

BAPTISM INTO THE POOR BODY OF CHRIST: OR, HOW TO POSSESS
NOTHING AND YET HAVE EVERYTHING

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“*[T]hey did not carry the dying of Jesus in their bodies*”¹

The purpose of the present project is to consider the state of ecclesiology against the backdrop of not merely a fractured Christendom, but a fractured Christian praxis. The disunity of the Church demands the reunion of churches, but reunion will not come to pass if the unity reached is only of an institutional, meta-ecclesial nature; because of the disunity of Christian praxis, setting up a separate meta-ecclesial institution to govern over unity would only add another layer to the existing problem—and this is a perceived danger with regard to the “ecumenical movement.” What is required, rather, is unity gained through the bond of love, embodied in a unifying praxis. The claim advanced here is that only through a renewed understanding of Baptism—which in early Christian thought is itself a unifying praxis within Church life—can such unity be attained.

Just as the Eucharist is commonly referred to as the “sacrament of Unity,”² Baptism is most properly understood as the sacrament of identity, and the identity granted in the rite of initiation is dispossession, by which I mean the baptizand’s self-abdication of claims to self-possession or self-assertion.³ The dispossessive action of Baptism thus

¹ St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, 14.32, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 55; with reference to II Cor. 4:10.

² This is an Augustinian concept, though it has roots in many early Christian writers. See Henri de Lubac’s analysis in *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sister Elizabeth Englund, OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1950), 88-91.

³ The term “dispossession” is most prolific in the “radical” phenomenological literature of Jean-Luc Marion, Stanislas Breton, Jean-Yves Lacoste, etc., and is inherited from a refusal of Descartes’s notion that the thinking subject is *causa sui*, especially as developed by Martin Heidegger. Heidegger himself describes “the event of appropriation” [*Ereignis*] as Dasein’s *being appropriated* in Being’s event of

reveals itself as the very condition for the unity received in the Eucharist, unity characterized as loving mutuality. This can only mean that the Church today, as it persists in disunity, not only contradicts the Christian understanding of Baptism by its possessive claims, but identifies itself *as* self-possession, and thus manifests sin. We will now turn, therefore, to the state of the Church today, which is characterized by possession, self-declaration, and in short, its own sinfulness.

For centuries, Christians of every confession and stripe whispered about the tremendous impact of the Reformation on the Church. When these murmurs courageously transformed into conversations, they were customarily a means to throw stones across denominational lines. Today, in the wake of countless ecumenical councils and conferences, the universal Church finds herself in the same precarious position.

appropriation; and of the “expropriation” of the world—into which Dasein is thrown—to Being’s worlding of the world; or even of the necessity of Dasein’s “releasement toward things” [*Gelassenheit*] in order to attain “authentic existence” [*Existenz eigentlich*]; “*Gelassenheit*,” it should be noted, is a term inherited from Meister Eckhart’s “*Gelazeneheit*,” which generally means a letting-go or abandonment. Cf. Martin Heidegger, “The Principle of Identity” (15-24), “Language” (41-56), and “Time and Being” (57-74), in *The Theory of Difference: Readings in Contemporary Continental Thought*, ed. Douglas L. Donkel (New York: SUNY Press, 2001); and *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966); also cf. Thomas A. Carlson’s “TRANSLATOR’S INTRODUCTION: Converting the Given into the Seen: Introductory Remarks on Theological and Phenomenological Vision” to Jean-Luc Marion’s *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham, 2001), xi-xxxi. Nevertheless, there is hardly any question that “dispossession” is a theme that runs throughout the Christian mystic corpus, even though it is not a specific term used in the literature. Cf. especially St. John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1979); Meister Eckhart, *German Sermon*, 5b, in *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 184: “If this will turns away from itself and from all creation for one instant, and back to its source, then the will stands in its true and free state, and it is free”; Marguerite Porète, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. Ellen L. Babinsky, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), esp. #115, pp. 185-6: “...there is nothing except Him from Whom all things have being...says this Soul who is at rest without obstructing the outpouring of divine Love. By such divine Love, the divine Will works in me, for me and without my possession.” If one wanted to plumb the depths, so to speak, this same theme can be grasped also in Islamic Sufi mysticism, and in modern mystics like Simone Weil and Martin Luther King, Jr. For an example of one such search, see the recent and important contribution by Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), esp. 208-32. From these sources, in fact, one can grasp something like “dispossession” as the very basis or the center of the mystic: the denucleation of the self, that the self *is* only outside of itself; or, to quote St. Paul, the mystic literature claims as its hallmark: “you are not your own” (I Cor. 6:19).

While the Eastern and Roman churches have held many “talks” about opening up a shared table since the lifting of the mutual ecclesial excommunications in 1965, their talk always seems to remain only that. Moreover, though both Eastern and Western “orthodoxy” have opened up dialogue for intercommunion with the Anglican church, they have simultaneously turned their backs on unity because of the ordination of an openly gay bishop in the Anglican communion and the ordination of women as priests. In fact, Cardinal Walter Kasper recently informed Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams that if the Anglican church persisted in talks of ordaining women as bishops, unity would be “unreachable” and intercommunion “would disappear into the far and unreachable distance.” In addition, Kasper stated that the Anglican and Catholic churches would no longer be moving toward one another in peace, but “would coexist alongside one another.”⁴

This is to say nothing of the countless other Protestant churches⁵ that appear to have been left to their own devices by the Eastern and Roman churches, nor to mention that some of these Protestant bodies are totally unaware of the reality of their schism, nor that those who are aware seem simply unwilling to move forward into a real unity with the worldwide churches. Nevertheless, for many churches—Protestant and Orthodox of West and East—there is an obvious intentionality towards unity; it is simply never actualized.⁶ Perhaps the Church today would do well to remember Augustine’s point in the fifth century that an intention is only ever truly good if it displays the fruit of charity.

⁴ Walter Kasper quoted in Ruth Gledhill, “Church unity ‘impossible’ if women become bishops,” *Times UK*, 7 June 2006; available from <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2-2214638,00.html>; Internet.

⁵ I assume here that the Anglican Communion is a “Protestant” church, in the truest sense of that word.

⁶ There are moments where such actualization takes place, such as the shared office of ministry in the Lutheran and Anglican churches, for instance, yet this only serves as an *institutional* unity that never

This paper will advance the claim that absence of unity signifies that the Church has disappeared. The “disappearance of the Church” indicates that the Church is no longer readily localizable as the Body of Christ, because it fails to render present the loving bond of unity, which signifies the invisible presence of Christ.⁷ However, this does not result in an ontological failure, which would mean that the Church would cease to exist or that its own actions could deterministically drive itself outside the power of Christ’s saving will and intention. The failure resides, rather, at the level of appearance. The opposition of “ontological” failure and a failure to “appear” can be compared analogically to the distinction between existence and agency: the Church ceases to appear at the level of its agency, whereby the members of the body fail to display the fruit of charity which is the bond of their loving mutuality; but, because its existence is a gift proffered by grace, ontologically the Church persists. In other words, Christ is still present in the Eucharistic meal—where Church happens—but because of disunity at the

flows out into unity of praxis. In fact, these moments of institutional unity can at times serve to cover over the greater problem of an absence of unity at the level of praxis.

⁷ The phrase “the ‘disappearance’ of the Church” has been used by various thinkers. Cf. Archbishop Javier Martinez—the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Granada—in an address entitled “‘BEYOND SECULAR REASON’: Some Contemporary Challenges for the Life and the Thought of the Church, as Seen from the West.” This was “[a] talk given in the presence of Metropolitan Filaret (Vachromeev), de Minsk, at the occasion of the Conference organized by the Foundation “Russia Cristiana”, of Seriate, Bergamo (Italy), together with the Synodal Theological Commission of the Moscow Patriarchate, on the topic: ‘Orthodox Theology and the West in the XXth Century. History of a Meeting,’ on the 30th-31th October 2004”; available from <http://www.philosophyandtheologycentre.co.uk/papers/>; Internet. Also cf. William T. Cavanaugh’s discussion of the disappearance of the Church: “The Ecclesiology of a Disappearing Church” in *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 151-202. Martinez’s and Cavanaugh’s positions are to be distinguished from mine, and Cavanaugh’s will be briefly dealt with in the second chapter of this paper. Also, Karl Barth refers to the possibility of both “apparent” churches—or “the Church with sleepy, squinting, or blind eyes”—and “dead” churches—which only ever partially cease to exist. Both approximate closely to my use of the term disappearance. Cf. his essay, “The Church: The Living Congregation of the Living Lord Jesus Christ” in *God Here and Now*, tr. Paul M. van Buren (New York: Routledge, 2003), 75-104. Because Barth’s position concerns primarily the unity of the Church, or “living congregation,” his position is closest to mine; however, his point that the Church can indeed cease *to be* the Church—even if only partially—goes too far.

table, Christ becomes the judge of the broken Church, and we fail to make Christ's presence present to the world.⁸

The disappearance of the Church is thus a result of the sinfulness of the Church—that is, it is a result of the Church's dogged behavior to identify itself by possession, which is manifest in the refusal of unity, in the fissure of loving relation. We know that the salvation of Christ has freed all of humanity from the bondage of sinful division and isolation, yet we still remain in the chains of brokenness and disunity.⁹ It was for this precise reason that St. Paul wrote to the churches of Rome:

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in the newness of life. (Rom. 6:1-4)¹⁰

The Apostle understood that to be baptized into the Body of Christ is to be dispossessed of that which causes us to persist in sin, to pass with Christ through the separation of death into the new life characterized by thanksgiving in Eucharistically-shaped relationality. If we who have been baptized have been dispossessed of sin, then why do we persist in our sinful brokenness? Why do we live as though death is the victor and sin our prize?

In fact, it is most often communal and denominational possessions that keep us from embracing one another in love, which is the fruit of dispossession: we allow

⁸ Rowan Williams puts it this way: “[T]he dishonesty, the untruth and unfaith of the community means that [Christ] can be present only as judge, with deeply destructive effects,” *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1982), 101. Cf. also the brilliant first chapter of that book, “The Judgment of Judgment: Easter in Jerusalem,” (ibid.), 1-22.

⁹ “We” is used here to indicate because the issue at hand is the *catholic* or *universal* Church, we are all guilty of this accusation, including the present author.

¹⁰ All Scripture references are to the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

ourselves to be separated from the love of Christ¹¹ by differences of doctrine, race, class, gender, political affiliation, nationality, worship styles, or economy. Yet St. Paul reminds us that because we have been baptized into one body, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Because the Body of Christ cannot be divided, and since all divisions are destroyed in Him, we have been made one body in Him, united in love by one Baptism, partakers of one loaf and one cup. The destruction of the unity that the Holy Spirit has forged—which results in the disappearance of the Church—thus places on every Christian the demand to actively remember our Baptism, and the dispossession that takes place therein, so that we may vigorously pursue the unity that follows at the table of the Lord’s Supper—together.

The question that remains, therefore, is not *whether* the Church should be united, but *how* the Church will and should be united. Two disclaimers must be immediately proffered. First of all, the apparent “integralism” of worldwide unity cannot overshadow the diversity of the members of the one Body, such that the “one Church” becomes a totalitarian structure, swallowing all difference into sameness. Even though Paul says on more than one occasion—to churches in both Galatia and Colossae—that “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free,” he reminds the divided congregations of Corinth that “the body does not consist of one member but of many” (I

¹¹ Though Paul reminds us that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ—since the fruit of the Church’s life is the love of Christ which joins us together as One Body—to separate ourselves one from another is to separate ourselves from the love of Christ. Nothing can keep Christ from gratuitously loving us, but our obduracy to welcome Christ’s love into our midst can in fact bind us to our sinful division. Cf. Karl Barth, “The Church: The Living Congregation of the Living Lord Jesus Christ,” 88.

Cor. 12:14).¹² The Apostle's point is not that difference is abolished, but that because of the free gift of reconciliation wrought by Christ, those distinctions no longer hold their divisive character, as they did for the "old humanity"; the former contradiction—that we could be many and yet one—becomes for us instead a paradox of grace in Christ because of the mysterious gift of God in the power of the Spirit.¹³

Secondly, the proposal put forth here for how the Church should be united must not be perceived as the best or most efficient option among a host of other options, but

¹² John Milbank's distinction between the "subsumption" rather than the "abolishment" of difference in the pursuit of "universalism" seems at first to be quite helpful: "Christianity is peculiar, because while it is open to difference...it also strives to make all of these differential additions a harmony, 'in the body of Christ.'" "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short *Summa* in Forty-Two Responses to Unasked Questions" in *The Postmodern God*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 268. Milbank's particular type of "universalism" arouses suspicion, however, when he later comments that the "true universality" of the body of Christ should look something like the voyages of "the English sailors John and Sebastian Cabot of Bristol...and before them the Portuguese sailors Magellan, Vasco de Gama and Columbus"; *Being Reconciled* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 104. Such a universalism grounded in the voyage of "conquerors" [*conquistadores*] recalls the horrors of the *abolishment* of differences in the respective pursuits of these voyagers—particularly the latter Portuguese sailors; there is simply too much violence and bloodshed involved to consider this at all a viable theological option for ecclesial "universality" for the body of Christ. Not to mention, ecclesially, it recalls the conquering Constantinianism which, for many, is a mark of shame in the Church's history.

