WORSHIP WIDER, WORSHIP DEEPER:
COORIENTING RELATIONSHIP IN THE CHRISTIAN IMAGINATION

By

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soli Deo gloria
may my life be a constant answer to Your call
&
for Jim,
whose love empowers me

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Introduction

Social Formation and Roles in Worship

Queen Elizabeth I was born a Tudor princess on September 7, 1533, the second royally recognized child of King Henry VIII and the only child of Anne Boleyn, the second of the king's six wives.[1] Elizabeth's life was marked by both privilege and turbulence due to the chaotic swells of political and religious upheaval in English history. Her gender and Boleyn lineage, in an epoch of expansion and reformation, filled her journey with rejection, delegitimization, peril, and imprisonment. Yet she navigated these challenges by emphasizing her likeness to her father and comparing herself to scriptural heroes like the prophet Deborah and King David.[2] In doing so, the queen continually reaffirmed her ability to wear the English crown and to rule as a solo figure.

Across the border on December 8, 1542, Mary Queen of Scots was nearly born with a crown on her head, her father James V dying just five days later.[3] Mary's reign began sixteen years before Elizabeth's, creating more stability in her childhood despite being marked with tragedy. Exiled from home before she turned six, the young queen spent her formative years in France, years which culminated in her teens with a two-year marriage to the French king.[4] Mary's charm and intelligence served her well, especially in the French court, but after her young husband's death she found the security of her ties to France quickly severed. She returned to Scotland in pursuit of once again fulfilling traditional role expectations: marrying another king consort and producing an heir. Still, Mary could not quell the tumultuous challenges of English threat or a split court of Scottish Lords, her troubles culminating in an imprisonment by the English at the age of twenty-five and execution at forty-four.[5]

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[1] Jane Dunn, *Elizabeth and Mary: Cousins, Rivals, Queens* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2004), x–xi.

[2] While these qualities pertaining to Elizabeth weave throughout the entire biography, Dunn offers some directed analysis of the gender politics on 107–9.

[3] Dunn, xiv–xv.

[4] Dunn, 69.

The intertwining lives of these two queens have captured the imaginations of both historians and storytellers through a compelling narrative found in their likeness, proximity, and relationship. Biographer Jane Dunn explicitly examines their histories through the lens of their relationship to one another, outlining not only how they interacted, but how each was formed in connection to the other. Their similarities suggest that the two could have formed a deep bond of solidarity. They were cousins at a time when kin and relationship overwhelmingly mattered. They were close in age, rule, language, upbringing, and geography. Both lost their mothers at young ages for different reasons, but felt the consequences of remarkable matriarchal legacies. Each faced significant scandal with intelligence and charm, reigning as queens in a masculine world which resisted their rule with severe prejudice. They could have been friends and allies who offered support as they travelled similar journeys. Instead they became rivals, forming their identity at least in part through antagonism toward the other. The roles they played transformed them into enemies.[6]

In an address to Parliament, Elizabeth herself notes the dramatic twist of their likeness into opposition. She contends that if God had made them "milkmaids with pails on our arms," she could have offered a different kind of grace and forgiveness to Mary, but their roles shaped their relationship.[7] This insight reveals Elizabeth's acknowledgment of the social, political, and religious mechanisms that tied these queens into inescapable relational opposition, despite having never met. Various powers desired to see Scotland and England unite under a single crown, Protestants backing Elizabeth's claim and Catholics supporting Mary.[8] Dunn explains how this impacted their self-understanding in the context of the other:

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[5] Dunn, xv–xviii, 167–76.

[6] Dunn, xxi–xxiv.

> To have a rival living next door presents its own particular problems. To have a rival in such proximity, but one you never meet, inflates the imagination. Character [lowers] into caricature, conversations relayed through third parties inevitably grow distorted and facts become sullied with the interests of others. When that rival claims not only one's God-given vocation, the very purpose of one's life, but also one's identity and birthright, threatens even life itself, the rivalry becomes a mortal combat. [9]

Their relationship could have resulted in deep camaraderie but instead it evolved into an antagonistic struggle for the same crown. Through it, these similar queens grew to see each other as an enemy with a deadly rivalry that culminated in an act of regicide. The social structures uniting their worlds placed their roles in opposition, forming their identities through competition and antagonism. How each queen saw the other directly connected to how she saw herself.

Why begin a project concerning Christian worship with the story of two queens from the sixteenth century? Elizabeth and Mary elucidate the profound power social structures exert on the formation of one's own identity in relationship to others and how that identity then contributes to the continued evolution and manifestation of relational patterns. Set up as rival state heads who represented religious power struggles, these queens found identity through their roles within a larger schema that had room for only one. As we engage the world around us, we socially relate to our surroundings and intuitively create categories of understanding. This becomes evident in the ways we relate to our physical surroundings. We see green and understand *go.* We throw out our hand out to save our falling phone without hesitation. We smell smoke and look for fire. We constantly glean information that forms, adjusts, and reiterates categories of understanding, designing social paradigms that enable our interaction with the world.[10] These paradigms operate as we connect with others as well. We interpret interactions through categorical frameworks of "friend" or "mother" or "coworker" and the collective meaning surrounding those labels. We exist in mutual social patterns which both create and recreate our perspective of ourselves and others: our experiences adjust our categorizations and our categorizations shape the way we experience the world. Mary and Elizabeth operated within a social framework that not only named them as rivals, but drew them further into that rivalry by affirming the preexisting categories of enmity that names these roles in the first place. Every letter they wrote to each other was read through this lens, each piece of information was interpreted through their suspicion, propelling them down a road toward death.

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[7] Dunn, 394.

[8] Dunn, 416.

[9] Dunn, 177. Original text uses "lours" for lowers.

This small historical example illuminates how social paradigms exert influence on relational patterns. Despite their similarities, these powerful and intelligent women became mortal enemies. Most of the roles we assume in our social worlds do not yield such extreme results, but we are nonetheless formed through the same type of social force. Our communities contribute to our sense of identity and the way we relate to others through the roles we play within them. Communities range in size and organizational affiliation, from a small group of best friends to employment at a fortune 500 company, from an immediate family unit to national identity. Each person navigates multiple sites of belonging in a variety of communities, each site informing the self's social formation as well as the self's connection to others. Positively, our interactions have the potential to reveal new aspects of who we are and can build multifaceted relationships as we navigate the world. Negatively, our interactions can invite us into limiting and sometimes harmful forms of social interaction. For example, social media can sweep users into an echo-chamber that both creates and affirms identities within online communities. Digital algorithms designed to determine user preferences, combined with users opting into particular communities, narrow the possibilities for experimentation with categorization. This limits how we see ourselves and the world around us by shoring up existing ideas and eliminating different voices—a process which, in extreme instances, leads to dehumanization. Positively or negatively, activity within communities generates formative results for the self with relational implications.

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[10] I use the term paradigm to describe social patterns of interaction that build into constitutive structures of meaning, becoming frameworks for experiencing and interpreting all future social activity. These paradigms evolve alongside social activity, their creation and continuation occurring through personal and communal assent. Paradigm construction will be evident throughout this project, but will be explored in particular connection to worship in chapter four.

The Formative Power of Christian Worship

I am loosely identifying Christian worship as a group of people who gather together with a common purpose of glorifying God.[11] While worship occurs in a variety of manifestations, it always becomes a formative community for its participants. Worshipers are encouraged and sometimes mandated to take on different roles throughout liturgical and homiletical processes. This project examines these processes through social activity—the verbal and non-verbal gestures occurring within social frameworks, both self-referentially and in community. The social action manifesting through the interplay of roles within larger paradigms cannot be neutral. Therefore, analyzing worship through this method will equip practical theologians to perceive social action’s formative effects and to shape future activity. As a quick introductory example, consider the lyrics of a popular contemporary Christian music (CCM) song, “Graves into Gardens” currently being sung in many churches:[12]

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[11] While this is likely not the sole purpose or the only factor involved, it provides a wide definitional constant for the context of this project.

Graves into Gardens[13]

Verse 1
I searched the world
But it couldn’t fill me
Man’s empty praise
And treasures that fade
Are never enough
Then You came along
And put me back together
And every desire is now satisfied
Here in Your love

Chorus
Oh there’s nothing better than You
There’s nothing better than You
Lord there’s nothing
Nothing is better than You

Verse 2
I’m not afraid to show You my weakness
My failures and flaws
Lord You’ve seen them all
And You still call me friend
‘Cause the God of the mountain
Is the God of the valley
And there’s not a place
Your mercy and grace
Won’t find me again

Bridge
You turn mourning to dancing
You give beauty for ashes
You turn shame into glory
You’re the only one who can

This song engages themes of renewal and redemption. The juxtaposition of graves and gardens prompts resurrection imagery both generally and specifically in the gospel of John where the empty grave is situated next to a garden and Mary mistakenly identifies Jesus as the gardener. The illustrations “beauty for ashes” and “bones into armies” echo the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel respectively. Through these words, the song sets up key roles for God as *redeemer* and *caregiver* and worshipers can respectively identify with these themes through roles of *friend*, *loved one*, and *broken.* The different roles interact throughout this song in a way that prompts support, hope, and joy for the self in connection to worshiping God.

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[12] In January 2022, “Graves into Gardens” was listed as the second most popular song for the United States on Christian Copyright Licensing International’s website. While not all churches incorporate CCM into their worship and CCLI is not the only license that churches use, the rating does indicate that this song is regularly incorporated into worship across the country with some degree of frequency. CCLI, Inc, “Home,” https://songselect.ccli.com/, accessed January 11, 2022.

[13] Brandon Lake, Chris Brown, Steven Furtick, and Tiffany Hudson, “Graves into Gardens,” track 2 on *Graves into Gardens,* Elevation Worship, 2020, iTunes Music.

This song, however, is not sung in a relational vacuum. Social action operates within existing paradigms, suggesting that further analysis is needed. For instance, in a culture of coercion and judgment, the words "I'm not afraid to show You my weakness, my failures and flaws" reiterate harmful paradigms that oppress the self and harm relationships. Similarly, consider how the chorus might be heard in a congregation where people struggle with addiction. The repeated proclamation that nothing is better than God could ring hollow for the person who struggles to overcome their desire for a particular substance. Connecting this song to larger tropes of masculine language, nebulous markers of brokenness, and habitual roles rooted in victimhood all suggests that while this song has the potential for positive social action it can also have negative implications.

This project argues that it is crucial to interrogate, theologically and ethically, the social action present in worship. Doing so describes worship's formative action and suggests new relational patterns for role interaction, both in the context of worship and in connection to communities beyond worship. Engaging the complexity of social action can help leaders craft worship in a way that encourages role taking to become more open, flexible, imaginative, dynamic, and biblically and theologically grounded. Such worship can strengthen self identity, bonds among people, and connection with the Holy Other.

The Approach

In his essay "Speaking from Experience," priest and systematic theologian Stephen Happel argues for the necessity of using the social sciences in the study of worship because they bring abstract, classical, metaphysical ideas of theology into concrete form. Some Christian scholarship has eschewed the social sciences as a secular discipline that does not have the capacity to make room for holy activity. Happel addresses these concerns by suggesting that the social sciences do not attempt to explain why God choses to act with humanity in ritual. Instead, they help us understand ritual activity within the larger human horizon of symbolic action and meaning-making. Holy transcendence is shaped and interpreted in worship. People carry entire worlds (interpersonal, familial, social) into worship alongside their praise and prayers, which then refer back to these worlds. The social sciences can provide insight into how humanity shapes its worship and vice versa.

> Worship is not politically, economically, or aesthetically naïve; it argues, persuades, and embodies various schemes of social recurrence. Through its visions of the future, it redirects common desire, not in such a way that the community feels guilty for not living up to an ideal but by transforming the communion of believers, however incrementally, in the present.[14]

Happel's insight into the charged nature of worship suggests that the social sciences should not only make room for this type of examination, but that this type of examination is necessary for liturgical scholarship. The goal of this project is to create a tool for this type of interdisciplinary work, a sociological method for practical theological reflection on worship that foregrounds George Herbert Mead's social development model of role-taking. The method, it will be shown, provides a unique way to interpret both the human and divine interaction in worship, appreciating the social dynamics at work in worship without discounting holy interaction.

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[14] Stephen Happel, "Speaking from Experience: Worship and the Social Sciences," in *Alternative Futures for Worship: Baptism and Confirmation*, ed. Bernard J. Lee, vol. 2 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1987), 179.

G.H. Mead was a social psychologist and a philosophical pragmatist. Mead and his colleague John Dewey are widely credited as foundational members of the Chicago School of American Sociology.[15]

> Mead's distinctive contribution to American social psychology was his emphasis on symbolic behavior, or communication through language, as the chief mechanism for both social control and social progress. In communication through language, the individual must, to some extent at least, adopt the attitude of the others of his group in order to be heeded. He [sic] must understand in order to be understood.[16]

Mead's form of social action theory set a new sociological trajectory for the study of human development, much of his work in conversation with behaviorist John B. Watson. In his editorial introduction to Mead's foundational *Mind, Self, and Society,*[17] Charles Morris helpfully summarizes how Mead differentiates himself from Watson. Whereas Watson treats language as physiologically inherent within the human being, Mead argues that language is a phenomenon belonging to the social group which the self internalizes and then uses to constitute the inner mind. The hidden nature of the inner life of individuals caused Watson to place it beyond the realm of observable action, but Mead argued that this neglected the social element of the act could provide insight into the internal reflective aspect of the self. For Watson, an organism's reactivity reveals how they are shaped by the physical environment, but Mead argues that humans are unique organisms whose self-conditioning allows them to reflectively respond.[18] As Morris summarizes, Mead claimed a *social* behaviorism as opposed to an "individualistic and subcutaneous one; he did not find an answer in any of the stages or schools of psychology as to how mind—full-fledged, reflective, creative, responsible, and self-conscious mind—appeared within the natural history of conduct."[19] Mead's approach to behaviorism through a social emphasis changed the perspective of examination—he flips the script. Rather than starting with the individual and working out toward society, Mead starts with the society and works in toward the individual considering how they interact within their world and form in relationship to it.[20] For Mead, this social behaviorism was at the heart of the process of human development, which he primarily explored through *role-taking*. Role-taking is the idea that selfhood develops through holding positionality of another object (self, other, or thing—both tactile and theoretical) within an imaginative environment. In role-taking, the self imagines the position of the other, remains differentiated from the other, but is affected through connection with the other, at least as the other is perceived.[21]

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[15] Mary Jo Deegan, "Chicago School of Sociology," Oxford Bibliographies, Oxford University Press, August 18, 2020, https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0007.xml.

[16] Grace Chin Lee, *George Herbert Mead: Philosopher of the Social Individual* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1945), 10.

[17] Although Mead published many papers, he never created a systematized collection of his ideas. All of his books were published posthumously by students of his work. The primary text used for this dissertation, *Mind, Self, and Society* is a compilation of Mead's lectures from classes in social psychology edited together with the aid of students' notes. Charles Morris outlines this source material and systemization process in his introduction to *Mind, Self, and Society: The Definitive Edition*, by George H. Mead, ed. Charles W. Morris (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934).

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[18] Charles W. Morris, "Introduction," in *Mind, Self, and Society*, xxiv–xxvii.

[19] Morris, xx.

[20] Morris, xxx.

[21] In 1978, Premack and Woodruff's study of chimpanzees' ability to behave deceptively led to the term "theory of the mind": the concept that one can cognitively represent and predict the behavior of another. This concept has exploded in research directions and seemingly abuts Mead's concept of role-taking. Ryan McVeigh, however, differentiates the concepts. He argues: "Mead's pragmatism distances itself sharply...His view of the self as distinctly social emergent radically undermines the individualistic assumptions at play within cognitive science and challenges the view that other minds are existential problems to be solved." For an article which both situates and differentiates theory of the mind within the larger and longer tradition of philosophy of the mind (to which Mead arguably belongs), see: N. Puig-Verges and M.G. Schweitzer. "Philosophie de l'esprit et théorie de l'esprit." *Annales Médico Psychologiques, Revue Psychiatrique* 166, no. 2 (March 2008): 127–31. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amp.2007.12.014. Hughes and Devine, "Theory of Mind"; McVeigh, "Mead, the Theory of Mind, and the Problem of Others," 220.

Role-taking offers insight into the formational aspects of worship because it does not begin with isolated individual behavior. Instead, it looks at the interplay of roles to consider how individuals collectively participate in social systems by adopting these roles. This action is internally significant in creating meaning and externally significant as these roles connect to overlapping communities. As a Protestant attending Catholic Mass for the first time, I remember feeling out of step, unable to keep up with the vocal and physical gestures of worship. As in any worshiping community, regular participants had internalized their roles through repeated patterns that were unfamiliar to me as a guest worshiper. However, with some repeated visits, I was able to anticipate and join in with greater ease. By paying attention to roles in worship, we can see how the self interacts with the social paradigms unique to each community.

Theodore Newcomb's idea of communicative "coorientation" takes another related step for thinking about how social action functions in worship. Coorientation expands role-taking by applying its activity to group action around an object. Whereas role-taking focuses on the development of the individual within a social context, coorientation concentrates on the interconnected nature of simultaneous social activity. Applying this to worship enables analysis to expand further in group observation, revealing how role-taking activity can create a widening spiral of inclusivity by offering new or overlooked roles for God, others, and self. In this way, I aim to show how individual role-taking in collective coorientation provides a sociological approach to examining the dynamics of social action occurring in worship. With these insights, worship leaders can shape community action to create space for individual transformation that echoes out into related social spheres.

The Workspace

To build an applicable model for worship, we must consider the whole person involved in coorientation. Mead's social developmental model, however, is focused primarily on cognitive aspects of interaction and effect. This can be limiting, especially when applying it to religiosity. Religious sociologist Meredith McGuire notes that both her disciplines of sociology and religious studies have inherited epistemological frameworks which often bifurcate the spiritual realm from the material. The body has been involved either as a means to achieve cognitive enlightenment or something which the cognitive process must overcome or control.[22] She argues that the body offers a locus for our spiritual lives, and not simply in the abstract. She writes:

> I mean real bodies—arthritic bodies, athletic bodies, pregnant bodies, malnourished bodies, healthy bodies, and suffering bodies. I mean human bodies that labor and rest, bodies that create and destroy, bodies that nurse babies and bodies that torture the bodies of others, bodies that eat, drink, fart, and sweat. With real material bodies, people also touch, hear, see, and taste their material worlds.[23]

Emphasizing the body's involvement in social and religious development is important. It keeps us mindful of how bodies develop within and contribute to their social worlds. It encourages us to perceive how socially constructed ideas graph onto our embodied humanity in such a way that they shape our material reality. McGuire lifts up the example of gender. While biological sex creates little differentiation in ritual ability, social coding inscribes gender roles onto sex, mistakenly conflating them to create a differentiation that ultimately bans certain bodies from participation.[24] The imposition of cultural boundary making that prohibits women (as well as non-cis, non-binary people) from aspects of institutional religious life then forces these people to find new ways to practice religiosity. Concepts of gender (and race, ability, etc.), while socially constructed, proliferate throughout systems to such a degree that they contribute to the actual embodiment of religious experience. Emphasizing the body allows us not only to expand spiritual meaning making, but also to examine how the body interacts with cultural influences as a point of social and religious meaning making.

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[22] Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 97–98.

[23] McGuire, 97.

[24] McGuire, 160.

Philosopher James K. A. Smith similarly argues for a methodological shift in sociology and the study of religion through a form of post-secularism. He agrees with Saba Mahmood's critique of secularism as an approach which treats religion as optional and primarily intellectual, rendering it an addendum to humanity that can be removed to create an "enlightened 'secular'" observer. Smith argues that even those who claim to be secular are still religious.[25] This does not default to belief in God or gods, but simply acknowledges that as ritualistic beings we cannot opt into or out of religion because it is intrinsic to our humanity. He explains: "I mean that humans are *liturgical* animals whose orientation to the world is shaped by rituals of ultimacy: our fundamental commitments are inscribed in us by ritual forces and elicit from us orienting commitments that have the epistemic status of belief."[26] Some of our thickest liturgical practices may indeed connect with an institutional religion, but Smith contests that all humans are shaped by rituals which orient around "normative visions of 'the good life,'" visions adopted through ritual.[27] Like McGuire, he relocates religion from the head into the body, especially bodies engaged in ritual action, carrying these ideas on in subsequent work when specifically examining how worship works. He brings together theorists Pierre Bourdieu and Maurice Merleau-Ponty to illustrate how liturgy emerges between bodily participation (kinesthetic) and narrative (poetic) within an imagination space. Smith summarizes:

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[25] Smith, "Secular Liturgies and the Prospects for a 'Post-Secular' Sociology of Religion," 165–66.

[26] Smith, 165.

[27] Smith, 167.

> Liturgies are compressed, repeated, performed narratives that, over time, conscript us into the story they 'tell' by showing, by performing. Such orienting narratives are not explicitly 'told' in a 'once-upon-a-time' discursive mode—as if the body politic invites us to passively sit at the proverbial librarian's feet for 'story time' while she walks us through a picture-book narration. No, these stories are more like dramas that are enacted and performed.[28]

Through the process of performing story together in both great and mundane ways, this story becomes inscribed in bodily patterns which we perform inside worship and carry in muscle memory outside of it. Christian worship offers a story of God, particularly through the reconciling work of Christ, within an imaginative framework that invites holistic participation. Individuals don't just *think* their religious belief, but they attest to, inscribe, and pattern their bodies in light of it. Practical theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore delineates this as sensory theology, exploring how we learn and change through embodied experience. She points out that because our bodies enable us to know God, then our bodies ultimately "inform, shape, and transform our Christian knowing."[29] How does bowing before a wooden cross form the self's inner life through outer movements? What knowing occurs when we reach out to receive a Eucharistic element? How does a look, a hug, or an anointing interact and impact what we believe? This suggests that any sociological framework for analyzing worship must consider the whole person, both their physical presence and action in worship and their material realities and patterns of faith outside of it.

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[28] James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 108.

[29] Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "Spooning," in *Christian Practical Wisdom: What It Is, Why It Matters,* edited by Dorothy C. Bass, Kathleen A. Cahalan, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, James R. Nieman, and Christian B. Scharen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2016), 29.

Defining our workspace of study in this dissertation as both cognitive and physical extends beyond the individual to the worship space itself, the bodies of the collective and the things they gather around.[30] Liturgical scholar Gordon Lathrop outlines four types of sacred things: objects—tactile items such as bread, wine, and water; words—both particular books of sacred text as well as those read, spoken, and sung, which vibrate throughout space and bodies; places and times—the intention and proximity of the gathering indicates something about both the physical location and a sense of appointed moments; and people—the assembly itself as well as individual actors who contribute different facets to worship.[31] These things constitute and contribute to our worship patterns, physically in use and imaginatively in meaning. A burning candle in an Advent wreath acts differently in worship than one lit in conjuncture with a whispered prayer. The same sermon communicates different things from different spaces: one seat in a circle or a raised pulpit. A loaf of bread becomes a connection to Christ while also representing the diverse gathering of those at the table's edge. Worship brings the kinesthetic and the poetic together, regardless of historical time or physical location. Even more, the expectation of God's presence adds holy meaning to the process. Lathrop writes that the things of worship

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[30] The COVID-19 pandemic response has accentuated an existing trend of digital worship practices that occur outside temporal, physical boundaries. The debates over the elements of online worship and even its inherent validity continue. While this project does not engage in these debates or specifically address the aspect of online worship, the interplay between physical immediacy and imaginative reach still manifests despite its difference from local gathering. The whole person participates in worship around things which take on meaning through an imaginative stretch. For a good resource that offers a wide engagement with the increasing presence of online worship and how its growth interacts with local worshiping bodies see August E. Grant, Amanda Colson Sturgill, Chiung Hwang Chen, and Daniel A. Stout, eds. *Religion Online: How Digital Technology Is Changing the Way We Worship and Pray*, 2 vols. Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2019. See particularly chapters in the first volume: chapter 2, "Posting, Sharing, and Religious Testifying: New Rituals in the Online Religious Environment" by Kris Boyle, Jared Hansen, and Spencer Christensen; chapter 3, "From Facebook to Instagram: The Role of Social Media in Religious Communities" by Lee Farquhar; chapter 6, "Salvation by Algorithm: When Big Data Meets God" by Heidi D. Blossom, Jeffrey S. Wilkinson, Alexander Gorelik, and Stephen D. Perry; and chapter 11, "Online-Ritual and the Active Participation of the Faithful: Digital Technology and the Roman Catholic Liturgy" by Jack Turner.

[31] Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1999), 91–115.

"are set aside not simply by our liturgical focus and human history but by God's intention. That is, in the midst of them and by means of them, God speaks grace and mercy."[32] Christians gather around objects, words, and others in particular spaces and times with an expectation of participation in God's larger world. In this way, the interaction between the kinesthetic and poetic also takes on another quality, reaching into the transcendent. For a coorientation model to examine this type of space, it must include physical and transcendent aspects of being alongside the cognitive. Therefore, its workspace must be able to contend with the embodied imagination as a whole lived reality for human development and social formation. This includes considering the whole individual, the kinesthetic poetic nature of the gathering, and the presence of the holy.

The Map

This project has two overarching parts. The first three chapters form a first section dedicated to building a coorientative model for worship. Chapter one will present Mead's work and subsequent scholarship, including Newcomb's coorientation model, as a valuable tool for evaluating and constructing worship. This includes exploring different pieces involved in role-taking, such as society as a formational system, the importance of language, and the incorporation of others, showing how these pieces connect to worship. The subsequent two chapters build on the initial model proposed in chapter one by addressing two important issues.

The first concern addressed in chapter two relates to the categorical foundations of role-taking and coorientation. To participate in social activity, the self sorts internalized information into categories for subsequent engagement. Problems arise in this process, both internally and externally, as powerful and biased frameworks shape the categorization process, perpetuating harm against others and affecting relationships. Deconstructively, this chapter illustrates how unhelpful or harmful role-taking limits our empathetic abilities and shapes an embodied faith that impairs relationship with self and others. Constructively, it suggests ways to broaden liturgical role-taking by expanding limiting relational ideas about God and others, traversing human-made categories, and encouraging a multifaceted liturgical vision of the world around us.

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[32] Lathrop, 116.

Chapter three turns to phenomenology in the context of coorientation, a model which lends itself to a constructivist approach. A theology of God as relational actor undergirds most of North American Christian worship: a Holy Other who listens to prayers, who engages hearts, who speaks through liturgical elements like scripture. Approaches like Mead's developmental theory, however, which dissects social formation, can narrow into a constructivist perspective, which typically resides opposite a phenomenological one. This chapter explores the dynamics of these different camps to propose an equilibrium between them by deconstructing their binary. In bringing Mead to the study of liturgy and homiletics, we can see the realities of socially constructed worship while also acknowledging that we coorient with and around a God who exists beyond social categorical confinement. To summarize, part one will engage the different facets of Mead's developmental theory in connection to worship for the purpose of creating a coorientation model that focuses on how social action in worship provides roles, engages categorization, contributes to paradigms of understanding, and impacts relational capacity.

Section two will move from proposed method to practical theological application and the implications of constructing worship through a coorientative frame of reference. Chapter four introduces coorientation as a means for strategic practical theology. Returning to the embodied imagination space, it proposes a framework to situate coorientation within the imagination. This not only reveals a flexibility in scope of application, from micro-elements like sung metaphor to macro-elements like sermon series, but also describes formation by tracking the process of transformation. This chapter will explore two simple examples of applying coorientation analysis through two perspectives, insider-out and outsider-in, before finishing with a turn to using coorientation for worship creation.

The final chapter narrows in on the leader as a facilitator of coorientative action and explores three facets of their unique roles. The organist and the guitarist, the liturgist and the preacher, anyone who participates in some form of worship leadership takes part in coorienting congregations. The leader's role fluctuates throughout worship based on the person stepping into leadership role, the community's relationship to the leader, and the particular element of worship being led. This chapter explores these roles and the ethical responsibilities tied to them in both planning and leading. Finishing this project with a look at the leader not only names the particular facet they occupy within a coorientation model, but hopefully acts as a point of encouragement for practical theologians to use this sociological tool for creating formative worship.

My Socially Situated Self

In offering a map for this project, I would be remiss without including a word about my own social location. I grew up in a very small town (population 1000) in rural southwestern Ontario, Canada. We got our first—and to date only—stoplight when I was twelve. My father, a Dutch immigrant, worked in a feed mill creating pellet food for the animals on surrounding farms. My mother, a Dutch immigrant daughter, taught special education in a public school built eleven kilometers outside of town to serve the large Mennonite population in the area. In some ways, I completely fit into our small, white, Protestant, largely Reformed Christian community. We all had similar names, similar histories, and similar beliefs. However, I also felt like an outsider, neither my family nor I fitting in with the traditionally conservative roles built into my community. While I have moved away from this small town, writing these words in a large city in a different country roughly 2,500 km away, this project has highlighted how much that community remains a part of me. The questions filling these pages touch on my particular experience of troublesome role-taking, both in my hometown but also in similar communities I subsequently called home. As such, the approach, illustrations, and suggested trajectories reflect my Protestant Christian, Reformed, white, upper-middle class, graduate educated, heterosexual, cis-female, larger-sized-body perspective, recognizing that even these labels flatten a diversity of experiences. Still, I hope that this project supplies a methodological tool that can offer wider access points than my own narrow location, adjusted and applied to different social locations, activities, and needs.

Conclusion

This introduction began with a story of two queens who formed their identities in a social milieu of competing forces that pitted them against each other as rival enemies. They lived into roles established in context with one another, eventually determining that regicide was necessary for their own survival. Their story seems more like a Shakespearian drama than an accounting of relational formation, but it indicates the power of social activity. Social formation impacts our lives; Mead's social development model can offer insight into the social activity of worship by tracing the stands of different roles interacting together. An expanded coorientation model—specifically built for worship—will reveal a way to map worship's embodied imagination space and shape it. In doing so, worship leaders can offer greater opportunities for participants to deepen their relationships: with God, with others, and with themselves.

Chapter 1

Creating a Model:
Mead's Role-Taking Theory, Coorientation, and Worship

In 1914, the first year of World War I, British soldier Ernest Morley sent a letter home after facing the German army in the trenches on Christmas Eve. He shared that the riflemen had planned a "gift" for the opposing army that night: three carols followed by five rounds of rapid gunfire. However, after singing "While shepherds watched their flocks by night" they heard the Germans respond with a friendly Christmas greeting, lit lanterns, and promises to lay down their weapons for the evening. The gesture changed the British soldier's minds. Instead of sending gunfire, they responded in kind, forming a truce as they turned their bayonets into candle stands to hold high enough for the Germans to see.

This event represents just one of many unconnected stories of small truces sprinkled along the front lines. As soldiers heard their own beloved Christmas songs on their supposed enemies' lips, many emerged from their trenches of war to meet in no man's land. Powerful pictures of these moments capture British and German soldiers, who were working to kill one another just the day before, gathering together for a breath of peace. Evidences of these disparate, impromptu truces ranged along the front line, from shaking hands and exchanging gifts to the somber returning of the other's dead for burial. Yet, despite these different outcomes, many cite the origin of connection in shared bars of beloved Christmas music, hearing familiar songs of faith and home waft over from the "enemy" line. When, in the following days, the commanders of the army heard about what had occurred, they sent down orders that were heavily enforced in the remaining years of the war, preventing this from happening again. However, many of the British soldiers who participated in the Christmas Truce of 1914 refused to fire on their opponents again and were eventually rotated out.[33] This story reveals the power of social action occurring in worship each week as songs, images, and words weave together a collective imaginary. No formal liturgy was planned that day. Yet tones of carols like "Silent night, holy night" hung in the air between warring fronts, bringing soldiers together through shared memories, habits, and rituals common in each country. They were no longer shooting at faceless enemies, but men they could now picture singing beside in a pew bench, placed within their own familiar world.

Worship wields this type of power; it creates connectivity where worldviews overlap to unite seemingly disparate actors into a common formative imagination space. Worship is of course doxological, coming together to praise God, but to participate in doxological action worshipers necessarily bring themselves into the process. They enter into worship carrying their lives with them. The smitten teenager comes with the feelings of new love. The struggling mother enters with feelings of inadequacy as she looks down at her toddler and realizes he's wearing two different shoes. The excited grandparent sits with anticipation for lunch with his entire family. The employee who received a mediocre work review cannot stop worrying about their position at a company threatening layoffs. Worship spaces are filled with people of all persuasions, connected to the immediate action of worship but also the world they carry in with them. Each person represents a multiplicity of experiential threads within worship which also anchors their life outside of it. Worship then becomes a hub of social action where thousands of gossamer strands come together within one event. They intersect in a space that acts as a social world of its own and tries to craft an edifying experience to send tremors down those strands in hopes of creating some sort of resonance for each worshiper within those different worlds. To consider this larger picture is intimidating. Creating a formative space for identities to thrive in connection with one another through their combined act of worship seems like a daunting task. It involves sorting the intersectionality of diverse people with diverse experiences to somehow create a worshiping community where each person finds a resonant place to connect with God, with others, and with their own self. My goal with this project is to present a model that will help ministerial leaders navigate this complex reality. How might preachers speak a word that reverberates in the ear of those bearing smiles, sorrows, and scars? How can we offer an effective space to worship in light of all these connections? How might our examination benefit those gathered?

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[33] Ari Shapiro, "A Century Ago, When the Guns Fell Silent On Christmas," NPR.org, December 25, 2014, https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2014/12/25/370381693/a-century-ago-when-the-guns-fell-silent-on-christmas.

I contend that social development theory presents an effective tool through which we can critique and construct meaningful worship, specifically the theory of American sociologist George Herbert Mead. A sociological look at worship provides an "outsider" approach that works from core assumptions useful for worship applications. Mead begins from the belief that humans live in a perceptual world, susceptible to the attitudes of others, both particular and in general, through systems which compromise society. Everything in an individual's world comes endowed with social meaning, communicated by the social circles the individual belongs to. Through language, which itself is socially communicated, the individual participates with their community through social action around objects to engage and create meaning, which employs and affects all persons involved. Our world predates our own existence and shapes our development, but also invites us to contribute to the social dynamics through our participation.[34]

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[34] George Herbert Mead, *The Philosophy of the Act*, ed. Charles W. Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938). See especially: "Perspective Theory of Perception," 103–125, and "The Social Factor in Perception," 140–54.

In sum, Mead argues that we are innately social beings, shaped in interdependent relationship to our communities.

Thus, I argue that using Mead's sociological lens to study worship can provide a foundation to form a strategic practical theology for creating worship. This type of study takes individual ministry leaders, lay leaders, and worshipers into account, but also places them into the larger social system of worship, understanding the interplay of multiple worldviews within the whole. It also recognizes that worship presents a formative social world of its own, which impacts, shapes, and edifies the individual. As such, a sociological tool can help us examine what we do in worship, generate critical feedback, and construct a way forward into deeper relational patterns that enable a doxological transformative space. Throughout this chapter, I intend to outline seven key aspects of Mead's development model alongside related subsequent scholarship toward the goal of building a coorientative model for worship. I will not look at any one piece of the liturgy in particular, but rather work toward a method applicable across all facets of worship and traditions, from those who employ highly regimented and historic liturgical structures to those who might suggest that they follow no liturgical structure at all. The scope of analysis can extend from a partial phrased metaphor in a sermon to the expected rites which have formed over generations of worshipers. I aim to present a method that can navigate worship's embodied imaginary to bring the community of believers into deeper relational connection for the edification of all.

Who Was George Herbert Mead?

George Herbert Mead was an American social psychologist and philosopher whose theory outlines how social environments form the self and through cooperative cultivation, selves form society. For Mead, a key aspect of our *humanness* is the ability to socially process our reactions. We do not automatically respond to a stimulus, but hold onto that stimulus, analyzing in overt and/or subliminal mechanisms in conjuncture with our social perspective before offering a response.[35] Sociologist Anselm Strauss argues that Mead was influenced by the Romantics as evidenced by his emphasis on the social environment and its influence on the individual. However, Mead also clearly connects his scholarship to Darwin's theories, melding the Romantic social perspective with a scientific one, working to replace mysticism with Enlightenment rationalism.[36]

Mead's interdisciplinary work provides porous boundaries which have invited varied use throughout different fields. This is partly due to Mead never systematizing his own work although a system clearly weaves throughout his writings. As Charles Morris notes, Mead "was not the writer of a system…due to the fact that he was always engaged in building one."[37] Yet, his work was groundbreaking because his analysis of the individual differed from other behavioral and psychoanalytic psychologists at that time. Many saw the ego as its own entity, treating it as a whole structure of internalized habits, norms and values to form the personality. However, as Herbert Blumer[38] summarizes, Mead contrasted with this viewpoint, treating the self as a reflexive process, receiving from and contributing to the world around it. Mead's self evolves within a pre-existing social structure, taking shape by participating through social action within its system. This developmental approach rejects the concept of the self as *ex nihilo* in favor of a self that emerges in reciprocal connection with its world.[39] The self is not simply a structural medium through which action is processed; it is an active organism in its own right, coming into being through action it generates itself.

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[35] George H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society: The Definitive Edition*, ed. Charles W. Morris (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934), 94, 128.

