCTION

The "turn to culture" in academic theology has been much documented and discussed.[1] Whether this turn has sought to analyze church cultures, correlate the spheres associated with ecclesial, academic and everyday life, or engage the practices of marginalized peoples in an effort to disrupt and reshape the normative assumptions of mainstream theology, this turn to culture has comprised a simultaneous turn to anthropological or sociological theories and, at times, methods. Liberation, liturgical, feminist, womanist and *mujerista* theologies, for example, have all employed ethnographic methods in order to study the beliefs and practices of concrete communities. And in so doing, they have demonstrated the rich resources to be mined in the practices of everyday Christian faith for the doing of academic theology.

Turning to culture both as a source for theological reflection and as an analytic category for interpreting the field and methods of our study gives rise to a number of important questions. What voices in culture have and have not, and might need to be heard? What best practices enable such hearing, and how then do we interpret what we have heard? Which other academic disciplines might prove most helpful to our

[1] For two comprehensive, collaborative studies of this turn to culture in academic theology, see Sheila Davaney & Dwight N. Hopkins, *Changing Conversations: Cultural Analysis and Religious Reflection* (New York: Routledge, 1996) and Delwin Brown, Sheila Greeve Davaney, and Kathryn Tanner ed., *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). See also, David Kamitsuka, *Theology and Contemporary Culture: Liberation, Postliberal and Revisionary Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

endeavors? And how does the way we frame culture as an analytic category impact our modes of engagement with cultural practices, particularly our theological modes?

Kathryn Tanner addresses this final question in particular as she outlines a scheme for understanding theology as a cultural practice that gives rise to both ad hoc, context specific forms (everyday theologies) and more specialized, historically consistent, systematic forms (academic theologies).[2] As Tanner rightly assumes, the academic theologian is often already socially positioned somewhere within the field of practice that creates everyday theologies. In both competition and cooperation with everyday theologies, then, the academic theologian uses her specialized set of academic gifts and skills to address the concrete problems arising from Christian life.

Tanner therefore sets up a theoretical structure for understanding the practice of doing academic theology as transcending divisions of church and academy, theoretical reflection and practical engagement, or abstraction and concretion. She provides academic theologians with a framework for understanding Christian social practices as already integrating – to varying degrees – the discourses of church, academy and everyday life. Tanner's framework thus describes systematically, and most accurately, the terrain for a theological engagement of Christian social practices and discourses.

Mapping a terrain of practice in ways that ring true and help make sense of it, Tanner's framework both guides this study and receives correction from it. In this dissertation I attempt to use Tanner's map to move through my own terrain. At times I find her map to be helpful; other times I find that I need to draw an alternative, less-beaten path onto the picture in order to make sense of my own journey. These rugged

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[2] Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

paths might be more difficult to walk, or even to plot and integrate with the larger map, but as we will see, they become necessary when the charted freeway rushes too quickly by a site of interest. In less metaphorical language, while I use Tanner's theoretical structure in this dissertation both to guide and to interpret a set of practices, I endeavor also to use those practices to disrupt and re-configure the theory through which I make sense of them. The movement between theory and practice here is rapid; at times the two might even seem to integrate.

And in this integration, what I hope we end up with is a number of dense, rich stories that make sense in light of, but which also complicate and, at times, elude any categories of theological thinking that any one of us – myself, my research partners, or any reader of this text – might already be putting to use. I hope that these dense, rich stories – and the processes of their construction, which will be outlined further throughout this text – teach us all something new about how to understand, but also how to live, the theologies that give rise to Christian faith.

But how can we simultaneously use, disrupt, and re-configure Tanner's scheme for understanding theology as a cultural practice performed with varying levels and types of specialization or fluency? Concurrent with this academic theological turn to culture and theories of culture has been a rising interest in various forms of ethnography as a partner for theological reflection. Practical Theologians have long described the first task of academic theology as careful description of a theological situation.[3] Liberation

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[3] Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991) 8, 15ff.

theologians have suggested likewise.[4] And in recent years, Mary McClintock Fulkerson in particular has sought explicitly to bring Tanner's scheme for understanding the relationship between everyday and academic theologies to life with her own ethnographic study of a congregation, Good Samaritan Church.[5]

This project functions as a complementary alternative to Fulkerson's. Whereas Fulkerson's study primarily employs ethnographic methods of participant observation, my study here is grounded more in what Pierre Bourdieu calls, "participant objectification" or "participant objectivation." In other words, it is grounded less in straightforward observation of a field of study, and more in my conscious construction of a field of study. Let me explain.

Simply put, the difference between participant observation and objectification comes down to the difference between the ways in which the researcher's own subject position is theorized. As forms of ethnographic, anthropological, sociological and other qualitative methods have developed, the role that the researcher plays within the field of the other, or of the one or community that she studies, has attracted increased attention. And such attention has both practical and theoretical implications.

In practical terms, the presence of an American researcher at a Balinese cockfight, to use the famous example from Clifford Geertz's work, surely has an impact on how at least some of the events of the day play out.[6] Balinese forms of hospitality to the other

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[4] See for example, Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations* (Maryknoll: Orbis,1987) and Stacey Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode: Method in Womanist Ethics* (Pilgrim, 2006).
[5] Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[6] See Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 412-453.

become a part of a story that would not otherwise have occurred without the anthropologist's presence, for example. One cannot be hospitable to the other if the other is not present.

Alternatively, in terms of the theoretical structures he uses to reflect on his field of study, this same anthropologist could – and inevitably always does – inadvertently allow some of his own particular, deeply engrained cultural dispositions to shape his lenses of interpretation. These dispositions, in fact, shape what the anthropologist even looks at in his study. In other words, they shape the object he constructs for study.

We must account for these forms of practical and theoretical proximity and distance, which amount, essentially, to the researcher's own subjective positioning if we are to hope for any objectivity to the analysis. In other words, if we do not account for them, it is difficult for a reader to trust that we are offering anything more than a simple journal entry or memoir narrative. Such concerns have given rise to, among other theoretical trajectories, the particular trajectory of Reflexive Ethnography. To use the language from above as shorthand, this accounting of the researcher's own subject position – that is, an accounting of the practices and theories by which the researcher turns a set of messy, somewhat incoherent, practices into an object to be studied – is what Bourdieu calls "participant objectification," and it is the particular process that interests the ethnographic components of this dissertation.

In these pages, I develop a form of self-implicated ethnography, grounded in the reflexive ethnographic methods of Bourdieu and his student, Loïc Wacquant.[7] By changing the methods and practices by which Tanner's scheme is brought to life – from

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[7] See in particular, Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Fulkerson's participant observation to this particularly Bourdieuian form of participant objectification – I simultaneously change the types of theological knowledge that can be produced. And in so doing, I endeavor to furrow out some of those uncharted paths on Tanner's map in a way that might change the overall cartographic picture.

In particular, I do not only report the beliefs and practices at play in my field of study, First Baptist Church, Nashville (FBC), although these certainly make up part of my theological reflections. More so, I report the process by which I – as a minister and trained theologian within the community – guided those beliefs and practices in a small sub-section of the congregation. Observation gives way to objectification as, with conscious intentionality, I not only outline the borders and focus of my study, but also, again with conscious intentionality, shape what happens within and among those borders and foci.

Therefore, this is less a study about how everyday Christians might think and feel about particular topics, or how they might grapple with them, and how an academic theologian can make normative theological claims based on them. It is, in fact, much more about what happens when academic theologies intervene in a particular community of everyday theological discourse (itself, a complicated category, as we will see), disrupting that discourse and contributing to its ongoing relationship to Christian practice. It is also a study of how that same, particular everyday theological discourse can disrupt and contribute to an academic theologian's own discourse and practice. As much as the academic theologian seeks to convince everyday Christians to some of her views, we will see here that she must also be willing to be convinced by theirs, even at time converted by them.

This study is therefore less about the ways in which everyday and academic theologies compete with each other to influence Christian practice, and more about what can happen when they tackle such problems together *in* practice. It is less about *what* an academic theologian might wish to communicate to everyday Christians, and more about *how* she might communicate it.

My opening up, complicating and revising of Tanner's theoretical structure with a form of ethnography different than that used by Fulkerson is thus guided by a couple of goals. First, I endeavor to reveal some of the problems with Tanner's framing of the relationship between everyday and academic theology. At times, her description of the messiness that can arise in the clash between everyday and academic theology remains too neat. It misses out on the emotional, bodily dimensions of real people talking about God. And in so doing, it tends to idealize the process by which theological construction happens. One of my goals here is to show that messiness and to demonstrate the types of theological construction that happen throughout such processes. Theology happens in fragments as well as systems, in broken conversations as well as polished monologues. This dissertation is an attempt to bring to light these fragments and snippets of speech as alternative, yet important, insights into Divine and ecclesial life.

My second goal is related more closely with the ways in which this ethnographic theology differs from Fulkerson's. Theologians are not ethnographers. At best, we can borrow the tools and insights of ethnography and use them in imperfect ways but nevertheless ways helpful for our purposes. My second goal, then, is to offer a set of methodological warnings, guides, hints and advice for the academic theologian interested in using qualitative methods for her theological reflection. It is a call for theologians to

think carefully through what ethnographic methods and practices they will borrow in their research, as it is also a call for theologians to consider how their choice of methods and practices impacts what the theologies we construct will look like.

Reflections in this order will reveal how borrowing from reflexive ethnography helps the theologian avoid unconsciously imagining herself to be external to the field of study. By extension, it helps her avoid incorrectly imagining herself as able to impose a totalizing interpretive model onto the field of practice in her description of it. Reflexive ethnography, therefore, helps the theologian describe more accurately how the spatial incongruities and temporal processes can cause flux and difference within, across and outside of a particular demarcated field of study. In addition to accounting for the theologian's subject position within the field of study, in this dissertation, following Wacquant, I am particularly interested in using that position – in deploying it from within the field – for the purpose of creating fresh theological insight.

The form of self-implicated, reflexive ethnography I develop here thus deploys my own particular competing and cohering roles as both minister and academic theologian into a loose, performative integration with each other within my community of study. Specifically, I teach adult education theology courses through the education programs of the church. And in so doing, I endeavor to bring everyday and academic theologies into a shared practice of pursuing the wisdom of Christian life together.

Before I begin introducing the field of my study, or the methods by which I integrated my ecclesial and academic roles as a research tool in this way, I should answer a question that permeates these pages, the question of "Why?" Why this church, and why this desire for a loose integration of these roles?

Faith in My Bones…

This dissertation begins in two simultaneous convictions and a fraught and complex love. First, it begins in the conviction that we carry faith not only in our minds, in our articulations of conscious thought, but also in our bodies, in our bones. Second, it begins in the conviction that deep in that marrow resides resources for pursuing wisdom, a pursuit by which we might embody our faith again and again and ever anew. And third, this dissertation begins in the fraught and complex love I have for both the church and the academy; it begins in my hope that I might be able to nurture the ways these two can pursue wisdom together.

I think I remember the moment when I decided to become an academic theologian. Naming one's origins is a tricky task; I have inevitably forgotten more about this process than I remember. But I think some form of its beginning happened here: I was in my second year of divinity school, sitting in my liturgical theology classroom, and two of my friends were giving a presentation on a set of feminist and womanist texts. The two had paired up for the assignment for a particular reason. As I remember it, they saw themselves as socio-political-theological opposites, self-describing as one conservative, one liberal. And they perceived the ground between them as one that could be mapped by a conversation about something they had experienced differently than each other but, nevertheless, together.

As each had tried to integrate the stuff of her study with her religious life, each had found a fruitful spiritual discipline in the practice of struggling consciously against and within the structures of Christian worship. These two women sunk into real

concretion with their descriptions. They narrated and re-narrated their paths of struggle within particular divinity school community worship services that the majority of our class members had also attended. Their stories overlapped each other, as they intersected with each of ours. These two women were – still are – brilliant, creative theologians, and their insights stirred us all as we each found ourselves relating with both of them in different ways. Their willingness to be vulnerable with each other and with us opened up the classroom to new forms of risky conversation in which the personal, the political and the theological converged.

My two friends closed their presentation by turning analysis back onto the rest of us. By this point, we – or at least, I – felt so implicated in the story they were telling, that their question, "Why stay? Why stay in congregations that appear to have no room for us as we are, let alone as we are becoming?" caught me up and demanded my response. Their journeys had intersected with mine. I too was at a crossroads, as might, in fact, be one of the goals to the design of divinity school curriculum: first year dismantle the religious self, second year flounder, third year, hopefully, get put back together. By this point in my education, I had moved through feeling liberated from the evangelical religion that had brought me to divinity school on little more than a whim, a prayer, and some sense of God's calling, into feeling alienated instead.

Alienated from my faith formation, however, my grasping toward new religious forms felt equally unsatisfactory. On the one hand, there was a particular shape to my yearning from home for home's transcendence that could not be fulfilled by a journey to elsewhere. I could assent intellectually to more so-called "liberal" or "progressive" Christian practices, but they felt unnatural to my own particular faith constitution; they

could not stir me. I wonder now if I would have grown into them over time. But doing so felt pointless at the time, as on the other hand, I found no matter how "progressive" the congregation or set of Christian practices I tried to engage, they remained also unable to fulfill the yearnings my academic study was now creating in me. Sexism, shallow thinking, homophobia, racism, closed-mindedness, fear of the body, and just plain meanness are able to traverse the whole spectrum of Christian and, indeed, all social practices. And so I became less interested in the struggle's matters of degree, and more interested in the struggle itself.

Looking back on my moment of decision to stay, I sometimes wonder now if I simply should have admitted my growing sense that Christianity might be a bust. Perhaps my decision to stay was caused by a failure of imagination; I simply could not conceive of any other place to go. Such possibilities haunt the fringes of the life I have chosen. Even so, I remain convinced that my decision to stay with Christianity in general, and with the types of churches where Christianity had become my home in particular, in fact grew out of some nascent realization that no matter who we become, we can never escape who we are.

And so stay, I did, and stay with a renewed sense of commitment to the life of faith as a spiritual discipline of struggle. *Let's take this commitment to the belly of the beast*, I remember thinking. One decision thus forged two distinct, yet intersecting paths: I began discerning a call to ordination that culminated in the Southern Baptist congregation where I conducted this dissertation's study, and I began discerning a vocation in the theological academy.

This question of struggle remains at the heart of this dissertation, however. I might have settled in FBC simply because I have a scrappy personality that likes to find admission to clubs from which I otherwise feel excluded. FBC offered a rare path into ordination in a denomination that on the larger scale, outside of the autonomy of rare, local congregations, is fundamentally opposed to women in such roles. But framing my belonging in this way allows me an ironic detachment from it that exposes only the most fragmented version of the truth. I settled in FBC because in the fullest sense of what it means to claim a place as home – a place to which we can never really return once we have left, but which surprises us with moments of belonging that sink deeper that we knew possible – FBC felt like home. Not intellectually, not theologically, certainly not politically: FBC connected with some form of the faith so deep in my bones that I can hardly articulate it when I try. It was a community that could help me hold on to my faith and, in this way, FBC provided the anchor for a few years of struggle to understand that faith, to go as deep into it as I could, to reclaim it again and anew for myself.

The marks of this struggle are evident throughout this text. It is, in many ways, an exercise in understanding why I might call this community home. The anxiety and ambivalence I feel at my own, indeed, pleasurable sense of belonging leave traces in each story I tell about the community. These traces threaten to disrupt not only my insistence that I belong, but also my insistence that I do not. They risk undermining the reader's trust in me, precisely because they mark the places where I do not entirely trust myself. The question, "why this community, and not another?" therefore also haunts the text. And perhaps the most honest answer I can give is simply the text itself, my desire to write it,

and an enduring conviction that of all the locations in which theology needs to find itself, a place some might call the beast's belly, but which I call home, remains one.

First Baptist Church, Nashville

FBC was founded in 1820 when thirty-five members of Mill Creek Baptist Church split off to form their own congregation. Less than ten years later, doctrinal differences led a group that maintained the First Baptist name to leave its building and pastor to found a new – or, depending on one's perspective, to preserve the original – community. In 1844, FBC's African-American members, a mix of freed and enslaved persons, began the slow process of moving to independence, which culminated in their founding their own self-governing body in 1865, now First Baptist Church Capitol Hill.[8] In the interim, when the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) split from northern Baptists in 1845, largely over the issue of slavery, FBC became a founding member.

The marks of these origins still remain; the church is racially homogenous, comprised of mostly middle to upper-middle class, white, educated professionals. In the 1950s and '60s, when other wealthy, white churches were moving their campuses out of the downtown, into the suburbs, FBC stayed. Even so, most of its members commute in from those more affluent neighboring suburbs for church activities.[9] Any racial and class diversity can therefore be observed primarily through the church's outreach programs for

[8] This process involved, sequentially: worshipping as a separate community in FBC's building, then being led in worship in a separate building by a white pastor as an FBC mission church, and finally worshipping with an African-American pastor in an FBC governed mission church before founding their own congregation.
[9] On Sunday mornings, there are usually approximately 700 people present in adult Sunday school and 700 present in the single worship service. Of course, there is considerable overlap between the two groups, but on any given Sunday, many just dip in for either one or the other.

the more socially disadvantaged people living on the streets of Nashville's downtown core.

As an original member of the convention, and with the SBC denominational offices and publishing company stationed just a few blocks away (many of the church's members work at the latter), FBC is so thoroughly proximate to and rooted in SBC life that it can forge an identity both in distinction from and in relation to the larger communion. Such a balance between affiliation and autonomy is not atypical in Baptist life, however. As Stephen Warner puts it, despite the "conservative ascendancy" in the SBC, which indicates a strong overarching denominational presence, local church autonomy is "not just a symbol."[10] Indeed, Arthur E. Farnsley points out that Southern Baptists tend to be "fiercely loyal Congregationalists, preferring to think of themselves first as members of particular local churches who co-operate – to whatever degree – with others under the auspices of the SBC."[11] Whether or not this claim can be made across the board for Southern Baptist congregations, it does seem to be true at FBC. Everyone I

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[10] R. Stephen Warner, "The Place of the Congregation in the Contemporary American Religious Configuration," in vol. 2 of *American Congregations: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations*, ed. James P. Wind & James W. Lewis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 76.
[11] Arthur E. Farnsley II, "'Judicious Concentration': Decision Making in the Southern Baptist Convention," in *Southern Baptists Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination*, ed. Nancy Tatom Ammerman (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 47. A single Baptist church has an autonomous, democratic governance structure. That church can choose to affiliate with other organizations, such as local (the Nashville association), state (the Tennessee Baptist Convention), and/or national (SBC). A local body can disfellowship an individual church (in recent years, this has usually happened in more conservative local bodies over of female ordination). Because local bodies have no formal ties with state and national bodies, however, disfellowship from them does not immediately imply disfellowship elsewhere. Likewise, membership in the local body does not immediately imply membership with state and national bodies. For a fuller explication of this structure, see Nancy Ammerman, "After the Battles: Emerging Organizational Forms" in *Southern Baptists Observed*, 305.

interviewed said that they joined the congregation because of its kind, welcoming atmosphere; no one mentioned joining because of doctrinal reasons, or because they were looking for a specifically Southern Baptist congregation. In fact, a number mentioned joining "in spite" of the fact that it was Southern Baptist, noting how important its moderate nature in relation to the larger communion was to them.

People join because of this sense of welcoming love, a core mark of how the church frames its identity. FBC's motto, "Loving God, Loving People," puts the congregants' desire for emotional bonds with God and with each other front and center in their life together. As with any community, FBC exhibits implicit and explicit exclusionary practices. And these exclusionary practices tend to define the borders on who gains entry to the shared emotional bonds. Even so, cultural objects like posters and worship bulletins emblazon this motto all over the church's campus, reminding everyone who enters that their love for one another grows out of their love for God.

Indeed, as Nancy Ammerman argues, people tend to join a particular congregation because its ministries can put their "moral energies" to work, and this seems to be the case at FBC.[12] "Loving God and Loving People" manifests in a vast array of mission activities, through which members who understand the concept and goals of "mission" in an equally vast array of ways are able to direct their moral energies. On one side of the spectrum, FBC participates in the types of evangelistic practices that are common to American evangelicalism: witnessing to friends, street evangelism at public events, inviting friends and co-workers to church events that are subtly – and not so

[12] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 268. See also, Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 355.

subtly – designed to guide the conversion of non-Christians to Christianity. At the other end of the spectrum are the social programs I mentioned above: ministries for Nashville's homeless populations and for women who are in transition out of prison and rehab, conversational English classes for immigrants, and more. As Ammerman argues, most American Christians have "not learned the ideological lesson that if they believe in promoting social justice, they should place less emphasis on witnessing; or – at the other pole – that if they believe in witnessing, they should be wary of calls for social justice."[13] In lived practice one tends to imply the other, and at FBC most members are involved in some way with both. In sum, the community is one that thrives in its warm, friendly and, indeed, loving life together.

Life Change University

The chief component of my fieldwork at FBC entailed teaching Sunday night adult education theology classes as a component of the church's "Life Change University" (LCU) program. I will go into more detail on these classes' nature in subsequent chapters. But for now, a brief introduction to the two LCU semesters in which I taught will be helpful for situating the broader religious education landscape within which this fieldwork occurred. While we see throughout this dissertation that there was room for courses like mine to flourish, as also becomes clear, they nevertheless functioned in a somewhat atypical way within FBC's broader education practices.

Sunday nights at FBC hop with all the LCU activity. Adult education classes are offered in both a fall and spring semester program, each running for about thirteen weeks.

[13] Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 358.

In the semester that I taught “Topics in Theology: Jesus Christ and Salvation,”[14] other offerings included: “Griefshare,” a seminar and support group for people who have lost someone; two women-only classes using material by Beth Moore, on “Christian Freedom” and the book of Revelation;[15] Ken Hemphill’s *The Prayer of Jesus*, focused on living “a kingdom adventure every day”;[16] “The Truth Project,” which followed a DVD-based curriculum focused on living life with a “Biblical worldview”;[17] and “The Family Life Cycle,” which dealt with negotiating standard types of transition in family.[18]

In the semester when I taught “Topics in Theology: God as Trinity,” other course offerings included: “Bridges: Christians Connecting with Muslims,” a class that used the “Crescent Project” curriculum;[19] “5 Conversations You Must Have with Your Daughter,”

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[14] See appendix A & B for the syllabi of both classes: “Topics in Theology: Jesus Christ and Salvation” and “Topics in Theology: God as Trinity.” Both syllabi were used for publicity prior to each course’s beginning, and students used it as a guide throughout. Both classes engaged an historical survey of Christian theologians. I guided reflection on the ways in which these particular doctrines had changed shape throughout time, as well as how they related to the beliefs and practices shared by FBC’s community.

[15] At least four people I interviewed referred explicitly to my theology classes as a welcome alternative to the “Beth Moore style theology” always on offer on Sunday nights. Moore is a popular Christian writer who writes curriculum primarily for women. For more on her, see http://www.lproof.org/aboutus/bethmoore.

[16] Hemphill currently serves as an SBC strategist for “Empowering Kingdom Growth”. He previously served as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. For more on him, see http://www.empoweringkingdomgrowth.net.

[17] For more on The Truth Project see http://www.thetruthproject.org. The Truth Project, as the name suggests, offers an authoritative view of what truth is which, by extension, is a particularly conservative – and as with many contemporary fundamentalisms, a surprisingly Modernist – view of truth.

[18] Like mine, this final course did not follow a purchasable curriculum, but was a discussion based learning module designed by the pastoral counselor who taught it.

[19] While the main goal of The Crescent Project is evangelism, it has a significant sub-concern for fostering healthy and civil inter-religious dialogue between Muslims and Christians. While I question the possibility for genuine inter-religious dialogue alongside proselytizing, this series was taught during the time when feverous national attention was directed toward the so-called “Ground Zero Mosque,” Qur’an burnings, and other forms of American anti-Islam sentiment. It therefore offered an Evangelical alternative to this

based on a book by Vicki Courtney that affirms traditional gender roles;[20] and "Praying to Make a Difference," which seeks to establish "a meaningful and consistent prayer life." Beth Moore's study of Revelation was also repeated, and Pastor Frank taught "Servant Warriors" followed by "The Man God Uses," which is a men's Bible study course that he runs every few semesters.[21] Courses therefore covered various topics, meeting the needs and desires of a cross-section of the community's theological, practical and lifestyle interests. At the same time, they mostly followed Southern Baptist and more broadly evangelical curricula and themes. As we see throughout, the courses I taught departed from this model. That they were offered thus begins to reveal one of the ways that academic theologians might be able to impact Christian social practices, specifically ecclesial ones, a core theme of this dissertation.

An Exercise in Ethnographic Theology…

The subtitle of this dissertation indicates that it is an exercise in "ethnographic theology." My intention with linking the terms ethnography and theology with each other in this way is to make the two dependent on each other. I am not an ethnographer. It is unlikely that this project would pass muster with sociologists or ethnographers, and to imagine that it could – when I do not have advanced degree studies in either field – would be an insult to those who do receive such intense, formal intellectual and practical training. My endeavors here are theological; they borrow from the tools, guidelines and

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anti-Islam fervor. For more on the Crescent Project DVDs used in this course, see https://www.crescentproject.org/bridgesdvd.

[20] For more on Courtney, see http://vickicourtney.com/.

[21] In the first hour of each class, he leads a martial arts-based exercise routine, and in the second half the men do Bible study together.

tactics of ethnography without actually become ethnography proper. Decisions for what tools and tactics might be most helpful are grounded in theological criteria, for example: "what methods best contribute to theological construction?" is a more pressing question than, "what particular social/political/economic/etc. trend gives rise to or is a result of this particular Christian belief and/or practice?" even as the latter question matters also.

At the same time, the qualifier "ethnographic" is nevertheless important; the practice of doing theology is changed by doing it in an ethnographic way. Normative statements are not easily made. Theology becomes more descriptive than prescriptive. In fact, this project in many ways challenges the notion that theology must, by definition, be normative and prescriptive. It seeks to carve out greater space for the descriptive moments of theological reflection, claiming that if stories contribute to the shaping of who we are, then the telling of complex theological stories is a good in itself.

In the first chapter I locate my project within a set of particular academic theological trajectories. These trajectories understand theology to be a cultural activity that rises out of the practices associated with church, academy and everyday life. In particular, I draw on the way in which Kathryn Tanner frames this cultural activity, as she outlines a continuum of theological activity ranging from everyday, context specific theologies to more specialized, institutional forms. Attempting to bring this continuum to life in practice, I guide an ecclesial practice of theological conversation across theological fluencies that I shape by deploying a loose, performative integration of the roles associated with both my ecclesial and academic formative practices. This conversation brings together the theological discourses associated with church, academy and everyday

life into their own loose, performative integration, such that what Tanner calls everyday and academic theologies are able to tackle the problems of Christian practice together.

Having laid the theological foundations for my ethnographic project, in the second chapter I critically appropriate Pierre Bourdieu's way of construing the concept, *habitus*, which can be preliminarily understood as a knot of dispositions, instincts, perceptions and apperceptions, inculcated into agents at a bodily, unconscious, level through their participation in practices. I use this concept, *habitus*, in order to begin mapping how particular forms of theological activity and, by extension, discourse, can flow out of the spaces where everyday and academic Christian social practices consistently overlap through time. Here I argue that an ecclesial conversational practice can be one such activity, and that such activity can be framed as an ongoing pursuit of wisdom. And I argue that this pursuit of wisdom is continually marked by each participant's own loose, performative integrations of the various competing and cohering *habitus* and roles that shape the people we are, and the people we are becoming.

This second chapter employs the concept *habitus* as a theoretical descriptor for understanding the *habitus* of pursuing wisdom as this dissertation's topic. In the third chapter, I deploy the concept *habitus* as a tool; put simply, my own *habitus* of pursuing wisdom becomes the mode of inquiry by which this dissertation's method is performed.[22] Here I unpack how the roles associated with the distinct spheres of ecclesial and academic life can be loosely integrated in the bodily wisdom of the academic theologian-as-minister, and the activity made possible by that bodily wisdom can be deployed as a

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[22] The notion of *habitus* deployed as both a topic and a tool is developed in Loïc Wacquant, "Habitus as topic and tool: reflections on becoming a prizefighter," in *Ethnographies Revisited: constructing theory in the field*, ed. Antony J. Puddephatt, William Shaffir and Steven W. Kleinknecht (New York: Routledge, 2009), 137-151.

research tool for doing ethnographic theology. Expanding Bourdieu's work with the writings of his student, Loïc Wacquant, I thus construct the foundations of my own self-implicated mode of theological ethnographic research. I offer this mode as a companion or complementary alternative to the theological ethnographic methods outlined by Mary McClintock Fulkerson, and claim that either could be used to bring Tanner's mode to life in concrete practice.

In the fourth chapter I construct an ethnographic ecclesiology, demonstrating that while our conversational pursuit of wisdom constituted our class as an atypical space within FBC's life, it nevertheless participated in maintaining the equilibrium of the wider ecclesial system. Here, my attempts to put Tanner's model into practice challenge notions that an academic theologian's intentional desire for social change necessarily has the power to bring about such change. In practice, social change happens very slowly, I argue. Revolution is rare. But I suggest that the goods of everyday and academic theologies pursuing wisdom together are contained as much – if not more – in the process itself than in the products it creates.

Taking its cue from this emphasis on process over product, chapter five traces the process of pursuing wisdom through an ongoing doctrinal conversation that one of the classes I taught had about sanctification. Here I do not create a constructive doctrine of sanctification so much as I reveal the inner workings of an internally diverse, conversationally created communal view of it. By engaging process more than product in practice, I reveal that the messiness ascribed by Tanner to concrete Christian social practices might actually be more complex than she thematizes. Using a metaphor from performance art to expand Tanner's image of the theologian as bricoleur, I describe the

practice of cultivating theological conversation in and with "found objects" (the faith in our bones): "found objects" that always already are a mix of theological concepts and their emotional, bodily, and personal contexts of practice.[23]

Therefore, as each chapter seeks to bring to life the model that Tanner constructs for the relationship between everyday and academic theologies, they also reveal some of the possibilities and limitations inherent to this model. In so doing, each chapter, to a different degree, takes on questions of power, agency, and embodiment, while revealing the struggles of interpersonal interaction and the messiness of the practice of the pursuit of wisdom where everyday and academic theologies meet.

[23] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 166ff.

CHAPTER I

THEOLOGICAL PRACTICES OF CONVERSATION

A Dinner Party

"My grandmother had dementia," Miriam[24] says, her eyes fluttering upwards as she tries to access her own memory correctly. "She hugged me once, and then asked me who I was. She knew I could be trusted…[*pause*] even though she didn't know who I was. And I remember thinking, 'How Divine! To see everyone as someone who is in your family!'" We all pause to take her image in. This is not church. It is not a classroom. We are a group of friends, three couples – Miriam and Gary, Elaine and Jake, Tyler and Natalie – out for dinner, and our conversation has turned to theology.

A week prior, Elaine had emailed around a notice for an upcoming wine tasting at a local restaurant: "I've taken the liberty of booking us a table!" And so it is Thursday night, and the six of us are ringing in the weekend early at a funky Nashville restaurant, housed in a converted cottage-style home. The event – for which about forty people have registered – is set up "family style," with tables squished in two long lines across what was probably once this house's dining room.

My husband Tyler and I arrive first and grab the end of one of the tables in the hopes that doing so will give our group a little privacy. Miriam and Gary arrive next.

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[24] A pseudonym, as are all the names in this dissertation. Only the pastor of the church I studied for my fieldwork, my husband and myself are named with our actual names. Pastor Frank's name is used because of his official, public role in the church. Tyler's name is used because the fact that he is my husband matters for this story, and giving him an alternative name would do little to disguise his identity in light of that. Both Frank and Tyler gave me permission to use their real names.

Excited to see each other, we maneuver our way awkwardly around the tables to give hugs before rearranging our seating. I compliment Miriam's new blouse and we all express some disappointment that we will not have our own separate table. The seats begin to fill up, and after a few minutes Elaine rushes into the room, her long coat and her boyfriend Jake both fanning out behind her trying to keep up. Apologies for lateness are offered, but not needed, and we all rearrange our seats once again so that Jake, who has difficulty hearing in one ear, will be able to hear the rapidly moving conversation—he is not a member of our church, and so the rest of us, who have spent hours getting to know each other in and out of church, are eager to make him feel welcome in the group. Miriam and Gary teach the Sunday School class where the five of us have become friends. Miriam and Elaine are both on faculty together at a local university. Gary and Tyler both work in the Christian non-profit sector. Jake is a lawyer. And I am a theologian. Conversations erupt.

We finally get to hear about Jake's winning stint on the game show, *Jeopardy*. We help Miriam think through the pros and cons of a potential promotion at her work. We all probe Gary with questions about a documentary he is filming on immigration issues and the church. And Tyler and I try to convince the group to come on a hiking trip we do each spring with some old seminary friends. The end of the night leaves us feeling far from done, even as the waitress clears away our final glasses in a fashion that hints strongly, "it is time to go!" Elaine, ignoring the nudge, asks me how the dissertation fieldwork is coming along.

"It's fine," I say – "actually, I'm captivated by this image that came up in one of my conversations. It was of a God who has Alzheimer's disease. I just can't get it out of

my head." The group perks up. We usually lapse into some sort of theological conversation towards the end of our evenings together. I recall asking myself in the moment something like, "why do we only get to theological conversation after we've first dealt with all the laughter, stuff, and news of our lives? Only once we've gone through all that, can we turn our attention to God." Tyler leans back in his chair and I plunk my cheek into my hand, propping it up with my elbow on the table: "I don't know, what do you guys think of that image?" Miriam exhales as she ponders it and Jake leans in, curious. The waitress senses she has lost the hinting game, and refills our water glasses.

Elaine begins by noting that as Christians "we strive to forgive, but forgetting is beyond us." In that way, then, God's forgetting might indicate a perfecting over human forgiveness. I sense that we might stick with this topic and fish for a pen to start taking notes on unused napkins. Jake wonders, though, if forgetting can cheapen forgiveness. "Alzheimer's," he notes, "isn't a purposeful or intentional forgetting. If a Holocaust survivor now has Alzheimer's and is cared for by Germans," he continues, "is that healing or is it cheapened?" Gary seeks clarification by asking if forgetting would be permanent for God. "We can forget something and then remember it," he points out. "What type of forgetting are we talking about?" "Yeah," responds Jake, leaning in a little more, "if you got a lobotomy, you might forget who has hurt you, but you haven't forgiven them." "Sequence, then, seems to matter," adds Tyler.

"I don't know," Elaine continues. "It feels like we'd lose God's omnipotence. Alzheimer's patients still have all the mechanisms; they just don't work. How would it be for God? Doesn't the power feel different?" "It makes me think about all the levels of consciousness we just don't understand," adds Miriam, as she stares off into the distance

a little contemplatively. Something is on her mind, but it seems she is not ready to share it yet. "Yeah, I guess I wouldn't want to use the image to say that God actually *has* Alzheimer's disease," I clarify.

I realize in that moment that I am clarifying this position for myself as much as I am for them. I have been thinking about the image metaphorically and through the doctrinal loci of theological anthropology and revelation, not the doctrine of God. Mine is a question about the fragmented ways our lives help us understand something about God, not about the nature of God in Godself. But here I realize that the question, "what would it mean to imagine God has Alzheimer's disease?" functions differently in different contexts. To some, the question is taken plainly: God in Godself begins to be imagined in a degenerative state. However, to others, particularly those who have specialized academic theological training, the question could leap almost automatically across different systematic theological categories, changing shape slightly each time it moved.

I quickly translate my systematic theological terms before continuing: "But I would want to say that someone who has Alzheimer's disease is still made in God's image or, simply, still *is* in God's image…" I trail off, and pause. I need to find my thoughts and make them communicable. "I've been reading different theologians who write about disability lately. They write about how the brokenness of bodies can reveal something about the brokenness of Christ's body on the cross."[25] I can feel something

[25] In particular, I have Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994) in mind, especially her constructive chapter on "The Disabled God" (chapter 5) and Sarah Coakley's image of Christ's wounds enduring through the resurrection as scars in, "The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation, and God," in *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 153-167.

getting lost as I try to communicate these theologies to my friends: "…so I guess I wonder how someone who has Alzheimer's disease reveals God too?"

Jake takes the floor, beginning his point slowly. He seems still to be figuring it out, but perhaps he, too, is searching for the communicable translation: "With the disease, it's not just about them forgetting, but about how you react to being forgotten." I feel myself light up, intrigued by this new idea. My pen is moving furiously. I am now writing on a letter from Elaine's son's teacher that she dug out of her large purse for me when my napkins ran out. Jake pauses. I nod emphatically in an effort to encourage him to keep going. "Can I still care about someone who has it?" he continues. "It's a challenge to *your* memory as much as theirs." We all sit with that for a moment quietly. I can feel the excitement of possibility bubbling up inside me – for theological constructions around *imago Dei*, the Doctrine of God, salvation, and much, much more. I begin wondering if there is a thread through theological history of God as forgetful that I could find and trace.

And then Miriam's mouth curls in an expression of trying to find the right words. Moving into a place where vulnerability overlaps with the ability to trust one's friends, and where the intensity of personal experience creates the rich insight of the most contextual of theologies, she tells us about her grandmother's dementia. As Miriam's image of her grandmother's inability to remember her connects with an image for God, my chest feels struck at its center. I experience an involuntary rush of recollection of various times I have felt forgotten and, in some strange, connected way, times I have felt forsaken by God. And I think we all feel that bittersweet hurt for a moment.

Perhaps it is too much for Elaine. At least, the feeling brings it home for her: "I want God to know who I am. That's the whole point…we've been together for thirty-seven years." She pauses and continues, "I can start praying at any point, God knows who I am, knows the people I pray for by their first names. I love the idea of him forgetting the bad things about me, but even those are part of who I am!" And I feel myself aching for a theology that can do justice to both a God who loves us, even when we are forgotten, and a God who knows everyone's name.

Shortly after that, the image petered out and lost its power. But for half an hour or so, we suspended that final judgment of whether or not is was even an option to talk about God in this way and, as a result, the image gave us much to discuss. We all – church and non-church member, theologically trained and not alike – brought snippets of theology and narrative to the table, the two blending in to each other so as to be indistinguishable. We experimented and played with our stories and beliefs, diving deeper into them and into each other, the conversation contributing to the ongoing formation of our relationships with each other and, in that, I hope, with God.

These are the types of conversations my friends have come to expect with someone whose days are spent working as an "academic theologian" as their dinner partner. I will describe more fully what it might mean to call someone an "academic theologian" below, but for now, more pointedly, these are the conversations my friends expect to have when they go out for dinner with me. Sometimes they come to me with the questions and thoughts that bubble up in their faith, not expecting answers, but simply for the pleasure of pursuing something together in the midst of our shared unknowing. I help them see various cultural connections – like with the construction of disability – to the

beliefs they hold. In addition, as I will show later, I can also help them see the historical roots of the beliefs and questions they hold. And because this relationship is not one-sided, I also take my projects to them, as I do in this story. Like Miriam, my friends connect my abstractions to their grandmothers. They show me the concretion I am missing. They give me fresh insight and a rejuvenated sense that theology might matter.

Why begin a dissertation by describing a dinner party? Because, though all theology grows out of (often unstated) contexts, this dissertation is an explicit engagement with my experiences in numerous communities of friendship just like this one. These are the types of experiences through which I have come to believe that theology can be a conversation in and across all the kinds of intersecting communities that make us who we are. And so, the first reason I begin this dissertation around a table drinking wine is because that is where some of the best conversation happens.

In particular, I will argue here that if theology is, as Kathryn Tanner contends, a cultural activity ranging in styles from the ad hoc, context-specific reasoning of "everyday Christians" to the specialized, systematic discourses of academic institutions, then one fruitful way to do this activity is as a conversation that brings together these various styles of theology in practice, into a shared pursuit of wisdom.[26] Taking the dinner table as my inspiration, I endeavor in these pages to construct a more formal practice of guiding everyday and academic theologies, as Tanner names these styles, into this shared pursuit. In so doing, I seek to make evident the hidden possibilities of her

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[26] Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997). I explore what it means to pursue wisdom through the conversation between everyday and academic theology more fully in the second chapter, but for now it is worth noting that the pursuit looks something like what happened around that restaurant table. As Gary put it in my interview with him, it is "an intellectual pursuit to know God more deeply so that we can love God more deeply."

vision for the relationship between everyday and academic theologies, as well as its hidden limitations. Tanner's model, we will see, makes room for, but does not actually thematize this conversation towards which she gestures.

In order to open up the possibilities and limitations of this model, then, I argue throughout this dissertation that conversation requires that all partners be able both to speak to and listen to the others.[27] Thus, ecclesial and everyday realms cannot simply be treated as repositories to be mined for academic theological reflection in the conversation I am seeking to create and describe here. In the other direction, neither can academic theologians simply hope that members of churches and participants in broader public life will read our academic texts. The divisions between church, academy and public life cannot be bridged this way because both of these models remains much too uni-directional in communication. Rather, good conversation benefits from each partner's ability to reflect on and understand the factors contributing to the creation of her own perspective, as well as the perspectives of those with whom she converses, back and forth repeatedly through time. Understanding the relationship between various everyday and academic theologies as conversational, then, requires that we create a space for that conversation to occur. A dinner table is as good a space as any to begin.

Second, I begin with conversation around a dinner table as a reminder that neither the institution of church nor the institution of academy owns theology. The bulk of my ethnographic research for this project took place within a particular ecclesial practice and it employed various specialized academic methods and skills. I describe this

[27] This definition is not meant to exclude those who are unable to speak or hear due to variances in linguistic or sensory dis/ability. Rather, activities of speaking and listening in this definition include diverse forms of communication, including oral, written, and bodily.

simultaneously ecclesial and academic practice more fully below. But for now, this image of a dinner party is a reminder that while churches comprise one (diverse) type of institutional location for everyday theologies, and while universities, colleges and seminaries are primary institutional locations for academic theology, both types of discourse are produced across and outside of those institutional borders as well.

In addition to the location of the dinner table outside of the church, Jake's presence at it particularly affirms this point. While he was baptized Catholic as an infant, he chose not to be confirmed, does not attend church, and describes himself as an "immediate skeptic" of the religion he inherited from his devout mother. Neither church nor academy can fully account for the internal multiplicity of everyday and academic theologies or, even more so, the places where these complex discourses overlap. The image of the dinner table can be held in tension with the images of ecclesial conversational practice I explicate more fully below as a reminder that the practices associated with Christian life extend far beyond the church's walls, even as they constantly pull what is beyond those walls back into them.

Third, I open this dissertation around a dinner table conversation with friends because, while theology is not owned by church or academy, it is nevertheless always located. Sometimes it is located in a slow march to freedom, sometimes in the alternative worshipping communities of feminist liturgy groups. Sometimes it is located in the love letters written between a medieval nun and monk, and sometimes it can be found where a lemon vendor in Buenos Aires confuses her own "musky smell…with that of her basket

of lemons."[28] Whenever we are writing from the institutional academy, whatever struggles we have overcome, or even with which we still struggle, we are always already writing from a location of privilege, one that always also bears the possibility of being compounded with others. And often theology – academic or everyday -- grows out of sites of such extreme privilege that admitting the privilege might feel embarrassing enough for the theologian to consider leaving it unsaid – like a meal built around tasting new wines.

This dissertation also explores various themes of self-reflexivity related to the conversations in which academic theologians might engage to produce their academic texts. I begin around this particularly privileged dinner table because despite the complex and inter-related ways all my identity markers constitute me as both an insider and an outsider to various systems of power, this dinner table offers a concrete acknowledgment of one complexly constructed, privileged place from which I write. Indeed, as we shift the conversation from the restaurant to the ecclesial classroom, this question of privilege will remain. Because our conversational interaction of everyday and academic theologies does not reveal a clash of discourses but, rather, reveals a host of interpersonal connections between real people, the power that constellates between such relationships becomes increasingly evident in light of the different types of privilege we all have.

Fourth, and finally, I open this dissertation around a dinner table with friends because I believe that theology is deeply personal. Theology begins and ends around dinner tables – those lavish and those simple – with the people we love (and even sometimes with those we don't); whether we acknowledge it or not, it begins and ends in

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[28] Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1.

all the “laughter, stuff, and news of our lives” that is shared in and around our conversations about God.

We carry faith in our bones. The title of this dissertation is a poetic allusion to the concept of *habitus*, in which this work is grounded, with its corresponding understanding that faith and theological knowledge are produced and carried, not simply in the mind, but in the whole, embodied, mindful, communally constituted self. This faith that we carry in our bones – academic and non-academic bones alike – is not naïve and simple. It comes loaded up with a chaotic panoply of Christian thought and action, access to which might only be granted to many of us at this level of pre-cognitive, embodied knowing. But this spiritual family tree resides there nonetheless. Our bodies are like reliquaries, housing communities of saints therein, bone to our bone, flesh to our flesh, buried within us all in messy, often inaccessible ways.[29] The practices we perform now always bear traces of their prior performances.

And so – on rare occasions, with the right circumstances aligned, careful historical study, and help from the Spirit’s divine wisdom – traces of these traditions inculcated into us might be able to be brought to conscious articulation. This articulation does not happen simply when someone speaks it from a pulpit or whispers it in a pew, or when an academic theologian sits at her desk to interpret it. Knowledge, power and insight work in much more complex, multivalent ways than that. And as we will see as this dissertation unfolds, conversations at the intersection of everyday and academic theological discourses do not always go smoothly. For every time all pistons fire, like with the conversation above, there are moments when they sputter and fail. Sometimes

[29] I am indebted to Ted Smith for suggesting the image of a reliquary.

one of us refuses to hear what another is saying in the fullness of its beauty. Or what is being said might not be beautiful, causing frustration and anger in its hearers. Sometimes tension gives way to theological construction; sometimes tension is just tense. And yet, of all the forms that a conscious articulation of hidden wisdom might take, this dissertation seeks to nurture one: speakers who speak everyday and academic theological discourse with varying fluencies coming together to pursue the wisdom of the faith that is already in our bones.

Therefore, the particular research questions that give shape to this dissertation, which I unpack below, converge in one core question: what particular fruits can be produced by a conversation that incorporates various fluencies of theological language into a shared pursuit of wisdom?

The question of how to relate what happens in ecclesial and broader public life with the normative claims of academic theological reflection has received renewed attention in the past forty or so years. Postliberal theologies, for example, have concentrated on the doctrinal shaping of ecclesial life, distinguishing appropriate Christian belief from broader culture.[30] Revisionist or correlationist theologies have sought to make academic theology intelligible to the multiple arenas of ecclesial, broader academic and public life.[31] And Liberation theologies constructed along the cultural identity markers of ethnicity and race, gender and sexuality, dis/ability and economy, for example, have all at one time or another centralized the category of ecclesial experience

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[30] See, for example, Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press,1980) and George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: WJKP, 1984). See especially Lindbeck,120-124.
[31] See, for example, David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), especially chapter 1.

in order to destabilize traditional theology's supposedly neutral core.[32] Each of these theological perspectives has, in turn, given rise to a strategic use of anthropological theory or methods in order to enflesh abstract theological claims with the descriptive analysis of concrete locations of religious practice and belief.

This dissertation both argues for and performs an extension of these methods. To do so, it deploys a form of reflexive ethnography from my own particular subject position. My particular subject position is located within the formational practices of both church and academy, both of which remain ever open to the multiple, complex intersecting spheres of everyday life.[33] The moves I just made with our dinner party conversation offer a foretaste of that fuller method and content. But before we can turn to this constructive methodological project, we must first introduce the church classroom conversations that are at the center of this dissertation's study.

After briefly introducing how these conversations functioned in practice, I engage Kathryn Tanner's use of "culture" as an analytic category in order to understand more deeply the ways in which the discourses associated with church, academy and everyday

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[32] For a pivotal work in white feminist theology see Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973). For pivotal works in womanist and mujerista theologies see Jacquelyn Grant's groundbreaking dissertation, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta: AAR, 1989) and Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *En la Lucha (In the Struggle): A Hispanic Woman's Liberation Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). For a Latin American Liberation theology, see Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (Orbis, 1973). For a study that brings together gender, race, sexuality, class and economic critiques in relation to theology, see Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology.*

[33] Of course, not all academic theologians locate themselves also within the church, nor do they need to. This method is explored as a suggestion for those whose identities are already constructed in this hybrid way and, more particularly, as the most appropriate method for my own distinct subject location. This will be addressed more fully in the third chapter.

life rise out of cultural practices to shape us as speakers of those same discourses. Having situated these discourses in various cultural practices, I look at how Tanner maps theological activity along a continuum from the everyday to the academic. Seeking to understand this continuum gives rise to the research questions that guide this dissertation, as I seek to fill content in to some of the methodological areas Tanner chooses not to develop. After introducing these research questions and offering preliminary outlines for how they will be pursued in these pages, I offer also a brief introduction into the ethnographic field in which they were pursued.