¹³ Quite contrary to most caricatures of catholicity, the unity of the early Church, particularly in the West, did not tend to denigrate the local body of Christ. In fact, differences and variations in worship were allowed to proliferate, so long as these differences did not threaten schism or undercut the dogmatic bases of the unity of the Church. This can be seen, for instance, in the Spanish councils of the Middle Ages regarding Baptism. Cf. E.C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, revised and expanded by Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1960), 153-75. Also cf. Nicholas of Cusa, *The Catholic Concordance*, trans. and ed. Paul E. Sigmund (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): "Augustine says in Book I of his work *Against the Donatists* when he wishes to prove that the faith is firmly based on the decision of the universal council, 'Do not think that I am using human arguments since in earlier times in the church before the schism of Donatus the obscurity of this question compelled many men and bishops of great charity to debate and disagree among themselves while keeping the peace, so that for a long time differing conciliar statutes were adopted and amended in each area, until the view which was considered more salutary was confirmed and doubts were removed by a full council of the whole world'" (Book II.5.83; 62). The main reason for this was the dissemination of the Church into various cultures, which eventually created the necessity of taking seriously Paul's statement that the body of Christ is "one body made up of many members." Nevertheless, some of those cultural distinctions eventually provided an entrenched dividing line that would later contribute to the shattering of the unity of the Church. This ecclesial model of singularities contained within the universal "Catholic Church" is thus no longer tenable for the multicultural Church today. This at first appears to affirm both Alain Badiou's and Slavoj Žižek's notions of universality, each of which—different as they are—is out to annihilate the liberal innovation of "multiculturalism." However, this should be adequately dispelled—indeed countered—in the paragraphs that follow. Cf. Slavoj Žižek, "The Politics of Truth, or, Alain Badiou as a Reader of St Paul," in *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), 127-70; and Alain Badiou, *St. Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier, *Cultural Memory in the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

rather as one concrete theological expression for how to attain such practical options. The practical-theological projects which attempt to address the issues of cultural and linguistic diversity within the realms of economy, gender, race, or class, are absolutely necessary, but can be divisive if these projects are not themselves moving from the same origin and oriented to the same end. The words of Jesus, that “none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions” (Lk. 14:33), thus take on new light.¹⁴ These words are not to be limited to earthly material possessions; “*all* your possessions” include also our intellectual and spiritual possessions: our projects, goals, and ambitions.¹⁵

Our proposal resides, then, in the way in which the renunciation of all our possessions lies at the very heart of membership in Christ’s Body, of His Church, of discipleship, and of mission. It is in the drama of Baptism that we see this dispossession first enacted.¹⁶ The dispossession of Baptism—dying with Christ, being buried with him, putting off the old humanity, and obliterating the divisiveness of sin manifest in “Jew or Greek” by the purifying waters—prepares the baptizand and the Church, through identification with her, for the unification for which they give thanks in the celebration of

¹⁴ St. John of the Cross translates this passage this way: “He who does not renounce all that he possesses *with his will* cannot be my disciple,” *The Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, Book I: 5.2, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, 82 (my emphasis). The significance of this translation will be brought to light in chapter three of the present paper.

¹⁵ “It should be known that not only temporal goods and bodily delights are contradictory to the path leading to God, but also spiritual consolations, if possessed or sought with attachment, are an obstacle to the way of the cross of Christ, the Bridegroom. He who is to advance must not gather these flowers”; St. John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle* [Stanza 3.6] in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, 430.

¹⁶ This does not mean that the Eucharist does not itself contain “dispossessions,” as Rowan Williams clarifies: “As has been said, the Christian Eucharist provides a central interpretative model for this: our food and drink is given up into the hands of Jesus so that we become his guests and receive our life from him. The elements are shifted from one context of meaning to another, from being our possession to being gifts given and received back (and in spite of a proper caution about speaking too loosely of the elements as ‘offered’ to God in the Eucharist, we still need to say that the moment of *relinquishing what is ours* is crucial in the Eucharistic process),” *Resurrection*, 102. The dispossessions enacted in the Eucharist carries forth the dispossession first enacted in Baptism.

the Eucharist. At the table, the newly baptized, still dripping wet under their new clothes, join in loving embrace with the already baptized and eat their first meal together as members of their new body. It is the dispossessive shape of Baptism that affords the unity at the table; without it, unity would not be possible. For this reason, at each and every celebration of the Eucharist we must remember our Baptism.¹⁷

However, relinquishing our ecclesial possessions and joining in love following the utter splintering of the Church is no easy task. The failure of the numerous ecumenical councils and conferences of the past six centuries or so should give contemporary Christians pause—just as the small successes along the way should give us hope that we are not totally abandoned to our sin. The road that lies before all Christians is one filled with adversity. The vision of a universally united, catholic Church, however, is no utopic, idealistic pipe dream, since “for God all things are possible” (Mt. 19:26). The uniting of the catholic Church is not only a possibility, but is also the very will of the Father, because Church unity is a preparation for the Holy Spirit’s work of reconciliation and redemption of all of creation. If we remain in sinful division from one another, we thereby stand in direct rebellion against God and diminish the Lordship of Jesus Christ, who, St. Paul says, has received “the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9-11).

Consequently, confession of the sin of the disappearance of the Church, and the active pursuit of the worldwide unity that must follow such confession, should be acknowledged as fundamental, theological principles which can together ground the

¹⁷ And indeed this is a part of the liturgical shape of the Eucharistic rite in the Anglican, Catholic and Orthodox traditions; the priest sprinkles the congregation, asking them to remember their Baptism.

possibility of destroying the shared ecclesial separations of race, class, gender, sexuality, and economics. In other words, it is imperative that we recognize, for example, that the global economy does pose a great threat to the worldwide unity of the Church. As M.

Douglas Meeks warns us:

Churches are not separated merely by questions of doctrine, authority, polity, ministry, and sacrament . . . What remains as an infinitely more difficult question is how the churches can live together in a world so divided by economic ideologies and interests . . . these divisions run through every communion, dividing congregations and denominations according to the prevailing spectrum of economic ideologies and the urgent life and death questions of the world economy.¹⁸

Nevertheless, the various manifestations of division—be they economy, race, class, gender, or whatever else—cannot be properly addressed until the problem of the disappearance of the Church, as a result of possessiveness, is registered as the source of those divisions for all Christians. The refusal of the practice of dispossession enacted in Baptism causes the Church to persist in the sinfulness of division and isolation of all sorts.

We can anticipate two types of responses from contemporary Christians to this thesis (somewhat crudely divided between Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox believers on the one hand and Protestants on the other). The first group—the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches—refuses to recognize the disappearance of the Church because it claims rights to the visible Church in its own body. Fundamentally, this first group promotes an ecclesiological realized eschatology, where the Kingdom is present—even if only proleptically—in the earthly endeavors of *their* local bodies. Because of the unity of their respective local (though “universal”) bodies—and since all others have willfully separated from their bodies in schism—each claim to be the One,

¹⁸ M. Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 25.

Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. Of course, the claims to which of these two bodies is the one “visible Church” is contentious. This is exacerbated by the fact that each one claims a nearly identical set of criteria as to why *its* body has “rights” to being the one Church against all others. The answer is of course that neither can be the one Church if they are not joined together as one body!¹⁹ There is a sad irony to such claims, as they are advanced in the midst of an obvious and persistent disunity; ultimately, defenders of such claims only bury their heads in the sand to avoid the historical reality of the disappearance of the Church.

Even so, St. Cyprian and St. Augustine both stated that if one congregation breaks off from the unity of the body by willful schism, then they have sinned against Christ and His Spirit and have thus severed themselves from the one, catholic Church. This makes the situation between Western and Eastern “orthodoxies” quite precarious, since the Roman church claims that the Greek church split off from unity by schism, and thus *placed* themselves outside the unity of the One, visible Church—just as *vice versa* the Greek church makes the same claim against the Roman church.

As a consequence, the Roman church maintains that Protestants are in schism from the one catholic Church, while the East does not yet recognize Protestant churches as anything other than mere, splintered sects, since, they claim, the Protestants were separated out from a church which was *already* in schism from the one Church (*viz.*, Rome). Negotiating the lines of inside and outside with respect to this history is not simply a difficult task; it is an impossible one. We can say with confidence, however, that as long as each body confronts the other with such equally divisive hostility, *neither*

¹⁹ As it is written: “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand” (Mt. 12:25).

*body can claim to be the one Church.*²⁰ The Church can only *appear* in such instances when one body is actively pursuing the other in loving charity, in order to bring them into unity and reconciliation (as was the case with Augustine and the Catholic Church in relation to the Donatists). If the one is somehow reunited with the other, it cannot be because one submits to the other's claims to authority, but because *both* submit to one another under the sole authority of Christ, who is alone the head of the body.

This first argument is ultimately an argument for universalism, inasmuch as the particular is swallowed by a locally universal body of Christ. Such a case for a local, universal Church—which must be recognized at once as an oxymoron—wanders dangerously close to the errors of the Donatists, who, in their regionalism, claimed that only their church in one section of North Africa was pure enough to be designated the “One, Catholic” Church out of the entire Christian world.²¹ Contrarily, there is no doubt that across the world there are many faithful, local bodies whose practice and goal is love. However, local bodies that refuse, for example, to join at the table in intercommunion with another local body, no matter the condition for such refusal—since love has no condition and does not fail²²—cannot make Christ present to one another or to the world around them. As a consequence, neither can such local bodies make present the “universal” Church.

²⁰ Though it is the Roman and Greek churches that are discussed here, they serve only as examples. This same charge could—and in fact should be—*easily* applied to various Protestant, Reformed, and Holiness denominations, including the Anglican Communion. The point here is not to point fingers, or lay blame on one particular body, but, rather, to demonstrate by way of example the disunity of the *entire*—read, “catholic”—Church.

²¹ Cf. the last chapter of John D. Zizioulas' book for an account of the distinctions between “catholic” and “universal” Church in relationship to the local Church body. “The Local Church In a Perspective of Communion,” in *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 247-60.

²² I Cor. 13:8.

The second response to the thesis to be anticipated by contemporary Christians—the more characteristically Protestant response²³—is that worldwide unity of the Church is not attainable this side of the eschaton, since the Perfect Church can only be manifest when God is all in all (I Cor. 15). This response can be seen as the polar opposite to the first response—an ecclesial-eschatological reserve over against the ecclesiological realized eschatology. The reply of the “ecclesial-eschatological reserve” appears at first glance to have the weight of tradition on its side, since even St. Augustine says that the *civitas dei* is caught up with the *civitas terrena*. The Church is a mixed body with both saints and sinners; the two will not be separated as the goats from the sheep and the trash fish from the net until the Day of Judgment. On that day the Church will be pure and holy.²⁴ However, St. Augustine also recognized that the Church must be visibly manifest as gift and subsequently given over for the life of the world. Or, as the Augustinian Alger of Liège put it, “Christ is not made present where the whole Christ is not made present.”²⁵

Just as the “already” of the first response cannot be properly understood without the “not yet” of the second, so is the “not yet” in this response wholly inadequate without the “already,” and no simple balance—a little of the already, a little bit of the not yet—

²³ These crude generalizations are of course not meant to be exhaustive. Just as there are many Protestants who share the convictions of the first response—that I have characterized as more typically Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox—there are also many Catholics and Orthodox who share the convictions of this second response. The point is more to give a “general” picture of the state of the churches today than to discriminate the anomalies within this or that tradition.

²⁴ It should be noted that the Donatists’ main concerns were for the “purity” and “holiness” of the Church, particularly as these are—they believed—displayed in the performance of ecclesial leaders. Augustine does not refuse these categories *in se*, but, rather, maintains them against the Donatists by turning these Cyprianic elements on their heads, so to speak. I am indebted to Joshua Davis for conversations on this matter. Also cf. J. Patout Burns, *The Development of Augustine’s Doctrine of Operative Grace* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1980).