[36] Anselm Strauss, ed., "Introduction," in *The Social Psychology of George Herbert Mead* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956), vii.

[37] Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, xv.

[38] Although Mead did not publish a systematized volume of his theory, his student Herbert Blumer built heavily on his work and did create a key system that ties directly back to his scholarship. *Symbolic Interactionism* presumes that meaning is not inherent in either the object or the psyche of the individual, but arises in the midst of action, a social product created through surrounding activity. Blumer's foundational text is *Symbolic Interactionism; Perspective and Method* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice–Hall, 1969), https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000000193. For particular explanation of meaning see page 4.

Scholars who study Mead contend that this greatly shifted the paradigm of psychological thought. Ryan McVeigh points out that Mead moved the individual from the centered focus of development to a part of a larger system. The self is socially emergent and this radically undermined the individualistic assumptions of psychology at that time. Mead still studied the individual but placed their development within community, presuming its direct influence. The self needs others to develop; it cannot come into existence without them. The self internalizes the behavior and attitudes of those it comes into contact with toward adoption or rejection in identity.[40] This does not devolve into determinism, as Joshua Daniel explains, where the self cannot help but be what society creates it to be. Mead's theory makes room for individual creativity. Society provides the evolutionary setting for the self, but the self participates in different social settings, has room to evaluate social settings, and contributes to social settings which affect communal development alongside the individual.[41] Mead shifted paradigms of thought, inciting new directions within many fields, as his study of the self took on increased social dimensions.

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[39] Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism; Perspective and Method* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice–Hall, 1969), 62–65, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000000193.

[40] Ryan McVeigh, "Mead, the Theory of Mind, and the Problem of Others," in *The Timeliness of George Herbert Mead*, ed. Hans Joas and Daniel R. Huebner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 220–24.

[41] Joshua Daniel, "Conscience as Ecological Participation and the Maintenance of Moral Perplexity," in *The Timeliness of George Herbert Mead*, ed. Hans Joas and Daniel R. Huebner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 278–79.

While Mead's scholastic contribution is valuable, we must also note that it interwove with his passion for social justice. Social theorist Filipe Carreira da Silva argues that Meadian scholarship has often suffered a narrow reconstruction by ignoring the social impetus in Mead's work. Da Silva outlines key pillars in Mead's theory, finding coherence on "three central modern problematics—science, selfhood, and politics."[42] Science outlines the logical way Mead examines the world, providing the criteria needed to do thorough and theoretical work. The second pillar of selfhood represents the obvious, and most often examined, aspect of Mead's social development. The final pillar, politics, presumes a positive trajectory of society when rooted in participative democracy toward social reform.[43] Da Silva writes, "From an early stage in his life, Mead develops a critical political consciousness, guided by radical democratic principles and oriented to the betterment of his community."[44] Mead's idealistic commitment toward a better social world works with the other pillars of science and selfhood to create his scholarship. Daniel Huebner agrees, showing that throughout Mead's career,

> Mead was known primarily as a public intellectual who spoke at social reform events rather than as a professional writer, that much of what was published under his name was originally given in the form of public speeches, and that the body of his publications bears only a tenuous relationship to his own interests.[45]

Mead's canonization in the publications under his name, curated after his death, minimize the political pillar of his work, but it remains infused throughout. Mead was not simply a philosopher concerned with the nature of the self, but his theory tied to his advocacy work concerning settlement houses, public education, women's suffrage, and the rights of immigrants and racial minorities.[46] A commitment to self and societal evolution undergirds his theoretical insights, social action seeking empowerment and equality for all being woven throughout. This brief overview of Mead's general theory and overall contribution suggests some points of connectivity into the study of worship which the next section will explore.

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[42] Filipe Carreira da Silva, *Mead and Modernity: Science, Selfhood, and Democratic Politics* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), 33.

[43] da Silva, 36.

[44] da Silva, 169.

[45] Daniel R. Huebner, *Becoming Mead: The Social Process of Academic Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 4.

Using Mead for a Strategic Practical Theological Model

Before constructing an analytical model for worship from his theories, we must first determine how Mead provides an appropriate fit for practical theological concerns. This section will generally explore Mead's scholarship in connection with worship. First, I will reveal how the church finds room within Mead's theory. Then I will provide several examples of interdisciplinary worship studies which utilize sociological and psychological elements. Finally, I will demonstrate the generative excitement that Mead's theory and worship share in the relational self. Through this, I hope to demonstrate why Mead proves an effective fit for creating a critical and constructive model for worship.

Religion in Mead's Theory

While Mead does not engage the particularities of Christian worship,[47] he does incorporate the significance of religion as an institutional force which holds substantial social sway. Mead defines an institution as something which "represents a common response on the part of all members of the community to a particular situation. This common response is one which, of course, varies with the character of the individual."[48] Institutions thus represent organized forms of group or social activity. Individuals collect together because they share a connection to a central feature, such as a goal, a figure, or a common interest. The responses may vary, but they share enough similarity to create a collective through affiliation. Broadly, for the Christian church the central feature is the person of Jesus Christ who creates a unique aspect of this particular religious institution. Those who claim membership in a church share similar responses of affinity for or belief in Christ. This represents the big picture of institutional involvement. However, Mead's definition also allows us to scale institutional consideration into narrower fields of observation. Church denominations, for example, represent not only a broad connection to Jesus Christ, but also common responses to objects such as particular doctrines, social movements, and ethnic heritage. Narrowing in even further, an individual church represents more particularities that elicit common responses, like familial heritage, age or class representation, and community engagement. One way to examine the features eliciting a common response within a church's membership[49] is to ask "what draws you into this church?" or "why do you choose to worship here?" For Mead, the church represents one of many types of institutions that together create our society.

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[46] Huebner, 25–26.

[47] Interestingly, Mead's parents were invested in Christian worship. Rev. Hiram Mead was a practicing pastor in the Congregationalist Church before taking the chair of Sacred Rhetoric and Pastoral Theology at Oberlin Theological Seminary. Elizabeth Storrs Mead was educated at Ipswich Female Seminary and taught in secondary schools and colleges before becoming president of Mount Holyoke College. Mead did not mimic his parents' faith, but became increasingly agnostic "resulting at least in part, from his independent study of critical philosophy and modern physical and evolutionary science." Despite not continuing with Christianity, Mead's own argument for the formative nature of communities suggests that some aspect of his family's religiosity had an impact on his life. This is certainly seen in Mead's value of education, the child of two highly educated educators. The biographical material and quote source: Huebner, "Mead, George Herbert (1863–1931)," 831.

Mead argues that a reciprocal relationship connects the individual to the institutional collective. The church, as a social institution for Mead, not only provides a place which helps individuals become fully matured selves, but also manifests as its own particular identity, the development of which relies on the participation of healthy individual selves.[50] Institutions are not static entities, but exist through individual responsive ascription to a common feature. Churches manifest with the qualities and traits of particular members because members create the institution. So as the church shapes and forms its members, members shape and form the church. This becomes extremely evident in worship, as ritual, prayer, scripture, song, and sermon all hopefully create an impact on the individual while at the same time being driven by the individual who gives voice, ear, heart, mind, and body to the worship process. Worship becomes its own developing entity as membership fluctuates, needs vary, tastes adjust, and leadership changes. Worship develops alongside the individuals in its collective, relying on healthy selves for its own vitality, so all can thrive.

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[48] Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, 261.

[49] I use the term membership in the loosest sense here, not necessarily representing any official church membership, but those who affiliate with the church in some way, and may even consider themselves *members*.

Mead's theory proposes evolutionary movement driving toward healthy selves and a healthy society. Heavily influenced by Darwinian thought and his own community justice engagement, Mead weaves an idealistic hope throughout his developmental model. At a time when religion and evolution were pitted against one another, Mead brings them together with hope that both institution and individual can evolve into something better. Philosopher Trevor Pearce helpfully traces how Mead's scholastic journey brought him to this point of mutual coexistence, combining scientific evolutionary world and an idealist, spiritual world. Mead saw a value in religious institutions as they participated in positive self development. His frustrations with religion centered on what he deemed as cult values that prohibited societal progression, like the church becoming more caught up in reprobation and vengeance of criminal activity rather than in crime prevention.[51] Mead rejected these aspects of religious tradition but he still saw the immense institutional force and value that the church's institution could contribute to a unified purpose. He was committed to the idea that the problems of life could be solved when both the self and institutions developed within healthy and balanced intersubjectivity. Both the individual and the church collective participate in this trajectory toward an ideal. While Mead's idealism appears problematic for some scholars, it coincides with theological interests of sanctification and a holy desire for human existence. Mead's concern for the self in connection with the institution alongside his idealism provides clear connectivity for utilizing his developmental theory to create a model suitable for analyzing and creating worship.

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[50] Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, 262.

Connecting to Worship Scholarship

This project nestles within the pattern of scholastic interdisciplinary approaches which incorporate psychology or sociology into worship study, including a few which directly engage Mead and whom we will engage throughout this project. Evidence of incorporating psychological insights into worship litters the last century. In 1918, Charles S. Gardner wrote *Psychology and Preaching,* a tome nearly four hundred pages in length, applying the psychology of the time to the function of preaching. Decades later, Edgar N. Jackson wrote a similarly titled and structured volume, *A Psychology for Preaching* (1961), alongside other books and articles that articulated how preaching and liturgy can provide pastoral care. Similarly, Elaine Ramshaw's foundational text, *Ritual and Pastoral Care* (1987), presumes the pastoral care action present in liturgy, showing how ritual action meets both individual and community needs. J. Randall Nichols argues that the chasm between prophet and priest need not exist in *The*

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[51] Trevor Pearce, "Naturalism and Despair: George Herbert Mead and Evolution in the 1880s," in *The Timeliness of George Herbert Mead*, ed. Hans Joas and Daniel R. Huebner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 117–44.

Restoring Word: Preaching as Pastoral Communication ([1987] 2003). He shows how pastoral needs can come together with theological interpretation to form a unique and restorative word for the listener. William H. Willimon writes a related argument in *Worship as Pastoral Care* (1996), showing how worship ties complex human activity to the holy. He proposes that psychology provides a discerning approach to move us from judgment to action, although he laments that "very little psychological reflection has been brought to bear on worship events."[52] Similarly, Neil Pembroke contends that theocentricity does not exclude spiritual nourishment as he explores the pastoral dimension of worship in *Pastoral Care in Worship: Liturgy and Psychology in Dialogue.* While doing so in different ways, each of these texts explores the interplay between worship and the self.

Sociological analysis in religion is a wide field, but when applied particularly to Christian worship, the examples usually appear through ethnographic study. This occurs in concrete qualitative instances, like the *Listening to Listeners* project,[53] as well as the abstract work of the local theologian, as described in Lenora Tubbs Tisdale's book *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (1997). She suggests that the preacher acts as an insider and an outsider, one who is both immersed in local life, but who can also step outside of it to uniquely see the congregation in order to bring an appropriate word. Teresa Fry Brown provides another sociological approach in her book *Weary Throats and New Songs: Black Women Proclaiming God's Word* (2003). She merges her own concrete qualitative study with the observations of local theologians described by Tubbs Tisdale by dedicating large sections of texts to the words of the black woman preachers she interviewed. She combines them to create an ethnographic study which weaves a picture of "black women's proclamation."[54]

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[52] William H Willimon, *Worship as Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 57.

[53] As Ronald J. Allen summarizes in his reflective article on the project, this qualitative study interviewed 263 people across twenty-eight congregations in the mid-west of the United States of America. The study directed its attention to the listener's engagement of the sermon, what helped and what frustrated their perception. "Listening to Listeners: The Board Reflects Critically on the Study," *Encounter* 68, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 69–84. Several books were published from the findings of this project, including: John S. McClure, Ronald J. Allen, Dale P. Andrews, L. Susan Bond, Dan P. Moseley, and G. Lee Ramsey, Jr., *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004); Ronald J. Allen, *Hearing the Sermon: Relationship/Content/Feeling* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004); Mary Alice Mulligan, Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm, Diane Turner-Sharazz, and Ronald J. Allen, *Believing in Preaching: What Listeners Hear in Sermons* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005); and Mary Alice Mulligan and Ronald J. Allen, *Make the Word Come Alive: Lessons from Laity* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005).

These sources represent a wide and varied interdisciplinary field. However, recent scholarship also reveals the direct incorporation of sociological paradigms for the purpose of creating models of analysis specific for worship. In his book *Trauma Recalled* (2010), Dirk Lange uses trauma studies to study Martin Luther and the institution of the eucharist. Eunjoo Mary Kim utilizes sociology alongside politics, cultural studies, and anthropology as interdisciplinary partners in her book *Christian Preaching and Worship in Multicultural Contexts: A Practical Theological Approach* (2017). She draws on these resources to build a reflective practical theology that aims for renewal in different multicultural worship models. In her dissertation, *The Hermeneutics of Recognition: A Ricoeurian Interpretive Framework for Whites Preaching* (2014)*,* Carolyn Browning Helsel brings psychologist Janet Helms's developmental stage model for white racial identity together with Paul Ricoeur's *Course of Recognition* to present a movement from self recognition to mutual recognition. My project resides closest to this scholarship, where sociological and psychological theories enhance assessment for the strategic creation of worship. It resembles Robert Dykstra's work in *Discovering a Sermon: Personal Pastoral Preaching*. Dykstra uses Donald Winnicott's psychoanalysis of object relations theory to inform the craft of preaching and address the particular problem of boredom. I similarly use Mead's social development theory and his emphasis on roles to study worship and preaching, aiming to provide a model which enables leaders to intentionally shape paradigms of understanding. These titles cannot capture the breadth of interdisciplinary scholarship, but they hopefully suggest how Mead's scholarship can bring something to the study and practice of worship.

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[54] Teresa L. Fry Brown, *Weary Throats and New Songs: Black Women Proclaiming God's Word* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 18.

The Relational Self

I have thus far indicated how systems of religion play a role within Mead's theoretical framework as well as provided examples of psychological and sociological interdisciplinary interest with homiletical and liturgical scholarship. However, the greatest connectivity arguably exists in the relational emphasis represented in both Mead and worship. Mead proposes that the self cannot exist without community and relies on social relationship. This argument directly connects to theological tones of our created selves. From the beginning, God created humanity to live in relationship with one another. In Genesis 2, after unsuccessfully searching all of creation to find a suitable partner for the first created human, God creates a second person to form a community which reflects God's own relational image and complete creation. Worship forms a microcosm of this relational garden ideal, where humanity intentionally and doxologically communes together with God. Micah 6:6–8 affirms that ritual becomes worthless without the foundational commitment to "do justice," "love kindness" and "walk" with God. In Acts 2, the Christian church's commitment to fellowship, prayer and the Meal in Acts 2:42 further imparts the relational component of worship. The things we say and do in worship find their meaning in the relational connection we have with one another as even the act of isolated, personal prayer presumes a Holy ear.

Relational connectivity provides a common foundation, but Mead's emphasis on interplay between self and community requires that we also look for this dynamic in worship.

The concept of self often comes with theological baggage as inconsistent treatment results in confusion and a wariness of exploration. Christian claims based on scriptural statements of being "made in God's image" (Gen 1:27), to love others as yourself (Mt 22:39), and having unforgettable value (Lk 12:6–7) impart a value of self. However, these exist alongside calls to "deny" oneself (Lk 9:23) or to "die" so that Christ may live within (Gal 2:20). Theological paradigms contribute to this confusion as major thinkers, beginning with Augustine, build paradigms around sin and name *pride* as its source.[55] Inconsistent approaches to the self achieved through proof texting and overemphasis of particular theological claims have caused confusion regarding the Christians self. Psychological and sociological sources which seek to empower the self are treated gingerly and skeptically, if incorporated at all due to a fear of an overemphasizing self, citing Romans 12:3 which cautions "not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think" (NRSV).

Mead's theory provides insights into relational community which enables a resolution for this tension. The self develops in relationship to the community and the community represents its own evolving system shaped by the connectivity of its members. This particularity in unity reflects God's own Triune being and builds a theological basis for the relational self at the center of this project. Each person of the Trinity exists in particularity, yet we ascribe to one God. This three-in-one case has presented a problematic doctrine that theologians have struggled with since the church's inception. However, systematic theologian Cornelius Plantinga argues that a social view of God provides the best explanation. He writes,

> Each member is a person, a distinct person, but scarcely an *individual* or *separate* person. For in the divine life there is no isolation, no insulation, no secretiveness, no fear of being

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[55] Practical theologian Neil Pembroke helpfully outlines the problem of pride for Augustine as well as Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, and Karl Barth in his argument to shift the onus of sin from pride to sloth. See Neil Pembroke, *Pastoral Care in Worship: Liturgy and Psychology in Dialogue* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 12–13.

> transparent to another. Hence there is a penetrating, inside knowledge of the other *as other*, but as co-other, loved other, fellow. Father, Son, and Spirit are 'members one of another' to a superlative and exemplary degree.[56]

The particular essence of each person within the Trinity leads to unity through love, loyalty, commitment, and knowledge of one another. Particularity does not dissolve into flat unity, but is empowered in unity by the other particular members. Their one-ness is a result of such extreme transparency that their knowledge of the other does not experience any boundary.

The Trinity provides an exemplar for both self and community, unachievable in exact replication yet inspirational for both self and community desiring to embrace its created reflection of God. This connects to the work of Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebstyne King, and Kevin S. Reimer work on the *reciprocal self*. They propose a theological teleology for self development theory by connecting development scholarship, including Mead, with *imago Dei* theologies. Their reciprocating self represents a "self that, in all its uniqueness and fullness of being, *engages fully in relationship with another* in all its particularity."[57] A vital component of the reciprocating self is the importance of reciprocity. Not simply a mutual backscratching, this interdependent investment in the other recognizes that we experience our unique selves more when we enter into authentic, empowering, intimate, and grace-filled relationships with others.[58] Sin moves from the individual aspect of pride into the contextual. "From a theological perspective sin can be defined as a failure to be in right relationship."[59] This does not mean that the individual is not responsible for particular sin, but places their sin within social aspects, creating harm to the other that results in distance.[60] Our complete humanity, our fully developed selves existing and investing in relationship with one another, represents the complete *imago Dei*, a reflection of God's own Triune nature. Mead's relational theory allows us to study how relationships function in worship, learning how to shift, craft, and deconstruct paradigms to further promote healthy connectivity which empowers all. This is how we understand ourselves. This is how we dive into deeper relationships. This is how we live into our full humanity, reflecting the Trinity.

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[56] While the term *penetrating* may instigate historically problematic associations with aggressive masculinity, I appreciate Plantinga's (perhaps inadvertent) use of the term. It aligns with a desire to reclaim it through three recognitions. First, we increasingly recognize that cis-men are not the only people who practice penetration. Second, positive penetration indicates a welcome reception within healthy relationship. The type of knowledge occurring between the different members of the Trinity, as Plantinga describes it, may be invasive, but it is also mutual and indicates profound connection. Finally, it communicates deep, inescapable intimacy. Cornelius Plantinga, "The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity," *Calvin Theological Journal* 23, no. 1 (1988): 50.

[57] Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebstyne King, and Kevin S. Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, Second ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 24.

[58] Balswick, King, and Reimer, 56.

Mead's Development Theory as a Model for Worship

Mead's work is extensive and interdisciplinary to the degree of contributing to a new field of study in sociology. As a result, despite a lack of systematized theory, he has been widely used by scholars who rally around core elements patterned throughout his work. This section proposes seven key Meadian features relevant for creating a constructive analysis model for worship. The first two look at large-scale functional elements of Mead's theory: the self as actor in conjunction with a systematic whole, and the role of language as the primary process through which meaning arises and all social action functions. The next three elements represent Mead's social triad: the stages of self, role-taking and play; the other, both general and particular; and the role of objects, around which the self and others collectively orient. The final two elements of Mead's work concern practical applications for worship: how Mead's psychological emphasis connects to the embodied reality of worship; and how we can set parameters in our application to create observable units of social action. These elements of Mead's theory provide the foundational concepts for a strategic practical theology for worship.

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[59] Balswick, King, and Reimer, 73.

[60] This does not mean each individual must participate in each relationship in the exact same way. Nor does it give them the instruction to continue in relationships which harm their selves. Mutual interdependence is affected by the actions of all parties involved. The distance created may be influenced by the harmful actions of others, whose repentance, in word and action, is key for moving back into closer relational connection.

The Self as Actor and System Participant

Mead's work aims to blur the line drawn between social psychology and individual psychology. He connects behavioral studies, analyzing observable action, with psychology, the "inner phase of that process or activity."[61] In this way, the individual does not disappear into the collective, as he asserts occurs within behaviorism. Nor does the individual take precedent, studied as an individual element, as he asserts occurs within psychology.[62] Mead looks at the social process from both inside and out to reveal how the self develops in symbiotic relationship to its community. The self is not a souled being who seemingly comes into existence *ex nihilo*. He argues, "The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals in that process."[63] The self cannot exist as a solitary being. It needs to develop through social exchanges. Even when someone is alone, they think and converse with themself through social paradigms and ascribe socially determined meaning to the objects they engage. The self develops within a larger context, one that pre-exists the self. As the self grows and develops it learns about itself and the system surrounding it through social exchanges within its community.

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[61] Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, 8.

[62] Mead, 165.

[63] Mead, 135.

This process does not predetermine the self because subjective positionality permits unique and personal access to certain experiences. The self is also reflective, allowing the individual to experience a common reality while also curating a particular response.[64] The self can uniquely experience the world, even relying on social paradigms to process and reflect on that experience. The self can also draw from multiple social worlds as they grow. In infancy, the primary social world comprises the immediate family, particularly the primary caregiver. In typical development, however, the child's social reality expands as they grow, incorporating multiple worlds which overlap into their experience. Formative social worlds multiply by attending faith institutions and schools, reading books, watching movies and the like. This impacts development as the self curates its reaction to an immediate situation through its experience within a variety of social worlds.[65] A child might balk at restrictions in their own home after experiencing certain freedoms when visiting a friend's home, challenging the social institution responsible for a great deal of their own formation. In hearing the challenge, a parent may or may not acquiesce. If they do, the social system then changes. Typically, social institutions cannot predetermine selves because they themselves are not fixed. They rely on the contribution of the individuals formed within them to continue in their own existence. In Mead's developmental model, society is not an independent organism which exerts authoritarian influence on the individual, but a system of independent selves as empowered actors.

This symbiotic picture provides obvious correlation with worship, as Mead's theory resonates in the dynamics occurring within individual selves as well as the collective that doxologically gather. Worship takes its shape from the people; liturgy is a result of their work and thus worship reflects them, evolving alongside them. Yet, edification and spiritual development are presumed byproducts of worship, returning a shaping action back to the people as a whole and to the individual self. Worship leaders carefully choose music, write sermons, create art, and plan other facets, with hope that each of these elements connects with and affects those gathered. Mead's perspective on social formation enables us to examine the developmental function of worship. Worship presents its own system for analysis, but Mead's model also recognizes the influence of other social systems. The worshipers who form worship carry in connections from other social systems, worlds which develop the self in the same symbiotic way, their relevance, importance, and influence determined by the self. Worship does not occur in isolation, as the self carries in a multiplicity of connected threads with them. Mead's theory highlights the self amid this woven worldview, where worship provides an interconnected social development space. Using this perspective will allow us to trace the many influential threads moving in and out of worship. In doing so, we can strategically create worship to effectively and ethically resonate from its own point and ring down the connected threads with hopeful tones into the many connected social realities of each individual.

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[64] Mead, 166–67.

[65] Mead, 168.

Meaning Making and Language as the Primary Tool

For Mead, our entire "experiential world" emerges through social process. This shifts traditional perspectives on meaning from the object or the individual psyche to a system. An individual object does not inherently contain meaning but acts as a gathering point, where meaning pools through the social action. Nothing holds inherent beauty, and beauty is not simply in the eye of the beholder, for each self has developed their perception of beauty through social action within different contexts to form a particular understanding of where beauty manifests. The psyche needs social processes to comprehend meaning. Infants may perceive their own hunger and cry out because of it. However, their hunger only takes on meaning as they grow and learn through the social processes of being fed. Their connection with food only becomes more complex with greater exposure to wider circles. What was simply a perceived pang early in life begins to take on additional dimensions. Felt hunger in a home with bare cupboards holds class and economic meaning. Felt hunger in a larger-sized body within a community that values smaller-sized bodies holds a generated cultural meaning. Mead suggests that meaning arises within a threefold matrix that includes the self, the other, and an object at the center of a social act.[66] He writes,

> Our whole experiential world…is basically related to the social process of behavior, a process in which acts are initiated by gestures that function as such because they in turn call forth adjustive responses from other organisms, as indicating or having reference to the completion or resultant of the acts they initiate. That is to say, the content of the objective world, as we experience it, is in large measure constituted through the relations of the social process to it, and particularly through the triadic relation of meaning, which is created within that process.[67]

Meaning rises in the midst of a social process, occurring along relational lines that shape the perceptive ability of the self. The next three sections will examine each individual element of Mead's triadic meaning in detail. However, before then it is important to examine the role of gesture in creating meaning between the self, the other and the object and how language functions as the primary tool because it provides the most direct route to generativity.

An individual connects with themself and with others by reaching out through gesture. Any gesture offered represents meaning within the first individual who utilizes that gesture to generate that same meaning in another. These gestures occur within social fields, calling out reactions around an object, potentially adjusting attitudes toward that object, and allows all social players to react with subsequent behavior and attitude in light of the gestures being shared.[68] For example, in North American culture, the waving of an open palmed hand beside one's face in a gentle gesture to another expresses friendly greeting or departure. The motion socially connects the giver and receiver, raising similar meaning in each around the object of their physical relatedness (coming or going). However, while the involved parties may agree upon communicative meaning, attitudes vary based on the related nature of the giver and receiver, influencing subsequent reactions. An exuberant wave given to a friend upon arrival will likely raise similar attitudes of happiness in both the giver and receiver. This same wave given to a stranger may raise an attitude of greeting in the giver, hoping to make a new acquaintance, but raise an attitude of suspicion in the receiver drawn from bad experiences in the past. The social field also contributes to these dynamics. A wave used to gain the attention of someone across the room will communicate the same meaning of "here I am" but will raise different attitudes in the receiver based on whether they are entering a crowded cafeteria, looking for friends, or attempting to inconspicuously enter into a meeting late, trying to avoid notice. While the communicative meaning of gesture in all these instances may be accurate amongst all parties, the attitudes, reactions, and subsequent actions may be dissimilar, allowing for subjective positionality and personal response.

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[66] Mead, 75–76.

[67] Mead, 112.

These subjective variants illustrate why language represents the pinnacle of gesture for Mead, because language provides the best tool for direct communication. Language requires social activity to learn and gains meaning through the consensus of speakers.[69] We develop in linguistic spheres and our minds rely on linguistic symbols to create thought processes.[70] While we certainly use a wide variety of gestures throughout life, we quickly reach for words to clearly indicate attitudes and actions both within and without. Inwardly, we use shorthanded versions of outward dialogue to communicate with ourselves, relying on linguistic meaning to process reflection. Outwardly, language connects us to the other more efficiently, especially when accompanied by other embodied gestures. A stranger will likely receive a friendly wave more openly, aligning a similar attitude, if it is accompanied with a vocal "Hello, my name is…" or acknowledgment of connection through a mutual acquaintance or purpose.

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[68] Mead, 45–47.

[69] Mead, 13.

Gesture and language provide vital components in meaning making in worship because meaning relies on symbol and imagination for formation. While worshipers physically gather in an actual space, a great deal of the material they engage with exists beyond that particular physical and temporal reality. The words of worship reach out beyond the immediate gathering, stretching into the homes, workplaces, and play places. Words reach over land and ocean into different nations. Words reach back into history and stretch forward into future hope. Words turn bread into body and wine into blood. As Mead suggests, "Language does not simply symbolize a situation or object which is already there in advance; it makes possible the existence or the appearance of that situation or object, for it is a part of the mechanism whereby that situation or object is created."[71] Language enables us to bring the entire world symbolically into worship and shape its meaning through our liturgical social interaction. A Meadian worship model acknowledges the foundational role language plays in creating paradigms, laying them bare for assessment and cultivation. While not all religious experience can be directly communicated through language, language offers a primary tool through which we attempt to understand and ascribe meaning to that experience.

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[70] Mead, 145.

[71] Mead, 78.

Developing the Self through Play and Game

The first element of Mead's triad of meaning is the individual self, which develops through social process. Acquisition of meaningful gesture and language in young children shows this in base form. They understand that smiles earn joyful responses from their immediate surroundings and cries bring help. They learn to point to different parts of their body when they hear words like "eye" or "ear" or "nose." The babbling of "mama" results in rejoicing from the one who claims that name. Through social process, the child learns the dynamics of gesture and the common meaning of language, submitting to the existing structure in order to participate within it. This first step of development reveals a key process that weaves throughout Mead's entire developmental theory: the social action of role-taking, where the self takes the positionality of another subject within its imaginary. As children learn specific gestures, they do so in a communal context. They point to their ear, associating it with the word because they have learned that their social sphere makes such an association. Their own role emmeshes with the other as they participate in linguistic expectations. Mead draws the term *rôle* from the French, referring to a literal "part played by a person in society or life."[72] In role-taking, the self imagines the role of another, holding their position within their inner sphere. This action affects both selfhood and external presence. The child learns where the ear is on their parent and in the process also learns about part of their own self. Language acquisition represents the shallowest aspect of role-taking, where the self and other merge. Role-taking becomes more complex as the self becomes more particular in connection, as Mead outlines in his subsequent developmental stages of play and game.

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[72] Mary Jo Deegan, ed., "Introduction" in *Play, School, and Society*, American University Studies. Series XI, Anthropology and Sociology, v. 71 (New York: Peter Lang, 1999) liv.

The primary difference between play and game concerns the ability to take the role of one or multiple others.[73] In play, children only take on the position a single other, one at a time in linear fashion. When a child plays as a teacher, as a doctor, as a mommy, even as a kitty, they literally take on that role, becoming who they understand that other to be. As children play, they participate in the social actions they have determined belong to a particular other and act them out within their ability. Play is individual in the sense that children can only hold onto one role at a time and move through different roles by abandoning one to adopt another.[74] The complexity of these roles depend on the development of the child, and their ability to understand the different elements of these roles. Through play, children also learn how to become an object to themselves, differentiating physical, emotional, and psychological embodiment. They use a conversation of gestures within themself to understand that role in relationship to themselves. When they play as a doctor, they need a patient stand-in. They treat their dolly as they have experienced a doctor treating themselves. They organize how they understand themself by playing others in connection with themself. Through this process they discern how they are like others and how they differ. Through play, the child takes on the particular role of another to organize their understanding of others' attitudes toward themself.[75] Through play, children learn to see themselves through the eyes of others, recognizing their objectivity.

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[73] Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society,* 153.

[74] Mead, 150.

[75] Mead, 158.

In game, self development shifts from an inward gaze to an outer organizational perspective. The child gains the ability to hold multiple roles at a time, allowing them to perceive and join into the relational system. When one participates in a game, they hold themself in tandem with the roles of multiple others as well as the structure of the game itself. Mead helpfully illustrates this by describing a game of baseball.[76] The self, stepping up to bat, holds the roles (perhaps unconsciously) of all other players on the field. The batter anticipates the action of the pitcher, the catcher, and all field players alongside their own differentiated position at home plate. After hitting the ball, the player runs to first base, not third, because they understand the social paradigms that govern the rule of play, the meaning of the game agreed upon by those who participate. Knowing that the ball was hit out to left field, the batter runs with knowledge that they have extra time due to the physical distance between the engaged fielder and first base, but also anticipate that fielder working to catch the ball before it hits the ground, rendering the batter "out." By participating in the game stage, the self continues to understand themselves in connection to others, but now begins to interact with the system as a whole. They continue to understand their objectivity, as one player within the community, but take on multiple roles at once, differentiated from their own. Game stage reveals a self able to hold multiple positionalities in tandem with their own, navigating the system while never losing the self to pure objectivity.

Worship acts as its own game. There are multiple participants that communally create and adhere to a system of rules and expectations in participation with one another. This may be difficult to consider in connection to Mead's more competitive illustration. However, feminist psychologist, Carol Gilligan, takes the work of her peers, Nancy Chodorow and Janet Lever, to address the self-development theories rooted in games like Mead and the related work of psychologist Jean Piaget. She points out how girls are typified as underdeveloped when compared to their male counterparts.[77] In play, boys typically participate in competitive sports that utilize a large, diverse group of participants, developing independence and organizational skills. This type of game play juxtaposes against that of girls who tend to prefer smaller, more intimate groups, pointing to a pattern that places primacy in human relationships over abstract goals.[78] Women construct their thinking in the context of the responsibility of relationships, rather than abstract thinking which results in more formal logics of fairness and justice.[79] Gilligan's insight into the gender bias of development models, and Mead's model in particular, widens the parameters of game, making it more apt for worship analysis. Worship's game does not work toward some abstract goal, but with the aim of creating relational connection.

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[76] Mead, 154–55.

Looking at worship through role-taking examines it from both the micro aspect of individual self development to the macro perspective of systematic analysis. The function of a role-taking model in worship should be able to address a multitude of analytical questions: How does the individual perceive themself in connection to worship? How do worshipers perceive others inside and outside the immediate worship space? How do roles in other areas of life affect and even manifest within worship? What implicit and explicit rules function within this particular worshiping body to regulate social action within worship? Are there larger systems that regulate the rules affecting the worshiping body? How do ministry leaders function within worship; are they players, referees, or spectators? By examining worship through Mead's role-taking perspective, we can begin to unravel layers of meaning and connection to see them clearly with the hope of building greater relational connectivity.

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[77] This epistemological bias is not unique to Mead. Ellin Kofsky Scholnick was among the many feminist psychologist to point out sexual bias as a prevalent issue throughout developmental psychology which typically links traditionally male characteristics with fully developed adults and traditionally female characteristics with children, highlighting the prejudice in developmental markers. She examines the evidence through the primary metaphors used within the field. See her chapter "Engendering Development: Metaphors of Change" in *Toward a Feminist Developmental Psychology,* ed. by Patricia H. Miller and Ellin Kofsky Scholnick, 29–42 (New York: Routledge, 2000).

[78] Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, [1982] 2003), 11.

[79] Gilligan, 73.

The Other: Particular and Generalized

Mead's understanding of the other represents the second element of his social triad. A reflexive process, the self depends on others for its own emergence. Through role-taking, the individual experiences themself from the standpoint of others within their own group, becoming an object within their imaginary.[80] The self needs to experience the other because it learns about itself as it looks inward through the eyes of others. Through comparison, the self determines what it is and what it is not.[81] Mead explores this phenomenon through interaction with two types of others, particular and generalized. A clear example of the particular appears in connection with play, as a child takes on the role of a single other held at one time in their imaginary. Then, as they grow, this single role may start to derive from a collective idea. A child pretending to be a firefighter might start out with a particular person in mind, mimicking their specific actions, but as their examples expand, they collect general ideas and begin thinking in terms of what firefighters *do* rather that what a single exemplar *is*. In this way, the child creates a generalized other, interpreting the role based on categories associated with that role. When children begin creating these generalized categories of understanding, they show evidence of seeing larger systematic ideas. Thus, the generalized other is typically associated with the game stage because it requires the reasoning skills able to build groups and systematically intertwine them. The game does not center around the individual, but the individual fits themself into the game. Returning to our baseball example, the batter might engage the particular other at certain times, such as the pitcher, by anticipating the type of pitch. But to play the game, she must also be able to draw from categories of understanding which reflect a general other, the overall attitudes that the other players hold about her. The batter role-takes with the generalized other, anticipating a general reaction, regardless of the direction she hits the ball. She draws on general categories of the game to understand the orientation of all fielders toward the ball, their collective action in a strategic attempt to catch and throw that ball with the goal of getting her out. The individual batter fits herself into the game, recognizing the structure of the game itself and anticipating the activity of other participants. The batter holds the generalized other in tandem with her own self, drawing from categories she understands about the other, to shape her own active contribution to the game.

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[80] Mead*, Mind, Self, and Society,* 135–38.

[81] Mead, 195.

The self creates the generalized other by amalgamating information about the other until it crystalizes into general categories of understanding.[82] This developmental stage allows the self to expand into new worldviews and navigate wider systems with greater ease because it can encounter and hold more people within its imaginary, no longer limited by the particular other. However, it would be a mistake to surmise that the generalized other is a more developed version of the particular other. Turning to Gilligan's research again, she suggests that in comparing the types of relationships presented through game, Mead's generalized other is most apparent in games typically preferred by boys, promoting abstract human relationships. She compares this with girls, who typically prefer smaller, more relational patterns of play, developing "empathy and sensitivity necessary for taking the role of 'the particular other.'"[83] Here, game action invests more in knowing the other, as that knowledge contributes to differentiation of self. Gilligan's inclusion of the particular other in consideration of higher developed game play makes room for the ways the particular other can improve the role-taking model. Not only does it widen the model by emphasizing the use of the particular other in game, but it allows the particular other to interact with the generalized other. When the self invests in knowing the particular other, it reduces the possibility of harmful or fixed generalized categories for the other. Through particular relationship, the self recognizes the complexity in others, preventing flattened, general treatment. The self requires the ability to create the generalized other to navigate larger systems of communal belonging, but the particular other keeps the self grounded in complex relationship, refusing to let the other dissolve into abstraction.