Life Change University

While the fourth chapter of this dissertation will offer a fuller ethnographic explication of the church that I studied for my research, a brief introduction is necessary here for situating the project. First Baptist Church, Nashville (FBC) is my church. It is where I was ordained in May of 2009 after two years of being a member, about eight months before my theological ethnographic project began. One of the many valuable lessons I have learned at FBC is that just as I often fail to recognize my privilege as an academic theologian, I also often fail to recognize the theological richness of the more everyday locations in which I live.

I entered my doctoral program with a desire to do theology from an ethnographic perspective, expecting my focus to be on some alternative form of Christian community. My academic instincts had me searching for the one thing no one else had written about yet. I toyed with studying an underground Christian community I had heard about that participated together in both worship and BDSM practices, or maybe another community

I had visited whose worship life was explicitly shaped according to the philosophical movement known as deconstruction.[34]

It had therefore not occurred to me that I might study my own Southern Baptist congregation, which I perceived as exceedingly normal and mainstream. But the deeper I got into First Baptist's life, the more I felt the lure to make it the focus of my study. I began to see what Mary McClintock Fulkerson calls "the fascinating grain of the ordinary" and, like her, I began to wonder if studying such a fascinating grain could "bring something fresh to theological reflection on ordinary Christian community."[35] At the same time, I was reading various theorists in reflexive ethnography as part of my coursework, and these theorists were complicating my understanding of ethnographic participant observation. As a result, particularly while reading Loïc Wacquant, I began to wonder how I might deploy my own ministerial vocation within the FBC community as my primary research tool. At FBC, one of the chief deployments of my ministerial vocation occurs in the capacity of Christian education. In this way, my vocation loosely integrates my ecclesial and academic roles as I teach Sunday night adult education classes to groups of twenty to twenty-five participants at a time.

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[34] BDSM refers to erotic practices associated with bondage and discipline, domination and submission, and sadism and masochism. For more on the connection between BDSM and religious life, see Julianne Buenting, "Rehearsing Vulnerability: BDSM as transformative ritual," in *Chicago Theological Seminary Register*, 93 no 1 (Spr 2003), 39-49. For information on liturgical and ritual practices associated with IKON, the second community I considered studying, see Peter Rollins, *How (Not) To Speak of God* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2006). My inclinations toward these two potential projects in fact come together in the fourth chapter of this dissertation. Therein, the relationship between bodily regimes of discipline and transcendence that characterized my academic interest in BDSM as a religious, specifically Christian, practice connects with articulating a theoretical structure for understanding religious practices, as was characteristic of the IKON community.

[35] Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.

Each year, our church offers a spring and fall semester of a whole roster of Sunday night adult education classes in what we call our "Life Change University" (LCU). I have found a home in this program for sharing both my ministerial and academic gifts with the church. It is also where I have learned as much, if not more, about the theologies constructed in church life than any other ecclesial activity with which I have been involved. Prior to the fieldwork conducted for this dissertation, I co-taught a class called "Citizens in the Kingdom of God" at LCU. This led me to develop a series titled "Topics in Theology," wherein I taught "Topics in Theology: Jesus Christ and Salvation" in the spring of 2010 and "Topics in Theology: God as Trinity" in the fall of 2010. Both courses functioned as the chief components of my theological ethnographic research. With my fieldwork now closed, my work continued at LCU with the course I taught as I finished this dissertation, "Topics in Theology: Worship."

In the two courses I taught as part of this research, we studied historical surveys of each doctrinal focus. Across both we engaged the Gospels, Paul, Justin Martyr, Origen, Arius and Athanasius, Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, Anselm, Abelard, Aquinas, Beatrice of Nazareth, Marguerite Porete, Luther, Calvin, Descartes, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Kant, Schleiermacher, Hegel, Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, Gustavo Gutierrez, James Cone, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Elizabeth Johnson. I situated each theologian within their cultural context and lectured briefly on their writings, but the bulk of the class would be taken up with discussion. The theologians we studied provided stimulus for our own theological reflection. They opened up theological questions, revealing how doctrines had shifted and changed across time. In this way, everyday and academic theological discourses came together in a shared practice of conversation.

The Turn to Culture in Academic Theology

This path into the particular practices of my study is best understood when situated within the broader turn to culture that has taken place in academic theological discourse. While my theological ethnographic study grounds this dissertation's endeavors in everyday Christian social practices, this turn to culture grounds them also in the theologies created in academic theological institutions. Indeed, part of my argument entails this claim: theology is always already grounded in some loose integration of the church, academy and everyday life. Theology, as a pursuit of wisdom, grows out of the conversational space between the inter-permeating and interlocking practices that make up the multiple spheres of life. My research attempts to make this relationship explicit and intentional.

Each of the perspectives in contemporary Christian academic theology that I mention above has made its turn to culture differently, each one framing its engagement – or disengagement – with its own particular spin. I noted how postliberal, revisionist and liberation theologies each relate themselves to ecclesial and broader public life.[36] Part and parcel for each of these relationships is their simultaneous interest in the relationship between the activity of theology and culture as an analytic category, even if this interest is sometimes only implicitly present in the texts. For postliberals theology constructs a

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[36] It might seem strange to ground a theological project in these seemingly competing theological perspectives. As theologian David Kamitsuka has effectively argued, however, all three share similar goods and goals; each just directs their focus differently within those goals. Put simply, he argues that all three genres share postliberalism's desire for biblical fidelity, the revisionist desire for intellectual credibility, and the liberationist desire for ideology critique. See David Kamitsuka, *Theology and Contemporary Culture: Liberation, Postliberal and Revisionary Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

border between Christian and non-Christian, secular cultures; for revisionists and correlationists, theology correlates the beliefs of distinctly Christian culture to distinctly public and academic cultures; liberation theologies understand theological reflection to be situated within a cultural matrix of power relations that construct identity and difference according to bodily markers of class, race, gender, and sexuality, for example.

Whichever way the theological engagement of culture is framed, however, there is a shared belief that the cultures we perpetuate simply by living in them also have some bearing on the people we are and the people we are becoming. As theology's foundations in reason, revelation or notions of the self have all been shaken by the critiques extending throughout modernity, *culture* becomes the omnipresent factor that has bearing on the content and form of what and how we know. Cultural Studies – the mode of inquiry that help us analyze culture – thus becomes the crucial companion discipline to theologies created in academic institutions.[37]

Kathryn Tanner brings these concerns together in her work, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*. Arguing that specialized academic theology has already been using the category "culture" in "implicit" and "unself-conscious ways," Tanner seeks to historicize the term, thus revealing the shifts between its modern and postmodern usage.[38] I engage her usage of "modern" and "postmodern" below, but for now it is worth situating her project within these approaches to the theological cultural turn.

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[37] For a comprehensive study of different theological perspectives on engaging culture, see *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism*, ed. Delwin Brown, Sheila Greeve Davaney, and Kathryn Tanner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[38] Tanner, x.

Concerned with grounding academic theology in Christian social practices, Tanner reflects postliberal sensibilities, even as she criticizes their failure to communicate appropriately from Christian cultures to broader public life and their dubious over-policing of the borders of Christian identity.[39] Like revisionist and correlationist theologians, Tanner is concerned with the relationship between ecclesial, academic and everyday realms of public life. But she also criticizes these methods for engaging broader public life "simply for the evaluation of a distinctively Christian way of being in the world."[40] Her critique of revisionists thus parallels her critique of postliberals, as she argues again, but this time with regards to revisionist theology, that "a kind of apologetics or polemics with other cultures is internal, then, to the very construction of Christian sense."[41] Instead of distinct cultures, Tanner argues that "culture" can function as an analytic tool for understanding the Christian social practices out of which theology arises. Finally, Tanner's interest in the relationship between power and culture for making audible the voices of oppressed or marginalized peoples reflects liberationist sensibilities. While Tanner does not explicitly situate her own theological identity within liberation approaches, she remains less critical of them and, perhaps for this reason, seems to ground her particular approach to interpreting culture in their methodological trajectory.

Drawing on liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez and *mujerista* theologian Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, Tanner argues that "specialized theological investigation should be placed on a continuum with theological activity elsewhere as something that arises in an

[39] Tanner, 115.
[40] Ibid, 116.
[41] Ibid.

'organic' way out of Christian practice."[42] Positing Christian practice as a distinct sphere with its own internal differences that gives rise to more specialized Christian theological reflection, Tanner's view of culture will not only help us to understand the particular classroom culture of the LCU class I taught. It will also provide us with a model with which we can critically engage in order to understand how everyday and academic theologies both rise out of and are related to each other. In particular, it will help us understand how these discourses can be more fruitfully related to each other in a shared practice of conversation.

Cultural Practices and the Theological Continuum

Tanner argues that theological discourse – which is embedded within, shaped by, and arises from internally and externally diverse sets of cultural practices – is performed in similarly diverse modes. Theology is both an everyday, context-specific activity engaged in by those who practice the Christian faith, and it is a specialized, academic activity. There is continuity between these two activities, however, as academic theology seeks to systematize or make consistent the messiness of the everyday theology out of which it rises.[43] Both types of discourse share the goal of making sense of their shared Christian social practices.[44]

Tanner is not, in essence, describing a new way of doing theology. She is, arguably, calling our attention to a nuanced version of one of the ways theology has historically been done. Consider Augustine's *Confessions* or Calvin's *Institutes*, Barth's

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[42] Ibid, 71. In her note to this statement Tanner explicitly relates this approach to Gutierrez's *Theology of Liberation* and Isasi-Diaz's *En la Lucha* (pg. 183).
[43] Tanner, 69-71.
[44] Ibid.

Church Dogmatics or Althaus-Reid's *Indecent Theology*: all these texts abstract from the particular religious, cultural practices in which their authors participated. They systematize and thematize what people were doing, thinking and saying in the concrete communities where they lived. In each situation, the texts are simultaneously authorized by their continuity with other similar Christian intellectual traditions. And yet they speak back to the context out of which their concerns initially arose. Tanner's model begins to create a structure – both temporal and spatial – for interpreting and traversing these moves back and forth.

Augustine, Calvin, Barth and Althaus-Reid all produced specialized texts that performed this speaking back to their particular contexts (the *Institutes* were written as a catechetical source for new Reformed Christians, for example). But as I will argue throughout this dissertation, this speaking back can also happen through the theologian's own return to the context of practice as a more fully reflective participant, as one might imagine was also the case for these four theologians and others. Tanner thus helps us to see that through historical and contemporary theological methods, the situation of practice cannot be treated merely as a coherent, closed source for distinct theological reflection. Rather, it should be encountered as the place out of and into which reflection bubbles and disperses.

Indeed, the danger in theology turning to practices as its subject matter, Tanner warns, is that it can begin to make too sharp a distinction between practice and theoretical reflection on practice, without acknowledging how the latter might have shaped the perception of the former.[45] In this way, theology risks "projecting onto the object studied

[45] Ibid, 72.

what its own procedures of investigation requires – a coherent whole," thus eclipsing the internal messiness of the practice studied.[46] Postliberal theologians, for example, imagine that they have managed to "dig underneath the messy surface of Christian practice" to unearth "some underlying body of rules or patterned order to which the theology of practice conforms despite its messiness."[47] By positioning themselves as second-order reflectors, external to the supposedly first-order practices, they impose a logic that "validates the conclusions of the theologian while disqualifying the people and practices it studies from posing a challenge to those conclusions."[48]

Alternatively, for Tanner, the academic theologian cannot understand her subject position as being external to the practices she engages in this way. Instead, she must recognize that she is implicated in them. Like any everyday and ecclesial practice, academic theology always bears the potential that it is or, at least, could become, one among many Christian social practices, albeit one shaped also by a distinct set of academic social practices. Understanding academic theology as specialized reflection on the Christian social practices in which it participates, then, the academic theologian seeks to engage the messiness of inconsistent forms of practice, both for questions to be resolved and fruitful possibilities for social change to be explored.[49]

This is not to say, however, that Tanner sees everyday theologies necessarily failing to address and answer their own problems. The difference between everyday and academic theologies is not whether or not they tackle the problems that rise out of the Christian social practices in which each is implicated, but rather how they do so. And this

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[46] Ibid, 76.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid, 80.

difference matters. "Everyday theological investigation," argues Tanner, tackles problems by employing "something like a sense for the game, a feel for the possibilities of Christian living."[50] Everyday theology functions more by instinct, a culturally ingrained understanding of how to respond to a particular situation. Everyday theological questions are bound to concrete situations, back into which their answers directly feed, almost as if by instinct.[51]

Similarly, argues Tanner, academic theology is also a form of "social practice in its own right, with goals and standards specifically suited to it."[52] The academic theologian therefore participates in and is responsible to a broad spectrum of Christian social practices with which a distinct set of academic social practices – in which she also participates and to which she is also responsible – intersects. Growing out of *Theories of Culture*, the intellectual trajectory of her model that Tanner primarily explores centers on the permeable border at which broad social practices are made Christian.[53] For Tanner, the question primarily guiding her inquiry seems to be related to how Christian identity is continually negotiated in relation to the broader social practices of public life, both everyday and academic. The permeable border between theological difference outlined by her model that interests me here, however, is this one between everyday theology and academic theology: between the everyday Christian and the academic theologian.

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[50] Ibid, 81.
[51] Ibid, 80.
[52] Ibid.
[53] See, for example, Kathryn Tanner, "Theological Reflection and Christian Practices," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 228-244; "Shifts in Theology in the Last Quarter Century," in *Modern Theology*, 26:1 (January 2010), 39-44; and "How My Mind Has Changed: Christian Claims," in *Christian Century* (February 23rd, 2010).

Particularly, I am interested in how the academic theologian who is shaped by both ecclesial and academic social practices negotiates the powers, privileges and responsibilities with which both inculcate her, and how one so positioned can effectively foster conversation between academic theology and everyday theology.

Because everyday Christians do not need “detailed understanding” of their practices in order to participate fully in them, everyday Christians can run into crises of practical coherence, argues Tanner. In these crises, the internal logic of Christian social practices, as well as the relationship between their Christian and broader social practices, cease to make sense.[54] In such moments, “the processes of specialized theological investigation,” which are “less episodic” and “more cumulative” than everyday theologies, are able to draw on a “wider range of materials” to make possible moves of abstraction beyond these concrete situations. From that move of intellectual abstraction, academic theologians are able to create and offer solutions to the crises that erupt within the field of practice.[55] Far from falling into false caricatures of academic theology as a de-contextualized, “ivory tower,” mode of discourse, however, the academic theologian’s ability to turn “practical answers to practical problems” into “intellectual answers to intellectual problems” is precisely what enables her to be of service when practical circumstances feel conflicted.[56] With what she characterizes as a “division of labor,” Tanner argues that academic theologians possess the necessary skills for helping everyday Christians negotiate their re-investment in broken practices with a fresh sense

[54] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 75.
[55] Ibid, 81, 89.
[56] Ibid, 80.

for Christian living. Historical, systematic and concrete forms of wisdom are all necessary for the tasks set before academic theology.

My description of Tanner's model thus far describes only how academic theology is responsible to a broad spectrum of Christian social practices, however. Tanner goes on further to argue that the academic theologian's ability to abstract from these social practices also allows the continuance of academic social practices.[57] These are the moves of abstraction by which academic theologians create products like books and other writings that have "a relative autonomy from processes of theological investigation in everyday life." Even when academic theology's questions rise out of practice, then, its critical response seeks to abstract from the particular everyday situation in order to make claims that are evaluated according to "their own field-specific values, interests, and investments."[58] In this way, academic theology rises from and seeks to serve both the broadly Christian and distinctly academic social practices in which it participates simultaneously.

The reason everyday and academic theologies need each other, then, in Tanner's model, is because while everyday theology's concretion suffers from a loss of broad, systematic, historical perspective, academic theology's broad, systematic, historical perspective suffers from a lack of concretion. These different styles of theology therefore need each other if they are to perform their shared goal of influencing Christian practice, even as their primary mode of relating for that need might be in their competition with each other.[59]

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[57] Ibid, 81.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid, 82-86.

Without everyday theology, academic theology not only has no reason for existing; but without listening to everyday theology, academic theology also has no structure for engagement.[60] Tanner emphasizes that if academic theology wants to influence "everyday Christian life," it is "dependent on the consent of regular rank-and-file Christians" and, indeed, must make sense "in great part on those theologies' own terms."[61] Even so, it remains unclear how the academic theologian either gains that consent, or speaks back to the everyday context in communicable ways. Thus, while Tanner does not outline how the move from everyday to academic theologies happens, neither does she describe how to make the move in the reverse direction. The next logical step of her method would therefore be to articulate these moves, as I endeavor to do in this dissertation.

Research Questions

The desire to take this next logical step thus forms the foundation for my research questions in this dissertation project: first, as academic theology listens to everyday theologies in order to hear the crises that need guidance, how can academic theology also hear and learn from the context-specific wisdom that is present in everyday theology alongside these crises? Second, how could the context-specific wisdom of everyday theologies be best communicated to an academic theological audience and how could the context-specific wisdom of academic theologies be communicated to the everyday? And finally, when crises erupt in academic theology – when academic theologians lose their

[60] This very point is made by one of my research partners as he shares his own understanding of what the tasks of academic theology should be. This story is told more fully in chapter three.
[61] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 85.

"sense for the game" – can everyday theology compete to be heard and to correct in the academic environment as well? In this section, I take each of these questions in turn in order to introduce how they will be developed throughout the dissertation.

In response to the first question, I argue that the listening practices of ethnography are best suited for hearing the crises of everyday theologies. Ethnographic methods can provide the academic theologian with theoretical and methodological structures that guide her modes of listening towards the possibility of a greater objectivity. Of course, as most contemporary ethnographers would agree, complete objectivity is impossible. Nevertheless, most would also agree that the drive towards accurate descriptions of the contexts being studied should also always remain a goal of ethnographic work.

Therefore, whereas Tanner argues that academic theologians have been using the analytic category of culture in "implicit" and "un-self conscious ways," academic theologians also tend to perform their modes of listening to concrete contexts in similarly "implicit" and "un-self conscious ways" This is the precise problem I am endeavoring here to correct.[62] Mary McClintock Fulkerson and others have recognized how helpful ethnography can be for performing these more objective modes of listening. My methods here will serve as a complement to theirs.

Second, taking seriously Tanner's desire for academic theology to avoid thinking of itself as second order reflection on first order events, I endeavor in these first three

[62] Ibid, x. For examples critiquing academic theology's tendency to gloss over the complexity of the concrete contexts on which their work supposedly draws, see Ted A. Smith's critique of Stanley Hauerwas and Delores S. Williams in "Redeeming Critique: Resignations to the Cultural Turn in Christian Theology and Ethics," in *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 24, 2 (2004): 89-113. See also Christian Batalden Scharen's critique of John Milbank and Stanley Hauerwas in "'Judicious narratives', or ethnography *as* ecclesiology," in *Scottish Journal of Theology*. 58(2): 125-142 (2005).

chapters to unpack my self-implicated ethnographic method by which my own embodied practices enabled everyday and academic theologies to communicate with each other. This intentional deploying of my own self-implication – as both minister and academic theologian – within the field of study, marks my primary methodological difference from Fulkerson's more traditional ethnographic methods of participant observation.[63]

Throughout this dissertation, I draw on trajectories in reflexive ethnography in order to account for the ways in which I am implicated in my field of study as both minister and academic theologian. Using these methods, which seek a balance between modes of objective and subjective knowing, I demonstrate that as both insider and outsider to the field of study, I am able to both shape it and study it. Following the two key modes of academic theological work that Tanner outlines, then, my self-implicated ethnographic practice undergirds both how I taught ecclesial classes in which a conversation that incorporated various theological fluencies took place, and how I created a text out of that teaching practice – this dissertation – that is appropriate primarily in the realm of academic theological discourse.

By seeking to perform Tanner's model in this way, however, my own practices reveal some of her model's more idealizing tendencies. I already noted that Tanner's

[63] For other examples of more traditional uses of participant observation based ethnography in theological practice see, John Swinton and Harriet Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (SCM Press, 2006) and *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*, ed. Christian Scharen & Aana Marie Vigen (New York: Continuum, forthcoming 2011). For examples of theologies that endeavor to use some of the tools of ethnography from a ministerial subject-position see Thomas Edward Frank, *The Soul of the Congregation: An Invitation to Congregational Reflection* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000) and Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008). My self-implicated methods depart from these two projects in that while they focus primarily on the ministerial subject-position, I endeavor also to highlight the significance of my academic theological subject-position as well.

main concern, as an inquiry into theology as a cultural practice, focuses on the permeable border between Christian and other social practices. She therefore pays less attention to the border between Christian social practices more broadly construed, and the ways in which these practices intersect with academic social practices in order to give rise to academic theologies: a border that, at least as is true in my case, can constitute the heart of an academic theological identity. I endeavor here to open up understanding of this academic theological identity in a more complex way. As a result, my self-implicated method, as I outline particularly in chapters three and four, is revealed as intentionally drawing on my commitments both to the ecclesial realm in which my study occurred, and to the academic realm by which the ecclesial practice became simultaneously a form of study. These forms of commitment, therefore, are not taken for granted. I instead argue for their importance to theological method.

It should be noted, moreover, that this academic realm is constituted by practices that are, unlike Tanner's emphasis, not only intellectual. A flailing job market, increase in what is required for tenure reviews and, even, increase in what is required to find a stable job within the field, as well as a general anxiety about the future of theological education, all contribute to the shape that academic research, discourse and knowledge takes. Academic theology does not just seek its own continuance; academic theologians, in the most interested, haphazard and context specific ways, also seek the continuance of their own place within academic theological discourse. Indeed, our own tactics of self-preservation integrally shape the theological academy's continuance. Therefore, the already existing set of academic discipline-based criteria that Tanner mentions is itself hotly contested, internally diverse, and politically and personally charged. The discourses

of the academic theologian who is committed to both church and academy are therefore always competing and cohering in ways that are marked by both ambivalence and loose moments of performative integration, as I will argue throughout this dissertation.

In fact, it is precisely because of this competition and coherence that I intend to outline how specialized, academic theology is composed of practices that are more complexly intersectional than Tanner's image of a continuum indicates. Academic theology does not merely comprise the furthest point along the line of Christian social practices, as Tanner tends to describe it. If everyday and academic theological discourses, regardless of their institutional home, range in concretion and abstraction as they rise out of Christian practices, then something distinct happens when this second theologically particular institutional home is added, especially when it is added to the degree that it is for those who go through the formation of a theological doctoral program and, then, subsequent career in academia. This dissertation, among other things, functions as an exercise in understanding the particular tasks and potential gifts such a theologian has to offer to *both* church and academy concurrently.

Shaped by at least two distinct sets of practices, then, my self-implicating method also endeavors to shed light on my final research question: when academic theologians lose their "sense for the game," can everyday theologies impact, help, guide and shape their academic practices too? Throughout my reports of the conversations we had in our ecclesial practice, I will demonstrate moments of my own failures, moments of my own pedagogical shortsightedness, and moments when my own understanding of Christian intellectual traditions required expansion and revision; in essence, I will continually reference my own need to be corrected. And throughout, we will see how the everyday

Christians did that correcting. Not only did my research partners press me to figure out modes of communication that were relevant in their context, but they also guided me into deeper understanding of the texts and figures I was teaching them. Their work thus shaped mine, a fact to which I hope this text bears proof.

That all of us in my ethnographic field were capable of correcting, guiding and shaping the practices and intellectual insights of each other, then, indicates that Tanner's vision of how everyday and academic theologies compete and cooperate with each other to solve everyday theological problems might be too restricted. [64] This competition and cooperation produces more than answers to problems. As our class conversed in fluencies that could be mapped all along Tanner's theological continuum, what we were doing is perhaps best not described as "theology" as simply a type of discourse – either everyday or academic – or theology for theology's sake but, rather, as a pursuit of wisdom by which we all gained practical and intellectual know-how. I will develop this definition much more fully in the next chapter, but for now we can note that what we engaged together was a spiritual discipline, one that the class members described – with my agreement – in terms of "seeking to love God with all our heart, mind, and soul."

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[64] Indeed, while the members of the classes I taught spoke in haphazard ways, certainly, as did I, when asked why they took these classes, they answered that they wanted to learn something "bigger," "deeper," or "broader" than the beliefs they had inherited. And they wanted to do so in order to gain a new and larger perspective on their own faith. In other words, they wanted to learn some of the more specialized discourses that could help them transcend the particularity of their concrete contexts. But to interpret such desires as "more academic," according to Tanner's way of framing the theological continuum would be to wrongly interpret them, I would argue, through an alternative institution's discourse. Everyday theologies have their own methods of abstraction and systematizing that they relate with intellectual forms of worship: "Knowing God more deeply in order to love God more deeply," as a number of my research partners put it.

Conversations Across the Theological Continuum

I noted above that Tanner historicizes the term "culture" by revealing shifts between its modern and postmodern usage. Bringing these shifts to the light of explicit reflection, Tanner seeks to show what academic theology can learn from the theologies created across all the spheres of church, academy and everyday life as it rises out of concrete Christian social practices. Her description of these shifts is helpful for understanding how our own classroom conversation practice gave rise to an integration of diverse theological fluencies in a sort of hybrid conversation.

Yet, at the same time, because Tanner's model deals with an abstracted notion of discourses, rather than actual speeches made by real people, her turn to concretion actually comprises more of a turn toward what Ted Smith calls "invisible church cultures."[65] In their turn to culture, Smith argues, theologians have tended to turn their attention less to an analysis of concrete practices in all their complexity, and more toward a vision of the church interpreted through the lens of an idealized version of what they want the church to be. In other words, they performed the same sorts of secondary reflection on supposedly first order events that Tanner criticizes, as outlined above, but to which she also falls prey. Whereas Smith's examples of the ways Stanley Hauerwas and Delores Williams eclipse concrete church practices with, respectively, sanctified visions of gospel proclamation and romanticized visions of black women's experience, Tanner names a messiness in church culture that remains surprisingly neat.

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[65] Smith, *Redeeming Critique*. For a more compact version of this argument, see Smith, *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 17-22.

Throughout this dissertation, and in the fourth and fifth chapters in particular, we see that flesh and blood practices of theological conversation produce disagreements that are never only theological. Questions like "What is God's wrath in light of God's mercy?"[66] cannot be easily disentangled from the death of a friend, a sense of injustice, or the pleasures of finding belonging in a community, for example. By engaging a conversation in which such questions become concretely situated, we gain deeper insight into how wisdom can be pursued across various theological fluencies.

When we view culture through a modern lens, Tanner rightly avers, we tend to ascribe certainty or authority to particular, supposedly "characteristic beliefs, values and so forth" which we seek to understand in distinction from their locations of social practice.[67] But postmodern views do not destroy, or even wholly replace, this modern sense of authority. Instead they destabilize it through fresh understandings of space and time and of identity and difference. Therefore, whereas a modern view of culture tends to see culture as bound by geographical space, presuming uniformity and agreement on cultural elements within that space, a postmodern view disrupts that stability of space by also accounting for the contingencies of time.[68] This means that a postmodern view takes account of the historical processes by which some or even most members of a particular geographically defined group might come to share affirmation of a particular cultural element, and in so doing, it undermines the abiding, universal authority of it.

This postmodern view of culture helps us understand some of the dynamics at play in the classes I taught for this theological ethnographic research. First, it presses us

[66] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 88.
[67] Ibid, 44.
[68] Ibid, 41.

to reflect on the diverse historical trajectories that contributed to the shape of the conversation we had. As one whose discourse is shaped by the institutional practices of academy as well as church, the trajectory to which I returned again and again for interpreting our shared conversation was that of the historical Christian intellectual traditions. Indeed, I was curious to see how articulating these intellectual traditions explicitly in conversation might help class members better understand and bring to cognition the faith that was in their bones. The class members, however, brought an entirely different historical trajectory to bear on our conversation, one that was more local, related both to our particular church and the Southern Baptist Convention.

My historical focus was demonstrated first in what I chose to teach to the group and, second, in how I taught it. My immediate instinct was to plot a course that followed a traditional, historically based survey of key theological thinkers. In fact, I often surprised myself by how traditional I could be. Despite my own personal academic pleasure at exploring thinkers situated closer to the fringes of Christian traditions, not to mention my usual hermeneutic desire to disrupt any notion of a "core tradition" to begin with, when designing these classes I found myself drawn to the Augustines, Luthers and Kants of Christian history, with a female mystic – any one would do – thrown in for good measure and a feminist tacked on at the end. In other words, I found myself performing the very pedagogical practice I usually strongly criticize.

While topics I taught felt surprisingly traditional, however, how I taught them felt less so. I found that I tended to deploy those historically foundational figures for destabilizing purposes. While I did not seek to destroy or even replace traditional views, neither did I seek to conform the class members' beliefs to the authority of an orthodox

tradition. Rather, in a way that makes more sense in light of what Tanner calls the postmodern view of culture, I sought to destabilize the presumed authority of certain traditional Christian claims and, perhaps, especially, of traditional Baptist claims, by putting them into dialogue with one another.

The theological crises that erupted became fertile ground for conversational reflections not only on how we might solve such issues, but also on what we might find if we kept them open. I therefore found that any impulses I might have had to disrupt the status quo of our shared Christian beliefs – impulses usually associated with the vernacular understanding of *postmodern* – were parasitic on deeper understandings of those beliefs. I think I already believed in this destabilizing power that Christian traditions inherently possessed. And yet, I was consistently surprised by how fruitful it was revealed to be throughout the practice of theological conversation.

Chapter five explores these themes more fully by analyzing our discussions on Beatrice of Nazareth, Martin Luther and the doctrine of sanctification. But for now, let me offer a hint of what is to come to ground my point. A concern that particular figures were trying to "earn their own salvation" consistently undermined class members' abilities to engage those figures. To help them forge such engagement, then, I traced some of the historical trajectories that give rise to their certainty that salvation cannot be earned. I did not try to undo their belief or convince them to let go of it, but I did try to help them see that it was not the only rubric through which they could interpret every figure. There were other theological rubrics to be had, and we endeavored together to find and articulate them.

Subsequently studying my own pedagogical practices, brought to light while reviewing transcriptions of our classes,[69] I realized just how much I relied upon explanations of the historical, cultural conditions of particular beliefs in order to aid class members' critical reflection on their own personal views. In sum, later reflection on my instinctual pedagogy revealed just how central this notion of historical contingency as authorizing and de-authorizing particular ideas, summarized so succinctly by Tanner, is to my own ingrained understanding of culture.

But this analysis only describes the historical contingencies brought into our classroom culture by me, as one shaped by the practices of both church and academy. It therefore risks either treating the other class members' speeches as coherent, de-temporalized wholes, or treating them as if their historical shaping only bears sub-conscious traces of the types of the particular theological discourses I taught them. However, the class members were also speaking out of conscious knowledge of historical moments of which I had little to no knowledge.[70]

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[69] All classes were recorded with the permission of those in attendance, and were later transcribed by me. I tried two methodological approaches to these transcriptions. With the first course, I transcribed each Sunday class the Monday after, before I planned the next week's class. That way, I had deeper insight into how classes were going, and could tailor my subsequent lessons to the needs I discerned in each particular discussion. Realizing that such immediate levels of reflexivity were impacting the very nature of my teaching, I experimented in the second course, "God as Trinity," with saving all the recordings to transcribe until the entire course was over. The differences, losses and gains between these two approaches is beyond the scope of discussion here, although I intend to gather them into a future methodological piece.

[70] While numerous cultural trajectories were brought in to our classroom discussions, it is worth also noting what was missing. Aside from my own bi-raciality, the class was made up entirely of white participants, and no member was openly lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or trans-gendered. Class variances were minimal. Middle class people dominated, with only two people across both courses – one person in each – who spoke openly with me about their own struggles with both homelessness and joblessness. We had a couple of class members with visible physical and/or cognitive impairments. With regards to these

In a conversation about female deacons, for example, one older participant who had attended the church before its current pastor's tenure was able to outline for us the processes by which women's leadership had slowly come to be accepted in the church. And within that communal ecclesial history, he could also track his own personal history of change on that particular issue. In addition, those who had paid careful attention to the Southern Baptist culture wars that culminated in various versions of "The Baptist Faith and Message" – a document that, in its current form, is notoriously biased against female leadership – were able to outline the ways in which broader denominational politics had and had not contributed to our own church's views. One class member even emailed me side-by-side copies of older and newer versions of this document, highlighting their differences, in order to help me understand the shifts in authorized denominational theology and polity. I made copies for the whole group so that we could all benefit from understanding how this particular historical event might contribute to our life together.

Therefore, as I taught the class how a more specialized, abstracted, Christian theological perspective contributes to our historically constituted, embodied faith – the faith in our bones – they opened up for me its more local (also specialized, abstracted) version. My own theologies of ordination and ecclesiology became complicated as I grew to understand better the significance of this group accepting not only a woman, but a "Northerner" (a British girl from Canada who claims to be a feminist at that!) as their teacher and minister. They also pressed me to think pneumatologically. As the faith in my

unrepresented or under-represented communities, the issue of race was perhaps most frequently discussed but, of course, from white perspectives, particularly by those members who could recall the Civil Rights Movement. When stories were shared in this regard, they almost always entailed a "conversion moment" to the realization of racial injustice in the society in which we live, sometimes with dramatic consequences.

bones is expressed more often than not as doubt, they reminded me again and again that against all odds, the Spirit might still be moving among us in surprising ways.

Tanner's view of postmodern culture thus helps us see how the discursive hybridity of our conversations paired with my specialized academic interventions enabled us to unravel the cultural elements we had all inherited from participation in various Christian, academic, ecclesial, and other cultural practices in order to put them into rich conversation for fresh theological insight. What each of us took to be abiding and universal shifted somewhat as we each became able to understand it – and each other – in a more complex way. The conversational back and forth that enabled the class members to correct me as well, however, reveals a limit to Tanner's model. Though she opens everyday theology up for specialized academic theological reflection, her project does not thematize the reverse, even as it invites it.

Tanner's second point about postmodern views of culture grows out of her first, as she argues that a postmodern account of culture brings to light the diversity existing within identity groups. Modern views of culture impose a vision of internal consistency onto geographically defined identity groups over and against external difference, Tanner argues. The effect is a distortion rather than a description of the realities of lived practice.[71] As a result, voices that are discrepant from that dominant, consistent view are silenced.[72] However, Tanner argues that postmodern views of geographically defined identity groups highlight internal difference. Attuned to post-structuralist understandings of power, the postmodern view listens to and brings to broader hearing marginalized voices as contributors to group identity. It is therefore better able to understand how

[71] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 42.
[72] Ibid, 46.

shifts and changes in group identity can be generated from within rather than solely from beyond the group's borders. Change is not encountered merely as threat or failure, but rather is able to be viewed as a location of possibility.[73] Christian identity, for example, is not strictly defined against non-Christian identity because difference and change exist inside, outside, and across the boundaries of identity definition.

This view of culture also helps us understand what happened in the conversation between everyday and academic theological discourses in our classroom space. It would be overly idealistic to say that we always made it to open, honest discussion of the differences between us. Indeed, more than one participant admitted in one-on-one interviews that they were sometimes scared to say what they were really thinking in class in case others viewed them as a "heretic" or worse, "not really saved." In this way, some form of a border seemed to remain between what constituted Christian and non-Christian identities. And yet that border also seemed to be permeable as more confident class members would actually deploy the language of "heretic" as a self-description that permitted them to draw more controversial views into the discussion. The language of "heretic" complicated the difference between what was acceptable and unacceptable, insider and outsider, belief.

One man in the class, Richard, in fact, was particularly fond of this tactic. Over the course of my ethnographic interviews, I asked everyone to name who they thought was the wisest class member.[74] By a strong margin, Richard received the most votes.

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[73] Ibid, 51.

[74] I asked this question in large part because it opened insight into numerous classroom dynamics. I learned much about the relationships between class members outside of our time and space together, such as who taught whom in Sunday School, who had served on various service projects together, and the emotional responses certain class members had

Class members described him as humble, as someone who waits until he truly has something to say to speak, and as open-minded in ways toward which they strived. Whenever I was unable to come up with an answer to a question, the group would turn to Richard for an answer. And yet he never imposed his views on us or attempted to usurp my position as teacher. He always couched his comments carefully, framing them in ways that invited discussion rather than agreement.

On numerous occasions, then, he would jokingly begin a point by stating, "y'all are going to think I'm a heretic, but…" Such naming thus allowed him to introduce ideas that seemed foreign into our particular location by using playful declarations of heretical speech. Other more quiet class members, bolstered by the place of authority Richard occupied within the room, could then respond that they too sometimes subscribed to such supposed heresy with safe cover. And still others felt authorized to disagree with such a vein because, at least in their view, "the tradition" was on their side. As a consequence, voices typically marginalized were heard and affirmed, revealing the diversity internal to our group.

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to others. The insight that intrigued me the most from answers to this question, however, was that responses were fairly evenly divided between male and female examples of the "wise person." Richard received the most "votes," but second and third place went to two women, whose cumulative "votes" far exceeded Richard's. Whereas psychological data on the perception of wisdom highlights a general populace view toward perceiving wisdom more acutely in male examples, this group bucked the broader trend (see Susan Bluck and Judith Glück, "From the Inside Out: People's Implicit Theories of Wisdom," in *A Handbook of Wisdom: Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Robert J. Sternberg and Jennifer Jordan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 84-109). This research does show that, in general, people tend to associate "intellect-insight" more with men's wisdom, and "social-compassionate" features with women's wisdom (Ibid, 106). These qualities were evident in the reasons people gave for picking, alternately, Richard, Joan or Ann as their example. The conclusion I would draw from this, then, is that this particular group is perhaps more able to recognize "wisdom" in its social, emotive modes than is a general populace and, therefore, is also able to recognize it more in female examples. Reasons for why this might be the case would require further study, however.

Indeed, through the ongoing pursuit of wisdom, class members came to value such internal inconsistencies. In a one-on-one interview conducted after the first course was finished, a course participant, Gene, summed up well what quite a few others had also articulated. When asked to describe why he took the class and what his experience of it was, he answered:

> I think it's good for people to get together and talk about things that are *really* on their minds, and in a lot of settings we don't wanna do that, especially Southern Baptists. We're afraid we might say something that would break tradition. People would be outcast or whatever. So I felt like it would be a good opportunity, first of all to learn some of the history… to learn what we believed across history. And second to try myself to ask some questions, some honest questions….

For Gene, there is a connection between the history of Christian traditions, asking himself honest questions, and overcoming his fear of saying the very thing that could supposedly get him cast out of the community.[75] Engaging broader theological perspectives, and hearing other class members do the same, Richard, Gene, and others, myself included, were invited to play with the borders between acceptable and unacceptable belief and practice in order to come to a deeper, more complex understanding of their own place within our particular Baptist community, as well as within the ongoing nature of a broader understanding of Christian social practices.

[75] It is worth noting that despite all the language people use of being "cast out of the community," to my knowledge no one has ever been "cast out" for something they believe or fail to believe. Moreover, divergent views generally stimulated discussion rather than shut it down. Even when a class member backed me into a corner and asked me explicitly if I believed there was a Hell and I had to admit I did not, something I in fact believed would be a major, border-defining issue, three separate class members told me afterwards that I seemed more stressed out by the question than I needed to be. And, indeed, they showed me how I too have been inculcated with these fears of being cast out, even as I try to help the class members overcome them. Such instances reveal the power we believe the borders of our identity groups' definition have, while they also reveal how easily those borders can be permeated – and, more accurately, reveal their status as already permeable – simply by naming them in conversation.

That said, these internal doctrinal differences were mostly slight. On the topic of salvation, for example, most professed something like, “Jesus is the only way to salvation,” but then in more private conversations, debated what such a statement might mean, how their own life experiences led to the way they held it, and what particular emotions they felt while considering it. For example, one woman, Maureen, whose story I engage more fully in the next chapter, claimed emphatically that she has no doubts that “Jesus is the only way to salvation” in one breath, and that she struggles with the idea that some people will be kept out of Heaven in another. When asked about this conflict, she noted that she did not want to deny that Jesus is necessary for salvation, even though various life experiences made such a restriction feel wrong to her. Having had a strict, conservative Christian upbringing, she described various aspects of her faith life with strong language of “fear” based in the image that “God was gonna getcha!” Moreover, she had “always been taught” that Jesus was the only way to salvation, by pastors, parents, Bible study teachers, and others. All these personal factors contributed less to whether or not Maureen holds this particular doctrinal belief, and more to the way in which she holds it: somewhat fearfully, marked with much doubt, and nevertheless, strongly affirmed in the midst of that doubt.

Internal difference within our class was therefore evident, but it manifested in various, intersecting ways, many of which were not doctrinally based. Our concrete engagement of an internally diverse conversation practice thus nuances Tanner’s vision of internal difference, as it leads us into her third point about postmodern views of culture: culture produces a focus for engagement rather than the substance of agreement as difference contributes to the construction of cultural identity as a “hybrid, relational

affair."[76] The relationality of this affair matters, as Christian identity was negotiated by each member of class not only in light of Christian social practices and intellectual Christian traditions, but also by their own life experiences, personal relationships, emotional lives, and countless other factors that contribute to making them who they are.

Difference, therefore, is less evident in the difference of opinions held, and more evident in the complexly constituted lives that hold them. In this way, then, Tanner's postmodern view of culture helps us see how particular historical trajectories, moments of concretion and abstraction, and various debates over theological difference came together in our shared practice of conversation. It also helps us to see how such internally diverse conversations could in fact contribute to the ongoing cultural construction of Christian identity as a hybrid and relational affair. Yet at the same time, the nature of our conversation's complexity begins to reveal just how messy the diverse forms that internal difference within a particular Christian social practice can be. Theological difference is always parasitic on other forms of difference. Playing with the relationship between numerous forms of this difference through the practice of conversation can produce rich insight that would otherwise be lost.

Remembering Wine and Supper

This chapter opened with some analytic description of conversation around a dinner table with friends. As we leave this chapter, my description makes a definitive shift from the restaurant to the church classroom. Nevertheless, the dinner party chat should linger in the background of my descriptions of our classroom conversations as a

[76] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 57.

reminder that both everyday and academic theological discourses are created, shaped and spoken both inside and outside their primary institutional locations.

The description of both the dining table and the classroom conference table showed us conversations that integrated everyday with academic theologies while also requiring the interventions of a discourse shaped by both ecclesial and academic social practices. What matters most about both visions is not that any one person said something beautifully wise, or that I managed to ask good prompting questions (as well as a few stifling ones). What matters about both scenes is that they contained people using the various tools they had at their disposal to labor together in the pursuit of wisdom, and that in both contexts, there were moments where that wisdom seemed almost to be grasped. Maybe only one of us got to articulate it in those moments, but in each, we all contributed to it. Any insightful speech in a sense belonged to all of us and none of us. Any insightful speech was experienced communally as a gift from God.

In one way, the whole process was dependent on my academic expertise to construct the lessons, questions and comments that would help us get there. My academic reflection did not just come in at the end to report and interpret what I heard. Rather, the theological knowledge I have acquired through explicit and deep formation in the practices of theological academies shaped the content of my teaching and my ability to recognize historical theological trajectories that contribute to the make up of what the class members said.

In addition to knowledge of a particular set of texts and intellectual traditions, my academic theological training, as well as my ministerial formation, have both equipped me with pedagogical instincts. Sometimes these instincts would compete, and sometimes

they would cooperate, both guiding my practical know-how for integrating the intellectual insights into the practice of classroom teaching by interpreting, hearing, echoing back and seeking to challenge the class members again and again until we created something new together. Much as these forms of knowledge and skill were necessary for shaping our classroom conversation, we will also see throughout this dissertation my moments of failure. In these moments, we will see, then, how the class members taught me something about my pedagogical skills, helping me refine my know-how through consistent practice of them.

But the class members did not only teach me know-how. They also taught me intellectual knowledge. At no point did the group simply submit to my articulation of the Christian intellectual traditions. In fact, I would be hard pressed to recall a moment in which anyone wholly submitted to anything. We all staked out our positions, allowing for their revising and refining, but not their complete undoing. In this way the class members helped me see the importance of local histories and denominational fights. They changed the way I read numerous theologians. They helped me bring my own difference within our church walls by staking claims I would not usually stake, such as the fact that I do not believe in the geographic existence of Hell. As I helped them abstract from their concretion, they helped me bury my abilities for specialized abstraction deep into the immanence of the concrete life we live together.

Anything that fits on the back of a Frisbee, it's just not complicated enough to build a life around.

I think that was a funny moment…when you essentially made us all be theologians for a moment saying, "What do you really think?"

We all know the rules, but no one picks apart the rules.

Miriam, First Baptist Church Member

CHAPTER II

THEOLOGICAL PRACTICES OF PURSUING WISDOM

Making Theologians

When Miriam expresses frustration at our church's evangelistic practice of printing "the plan of salvation" on a Frisbee to be handed out during Fourth of July parades, she is revealing a desire many members at First Baptist Church Nashville (FBC) share: the desire for something complex enough to "build a life around [it]." Yes, there are many in our community who want a graspable set of rules to order their existence – something that fits on the back of a Frisbee. We find that desire, or one like it, in all churches, all organizations and institutions, and even the academy. But then there is this group of thirty plus church members at FBC who, by attending these Sunday night theology classes, demonstrate that they want more than the Frisbee's list (which is, of course, itself a particular theology). Or, better put, they want to keep wrestling with what the Frisbee says, acknowledging the rules on it, but then picking those rules apart. By spending two to two-and-a-half hours each Sunday night studying historical and

systematic theologies together – by wrestling with the Frisbee – this group demonstrates a desire to connect consciously with the processes by which we all together are continually made and remade as theologians.

Indeed, Miriam's language of being made into theologians is intriguing. The idea that a teacher could "make" someone into a theologian, simply by asking a question, seems almost ludicrous. And yet something special did happen in those moments of inquiry and conversation. By asking what they really thought, I was asking them to be honest, not only to parrot the rules we all knew, but to pick those rules apart, as Miriam tells it, and in so doing reveal how malleable they really are. But at the same time, they questioned me and, thus, participated also in the process by which my own theological identity is constructed. As each of us asked our own questions and responded to each other, we were all challenged to face the edges of our knowing in order to risk the discomforting state of unknowing and, in that, come to know something new or, at least, know something in a new way. Our conversations therefore took us all deeper into our mutual making of each other into theologians.

In this chapter, I interpret this process of making and remaking using the concept of *habitus*. As we will see, *habitus* describes, among other things, the processes by which agents are continually constituted over the course of a lifetime through their participation in all different kinds of social practices. My language of "making and remaking" to describe this process is intentional, so as to describe a never-complete process, rather than the illusion that we could be "made" once and for all into a static identity. I therefore define *habitus* here as a site of both stability and flux, demonstrating how practices give rise to forms of agency and discourse in ways that both reproduce and transform social

structures. This definition requires engaging the sociological works primarily of Pierre Bourdieu, but also Sherry Ortner and Ann Swidler, in order to demonstrate how the conversational practices our class engaged guided the making and remaking of us all as theologians. In the next chapter, I focus on my methodological deployment of my own plural *habitus*[77] as a set of tools for research. In particular, I deploy the various competing and cohering *habitus* that give rise to my theological identity and modes of theological speech. Gaining a sense of the plurality of *habitus*, and their ways of competing and cohering will thus be crucial in this chapter for undergirding the next.

Theological conversation can have many goals: the thrill of debate, the desire to convince another to one's point of view, the construction of a particular fresh insight, the desire to live more faithfully, and so on. Indeed, such goals were likely all operative at different moments throughout our shared classroom conversation practice. Moreover, each of these goals can be associated with the theologies located in church and academy, and in broader, everyday life. In this chapter I endeavor to interpret a conversation that incorporates and transcends these theologies that rise out of ecclesial, academic and everyday life through the lens of the ongoing nature of *habitus* construction. Some additional term is therefore required to describe the particular *habitus* that is born out of the intersection of the ecclesial, academic, and everyday fields.

I argue that this additional term is best captured by the concept of the "pursuit of wisdom." *Habitus*, after all, describes a type of constituted bodily wisdom, the constitutive practices for which I sought to open up and refine using the practice of

[77] It might be worth noting that the singular and plural forms of *habitus* are identical. This inevitably causes some confusion. I endeavor throughout here to situate the word in ways that make its number clear.

conversation. Wisdom's pursuit brings together the class members' desire to "know God more deeply" in order to "love God more deeply," as I mentioned in the previous chapter. It also transcends dichotomies that concerned both class members and myself, like practice and theory, everyday and academic, thought and action, and concretion and abstraction. Finally, framing the goal of our conversation as the pursuit of wisdom according to the ongoing making and remaking of us all into theologians undermines any vision that everyday Christians need to become academic or academic theologians need to become everyday if we are all to participate in this activity together. Instead, each of us draws on the goods of interaction with the other in the ongoing pursuit of wisdom.