²⁵ Cited in De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 93n. 40

will work either.²⁶ The Church's "already-not yet" status is first enacted in Baptism, where the baptizand—and the entire Church body with her through all members' remembrance of their own baptisms²⁷—is buried with Christ in a death like his, but is also promised the new life of resurrection. Caught between death and resurrection, the Church looks back with thanksgiving in order to look forward with hope. Thus, since recollection (*anamnēsis*) and anticipation (*epektasis*) are inextricably bound with one another, the baptized Church can be one, here and now, because of the reconciling work of Christ, though its unity is at the same time provisional or preliminary. In other words, this worldwide unity is decidedly *not* the Kingdom of God. The gap that the "already" posits for the Church is thus between the unity of all believers across all boundaries, and the unity of all of humanity, for which the Church serves a "preliminary function."²⁸ The Church is to represent the unity of the Body of Christ to the world, in order to prepare the world for the unity of all of creation in the coming eschaton, for which creation groans (Rom. 8:18-25).

This is the ground that gives our various practical-theological projects for unity possibility. The burden of the remainder of this paper is, therefore, to give concrete weight to the necessity for baptismal dispossession in contemporary Church life, while

²⁶ The duality of these two contemporary theological responses reveals that contemporary theology has failed to work through the brilliant arguments of the great, German, "eschatological" theologians of the past century. These "eschatological" theologians are, most distinctly: Albert Schweitzer, Johannes Weiss, C.H. Dodd, J. Jeremias, Oscar Cullmann, Rudolf Bultmann, Jürgen Moltmann, and Wolfhart Pannenberg.

²⁷ Anytime there is reference to the individual baptizand, or to "each member," it is instructive to recall St. Paul's comments to the Corinthians that each member of the body *is* indeed the whole. Also cf. John Milbank's brilliant article, "On Complex Space" in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 268-92.

²⁸ "The function of the Church is a preliminary function. By this we mean that the existence of the Church is justified in view of the fact that the present political forms of society do not provide the ultimate human satisfaction for individual or corporate life. If the present social structures were adequate, there would be no need for the Church. For then the Kingdom of God would be present in its completeness." Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Kingdom of God and the Church," in *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 82.

also laying bare the material shape of this dispossession for the Church's day-to-day life. Chapter two will demarcate the liturgical shape of dispossession in the rite of Baptism. As a "work of the people" [*leitourgia*], it will be demonstrated how this particular work of art, characterized by dispossession throughout, cannot ever be "our" work. The Eucharistic body into which we are baptized and within which we work is to be given away for the life of the world and consumed for the nourishment of all creation. The ritual of our common work, however, cannot be cordoned off from the embodied, material, day-to-day life of the Church; the two must interpenetrate one another such that there is no distinction between sign and signified. Thus, chapter three will isolate the embodied shape of dispossession for the Church today, paying more regard to the structure or form than to specific practices. The particular form of the tactics of the sixteenth and seventeenth century mystics will be the subject of this chapter's scrutiny. The fourth and final chapter will outline a theology of dispossession which grounds the identity of the dispossessed Church in the dispossessed of this world: the widowed, orphaned, imprisoned, poor, and destitute.

CHAPTER II

BAPTISM & DISPOSSESSION

In this chapter, “dispossession” will serve as an interpretive framework for the early Christian writings and practices of Baptism and initiation. Nevertheless, we must exercise caution, since the early writings on Baptism are notoriously *not* unified, sometimes contradicting one another, at other times simply not giving us enough information to justify a unified position. Thus, dispossession is not a *continuous* thread that is present from very early on in Christian writing that is then universally developed in the first three or four centuries of the Church—but, of course, neither is the placement of the anointing, or even the reception of the Holy Spirit, for that matter. Using dispossession as a hermeneutical paradigm, therefore, allows us to “imagine”²⁹ a unity by taking note of the many places where something like what we have described as “dispossession” in the first chapter appears.³⁰ From this we can then grasp dispossession as something like a continuity in the early Christian witness, though, as in most matters historical, one that will only ever approximate to the true state of things. What follows, then, must be viewed more like a story than “the actual state of things as they were.”

²⁹ I use the word “imagine” here to signify the way in which reality is narrated, like a fable. Thus, this “make-believe” is not something set over against reality, but is intertwined with it. Cf. especially Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: Volume I, The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992); and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

³⁰ This is anything but presumptuous, I believe. Just as others have done work to demonstrate a certain strand such as salvation, or the connection between ours and Jesus’ baptism, *within a confessed multiplicity of possible interpretations*, the imagined unity here is not meant to take precedence, or to be set as *the* meaning of Baptism over against all others, but instead that it is one important interpretation that must be placed alongside the others; and this is important in that it seems to be an interpretation that has often been neglected.

I will attempt to show that dispossession is what grounds the Church's identity, what grants the possibility of unity—it is the condition of possibility for the Eucharist—and thus it is also what grants Christ's presence in the power of the Holy Spirit in the community.³¹ First, I will address the New Testament witness, moving next to the post-NT early Christian witness. Finally, I will take into account whether the contemporary Church has adhered to or disregarded the notion of dispossession in these early Christian accounts.

The New Testament Witness

Even though the earliest New Testament writings on Baptism are found in the letters of St. Paul, the today central text of Romans 6 that identifies Baptism with a “burial” and “dying with Christ,” this text does not really appear in the post-New Testament period until around the early fourth century.³² The most decisive texts for the early Christian witness are those that narrate Jesus' baptism by John, a baptism “of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3; cf. Mt. 3:11 and Jn. 1:26-7). In fact, Mark and John both viewed this event so significant as to place it at the beginning of their gospels, and it appears in the gospels of Matthew and Luke only after the nativity

³¹ This holds true even in schismatic communities, like the Donatists, where the operation of the Spirit in Baptism is still efficacious, even if it is not “beneficial,” to use Augustine's language.

³² It does, however, appear frequently in the third century writings of Origen of Alexandria. For the long list of references, cf. Killian McDonnell O.S.B., *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan: The Trinitarian and Cosmic Order of Salvation*, A Michael Glazier Book (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 201-3. McDonnell suggests that one possible reason this text may have been ignored is due to Marcion's latching on to St. Paul's writings; relying too much on Pauline theology, therefore, might have been confused with a reliance on the Marcionite doctrine, which was thoroughly refuted by many early Christians—particularly Tertullian. *Ibid.*, 184-5.

story.³³ The significance of John’s baptism of Jesus is not that it sets up an iterable framework for later followers to repeat, however, but as K.W. Noakes puts it, that here is established “the way of entering into the fullness of redemption begun by that unique baptism.”³⁴ Thus, the early Christian understanding of Baptism must be viewed in light of the entire story of redemption, which relates to the Jewish eschatological understanding of a “passing” into the messianic age—opened up by Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan.³⁵ This is also how we must understand John the Baptizer’s recitation of Isaiah (present in all four gospel accounts): “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight”” (Mt. 3:3; Mk. 1:2; Lk. 3:4; Jn. 1:23).

The possible but contentious connection between Baptism in the gospels and earlier Jewish ritual cleansings is not as significant here as is the connection between Hebrew and Christian notions of “repentance.” Repentance in the early Judeo-Christian world signified a disposition of the soul; it implied a turning [*epistrephein*], or conversion [*conversio*], of one’s desires and entire way of life (what we have above referred to as “identity”) to God’s purifying Spirit. The purification of repentance took on many

³³ The placement of Jesus’ baptism after the nativity (epiphany) story is most likely a way of emphasizing Jesus’ messianic nature, which is then restated in the baptism story by the descent of the dove and the voice that cries from heaven, “This is my son, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased” (Mt.3:17; Lk. 3:22; Mk. 1:11; cf. Jn. 1:32-4).

³⁴ “From new Testament Times until St. Cyprian,” in *The Study of Liturgy*, revised edition, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold SJ, and Paul Bradshaw (London: SPCK, 1992), 113.

³⁵ Until the fourth century, the “time” of Baptism, was most often associated with the Jewish celebration of Passover; the “pascha”—suffering of Christ—was couched from very early on within the context of the Hebrew eschatological “passing” over from this age into the next (this is especially true in the Syriac-speaking regions of the early centuries of Christianity, as Thomas M. Finn notes in *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate: West and East Syria*, Message of the Fathers of the Church, Vol. 5 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 10). This should not, of course, take away from the newness of the Christian practice, even as it should guard us from the mistakes of Marcion.

different forms in Jewish and early Christian communities, but its significance lies in its direct correlation to Baptism in the New Testament texts.

This important connection could allow one to conclude along with R. A. Barclay that, “whatever form the soul-purification took in repentance, confession, reception of the Holy Spirit, proclamation of the nature of Jesus as Messiah (Christ) or Son of God, and the coming of the Messianic kingdom of God, this was incomplete without the act of baptism, the immersion in water.”³⁶ Even if one were to receive the Holy Spirit *prior* to being baptized, as with Cornelius in Acts 10:38, Baptism is thus still *given* as a way of sealing the anointing or reception that has taken place; in other words, while repentance does not require Baptism for the early Church, Baptism was used in the very least as a way of sealing or marking one *as* repentant, to “prepare for the way of the Lord.”³⁷ As Aquinas later put it, “The sacrament of Baptism is said to be necessary for salvation in so far as man cannot be saved without, at least, a Baptism of desire; ‘which, with God, counts for the deed’ (Augustine, Ennarr. in Psalm 57).”³⁸ The New Testament language of salvation, healing, and restoration [*sōtēr*] can thus be understood as requiring a turning towards the free gift of salvation,³⁹ symbolized in the act of Baptism, which is later associated with “initiation,” or entrance into the faith-covenant community.

³⁶ “New Testament Baptism: An External or Internal Rite?” in *Initiation*, ed. C.J. Bleeker, Studies in the History of Religions, vol. X (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965), 183. This statement does take into account the fact that there are discrepancies—especially in the book of Acts—between when Baptisms are performed in relationship to when the “gift” of the Holy Spirit is received.

³⁷ The emergence of the problem of the necessity for so-called “emergency” baptisms, however, allowed for a more nuanced interpretation that granted “faith” as conveying of the effects of Baptism, were one to die before being baptized. Though an early problem, this issue is given the most clarity by St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III., q.68, a. 2, 8-9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, q. 68, a. 2. reply to obj. 3.

³⁹ For a fascinating array of early Christian texts that connect “our Baptism” and “Jesus’ Baptism in the Jordan” with cosmic salvation, cf. Killian McDonnell’s book *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan*, esp. 50-68.

My contention here is that the various descriptions of this general turning, spoken of as “repentance,” or “confession of sins,” or “conversion,” can be understood under the auspices of our use of “dispossession” above. One’s old identity, therefore, cannot remain intact when one encounters the Holy Spirit in Baptism, but is relinquished over to the Father’s gracious new life in His Son, Jesus Christ. This theme of a dispossessive conversion becomes much more important for the post-New Testament Christian communities who encounter and contest immeasurable contentious identities in emperor worship and other pagan religions.

The Early Church

Following the New Testament witness, the earliest accounts of Baptism describe the rite as one of passage, initiation, or entrance into the Christian covenant-community.⁴⁰ Baptism is what first allows for the various members to be fashioned into “the body of Christ”; it is the praxis-symbol of dispossession for the Christian Church. “Repentance,” “preparation,” “exorcism,” “renunciation,” and the like—as they appear in the New Testament—are all early Christian terms that should fall under the umbrella of what I am calling “dispossession” here. In the post-New Testament communities in which the meaning of Baptism is shifted to include initiation, this dispossession becomes tied up with the liturgical framework of the ritual. We will, therefore, focus primarily on the

⁴⁰ Although it is not altogether clear from the New Testament writings that there is any association of Baptism with an initiation into the community, Adela Yarbro Collins notes that in the New Testament accounts, and especially in the Pauline texts, there is indeed some operative understanding of Baptism as initiation; “The Origin of Christian Baptism” in *Living Water, Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 49-50. As we have mentioned, however, the Pauline texts on Baptism do not become central for the early Church until the fourth century, and thus it is perhaps more proper to place a development of “initiation” in baptismal reflection and practice *after* the NT period.

dispossessive nature of this framework in this section. What follows cannot even skim the surface of the many early texts on Baptism, even just within the first four centuries. We will, therefore, take a look at only a few texts in order to attain a somewhat (chronologically) “comprehensive” view, giving us an amalgamated early Christian Baptismal rite.

The earliest text we have available, dating from the late first to early second century, is a West Syrian document entitled the *Didache* (*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*). The most pertinent passage is situated in the section on “life,” from the didactic instruction, the “Two Ways” (life and death), just before the commentary on Baptism: “Do not turn your back on the needy, but share everything with your brother, and call nothing your own. For if you have what is eternal in common, how much more should you have what is transient!” (4:8)⁴¹ It is assumed that the Baptized Church follows the way of life, not death, because they have passed through death with Christ, and thus, the Baptized Church possesses nothing but the new life itself constituted by dispossession.⁴² This is restated in the section on Baptism in the form of a prebaptismal repentance by way of fasting: “Before the baptism...the one who baptizes and the one being baptized must fast, and any others who can. And you must tell the one being baptized to fast for one or two days beforehand.”⁴³ The second-century Italian, Justin Martyr, echoed this sentiment: “Those who are persuaded and believe that the things we teach and say are true, and promise that they can live accordingly, are instructed to pray

⁴¹ Cited in Cyril C. Richardson, ed., *Early Church Fathers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 173.