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[82] Mead, 90.

Both particular and generalized others appear in worship. Worshipers both represent and carry particular others into worship within their own embodied selves. Their physical presence represents a particular standpoint as they engage in small group social action with others in the gathering. They carry in particular joys and concerns of their own, related to particular others they know from work, school, book club, and other social worlds represented in their lives. They potentially represent a particular other for worship leaders planning the service as they attempt to created relevant social action for worship. However, the liturgy also relies on the generalized other. Worship creates a shared imaginary space, gathering a diverse community into unified action. This requires drawing from shared categories of understanding to form a generalized other. The preacher does not typically speak to an audience of one, but works to create a sermon that resonates in multiplicity. Prayers may rise for particular people, but they are often accompanied with desires for large collectives, generalizing experiences to cover wide territories. Even action which utilizes the particular other, like personal confession or an individual response to an altar call, also contributes to generalized categories of repentance, commitment, and the overall generalized identity of the congregation. Worship participates in creating, perpetuating, and deconstructing categories for the other. This action connects the gathered individual selves in worship to others relationally in a charged way. When we look at how worship uses the particular other and the generalized other, we can analyze how liturgy creates this connection and how relationships are being developed. This developmental model will lay bare the categorization effects of social action and empower worship leaders to shape the relational direction into intended patterns that reflect God's own relationally Triune nature.

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[83] Gilligan, *In a Different Voice,* 11 .

The Object within the Social Act

The object is the third and final element needed for Mead's triadic social act. While objects do hold their own ontological position of discernable being, they do not carry inherent meaning. Objects gather collective meaning, generated through the surrounding relational schema. Thus, humans can live in very different worlds because the meaning of objects can vary from one social group to another. Blumer writes, "To identify and understand the life of a group it is necessary to identify its world of objects; this identification has to be in terms of the meanings objects have for the members of the group."[84] Any element which can be placed within the relational field has the potential to become an object. Blumer helpfully defines an object as "anything that can be indicated, anything that is pointed to or referred to—a cloud, a book, a legislature, a banker, a religious doctrine, a ghost, and so forth."[85] For worship this could be anything including a physical item, a doctrine, a symbol, and other beings. This includes the self, the particular other, and the generalized other discussed above. In one context, a person can be conversing with their mother, holding their mother's role in tandem with their own in order to connect. In a different context, that person could place their mother into an object position, talking about them to a friend. The object positionality is not inherently negative or degrading. Quite the opposite according to Mead, who argues that objectivity is the goal—a crucial ability where the self can become its own object by taking on the attitudes of others toward the self. One must be able to step outside themself to appropriately perceive themself, especially in relationship to the larger social systems to which the self belongs.[86] A fully developed self participates within the social matrix but can also step outside of it. The object simply acts as a point of meaning separate from the self but belonging to the same social environment.

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[84] Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism; Perspective and Method* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 69, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000000193.

[85] Blumer, 10.

Mead suggests that there are two types of objects: physical objects exist within the social framework but do not elicit a social response; social objects invite the individual into experience, connected to the self's own existence.[87] Blumer builds on Mead's ideas, but further delineates a third classification. His three include: physical objects, such as a table, a car, a tree, and an office building; social objects, such as a pastor, a friend, a colleague, and a judge; and abstract objects such as morals, confidence, victory, and belief.[88] This type of grouping enables us to see how an object functions within Mead's triad, but we must be cautious to not let categorization prevent the observer from working through potential multi-layered meaning. The most obvious example occurs in abstract objects, which present obvious complexity with porous boundaries where meaning making cannot be clearly delineated. Yet, physical and social objects also blur the lines as meaning moves through different social environments. A candle, for example, works as a physical object for candle artisans or those searching for a source of light after losing electricity. However, a candle exchanged as a gift between friends takes on new social dimensions. Even more, in worship a candle lit during worship in memory or in prayer takes on social and abstract tenors. Objects containing symbolic meaning automatically touch social or abstract categories as their meaning stretches beyond the immediate physicality of the object itself.

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[86] Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society,* 138.

[87] Mead, *The Philosophy of the Act,* 292.

[88] Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism; Perspective and Method,* 10–11.

The study of objects in connection to meaning and symbol in worship is not new.[89] However, by utilizing Mead's development theory to approach the study of objects and their meaning, it provides another approach to studying the object in the midst of social action. In this way we see objects as social creations within human environments. As Blumer notes, "The meaning of anything and everything has to be formed, learned, and transmitted through a process of indication—a process that is necessarily a social process."[90] Mead's claim of triadic meaning places the study of objects within the structure of the environment. For the study of worship, the meaning of the object can only be fully understood when considering the entire environment. Objects utilized in worship participate within a larger system of meaning making; this type of approach works to expose the network.

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[89] Elbatrina Clauteaux contends that the term *symbol* represents a polysemic symbol in itself. Used and defined through many disciplines from mathematic to linguistics to psychology to theology, symbol appears in variety of both context and meaning. Worship material reflects this wide range, as books and essays reach for the term to describe functions of meaning from the practical colors of vestments to the theological implications of imbibing eucharistic wine. This project's use of symbol resides close to Louis-Marie Chauvet's approach. Clauteaux, a student of Chauvet, argues that his work bridges the theological with the anthropological, moving our understanding of the symbolic nature of sacraments from an observable sign to a participant in reality. Symbols are not simply a product of our social system, but participate in them. This project will return to Chauvet's ideas about symbol in chapter four. See Elbatrina Clauteaux, "When Anthropologist Encounters Theologian: The Eagle and the Tortoise," in *Sacraments: Revelation of the Humanity of God: Engaging the Fundamental Theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet*, ed. Philippe Bordeyne and Bruce T. Morrill, 155–70 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008).

[90] Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism; Perspective and Method,* 11–12.

Embodied Imagination Space

The introduction touched on the importance of worship's whole kinesthetic poetic nature. Using Mead's developmental model, which does not discount the body but emphasizes the mind, requires considering the embodied imagination space a bit further in this context. Returning to Meredith McGuire's insight, we build this model understanding that both the fields of religious and sociological study have been impoverished through an epistemological tradition that bifurcates the self and the spirit from material things: "We have neatly divided our subdisciplines along the lines of this dualism: The 'mind/spirit part goes to the social scientists and the religious studies scholars, while the 'body' part (translated by some as 'really real') goes to the biologists and medical scientists."[91] Worship has struggled with this type of bifurcation, particularly with the Protestant claim that *faith* (translate belief held in the psyche) is all you need. But as McGuire contends, bodies are important because they shape the way we know the world. Bodies link us to the material realities of hunger, illness, pain, pollution, and more. They experience the aesthetic and the sensual. We identify ourselves with our bodies; our thoughts are active through our bodies. Even the language we use to communicate our thoughts must move through the formation of each vocalized syllable or gesture of our hand.[92] Holistic worship draws from an epistemology that bodies matter to us and to God, recognizing that the primary offering people carry into worship is themselves, as embodied beings. Acts of praise include the push of a diaphragm, to expel air from the lungs, through the pitched vibrations of vocal chords, given shape by the lips, to join in with the motion of hands or the steps of feet. Prayers rise before God for work concerns that directly connect to the callouses of the hands offering them. The scent of

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[91] Meredith B. McGuire, "Religion and the Body: Rematerializing the Human Body in the Social Sciences of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29, no. 3 (1990): 284–85, https://doi.org/10.2307/1386459.

[92] McGuire, 284.

Eucharist wine snips at the nose before its sharp taste reaches the tongue. Much needed comfort comes in a handshake or hug alongside a word of peace. People participate in worship as physical beings linked to embodied realities beyond the immediate moment.

For Mead to provide an appropriate theory to undergird any worship model, his work must make room for this embodied reality. The aspects we've already examined—language, role-taking, connection to the other, and meaning making around objects—represent key elements that typically have captured the interest of subsequent scholarship. This has led, as sociologist Ryan McVeigh notes, to an overemphasis on the interactive and interpretive elements of Mead's theory and an under-emphasis on the self and subjectivity. Cognitive aspects have taken precedent while the role of the body is consequentially minimized. However, McVeigh argues that Mead's social action does not represent a disembodied phenomenon. Rather, "the body is the primary vehicle through which society *becomes* the type of social interaction that matters."[93] Thus far we have examined the factors important for the imagination work required for joining into social action, but Mead also acknowledges the importance of our physicality. Aspects of physical realities weave throughout Mead's work in regard to both the individual organism and its surrounding environment. He constantly denotes the person's physical representation through the term "organism" and the mind through "central nervous system." These two facets interweave with one another to create social action. Mead uses the metaphor of an engineer working in an office with blueprints and designs. The engineer acts as the central nervous system, coordinating action in the creation of a product. However, the people in the factories, who work with the material, signal back to the engineer problems and successes, informing the engineer about the tangible creation activity.[94] For Mead, the body provides connection and information for the central nervous system as the primary point of contact within the environment.

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[93] Ryan McVeigh, "The Body in Mind: Mead's Embodied Cognition," *Symbolic Interaction* 43, no. 3 (2020): 494, https://doi.org/10.1002/symb.476. Emphasis original.

McVeigh outlines three ways embodiment presents a vital component of Mead's work. First, he argues that Mead creates an organism-environment dyad. Strongly influenced by Darwin's naturalism, Mead presents the organism and the environment as mutually dependent upon one another. The organism cannot not come to understand itself in a vacuum; however the environment relies on embodied beings for its own existence. Mead acknowledges the human biological impulses, but our distinguishing characteristic is the ability to circumvent or counteract these impulses through internal thought processes, differentiating us from lower organisms. Therefore, even with the interdependence of organism and environment, the organism has the potential to respond and shape its own action and environment. Second, McVeigh presents the centrality of perception. As a social pragmatist, Mead emphasizes the use of sensory organs to receive and filter information, rendering our perception dependent on the physiological attributes of the organism.[95] Finally, McVeigh argues that embodiment appears in Mead's theory through contact experience. He writes, "perceived objects only represent a *hypothetical* reality, the validity and proof of which always requires (or at least implies) physical contact with an organism."[96] For Mead, physical contact provides the final test of reality. These aspects of embodiment provide necessary elements for a worship model because they not only ground imaginative action in physiological reality, but acknowledge that the body participates in generating meaning. Our physical selves do not simply function as receptors, but actively participate in the construction of the self and its surrounding interdependent environment.

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[94] Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society,* 128.

[95] McVeigh, "The Body in Mind", 498–502.

[96] McVeigh, 503.

McGuire usefully builds a similar argument through a sociological approach to ritual. She argues that our senses not only participate in generating meaning, but are also socially given meaning. The memory, she suggests, is not solely located in the brain, which is a predominant theme in Western thinking, but is connected to our whole body. As such, our bodies have embedded learned senses, like the sense of disgust. She explains,

> Each culture imbues the body with numerous meanings which serve as both maps and repertoires for individual experience and expression. This meaning, however, is not merely a cognitive or symbolic overlay. Rather, comparable to how the music of an *étude* becomes part of the "ways of the hand" (Sudnow, 1978) through ritual practice, social meanings become physically embodied.[97]

Through ritual physical engagement, the self creates an embodied memory which both reflects and contributes to the social environment. This interplay between self and environment explains why similarly believing congregations may worship very differently based on how their belief manifests within different physiological realities. The "worship wars" of the 1980s and 1990s in white Protestant churches provide a helpful example. Church congregations fought and even divided over *sensed* differences in worship. Parishioners still shared the same beliefs, but some desired a different "feel" for worship. The influence of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) and the inception of mega-church ministry created archetypes of a new, competitive style of worship. Many smaller congregations concluded that the sheer numbers provided proof of the allure found in the intentionally emotive and entertaining liturgical elements. They similarly fought to change the "feel" of their services with a desire that numbers would follow. Churches paid minimal attention to changes in belief structure as they contended with the embodied experience of its members. However, as both Mead and McGuire point out, ritual affects both the embodied reality and the belief structure as interconnected aspects of being. In working to create a new feeling in the worship experience, these churches inevitably affected belief structures.[98] Any serious worship model must take this interconnected reality of embodied belief into account as shifts in either environment or imaginative paradigm inevitably affect the other within the whole.

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[97] Meredith B. McGuire, "Individual Sensory Experiences, Socialized Senses, and Everyday Lived Religion in Practice," *Social Compass* 63, no. 2 (2016): 155, https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768616628789.

Social Action in Observable Units

To this point we have discussed the different elements involved in creating social action toward the development of self. However, the term social action is general and requires refinement to create observable units of social action for methodological application. The first step involves sorting social action from reflexive action. Blumer reasons that reflex responses are interactions which take place without interpretation.[99] This does not include action that appears reflexive but holds instinctive or subconscious interpretation. For example, instantly pulling your hand back from a hot stove reveals reflexive behavior. The direct interaction with a hot object did not require an interpretive framework for instincts of self-preservation to take over. Comparatively, instantly cringing away from a raised fist also quickly draws from self-preservation, but requires some type of interpretative framework to understand. The action may seem reflexive, but the self instantaneously processes the raised fist as a certain type of gesture.

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[98] Follow-up surveys with mega-church ministry in particular reveal flagging data regarding discipleship and other spiritual markers which push back arguing for stronger numbers. More research specifically connecting liturgical decisions to spiritual markers in the church still needs to be done, but some initial projects on the "attractional model" of church ministry indicate correlation changes that support McGuire's embodied belief claims. For some examples see: Gregory A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services: Evaluating a New Way of Doing Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995); Kent Carlson and Mike Leuken, *Renovation of the Church: What Happens When a Seeker Church Discovers Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011); James K. Wellman, Katie E. Corcoran, and Kate Stockly-Meyerdirk. "'God Is Like a Drug…': Explaining Interaction Ritual Chains in American Megachurches," *Sociological Forum (Randolph, N.J.)* 29.3 (2014): 650–72; and George Sanders, "Religious Non-Places: Corporate Megachurches and Their Contributions to Consumer Capitalism," *Critical Sociology* 42.1 (2016): 71–86.

[99] Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism; Perspective and Method,* 8.

Although it is necessary to delineate between reflexive and social action, the majority of the self's action requires an interpretive framework which results in social action. Mead explains social action in broad terms, writing:

> The unit of existence is the act, not the moment. And the act stretches beyond the stimulus to the response. While most of our acts stretch into the world that does not yet exist, they inevitably include immediate steps which lie within the existent world, and the synchronizing, with recorded elements in some uniform process of change, or attitudes in the act by means of the indication of these to the self, affords the only approach to the definition of the span of existence.[100]

Social action exists beyond the impetus contained in the individual, extending into the world in responsive connection with others. This stretches social action beyond the temporal and physical. The span of the act relies on memory to build anticipation for the future to impact the present action of the self. Social action does not treat these different elements as static or successive, but brings them together into a unit. Social action in role-taking requires the self to draw on past experiences that have shaped understanding to reach out to the other, already anticipating their future response. The material of the past combines with future expectation, two sides of the same coin, to affect the present action of the self. These qualities of Mead's social act resonate with worship's own anamnetic qualities, that is, where memory of the past stretches into a future hope to edify and direct the present moment.

Mead's existential description of social action helpfully reveals connectivity between his model and worship, and gives insights into the dynamics of social action, but leaves the actual observable structures wide and undefined. Bruce Biddle and his foundational text, *Role Theory,* provide a path for narrowing such broad application. Biddle primarily focuses on behavior, but he delineates three beneficial approaches to empirical study of elements that are primarily existential.[101] First, he contends that we need to establish the aspects we intend to study. For preachers, "sermons" do not provide a sufficient unit of study. Rather, they must decide what aspects of sermons to study, creating an observable unit. Perhaps the unit is a single sermon, examined for specific roles the congregation is invited to take. Studying social action requires narrowing the field of study, not necessarily the material. A preacher could examine a decade worth of sermons, with the narrow focus on the social action around a common object of a particular theological doctrine. The anamnetic qualities of worship stretch the material beyond the physical and temporal. As a result, any developmental model requires a narrowing focus, scaling into intentional units for study.

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[100] Mead, *The Philosophy of the Act,* 66.

The second element of Biddle's approach offers a reminder that no unit operates as a discrete entity. All social action is interconnected. Worship leaders may narrowly create an observable unit by looking at the social action around reference to humanity in song, but the categories of reference are connected to other elements of the liturgy, church life, and other worldly spheres. Congregational song may continually reflect God's nearness inviting role-taking action rooted in welcome. However, if these songs are surrounded by liturgical elements reflecting God's distance, drawing from memory images of holy fear, then the narrow study of song does not reveal the whole picture. This reality should not discourage us from creating observable units, but should curb any tendency toward concrete conclusions based on a single unit of study. Positively, this type of focused study within an interconnective framework can reveal insights into areas of dysfunction. If the social action of song life does not reflect the other aspects of worship, church action, or the wider social lives of congregant, it leads worship leaders to consider how congregants are creating frameworks of reason to resolve the dissonance. Narrow study is necessary for creating observable units of social action, but we must remember that social action in worship has an anamnetic quality. All action arises out of memory with future anticipation, linking the present action with numerous realities beyond it. We study the present social action, not in fear of these interconnected realities, but with the desire to know them better.

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[101] Bruce J. Biddle, *Role Theory: Expectations, Identities and Behaviors* (New York: Academic Press, [1979] 2013), 26.

Finally, Biddle contends that we must recognize our own positionality in relationship to what we are studying. He writes, "an action may be described as hostile, or motivated, but if we make such a judgment we are also implying something about the covert processes that lie behind the action. Again, to judge a behavior as deviant or creative suggests that we share a standard against which such a judgment can be made."[102] Even in the creation of units of study, we reveal our own partiality. This bias does not negatively mar our study. Feminist scholars have long argued that the modernist claims of neutral, empirical study are impossible. Rather, in naming our motivation, we trade fake impartiality for honesty which enables us to navigate our potential bias rather than be duped by it navigating under the guise of neutrality. When we create units to study, we do so in the search of particular answers. Our aims after beginning this study may, and likely should, diminish, so that we do not sway the results which may be surprising and even completely counteract our initial aim. Yet the first step into inquiry comes from our own socially active place. A liturgist who wants to be more inclusive in their prayers can study the objects of social action in their intercessions to see how and where they can expand. A pastor who wants to explore how they act as an intermediary between God and the congregation in times of confession does so with a desire to align closer with the congregation by emphasizing their own confessional need. Embracing our initial bias drives us deeper into study through honest inquiry. Creating a model for analyzing and constructing worship requires parameters for study. Biddle's markers help us create these parameters as we sort social action into observable units.

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[102] Biddle, 26.

Expansion on Mead's Model

Mead's theory created significant shift in psychological scholarship which not only contributed to the development of a new sociological field, but also had other, interdisciplinary ramifications. Yet, as in any major shift, more voices are required to fill out the picture. One such voice relevant for this project is developmental psychologist John H. Flavell, who used Mead's role-taking in his own research on childhood cognitive development. He reveals several crucial aspects of role-taking that one cannot draw adequately from Mead. First, while Mead does acknowledge differentiation, he does not make room "for role-taking and communication *difficulties and errors* in the individual performing these acts, and hence does not really deal with the developmental process by which the difficulties are gradually surmounted and the errors gradually diminished."[103] As a result, Flavell contends that Mead's theory generates concepts of sameness among individuals. The second concern regards the skills required in role-taking. Mead describes role-taking in depth but never addressed how one acquires the ability to discern the other's qualities to the point of taking on a role.[104] To fill in these gaps, Flavell turns to the neighboring psychological scholarship of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, and the subsequent scholarship of Eleanor E. Maccoby. According to Flavell, Piaget's work in egocentrism provides insight into the potential communicative disconnect that might occur in role-taking. Egocentrism causes disconnect for a child in taking the role of an other, making the child a “prisoner” of their own point of view. This results in two deficiencies: an *insensitivity* to understand another’s attributes; and an *inability* to understand another’s attributes due to a lack of perceptual, cognitive, and/or linguistic skills.[105] While egocentrism is not the only limiting factor in role-taking, Flavell asserts that Piaget persuasively provides evidence that a generalized egocentrism plays a vital part in a child’s self-coding of communication material, creating distance. Flavell widens the gulf around the speaker by incorporating Vygotsky’s research on external communication in connection to *inner speech.* In early childhood, private and public communication hold no significant differentiation, but as the child develops the two functions diverge. Social communication remains directed outward and becomes more complex. Private speech similarly grows more complex, but it also becomes more covert, abbreviated, and condensed. The inner dialogue with the self often drops the subject and sometimes more. “Thus, the inner-verbal expression of ‘I guess I’ll go there tomorrow’ might be ‘go tomorrow’ or simply ‘tomorrow’; since the subject of the action is already understood…”[106] In addition, inner speech is extremely saturated with meaning. A person can find themself falling short of words to communicate outwardly what they know inwardly. This is more than a linguistic translation from self to others, “It is a complex, dynamic process involving the transformation of the predicative, idiomatic structure of inner speech into syntactically articulate speech intelligible to others.”[107] As a result, communication requires more effort for a person to communicate outwardly what they hold internally. While Piaget and Vygotsky helpfully dissect that which contributes to the break-down in role-taking, Flavell turns to Maccoby to consider how we acquire role-taking behavior. Her research proposes that children acquire such skills by covertly imitating the actions characteristic of the adults in their lives. Not all learned behavior is expressed immediately, but some will remain latent until a situation requires it, such as discipline. She provides the example of a child imitating their parent's actions years later when they have reached adulthood and have children of their own. These actions are not simply for communication to others, but are used reflectively for learning in private rehearsal.[108]

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[103] John H. Flavell, *The Development of Role-Taking and Communication Skills in Children* (New York: Robert E. Krieger Publishing, 1968), 15.

[104] Flavell, 16.

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[105] Flavell, 18–19.

[106] Flavell, 20.

[107] Flavell, 21. Cited from Lev Vygotsky, *Thought and Language* (New York: M.I.T. Press and Wiley, 1962), 148.

Flavell's gathering of scholarship connected to Mead's role-taking proved fruitful as following scholars built on his claims. One such psychologist, Robert Selman, proposes a *social-cognitive* model based on Mead, Piaget, and Lawrence Kohlberg. This model subscribes to Meadian assumptions around role-taking to consider the changes and dynamics that occur *between* people, but also consider the egocentric impediments to social action which occur *within* people.[109] Through his qualitative research, Selman constructed a structural description for different levels of development. Each level connects role-taking ability (as represented by the first title of the level) with perspective ability (as represented by the second title of each level). Selman's different levels, along with his titles and age ranges are summarized here:[110]

- Level 0—Undifferentiated and Egocentric Perspective Taking (about ages 3 to 6): The self cannot clearly differentiate between the physicality and psychology of others and thus the self only differentiates physically. It does not understand that others hold different perspectives and thus cannot recognize other perspectives.

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[108] Flavell, 22–23.

[109] Robert L. Selman, *The Growth of Interpersonal Understanding: Developmental and Clinical Analyses*, Developmental Psychology Series (New York, NY: Academic Press, 1980), 33–36.

[110] Full descriptions of the different levels can be found in Selman, 37–40.

- Level 1—Differentiated and Subjective Perspective Taking (about ages 5 to 9): The self can now differentiate the physical being and the psychological perspective of others, recognizing that each person has a unique perspective, yet their subjectivity is still considered only in unilateral terms.
- Level 2—Self-reflective/Second–person and Reciprocal Perspective Taking (about ages 7 to 12): The self gains the ability to take a reflective posture, stepping outside itself, and recognizes that others have the same ability, realizing that others can similarly have multiple feeling states and that another's inner feelings may not be reflected in their behavior. The self participates in full reciprocity with the other, but is still fairly isolated, still seeing two individuals rather than a system of belonging, the differences of perspectives still tied to the individual.
- Level 3—Third-person and Mutual Perspective Taking (about ages 10 to 15): The self can now step outside of the system, seeing the relationship between the self and other, coordinating reciprocal perspectives and relations within an ongoing system in which thoughts and experiences are shared.
- Level 4—In-depth and Societal-Symbolic Perspective Taking (about ages 12 to Adult): The self recognizes its own personality with beliefs, values, and attitudes, understanding that each person similarly holds a subjective position. The inner workings of each person are complex and the complexities cannot necessarily be understood, even in self-reflection. Mutuality in perspective taking deepens beyond common expectations or awareness as the self can hold multiple "generalized others" to consider the multidimensional levels of communication.

Selman's model clearly outlines developmental stages that merge Mead's role-taking theory with the inner workings of the ego. Mead's concern with the inner self focuses on the inner dialogue that contributes to development. Selman merges this with the potential isolating action of the ego which inhibits the social action that Mead proposes.

Selman's model provides insight for worship, despite representing a schema for individual development, because it highlights the attributes of isolation that can occur even when participating in active role-taking. Worship may be formed and led by fully developed individuals. However, participation in a system can devolve an individual through what Mead calls *mob mentality*. While role-taking promotes an interrelation of individuals that promotes greater understanding of the particular self and other, it can have the opposite effect.[111] Individual particularity becomes repressed when the self begins to primarily identify with the speaker, the crowd, the ideal, or the organization.[112] This occurs in a variety of ways, scaling both in size, influence, and toxicity. A persuasive speaker can sweep an entire crowd into full identification with them, where the listener disappears into a general crowd caught up into the one they are listening to. A patriotic individual can devolve into full identification with country and the perceived ideals associated with it. Organizations degrade from complex interrelational systems to monolithic herds and individuals within them act from the degraded state of being. In worship, we must consider how individuals are functioning as selves. Are they developing as a differentiated self within multifaceted interrelationships? Or, are they caught up in the ethos of a preacher, an emotional effect of a song, or a doctrinal ideal to the point that they unhelpfully lose themself to fully identify with the elsewhere? Selman's model provides guiding parameters for how the individual functions within worship, but also how worship promotes the health of the individual. Does the organization of worship generally encourage mutual differentiation, or does the impetus sway toward a devolving individual?

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[111] Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society,* 218.

[112] Mead, 253.

These critical additions are vital for worship's diverse community Ideally, worship provides a place where we name our differences, we embrace them, and grow through them. In worship we participate in a relational space that engages with numerous interconnected social undercurrents as people from all avenues of life come together to embrace in love, drawn together around the common magnetic force of Christ. Mead's idealistic role-taking can outline how this type of community can thrive, synergistically developing relationship with one another, joined in communication that empowers all participants. Flavell's concerns remove some of Mead's idealism to ground this model in reality and reminds us to proceed with both hope and humility. The diversity represented in worship guarantees that errors will occur in role-taking. The excess of meaning in personal religious experience guarantees that we will engage elements beyond our communicative ability. This does not preclude us from role-taking, as if this were possible, but it frames a role-taking model with honest application, recognizing that role-taking requires practice, the expectation of errors, and a willingness to change.

Coorientation

I have to this point outlined seven key items within Meadian theory that I find relevant for this project as well as follow-up critical expansion. The final aspect of development theory that I want to present acts as a capstone piece, through which all these other elements will flow: coorientation. Social psychologist Theodore Newcomb first presented this term in his paper “An Approach to the Study of Communicative Acts,” where he explores how role-taking functions in a group around a subject. He brings social behaviors typically studied as interactions into the realm of communicative action in order to examine the equilibrium of social behavior (see Figure 1, which appears in Newcomb’s essay).[113] Every communicative act, in its simplest form, is one person (A) transmitting information to another person (B) around a subject (X). Newcomb presents the system as a whole and outlines the layers of role-taking occurring in communication, represented in this diagram.[114] When (A) communicates with (B), she meets him at multiple access points, as represented by the dotted lines. She participates in role-taking action to see herself through his perspective, to see X through his perspective, and to see him through what she perceives is his own self-knowledge. She does this while also simultaneously holding her own role and relationship to self, object, and other, as represented by the solid lines. (A) utilizes language within this framework to orient

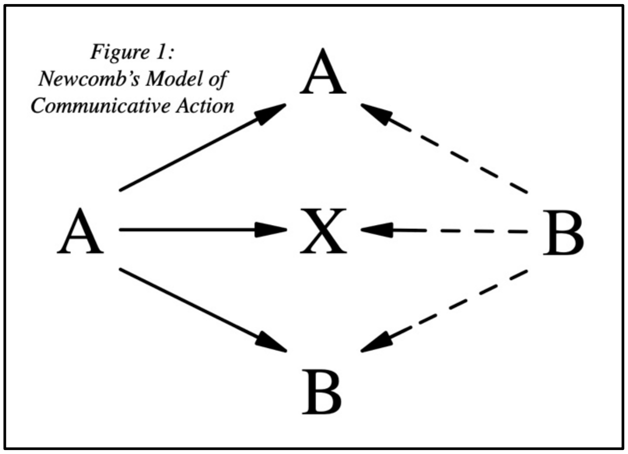
Figure 1: Newcomb’s Model of Communicative Action

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[113] Theodore Newcomb does not expressly cite G. H. Mead or Herbert Blumer in “An Approach to the Study of Communicative Acts,” *Psychological Review* 60, no. 6 (1953): 394–404. Yet, his method is clearly influenced by Mead and his use of the term *interaction* mimics Blumer’s subsequent work under the heading “Symbolic Interactionism.” Donald Capps connects Newcomb and coorientation to Mead in “The Psychology of Petitionary Prayer.” *Theology Today* 39, no. 2 (July 1982): 130–41.

[114] Newcomb, 401.

herself with (B) around (X). The difference between the arrow lines demonstrate that (A)'s role-taking of (B)'s perspective may or may not mimic her own orientation to the object as she perceives (B)'s role. Newcomb uses the term co-orientation (his hyphenation use) to describe this relational system as communication attempts to raise similar attitudes in all participants, similarly orienting them around the object. He contends that most, if not all objects are influenced by other's orientations and as such, all our role-taking orientation is interdependent.[115] Newcomb mimics Mead's emphasis on language, contending that communication provides the most common, direct, and effective means by which a person can orient themselves toward the objects and others within their environment.

Newcomb's coorientation proposal helpfully provides a functional model for Mead's theory to examine the wider scope of activity within worship. He brings role-taking into community, allowing the model to consider both the function of the system and the participation of the individual within that system. While his paper still focuses on a small system, (A) communicating with (B) about (X), it easily expands to group application, as it considers how participants orient around a subject. Here we can insert everything which contributes to social action within worship: worship leaders, worshipers (both immediate and separate), non-worshiping others, symbols, and objects. We can also incorporate the activity of God into the model and consider how our perception of the Holy Other shapes social activity. A coorientation model provides insight into both the system and the individual components which contribute to it. In reference to worship, this enables us to be concerned with both the edification of the individual and a concern with the health of the body, both the church local, global, and universal.

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[115] Newcomb, 401.

The interdependence of this system also indicates how social systems evolve. Coorientation presumes that change in one part of the system will ripple out and effect perception throughout the rest of the environment. Newcomb calls this the symmetry of orientation, evaluating how (A) and (B) are oriented toward the object (X) and whether they are relationally similar or dissimilar. While coorientation can occur among dissimilar attitudes, it typically strains toward symmetry as balance is socially rewarded. The force of the strain correlates to (A)'s attitude toward both (X) and (B). The stronger the bond, attraction, or assertion, the greater the pressure into symmetry.[116] This leads to fruitful analysis questions when applying this model: Where does the pressure to conform occur? What does symmetry in the analyzed relationship validate? How does change in a system occur? Who or what needs to change within a social environment to shift the pressure for symmetry into another direction?

Theodore Newcomb's communication model of coorientation has been taken up and explored through multiple disciplines, including practical theologians. John McClure and Donald Capps have each written about these aspects in connection to petitionary prayer, both scaling role-taking out from individual development into relational coorientation. Capps focuses on the relationship between the petitioner and God. He suggests that modern interpretations of what occurs in prayer often get bogged down in a clash of wills, between God's will and ours. If we believe that God's action changes in deference to our petitions supported by an unwillingness to stop asking, then a great deal of theology must be created around a fickle Holy Other. If God holds an unchangeable will, then our petitions are useless and a great deal of theology must be

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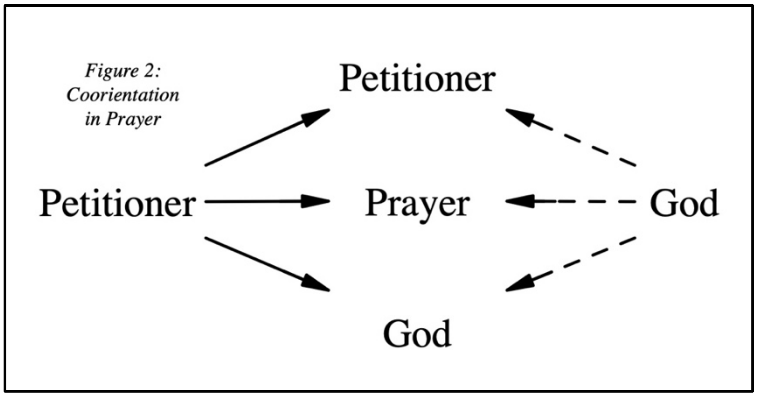
[116] Newcomb, 395–96.



created around our helplessness. Capps utilizes coorientation to resolve this tension. Rather than a battle of wills, Capps suggest that we look at prayer as a communicative transaction (illustrated in Figure 2).[117] When we look at the social action of prayer, the wills of (A) and (B) become a part of a larger relational system. As we pray, we utilize role-taking to anticipate God's view of the object—the prayer itself. We see ourselves as God sees us. We see the object as God sees it. We see God as we perceive God to be. The difficulty of this system resides in our anticipatory view of God as we role-take with a Holy Other. Capps suggests that we have multiple sources within our social worlds which orient us toward God and shape our perception. We identify with others in our world and our religious heritage where God has acted, trusting that God will act similarly toward us.[118] Our sacred texts, historic heritage, and current social connections and experiences all provide access points that allow us to habituate with God and form paradigmatic understanding of a Holy Other who typically communicates through indirect means. Thus, when we pray, we coorient with God, whom we have come to know through patterns of belief, revealing God's character to us. As such, prayer ceases to be a battle of wills, submission no longer the aim. Rather, prayer becomes an activity where we gather with God around a subject, anticipating God’s response.[119] We seek symmetry with God’s will, creating a relational balance, the pressure of that balance correlated to our attitude toward God.

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[117] Capps, 134.

[118] Capps, 139.

Capps’ use of coorientation in worship reveals how a model for prayer can resolve theological tension on a vertical axis in our conversation with God. McClure builds on Capps ideas and expands it to also include the horizontal, intersubjective relationships. His use of coorientation within prayer fits into a larger project that explores the ethical dimensions of liturgy. In considering the action of prayer, he wonders how a collective “we” can make sweeping normative statements in a way that considers all the varied perspectives related to such claims, including past, present, and future concerns. McClure uses intercessory coorientation as a model that provides “a rich semantic field of biblical images of God, anamnesis of the history of the world’s suffering, and an eschatological hope that requires the consultation of future generations who might also potentially suffer from the truth claims being ventured.”[120] Through this lens, a coorientation system allows humanity to come before God together as equal listeners and speaking partners, informed by one another. In this relationship system, petitioners not only see the other, but see the other through God’s eyes. This moves beyond empathy into petitionary compassion that fits the suffering of one into a larger worldview.[121]

We could carry McClure’s ethical trajectory farther when considering it within Newcomb’s communication model (see Figure 3). The pray-er (A) does not simply cognitively understand and empathize with another, placing them into the object (X) position before God

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[119] Capps, 137–38.

[120] John S. McClure, *Speaking Together and with God: Liturgy and Communicative Ethics* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018), 76.

[121] McClure, 76–79.

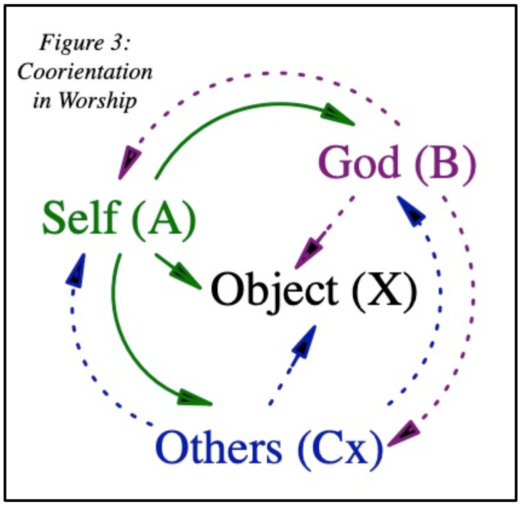

Figure 3: Coorientation in Worship

(B). Rather, the pray-er (A) coorients with another (C) as well as with God (B) around a shared object (X). This expanded communication model merges with Mead's game model.[122] When a baseball player hits the ball out into left field, they anticipate the reaction and processes of all participants on the field alongside their own. Likewise, in worship, the players within this model may shift, but the social action remains constant. The preacher (A) uses illustrations (X) that both reflect truth about God (B) and resonate in the listener's ear (C_x). The organist (A), knowing that the tune (X) is unfamiliar for those gathered (C_x), simply plays the melody line as introduction to congregational song. The worshiper (A), raises their hands to physically posture themself in praise (X) before God (B), despite being in a congregational setting (C_x) that does not typically participate in the practice. Coorientation exists as a communicative reality throughout the many different facets of worship. Utilizing this model lays bare the particularities of the embodied imagination space because it examines how worship uses language and gesture to orient all participants within social activity.