I explore the nature of wisdom's pursuit in this chapter by unpacking a particular conversation that was a part of my fieldwork. Because this particular fieldwork interview – with a married couple, Maureen and Joe – is more intimate than the conversations that took place in our classroom, it offers a more focused analysis of some of the personal trajectories that contributed to the larger group dynamics. Through this conversation, Maureen and I in particular engage each other in a way that opens up our bodily wisdom for concrete reflection. In so doing, each of us pursues the wisdom of our already embodied faith – the faith in our bones – for deeper, more reflective understanding of who each of us is and who we are becoming. This particular conversation thus serves as a model for understanding the larger group conversations also as a pursuit of wisdom in this way.

As I unpack our conversation, I endeavor to bring to light aspects of the ways in which the constellation of *habitus* that give rise to how Maureen and I act and who we are both compete and cohere with each other. The pursuit of wisdom entails finding some

sort of loose, performative integration of these *habitus* such that our sense for the game (to use Tanner's language, which is itself an echo of Bourdieu's) of living is deepened. To be clear, this sense for the game does not entail a hierarchical ordering of *habitus* or the construction of some consistent meta-*habitus* that imposes an impossible vision of uniform authenticity or regularity onto all our actions. Rather, this loose, performative integration – which develops the foundation for my own theological ethnographic methods – entails finding strategies for context-specific action among the ways in which the different facets of our lives that make us who we are connect with each other.

Habitus: A Definition

The concept *habitus* is, of course, not new. Its genesis can be traced to Aristotle, through Thomas Aquinas, and into contemporary theory. At its core, it describes a type of practical bodily wisdom, the way an agent gains that wisdom over time, and the ways she does what she does with it. Let me explain what I mean by this by beginning my definition with some exposition of the way Pierre Bourdieu frames the concept.

Pierre Bourdieu describes *habitus* as the "schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class."[78] It thus limns a theoretical structure for mapping the site where the "objective structures" that make up particular sets of practices meet with and constitute a subject's knowledgeable agency. But it also describes the way that constituted agency simultaneously shapes and reshapes those same objective structures. It therefore demonstrates how subjective modes of knowing and acting have objective basis, even as objectivity is shaped by those same subjective modes

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[78] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 86.

of knowing and acting. It is the wisdom we gain by doing; it is what our gut has us do by habit and instinct or a certain sort of "feel for the game."[79] Moreover, because *habitus* describes actions, motivations and dispositions, it describes not only what we do, but why we do it and how we feel when doing it.

In this way, *habitus* accounts for a type of agency that is less than fully conscious of its act or intention, but which nevertheless is still active and knowledgeable. It is the bodily wisdom one feels when one's heart automatically quiets to pray because one's knees have begun to bend. Indeed, because action and knowledge are only possible because of, within, and from one's *habitus*, Bourdieu can maintain that all knowledge associated with action "presupposes a work of construction." But, as he continues, this work of construction "has nothing in common with intellectual work," and rather, it "consists of an activity of practical construction, even of practical reflection, that ordinary notions of thought, consciousness, knowledge prevent us from adequately thinking."[80]

Indeed, in a particularly lovely turn of (albeit translated) phrase, Bourdieu argues, "it is because agents never know completely what they are doing that what they do has more sense than they know."[81] The *habitus* is an "embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history" such that it is, for the one it possesses, "the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product."[82] Our bodies carry the wisdom (and folly) of a whole history we no longer recall. We are cognitively unaware of

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[79] See especially Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), 66-68.
[80] Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, "The Purpose of Reflexive Sociology (The Chicago Workshop)," in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, ed. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 121.
[81] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 69.
[82] Ibid, 56.

this wisdom that is in our bones, and so the ways in which we live, move and have our being are teeming with an ongoing production of bodily knowledge that can be opened up to be shaped and reshaped.

At the same time, because *habitus* can be divorced from their original conditions of creation, the concept also describes how these knots of perceptions and dispositions are transposable across different fields of space and time. There are, therefore, visible homologies in *habitus* across diverse fields. For example, the *habitus* of a desire for the new, shaped through all the ways a family's life is enriched by emigration to a new country, might be passed down through the unfolding of generations all living within that same new country. Likewise, a downturn in family fortunes initiated by a negative immigration experience could create a fear of the unknown, also passed down through generations who are happily transient but unwilling to experiment with eating foreign food or trying a new laundry detergent. And all these perceptions, dispositions and apperceptions can be passed on without the agents who embody them ever knowing of their genesis.

To summarize our reflections on the *habitus* thus far: on the one hand it is a site in flux, shifting changing and affecting change in relation to the stimuli to which it responds and the practices that it generates. On the other hand, it can mark a site of stability, describing similar ways of processing varieties of stimuli and practice with a sense of continuity. This tension between *habitus* as a site of flux and as a site of stability – that is, the tension between the supposed changeability of the objective structures embedded in practices and the ways our activity nevertheless seems to reproduce those structures automatically – should give us pause. Where in this dialectic of flux and stability should

we focus our attention? Here, anthropologist Sherry Ortner's critique of the language of *construction* with the language of *making* can help us, especially as, following Miriam, this is the same language I use in this chapter to describe the process by which we all are made and remade as theologians.

In her essay, "Making Gender," Ortner points out how various French theorists, like Bourdieu, have, each in their own way, "directed us to see subjects as *constructed* by, and subjected to, the cultural and historical discourses within which they must operate."[83] Arguing that much is at stake in this language choice, Ortner notes how construction is a metaphor from industry. It connotes the weight of immovable structures, made of iron, steel, or some other tough, unbendable product that keeps the building from falling down. "Construction" emphasizes the structures themselves, not those who make them. Departing from this heavy industry metaphor, then, Ortner instead lifts up the lighter language of "making." Derived from the less weighty materials of crafts rather than industry, "making" is better suited for focusing attention on the activity of the agents themselves who make the structures that simultaneously make them. This allows for a more malleable vision of the structures that make and are made – one that, by extension, proliferates the possibility for creating new practices of justice, for example, within them, as well as new practices and new ways of knowing. This language is better tooled to ethnographic tasks that are "descriptive and analytic rather than interpretive or deconstructionist," and which are capable of "looking at and listening to real people

[83] Sherry Ortner, "Making Gender," in *The Politics and Erotics of Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 1 (italics mine).

doing real things in a given historical moment…to figure out how what they are doing or have done will or will not reconfigure the world they live in."[84]

As Ortner points out, then, while Bourdieu makes room for flux and change, he nevertheless tends to "emphasize the role of practice in social *reproduction* rather than *change*."[85] Of course, she adds, "social reproduction and social transformation can never, and should never, be wholly separated."[86] But, she goes on to say, there are different ways that we can approach the data in our field of study. We could, like Bourdieu, "do practice analysis as a loop, in which 'structures' construct subjects and practices, but subjects and practices *reproduce* 'structures'."[87] While allowing for the possibility that reproduction entails slippage, by focusing on the reproductive loop, Bourdieu nevertheless tends to eclipse those slips. Or we could, like Ortner, choose to "avoid the loop, to look for the slippages in reproduction and the erosions of long-standing patterns, the moments of disorder and of outright 'resistance'."[88] Focusing on the slippages of power and the disruptions of the status quo by actual agents, she argues, is more in line with feminist and other "subaltern" forms of analysis.[89] This is not to deny that the loop exists. It is rather, to let it fall into the background, drawing on it only when it is helpful for illuminating something particular.

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[84] Ibid, 2.
[85] Ibid, 17. Italics mine.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid. Italics mine.
[88] Ibid.
[89] "Subaltern" is the language Ortner uses to describe her methods, even as she tends to put it into quotation marks and question its appropriateness. For more on the critique of overusing the language of "subaltern" to refer to any marginalized people group, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271ff.

In addition to this corrective to Bourdieu's vision of *habitus* from Ortner, we might also consider one from the sociologist Ann Swidler. Like Ortner, Swidler stresses the agency produced by *habitus*. The dispositions, perceptions and apperceptions by which a *habitus* inculcates agents – or, as Swidler puts it, the "habits, skills, and styles" by which cultural practices give rise to action – assemble into what Swidler calls a "repertoire or 'tool kit'."[90] "Both individuals and groups know how to do different kinds of things in different circumstances," she argues, indicating that culture is less like "a unified system that pushes action in a consistent direction," and more like "a 'tool kit'…from which actors select differing pieces for constructing lines of action."[91] Bourdieu would agree with the critique of culture as a unified system, as I will explore further below.[92] But whereas Bourdieu understands the *habitus* as essentially possessing the agent and, moreover, in a way of which the agent is not fully conscious, Swidler reframes the agent as possessing the *habitus* such that she is able to draw consciously on the knowledge with which it equips her.[93]

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[90] Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," in *American Sociological Review*, 1986, Vol. 51 (April: 273-286), 273.
[91] Ibid, 277.
[92] See especially Bourdieu, *Outline*, ch. 1.
[93] While Swidler does not explicitly use the concept *habitus* in the body of her article, throughout her footnotes she draws parallels between her understanding of a "tool-kit" and Bourdieu's notion that I have outlined here. In particular, she gestures towards how Bourdieu's view that "cultural patterns provide the structure against which individuals can develop particular strategies" fits within a whole subset of anthropological query. This subset of anthropological query reframes the more traditional, static understanding of "rules," seen to govern a culture's activity, as "strategies" that "unfold over time" (see note 9: Swidler, 276). "For me," Swidler adds, extending Bourdieu's understanding, "strategies are the larger ways of trying to organize a life…within which particular choices make sense, and for which particular culturally shaped skills and habits (what Bourdieu calls "habitus") are useful" (Ibid). Swidler thus acknowledges that her "tool-kit" is similar to Bourdieu's *habitus*. Their different language choices seem primarily to indicate the amount of conscious, strategic agency each wants to ascribe to the cultural

Whether we focus our attention on moments of flux or stability, for Swidler, we can always see agents drawing on the tools at their disposal as strategies of action that shape the cultural practices within which they gain those same tools. While I follow Ortner in focusing on moments of *habitus* tension and slippage, then, we must also remember that even when it seems like cultural practices are merely reproducing particular beliefs, those who are implicated in the processes of reproduction still have agential roles within them. In other words, whether someone in the classes I taught accepts, rejects, reaffirms or renews a particular Baptist belief is less relevant to our discussion than how they do so. It is the process of pursuing wisdom – the cultivation of tools for our tool-kits and strategies of action for living – that interests us here.

Theologia and the Pursuit of Wisdom

If these strategies for faithful living are cultivated in the practice of theological conversation, then we need to draw the connection between the concept *habitus* and the pursuit of wisdom as a distinctly spiritual discipline. Most everyone cultivates strategies of action for living; wise people might manage to cultivate a loose integration between their competing and cohering *habitus* in order to give rise to these strategies of action. So how can a conversational practice that loosely integrates the competing and cohering *habitus* and discourses associated with ecclesial, academic and everyday life be understood as a spiritual discipline of pursuing wisdom?

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actors whose narratives they are describing. Swidler, of course, like Ortner, seeks to ascribe more agency to the actors, even as, unlike Ortner, she also wants to describe those agents with a more conscious recognition of their own actions and motivations.

First, it should be noted that the members of the classes I taught, including me, viewed what we were doing as a religious – more specifically, Christian – practice. We saw it to be a form of intellectual worship: knowing God more deeply in order to love God more deeply. This was further confirmed not only by their statements to the fact, but also in the way in which prayer was integrated with our conversation practice. On the first night of class, I forgot to open us in prayer. Within minutes, I could feel my error. In essence, it felt like we had never really begun and, while I felt I could not interrupt the class in process to "open it in prayer" after the fact, I knew we at least needed to close it this way to somewhat make up for my forgetfulness. Classes like ours throughout FBC's practice – whether Sunday night classes, Wednesday night meetings, or Sunday School in the mornings – always open with prayer.

After that first night, I corrected my error, and throughout the rest of that semester and the one that followed, always opened class by inviting someone to pray for us. These prayers almost always combined a similar set of elements, no matter who was offering them: 1) an invitation for God to be present, 2) a request for God to "guide," "be in," or "direct" our "conversation" or "study," and 3) either a note of thanksgiving for me as a teacher, a request that I would be "guided," "helped," or "blessed" in my teaching, or some combination of the two. The second a prayer was completed and people lifted their heads, it did not matter how energetic conversation had been prior to the prayer, all eyes turned immediately to me, expectant for the lesson to begin. Prayer marked the transition from social time to class time in a very particular way. It offered a conscious articulation of a shared belief that each discreet theological conversation was grounded in our openness to the presence of God among us.

Theologian Edward Farley argues that the pursuit of wisdom within religious communities not only maintains, but is grounded upon its openness to the Divine. Arguing for a new paradigm for theological work – one that bears significance for all the theologies rising from practices associated with ecclesial, academic and everyday life – Farley lifts up practices of *theologia*, modeled on the Greek notion of *paideia*. *Paideia*, explains Farley, is education understood as the "culturing of a human being in *areté* or virtue."[94] Resonating with the reasons named by the people who took my class for why they took it, *paideia* refers to the whole orientation of the wise, virtuous life. In this way, while it draws on intellectual knowledge, it is not to pursue knowledge for its own sake. Like *paideia*, *theologia* describes a culturing of the human being but, for Farley, in "sapiential knowledge engendered by grace and divine self-disclosure" rather than in a Greek notion of the virtues.[95] Theology as the pursuit of wisdom, founded on a pre-reflective awareness of God's salvific work among us, is gained through the grace-full culturing of the human being through the presence of God's Spirit in her life – including, the study of theological texts together.

It is no accident how much Farley's account of *theologia* as a cultural formation of wisdom sounds like the way I have described *habitus* here. His vision is grounded in reclaiming aspects of premodern understandings of "theology as a *habitus*, a cognitive disposition and orientation of the soul…"[96] The historical activities of theology as a pursuit of wisdom that he wants to revive relates both to theology as a *habitus* and

[94] Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Wipf & Stock, 2001), 153.
[95] Ibid, 153.
[96] Ibid, 35.

theology as the *discipline* that rises from that *habitus*.[97] Indeed, the key problem with contemporary theological education, as Farley sees it, is that it no longer inculcates ministry students with a *habitus* of pursuing wisdom in this way. Falsely dividing out theory from practice, disparate academic theological disciplines are oriented to what Farley calls a "clerical paradigm," finding their unity in the tasks of ministry, not the *habitus* of pursuing wisdom that, among other things, gives rise to those tasks as instincts.[98]

Farley is using *habitus* in a slightly different way than I am here, grounded more firmly in Aristotelian thought and premodern understandings of it. Nevertheless, Farley's vision resonates with the one I have developed in these pages. It is a form of bodily wisdom, related to "cognitive habit" and, he adds, it is a "state of the soul."[99] In this way, it is a form of wisdom that bridges body, mind and soul. Two things in particular matter about Farley's framing: first, that the *habitus* of pursuing wisdom is shaped by a pre-reflective (i.e., unconscious, embodied) awareness of God's salvific work among us and, second, that the *habitus* of pursuing wisdom is made and remade in agents through their

[97] Ibid, 31.

[98] Ibid, 85-88. Bonnie Miller-McLemore has argued that Farley's notion of a "clerical paradigm" does not tell the whole story. It needs to be supplemented with a correlative understanding of the "academic paradigm," she argues, if theological institutions are still to do the important work of training clergy with practical know-how. Accepting Miller-McLemore's idea that academic theology might be "too academic for the church," my goal here is not to make academic theology 'less academic,' but rather to make particular aspects of it – i.e., not necessarily texts – more communicable in the ecclesial sphere. See Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "The 'Clerical Paradigm': A Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness?" in *International Journal of Practical Theology* (vol. 11), 19-38.

[99] Farley, 47. Note 15. In this way, Farley emphasizes the cognitive, conscious dimensions of *habitus* more than Bourdieu and Ortner and, to some degree, Swidler and myself. Even so, his argument is particularly helpful here as I endeavor to guide a practice in which we seek to connect consciously to the ongoing making and remaking of our *habitus* in a conversational pursuit of wisdom.

conscious, cognitive engagement of what we might call, a faith that is already in their bones. It is both *habitus* and the discipline to which that *habitus* continually gives rise in its own ongoing reshaping. It is embodied wisdom and the pursuit of a more reflective, embodied wisdom. In an echo of our class members' prayers, God's work among us is the thread running through practices of *theologia* – practices like theological conversations – by which we open ourselves up to study, and to testing, challenging and revising our Christian practices and beliefs through our pursuit of wisdom.

Theologia, as this bodily, conversational pursuit of wisdom, thus rises from and gives rise to our lives of faith. In this way, also, Farley points toward the possibility that God's Spirit is at work in our communities, participating also in the making of our particular competing and cohering *habitus*. Not bound by ecclesial borders, God's Spirit thus moves in and through all the practices we engage across the multiple spheres of our lives. The competing and cohering sets of practices associated with church, academy and everyday life come together not as the distances between them are bridged by theory, but rather, in the embodied living – the embodied wisdom – of those who participate in them.

Competition and Coherence Between *Habitus* in the Pursuit of Wisdom

Given the above, we can understand our competing and cohering collections of *habitus* as instinctual, dispositional, bodily forms of wisdom, inculcated through practices into our strategies for knowledgeable action, saturated with a pre-reflective awareness of God's work in our lives. In other words, our various *habitus* can describe the dispositions of faith that are embedded in our bones through participation in Christian and other social practices. And *habitus* simultaneously describes how those dispositions of faith give rise

to further faithful strategies for action and belief, for faithful living. *Habitus* give rise to the disciplines by which we pursue the very wisdom with which they inculcate us. As Tanner argues that theological discourse rises "organically" out of Christian social practices, *habitus* helps us understand how that organic process works, as well as the activity to which it gives rise.

Furthermore, studying the moments of slippage and tension that rise from within and across the multiple spheres of practices that give shape to our cohering and competing collections of *habitus* helps us not only to see better, but also to interpret and perhaps even live better the complexity of lived faith. Given these points, in this section I focus on a particular narrative of tension that helps illuminate the complex processes by which conversations between people speaking various theological fluencies comprise a pursuit of wisdom wherein they – we – are made and remade as theologians.

Perhaps because it tends to be a border-defining question for Baptists between who is Christian and who is not, the question of Jesus being the only way to salvation provided a fruitful focus for theological conversation among our class members. It is a question around which conflicts often arise between what *feels* true for someone or makes a certain sort of sense for their living in one context or another, and what they find themselves proclaiming to believe in these various contexts. Moreover, because this question tends to define the borders of Christian identity with such drastic soteriological ramifications, and because it thus creates these tensions that might feel difficult to engage, class members often felt more comfortable talking about it in the privacy of our one-on-one interviews. We already saw Gene admit that he could say things in the interview format that he did not feel comfortable saying in our more public classroom

forum. Numerous others echoed this sentiment as we sought to negotiate this traditional Baptist belief in the context of other practices associated with ecclesial and everyday life through conversation together. The further I pushed into this line of questioning, the more the tensions between competing and cohering *habitus*, but also the competing and cohering roles we play in life, not only for class members, but also for me, became apparent.

One evening I ended up at Joe and Maureen's house for an extended interview conversation. Joe and Maureen are an energetic, middle-aged couple, both of whom work in high school education. Their speech patterns tend to bounce off of each other, interrupting and talking over each other, helping each find the words to get at their particular points. I never feel that they are cutting each other off, but rather that they are finding ideas in sync. Indeed, the ways in which they have come to know each other deeply over time are evident in these speech patterns, as often one is able to find the words to describe what the other is trying to say better than the other can for him- or herself. I enjoy spending time with them, and I found myself looking forward to their interview like I would look forward to an evening dedicated to getting to know some new friends.

Maureen and Joe seem relaxed as we talk, seated in their eat-in kitchen, munching on a light supper of sandwiches, veggies and cookies that they have provided. They are explaining how they think they view the Trinity differently than the other members of our class and church, and perhaps even Christians in general. We are finishing up our musings over how controversial is Joe's statement that he thinks he is "more of a polytheist" when it comes to understanding God as three and one. Using this as a segue, I

ask, “so are you guys flexible on other doctrines too – like salvation? Do you have to believe in Jesus Christ to be saved?”

“No, I’m not flexible on that,” answers Joe immediately, putting down his sandwich and shaking his head with a serious expression on his face. Maureen echoes over top of him, “no, no I’m not flexible on that – I believe you have to believe in Jesus Christ and that he died for our sins to be saved.” The relaxed friendliness of our conversation halts for a moment and the room feels tense. I have to work my way back into a comfortable feeling with them, asking questions about the cookies Maureen has baked and about how long they have lived in their home. Around this time, a screw actually falls out of my chair onto the floor, and Joe’s attempts to fix it provide us with a little breathing room.

Their adamant insistence, at least for Maureen, it turns out, comes from a place of doubt, however, not conviction. Later in our conversation, distanced from this question about salvation both by time and the mix of other topics discussed, and with no explicit reference to the question of salvation in my framing, I ask them to reflect on what non-church sources also shape how they think about God. Maureen answers,

> “well I think literature, literature effects the way I think… I read books where I learn something. They may be fictionalized accounts, but I learn something… and I see all these cultures and what they believe and you know, sometimes it does give me pause, you know – is this the only way?”

Joe jumps in, “yeah, how could so many people be created to live a life where they don’t know?” as Maureen continues,

> They don’t know Jesus and does that mean they’re condemned, and you know, they just feel so right in their own faith, the way they were raised, and you know, I will say that I have to just, sometimes I think I have to make a conscious effort to come back and say, NO you know Jesus is the way, is the *only* way.

Of course, the question of Jesus as the "only way to salvation" might still have been hanging around in the background of their thoughts as they answered this different question. But when I pointed out the inconsistency between their answers, both appeared surprised and laughed. They paused reflectively, as their smiles and the way they shook their heads indicated that they had not realized the connection themselves.

On the one hand, Maureen and Joe seem drawn to the idea that non-Christians can "be saved." At times, they even find themselves feeling the dangerous feeling that Heaven might be open to everyone (as Maureen ponders later in our conversation, "You could say, well everybody's going to a Heaven of sorts; there are just different paths."). Conversely, they both feel a real need to make a "conscious" break from going down that particular path of belief: "I have to make a conscious effort and come back and say, no you know Jesus is the…only way." Maureen feels natural inclinations – more accurately, dispositional inclinations inculcated into her by a lifetime of participation in particular ecclesial and other social practices – that compete with each other. Moving between these moments of competition seems to her to require a conscious affirmation of one over the other, a conscious affirmation that never entirely works.

Moments of tension and slippage between different *habitus* provide space for reflection on why these tensions arise. They open up what feels natural because of a particular faith formation in particular cultural practices. And they create room for questioning some presuppositions in light of other ones held. The tension allows a moment wherein these different forms of bodily wisdom that find themselves in vague arrangements of competition and coherence can be opened up for a new way of being grasped. In the midst of this conversational practice that opens up these forms of bodily

wisdom for a pursuit of deeper understanding of them, discernment is required for seeking God in the midst of the confusion. New strategies of faithful action must be cultivated such that when the competition between *habitus* leads to a suppression of various forms of bodily wisdom in ways that undermine faithful living, a loose, performative integration of these *habitus* can instead be negotiated.

These tensions do not grow out of simple, enclosed sets of practices, as if a coherent ecclesial *habitus* is combating a *habitus* associated with reading literature or other sources that are not explicitly Christian. Maureen and Joe's theological grappling is shaped not only by their current church affiliation, but also by their church upbringings, as well as by the various competing and cohering collections of *habitus* associated with their education, class, and leisure activities, for example. Indeed, both Joe and Maureen particularly value education – and not in a purely academic institutional sense – especially with regards to how they understand their faith. Having grown up in Christian traditions more conservative and strict than the one they have together chosen for their adult lives, they value thinking more broadly than the ideas they have inherited.

At the same time, this familial heritage has shaped them with a bodily knowledge of the risk associated with stepping out into such broadness. Maureen experienced tension with her birth family when she ventured out from their form of Christianity (which, as I mentioned in the first chapter, she describes with a dramatic flair to her tone and gesturing as the kind where "God was not a friendly God. God was gonna getcha!"). Moving into Baptist churches which, unlike the church of her upbringing, used musical instruments in worship, did not condemn drinking alcohol and allowed women to be in positions of leadership left her family critical of her religious choices. Theological risk is

not purely intellectual for her. Hence her initial desire to shut down the conversation about salvation with a definite, over-confidently stated, awkward answer.

And so when I ask her why she feels she needs to remind herself consciously to believe something that is failing to work with her growing view of the world she answers, "I think I'm afraid not to." "Why?" I continue. "I think it's because this is what I've always been taught, that the only way you'll get to Heaven is through Jesus," she says, pauses, and continues, picking up a little speed, "…and then all of a sudden if I say no, what if it is – what if it is only through Jesus and then I don't go to Heaven because I'm saying it's not through Jesus?" As soon as she says it, she starts laughing at herself. All three of us actually laugh together, and the moment relaxes us all. It is difficult to let go of something that one has "always been taught."

This question of "being taught" is an interesting one. On the one hand, as Maureen puts it, she was certainly taught explicitly and discursively, "Jesus Christ is the *only* way to salvation." But on the other hand, she was "taught" this through the practices she engaged at her childhood church. She describes her participation in baptism rituals that were understood to be necessary for salvation, a close guarding of the Lord's Supper table, and a general theology grounded more in God's wrath than God's love. In this way, what she was taught echoes Bourdieu's description of *habitus* as having an "implicit pedagogy." He writes, "One could endlessly enumerate the values given body, *made* body, by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy which can instill a whole cosmology." And this cosmology is made body "through injunctions as insignificant as 'sit up straight' or 'don't hold your knife in your left hand'…"[100] In this way, what

[100] Pierre Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice,* 69.

Maureen has been “taught’ through participation in various practices grips her as strongly – if not, more strongly – than what she was taught in more verbal, cognitive, conscious modes of education.

But this power of habituation also shapes Maureen’s alternative view, the very one that presses on her professed belief that Jesus is “the only way to salvation.” It is because Maureen feels the power of what she has “always been taught” that it is difficult to “condemn” anyone who also “just feel[s] so right in their own faith, the way they were raised…” The very power that affirms her belief is the same one that undermines it, and this is perhaps why the language of fear characterizes her description of why she believes in this way. If we all feel equally sure of conflicting accounts of salvation, how can we know who is right? Entertaining such a thought is scary for Maureen because it impinges on her sense of her own eternal fate.

In general, there is, of course, nothing inherently wrong with holding conflicting beliefs, or even with the inability to cohere the faith in one’s bones with the profession of one’s beliefs. Such conflicts might even be necessary in some situations for being able to participate in day-to-day life. In this particular situation, however, Maureen’s marking of her experience by fear and a negative understanding of doubt indicated that for her, there was something wrong with this incoherence. It indicated that she needed, for herself, to articulate some of her different forms of embodied wisdom in order to find strategies for faithfully living some loose, performative integration of them.

Maureen in fact affirmed this need by explicitly connecting her experiences of tension around questions of salvation to her fear that she might be missing out on some of the aspects of faithful living. Later in the conversation Maureen admitted her concern that

it is her doubts, her inability to hold to a belief as firmly as she thinks she should, that block her ability to live her faith more fully:

> You wouldn't believe Natalie how many times I've prayed that the Holy Spirit come into me. I don't know that I've ever felt the Holy Spirit, you know? And I look at all these people I admire and they just seem to have it together and I'm thinking, is there something wrong with me, that I don't have that wash over me?

FBC is not a church where we pray for the Spirit to fill us very often. There are pockets of resistance to such charismatic versions of Christian faith, even as there are also pockets that promote it.[101] But the vast majority of members reside between these two poles, exhibiting the friendly reserve common in middle to upper-middle class, predominantly white churches. For Maureen to frame her fear as missing out on the full power of the "Holy Spirit com[ing] into [her]," thus grows out of her prior, childhood ecclesial formation in a church that in its discursive and other practices emphasized the relationship between purity, certainty and faith. This formation, it seems, still holds her tightly even years later.

As Maureen discloses these fears and doubts, she begins to speak more rapidly, a little anxiety creeping into her tone. I feel myself wanting to slip out of the ethnographic mode and into one of pastoral care. I instinctively drop my pencil and lean across the table toward her. My voice gets softer as I speak. And here is where the instability of my own competing and cohering *habitus* comes into play.

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[101] One time Pastor Frank used the word "revival" in a sermon, and I heard murmured complaints that he was sounding "too Pentecostal" as I walked out to my car after services. During particularly rousing moments of preaching, we might hear a single, misplaced, "Amen," just as during a particularly rousing bout of singing, one woman out of an average 700 people in attendance, can be seen to raise her hands in the air.

I realize in the moment that I could push on Maureen's own moment of instability to gain a deeper insight into what is going on. But the instability between the various competing and cohering *habitus* associated with my own ministerial role and the various competing and cohering *habitus* associated with my academic identity, not to mention the fact that I quite like Maureen as a friend, are confusing me. Numerous desires, dispositions, instincts and impulses battle each other in this moment. I want access to the interesting story being spun here because I think it might be helpful in my research, but I also want to help Maureen feel better. It is not yet clear to me if the two are in conflict and, worse, in the moment, while I know that I dropped my pencil and lowered my tone to communicate care, I am a little less clear on my motivations for such communication. Is this a pure desire to comfort a congregant, or am I communicating care because I know it will get Maureen to keep giving me the information that will help my project? Indeed, in the moment, it is likely both. And so I feel a twinge of guilt about the latter, and wonder if I should shut the whole thing down. Yet, while guilt is my dominant feeling, the logic of that guilt does not prevail, and so I continue the conversation.

As we saw with Maureen, choosing consciously between my roles, or between the various competing, cohering and intersecting *habitus* constellating in this moment in a way that suppresses some while elevating others, does not feel like a satisfactory option. More significantly, choosing consciously in this way does not feel like an option that is faithful in the situation. Rather, both roles, and all the *habitus* remain in play in their own unstable, complex negotiation of each other. To be faithful in the moment to the duality of my roles, and to the desires I am experiencing, remembering that those desires are not

all self-serving, requires instead some loose, performative integration of the various competing and cohering *habitus* that are shaping my strategies of action in that moment.

And so, I do not turn off my recording device. I allow my movement into a more explicit ministerial role to remain a part of the record. My conscious decision does not allow me simply to let go of the research to care for a congregant. Too many desires are competing here. Rather, I deploy my ministerial identity as a research tool, as I discuss in more detail in the next chapter. And in so doing, I also feel myself letting go of questions that could yield deeper insight, but which I sense might cause further pain for Maureen.

Pastoral care becomes the mode of my inquiry. And so I begin to ask her, "Do you think they [these people you admire] believe without any…?" but she cuts me off quickly. The amount of prompting she needs is minimal. She has thought about this all much before: "I don't know!! They seem to from what they say!" The anxiety building in her tone instinctually leads me to make mine calm. "Actually," I share, "usually it takes a few questions, but most people end up here where you are in these interviews." I wince a little as I realize this is not entirely true. I am overstating the case to help her feel better. Nevertheless, it is true that everyone I interviewed recounted doubts that they have with regards to orthodox Christian faith, so I emphasize this.[102] Maureen remains unconvinced.

What about the "ex-pastors or retired pastors" from our class, she asks. "When you ask them questions like this…do they have the same thoughts?" "Yes," I respond, instinctively drawing my mouth into a sympathetic smile. "They do?" she asks

[102] Indeed, whether consciously or unconsciously, I probably lead the interviews in this direction precisely because doing so helps us to open up the faith in our bones for a more conscious pursuit of wisdom.

incredulously, tipping her head to one side and narrowing her eyes a little. “Yeah,” I respond again, nodding my head slowly, but also clarifying that I am talking now more about “people I know training in the ministry” because I want to be careful not to disclose details from other interviews. “My sense is that *we* have the most doubts,” I share, because we “spend the most time thinking about it and discovering more and more of what [we] don’t know, and discovering that what we do know is such a small part of the puzzle.” I continue that I think those of us in positions of ministerial leadership and academic theological training tend to believe that doubt can be a productive part of faith. “But for some reason,” I add sadly, “people who are theologically trained think we’re the only ones who can handle it.”

I present this idea that “we think we’re the only ones who can handle it” in the moment as something those other academics do. Afterwards, while reflecting on my transcription, however, I realize that I am not immune to this disposition. There are a whole host of tensions I experienced while teaching these Sunday night classes that I will discuss more fully throughout this dissertation’s more constructive chapters. And these tensions are marked by fear and anxiety, just like Maureen’s. For now, a couple of examples will suffice.

For one, my language often faltered when I used gendered pronouns for God. While I use feminine language for God in my own personal and academic practice, I never managed to use such language comfortably with the class. Doing so felt strange, and every time I tried, my mouth would stutter and I would fall back on neutral or masculine language. Then, when I used masculine language, I always felt a twinge of guilt that I was betraying my own commitments in order to fit in, and I wondered if the

group could see my teeth clench slightly as words like “he” and “Father” slipped through them.

I do not know if certain class members sensed this strain for me, but as we discussed gendered language for God during our engagement of feminist theologies, I felt a few of them open space for more expansive language. Richard shared that he sometimes prays to a “Mother God.” As the person in the room so many saw to be wise, this opened the possibility that others could do the same. Maureen and Gene both shared that they wanted to try praying to God in this way too, Gene noting that he wondered if the language of “Father” in the Lord’s Prayer was only there because Jesus was praying it in a “male-dominated culture.” Jerry, a gentle, soft-spoken, retired minister shared that his image of God has always had a female dimension to it because, as he put it, the “most loving figure in my childhood was my grandmother…she was the person who took time to sit with me and read and draw birds with me and so forth.” After articulating this point, Jerry started slipping female gendered pronouns into the conversation, trying them on for size. At first, he and we laughed as he did it, all sharing in how jarring the language sounded to us. But as he repeated them, in the context of the particular conversation on gender, they came to feel more natural. Finally on our last night, when I asked the group what they had learned and which ideas still lingered, Gene volunteered that he had continued to think about God’s gender and his own potential “idolatry” at imaging God only in the masculine. A few brought this same point up in interviews.

Their willingness to play with new language helped me do the same. I joined with Richard to say that I also pray to a “Mother God,” and shared that I even change the words to hymns sometimes when we are singing them in church because I find the

onslaught of masculine language in those situations difficult to take. Like Jerry, I slipped some female gendered pronouns in for naming God in our conversation. And like Jerry, I did so awkwardly at first, but with growing comfort, at least within the context of the conversation about God's gender. Their willingness to engage on this topic led me into loose, performative, always fragmented, never perfect, integrations of the various roles I play and the constellating *habitus* that give rise to my playing them.

However, perhaps the most definitive example of me not sharing something with the group because "I thought they couldn't handle it" occurred when I taught African-American, Latin American and feminist Liberation Theologies from the 1970s and 1980s. In addition to being aware of my gendered body while teaching feminist theologies, I felt my own somewhat invisible racial difference from the group acutely in my flesh in ways they could not see. Perhaps because my white appearance tends to occlude the fact that I am bi-racial – my mother is black and my father is white – I felt particular discomfort presenting black theology. I did not hide my racial identity from them, but my appearance made it easy for them to forget my mixed racial heritage. If they had a negative response, I worried that I would become frustrated with them.[103] But their response was wholly affirmative. And my own nerves around teaching what I thought would be pretty radical theologies for them kept me from questioning too deeply why the group seemed so comfortable with them.

[103] This feeling was, in part, based on a prior experience teaching black theology to a group of white seminary students. This group heavily criticized the African-American author, and I struggled to help them read her more fairly and generously than they were. It never occurred to me that I should let them know I was bi-racial. When they found out my racial identity later in the semester, I was accused by one of intentionally hiding it from them. The implication of this comment, explained to me by another student, was that had they known my racial identity, they would not have criticized the African-American author so freely.

I asked them if anything struck them as controversial about these liberation theologians (Cone, Gutierrez and Radford-Ruther) and Rickie responded quickly, “they strike me as very much of their time and place.” Gene added, “and in that sense, they are no more controversial than anyone else.” “When Christ said ‘I have come to give you life and life more abundantly’,” continued Elizabeth, “each one of these people has tried to do that in their own time and place. That’s part of what Jesus came for, to change this world.”

On the one hand, I was pleased with their response. Perhaps my own prejudice cultivated in difficult, personal racially marked experiences had made me over-cautious with a fearful concern that the group would reject these thinkers. But on the other hand, their affirmation of black, Latin American and feminist theologians, each working in their own “time and place,” authorized our ways of seeking “life more abundant” according to the structures of our own “time and place.” Why question “our” homogeneity if “they” are happy with theirs? In a sense these theologians affirmed our informal practices of segregation. With hindsight, I should have taken this as a sign that further pressing was required, and that perhaps I should teach some more advanced theories (something written after the early ‘80s that might feel more disruptive to their racial status quo) in the second course.

Not only did I avoid moving into more cutting edge theologies of race, gender and economics, however, I also never presented any Queer theologies. Indeed, I avoided bringing up theologies that dealt with contemporary questions about sexuality completely. Subsequently, in one-on-one interviews, I began admitting to those with whom I felt a sense of trust and friendship more of my own stances on gender and

sexuality. In this way, I performed the exact same need for more intimate contexts in which to disclose matters I perceived as particularly threatening. In other words, the instability between my own ecclesial and academic theological roles, and the various competing and cohering *habitus* that give rise to them produced dispositions and beliefs I also failed to loosely integrate in this context.

This single story thus reveals numerous tensions that exist among and between the overlapping *habitus* loosely associated with church, academy and everyday life. Each of us makes conscious and unconscious decisions to prioritize one *habitus* or social role over another depending on how we interpret the context in which we find ourselves. And based on insecurity, fear, and doubt, but also a sense of care, commitment, and fidelity, we take and avoid taking risks in the spaces between our competing and cohering *habitus*. Living faithfully entails trying to live in this tension in ways that make sense and which cohere as best they can to the multiple spheres of practice in which we find ourselves.

The pursuit of wisdom enables these places of tension between our embodied ways of being to be brought to light, creating space for loose performative integrations of the aspects of our selves that make us who we are. Such performative integrations are “loose” because they are never wholly successful or, even, wholly failures. Each loose performative integration connects with the others as we perform them across time, each in its particular balance of success and failure contributing to the process by which we are made and remade as theologians.

Making (and Remaking…) Theologians

As Miriam's quotations state in the opening to this chapter, I helped those I taught to pick apart the rules they already knew so that they could more fully be made the theologians I would argue they already were, simply by asking, "what do you think?" But this process worked in reverse also. Those who took the classes I taught helped me to pick apart the rules of my primary theological discourse too. They made and remade me more fully into a theologian by leading me to ask myself, "Why does it matter what I think?" And as we have seen in this single instance of a theological conversation engaged here, these rules are never so simple as the rules outlined on a Frisbee.

These rules are always alive, temporally bound, constantly in flux as they connect with all the other aspects of our lives that make us who we are. As much as Miriam, the group, and I asked each other to pick apart the rules of our discourse we all already knew, we also pressed each other to dig deeper, to discover the strategies for faithful action we did not know were buried already deep within our embodied ways of being. And as we sought to bring these strategies for faithful action into play, we found ourselves in moments of loose, performative integration of the roles and *habitus* that make us who we are.

I have already discussed the ways in which *habitus* share homologous dispositions across different fields. For all the ways they might differ, the various competing and cohering *habitus* produced across church and academy, in particular, but both within the context of everyday life, bear the potential to share this disposition of desiring wisdom and this activity of pursuing it. And as Farley's vision points toward the possibility of this disposition being cultivated and this activity being practiced in

communities of conversation that blur the lines between church and academy, my methods here can be interpreted as an attempt to perform and expand his understanding of wisdom's pursuit.[104] In this way, both the wisdom of everyday Christians and academic theologians comes together to guide us all into deeper engagement with the broadly historical and local traditions that make us who we are, deeper understanding of our personal trajectories, and contemporary commitments, and deeper awareness of the conflicts that arise between them all.

There are convergences and divergences between the ways all of us who participated in the classes I taught live and think theologically, the goods and goals of these processes, and the intentions and normative moments inherent to them. Sharing in conversation together entails all kinds of slippage and failure, but it also can help spur each of us on to the pursuit of deeper wisdom within the contexts in which we find ourselves. It is in this mutual spurring on to the pursuit of deeper wisdom that together we are made and remade more fully into theologians.

It should also be becoming clear by now that the particularity of my own theological identity in relation to those who took the classes I taught matters. As I outlined in the first chapter, while I speak discourses that could be plotted at various points along Tanner's theological continuum – a continuum that she understands to be shaped by Christian social practices – I am also shaped by a distinct set of institutional academic social practices. There is this distinctly academic layer to my theological discourse that tends to take precedence over others. And this additional layer of academic

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[104] Farley, 131ff.

theological complexity in my own theological identity sets me apart from the other people in our class as their teacher.[105]

Therefore, on the one hand, I am like any other speaker of theological discourse that rises out of Christian social practices. I live my faith close to my faith practices, and I have to negotiate the crises of those practices in light of that concretion. At the same time, however, like others trained in a theological institution, my theological discourses and instincts are very particular. I think and speak in ways that can be – and indeed should be – greatly abstracted from the concretion of everyday Christian social practices.

To expand the tool kit metaphor, my workbench is teeming with gadgets that have such specialized functions that they seem useless for my more everyday tasks of living faith. In fact, the presence of so many gadgets often makes my everyday theological tasks feel more difficult. The appropriate tool becomes difficult to find when it is lost among the rubble of my over-stocked workshop area. It is therefore easy to feel alienated from

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[105] This language of being "set apart" echoes the language used for describing what it is that happens in ordination. In Baptist congregations, the whole community is able to vote on a candidate's ordination. Because the final decision is not made by a committee or governing body, the theology of ordination entails the notion that a whole and particular congregation has raised up 'one of their own' to serve them as minister. The language and images of "raising up" and "setting apart" are used significantly in this process. Similar themes apply to my teaching practice at FBC (which is, of course, grounded in and in part authorized by my ordination there). I am "one of the community," because I have also been raised out of the community and set apart by it in order to serve it with my teaching authority. Unlike many other Protestant denominations, people can be ordained in Baptist traditions without being "installed" in a church. Bi-vocational identities, like mine, are not uncommon. My primary work, as an academic theologian, allows me to maintain a role at FBC that functions as both congregant (I am not formally on staff and I participate in various church programs as a participant, not leader, like my Sunday school class) and as a minister (I lead a monthly Lord's Supper service and I teach adult education classes). These levels of authority, power, and submission will be explored more fully in the fourth chapter. For now it is simply worth noting that the two ways in which I am set apart from being a congregant only at FBC – as academic theologian and as minister – converge in my dually constituted role of teacher.

living as an everyday Christian, an identity I also embody. Pursuing wisdom as we have seen it articulated by Farley and in the conversation between Maureen, Joe and I, however, requires both screwdrivers and task-specific gadgets, and the ability to use each in task-specific ways. It requires the types of tools helpful in a plethora of circumstances, as well as those for which the function is so specialized that they might only be helpful for the most particular of tasks. It also requires the know-how associated with each. If we want to avoid feeling alienated from our work, I want to argue that we need something like the division of labor that characterized our classroom conversations to help us.

Despite my academic specialization, I maintain a particular role within my church community, one that allows me to deploy my insider status as congregant, but primarily as minister, in order to participate in everyday theological conversation, while also deploying my outsider status as an academic to share the tools and skills of my trade within the church walls. I therefore deploy both my insider and outsider status not simply to hear and report from everyday theology to academic or vice versa, as if one can be a source and the other a guide. Rather, I deploy this mixed status so that I can guide the process by which everyday and academic theological discourses can be blended together in the pursuit of wisdom. And then I report on those findings.

While these methods might initially raise hackles of concern about objectivity and non-interference, they do also grow out of a trajectory in Reflexive Ethnography that authorizes them. In the next chapter, I continue to expand our understanding of the concept *habitus* – with both its objective and subjective modes of knowing – as an authorizing discourse for my particular mode of ethnographic theology. In so doing I build on the moments of slippage and instability among and between the competing and

cohering *habitus* associated with my ecclesial and academic roles – like the moment we witnessed above in my conversation with Maureen. And I do so in order to begin to outline a theology that arises not only from Christian social practices, but also from the multiple practices associated with the intersecting spheres of church and academy as both are situated within the practices of everyday life.

Someone could come along with a powerful sermon and they'd be like, 'oof, wow!' They weren't rootless, but they had been removed from their roots.

I think the crisis brought a strong emphasis on doctrine…Institutions began to grow…academia began to establish itself again.

Peter, First Baptist Church Member

CHAPTER III

THEOLOGICAL PRACTICES OF TEACHING

In the last chapter, I used the concept of *habitus* as a theoretical descriptor for negotiating the complex relationships between practices, identity, activity and discourse. In particular, I have outlined a specific *habitus* of pursuing wisdom as a topic of inquiry. In this chapter, I turn to an entirely different use of *habitus*: the way in which it can be used not only to describe and analyze a topic of inquiry, but also how it can be deployed as a tool in ethnographic research settings. I have already established that the pursuit of wisdom entails an ongoing process of loose, performative integrations – to varying degrees of success and failure – of the numerous competing and cohering *habitus* and roles that make us who we are. In addition, I have established that this pursuit of wisdom loosely integrates the theologies rising from the various competing and cohering *habitus* rising from Christian social practices. Here we explore more fully how it can also loosely integrate into such performances the competing and cohering *habitus* associated with another distinct set of institutionally defined academic theological practices.

Given that my own theological identity is comprised of this latter type of formation – both in church and academy, and the broader social practices within which each is situated – this chapter explores how this particular configuration of a *habitus* that pursues wisdom can be deployed as a tool for self-implicated theological ethnographic research. Here, my way of deploying this tool is, as we have seen throughout these pages, in the mode of teaching adult education classes in the context of my own church.

Teaching the adult-education classes that comprised my theological ethnographic fieldwork, I pursued the wisdom of a loose, performative integration of my own numerous competing and cohering *habitus* and the competing and cohering ministerial and academic roles to which they gave rise. And I depended on my conversation partners to help me do so, just as I endeavored to help them perform similar loose integrations of their own competing and cohering *habitus*. In this way, our shared conversation became the practice by which we all pursued together the wisdom of the faith that was already in our bones. Moreover, this conversation entailed something like a division of labor, with different types of theological speakers employing different sets of skills – or, using Ann Swidler's language, different kinds of tool-kits.

I begin this chapter by grounding my distinct self-implicating method as a complementary alternative to Mary McClintock Fulkerson's theological ethnographic work. I do this because I interpret Fulkerson's ethnographic theology as one, but not the only, method by which we can probe the gesture Tanner makes toward concrete Christian practices in her proposal for understanding the relationship between everyday and academic theologies. In order to figure out what an alternative method might require, I engage the ways in which the people who took the classes I taught thought that an

academically trained theologian should engage with their own theological practices and discourses. Their implicit requests return me to the question of what it is I have to offer them.

In order to develop these offerings, I expand Bourdieu's understanding of *habitus* as a topic for inquiry by engaging the work of his student, Loïc Wacquant. Here I argue for this distinct theological ethnographic method growing out of my own various competing and cohering *habitus* that give rise to my own particular ministerial and academic roles. Shaped by both Christian and academic social practices, I argue that my dual formation in both a particular ecclesial location and in an academic institution enables me to deploy these *habitus* and roles together in a loose performative integration of a teaching practice as a research tool. In so arguing, I demonstrate how the Sunday night classes I taught in my church comprised the particular theological ethnographic method of this dissertation.