⁴² In this sense, “dispossession” could be called a possession, of sorts; but, this is only the case if it is understood that the praxis of dispossession is itself *God’s* act, and is thus *God’s* possession.

⁴³ *Didache*, 6.4, in Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers* 174.

and beseech God with fasting for the remission of their past sins, while we pray and fast along with them.”⁴⁴

The *Didache* and Justin both affirm in Baptism what Alexander Schmemmann calls a “double preparation”—“that of the catechumen and that of the Church.”⁴⁵ By the time of the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus⁴⁶ this twofold preparation of the catechumenate becomes even more significant; there, the catechumens are “to hear the word for three years” in preparation for Baptism, which culminates—as for Justin also—with the entire congregation in the sharing of the Eucharistic meal.⁴⁷ During a final period of preparation, the candidates are measured up to such questions as: “Have they honored the widows? Have they visited the sick? Have they done every kind of good work?” At this time they are then exorcised daily, leading up to the day of the Baptism. In the baptismal rite, the oil for anointing is exorcised, and the candidate is asked to renounce Satan and all his pomp and works. The daily exorcisms and the exorcism of the oil in the *Apostolic Tradition* are only paralleled, as Maxwell Johnson notes, in the fourth century, but the renunciation of Satan and all his pomp and works (referred to as exorcism, or “scrutiny”) is common to many other texts in both East and West from the third through the fifth centuries.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* c. 64, in Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers*, 282.

⁴⁵ Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 15.

⁴⁶ Dating of the document is contentious; while Thomas M. Finn dates it to around the “turn of the second century,” Maxwell E. Johnson places it around 215 C.E. Cf. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism: Italy, North Africa, and Egypt*, Message of the Fathers of the Church vol. 6 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 43; Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 72.

⁴⁷ Hippolytus of Rome, *The Apostolic Tradition*, ch. 16; quoted in Johnson, *ibid.*, 73. Cf. also Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 88; quoted in Johnson, *ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁸ Johnson, *ibid.*, 79. Though the exorcism rite is not found in the earliest treatise on Baptism, Tertullian’s *De Baptismo*, Johnson suggests that Tertullian’s writings suggests that it was in practice elsewhere in North Africa; cf. Johnson (*ibid.*, 61). Tertullian’s view of the world was indeed one where evil spirits settle upon “shady springs, all sorts of out-of-the-way streams, pools in the (public) baths, aqueducts,

All of this preparation serves as a way of symbolizing the baptizand's movement to the font, to the waters of Baptism. Because water, in ancient cosmologies, was viewed as a boundary—a “liminal” space, as Victor Turner calls it,⁴⁹ between death and life—the preparation of the catechumens symbolized their reverence for the death-dealing flood waters, but also the power of new life that sprung from the waters. As John Chrysostom says, “[Baptism] represents death and burial, life and resurrection. . . . When we plunge our heads into the water as into a sepulcher, the old man is immersed, buried wholly; when we come out of the water, the new man appears at the same time.”⁵⁰ And Cyril of Jerusalem connects this ancient symbolization of water with Jesus' baptism in the Jordan: “According to Job, the dragon Behemoth was in the Waters and received the Jordan into his jaws. Now, since the heads of the dragon must be broken, Jesus, having gone down into the Waters, bound the Strong One, so that we should have the power to walk on scorpions and snakes.”⁵¹ The baptizand's preparation for entrance into the water is for this reason to be revered: it is as a soldier preparing for battle, or an athlete preparing for an arduous game. The immersion itself then serves to characterize a “passage” of the baptizand from one region of life into another; and in connection with the entire story of redemption, that life is the life of Jesus Christ. The Eucharist fulfills this movement, in that, by eating and drinking, the newly baptized *participate in* this same life.

and domestic cisterns,” and thus the necessity for exorcism at Baptism *in water* was not, for Tertullian, taken lightly! *De Baptismo*, 5; quoted in Finn, vol. 6, 121.

⁴⁹ Turner, “Passages, Margins and Poverty: Religious Symbols of Communitas,” *Worship* XLVI, 7 (September, 1972), 390-412.

⁵⁰ *Homil. in Joh.*, XXV, 2; quoted in Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion: The Significance of Religious Myth, Symbolism, and Ritual Within Life and Culture*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1959), 133.

⁵¹ Quoted in Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*, 133. As Eliade points out, this symbol of water for the Christian narrative adds new elements that are particular to the sacred history, and hence the symbol of baptism as a descent into the waters to do battle with the marine monster; *ibid.*

What is significant about all of these early texts is that there is a liturgical movement of the entire Church congregation from preparation, or repentance, to Baptism and finally to Eucharist. Initiation into the community of Christ involves this entire movement; it displays the necessity for the early Christian catechumen to carry forth a certain disposition to Baptism. Sometimes the preparation period was so intense, and the sacrament so revered that some would literally wait their entire lives to be baptized (simply for fear of falling back into sin afterwards); and some others would not even make it through the process.⁵² John Chrysostom addressed the issue of external hindrances to retaining the life granted in Baptism by describing the way in which one's wealth can be a hindrance to baptismal repentance because it posits possessions *in this world* as greater than the gift of the Holy Spirit granted and possessed in Baptism. As he says to those "about to be illuminated":

For poverty is far more conducive to piety for us than wealth, and work than idleness; since wealth is even a hindrance to those who do not take heed. For when it is needful to dismiss anger, to extinguish envy, to curb passion, to offer prayer, to exhibit forbearance and meekness, kindness and charity, when would poverty be a bar? For it is not possible by spending money to accomplish these things, but by exhibiting a right disposition.⁵³

What is significant to note here is the way in which *wrong disposition* as a sort of earthly possession, or "wealth," is a hindrance to "piety." For those about to be illuminated, says the "golden-tongued," the important thing to remember is that there is a certain lowly, even "poor" disposition required for the Christian life into which one is about to be baptized. The Eucharistic life in which the catechumens are soon to partake is one that

⁵² Cf. Finn, "General Introduction," p. 6 in vols. 5 and 6.

⁵³ *Baptismal Instructions*, translated and annotated by Paul W. Harkins, Ancient Christian Writers, 31 (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1963), II.4.

only the naked can approach,⁵⁴ one who stands on burlap sack-cloth,⁵⁵ stripped of all this world's "possessions," exorcised of evil spirits, one who has renounced Satan, and all his pomp, works, and angels, and affirms faith in Jesus Christ alone who grants new life through his baptism, passion, and resurrection.

In both the New Testament witness, and the early Christian rituals of Baptism, therefore, we can grasp an interpretive framework, or paradigm, that yields two concrete marks of what we have called "dispossession": identity of the self and identity of the community.

Prior to Baptism, the identity of the baptizand is still caught up in those things which characterize the reign of death and sin in his life: his habits are still those of idolatry, greed, racism, division, or gluttony. The act of Baptism, however, is the loosing of that identity so that it might be re-formed in grace by passing through Christ's atoning death into the promise of new life (Rom. 6).⁵⁶ This is signified in the early baptismal rites in such movements as the turning of the baptizand from the land of darkness to face

⁵⁴ John Chrysostom refers to the appearance of the candidate as one who is in captivity (Edward Yarnold SJ suggests that this has a connection to being "stripped"; *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the R.C.I.A.* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1971), 157n.21); Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition* exhorts the catechumens to "take off [their] clothes" (Finn, vol. 6, 49); the *Didascalia Apostolorum* says that a "deaconess" should baptize women if there is a woman present—this suggests that the candidates would have been naked, and that "it is not fitting that women should be seen by men" (ch. 17; quoted in Johnson, *Rites*, 41); it is also worth noting that the early iconography of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan depicts Jesus naked.

⁵⁵ Yarnold sums up the significance of the sackcloth, or "goat's fleece": "The symbolism of the goat's fleece is fourfold: (a) Sack-cloth is the traditional sign of penitence; (b) It recalls the tunics of skin worn by Adam and Eve after the fall and so reminds the candidate of original sin (Theodore); (c) It is an acknowledgment of the candidate's former slavery to the devil (Theodore and Chrysostom); (d) The trampling of the goat's hair shows that the candidate wishes to be numbered among the sheep rather than the goats at the Last Judgment" (*The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the R.C.I.A.* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1971), 11).

⁵⁶ The significance of the Pauline text for our study can thus come to the fore, since it becomes operative not only for Origen in the third century, but a host of other fathers from the fourth century forward (chronologically, in other words, here is the proper place for its insertion in the movement from the *Didache* to John Chrysostom). St. Augustine's use of St. Paul, however, is perhaps the most decisive for the Western understanding of Baptism as death, burial, and resurrection, connected with Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

that of light,⁵⁷ renouncing Satan and affirming Christ with the Creed, or in the stripping of the baptizands before Baptism and subsequently being clothed with a white garment. Habits are thus restructured according to this multiform dispossession, or, rather, they are buried and resurrected as completely new creations, no longer to the end and desire of one's own self-assertion—the bondage of improper self-love characteristic of sin—but to the glory of God. Desire is now turned to its proper end [*telos*], the Other.⁵⁸

Likewise, the identity of the community is transformed with the baptizand as the many members of the one body enter into penitence with the baptizands during the Great Lent. The Apostle John reminds us that the many members that have been born from above—a Church that is learning to love one another—will be fashioned into Christ's very body, made bread for the life of the world. Baptism marks the Church as a body of mission: when we are turned from the "old humanity" to the "new human being" as one body, the new communal life we receive must be perpetually given away, since the one body of Christ is itself the gift for the nourishment of all of creation. At this point in the liturgical movement of the Church, the Eucharist becomes the central mark of the life of

⁵⁷ In the Eastern rites of renunciation, the baptizand faces the west to renounce Satan—because the sun sets in the west: "I will tell you now, for you need to know, why you face westward. The west is the quarter from which darkness appears to us; now the devil is darkness, and wields his power in darkness," Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catecheses* I.4 (cited in M. Johnson, *ibid.*, 95); in the West, however, the baptizand would face the east to renounce Satan, and then be turned to the west for the profession of faith in Jesus Christ—this difference in direction in western orthodoxy probably has, unfortunately, more to do with some form of *ressentiment* to eastern peoples than the actual geographical locations of the sun's setting and rising.

⁵⁸ The term "Other" is intentionally left ambiguous here. Whether one refers to God as Other, or the neighbor as Other must be confused, the lines blurred. For, as the Danish "thinker-poet," Kierkegaard reminds us, the greatest of the commandments is that we are to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, but also to love our neighbor as our self, because we properly love both God and self *in* loving the neighbor; or, as he clarifies, "God is the middle term" between self and neighbor. Thus, when we love the neighbor we love God; and if we are truly loving God, we will love the neighbor. God is encountered *in* loving the neighbor, since this is to where God in Christ goes. Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Kierkegaard's Writings, XVI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Also cf. Emmanuel Levinas: "It is as though the unity and uniqueness of the ego were already the hold on itself of the gravity of the other," *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 118.

the baptized body. A body of “thanksgiving,” the baptized give thanks by giving themselves over wholly to the Father’s will, and to the constant reshaping of their baptized desire by the Holy Spirit. The baptized Church’s prayer thus becomes: “I seek not my own will but the will of him that sent me” (Jn. 5:30).

Out of this twofold marking, the form of “dispossession” according to the liturgical shape of Baptism in the early Christian context enters our purview: *Dispossession is the total self-evacuation of all possessions and possessive claims, including those of both identity and community.*

The Church Today

In our time, however, the content of the sacrament of Baptism has been obscured because of a failure to adhere to the form of Baptism analyzed above, that is, dispossession. As already emphasized, the act of dispossession in Baptism is liturgical in nature. That is to say, it is the Church as a social body of distinct persons, and not simply the individual, that is dispossessed in Baptism. The failure to adhere to the dispossessive form of Baptism is accordingly the result of two movements, both of which demonstrate the forfeit of the invisible grace which constitutes the social and liturgical life of the Church. The first is what William T. Cavanaugh and Graham Ward correctly identify as the atomization of the social body that makes up the true Church [*corpus verum*].⁵⁹ The second movement is the politicization of the social body of the Church.

⁵⁹ See William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*; and Graham Ward, *Cities of God*, Radical Orthodoxy Series, eds., John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, Graham Ward (New York: Routledge, 2000).