However, we also need to confront two key issues that arise when utilizing it as a tool in this context. The first is categorization. Coorientation relies on (A) utilizing the generalized other, as described above, in the creation of social action. How (A) takes on the role for (B) and (C_x) relies on how they draw upon the different categories they form around others. These pragmatics presume the influence of social structures, which come fraught with inconsistency, inaccuracy, and power disparity. Chapter two will address this problem within the coorientation model by listening to voices typically marginalized by hard category divisions. Through their correction, I contend that coorientation can participate in softening the boundaries of categories it draws from to enable fluid movement and create greater possibility for inclusion. This will increase the efficacy of a coorientation model by incorporating questions of power, care, and appropriation in connection to a goal of diversity in relationships.

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[122] This expansion of Newcomb's model to include both God (B) and multiple others (C_x) also simplifies the interior self reflection represented in his diagram where (A) has a self referential line and considers how B also has the ability to consider themself. As I have outlined through Mead, Selman, and others above, the ability to view the self in a second and third person perspective represents an important developmental step present in role-taking activity occurring in coorientation. This ability is difficult to convey in a model that includes multiple parties. Thus, to simplify the model to highlight the group action, each element only has one reference in the figure, representing both the actual being and their self-referential abilities.

The second issue in utilizing a coorientation model to examine worship regards phenomenology. A theology of God as relational actor undergirds most of North American Christian worship; a Holy Other, a being in Their own right, who listens to prayers, who engages hearts, who speaks through liturgical elements like scripture. However, Mead's developmental model represents a social constructivist approach, presuming preexisting social structures which shape self development. If we understand God through social means, then how do we know that God does not simply exist as a social construction? Chapter three will strike an equilibrium between both perspectives: God as Holy Other as well as God who reveals Themself through social construction. The next two chapters will further hone the coorientation model by addressing these categorical and phenomenological issues in recognition that worship is not naïve, but participates in flawed systems.

A coorientation model with Meadian roots explores worship as whole system without losing sight of the individual shaped and edified by it. Examining the social action of worship through this communicative and developmental lens not only leads to fruitful analysis, but also provides insight for strategically creating coorientation spaces in worship to positively shape imaginative paradigms and dive into relational purpose. Thus, with a strategic practical theology of coorientation, worship leaders can empower worshipers with personal edification and encourage them to live into the *imago Dei*, participating in community relationality that reflects God's own Triune self.

Conclusion

By bringing a coorientation model into worship, we can use Mead's developmental theory to examine the social force which moves through worship and channel it in a positive transformational trajectory along the relational lines that connect self, others, and God. In the days before the Christmas Truce of 1914, soldiers cooriented with the others in trenches across the field around the common objects of *battle* and *war*. The roles they took on within their imaginary was that of *enemy,* grounded in fear, opposition, and even hatred. These roles incited and enabled action around the death of the other. However, when the tones of "Silent night, holy night" wafted into no man's land between the trenches, it forced the common object of battle to the side and put a new object, a carol, in its place. This shifted the *game* they were participating in from war to worship as the social actors shifted from enemies to siblings united in Christ, singing next to one another in trenches as church pews, gathered around a manger held in a collective imagination space. The power of this coorientative action was so strong, it shifted relational paradigms. Many soldiers could no longer return to past social action moving toward death; they could not orient themselves around the common object of battle. The paradigms shifted to such a degree that caroling was forbidden in years to come. This is the power of coorientation: empowering one-time enemies to connect in a way that shifted self understanding and community reality, ultimately moving toward a better reflection of our humanity reflected in God's own relational Triune nature.

Chapter 2

Getting at the Root: Exploring Categorization in Coorientation

At the age of five I decided to be a preacher. I made the announcement one Sunday afternoon as my family gathered in my grandparent's living room for a cup of tea. Although I was very sure of my future, I slowly forgot it, burying it as I grew. Maybe it was because my family chuckled at my proclamation. Maybe it was because I was automatically assigned to help out in the nursery but my brothers never were. Maybe it was because my voice was constantly interrupted and dismissed in church classrooms, clubs, and teams. Maybe it was because I never saw a woman preacher or elder or deacon. Maybe I eventually concluded that girls were not allowed to be ministry leaders. Girls are not preachers. Years later, when I finally met a female pastor, my call to ministry resurfaced. She mentored me through a painful but liberating process of unlearning the theology that rejected my calling. She helped me see how the categories of belonging that my home church had directly and indirectly named were not God-ordained. With her help and with her example, I remembered the desire of my five-year-old heart to be a preacher.

Feminist theologian Sallie McFague writes, "Theological constructions are 'houses' to live in for a while, with windows partly open and doors ajar; they become prisons when they no longer allow us to come and go, to add a room or take one away—or if necessary, to move out and build a new house."[123] Our developed selves dwell within socially constructed theological homes we co-create with our communities. Worship both engages and contributes to the design of this house: it works within the existing structural categories to open windows, move walls, add rooms, change furniture, and brush on paint for a whole new color. It leads us in wandering through these rooms together, but can also harmfully lock us into or out of rooms.[124] Coorientation reveals these theological rooms by examining the social structures we use to frame worship. It enables us to contemplate limiting or problematic categories which turn a home into a prison or a room into a cell, and it shows us how to intentionally work within categories to adjust the structures of our practical theological home to enable all people to thrive.

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[123] Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 27.

Several years ago, I heard a pastor preach a sermon on authority. I found it difficult to listen to his sermon, feeling disconnected from him and from everyone around me. Was everyone accepting what he was saying? Was I the only one who was having a problem? He approached authority like a divine ladder, placing men above women, ordained men above the congregation, and ordained men just one rung down from God. In the moment I knew my discomfort came from disagreement, but reflecting on that experience now within a coorientation framework, I can see the categorical dissonance which occurred. The pastor placed the theological theme of authority into the object position and worked to coorient the congregation around it. He mistakenly drew from categories of presumed submission role-taking with the listener. The categories I had worked hard to unlearn were the theological walls I tore down. He was attempting to reconstruct them while I refused to pick up the hammer. My refusal meant that I disengaged from the coorientative action of worship. I could not approach the object. I felt disconnected from the communicative action. The congregation oriented themselves around the presented object, and through the social action of his preaching, he guided the congregation into a theological room, leaving me standing outside the door. He anticipated a certain categorical perspective of the congregation, one which (unintentionally) excluded me and ultimately separated me from the community he was addressing.

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[124] Worship is not the only contributing factor to this type of theological construction. Christian education, familial instruction, personal piety, media technology, and many other social constructions contribute to the dynamics of category creation discussed in this chapter. Worship, as the focus of this project, acts in conjunction with these and through the nature of interconnectivity can send reverberations into these other areas. The hidden theological structures of worship likely reflect hidden structures elsewhere. The intentional engagement of these structures in worship will hopefully influence the hidden structures in other avenues of life.

As a model, coorientation can enable the intentional worship leader to see how categorization functions within worship's social action because its base action of role-taking relies on paradigmatic understanding formed by the self through earlier social-relational experiences. This forces the leader to reflect with questions like: What am I presuming about worshipers? What barriers might I be asking them to overcome to join my presentation of this object? Who might we be excluding through a particular orientation around this object? Questions like these delve into undercurrents of our presumptions about the other to challenge our categories and increase the efficacy of our role-taking action. Categorization enables the self to participate in relationships but can also limit the self, others, and social action through narrow or concrete boundaries that potentially traumatize others and diminish the self. However, reflecting on categorization and its developmental influence can also provide avenues for the intentional leader to shape social action toward reforming categories in a way that then creates positive paradigms for all human flourishing. Coorientation works at the foundation of worship construction.

Thus, it is important that a coorientation model for worship aligns with a feminist approach, one concerned with the creation and continuing evolution of knowledge categories. In their survey of the types of feminist theories pertaining to developmental science, Sue Rosser and Patricia Miller outline differences between a variety of feminist approaches. On the one end of the range, liberal feminism simply advocates for research free from gender bias. These approaches work on the visible level of discrepancy, such as finding more balanced samples, addressing the biases and barriers which exist against women. The other end includes radical and postmodern feminism, which deconstructs systems with the presumption that gender oppression's far reach mars every aspect of constructing knowledge. Change here occurs in the formative structures, suspicious of the very categories of knowledge and behavior as patriarchal.[125]

Initial feminist approaches in worship scholarship have worked through a similar variety of stages. Liturgical scholar Teresa Berger outlines a trajectory in her historical account of *Women's Ways of Worship*. The initial steps of the Twentieth Century Women's Liturgical Movement[126] reflects the liberal feminist approach by working to fix women's invisibility within liturgies. The solution to female absence was inclusion, both in leadership and language. These attempts at change met varying responses, revealing that simply adding women to the existing structures was insufficient for the desired changes by feminist liturgists.[127] The next step feminists took in this movement was to create liturgies which placed women's experience at the center: "These liturgies do not attempt to start with the traditional liturgy and add women where possible. Their starting point is the (liturgical) flourishing and well-being of women themselves…Clear alternatives to 'Man's Liturgy' as a whole…"[128] While this move in feminist liturgical scholarship begins to address deeper structures, its creation of an alternative liturgy ties itself to traditional liturgy through a problematic binary. The "women's liturgy" may have attempted to center women's experiences, but was still determined by traditional "male" liturgy through rejection.

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[125] Sue V. Rosser and Patricia H. Miller, "Feminist Theories: Implications for Development Psychology," in *Toward a Feminist Developmental Psychology*, ed. Patricia H. Miller and Ellin Kofsky Scholnick (New York: Routledge, 2000), 11–28.

[126] This movement finds connectivity in Second Wave Feminism and the Liturgical Renewal Movement around 1960-80.

[127] Teresa Berger, *Women's Ways of Worship: Gender Analysis and Liturgical History* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 116–21.

[128] Berger, 121.

In subsequent writing Berger continues to trace these movements, suggesting that the growing complexities in feminist theory and the emergence of gender theory generate a new vibrancy of "perspectives and interpretive strategies."[129] Applying this specifically to historiography, she argues that the history of liturgy is also a history of gender difference in the ways gendered paradigms have shaped liturgical tradition.[130] This carries into today's practices, both in the headline topics (such as questions of ordination) but also in the ways gender continues to be embedded in our liturgical practices, requiring that we "lift the veil" of gendered worship to address its influence.[131] Coorientation potentially lifts this veil not just with gender, but with the intersectionality of identity in worship, coinciding with the radical approach Rosser and Miller describe. As a radical model, it considers the formation of structures by revealing, engaging, and shaping categories of understanding at the base of our systematic paradigms. While changes to correct harmful paradigms likely include some surface-level category engagement, the social action in this approach focuses on the theological structures of the houses we navigate in worship.

This chapter will contribute to building a coorientation model by examining how it engages and shapes categories with the purpose of directing social action to flourish both people and relationship. Coorientation is not neutral, relying on categories to create social action, and directing this action toward a positive end requires anticipating potential problems and preemptively forming an epistemological foundation to counteract these problems. The three issues I will address are the function of power, hegemonic pressure, and navigating influential structures already in place. These are not the only issues regarding categorization, but are the ones I perceive most relevant in regard to coorientation and shaping it as an effective model. I will also explore how coorientation acts as a force to shape categories of understanding: deconstructing, solidifying, shifting, and/or creating. I contend that coorientation can be an effective method for ministry leaders to examine and shape worship if we first recognize potential categorization problems and take steps to reduce their harm. In this way, our practical theology becomes strategic on a deeper level as liberation and egalitarian action works at the categorical foundations of worship.

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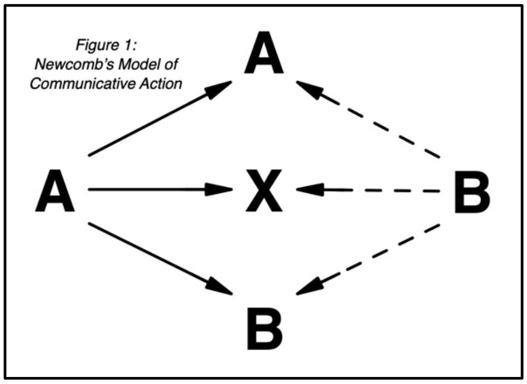
[129] Teresa Berger, *Gender Differences and the Making of Liturgical History: Lifting a Veil on Liturgy's Past*, Liturgy, Worship, and Society Series (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 24.

[130] Berger, 161.

[131] Berger, 173.

The Coorientation Model and Categorization

As was demonstrated in chapter one, the development of the self relies on interaction with others, forming itself through relationships with others. Our selves continually evolve as we grow and move throughout life, engaging wider social worlds that vary based on the time and place we find ourselves in. A toddler's relational variability represents a small segment of people within a closed social world, located primarily in the home with primary care givers. This restricted world likely holds several closely connected variables such as day care, a grandparent's home, or faith institution connected to the family. However, as children grow into childhood and increase their autonomy, their opportunity for greater variability in social connection grows. Even as adults our selfhood develops and adjusts alongside new roles in new settings. We change with the start of a new job or a move to a different city. Having children brings us into new communities. Starting a new hobby connects us with those who have similar interests. The effects of these changes vary on relative difference, but the pattern remains: as we engage others, we adapt and learn within different environments, shaping ourselves to exist within them.



Mead's role-taking theory enables us to unpack the formative social dynamics at play throughout a development process that continually shapes our individual selves. We have explored this phenomenon with a general understanding of role function up to this point. This chapter traces the thread of role function further to explore *how* the self acquires its understanding of these roles. Returning to Newcomb's simple diagram of interaction between a dyad (see Figure 1),[132] we see the self (A) taking on the role for the other (B) in tandem with its own self to participate in social action. This diagram reveals that (A) takes on multiple perspectives: (A) understands themself, the object (X), and the other (B) from both their own perspective as well as their perception of (B)'s point of view. The arrows represent how (A) understands and participates in each point of connection. Along each arrow, (A) draws from predetermined categories to perform its social action to create the adopted role. Each role requires that (A) draws from some preexisting knowledge and apply it to the interaction. (A) understands these categorical markers as appropriate until shown otherwise. A small child (A) at a petting zoo may call the goat (X) he's feeding a "doggy," associating it with the household pet. His parent (B) gently corrects him, teaching him about goats, creating a new, but related category of understanding for future use. This simple example reveals how (A) draws from particular categories of understanding not only to connect with (B) around (X), but also participate in social verification. In this case, a categorical misunderstanding needed to be corrected as the child trust the parent's perspective, adjusting their own.

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[132] Newcomb, 401.

Sociologist Ralph H. Turner provides further insight into this process in his essay "Role-Taking: Process Versus Conformity" where he explores how a person groups behavior into consistent units for the purpose of role-taking. The self creates groups of generalizable attributes by organizing behavior according to relevant others. Turner defines "role" as a pattern of consistent behavior tied together in a "unique constellation."[133] When the self takes on a role, it participates in recognizable patterns dependent on organizational categorization. This occurs in the literal taking on of a role, like a new teacher who structures her actions and the classroom setting according to the constellation of patterns she has ascertained about the role "teacher." This is also required for social action, as someone who meets a teacher draws on their own constellation to engage with that teacher. Recognition of role patterns not only occurs in the self but also heavily relies on the other, particularly a group of others through social affirmation. Turner writes, "the folk judgment of consistency requires that some more general principle be invoked. The principle must either be one which is already recognized in the group or one which is capable or representation to a relevant group."[134] He illustrates this point through the example role of "leader." Two members of the same group may exhibit similar behavior by deviating from group norms, but are assigned different roles by the group. One may be labeled a leader while the other a "dissenter" or "trouble-maker" despite the same categorization of activity.[135]

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[133] Ralph H. Turner, "Role-Taking: Process Versus Conformity," in *Human Behavior and Social Processes: An Interactionist Approach*, ed. Arnold M. Rose (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 25.

[134] Turner, 25.

[135] Turner, 27.

Both may have taken action with a particular role in mind, but validation from the group contributes to the role-taking process as well. As the self develops and evolves through social interaction, it adopts existing categorization from its community and uses those categories to form its subsequent interaction. Any role the self wishes to perform requires relationship and recognition with the other, as the verification of roles come through both an internal and external validation.

In the same way, the self also learns to categorize attributes of roles to assign others. Just as the self organizes patterns of behavior into categories to understand itself, it does so for others. In order to take on the role of "sister," the self must also construct the associated categories which determine the role "sibling." The self does not necessarily share in the qualities it associates with the other, often creating understanding through negation. Mead emphasizes humanity's reflective intelligence, the ability to think through our responses, which allows the self to perceive, differentiate, and sort elements within its development. The self may reflect on role attributes, understand them to a degree, and simply reject them as not-self.[136] Turner uses the role of "murder" to illustrate how the self functionally understands the role through a comprehensive negative. The majority of people will never take on this role and yet they can confirm the role through negation.[137] They communally validate the role of murder through categories they understand and can assign it to others despite never experiencing the role personally. The self develops by creating patterns of behavior drawn from categories of understanding to form roles it performs. These categories simultaneously form for others and supply the material from which the self draws in order to navigate its community and perform social action.

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[136] This weaves throughout Mead's theory, but can especially be seen in: George H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society: The Definitive Edition*, ed. Charles W. Morris (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934), 62–67, 91–100; 135–44.

[137] Turner, "Role-Taking: Process Versus Conformity," 30–31.

The communal validation of roles and categories does not deterministically limit the self but through strict and narrow communities can stunt development. Mead calls out ultra-conservative institutions, like the church, which enforce rigid categories and "blot out individuality," discouraging original thought and behavior.[138] Turner similarly argues that militaristic or bureaucratic approaches to roles harmfully restrict the process to the point that role-making becomes inconsequential and limits interaction.[139] We learn about roles and categories through exploration. Roles flourish in experimentation within a patterned dimension marked by "an infinite number of definitions of the boundaries between roles."[140] There is no limit to a single role, defined by a bracketed set of behavior. The self holds multiple roles which inform one another. It participates within role patterns validated through other's consensus, but moves through boundaries based on the multiplicity it internally navigates. People work within the normative components of these roles, but once identified with that role, their subsequent behavior contributes to the collective understanding of that role.[141] In this way, the self plays with categorization and shows the ability to be flexible in engagement.

These attributes of role formation reveal the malleability of both the roles and the categories which form them. While some fixed patterns are required to create stability in interaction, interaction also has the potential to shape and change patterning. To illustrate this, consider an interaction I had as a worship coordinator with a congregation member who approached me after church one Sunday to discuss some of the art installations within the sanctuary. The conversation began easily enough as this member had always been friendly and seemed open to the different ways I structured worship throughout my tenure with the church. The pieces of art were two large trees made by the church's Fine Arts Camp which I ran every year. The church widely celebrated this event and I had received a large quantity of positive feedback regarding the colorful trees at the front. Congregation members loved the bright, rainbow, sparkly trees, seeing them as representations of the vibrancy of the camp which most of the younger members of our congregation attended. When this particular congregation member approached me, I drew from the general categories I had created throughout my interaction with other members to guide my initial social action, presuming that she wanted to discuss the camp when she mentioned the trees. I saw myself primarily as the camp director, ready to answer questions. I drew from my experience with other members using their feedback to anticipate her potential feedback and frame how I entered into our interaction. As I took on her role, I focused on her as a grandmother whose grandkids contributed to the artwork, thinking she was excited to see loved ones contributing something to worship life. I drew from past, positive experiences with her around other liturgical changes

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[138] Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, 262.

[139] Turner, "Role-Taking: Process Versus Conformity," 22. I use role-making here as intentionally different than role-taking to emphasize role impact on role creation Turner describes.

[140] Turner, 22.

[141] Turner, 35–36.

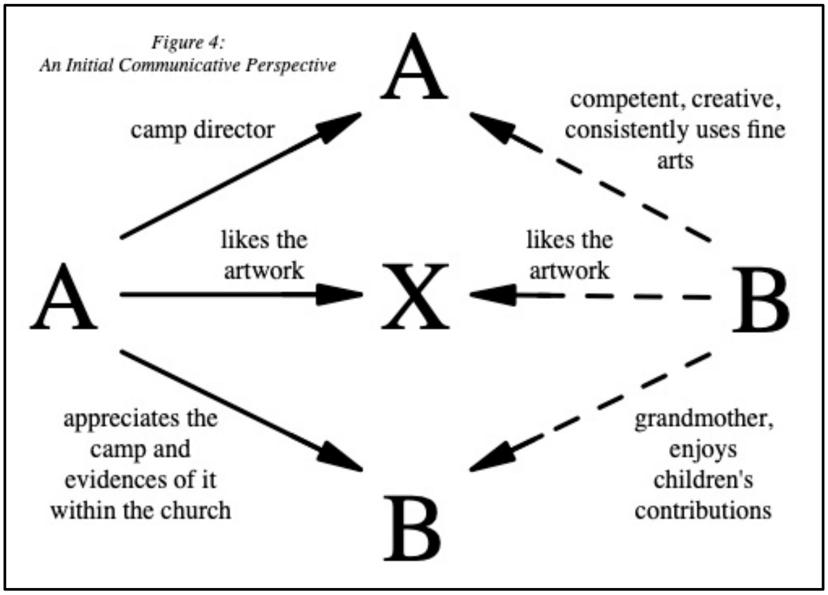


Figure 4:
An Initial Communicative Perspective
A
camp director
competent, creative, consistently uses fine arts
A
likes the artwork
X
likes the artwork
B
appreciates the camp and evidences of it within the church
grandmother, enjoys children's contributions
B

I had implemented from time to time, presuming that she saw my use of the trees in a similar way (illustrated in Figure 4).

However, as we continued our conversation, I quickly realized that my communicative presumptions were incorrect. She informed me that the trees made a mockery of worship. The sanctuary represents a holy space and the trees were inappropriate. I quickly shifted my role from camp director to worship coordinator in responding to her liturgical concerns. My attempts to come to a compromise by communicating the many positive responses I had heard proved fruitless as she repeatedly demanded that I remove the trees before the next service. This interaction created a sharp change in categorization in the process of our interaction, contributing lasting effects in how I understood the congregational response to the camp in general and how I related to this member in particular (illustrated in Figure 5). When we began the conversation, I felt confident in my role, but by the end I wondered if she questioned my ability to appropriately lead worship. This interaction shifted how I took on the role of this particular other, affected my perception of the congregational generalized other, and challenged me to reflect on my own lived role as camp director and ministerial leader. I was challenged to draw on new categories of understanding as this worshiper’s reaction revealed how I had been unsuccessful in incorporating her into a coorientative action around these trees.

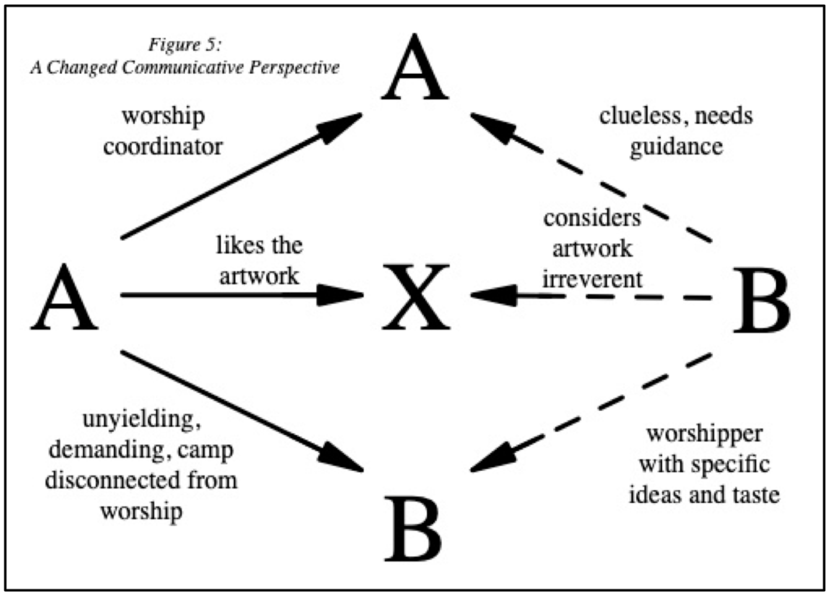


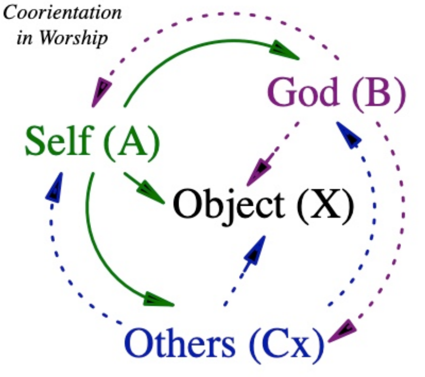
Figure 5:
A Changed Communicative Perspective

A
worship coordinator
clueless, needs guidance
considers artwork irreverent
likes the artwork
A
X
B
unyielding, demanding, camp disconnected from worship
worshipper with specific ideas and taste
B

This brief example reveals both the navigation and alteration of roles and categories which occur throughout interaction, presenting some key elements to note. First, these two models represent my perspective of the event. The parishioner's perspective, from the (A) position, obviously varies from mine as her self draws from categories of understanding particular to her experience. Although effective communication often reveals symmetry in orientation, categorical structure depends on the particular social formation of the self. In this case, our impasse of her unmet demands indicates a significant difference and an imbalance in our orientation. We will explore the balance dynamic further on in this chapter. Second, we must remember that roles do not function unilaterally. Throughout this interaction we both held a multiplicity of roles, I was both a camp director *and* a worship coordinator alongside many other roles which contribute to my identity. We draw from all these aspects of our being, even when we emphasize one particular role. We cannot compartmentalize our being, even when we successfully conceal it. Third, categorical depth and variety varies based on relational intimacy. We draw from relatively shallow categories when interacting with strangers as the self does not have the capacity to take on complex roles of every other it encounters, nor does it need to. Social action occurring with a toll booth operator taking a fee, a doctor in your yearly physical, a grocer helping you find an item, do not usually require complex role-taking. Comparatively, the categorical understanding of the other complexifies exponentially in connection to others the self knows intimately: a spouse, a child, a dear friend. The example of my encounter over the trees reflects some familiarity with multiple categories to choose from. However, our interaction still reflected the limited distance of someone I knew mostly through church context. Finally, I used

Newcomb's model to simplify the example, but our interaction more appropriately fits within the coorientation worship model (Figure 3), where a third party is present in the social action. The trees acted as an object in worship, automatically incorporating the understood interaction of the holy other. My approach to the object drew from categories of God in connection to the creation story, the creativity of the children reflecting God's own being. I also drew from ecclesial categories and discipleship categories, shaped by how I understood God and the holy to function within worship. The parishioner drew from different categories, arguing that holy spaces did not include such visuals. She perceived God's orientation toward the object quite differently. Although this third party within our conversation was not outwardly discursive, it still contributed to the communicative action. The Holy Other represents a transcendent element within this model, a complex interaction which will be further explored in chapter three. For now, it is simply important to note that categorical understanding enables role-taking action to connect all actor points of the worship coorientation model.

Figure 3: Coorientation in Worship



Throughout this section I aimed to explore how categories function within role-taking action. The self requires patterns of behavior, malleable as they might be, to participate in social action, forming categories to understand both itself and others. Coorientation symbiotically connects with categorization: categorization enables the self's ability to join into coorientative activity and coorientation shapes social categories. However, this is not a neutral process. Even categorical stagnation requires action which continually builds up the status quo. Thus, while coorientative action can empower greater relational connection, it can also contribute to toxic categorization which harms both the self and other. To build an effective model for worship, we must further explore how categories function in connection to the self as well as the other for the purpose of directing coorientation toward positive social action.

Categorization and the "Other"

The self develops within, moves throughout, and contributes to the functional categorization of its communities. These communities are not discrete entities, but often overlap, influencing each other, as individuals navigate between them. Mead proposes that social communities are divided into two types of subgroups: concrete and abstract. Concrete subgroups represent a collective social patterning which directly and functionally connects its members. This includes groups such as political parties, clubs, and churches. A medical center acts as a concrete group; all personnel are functionally associated through institutionally prescribed membership, and their assigned roles guide their participatory action. Concrete group membership operates in clear definition for participation whereas abstract group membership contains much less formalized functionality. Abstract group membership examples include home ownership, education level, and hobbies. Language represents one of the largest abstract subgroups because participation in communicative interaction using a specific language automatically associates you with other speakers. Abstract groups hold less definition than their concrete counterparts but offer more flexibility, opening up the possibility for a wide range of relational connection simply because abstract classification usually generates a larger group of people with a wider scope for connection.[142]

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[142] Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, 154–56.

Identity takes shape through different group memberships, forming by *belonging* or *not belonging* to these communities. In belonging, the individual takes on the social attitudes of the community, cooperatively participating in its functionality. Identifying as a Democrat, for example, the self takes on the organizational attitudes of the party, shaping future social action in a way that reflects the functional pattern of this group as a whole. The self also contributes to the dynamics of the group, shaping it through their own activity as a known member.[143] Not belonging to a particular group also shapes self identity, as individuals either reject or cannot fulfill the particular categorical qualities of that group. Not belonging to the abstract group of "drivers," either by choice or operational requirement, shapes the identity of the self to varying degrees depending on the individual. Not belonging likely contributes more to the identity of someone who has rejected the category due to passionate environmental reasons, than someone who lives in a large city where driving is simply inconvenient.[144] The self develops through both membership and non-membership with groups, drawing from categories it understands as particular to that membership to situate its own identity and shape future social action.

The creation of groups and the self's interaction with them provides a necessary function for self development. However, this action carries implications fraught with potential problems for both the self and others. In their book *Radical Otherness*, Lisa Isherwood and David Harris describe the challenge of otherness within relational systems. While group membership enables self identity, it also carries a "disruptive aspect: the exclusion of others."[145] Group membership can and has devolved into unhelpful binaries of *in* versus *out*. Rather than group membership existing among a plurality, it devolves into antagonistic classification where others are used to cement boundaries of identity. Consider, again, the environmentalist who rejects membership into the abstract group of "drivers" by flattening participation into a binary where drivers symbolize problematic others. Drivers represent those who disregard carbon issues and pedestrian fatalities for selfish convenience in contrast to the environmentalist's own idealistic self understanding. Categorization moves *others* from peers who might or might not share your membership to pawns used to achieve a categorical goal. Categorization operates as a functional reality that exists to create selves, but our history is littered with evidence of how it can be coopted to demonize others to shore up identity. People have often used harmful categorization to reinforce group membership to create or maintain power. Political sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva outlines this dynamic in the creation of racial categories. He writes:

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[143] Mead*,* 156.

[144] This simple introduction of belonging and not belonging to groups is intended to show the basics of how social group dynamics contribute to the formation of identity. Of course, the intersection of communities in identity contributes to variation in group belonging, both adopted and imposed, which will be addressed further on in the chapter, specifically through deviancy and a/symmetry of attitudes.

[145] Lisa Isherwood and David Harris, *Radical Otherness: Sociological and Theological Approaches* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 3, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315729527.

> Historically the classification of a people in racial terms has been a highly political act associated with practices such as conquest and colonization, enslavement, peonage, indentured servitude, and, more recently, colonial and neocolonial labor immigration. Categories such as "Indians" and "Negroes" were invented…in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to justify the conquest and exploitation of various peoples. The invention of such categories entails a dialectical process of construction; that is, the creation of a category of 'other' involves the creation of a category of 'same.'[146]

Colonizing whites created racial categories to shore up their own identity and justify their crimes against the other. This example provides easily observable evidence of the violence resulting from toxic categorization, yet this kind of malevolence can present in much more nebulous ways.

Consider this action in worship; how we speak about God and others shapes categorization both in the ethos of worship and in the selves who claim membership within the body. For example, in an essay for *The Ecumenical Review,* a journal belonging to the *World Council of Churches*, New Testament scholar Amy-Jill Levine presents multiple ways theology creates Christian identity through anti-Semitic tones. In the proclamation of Christ as liberator, Jewish others are often given the role of oppressor. Discussion of Jewish practices are often incorrectly aligned with the taboo, such as misreading *unclean* as marginalized or assigning the problems raised in the New Testament to rabbinic vestiges. Christians bifurcate the characteristics of God between the type of Holy Other presented in the Torah (e.g., God of wrath) and scripture particular to Christian tradition (e.g., God of love). Levine outlines how anti-Semitism surreptitiously moves into Christian theology.[147] Most Christian worship does not consciously or overtly engage in anti-Semitism, but through the use of these theological tropes, it shapes paradigmatic understanding of our Jewish peers. Christian group membership solidifies its identity by othering Judaism as a binary counterpart, harmfully reducing the humanity of others and limiting self understanding into solidified categorical boundaries. Self development and social interaction rely on categorization and group membership, processes which can result in healthy selves and positive outcomes. However, they also come fraught with potential problems such as power dynamics, prejudicial frameworks, and hierarchies of subgroups, to name a few, all contributing to harmful categorization which diminishes the other and limits the self. Coorientation navigates the tension of necessity in light of plausible injury because it both reveals and begets categorization.

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[146] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation," *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 3 (1997): 471, https://doi.org/10.2307/2657316.

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[147] Amy-Jill Levine, "The 'Teaching of Contempt' and Ecumenical Publications," *The Ecumenical Review* 57, no. 4 (2005): 433–45, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6623.2005.tb00564.x.

Coorientation and Problematic Categorization

Coorientation's lack of neutrality can beneficially contribute to the creation of worship by intentionally directing its action to benefit participants by deepening and diversifying relationships. To shape the efficacy of the model with this goal, we must first address several issues connected to categorization. While the scope of this project cannot explore the many potential issues, I will present three that obviously exert influence in connection to role-taking: navigating power in social action, navigating pressure toward conformity, and navigating influential structures.

Navigating Power in Social Action

The strategic nature of a coorientation model, which uses, produces, and affects categories of belonging, automatically engages with questions of power. Who gets to decide categorical frameworks? What epistemologies influence categorization? How will these categories manifest relationally between groups of belonging? Categorization comes laden with varying degrees of power dynamics. History provides evidence of how those in power perpetuated their dominance by enforcing hierarchies of categorization. Returning to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's scholarship, he shows how racial classification began as a political act in the sixteenth and seventeenth century to enable "practices such as conquest and colonization, enslavement, peonage, indentured servitude, and more recently, colonial and neocolonial labor immigration."[148] European explorers and subsequent settlers invented the categories of "Indian" and "Negro" to construct a social system for their benefit.[149] However, the category morphed over centuries of use, as those in power perpetuated the social classification with false characteristics to maintain their hegemonic power. The results yielded a category that also "became an independent element of the operation of the social system."[150] Bonilla-Silva's illustration outlines how power dynamics of categorization occur on both micro and macro levels. On the micro level we see how individuals interested in personal gain, without concern for the other, construct categories to manipulate social structures in their favor. On the macro level, we see how classification evolves beyond the individuals who contribute to its initial creation, becoming its own force to shape the development of subsequent individuals within the system.

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[148] Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism," 471.

[149] Bonilla-Silva, 471.

Social categories of gender provide another example of this same dynamic. In her article "One is Not Born a Woman," feminist theorist Monique Wittig examines how lesbianism breaks the category of *natural womanhood*. Part of her argument outlines how patriarchal structures create the category of womanhood through the male gaze. While particular groups and individuals have contributed to the creation of this category, the social influence of a strict binary has become a systematic influencer in its own right, now defining what it means to be a "real" woman and a part of the "natural order." [151] Queer women break this categorization by breaking the binary and refusing to exist within the male gaze.[152] In both Bonilla-Silva and Wittig we see the micro and the macro realities of problematic power dynamics in categorization. Rather than the self placing its own belonging within a category, another force places it there through the intent and action of powerful others to its own detriment. This placement becomes an independent social force which replicates classification, forming new selves within its orbit, allowing beneficiaries of the power differential to inherit its benefits just as the marginalized continue to experience its oppression.

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[150] Bonilla-Silva, 473.

[151] Monique Wittig, "One Is Not Born a Woman," in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1997), 266–67.

[152] Despite patriarchal attempts to try reclaiming them by fetishizing their sexual activity for male gratification.

How, then, do we move forward? As social action requires categorization for participation, we must then look at altering the other part of the equation: the problem of power. Traditional patriarchal approaches to power treat it as a limited quantity, like a cherry pie. Those grasping for power work to take the entire pie. Those seeking equal shares attempt to divide the slices so each has an equal, but fixed amount. This approach to power creates a competitive atmosphere breeding antagonistic attitudes, pitting the self against others within its sphere. Feminists approach power in a much different way. Rather than a finite resource, power generates more of itself as it is shared. Knowledge provides a fantastic example of this, replicating itself in the other when shared. Shifting the perspective on power, as a source of replication for the flourishing of all parties involved, will guide categorization toward positive social action. Feminist developmental psychologists strive to make this change by stressing an epistemology of interconnectivity. Patricia Miller reveals this change through the assessment of knowledge. Rather than seeking the origin of knowledge in the individual, as traditional theorists do, feminists seek the origin of knowledge in the community and its subsequent influence on the individual. She demonstrates the feminist presumption of knowledge as co-constructed. All participants work through dialogue and reciprocity to create a relational connection which situates contextualized knowledge in its midst.[153] This concept does not disagree with Mead's sociological claims, sharing a similar position on the influence of social structures. However, as Melissa Welch-Ross points out, feminist scholars reject the typical trajectory, even in sociological study, toward the abstract. They aim for concrete application which directly frames interaction and affects all persons involved. In this way, interconnectivity strives to move beyond simple cognitive knowledge *of* the other to forming bonds *with* the other. [154] The self does not simply use others as a means to understand themself, but willingly invests in others' own development because they are linked. All experience then takes place within a framework of interconnected relationality where the flourishing of one affects the flourishing of all.