A Role for Ethnography in Theological Reflection

Mary McClintock Fulkerson's work has been marked by, among other things, a continual turning to deeper and more careful attention to descriptive analysis of social and religious practices over the course of her career.[106] All these modes of descriptive attention come together in her most recent work, *Places of Redemption*. Therein she

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[106] For example, her dissertation (*Ecclesial Tradition and Social Praxis: A Study in Theological Method*, Vanderbilt University, 1986) engages theories of praxis, without engaging practice itself. Her next major work (*Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001)) engages ethnographies of practice as case studies or examples for a larger theological argument. Her most recent work (*Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007)) comprises a larger, single ethnographic project paired with theological reflection.

describes how she trained as an ethnographer because she desired, as I mentioned in the first chapter, to see "the fascinating grain of the ordinary" in order to "bring something fresh to theological reflection on ordinary Christian community."[107] Fulkerson's ethnographic project is therefore theological through and through, as mine also endeavors to be. Averring that "theological reflection is not something brought in after a situation has been described," she notes that theology is in fact "a sensibility that initiates the inquiry at the outset."[108]

This thread of theological conviction that runs through Fulkerson's ethnographic work thus involves interpreting the church she studies – Good Samaritan Church – according to the language of redemption. This does not mean that she 'sees God' in anything her own worldview encounters as positive within Good Samaritan's communal practices, however.[109] Rather, it means that she looks for the places where the community professes to be and seems to be "sustained by God."[110] Similar to how I seek to describe both the successes and failures of wisdom's pursuit, Fulkerson takes seriously both the successes and failures of the church she studies. She recognizes moments of coherence

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[107] Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.
[108] Ibid, 13. See Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987) for an alternative to this approach. Boff argues that theological inquiry must be maintained as a distinct, second stage after ethnographic description is completed. For Boff, the mixing of the two leads to an ideological taint.
[109] Indeed, this is a common mistake perpetrated by theologians attempting to bring together descriptive and normative claims. Adams and Elliot, for example, link God's action so inextricably with moments when the powerless are vindicated from the oppression of the powerful that they are forced to admit that they "do not yet have a strong enough hold on this idea [i.e. ethnography as dogmatics] to show how it might work out in situations of radical failure" (pg. 360). See Nicholas Adams and Charles Elliot, "Ethnography is Dogmatics: Making Description Central to Systematic Theology," in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 53 No. 3 (2000), 339-364.
[110] Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 22.

and slippage between the practices, discourses and, indeed, *habitus* of the church members whom she studies. Seeking redemption in the midst of broken practices, she therefore resists "letting the claims about the transcendent falsify the density of the worldly wounds."[111]

In the first chapter, I argued that Tanner stops short of providing academic theologians with a method by which we can hear the concrete wisdom of everyday theologies at work. Fulkerson makes an important advance down that road. Agreeing with Tanner that, "theological reflection arises in an organic way out of Christian life in order to address real life problems," Fulkerson first interprets everyday theologies to be reflecting on the meaning of their own practices and, second, she studies those everyday theologies using ethnographic methods.[112] In so doing, ethnography enables her to perform the tasks that Tanner ascribes to the academic theologian of reflecting on, systematizing and even answering some of the questions and problems produced in the everyday theological location. Whereas Tanner's method stops short of providing academic theologians with the tools and method required for engaging everyday theologies, Fulkerson locates that tool in the methods of ethnography.

Using the concept, *habitus*, Fulkerson interprets the congregants at Good Samaritan as "socially informed bod[ies]," who are both shaped by practices and shaping those same practices in which they share. She seeks not only to describe these practices, however, but also to evaluate them. "In sum," Fulkerson notes, "the 'understanding' of *habitus* is, first a *competence*, one that is productive and creative." It is, in essence, a type of "'everyday' knowledge" that has the "capacity to respond improvisationally to a

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[111] Ibid, 22.
[112] Ibid, 233. Here Fulkerson explicitly references and cites Tanner's work.

situation" and to "do or say something well *for a circumstance.*"[113] In a way that resonates with how I have outlined the *habitus* of pursuing wisdom, Fulkerson evaluates this competence according to some loose, performative integration of competing and cohering *habitus*.

For example, Fulkerson's study reveals that the members at Good Samaritan Church place values of multi-culturalism and racial reconciliation as central to their understanding of their church's identity. In order to evaluate these claims, Fulkerson endeavors to understand what precisely the church members mean by these concepts. And then she evaluates their practices according to their own criteria before bringing in more wider reaching modes of analysis. She finds that congregants do raise up leaders from multiple races, but that there remain some implicit limits on what types of difference the community is able to incorporate.

Subsequently, these tensions between what the congregants say they do, what they want to do, and what they actually do become the growing edges from which Fulkerson sees the possibility for performing ecclesial and other practices of multi-culturalism and racial reconciliation in more faithful ways. As a result, the reader is able to envision the texture of the concrete place that has given rise to a community's everyday theology *and* Fulkerson's academic theology. The insights that Fulkerson has for contributing to the ongoing shaping of Christian practice – for example, advice on how to improve programs of racial reconciliation – thus incorporate the concrete wisdom of the everyday theologies that have already tackled the problems and questions rising from that practice. Moreover, by bringing academic theology to bear on a particular

[113] Ibid, 47-48. Italics Fulkerson's.

problem in Christian social practice, like racial reconciliation, Fulkerson's insights are potentially able to shape similar practices related to this problem far beyond the particular context in which her study took place.

In addition to arguing in the first chapter that Tanner does not offer a method for how to engage everyday theologies, I also argued that she stops short of outlining how everyday Christians can hear the concrete wisdom that rises out of distinctly academic theological practices. Fulkerson offers some insight here as well. First, at the local level, even though she never states it as an explicit goal of her work, the questions she asked in her interviews likely helped the particular everyday Christians of her study engage deeper reflection on their own practices.[114] On a more broad-ranging level, her formally developed constructive theological work was subsequently available in the book she published. As Fulkerson notes, when academic theology intervenes in everyday theology, it seeks to "normatively assess a situation for purposes of transcending that situation."[115] Texts are produced primarily not for the local community that was studied, but so that others can learn from that local community. Moreover, while everyday Christians might engage Fulkerson's text, the primary audience who can learn from the community is an

[114] It is a common occurrence for research subjects to express having learned something about themselves from participating in ethnographic interviews. Such occurrences actually found the epistemological dimensions of both feminist and action-research ethnographic methods. See Virginia Oleson, "Early Millennial Feminist Qualitative Research," in *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin & Yvonne Lincoln (Sage Publications, 2005) and Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research* 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007). For more on the relationship between Action-based research and theology, see Helen Cameron et al., *Talking About God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (SCM Press, 2010).
[115] Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 233.

academic theological audience as, I would argue in agreement with Fulkerson, it should be.[116]

As an alternative to Fulkerson's method, one that seeks to complement it, not critique it, I endeavor here to cultivate a particular self-implicated mode of ethnography. In a sense, this self-implicated ethnography places the local ecclesial goods I imagine occurred in Fulkerson's ethnographic interviews at the center of this project's goals by guiding processes of everyday theological reflections through a conversational teaching practice. And I structure my alternative method in this way in part because I have learned through my ministerial role that this is one of the things everyday Christians want academic theologians to do with them.

From Frontier to Institutional Theologies

As I noted in the first chapter, while it is a very helpful tool for analyzing our classroom conversations, Tanner's theological continuum nevertheless tends to elevate academic over everyday theology by treating theological processes as a movement from the latter to the former. As I endeavor to articulate the movement from academic to everyday – as itself a simultaneous type of progression or good – I want to make sure that the non-academic voices from our classroom conversations also have a stake here in framing what a theological conversation that rises out of ecclesial, academic and everyday practices should look like. As academic theologians, we often ask one other how we should connect our work with the church's. In so doing, we often overlook the

[116] In this regard, it should also be noted that students of ministry, as part of that academic audience, will also read the text and, therefore, the text would be able also to effect Christian social practices through the insights that those students pick up from it.

fact that many people in the pews actually have some suggestions for us. In this section we see a desire from church members that academic theologians be present within the local communities they seek to serve, implicated in their practices and responding to their crises on the ground in practice. What they wanted was, therefore, not dissimilar from Tanner's description of the academic theologian should do. The difference, however, was that the people I interviewed wanted academic theologians to enact this process through a genuine conversation with them. They wanted the academic theologian to be a part of their community, guiding its processes from within. And it is this desire that directs my method of guiding the construction of communal, conversational theologies from my own implication in such a place.

In all of the interviews I conducted after the "Jesus Christ and Salvation" class, I would describe my dissertation project loosely as an exploration of the relationship between theologies created in the church, or by non-academics, and theologies created in the academy.[117] I would then ask some variation on the questions, "How do you think theologies created by people in church should interact with academic theologies?" or "Do you have any advice for me on this topic?" Everyone of whom I asked this question agreed that academic theology had an important role to play for the church. But no one thought that their everyday theologies should be treated as a source that academic

[117] It is difficult to know whether or not their answers would have been the same had I asked my question *before* I taught one of the classes. Surely, having just participated in a process class that an academic theologian taught in the church impacted their view of what an academic theologian should do in the church. Even so, the fact that they support their points with narratives and histories that are distinct from the class indicates that their desires rise from a broader spectrum of practice than only that class. Furthermore, I began teaching at FBC not because I decided to initiate the practice myself, but because a congregant requested it. As she explained it, she figured if the congregation had a theologian in it, they should see if they could put that theologian to work.

theologians should systematize or even from which they should abstract in order to reflect on it. And, interestingly, no one answered that academic theology could provide them with the "right answers" to questions they might have about belief and truth.

Rather, three key interconnected themes emerged during these discussions: 1) those who are trained in academic theology should help everyone else guard against being manipulated by what I came to think of as fast-talkers in times of crisis or hustlers with agendas because 2) academic theologians can help everyday Christians interpret the structures of what we all as Christians believe and why we believe it, thus helping us dig deeper into our faith and, in so doing 3) academic theologians do – or should – help us all to live better. Each of these themes is dependent upon the theologies that rise out of church, academy and everyday life working together in a larger project of faithful living. No one functions fully without the other. Each spends time apart and time together, doing theology in its own mode and then piecing their pieces back together, only to separate out again, like an unending dance.

These three themes, echoed by quite a few of the people I interviewed, come together nicely in a story Peter told me about frontier times. Peter began his career as a Baptist minister. He then worked for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board – now, Lifeway Christian Resources – on "family and marriage enrichment" curricula. Peter describes the foundation of the resources he created being the notion of "marriage as a partnership between equals." Thus, with the conservative resurgence that happened in the Southern Baptist Convention, which I will discuss more fully in the next chapter, he began to receive numerous complaints over his work, eventually leading to his need to leave his job. "My snide comment is," he noted, "once you decide that man is the head

and the woman is submissive, there really isn't that much to do after that." And so his department was dissolved, and Peter finished his career as a pastoral counselor in various settings.

Peter's theological identity is thus complexly hybrid if we were to map it according to Tanner's theological continuum. He has an M.Div that he gained for the purposes of practicing ministry, but he is not shaped by the distinct practices associated with a vocation in the theological academy. He negotiates various Christian roles, such as former-minister, former-pastoral counselor, and now, by practice, lay-person. But he does not negotiate the role of academic theologian. Versions of his type of complex theological identity are not uncommon in ecclesial life in general and, in particular, are especially not uncommon at FBC, as we have many retired ministers as members, as well as many current and former employees of Lifeway Christian Resources and other SBC institutions. Peter thus reveals the complex textures of practice and identity that give rise to the theological discourses that rise from church and everyday life.

One afternoon, I visited Peter in his home. He seems to get a kick out of referring to his bright, efficient, airy digs – complete with granite kitchen counter-tops, a walk-out deck and a sprawling backyard, hardwood floors and full sized, beautiful windows – as "a basement apartment in my son's house." His adult son and daughter-in-law, who both live upstairs, built the apartment for Peter and his wife to move to after they retired. After a brief tour of the space, we settle into an efficiently organized office that Peter refers to as his "man cave," the room in which he conducts his study both for fun and for what he describes as "a desire to never stop learning." The darkest room in the home, the space does have a masculine feel with its large, dark leather chairs. Books are the chief mode of

décor in the room, and Peter gestures to them often while telling stories, even sometimes getting out of his seat so that he can pull one from the shelf to make a point. These books are primarily theological in theme, but also historical. He has books written by popular theologians and books written by academic theologians for a popular audience, as well as books that are more narrowly academic in nature, left over, probably, from his formal theological studies. There are some novels as well, and texts related to one of his hobbies of tracing his family genealogy.

The way Peter tells the story of the theologies rising out of church, academy and everyday life is as a narrative back and forth between what he calls frontier and institutional theologies. As America expanded west, he tells me, frontier Christians left institutional, academic theologians behind on the east coast. And, he notes, "Having left academia, they evolved a kind of cultural, adaptive theology of their own…They didn't worry about 'theoretical stuff' or doctrine." In a sense, academic theology was not welcome on the frontier. It did not know how to fit in there. And so there was a real, tangible, geographical divide between frontier and institutional theology for a while.

This divide was not a problem at first, however, according to Peter. The academic theologians were happy, "cloistered away in their ivory towers" to think about God, and the frontier Christians ticked along just fine with their contextual, everyday ways of negotiating faith.[118] Indeed, we can imagine that separated out in this way, the theologies

[118] A few times, now, when Peter has asked me to describe my dissertation to him, we reach a point in the conversation where he says, "So you're taking theology out of the ivory tower!" "Ivory tower" is a phrase he finds helpful and uses often. The first time he asked me this question, I responded, "Yeah, I guess so." Each subsequent questioning has made me rethink my position a little more, until one day I answered, here in a paraphrase because I was not recording this conversation, "Yeah, but also no. I want it to come out, but then it needs to go back in, and come out again, and go back in. I want it to interact

produced by the frontier Christians were as grounded in and shaped by their frontier practices as the academic theologians' theologies were grounded in and shaped by their academic practices. But then, Peter continued, "different movements began to stir and the people were not prepared to discern…they just went with their guts – what seemed to be right to them." Slapping his knee to punctuate his story's end, "someone could come along with a powerful sermon and they'd be like, 'oof, wow!'," meaning that they were easily swayed by anyone with a good story. "They weren't rootless," he continued, leaning forward in his chair, "but they had been removed from their roots." In other words, the further they moved away from their association with academic theology as a resource, the easier it was for them to be swayed by preachers with emotionally moving stories.

For Peter, when our theology is immediately adaptive to its cultural context, in close proximity to the practices that shape it, and with little critical distance on those same practices, it also lacks the critical distance to resist a seductive line of thinking that can lead into lived error. That is, everyday theology works fine until crisis erupts. Peter's description resonates well with the way I have described the *habitus* of pursuing wisdom. When just going "with their guts" ceased to work for them, the frontier Christians needed to develop skills of discernment to think carefully through the faith that was in their bones. And this is where the academic theologians found their way back in to help.

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with the world outside, but it always needs to go back inside if it is to keep training in the gifts of the academy to offer them to the world." With each subsequent answer, his smile has faded a little. With this last one, he clasped his chin in his hand, a look of disappointment tinged with curiosity fluttered across his expression, and he simply said, "Hmpf."

While Peter's story outlined that academic theologians could be helpful in this way, he nevertheless ended up emphasizing another aspect to the narrative. "I think the crisis brought a strong emphasis on doctrine…Institutions began to grow…academia began to establish itself again," he added. With that, he shrugged his shoulders, gave a little knowing pout, and sat back in his chair. Story over. On the one hand, then, yes academics can be helpful in times of crisis, helping people think through what they really believe and want to believe. But on the other hand, times of crisis produce the conditions that enable academic theology to flourish. Peter is, of course, making a historical claim that may or not be accurate. My interest is in how this claim is situated within his own narrative understanding of how academy, church and everyday life relate, and what that tells academic theologians about what the church might ask of them. According to Peter's narrative, academic theologians did not find a home on the frontier until the frontier had made room for their presence, until they could find a way to fit in and perform their particular role. In this way, everyday Christians might need academic theologians in crisis about the same amount that academic theologians need them to have those crises.

Resonating with Tanner's insightful and honest arguments that academic theologians do and must care about the perpetuation of their own discipline, then, Peter thus affirmed this idea that the church needs the academy to hold onto the roots of the faith for the sake of the faith. But he also reminds us – to extend the tree metaphor – that roots require ever-budding leaves to live. As academic theologians, we rely on the faith's continued everyday practice for the very exercise of academic theology. Peter thus corrects the more uni-directional analytic focus in Tanner's method from everyday to academic theology by adding the reverse direction: from institutional to frontier and back

again. And again. And again. Somewhere between the roots of the faith and the life of the faith seems to be, for Peter, where the growth happens. And I tend to agree: pursuing wisdom begins with embodied awareness of the faith in our bones, and progresses through disciplined study of other ways that faith has been embodied through space and time.

Because we hold the roots of our traditions – both historical and contemporary – academic theologians also have the ability to help everyday theologians understand the ever-expanding root-structures that give rise to their beliefs and practices. Like Peter, Rickie made this point explicitly. For Rickie, diving into this "more systematic study of trying to say: what is God, what is salvation?" guides our maturation as Christians. We make not only historical connections, but also contemporary constructive connections between aspects of the faith already in our bones, and between our own faith and the faith of other everyday Christians.

I had the opportunity to explore this idea further with another class member, Ann. One evening I met Ann at the hospice care center where her husband was living. We spent some time with him, feeding him and participating in the delusional conversations that had become his chief mode of communication. The fact that on this night these conversations were marked by his joyful demeanor, rather than the sense of fear and panic that equally often characterized his narratives, set a peaceful tone for the rest of my and Ann's evening together. After her husband's dinner, Ann and I ventured down to a local Indian restaurant.

Not having tried Indian food in her seven decades of life, Ann described her tastes and I attempted to order a meal that we could both enjoy. She would laugh uproariously

as she tried to figure out which colors in the food bore more spice: "*What* are you trying to do to me, Natalie?!" she exclaimed more than once. No matter how many times I said, "the colors are just colors. Just because green is spicy in the sauces, doesn't mean it's spicy in the spinach!" she kept searching for the underlying color to heat ratio scheme. Her laughter was so contagious that our young waiter began to flirt playfully with her whenever he was at the table, suggesting she should take some time and go to India with him. When I ribbed her about the waiter's playful advances, she responded, laughing with wild abandon again, "Oh Natalie, he can do that. I'm old. I'm no threat!" She had me in stitches laughing most of the night, and at some point in our hours together, I asked her this question about the relationship between everyday and academic theologies.

For Ann, the practice of "evaluat[ing] what your beliefs are, what undergirds them" gives us a depth to our faith that, again, stops us from being swayed by "conceited" and "prejudiced" preachers who are trying to impose their own self-interested agenda on others.[119] "I think that people in the churches I've been in are scared of the word 'theology'," she noted, "but they're not scared of the word, 'doctrine.' I think that's one reason why people who want to indoctrinate find ripe fields for indoctrinating people." Her implication is that academic theologians need to help people in churches be less afraid of theology, otherwise they might be swayed by anyone who tells the lie, as she put it, that "you have to believe this, this, this and this or you aren't a Christian." Ann thus offered an expansion on Peter's point that the academic theologian helps the person in church to avoid being pulled away from his faith. The academic theologian also keeps

[119] Ann had a specific contemporary preacher from the Religious Right here. Describing his rise in politics and religion she noted, "Oh I never got so sick! Turned my stomach he was the most conceited…[*flustered by the memory, she is speaking rapidly with anger in her tone*] He was supposed to speak on the family. All he spoke on was [himself]."

the conceited, self-interested religious leaders who have agendas from tricking Christians into thinking they have moved out of the circle of faith when they really have not. The academic theologian helps Christians see a broader understanding of their own, personal theology.

A few days after my interview with Ann, I was scheduled to meet with another class member, Joan, who will be introduced more fully in the next chapter, and her husband Harlan. Joan and Harlan worked for years together in ministry in Manhattan, but they retired to a condo in Nashville to be closer to their children and grandchildren. They invited me to their home for the interview. Ann and Joan are friends, so Ann had given Joan the scoop on what kinds of questions I would be asking. I teased Joan affectionately for trying to "cheat at something that wasn't a quiz."

Like Ann, Joan also expressed the idea that theology does not only transform belief and practice, but that it helps us more deeply affirm what we know to be true, both for ourselves and as a guard against manipulation by others. Here she made explicit reference to one of the topics of discussion in the "Jesus and Salvation" class, noting that our conversations about sanctification did not change her beliefs, but rather helped her to understand more fully why she believed them. But a deepened understanding, she indicated, must also always then connect what we believe more deeply with what we do. She noted passionately, punctuating important words by drawing them out slowly, "I think that *many* in our church are interested in and involved in *acting out* their theology…To me that is theology – *not talking theology, but acting theology*!" To this Harlan added, "Yes, I think the theology term gets used when we might better speak of an enfleshment of our belief."

Joan and Harlan thus bring us full circle, but with a much deeper understanding of what our original position entailed. Yes, academic theologians can help people in churches avoid manipulation, respond to crises, understand why they believe what they believe, and more reflectively affirm the beliefs they have. But at the same time, their work does and should simultaneously help guide the practices with which those beliefs are linked. As Joan and Harlan rightly point out, reflection and enfleshment are intimately linked. Thinking leads to doing leads to thinking leads to doing and so on. In this way, Joan and Harlan capture the spirit of the *habitus* of pursuing wisdom that I have used to describe our shared practices of theological conversation. And Peter, Ann, Joan and Harlan together provide a rich and complex image of what should happen in those conversations that both resonates with, but also tweaks what Tanner proposes by insisting on its location in the ecclesial sphere.

As might be expected, no one in these interviews responded that academic theologians should write texts for lay people to read, or even that we should train ministers well in seminary, or write texts that ministers could read and then incorporate into their preaching and teaching. Quite a few of them do actually read such texts, so I am not negating the importance of them for everyday Christians. People in the classes I taught cited academic theologians, church historians and Biblical scholars they had read from Barth and Bonhoeffer to Karen Armstrong, Marcus Borg and Amy-Jill Levine (the latter being a particular hometown favorite in Nashville). More to the point, our creation of such texts enables academic theologians to continue our particular conversation with each other, as well as to contribute to the formation of ministers, thus impacting congregational life but, still, in a somewhat muted way. Even so, the overwhelming

response I got from people I interviewed was that the good that academic theologians could offer to local churches involved participating in those local churches directly. Whether they did this by providing direct instruction in local churches, or simply participating in ongoing interpersonal conversations with everyday Christians seemed to matter less than the fact that they do it in an intentional, sustained way.

What is challenging about this conclusion is that it calls academic and everyday theologians into a joint venture whose success cannot be determined by either party alone. I am not saying that this is a venture in which all academic theologians should engage, although it is also a practice that many of us do engage, both within our own communities of worship, and as guest lecturers, preachers and teachers in communities that are not intimately our own. Therefore, I name it as one site from which the academic theologian already working in both church and academy can serve both. The classroom in and from which I did such work implicated not just my research partners, but also me. It is the place in which we all together became my research subject. My own experience of being implicated in this way is, in fact, the seed of my theological ethnographic method. Let me explain what I mean by this.

From Participant Observation to Participant Objectification

Just as it became clear in the last chapter that there is a particular complexity to my own mode of theological discourse in relation to that of those who took the classes I taught, it should also be clear by now that my own ethnographic fieldwork is also quite a bit messier than the practices we might typically associate with participant observation. My involvement in the community of study – my own church community – is not limited

to observation. Not only am I a member, I am also ordained by them. I have a responsibility to teach, preach and lead worship. Indeed, our classroom demarcated a place in which I imparted new ideas and sought to cultivate new practices in the very people who were simultaneously my research partners. In the following sections I unpack the ethnographic theory that authorizes the moves by which I am implicated in my field of study and guides my deployment of these moves as research tools.

Bourdieu criticizes ethnographers who "in taking up a point of view on the action, withdraw from it in order to observe it from above and from a distance," because they mistake multiple, dynamic, and inter-related, temporally embedded practices for a single, static "object of observation and analysis."[120] This is, for Bourdieu, a matter of the epistemological problems inherent to participant observation. The observer, he argues, experiences not only an epistemological break from the object of observation, but also a social one. She enters her field of study governed by a scientific or academic *habitus*, not the *habitus* of the field studied. And she therefore lacks the practical wisdom – the embodied, tacit knowledge, and shared tool-kit – inculcated in those she studies because she does not belong to their class or group.[121] Indeed, even if she were a member of that group, she would not seek the loose performative integration of competing and cohering *habitus* that I am seeking here, but instead, according to Bourdieu's scheme, she would need to hierarchize her scientific *habitus* over her *habitus* of belonging.

Indeed, for an ethnographer to imagine herself as participant entails an unconscious, strategic forgetting of the conditions of her own scientific *habitus*,

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[120] Bourdieu, *Outline*, 2. We should hear here the underpinnings of Tanner's and my ongoing critique of postliberal attempts to do second order reflection on supposedly first order events.
[121] Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 33.

according to Bourdieu. But this is a problem because doing so leads her to mistake the occasional mimicking of actions performed in the community of study for the practical, bodily understanding gained from years of participating in them. For Bourdieu, the solution to this problem is not membership or the prioritization of a membership *habitus*. It is, instead, the reflexive reaffirmation of the scientific *habitus*, through an explicit accounting for the *habitus* that is being studied. Instead of participant *observation*, he argues, the ethnographer must perform a participant *objectification* that brings to detailed light the conditions that created the particular forms of practical knowledge, thus accounting for the practical wisdom the ethnographer lacks.[122]

Bourdieu thus takes seriously the effects that an ethnographic approach has on what it produces as its object of study as he accounts for the tempo of practices, the role of the ethnographer, and the open-endedness of the relationship between "objective structures" and the practicing agents. The ethnographic field is not, for him, something to be mined for information. Rather, it is a field of cultural production in which the ethnographer participates by taking strategic account of her own particular relationship to it. Despite the differences between his hierarchical ordering of *habitus* and my proposal for a loose, performative integration of *habitus*, this image of the field of cultural production within which the ethnographer participates is where his method opens up for my purposes.

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[122] See especially, Bourdieu, *Outline*, ch. 1. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Bourdieu holds so firmly to the epistemological implications of his method that even when he studies a community to which he does belong – the academic community – his focus is still on intellectually recreating the cultural conditions that give rise to academic identities and practices in order to isolate the problems inherent to them, rather than on deploying his own academic identity to bring correction to those problems at the level of the practices themselves. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, trans. Peter Collier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

For Bourdieu, the ethnographer participates as a cultural producer in this field of cultural production with her scientific *habitus* only. Her cultural product is limited to the texts she creates, and not to the impact she might have on the actual community of study. But what if, like me, she was inculcated with both the scientific *habitus* and the *habitus* of group membership, and what if, like me, she sought their loose performative integration rather than their hierarchization? The particular cultural conditions that need to be intellectually re-created would shift. Some reflection would be certainly required on the competing and cohering *habitus* associated with my ecclesial and academic roles. Otherwise, my narration of the experiences associated with each could lapse into solipsistic autobiography. But more so, it is the *habitus* of pursuing wisdom – a performative, loose integration of various other competing and cohering *habitus* – in which all the class members, including me, shared that needs to be objectified. As Bourdieu's student, Loïc Wacquant, exploits this same moment in Bourdieu's theory in ways that have import for my project here, we now turn to an analysis of his methods.

From Participant Objectification to Objectified Participation

Radicalizing Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus*, Wacquant seeks to play with this notion of the sociologist's membership into his or her community of study. Wacquant focuses his attention on a boxing gym in order to study the Chicago ghetto in which it is located. And to study the gym, he trains in it as a boxer, constructing a pugilistic *habitus* in his own body. This *habitus*, inscribed into his flesh by a disciplinary training regime, is beaten down deep into his strong, sore muscles and aching, stiff joints, buried into the muscle memory of himself as combatant. In his study, then, Wacquant does not shift the

conceptual meaning of the *habitus*. It is still the site, inscribed onto the body, at which a set of cultural practices and an agent meet and mutually shape each other. It is also the product and producer of practical, embodied wisdom. What Wacquant does shift, however, is the relationship between the ethnographer and the *habitus* of study. Rather than intellectually reconstructing the cultural conditions of the *habitus* of others, Wacquant submits himself to a set of cultural practices to form his own self as bearing the *habitus* of study; that is, he seeks to be possessed by, but also to possess the tools associated with, both the objective and subjective modes of a particular practical wisdom.

A brief exposition of how Wacquant embeds this knowledge into his body helps clarify his method while pointing toward my own. Describing his training, Wacquant recounts the need to "repeat the same exercises to the saturation point," to perform them "like a robot."[123] He describes them as becoming the type of instinctual second nature that Bourdieu writes about. No longer thinking consciously through how to form and land a punch, he strikes automatically. This improvisational competency reveals how Wacquant is more than a participant observer. As what we might instead call a participant objectifier, he is constructing his object of study out of his own flesh and studying the process by which that flesh is *made* boxer.

Wacquant describes this process as pleasurable. And the more deeply his instincts are honed, the more deeply he feels the pleasure: "I feel great and my punches are landing right on target…Their snapping fills me with joy and whips up my energy."[124] Even when the moves cause pain – "this is killing me! I can't feel my right wrist or

[123] Loïc Wacquant, *Body and Soul: Notes of an Apprentice Boxer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 60, 65.
[124] Ibid, 64.

shoulders anymore" – he continues to perform them until the "right sound against the mitt" fills him with the motivating desire to move through the pain and "hit harder next time."[125] The "right" performance of the action – meaning competently improvisational, not strictly copied – produces pleasure. This pleasure produces more desire to continue with additional right, competently improvisational, performances so that more pleasure can be produced. And so the cycle continues again and again, as Wacquant pursues developing the wisdom that is slowly being inculcated into his bones or, rather, muscles.

Wacquant does not describe his pugilistic practices exhaustively through his regime for the ring, however, but also through his relationships. Entering relationships at the gym requires embodied learning of and, due to his particular identity markers, re-creation of strategies for cross-cultural interaction and relating to trainers and buddies. Wacquant describes himself as participating in a broad set of cultural practices through which he, as a French, white, Harvard-educated academic gains access to a predominantly African-American, working class, urban environment. The men gift him with numerous nicknames – Fightin' Frenchman, brother Louie, Bad Dude, The French Bomber, The French Hammer, The Black Frenchman and his ring moniker, "Busy Louie" – all indicating at least some measure of acceptance of him as a co-pugilist and, in various cases, as a friend.

Even more significant than their acceptance of him, however, is his description of his own self-perception that results from his feeling accepted:

> I'm at the point where I tell myself that I'd gladly give up my studies and research and all the rest to be able to stay here and box, to remain 'one of the boys'. I know that's completely crazy and surely unrealistic but, at this very moment, I find the idea of migrating to Harvard, of going to present a

[125] Ibid, 65.

> paper at the ASA, …and participating in the *tutti frutti* of academe totally devoid of meaning and downright depressing, so dreary and dread compared to the pure and vivacious carnal joy that this goddamn gym provides me…that I would like to quit everything, drop out, to stay in Chicago. It's really crazy. PB [Pierre Bourdieu] was saying the other day that he's afraid that I'm 'letting myself be seduced my object' but, boy, *if only he knew*: I'm already way beyond seduction![126]

Experiencing himself as "one of the boys," he describes a desire to remain so, even to the extent that his academic self loses its lure.

Based on his own methods, Bourdieu has an understandable concern over Wacquant's radicalization of his theory. His student is not simply studying a culture, but moving into it. He is shifting from participant objectification to objectified participation. And as we have already seen, Bourdieu would worry that such a shift risks damaging the scientific objectivity of Wacquant's sociological, academic *habitus*. But at the same time, the shift opens up great possibilities for the production of a particular type of bodily wisdom and its relation to academic study of that wisdom.

Through his scientific *habitus*, Bourdieu intellectually reconstructs the objective conditions of the subjective experience that he lacks. Wacquant, however, finds himself gripped by and able to deploy the tools associated with both the scientific *habitus* and the *habitus* of membership in the group he studies. Thus his reconstruction of the objective conditions happens at the social, bodily, and not purely intellectual, cognitive level. Of course, Bourdieu describes the objective conditions not only because he lacked access to that subjective experience, but also so that he could guard against the potential solipsism and lack of objective accountability associated with purely subjective knowledge. By inculcating himself with the *habitus* of study, and doing so with reflexive intentionality,

[126] Ibid, pg. 4, note 3. Text is copied from his fieldnotes.

Wacquant attempts to overcome both problems. And the theologian who performs similar reflexive intentionality with her own ecclesial *habitus* embodies the same risks and the same potential.

The pleasures and pains of bodily practice, friendship and group membership all converge in Wacquant's study at the site of his body. By making his own body into an object of study ("*habitus* as topic"), Wacquant is also able to deploy it for analysis in the broader fields of gym and ghetto ("*habitus* as tool"). Cultured as an improvisationally competent agent within those fields, he gains bodily, social access to them, thus giving him bodily, epistemological access also. As they become his world, he knows how to be in them instinctually. Yet, at the same time, his reflection on the processes by which he is made pugilist shapes him with a reflexivity that provides some form of objective distance for a view of himself as an object of study.

This view is not perfect, as critics have observed. For example, as expert in urban sociologies Richard Lloyd argues, Wacquant tends to over-identify with his "buddies" in the gym in ways that lead him to eclipse his forms of racial privilege and other forms of symbolic, cultural and economic capital. Not only must this privilege have had some impact on Wacquant's ability to even fully become "one of the boys," these unobserved limitations further create "distortions" on Wacquant's larger view of his field, argues Lloyd.[127] Traces of disruption to his pugilistic regime and gym relationships caused by either Wacquant's study, or his elite class status, are therefore rarely observable.

Indeed, it is his tendency to over-identify as "one of the boys" that sometimes eclipses the way his loose, performative integration of academic and pugilistic *habitus* is

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[127] Richard Lloyd, "Sentimental Education," in *Contemporary Sociology*, Vol. 37, No. 6 (Nov., 2008), 538-541.

actually making his project possible. Wacquant is never so unconvincing to this reader, at least, as when he seems to overstate the ways he is accepted and feels accepted at the gym, or when he seems to over-state the battle he experiences between his pugilistic and academic selves. He describes his deep membership as creating tension in his self-perception, leading him to describe a further desire to leave the academy for a career in boxing. At the same time, while boxing reveals the carnal gaps in his academic pleasure, it is also true that his analytical enjoyment of the boxing is produced not only by submission to the pugilistic regime, but also by the intellectual pleasures of observing and charting the process of that submission. The complexity of his theoretical positions, paired with the exuberance of his prose, even when that prose is excerpted from fieldnotes written in the midst of his pugilistic training, make it difficult to imagine Wacquant ever wholly thinking of academia as mere "*tutti frutti*…totally devoid of meaning and downright depressing."

At times it seems Wacquant is so eager to convince the reader of his belonging, that he avoids telling the ways in which he experiences real exclusion from and within his field of study. Taking these problems as a warning, then, I endeavor throughout my descriptions of my own *habitus* of pursuing wisdom to describe my insider and my outsider status, both the ways I feel a part of our group, and the ways in which I experience distance from it. Moreover, I recognize, at the same time that, like Waquant, there will be aspects of my performative practice that will remain obscure and unavailable to me.

The pleasures of embodied belonging are complex in Wacquant's text, as they are shaped in multiple loose performative integrations of his competing and cohering

pugilistic and scientific *habitus*. The more these *habitus* integrate, the more Wacquant describes himself as compelled to choose between them, but the more the reader realizes the necessity of each in co-operation for Wacquant's pleasure – and, indeed, project – to continue. Both are necessary for constituting his self-implicating method.

The theologian committed to both church and academy knows this series of experiences well. I too have a pleasurable, bodily understanding of the practices of my church in a way that makes me desire a deeper and deeper sense of belonging with them. Even when I disagree with the things we do, I have an instinctual sense of why we do them and I remain a member of the community that does them. Even with some of the moments of alienation I experience, as mentioned above, I am usually fumbling my way toward knowing instinctually how to function, fit and respond to what happens around FBC, even when that response might cause me pain. And so, like Wacquant, I experience myself as a member of my community of study, while others also recognize me as such.

In a similarly complicated and even fraught way to what is revealed in Wacquant's text, even when it is read against his insistence of his own belonging, my relationship to my study cannot be summarized primarily with me as "the sociologist" studying "them" because I am both an insider and outsider in and to our community. In some ways we are a community of friends together, within which I have particular integrated, often times confusing, ministerial and research roles as well. But then in other ways, that particular integrated, often time confusing, ministerial and research role keeps me from becoming fully friends with most of the class members.[128] I have an experience

[128] Some exceptions: My deep friendships with Miriam, Gary and Elaine were cultivated before I started teaching these classes. Indeed, when asked why they took the classes, their answers would often entail some version of, "because you are my friend." Far from

of being an insider, while my outsider experience is defined not only by my ethnographic identity, but also my ministerial identity. Both insider and outsider status converge in complex ways, requiring discernment in each situation for how to perform a loose integration of my various roles. As we will see over the next two chapters, in the pursuit of wisdom, these performances are marked by as much failure than they are by success.

Furthermore, like Wacquant, this duality creates a tension in my sense of belonging between my church and academic vocations, and I nevertheless endeavor to perform both in some sort of loose integration.[129] Hybrid-vocations are difficult to negotiate, perhaps even more so when they already overlap and compete as they do for the academic theologian committed also to church life. Therefore, the complex hybridity of Wacquant's position as fully pugilist and fully sociologist, even as aspects of each require constant sacrifice for performative relation to the other, offers insight into how both the ecclesial and the academic practices of theologians can contribute together to the formation of an ethnographic theological practice.

For example, my academic commitments, in terms of pedagogy as well as research, shaped my desire to teach theology classes as the chief component of my theological ethnographic research; put simply, as an academic, teaching is what I do. At the same time, I drew materials for both courses directly from my comprehensive exam

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simplifying them, however, these dynamics further complicate our balance of friend/teacher/minister/etc. roles. The type of ministerial authority I experienced in my conversation with Maureen, for example, would be experienced differently – or even, not at all – with these friends.

[129] While it is the relationship between my everyday and academic theological identities as a teacher that matters primarily here, it should also be noted that I experience these tensions in a personal way as well. For example, I have loving commitments to people whose particular beliefs in the exclusivity of Christ, the role of women in the church, family and culture, the rapture and the end-times, and the status of LGBTQ persons differ drastically from mine, and have social ramifications that I find deeply upsetting.

reading lists for my doctoral work. The particular figures I used were drawn from my historical exams, while the doctrines I taught combined into two courses the three doctrinal loci I studied for my systematic theology exams. At the same time, teaching such topics in the ecclesial, rather than academic, environment revealed the "carnal gaps" in my academic knowledge; it is not that ecclesial teaching is so much more radically embodied than academic teaching, but rather that the personal, concrete specific dimensions of texts that I have primarily read and reread through academic eyes became more evident in this ecclesial milieu.[130]

My particular areas of academic interest therefore shaped the make-up of the ecclesial classes. Modes of theological discourse that have been formed into my theological identity through training in academic institutions thus made their way directly into a particular ecclesial environment in a much more direct way than they do in Tanner or Fulkerson's models, for example. Indeed, by following Wacquant's self-implicating ethnographic methods, I carried my distinctly academic formation and its related modes of theological discourse into the ecclesial environment in my bones, much as Peter, Ann, Joan and Harlan suggested academic theologians should.

At the same time, we will see in the fifth chapter that despite this pleasure, I also found it difficult to teach texts in these ways. I lost a sense of their systematic coherence, which led me to worry that I was undermining appropriate interpretations of them – perhaps, a distinctly academic concern. Like Wacquant, the deeper integration of these

[130] My treatment of texts in this way resonates with Wendy Farley's description of non-academic ways of relating to texts. See Wendy Farley, *The Wounding and Healing of Desire: Weaving Heaven and Earth* (Louisville: WJKP, 2005), ix-xiii.

roles and *habitus* thus also created greater tension between them, even as that tension could hold or give way in moments to numerous experiences of pleasure.

Physical vs. Bodily Practices

One key difference between Wacquant's "sociology from the body"[131] and my theology from the body must be addressed before I move on to how the structure of his text guides the structure of my own method. Wacquant's pugilistic practices are much more dramatically embodied – or, rather, dramatically physical – than the typical Christian social practices with which I am comparing them. The pugilistic *habitus* thus displays a much more overt and visible type of practical, bodily wisdom. That being said, it remains the case that any and all practices constitute embodied, practical wisdom in the agents who perform them. While Christian social practices might not be as physical as boxing, my leadership of our small, monthly, early morning Lord's Supper service, for example, is shaped by and shapes the way I experience other social practices in and beyond church. Let me explain.

Standing at the front of the room, holding in my hands the warm bread that Tyler has baked, I break and serve it to the line of people walking down the aisle toward me. With each piece I tear off, my body remembers occupying a similar position in the chapel where I led worship at Divinity School. The memory is not so much consciously articulated as emotively felt. If my fingers rip a piece that feels too large or small, an old friend from that community flashes through my imagination. He used to take large

[131] "Sociology *from* the body" is contrasted with "sociologies *of* the body" in Wacquant, *Body and Soul*, vii, to demonstrate how the ethnographer's body, itself, can be 'made' into a field of knowledge.

chunks from the loaf, describing them as a recognition of grace's immensity, and I feel that graced warmth I used to feel for him each time he did so. I smile. Feeling my love for my friend, the memory stays only as long as a spark, igniting the desire in me to connect with each person in this line now as friend too.

As an instinctive consequence, I feel myself leaning my torso closer now toward each approaching person. Still, I start holding the bread closer to my own body as I lean, so that they too must enter deeper into our shared space. No one rejects this invitation. They lean in with me. And as the line moves quickly, I try to speak the names of those who come forward: "Christ's body, broken for you, Elaine; Christ's body, broken for you, Gene…" When I miss recalling quickly enough a name I know I know, I feel the guilt of failure, and I am surprised by how many names I do not know in this small community. I remind myself to learn the names of regulars but then promptly forget to do so. I will feel this guilt again in next month's service.

One man gently closes his hand over mine as he takes the bread from my fingers. The warmth in his smile disrupts my sense that I am ministering to others with a second of feeling that someone is ministering to me. The tenderness of his touch comes as a gift of affirmation, not unwanted contact or a thieving from my role. After the fact, I recall a time long before I came to FBC when the bread was yanked from my hand by a man seeking to usurp my ministerial presence simply because I am a woman. The difference between these touches gives me pleasure. I am here now, with acceptance, not there, without it. And as I look down the line of approach, I feel some resonance of the similar vision of a line of people waiting to lay hands on me for ordination a year or so prior. My

worship leading body, as an eating, praying, loving, touching body has its cultivated ecclesial instincts just as Wacquant's boxing body has its cultivated pugilistic instincts.

More significant for the present project: when it comes to the class, I have a bodily knowledge for teaching in this particular community. As I have already mentioned, one evening when I forget to ask someone to pray at the opening of one class, I feel in my gut that something is off kilter. Another time, my Baptist preacher hands know that striking the table, like pounding a pulpit, will emphasize my point. These hands recognize instinctively not only when to strike the table, but also when I have done it wrongly. Temperature fluctuations in the classroom, paired with the heat that rises from energetic teaching, register in my flesh. Sweat breaks through the surface of my skin under my arms and above my lip. On one occasion, I have not adequately prepared for such heat, and I feel discomfort as I inadvertently flash a strip of skin while removing my sweater so as not to overheat. I look around for my water bottle.

While teaching, I often instinctively and unconsciously scan the room to track eye movements, people checking their watches, shifting in their seats, or thumbing through their Bibles distractedly in ways that communicate boredom, frustration, confusion and shyness. Some intuition usually kicks in during these moments so I can shift us to a new topic, clarify a controversial point or an unclear one, or invite a quiet person into discussion. In most cases, I do not need to think consciously through the steps that must be taken to do this. If this intuitive response fails, I feel that failure acutely as I struggle to get us back on track. Now my unconscious checking of the bodies in the space becomes more conscious. My slip-ups make me work harder.

Because my worship-leading, teaching body has ministerial and pedagogical instincts just as Wacquant's boxing body has pugilistic, his method opens up possibilities for how to use my academic skills not only to study my own ecclesial *habitus* as a topic, as we did in the previous chapter, but also to deploy its integration with my academic *habitus* as a tool as I endeavor to do ethnographic theology from my body.

The Problems and Possibilities of *Habitus* as Tool[132]

Each of the three sections in *Body and Soul* relates to a different moment in the *habitus'* definition – its construction, its dispositions, and its competent performance – which gives us three particular angles on the field of study. While my ethnographic theology relates most significantly with this final section – competent performance – understanding the former two is nevertheless significant for undergirding the performance I have here been calling, a loose integration of competing and cohering *habitus* and roles. In this section, I therefore compare and contrast my own particular subject position within my community of study with each of these three modes of reporting in order to demarcate the boundaries and contours of the studies offered in the next two chapters.

I have already outlined above how Wacquant describes his initial inculcation with a pugilistic *habitus* through both physical and relational modes of bodily practice. These are the detailed narratives of learning how to land punches, or being gifted with a ring moniker. Of course, whereas Wacquant was able to chart the progress of his pugilistic

[132] The notion of *habitus* deployed as both a topic and a tool is developed in Loïc Wacquant, "Habitus as topic and tool: reflections on becoming a prizefighter" in *Ethnographies Revisited: constructing theory in the field*, ed. Antony J. Puddephatt, William Shaffir and Steven W. Kleinknecht (New York: Routledge, 2009), 137-151.

habitus from his first punch, the genesis of my participation in Christian social practices preceded the moment when I decided to study them academically. Even so, Wacquant's initial reflections on the *construction* of his pugilistic *habitus* thus continually remind me to re-imagine the conditions by which particular practices come to feel like second nature to me within church life. This helps me avoid the solipsism mentioned above, as it opens the possibility for me to tell my own stories by producing linguistic, reflexive renderings of what my body already knows implicitly about my field of study.

This mode of describing *habitus* construction can, however, also be used to understand the *habitus* I am here interpreting as a pursuit of wisdom. The next two chapters offer descriptions of how the conversations engaged by our classes contributed to our *habitus* of pursuing wisdom. At the same time, I endeavor to ground my own *habitus* of pursuing wisdom in a reflexive interpretation of the pleasures and pains experienced both in my own ordination service, and in the ways I read academic texts. As my ecclesial and academic roles seek performative moments of loose integration through both narratives, the stories reveal the process by which the particular *habitus* of study, that of pursuing wisdom, is one I hope is being also inculcated in me. Like Wacquant, I am therefore held responsible to the objective structures of my subjectivity, unable to fly off into my own imaginative fancy.

Given that I am unable to chart my entry into the process by which involvement in Christian social practices developed my forms of practical wisdom, the second section of Wacquant's text – the one that outlines his inculcated dispositions – is particularly helpful for my method here. My own ecclesial role equips me with a wealth of already instilled embodied knowledge into which I must learn to tap. This embodied knowledge

comes in various forms; it is ever in a state of being developed, but as I experience some of it as malformation, I am also in a state of unlearning aspects of it too. This development and unlearning all contributes to the dispositions of the various *habitus* associated with my ecclesial role.

In the second section of his book, "Fight Night at Studio 104," Wacquant describes in great detail all the events of a single day; a day on which his co-pugilist and friend, Curtis, fought a title match. In this section, Wacquant's boxing-related dispositions become an interpretive lens for how Curtis might be feeling. Wacquant articulates questions based on his own experience to ask Curtis and the others. In this way, his inquiries are more directed; they grow out of the fighters' shared experience, enabling the honing of insight into how each one encounters the shared experience in their own particularity. On the one hand, I too am able to draw on my embodied wisdom in order to formulate more directed questions that forge deeper understanding of the embodied wisdom of others in the FBC community. More so, my dispositions for life together at FBC – as well as my academic dispositions – enable me to formulate the questions that can guide our classroom discussions. I can anticipate where conversations are going, and how to direct them elsewhere by opening up unexpected avenues of thought.[133] While my academic skills and tools help me chart out theological courses for discussion, my sense for the FBC game gives me embodied understanding of the terrain in which those courses are to be deployed effectively.

[133] Indeed, this point was brought home to me when during the course of my fieldwork, I was invited to teach a two-week long Sunday morning theology class in a local mainline church. This required completely different teaching instincts than my role at FBC and, as I lacked a feel for the classroom game within this community, I found myself consistently surprised by their answers to questions. I needed to think more consciously through how to respond in each case.

In addition to deploying his dispositions as an interpretive lens, in the third section of his text Wacquant deploys his *habitus' improvisational competence* to impact and shape his field of study. Here he rises through the pugilistic ranks to fight a match at the Chicago Golden Gloves, "the most prestigious amateur tournament in the city."[134] In the re-telling, he details interactions with friends, guys from the gym, and his girlfriend, as well as his strict diet, exercise and lifestyle regimes leading up to the fight. Moving beyond descriptions of how his body is trained, and how his trained body gives insight into the trained bodies of others, here he describes his body's maintenance. We see his power to shape the community that shapes him. Furthermore, this shaping is formal as well as relational. By disrupting the structures of their shared boxing field – his rankings effect the rankings of others – he impacts the ways his research partners will experience their own environment even after his absence from it.

Here a particular difference between Wacquant's subject position within his community and my subject position within mine becomes especially clear, however. While deeply involved in his community to the extent that he is able to shape it, Wacquant nevertheless also remains a novice within it. He does not teach other boxers but rather learns from them without intentionally giving any tutelage back. Like Wacquant, I am able to contribute to shaping life at (and even beyond) my field of study, but whereas his submission to his field's regime creates in him a novice identity, my submission to FBC's regime creates in me an identity associated with a greater accrual of power and authority. I explore these questions of submission and authority, and the complex space of their overlap, more fully in the fourth chapter, but for now it is worth

[134] Wacquant, *Body and Soul*, 235.

noting that the power that accrued to me in the classroom afforded me different types of opportunities for shaping communal life than Waquant had at the gym.

Moreover, with this increased power came increased responsibility. Put simply, I am responsible for the spiritual care of others, as we saw in my conversation with Maureen, for example. I experience a sense of responsibility to teach topics that, while stretching our thinking beyond traditional Baptist beliefs, still do not depart too much from them, and which almost always remain anchored in explicitly Christian intellectual traditions. I instigated theological tensions and crises in our classes in an effort to be productive. As we saw with my fears around teaching more advanced theories of gender, race and sexuality, my intentions sought to block the development of tensions and crises whenever I perceived – rightly or wrongly – that they risked becoming destructive.