First, the contemporary Church presents a shift from the liturgical nature of Baptism characterized by dispossession, to an individualized sacrament that reduces the meaning of Baptism to a function, either to the Bishop as the Mediator of Christ's salvation, or to the individual who receives this salvation. Henri de Lubac, in his study of the medieval Eucharistic theology⁶⁰ of the *corpus mysticum*,⁶¹ notes a shift which had similar consequences for the sacrament of the Eucharist. The shift was made from earlier Augustinian theology that emphasized the mutuality of the social "body of the Church" [*corpus verum*] and the sacramental and hidden "body of the Eucharist" [*corpus mysticum*]⁶²—which are effects of the event of the historical "body of Christ" [*corpus historicum*]⁶³—to an emphasis on the bifurcation of these bodies. The consequence was a reverse in the terms, such that the (invisible-mystical) Eucharistic body became coupled not with the (visible) social body of the Church, but with the historical body of Christ. The Eucharistic elements became a spectacle for the laity, while the social body of the Church was relegated to the secret and hidden character previously afforded the Eucharistic body. No longer was the Eucharistic body *performed* by the body of the Church—which simultaneously receives herself by and as the Eucharistic body—because the Church body was now reduced to the hidden, sacramental body, atomized into isolated individuals and ruled by a lofty clericalism.⁶⁴

Much like the medieval Eucharist, Baptism has increasingly become a mere spectacle. A congregation can sit comfortably and gaze as new members are baptized

⁶⁰ It is important to note, here, that though this shift is made within medieval Eucharistic *theology*, the social body is *directly affected*. We cannot pretend that theological language or discourse and what phenomenologists refer to as "lived reality" do not mutually influence one another. Words matter, literally.

⁶¹ Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: L'Eucharistie et L'Église au moyen âge* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1949).

⁶² In addition to de Lubac's study, see Michel de Certeau's *Mystic Fable*, esp. "Chapter 3: The New Science," 79-112; Certeau considers that his "history might be the sequel" (79) to de Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum*, and is thus a necessary supplement.

into their community, but without having to participate in fasting and in prayer.⁶³ The promulgation of so-called “private” baptisms should alert us to the forfeit of the social nature of Baptism; Baptism is seldom considered any longer to be a liturgical act of the entire social body. On this count, the anti-liberal arguments of theologians such as Cavanaugh and Ward are correct in that the atomization of the social body into isolated individuals—wherein the social body is relegated to mystical retreat and grace is received privately—is an obstacle to the appearance of the Church. It hinders such appearance because the individualism inherent in these communities is clung to as a possession, with no recourse to the dispossession that frees the Church to be a social body that fosters distinction in mutual loving relation.

Secondly, due to political events of the twentieth century which have demanded a renewed understanding of the relationship between the Church as society and the State as society, the social body of the Church has been politicized to such an extent that it has become wholly externalized from what constitutes it *as* Church. The sacramental Church paradoxically—and mysteriously—exists in two realities at once: the heavenly and the earthly. It thus appears as a phenomenon—an *historical* reality—in the world, and is yet constituted by and makes present a reality beyond this-worldly phenomena. As a result, the sacramental Church is said to have a double referent: the historical or visible reality, and its eschatological or invisible reality.⁶⁴ The contemporary Church, however, has

⁶³ This is certainly more so the case with many Protestants, since fasting and beseeching are not built into the liturgical structure of their worship. Nevertheless, “private baptisms” or “closed” baptisms open only to the baptizand’s family are perhaps even more pervasive in Catholic and Orthodox traditions. The post-Vatican II “RCIA” reforms of the Catholic Church’s liturgy of initiation have, however, tried to overcome some of these obstacles. Cf. Yarnold, 1-66.

⁶⁴ This model of the “Church as sacrament” attempts to apply the tradition of the *sacramentum* beginning with Tertullian—i.e., that a visible reality (such as water) is a sign [*signum*] that points to an invisible reality [*res*] (sanctifying grace), constitutive of the sign as sign—to the social body of the Church. For one of the earliest accounts of “Church as sacrament,” see especially Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism*:

become *thoroughly* politicized, and therefore thoroughly visible, insofar as it has staked an identity for itself that is approximate to the way in which it is visible *as* a political reality. Ironically, because the Church is a precarious phenomenon—a signifier with a double referent—it is not constituted *qua* Church by becoming purely visible without remainder, but, rather, disappears. There is, in other words, an invisibility to the Church that is not affected by the disappearance of the Church; because it is a social, worldly phenomenon, the Church can be *visible* in various forms—e.g., as a political reality opposing same-sex marriage, or in approximation to consumerist market values—while it fails to appear as Church in such instances. It is the invisible grace, or the Spirit’s bond of love that reconciles divisive human relations and redeems them in relations of loving mutuality, that manifests the Church *qua* Church, and renders its visibility, or appearance. Thus, at stake here is the very sacramentality of the Church. In becoming purely visible, the Church no longer *signifies* or *makes present* the invisible grace that constitutes it, but merely points to itself as a political reality.

While the first of these movements has become the brunt of a tirade of anti-liberal theological reflections⁶⁵—charging liberalism and particularly its construals of the

Christ and the Common Destiny of Man, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sister Elizabeth England, OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1950): “If Christ is the sacrament of God, the Church is the sacrament of Christ; she represents him, in the full and ancient meaning of the term, she really makes him present” (76). Cf. also Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., “The Church, Sacrament of the Risen Christ,” in *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter With God* (Mission, KS: Sheed and Ward), 47-89. This same notion is deployed in several other thinkers that simply don’t use the phrase “church as sacrament.” Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Visible Church-Community,” *Discipleship*, 225-52. As this notion is furthermore a way of saying that the Church in history *has a future*, also cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1967), and Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, *ibid*.

⁶⁵ These reflections are most persistent, but not limited to, the work of Stanley Hauerwas and the British theological movement “Radical Orthodoxy.” Cf. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), and Graham Ward, *Cities of God*, in particular, for the most interesting accounts of Radical Orthodox theology; also Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1995), and his student William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist* for the best examples of the “Hauerwasian” school of thought.

“subject” and the “nation-state” with the violent individualization of society—the second has been completely ignored. In fact, it could be argued, the latter has been ignored due to a one-sided attempt to properly address the former. Much of contemporary political theology has tried to show that the Church as social body is more properly political than the liberal nation-state, because only the Church can constitute a true polis, and thus produce the peace the state promises yet cannot fulfill. These theologians do not, however, constitute the Church as a viable political and sacramental reality, but merely as a hypothetical body. They ignore the historical fact that the Church, constituted by the dispossession given in Baptism, has disappeared, because they take the Church to be a presupposed *datum*. In other words, they fail to perceive how their theological reflections [*thēoria*] on the Church are divorced from the historical reality [*praxis*] of the disappearance of the Church.

Given the state of the Church today, characterized by possessions—either of the autonomy of the individual, or the political niche the social body of the Church has carved out for itself—it is thus necessary to lay out what it would look like for the Church to live into its Baptismal identity as a Church of dispossession.

EXCURSUS: BAPTISM AND THE COMMUNITY⁶⁶

For the Christian, to receive the gift of Eucharistic new life, which is to say, to be joined by participation with the body of Christ, requires the act of Baptism. Drowned in the waters over which the Holy Spirit hovers and sanctifies, the baptizand⁶⁷ dies to her sin, pride, and security—what Paul calls our “old humanity”—and is raised into the new life that is Christ Jesus. By Christ’s resurrection she become a new creation; who she is becomes completely transformed, since the baptizand receives a new birth in order that she may, with God’s grace, move toward the end (*telos*) for which we were all created.⁶⁸ The work of Baptism, though, is not something that we can do by our own power; it is the free gift of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. We are given over to the life of wealth and joy, only as pride and selfish ambition are relinquished. Not even the supposed “free will” can perform this task, as Augustine understood: “The will, therefore, is then truly free, when it is not the slave of vices and sins. Such was it given us by God; and this being lost by its own fault can *only be restored by Him who was able at first to give it*. And therefore the truth says, ‘If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed’” (*Civitas Dei*, Book XIV.11, emphasis mine).⁶⁹ The “will” is made free by the restorative gift that Christ grants through his sufferings and thus is not a capacity that can be freely exercised, or a potency that can be actualized, to liberate us from the vices and

⁶⁶ This section’s necessity is demanded by our modern tendency to make Baptism into an “individual” affair, lest we forget that not only is there a “double *preparation*” before Baptism, but that the entire rite is itself the work of a community within which God’s Spirit is at work.

⁶⁷ I use the term “baptizand” to refer generally to those seeking baptism, since the more traditional term “catechumen” wasn’t common until at least the late-third century Cf. M. Johnson, *ibid.*, 33-88.

⁶⁸ It is unnecessary here to rehearse the distinction between the East and West on this issue; in other words, whether one ultimately decides that “participation in the Godhead” or “beatific vision” constitutes “the end (*telos*) for which we were created,” does not alter the essential point, here.

⁶⁹ St. Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. and ed. R. W. Dyson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 605.

sins of “our old humanity” without that restorative gift.⁷⁰ This likewise means that Baptism is not an act which an isolated individual performs, neither the baptizand nor the Bishop, since it is the reconciled humanity, the many members forged into One Body by the redeeming work of Christ Jesus, that has been freed from sin to “work out our salvation” (Phil. 2:12-13). It is a liturgical drama, a true “work of the people,”⁷¹ of which baptizand and Bishop are each only a part.⁷²

Thus, the one Church body is brought before God in Baptism, and joins with the baptizands in fasting and in penitence as all members are asked to remember their personal Baptism.⁷³ According to the ancient baptismal rite of John Chrysostom, for

⁷⁰ The reader should infer that the restorative gift *continues* to work in us and with us; the gift is not a deposit of some new capacity we did not have before...grace is still necessary for all human action, even after reconciliation and redemption.

⁷¹ The Greek word for liturgy, *leitourgia*, means, of course, “the work of the people.”

⁷² Perhaps the liturgical nature of Baptism can allow us to make room for the much disputed question of “infant baptism.” Whether or not the New Testament or earliest Christian communities actually baptized infants is quite irrelevant. The actual cause of the proliferation of infant baptism in the West is rather difficult to pinpoint. There is evidence of infant baptisms in the late second to early third centuries, as witnessed to by Tertullian—with great disturbance, we might add. It is perhaps the Augustinian and later Thomistic interpretations of an allowance of infant baptism in cases of “emergency,” however, that seems to have taken hold in the West. Even so, the broad Augustinian point that is given definition in St. Thomas, seems to be wholly ignored. Both Augustine and Thomas claim that the community’s profession of faith—most certainly a reference to the common recital of the Creed, which was linked from very early on to the baptismal rite—“makes up for what is lacking” in the infant; though the infant cannot repent, or make an affirmation of faith, *God*—operating upon and with the believing community—can indeed do these things *for* this little one. The most common Protestant argument against infant baptism involves the fact that the infant has not yet reached the spiritual maturity to be repentant, or to make a decision to turn from the ways of sin, let alone to have faith. Such an argument displays a severe distrust in the believing community within which the infant will be raised. Any opposition to this response must be careful, however, not to make the mistakes of the likes of Zwingli or Bucer, who tended to transform the sacramentality of baptism into obligation, by the requirement of parental or god-parental assent *with* the baptizand, “as the very condition *for* the giving of baptism,” Johnson *ibid.*, 249. Indeed, the “lack of maturation” in the infant does not stop St. Cyprian from stating: “We think [baptism] is to be even more observed in respect of infants and newly-born persons, who on this very account deserve more from our help and from the divine mercy, that immediately, on the very beginning of their birth, *lamenting and weeping, they do nothing else but entreat*” (Epistle 64), *Anti-Nicene Fathers* 5: 354, cited in Johnson *ibid.*, 68, Johnson’s emphasis. Even with such “evidence,” however, the point here still has less to do with *whether* or not infant baptism is appropriate, than that infant baptism demonstrates a prayerful disposition of an entire community—a body—bound by loving mutuality in faith to the building up of this very body and *each* of its members.

⁷³ The word “personal” here should not mislead the reader into fancies of individualism; Vladimir Lossky’s distinction between “individual” and “personal”—the latter being linked to the “hypostatic” person of Christ—should be kept in mind. Cf. Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), especially chapters 6 and 7.

example, after the new members are baptized, they are then led into the congregation to greet for the first time their new family with a kiss and then they partake in the holy meal with the same family for the first time.⁷⁴ The *entire* Church body moves from Baptism into the celebration of the Eucharist together. At the Eucharistic table, the work of the people constitutes a daily dying to sin, which is “merely a consequence of the one death that has already taken place in baptism.”⁷⁵ Thus, the Eucharist cannot be properly understood without the prior work that takes place in the sacrament of Baptism. Is this not the meaning of the voice that Augustine hears in the garden: “I am the food of full-grown men. Grow and you shall feed on me. But you shall not change me into your own substance, as you do with the food of your body. Instead you shall be changed into me” (*Confessions*, VII.10)⁷⁶? Indeed, it is only when one relinquishes the attempt to possess God, like the food we possess in our bodies that they become free to be transformed into the newness of life in the risen Christ. To believe that we can possess God or Christ’s body, his Church, is to give in to the illusion that the Baptized body can subsist by its own volition; or that the people who make up the work of the people are not themselves God’s work, fashioned in his own likeness by death and resurrection.