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[153] Patricia H. Miller, "The Development of Interconnected Thinking," in *Toward a Feminist Developmental Psychology*, ed. Patricia H. Miller and Ellin Kofsky Scholnick (New York: Routledge, 2000), 45–59.

The implications of interconnectivity within a coorientation model manifest in how we bring others into the social action of worship. Are we using others to achieve a certain aim or contribute to individual benefit without connection? Are we avoiding challenge or conflict to maintain a harmonious majority? Are we denying culpability at the expense of relational bonds? These questions apply to both individuals as well as communities which collectively work to maintain the status quo for the majority or those in power at the expense of others. Practical theologian Kathy Black touches on this nuance in her book *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability,* where she addresses how we preach healing texts in ways which shape attitudes concerning disability. She writes,

> Both the conservative and liberal ends of the theological spectrum have contributed to the alienation and oppression of persons with disabilities. The conservative perspective tends to look at healing in terms of 'cure.' The healing texts are taken literally, and accordingly, persons with disabilities today need to be 'cured' to be returned to 'wholeness'—to be in a right relationship with God… The liberals take a more psychological approach to healing to avoid the concept of a healing ministry altogether. The healing texts in the Gospels are used metaphorically, or the healing itself is put aside so that more important issues in the text can be dealt with… In neither case is the person being healed in the biblical texts dealt with as a subject or agent of his or her own history. We tend to use them as objects to make some other point. The problem with this is that persons with

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[154] Melissa K. Welch-Ross, "A Feminist Perspective on the Development of Self-Knowledge," in *Toward a Feminist Developmental Psychology*, ed. Patricia H. Miller and Ellin Kofsky Scholnick (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1.

> disabilities today likewise find themselves treated as objects…rather than as subjects that have something to contribute.[155]

Black argues that the way we treat those with disability in the text directly affects the ways we treat those with disability around us. We shape the category of disability to achieve a particular end, placing people with disabilities into object positions for the benefit of those without them. As I suggested before, the object position within a coorientation model does not implicate a position of *less than.* Anything which can be indicated can be placed as an object within coorientation. However, we must contend with the social action occurring as a result of the positionality and what it indicates about the relational connection, which reflects Black's critique. Is the other, particular or generalized, occupying the object position due to their own relational agency, or are they placed there for the collective's own purpose?

Consider the social action of a sermon on Luke 8, where the preacher emphasizes the faith of the woman who touched the robe of Jesus to be healed from perpetual menstrual bleeding. She is placed within the object position to create an edifying proclamation for those coorienting around her, shoring up their ideas of the power of faith. However, in doing so, the preacher has placed all persons with disability who desire healing alongside the illustrative woman. The proclamation of faith that leads to healing offers only pain and doubt to their ears. Even more, this social action renders them invisible in worship, unable to join with the healed woman in the object position differentiated by their continued disability and also unable to join those coorienting around the object, precluded by their connection with the woman as the object. In this case, disability becomes a categorization used by those in power to prop up personal identity while also severing relational connection with others who have disability.

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[155] Kathy Black, *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 13.

Compare this with the social action of a prayer petitioned by a woman who is battling cancer and feeling the effects of her chemotherapy treatment. She asks the congregation to pray for relief for her nausea and increased strength which never seems to be enough in supply. The congregation does so, placing her in that object position, gathering around her with specific requests that they present to God. In this action, their hearts break for her pain, which spurs one to make a meal that week, another to send a card, another to make a call. This woman with cancer feels seen, loved, and cared for. Not only does she have agency within the object position, but the social action contributes to the empowerment of all along strengthening relational bonds. Coorientation which works from an epistemology of interconnectivity aims to create social action for the flourishing of all people. It recognizes that any disempowerment of one group creates adverse effects throughout the system. Even more, a catalytic approach to power presumes benefit for all when intentional agency occurs even for one. These benefits ring down relational lines, creating different tones for different selves based on subjective categorical underpinnings, but harmoniously reverberate through by strengthening both self and its bonds to others.

Navigating Pressure Toward Conformity

From the outset of his presentation of coorientation, Theodore Newcomb discerned a pressure within his model toward symmetry among the attitudes of parties involved. By symmetry, he means similar individual orientations toward the object around which the group gathers. Coorientation does not require symmetry but symmetry provides both communicative and cognitive advantages. When parties are symmetrically oriented toward an object, communication requires less effort and the chance for misfire decreases as (A) has an easier time role-taking for (B). It reduces the amount of "translation" work for social action to take place.

People oriented toward (X) in different ways, on the other hand, have to do more work to perceive the object from the other's vantage point.[156] Two similarly trained musicians can talk with ease about the subtleties of a particular concerto, the phrasing, the articulation, and the dynamic range. However, exchange one of the musicians for a mathematician and the conversation changes significantly. Now the musician no longer easily pulls from categories closely aligned to his own relational position to the music. Instead, he must now work to discern the mathematician's relational position to the concerto and her categories for understanding it to have any type of engagement. The coorientative action between a musician and a mathematician around an object like a concerto requires a great deal more effort because of the asymmetry in their attitudes toward the object. Social connection rewards symmetry because of the facilitative value it adds to the process.

Newcomb suggests that the pressure of coorientative symmetry varies in connection to the intensity of the self's attitude toward the object and their attraction toward the other. If (A) feels passionate about their orientation toward (X), they feel less pressure to find similarity in (B) and may in fact work to sway a differently oriented (B) to their own vantage point. However, if (A) values (B) more than their different positionality to the object, (A) may be willing to adjust their orientation into symmetry.[157] These pressures affect the categorical underpinnings running along each axis, where (A) adjusts their understanding of either (X) or (B) based on the pressure of moving from different orientations to symmetrical ones. Newcomb expands on his symmetry thesis in connection to cohesive groups, arguing that communication is "directed most frequently toward those perceived as deviates, up to a point where the deviate is sociometrically rejected

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[156] Newcomb, "An Approach to the Study of Communicative Acts," 385.

[157] Newcomb, 396.

(i.e., attraction decreases or becomes negative), beyond which point communication to them becomes less frequent."[158] The symmetrical pressure pushes towards a homogeneous unity in groups. Newcomb's suggestion of the strain against deviance within coorientation requires further thought for its application into worship.

Deviance theory illuminates how symmetrical pressure functions within groups. While a wide topic of study, scholars generally coalesce around two common assertions: there are people who are different, departing from social standards of "natural;" and those who hold those differentiated positions are "not just different but bad."[159] In their *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology* chapter, "Social Categorization, Social Identification, and Rejection of Deviant Group Members," José Marques, Dario Páez, and Michael Hogg bring together deviancy research to explore and summarize why group members tolerate deviant behavior. They outline how deviancy contributes to group identity through multiple levels of participation. Ingroup members are "upgraded" and "downgraded" based on how they contribute to the overall image and identity of their group. When deviance from the group's practiced norms emerges, "people first attempt to persuade the deviants to join the group's mainstream, they then show hostility toward deviants who consistently resist these persuasive efforts, and, ultimately, they reject them, or redefine the group's boundaries."[160] While deviancy can provide a tool for reshaping boundary identity, this places the pressure for changing group dynamics through potentially harmful processes on typically minority players within the group. More often, as Newcomb suggests, deviancy contributes to solidifying the identity of a group. As deviants violate the normative expectations of a group, judgments from the group against deviance reaffirm the norm of what constitutes the ingroup and the deviance provides a contrast to support group identity.[161] This allows for different ranges of likeability in regard to deviance. Behavior by an ingroup member may prove unlikeable versus likeable in an outgroup member based on how that behavior contributes to group identity.[162] Using Christian identity as an example, certain behavior may be unacceptable within a congregational body, rendering some members unlikeable for their participation. However, people participating in the same behavior outside of the congregation may be accepted, even valued, because they present examples of outsiders, clear others, who act in ways that also shore up group identity.[163] Groups use deviancy as concrete examples to delineate where categorical boundaries exist, hardening these boundaries into place.

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[158] Newcomb, 396.

[159] José M. Marques et al., "Social Categorization, Social Identification, and Rejection of Deviant Group Members," in *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Group Processes*, ed. Michael A. Hogg and R. Scott Tindale (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 400.

[160] Marques et al., 402.

The exclusion of non-cis-hetero people from some churches offers an example of ingroup members using deviancy from expectations to harden categorical boundaries. These church communities use queer "others" to provide a clear identity boundary between ingroup members and outgroup members to shore up their identity through exclusion. The damaging effects of this type of action ripple throughout both ingroup and outgroup members. Communications and sexuality studies scholar Gust A. Yep does not specifically address deviance theory, but his work relatedly explores the toxic effects of treating homosexuality as a fixed minority within a problematic binary against heterosexuality. He outlines how this binary creates violence against all people. For cis-hetero men, it props up a certain type of male-ness with compulsory markers of what it means to be a "real man." For cis-hetero women, it perpetuates certain conditions for women, particularly regulating a woman's place within her relationship to a man. For those who do not fit the heteronormative binary, these frameworks create a pressure to *internalize* homophobia, learning from an early age a standard that promotes a hatred of self for not fulfilling the standard, resulting in anxiety, guilt, fear, shame. This internalized process comes from an *external* violence built into our social systems through everyday discourse that promotes a heteronormative standard. This occurs covertly through silencing and stereotyping expectations, and overtly through harassment, avoidance, verbal abuse, discriminatory treatment, and physical violence. Yep summarizes, "heteronormative thinking is deeply ingrained, and strategically invisible, in our social institutions. The process of normalization of heterosexuality in our social systems actively and methodically subordinates, disempowers, denies, and rejects individuals who do not conform to the heterosexual mandate."[164] He explicates the damaging effects of hardened categorization against all members of the group. Even still, his in-depth analysis of homophobia's harm only focuses on the individual. His insights carry even further when applied to relational connectivity. The divide between once in-group members and those that shut them out creates a severing action that harms all parties involved, even if one person withstands the greater pain of rejection. Yep's work provides an example of how a group treatment of deviancy can become toxic, perpetuating harm in the prescriptive expectations for group members and especially against those who deviate from those normative expectations.

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[161] Marques et al., 411.

[162] Marques et al., 418.

[163] Mary Douglas' work reflects this reality as religious action sorts through pollution and the taboo in ritualization. Through rituals of purity and impurity, people can find unity. Her work adds the idea that we all work with some level of uncleanness or impurity. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, [1966] 2002). Contributing this to the idea of deviance theory, we all deal with some level of deviance within our groups. Our ritualistic action offers a means to frame our deviance within "likeable" action. In this way, admitting to our deviance contributes to group identity, allowing us to participate ingroup while also contributing to the ingroup from the position of "other."

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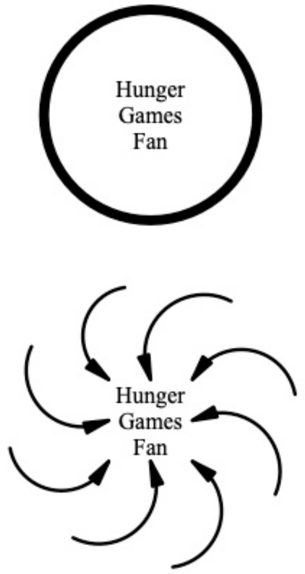
[164] Gust A. Yep, "The Violence of Heteronormativity in Communication Studies: Notes on Injury, Healing, and Queer World-Making," *Journal of Homosexuality* 45, no. 2–4 (2003): 24, https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v45n02_02.

In light of the potential toxicity of a group's reaction to deviancy, coorientation must carefully explore how to incorporate the necessary difference while also preemptively working against any potential harm. Deviance theory suggests that groups shore up their identity at the edges, creating a clear demarcation of who is "in" and who is "other." To counteract the harm, coorientation must switch its perception of categorization from boundary marking to magnetizing force. For example, the descriptor "Hunger Games fan" creates a category (see Figure 6). This categorization becomes difficult when working at the edges to create boundaries of who's *in* and who's *other* as arguments at the border occur. What does this fandom look like? Does watching the movies count or do you have to read the books as well? Is dressing up as a character at least once a requirement? How do you feel about the author? Things get messy. However, if the category is created around the magnetizing force of the fictional story of Katniss Everdeen, these questions of boundary limits soften or disappear altogether. Room appears for category differences as multiple approaches of fandom involve belonging. Even more so, the increased flexibility in boundaries encourages intersectionality. Movie buffs can find connection with bookworms in the world together even if they find belonging in different ways, neither engaging the exact same material as the other. This simple, and somewhat silly example shows how a different approach to categorization can yield healthier results.

Figure 6:
Group Membership
as an Attractional Center



A shift in categorical alignment will likely meet resistance due to insecurity around an attractional model of identity. The creation of identity through the rejection of others has been an easy way to create confidence. Understanding the other as something different from the self contributes as much to the development of self identity as finding similarities with the other. Part of the pressure to concentrate on border creation rather than a magnetic center may stem from insecurity in or mistrust of the central, defining attribute. In Yep's example of the hetero/homosexual false binary, he argues that unhealthy heterosexual identity creates homosexuality as a minoritized other, this form of heterosexuality representing "a subservient and unstable construct in need of constant affirmation and protection."[165] When we focus on shoring up the borders of categorization, it hints at our own insecurity of the center. Christians claim that the boundaries protect the center, but really the boundaries exist to protect themselves. We forget that God needs no protection from us, that Christ creates a category of belonging beyond our limited abilities.

For worship, what are the untouchable categories, or the entrenched paradigms? Several years ago, I preached at a church where I concluded a prayer with, "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One God, who is Mother of us all." Weeks later I received a call from a leader who represented the church's council to discuss the fallout of this (biblical) imagery and the anxiety it caused among worshipers. In light of categorical boundaries and identity shaping, I wonder how the fear of feminine imagery for God shapes personal identity. Even more, I wonder at the richness they are failing to enjoy by narrowing their imagery.

For Christians who hold powerful majority positions, it will take significant work to uncover the fear causing them to shore up boundaries which exclude someone or something different. Although it can be hard, the beauty of a magnetizing force is the ability to create porous boundaries, where people can bring intersectional identities in. Newcomb argued that the interplay of passion toward (X) and the attraction toward (B) offered two different forces, where one would eventually win. An intentional coorientation in this model rejects the antagonism in these forces and aims to bring them together. Our desire to foster good relations with others works with a passion toward the object to create a space where symmetrical force recedes because we are called to be united even in our diversity.

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[165] Yep, 13.

Navigating Influential Structures

In their ad "#LikeAGirl," the *Always* brand interviewed a cross section of people with a series of questions to illustrate actions like run, throw, and fight with the descriptor "like a girl." The young girls threw themselves into the actions with serious vigor, showing powerful confidence in their abilities. But the others interviewed, a young boy and teens, all acted out stereotypes that illustrated silliness and weakness. The ad asks, "when did doing something 'like a girl' become an insult?" indicating that throughout puberty girls begin to internalize the toxic stereotypical tropes of femininity.[166] Role-taking explains the process through which this phenomenon occurs; as people identify with femininity, they internalize social categories associated with that marker. However, Mead does not provide much for the self navigating harmful social structures beyond naming oppressive institutions. For this we must turn to another sociologist working at about the same time. While Mead was theorizing on the self developing through the gaze of others, foundational scholar W. E. B. Du Bois experienced its harmful effects. Du Bois also saw how the self came to know its being through the gaze of others, only he outlined the harm of a self developing within social systems designed to erase the self. He writes:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro;

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[166] Always, "Always #LikeAGirl," *YouTube* video, 3:18, June 26, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjJQBjWYDTs.

> two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[167]

DuBois contended that a full, truer self could materialize by merging both the identity of African and American. Neither identity would disappear in this process, but each would bring unique perspective to the world in both the person's self and through the person into their communities. Yet systematic structures pre- and post-emancipation prohibited either identity from thriving. Racist gazes within society continued to oppress African Americans at the very outset of their own identity formation as implicit and explicit bias favoring lighter skin functioned throughout the predominantly white communities they navigated.

DuBois's insight into self development within toxic social tropes nuances Mead's idealistic hope of social evolutionary action. DuBois's articulation of the toxic gaze of the other indicates the adverse effects of role-taking on a person. This not only harms the person, but perpetuates racism within the social structure, degrading humanity rather than evolving toward the thriving of all persons. Carrying his ideas further, one could surmise that these tropes groom the self's identity into the very stereotypes which hinder them, as seen in the *Always* commercial. Throughout second wave feminism, many female scholars pushed back against traditional psychoanalytical theories which prohibitively emphasized male experience to create theory. They appropriately began incorporating and emphasizing female perspectives. However, the emphasis of the binary often contributed to continuing stereotypes of gendered experience, leading us to wonder what might be inherent characteristics of the gendered self and what has been placed there by social expectations. Sociologist Nancy Chodorow hints at this in her chapter "Family Structure and Feminine Personality" where she argues that social conditioning, not biological factors, imprints gendered identity. Relational structures throughout childhood reinforce specific gender role-training for later in life. Women relate across an intergenerational world because they have participated in these expected relationships since birth, whereas men are taught to participate in the single-generation of their age mates, groomed into independence from family ties.[168] Here Chodorow still engages a binary to make her point, but she articulates the influence of gendered social conditioning which helpfully indicates the deterministic structures which shape the self.

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[167] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, [1903] 2015), 5 https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300213720.

Similarly, philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler outlines how historical-cultural dialogue creates a limited field which impacts gender identity formation. When people participate within a system shaped through historically agreed-upon bodily conscriptions, personhood cannot be "logical" or "analytic," but instead reflects "socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility."[169] Gender becomes institutionally inscribed as the institution is markedly heteronormative, the masculine differentiated from the feminine through heterosexual desire.[170] "The coexistence of the binary is assumed, and then repression and exclusion intercede to craft discretely gendered 'identities' out of this binary…"[171] Through sharp categorization, identity becomes socially formed even when roles are not explicitly present.

Categorization perpetually influences the creation of identity as it passes down generationally, forming ideas about the self. This does not devolve into absolute determinism because the self has opportunity to navigate multiple communities which contribute to its identity. Positively, this enables the self to draw from different narratives in its own construction. Negatively, as DuBois, Chodorow, and Butler illustrate, certain tropes pervade social systems to such a degree that at some point the self must contend with them. Some systematic pressures exert such a force that the self is determined in some way by them.

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[168] Nancy J Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality," in *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 45–65.

[169] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 20–23. Quote on 23.

[170] Butler, 31.

[171] Butler, 74.

So how do we navigate stereotypes? Isherwood and Harris propose that stereotyping occurs as a problematic offshoot of our natural typing process. The category of belonging becomes problematic when it cues the release of deeper, unconscious material. They use the example of the Nazi Reich who stereotyped Jews, using propaganda to associate irrational attributes to rational categorization for the purpose of persecuting those belonging to that category.[172] They further show how this type of social action occurs within the otherness of everyday life, highlighting Brett St Louis' 2004 study, where spectators of athletic events notice the skin color of athletes and draw connections between black skin and athletic prowess. "What the spectators then do is supply their own 'irrational' explanations: that athletic prowess is somehow connected to various attributed 'racial' characteristics – a preponderance of 'fast twitch muscle,' unusual shoulder joints or lung capacity (in the more 'scientific racist' version) or an enhanced physicality, bestiality or naturalness (in the more vulgar racist versions)."[173] "Black athlete" is not a bad categorization in itself, a rationally based assessment of an other, but the insidious connection to irrational conclusions about this category or the flat application of personal presumptions about the category onto any person with dark skin makes the categorization problematic.

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[172] Isherwood and Harris, *Radical* Otherness, 49–51.

[173] Isherwood and Harris, 53.

Isherwood and Harris illustrate how categories function within stereotyping, in presuming categorical connectivity where none exists. However, their assertion that this happens in an irrational manner has come under critique. Bonilla-Silva rejects this approach, common among "mainstream social scientists," arguing that to understand stereotyping as irrational underestimates the systematic elements influencing these associations. His work reflects Du Bois's premise as he outlines how racism functions as a determining social influence. Perceiving racism as irrational ideology problematically renders it an individual psychological phenomenon, treated statically as a single incident of incorrect, rigid behavior. This viewpoint, he contends, misses the rational elements of racism, evolving out of racialized systems, fluidly adapting to changes in the social systems within with it participates.[174] To fully understand racialized phenomena, we must understand how racial categories within our social system create internalized hierarchies which result in particular social manifestations.[175] While Bonilla-Silva specifically examines the influence of racialized social categorization, his work generates insight into the systematic qualities of unhelpful stereotyping. Race in his work represents socially created categories of identity that are then placed into a hierarchy of relationship.[176] This occurs similarly with gender, class, physical ability, and other markers of belonging. Social value systems order these classifications and contribute to stereotyping from a rational, systematic source.

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[174] Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism," 467–68.

[175] Bonilla-Silva, 469.

[176] Bonilla-Silva contends that racism is the crystalized ideology that emerges out of the racialized social system. Racialized social systems allocate different "economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards to groups along racial lines; lines that are socially constructed. After a society becomes racialized, a set of social relations and practices based on racial distinctions develops at all societal levels." (474). Racist ideology and action emerge from this framework.

The bad news and the good news are one and the same—stereotyping emerges within systematic design. Thus, the cure can move along the same developmental lines which carried the toxins. Shifts in social structures, difficult as they may be to achieve, carry echoing ramifications throughout the system. Coorientation is not neutral as the social action it presents can participate in perpetuating stereotypes, or can intentionally examine social action to purposely shift paradigms through altering categorization. Coorientation can address problematic categorization by inviting diverse perspectives on their own terms. In her groundbreaking essay to define Black Feminist thought, Patricia Hill Collins contributed a perspective on standpoint theory within feminism that broke down the single-focus drive of the movement at the time. Second wave scholarship, largely caught up in the perspective of white women from the Western world, missed its own systematic perpetuation of other forms of oppression. Collins contributed a key voice to push back on a white-dominant standpoint, arguing that the patriarchal perspective interweaves with racist, classist, ableist, and other points of domination.[177] She challenged the movement to deal with the reality of intersectionality as black women navigated multiple circumstances of oppression, helping pave the way for the next wave to resist biological determinism in favor of systematic insight.[178] Collins challenged others to live with the tension that her intersectional presence brought to the movement. By coming on her own terms, she claimed her identity while at the same time challenging the systems which tried to rob her of that identity. Womanist ethicist Katie Cannon outlines a similar impact through the literary tradition of Zora Neal Hurston, who contributed to Black survival by foregrounding the positive attributes of Black life.[179] Hurston's characters presented exemplar agents of Black women who created mechanisms to break away from the oppressive ideologies which defined their reality. Through story, Hurston provided strong characters with which Black women could identify, role-take, and coorient around the issues that plagued them, contributing to the development of their own self and subsequently affecting their lived experience. Her writing invited the reader to redefine their reality, affirming "black people's right to a healthy existence."[180] Canon's exploration of Hurston's influence reveals the power of story.

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[177] Collin's work toward intersectionality is echoed throughout not just black feminist scholarship but also feminists from other non-Western areas of the world. These feminists, many taking on the descriptor "Third World Feminists," also bring up the challenges of intersectionality that challenge the traditional single categorization of White Feminism, including those who experience colonization. Some examples of this perspective include Awa Thíam's "Feminism and Revolution," in *I Am Because We Are: Readings in Africana Philosophy*, ed. Jonathan Scott Lee and Fred L. Hord (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016) 114–27, and Uma Narayan's "Contesting Cultures: 'Westernization,' Respect for Cultures, and Third-World Feminists," in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory,* ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1997), 396–414.

[178] Patricia Hill Collins, "Defining Black Feminist Thought," in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1997), 241-59.

Coorientation in worship can function in the same way as Collins' standpoint testimony and Hurston's writing. By intentionally inviting different narratives which challenge harmful categories, worship provides an avenue to shed old presumptions and create new insight about the other. This is not a one-time action, reserved for special Sundays once a year to honor particular groups of people. This is not simply a sprinkling of new inclusive nouns throughout songs and sermons. Patricia Hill Collins was not the first Black woman to voice oppression within the feminist movement, but participated in a century-long multi-voiced echo of Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a woman?" Still, white feminists often miss their own complicity in racist belief and action. Systems of oppression were not built in one category defining action. They formed over centuries of curation and have evolved alongside social systems to the point that they change, move, and intertwine within our formational communities. As activist historian Ibram X. Kendi articulates in his book, *How to Be an Antiracist*, it is impossible to not be racist; we must actively be anti-racist by intentionally working against systems of oppression.[181] For worship, this means lamenting in pain when people different than us suffer loss, while also confessing ways that we might contribute to that loss. This means celebrating diverse expressions of God's personhood, reflected in humanity, even if that humanity is not presently in worship. It means looking for those who are harmfully othered in the pew and wrestling with how our worship structure participates in structures of oppression.

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[179] Katie G. Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 68.

[180] Cannon, 84–89.

I recently met a pastor who told me about an unusual arrangement he once had with a musician at his church. This instrumentalist wanted to play in worship, but also struggled with alcoholism, often missing worship. The musician decided to fix the problem by sleeping behind a shed on the church property on Saturday night, so the pastor could go wake him up on Sunday morning. The warm climate allowed this to go on for a while, the man continuing to play on Sundays, even after he joined the church's sobriety program and his sleeping arrangement stopped. This odd story first caused me to pause: why didn't the church help him with his pressing problems, or at least give him a key to the shed? But my anxiety to fix overlooked him as a person. He was aware of his alcoholism but he also had a desire to contribute. The beauty of this story is that he was a person, not a problem, who set the terms of how he wanted to show up without conforming to a particular way of being and through his presence shaped both the immediate and overall identity of the worshiping community.

Coorientation that resists the detrimental influence of oppressive structures does so by continually presenting multifaceted stories that contribute to anti-action (i.e., anti-homophobic, anti-sexist, anti-classist, anti-racist, etc.) to reshape categories to resist oppressive structures. Worship continually reaches for stories, symbols, and metaphors to communicate a message. Paying attention to influential structures means not simply proclaiming *love your neighbor,* but recognizing how a particular congregation sees its neighbor and the systems driving their orientation toward their neighbor. The referral to neighbor taps into a multifaceted category that requires careful illustration over and over again to present the variety of ways "neighbors" appear within our lives. This approach recognizes that one story may not make a prolonged change, but the perpetual presentation of multifaceted viewpoints can shift categories, can strengthen relational connection, and can open up opportunities for all selves to flourish.

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[181] Ibram X. Kendi, *How To Be an Antiracist* (New York: One World, 2019).

Using Coorientation to Enable Positive Categorization

In exploring the three potential problems with categorization above, I proposed three countermeasures worship leaders should incorporate into their coorientative action. They should work from an epistemology of interconnectivity, relationally supporting others to participate through their own agency. They should emphasize categorical centers to create unity through an attractional force rather than rigid boundaries. Finally, they should continually work to incorporate diverse stories for multidimensional role-taking to intentionally resist and reshape influential social paradigms. These general goals aim coorientation toward a positive trajectory, but still require exploring how coorientation can intentionally interact with categorization to equip the strategic practical theologian in creating effective worship. For this, we must examine coorientation's actual action when engaging categories. I propose that it occurs in four ways. First, some social action intentionally deconstructs categories of understanding. Here worship leaders note a category of belief held by listeners and work to undo or break it. This can be done in many ways, from a large sweep, by introducing a paradox which reveals the impossibility of that category, to a small introduction of a particular other which breaks categorization. Second, coorientation can reify existing structures of understanding. Here worship leaders tap into the existing categories of understanding of the listener to reinforce that belief. This action solidifies the category of the generalized other. Third, social action can shift the structure of an existing category. Here worship leaders work within an already accepted category as they do in reifying categories. However, unlike that action, coorientative action in worship attempts to soften, not solidify the boundaries of that category, aiming to adjust what is already known. This is a disruption, not a dismantling as occurs with deconstruction. Finally, coorientative action can create something new by rearranging what is known in connection to something unknown. Mead contends that anything new requires some connection to an existing structure so that the self can access this new idea. Thus, novelty emerges through reorganization of what exists. These four actions do not occur exclusively from one another and listeners may not necessarily have a unified response to the social action occurring in coorientation.[182] Ministry leaders may place a particular object in worship knowing that it will likely solidify a category for one listener but deconstruct a category for another. The remainder of this chapter will examine each of these actions in more detail, revealing how to shape coorientation's engagement with categorization for the purpose of positively developing the self, the worshiping community, and ultimately the community's engagement with the wider world.

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[182] I have written about these four aspects of activity elsewhere. See Katrina J. Olson, "Considering the Social Action within Preaching: Reading 1 Samuel 3 through the Lens of G. H. Mead and H. R. Niebuhr," *Homiletic* 46, no. 1 (June 2021): 40–52.

Deconstructing Harmful Categorization:
Breaking Oppressive Tropes Through Loving Indecently

Deconstruction presents a loaded term in a postmodern age, as the philosophical hammer of Jacques Derrida smashed through modernist claims to reveal that nothing exists of itself, that differences are not natural but socially made. In some ways, the deconstructive aims of coorientation reflect this school of thought. Coorientation presumes the systematic creation of centers of meaning, largely done through language, which contribute both to the self and to the relational bonds connecting selves within community. It acknowledges how the self forms its identity not only through identification with what it is, but also, in large part, through what it is not. With this knowledge, coorientation can similarly work to unpack and reveal unstable categorical concepts. However, social action working toward deconstruction of categories does not occur in isolation, as deconstruction also contributes to the construction of meaning elsewhere. The use of a paradox within social action can present counter-logic to reduce specific categorical meaning (at times even destroy it), but at the same time, it produces meaning elsewhere in constructive activity. The preacher may emphasize the perspective of the older brother in Luke’s parable familiarly called *The Prodigal Son* to intentionally unravel categories of personal need or loss in the listener by asking them to identify with one who powerfully “has” in the story. The action of deconstruction simultaneously contributes to new ideas about self. In this way, coorientation utilizes deconstruction as a function to shape and create, similar to art and architecture, where its influence prescribes a new direction in the wake of undoing, creating something new. Deconstruction acts as the sculptor’s knife in the worship leader’s social action tool kit when forming a coorientative space, dismantling for the purpose of creation.

Deconstructive social action tears down the familiar, which can be painful, disorienting, and even harmful. Therefore, the intentional practical theologian must incorporate a framework to direct coorientation toward edification and empowerment. Queer theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid's "indecent theology" offers an appropriate paradigm in both fit and positive intention concerning interconnected flourishing. Her proposed theology brings sexual ethics raised in non-hetero spaces to bear on liberation theology, showing how each can inform the other towards pursuing the gospel ramifications concerning the dignity of life. Althaus-Reid uses the term *indecent* because a liberational gospel must challenge normative restrictions framed and perpetuated under the description "decent" to unravel the hold of that category. She builds a praxis, beginning with the experienced questions around the web of class, race, gender, and sexuality, connecting it to Christian theology. She argues that theology can speak to the construction of identity and the navigation of those identities in the public and private spheres.

Indecent theology can positively shape the deconstructive function of coorientation in several ways, borrowing from Althaus-Reid's three central characteristics. First, it presumes expansive categorizations for God. The foundation represents a praxis "which understands that God is always a category of the possible, that God is not God's own limit, and that the path of theology is not continuity but nonconformity."[183] Part of deconstructing categories works with the presumption that certain categories are harmful because they are limiting, particularly when they become a hardened identifier of the Holy Other to the exclusion of other attributes, such as Jesus becoming such a close "friend" that the Trinity becomes divided, aligned more with us than with the God. Deconstruction works alongside shifting and creative action to address the problem of limited or hardened categories. Second, indecent theology builds on its liberation heritage by troubling the status quo through transgressive discourse. Althaus-Reid shares the example of a peasant going to church with a bag of grain as a prophetic act. Carrying in the cereal represents going before God with a full self, unveiling the hidden economic agendas of farmers going hungry while producing food for others to profit a few. The gospel as liberation unveils the ideology of the normative, including the supporting theologies which oppress rather than free people. Indecent theology calls "to deviancy from centers of knowledge and faith to the margins, without returning to the center."[184] Positive coorientative action deconstructs by incorporating narratives which unmask harmful categorization to emphasize the dignity of life for all people. Deconstructive social action is not meant to prop up the status quo, but instead it engages the *indecent* as a means to disrupt, to unravel. Finally, indecent theology claims its theology as an act of love, both for the gospel and for those who are held in chains. Deconstructive efforts easily result in harm to both self and others when done from unexamined motivation. Love for other not only reflects the holy call to love others, demonstrated and reiterated by Christ throughout the gospels, but it guides deconstructive action toward the edification of all people involved in coorientation.

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[183] Marcella Althaus-Reid, "From Liberation Theology to Indecent Theology: The Trouble with Normality in Theology," in *Latin American Liberation Theology: The Next Generation*, ed. Ivan Petrella (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 22.

Love guides the action of indecent-ing the status quo in light of a limitless perspective. A worship leader wanting to deconstruct categories of homophobia must work from a point of love if their coorientative action is to be both effective and positive. Love for LGBTQ+ others who have traditionally been marginalized not only motivates the leader to create intentional deconstructive social action, but it also guides how this action should occur. As worship incorporates indecent qualities to disrupt the normative, it must center on love for others to prioritize care for them within action. Without honoring the agency of others in love, the use of their experience is, yet again, used solely for the gratification of the group by shoring up identity.

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[184] Althaus-Reid, 27.

This can be especially harmful when self-interest becomes prioritized over the other to pursue individual development and a desired *woke-ness*. When love for other does not propel the action, even positive deconstruction of a homophobic category can perpetuate harm. Working from a base of love for other requires that leaders contend with how the social action will be felt and experienced by everyone, especially those who will be centered in the transgressive action. This means not just saying "you're welcome here" but introspectively doing the hard work building that welcome through worship itself. This includes actions like adjusting how we refer to the worshiping body, or reading scripture differently to reject the heteronormative patterns we have inscribed upon it. This type of action must acknowledge the ways we ask people to enter worship as partial people, leaving part of their embodied identity at the door by never engaging a part of their experiential reality. Concern for the other requires leaders to shape worship in a way that will edify all people, especially seeking to enable those who have been harmed by the oppressive categories being deconstructed.

Love as a guide also enables the worship leader to consider the others who represent the normative, whose categorical perspectives they will invite to change. Leaders work to create categorical change because they recognize that forming deeper and wider relational connection benefits all participants. As the oppressor builds chains around others, they simultaneously build chains around themselves, ones that only they can free themselves from. To hate or harm another human carves away from one's own humanity. Worship leaders initiate deconstructive action so that the others they love can adopt the gracing action of removing chains they have placed around others and around themselves. Effectiveness also requires loving care as certain social action will alienate rather than invite, further cementing problematic categories. The strategic practical theologian works to know those they invite into coorientative action. This knowledge guides the direction and speed of the deconstructive action, recognizing that an attempt to rip out entire paradigms with one paradoxical swipe might cause outright rejection or disorientation that troublingly leaves the self to reconstruct other potentially problematic categories in its place.

Several years ago, I showed a group of women a side-by-side printout of the same scriptural psalm, only the pronouns for God were different: once as He/Him/His, once as She/Her/Hers, and once as They/Them/Theirs. I asked how they would feel if this psalm was read in each of these iterations in worship. This sparked an interesting discussion which concluded with each firmly rejecting any reading other than the traditional one with male gendered terms. One woman claimed it was because she had grown up with this psalm, had memorized it, and it would feel strange hearing or reading it otherwise. Another woman firmly asserted that while she didn't think God was male, anything other than male pronouns would make God feel like a "stranger." Liturgical scholars like Gail Ramshaw rightfully underscore the importance of deconstructing the androcentricity of speech patterns in worship.[185] However, to do so requires care as it engages important relational bonds which, improperly or insensitively handled, can result in harmful repercussions or rejection of the change itself.

Love guides indecent social action into new possibilities in a way that takes the effect of social action seriously within the lives of others. This perspective creates critical guards for deconstructive efforts, which, while liberating, also functionally destroy the familiar. Deconstructive coorientation can vary in context, and thus needs parameters to establish a positive trajectory. Althaus-Reid's indecent theology outlines markers of expansion through a limitless perspective of God which invites transgressive action toward liberation for all out of a motivation of love. This approach can undergird all social action, but becomes particularly important for deconstruction. With it, deconstructive social action truly becomes a careful sculpting knife which the worship leader can use to appropriately carve beautiful social action with full knowledge that a careless move can also create devastating effects.

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[185] Gail Ramshaw, *Liturgical Language* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 18–24.