Even with this difference, however, Wacquant's third mode of storytelling offers an ethnographic precedent for the way that my teaching practices actually affected change within my field of study. Like him, I did not just train my own body in the *habitus* of my field. By the very definition of *habitus*, we both also contributed from our pugilistic and various ecclesial, ministerial *habitus* to our fields' shaping. Given this precedent, I can return to as description of the practice of ethnographic theology in order to finish outlining my method here. In this final section, then, I argue that self-implicating methods like Wacquant's offer a complementary alternative to theological ethnographic methods like Fulkerson's for bringing the gestures toward concretion in Tanner's theological continuum to life.

An Expanded Role for Ethnography in Theological Construction

The structure of my story overlaps Wacquant's. As I have already mentioned, I cannot mark the moment when I began to form my particular subject location – and its concurrent authority and responsibility – within the community I studied. Perhaps it precedes the first time I attended worship at FBC and is located somewhere in the midst of completing my MDiv. Maybe the moment occurred in my ordination service in FBC's sanctuary, or it was the day I converted to Christianity. Perhaps it was my birth? I have no clean moment at which I entered under a trainer's watchful eye to punch and skip my way into a pugilistic *habitus* marked clearly by the bodily hexis of boxing activity. Infinite competing and cohering *habitus*, the fields for each of which I have no clear memory of entering, enable my negotiation between the positions made possible for me in those fields and my own particular ways of taking them up.

The particularity of my subject position within the community in comparison and contrast with Wacquant's within his thus shifts the ways in which I am able to deploy my various *habitus* as loosely integrated, performative tools. I am already situated as something other than a miner or even producer of knowledge. Rather, as I recounted Miriam pointing out at the beginning of the second chapter, my role in our community as both minister and academic theologian means that through my leadership of church practices I have power to guide the process by which we all make (and remake) each other theologians. I not only recreate the conditions by which a *habitus* of pursuing wisdom is constructed, negotiated and renegotiated in our community at an epistemological level. I actually participate in and even explicitly guide its construction – in myself and in others – at the social level. Here the connections to Bourdieu's

epistemological and social access come back into the foreground. Pairing this with Ortner's focus on moments of *habitus* slippage rather than reproduction, we begin to see how even the so-called participant observer might contribute to the self-understanding of those she studies. Disruptions of practice can become as important an analytic tool as perpetuations.

Mary McClintock Fulkerson's ethnographic work reveals this dynamic with brave and honest insight. Describing the tensions she experienced between the racially monolithic *habitus* of her own church life and her academic study of a racially diverse congregation, she confesses that upon entering an initial worship service at Good Samaritan Church, "…I am surprised at my own response to all the dark skin in the room."[135] When she attempts to hide her discomfort, she notes that "the overeager sound of my voice tells me I am probably failing."[136] Likewise, she finds herself unaccustomed to the congregation's diversity in terms of physical and psychological dis/ability. The passage that describes her experience is worth citing in full:

> As I approach the man in the wheelchair, my body feels suddenly awkward and unnatural. When I get in his immediate vicinity, I realize I do not know where to place myself. My height feels excessive and ungainly. I tower over the pale man strapped in the wheelchair. Do I kneel down? Bend down to be face level with him? Speaking to him from above feels patronizing. Or is it the crouching down that would be patronizing? My hand moves to touch his shoulder, as if to communicate, 'I care about you, despite your mildly frightening, contorted body and guttural gurgling sounds.' But I withdraw my hand quickly, wondering if this, too, would be a sign of condescension. What was it like to be unable to command safe space with your presence, to be vulnerable to the groping of other people's hands?[137]

[135] Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 4, 5.
[136] Ibid, 5.
[137] Ibid.

Orienting oneself to a new *habitus*, or even a slightly different type of *habitus*, for the purpose of study is difficult. But Fulkerson is not the only one who experiences her transition.

When Fulkerson's voice squeaks, it is not in response to racial difference; it is in response to actual people racially different from her. And they hear it. When she touches someone uncomfortably, she is not confronting disability; she is touching a present, disabled man. Fulkerson does not enter this space in a neutral way. She enters it with her own struggles and difficulties at blending in. And the people she observes simultaneously observe – and feel – her struggle. As a result, the field of study is changed. Much as she tries to guard against it, Fulkerson's actions shape the responses of those she encounters.

What Fulkerson so insightfully describes is a process experienced by many ethnographers: the process by which what is foreign in their environment of study shocks them until they begin to understand it and manage to incorporate it into their own structures of understanding. This is not a failure in her ethnographic skills, but rather is a revelation of how the beginnings of an ethnographic project feel. And yet what these disruptions show is that even the theological ethnographer who is familiar with church life experiences disorientation and perpetuates disruption. Fulkerson is careful to understand her role in the community – as non-member – and to abide by the practices and ethics associated with that role; indeed, disruptions can be problematic not only from an ethical, but also empirical perspective and she therefore, seeks to limit them.[138] But when, like me, the ethnographer is also a member of the community she studies, these

[138] As noted above, certain feminist and action-research ethnographic methods offer exceptions to this general rule.

moments of tension and disruption can occur in additional and, in some cases, particularly productive ways.

On the one hand, like Fulkerson I experienced jarring moments due to racial difference and dis/ability. For example, I am bi-racial, born of a black mother and a white father, but the members of my classes were all white. Moreover, I am not Southern born, and I have consistently struggled throughout my five years living in the south to gain a bodily understanding of racial codes I find utterly alienating.[139] I thus often found myself viscerally frustrated by what I perceived from some to be dispositions guided by a *habitus* shaped from an unquestioned racial majority perspective. Yet often times, my personal, visceral frustration, paired with my lack of bodily wisdom regarding Southern racial codes, left me unable to open up the discussion on such topics in fruitful ways. In this regard, like Fulkerson, I struggled to open up personal tensions and disruptions caused by racial difference so that they could be pursued in ways that contributed to our ongoing pursuit of wisdom.

Another example: one evening an older man who did not usually attend our class came along with his wife to check things out. Over the course of the night, he interrupted me continually, spoke over top of my words, aggressively pursued points that I had trouble connecting to the larger lesson, and generally acted in what I perceived to be a disruptive way. Initially, I interpreted his behavior as stemming from an inability to respect a young woman as his teacher and I puzzled over it because I almost never, if not

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[139] For more on the complexity of racial identity in ethnographic settings, see Natalie Wigg-Stevenson, "Reconciliatory Hope: The Aesthetics and Ethics of Passing," in the *Postcolonial Body Performance Narratives* series, *Postcolonial Networks*. http://postcolonialnetworks.com/pbpn/reconciliatory-hope-the-aesthetics-and-ethics-of-passing/. Accessed 5/7/11.

never, encounter such an attitude at FBC. That is not to say that I do not encounter sexism; I just do not encounter sexism so overt as these actions appeared to me.

Despite my academic commitments to the insights I have gleaned from theologies of disability – Fulkerson's above insight included – it was not until the end of this man's second time visiting the class that I realized he was experiencing a form of dementia. His interruptions were not connecting to the flow of conversation or my lessons because he was not able to track either. I had not yet come to embody my intellectual studies concerning disability in congregational life as second nature. I thus lacked the instincts of recognition. Like Fulkerson, my *habitus* also needs to catch up sometimes to new experiences. In this case, my realization helped me begin channeling what felt to me to be his random insights into the larger frameworks of our conversations. I worked harder to find and forge connections between his comments and what we were doing in an effort to maintain his inclusion in the conversation. But the struggle of doing so precluded larger efforts toward flourishing in the midst of the difficulty. The extent of my skills with regards to the situation kept me from doing much more than mere maintenance of it.

Even so, the fact that my ecclesial *habitus* is produced within and by the same set of social practices that produces the ecclesial *habitus* of the people in my class (acknowledging that those practices and *habitus* are never embodied in identical ways) entails another set of struggles that are potentially productive, but which also are largely irrelevant to Fulkerson's particular subject position within her field of study. Consider again the experience of tension I felt when interviewing Maureen, while also feeling a need to offer her pastoral care. Just as Maureen's attempts to choose consciously between competing *habitus* with her view of salvation could only offer temporary relief from the

tension, so too would attempting to choose consciously between the two sets of role-related desires I felt in that moment. I was in fact responsible to both of them. As a result, they called for a loose performative integration, not hierarchical ordering; they required my own pursuit of wisdom in the midst of conversation. And so I needed to come up with a line of questioning that both continued the interview and cared for Maureen – which, in a fumbling, marginally successful way, I think I did.

In this way, my research took on the tone of pastoral care and echoed the suggestions by practical theologians like Thomas Frank and Mary Clark Moschella that the ministerial role can become the subject position from which the study of a congregation happens.[140] As Moschella in particular argues, ministers can use ethnography as a practice of care for spiritual transformation.[141] Quite simply, by deeply understanding the theological crises of one's congregants, the minister is able to serve them more effectively. The flip side of this is that by understanding those theological crises more deeply, we also help produce fresh theological insight that can prove to be both helpful and interesting for theologians across the theological continuum.

By teaching historical theological classes in the ecclesial environment, I essentially reframe the way that the theologies created across church, academy and everyday life converse. Following Tanner's suggestion, and like Fulkerson, I do not perform second order reflection on first order events. But at the same time, I do not abstract from the concrete situation in order to construct more general academic

[140] Thomas Edward Frank, *The Soul of the Congregation: An Invitation to Congregational Reflection* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000); Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008).
[141] Moschella, 12.

theological answers to everyday theological questions (indeed, the fact that I am unable to do so is one of the losses of my method in relation to Fulkerson's). The gain for the local church community, however, is that because I am a minister within the community, I am able to guide an ecclesial conversation that incorporates various theologies associated with church, academy and everyday life. In other words, through this loose, performative, self-implicating integration of my ministerial and academic roles, I am able to bring the goods of academic theological institutional formation into the ecclesial realm. I bear it there in my bones. In this way, the theology that rises from distinctly academic institutional practices makes its way to the everyday theological discourses with a local immediacy that is lacking in Fulkerson's model. I am not claiming that this immediacy is better, simply different and that, in its difference, it can function as a complement to Fulkerson's methods.

In addition to shifting the way that this self-implicating theological ethnographic method serves the church, I also shift the nature of the academic theological text produced out of it. Here, as the academic theologian produces resources appropriate to the academic social practices that give rise to her work, especially as she simultaneously desires to perpetuate those practices' continuance, I see a definitive break or jump from the academic end of Tanner's theological spectrum to the position occupied by the academic theologian. Indeed, for the theologian who feels her work should serve the church and the academy, my method frees her to do both, without compromising the academic integrity of the texts she creates. The method serves the church directly; the text is for the academy.

What this means is that the text I produce out of this method is not an academic theological answer to everyday theological crises. It is, rather, a reporting of what the pursuit of wisdom looks like when everyday and academic theologies tackle these crises together. As specialized academic theological discourse, it rises from both the ecclesial conversational practices that bridge the theological continuum *and* the context specific practices of the academy. While these first three chapters have outlined the theory and methods undergirding this process, the final two chapters, which are more theologically constructive, engage what this *habitus* of pursuing wisdom looks like in practice.

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters *will prophesy.*

Joan, First Baptist Church Member
May 3rd, 2009

CHAPTER IV

THEOLOGICAL PRACTICES IN ATYPICAL SPACE

Having demonstrated how a self-implicated form of ethnography guides this dissertation's method, I now need to account for that self-implication. I noted already that unlike Wacquant, I am unable to account for the whole process by which I was made into a member of my field of study, as I was a member before the study began. But in describing here the ritual by which the making of my ministerial authority was officially recognized – my ordination ritual – I begin to outline the contours of how academic theology intervened in this ecclesial environment.[142] And in so doing, I begin to demonstrate both the possibilities and limitations to such a self-implicated method.

As I have already argued, the way academic theology intervened in the ecclesial environment in this dissertation occurred through my attempts to perform loose integrations of my ecclesial and academic roles within the ecclesial community. Thus, my own endeavors to cultivate a *habitus* of pursuing wisdom – in Edward Farley's sense of *theologia*, described in the second chapter – guide the ecclesial conversation practice of pursuing the wisdom embodied in ecclesial, academic and everyday spheres of life. In the

[142] Baptist theologies of ritual practices – ordination, baptism, Lord's Supper, etc. – claim that these rituals effect no necessary change in their participants but, rather, that they acknowledge a change that has already taken place. This is why I describe this ritual as recognizing my making, rather than actually making me into a minister.

second section of this chapter, I unpack my loose, performative integration of the competing and cohering *habitus* that give rise to my theological identity by relaying the bodily dimensions of academic attempts to understand my ecclesial role. In this section, I argue that my particular mode of entry into the ecclesial environment – the very mode that allows me to shape that environment – is also the mode that prevents me from disrupting the wider ecclesial system. The pleasures of belonging that I experience through the process of entering the system are the same pleasures that keep me from undermining that system's power.

By accounting for these processes by which I endeavor to pursue wisdom as a loose integration of my ecclesial and academic roles, I thus seek to objectify myself in order to make the academic theologian one of the characters in the ethnography. In essence, I endeavor to give descriptive, personal, intimate weight to the more abstract notion of academic theology's intervention into the everyday, even as I then abstract from that subject position in order to make its efforts more broadly communicable.

Having accounted for how I bear academic theology into Christian social practices as I am shaped not only by those Christian practices, but also by my academic ones – that is, having accounted for my revised version of Tanner's model for relating everyday and academic theology – I move on to question the possibilities and limitations of what academic theologians can accomplish within Christian social practices. And I do so through a particular narrative of how my mode of intervention created an atypical space that did not disrupt the wider ecclesial system, but rather become integrated into it for the purpose of its flourishing.

A focus on how the equilibrium of the wider ecclesial system is maintained might sound disappointing to any readers whose instincts are to revolutionary impulses. Indeed, since most of the time the various *habitus* associated with my academic role greet any aspect of a status quo with a hermeneutic of suspicion, these are impulses I share. In general, I agree with Tanner's assessment that specialized, academic theological discourse does not preserve or even simply build upon what came before, but rather, that it seeks to take apart the theologies that came before and reconfigure them in new ways.[143] This is precisely the activity I have attempted to perform through the ecclesial practice that I guided. Nevertheless, in the conversation practice I did pursue and, perhaps, by nature of that particular practice, Tanner's hope that a theological creativity "expressed through the modification and extension of material already on the ground" does not necessarily entail a "plodding reformism" was difficult to substantiate.[144]

Tanners argues that "small changes" can "have a major effect," and that small tinkers to an ecclesial system, really can "make the whole construction wobble and threaten it with collapse," at least in terms of the unjust marks of that construction.[145] But in seeking to bring her model to life, I learned that the very fact that small changes can threaten a whole system with collapse is precisely what makes them so difficult to effect. It is a rare tool that wields the precision to remove the unjust marks from a system without irreparably wounding it.

Tanner is certainly right to say that the "established meanings and rules" that govern a system "have no power of themselves to resist alteration," but rather, that they

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[143] See Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 83.
[144] Ibid, 166.
[145] Ibid.

are “held in place through the exercise of human power – by the will of the participants…”[146] But as we see in my objectified account of my own theological identity, this is only part of the story. In addition, we find that the pleasures of belonging can easily make one into a participant willing to deploy one’s power in ways that inevitably, even against one’s will, perpetuate these rules, strategies and tactics.

As much as anything else, this desire I experienced might primarily reveal my own struggles.[147] Nevertheless these struggles might reveal a problem in Tanner’s model. Theological reflection in her mode necessitates some sort of implication of the academic theologian in the everyday Christian practices she wants to impact. But to be an insider can entail a sense of group membership that at least complicates, if not diminishes, any desire to overthrow the whole system. Even the insider who is also outsider, like myself, as we saw in the last chapter, and will see here, might feel the pull between ambivalence with the system, and a simultaneous desire to invest more deeply in it. Performing a loose integration of the competing and cohering *habitus* and roles with regards to this ambivalence and desire might, at some point, entail moves toward revolution. But for the most part, it seems this is not how everyday life together works.

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[146] Ibid, 167.

[147] Therein lies the limitations of my particular method: it requires other academic theologians to corroborate my findings. It might also reveal the limitations to performing this model in a conservative congregation. Although, here Mary McClintock Fulkerson’s findings that a more progressive community struggled to sustain social change, particularly with regards to racial reconciliation, point to the possibility that I might be tapping into a larger ecclesial trend that transcends the differences between conservative and progressive congregations. See Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, particularly chapter 7. See also Dawne Moon, *God, Sex, & Politics: Homosexuality and Everyday Theologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) for a descriptive analysis on how debates around sexuality and politics share themes across a conservative and a progressive congregation (see especially Pp. 229ff).

Perhaps my experience is unique, but as we see in this chapter, the prevalence of theoretical structures that can help explain it, plus the tendency of atypical spaces – even those created by people who interpret themselves as "insurgents" – to enable the wider ecclesial system's flourishing, suggests it might not be. At the very least, this chapter functions as a minority report that complicates Tanner's more idealized claims for the possibilities of revolutionary social change. Working with everyday theologies does not by necessity entail "plodding reformism," but the possibility of revolution is much more difficult to attain – and even desire – than she makes it sound as she defends her own use of anthropological theories that have a tendency to be viewed as deterministic. By arguing that the practice of pursuing wisdom cannot necessarily be directly correlated with movements of social reform, then, we must ask what theological goods it does produce? And here is where Tanner's insights into such goods are particularly helpful. Like her, I want to highlight the goods of the process itself – as a process than enables mutual understanding of difference, and which deepens participants' shared commitments to the materials over which they are debating, thereby deepening their commitments to each other.[148]

As I endeavor to show in this chapter, in agreement with Tanner's claims to the same, when academic theology enters the everyday environment, it can only be heard if it works with that context's particular ways of being together. As a result, such academic theological interventions into the ecclesial sphere do not necessarily manage to create pockets of atypical space that can overthrow unjust systems, precisely because those unjust systems have also participated in creating those same pockets of atypical space.

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[148] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 175.

Change in Tanner's model, when it is performed in concrete practice, is therefore more chastened. It happens first as agents experience tension with the wider ecclesial system, second, as they more consciously affirm their integration with it, and third, as their more conscious affirmation of their integration creates small ripples of effect that might nevertheless enable the wider system to flourish. Each of these three modes of chastened change occurred in the course of my study, and I demonstrate them in this chapter.

Parasitic on the processes by which structures are made and remade, change is evident in their moments of slippage, even when that slippage is re-integrated into the structures. Change might, therefore, be most evident on the backs of those who rebuild the structure. As we saw from the combination of Ortner's and Swidler's revisions to Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* in the second chapter, for transformation to occur, the social structures need to be reproduced, if in a slightly different way, while in those reproductions, agents become able to draw on new tools for living life in new ways. In this way, the pursuit of wisdom is revealed to be a good in itself for those who participate in it. The small tinkers that "have a major effect" are few and far between in the mostly "plodding reformism" that makes up ecclesial life. But that plodding reformism is, itself, part of the life of faith.

The final narrative of this chapter endeavors to reveal just this: that while wisdom's pursuit is not always producing social change, it is nevertheless working on something more subtle: small changes in the agents that make up the society. Moreover, in that subtlety, it is difficult to see the effects of the process anywhere but the minute details of a body's shifting posture: it is, as we will see, audible in a voice tone's

elevation, visible in a torso slumped in a chair, perceivable in an emotive response to facing evil.

Self-Implicating Ethnographic Method and My Ecclesial Role

The epigraph at the head of this chapter is probably best recognized as the prophet Joel's words, but for me they are Joan's. They became hers when she laid her hands on me and whispered them into my ear during my ordination service. Her whisper emphasized the word daughters over sons, inaugurating me into a line of women seeking to live into that eschatological promise. Tracing the whole process by which my body became minister is beyond the scope of this discussion. Still, this ordination service marks the ritual action by which that identity was formally recognized and bestowed. In this section, I therefore focus attention on this ritual of ordination in order to begin to unpack the ecclesial trajectory that contributes to my endeavors to perform loose integrations of my competing and cohering *habitus* and roles within the field of my study.

My body is in submission, on a prayer kneeler at the front of the sanctuary, waiting for the hands to come. At FBC, like some other Baptist churches, we lay on hands for clergy ordination, and we don't lay them on all at once. And so a line of ordained clergy (of all denominations) and deacons begins to form stretching long down the center aisle.

This aisle is the same one opened at the end of every Sunday service for the altar call. It is the same aisle that I walked first to join the church and then a year and a half later, to declare to our whole community my calling to Gospel Ministry. I have watched bridal processions walk this aisle, as well as processions of families bidding farewell to a

loved one now deceased. Indeed, I too have walked it to bid farewell in this way. We walk this aisle during business meetings to argue a point or raise a motion for vote from the microphone. It is the aisle down which the pastor carries babies to be dedicated so that we can all see the cuteness. Many of us walk down simply to get to our seats for Sunday services.

All the feet that have trod this aisle, carrying whispers or shouts or declarations of dedication, mourning and hope, have made this aisle sacred. It throbs with memories – not one single memory-conglomerate to which the building bears witness, but rather constellations of particular memories upon, through and around which an infinity of shared gazes flow. The aisle marks the liminal space of becoming in our sanctuary: becoming saved, baptized, becoming dedicated, church member, or clergy. It marks the space of intention, of declaration that we are starting something new, even if that something new is so simple as attending a regular service.

At my ordination, this aisle filled with feet treading up hands to lay on me. First came the hands of clergy, then deacons, the members of my ordination committee, and finally the hands of Pastor Frank. Each hand grasped me differently – holding my head, my shoulders, guiding arms to wrap fully around me – and then bending lips to my ear to whisper. Some whispered a prayer, some a charge. Others declared a gift they wanted to see me bring to my ministry. Some simply thanked me that they could participate in this day. Some prayed that justice would flow from my ministry, others prayed for a flowing of knowledge, of wisdom. One woman from my doctoral program, a Methodist minister, prayed in the power of the Spirit, unleashing energy from her body into mine that I found disarming, yet enlivening. One man’s lips accidentally brushed my cheek and ear in a

way that would lead a friend to comment later with awe on the shocking intimacy of bodies in space together. Indeed, even without lips and ears and the moisture of breath, all this touch relied on a suspension of the norms for bodily interaction that is rare in any form of ecclesial or everyday life.

The whole experience was overwhelming, and yet I tried to hold myself together. The service included my presentation to the community, a clergy covenant to which I proclaimed, “I do” and “I will,” and ministerial charges offered by representatives from various arenas of my life: my academic advisor, my spouse (who is also an ordained Baptist minister), a friend and colleague, a member of my ordination committee and Pastor Frank. I had been surrounded by and caught up in words, gestures and touches that delighted, challenged, and called me into my new identity. Representatives from both church and academy were involved, highlighting the significance of my hybrid vocation, along with representatives from my family, highlighting that the simple dualism of hybridity can never quite capture all it is to which we might be vocationally called. And yet still I held it all together. Not yet broken, I felt wholly bolstered by the gathered.

Words and songs and kneeling and hands – I felt able to hold myself together. And then came Joan. She is in her seventies, and yet she moves around the church building with a force unparalleled in many of our youth. She is serious about women in ministry. Faith for her is inseparable from justice. Talking about the Transfiguration with me one time, she laughed as she noted that the disciples wanted to stay on that mountain, make themselves “an ol’ boy’s club.” But Jesus said no. Those boys have got to get back down the mountain and get to the business of helping the people. Friends asked me afterwards who the lady was who made me cry. “She visibly broke you,” one

commented. “It was like your body crumbled for a moment,” said another. “There was no coming back.”

Joan leans in to me, at her full height not standing that much taller than me kneeling. She rests one arm on my shoulder and brings her forehead to meet mine. I can see a small note pressed into her palm, which, unlike mine, is not shaking. A member of the deacon board, she knows the ritual format and she has prepared in advance. She knows what she wants to say and she knows how she wants to say it. “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons…*and your daughters*…will prophesy.” Her pauses and inflection let me know she is inserting me into this narrative, inscribing this Scripture into my body. Right here. Right now. And then as fast as she arrived, she is gone, and the next hands are on me.

Before the service, Pastor Frank had warned me not to stand too quickly at the end of this onslaught of hands. I would be emotionally exhausted and a little dizzy, he warned, from being on my knees for so long. As Joan moves away, I realize how right he had been. The aisle is still full and I wonder if I will make it. Now people start sneaking tissues up in their hands to give to me to help me through the weepy, snotty mess my body tends to make in response to the Spirit’s influx. And at some point I become aware that everyone who has laid hands on me has been slowly gathering behind me. Tyler, the first whisperer, my husband, still has his hand on me, now on the space between my shoulder blades, and everyone is connecting to him. The brokenness I experience with each whisper transports the whisperer to this growing shape unfolding from my back. Some fragmented set of imagistic words that draws me to the prophet Isaiah – “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they

will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Isaiah 40:31) – flashes through my imagination. And I feel the bodies fanning from my back, stretching out across the sanctuary, as this promise of wings that will bear me up into ministry.

And the promise is kept. I waver, but do not fall, as I sense these wings making me light, bearing me up the steps to the communion table to break bread and pour out juice. I step behind the table, place my hands on it and feel a jolt of gleeful surprise at the transformation's effect. My hands feel different. They feel full of power – full of the power infused into them by the trail of hands that had blessed them to this table. I have been broken, cracked open, to make room for their power to reside in my hands. And now that power is pulsing with the desire to leap like sparks of electricity back and forth between the bread and cup, me, and those who have given it me – back to those who were, as one of my friends put it, loaning it to me for this occasion. By submitting to the authority of their hands to ordain me, I was gifted with the authority to bless them in return, by presiding but also by serving. Their authority has made me into something new: a person whose preaching and teaching now has an authority for them.

Joan's hands participated in ordaining me, but she also subsequently took my classes, "Jesus Christ and Salvation" and "God as Trinity." Indeed, this service was also filled with others introduced in prior chapters – Miriam and Gary had speaking roles, Richard and Gene laid on hands – as well as class participants whom I will describe later: the woman who offered the charge from the church, the man whose lips brushed my cheek, the man who led me in my covenant with the church, and numerous others who joined the aisle to touch me into my new identity, to whisper me into ministry. These sparks of power, at that moment residing in my hands, did not flow one way. They were

passed back and forth between us, gathering energy, coming to life, functioning differently around our different subject positions and the ways we take them up. Power, indeed, I realized as my hands touched the table, is difficult to pin down.

Being so firmly entrenched in this community is what gives me the power to shape its life. It is what enables me to speak to them using the skills, instincts and dispositions inculcated in me by the various *habitus* associated with my academic role in addition to my ministerial one. My implication in the community is what allows me to interject the wisdom of academic theology into its practices. But inasmuch as I can bring academic theology into this environment, this environment insists on its own ability to claim me and, in that, to shape also my academic theology. The two roles can be difficult to integrate, even loosely.

Self-Implicating Method and My Academic Role

The day after my ordination, a feminist theologian friend who had helped me discern my call is eager to hear how things had gone. Still feeling emotionally spent, I sit in my favorite chair in my living room and dial her number. We both self-identify as former Evangelicals, and we enjoy talking about the traces of that tradition that remain in us – both for ill and for good. I begin to try to explain to her this experience of “brokenness,” language common to both of our former faith lives. I am fully aware, I tell her, of the feminist implications of “brokenness” imagery, especially when it is experienced in such a bodily manner, and especially when it is inflicted on me by a

barrage of people who, despite the presence of Joan and a few other women, are mostly a band of white men with churchy authority.[149]

Pacing the living room now, I feel my energy return. "And yet," I continue, "it was beautiful." As feminists, we value empowerment, emancipation, and wholeness. And despite the myriad anxieties and ambivalences I feel around my role as a Southern Baptist minister, I would be hard pressed to recall a time in life when I felt stronger, more free and more full than I did in these moments that I struggle now to describe without using some sort of violent metaphor. It was, for me, a shocking moment of being "bolstered by brokenness."

We toss this image – "bolstered by brokenness" – around for a few minutes, wondering how as academic feminist theologians we might make sense of these experiences of power in submission that we know with such bodily intimacy.[150] The very set of *habitus* associated with my academic role that are making me question my religious experience begin to come to my aid. I realize that the same social theorists I was reading while discerning the call to ordination – theorists who outline the complex nature of power's play in structural and social relationships – could help us understand how such submission can be empowering.

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[149] The texts my friend and I explicitly referenced in our conversation: Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001) and Serene Jones, *Cartographies of Grace: Feminist Theory and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

[150] The relationship between agency and submission is receiving renewed attention in feminist scholarship. See, for example, Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002) and Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Michel Foucault has shown us the disservice we do our interpretations of sociality when we imagine power to be located solely in a monarchic figure – like a church's pastor – and not to be constellating between and accruing to myriad subject positions and their ways of being taken up within a social system or particular culture.[151] All of a sudden I could see Foucault's constellations mapped over all the bodies in the sanctuary that afternoon, mine included. But still, the *habitus* associated with my academic role nudged me, what was it about that submission that brought me such pleasure? What gave me that jolt of glee?

I turned to my shelves that day, and numerous days following, to search for an answer. My fingers run over books' spines and rest at a particular volume by Michel de Certeau.[152] My hands – the power from the communion table still in them, but perhaps now as a memory's trace – begin leafing through the pages, searching. Certeau, drawing on Foucault and Bourdieu, describes the role of power and submission, as well as desire, in the inscription of *habitus* into a body. We long to be named by particular social systems, he avers, and so we all – pastors and congregants and ordinands alike – submit to these systems, to let them give us our identity.

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[151] See, for example, Foucault's discussion of "Docile Bodies" in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* ed. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 135-169. I am borrowing the language of how a subject position is "taken up" from Pierre Bourdieu's phrase, "prise de position," which generally remains untranslated in his texts. This concept connotes the tension between how certain subject positions are made available to agents by the social systems in which they live, and the particular ways those agents take those positions up themselves. For more on this concept, see Pierre Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed" in *Poetics* 12 (1983), 311-356. This essay is reprinted in Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production,* ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
[152] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

Notes I have scribbled in margins draw my eyes' attention. I reach a section where tentative penciled underlines become punctuated with pen markings. My hands flip slower now, revealing inked words that mark passages I tend to read more often: the script of the system that gives us our identity, Certeau argues, "would have no power if it were not able to support itself on the obscure desire [that one has] to exchange one's flesh for a glorious body, to be written, even if it means dying, and to be transformed into a recognized word."[153] I begin grafting his words on to the words of my ordination covenant, both now digging in to my flesh together.

Certeau's language, like mine, is unavoidably violent. The process of being made legible within the structures and practices of a particular social system requires some form of dying to the possibility – which is actually always a delusional possibility – of self-determination outside of that system. I can never perform my ecclesial role apart from my academic, just as my academic role is always shaped by my ecclesial. Both are reaching toward some sort of loose, tense integration or, at least, co-operation with each other. The tension between them is not dissolving, but igniting, pressing each toward the ongoing search, the pursuit of an object I cannot quite name. I pull Bourdieu off my shelf now, too, and, sitting on my office floor, begin leafing through both texts, comparing underlined passages, finding new ones I had not noticed before, feeling the deep integration of these two writers coming together in my hands.

Bourdieu describes *habitus* as a middle path between the radically free subjectivism of Sartre's Existentialism and the overly deterministic objectivism of Levi-

[153] Ibid, 149. Certeau's insight thus reveals the heart of my nuanced disagreement with Tanner in this chapter. Systems have no power outside of that which agents give them, true. And yet we find ourselves longing to give that power back to these systems in order to also keep it for ourselves.

Strauss' Structuralism.[154] Certeau describes this compromised path as a violent clash, because the *habitus* is written onto, even inscribed into, the flayed flesh of the subject. Freedom is always already shaped by the structures that make us, and remake us. The wisdom of *habitus*, for which we long, extracts a payment of something like a death to self from us when we receive it. We must be continually broken to be made continually new. Certeau's language appears unapologetically theological next to Bourdieu's. Perhaps this is why he draws my desire closer, especially in this moment when the *habitus* associated with my ministerial and academic identities are demanding answers of each other.

Thought in the realm of FBC, Certeau's insight reveals that the ritual of ordination in which we all participated could have no power, no meaning or effect, if we all did not desire to bear its power, meaning and effect in our own bodies. The hands that the ministers and deacons lay on me carry this power because they were instituted by the community to do so. And that power is now transported into my hands, now also instituted to carry it further. Named "Reverend" by the ritual, I continue to bear the ordination power back not only to the people who gave it and on to others, but also back into the institution itself that grants it. This power "is channeled and instrumented," continues Certeau, helping me see that in this situation – in an echo of my friend's idea that it is loaned to me – the way I hold the power of ordination is always turned into something that the broader ecclesial system can use, and then channeled by that system for that use. The institution shapes the power; the institution decides where the power will go. Put simply, and utterly unromantically, the institutional machine (of this

[154] See Bourdieu, *Outline*, 4-5 for his discussion of Levi-Strauss' objectivism and pp. 73-76 for his discussion of Sartre's subjectivism.

particular ecclesial community) empowers me primarily to be a cog that enables its own flourishing. And somehow, in the midst of all the ways my desire is constructed and made to want to resist this system, *I also find myself also wanting to be this cog*.

Still sitting on my office floor, my lower back begins to ache from the hard surface. But I continue to compare texts and marginalia, each of which reveals an outworking spiral of conversation partners: Certeau is not making Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* more deterministic. No, his descriptions outline a fuller sense of subjective agency than Bourdieu's. I lean back on my elbows to relieve the pressure from my back and take it all in. Perched there, I recall Ortner's critique that in Bourdieu's scheme, agents were mostly seen to reproduce the structures that shaped their *habitus* in a largely unconscious way, and I lean forward quickly to pull her down from my shelf too. I am no longer aware of the pain in my back. Indeed, I feel pleasure now at the idea of incorporating Ortner into my process; it does not feel right to let two men alone define the structure of a game inspired by a feminist conversation, no matter how much I love their theories.

Certeau describes the process by which agents experience their reproduction of these structures *and* the way they cause slippage within them, both according to modes of resistance and submission. He writes, "the only force opposing this passion to be a sign," meaning the only force that can disrupt our desires to simply reproduce the power of the institution's meaning in our bodies, "is the cry, a deviation or an ecstasy, a revolt or flight of that which, within the body, escapes the law of the named."[155]

[155] Certeau, *Practices of Everyday Life*, 149.

I stand up and stretch, feeling my left hip crack, then make my way to my desk to grab some paper and a pen. I want to diagram this out by hand before I try to type constructed sentences. I scan Ortner's pages again: she reminds me that there is a relationship between reproduction and transformation that occurs in moments of difference and slippage. I draw the church on my page, and place myself within it. I try to capture an image of the way its structures shape my various *habitus* and the way those *habitus* shape my ecclesial, ministerial role. I draw multiple, densely overlapping, arrows from the church directly into my body, which is represented by a little blob with an "N" in the center. As I attempt to draw my mutual shaping of the church's social structures, I realize only one arrow, maybe two, is plenty for capturing the power of my presence therein. I read Certeau's line again. There is a surplus, a moment of ecstasy, an almost masochistic, involuntary utterance of both protest and pleasure that erupts from the agent's lips as she is wounded by the inscription of *habitus* into her flesh. "Yes," I think, "that's how I felt it." That's the shocking glee of my hands receiving power.

I move to my keyboard and begin to type. Longing, wounding, ecstasy and desire come together as the subject is made and remade for the purpose of the institution's use, but also as she resists – and resistance is always inextricably wrapped up with submission – the institutional grind. It is this inextricable blend of submission and resistance, as well as the spontaneous cry that erupts from somewhere between the two, that characterizes agency for Certeau and, now, in some way, for me. I am a female, bi-racial Southern Baptist minister: a rare commodity that many of the agents who hold together the power of the broader institution might not actually want to re-integrate. The tension between the markings of my gender and religious identity position me as something atypical, an

anomaly within a system I have been constituted to serve. I am an exception helping to prove the rule, and my presence is only possible because others with power within the system let it be. Indeed, by ordaining me, FBC too performs its own atypical act, an exception within the very rule that upholds the Baptist tension between church autonomy and denominational association.

This type of bodily performance, by which ecclesial and academic roles become integrated within the same person, luring each toward a deeper understanding of the other, reveals the process by which my own *habitus* of pursuing wisdom is continually constituted. In charting some of this loose performative integration of roles, I have also demonstrated that my particular mode of bringing academic theology into the ecclesial environment is the same mode that prevents me from disrupting the wider ecclesial system. The pleasure I experience from belonging to this system, being named by it, also keeps me from wanting to undermine it; undermining the system, I realize, is more likely to result in my removal from it than it is to result in any long-standing social change. And I find that despite my leanings toward radical, intellectual pursuits, in the end becoming a cog, an utterly non-radical act, is about as radical as I am able to be.

My experience is not normative for other academic theologians, and certainly not prescriptive. By accounting for the processes by which my own ecclesial and academic roles were loosely integrated, I hope that others might find a way to do it better. At the same time, accounting for this process has objectified a particular academic theologian as a character in this ethnographic theology. And in so doing, it reveals the possibilities and limitations of one method for how academic theology might intervene in the ecclesial environment.

Cogs in the Machine

Feeling this loose performative integration between my academic and ecclesial roles, I begin to think about the people who take the classes I teach. I see Peter and Gloria, who describe themselves as "sneaky liberals" and "insurgents." I see Joan and Harlan, and I recall Joan's side comment to me one evening that the two of them are "that D-word we don't say around here," indicating that they, in contrast to their perception of the rest of the congregation, are not Republicans. I recall a moment in class when someone mentioned "The Conservative Takeover" in the SBC – complete with the tone and eyerolls that my capitalization of each word suggests – prompting various members of the group to offer knowing glances at each other.

In this section, I engage some of FBC's primary identity markers, particularly its denominational affiliation and, more fully, the relationship between its racial homogeneity and its understanding of mission. And I demonstrate how each contains a minority report, a trajectory of belief and practice that functions atypically in relation to the whole. The liberals have their "Democrat enclaves," as Gloria puts it, for example. Those who are angry with the SBC join the Sunday school classes that tend not to use SBC curricula. The classes I taught, in fact, create a space in which both of these concerns find voice. Still, by having their own spaces within the larger whole, alternative viewpoints are kept from creating conflict, precisely because their own ways of directing their "moral energies" are not quashed.[156] They are kept in line, their flourishing in fact

[156] As Nancy Tatom Ammerman argues, people tend to join congregations that offer them a way to put their "moral energies" to work. See *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 268.

enabling the flourishing of the wider ecclesial system. There is no revolution at FBC, only the daily, indeed, pleasurable, grind of trying to make and remake church together.

Take, for example, one of the examples above: modes of relating to the SBC. It is not the case that members of the broader ecclesial system at FBC exhibit a particular conscious pride at denominational affiliation.[157] Reflecting broader American trends of what Warner calls, "de facto Congregationalism," in my experience, most members seem to have neither strongly positive nor strongly negative feelings about the SBC, but rather are mostly disengaged from the larger denominational body.[158] Indeed, most FBC members of my acquaintance do not refer to the "conservative ascendance," or "conservative resurgence," to use more neutral language, at all. And if they were not in some way personally involved with it, they tend to know little about it. The wider ecclesial norm at FBC is to go with the flow of being an SBC church, with little conscious acknowledgment of that fact.

Alternatively, by referring to this shift in denominational leadership as the "Conservative Takeover," members of the classes I taught hold their primary congregational affiliation in a more polemical way. They intentionally distance

[157] The rare occasions I have heard some form of explicit "denominational pride" have occurred around budget questions, in which there is an annual push by a small but outspoken group to increase FBC's giving to the denominational missions fund. Of course, denominational pride is expressed more unconsciously in the ways that church members emphasize their congregational belonging, a distinctly Baptist kind of pride in itself.
[158] R. Stephen Warner, "The Place of the Congregation in the Contemporary American Religious Configuration," in vol. 2 of *American Congregations: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations*, ed. James P. Wind & James W. Lewis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 73. As Ammerman's research also shows, at least half of Southern Baptists sense that the national body of the SBC has little to no effect on their local church practices. Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 258-271.

themselves from the convention, marking FBC as a faithful outpost for the "way things were before things went bad," as they often describe the power shift. Continuing to go with the flow of being an SBC church, at the same time this group consciously resists that larger identity. They do not cease to be a part of the community that claims that identity. Nor do they affect any significant social change with regards to the aspects of that identity they dislike. For example, ordaining women is a longstanding FBC practice, begun before the SBC changed its formal policies on female ordination. It is, therefore, a continuation of a practice that has longer historical roots than the denominational practices that would deny it. The somewhat non-efficacious resistance that the group exhibits in fact contributes to FBC's ability to maintain its affiliation with the SBC without repelling new members who might initially be put off by that affiliation from joining. And in this way, pockets of resistance end up contributing to the health of the broader ecclesial system.

A larger identity marker for concern at FBC, in my view, is the homogeneity of the congregation's racial and class make-up and the way that homogeneity relates the church's sense of mission. Once again, as with the "de facto Congregationalism," FBC is not bucking any national trends with this homogeneity. Sunday morning at ten o'clock, or thereabouts, is often named as the "most segregated hour of the week." Michael Emerson in fact describes American congregations as "hyper-segregated," as only 2.5 percent are comprised of a "stable, long-term ethnic mix."[159] Therefore, FBC is not one of the rare

[159] Nancy T. Ammerman, "Congregations: Local, Social, and Religious," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 568. Ammerman is citing Michael O. Emerson and Rodney M. Woo, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

churches that intentionally cultivates a more heterogeneous community out of a commitment, theological or otherwise, to diversity.

Rather, the primary mission focus at FBC is on creating an atmosphere and programs in which "our friends, family and coworkers who do not know Christ," an oft-repeated phrase, will feel comfortable. In other words, the congregation is concerned with witnessing to and drawing people who members already know into the community. And as people tend to associate with others who share their similar experiences, Ammerman argues, one's friends, family and co-workers tend also to share one's racial, economic, and class traits. It is not that people "set out to make a choice based on class and race, but the results are often just that."[160] And in this way, as with many American churches, the primary mission focus at FBC contributes to the perpetuation of the congregation's homogeneity.

Take, for example, the 4th of July parades at which the Frisbees mentioned in chapter two were handed out. These caused an underground stir. This was evangelistic activity directed toward those who, like the majority in attendance at FBC on Sunday mornings, were coming in from neighboring suburbs for a particular purpose. FBC members engaged their bodily needs (free bottled water to quench the thirst of Southern summer heat) and potential bodily wants (Frisbee toys with which they could enjoy leisure activity).[161] But these material needs and wants were much more frivolous than a

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[160] Ibid.

[161] Of course, these toys also had "the plan of salvation" and our contact information printed on them, but even that constituted a perceived spiritual need and want. While I have discussed the ways in which church members experience dissatisfaction with this model so far, it also produces effects that we as a congregation celebrate. At least one of the adult baptisms we celebrated in my year of ethnographic study was related to someone receiving a Frisbee at the parade and following up on its instruction.

safe place to sleep or food they might not be able to provide for themselves. And so, the question of why water was handed out at this event, to people who could afford to purchase it from the street vendors themselves, when the streets are full of thirsty homeless people every day, gets muttered among church members whose understanding of mission does not cohere with using resources in this way.

Therefore, within this primary way of framing missions, there runs another current of belief and practice. FBC's social outreach programs focus less on drawing people in to broader church life, and more on reaching towards the needs of the socially disadvantaged people living in the downtown core. They are not directed toward members' immediate social networks, but toward a more socially disadvantaged group that tends to be more racially diverse than FBC's general make-up, even as they are held together by shared class status.[162] Almost all of the people who take the classes I taught volunteer or have volunteered in some capacity with one or more of these programs, and some exhibit outright disdain for programs like the Frisbee distribution. In addition, Miriam and Gary, along with their children, Gloria, Joan and I, all serve in some official, volunteer capacity that is central to one or another particular program's functioning. The group is not necessarily uninterested in witnessing; but they are more interested in their witness being part of a larger, social justice framework. As Gloria frames her own

[162] The desires motivating this "outreach" are complex. Some might want to avoid – consciously or unconsciously – disrupting the make up of FBC's "family." People who volunteer with the church's program for the homeless frequently share a need to get over their fear around the guests in order to serve them. On the other hand, many also want to avoid linking social services to a willingness to "convert" or attend church services, as guests to FBC's programs have shared that they do not like this common evangelistic strategy. The language commonly used to describe the homeless people who come to FBC's programs – "guests" – further affirms this point. On the one hand, "they" are not encountered as one of "us," and on the other, the programs are primarily characterized by hospitality for guests rather than focused on the conversion of others.

involvement, “I think I’m probably more social gospel…you gotta do what you say you believe. You gotta do things to make the world better…help the poor…”

Despite not being the primary missions focus of the church, the work FBC does in social programs is nevertheless diverse. The church participates in “Room In The Inn,” a Nashville-wide ministry to homeless people. It founded “The Next Door” ministry – which helps women transition back into society out of prison, rehabilitation or homelessness – and it continues to lease to this now independent ministry a valuable downtown building for offices and residences at one dollar per year.[163] The church works with the “Christian Women’s Job Corps,” which prepares socially disadvantaged women for gainful employment. Sunday school departments participate in Habitat builds. And finally, the church’s “clothes closet,” which hands out clothing to homeless people, and conversational English classes for immigrants seeking to bolster their language skills, were both instigated by members who saw a need that was not being met. Even though this work is not a part of FBC’s dominant mission narrative, then, it fulfills a significant aspect of who the congregation understands itself to be.

By maintaining these pockets of practice that resist the dominant narrative for mission at FBC, the church creates spaces for alternative understandings of mission to flourish. As the same time, in so doing, these spaces continue to support the homogeneous make-up of the congregation. Ministry to immediate social networks tends to draw people in; ministry to people with different racial and class characteristics tends

[163] For more on The Next Door, see http://www.thenextdoor.org/ - The Next Door occupies a place of almost legendary status in the life of FBC. A group of women came together to pray about a building the church owned but was not using. This small group quickly grew to over a hundred “Wild Praying Women,” a name that still is used when this story gets told years later. The organization has received national recognition and has recently opened centers in Chattanooga and Knoxville.

to look outwards. In fact, tension seems to erupt – with little to no effect – when this balance is disrupted. One informant told me about how she attended a church meeting in which a consultant instructed the group on how to attract a "particular type of congregant." The consultant did not name who this "particular type" was, although his advice to install big-screen televisions in Sunday school departments, renovate the classrooms, and use full color printing in worship bulletins indicated that he was referring to middle- and upper-middle class congregants. "If you want to get the homeless to join," he said, "all you need to do is fling open the doors."

The way my informant tells this story, the consultant was not necessarily making a judgment between these two populations; he was simply outlining the appropriate tactics for attracting each (although, one might question whether or not his plan for attracting homeless people would actually work). Nevertheless, my informant tells this story with anger in her voice: "I shouted 'Amen'," she said, "and I said to the people around me, 'don't we want the homeless to join? Let's save this money and just fling the doors open!'" Her outburst was greeted with silence. The narrative she wanted to tell fit neither the dominant practices of perpetuating homogeneity, nor the more atypical practices of reaching outwards toward alternative populations. Her view, in fact, was too radical. The silence with which it was greeted revealed that there are limits to the social change that atypical beliefs and practices can accomplish.

Moreover, that these atypical practices can tend to get caught up in the larger institutional grind reveals that theologians might need to think more carefully not only about which modes of academic theology might be helpful to aid everyday theologies work through their context-specific problems, but also the tactics by which such

theological programs can be integrated into ecclesial life. As we see here, my own academic theological interventions, which focused on helping congregants bring to full articulation their views of Jesus Christ, salvation and God, and which focused on cultivating more expansive visions of each, nevertheless ended up affirming most of the theological commitments already held – or at least accepted – across the wider ecclesial system.

The Classroom as Atypical Space

As I have already begun making clear, the classes I taught on Sunday nights tended to attract FBC members who associate themselves more with this undercurrent to church life, both in terms of their strong sense that the SBC's conservative ascendance was a "Takeover," and in terms of the way they understand missions. For the most part, they also saw the classes I taught as one of these atypical spaces within congregational life. In this section I establish that these classes functioned like FBC's other atypical practices I have described here, both in the sense that they functioned differently – or, at least, were viewed as functioning differently – than other FBC classes, and in the sense that their atypical nature was easily incorporated into the larger ecclesial equilibrium.