Consequently, it is something of a paradox that Baptism is a liturgical performance, since it is at once the work of God and the work of the people. The mistake is to believe that any liturgical act can be performed without the prior, prevenient grace of God. It is precisely with this prevenient grace in mind and heart that the Bishop speaks the epiclesis, praying for the Spirit to come and bless the waters prepared for and by the work of the people for Baptism. In the words of Theodore of Mopsuestia, “Now ordinary

⁷⁴ See John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Homily* II.27, in Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 162.

⁷⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 211.

⁷⁶ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 147.

water cannot become this other thing except by the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Consequently the bishop beforehand pronounces a prescribed form of words, asking God to let the grace of the Holy Spirit come upon the water and make it capable of begetting this awesome birth, making it a womb for sacramental birth” (*Baptismal Homily III.9*).⁷⁷

Even the breath used to speak the epiclesis to ask for the Holy Spirit is itself a gift, a sign of the Holy Spirit’s already having come.

⁷⁷ Yarnold, *Awe-Inspiring Rites*, 185.

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST

In the last chapter we observed that the sacramental-phenomenal Church has a double referent (the “visible” and the “invisible”), and consequently that its visible manifestation must not outstretch the invisible grace that constitutes it—since they mutually refer to and interpenetrate one another. Because the Church today persists in sin by carving out a proper space for itself—or actually a plurality of spaces—however, we witness the invisible vanish in the spectacle of the Church’s visibility. But, it is this very invisibility that constitutes the visible unity of the Church, and thus this chapter will give content to that invisibility in the *modus vivendi* of the mystics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁷⁸ First, we must make a necessary aside to St. Augustine’s theology of the intentionality of the baptizand, in order to set the stage for the dispossessed mystical subject.

Augustine and the Donatists on Intentionality and Performance

St. Augustine’s concept of an association between intention and performance within all human action is first given shape in response to the exigencies of the Donatist controversy in the fifth century. The Donatists held what J. Patout Burns calls “an

⁷⁸ This chapter is highly indebted and will make constant reference to the historiographical work of Michel de Certeau. First, to his work *The Mystic Fable: Vol. 1* (from now on abbreviated as “MF”); and, secondly, to his brilliant essay, “The Weakness of Believing,” trans. Saskia Brown, in *The Certeau Reader*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 214-43 (also from now on abbreviated as “WB”).

excessively objectivist religious system, one which apparently judged primarily on the basis of performance.”⁷⁹ For instance, the root of the Donatist reasons for schism lay in the charge that the Catholic communion had been tainted by the apostasies of Felix of Apthunga—who was considered a “*traditor*,” or, one who handed over⁸⁰ the sacred books to the emperor during the Diocletian persecutions—and also Caecilian, the bishop of Carthage, since he was consecrated by Felix.⁸¹ Consequently, the Catholic apostasy “had ruined the power of sanctifying of all Christian bishops except those of the Donatist communion, who had never associated with the apostates.”⁸² Relying on Cyprian for much of their case, the Donatists argued that the bad performance of one bishop spread like a disease to the entire communion—save those who had nothing to do with him—and thus any who were baptized in the Catholic communion were to be “rebaptized.”⁸³ Since the holiness of the Church was judged solely based on (good or bad) performance, the Donatists “refused to recognize that the good intention of healing a division and establishing peace actually constituted the action of communicating and preserved each bishop’s innocence.”⁸⁴

⁷⁹ J. Patout Burns, *The Development of Augustine’s Doctrine of Operative Grace* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1980), 60.

⁸⁰ *Traditor* is a Latin term meaning “to transmit,” or “hand over.” See Jaroslav Pelikan’s account of the Donatist controversy in *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 308-13.

⁸¹ Although Felix is the “original” *traditor* in the matter, it is his consecration of Caecilian as bishop of Carthage that actually sparked the schism.

⁸² Burns, *The Development of Augustine’s Doctrine of Operative Grace*, 56.

⁸³ This term, “rebaptism”—which has become commonplace in Church history—is not exactly accurate, and not at all what St. Cyprian intended when it began to circulate. Since his opponents believed that theirs and no other was the true baptism, and thus broke with the Unity of the Catholic Church, Cyprian did not recognize their baptisms as valid at all. So, converts to the Holy Roman Catholic Church were not “rebaptized” but, instead, *baptized for the first time*, in Cyprian’s eyes. This is fairly certain the case with the Donatists, as well—at least in aim. They failed to see how they did not adhere to Cyprian as closely as they would have liked, however, and actually ended up proferring a Church which did “rebaptize.”

⁸⁴ Burns, *ibid.*, 60.

According to Augustine, on the other hand, the Catholic intention of peace did not arise from an objectivist moral adherence to a blind *fidei regula*, but, rather, from the love that God Himself breathes into the Church—from the Holy Spirit. In fact, Burns notes, the Donatists had narrowed “the standard which defines the true church to unfailing witness to the faith,” whereas Augustine emasculated such fideism by grounding the chief characteristic of the true church in charity, or love: “Augustine explained that because charity actually contains and realizes the salvific elements of faith, a sin against charity is equivalent to denial of the faith.”⁸⁵ Therefore, the Church will be “the true church” [*corpus verum*] only when the donated good intentions of unity, love, and peace are displayed in the tolerating of sinners within the communion, rather than turning them away. According to Augustine, intentionality towards loving unity is the invisible ground of the visible sign of good performance, but, this intentionality is not a human work: “Because their union is the fruit of charity, the true church is the work of the Holy Spirit rather than an achievement of human fidelity.”⁸⁶ Hence, the will only operates properly, for Augustine, when it is the Holy Spirit which operates in it. And, this is true not simply for the individual, but also for the Church—since the true Church is constituted by the willing of intentionality.⁸⁷ This Augustinian conception of the will (even as an “ecclesial will,” of sorts), we will see, is fundamental for the development of the dispossessed “subject” in the mystics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

⁸⁵ Burns, *ibid.*, 64; 65.

⁸⁶ Burns, *ibid.*, 66.

⁸⁷ Cf. Burns, *ibid.*, 63.

The Invisibility of the Mystics

The import of Augustine's concept of the association between intentionality and performance is that neither good willing nor good practice on their own will be sufficient. Or, to put it another way, reforming the *practices* or moral composition of the Church will not solve the problem of the disappearance of the Church; in fact, such a response ignores our predicament. Augustine's point is that human action will never be good or efficacious in and of itself; it will only be good and efficacious if it springs from the invisibility⁸⁸ of grace that *bestows* that same good act.

In the milieu of the disappearance of the Church in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there grew a necessity for God to speak in this invisible place, where the voice of God had grown silent. That is to say, the dwelling of God's speaking was no longer audible, since His body, the Church, stopped listening. It is crucial, here, to recall the distinction deployed earlier between an "ontological" (or existential), and a "phenomenal" (or agential) disappearance of the Church—the latter of which is at work in our situation today and in the situation of the mystics nearly five centuries ago.⁸⁹ Though neither the mystics nor Certeau make such a distinction, it is clear that what disappears in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Church, for Certeau's mystics, corresponds to a burgeoning of the visible, and a general focus on "vision" in nearly

⁸⁸ I could just as easily say "interiority," here, rather than "invisibility." This should not be confused with a Cartesian duality between substance and body, however—as Augustine is often charged by modern thinkers. This "interiority," or "invisibility," is nothing other than the dwelling of the Spirit in the human person, the operation of grace moving the human person to act. Thus, the visible manifestation of action and the interior movement of the human person to action are seamless parts of one operation. For a discussion of how Augustine decidedly does *not* open "the flood-gates of Western introspective subjectivity—leading, supposedly, straight to the hegemony of the modern autonomous self," see Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 220; but, esp. 220-2.

⁸⁹ Certeau actually uses the phrase "disappearance of the body." Cf. WB.

every field of thought.⁹⁰ This is evidenced in the fact that during this time the liturgical inclusion of the “adoration of the host” was developed, giving concrete form to the theoretical notion of the coupling of the historical body of Christ with the Eucharistic body—relegating the social body to the “mystical,” and subsequently constituting the Eucharistic body as a spectacle.⁹¹ This making a spectacle of the Eucharistic body did not mean that it ceased to be efficacious for the social body, but, instead, that the social body *could not* be made visible, because of a reverse of the terms of the threefold body of Christ.⁹² In the midst of this paradox, of an escalating focus on visibility that simultaneously produced an absence, “an exile and a disappearance,”⁹³ there awoke a desire within the mystics for the voice that stopped speaking to speak once again. Thus, the communities that emerged during this time created a space within their very bodies for this speaking to take place.

As we have seen, the precarious nature of the phenomenal Church means that its disappearance takes place at the level of the “invisible.” Ontologically, the invisibility that constitutes the Church’s existence persists because of the “guarantee” [*arrabōn*] of the donation of the Spirit, who is the “down-payment” or “seal” of redemption (2 Cor. 1:22, Eph. 1:13-4). However, the possessive spirit of the Church’s praxis, or in which the

⁹⁰ “[V]ision slowly invaded the previous domain of touch or of hearing. It transformed the very practice of knowledge and signs. Even the religious field was reorganized in function of the opposition between the visible and the invisible,” Certeau, MF, 89-90.

⁹¹ Here, it is extremely important to uphold Certeau’s distinction between mysticism and what Michael B. Smith translates as “*mystics*.” The former designates a science as it is developed in the counter-Reformation Church according to the reversal of the terms in the threefold body of Christ, (as outlined above via de Lubac); the latter instead designates mystery, or secret, or what I am here calling “invisibility.” The potential connection between the mystics’ *modus vivendi* and the *disciplina arcana* of the early Church is a rich and pregnant metaphor. In this light, John Chrysostom’s reference to Baptism as a “mystic cleansing” takes on new and fresh meaning for us. Cf. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* I.2.

⁹² Cf. Certeau, MF, 85-90, esp. 87-88.

⁹³ Michel de Certeau, “Mystic Speech” in *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 92.

Church is phenomenally visible, keeps that invisibility from becoming visibly manifest as the fruit of the invisible: loving unity. Likewise, the absence of the Church—or even the voice of God’s Word within the Church body—for the mystics means the absence of this invisibility in the body’s visible, agential manifestation. The purpose of the mystic communities thus aimed at hollowing/hallowing⁹⁴ out a space within which the Voice of God’s Word might again speak. As Certeau says,

The objective of these communities was indeed to create a body that would make visible a ‘spirit’ (a communication) in accordance with the prestigious model of the original *vita apostolica*. Nothing was to be withheld, nothing hidden: “All the believers together put everything in common—*Omnes...habebant omnia communia*.” Individual poverty was but the precondition of mutual exchange. It divested one of any asset or held-back secret. It was essentially epiphanic. The stories of “brothers” or “sisters” worked in the direction of composing a legible scene. The point was to create transparent bodies. It was a Franciscan dream: that a body might preach without speaking, and that in walking around it might make visible what lives within (MF, 88).

For Certeau and the mystics, “transparent bodies” are those for which any division between visible manifestation and invisible grace is no longer tenable. The mystical “subject” is born here: out of the disappearance of invisible grace by a desire to create Franciscan, peripatetic, transparent bodies.

Based on our comments earlier about the liturgical nature of dispossession, and the atomization of the social body into individuals, any talk of a “mystic ‘subject’” must be elucidated before moving any further. At the outset, Certeau explains, the mystic “subject” should not be equated with “individual,” “but to the site which spoken language refers back to: the speaker of the discourse, the addresser of the contract of utterance, the subject of the utterance” (WB, 239n. 12). Thus, “subject” can—and in our case does—

⁹⁴ Craig Keen, “The Transgression of the Integrity of God: Or, the Trinity and the Hallowing of the Flesh,” *Wesleyan Theological Society Journal*, 36:1 (Spring, 2001), 73-102.

refer to a communal discursive body. The bodies that the mystics innovate, in other words, are communally discursive bodies that speak an Other-Word into a foreign land—the institutional Church—simply by their praxis. In this land, where the Voice of the Other falls on deaf ears, mystic communities take up a “deconstructive”⁹⁵ relation to it, not to destroy it, but to loosen it up from what binds it, and create a space within it for the Voice of the Other to speak once again.⁹⁶ It is thus the invisible bond of their dispossession—wrought out of the desire and love of the Other—that unites the mystics in relation to the shattered institutional Church. In the wake of the disappearance of the Church, the mystic communities do not forsake it, but, rather, render apparent what has disappeared in the invisible praxis of their dispossession.