Appropriately Solidifying Categories:
Creating Diverse Buy-In

Social action can contribute to categories in a way that builds on the existing framework to affirm paradigms. Solidifying action in coorientation positively contributes to points of security for the self, offering anchored axes to ground our thinking, reduce anxiety, and enable greater freedom and flexibility. However, this aspect of coorientation also directly connects to the potential pitfalls of hardened, inflexible categories. Worship leaders must discern the difference between solidifying action that contributes to healthy anchor points for the self, and building identity strongholds formed though hardened and harmful boundaries. I have already suggested a direction for this discernment by focusing on an attractional center for categorical unity, rather than impermeable boundaries to address this issue. Solidifying social action ties into this initial proposal by contending that the attractional center gains strength through multifaceted representation, inviting diverse affirmation of the center to show its magnetic qualities instead of working at the boundary of a category. This multiplicity does not necessarily translate into larger numbers, as homogeneous normative claims can present in vast numbers but still represent shallow, unstable claims. Rather, solidifying a strong attractional center occurs through diverse contributors who voluntarily affirm the categorical concept.

The concept of solidifying concepts ties to a question which has plagued philosophers, "*How do I know what I know?*" Social developmentalists are less concerned with the existential dimensions of this question, instead focusing on the cognitive function of knowledge in the construction of self and its groups. As we have seen throughout Mead's theory, knowledge co-

constructs within communities, evolving and carrying on through the individual participants. As Patricia Miller notes, feminist scholars in the field agree with this claim, yet differentiate their position through an emphasis on the interconnected nature of the participants. Traditional approaches to co-construction view social action as a solitary way for an individual person or group to claim knowledge for themself and establish domination of that knowledge, whereas feminists focus on the group's efforts. Domination of knowledge is exchanged for the goals of strengthening social bonds or reaching group consensus through the production of knowledge. This occurs by complexifying knowledge, situating it within the context of its creators. Universal claims are considered unstable because what is true in one situation may not be true in another. Contextualized knowledge reveals the web within which understanding arises, emphasizing the relational connection and dialogue required to produce any knowledge. As a result, interconnected knowledge draws participants closer to one another.[186] Miller's summary insights contribute to our idea of an attractional center by changing focus from the product (knowledge) to the producers (knowers). In doing so, we can perceive how knowledge functions within the context. Is the solidifying social action working to shore up universal claims emerging from a shallow and homogenous context? Does it maintain an isolated identity held by a select few? Or does it reflect an interconnected ideal that seeks to find diverse consensus? Is there robust dialogue that draws us relationally together? An attractional center informed by interconnected knowledge rejects solidifying action to create firm and hegemonic points of knowledge. Rather, it desires a strong, shared axis which develops through communal dialogue, consensus, and connectivity.

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[186] Miller, "The Development of Interconnected Thinking," 49–54.

Diversity of voice represents a key feature of interconnected knowledge, to achieve a robust, multifaceted center. Miller argues that, for a phenomenon to be known, there must be a network of knowers who represent different and particular vantage points.[187] The concept seems straightforward; different people bring in different ideas. However, even here we must proceed with caution. Diverse representation does not necessarily produce multifaceted consensus. Just as with deconstruction, solidification can negatively incorporate diverse perspectives for continuing and maintaining dominant purposes. In an article for *The Guardian*, author and advocate Ijeoma Oluo describes participating in numerous panels and training events addressing racial inequality where white participants interrupted, argued, and questioned in such a way that revealed motivation to resolve personal concerns: making friends, reducing anxiety, or overcoming helplessness. In frustration she posted on social media, "If your anti-racism work prioritizes the 'growth' and 'enlightenment' of white America over the safety, dignity and humanity of people of color – it's not anti-racism work. It's white supremacy."[188] She points out the malignant feature that can arise in events aimed toward racial equality, where white folk desire "woke-ness" for their own gain. This perpetuates the very problem these panels seek to overcome. Building consensus through diverse perspectives requires careful reflection and intention to ensure that any work to incorporate diversity is not done for the purpose of shoring up existing hegemonic claims. Incorporating diverse perspectives not only requires a careful, listening ear, but presumes that a perspective from a different context will alter our own perspective. Diverse perspectives contribute on their own terms. In this way, solidifying action presumes categorical strength through patterns represented in difference.

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[187] Miller, 55.

[188] Ijeoma Oluo, "Confronting Racism is Not About the Needs and Feelings of White People," *The Guardian*, Guardian News & Media Limited, March 28, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/28/confronting-racism-is-not-about-the-needs-and-feelings-of-white-people.

Solidification as a positive effect in coorientation invites different voices into role-taking action in a way that breaks shallow categorical claims while at the same time reifying the category itself. These voices may or may not be physically present within the group, but nonetheless offer a familiar categorical pattern to add breadth and substance to the community's construction of knowledge. This approach respects the interconnective emphasis of consensus building. An example of this type of social action in worship exists within Eunjoo Mary Kim's description of a spiral form sermon. This style of preaching is based in Asian-American homiletics, culturally influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism, and shamanism. It emphasizes the holistic aspect of the listener, where the intuitive aspects of participation are equally or more valued than the cognitive. As such, the sermon form reflects the listeners' communal process of exploration. The sermon makes room for reflection, aims for a conversational mood, works through all faculties, and presents truth as something we receive.[189] The preacher uses these characteristics to build consensus within the listeners, with harmony and unity the goal. The spiral form works to enable "the listeners to experience the truth holistically through the indirect movement of the spiral winding around a focal point."[190] This is not to suggest that the basic coorientative action of a spiral sermon is solidifying. One can build consensus toward action that deconstructs or shifts. Rather, it shows the rhythm of how to appropriately solidify categories through coorientative action, by holistically incorporating diverse others in building consensus among the parties involved.

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[189] Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Preaching the Presence of God: A Homiletic from an Asian American Perspective* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1999), 116–21.

[190] Kim, 126.

I attended a relatively racially diverse church during a swell of #BlackLivesMatter activism and chatted with other members about why we were not engaging the movement more. A founding member of the church looked at me and said, “I love this church, but when I come, I check my blackness at the door.” Her comment articulates how the presence of embodied diversity does not automatically translate into diverse worship, even when the founding families were themselves diverse. To build consensus that solidifies categorization, worship must provide a place where people can assent with their whole person, where a category like justice must address the unjust realities suffered by people inside and outside the worshiping population. This not only deconstructs categories (like the paradigm of whiteness in this instance), but solidifies the presence of categories across a multiplicity of experience. Including a diverse voice does not automatically add a multifaceted dimension to the category engaged. Rather, we must invite voices to contribute on their own terms with their whole person to shape any consensus. Coorientation can positively contribute to solidifying categories by intentionally inviting diverse actors into role-taking around an object, treating it as an attractional center around which all participants voluntarily build consensus.

Shifting Categorical Understanding:
Softening Boundaries Through Metaphor

Social action which shifts categorization aims to change existing frameworks without dismantling them. A strategic practical theology would employ shifting social action to adjust categorization that might be correct, but has become hardened, narrow, or exclusionary. This may look similar to deconstruction but differs with intention. Deconstruction works to ultimately remove harmful categories. Shifting action recognizes the legitimacy of the categorization, but also acknowledges that certain aspects of that category require change, and in this way, resides closer to solidification. Solidification works within a category, focusing on the center by building patterned consensus. Shifting action works one degree removed, in the area surrounding the center, altering the supportive framework. It represents the continual flux of knowledge that moves around axis points. Comparatively, solidifying action contributes to an attractional center by focusing on the direction inwards whereas shifting action focuses on the direction outwards, dislodging limitations which may surround the center.

The effectiveness of shifting categorical qualities within worship can quickly be seen through the use and misuse of metaphor. Most worship commonly uses metaphor throughout all aspects of the liturgy as we sing about soaring on wings like eagles, pray to the Good Shepherd, and preach about being grafted into Christ like branches into the vine. We undeniably rely on metaphor, yet its use does not automatically indicate appropriateness or effectiveness. In his article exploring Gestalt theory and the cognitive aspects of metaphor, cognitive scientist Bipin Indurkhya examines how influential factors affect the self's ability to participate in metaphoric action. He argues that while a variety of factors influence how we engage material (neurological, biological, cultural, etc.), the greatest hindrance in effectively using metaphor is functional fixedness.[191] This occurs when one cannot see an object performing beyond a certain function, limiting the possible or novel that could emerge through metaphoric use. Our perception becomes so predetermined by its categorization that we cannot see beyond a single use, like when holding a hammer, everything in the environment becomes a *nail.*

Sallie McFague outlines a similar phenomenon within theology, using fundamentalism as an example. She argues that fundamentalists have an inability to accept the metaphorical character of religious and theological language, identifying the Word of God with human words:

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[191] Bipin Indurkhya, "Emergent Representations, Interaction Theory and the Cognitive Force of Metaphor," *New Ideas in Psychology* 24, no. 2 (August 2006): 152, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.newideapsych.2006.07.004.

God as Mother becomes an impossibility because God as Father is not simply associated with fatherly characteristics, but embodies the literal term to the exclusion of motherly imagery. Through this restriction, the metaphor ceases to exist as the descriptor becomes literal. She argues,

> The essence of metaphorical theology, however, is precisely the refusal to identify human constructions with divine reality. Since a metaphor is a word or phrase appropriate to one context but used in another, no metaphorical construction can be univocally applied, that is, applied in the form of identity.[192]

Thus, fundamentalism misses the iconoclastic character of metaphor language. Unfortunately, this issue persists beyond simple definition because literalism continues to disguise itself as metaphor. In surface analysis, the illustrative use of God as Father presents as a metaphor. Yet, through consistent use and assignment, this metaphor has now hardened to the point where the metaphor itself disappears, to stealthily be replaced by definition. McFague suggests this happens when metaphors become so common, they enmesh into "conventional language (the arm of the chair)."[193] We may use metaphors, but they no longer provide a transcendent or novel meaning as the initial shock of difference has settled into familiarity through overuse. God as Father provides a metaphor, but its metaphoric qualities have been displaced for exclusive identification.[194] The theological structures of God as "Father" become problematically finite, reducing imaginative capability rather than expanding it. McFague argues that theology has a

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[192] McFague, *Models of God*, 23.

[193] McFague, 33.

[194] Liturgical scholar Gail Ramshaw also addresses the problem of literalism in worship symbols, and argues for a preponderance of thriving metaphors in *Liturgical Language*, 7–10.

"high stake in truth" to the point that it trends away from imagination and emphasizes formulations that enable safe structure in creeds and orthodoxy.[195]

The categorical axis point of "Father" correctly provides an attribute of God's nature, but it becomes problematic when we solidify its pattern to the point of taking on a functional fixedness. Excessive solidification of an appropriate metaphor renders a correct categorization problematic. Shifting action solves this issue by working with connected material to adjust the category without discarding it. Metaphors provide great resources to create shifting movement when we embrace its true nature of words and phrases "used *inappropriately.*"[196] Metaphors pack a punch. They simultaneously feel familiar with recognition and out of place with strangeness. They are "imaginative leaps across a distance."[197] They break the stronghold of rigid categorization by being simultaneously wrong and right. They provide a shift because they play inside categories of understanding but also break those categories by uniting the possible with the impossible. They connect to faculties of reason within the self but are not limited by the reasonable as they bring in the novel, the inappropriate, the confusing, and the mysterious. In doing so, metaphors show the fallibility of functional fixedness and adjust the material connected to the central axis point. When engaging a fixed category like God as Father, shifting resembles deconstruction in process, requiring strategic and continual action. The worship leader, recognizing the categorical state of a worshiping body, may be prevented by the structures from inserting certain images, like Mother or Parent, because their use will cause automatic dismissal by the listener with prejudice. Intentional shifting action recognizes these limitations and works to soften hegemonic categorization, like intentionally exchanging the habitual metaphor of Father for non-gendered descriptors or gendered narratives which do not directly name God as mother, but highlight God's image in a mother's action. By bringing in multifaceted metaphors which broaden the category, leaders can aim for an eventual goal of including those previously rejected. Not all shifting action is metaphoric and it requires varying levels of intention. However, by examining the use and misuse of metaphor, we can see how this type of social action functions within categorization and interplays with solidification.

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[195] McFague, 34.

[196] McFague, 33.

[197] McFague, 35.

Creating New Categories

Recognizing the Cost of Something New

Finally, coorientative social action creates new categories of understanding for self and community. Creation does not happen in isolation, as novelty requires existing categories and paradigms to occur. This is not to say that the new is predetermined by what already exists, but it emerges from what exists in such a way that the self can access it. Mead suggests that the creation of something new is a co-operative process, where we work together to reorganize what exists and out of this reorganization something new appears.[198] This is also a potential function of metaphor. Not only does it transgress boundaries and open up categorical qualities, but in bringing together seemingly disparate aspects, something new can emerge. Joining diverse perspectives can create new ideas. Resituating the familiar can bring about different insights. Bodily entering a different space brings familiar skin into a different world to generate discovery by relating known to unknown. Creation functions like the game *Boggle*, where existing dice with different letters, shuffled into a grid, form certain words. At the beginning of each round, all the letters are picked up, shaken and placed down again in random order to see which new words may appear. Social action requires certain categorical markers which function like those letters. The self understands enough of the existing framework to understand new words that appear, but can also intentionally "shake the dice" to see what might emerge. This also requires care as the self automatically tries to understand the new within an existing framework. Unguided, the creation of new can inadvertently rely on familiar, potentially harmful or limiting patterns as the self attempts to make sense of its experience. Social action aiming to create must balance between guiding the process and releasing the process, to avoid stifling any potential.

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[198] Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society,* 197–98.

Creation may seem like the most exciting action of the four, opening up possibility for newness. However, Chicana cultural and arguably developmental theorist[199] Gloria Anzaldúa reveals the complexity associated with the creation of new paradigms in her description of residing in *una Mestiza* state—existing in the borders of overlapping worlds. Anzaldúa writes from a position of voluntary, yet forced identity creation, residing in the margins of multiple borders, but never fully existing in any. She labels this place the Borderlands: a physical, emotional, and/or mental space that engenders multiple identities within the self. This does not mean that the self simply fuses together disparate parts, but instead invites a *travesía*, a crossing, again and again into new territory to increase knowledge and consciousness of self and others. This increased knowledge comes at a cost. Anzaldúa writes, "'Knowing' is painful because after 'it' happens I can't stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before'"[200] This uncomfortable newness increases even more with involuntary action, as she describes the reality of being Chicana in predominantly white spaces and queer within heteronormative ones. It is an "intimate terrorism" to be infused with home while also in fear of rejection from that home.[201] Despite these trials, Anzaldúa's writing becomes hopeful as *la Mestiza* state straddles multiple cultural streams to create something new. This state requires flexible, divergent thinking that departs from set patterns in the creation of a new element which is "greater than the sum of its severed parts."[202] Anzaldúa's exploration of the new strips away the potential for an overly optimistic veneer as she unveils the cost associated with creation. Although the costs will vary, sourced from different access points of oppression, belonging, privilege, and the like, their existence reveals that creation requires something of us, if we are to leave changed from the encounter.

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[199] In their essay "The Development of Self," Lindesmith, Strauss, and Denzin summarize Charles Lemert's argument that those who write about the self can be divided into two categories. The first group are writers who position their theory in universal terms, writing in terms of a "strong-we" which reflects their own (typically) white, heterosexual, middle class, male perspective. The second group is often overlooked as contributors to self development scholarship because their reference to self is much more indirect, avoiding sweeping claims about the self, by writing in narratives, personal stories, or verse. Those in the second group also typically write from margin positions, and the examples they include are Gloria Anzaldúa alongside Patricia Hill Collins, Donna Haraway, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Judith Butler. Alfred R. Lindesmith, Anselm L. Strauss, and Norman K. Denzin, "The Development of Self," in *Social Psychology,* 8th ed., (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc, 1999), 222–24, doi: 10.4135/9781452225470.n8.

For coorientation, Anzaldúa's traversing perspective challenges worship leaders to appropriately orient their expectations for new-ness. Creation requires the willingness to engage difference, to shake up the normative, and to traverse boundaries. These are not easy actions. In this way, creation reflects deconstruction, requiring a loving posture as leaders knowingly ask those they invite into role-taking action to pay the cost of creation. This can explain, at least in part, the resistance leadership meets when attempting to introduce newness into worship and theological life. The fear of newness connects to the cost of what might be left behind when the self propels into different knowledge leading to the questions: What about the steps before this point, what did I leave behind? My first full-time job in worship ministry took me into a church where members had made a significant style change almost a decade before I arrived. Yet, when I came there were still points of unresolved grief around the change which still needed to be processed. While these new worship expressions had blossomed in some beautiful ways that the whole congregation celebrated, this does not minimize the work, nor offset the pain involved.

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[200] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th ed (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, [1987] 2012), 70.

[201] Anzaldúa, 42–44.

[202] Anzaldúa, 102.

Social categories within worship touch our faith in the holy Other, transferring holy status to those categories. Each of the four social actions examined contribute to the formation, adjustment, or deformation of categories that are not holy but reflect our understanding of the holy. The cost of creation as well as any of the social actions incites fear of what change might mean about our understanding of the holy. Melissa Welch-Ross argues that traditional developmental theory undervalues or ignores the role of emotion, suggesting that development is a neutral cognitive process. Feminist theorists differ, arguing that emotions play a significant role in the evaluative part of processing personal experience.[203] Worship leaders may recognize the affective nature of worship through relational connections while also undervaluing the emotional impact that the costs of creation, shifting, deconstruction, and even solidification impart on participants. To holistically understand the implications of categorical engagement through social action for participants, worship leaders must recognize the emotional, physical, and cognitive costs involved in participation and the potential resistance that cost might generate. This does not inhibit social action, but heightens awareness of its impact and challenges the leader to act with care and reflection, hopefully guiding their strategic practical theology toward empowerment.

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[203] Welch-Ross, “A Feminist Perspective on the Development of Self-Knowledge,” 110–12.

Conclusion

Categorization can give rise to problematic divides and hinder relationships. Fixed ideas prevent us from knowing one another and knowing ourselves. Coorientation as a tool which both uses and constructs categorization can intentionally engage and shape categories toward the flourishing of all people. Through the activities of deconstruction, reifying, shifting, and creation—with careful attention to issues of power, hegemony, and existing influential structures—coorientation can invite worshipers into deeper and wider relational understanding about themselves, each other, and God. These activities do no operate exclusively from one another. Due to the web of interconnectivity, one can presume that even intentional social action occurs in multiple places in multiple ways. As we work on a category in one area, its connection to others inevitably creates simultaneous action, both in the self and the community generating knowledge. Strategic practical theology requires leaders to seek out patterns within the multiplicity and intentionally to engage them, knowing that various effects will ripple out from the point of action. We will explore each of these activities further in chapter four, practically applying them to the analysis and creation of worship, as well as consider the ethical implications for this strategic action in chapter five. For now, we must recognize the role of categories in shaping a coorientation model for practical theology. They provide the means for connecting worshipers into a collective, while also revealing the paradigms worshipers operate with. Ministry leaders can work within this framework while simultaneously altering it by intentionally guiding coorientative activity.

Chapter 3

Coorientation with the Holy:
Bridging Social Construction and Phenomenology

At the end of a long saga, covering seven novels of story, Harry Potter sacrifices himself to the anti-hero, believing that the action will save his friends, community, and the world. After the act, when Voldemort has released a deadly curse, Harry regains consciousness in a nebulous space both familiar and unfamiliar. Here Harry meets Albus Dumbledore, a mentor who guided him through most of his long journey and who had perished a year before. In this passage Dumbledore encourages Harry, explains the complexities of the magic occurring in the situation, and helps him discern his next steps in life once Harry realizes that he has not actually died. At the end of this long scene of insight, confession, forgiveness, and compassion, the mist thickens and Harry knows he has time for one last question. He asks Dumbledore,

> "Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?"
> Dumbledore beamed at him, and his voice sounded loud and strong in Harry's ears even though the bright mist was descending again, obscuring his figure.
> "Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?"[204]

The question "Is this real" stretches into multiple disciplines, which each take on their own facet of this loaded question. In their cornerstone book *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge,* Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann outline a sociological approach to reality, analyzing the social processes of its construction. Subsequent scholarship often refers back to this title as a key source for constructivist scholarship. In it, the authors define reality as "a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition."[205] Berger and Luckmann differentiate between philosophical and sociological approaches to the study of knowledge and reality. They claim that the philosopher is obligated to pursue the ontological status of reality, asking "*What is real? How is one to know?*"[206] in the pursuit of discerning valid and invalid assertions. The sociologist approaches the subject of reality in a different manner, recognizing that the answers they seek are much more interested in the practical and systematic qualities concerning reality. Berger and Luckmann are interested in how knowledge and reality are defined by their social relativity. What is "real" for one might not be such for another. Climate change possesses a dire reality to the scientist who engages with a social framework constructed with contributing factors like empirical data and fellow researchers. Comparatively, a politician rejects climate change as a reality, drawing from social frameworks driven by private interest agendas and public pressure from a constituency. A sociological approach is not only concerned with the empirical quality of reality, but also with the process in which it comes into being.[207]

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[204] J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2007), 723.

In reference to this project, which aligns more closely with Berger and Luckmann's sociological approach, we must contend with the reality of religious experience and its function within worship. While there are ties to the philosophical questions, what constitutes a *real* religious experience, the primary focus centers on how religious experience functions within the social process. How do different worship spaces produce knowledge of God? How might a worship coorientation model similarly make room for religious experience of God in different worship styles? How do we interpret God as an actor? Proving God's existence belongs to the concerns of other scholars. As a project from a Christian perspective, these questions presume the existence of a Holy Other and wonder at how we might incorporate phenomenology into a sociological model in the construction of reality. Yet some work must be done to delineate how the pragmatic approach of social constructivism can come together with the transcendent and potentially ineffable qualities of God. While not impossible, these two theoretical positions have often been miscategorized into polarized positions.

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[205] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, [1966] 2011) e-book: Austin Public Library, Introduction.

[206] Berger and Luckmann, Introduction. Emphasis original.

[207] Berger and Luckmann, Introduction.

In his book *Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality,* James M. Nelson gives an overview of this polarity by tracing the modern isolation of scientific inquiry from religious and theological thought. Beginning in the sixteenth century with the early modern philosophy of Francis Bacon, the *two books* of religion and science emerge as contrasting sources of knowledge. This differentiation continues through Immanuel Kant's subjectively reasoned knowledge into Aguste Comte's philosophy of positivism, which "advocated a *strong empiricist and naturalist view of inquiry."*[208] The effects of positivism, tied to the intellectual thrust of the Enlightenment, not only further entrenched the isolated perspective of the two books, but now put them into conflict. This antagonistic attitude continued to solidify throughout the nineteenth century, and despite the collapse of positivism with mid-late twentieth century critiques, the oppositional effects of two books remain.[209] For the purposes of this project, the remnants of positivism have manifested into a debate within psychological, sociological, and religious scholarship between social constructivism, where religious experience is traceable through *a*

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[208] James M. Nelson, *Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* (New York, NY: Springer, 2009), 58. Emphasis original.

[209] Nelson, 52–65.

priori social systems, versus mysticism, where religious experience is empirically immeasurable not only through subjective access, but through a potential surplus into ineffability.[210]

Mead's emphasis on the prior existence of social communities and their primarily role in self development, as well as coorientation's parsing of social action, strongly coincides with a constructivist approach. Yet the application to worship requires that we also consider the mystical aspects of religious experience, as the activity of Christian worship itself conveys a Presence beyond the finite. In this chapter I intend to reveal how a worship coorientation model works within the pragmatics of social construction while also presuming holy interaction in religious experience. My incorporation of religious experience rejects the typical antagonistic binary of constructivism and mysticism by suggesting that coorientation can simultaneously reveal how social paradigms function while also recognizing that a Holy Other beyond these constructions joins into worship's social action. Value not only exists in both perspectives, but they can inform the other, as a constructivist approach offers insight into processing mystical experience while a phenomenological epistemology gives validity to the experienced reality of worshipers, including mystical experiences of the holy. Both social constructivism and mysticism present large ideas, the full exploration of which is beyond the scope of this project. I hope to bring surface snapshots of both through key representatives to show the polarized setting in which coorientation resides, before deconstructing this binary and proposing a moderate position in coorientation. Once I've established the positive contributions of each to the model, I will finish by exploring how to incorporate transcendent revelation into a constructivist model.

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[210] Nelson, 129, 141–42. While the "perennialist-constructivist" debate continues to divide scholars, Nelson does see some movement toward a "middle position" which acknowledges the weaknesses and reductionism in the extremities of either position in this debate. As an example, he highlights Mary Frohlich as a scholar who builds on the work of Bernard Lonergan, a Catholic theologian, to use intersubjectivity as a bridge between subjective experience and one's own social context. He also highlights a trend in cognitive psychology which places constructed structures of beliefs and attitudes as a means for processing experience, although this has not extended into models which process understanding religious or mystical experience (Nelson, 132–33, 141–42).

To do so, I propose three sources of revelation: scripture, human testimony, and God as an independent actor. The interplay of these points of revelation will contribute the necessary categorical understanding of God to enable the transcendent to accessibly contribute a role point within the model, revealing how God contributes to the social action of worship.

Phenomenological Scholarship: Along A Continuum

The approaches to religious experience are various and vast, yet the continuum relevant for this project is that which discusses the source of religious experience and the opinionated divide over *a priori* elements in creating such an experience. One the one hand, phenomenologists emphasize an independent Holy Other who preexists humanity, including its created social structures. Religious experience is the result of humanity's innate sense of God's existence and often results in an ineffable transcendence, holiness demarcated by an *otherness* free from human construction. Constructivists conversely argue that the *a priori* elements of socio-cultural structures not only contribute to the formation of the self, but also contribute to and perhaps even create religious experience. God may be present, but the self's own ability to connect limits any action. This leads to several questions. Are we constructing all that we believe or is there truth beyond our own constructions? If there is truth beyond our communal constructions, how do we access it when we are firmly rooted in social paradigms? These questions are relevant for a coorientation model because such a model must consider how religious experience in general, and God in particular, contribute to worship that gathers in expectation of a holy encounter. This section will offer some broad vantage points of both phenomenology and constructivism within which to situate a worship coorientation model before deconstructing the antagonistic stance between them in the hopes of creating a mediating position.

Religious Experience as Engaging the Holy Other

Phenomenological experience, and particularly the idea of mysticism, covers a wide swath of scholarship, tradition, and definition. As spiritual theologian Celia Kourie describes, spirituality in general and mysticism in particular weave together a tapestry of many diverse strands, making it nearly impossible to keep up with the vast material produced even in the last thirty years or so. Through globalization and the ever-increasing data available through internet sources, our pluralistic, cross-cultural, ever-expanding diversity has exploded mystical study, ranging from personal piety to neurotheology.[211] "There is no easy, unequivocal definition that does justice to the full range of issues involved in the study of mysticism."[212] As a result, this project needs to hone in on its engagement with mysticism in two ways. First, in belief, I am limiting the scope to religious experience through a monotheistic Christian lens which believes in a relational God who self-discloses to humanity. Second, in purpose, I am looking at religious experience as it participates in a coorientation model. This approach veers from the philosophical concern of the actuality of God, and explores how humanity expectantly engages with God and how this engagement functions within a social system.

Even with this focused approach, examining religious experiences still presents a nebulous challenge. As womanist theologian M. Shawn Copeland muses, religious experience can generate assurances as easily as it can upend a person's life. It can involve clarifying insight as quickly as it can evoke confusion: "Given its intense, extraordinary, and fleeting character, religious experience eludes rationalization, propositional logic, and quantitative analysis, rendering communication of its content, meaning, and effect difficult."[213] Arguably, this is why philosopher Rudolph Otto challenged readers who have never known a "deeply-felt religious experience" to put down the book and turn back. How can one patiently discuss the nature of the holy without having experienced it?[214] Otto notoriously attempted to explain the characteristics of this ineffable otherness, culminating the description into a single term, *numinous*, a symbol which has carried on throughout religious phenomenological scholarship. The numinous goes beyond simply an essence of goodness or morality. It is a phenomenon that brings awareness of awe-inspiring otherness. Leaning on Friedrich Schleiermacher, Otto describes a "creature-consciousness" where humans become overwhelmed by their own nothingness in contrast to a supreme Other. The numinous is an objective element, entirely separate from the self, capturing the self in wonder at something beyond majesty.[215] Otto's circular description further locates his argument of the ineffability of religious experience.

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[211] Celia Kourie, "Weaving Colourful Threads: A Tapestry of Spirituality and Mysticism," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 71, no. 1 (2015): 1.

[212] Kourie, 4.

Still, Otto's roundabout expression does not fully capture the wide berth of religious experience. Consider the opposite, where a self thoroughly demoralized by social structures encounters God who imparts intense value. This type of creature-consciousness becomes defined through a likeness to God, made in the Holy Other's image (Gen 1:26–27). Theologian James Cone suggest exactly this when he also addresses Schleiermacher's creature-consciousness from an African American point of view. He writes, "Blacks are not afforded the luxury of navel gazing."[216] For Cone, religious experience is inseparable from black existence, where God's presence manifests both in liberation from toxic racist structures as well in affirming love and power in one's own being. Cone connects God's presence to action, manifesting in spaces where freedom is needed.[217] These two differing responses to Schleiermacher reveal how the Holy Other appears and acts differently throughout humanity. This type of variety extends not only in content, but also in type. While some encounters result in jaw-dropping action, other manifest like a companion in the habits of life. Franciscan nun and sociologist Luz Beatriz Arellano highlights this variance in her study of how Nicaraguan women experience God. Faith comes through everyday practice, more than theological reflection, as religious experience comes through their daily hopes and struggles. She writes, "We are discovering God as the God of life, closer to us, as one who journeys with us through history."[218] God's presence offers a continual engagement in daily life, one that offers glimpses of the Holy.

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[213] M. Shawn Copeland, "African American Religious Experience," in *Oxford Handbook of African American Theology*, ed. Katie G. Cannon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 47.

[214] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 8.

[215] Otto, 8–11.

These brief touchdowns into different manifestations of God's self-disclosure reveal different accountings of a common result: knowing God. How does this type of knowledge function differently from knowing any other being? James Loder, a scholar who studied the relationship between theology and psychiatric theory, argues that a knowledge event of God holds convictional elements which lead to transformation. His aptly named book, *The Transforming Moment*, delineates between ordinary knowing of others and the convictional event of knowing of God. Loder lifts up two examples of encountering such convictional moments in the first chapter: his own near-death experience and the scriptural Damascus Event described in Acts 9 as Saul meets Christ and becomes Paul. Paul's transformation moment reveals key markers which accompany a God-knowing event:

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[216] James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 40th Anniversary Edition (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 19702010), 25.

[217] Cone, 48.

[218] Luz Beatriz Arellano, "Women's Experience of God in Emerging Spirituality," in *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, ed. Ursula King (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, [1988] 2015), 320–21.

- no one can know or comprehend the central meaning of an event from outside of that event;
- validation of the event is given by God and not human procedures or social structures;
- the historical moment recedes in comparison to the emphasized transformation which occurs;
- an imaginative leap is necessary to reach beyond one's own limits; and
- knowledge requires reconstruction.[219]

Like Otto, Loder defines characteristics of the encounter without precisely naming the encounter itself, pointing to the ineffability of defining these convictional experiences of God. The resulting transformation provides the evidence that a religious experience has occurred.

To articulate how this type of transformation functions, Loder parses out the knowing event as an action which occurs between a four-fold dimensional ontology. First, the "Lived World" represents the environments that humanity creates in general, and the self in particular, to order our reality. Second, the "Self" represents the aspect of our embodied humanity, our selfhood, rationality, and spirit. Loder's use of *self* here aligns with the reflective personhood described by Mead and others thus far discussed. Third, the "void" represents the nothingness or lack which participates in our existence. Realities of loss, shame, guilt, and hatred all represent aspects of the void's lack-of-being, death offering the best example.[220] Finally, the "holy" represents a presence, beyond the reach of the void and an anchor point for the self. It is the source of all being as the ultimate Being. Loder sumarizes:

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[219] James E. Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 2nd edition (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989), 21–25.

[220] Loder, 71–85.

> [T]he Holy is the manifest Presence of being-itself transforming and restoring human being in a way that is approximated by the imaginative image as it recomposes the 'world' in the course of transformational knowing. As the Presence of being-itself, the Holy is both within and beyond people, but always it retains its essential character as *mysterium tremendum fascinans.*[221]

The Holy exists in each person, exemplified through a desperate need for being connected to the Holy as an external source. Each person navigates these four dimensions in life. Transformation occurs when the self connects with the Holy in such a way that a "new 'world'" intrudes throughout a person's whole self, pushing the void into its place, and shifting the lived world's reality. All this happens when the self further anchors to the Holy as the Source.[222]

Loder suggests that the self needs to participate in transformational knowledge to reach its full human potential. He argues that developmental history has restricted this potential by focusing on only two of the four dimensions he listed: the lived world and the self. By concentrating on the empirical aspect of humanity and disregarding that which both the void and the Holy represent, developmental science has contributed to unhelpful negations of the self.[223] Scholars dismiss reports of transcendent experience through assumptions such as stress, hysteria, and shock, reinterpreting them to fit the method particular to the field of study (such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, and even zoology.) The *what* of the content is dismissed in favor of the *how*. Loder writes, "[T]he presumed reality of the human sciences becomes normative for those experiences that to the experiencer are disclosing a reality of a related but distinctly different order."[224] Interpretation and reasoning become circular as the *what* of belief determines the content of discovery. Ironically, the constructivist argument levies the same charge, as we will see, against phenomenology, particularly mystical experience. Yet, from Otto to Loder, we see claims of a Presence which exists outside the circular pattern which can functionally break systematic holds or feedback loops to introduce something new, something transformational.

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[221] Loder, 91.

[222] Loder, 80.

[223] Loder, 157–61.

[224] Loder, 16.

Religious Social Constructivism

In regard to phenomenology, religious academics on the extreme constructivist end of the spectrum reject the unique subjective data of experience as non-empirical, non-observable and thus non-relative. Religious experience is simply the result of social factors which prescribe it. Russell McCutcheon's religious studies scholarship represents this part of the field. He deconstructs religious experience in the introduction to his compiled reader of essays which, for the most part, contribute a similar action. He denotates between *experience-present*, which is "private and unavailable for empirical (that is, sensory) confirmation," and *experience-past* which is "very public and therefore available for empirical confirmation."[225] While experience-past is verifiable (teaching experience, for example), experience-present primarily occurs through claims which operate linguistically, both internally and externally. Turning to the work of Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, McCutcheon dissects the meaning of experience-present through the experiencer's expression and argues that such expression provides evidence of the speaker's formation and participation in social systems. This reveals the influence of social formation, as what "gets to count as experiences is determined for us by others, by the grids given to us and by means of which we determine what is and is not significant to us."[226]

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[225] Russell T. McCutcheon, "Introduction," in *Religious Experience: A Reader*, ed. Craig Martin, Russell T. McCutcheon, and Leslie Dorrough Smith (Bristol: Equinox, 2012), 8.

[226] McCutcheon, 6.

Taking this perspective further, he contends that any experience-present event could simply be a product of these systems, conjured through particular formation by particular systems, "the seemingly private residue of an all too public thing."[227] Broadly, social constructivism presumes that forerunning cultural paradigms shape all experience. As a result, constructivists suspect that all experiential data is (at the least) tainted by or (at the most) produced by the systems within which the self functions. For religious experience, constructivism presumes that a person's experience of the holy is formed by and understood through a filter of beliefs and culture, even contributing to or creating the experience itself.[228] McCutcheon represents a constructivist position which understands religious experiences as entirely socially constructed and suggests that scholars who claim to have these experiences are unable to detangle themselves from social structures enough to offer any contributive evaluation.[229] Yet, if we apply this argument to constructivists themselves, no person can be fully objective when observing anything.

A more moderate constructivist position does not preclude religious experience as possible, but attempts to brings it into the realm of empirical dissection. Nelson notes that philosopher Steven Katz was one of the first to do so by addressing the social structural influences on all experiences.[230] In his key edited work, *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, Katz includes a snippet of the letter he sent requesting contributions. In it he named the desire to move mystical scholarship into a logical direction beyond that of James, Otto, Stace, and Zaehner, while also refraining from labeling religious experience as nonsense.[231] In Katz's own essay, he suggests that religious experience is possible, but its scholarship faces significant empirical challenges, including interpretation, veridicality, and epistemology.[232] He argues that much of the scholarship around religious experience also reflects underlying dogmatic and ecumenical assumptions, attempting to find experiential commonality as proof for transcendent existence, working backwards from accounts of religious experiences to the actual event. This scholarship culminated into perennialism, arguing for a common truth despite different mystical manifestations. Katz suggests that such a commonality does not exist as evidenced by the variety of mystical experience. Evaluation of these differences must change the approach to study, working forward to the point of experience rather than reflecting backward. Doing so will allow scholars to explore the existing framework within which the experience comes to be. He contends:

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[227] McCutcheon, 15–16.

[228] Nelson, *Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, 129.