Before I get to describing the classes' atypical nature, I should offer some brief words on who took them. A core group of ten people took both classes—six men and four women. Of the six men, four had previously been employed in ministerial work, three as senior pastors, one as a music minister. None of the women had previously been employed in ministry leadership. All ten do, however, participate in some form of lay leadership at FBC, as does almost every member of both courses. When I conducted

interviews after each course, all ten core members participated with relation to one course or the other, except for two.[164] Of the ten, seven had perfect or almost perfect attendance across the two courses. All ten have already been introduced in the preceding chapters: Miriam and Gary, Elaine, Peter, Richard, Joan and Harlan, Gene, Rickie, and Mike.[165]

Overall, both classes tended to draw slightly more men than women. Yet, while men in general seemed more comfortable talking than women, among those who talked the most, the gender division was equal. Among the men in the classes, at least half were retired ministers.[166] The official enrollment for each course hovered between twenty-two and twenty-five members, which is high for a Life Change University course. On any given night, there were approximately eighteen to twenty-two members present.

Just by describing the demographics of the courses then, a few exceptional details stand out. First, while many (but not all) education classes at FBC are divided by gender, marital/family status and/or age group, these Sunday night classes were intentionally co-ed, mixed family status, and inter-generational.[167] And these were all aspects of the

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[164] One denied my request for an interview, the other attended only sporadically and so I did not make a request of her

[165] Some other demographic details: all ten are white, middle-class professionals and retired middle-class professionals. There are two married couples in the mix: Miriam and Gary (in their late thirties), and Joan and Harlan (both in their seventies). Elaine, in her late thirties, is divorced. Miriam, Gary and Elaine all have young children. Gene, about fifty years old, is single. Peter, Richard and Mike are all retired, and are all married with grown children. Peter is the oldest of the three, in his late seventies. Rickie, also around fifty years old, is married with no children.

[166] FBC in fact has many retired ministers as members, enough that their integration into lay life is not strained or a significant challenge to our current pastoral team's authority. As Richard pointed out, one likely reason so many ministers and theologically educated people settle in our congregation is because of its proximity to Lifeway, the SBC publishing company, as many ministers finish up their careers there.

[167] Classes divided by gender are more common in the evening programs: consider the Beth Moore and pastor's martial arts class, mentioned in the introduction. Divisions by marital/family status and age are more common on Sunday mornings than evenings.

classes that members said they appreciated, particularly with regards to the inter-generational component. This was also a group of leaders. On the few nights when a deacons' meeting was scheduled at the same time, for example, the room felt strangely empty. And finally, it was a highly educated group, with all of the retired ministers having some form of advanced theological training. Nearly everyone had a Bachelor's degree; a few had Master's degrees; and at least four members had Ph.D.'s. As a somewhat more elite group of leaders within the broader church structure, then, it might seem strange that they would think of themselves as insurgents, but they also tend to be leaders within more atypical areas of church life, and/or alternative voices within larger power structures.

I outlined the roster of Sunday night course offerings in the introduction to this dissertation, noting its broadly Evangelical appeal. The classes I taught fit within this roster atypically, not only because they were studies of doctrine, but also because of their style and goals.[168] This atypical nature became especially evident when, on the final night of the "God as Trinity course," I set aside fifteen minutes for us all to write responses to

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Furthermore, because there are no visible same-sex couples at FBC, classes designated for either men or women (there is also no formal recognition of sex/gender beyond this dichotomy), are not open to couples. As more stable, enduring communities, Sunday morning, "Sunday school," classes tend to attract couples enrolling in a class together. With the LCU turnover each semester, this coupling is less prevalent for Sunday night classes. For example, Harlan attended a previous course I taught, while Joan attended another elsewhere in the building.

[168] A brief note on how a typical class proceeded: the syllabus framed each class with guiding questions and a list of who would be studied. Some looked up thinkers in advance online or in aids they have in their personal libraries, but most did not. Each class opened with prayer, then brief discussion on the theme for the day (if there was one). Usually I prepared a handout that included relevant or interesting quotations from whoever we were studying, sometimes for us to interpret together, sometimes simply to give a feel for the thinker. We then moved between brief lectures by me on key figures and class discussion, with the lines between these two forms of discourse often blurred.

questions like, what had worked? What did not work? What surprised you? What challenged you? And so on. Following a comment from another class member, "it [the class] has been a[n intellectual] stretch," Joan responded to much agreement from others:

> …and I think that's atypical. What I'm trying to say is that it's unusual to have – in a Baptist church – a course where you have to think [*She says this with such a dry type of humor that is not innocent in its execution, and everyone starts laughing. I quip, "that is definitely going to make it into my dissertation," and the laughter becomes raucous at the joke Joan and I have created together*]. No, seriously, it's like you're spoon-fed, you know? Read this. Fill in the blank. That kind of thing. Although some of what we've discussed has gone way over my head, I still would do it again. It was [*she pauses to find the right words*] you're learning, you're stretching, you're seeing what other people think. And also, that there's just not conclusions to everything.

According to Joan, our classes were "atypical" in part because they allowed authority to be questioned. People were invited to come up with their own answers, and leave theological questions open rather than tie them up with neat conclusions. Departing from the more typical "fill-in-the-blank" format of much of the curriculum used elsewhere in FBC's life, these courses endeavored to help members come up with their own avenues of thinking and doing.

Joan's comments, and others offered like them, are not necessarily criticisms of the other courses on offer. She and others describe other LCU courses they have immensely enjoyed. Rather, it is a direct, focused, positive appraisal of the rarer (in their experience) kind of critical reflection – the very type that an academically trained theologian is able to lead – engaged in our time together.

Indeed, it was this desire for critical reflection and deeper, broader thinking – the very aspects that made the class feel atypical – that bonded the group together more than their demographics. For example, while these courses tended to attract church members

who gravitate more toward social justice concerns and left leaning politics, they also had some conservative members. Some of these members drifted away after a couple of sessions. But one of the more active members of both classes, Mike, was among those of a more conservative bent who stayed.[169] As he put it one night, regarding the diversity of our group and his own place in it:

> I've been surprised to realize that I'm sitting with fellow Baptists, with the different backgrounds and the different beliefs and interpretations of beliefs…And we've enjoyed hearing each other, I think…And it all, it causes you to leave with the idea that maybe I need to search just a little more…

Whether "liberal" or "conservative," then, the people who took the classes I taught all seemed to want to engage processes of being opened up and challenged in the Christian beliefs and practices they already embody. They expressed dissatisfaction with the types of courses that give them simple answers, instead wanting help to develop not only their own answers, but also their own questions. From the framework of this dissertation project, they wanted to develop the skills and dispositions of pursuing the wisdom of the faith that was already in their bones.

Given that these classes can be established as atypical spaces within the congregation, we must now ask how they related to the wider ecclesial structure. Like other atypical spaces within church life, the classes I taught caused their members to experience more conscious forms of tension and coherence with the broader church

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[169] I refer to Mike as "conservative" based not only on my own assessment, but also because he is repeatedly described as such by other class members in interviews. Self-described "liberals" point to him as an example of valued diversity within the group. One night, as we were dismissing class, I caught Mike and said, while laughing, "oh Mike, I feel like you're always saying, 'well it's this, of course, or that,' and I'm always going, 'but what about this, and what about that?'" I loosely grasped his wrist while saying this, and gestured on his arm the motion of picking at him over and over again. He walked away laughing saying, "but it's all good; it's all good!"

structure, forms of tension and coherence that are not, of course, by necessity either bad or good. But at the same time, similar to how the ministerial authority I was given was channeled and instrumented to the larger system's use, the tools acquired by members of these classes was integrated into the ecclesial structure in a way that enabled that system's flourishing more than its disruption. And in this way, the intervention of academic theology into everyday theologies – at least in the mode of intervention I attempted – did not disrupt, but rather served the broader ecclesial structures.

A moment from a particular "God as Trinity" class will help clarify this first point, that the classes created moments of tension with the wider ecclesial system. That morning we had sung a Trinitarian hymn in worship, but we had left out the third verse about the Spirit to save time for the larger medley. We opened our discussion that night on the topic of the hymn and a number of class members expressed intense shock at what we had done, but with the simultaneous and somewhat paradoxical admittance that "I probably would never have noticed it though if I weren't taking this class." What they were learning in class impacted their experiences of the rest of church life, causing moments of incongruity that led to their deeper reflection on why we do things the way we do. "I wanted to know what you guys would think of it," said a class member arriving that evening, eagerly noting that she had been thinking about the hymn all day.

Her experience, which resonated with that of others in the class, myself included, had involved first noticing the disruption, as she might not have done before studying Trinitarian questions explicitly. Then, periodically throughout the day, she had mulled over the disruption, thus stimulating her desire to hear what others thought about it too. And then finally, she introduced the recollection of the disruption into the evening

conversation, and conversed with others about it. In this way, her experience in the class had given rise to a new way of interacting with Christian practice that simultaneously gave rise to a personal and corporate pursuit of wisdom in order to understand that new experience in light of the rest of her faith experiences.

Some sort of change in larger social practices is certainly possible in this instance. Perhaps a choir member from the class would report our conversation to the music director and he, in turn, would shift the practice of cutting the verses about the Holy Spirit out of hymns to save time. This could create the ripples of effect that Tanner mentions. As the congregation sang about the Holy Spirit's power more often, its deep, embodied understanding of the Spirit's importance would be affirmed. This could have a cyclical effect, such that removing the verse about the Holy Spirit from hymns would come to seem completely unnatural, as it might in a church that more intentionally affirmed the Trinity. And with time, the congregation could be inculcated with a more powerful pneumatology that further impacted other ecclesial practices.

All of this is certainly possible. Indeed, Mike commented that he would speak with the choir director about the hymn and report back to us, but he never did. This might be because once he left our atypical space, any attempts to rock the boat alone elsewhere felt less possible than they had seemed when bolstered by twenty other people calling for the rocking. Indeed, as Mike had been the one defending the possibility that the verse had been cut "only" to save time, perhaps he did not bring it up with the choir director later because upon further reflection he had seen the other class members' point, and had felt that asking what initially felt like an innocent question would instead come across as critique. Or maybe he simply forgot. It is possible for the recognition of cracks in the

system to produce social change, but it is also rare, as it is also difficult. And it might require a more focused plan for integrating theology's work into the broader system; even the force of a good, communicable argument does not by necessity create strong effects.

Based on the way that I tried to introduce academic theology into the ecclesial environment – a way, I have argued, that makes it able to be heard in the ecclesial environment – it seems that the social changes that are possible and which are, indeed, more common, are not particularly dramatic. But that does not mean they are not worth pursuing. Indeed, what they reveal is that inasmuch as social change might be a goal for academic theologians to bring about in ecclesial environments, the process of pursuing wisdom itself might be its own type of good.

Just as often as the group's reflections in the course created moments of tension for them with the larger church structure, they also created moments of deeper coherence. Harlan, for example, noted that his belief in the Trinity was more consciously affirmed as he sang the Doxology benediction one morning in worship, a chorus that is sung as often as any other hymn, but has no standard, repeated liturgical function at FBC. In addition to moments of disruption, then, as with the removal of Spirit from a song, class members also experienced recognitions of coherence on occasions when they praised the fullness of the Trinity, each person by name. As much as the pursuit of wisdom entails holding the tensions between practices together in loose, performative integrations of the ways they shape us, it also involves recognizing these moments of surprising coherence.

While any impact on the larger church structure remained at best largely imperceptible, then, our shared conversational practices, as atypical practices, were nevertheless able to reorient participants to the larger structure in fresh ways. And in that

re-orienting, the ripples that were sent into the broader community may not have changed it, but they contributed to its flourishing anyway. Joan, for example, shared a story about one such ripple:

> One thing this course did for me – I had an assignment to do a devotion for the deacons, and in keeping with the, our [FBC's] theme for this year – Worship and Prayer – I chose to think of hymns to sing that we sing specifically to God, Jesus or Spirit. And that, this class triggered that thought in me that I developed for that devotion.

As Christian Scharen has argued, "for most people most of the time, worship is less formation as con-formation, a reinforcement and reminder of what is important in life as they envision it in that place."[170] While devotions based on the Trinity might be atypical for Deacons' meetings, they are certainly not disruptive, or even controversial. By carrying a little piece of our class to another room in the church, Joan did not disrupt or dismantle anything. But she did remind FBC's crucial leadership team, whether they were aware of it or not, of a belief they hold but rarely articulate. Like a missionary from our field, arriving to a place she finds needs no converting, Joan was able to share in a collective remembering that affirmed the coherence of our community. The very tool she had picked up from our atypical space was put to work for the larger institution's use.

New Tools for Our Tool-Kits

Scharen further grounds this distinction between worship practices – or, for our purposes here, any ecclesial practice, like religious education – as con-formation or formation in the difference Ann Swidler draws between "settled" and "unsettled" lives.[171]

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[170] Christian Scharen, *Public Worship and Public Work: Character and Commitment in Local Congregational Life* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 221.
[171] Ibid, 221.

Settled lives are marked by periods of normalcy, when culture seems so "intimately integrated with action" that it becomes difficult to see the role of agents in the reproduction of social structures.[172] For Scharen, settled lives thus give rise to the con-formative nature of practices, as we saw with Joan's picking up and carrying of a Trinitarian framework into another location within the church. Alternatively, unsettled lives mark periods of dramatic change, like with rites of passage or religious conversions (consider, for example, my own ritualized ordination).

Unsettled lives describe times when the standard, accepted ways of doing things no longer work. They expose the need for new strategies of action – new tools for the tool-kit – to be formed from the very cultural elements that have seemed to fail.[173] In these times, small shifts in the deploying of cultural elements can lead to genuine change in the ways people's *habitus* are constituted and, thus, in the ways they are oriented to their worlds. It is possible that revolutionary change can result from such minor shifts, as Tanner argues, but as we will see here, in practice these changes might instead occur on a much more local, personal level. Indeed, they happen according to Tanner's more process-oriented goals of shaping relationships and identities of the people who engage in the conversation. I have argued throughout this dissertation that tensions arising between our competing and cohering roles might not be able to be resolved, but that we can nevertheless live with the tensions through the loose, performative integrations of various *habitus* contributing to wisdom's pursuit. When we do this, we begin to fashion new tools for our own tool-kits. This happened in the "God as Trinity" class.

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[172] Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies" in *American Sociological Review*, 1986. Vol. 51 (April: 273-286), 278.
[173] See Swidler, 278ff for a fuller discussion of "Unsettled lives."

I found the “God as Trinity” class much more difficult to teach than the “Jesus and Salvation” one. I struggled to find the prompts that could get conversations going and, when those conversations did start to get traction, students would often shut them down by claiming, “It’s just all a mystery.” They lacked the tools to understand where I was coming from, just as I lacked the tools to understand where they were coming from. We needed to find our way toward each other in conversation. Before I realized my own failings, however, I initially found myself frustrated by the group’s constant foreclosures. I would become nervous for teaching and, as a result, enjoyed it less. And both of these factors compounded the problems further as we all struggled to find the motivations and words to get us back into dialogue. In that moment, my pedagogical instincts directed me toward a practice upon which they often rely when students seem unwilling to talk, offering an impromptu lecture.

And so, I launched into the following, as a somewhat frustrated response to another conversation foreclosure:

> The way that I think about mystery is that mystery is not the thing we have when we run out of things to say, because mystery is so much better than that. And mystery is actually the place where we start. We can do ourselves a disservice when we make mystery the place where we run out of answers to our questions. God is mystery from beginning to end. And even when we think we’ve caught some sort of glimpse of understanding, all we’re still doing is walking through mystery when we’re talking about God. And so as we go through, it will be interesting to notice the places where we do think we know something about God, and to realize that those are actually places of mystery as well. And the places where we don’t know something probably aren’t all that different from the places where we do. That no matter where we are, we’re walking through the mystery of God. Because I know that the Trinity is difficult and frustrating. But I think that if we hold on to that idea of walking through the mystery of God, it will make it a little more pleasurable.

This speech functioned as a turning point in our discussions because it articulated an unnamed tension hidden in our conversation, therefore unearthing some new tools with which we could work. Our disagreement had been over what mystery is. Naming that disagreement allowed the tension – a tension we were not understanding – to break.

The following week, as I opened the class, Richard offered the comment, “I think where you ended last session was really appropriate, talking about the mystery that must remain.” My words – which had grown out of their words – had lingered, causing a shift in the way our discussions were approached. This tiny shift contributed to the ongoing process of constructing a *habitus* of pursuing wisdom. Fulfilling one of the things it is teachers should do, I had helped hear them into speech. Other class members noted agreement with Richard’s consideration. My confidence – and pleasure – with teaching began to return as they began to catch themselves when they turned to mystery as a way of halting inquiry. Indeed, the desire to use mystery in this way even became a point for humor in our discussion, with people saying things like, “It’s all just mystery…[*pause*]…but I know, I know, that means keep going.”

This mini-lecture also became something I needed to build upon continually to maintain its efficacy. As something new, still nevertheless drawing on Christian intellectual and practical traditions, these words introduced more instability into lives that were already unsettled by the situation in which they had placed themselves. We might not have been starting from scratch. Aspects of the wisdom we pursued together were grounded in traditions that the group – to varying degrees – already embodied, with varying degrees of consciousness. Still, as Swidler points out, when lives become unsettled, even though agents might draw on the cultural resources they have long had at

their disposal, the process from articulating a newly formed idea out of those resources to its acceptance as common sense is slow.[174]

In an effort to sustain this momentum for using the new tools we were acquiring together, I instigated an open discussion of why we struggle so much to talk about God. Employing an intentional pedagogical strategy, I asked them in a direct way to reflect on the difficulty they were experiencing:

> So sometimes when we're thinking theologically, I feel like Trinity is the hardest one [i.e. doctrine]. Jesus Christ, no problem, salvation, not that difficult, Holy Spirit, I'm all over it [*with these last few words, I leaned back in my chair and mimed a dismissive "no problem" gesture with my hands. Then, leaning forward again and clasping my hands together on the table...*] But the Trinity feels like a difficult one to me, and it feels like a scarier one too – something about thinking my way into the mystery of God feels overwhelming, and I wondered if others felt the same way. It feels like there's a lot at stake. It feels different.[175]

Peter responded, with his usual willing openness to the new:

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[174] Ibid, 279.

[175] It might be interesting to reflect for a moment on my method in order to offer a layer of self-reflexivity to it. With both these words, and the words on mystery incorporated above it, I am experiencing discomfort at including a chunk of my own impromptu speech, transcribed directly from my recordings, into the ethnographic reporting here. As scholars, we tend to revise and edit and polish our thoughts before offering them for public consumption. Off-the-cuff speech is reserved for question and answer periods in public presentations, a genre that is by nature improvisational. We almost never put our impromptu speech into print, however. With these speech, even more so that the one on mystery, some of what I said is actually embarrassing: the phrase, "Holy Spirit, I'm all over it," paired with a dismissive gesture is utterly ridiculous, as I recall thinking as soon as it came out of my mouth and I leaned back in my chair. Indeed, being able to get away with saying it depended on the already marginal status of pneumatological doctrines within FBC's theological commitments. I thus perpetuated what I perceive to be theological problems in my church with a flippant claim. Despite the failings of my speech, however, I am convicted by the power imbalance implicit in the ways ethnographic self-representation can become polished in contrast to the ways we represent others. Furthermore, I am convinced that study of our own everyday theological speech can yield similar types of helpful insights as study of the everyday theological speech of our ethnographic partners. My own speech is as full of context-specific compromises – conscious and unconscious – as anyone else in the class.

> I agree, and I think it's the temptation to say, well I can't understand that, and go on to other things. But there's something about the mystery of God that is like a magnet. It's not that I don't want, or that I want to solve the mystery – that's not it. It's that I can't leave it alone. I keep coming back and, well, ok, I'll never know it all, but I wanna know more.

Drawing on knowledge I knew had been inculcated into me through reading for my doctoral exams, the origins and specific references for which remained beyond my articulation and, even, awareness in the moment, I responded, "I do think of theology as the words that move us between God and God." Drawing on tools that my academic role had made second nature to me, the image also resonated with a few class members who – drawing again on their new tools – repeated it in subsequent classes, as well as in one of my post-course interviews. Peter's openness invited us all to follow, and we began to delve deeper into the dangers we feel are associated with theological speech.

Miriam, who at that time was working on reading the entire Bible in a year, and was finding herself shocked by stories she had never read before, brought up God's wrath against idolaters in the Old Testament. Elaine responded:

> I think that's what makes the Trinity such a kind of scary concept to wrestle with. You don't wanna get it wrong [*people laugh quietly and somewhat awkwardly in agreement*]. You don't wanna give Jesus too much credit and not give everybody his due. And so you have this prism to look through and you don't know how do I address my prayers? What am I supposed to do here? I think there's just more at stake. You remember that vengeful God!

Others resonated and murmured notes of agreement with Elaine's description. And in that moment, a theological distinction rose out of our shared practice. We have seen throughout this dissertation that the group laughs in the face of heresy. Indeed, they deploy claims that they intentionally name as heretical as theologically productive

tools.[176] They have no problem, it seems, experimenting with a belief that does not jibe with the authoritative beliefs of others. We have even seen that there is a sense among some in this group that truth sometimes lies in the places of resistance to authority. The radical individualism of American Evangelicalism and the Baptist affirmation of self-determination invite such resistance.[177] But in such a schema of resisting worldly authorities, there remains one final arbiter of truth in this group's understanding: God. And so getting God wrong becomes a key place where theological freedom hits a wall.

Naming this fear out loud undermined its ability to grip us so firmly. Finding the grace and space to converse, the group cultivated more and more tools for talking about God, and I continued to learn how to frame conversations that invited freer speech. As we came to the close of the course, and I was preparing to teach about theological responses

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[176] The group's consistent deploying of "heresy" as an intentional mode of speech echoes Bourdieu's understanding of how unarticulated *doxa* – that is, the "self-evident" things we don't say out loud (or even bring to conscious articulation) because they mark the "quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principles of organization" – is brought into the realm of speech (Bourdieu, *Outline*, 164). For Bourdieu, *doxa* can only be brought into the realm of discourse as orthodoxy when it is "euphemized," (meaning that such discourse is disguised in order to be made palatable) or by dismissing it as heterodoxy through the articulation of blasphemy (see Pp. 159ff.). "Heretical power," argues Bourdieu, entails "offering the means of expressing experiences usually repressed" (171). "Heretical discourses" actually "derive their power from the capacity to *objectify* unformulated experiences, to make them public" (170-171). For Bourdieu, bringing doxa to light by blasphemy does not have the intentional aspect to it that it did in our classroom. Nevertheless, the structure by which he understands heterodoxy to relate to doxa and discourse, is helpful to us here for understanding what it was the members of the class were doing with their playful heretical speech. By repeating "heresies" that they had heard before, class members were continuing to draw into speech aspects of Christian traditions that hover beyond both our articulation and our acceptance but which, nevertheless, remain present as a surplus to our orthodox claims.

[177] For more on the relationship between modern American religion and the ways in which heresy is no longer a possibility so much as it is a necessity for being able to claim religious affiliation, see Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1979), see especially Pp. 26ff.

to the Holocaust, I decided to try an activity I thought might allow them to use some of these tools they had acquired in a more powerful way. This activity, which I had read about in a book, functions as a communal performance of the clash between concretion and abstraction in the theological pursuit of wisdom. In it, the teacher invites the group to brainstorm answers to the question, “Where is God?” She then reads to them a particularly unsettling passage from Elie Wiesel’s *Night*, and asks them the same question again: “Where is God?” The author of the activity promises that after hearing the Wiesel passage read, no one can offer the somewhat trite answer, “God is everywhere,” likely to have been given in the first round.[178] Thusly, the clash between concretion and abstraction that we had been performing all semester long would be revealed to the class in a dramatic example. Over-trusting this author’s advice, as well as his particular read of Wiesel’s text, I was perhaps somewhat foolishly over-eager to see how the group would respond.

I moved from my chair, to stand at the white-board. “Where is God?” I asked them. The first answer came from Mike, “Everywhere.” *Perfect*, I thought to myself. This was going to work splendidly. “Right here,” said another. “Within us,” “in my heart,” “Heaven,” called out others. When the answers died down, I handed around copies of the Wiesel passage – a brutal passage in which a child is hung in a concentration camp – and asked for someone to read it aloud. Mike fluttered his hand to volunteer, and we all began to be drawn in by his voice. In the midst of the scene, a character asks, “Where is God,” and the author, also a character in the scene, answers that God is on the gallows in the

[178]Jon Pahl, *Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces: Putting God in Place* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), 34ff.

child.[179] We paused for a moment after reading. A few class members had tears in their eyes. Gloria's fingers were pinching her lips in a gesture of futility. Her usual energetic presence was stilled. The mood of the room was solemn and I worried for a moment that I had not adequately introduced the activity. I hadn't. The transition felt jarred and so the silence hung heavily. Feeling there was nowhere else to go but forward in the planned activity, though, I asked the class again, "Where is God?"

Mike began again, "Everywhere, still everywhere." His answer shattered my expectation. *Why isn't this working? What am I doing wrong? Why don't they just get it?* For a single moment I did not see that Mike's body was now hunched over, slumped in the chair, his tone dejected and with a grasping edge to it. The words of his answer were the same, but the answer was different. The author of the activity was both wrong and right. If we believe that the answer *is* the words, then the same words offered before and after witnessing tragedy seem foolish the second time. But if we believe that the answer is more than the words, that tragedy changes words' meanings, then the embodiment that now accompanied Mike's words matter.

Wiesel's passage offers an image that can amount to God's death, an image that potentially makes belief absurd. Mike's hunched, slumped torso revealed the possibility that his body had absorbed this absurdity or, at least, had absorbed his sense of struggle with the image, before his words could catch up to either. And from this unsettled place, his grasping tone indicated a reaching toward affirmation that God is everywhere, but perhaps not an affirmation itself. In contrast to his initial confidence, Mike's response

[179] Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Bantam, 1960), 61-62.

now bore a distance between body and words, a distance within which both doubt and hope had space to reconstruct Mike's *habitus* of pursuing wisdom anew.

Others followed in with answers that picked up our shift in tone in more discursive ways: "He's where the ugliest things go on as well as the good things;" "He's where there's death;" "He's hanging there…" "…on the cross." "God is in silence." "God is in the question and the answer." But then the final answer came from the youngest member of our class, a bright college student, Sarah. Refusing even to answer my question, she moved us back to the realm of disposition and affectation. In the face of tragedy, she denied the need to interpret or analyze consciously and simply said, sitting back in her chair and letting the sheet of paper fall on the table, "I hate that passage."

My initial frustration grew out of my thinking that the group was failing to use the tools that I, somewhat arrogantly, thought I had given them. But they were showing me something much better. The tools we were gaining together over the course of an unsettled semester were settling, to play with Swidler's language. New strategies of action, cultivated in unsettled times, come eventually to feel "natural," she argues, like an "undeniable part of the structure of the world."[180] They become *habitus*, wisdom inculcated into us through our own pursuit of it through the shared, ongoing practice of conversation.

Faced with the unsettling gravity of the relationship between suffering and God's presence in that moment, the group neither turned away or offered panicked excuses, as they had done at the beginning of the semester. Rather, we all allowed ourselves to be unsettled for a moment – they better than I – and then to pick up the words that still made

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[180] Swidler, "Culture in Action," 279.

sense to us out of the rubble to use them again anew. Surely whatever happened in that room that night had little (to no) effect on FBC's broader ecclesial structure. We made no social change, or even theological impact on how everyone else at FBC believes and practices their faith. In this sense, the goods of pursuing wisdom were kept local, as the group worked together to a fresh understanding of God and of each other that could shape their own lives. Mike, Sarah and the others thus demonstrate that there is a wisdom to be pursued not only in, but also somewhere beyond discourse, in the way discourse is held together by its writing onto our bodies. It is the tone of our voices, fingers fluttering to lips now silenced, the curve of a man's back as he slumps into a chair, and the emotive cry of a young woman.

Conclusion

The very methods by which I gained access to bring academic theology into the ecclesial sphere in order to shape the Christian social practices therein are the same methods that undermined both my desire and ability to effect dramatic forms of change. In this way, my own theological identity has served as a minority report, revealing the more idealized dimensions to Tanner's model for understanding the relationship between everyday and academic theologies. While she is right to claim that systems only have the power with which their agents imbue them, I have sought to reveal here, through the reconstruction of my own theological identity as I endeavored to bring academic theologies into the ecclesial environment, how deep the desire to be named by such systems can run and, by extension, how much agents can be shaped to be willing to give institutions back their power.

My ways of teaching the classes stamped them with traces of my own competing and cohering academic and ministerial *habitus*. As my academic work was drawn towards concrete Christian social practices and my ecclesial experience was drawn towards abstract, more systematized reflection, I lived the tension between the two as the experience of searching, as the pursuit of wisdom. But as has become clear, concrete experiences send me quickly to my bookshelves. My books, however, rarely make me run toward concretion. I need help to get there. The community of our classroom, and the conversations we had therein, kept me – and them – in this place of pursuing. They helped us all maintain the tensions we needed for our various *habitus* to be opened up, challenged and refined within the very contextual practices that give rise to them. As I have said already, the process of pursuing wisdom mattered more than any grasping of it. Far from revolutionary training grounds, then, our conversations instead effected small shifts in the ways the *habitus* of their participants were constructed.

Injustice in social practices – like the forms of racial injustice perpetuated by the homogeneity of FBC's members – is not perpetuated simply because it has remained unrecognized, though that is certainly sometimes the case. Rather, the injustice that marks Christian social practices is perpetuated because it is inextricably bound up with both the powers and privileges that the system bestows upon the agents who belong to it. The members of the classes I taught who tend to participate in the more social justice oriented practices associated with the undercurrent of FBC's understanding of missions, still direct those moral energies outwards. My informant who wanted to fling open the doors to the homeless people living downtown found no allies. Perhaps they, like me,

liked being able to practice their practices a little atypically, without overthrowing the whole system that allows them to do so.

Therefore, I have argued that the goal of introducing academic theology into Christian social practices might need to have more to do with the processes of pursuing wisdom than it does with the explicit processes of affecting social change, or even than it does to do with discovering or articulating that wisdom as discursive content. The concrete ecclesiology I have presented here reveals the way in which a band of "insurgents" flourished, not through changing "how we do things here," to quote Edgell Becker's colloquial way of describing a church's sense of its own identity, or even by coming up with a set of new words for naming and describing the Divine.[181] Rather, their flourishing happened through how they developed tools for dealing with the tensions and ambiguities of their own positions within the larger whole, and within the practices that make up their faith lives in general. My argument has therefore been less about the efficacy of a struggle for ecclesial or even theological revolution, and more about the fidelity of the struggle itself. Whether or not our practices of pursuing wisdom actually altered FBC's more formally stated identity and theological claims matters as much as, and maybe less than, their ability to keep that identity and those claims contested, as Tanner's more process-oriented goals implies.

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[181] Penny Edgell Becker, *Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Local Religious Life* (New York: Cambridge University Pres, 1999), 85.

But when you get to the place where you see you're making a mess and you want to be rescued out of that mess you say, 'Ok, take me. I'm yours from now on.' Because I believe he shows you what 'from now on' means. And it means good works. It's not a real experience of initial salvation, conversion, unless good works follow!

Ann, "Jesus Christ and Salvation" class
First Baptist Church, Spring 2010

CHAPTER V

PRACTICES OF PERFORMANCE THEOLOGY

Ann, my friend with whom I shared Indian food, as outlined in chapter three, died suddenly between the "Jesus Christ and Salvation" and "God as Trinity" classes. She had entered the hospital for a non-life-threatening procedure, but then declined rapidly as a result of complications. Towards the end, as I visited her daily in the hospital, I would linger at her side, never quite knowing which departure would my last. And then one evening my husband Tyler and I received a call that we should make our way to the ICU to say good-bye. Harlan, Joan, and I had been updating each other and the church leadership about Ann's sickness, so I sent them all a quick email letting them know it was time. Tyler and I spent a few hours that evening, holding Ann's hand, praying with her and singing hymns for her. For the first time in my singing those old hymns, it felt like every one was about death, punctuated with glimmers of a life beyond. Tyler would begin to cry, and my voice would need to become stronger to keep the song going. Then he would do the same for me as I found lines too difficult even to read. And I found myself hoping in these moments that the glimmers of a glorious after-life punctuating the songs

were true. When Ann pulled her oxygen mask to the side to join her shaky voice with ours for a line of favorite verse, I even found myself believing they might be.

Ethnographers often form intense emotional bonds with their research partners and, as a result, have intense emotional experiences of their own.[182] While this experience felt uniquely painful to me, its intensity was not, therefore, unique to my own particular ethnographic method.[183] Nevertheless, when such moments happen in ethnographic studies, they are usually aberrations, strange surplus fragments that hover at the fringes of the academic study. They are reported as flashes of insight that might illuminate the whole project, but are not incorporated as methodological guides or sites for explicit reflection throughout it. Intentionally implicating myself (especially as minister) into my field of study, and then deploying my implication as a research tool, however, makes moments like this matter for what I am doing.

Throughout this dissertation I have resisted correlating everyday and academic theologies with distinct personal identities, like "everyday theologian" or "academic theologian." Everyone who participated in the classes I taught, myself included, speaks in everyday and academic modes, with moves toward both immediate relevance and systematic coherence. Still, as I have endeavored to distinguish between discourse and identity in this way, we have nevertheless encountered distinct personalities throughout these pages. We have not witnessed a group of theological discourse speakers. We have

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[182] Consider, for example, James M. Ault Jr.'s conversion to Christianity in his work *Spirit and Flesh: Life in a Fundamentalist Baptist Church* (Knopf, 2004) or Dawne Moone's intensely emotional experience at a Eucharist service in *God, Sex and Politics: Homosexuality and Everyday Theologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
[183] The fact that Ann's death connects not only with my ethnographic project and my own personal relationship with her, but also that it connects directly with the life of my family might, however, be a more unique ethnographic occurrence as, perhaps, was my ministerial role in helping choose the hymns for and speaking at her funeral.

witnessed Miriam's frustrated complaints about a Frisbee's simplicity, Peter's animated descriptions of the frontier, and Joan's steady palm bearing Scripture. Conversation has not been a philosophical concept in this context. It was a flesh and blood practice, wholly dependent upon which people were in the room at any given moment, and shaped to an immeasurable degree by the various relationships constellating between us all.

Ann's death cut through a whole knot of those relationships. When we lost her, we lost more than a unique hub of relationality at which various conversational vectors crossed. We lost a beloved friend whose energy kept our evenings lively. We lost someone who both Gene and Gary described, in interviews before her death, as someone to whom they could turn for "wise counsel" if they needed it. We lost someone who would "struggle her way through" a problem, as Richard described her. I always encountered this struggle in her as inspiring and ferocious tenacity, but Gene described it with calmer notes, recalling how Ann was always able to "filter information and avenues and take a deep breath and reflect." Ann, it seemed, saw herself differently, as she would often apologize for "talking too much." Each person in the room connects with the others differently. The relationships in the classroom thus matter not only for how we interpret what is said therein, but for shaping what actually gets said to begin with.

But how can we account for these relational layers of complexity in Tanner's model for relating everyday and academic theologies? In this chapter I expand Tanner's metaphorical description of theological construction as "bricolage," arguing that our conversational pursuit of wisdom, and the relationship of this pursuit to the academic theological text created out of it, is best interpreted like a version of performance art. This expanded metaphor helps us to see that the human, relational and agential elements of

theological conversation are part and parcel of the pursuit of wisdom. Like performance art, the pursuit of wisdom is dependent upon who shows up, as discourse cannot be abstracted from the people who speak it.

I then outline two narratives that put flesh on this process, as I endeavor to demonstrate both the possibilities and limitations of these wisdom-pursuing conversations. In so doing, I argue that like performance art, the product created subsequent to the performance can never capture it, because the process always resists the commodification that nevertheless needs to happen to make it more broadly communicable. At best, the text can gesture toward the process, offering fragmented representations of it. And these representations, through their fragmentation, inevitably re-create the process as something new: guild specific glimmers of something that always transcends them.

I have described theological reasons why the "God as Trinity" class was harder to teach than the "Jesus and Salvation" one. And while those theological assessments grasp significant aspects of the problems we encountered, I also think we suffered because Ann was not there. Sometimes a chatty person can be helpful for a teacher, simply because they leave little empty, dead time for us to fill. But more than filler, Ann also called out the best in me as a teacher. As we will see in the chapter, she would often articulate a theological idea shared by a number of her classmates. Sometimes she would make points that, in my error, I might have dismissed too quickly if spoken by someone else. When she spoke them, however, my trust in her instinctively made me work harder to see the

fullness of what she was saying.[184] Doing so allowed us all to open up ideas further together. And so Ann helped me avoid moving too quickly through wisdom's pursuit to try to construct some theological product. Without her presence, I had to learn how to embody such dispositions without her help. This took time, as it also required the creation of new relationships: Maureen and Joe, and Gloria, for example, joined us in the second class. Even with these new additions of conversation partners who I came to treasure, however, this new class always bore a trace of the old. Ann's absence became less pressing, as absences often can, but it never disappeared.

This chapter speaks theologically out of this relational space. Rather than arguing for it explicitly, this chapter presumes the claims of the prior chapters, claims that everyday and academic theological discourses came together in our group's conversational practice of pursuing wisdom. And it endeavors to show – like with the dinner party that opened this dissertation – that theological claims here are inextricable from the people who make them, as well as from those people's stories. They rise from embodied agents and the interactions of embodied agents. We will see how ad hoc context specific comments within these conversations were continually drawn out,

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[184] In particular, I felt a deep trust in Ann with regards to issues around gender and race. She was passionate about women in ministry, and had agreed to serve on my ordination committee during a particularly stressful time in her own life. Moreover, she served saying, "I would have wanted to do this myself in another time; at least this way I get to be a part of someone else getting to do it," with an utter lack of bitterness regarding her own missed opportunities. And so I trusted her generosity of spirit. She would also tell me stories about how her job at the Southern Baptist publishing house was threatened during the Civil Rights Movement because she tried to put pictures of black children and white children playing together in Sunday school curriculum for SBC churches. Knowing she sought coherence between her words and action, and that she would take risks to do what she thought was right, I therefore trusted her. Also, as outlined through my interview with her in chapter three, her personal experiences greatly shaped her theological claims. If she was struggling to articulate an idea in class, I always trusted something deeper was going on that she was trying to reach.

engaged and tested by moves toward systematicity, while those moves of abstraction and systematic connection were continually drawn back to the concrete lives of the people who were interacting with each other. This process of back and forth movement matters more than its product for our interests here; the pursuit matters more than any elusive wisdom fragmentarily gained. Moreover, by focusing on the process rather than the product, we are able to see that the messiness involved with theological constructions across an everyday and academic theological conversation has as much to do with interpersonal, relational interactions as it does with a clash of theological ideas or beliefs.

Performance Theology

The way Ann describes it, salvation has a moment when it begins, and a process by which it is worked out. But Ann does not convey this idea in such a dry way. Rather, she blends different types of language: narrative, doctrinal, theological, emotional, and more. Salvation happens "when you get to the place where you see you're making a mess, and you want to be rescued out of that mess." It has a conversion moment when one says to God, "Ok, take me. I'm yours from now on." There is a transaction of ownership over the convert's life. She hands it over to God and, in that action, God removes her from her mess, but then reorients her to it. With new knowledge of what her "from now on" will look like, she becomes able to greet the mess, able to do the "good works" that clean it up.

Like Ann, all of us in the class spoke using this mix of personal, theological, Biblical, narrative, and other language forms to articulate our embodied beliefs with and for each other. Moments of crisis therefore often erupted when the inconsistencies in both

those beliefs and the language forms clashed. In Tanner's paradigm, the academic theologian collects these crisis moments and systematizes them into a loose "bricolage" theology. She refers to the academic theologian as drawing on the "creativity of a postmodern 'bricoleur'…":

> …the creativity, that is, of someone who works with an always potentially disordered heap of already existing materials, pulling them apart and putting them back together again, tinkering with their shapes, twisting them this way and that. It is a creativity expressed through the modification and extension of materials already on the ground.[185]

Tanner's description resonates with what we sought to do in our classroom conversations. But in order to grasp the more performative elements and agential aspects that shaped our practice of flesh and blood people speaking to each other, we can also refine what kind of bricolage it was that happened. To make this refinement, I turn to the metaphor of performance art.

Whatever I worked with was disordered, certainly. But because I did my "tinkering" on site, it happened with a polyphony – sometimes a cacophony – of voices that continually spoke back, refusing to be pinned in place. No sooner had I pulled apart someone's gestures and comments to "modify" and "extend" them, did that person or

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[185] Tanner, *Theories of Practice*, 166. For more on bricolage, Tanner cites Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988); and Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon, 1988). One might also consult Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), where the concept is first developed in philosophical discourse rather than the arts. As Levi-Strauss' Structuralism undergirds the objectivist epistemological leanings of Bourdieu's project, which I have been engaging throughout, the image of bricolage seems particularly apt here. This oblique reference to Levi-Strauss should, however, be read in light of my critical engagement of Bourdieu's work. As Bourdieu's understanding of *habitus* has offered too deterministic a vision for the human agency I have been describing in these pages, Levi-Strauss' vision of the structures that give rise to spontaneous bricolage are decidedly more so. Hence, the helpfulness of the art metaphor I develop in this section.

another take it from me to play some more. Round and round we would go, no clean idea coming immediately back to me, or even ending at me with me to tie our pursuits together with systematic precision. As we see throughout this chapter, every twist and tweak opened more paths to pursue than we had time to do. Nothing ever hit the ground; whatever we were making – we were never fully conscious of what – remained in the air, tossed back and forth between us until it was time to go home. In the end, what we pursued was not an object, but a shared experience.

The differences between our class experience and Tanner's model seem slight, but one aspect might demand an expansion of theoretical method for an adequate accounting. With Tanner's image, the process of assemblage appears as solo work. The work of the everyday Christians is less visible than the work of the academic theologian. As the academic theologian who taught these church courses, I, of course, set the process in motion, guided much of it, and had an authoritative voice within it. Nevertheless, as we saw in the previous chapter, my power in the classroom was only one part of the whole picture. The pursuit of wisdom required all of us to use our skills of context-specific, ad hoc reasoning and our skills of systematizing abstraction; it required tools that were general-use and specialized. And in that, we found that our temporally, spatially, relationally defined process continually resisted its eventual commodification. Expanding Tanner's metaphor of bricolage into performance art, we become able to see both the workings of this process more clearly and how the theological outcome created by the process bears these marks of resistance.

To explore how this might work, I use *Rhythm O*, a 1974 work by performance artist Marina Abromović as a lens. In this performance, which I liken to our classroom

conversation practice, Abromović sat still in front of a table filled with seventy-two objects – including a rose, a camera, oil, a whip, honey, a gun and a bullet – for six hours without speaking. While she had the power to set up the whole scene, and to close it when she was finished, throughout it she remained, in her words, "totally passive."[186] There were no security guards to intervene when people began to harm her, and no rules, besides those internalized through the *habitus* borne into the room by whoever became present. In the span of the six hours, people cared for and fed the artist, while others cut her clothes from her body exposing her breasts and stuck thorns from the roses into her flesh. One visitor even loaded the gun and pointed it at her neck. Another visitor moved the gun away. Still, there was no formal intervention. At the end of the six hours, Abromović stood up and ran towards the gathered people. Not expecting this, they scattered in fear, as she describes it, "to escape actual confrontation."[187]

Some structural similarities, to begin: Abromović's power to set up the whole scene, and to close it when she was finished, is similar to my authority as a teacher. Also, just as Abromović invited gallery visitors to create the performance of the artwork using

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[186] Indeed, the image resonates with my own ordination ritual. While Abromović describes herself as "totally passive," she is not, but rather she endures a period of passivity that is both pleasurable and painful, as I did at the ordination kneeler, while other bodies inscribe meaning into hers.

[187] Continuing to interpret Abromović's ritual through the lens of my ordination ritual, to continue deepening the texture of its basis for my theological method: at the appropriate time, at the end of the ritual, her transformed body re-engages the group, with a new authority made able to do so in a new way. She charged, whereas I served communion. I would therefore interpret her charging of the gathered not only as their inability to engage confrontation, but hers also. Left with no resources for a genuine engagement of those gathered, her only option was the type of aggressive communication she had allowed them. By remaining "totally passive" throughout the performance, she ended up demanding the same of them through her totally aggressive response. Submission and power function similarly to my descriptions in the previous chapter, if not more dramatically here.

the materials she had provided, so too our class was dependent on its participants to do something with the stage I had set up. But two immediate differences also seem to problematize a comparison of this performance art with the pursuit of wisdom that happened in the classes I taught. First, Abromović was silent throughout the performance, whereas I led various discussions in our classroom. And, second, through its intense focus on the body, her artwork offered an almost hyper-bodily performance. These differences are real and significant. Engaging this extreme silence and embodiment in comparison to our classroom practice, however, productively uses performance art to reveal some of our class' hidden edges.

I have noted how our group all censored ourselves to varying degrees in relation to what we said in the classroom. As with *Rhythm O*, there were no formal classroom rules that kept what we said and did in check. Rather, our own various *habitus* – some of which we loosely shared because of our shared ecclesial formation – shaped for all of us what felt right and comfortable or wrong and uncomfortable for us to say. Like Abromović, I had freedom to lead, direct and re-direct conversations as they developed. And yet precisely because that freedom was shaped by the various *habitus* related rules, strategies, and tactics upon which many of us in the class unconsciously agreed, I experienced moments in which I felt I could not say things that the rules, strategies, and tactics of academic theological speech, or simply other discourse patterns in which I also participate throughout my life, led me to want to say. Indeed, I would silence myself precisely because – in an echo of the previous chapter – despite wanting to disrupt our particular conversation, I also and simultaneously desired to maintain the order of our particular shared space. Like Abromović, my silence was self-imposed for the purpose of

keeping the performance – the conversation – going. Throughout this chapter, I explore these moments of silencing – and speech – to reveal the contours of a theology of sanctification as it was communally performed.

Our classroom conversational practice was also clearly not as hyper-embodied as Abromović's. There were no obvious objects of bodily pleasure and torture present, ready for us to use on each other. I could make an argument that the Bibles we carried can function in this way, but their presence was not so dramatic or arresting as a gun or a whip. The presence of such objects in Abromović's work, however, invited breaking the usual rules of engagement that tend to govern public space. And yet, we saw in my ordination service how certain ecclesial practices can suspend the normal rules for bodily interaction and, even more significant, we saw how our classroom's atypical nature allowed conversations to occur that could not happen in broader church life. The pleasures and pains of a *habitus* inscribed and re-inscribed again and again into bodies might be more visible in Abromović's thorn-scratched skin. But there is a violence to education too, particularly when a new way of experiencing or interpreting the world replaces our old way, as we saw with Mike's defeated posture and Sarah's emotive protest at the end of the last chapter.

Rather than a bricolage of objects, then, *Rhythm O* gives us an image of a group of agential bodies. And in this way, it offers a more suitable metaphorical expansion on Tanner's vision for the project I am articulating here. Like Abromović's performance art, I demarcated a space which brought together a number of participants. And like with *Rhythm O*, these participants created a work together where the process mattered – at least to us as a group – more than the creation of a final, stable, consumable product.

Such methods thus exhibit a resistance to their inevitable commodification; a resistance that remains visible in the final product.

But – as does Abromović – I still want to have something to show after the fact. The others in the gallery space are not her only conversation partners, just as the members of the classes I taught are not mine. Like Abromović, I want something to endure out of this communal process that I can communicate to others, primarily those others in my guild. Abromović owns the official photographs and videos of the show. Like me, she thus keeps for herself the authoritative voice for describing and analyzing what happened. Other artists might borrow from her method, and art critics can argue for and create new meanings out of it, as most all academic theologians hope other academic theologians will borrow from, critically engage, and find new meanings in the works we share with each other. And these final products, both Abromović's and mine, do not rise only out of the communal process that led to their creation, however, but also out of the social practices associated with particular guilds.

Throughout this chapter, as with the last, I am concerned with questions around how everyday and academic theological discourses come together in the pursuit of wisdom. How are the various *habitus* inculcated in us by our participation in Christian social practices – and academic social practices – opened up, challenged, reshaped and re-affirmed in the context of theological conversation? The themes of power, submission and desire that dominated the previous chapter give way in this one to concerns about silence and speech in the process of theological construction. How can we bring to articulation the faith hidden in our bones? When do we silence it? What is gained and lost in silence? And in this play of speech and silence, how do we find common ground to

keep talking and, just as important, keep listening? These themes contribute to the overall argument of this chapter, which is made more visible through the metaphoric lens of performance art, that the conversational pursuit of wisdom cannot be extricated from the human, relational and agential elements that give rise to it without losing some of that conversation's meaning. Any attempt at extrication therefore bears the marks of resistance to it, marks I endeavor to make more visible here than might usually be the case in academic theological writing.

Mystical Enough for a Baptist?