Likewise, it is true that the mystics’ desire to create a body is indeed an exercise of the will, but not in the sense normally attributed to “willing” in modern thought.⁹⁷ The willing desire [*volō*] of the mystic subject constitutes the “I” in an act that is characterized by the simultaneous willing of nothing (the loss of the ego in the divine will and obliteration of the “I”) and willing of everything (that God will possess all including the “I,” thus returning the “I” to itself, transformed). Hence, because the subject’s will is obliterated, its return back to the subject truly means that the will exercised is actually *God’s will*. Here we glimpse that Certeau’s notion of the mystic willing desire [*volō*] is consonant with Augustine’s notion of intentionality: it is God’s Spirit that performs the

⁹⁵ All of the pitfalls of this term must be taken into account. I use it here in consonance with what Derrida calls “gift,” even though the word deconstruction is not a term Derrida ever liked to use. Cf. *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁹⁶ See n. 42 above for the intentional ambiguity of the term “Other.”

⁹⁷ “With this founding act, the subject enters a retreat, it goes where the world’s objects are absent. The subject is born of an exile and a disappearance. The ‘I’ is ‘formed’—by its act of willing *nothing* or by (forever) *being incapable of doing* what it wills—as a ‘desire’ bound only to the supposed desire of a Deity. It is created by the state of being nothing but the affirmation of a will.” Certeau, “Mystic Speech,” 92.

work of the innovation of a new body, a space where God's Voice can once again be heard.⁹⁸

Whether consciously or not, therefore, the mystics recapitulate the shape of Baptism as dispossession—especially as it is inherited from St. Augustine's concept of the will. Baptism is not even a prominent theme in the mystic literature, necessarily; nevertheless, the evacuation of the ego in self-bestowal to the will of God is a dispossessive move on the mystic subject's part—and, as we have seen, this dispossession is grounded in the early Christian understanding of Baptism. To repeat the definition formulated from the early Christian witness: *Dispossession is the total self-evacuation of all possessions and possessive claims, including those of identity and community.* There is no end to the references in the mystic literature to voluntary poverty; to the abandonment of all possessions, material and spiritual; to the relinquishing of all rewards, earthly and heavenly; to the loss of identity in insanity or dejection. To give but one example, St. John of the Cross inscribes in his illustration of the *Ascent of Mt. Carmel* the following:

To come to the knowledge of all/desire the knowledge of nothing/To come to possess all/ desire the possession of nothing/To arrive at being all/desire to be nothing/To come to the pleasure you have not/you must go by a way in which you enjoy not/To come to the knowledge you have not/you must go by a way in which you know not/To come to the possession you have not/you must go by a way in which you possess not/To come to be what you are not/you must go by a way in which you are not/When you turn toward something/you cease to cast yourself upon the all/for to go from the all to the all/you must leave yourself in the all/And when you come to the possession of all/you must possess it without wanting anything/In this nakedness the spirit/finds its rest,/for when it covets nothing,

⁹⁸ If Jaroslav Pelikan is right that the “growth of medieval theology” and the consequent Reformation, are the result of a series of Augustinian “syntheses,” then one could make a case that the mystic notion of the will *derives* from Augustine's notion of the will—even if they redeploy that notion in a different direction. That is my assumption here. Cf. Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)*, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

nothing/raises it up, and nothing/weights it down, because it is/in the center of its humility.⁹⁹

St. John of the Cross' haunting words serve as a thematization of the entire mystic literature: "To arrive at being all, desire to be nothing." Hollowed out, the mystic subject literally becomes nothing, associates with the riff-raff of the world, and even becomes the dejected, poor, mad, and dispossessed in order that within the deepest interiority of their very bodies God might speak and be present. The invisible space within their bodies is cleared out—just as the nothingness of the traits of poverty or madness are the visible signs of this clearing—in order to constitute an "I," the "I am who I am," YHWH.

The new body created by the mystics is thus an infant body, born from the desire "*to be other and to move toward the other.*"¹⁰⁰ Crying, entreating, praying, this body relinquishes all possessions, risking the possibility of either death or life, with the hope that the Voice of the Other will give this body new life, sustain it beyond itself, and make it other than itself. Thus, the mystics departed within, on an interior journey to be dispossessed of all that would hinder the Voice of God from resounding within their souls. Be that as it may, Timothy J. Johnson notes, "[T]his interior spiritual journey is extended into exterior topography," exceeding the bounds of the typical perspective of mystic fixation on interiority and "the soul."¹⁰¹ The interior dispossession necessarily opens out onto a panoply of spatial practices that instantiate this same dispossession onto the geography upon which the mystic walks. As Certeau would say, the mystics convert "places" into "spaces," as they move from here to there, with nothing more than their

⁹⁹ St. John of the Cross, *Collected Works*, 67.

¹⁰⁰ Certeau "Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 110; Certeau's emphasis.

¹⁰¹ Timothy J. Johnson, "Dream Bodies and Peripatetic Prayer: Reading Bonaventure's *Itinerarium* with Certeau" (*Modern Theology* 21:3, July 2005), 3.

desire for luggage.¹⁰² They are given away to the Other's call and response by practices of dispossession, making their own bodies and the places these bodies traverse hollowed out spaces, no longer their own, but spaces open to the moving of the Other.

As they are given away, abandoned to the Other's will by the willing of nothing, there is not a complete and utter loss, however. Indeed, the ego is obliterated, but by giving oneself away, the mystics believed, the self, or "I," is returned to itself transformed. Even so, this is nothing more than an affirmation that, as created by God for God's purposes, the person *is* already inhabited by the Other, is in and of itself other than itself, and thus must relinquish itself to the Other in order to truly be that which it already is. There is a paradox, then, to the mystic life: though entirely dispossessed, from the deepest recesses of interiority to the most exterior shore of the body, yet—because possessed by God—they have everything. The mystics bring to life Paul's words to the Corinthians: "We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as possessing nothing, and yet having everything" (2 Cor. 6:8b-10).

The mystics are accordingly thrown in sharp relief from both the Church today and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Church, since in both cases, the sacramental Church fails to make present, or signify, the invisible grace which constitutes it; it fails to pronounce the good news of the kenotic work of Jesus Christ; it fails to make Him

¹⁰² "Spaces" [*l'espaces*] are the gaps, or interstices opened up within the system of the proper place [*le lieu*] so that the voice of the Other might speak. Cf. especially, "Spatial Stories," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117-18. Certeau is rather fond of the metaphor of the mystic as a traveller with luggage: "Just as, after the destruction of the Temple, the Jews were deprived of a country, with no proper place and hence without history (there is history only where there is a site), so believers are abandoned to the road with only texts for luggage" (WB, 236).

present in love and in mission. The mystics, on the other hand, signify the riches of the poor Jesus Christ in their very own bodies. Again, the words of Paul to the Corinthians are noteworthy: “For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). So, the body of St. Francis of Assisi, for example, bore the marks of Christ’s poverty, the stigmata, not because he himself had become Christ, but, rather, in order that the willing desire [*volo*] of his dispossessed body might signify the wealth of Christ’s poverty for the Church and the world to imitate.

A witness to the nothingness of Christ’s cross, the mystic is exactly the opposite of the spectacular: withdrawn, detached, transitory, the mystic passes by like a soft breeze. Consequently, since what the mystic signifies is *the invisible*, their signification is not a readily recognizable one—at least to the eyes of the world. Even the disciples’ vision can mistake this signification for something “proper” to the worldly order, and thus easily categorized. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus, for example, did not recognize the resurrected Jesus in their midst until he finally appeared to their eyes in the breaking of the bread, from whence he vanished (Luke 24:13-32).¹⁰³ If the question is the visibility, or appearance of Christ’s presence, however, then why does He disappear at the moment the disciples recognize Him? Jean-Luc Marion answers: “because the issue now is not, or is not only, to *see* him, but to *show* him ‘to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem’ (v. 47).”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ See Jean-Luc Marion’s brilliant discussion of this passage in his article, “‘They Recognized Him; And He Became Invisible to Them,’” Translated by Stephen E. Lewis (Modern Theology 18:2, April 2002), 145-52.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 151.

The mystics' *modus vivendi* is one of mission, and appears, therefore, in the mode in which Christ appeared; dispossessed, Christ walked the earth incognito, hidden in material tactics that manifested the will of the Father. The vocation of the mystics, then, is rendered visible by way of a mode of invisibility. It is indeed a vocation that appears—for it marks the bodies of the mystics in their poverty, madness, and passion. Nevertheless, because the dispossessed in this world are those who are no longer seen, no longer recognized, who are no longer visible to the world's eyes, the mystic appearance of a praxis of dispossession is itself invisible—save for those who have eyes to see.

CHAPTER IV

THE DISPOSSESSED CHURCH IS A CHURCH OF THE DISPOSSESSED

Three tendencies must be cautioned against before proceeding. First of all, there is a temptation to reify the mystic praxis that we outlined in the previous chapter into a paradigmatic form for contemporary ecclesial behavior; that seems to be the logical conclusion of our investigation. This temptation, exemplified in the trend of contemporary theology to nostalgically hearken to better days, in order to reproduce the past—by the application of the form of certain practices to our contemporary situation—must be refused, however,¹⁰⁵ since “[o]ne can never reproduce the past,” as Certeau reminds us (WB, 226). Even if it could, though, the form of mystic dispossession could not be “applied” to our situation as an ethical norm, because this form itself does not correspond to a universal content, but to a myriad of plural contents—or, better, dispossession is a “pure formality,” necessarily “indeterminate, abstract, desert-like.”¹⁰⁶ “Dispossession” does have a form—with the three markings we discussed earlier: identity, community, and possessions—but, the *praxis* that yields such form must forever remain variegated. The imposition of a universalized content corresponding to the form of dispossession—e.g., as communities of “voluntary poverty”—would establish yet another possession, ironically unseating the very dispossession these communities would

¹⁰⁵ Though it is insistently refuted, John Milbank’s theology appears highly nostalgic, and is one example of what I mean here. Milbank calls for the Church to revive the “pre-1300” vision as a “counter-ethics” to civil political liberalism (he dates the onslaughts of nominalism and univocalism that led to secularization in Church and state to the year 1300). There is a strong sense of tradition—revealed here to be, literally, a rootedness—in Milbank’s theology, and this radicality springs from the pre-1300 vision of “Christendom.” Cf. especially “Ecclesiology: The Last of the Last” in *Being Reconciled*, 105-37.

¹⁰⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 90.

suppose to herald. Furthermore, the moral prescription of a universal praxis of dispossession for the Church today would set up a meta-institutional enclave, imposed for the attainment of unity.

The second tendency is to localize the mystic itinerancy, so as to establish a site upon which the mystic operation could unfold. On the one hand, the first tendency works upon the proper place—the already existing institution—in order to govern it by the imposition of some universal content of dispossession (ecumenism); the second, on the other hand, invents a new place and assigns a propriety to it by establishing “dispossession” as its moniker (Christian “intentional” communities). This second tendency, unlike the first, does permit the form of dispossession to disseminate itself in a myriad of contents, or tactics. Nevertheless, it abandons the existing cultural place in order to offer a new way of life, a new place proper to those who give themselves to such a way. The tendency to the innovation of a new place is indeed modeled on the mystic invention of bodies that would approximate to the ways of the “apostolic life” [*vita apostolica*] or the “primitive Church” [*forma primitivae ecclesiae*]¹⁰⁷; the difference, however, is that the mystic bodies did not create a new place, but performed tactics in and on the already existing places, creating *spaces* open to the Other.¹⁰⁸

These first two tendencies are thus only half-right: the first in that it intends to work on the existing place, rather than abandoning it in mystical escape; the second in allowing a plurality of contents to proliferate. A mystic unifying praxis of dispossession

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 102.

¹⁰⁸ “Whatever one thinks of mysticism, even if one recognizes in it the emergence of a universal or absolute reality, one can only deal with it in relation to a particular cultural and historic situation,” Michel de Certeau, cited in Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad Publishers, 1995), 311.

can neither impose itself on the existing institutional structures of the Church as a universal content to be imitated, nor can it wholly abandon these structures in pursuit of its own achievements—even if these pursuits are in the name of “dispossession.” In order for “dispossession”—which, we have said in the second chapter, is indeed the form that characterizes the *vita apostolica* and the *forma primitivae ecclesiae*—to serve as a unifying praxis for the Christian Church today—and thus as a bond of loving relation between all Christians—two things must be achieved. First of all, this praxis must be one that is performed within the singularity of the cultural place of the institutional Church. Secondly, however, the unifying praxis of dispossession must be disseminated in and on this place in a multiplicitous fashion—no one model of dispossession should conflict or compete with another, as this would simply leave us in the same position of disunity where we began. In other words, dispossession must not become yet another possession for the Christian Church, either in terms of universality or particularity.