[229] McCutcheon also proves the fallibility of his particular constructivist approach by creating a counter-productive argument which rejects the insights of scholars who have experienced the religious phenomena they are studying. He asks "[M]ust one be ancient Greek to study ancient Greece? Must one be a communist to study communism? What about marine biologists and what they study?" (McCutcheon, "Introduction," 11) before providing an example of someone walking through an immersive Holocaust exhibit claiming they have now "experienced" the horrors of that event. McCutcheon suggests that this example provides proof of how social structures function, fooling a person into an experience they never empirically had. Yet the experience-past of a holocaust survivor also represents their experience-present. The point he may not realize he's making ultimately vouches for the inclusion of experience-present within religious consideration. Someone studying ancient Greece, who constantly tries to overcome the temporal gap in their scholarship, would most certainly welcome a time machine to do so. And what marine biologist wouldn't take the opportunity to play in the waves as a dolphin? Religious experience is not necessary to study religion, but this does not preclude the use of religious experience or the testimony it provides. Similarly, the recognition of social construction provides empty conclusions for disregarding the potential involvement of God or other aspects of transcendent experience. It certainly does not disprove God, as some entrenched constructivists believe. McCutcheon's position represents an extreme position on the continuum, weakly relying on antagonism for his conclusions.

> *There are NO pure (i.e., unmediated) experiences.* Neither mystical experience nor more ordinary forms of experience give any indication, or any grounds for believing, that they are unmediated. That is to say, *all* experience is processed through, organized by, and makes itself available to us in extremely complex epistemological ways.[233]

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[230] Nelson, *Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, 130.

[231] Steven T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 3.

[232] Steven T. Katz, ed., "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 23–24.

[233] Katz, 26. Emphasis original.

For Katz, evaluating mysticism does begin with the aftermath of an experience, but requires also studying the concepts a mystic brings to the experience. He argues that there is a "clear causal connection" between the religious social structure to which a person belongs and their religious experiences.[234] Every person holds a particular cultural-social coding, is raised and indoctrinated with particular symbols, concepts, images, and ideologies which design experience in advance. This accounts for the vast differentiation between mystical experiences. Katz makes room for transcendent religious experience; he simply contends that we participate in forming that religious experience by bringing our own frames of reference into the creation of an event. We read particular meaning because we have learned that meaning prior to the experience and become co-creators of the event.[235]

Role-Taking in Conjunction with a Constructivist Model

While Mead does not engage religious experience, there are subsequent interdisciplinary scholars who work in his wake of symbolic interactionism and religious scholarship, placing an emphasis on preexisting social structures to create constructivist positions similar to Katz. For example, psychologist Larry Day examines how a child's concept of God develops through their role-taking action within a reference group. Children gather ideas about God through their social interaction and thus associate certain gestures, connections, feelings, symbols, etc. with God due to the framework within which they operate.[236] However, the most notable scholarship which incorporates the use of role acquisition in conjunction with religious experience belongs to Swedish religious psychologist Hjalmar Sundén. Sundén does not expressly engage Mead, but draws from intermediary scholars who solidified the use of role in psychology, such as Theodore Newcomb and Anne-Marie Rocheblave-Spenlé. Sundén's student Thorvald Källstad draws a connection between his advisor and Mead, arguing that both view language as the means through which a child learns to adopt another's role and offers a process through which role-taking becomes possible.[237] Nils G. Holm, another of Sundén's students, similarly connects the scholars when he outlines three types of role application to the field of psychology. Mead represents one strand, which focuses on the communicative interplay between individuals in a way that relationally connects them. Sundén carries the use of roles into the application of perceptual psychology by parsing the influence of relational role-taking in building perceptual references systems, which the self then applies to larger contexts. [238]

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[234] Katz, 40.

[235] Katz, 59–60.

[236] Larry G Day, "The Development of the God Concept: A Symbolic Interaction Approach," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 3, no. 3 (1975): 172–78.

In his major work translated into German, *Die Religion und die Rollen: Eine psychologische Untersuchung der Frömmigkeit* (*Religion and Roles: A Psychological Inquiry into Piety)*, Sundén outlines how reference systems contribute to the construction of religious experiences. The elements of religious tradition, myth, and rite create a social framework for experience, the self depending on its structure both to participate in and also to process the event.[239] Like Katz, he asserts the need for some functional understanding of the Holy Other in order to access the Holy Other. Although Sudén names multiple influences in the creation of a reference system, he primarily focuses, for Christians, on the use of Biblical narrative to create these frameworks. They offer a primary and constant structural feature through a literary tradition to connect generations of believers into a particular narrative.[240] It is then through these constructed frames that Christians can psychologically process any holy interaction.[241] As religious psychologist Jacob Belzen helpfully summarizes, just as one needs to learn something before having the ability to perceive it through a microscope, so "Religious experiences are the result, and not the starting point, of the religious relationship."[242]

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[237] Thorvald Källstad, "The Application of the Religio-Psychological Role Theory," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26, no. 3 (1987): 369, https://doi.org/10.2307/1386439.

[238] Nils G. Holm, "Religionspsychologie Gestern Und Heute: Einige Entwicklungslinien," *Archiv für Religionspsychologie / Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 22 (1997): 22–24.

[239] Hjalmar Sundén, *Die Religion und die Rollen: Eine psychologische Untersuchung der Frömmigkeit*, trans. Herman Müller and Suzanne Öhman (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1959), 27.

Sundén argues that these frames of reference shape the self's perception and thus determine the content of religious experience, involving the self in constructing the Holy event. He writes, "The great question for the psychology of religion…is to ask in what way religious experience can be understood as perceptual experience."[243] For Sundén, perception is the organism dealing with the stimuli it encounters through selecting, interpreting, and completing them. The stimulation of a certain pattern releases a certain pattern. Sundén offers the example of a police officer coming to a scene of a break-in and instinctively ducking behind a rock when they think they see a gun. The barrel, however, turns out to be the neck of a discarded beer bottle. The officer entered into the situation with a perceptual expectation and the beer bottle provided a stimulus (incorrectly perceived) which caused the release of a role pattern. Perception relies on frameworks so the self can participate in the construction of an experience. Roles fulfill two functions: they pattern behavior as well as build frameworks of perception.[244] The pious person can then restructure their world by incorporating a different frame of reference to their field of experience or swap frames of reference based on different stimuli. What was once *ordinary* can now be understood as *extraordinary*.[245] The use of a frame of reference depends on how much the self trusts it, trust built through social or experiential affirmation.[246]

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[240] Sundén , 13.

[241] Sundén, 29.

[242] Jacob A. Belzen, "Beyond a Classic? Hjalmar Sundén's Role Theory and Contemporary Narrative Psychology," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 6, no. 3 (1996): 183.

[243] Hjalmar Sundén, "What Is the Next Step to Be Taken in the Study of Religious Life," *Harvard Theological Review* 58, no. 4 (October 1965): 445.

[244] Sundén, 445–47.

Through this approach, Sundén distinguishes himself from phenomenological scholars who argue that a religious aspect inherently exists within humanity, or that holy experience can transcend or function beyond social constructs. He dismisses older theories as misinformed, failing to understand how the brain processes experience through social structures which determine the nature and content of those experiences. People construct their emotions and their consciousness in connection with God through the religious structures they build.[247] This does not mean that all perceptual frameworks are overtly constructed. Frames of reference often operate in latent situations until a stimulus triggers a reaction that seeks full resolution. Sundén's use of a framework which necessitates a particular response deviates from Mead's rejection of these characteristics in behaviorism. However, his use of roles and their function in religious experience reveals how easily a Meadian model situates within the constructivist position. The use of roles does not discriminate against the possibility of transcendent action and an independent Holy Other, but it does, like Katz, emphasize the influence of social paradigms to the point of participating in the creation of religious experience.

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[245] Sundén, *Die Religion und die Rollen*, 88.

[246] Sundén, 93–98.

[247] Sundén, 89.

Deconstructing the Antagonistic Binary

Throughout both constructivist and phenomenological scholarship on religious experience, an unnecessary and antagonistic binary has formed through arguments shoring up one end of the spectrum at the expense of the other. Deconstructing the binary will enable both positions to enhance the other, not necessarily to form a perfect cohesion of theory, but to find some aspects of shared interest which will undoubtedly strengthen each approach and create a way for projects like this one to integrate both into its model. Several feminist scholars offer an example of the positive effects of incorporating a phenomenological perspective into their epistemology. While feminist theories are not exclusively constructivist, their deconstructive methodologies reflect the presumption of influential systems which organize and process experience. Even more, many feminists resist phenomenology, as philosopher Linda Fisher suggests, due to a perception that its guise of general analysis covers for closed analysis based on subjective experiences. Phenomenology perpetuates an essentializing discourse through generalized claims based on a unique subject.[248] Yet, feminists struggle with this exact tension, attempting to articulate particular experiences in the context of describing a shared experience created by a generalized situation. This type of scholarship requires both constructivism and phenomenology and suffers when one is rejected. To solve this issue, Fisher turns to Judith Butler's engagement of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to show how feminists can find commonality with phenomenology, in sharing a commitment to grounding theory in lived experience. Fisher quotes Butler who wrote, "'My situation does not cease to be mine just because it is the situation of someone else, and my acts, individual as they are, nevertheless reproduce the situation of my gender and do so in various ways.'"[249] Fisher highlights Butler's work to illustrate how one's own existential experience of a particular situation can contribute to an accounting of generalized structures, and yet these structures do not necessarily remove the particularity from the person, nor communicate such an essential idea that prescribes a closed system to the exclusion of other experiences. Fisher shows how commonality found in subjective experience can offer insight into reality alongside general deconstructive analysis.

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[248] Linda Fisher, "Phenomenology and Feminism: Perspectives on Their Relation," in *Feminist Phenomenology*, ed. Linda Fisher and Lester Embree, vol. 40, Contributions to Phenomenology (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 27.

Linda Martin Alcoff, a Latin-American feminist philosopher, gives further insight into deconstructing the dichotomy by suggesting how each can actually inform the epistemological foundation of the other. She argues that phenomenology needs feminism (and other post-structural critical voices) to identify how it can result in closed systems. Imprinted with masculine, racialized, Eurocentric assumptions, phenomenology has relied on narrow categories for defining and utilizing experience. This narrow view gathers the consensus of a few, resulting in a constricting essentialism representative of a small population segment, closed off from the rest.[250] She argues that phenomenology needs feminism, to see how it has taken the complex object of experiential meaning and reduced it by prioritizing the experience of certain select group. Lived experience, taken seriously, does not work to find fixed essential structures, but acknowledges that knowledge is always unfinished, incomplete, and open-ended.[251] Ultimately, she suggests that a critical approach to phenomenology will not tear apart phenomenology, but snip the cords binding it, permitting it to spring free into the unknown where it truly should reside. On the other hand, Martin Alcoff also proposes that the highly deconstructive epistemology of feminism can also learn something from phenomenology. Feminism needs a better relationship between theory and experience, she argues, making room for experience which exists beyond descriptive discourse. Feminism presumes that language permeates and affects experience, but this then limits experience to the available discourse. She writes:

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[249] Fisher, 29.

[250] Linda Martin Alcoff, "Phenomenology, Post-Structuralism, and Feminist Theory on the Concept of Experience," in *Feminist Phenomenology*, ed. Linda Fisher and Lester Embree, vol. 40, Contributions to Phenomenology (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 39–40.

[251] Martin Alcoff, 48–49.

> If meaningful experience must pass the test of discursive formulation, we will preclude the inarticulate from the realm of knowledge, a tendency which has nicely served the interests of Western masculinity by allowing it to ignore forms of oppression that could not be expressed under reigning regimes of discourse. A better view would be one which understood experience and discourse as imperfectly aligned, with locations of disjuncture.[252]

This approach recognizes that experience creates a surplus of knowledge which exceeds discourse, enabling feminism to return to its foundational text: the body. We may access and process experience through language, but feminism must also recognize that knowledge through experience can exceed our linguistic capabilities.

Fisher and Martin Alcoff represent feminists who engage primarily in an existential phenomenology which emphasizes the value of experience within a limited physical existence and a knowledge that cannot be entirely communicated through discourse. Their concerns do not extend to religion, the holy, or what might be represented within transcendence. Yet their work in deconstructing the binary between constructivism and phenomenology overlaps interests and offers a way forward for bringing these theoretical approaches together. With this merger, we can both perceive and value the impact social communities have within the creation of meaning and the development of self. At the same time, phenomenology offers the reminder that these structures do not limit the possibility of experience. Deconstructing the binary enables transcendence to coexist with social construction, the holy participating both in and beyond our structures. For worship which presumes holy action, albeit in a variety of manifestations dependent on the worshiper and worshiping body, this union of constructivist phenomenology forces a recognition of the structures inherited, perpetuated, and passed on without limiting God, recognizing that experience can yield a surplus beyond these structures. Singular accounts of encountering God do not prescribe a generalized pattern on their own, but participate in patterned structures both representative of the systems surrounding the individual as well as a collective testimony about something beyond these systems. Constructivist phenomenology participates in an open-ended, plural, fragmented, and shifting account of the Holy that exists alongside social structures, even manifesting through them, but which cannot be fully captured by them.

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[252] Martin Alcoff, 47.

The collapse of the binary also requires that we address phenomenological expectations of encountering God. Modern mysticism has created particular markers to delineate phenomenological religious experience, including elements of transcendence and ineffability. Unfortunately, this perpetuates the binary through practical experience, as worshipers harmfully disconnect certain holy encounters from the supporting system while also missing the moments where God appears through the systems. To dismantle these expectations, we must look at how these expectations came to be. Feminist religion philosopher Grace Jantzen helpfully does so by tracing the history of mysticism in her essay “Feminists, Philosophers, and Mystics.” She reveals the relatively recent trend of both escapism and ineffability within modern mysticism. In the beginning of Christian tradition, mystics were simply those who had been “initiated in the mystery religions, who had undergone a rite of initiation about which they kept silent.”[253] The silence within this definition evolved the defining characteristics of mysticism when it connected to Platonic philosophy. Silence no longer simply represented mystery, but was applied to the body, as mystics practiced shutting out the senses to access divine knowledge. The emphasis on knowledge gave the next stepping stone of mystical definition, merging with an increased emphasis on the Bible. Mystics became those who could discern special meaning in scripture, able to perceive hidden depths. Women, who did not have similar access or resources to participate in this aspect of scriptural mysticism, began emphasizing their visionary experiences to gain access to a different kind of privileged knowledge of God. Male authorities saw these women as humble handmaidens and granted validity to these visions, permitted these mystics adhered to doctrines, submitted to a male spiritual director, and followed certain enclave rules for physical living. Even adhering to these requirements, women were not guaranteed the label "mystic" and could just as easily be tried and condemned as a heretic, with false mysticism being the demonic counterpart.[254] This tension continued on into the division of public and private life worlds. In the private sphere, women could finally claim visionary insight without heretical fear. Mysticism was deemed private as religious experience was the result of personal piety. This aligned with the woman's perceived domain—the home.

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[253] Grace M. Jantzen, “Feminists, Philosophers, and Mystics,” *Hypatia* 9, no. 4 (1994): 188.

> [The] ideal woman would, of course, never venture into the sordid public world. Both mysticism and women, then, became constructed as private and personal, having nothing to do with politics; hence mystical raptures were quite compatible with a woman's role as the 'angel in the house,' servicing her husband and children not only physically but spiritually as well.[255]

Jantzen contends that Anglo-American modern philosophy has taken this private picture of subjective mystical experience and read it backwards onto all mystical experience, collapsing all mystical experience into these particular markers.[256] Modern religious philosophy mistakenly engages mysticism as intense psychological events, aiming to prove the veridicality of those experiences as proof of God through personal experience. Jantzen points out that this narrow modern view misses the historical treatment of the divine. Expecting, experiencing, and interpreting religious experience narrowly evolved into the individual private sphere and does not represent the longer diverse tradition of divine manifestations.[257]

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[254] Jantzen, 189–90.

[255] Jantzen, 190.

Jantzen's writing favors a constructivist account of the historical definitions of mysticism as she tries to illuminate gendered and other cultural influences that often covertly operate within religious theological positions. However, her mapping of the socially constructed markers of mysticism reveal how Christianity currently perpetuates an unnecessary binary which bifurcates transcendent experience from "real life." While God can connect with humanity through personal visionary experiences, we must recognize that this is not the only way God acts. Encountering the holy manifests in many different ways, not necessarily in an event that "feels" transcendent, beyond structures capable of being analyzed in discourse. Just as God is not constricted by social structures, God is also not barred from acting through them. Different types of worship expect, create, and participate in different types of holy action, from intense subjective experience, to communal affect, to cultural or scriptural insight. God similarly contributes to the transformative moment by manifesting in variety, not particularity, in a range from structural participation to transcendent intrusion. Worship's social construction of anticipation does not necessarily predetermine God, nor create an artificial transcendence.

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[256] As already indicated, Jantzen's concerns reveal how this social-historical definition of mystic evolved as a means to keep women in a position of submission.

[257] Jantzen, 192–96.

Rather, it recognizes that God's action can pattern differently and meet the worshiper both within and outside socially constructed culture.

Uniting Constructive and Transcendent Action

Practical theology offers a fertile space for creating a model which utilizes constructivism and phenomenology because it engages the practices of the people in conjunction with the theological reflection these activities generate. Particularly for this project, worship intentionally constructs liturgical material with the social-historical context of the worshiper while also expecting some level of transcendent participation. Practical theologian Dorothy Bass contends that practical theology merges thinking and activity to generate wisdom among people who might not necessarily think of themselves as theologians. She writes, "Christian practices are patterns of cooperative human activity in and through which life together takes shape over time in response to and in the light of God as known in Jesus Christ."[258] Worship offers an example of these cooperative activities which represent the long constructed social activity of people in light of a presumed interaction with God. How do we take the practices and theological underpinnings of faith which have been passed on to us and continually shape, reshape, and pass along such theological and theoretical wisdom? A coorientation model addresses this question, looking at the particular practices of a worshiping people, examining the social paradigmatic inheritance alongside the perceived involvement of God. The first half of this chapter focused on outlining attributes belonging to different approaches to religious experience and deconstructing their supposed incompatibility. The remainder will shift to exploring the insights generated in merging these viewpoints, highlighting four aspects which shape coorientation's model before considering how to include God as a participant within it.

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[258] Dorothy C. Bass, "Introduction," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 3.

Relationally Connecting with God

While constructivists, like Katz, contend that *pure* or unmediated experiences are impossible, they do not preclude the involvement of a holy other. Humans need some sort of existing framework to have and process experience. Humanity places the limitations on any encounter, needing to filter it through what they already know to be able to process their experience. On the other hand, phenomenologists, like Loder, argue that there is something inherently built into our humanity, providing us the ability to recognize and engage God beyond us. This seemingly reduces into a divided position over the *a priori* elements of our humanity. It is a chicken-or-egg argument as we wonder which came first, social structures or divine interaction. However, if we recognize God as an actor who reaches out in relational connection, this difference fades. God as an independent actor can represent an *a priori* being who predates our own existence and therefore also contributes to the social factors which shape us in way to connect with Them. This gives God, at a base level, the same informative consideration we give fellow humans who contribute to and pass on the social structures needed for self development. The *a priori* elements given to us by parents and culture develop us in a way to interact with them. Certainly, we can presume at least the same level of influence in a relational God, who reaches us through, as Shawn Copeland describes, our *human finitude*. God both contributes to and connects with us through our temporal, historical, cultural, and social circumstances to create a connection with us.[259] God's creative activity did not stop at the physical realm, but extends into our social activity as well, contributing to the paradigms we function in.

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[259] Copeland, "African American Religious Experience," 47.

When my husband and I started going to a new gym, we joined a class full of friendly members where someone tried to strike up a conversation with him. He missed their intention and stayed silent, staring in a different direction. Someone else tried to direct his attention to the first questioner but still, he remained oblivious. Hilariously, a third person tried to get his attention and succeeded, only he presumed that she was talking to someone behind him and he turned to look around. Finally I called his name and, knowing my voice, he turned to me, allowing me to direct his attention to the others attempting to talk to him. Theologian Howard Thurman argues that this type of engagement is a point of recognition. In his book *The Creative Encounter,* he describes how humans need a "conscious 'toe hold' for God in religious experiences."[260] We need a frame of reference to enable us to make realizations. This does not act as a limitation, but rather as a launching point for religious experience. To be brought into the conversation, my husband needed a familiar voice to connect him to the experience. From there he could continue into engagement with new others. God as a relational actor provides these familiar toe-holds to invite us into an awareness within our own finitude. From there we can continue to reside with God in the familiar, the immediate, or we can launch into something beyond.[261] A worship coorientation model makes room for God's action and represents this action through a role-taking point of connection. While the phenomenological aspects may carry into a surplus beyond constructive evaluation, the necessary toe-holds reveal how God engages humanity within a framework this model can dissect.

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[260] Howard Thurman, *The Creative Encounter: An Interpretation of Religion and the Social Witness* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 27.

[261] Thurman, 27–30.

Varying our Experiential Expectations

I recently heard a sermon that invited the listener to dwell on the magnificence of God. The preacher worked to remind the listener of God's awesome holiness, puzzling at human failure to exist in a constant state of wonder. This is not the first time I have heard such a sermon, one which tries to carry the congregation into awe at the numinous, but realistically we cannot be awestruck at all times. Does this then mean that our consciousness of God disappears when we can no longer reside in the emotive mystical? Do all God encounters require our jaws to drop? My argument thus far has hopefully revealed that this is not the case. Jantzen's deconstruction of our inherited idea of mysticism reveals that the private emotive does not characterize all religious experience. Cone and Thurman both emphasize the necessity of God sightings to connect with humanity's lived reality. Even in numinous moments, social frameworks contribute to the event as Schleiermacher's creature-consciousness requires the profoundly mundane to act as contrast to these transcendent glimpses. Constructivism balances out phenomenological expectations by revealing that not all religious experience occurs in the awesome.

What should we then expect from a God encounter? While Loder's primary examples represent large *mysterium tremendum* accounts of experiencing God, his idea of transformation offers a marker for such encounters. The four ontological quadrants interact through God events to transform the self toward the Holy as opposed to the void. In convictional experiences, transformation negates the nothingness of the void, indicating its direction rather than goal. Theologian Edward Farley similarly describes this trajectory within God encounters when introducing *ciphers of redemption* as a means of understanding God without direct attribution. He writes, "In communities of faith, the bespeaking of God begins with redemption. In its most inclusive sense, redemption means the transformation of human evil that corrupts the spheres of agency, the interhuman, and the social."[262] Rather than suppressing our understanding of God into symbols, Farley contends that God appears through discernable holy transformative activity: in affirmation of one's own ontological being for the individual; in reconciliation in love rather than compensatory calculation for the interhuman; and in justice overturning oppression due to an eschatological hope for the social.[263] Farley's ciphers of redemption mimic Loder's description of the transformative moment in overturning the negation in relationship to the Holy, but Farley complexifies the idea by including greater multiplicity of God encounters. This creates an experiential range from tiny to enormous shifts represented from a move away from the distortion of the void toward the Holy.

A trajectory of transformation occurs when we encounter God; from the large, earth-shaking moments to the small insights—from small, personal changes to large cultural shifts. Worship offers this type of holy experience variety, certainly in the awe-struck moments which Otto describes, but also in slight alterations to the "ordinary" patterns of life. The united voices praising God also provide a testimonial of identity which transforms self, space, and public. Worshipers carry in stories of life for the body to hold in a way that supports the contributor, but also shapes the body's perception of both others and the holy Other. The bread and the wine at the table do not solely offer physical nourishment but become spiritual nourishment as the self transforms in sacramental participation. Transformational moments do not necessarily manifest as big events, but include subtle shifts which align self or society toward the Holy, away from the void. Coorientation requires this broader understanding of religious experience to examine the social action of the Holy. When we limit God sightings to ineffable numinous experiences, we miss a significant portion of God's action which appears in in the patterns and practices of life. The subtle and the habitual God encounters often go unnoticed, but a coorientation model can highlight their existence as important points of transformation.

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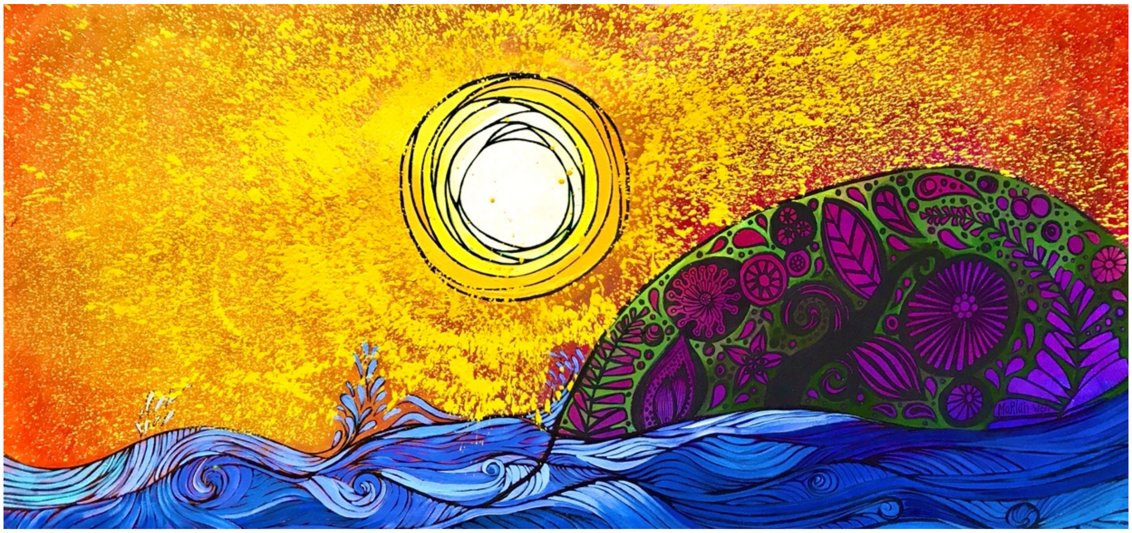
[262] Edward Farley, *Divine Empathy: A Theology of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 124.

[263] Farley, 125–31.

Rejecting the Experiential Passive/Creative Dichotomy

In her painting, *The Spirit of Creation*, artist Mariah West portrays day three of the Biblical creation story. Here God fills the bare landscape with every type of plant life, which itself carries seed to continue perpetuating creative activity (Gen 1: 9–13).[264] In describing her piece, she writes:

> God says, in essence, "Hey, let's give creation itself some creative power! I'd like to see that hill burst into bloom! I'd like to see people make babies! I'd like to see seeds fly through the air and plant themselves in the earth and sprout there, only to create more plants with seeds in them! This is going to be great!"[265]



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[264] Mariah West, *The Spirit of Creation*, 2020, acrylic paint and Uniposca markers on canvas, James and Katrina Olson personal collection, used with permission.

[265] Mariah West, "The Spirit of Creation," Mariah West Designs, accessed June 29, 2021, https://www.mariahwest.com/shop/the-spirit-of-creation-20x43.

West captures the idea of God imbuing creation with creative power itself, as its creative acts continue to participate in God's creative action. Constructivist insights helpfully shape the phenomenological perspective to reclaim this idea of creation. It does so by rejecting the passivity of the mystic, claiming that religious experience does not just happen upon a person, but they participate in creating the event. Through our inheritance of material to produce, we are called to contribute to production in our participation. This does not discount the possible qualities of a shocking or intrusive religious experience, but recognizes that even in surprise, the self participates in constructing the event itself. In the Annunciation, possibly the most surprising God-event of history, Mary still contributes to the moment. The foretelling of Christ's birth is shaped, in part, by her questions, her willing embodied presence, and her assenting statement, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38 NRSV). God's relational attributes reveal that we are relational participants, connected in mutual social action. For connection to occur, each party must contribute something, even if participation manifests as a listening ear or a directed gaze. Rejecting passivity also applies to our consideration of God. Phenomenology shapes the constructivist perspective by rejecting the idea that God remains inactive within a person's creative contribution to religious experience. Humanity cannot create religious experience alone but, in the activity of seeking God, involves God and joins with God. A relational framework rejects the idea that any participant can remain passive in connection and celebrates the co-creation of an event marked by God meeting humanity.

Worship reflects this idea, as it intentionally builds a space through the work of the people, but cannot be complete without God joining into the action. Coorientation recognizes the frameworks we utilize to build space for religious experience, but also recognizes that God contributes to the action as well. Neither fades into passivity as each holds a role within the model. This relationship mimics any activity which reaches out toward others. Like a teen coming to apologize to a parent and worshipers coming to confess to God, both the parent and God contribute to the formation of the event. Like a friend who finally watches the summer blockbuster her friends are constantly referencing and gaining new insights into their conversation, so a worshiper may hear a passage of scripture in a new way in light of a fresh experience they carry into worship. New facets of understanding appear in connection to the activities of both the friend and the worshiper. The creation activity on any point of the coorientation model does not diminish the intentionality of a being at any other point. They exist in relationship to one another. This approach balances the pragmatics of constructivism with the intervening activity of God, the Holy Other. A worship coorientation model celebrates and honors the intentional creative activity of worshipers and God occurring through the social action.

Uncovering the Fallacy of Neutrality

The gift of meeting God through social frameworks also comes with issues related to these social frameworks, namely the fallibility of neutral claims. As Linda Fisher's argument illustrated in the deconstruction section above, feminists avoid phenomenology because of its history of using subjective experiences to form essentialist frameworks. She rightly articulates phenomenology's need for constructivism to reveal contributing structural influences, and rejects the idea that any experience can completely transcend its context. From a religious point of view, this approach can liberate phenomenology from the pressure of providing a "pure religious experience" that somehow transcends all social trappings. Even ineffable encounters tie into the social, mingling realities within the experiencer. Rather than diminishing the quality of phenomenology, constructivism can lean into religious experience by wrestling with it to determine contributing factors. Through this approach, phenomenology can stretch through the contributions of scholars who point out how visible and invisible systems operate to influence the self within religious experiences. Phenomenological claims can shed the shackles of power systems which diminish life, like racism or classism. Feminist scholars can point out the patriarchal influences that create the predominant imagery of God as Father without rejecting it as a legitimate experience of God, one of the many dimensions of a multifaceted Holy Other. Done well, constructivism can enable theologians to dive further into phenomenological insights by wrestling with the text of experience.

Carrying this into worship, coorientation can enable honest deconstructive reflection to influence reconstructive action toward relational inclusivity. Worship should presume variance not only in types of religious experience, but in the content of revelation as well. Experiential accounts should reflect a multifaceted God engaging a diverse set of people. Even in a relatively homogeneous congregational context, ministerial leaders should explore how diverse perspectives can contribute to a richer perspective of God. Perpetuating the tropes of inherited religious tradition without interrogation presumes a *pure quality* of that tradition, whether ten, one hundred, or one thousand years old. Good phenomenological constructive scholarship does not dismiss these voices to their socio-cultural past but parses them to merge with new insights through intentional reflection and engagement.

A Phenomenological Coorientation Model

Throughout this chapter, I have worked to show how constructivism and phenomenology can not only coincide within coorientation, but can inform each other to strengthen this model for application to worship. This final section will complete the argument by exploring how coorientation actually incorporates transcendent action into its model by inquiring how God meets us. When worship leaders plan sermons, litanies, songs, prayers, and offerings for worship, they do so by drawing on categorical understanding for the others in their pews. This same action occurs for the interactive Other. A relational God joins into worship's social action. The constructivist, who rejects a phenomenological category of knowledge, may argue that the congregation members present a more tangible interaction for the role-taking occurring in worship. The physicality of their presence allows for aural responses or physical gestures which communicatively contribute to categories of understanding in ways that a holy Presence does not. This fair assessment then raises the questions: How do we determine the functional categories for God which guide our role-taking action? How does religious experience factor into a coorientation model? I would suggest that there are three key components for discerning God's action: scripture as an inherited guide, a relational God of incarnation, and revelation which emerges through the patterning rising out of diverse testimony. These three access points work together to create insight into God's multifaceted character and enable us to incorporate God's action into a coorientation model.

Scripture as Formational

Scripture offers a clear choice for building a categorical understanding of God. Hjalmar Sundén focuses on it as the primary source within his foundational text. The biblical narrative functionally provides the blueprints for role-taking by outlining categories for God and humanity in connection to God. He begins by illustrating how the Bible does not report an event for its own sake, but passes on examples of how God interacts with people.[266] As a result it creates a historical narrative which creates a fixed and shared access point for a variety of roles, perpetuated through generations of believers. In scriptures we derive role characteristics for God as well as role characteristics for ourselves in relationship to God.[267] Sundén differentiates between two different types of *Rollenaneignung* (role appropriation) and outlines their functions. *Rollenübernahme* (role assumption) is the actual taking on of a particular role and the status it imbues to that role. In this adoption, the person becomes their role of preacher, parent, protestor, etc. This differs from *Rollenaufnahme* (role acceptance) which is the ability to anticipate the behavior of the other based on what you understand of that role without adopting it yourself, as in the role of murderer, discussed in chapter one.[268] Källstad helpfully delineates Sundén's approach. In scripture role-assumption occurs when humans identify their action with the other humans in the Scriptural narrative. Role-adoption occurs when the Bible reader understands how God has acted in the past and begins to expect that God will act in a similar manner again.[269] They create a scriptural frame of reference upon their own lives and expect God's action to recur in a similar fashion. Roles do not manifest as exact copies of characters within the narratives, but the self interprets the likeness and adjusts the roles accordingly for their particular situation. [270] Sundéns emphasis on scripture as a foundational text for creating frames of reference helpfully explores how we can begin to understand God's self disclosure through role-taking.

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[266] Sundén, *Die Religion und die Rollen,* v.

However, there are also several issues with Sundén's approach. First, while the delineation of role-appropriation and role-assumption makes room for some holy distance between God action and human action, the distinction might be more harmful than beneficial. It delineates an unnecessary barrier between God and humanity that prevents accounting for God's action through humanity. Scripture provides countless examples of God working and speaking through people in the narrative. Prescribing roles which create difference will create limitations where none needs to exists. Human action often represents the *imago Dei* as love or forgiveness which mimics God's own role. Perhaps there might be some instances where caution requires delineation between role appropriation and role assumption, but role-taking never presumes that the self fully knows the other. Even in a peer-to-peer situation, skin acts as an impenetrable barrier as no one can fully know someone other than themselves.

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[267] Holm, "Religionspsychologie gestern und heute," 24.

[268] Sundén, *Die Religion und die Rollen*, 9.

[269] Källstad, "The Application of the Religio-Psychological Role Theory," 368.

[270] Belzen, "Beyond a Classic? Hjalmar Sundén's Role Theory and Contemporary Narrative Psychology," 191.

Second, Sundén's emphasis on scripture presumes high levels of Biblical literacy and the traditional source of scriptural text. He authored *Die Religion und die Rollen* in the mid-twentieth century, perhaps when textual influence was more prominent. However, increased media offer a variety of sources which influence theological role creation. From video games, to social media memes, to movies and more, Christians craft their ideas about God from sources with various relationships to scripture. This does not necessarily discount these influences, which may or may not open new insights into roles for God, but a focus on scripture as the primary source for a holy frame of reference cannot withstand the plethora of other media. Scripture, as a tested inherited text, offers a fixed access point for roles, but ministerial leaders cannot presume that it provides the strongest influence, even for those who claim it as an authority.

Finally, Sundén does not address how power has historically shaped scriptural interpretation and the promotion of certain roles while dismissing others. As feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza outlines, the Bible was written in androcentric languages, came into being through patriarchal societies, and is proclaimed by religion with patriarchal structures.[271]

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[271] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 9.

This suggests that the roles derived from scripture also represent the social structures of their time and may also need some level of deconstructive activity as well. While Schüssler Fiorenza articulates androcentric issues in scripture, this particular concern echoes similar concerns about hierarchies related to power. These influences do not reduce the importance of scripture as a foundational text for identifying roles, but they challenge us to view scripture through particular hermeneutic approaches like suspicion and creative imagination.[272] Through careful reading, we can "conceptualize scripture as an open-ended prototype rather than as an archetype that has to be repeated in every generation."[273] An open-ended approach to scripture builds possibility for new interpretations, particularly from voices who have been ignored or overlooked. These new insights can destabilize once familiar paradigms in favor of new readings which add multiplicity to the role frameworks. Are there new roles to be found in the covenant established between Ruth and Naomi? Do we gloss over different aspects of Rhoda's role when, in her joy, she forgets to open the gate for Peter after he leaves prison? Treating the text as a fixed blueprint narrows role-taking with a particular reading; embracing scripture as a living guide allows different inroads into scripture which may upend inherited paradigms while simultaneously providing insights into the roles which emerge from God's character, some excitingly new and some steadfastly familiar.

God as Relational Actor

Scripture conveys a relational God who interacts with humanity; a being who walks through the garden of Eden, speaks through a burning bush, and moves among the dry bones to give them new life. Even more, the incarnation provides a direct example of God's relationality.

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[272] Schüssler Fiorenza outlines a variety of necessary hermeneutics in chapter 6, "Wisdom's Dance: Hermeneutical Moves and Turns," in *Wisdom's Ways,* 165–91.

[273] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 28.