In this first conversation we explore here, everyday and academic theologies are revealed to be different dialects of the same language, rather than completely different tongues. Speech is silenced when these different dialects go unacknowledged and we therefore misunderstand each other. Common ground is then found when we are able to enter each other's linguistic forms. Silence that creates space for such entering enables conversation to flourish. Silence halts conversation, however, when we fail to find such common ground, usually for interpersonal, rather than explicitly theological reasons. Here we begin to see the non-theological – at least in an explicit sense – textures of a theological conversation, as we also see how revealing these textures can help us to understand the conversation's performative process and ongoing development of meaning.

The class had a more intense response to Beatrice of Nazareth than any other figure we studied. Indeed, as we began reading sections of her *Seven Ways of Holy Love*

together, the group's reactions were quite vitriolic.[188] In the *Seven Ways*, Beatrice outlines a pathway of mystical ascent to the Divine. The language is poetic and bodily as it details the processes of detachment and renunciation associated with various meditative practices.[189] We read a few lines, and the first response proceeded: "What is she trying to earn? It seems like she's trying to gain her own salvation rather than relying on God for it!" Another class member, Elizabeth, continued this line of thought: "It seems selfish. She wants to do it all. Why would you want to transcend your humanity? God made us human. It's a little selfish!"

I experienced a rush of feelings in response to their response. First, I experienced a twinge of frustration. *"Why was no one concerned about powerful activities of prayer when it was men we were studying?*" I wondered angrily. I experience FBC as a complex place when it comes to the construction of gender. On the one hand, I felt fully affirmed in my ordination as a woman there. But on the other, as is true of any church I have attended, liberal or conservative, I nevertheless run into attitudes I perceive to be sexist. Language around men as the "spiritual head of the household" is spoken – and contested – at FBC, by both members and leadership. I have already noted the presence of LCU

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[188] The fullest handout I gave the group was the one with excerpts from Beatrice's writings. Here we did the closest textual reading of the whole course. I taught Beatrice this way in part because my attempts to describe her poetic language would inevitably obscure the meaning embedded in her style, and in part simply because I think she is fun to read.

[189] Recent studies in religion have demonstrated the problematic nature of studying "mysticism." In general, the mystical experience has been understood as some form of direct contact with the Divine, apart from any social, cultural, linguistic shaping. Such as view has been appropriately interrogated. See, for example, Robert H. Sharf, "Mysticism," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 96ff. For a study on how male power has defined the borders of the concept "mystic" and, by extension, has excluded female forms of "mysticism" from its definition, see Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

classes on Sunday nights that affirm traditional gender roles. And I have personally experienced what I perceive as sexism as well through comments like those often received by female preachers, such as, "I couldn't hear a word she was saying, but I sure enjoyed watching her say it." If I am over-sensitive to gender issues in some contexts, that sensitivity is not unfounded with regards to other contexts of FBC life. And so my immediate reaction was a frustration that remained difficult to verify.

And second, I often feel that I am a rare voice in our church who wants to emphasize the positive role of embodiment in the Christian life. I am saddened by what I perceive to be harmful restrictions on sexuality that are connected with a general mistrust of embodiment, and I worry that the ongoing, intentional inculcation of our youth with such attitudes is detrimental to their well-being. As I have done in this dissertation, I argue in various contexts throughout our church that embodiment is a locus for wisdom, a site of God's activity. And I seek out the rare, atypical spaces that feel safe to say that the pleasures of embodiment are not to be so restricted and feared. And so the instincts and dispositions shaped by all these experiences and practices rushed forward in an instant, without my having immediate conscious apprehensions of why.

One of the reasons I assigned Beatrice in the course was because I thought she could help us see the roles our bodies play in worship. I also thought she might help us tease out the deep connection between immanence and transcendence in the relationship between embodiment and the Divine. And so my perception that the group would need help with the move to grounded embodiment was upended by their desire to critique transcendence. This was not the direction I had intended this lesson to go, and so I initially felt confused by how to proceed with what seemed like an agreement between us

that I also sensed should not be trusted. I began to worry I would never get them see Beatrice as doing anything other than what they referred pejoratively to as "works righteousness." And thus, my intellectual and pedagogical expectations were challenged, as I had to re-imagine new directions for our conversation – for our pursuit of wisdom – to go.

Throughout both courses, the desire to protect the theological belief that no one can "earn their own salvation" was consistently revealed as one of the few unquestionable theological borders maintained by almost everyone, if not everyone, present. Whereas some borders proliferate questions and thus produce deeper insight, this one most often served as a stumbling block to discussion. We were able to tease out some of these issues in our discussion of Luther (as we see below), but until that point, the group tended not only to worry that work was being perceived by any given author as able to accrue righteousness, but also that it was perceived by any author as initiating salvation. Indeed, these two ideas were conflated for them. Therefore, any description of things we might "do" – even if that doing was Beatrice's doings of detachment and renunciation rather than, say, less submissive actions – immediately raised the group's hackles and brought the speaker under negative scrutiny.

Despite my rush of feelings in response to their response, then, I take a moment to step back from trying to convince the group of whatever confused, personally loaded point I was wanting to make. I pause for a moment of self-silencing, and then try to frame Beatrice's practice in language that resonates with our shared ecclesial life. I had the time prior to class to prepare what I was going to say about her. The group now needs similar space to process it. Mystics "don't think they're doing this of their own power," I note,

“but rather this is what it feels like to be lifted up by God.” “Their beating of the flesh is like us singing songs,” I continue, “we all do these things to connect with God.” Being “lifted up” by God, and “connecting with God” are experiences that this group can perceive practices as making possible. And then, to demonstrate that Beatrice, like our orthodox view, did not expect reward for her “works,” I affirm the possibility that she was practicing her mystical worship because she thought it might be purely “pleasing to God. And so, for a moment, I try to inhabit their discursive modes for interpreting a theological idea or text, rather than trying to get them to enter my frameworks, and the reins on the conversation feel loosened. We thus enter a space where our language begins to be shared.

While I am seeking to inhabit their language, I feel Ann take a step toward me. Or, to put it more accurately, she takes a step toward the figure I am trying to teach. Admitting that she is using a lens that makes sense to her but which might be foreign to or, at least, not central for Beatrice, Ann asks:

> What is the connection between this mysticism and salvation by grace through faith? Now, that’s our terminology. But is she a Christian? Has she already put her faith in Christ and she’s talking now after that? It begins to sound like we’re talking about salvation by works. But can we settle that she is a professing Christian? And this comes after that. That helps me [to understand what she’s doing].

In that moment, I trust that Ann is imposing her own structures for understanding onto Beatrice – structures that do not fit – because she wants to open Beatrice up for understanding, not because she wants to package Beatrice up in a discursive regime that would enable rejecting her. Back and forth and circling around our shared and different languages, Ann is thus seeking to create a common ground for difference to intersect. And it works. We all move into the space together.

Up until that point it had not occurred to me that the group would require convincing that Beatrice was a Christian. I had not thoroughly questioned my own ingrained assumptions of what constitutes Christian identity. Indeed, the fact that I was considering the problem in that moment as one about "Christian identity" is already an academic assumption with which I probably should have spent some time grappling as I endeavored to teach a class on salvation to a group of my fellow Baptists.

The ground between Ann and me in this moment could not be mapped only by whether Beatrice had "put her faith in Christ," as Ann puts it. The ground between us was mapped – still using my academic theological discourse – by whether "Christian" was a culturally produced identity or a soteriological state and whether or not that matters. Ann's comment jolted me into realizing and, indeed, feeling the distance between us more acutely. In this moment, in a conversation about salvation and mystical practices, I was the one framing things wrongly. I needed to stop distancing myself from the everyday theological discourse if I was going to learn from its wisdom. Just as I wanted them to come to engage whatever confused them about Beatrice, I needed to do the same self-reflection with regards to what they were teaching me.

In the moment, I pause, and resist responding with what my academic *habitus* instinctually flashes through my thoughts – something to do with how Ann's way of framing the question is dependent on a post-Reformation view of salvation that does not really apply in this Medieval case. I resist this not because it is "too academic" for the group to engage. Indeed, such historical situating of a particular theological question often opened up conversations for us throughout both courses. It was, in fact, something

they often found interesting, but only when offered at the right time. Rather, I resist using this analysis because in this moment it is I who needs to shift paradigms.

And so I say, “Oh, yes, absolutely she is a Christian,” quite simply because she is, but, more complexly, because by admitting that she is being loose with her language translations, Ann allows me to do the same. As soon as Ann is invited to recognize and name Beatrice as Christian according to Baptist understandings of conversion and profession others, including me, feel the same invitation. And in this naming, Ann helps me to see where the group’s confusion is taking place so that I can explain Beatrice’s mystical ascent not as a prescriptive course for what one must do to “be saved,” but rather as a descriptive account of what it feels like to be “lifted up by God.” Inhabiting their language for a moment, I am able to lead them toward the language of the text. And, together we begin to unravel each of our preconceived notions in order to create a framework for understanding that text – or, fragments of texts – in front of us.

And things begin to open up. Playing off of the language of ascent, Peter slaps the table and with a grin says the words to a familiar hymn, “I’m pressing on the upward way.” Ann laughs and gestures toward him, adding, “New heights I’m reaching every day.” In a move that felt strange after I made it due to its gendered implications, I had been trying to authorize Beatrice’s mystical activity by telling the class that Augustine had practiced the same. My academic *habitus* had certainly kicked in there: who better to authorize a questionable practice than the foundational theologian of the Western tradition? But in the end, it was this reference to a favorite Baptist hymn that got the group brainstorming how Beatrice’s actions connect with Christian forms we take to be theologically authoritative in our community. Again and again, able to use their own

structures for understanding to interpret Beatrice enabled them to open those structures up for questioning. The process of conversation, as a relational, personal, theological process of pursuing wisdom, continually opened us all to deeper understanding and more conscious articulation of the faith in our bones.

The conversation continues: someone else adds the example of a ritualized prayer form with which our congregation has been experimenting. Elizabeth, who was initially so critical of Beatrice, also enters common ground by noting how her own experiences of bodily transcendence tend to happen while she is gardening because that is where she "loses all sense of time." Others start drawing on the Scriptures, noting that this is not all that unlike Jesus' time meditating in the desert, Paul's references to being called up into a third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2-4) and even his references to having a thorn in his flesh (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Jesus sweated blood in the garden, notes Peter, leaning forward and hanging his head to mime the drips falling from his own forehead (Luke 22:44, a verse that says Jesus' sweat was "like blood," but which Peter recalls as actual blood, with no corrections from the group). They mention also that Ezekiel did some "really crazy things." Here, Biblical language – acknowledged as the most authoritative discourse governing FBC's life together – further bolsters their engagement of Beatrice.

Through this bolstering, Beatrice starts to help the group open up their readings of Scripture, though tentatively and tensely at first. One of the class members wonders aloud if John's visions at Patmos functioned like Beatrice's. Mike, whose bodily movement usually consists of small, restrained fidgets in his seat when he disagrees with what is being said, pushes his chair back from the table. His voice shoots up an octave: "You mean to say that John's visions were like THIS!" he exclaims, emphasizing the final

word by first smacking his palm to the handout I had passed around of snippets from her writings, and then picking it up and shaking it before slapping it back down onto the table. A few of us start laughing and I smile, “Maybe Mike, who knows? They might have been!” Our shared laughter grows louder as Mike, shaking his head with a look of amazement on his face, chortles, “Well, I don’t know. I just don’t know.”

Mike’s dramatic response keeps the point about John on Patmos in front of us for a moment in contrast to the way that the mentions of a third heaven, sweating blood, and Ezekiel quickly fade into the background. The friendly humor of the moment allows us all to feel comfortable with the drama, to rest on it and incorporate it into our own ways of approaching the texts. But also, the fact that many in the class understand themselves as “progressive” or “liberal” in relation to Mike indicates that his willingness to link John and Beatrice likely challenges others to be even more willing to do so too.

As the laughter subsides, Elizabeth, really coming around to engagement with Beatrice now, notes her own experience of feeling that sometimes God “just puts names” into her head to pray for them: “Perhaps,” she quips, “that’s mystical enough for a Baptist?” By continuing to open up the frames of reference for reading Beatrice, the conversation is propelled forwards. I had been trying to translate Neo-Platonic philosophy and Christian practices of mystical ascent in order to frame her experience. In other words, I had been framing her according to academic theological discursive norms. But the group wanted to know she was saved and united with God. They did not want to encounter her as a text – as I had reduced her to; they wanted to encounter her.

In beginning to relate to Beatrice not as a text or distant example of historical Christianity, but more as a fellow pilgrim on the path to God, they begin to question

further the imagery of her writing. By integrating her experiences with our own, the violence of the text starts to come a little closer to us. Someone asks how such beating submission of the body, as well as fasting unto what appears to them to be hypoglycemic fits, can be reconciled with a belief that the “body is a temple” (1 Cor 6:19-20). One woman, who works in counseling, particularly with young women, worries that Beatrice actually experienced some form of Anorexia Nervosa.

“Yes!” I say with excitement. An old academic interest in Simone Weil had led me to do some research in the area of female mystics, theologians, and eating disorders back in Divinity School.[190] Also, because of my own theological commitments, I was always thrilled when a concern raised by the group connected with feminist set of arguments and concerns. While this group wants to “affirm women,” as they put it, “in ministry,” none of them ever self-identified as “feminist.” And indeed, in one discussion some of the older men in the class noted that they feel uncomfortable when they see female construction workers, and scared when they board a plane with a female pilot. Nevertheless, they did not flinch whenever I self-identified as a feminist, but I sense that had more to do with their comfort with me than with the language itself. Indeed, whenever I pointed out that their concerns aligned with feminist ones, they would express surprise – forgetting, perhaps for a moment, that a feminist was in their midst. I was,

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[190] For a discussion of Simone Weil’s relationship to eating and the Eucharist, see Claire Wolfteich, “Attention or Destruction: Simone Weil and the Paradox of the Eucharist,” in *The Journal of Religion*, 81 no 3 (July, 2001), 359-376 For more general discussions of female mystics and eating disorders, see Martha J. Reineke, “‘This Is My Body’: Reflections on Abjection, Anorexia, and Medieval Women Mystics,” in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (LVIII/2); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) and *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992).

therefore, always eager to make these connections, to open up the possibilities of feminist critique for them.

In response to this woman's comment about eating disorders, I tell the group how some feminist scholars have written on this very topic. Their bodily postures remain attentive and so, assuming that this line of thought might be of interest to them, I launch into it: "Indeed," I add, "because Anorexia Nervosa is connected as much to issues of control as it is to body image, it's possible that women engaged strict eating practices as an attempt to have some self-determination over their own faith lives in a Christian culture dominated by men." My outburst receives a few interested expressions, but mostly it lands flat. My instincts are slightly off. Because the various *habitus* associated with my academic role create a sense of affirmation in me when a scholar shares my concerns, I unreflectively respond to this woman's comment as if she would feel the same. But the authority of feminist theological discourses does not connect with the types of affirmation associated with the various *habitus* inculcated in her through ecclesial and other social practices. She looks at me blankly, allowing the silence to hang for a moment after my comments without pursuing them.

There is a clear tension in the room – indicated by the silence and confused looks with which I am being greeted – but no one seems to pick up on the explicit, more systematic connections between my language of "control" and their concerns with "works righteousness." I quickly steer the conversation back to Beatrice and the violent language in her text before they do make these connections, because there had been some energy around that. But in so doing, I want to reframe the problem of violence so that it feels less to me like a judgment that Beatrice was intentionally disobeying what the group

takes to be a Biblical mandate, and more like a description of what the experience God had created in her had felt like. “Perhaps,” I note, “it’s not that she’s saying we have to hurt ourselves to encounter God.” “Perhaps,” I continue, “what she’s showing us is that sometimes the path to God just hurts.”

My reframing connects with theirs again as it ignites a reaction in some of the older class members who worry that the comforts of modern life make us all incapable of enduring the pain and hardship that was expected and endured in their parents’ worlds. Ann who grew up at the tail end of the Depression and who has lived an intentionally simple life, notes that “we find ways to numb the pain,” while Rickie, whose general style and demeanor tends to be less glamorous and more cleanly simple than exhibited by many of the women at FBC in her shared age and class bracket, adds, “we could learn something [from Beatrice] about suffering.” In this, Beatrice starts becoming an example for us through her willingness to suffer if that was what God wanted her to do. As a result, the conversation turns to a critique of our own spiritual practices.

First Peter tells a story about a contemplative prayer workshop he had attended at which he was the only Baptist. Richard, with a sad tone in his voice, asks why it is Baptists avoid doing practices like contemplative prayer. One of the quieter men in the class quickly chimes in, “because we’re scared of it.” “What are we scared of?” I ask, “That it won’t work or that it…” He cuts me off: “We’re scared it *will* work!” He thus implicitly introduces the possibility that we, rather than Beatrice, try to control God’s ability to act in our lives. Others nod agreement. Someone frames what Beatrice was doing as desiring to be united to Christ, and Richard notes, “We’re interested in it [being united to Christ], but less interested in the discipline.” This opens a discussion about what

being united to Christ looks like for us, while it also catalyzes a semester-long call from some in the class that I develop a course on worship for them so that we can explore some of these questions further together.

This discussion of how we experience unity with Christ returns us to Elizabeth's concern from the beginning of the discussion that Beatrice's desire for transcendence was selfish, a view that she softens over the course of our conversation. One man, Charles, notes that Baptists are "practical" and do not necessarily want to transcend the world: "We think God is already in us – there's no need to transcend our bodies." His point does not negate Beatrice's practice, so much as it draws a distinction between the way she experienced God and the way he understands typical Baptists to do so. And while others largely resonate with his point, they also voice concerns that because we frame transcendence in this way, we might also miss out on some of the mystery inherent to Beatrice's ways.

As a result, Peter and Elizabeth begin to articulate more explicitly the possibility that we have a controlling edge to the ways that we practice prayer. Leaping off from loose, performative integrations of the numerous points bubbling up and flying around between us all, the two note together that perhaps it was not Beatrice trying to" manipulate God," but us, precisely because we do not allow God to take us over in this way: "we're scared it will work!" In coming to see how Beatrice was not necessarily doing the negative things they thought she was, the group comes to wonder if we are. As a consequence, their insight into their own prayer and worship lives is opened up, complicated and loosely re-integrated.

As the group members allow Beatrice's more violent language to critique their own spiritual practices, thus forging distinctions between all the forms of language they use to make theological claims, I wonder how willing they might be to entertain her more erotic language too. As soon as the thought occurs to me, I become acutely aware of my flesh. As a female leader in the church, I am sometimes aware of being sexualized by others. I therefore take care in this community – as I do in my academic community and life in general – to self-present as I want to be perceived, regardless of whether or not others are willing to perceive me that way. While eroticism is an area of academic interest for me, about which I speak quite freely in an academic context as well as in life in general, as soon as I move into trying to talk about it in this ecclesial arena, I find myself struck – thanks to my various bodily *habitus* inscribed in me through participation in Baptist practices as well as the more broadly Evangelical practices of my past – with something akin to the fear of God. And so I start euphemizing my academic interests – not to mention personal experience – with all the grace of an embarrassed teenager.

"I realize the language is violent," I begin, "but doesn't *anything* in it also sound good?" *Maybe someone else has picked up on the sexual aspects*, I hope to myself, *and will bring it up so I don't have to*. But no one takes the bait. Perhaps they do not share my sub-conscious affirmation of sexual pleasure as a good thing; perhaps they hear this sexual, but don't like the sound of it. "No," they respond, "it just sounds painful." Out of the corner of my eye I see Miriam, only a few years older than I, smirk and lower her gaze. No one is coming to help me. "Really?" I continue, "there's nothing in Beatrice's bodily experience that sounds familiar?" I immediately think *what a silly thing this is to ask* – why presume this is familiar to them? – but I swear I see Gene smile now too. Still

no aid, though. “Ok,” I try a final time, really euphemizing my way to an abstract point, and continuing, even sub-consciously, to presume the goodness of sexual pleasure, “there’s nothing in the panting, sweating, heat overtaking her body, and then a moment of ecstatic release that sounds good to anyone here?”

My voice is raising in pitch, and the pace of my words is now rapid. I feel the heat flush my own face, a little sweat too. But this is embarrassment, not ecstasy. Someone giggles quietly, and now the class is divided between those who get my point and are not saying anything while refusing to meet my gaze, and those who are not getting it and are, therefore, protesting. “No! No, it sounds awful,” Ann says, shaking her head emphatically while a few other older ladies nod vigorously in agreement. I let it go.

Perhaps I should have just said, “Beatrice is using orgasmic language to describe her unity with the Divine.” Indeed, I halted the conversation – silenced myself – because explicitly saying the word “orgasm” was necessary for making my point any clearer. Immature or unenlightened though it might seem, my skin felt squirmy at the idea of saying that word to this group. Simply put, these are not the people with whom I talk about sex. At the same time, by euphemizing it, I created a knowledge divide between those who had ears to hear and those who did not. And I felt guilty that my discomfort at saying something plainly was leading some of the older class members to a somewhat comical, unknowing refusal of sexual pleasure. I did not want my own embarrassment to embarrass others. And that is why I finally let it go.

After class that night I wrote about the experience in my fieldnotes, noting how silly I felt for not being able to simply say what I was thinking. I challenged myself in that reflective text to handle things better when I taught a female mystic in the next

course. I wish I could say things did go better, but in the second course I over-corrected. I framed everything about the mystical experience in terms of sexuality, so much so that the class members ended up too perplexed to engage, rather than my fear that they would be too shocked to do so.

And in both cases I realized that it is one thing to discuss a set of somewhat abstract concerns about "the erotic" in an academic environment, and an entirely other thing to talk about sexual pleasure with an inter-generational group of my fellow Baptists. The abstraction of academic theological discourse allows us to talk about pleasure as an analytic category, distanced from our personal experience. With everyday theological discourses of concretion, talking about pleasure feels like too vulnerable an exposure of my own particular bodily experience. As academics, we might discuss pleasure out of a desire to impact concrete social practices and beliefs about sexuality, but it is our very tendency to abstraction that enables us to do so. In some ways moves of abstraction help us better understand particular context-specific points, as I have been arguing throughout, but in other ways, moves of abstraction actually allow academic theologians to communicate those points. In the conclusion to this dissertation, I reflect on the need for seeking out, nurturing and constructing modes of conversation that might enable the communication of such abstracted points – even about topics that remain taboo in ecclesial environments – back into those environments.

In this section, I have endeavored to put descriptive flesh on Tanner's model for how concretion clashes with abstraction, and how the ad hoc clashes with the systematized. At the same time, we have seen how theological clashes occurred because our languages and the commitment-laden practices that shape them lead us to encounter

and interpret shared Christian elements with completely different authorizing norms. As we performed our theology together in conversation, passing it back and forth between our hands, seeking common ground, we felt tensions between "Christian identity" and "being a Christian," between the encounter with Beatrice as a text, and the encounter with her as a person. Somewhere in these tensions we pursued the wisdom of *habitus* construction through performing the practice of a conversation across various theological fluencies.

At the same time, using the metaphorical lens of performance theology to supplement and expand Tanner's notion of bricolage, I have endeavored to show the possibilities and limitations to my particular way of bringing Tanner's model to life here. Enfleshment, we have seen, reveals that conversations between people, not discourses, create interpersonal as well as theological tensions. We become frustrated with each other, or embarrassed to talk about topics that feel taboo. Issues of gender and sexuality came to the fore as I realize acutely how my speech is always connected to and ushering forth from my body. The insight that comes from the interaction between concretion and abstraction, and the blend of emotive, doctrinal, experiential and other forms of language is thus paired with a particular, bodily felt, discomfort. The full messiness of bricolage, understood in this more performative way, therefore comes to the fore here, demonstrating that when everyday and academic theologies are hoped to impact and shape each other, modes of conversation for doing so need to be considered. Moreover, each mode, as a context-specific, ad hoc, concrete mode, will have its own goods and its own limitations.

My Mother's Hips

After the group's response to Beatrice, which I sensed stemmed from a (perhaps unduly) strict Protestant understanding of "works," while teaching Luther I focused on exposing how his similar fears ended up leading to a weakened understanding of sanctification. In so doing, I hoped we might further loosen the constraints on the group's concerns about works in ways that could lead to deeper reflection on them.

As I engage the moves of this conversation, I again explore how everyday and academic theological concerns were exposed, competed with each other, and sought common ground, as different types of emotional, theological, Biblical and experiential language comprised our shared pursuit of wisdom. The performative relationship between embodiment, wisdom and theological construction is explored here again. Even with moments of success, we see again that the tension between speech and silence remains and, indeed, reveals both the possibilities and limitations of the particular, performative way I endeavored to bring Tanner's model to life in ecclesial practices of classroom conversation. Here, in particular, I focus on how our classroom conversation at times made it difficult for me to communicate academic theology without inadvertently obscuring it.

I begin the discussion on Martin Luther by contextualizing him first within his own personal story – as a deeply anxious, intense monk whose supervisor sent him to study theology to try to move his focus off of his own failings. Then I contextualize him within the narrative of the church of his time. Narrating the medieval church, of course, includes some description of indulgences and simony. These, I try to reframe with more nuance than I imagine the group has heard before. I explain that Luther's concern was not

with the authorized practices themselves, but more so with the corrupted ways they were being performed.

To make these claims accessible, I describe the practice in contemporary Baptist or broadly American congregational terms. The pope was engaged in a massive "capital campaign" to rebuild St. Peter's, I note, tapping into debates around FBC over whether or not resources should be spent on renovations to our own building. According to the official church theology, I explain, money given for indulgences and simony was supposed to be an offering out of gratitude for what God had already done, not a payment for services to be rendered. In that way, I explain, it was not unlike our own Sunday morning financial offerings that we give for the work of the church out of gratitude for God's work in our lives. But the capital campaign, I note, with an implicit caution for our own renovation projects, had gotten out of hand. Consequently those who collected the money for indulgences and simony became a little more aggressive. And so, over time, a practice that was supposed to be the giving of money out of gratitude became something more like a bribe. I ask the class if they had ever heard indulgences explained this way before, and they all say no. Peter in particular exclaims, "So it's like their theology didn't match their practice!" "Yeah," I respond, "pretty much!"

What I was wanting them to see was that a strong reaction to a concrete situation had led to a theological revolution of which we are all inheritors, both in our faith beliefs and practices. If I could destabilize the concrete problem, then I might be able to loosen the hold that the theological outcome had on their thinking. This theological outcome – a strict focus on justification by faith – had, as we have seen, effects on our ability to engage ideas that even remotely threatened its power. Perhaps, I was thinking, if I went to

the source itself, I would be able to open up those conversations that were at times feeling stilted.

Having established the concrete church practice context, I go on to describe the theological revolution. I give a brief introduction to the concept of justification by faith, arguing that Catholics had always believed in justification by faith; they just did not centralize the idea such that the rest of their theology was interpreted through it. To emphasize this point, I tell them how Luther's view of justification in fact undermined his vision of sanctification. And here is where I – and by extension, we – focus our attention.

Whereas with Beatrice, the group began with reactionary criticism of her, with Luther they begin with reactionary defense. Ann starts us off: "He'd seen the extremities of works, so you can understand why he was like that." I affirm her point: yes, the practice of indulgences was deeply problematic, but it is also a problem to lose sanctification from one's theology. I feel a twinge of guilt. I think I might be overstating the problem in Luther's theology for a rhetorical effect of persuasion. *I will need to fix this as the conversation goes on*, I think to myself. But then Charlie, a vivacious, middle-aged man in the class, quickly redirects my attention by asking an explicit question of me, "was it just not on his radar because he was so focused on indulgences?" I falter for a moment. How can I communicate that a theologian does not have the freedom to let sanctification "fall off of their radar," even for a minute? But while I am thinking that, I falter again: *when did I become so obsessed with systematicity?* One of the things I like about Luther is how episodic his theology is. How can I communicate all these layers efficiently without taking focus from the task at hand? I find myself able to respond with little more than a "yeah, sure, but…" answer that quickly peters out into nothing.

But as I am trying to regroup and refocus the point that I want to make, the questions keep coming. “Was he scared he might stop over the line?” asks Ann. “Did he want to close that door quickly because we might think we can save ourselves?” I realize now definitively that I have overstated the case. And they are trusting my interpretation, agreeing with me that it is in error, but also defending Luther’s need to make that error from a practical perspective. *I really need to fix this*, I think again. As when I taught Beatrice, I was inadvertently and mistakenly leaning toward academic concerns – here, the way that attempts to make systematic coherence between Luther’s view of justification and his view of sanctification can cause theological problems – to convince the group of my point. But here, once again, they are much more concerned with the concrete stuff of life. Once again I am speaking a language inconsistent with the context, and I need to move toward common ground.

I begin to do so by trying to clarify the ways I have accidentally misconstrued Luther as having no theology of sanctification. “It’s not that he excluded the possibility of sanctification,” I explain. Drawing on academic practices of close reading and language analysis, I try to stay near Luther’s particular language of spontaneity, and I continue, “But what we do has no bearing on whether or not those works *spontaneously* happen. Because the connection between God’s work and ours is *spontaneous,*” I add, “it becomes difficult to see how the life of faith has any real impact on who we are and how we live.” I stop here because I know, as we have seen throughout, that this group cares about “who we are and how we live.” I have managed now to draw my concerns close to theirs.

Again, it is Ann who meets me in the middle ground: “How would Luther have felt about the idea of ‘psyching ourselves’ up for sanctification?” she asks. I, and others, give her inquisitive looks. She is searching for the right words, getting animated with her hand gestures, “I mean, the idea that the Holy Spirit is as involved in our process of sanctification as Jesus was in our redemption [*pause*], salvation, [*she pauses and makes a frustrated noise as she tries to clarify*], you know, I mean, our initial salvation.” She pauses again, perhaps recognizing that there is a difference between salvation and conversion, even though many in the class, and Baptists in general, can tend to conflate the two.

Unable to find the right language, Ann has been alienated from what typically works for her, but has not yet found something to replace or renew it. And so she is struggling to make her point, even as she is reaching towards it. Moving her mouth silently and still gesturing with her hand, it is clear she is not finished, and it seems the group, like me, wants to hear her get where she is trying to go, as no one interrupts or takes her pause as an opportunity to jump in. “I can’t do anything more about sanctification than I could about my conversion,” she bursts, now having found the words she needs from a whole set of theological words she already possesses. “God has to work that in me too. I have to be as dependent upon grace during my ‘growing salvation’ as I was during my ‘initial salvation’,” she adds, now inventing new terms to make sense of it all. And in so doing, Ann weaves together a number of types of language in order to perform the process of reaching a theological point in conversation with others.

In one way it seems that Ann is agreeing with the way I have construed Luther’s theology. God does the work in her framing of it. But at the same time, I hear her

describing our posture in relation to God's work. God's work is not bursting from us spontaneously; we actually need to "psych ourselves up" for it and be in the posture of dependence. The parallel to the Spirit's work in sanctification, as Ann puts it, is Jesus' work in justification. In both, then, we need to make a conscious decision to "accept the gift," as numerous class members put it on a number of occasions. And once again, Ann and I have found common ground upon which the whole class can begin to build.

Interpreting where Ann is trying to lead us, then, I ask them if we have a responsibility to act on our salvation, on our sanctification process. And they begin to think through examples of how this might be the case. Gene, perhaps the quietest class member, speaks first: "We're told to be transformed, work out our own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12-13). "And," he continues, indicating the role we play in this transformation, "we're told to submit to the will of God…so that would seem to hinder your sanctification if you fight that." I affirm his point, and introduce the language of human agency, noting that we too are "agents who participate in the process by which we are sanctified." I have learned from our conversation about Beatrice to avoid language of "self-determination" and "works," eschewing it for language of "agency" and "participation." This makes more sense to them, but it also feels more accurate to me. And they have helped me make that clarification. Peter responds, interpreting my comment by adding, "we're still accountable." "Yes," I affirm, "we're still accountable." The flow of our conversation is shifting and changing. From Ann's longer, slower, searching speech, into a few quick comments, and simple, short sentences as we clarify each other and seek understanding. And then Rickie chimes in with, as often was the case with her comments, a clear Biblical example to sum things up.

Referencing the hortatory letters sent to the various churches at the beginning of the book of Revelation, Rickie adds to Gene's comments: "we get exhorted to do things…he [*it is not clear whether she means God, or the writer of Revelation*] says "do this, change that, you're not doing this…I mean, why exhort people if they can't do anything about it?" She pauses and, when no one jumps in to pick up the point, she continues, "I have trouble saying we're puppets and God does it all and we just sit back and kind of…[*she trails off, pauses, and starts up again…*] I think God does most of it, and we have this strange tension, paradox maybe even, doing what we allow God to do within us and how we allow him to transform us…"

I feel awkward in this moment. I want to nurture the way Rickie has introduced notions of "tension" and "paradox" into the conversation, as I feel that would help us deal with some interesting questions about the relationship between Divine and human agency: questions their line of talking has brought to the front of my thoughts. But I also feel the need to clarify my framing of Luther one more time. It seems I still have not rectified my initial miss-steps. Especially because Rickie is a bright, engaged class member who often interprets hidden aspects of my lessons that did not necessarily occur to me, I trust that this is my error, not hers. Rickie's statement that she has "trouble saying we're puppets" thus makes me worry that I have implied first that Luther would claim such a thing and, second, that I want her to accept it.

Torn between this desire to nurture and to correct, I falter for a moment, and Ann jumps in before I have the chance to speak. This moment would haunt me throughout the remainder of the two courses, as a few times Rickie would say something like, "Yeah, that's why I can't get on board with Luther, because he doesn't have a view of

sanctification…" or, "well, like Luther says…" Each time, the context will not create room for me to mend the misperception, and each time I find myself uncomfortably surprised by how much Rickie has accepted my framing of Luther as what Luther had actually said.

I had not interrogated the gaps I presume between text and interpretation thoroughly enough when I created my lesson plan, and in this situation I – and, perhaps, Rickie – paid for it. This mistake points to a further tension in the way I am framing the relationship between everyday and academic theology here, however. The way that I taught Luther, for example, to this group, differed dramatically from how I would write scholarship about Luther, or even teach him in a seminary classroom. After offering an incredibly brief, broad strokes view of his theology, my focus landed squarely on sanctification. In fact, I worried afterwards that members of the class would think Luther should be understood entirely through this lens of his understanding of sanctification. At least for Rickie, Luther became equated less with justification by faith, and more with a problematic view of Christian responsibility and the sanctified life.

I had taught Luther in this way because that was how he connected with the conversation we were having in the class, at least as I perceived it. But I also taught him in this way because I thought doing so could disrupt a view I perceived as limiting our ability to talk about particular topics, like anything that smacked of "works righteousness," to these faithful Protestant ears. In sum, I taught him this way because I thought it best served as a conversation stimulant, regardless of how accurate or full an impression of Luther it would give to the group. Having negotiated my pedagogical goals

in this way, however, I tipped the balance too far in the direction of ad hoc reflection and contextual goals, losing the loose systematic coherence that I also value.

Such pedagogical concerns and my attempts to balance them surrounded all my teaching choices. And for the most part, I felt a coherence with the way I taught particular figures in the class and my broader understanding of their work, even though I was not explicitly communicating that broader understanding to the class. But with Luther, I inadvertently allowed some slippage that I did not realize until after the fact. It was not until Rickie repeated her dismissing of him a few times over the rest of the semester (as well as into the next) that I fully realized what I had done, and by then it was too late. These are the kinds of pedagogical decisions we make on the fly all the time while teaching. What we say in the classroom is never as fact-checked or coherent as what we might write in our scholarship. The freedom afforded to my authority in this ecclesial classroom brought this aspect of teaching to the foreground all the more.

Following Rickie's comment, Ann jumps in with a question that leads into a controversial idea, around which much of the rest of the discussion pivots:

> Don't you think we could stop the whole thing [*i.e. the whole salvation experience, sanctification itself*] as much as we can stop the whole conversion experience? I need to be dependent on the Lord to transform my life…I can stop the whole process by not being willing to do his will. We can stop the process anywhere we want to, but we can't speed it up by anything we do.

The introduction of ideas like speeding up or slowing down sanctification raises hackles as people begin to argue that if we can do that, then we have returned to saying that we could either earn or lose our salvation. The temporal dimensions of salvation, something Baptists tend not to consider too frequently or too explicitly, even though they would accept these dimensions when they are articulated, are complicating the conversation.

With various modes of discourse on the table with which we can play, we as a group are now grappling with which ones to pick up, and how to create performative integrations of them to keep the conversation moving.

What got lost by all of us in this moment was that Ann never said we could speed up sanctification, but only that we can stop it by our disobedience. Jumping into the gap between sanctification as something that can be stopped or stalled, and the idea that sanctification is part of salvation, Mike responds to Ann playfully by invoking the Baptist belief in "once saved always saved." Grinning, he asks provocatively, "if we can slow down the process of sanctification, in that slowing down, can we slow it down enough to lose our salvation?" Establishing the borders of what we are describing, Mike reminds us that Baptists do not believe someone who is truly "saved" can cease to be so. Once the gift of salvation has been accepted, according to Baptists, it cannot be given back. But, Mike reveals, there is a fine line between not having the power to give it back, and having the power willfully to slow its progression in us.

These metaphors of speed spill over into metaphors of movement in general, as Peter – still pondering the line of thinking about accountability that he had tossed into the fray earlier – then shares a paraphrase of a Biblical Story that helps him understand Christian responsibility: as he tells it, Paul was headed on a missionary journey to Bithynia, when he was stopped by a flooded creek. God then changed the "missionary team's" direction, telling them to go to Macedonia instead. "Well," Peter says, "it looks to me like that it's easier for God to use us when we're moving, even if it's in the wrong direction…I need to stay tuned." I ask Peter why it is more difficult for God to use us when we are still, and he responds:

> Inertia…it's easy to get passive and interpret the Bible, 'wait upon the Lord,' to mean, expect God to knock us over the head with his will…part of salvation as we go through life is asking, "I really would like to know," and sometimes I ask that while I'm moving, while I'm headed some direction. Otherwise I'm sitting at home going, "Lord I sure hope you tell me someday what I'm supposed to do because I'm not going to move until you do."

With this last line, in his usual dramatic performative style, Peter leans back in his chair, twiddles his thumbs, rolls his eyes to the Heavens, and closes out the speech by miming an appearance of someone whistling nonchalantly. Ann has been nodding along with his story knowingly. I, meanwhile, have no idea what they are referencing. I thumb through the book of Acts later, and still cannot find it. Eventually I enter "Paul + Bithynia + Acts" into an online search engine and discover that the reference is a single, seemingly inconsequential, verse: Acts 16:7.

Paul reaches the border of Bithynia (not a creek) and "the Spirit of Jesus" (not a flood) does not allow his group to cross, so they travel a different route (still to Bithynia, not Macedonia, even though they reach Macaedonia a few verses later). What matters here is not that Peter garbled aspects of the story, however, but that he knew a minute, random reference at all. Moreover, he expanded and changed the narrative, shifting details like the creek and the flood, allowing the story to be integrated with his understanding of his own practices of faithfulness in relation to God. This freedom with the text, paired with its significance for Peter's own daily living, indicates a knowledge of the Scripture that is as embodied as cognitive.

Indeed, most of the class members would toss out Biblical verses and narratives as proof-texts, examples, exhortations, and for insight, all with varying degrees of textual accuracy, throughout both courses. Biblical language is so firmly integrated with their

own modes of speaking – indeed, into the various *habitus* that give rise to their discourse – that textual accuracy is somewhat beside the point. What they were doing is better described as living the text than reading it, even as living it is impossible without repetitive – and, it seems, forgetful – reading of it. Despite the fact that I was not raised Baptist, and therefore lack the childhood Bible training common to Baptist practices, I nevertheless share a form of these *habitus* and am therefore able to know how to respond to a textual reference, even when I cannot quite make the cognitive link to the reference. Their varying degrees of accuracy, in fact, heightened my ability to do so. Often, when I tried to find the reference after class, only to discover how garbled it had been, I would wonder how many of them, like me, were also struggling to make the connection, even as their instincts helped them also appear as if they had made it.

Rickie, blending the theological musings that were circulating between us all with her own personal experience, then follows up on Peter's understanding of sanctification and movement: "As I have lived my life I have grown and changed physically, emotionally – everything in my life changes me in some way." "So how," she continues, "if I'm letting God work in my life, how is that not changing me?" If everything we do has the power to change us, how much more so does God have the power to do so? "We open ourselves up to allow God to come in and change us," she continues, "to get rid of the old and change it into new." Responding to a number of the issues we had discussed all at once and, like Peter, adding a layer of Biblical authority to her claim, Rickie's comments develop a picture of sanctification as a process of maturation: "We must change and grow as Christians. The Bible is replete with needing to grow. Paul's idea of

eating meat and maturing. Encountering God changes us. We keep moving toward what we'll be at the end of time."

While Rickie is speaking her whole thought, its opening line, comparing physical growth to God's work in her, begins percolating for me. And I pick this one up and start to run with it. Notions of sanctification and the body begin to swirl together, and a new theological articulation starts rising out of my own embodied wisdom. Caught in the flow of the conversation, I forget for a moment that I am responsible for the class, and dive instead into simply participating in it. In Rickie's comments, I see an image of a God who continually fills us with her image until we look more like her. And this evokes a body memory of my mother. Without really thinking about how my own feminine vision of God is allowing me to make this connection, I begin to share it with the class.

I tell them how my mother has this stance she does where she puts her hands on her hips and leans to the side. The stance is loaded with communicative meaning. It is cheeky, an assertion of my mother's self. Never angry or imposing, it indicates that she knows she has just lost whatever game we were playing but she is going to hang on for a minute more with grit. "As soon as I put my hands there," I say to the class, and instinctively I sit upright in my chair to make room for my hands to find my hips, "I can feel my mother in my body like I'm incarnating her. I feel her in my body and I feel my body become hers."

I laugh; I did not even realize my hands had made it to my hips to tell the story, but now feeling them there, I can feel my mother in the room with me. *It is amazing how a posture can incarnate a memory.* My thoughts are buzzing and I feel my face scrunch a little as I try to interpret what I am feeling in this moment deep under my skin in my

muscles and bones. It is like my thoughts are searching through my body, coursing my veins in search of the words for articulation. My body is becoming more and more explicitly necessary in my performative articulation of a theological idea.

I push my fists a little harder into my hips, as if I can find what I am looking for there. But as soon as I do so, I have directed my consciousness to myself; as fast as a flash, I am fully myself again. And my mother has left the room. But the flash creates a space and I realize that the reason my body becomes my mother's for a moment has something to do with the continuity of our relationship through time. "It's through deep relationship with my mother," I add then, searching for it, but not quite grasping it, "Maybe something…[*pause*] something similar is happening with God working through me. Maybe sanctification is something like an evoking of that relationship I've had with God over a lifetime." *Perhaps it's not the movement from somewhere to somewhere else*, I think, *but a movement that takes us deeper…deeper into our own bodies…deeper into what makes me me*. I stop and exhale. Reading my body aloud to the group was hard work, but good work, and I am smiling at my hands still on my hips. The room is quiet. It seems as long as I hold my hands there the floor is mine. I let go.

As soon as I let go, the silence of the room still hanging, I worry that I have said too much, and I feel grateful, then, that I avoided speaking my final thoughts about the relationship between transcendence and immanence aloud. I have just crafted a bodily image of the Divine feminine, based on my mother's hips, as some sort of exuberant performative utterance. The image had erupted from the theology, personal narrative, Biblical allusions, and other found objects we had all been tossing around between us. It somehow fit with the conversation we had been having, but it also disrupted it.

Time moves slowly when you are nervous, but after what felt like an aeon, Gloria laughs joyfully and exclaims, "I think that's part of this whole thing we're talking about!" She pauses and, gesturing with her hands because she is an animated speaker, continues, "when you allow God to be as much a part of your life as your mother, that does change you, and we do begin to reflect what he's doing in us. That's a good thing!" Gloria meets me in common ground, highlighting the parts of what I had said that could be acceptable to the group and relating them back to the conversation as it is flowing, while couching it all back in masculine language for God and replacing my metaphor with simile. She makes my story a little safer, more accessible and, as a result, the description becomes able to be integrated into our continued conversation. Nods circulate the table, and I notice how late it is getting. "Ok," I say, "now some of you have said you want to be Calvinists, let's talk about him for a bit and see how you feel then!" The group laughs, and we move on.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have endeavored to show how interpersonal relationships and the embodied dimensions of conversational interaction shaped the theologies that rose out of our theological pursuit of wisdom. And I used the metaphor of performance art to frame this process for two reasons. First, the metaphor of performance art helps us see how conversations performed across theological fluencies are dependent upon who shows up. It is intimately connected with the bodies in the room. And second, the metaphor of performance art helps us distinguish between the process of conversational theology and the subsequent product of the theological text that seeks to represent that process –

however fragmented – to an alternative audience. Performance art is captured in various modes: the performance itself, and the recordings, photographs and descriptions of that performance created according to the principles of artistic guilds. In much the same way, our pursuit of wisdom gives rise to a text that resists abstracting from the interactions of the process itself.

Furthermore, throughout this chapter we have seen clashes not only of theological beliefs, but also of personality, as we have also seen both discomfort and comfort in bodies as they sought to negotiate those tensions. In some cases, where we were able to bridge linguistic difference, these tensions opened out into fruitful conversation. In others, where our various *habitus* gave rise to dispositions of awkwardness and discomfort, conversation was halted. Speech was dependent on moments of silence to punctuate it, as we all negotiated what we could and could not say in public. Both silence and speech, therefore, marked both the possibilities and limitations of all of us performing loose integrations of our various competing and cohering *habitus* in our ongoing pursuit of wisdom.

Silence comes in many guises – a flush across the skin that halts a euphemized point from being expressed or a conversation cut short by death. If it is to be overcome it requires new words, and new friendships. But when we imagine the relationship between church and academy happening through abstracted discourses rather than embodied people living in relation to each other, we miss out not only on the messy complexity of lived practice, as Tanner puts it, but also on the factors that give rise to that complexity to begin with. In this chapter, then, I have sought to further complicate the complexity to which Tanner suggests theologians should pay attention, by teasing out what it might

actually look like in practice. It will be the task of the conclusion now to assess what this method has actually added to Tanner's method, as well as Fulkerson's, overall.

CONCLUSION

In the first chapter I used Kathryn Tanner's framework for interpreting theology as a cultural practice, one that gives rise to ad hoc, everyday discourses and specialized, academic discourses, to unpack the core question of this dissertation: what fruits can a conversation incorporating various theological fluencies into a pursuit of wisdom produce? The argument at the heart of Tanner's methods, outlined most fully in her book, *Theories of Culture*, is that the tasks of academic theology are "abetted by a highly complicated and subtle reading of the whole cultural field in which Christianity figures."[191] In large part for Tanner, this reading focuses on the permeable borders at which cultural practices are made Christian. I have sought here to explore the permeable border at which everyday and academic theological discourses compete and cooperate with each other. And I have done so in order to articulate the three distinct research questions that would give shape to my self-implicating ethnographic method. These three research questions asked how academic theology can hear everyday theology, how everyday and academic theologies can communicate their context-specific wisdom to each other, and how everyday theologies can impact the shape of academic theologies.

A constant division of labor has therefore marked this project. Taking seriously how concrete practices give rise to various *habitus*, discourses and particular social roles, this dissertation's key contribution to academic theology involves bringing to light one form of the embodied, interpersonal practices that could undergird Tanner's discursive categories of everyday and academic theology. The particular practice I sought to guide,

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[191] Kathryn Tanner, "Shifts in Theology in the Last Quarter Century," in *Modern Theology*, 26:1 (January 2010), 43.

then, was a communal conversation bringing a group of people speaking various theological fluencies together to pursue the wisdom of the faith that was already in our bones; put simply, we sought together to constitute our own *habitus* of pursuing wisdom. By performing and interpreting the practice thusly, I endeavored to ground the way Tanner frames the relationship between everyday and academic theological *discourses* in a descriptive analysis of the interactions between the practitioners who speak them.

In this conclusion, I reflect on these methods and practices. I endeavor to show how my attempts to perform a revised, expanded and, even, corrected vision of Tanner's scheme has opened it up to reveal the complex texture and messiness to which she alludes. At the same time, in opening this scheme up, we see that Tanner might frame this messiness a little too neatly. Of course, as I mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, all theoretical schemes tend towards neatness; their systematicity relies upon it. What interests us here is an inquiry into what Tanner's particular neatness hides about Christian practice. The description of these points of messiness thus serve as a friendly warning to theologians seeking to use some sort of ethnographic practice in their reflection. Different modes of research create different experiences and, by extension, yield different intellectual results.

This conclusion therefore clearly demarcates some of the limitations against which this project butted. These limitations were certainly a result of my own methods, but they also grew somewhat organically out of interpreting – and then shaping – the field of study through the theoretical lenses borrowed from Tanner. As a consequence, these limits serve as disruptions and corrections to her theory.