A final caution, however, must be heeded. The innovative nature of the mystic corpus can instill a tendency to the necessity for action. There is no doubt that “dispossession” has not simply theoretical consequences for Christians, but—and this by necessity—consequences for our moral life. All the same, an urgent penchant for action easily overlooks the necessity for the praxis of dispossession both to flow from and to mutually influence the interior journey. We must not, for the realization of hasty results, repeat the same mistakes of the politicization of the Church. Mystic praxis appeared in the mode of invisibility because it was a praxis of prayer—peripatetic prayer: the Franciscan body that prays simply by walking around. The obligation of a praxis fixated on results would thus overlook the intentionality, the willing desire [*volo*], of the mystic

tactics. What is offered in the rest of this chapter, therefore, is less a moral prescription than a story of desire.

The Vocation of the Dispossessed Church

The contours of the praxis of dispossession are delineated as a dispossessed Church that is a body of and for the dispossessed of this world. The Church is not simply a place toward which any who so desire, or are so persuaded,¹⁰⁹ can *move*; it is not merely a safe haven to which the refugee may *come*. The Church, in fact, is not a place at all. The Church is a *space* that is demarcated by the itinerant journeying of a body of mission who *goes* to the refugee and the dispossessed.¹¹⁰ This body of believers does not abandon the body that has disappeared by their perpetual departure, however, but, like the women at the tomb, perpetually quest after the absent Christ, continually asking along the way: “Do you know where they have taken my Lord?” Interrogating every proper place, every institutionalization of the gospel, this contemporary mystical body marks out the site that awaits the healing and restoration that God alone can give by tactics of dispossession.¹¹¹ Faceless and nameless, the dispossessed Christian Church, branded by

¹⁰⁹ I am thinking, here, of John Milbank’s proposal in his magnum opus, *Theology and Social Theory*, that the Church is a counter-narrative that outdoes liberal narratives of individualism and statist violence by way of persuasion not force—although, force cannot be completely ruled out for Milbank. Cf. esp. 380-422.

¹¹⁰ See note 102 above for the distinction between “place” and “space” in Certeau. This is not to reduce the Church to a merely spiritualistic entity. It is simply a way of saying that the Church is not to be identified with a building, or what is listed in the yellow pages under “church” (what contemporary culture normally passes for church), but with its *way of life* and praxis in the world. In other words, Church happens outside the walls of a building just as much as it does inside; the baptized body moves to and from the Eucharist table as a “sent” body. Cf. especially Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1963).

¹¹¹ The allusion to the resurrection, here, is important. It is because of the resurrection that the body of Christ—founded paradoxically by the *presence* of Christ *in his absence* at the ascension (in the gift of his Spirit)—is constituted as a body dispossessed, wholly reliant on an act of God’s grace that it cannot

the world as poor and weak, goes to and identifies with those who have nothing, the poor and the weak.

Those that seem to most contradict “proper” Christianity, those who are most shunned from civil society, therefore, are those to whom Christians are called. The mystics, for instance, made themselves the outcasts of the communities by associating with and welcoming the outcast. Teresa of Avila was herself an outcast by birth: the granddaughter of a “marrano,” a Spanish Jew of “dirty blood,” she was racially inferior to the “pure” in the Church community. Yet, she, together with the other outcasts, the mad, the women, the sick, and the sinner created a space within the institutional Church that refused to offer a space.¹¹² The mystics, hoping that God might give breath to the dry bones, thus became poor in order that the poor would be a voice of judgment on a Church clinging to its possessions. By opening up a space for the inclusion of the most destitute and disowned within the body of Christ, therefore, the dispossessed Church becomes a

itself perform. The dispossessed (kenotic) Church is only an *empty space*, therefore, insofar as that which fills it is the wholly Other. The identity it wills away is returned, but renewed as the identity of Jesus Christ, subject to the will of the Father in the power of the Spirit. The form of the dispossessed Church is one that is continually being reshaped and renewed into the image of its Creator and Redeemer. As John Wesley might say, the Church has only to do with holiness, the movement from “new birth,” to “sanctification.” Cf. “The New Birth” in *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 343.

¹¹² This should remind us that even the unlawful Gentiles were included as a shoot in the olive branch, and further leaves open the question, “Who precisely are the dispossessed?” This question can only truly be answered when we look to the dispossessed Jesus, broken on the cross. The resurrected crucified Christ affirms all of life—all “good” just as in the beginning—but just as in Christ’s ministry, it is the voiceless and disowned that the crucified Christ calls His Church to. The very concrete faces of the dispossessed are thus very close to all of us, and yet outstretch every geographical boundary. Those in whom we can see the broken Christ most clearly are those who have been disowned like Jesus: the orphan, the widow, the single mother on welfare, the prisoner, including “the criminal,” the rapist, the murderer, all those serving on “death row,” and also all of their victims, the refugee, the political exile, the terrorist, the racist and the racially injured, the sexist and the gender prejudiced, the prostitute, the homosexual, the sexual deviant and all of those victim to sexual perversion, the pornography addict and all victims of that industry, the child “slave” and her “master,” the child “soldier” and his “captain,” the hospitalized, the elderly, the mad, the handicapped. The resurrected Christ’s salvation reaches out to all, and calls us to the lowest of places where even there the glory of the gracious God shines.

space of healing for this world, a vehicle for God's salvation...even in the lowest of places.¹¹³

The mission of the Church to become poor does not thus search after a new enclave upon which to stand or a site from which to speak—a new possession—but simply seeks conversion to where Christ is going in this world. The conversion that results from Baptism turns us to the dispossessed visage of this world, to those disinherited faces who are no longer visible to the world's eyes.

In order for the dispossessed Church to live into its baptismal identity, therefore, it must become dispossessed, lose itself in the call of the Other—in the call of the dispossessed Christ hiding in the face of the dispossessed.¹¹⁴ Because of the singularity of the dispossessed Other, however, the way in which this becoming will take place, will be indeterminate, infinite. The dispossessed Church does not establish its unity in some universal praxis, but, rather, in the plurality of singular practices, the innumerable encounters with the dispossessed of the world. The Church will appear then, when it loses itself in its missionary vocation, when it seeks after the absent,

¹¹³ The Apostle's Creed says that Christ descended even to Hades before rising on the third day.

¹¹⁴ Though I have relied on the language deployed by Levinas and Derrida in this section, the identification of "Christ" in the face of the Other seems to straightaway put some distance between my project and theirs, respectively. Even so, I do not apprehend an immediate problem with Levinas' notion that God is first and foremost the "infinite Other," as does Derrida; nor do I disagree as fervently as some with Derrida's statement that the logic of alterity requires the tautology: *tout autre est tout autre*. For one such objector, cf. Richard Kearney, "Desire of God" in *The Postmodern God*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 112-145. To me Derrida's tautology does not seem to collapse the distinction between all other others—for instance "man and the divine"—at least not *ontologically*. His point is not that there *is* no distinction between any other, such as man and the divine, but, rather, that we cannot *determine* their distinction *prior* to the face-to-face encounter with the wholly Other. Thus, Kearney's objection that "God needs to be *recognized* for us to be able to say that it is indeed God we desire" (125), does not take into account Jean-Luc Marion's point—one which he inherits from his former teacher, Derrida—that the arrival of the incarnated Christ takes a distance, a withdrawal; or Kierkegaard's point that the incarnated Jesus walks this earth "incognito," *Practice in Christianity*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Kierkegaard's Writings, XXI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). Thus, the shining light of Christ in the faces of the dispossessed can only truly be seen by those with an intentionality towards love, who do not so much discover or recognize Christ by going to the dispossessed, but are captured by, given over to Christ's gaze there in the face of the Other.

disappeared Christ in the faces of the dispossessed of this world—for, as Christ reminds us, “those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it” (Mk. 8:35). The Church will appear when all of our possessions are laid at the foot of the Cross, as we join in the unifying praxis of dispossession. The Church will appear when we learn how to love, and this will only happen if we realize that we are not now—and never have been—our own, but are God’s and are at the disposal of His will. Our intentionality towards peace, love, and unity, therefore, will grow from God’s willing and acting in us by the power of the Spirit to be the body of Christ: the gift of the Father to this world, sent for the nourishment of all creation, the “life of the world.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Cf. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have demonstrated that the disappearance of the Church, a result of its division and possessiveness, requires a renewed praxis of dispossession that is grounded in the sacrament of identity, Baptism. In the first chapter, we introduced the problem of the disappearance of the Church as a “phenomenal” disappearance, or as one that resides at the level of its agency. Anticipated responses to the thesis by contemporary Christians were then addressed by demonstrating that the “possession” of the Church manifests the sinfulness of the Church’s situation. The concept of “dispossession” was introduced in connection with the identity of the community in Baptism. The second chapter then used this concept as a hermeneutical framework for interpreting the New Testament and early Christian accounts of the rite of Baptism. There the liturgical movement of the rite was shown to be one characterized throughout by a series of dispossessions. The state of the contemporary Church was then held up to the light of this framework in order to assess the degree of its adherence to “dispossession.” In chapter three, we then compared the situation of the Church today to that of the Reformation period, in order to account for the way in which the dispossessive praxis of the sixteenth and seventeenth century mystics could serve as a kind of model for us today. Chapter four, finally, applied one potential model for how to respond to the disappearance of the Church based on the mystics’ praxis of dispossession. The model developed was one of mission, where the baptized, dispossessed Church goes to, and is for the life of, the dispossessed of this world. It is upon this basis that the disappearance of the Church can be eradicated.

The thrust of this paper has been driven by a vocation: a call to create a space for the voice of God to resound again within the disappeared Church. Because the Church persists in division and sin, however, and thus the unity we have been discussing has not yet been reached, we must pay heed to this call; it is therefore fitting that we conclude not with a definitive solution, but, rather, as we listen together to this call upon all of our lives.

AFTERWORD: A CHURCH OF PERIPATETIC PRAYER

A body is drowned, destroyed by death-dealing waters—*baptizein*. The ravaging flood waters only subside under the figure of a dove, fluttering gently above them. The peaceful flight of this figure leads the body up from the waters to stand, no, to walk, as a new creation, fashioned like gold in a furnace where the inconsistencies of its previous form have now been purged away.¹¹⁶ This body passes over death by passing through the lethal waters, buried, drowned; but, is also made something new, fashioned into an infant, into the vulnerability of a child, dependent on the Mother who has just given her birth. Given over to something wholly external to herself, this new body simultaneously finds an interiority that is opened up, that becomes transparent in the one to whom she has been given over. Her walk is different now. She could walk before, but she now “walks in the newness of life”; her strides take her far away, but never far enough to escape the one to whom she has been given: she now goes where this One leads her, she walks *with* her beloved. One could say she only walks insofar as the Other walks with her, in her. Just like her Mother, this body *becomes* “peripatetic,” one who walks around, who goes. Her journey extends deep into the interior castle, where she petitions, entreats, cries out to the one to whom she has been given: do not abandon me, do not forsake your child. Her beloved speaks, but at a distance, a voice covered in the darkness of the night; she is on the move, searching, praying; she strains to hear the the voice of the Other who continually bids her “Come,” drawing her deeper into the fires of love. Her desire is not fulfilled as her heart is set ablaze, but only grows: she finds no satiety, she instead finds

¹¹⁶ St. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* I.3.

herself now desiring desire itself. Her walk becomes strengthened by a weakness,¹¹⁷ she is given over now, not to the fulfillment of her desire, but the fulfillment of the desires of her beloved. Nearer now, closer than ever, she reaches, groping for her beloved; and in this moment her beloved gives her away: sends her to a foreign land, back from whence she came; here, where the beloved seems most removed, most distant, most withdrawn, she joins in embrace with her beloved.¹¹⁸ Her petitions have now been transformed into intercessions: petitioning no longer for the satiety of her own desires, or the healing of her own wounds, she petitions to her beloved for those in the foreign land where she has been sent, for the satiety of their desires, and the healing of their wounds. In her very body, she has been baptized a walking prayer, a gift to a foreign land, homeless, dispossessed of everything that once defined her, made into the gift of her beloved's love to this foreign land. Here, she is loved, she loves, she is love.

¹¹⁷ Certeau, WB, 231.

¹¹⁸ "Our hearts find no peace until they rest in you," Augustine, *Confessions* I.1 (ibid., 21).

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