Engaging concrete practices always complicates theoretical categories, even as it is difficult, if not impossible, to interpret (and in this case, guide) these practices if we do not deploy some sort of theoretical structure. Even the simplest attempt to understand a practice and articulate that understanding is itself its own kind of theory. Academic theories, of course, are more specialized. They engage with other academic theories to gain deeper understanding of the practice. In other words, they do not arise from the practice alone. Academic theories fail to interpret concrete practice accurately, however, when they are negotiated only or, even, primarily in conversation with other academic theories rather than with the practices themselves. At the same time, no sooner have we articulated a theory to understand a particular set of practices does our ongoing observation of and engagement with those practices disrupt it again.

Categories like everyday and academic theology, for example, cannot capture the fullness of the conversation that takes place between everyday Christians and academic theologians, but they can help us frame what is happening in that conversation. Likewise, describing particular social roles – like everyday Christians and academic theologians – cannot fully capture the plethora of social roles available within a particular community of shared Christian practice. The various categories I have required to describe the people who took the classes I taught has demonstrated this. But even a seemingly specific social role descriptor, like "retired minister," does not account for the vast differences or even the nuanced similarities between Richard and Peter, for example, that I hope has come through in these pages.

In this way there remains a gulf between a particular social position that theory can – to varying degrees – pin in place, and the myriad ways that particular individuals

might take similar versions of that social position up. The tensions between these various theoretical categories and their particular performances has been at the heart of this study. In this conclusion I unpack some of these tensions' textures in order to gain a deeper descriptive understanding of the theoretical categories with which we have worked here. In so doing, I also seek to re-configure some of Tanner's ways of using these same categories.

In order to gain this richer understanding, I first outline some of the ways that I found everyday Christians to create complexly hybrid roles out of their own loose, performative integrations of their various competing and cohering *habitus*. I then reflect on my own hybrid subject-position, created out of my own competing and cohering *habitus* and roles, as both a tool for research and a topic for analysis. Everyday and academic theologies do not just compete and cohere as discourses: everyday Christians and academic theologians do the activity of bringing about that competition and coherence. Unpacking some of the texture of these particular social roles can therefore help us understand the processes by which everyday and academic theologies can compete and cooperate with each other better. It can help academic theologians consider more carefully not only what we want to say to everyday Christians, but also *how* we want to say it.

These various complex, hybrid social roles matter for understanding the relationship between everyday and academic theologies because they reveal how difficult it can be to disentangle the two forms of discourse from each other. In outlining the hybridity of the everyday and academic social roles performed by the people who took the classes I taught, I also reveal some of limitations to the particular way I brought

Tanner's model to life. As we will see, the nature of my self-implicated ethnographic method – teaching doctrinally based courses – inadvertently tended to exclude the participation of people who did not have post-secondary education or who had intellectual disabilities.

This focus on the people who produce and who are constituted by everyday and academic theologies next turns our attention to how conversations that pursue wisdom are nevertheless marked by complex systems of power and emotion. This reveals how difficult it is for academic theologians to engage Christian social practices not only ethically, but also without any personal discomfort. And that personal discomfort matters for shaping what types of conversations we are actually able to have in the ecclesial milieu, as well as what types of theology are able to be pursued in it and produced out of it. The role of space in the construction of theologies further demonstrates how difficult it is to disentangle everyday theologies from their concrete locations without occluding some of what makes them work.

The benefits and limitations of my method and my particular academic text created out of it are particularly visible in comparison to Mary McClintock Fulkerson's own turn to ethnographic methods. Both are complementary routes toward bringing Tanner's model to life. In this final concluding chapter I recap the ways in which the theology created out of reflexive ethnographic methods rather than more traditional forms of participant observation is able to have a deeper direct and local impact on practice than does Fulkerson's work, even as it is unable to make such broad normative and prescriptive claims as she does. What is gained by using this particular method is balanced by what is lost in it, as we will see more fully below.

In sum, we see that the processes by which academic theologians are able to shape a broad spectrum of Christian social practices directly also entail a willingness to be shaped by those practices. This mutual making and remaking of each other is, in the end, perhaps the real goal of our interaction: the spiritual discipline of pursing together the wisdom of the faith that is already in our bones.

The Potential Hybridity of Everyday Christians

I have argued throughout this dissertation that the theologies that rise from practices associated with ecclesial, academic and everyday life all overlap and inter-permeate each other, a point with which Tanner would most certainly agree. Seeing this inter-permeation in concrete practice has brought to light some of the ways particularly hybrid social roles can be created across the spectrum of theological fluency. As everyday and academic theologies compete and cooperate with each other to influence Christian social practices in Tanner's proposal, these hybrid social roles provide examples for understanding how complex the fluencies of the academic theologian's conversation partners – or competitors – might be. In the case of my research partners, they serve as a reminder that there are many everyday Christians in churches who are already doing some of the work of cooperation between the everyday and academic within themselves, before the more specialized academic theologian even shows up.

While none of the people who took the classes I taught located their vocation in the institutional academy, a number nevertheless had some level of formal, academic theological training and were, therefore, to varying degrees inculcated with some of the various *habitus* associated with such training. Between those who were retired from

careers in ministry, and those who had retired from or were still working in Christian publishing, the group racked up quite a few years of explicit theological training (a few had their Masters of Divinity or Religious Education, one had advanced degree work in Sacred Music, and one had a Ph.D. in Theology, all from Southern Baptist institutions). Other class members had taken required courses in Theology or Biblical Studies in their Christian colleges. And still others had taken Religious Studies and Theology electives out of interest in their college study.

My story about chatting with Peter in his "man-cave" in chapter three offers a case in point of one of these hybrid social roles. Peter has no interest in contributing to or shaping the life of the theological academy. He deploys the various *habitus* inculcated into him through his M.Div. and formal training in "Christian Counseling" toward the performance of his various ministerial roles, as well as toward the further theological study he endeavors to do daily in his retirement. In his view, the academy exists primarily to support the work of the church. Indeed, as I noted in the third chapter, Peter would often question me to make sure that I was not being swayed too far away from a focus on ministry by an "ivory tower" mentality. And at times he was disappointed with my answers to his questions.

Peter thus remains an "everyday Christian" in Tanner's model, but the hybrid nature of his social role when it is observed in practice reveals much more complex layers of the competing and cohering *habitus* that shape who he is, how he thinks, and how he acts. Peter is a conversation partner who pushes back and disagrees with me, and who does so with insights into concrete practice, but also into various Christian intellectual traditions that I sometimes lack because of my own academic disciplinary

focus. Moreover, in our conversations, when we compete over how to view problems in practice, we tend to alternate winning – if such a winner could be declared – not because I have not managed to communicate in the language of his everyday theology, as Tanner's schema might suggest, but simply because he has seen an angle on the problem that I have not.

This complex hybridity was also evident in the social roles constituted by non-theological academic training. Most, if not all, of the other class members were college graduates. A few had also completed Masters level and Ph.D. work in fields outside of theology. Near everyone then was inculcated with some configuration of the various *habitus* associated with post-secondary education – all of which are related in varying ways with certain class, economic, gender, and other *habitus* that contribute to who we are and how we live. As practices and discourses weave into each other, and as academic inter-disciplinary work is on the rise, these various forms of specialized discourse further complicated the hybridity of the people present in the room, as well to the theologies they articulated.

Take Miriam, for example. Miriam, who has a Ph.D. in Communications, teaches at a local undergraduate institution. Her own academic research focuses on power in interpersonal relationships and education. Despite not having specifically theological academic training, some of the academic skills with which Miriam is inculcated were nevertheless relevant and helpful to our conversation. On the night when we studied liberation theologies, for example, Miriam's questions and comments guided the group to ponder their own particular cultural locations in relation to those of the theologians we were studying. I could intuit that there was an undercurrent to their broader comments,

but I could not quite name it. Miriam could, and she brought it to light for all of us in a way that moved the conversation along.

When I asked Miriam about how her own academic work shaped her insights in my follow up interview, she began her response, “Yeah, I remember that: I remember thinking about the standpoint epistemology I teach my students…” Not only did Miriam bring this content and skill to our conversation, but she also participated in the type of translation of it (i.e., she talked about how our “culture shapes us,” and not about “standpoint epistemology” in the conversation) that I consistently needed to do with my specialized theological knowledge and skills. The complexity of Miriam’s role within our conversational pursuit of wisdom and the ways in which multiple trajectories of practice contribute to it reveals just how complex are the forms of theological discourse that could be plotted along Tanner’s theological continuum. Like Peter, she also reveals the striking possibilities within everyday theological discourse for speaking back to, correcting and guiding the intellectual pursuits of both everyday and academic theological discourses as well.

The specialized resources – theological and other – that everyday Christians bring to bear on their everyday theological reflections are diverse, as Tanner consistently notes. And in that, their contributions to theological conversations have the potential to be equally complex. Tanner’s theological continuum positions academic theologians as able to deploy specialized theological knowledge that can help solve the crises that erupt in Christian social practices. As everyday and academic theologies compete over how to do this, people like Peter and Miriam – as well as numerous others who took the classes I taught – embody particular forms of hybridity that might make them also well-equipped,

but differently so, and perhaps even better equipped for this task of crisis-management than is the academic theologian. Potential allies or, even, particularly well-armed foes, such characters indicate that the textures of conversation around an academic theologian's position within a Christian community are myriad and, often, more difficult to negotiate than we expect.

But this focus on the hybridity of everyday Christians also reveals a particular limit to my attempts to perform Tanner's method. FBC is already a middle- to upper-middle class church, filled primarily with wealthy, educated professionals. The way I designed the courses I taught tended to draw members who were theologically educated, in particular, but also highly educated in a more general sense as well. These levels of education thus also coincided with a particular class *habitus* that shaped the style of our conversations. Furthermore, as highly intellectually driven classes, they also tended to draw out church members who enjoy and are proficient with the practices of intellectual debate. The nature of my data therefore unfolds into reflections on these highly educated, intellectual hybrid social roles almost by necessity. The framework of my study thus tended to exclude those who are not educated professionals, and those whose intellectual capacities are diminished in some way.

There are, however, two cases that might function as minority reports despite my failures in this regard. We had one class member who was not educated at the college level. He was a recent convert to Baptist religion, having just completed a local area mission program that helped homeless men with substance abuse issues get clean and transition into the mission's subsidized housing program. We had another class member,

who I mentioned in chapter three, who exhibited signs of dementia and, therefore, struggled with some of the typical practices of intellectual debate.

Both men attended class sporadically. Despite my efforts to extend numerous explicit invitations for them to attend more often, and to participate fully in the conversation, the ways I designed and taught the courses nevertheless may have inadvertently discouraged and even excluded their participation. If so, that was my failure, not theirs. Reviewing transcripts after both courses were finished, I came across a number of insights that they brought to our conversations which, for various reasons related to my own shortcomings, I was unable to integrate into the ongoing course of the discussion. Not until I read and re-read these transcripts later, did I begin to see the threads the two men were pulling together in ways I was not able to recognize in the moment.

Therefore, because of my method's design, I now lack the data to support my claim that these two men also brought embodied wisdom into our conversations; that is, they brought various, diverse *habitus* that contributed to the internal diversity of our community. I also lack enough data to support my claim that their embodied wisdom both enlivened the pursuit we all engaged together and challenged my own thinking, though with hindsight, I can see that it did. In this section, I have endeavored to demonstrate how my method complicates Tanner's view of everyday Christians, revealing the hybrid nature many embody. The path to demonstrating this claim has, however, limited my ability throughout the dissertation to reveal how everyday Christians who lack the educational expertise and intellectual capacities that were *de facto*

normative for these classes might also contribute to a conversation between everyday and academic theologies.

The Hybridity of Academic Theologians as a Tool

Like everyday Christians, academic theologians are also inculcated with various competing and cohering *habitus* and roles that give rise to the forms of theological discourse we speak. My interests here relate particularly to our *institutional* hybridity, however. Drawing on my specialized ministerial and academic knowledge and skills, both inculcated in me by my belonging to the distinct social spheres of church and academy, I guided conversations that enabled everyday and academic theologies to hear and speak to each other. By highlighting the ways in which an academic theologian's hybrid roles can be performed in a loose integration for the purpose of ecclesial service, I endeavored to outline how the integration of everyday theologies with academic theologies can also lead to productive tensions, or forms of competition as Tanner puts it, as well as fruitful cooperation.

These forms of competition and cooperation became most evident in my expansion of Tanner's metaphor of the academic theologian as a bricoleur into the academic theologian as a performance artist. And by performing theology in this communal way, our conversation was able to bring to light – to varying degrees – aspects of our different forms of embodied wisdom shaped by the distinct institutional spheres of church and academy.

To affect this process, my own hybridity as an academic theologian shaped by both these spheres was crucial. My participation in the ecclesial sphere, even in a fraught

and complex way, gave me access not only to teach the classes, but also to foster the trust and vulnerability between all of us that was necessary for them to work (to the varying degrees that they did work). Being implicated in the ecclesial sphere, I was also inculcated with the instincts necessary for responding appropriately (when I managed to do so) to the flow of that particular teaching context, and for attempting corrections when I had not managed to do so. Deeply implicated as a member, the group seemed also more willing to forgive me, and forgive me quickly, throughout all my failings.

Such a subject position, of course, differs starkly from that occupied by Fulkerson in her own methods of participant observation. While I lose some of the objective distance on my field of study that she has on hers (evidenced, in particular, by the types of emotional responses I exhibit throughout my study), I also gain an "insider" status, as outlined above, that gives me access both to embodied "insider" information and, more significantly, to shape the practices that I am studying. I have a little more freedom to experiment with those practices, to see what happens when particular variables within them are changed, for example. As I have already argued, the ethics of such experimentation are complex, another way in which my methods contrast Fulkerson's. But as I have also argued, membership within the community also binds me to its own ethics, further complicating my own academic stance, as I will detail more fully below.

In addition to my participation in the ecclesial sphere, my participation in the academic theological sphere, also at times fraught and complex, provided me most simply with the knowledge of what to teach and how to teach it (again, to varying degrees of success and failure). But it also provided me with skills of theological reasoning, for pulling apart and tinkering, to borrow Tanner's language, with the

everyday theologies of the classroom. In my better moments, I was able to abstract from particular comments, situate them quickly within a broader theological and cultural framework, and then find ways to guide the conversation towards bringing the pieces back together, all before the class members then pulled apart and tinkered with those theologies again. Each round of tinkering took us deeper into the ways we were pursuing wisdom together: wisdom that was, by the very nature of its ongoing formation, a deep, complex integration of our everyday and academic theologies.

Highlighting the particular institutional hybridity of the academic theologian in this way thus helps us understand both her agency *and* the agency of the everyday Christians. In so doing, I have also sought to nuance Tanner's view of the "competition" that takes place between everyday and academic theologies by revealing the ways both everyday and academic theologians come ready to compete with each other for the purpose of productive, fruitful conversation. The particular strategy I employed here – teaching adult education classes – is only one strategy that the academic theologian can use to foster conversation across theological fluencies. More work therefore needs to be done to uncover and establish alternative strategies and tactics for making everyday and academic theologies communicable across the different spheres in which they are created.

The Hybridity of the Academic Theologian as a Topic

In addition to studying the ways in which I deployed the hybridity of my ministerial and academic roles as a research tool, this dissertation has also maintained an undercurrent of studying that hybridity as a topic. Agreeing with Tanner's claim that academic theologians should pay attention to "how people *without* specialized theological

training go about trying to live in accord with their Christian commitments," I have endeavored to demonstrate throughout that we would also benefit from paying attention to how people *with* specialized theological training do the same.[192] Attempts to live in the complexity of with these dual commitments, as I noted particularly in the introduction to this dissertation, are complex. They entail moments of real decision over whether or not to stay with Christianity in general and, in my case, with conservative churches in particular. And they come with certain responsibilities and privileges that are always marked by personal joys and struggles.[193]

On the one hand, we have seen multiple instances of how my ecclesial and academic skills and dispositions compete with each other; take my fears over which liberations theologies to teach in the ecclesial environment and how to teach them, for example. But on the other hand, in addition to competition we have also seen loose, of course still tense, performative integrations of these same skills and dispositions. Consider, for example the ways in which I managed to guide – with moments of halting, for sure – the discussion about Beatrice of Nazareth toward a conversation in which a more expansive view of salvation was discussed.

In general, my academic training leaves me less fluent with and, certainly, less comfortable with everyday theological discourse than I once was. My academic practices of historicizing, questioning and critiquing the language of my faith destabilizes the

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[192] Tanner, "Shifts in Theology," 42. Italics, mine

[193] My ambivalence about these privileges, particularly with regards to my own ordination, is perhaps most clearly exemplified in the tension I experience between the pleasure of subverting what I perceive to be erroneous, even sinful, SBC policies of barring women from ordination, and the pain of belonging to a tradition that was formed over being on the wrong side of the debate about slavery, and belonging to a particular congregation that I know would not have ordained me had I self-identified to them as gay, lesbian or bi-sexual, for example.

immediacy of authority that language once held for me. And as we saw in my narrations of our conversations, this destabilizing, at times, led me to make incorrect snap-judgments of the members of the classes I taught: either judgments that they were closed-minded or judgments that they were incapable of handling a particularly complex or controversial idea. These judgments would almost always turn out to be wrong-headed on my part. And I found that conversation with my research partners helped me to regain some understanding of everyday theologies' contours in a way that forestalled such snap-judgments long enough for me to hear more fully what the class members' were saying.

At the same time, this destabilizing distance academic theology gave me on my own everyday faith practices and language helped me to understand that faith more deeply and practice it more fully. For example, I found that our classroom conversations helped me re-learn how to deploy Biblical language to make a particular theological point in ways similar – if not as fluently and comfortably – as the rest of the class members. And I came to do so in a way that rang true to me in light of my academic training *and* made sense to other everyday Christians. The academic theological discourses that created a sense of distance between Christian social practices and their immediate ability to shape me is the same discourse that enables me to re-engage those practices and re-embody them anew in my own ongoing pursuit of wisdom as a loose, performative integration of my various competing and cohering *habitus* and roles.

Tanner's model acknowledges the disruptions academic theology can make to everyday theology as the two compete (and ideally cooperate) to shape Christian social practices. But the way I have framed the academic theologian's particular form of institutional hybridity here reveals how everyday and academic theologies can also

compete within the ways that the academic theologian herself speaks her own various forms of theological fluency. It is possible for this competition and cooperation to be performed within an ecclesial community, in ways that are committed to that community. And when that happens, there is the potential for the academic theologian's own loose performative integration of her competing roles to guide an intentional pursuit of wisdom in that community. Finally, when wisdom is pursued in this way, everyday and academic theologies can become loosely integrated also to work on the problems that arise from Christian practice together.

Power in Practices of Conversation

The process of drawing these connections between social roles, discourses and *habitus* in the context of a particular practice has also revealed some of the interpersonal dimensions of the interaction between everyday and academic theologies. These interpersonal dimensions are particularly important in this project because they reveal some of the differences between Fulkerson's style of participant observation and the reflexive ethnography I am employing here. A deeper integration of the researcher into her field of study, such that she is actually a member of it, complicates the types of relationships she can have within it. And the fact of these more intimate relationships, by extension, paired with my ability to shape the practices that I study, necessitates a more careful analysis of the power and emotion dimensions than would a more distancing form of participant observation.

In this section I deal with questions of power in interpersonal interactions in the conversational pursuit of wisdom and in the next, I deal with their emotional nature.

Because the specialized knowledge and skills on which the academic theologian draws create a reflective space between her and the everyday theologies she engages, space is also created between her and the speakers of everyday theological discourse. And that space makes room for different forms of power to accrue to everyone who participates in the conversation.

This fact was revealed throughout this study's course, but one particular example will suffice: the conversation I narrated in the final chapter about mysticism. When Ann asked me if Beatrice was a Christian, my initial instinct, which I resisted, was to map the historical theological trajectory that revealed the anachronism of her question. My academic knowledge gave me access to understanding aspects of the faith in Ann's bones: aspects of which she was largely unaware. Such knowledge entails power that needs to be acknowledged and appropriately handled by the one to whom it accrues.

My attempt to handle this power entailed first participating in Ann's language, before slowly bringing mine into the conversation. I attempted to give up my language to submit momentarily to her discursive regime. But even in trying to exercise my power ethically, a surplus power dimension to our relationship remained, one of which Ann remained largely unaware. I inhabited Ann's language out of respect and love for her as well as a desire to learn from her. But I also inhabited her language as a rhetorical device for introducing my own theological views into the conversation in ways that were communicable to the group. My more hidden knowledge thus allowed me to compete in our conversational debate with a surplus power that I then needed to choose - even instinctually – to integrate into the conversation itself for its flourishing.

But of course, as we saw in the fourth chapter, the choice of what to do with our power is always, already conditioned by the mode in which it is given to us. And so the power dynamic of our class was further complicated by the way in which power in our conversation accrued also to Ann and the others. Inhabiting Ann's discursive regime entailed some form of submission to it. Had I launched into a speech on the anachronistic use of salvation language to understand medieval Christian practices, thus destabilizing the community's most authoritative language, my own status as a member would have been undermined. They might have quickly forgiven me, of course. But in the moment, measuring the power that constellated between us, it seemed evident to me that the discursive submission needed to be mine if I wanted to keep moving the conversation along.

In fact, my self-silencing in this way reveals the power with which the whole community, myself included, imbues the rules of our discourse. Recall Gene's comments, echoed by others, that he was nervous to say certain things in class in case the group judged him as "heretic," or worse, "not really saved." Clearly I have also inculcated into my embodied wisdom a sense of how such a border between Christian and non-Christian functions in FBC's life and, indeed, Baptist life in general, and I desire to remain on the "right" side of that border – at least in the group's view – in order to continue my conversation with them. Even as I tried to find ways to undermine the "rules" about salvation with which I disagree, then, my ways of doing so remained so slight so as to keep them acceptable to the group, that I nevertheless reproduced them through my efforts.

It remains the case, therefore, that despite my submission to these rules, I am making that submission knowingly because I also know that I need the access it gives me if I want to continue to do the forms of education ministry to which I feel called. There is never a point in this cycle of the power we give back and forth to each other that we can name as balanced and ethical. The intervention of academic theology into everyday Christian social practices, even in the modes of ministry and pastoral care, inevitably produces such power dynamics. The ways in which these modes of power fluctuate and remain impossible to perform with any consistent type of ethic indicates how difficult it is to have conversations across theological fluencies.

Emotions in Practices of Conversation

Highlighting the relationship between various *habitus*, social roles and discourses reveals not only the power structures that shape conversations across various theological fluencies, but also the emotional aspects of them. Speakers of everyday and academic theologies disagree over more than the systematic coherence of ideas, or how such ideas can shape and reshape practice. As much as this conversation is marked by theological differences, it is also marked by aspects of identity, as well as by clashes of a more intimate nature. And these clashes give rise to emotional reactions of discomfort or embarrassment that can, like unbridgeable theological disagreements, also shut down a conversation.

In chapter two I outlined some of the difficulties I experienced teaching liberation theologies, particularly with regards to issues around race. I argued there that the easy acceptance by class members of these theologies inadvertently affirmed our particular

homogenous culture at FBC. My discussion in the fourth chapter of how atypical practices tend to support the flourishing of the wider ecclesial equilibrium further clarified this point. And I noted that because of my own racial identity, I felt a certain discomfort with pressing the group to engage their particular stances too deeply. On the one hand, I noted that some of my discomfort might have been due to my own fears. But at the same time, when I did try to lead us into such discussions, I found that conversation halted and slowed. A few class members became visibly agitated, fidgeting in their chairs, with their voices bearing a tone of frustration. When I asked direct questions, they would give short, clipped answers. They might not have been as uncomfortable as I was, but they were certainly not at ease.

Tanner argues that academic theologians require "tact" when making "ad hoc and situation-specific adjustments" to everyday theologies.[194] This tact is necessary not only for helping everyday Christians deal with the crises that erupt in their practice, however, or even for helping see crises that should be present but are not. This tact is also necessary for negotiating personally and politically loaded situations. And sometimes, often in fact, as we saw with my inability to engage issues of race and racism more fully, this tact fails. A second example will help clarify my point here.

In the fifth chapter I narrated the difficulty of talking about sexuality in the ecclesial sphere. On the one hand, this was a problem caused by my own embarrassment at using sexually specific language to make my theological point of connecting the experience of orgasm to the process of mystical ascent. On the other hand, the infrequency – if not absolute scarcity – of public conversations about sex at FBC (indeed,

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[194] Tanner, *Theories of Practice*, 93.

either in a way that I would interpret as positive, or at all) meant that we had no shared language for tackling the topic. And on yet another hand, my euphemistic speech caused a quick and decisive division between those who had ears to hear, and those who did not.

Of course, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, it is possible that such discomfort was simply due to my own failures. Even so, these stories about my struggles in such conversations might also reveal a need for academic theologians to consider more carefully the nature of diverse conversations within church life. While I had not intentionally set out to engage explicitly issues of race and sexuality in my performance of Tanner's model, I had hoped that such topics would arise organically from our theological explorations. The fact that not only did they not arise organically, but that the very nature of our conversations and their location tended to exclude this possibility, indicates that alongside the intellectual work we are doing on race and sexuality, as well as on other topics that remain taboo to talk about in certain church circles, academic theologians might benefit from also considering how to make such topics more tactfully communicable within the types of conversations particular to ecclesial circles.[195]

A key problem here as I see it relates to the fact that ecclesial conversations about sexuality are precisely the type that could benefit from the conversational help of academic theologians. This might be particularly true in conservative congregations like FBC where I encountered in-roads for conversation in more one-on-one, private settings. For example, a few of the people I interviewed brought up questions about sexuality. Those who did so brought it up particularly with regards to political and religious debates around same-sex marriage. They shared hunches that, as one put it, they "just don't think

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[195] I interpret Kelly Brown Douglas', *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004) to offer crucial insight in this direction.

homosexuality is really a sin," opening discussions into theological frameworks I could help them construct for undergirding such hunches. In these more private conversations, I was able to draw on academic resources around sexuality and theology, but such strategies did not feel available to me during larger group formats.

These stories about the interpersonal, emotional dimensions of theological conversation therefore reveal the limits of my particular attempts to bring Tanner's model to life. First, the organic connections I draw between topics of race, sexuality, gender and theology, might not be so organic for others. Discussing liberation theologies on the last or second from last night of class is, therefore, not a good strategy for incorporating liberatory themes into a classroom conversation. While neither Tanner's model, nor my attempts to perform it thematize how to have such conversations in the ecclesial context, then, more academic research might be necessary for understanding how to accomplish this goal of academic theology. The fact that such topics might best be handled one-on-one and in smaller groups not only points in the direction of where such research could be pursued, but it also underscores how slowly social and theological change is likely to happen by the intervention of academic theology into everyday theologies. It also points out some of the limits to using ethnography – either participant observation or reflexive ethnography – to facilitate conversations between everyday and academic theologies. And it highlights once again that the conversational practice of pursuing wisdom in community must also be seen as a good in itself.

Situating Conversations in Space

In addition to these questions around tact and communication, we can also consider how conversations across various theological fluencies do not just hover in the air but, rather, they take place in actual spaces, themselves marked by identity, difference and moments of pleasure and awkwardness. Fulkerson uses the concept *habitus* to argue that people encultured as "socially informed bod[ies]," both shaped by practices and shaping the same practices in which they share, create the (permeable) borders of a "place" that can be theologically read.[196] Fulkerson's attention focuses on how the practices engaged by congregants in the ecclesial sphere create the place, church, for her study. But because her method does not take much account of her own integration within her field of study – because she does not already embody a particular "insider" role at Good Samaritan Church – she does not engage how she and her informants might carry the modes of interacting associated with that shared space into others.

Alternatively, as I, like my research partners, embody the codes and modes of interaction associated with our shared ecclesial space, any departure from the norms of that space – either by changing the space, or by physically leaving the space – matters for interpreting the "theological place" in which we find ourselves. Conversation for our group happened primarily in a classroom in a church basement. But it also happened, for example, in an Indian restaurant with Ann, a "man-cave" with Peter, and a kitchen with Maureen and Joe. Each place shifted the tone of conversational style; each revealed the variety of ways that theological conversation can be enacted. Each thus opens possibilities for further avenues of research.

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[196] Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 35.

Let us begin with the classroom space. Our group met in one of the larger of the rooms dedicated for LCU classes, a room that was clearly multi-purpose. Various configurations of tables and chairs were possible. There was a closet containing Bibles and hymnals, an old – as far as I could tell – unused, piano, and other various random objects in rotation. But it was also neat, clean and functional. It felt like a classroom.

Classrooms in FBC are typically set up lecture-style with a podium orienting all the chairs in one direction, and we found our room this way a few times over both semesters. The first few times this happened, I asked class members who were able to help me rearrange the tables and chairs so that we could all face each other. After we had done this a few times, I would sometimes arrive to find class members already working on the rearrangement. In this way, we repeatedly worked together to create less hierarchical, more intimate space for our conversations.

Our space thus functioned like a transition from the expected norm at FBC, one that we often brought about physically as a group. Whenever I offered mini-lectures, I did so seated at the table in the midst of the group. The only times I addressed the group standing at a position physically outside of them were when I was writing their ideas up onto a white board. Thus, by my own pedagogical practices, and the group members' bodily investments in helping me to carry these practices out, we together created a space in which my intention, at least, was for everyone to feel equally invited to speak.

Still, these adjustments were all within the parameters of *classroom* space, and our conversation tended to flow in ways appropriate to them. I gave short lectures and asked probing (and sometimes inadvertently halting) questions. People addressed points to the group that sometimes gave way to short speeches. They disagreed with each other

or built up each other's ideas by adding to them. When conversations moved quickly, people jockeyed to get in. Rarely would someone address another directly. For the most part, conversations remained in the style of public speech. No one shared particularly private or controversial details. They saved these for the more intimate interviews.

The spaces for these interviews also shaped the conversations that happened in them. Take my interview with Ann, for example. This was not the first time we had met at her husband's hospice bedside. Our history of doing this practice thus reaffirmed the intimacy of our relationship from the outset of the conversation. Moving then to a restaurant for Ann's first taste of Indian food had further impact on the shape of our conversation. Though I had not intended it to be such, it reaffirmed my role as her young teacher by opening her up new ideas and experiences, common for my generation and class *habitus*.

Conversely, the space kept a desire to probe the wisdom of Ann's particular set of years at the forefront of my questioning. She was other to this space, and I wanted to understand her otherness. We fell quickly into long stories that exposed how her childhood at the tail end of the Great Depression shaped her theologies of simplicity, how her anger at the Religious Right could not be disentangled from the wounds of youth, both giving rise to her views on theological freedom, and how her vision of sanctification was inextricable from particular ways she had learned to forgive. Even punctuated often by our waiter's playful interjections, our conversation remained intimate. And mouthfuls of new tastes and exclamations of spice created space to collect ourselves between lines of questioning.

Peter's "man-cave" offered no such space for regrouping, even though it too created a sense of intimacy. As a "man-cave," it was a particularly gendered space, bearing the potential to make me, a woman, quite uncomfortable, something that did not seem to occur to him. After a minute of getting past the surprise of bypassing the typical interview locations of kitchen and living room, however, I quickly settled in, feeling neither the exclusion of being female in a specifically male-defined room nor a particular honor at it either. Indeed, it quickly came to feel natural, as it seemed to be the room in which Peter himself felt at home. I felt the intimacy associated with Peter's own personal, study space, my attention focusing squarely on the conversation we were going to have. And after all these rapid adjustments, I found myself losing track of time.

Because the room was Peter's library, primarily a theological library, it continually reminded us of our theological tasks at hand. I felt the presence of many books draw us into deeper reflection, especially as he pulled them off of shelves to make a point, a type of action the various *habitus* associated with my academic role readily recognizes. Indeed, as he narrated his view of the relationship between frontier and institutional theologies, he showed me antique books of church meeting minutes and old church ledgers that brought his stories to life, making them more present to us.

The move to domestic and social spaces brought a further shift in interview dynamics. The particular status of my project under the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines disallowed me from serving any food to my "research subjects." But as anyone familiar with Baptist life knows, food is near crucial for socializing. Indeed, as Nancy Ammerman has argued, "everywhere, food expresses cultural and religious identities no less than does the art and architecture" as it "binds communities together as powerfully as

their singing."[197] Moving into spaces where we could eat together shifted us further toward more personal conversational styles. Take my conversation about salvation with Maureen, for example. The presence of food – that we could talk about, take time to munch on, and which generally gave us something to do with our hands – created space to recover from awkward moments in conversation, allowing us to regroup. Food – and domestic space in general – created spaces for instincts to kick in to respond to situations when words were not helping us do so.

Place matters for theological conversation, whether in large group formats, or smaller, more intimate modes of relating. The intellectual move to making an academic theology out of an everyday theological interaction between practices and people is necessary, but it also loses some of the texture that makes the everyday theology make sense. Ideas need to be disentangled from the spaces in which they are created if they are to be communicated elsewhere. At the same time, as I have endeavored to show here, academic theologians engaging Christian social practice would also do well to consider the role of the spaces in which everyday theologies are constructed. Those spaces might give us clues to understanding more deeply what is at stake in the claims.

Serving the Church and Academy

By describing the gifts and limitations of these interpersonal conversations, I have endeavored to show the possibilities and difficulties associated with the tact that Tanner suggests academic theologians need to have as they engage everyday theologies in

[197] Ammerman, "Congregations: Local, Social, and Religious" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*. Ed. Peter B. Clarke (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 569.

context. The question becomes, however, what is the relationship between such complex, tactful activity, the Christian social practices that the academic theologian wishes to impact, and the academic theological products that she also creates? Two clear possibilities emerge: either the academic theologian's ongoing participation in Christian social practices effects an organic impact on them (much as Tanner describes academic theology rising organically out of these same practices), or the people engaged in the everyday practices read the academic theologian's text and incorporate its insight into their daily lives. Both options seem possible and desirable in Tanner's model, but both are also left largely unthemetized.

I argued in the third chapter that Mary McClintock Fulkerson offers one solution to this need for methodological clarity in Tanner's model through her use of ethnography for accessing everyday theologies. And I offered my self-implicated ethnographic project as a complement to her more traditional methods of participant observation. Furthermore, I argued that the differences between our methods offered different goods to the theological process, while also making different sacrifices. My method, I noted, more directly shaped the location of its performance than did Fulkerson's, offering a fuller, more directly engaged good to the particular, local congregation of my study. But I also noted that in so doing, my text lost its ability to make more general, normative claims that could be applicable across ecclesial spheres, claims that are evident in her text.

The fruits of my method therefore remained context specific. The church – or, rather, *a* church – was served directly in a local context. Practices appropriate to that context were developed such that they could give rise to this study. At the same time, this study has not only risen from the social practices associated with the ecclesial realm. Its

final textual product is also shaped by and desires to shape the perpetuation of academic social practices, in particular, teaching and research. Because I served the church of my study with my pedagogical academic skills, this text is freed to be written for the academy – and not the church – without undermining the possibility of the whole process to serve both. The advantage of this method is that I am able to seek to serve both church and academy directly. The disadvantage, of course, is that because the service to the church happens in such a local, concrete way, it becomes difficult to see how to serve more than about forty people at a time.

Even so, this mode of ecclesial conversation seems appropriate to Tanner's argument that the everyday theologies to which the academic theologian needs access are ad hoc and context specific, bound by space and time and, even, as we have seen here, bound to the personal lives of the people who create them. Perhaps it is only or, at least, primarily through direct access to these practices that the academic theologian is able to shape them, even as her so doing might happen at what feels like a painfully slow pace. Much as a division of labor has characterized the pursuit of wisdom outlined in this text, the academic theologian herself participates in her own labor divide. If she wants to make her work relevant to spheres beyond the academy – whether those spheres be ecclesial or some other aspect of broader public life – then as Tanner notes the need for academic theologians to speak and compete in ways communicable to everyday Christians, those ways will require our continual careful reflection on the multiple particularly located practices we do in addition to writing academic texts.

Indeed, such direct influence – the building up of presence through ecclesial practices as well as public practices of writing op-ed pieces, speaking at public events,

blogging and participation in other media, for example – might be the only way that the academic theologian is able to direct attention from outside the academy toward the texts she does produce inside it. The growing edges of my method developed here, then, of self-implicated ethnography, relates precisely to this particular form of presence. I performed this method in a church, but it could be just as fruitfully performed in an alternative Christian community like those I mentioned in the first chapter, a non-profit organization, some aspect of a political process, or any other set of everyday practices to which the theologian feels drawn.[198]

Concluding Remarks

This dissertation has proposed that a particular self-implicated mode of ethnography offers one method by which everyday and academic theologies can hear and speak to each other more fully in practice. The first three chapters of this dissertation outlined this self-implicating theological ethnographic method that I used to tackle my research questions through practices of theological conversation. Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that the theological nature of these conversations can be understood as a pursuit of wisdom in which the participants – myself included – each performed various, ongoing, loose integrations of the numerous *habitus* with which we were all inculcated. We have been less focused on the knowledge that can be produced out of this process, and more focused on the process itself.

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[198] Indeed, research done from the perspective of involving oneself in some aspect of public life is known as action-based research. For more on action-based research, see Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research* 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007). For more on the relationship between Action-based research and theology, see Helen Cameron et al., *Talking About God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (SCM Press, 2010).

In this conclusion I have reflected on the particularly interpersonal nature of these conversations. I have demonstrated that the characters speaking and listening in these conversations performed – in ways that both expanded and limited our insight into Tanner's model – complexly hybrid social roles, particularly with regards to the *habitus* and roles associated with the institutional spheres of church and academy. I have also sought to demonstrate that interpersonal theological conversations are marked by power and emotion, both of which are shaped by the spaces in which the conversations happen. Finally, I have endeavored to show how whatever the particular ethnographic practice is that is used to open up Tanner's model matters for the way theologies will be pursued and produced. Ethnography and academic theology do not just pair neatly with each other. Their integration needs to be theorized in ways that can be authorized by the disciplinary principles of each. I have thus marked out avenues for further research from this project related particularly to ongoing questions about how everyday and academic theologies might continue to work together on shaping the Christian practices from which they both arise.

In closing, I return to our classroom. It is the final night of the two courses, in the final minutes of class, and the group begins to ask questions about how my dissertation is coming along. They know they will be in it, and they want to know how they come across. I share a few stories about the writing process, and Maureen asks me, "do things get contentious at Vanderbilt?" "What do people think about your project?" Her implication is disbelief that people at Vanderbilt would care about what a group of church people have to say: that people at Vanderbilt would care what *she* has to say.

I tell Maureen that people have actually been really supportive; it might just be my misperception, I say, but I think they like hearing what our class has been doing together. In fact, I tell the whole group, "a few of my colleagues have gotten a real kick out of the image of me floundering, trying to teach Kant to you guys." They laugh. "Yeah, you really did struggle there," someone comments. I hang my head, admitting to them once again that perhaps I had taken on too much.

As the laughter dies down, Joe, often a quiet guy, takes the final words of our time together: "We need a historic plaque put up in this room," he smiles. "What would it say?" I ask with curiosity narrowing my gaze on him playfully. I think he might be referring to something with the names of our classes and their dates, but I am wondering why he is smirking so mischievously. Gesturing towards the back wall, he grins and marks out each word with punctuated emphasis, "She. Tried!" Everyone starts laughing again as Maureen swats her husband for his cheekiness. I shake my head, and smiling, gather my papers together and begin to prepare to hug everyone good night.

(APPENDIX A)

TOPICS IN THEOLOGY: JESUS CHRIST AND SALVATION
Taught by Natalie Wigg-Stevenson

In this course, we'll think together about two of the central doctrines of Christian theology: the doctrine of Jesus Christ (Christology) and the doctrine of salvation (Soteriology). We'll look at what different Christians throughout time have believed about Jesus (who he was, what he did, how he was both human and divine, how he is still present to us today, etc.), and how they connected those beliefs to the workings of salvation (what we are saved from, to, and for; how Jesus makes that salvation complete; what it means to say we are justified by faith; the role of the cross and resurrection; etc.). We will pay particular attention to how Christians connected their beliefs to the ways in which they worshipped God, as well as to how Christian beliefs throughout history relate to our own beliefs and practices of worship.

2/14 What do we believe? How are our beliefs derived from Scripture?
What do we as Baptists and as individuals believe about Jesus Christ: his person, work, humanity, divinity, time on earth, ongoing presence, return, etc…? And how do we relate our beliefs about Jesus Christ to our understanding of salvation, our practices of worship and our practices in everyday life? What are we saved from, to and for, and what are the implications for the Christian life? What Scriptures inform our views? What Scriptures are we overlooking when we form our Biblical views?

2/21 I am working Room In The Inn[199] – we can discuss whether or not to have a make up class

2/28 Theological views in the Bible and the Early Church
How was Jesus Christ both human and divine? How do his humanity and divinity relate to our salvation? If God came in the flesh, what does that mean for our own bodily lives?
Figures: Jesus and Paul, Justin Martyr, Origen, Arius and Athanasius

3/7 Early Church views continued… (1 hour class tonight for First Night)[200]
How do the early church controversies set the 'rule' or 'regulations' for future understandings of Jesus Christ and salvation for Christians? What early church issues are we less concerned about now? What role did practices of worship play in early church theologies of Jesus Christ and salvation?
Figures: Arius and Athanasius, Augustine

3/14 Medieval Theologies and Practices

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[199] "Room in the Inn" is a ministry for homeless persons in which FBC participates.
[200] "First Night" refers to FBC business meetings. On "First Nights," the first night of each month, LCU classes dismiss early.

How did atonement theologies develop in the Medieval period? How did practices of worship relate to theologies of Jesus Christ and salvation in the Medieval period? Are there any surprising connections between Medieval theologies and our own contemporary Baptist beliefs? How do female Medieval Christian mystics approach questions about Jesus Christ differently? What can we learn from their spiritual theologies?

Figures: Anselm, Peter Abelard, Beatrice of Nazareth

3/21 I am working Room In The Inn – we can discuss whether or not to have a make up class

3/28 Reformation Theologies

How did Reformation theologies reframe Christian ways of understanding who Jesus Christ was, his divinity and humanity, and what his significance was in relation to salvation? What did Reformation theologians believe human beings needed to be saved from? What did the life of salvation look like according to Reformation theologians? What is "justification by faith" and how did it become a central topic for understanding salvation in the Reformation? How did worship practices in the Reformation relate to the understanding of Jesus Christ, salvation and the life of faith?

Figures: Martin Luther, John Calvin

4/4 Easter Sunday – no class

4/11 Views from Modernity – 17th-19th centuries

How did Enlightenment views of rationality, history, science and truth shape and reshape Christian beliefs in miracles, Christ's resurrection, the existence of God and our ability to know/have faith in God? How was Jesus Christ understood in relation to these issues, and how did that impact the Christian view of salvation in the 19th century? How did Jesus' humanity relate to notions of human embodiment, knowledge and the emotions in this time period? How do our own contemporary Baptist beliefs and practices relate to and diverge from these beliefs in expected and surprising ways?

Figures: Rene Descartes & Blaise Pascal, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Soren Kierkegaard

4/18 20th Century Interpretations of Jesus Christ, Salvation and the Problem of Suffering

How did theologians in the 20th century pick up, critique, continue and depart from the views of Modernity? How did the tragic events of the 20th century shape theologians' understandings of Jesus Christ and salvation? How did a renewed interest in the problem of suffering impact how theologians understood the relationship between Jesus Christ and the triune God to be configured?

Figures: Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, Jurgen Moltmann

4/25 Contemporary Theologies – The Role of Context in the Shaping of Theology

How have the particular contexts in which theology has been written in the late 20th century – particularly in North and South America – shaped the ideas contained in the theologies? How have American revolutions in race relations and gender relations impacted theology and led theologians to new interpretations of Jesus Christ's person and work in salvation? How have movements of liberation in Latin America contributed to fresh understandings of the same? What is the relationship between politics and theology in all these different views? How does our own context shape what we believe and do in ways we might not even notice?

Figures: James Cone, Gustavo Gutierrez, Darby Kathleen Ray

5/2 A Return to Our Own Context, Beliefs and Practices (1 hour class tonight for First Night)

How have our own views shifted, expanded or been affirmed throughout the course of this class? What new ideas did we find ourselves surprisingly open to? What ideas or theologies connect with our own practices of worship and other church practices? How has our faith been impacted by the historic faith of other Christians?

Figures: Ourselves!

(APPENDIX B)

TOPICS IN THEOLOGY: GOD AS TRINITY
Taught by Natalie Wigg-Stevenson

In this course, we'll look at one of the key doctrines of the Christian faith: God as Trinity. We'll look at the Biblical basis for this doctrine, as well as its more systematic formulation by early Christian theologians. And then we'll study how the doctrine has changed shape throughout Christian history depending upon the period in which it was reconceived. We will look especially at how different Christian theologians throughout history have understood God's ways of relating to creation, how it is we come to know and experience God as Trinity, how God is revealed to us and how God's acts relate to our own actions. We will ask questions about how God is both transcendent to the world, and present within it with particular attention to how God as transcendent father relates to the historical presence of the crucified Christ and the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit among us. Throughout the course we'll look at how historical beliefs and practices of the Christian faith with regards to the doctrine of God as Trinity relate to our own beliefs and practices as 20-21st century Baptists.

9/12 What do we believe? How are our beliefs derived from Scripture?
What do we as Baptists and as individuals believe about the Trinity – the three persons and their relations to each other, God's relationship to the world, how it is we come to have knowledge of God, etc…? And how do our beliefs about God as Trinity relate to our understanding of salvation, our practices of worship and our practices in everyday life? What Scriptures inform our views? What Scriptures are we overlooking when we form our Biblical views?

9/19 Theological views in the Bible and the Early Church
What was the historical & theological process by which early church leader's came to an orthodox view of the Trinity? What Biblical stories were relevant for their formulation? What were the central debates and problems? How did the relationship between Judaism and Christianity play into the debates in this time? What early church issues are we less concerned about now? What role did the practices of worship lay in early church theologies of God as Trinity?
Figures: Early church creeds, Arius and Athanasius, Eastern Fathers

9/26 Class is cancelled because I will be out of town

10/3 Transitions: Early Church to the Medieval Period (We'll dismiss at 5:50pm for First Night)
We will use this week to wrap up whatever material we didn't manage to get to from the first two classes. We will also look forward to next week by asking what is at stake in the shift from the central question of the early church (what is God as Trinity?) to a central question of the Medieval period (how do we know God as Trinity?).

10/10 Medieval Theologies and Practices – How do we *know* God?
How do we as 21st century Baptists understand ourselves as coming to *know* God? What is the relationship between knowing God personally and knowing God intellectually? How did Medieval theologians understand that relationship? What spiritual disciplines or practices did they and do we engage to come to know God more deeply? How do you know you know God?
Figures: St. Anselm (Ontological Argument), Marguerite Porete (Mysticism), Thomas Aquinas (The nature of theology)

10/17 Reformation Theologies – Where is God and what is he like?
If God is three in one, and Jesus suffers on the cross, does that mean the Father and the Holy Spirit suffer too? What would be the problems with that? What would the nature of their suffering be? What is the character of God? Is God beautiful, terrible, wrathful, forgiving…?
Figures: Martin Luther, John Calvin

10/24 Class is cancelled because I will be out of town

10/31 All LCU classes are cancelled

We will find a time to schedule one make-up class from these two cancelled weeks

??? Theologies of Modernity – How did the rise of scientific rationality shape our views of God?
What are the limits of human knowledge, and how does knowledge of God relate to those limits? How does philosophical thought play a role in the ways Christians understand God? How is God both inside the world and outside it? How is God revealed in history? Where does the Trinity fit in all this?
Figures: Immanuel Kant, GWF Hegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher

11/7 Theology in its Historical Context (We'll dismiss at 5:50pm for First Night)
We will take some time to finish up the thoughts we didn't get to from the previous few weeks. In so doing, we'll ask how the particular historical and geographic contexts in which these theologies were formulated impacted the shape they took? We'll also discuss the historical, cultural shifts that took place in the 20th century, and how those impacted the theologies we'll study next week.

11/14 20th-century Theology – Why does an all-powerful God permit an unjust world?
With the cutting edges of theology located in Germany, how did the Holocaust impact the way Christians thought about God? Where was God in the Holocaust? How did the Holocaust impact the relationship between Jews and Christians in their image of God? How did the complicity of Christians with the Nazi movement impact our view of God? What should the Christian relationship to political powers be? How did the cultural revolutions of the 1960s and '70s impact the ways in which American Christians think about God?

Figures: Elie Wiesel, Karl Barth, Jurgen Moltmann, Elizabeth Johnson

11/21 A Return to Our Own Context, Beliefs and Practices
How have our own views shifted, expanded or been affirmed throughout the course of this class? What new ideas did we find ourselves surprisingly open to? What ideas or theologies connect with our own practices of worship and other church practices? How has our faith been impacted by the historic faith of other Christians?

Figures: Ourselves!

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