Jesus came into humanity in a form which joined him in the social paradigms of his day. A full participant of his socio-historical moment, Jesus took on the role of Jew, Rabbi, prophet, and more. Jesus acted within the systems of his community, contributing to their shape. He affirmed the centrality of scripture but brought new interpretation. He participated in the temple tradition but also found a whip. He sat around a Passover table, but passed the cup with a new word: remember me. Jesus reveals how God does not try to bring humanity out of its socially defined space, but joins humanity in that space. At the same time, Jesus also took on the role of Christ, one begotten of God Almighty and thus revealing a Holy Other. He gave glimpses of transcendent reality through his baptism, transfiguration, death, and resurrection (to name a few). The whole personhood of Jesus Christ, human and divine, reveals how God meets humanity within their limitations, but is not confined by those limitations. If Christians can believe in the relational incarnation action of Christ, can we also not conclude that a relational God continues to interact through our own socially constructed world? Jesus was an enfleshed version of the social action Israel had been testifying to throughout its history. God's engagement within humanity did not start or stop with Christ's incarnation, and God's action continues to manifest in our world today. James Cone reasons that reading the New Testament correctly means carrying God's encounter in Christ beyond the moment captured in its pages. The God encountering history in scripture is the God who continues to encounter us now.[274] We cannot transcend the finitude of our human existence, so God meets us in it. God becomes immanent in our own socio-historical moments and transforms them into events of liberation.[275] God represents an independent actor within social action, requiring at least the same consideration of any other who coorients around an object with the collective. This is not to place the Holy Other on an equal level with all others, but it grants that God continues to act as God has acted in the past, involved with humanity through humanity. We need to make room for God, a relational and independent Being.

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[274] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 31.

[275] Cone, 87.

Revelation Through the Diverse Lives of Worshipers

Christian tradition functions as an *a priori* social system for self development which incorporates God's relational involvement with the community. Scripture provides a snapshot of this reality. So, just as we learn to trust God's action toward humanity in the Biblical narrative, can the same also be applied to the testimonial patterns which emerge throughout Christian history into present experience? Presuming that the revelatory narrative of scripture continues, how do we treat modern revelation and its function as transcendent interaction? Theological ethicist H. Richard Niebuhr accommodatingly sets up some parameters. Like Mead, Niebuhr contends that the self develops within an interdependent social community. However, he hones in on the particular way moral intuition emerges within individuals by incorporating Martin Buber's existentialist "I-Thou." We judge our own actions by transcending ourselves to see them through the eyes of others.[276] The self acts morally not simply because of the mores or laws determined by the social framework, but because we find our own humanity in others. Niebuhr asserts, "To be able to say that I am I is…the acknowledgment of my existence as the counterpart of another self."[277] Each time the self participates in social action, it engages with both the proximate expectations of the current situation as well as the loftier expectations of an independent framework. To act morally, the self needs the ability to transcend its immediate situation and reflect on a larger connection to influence its subsequent action. Niebuhr's work illustrates the transcendent elements of role-taking action which point to patterns existing beyond the individual.

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[276] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self; An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 72–76.

[277] Niebuhr, 71.

This same type of transcendent action carries further, occurring in conjunction with the self's formational community. The church, as a formational community, exists in a symbiotic relationship with its members, where the community shapes the individual and the individual contributes to the formation of a collective identity. This identity holds particular markers such as theologies, symbols, and metaphors, which are preserved through the continual adoption of its members. One such marker indicates the reality of a transcendent presence as members commit to a common cause which points beyond themselves to God. The Holy Other becomes apparent through the commitment of a disparate group of people to a single identity.[278] The phenomenological appears through the patterned attestation of the church's members to a central, foundational Being. The pattern testifies to God, but no pattern fully represents God, whose being exists beyond a single representation. Niebuhr describes this patterning as *radical monotheistic faith.* He differentiates this from *henotheism* which holds a singular value system but closes itself off from diverse patterning by creating exact identification, and *polytheism*, which pluralistically holds many gods, placing the primary value-center on the self.[279] Radical monotheism represents a transcendent patterning which provides another avenue for perceiving God's activity, provided that the community is defined by an open system. Niebuhr notes that churches problematically move from monotheism to henotheism by creating closed social systems and identifying them with God. He writes:

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[278] Niebuhr, 86–87.

[279] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture: With Supplementary Essays* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, [1960] 1993), 28–29.

> For radical monotheism the value-center is neither closed society nor the principle of such a society but the principle of being itself; its reference is to no one reality among the many but to One beyond all the many, whence all the many derive their being, and by participation in which they exist. As faith, it is reliance on the source of all being for the significance of the self and of all that exists. It is the assurance that because I am, I am valued, and because you are, you are beloved, and because whatever is has being, therefore it is worthy of love. It is the confidence that whatever is, is good, because it exists as one thing among the many which all have their origin and their being, in the One—the principle of being which is also the principle of value.[280]

Radical monotheistic faith emerges out of an independently diverse yet surprisingly communal connection to the ultimate Being. We value the contribution of others because their created value reflects our own created value. As a result, testimony from the other becomes a value source of understanding God because while it echoes my own, it also provides different insights through their own relational connection. Radical monotheistic faith values the symphony of hearts widening our access to God. Still, constructivist caution recognizes that society flows toward the majority. To incorporate all testimonial contribution, we must be wary of henotheism that forms by missing, ignoring, or devaluing other's voices, their God-imbued being. And similar to the way we critically hold scripture, we must untangle potentially harmful social frameworks within testimonial contribution. Radical monotheistic faith requires intentionally listening to voices different than ours for insight into God's multifaceted being as the patterns of collective voices reveal something about God's interactive nature appearing within humanity. This makes room for the subjective experience, but holds it accountable within community, past, present, and future. The priesthood of all believers functions as a living Word of God's revelation in our world, both in particular testimony and communal pattern.

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[280] Niebuhr, 32.

The Interplay of Triadic Revelation

When Sundén explores how role-taking emerges from and contributes to religious experience, he focuses on the role of scripture for creating the frames of reference needed for God. Scripture provides a necessary common ground, a sacred text which tells of God's action both in general and in the particular revelation of Jesus Christ. However, Sundén's application of scripture treats it like a static entity, a historical document which simply communicates role examples of the past to recreate religious experience in the present. As a result, one could claim the extreme constructivist position that religious experience results from a reaction triggered by a perceptual frame of reference groomed through roles passed down through a historical document. Could such a static document wield such power, to influence centuries of disparate generations into such constructive activity? More likely, God's relational activity manifested into a multi-testimonial document, passed down and tested through generations who have experienced what is reflected in its pages to the degree that they have sacralized it. Scripture's authority represents God's multiple points of revelatory action through the patterned testimony of believers to place their encounters with a relational God in line with scripture. This carries scripture out of a static status and into a living, interactive document.

Homiletician Lisa Thompson helpfully describes how this dynamic occurs in preaching. She suggests that both life and scripture provide sacred texts which reveal good news through their *interplay* with one another.[281] She writes, "scripture brings its histories into the presence of the one it engages; and the one who engages scripture brings her life and history into the presence of scripture."[282] Life and scripture inform each other. Each contains porous boundaries which allow for movement to close the distance between them and make way for revelatory moments.[283] Thompson's articulation of fluidity between the worlds of text and listener illustrates the interplay of revelatory action. Scripture's narrative finds life in the resonances of the listener's ear. The life of the reader finds affirmation when their experiential patterns mimic what they find in scripture. God, as a relational actor, provides the common thread which weaves these two texts together. Religious experience occurs in the interplay of these three revelatory access points, all working together simultaneously and openly, reflecting Niebuhr's description of radical monotheistic faith.

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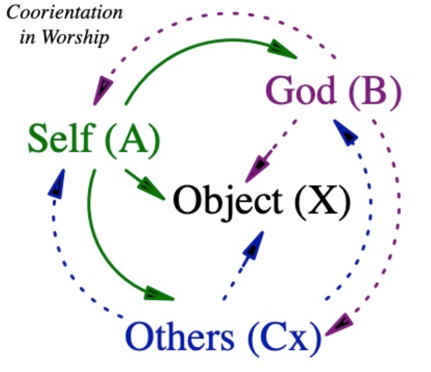
[281] Lisa L. Thompson, *Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), 65–66.

A coorientation model for worship anticipates this triadic divine participation in social action by incorporating a point of action for God. Those who gather in worship expect holy interactivity in a variety of manifestations. Scripture and tradition account for God's activity in the past. God's present activity appears through testimonial accounts: patterned responses, particular descriptions, and expected engagement. The two texts play together to create categorical expectations for God, as an independent actor within worship, One who joins into coorientative action around the object. By incorporating God's action into a coorientation model, we can examine not only what we understand about God, but how we understand God interacts with us. Just as we consider the categorical functions that connect us with others as we coorient around an object, we can begin to deconstruct the presumptions which

Figure 3: Coorientation in Worship



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[282] Thompson, 65.

[283] Thompson, 66–68.

exist along the arrows connecting to God in social action. How does God see other people? How does God see us? How is God oriented toward the object? Does God's orientation always match our own? How do we see God through others' eyes? Just as we can make errors when role-taking for others, we make errors in our role-taking action for God. This does not discount God's independent contribution, just as it does not discount any other person we misread. Fear of erring should not prevent us from examining our categorical underpinnings for engaging God, because our presumption of holy interaction in worship means that, aware or not, we do participate in role-taking activity. Careful examination of how we form our ideas of God and how these ideas shape our action can drive us into deeper awareness of God's being in the pursuit of data gathered through triadic revelation. The interplay of these sources propels us into further revelation, always presuming some error alongside some insight.

Conclusion

This chapter opened with a vignette from a novel which wondered if the experience of the protagonist was *real*. A constructivist would examine how Harry's vision took the frames of reference he knew to build the experience. A phenomenologist would emphasize Harry's transcendent interaction with someone beyond his finite scope. I have aimed to show that these two do not need to be mutually exclusive but can positively inform the other, as the author depicts transcendent action influenced by a social framework, yet is clearly not limited by it. Harry's interaction with Dumbledore in this space transformed his perspective and shaped his actions moving forward.

A phenomenological coorientation model wonders at how human social paradigms and interaction beyond these paradigms contribute to the formation of self and community. Worship's social construction does not preclude transcendent interaction, and transcendent interaction in action cannot claim to be free of paradigmatic influence. Therefore, coorientation must make room for both, presuming God's participation within the functional paradigms at work. This does not reject God's transcendent realness, but leans into the relational framework of God who, while infinitely beyond us, meets us in and through the particular trappings of our current finite structures. The social action of worship dances throughout this reality, seeking transformative moments, big and small, through holy interaction. Coorientation reveals the patterns of these dance steps and can lead to new patterns of connection. By collapsing the antagonistic binary between constructivism and mysticism, we create a hybrid that simultaneously recognizes the limits of our finite being while also continually striving to coorient beyond them by increasingly looking for new revelatory action from a relational God. A sociological approach to worship is concerned with the process in which it comes to being, but a Christian sociological perspective would add that a transcendent God has a part in that process, one which phenomenological coorientation seeks to outline and understand. Embracing this duality will enable us to pursue deeper connection with God through honest introspection of how revelatory sources function within our role-taking action.

Chapter 4

Imaginative Worship: A Strategic Practical Theology for Reflection and Curation

After long months of ordinary time, Advent arrives with a unique high energy sourced in layering the traditional liturgical calendar's anticipation of Christ's return over the Christian cultural anticipation of celebrating Christ's birth. As a worship coordinator, the first week of Advent always felt to me like a kick-off event for a period of worship planning that lasted through Pentecost. I acknowledged this pivotal moment by setting up the sanctuary to impart a sense of change at the point of crossing its threshold. One year I built a large cave around the front podium where a half dome of "starry night" speared out toward the congregation containing a tableau of a northern winter scape, inviting the idea of a quiet smallness. Another year I stamped the name of each worshiper in our community onto long ribbon streamers, suspending them in banners interspersed with hangings proclaiming different names for God. People milled about them before and after worship, looking for their names and noting others, building a sense of community and belonging. My personal favorite Advent change came in the form of six-feet-wide, purple, bauble Christmas ornaments. I suspended these giants from the ceiling alongside waterfalls of twinkle lights which cascaded down different walls, as if we were all captured within a huge holiday tree. With each of these projects I worked to change the physical space of worship so that worshipers could bodily sense stepping into Advent before a word was spoken or a note played. But a word was spoken—a note was played and those visual installations grew thicker through interaction.

The corporeal and imaginative collaborate as the multiple worlds of worshipers collide in holy action. Like music which reverberates through both pews and the people who sing about immeasurable concepts of grace and joy. Like the water splashing in the baptismal font giving a physical reminder of a spiritual identity. Like the sermon grabbing illustrations from scripture and from life to build an image spanning historical time and geographical distance. Like the sight of a cross with a word of salvation and the wafting of incense alongside a hopeful prayer. Worship weaves the measurable and immeasurable together, enabled and shaped by imaginative frameworks existing within the community. Mead emphasizes: "Our attention enables us to organize the field in which we are going to act…It is not simply a set of passive senses played upon by the stimuli that come from without."[284] The self creates and inhabits imaginative frameworks to navigate the world, reacting to and organizing its environment almost instantaneously. The self enters into worship equipped to contribute a unique reaction based on a personal framework, even if the response mirrors similar surrounding reactivity.

I curated the environment for the first Sunday of Advent hoping to generate a consensus amongst the reactions, but ultimately relied on each person who entered the sanctuary to contribute to the environment by constructing their own response. This tension between encouragement and release ties to liturgical scholar Janet Walton's image of worship leaders as coaches who create an imaginative space for *holy play*. "They set the context through the environment: its sounds, its silence, its light, and the way people are together. What happens depends. It depends on what each member of the community desires or can do in the moment."[285] Worship leaders offer an impetus, but the development depends on how the community picks up and carries worship forward. Like a good coach, worship leaders cannot control how the play will ensue, but they can strategically set up the players for success. Success which depends on their knowledge of both players and the game.

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[284] Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, 25.

[285] Janet Walton, "Improvisation and Imagination: Holy Play," *Worship* 75, no. 4 (2001): 292.

This chapter aims to equip practical theologians with another tool to measure and create informed coorientative worship. From a stained-glass window to a welcoming smile, an expansive metaphor to a responsive "Preach!"—every element of worship participates in social activity which manifests within the community's embodied and imaginative participation. Coorientation can help worship leaders parse these layers of social activity by analyzing worship's various elements within their larger existing social frameworks. Doing so will enable them to then intentionally shape social activity that invites transformation—of the self, of relationships, and of worship's own paradigmatic frameworks. This turn toward practical application is explored here in three parts. Initially, we must situate coorientation's functionality in the *imagination* to understand how the ordinary activity of a person's inherent imaginative faculty operates in worship. This requires the introduction of a four-part analytical method to map out *worship's embodied imagination space.* Once coorientation has been situated in relation to the imagination, and our analytical method is in place, we can then apply that method to two examples. This not only illustrates how to use coorientation as a tool, but also reveals two analytical approaches: insider-out and outsider-in. The chapter will finish by turning to the implications of curating social action, suggesting that it requires an ecological conscience. Overall, I hope to show how leaders can form elements of worship through coorientative reflection and curation to create a wide imaginative invitation that edifies the individual and deepens relational connectivity.

Imagination Framework

The term "imagination" holds a semiotic variety which requires a clarification of use. For some, imagination indicates something fictional, nonexistent, and make-believe. This aspect of association requires theologians parse how they use its terminology. James Loder does so by delineating imaginat*ive* from imagin*ary*, arguing that "The imaginative thought, act, or word puts you into history; the imaginary takes you out. The imaginative links the private to the public world; the imaginary is hidden in privacy."[286] Imagination provides the necessary faculty for a logical (and ultimately theological) leap Loder describes as "convictional transformation."[287] He wants to distinguish this process by rooting it in the ethical, directing its action into the world rather than fancifully carrying the person away, lost in experience. Worship's coorientative approach works in a similar way, connecting the private function of imagination-work to larger public frameworks through the presumption of social influence. Children who build worlds of "make-believe" do so with the building blocks of their concrete world: their unicorns look like horses, their play mimics the doctor they visited that morning, their imaginary friends act as expected. Language, idea, intent, and everything in between derives from and contributes to the socially developed reality of the person participating in imaginative action. Worship reflects this reality by drawing from accessible material for all who come together through familiar language, symbol, and expression. It draws on familiar building blocks to join worshipers together into a diversely united mind's eye. Imagination in worship pulls from a public reality to create a common orientation around an object, thus connecting its action back into public reality.

This project, however, also acknowledges the private function of imagination, addressing the particular formation of the self through its interaction with the public. The self brings its particularity to worship, drawing from different roles, communities, and histories to direct reception and participation. Mead contends that memory shapes the way a self relates to its environment, its consciousness never solely located in either, but simultaneously drawing on both.[288] Ideally, worship offers memory points for a person's imaginative response to connect them into public coorientative action, but leaders struggle to account for diversity in how this connection manifests. The multiplicity present in those gathered represents a variety of participatory responses, which might include rejection and retreat. Consider a worshiper who grew up in a home marked by abuse who hears a sermon which equates "honoring your father and mother" with submission and obedience. The preacher invites the congregation to join into a particular orientation around the object, a theological idea, leaving this worshiper to join in a deeply conflicted way or reject the suggested role altogether. This distances the worshiper from the object and the worshiping community, requiring them to create connection elsewhere; perhaps with God through a different avenue of processing the text, other teachers who have helped them process their memory in light of these texts, or other survivors of abuse. The private imaginary represents the self's interior active response to the environmental stimuli. These responses range from acceptance and full participation to rejection of the current experience in favor of connecting to a different public through memory. Withdrawal from immediate coorientation into memory presents more obviously in one-on-one conversations or small groups, but can easily occur in worshiping groups as the social action of large groups does not solely rely on individual participants. A minority of actors dissenting does not necessarily halt the progression of coorientation because the majority continues in collaborative imaginative action, regardless of the harm it might perpetuate.

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[286] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 24.

[287] Loder, 157.

This does not mean that the public and the private function as a binary or that coorientation results in either complete participation or complete disconnection. Rather, the private and the public occur together. Practical theologian Marrianne Gaarden suggests their interaction constructs a *Third Room*, where a surplus of meaning emerges "that was previously not present in either the preacher's intent or the listener's frame of reference."[289] Through her ethnographic study of Danish sermon listeners, she discovered the preacher's outer word activated an inner dialogue in response, forming a reciprocal relationship between listener and preacher.[290] The listener permits the preacher's voice to trigger an internal dialogue, a second sermon which situates the external words into the ongoing internal dialogue shaped by the listener's particular lifeworld.[291] Gaarden's thorough qualitative exploration of the Third Room emphasizes the link between private and public worlds and the subjective nature of responses.

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[288] Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, 332.

The variety of private internal worlds present in worship leads ministerial leaders to recognize the impossibility of a homogeneous response. Even in full coorientation assent and symmetry among worshipers, participation still varies in diversity of particular histories creating multifaceted responses to the object. In light of this, coorientative activity must anticipate multiple engagement points with objects, trusting private imaginaries to create the particular space each individual needs to grapple with the public invitation. Some of this anticipation may even intentionally try to produce some level of shock and asymmetry, creating a social jar with the hope of sparking a certain type of internal dialogue through particular memories. Leaders in white churches may knowingly spark different levels of attachment and detachment from the object by naming "Black Lives Matter" alongside scriptural paradigms which support this claim. With this calculated action, leaders anticipate a mixed response, introducing a potential asymmetrical pressure with hope that the discomfort will stir up an internal dialogue that will spill out into the public. The private and the public function together, shaping the individual in relationship to the group and shaping the group through the contribution of the individual. Worship practically relies on a diverse, interworking private and public faculty of imagination which connects the self into a coorientative space marked by varying levels of symmetry and contribution.

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[289] Marianne Gaarden, *The Third Room of Preaching: A New Empirical Approach*, Church of Sweden Research Series 19 (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2021), xi.

[290] Gaarden, 68–69.

[291] Gaarden, 94.

The interaction between the private and the public indicates a continuum which connects the internal world of the individual with its outer environment. However, the surplus of meaning emerging from their interaction, which Gaarden names as the *Third Room*, denotes another continuum present. For help in determining this second continuum, we can turn to the author of *Imagination,*[292] philosopher Mary Warnock. In her address to Oxford in 1980, Warnock explores two aspects of the imagination, the ordinary and the aesthetic. Ordinary imaginative activity resides in the faculty which enables us to functionally participate in the world. It represents the primary way we utilize our imaginative capabilities, interpreting red lights as "stop" and a mass of shapes and colors as "tree." Comparatively, she quotes Kant to explain that the aesthetic imagination strains "'after something lying outside the limits of experience'…a significance which goes beyond the immediate sense data presented."[293] She contends that these properties are connected: the imagination's ordinary functions enable the aesthetic to appear; likewise, the imagination's aesthetic ability contributes to the ongoing frameworks undergirding ordinary activity. Warnock offers the example of a melody. The ordinary function hears the different tones and silences in dynamic rhythm and interprets it as a melody. The music can continue along the continuum toward the aesthetic beyond the melody itself, where greater meaning stretches into extra emotive and cognitive realms which then shape future musical engagement.[294] Bringing this idea closer to Christian religion, she turns to C.S. Lewis's ideas about imaginative response to scriptural narrative. Simply hearing a narrative does not necessarily spark a deeper imaginative effect, but curiosity and continual return to the story generates an aesthetic response. The church offers this continual, curious return to the story, carrying the narrative forward through new avenues carved by imaginative work.[295] Warnock's work similarly implicates worship, where worshipers repeatedly gather to return to and participate in the perpetual story of the church. Ministerial leaders weave together different elements ordinarily accessible with the desire that perpetual, curious participation will create an aesthetic experience which glorifies God and transforms worshipers.

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[292] This key text historically traces thought concerning image-making through perception, aesthetics, practice, and phenomenology connected to romanticism. See: Lilian R. Furst, review of *Imagination*, by Mary Warnock, *Criticism* 19, no. 1 (1977): 70–72; Stephen Gill, review of *Imagination*, by Mary Warnock, *The Review of English Studies* 28, no. 112 (1977): 509–12.

[293] Mary Warnock, "1980 Imagination: Aesthetic and Religious," *Theology* 123, no. 4 (July 1, 2020): 266, https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X20934025.

This project engages imagination around the intersection of these two continuums to situate coorientation and its implications. The interactive intersection of the private and public as well as the ordinary and aesthetic offers a framework for worship's imagination space and the social activity which builds it. These lines link four different points together but do not represent isolated stops. Rather, they all work together simultaneously, creating a

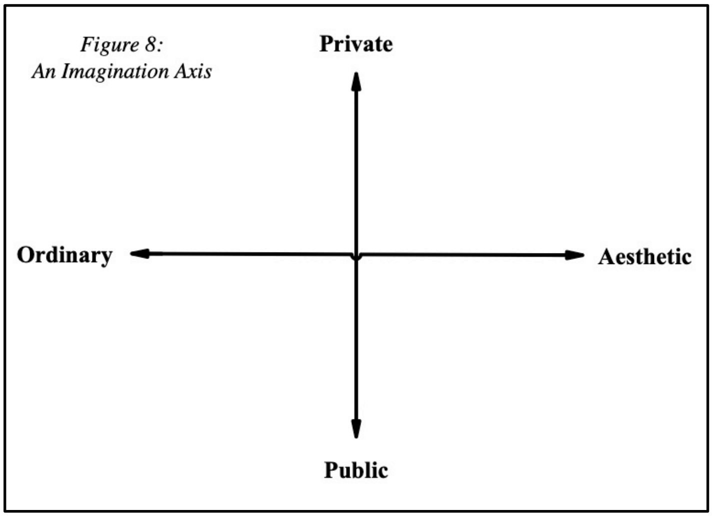

Figure 8:
An Imagination Axis

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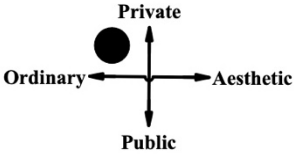
[294] Warnock, 266–67.

[295] Warnock, 267–69.

singular hum of harmonics resonating throughout. The next section will examine the functions of each quadrant of what we will call worship's "embodied imagination space" before considering their simultaneous interactivity.

Worship's Embodied Imagination Space

Private Ordinary



The private ordinary imagination is the inner, functional work of the individual, where interpretive categories and frameworks shape a person's interaction with worship.

The private functions of the self's faculty of imagination have already been explored at length in previous chapters, particularly chapter one. Worshipers individually require private, ordinary cognitive processes within their imagination to participate in their environment. Foundational to Meadian thought, a reasoning consciousness relies on relational activity, located both in the organism and its environment.[296] Imagination, then, is the faculty through which consciousness can emerge, bridging organism and environment. The self takes on roles within the imaginary. Meaning pools on objects in the imaginary. The past and present self play within the imaginary. Individuals, formed in community, draw meaning from their historical selves to access and process that meaning in context with current stimuli. Mead explains this process by differentiating two aspects of the self: the *I* and the *me*. The self creates the *I* as a historical figure from at least one second ago to earliest memory. The *I* forms as a compilation of previous encounters, adjusting its categories and frameworks for interaction through reflection of ongoing experiences in its memory. The self's *me* represents its immediate consciousness, its attitude and action in the present. These two functions work together: the *I* governs historical memory of self to shape the *me*'s interaction with the environment; the *me* feeds new material to the *I* to process in memory.[297] For example, an *I* recognizes the safety of a close friend, built through countless experiences creating trust, and shapes the role-taking categorical draw for the *me*, who confides in the friend with confidence. But when the friend betrays this confidence, it provides a new experience through the *me* for the *I* to process in memory and reshape frameworks for future engagement. The conscious emerges as history and present, person and environment, converging within the self. The private ordinary function of imagination makes this convergence possible, allowing the self to form, hold, and project its own being. Worship, like all avenues of life, requires the self to use the private ordinary imaginary faculty as a means of raising its consciousness into reflection and communal participation.

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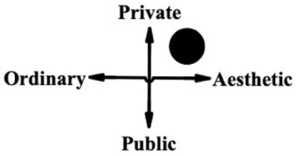
[296] Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, 332.

Private Aesthetic



The private aesthetic imagination is the inner stretch beyond experiential limits to create meaningful and transformative significance for the individual.

The private aesthetic refers to the imaginary's capability to carry the self beyond ordinary processes into the extraordinary. The trajectory toward the private aesthetic along the continuum connects with the phenomenological aspects of worship explored in chapter three and Loder's convictional event. Such an event is marked by transformation in a "nonrational intrusion of a convincing insight."[298] For Loder, the theological imagination provides the necessary space to make a logical leap into extra-rationality in a way that transformatively overcomes the void (i.e., evil, sin, death). Convictional experiences can certainly appear in worship where altar-call type moments return to the ordinary with such a paradigm shift that the ongoing life contains a marked change. However, incorporating the ordinary/aesthetic continuum also broadens our understanding of transformational action as a stretching beyond the ordinary elements present into significance. The transformational leap occurs in the ordinary becoming extraordinary, contributing to some difference in the self. This makes room for smaller moves into the aesthetic, like a tired parent experiencing a surprising peace when singing a hymn. The ordinary/aesthetic continuum makes room for a variety of transformative experiences, from large to small, any stretch beyond the ordinary offering some form of overcoming the void.

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[297] Mead, 174–78.

[298] Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 33.

We can see this variety in liturgical scholar Margaret Mary Kelleher's description of transformation as a shifting of horizons. In her article "Liturgy and the Christian Imagination," Kelleher explores the influence of social paradigms in conjunction with censorship in Christian formation. Each self exists in a world of meaning bound by internal and external limitations, such as interest, knowledge, access, and decisive rejection. Together these limits create *horizons* at the edges of communal meaning.[299] Worship discloses, performs, and transforms the church community's particular horizon and invites participants shaped by this horizon into its action and therefore becomes a contributing censor of Christian imagination. Worship offers a transformative space for shifting horizons because it participates in creating these horizons, making room for a private aesthetic experience that ranges from radical to subtle change.[300] Kelleher briefly outlines four different manifestations of a transformative shift: affective, religious, cognitive, and moral.[301] In affective transformation the self falls deeper in love. Kelleher delineates this from religious transformation, particularly falling in love with God, which I do not think is necessary. *Affective transformation* can describe the progression toward love for any other, including the Holy Other. It represents a relational strengthening as the self commits all the more along these bonds. Next, *cognitive transformation* occurs as new knowledge emerges when a surplus of meaning generates novel insight and the self expands its understanding beyond a previously held horizon. Finally, Kelleher describes a moral transformation which affects how a person makes decisions. I would like to expand this to *moral ethical transformation* in recognition of the interplay of private and public worlds. Meadian thought ties moral decision making to public systems, imbuing it with an ethical element. Any moral transformation automatically includes ethical implications. The private aesthetic represents a stretch out of the ordinary into affective, cognitive, and moral ethical transformation.

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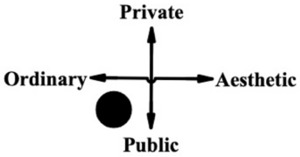
[299] Margaret Mary Kelleher, "Liturgy and the Christian Imagination," *Worship* 66, no. 2 (March 1992): 132–33.

[300] Kelleher, 140.

[301] Kelleher, 140–41.

Public Ordinary



The public ordinary imagination is the collective public work of worship, the ordo of elements inviting simultaneous action among worshipers.

Just as imagination provides a functional space for internal processing, it joins with others and creates a public space for systems to reside. The internal role-taking of a private consciousness manifests publicly through play and game as Mead describes. A baseball game takes on meaning in an imagination space, where each player unites, body and mind, in a single frame of reference. The balls and bases take on a particular connotation as players navigate a physical space tied together with imaginary strings of meaning such as *pitch, out, foul,* etc. Worship works similarly with a physical space containing items like a table, a basin, a podium which burst into the imaginary realm with multifaceted symbols around the Eucharist, baptism, and the Word. People carry their daily life in before God and each other with intention for confession, petition, and thanksgiving. Worship acts like the game itself, a public space which merges physical reality, roles, memory, intention, and identity into systems of participation. The amount of local curation to shape worship's game varies. Many churches inherit patterns of worship from traditional or denominational institutions, such as the Roman Catholic Mass, the Book of Common Prayer, denominational sacramental forms, and local church creeds. While the amount of local crafting of the public ordinary space varies, it is never absent. Even in institutionally crafted worship services, local contribution manifests in individual elements such as homiletical material and congregational prayer, sensory artifacts like Eucharistic elements and architecture, and the bodies of the participants themselves who contribute to the space. Relatedly, even worship which seems entirely locally crafted builds on explicit and implicit expectations for formation. Crafting worship requires leaders to understand the interplay of all four quadrants of the imagination, but the actual activity of worship begins in the public ordinary, offering the invitation to play the game. Songs, symbols, sermons, every aspect of worship invites and guides the congregating body together in embodied imaginary action. Done well, worship ripples in impact throughout all four quadrants, but the social action of coorientative activity begins in the public ordinary. It is public because it is the work of the people, not the person. It is ordinary because it begins by offering an invitation to act through common structures and ordinary processes.

If the public ordinary is the starting point for worship creation, how then do we deepen our craft to impact the whole? Here lies the importance of coorientation, which examines the paradigmatic features structuring the invitation for public participation. The concept of the imagination as a "paradigmatic faculty" comes from theologian Garrett Green, rooted in his proposal that the imagination is the anthropological contact point for divine revelation.[302] He borrows the term paradigm from the natural sciences, especially philosopher Thomas Kuhn.

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[302] Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989), 40, 66.

Kuhn's theory, hotly debated by some, rejects traditional epistemological foundations of science in a move from empirical to dialectical. He contends that scientific thinking ebbs and flows along its own development journey. Paradigms appear in scientific practice as assent creates a status quo which then guides scientific method. Scientific revolution occurs when these paradigms break down and new paradigms formulate to create a *new normal* within the field.[303] These paradigms not only represent consensus in current thought, but through consensus continue to shape scientific thought. Commonly, a paradigm is simply understood as a set of patterns which leads to a whole.[304] However, Green incorporates Kuhn's scholarship in reference to the imagination, suggesting that paradigms go beyond pattern accumulation to create normative models. He writes, "To grasp a pattern as paradigmatic means to see it as exemplifying the constitutive organization or essential structure of its object."[305] Paradigms become public imaginative structures which not only form from patterns, but then also contribute to continuing these patterns by framing continued action.

Green carries the idea of paradigmatic imagination into his own realm of theology, where communities build constitutive structures that create normative exemplars. He offers the example of the Apostles' Creed, which not only sketches a grammar for Christian faith, but has been used as the exemplar through which many Christians have read scripture and viewed the world. Green argues, "Christians have *imagined* the world according to the paradigm exemplified by the creed."[306] The Trinity represents a paradigmatic understanding of God, nowhere directly expressed in scripture. However, over history multiple paradigmatic approaches have worked to name God's existence through triune imaginative paradigms which, in turn, frame our engagement with God. These are just two examples of the many paradigms which function simultaneously and vary in edifice, from minute to enormous, crude to complex, ancient to modern. Paradigms can also be erroneous, imaginative representations, spurring debates about the appropriateness of certain model.[307] The systematic theologian participates in these debates, articulating these paradigms and wrestling with their appropriateness. [308]

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[303] Green, 44–47.

[304] Green, 52.

[305] Green, 54.

[306] Green, 67.

The practical theologian operates similarly in creating worship. The public ordinary of worship engages structural paradigms to create a collective imaginary space. Even entirely locally crafted worship begins its work with some level of prescription to meet some form of expectations. Worshipers would be shocked to gather for a service and find themselves at a baseball game instead. Paradigms become apparent when we examine the social action of worship, curiously reflecting on our activity: why we do, how we do, and what we do, and its effect on our perpetual activity.[309] Worship leaders can interrogate the public ordinary aspect of the imaginary to critically engage its structures and wrestle with their appropriateness. The public ordinary sets the stage for interaction. It invites those gathered into rituals which reflect their particular expression of faith and expectation to meet and celebrate God. Ministry leaders work with paradigmatic frameworks to craft an appropriate invitation, one which allows worshipers to gather and honors the purpose for which they have gathered.

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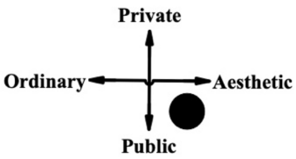
[307] Green, 66–69.

[308] Green, 70.

[309] In 1981 David Tracy named the particularities of the Catholic Imagination which emphasize the immanence of God rather than the Protestant distance. He attributes this difference to the Protestant *dialectical* imagination, which stresses hiddenness, versus the Catholic *analogical* imagination, which emphasizes similarity through metaphor (like in unalike). This idea has continued in the work of scholars like Mary Catherine Hilkert and Andrew Greeley. Roman Catholics argue for this particular imaginative lens as sacramental, God's self–disclosure through the world. The particularity of this imaginative framework is so influential that as Roman Catholic homiletician Edward Foley summarizes, the sacraments have become "the instinctive center for the catholic imagination," where even disengaged Roman Catholics still desire particular sacramental rites such as marriage and baptism (10–11). While these scholars do not name or engage paradigms in the way that Green suggests, their naming of a distinctive imagination, clearly connected to liturgical sacramental elements, represents paradigmatic interplay within worship. See Edward Foley, "Preaching to the Catholic Imagination," *Liturgy* 25, no. 4 (July 20, 2010): 10–17, https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2010.494129; Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 2003); Michael Flecky, Review of *The Catholic Imagination*, by Andrew Greeley, *Theological Studies* 62, no. 4 (December 2001): 859–61.

Public Aesthetic



The public aesthetic imagination is the outward implications of the joined work of worshipers in generating a symbol which communicates holy meaning about God, about the world, and about the worshiping body itself.

The final quadrant represents the public aspect of worship that occurs when the worshipers accept the invitation to participate in the public ordinary. The united action of those gathering sums the body beyond its individual parts to join with the Holy Other in creating a point of (not source of) holy public revelation. The public aesthetic *does something* greater through participation and proclamation in an outward combined assent. Movement along the continuum stretches ordinary action into the aesthetic, into the holy. As Gordon Lathrop explains, worship assembles with and around ordinary *things*. Water, bread, music, time, and even the people themselves constitute the things of worship, but juxtaposed with the words and actions, common objects become sacred.[310] The stretch occurs as the "Christian community confesses that [these ordinary things] are used by God. They are holy."[311] This movement is not simply the simultaneous song or dance occurring among individuals, but the public aesthetic represents the imaginative space where the activity of worshipers moves beyond individual participation to collectively contribute to a transformative symbol.

The nature of a symbol indicates the continuum connecting the ordinary and the aesthetic and the trajectory of transformation therein. Theologian Paul Tillich contends that symbols are

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[310] Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1999), 164–65.

[311] Lathrop, 116.

"double-edged." They direct truth toward the infinite, allowing for a surplus of meaning to amass, while at the same time directing truth toward the finite, allowing the greater meaning to reverberate in its source. He writes, "this double meaning of the truth of a symbol must be kept in mind. A symbol *has* truth: it is adequate to the revelation it expresses. A symbol *is* true: it is the expression of a true revelation."[312] Thus religious symbols derive their truth from the truth of the revelation they express, linking them to their source.[313] Sacramental theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet similarly points out that symbols participate in the realm to which they belong, correlative to the other elements within the realm and a means for mutual recognition.[314] So when Chauvet describes the symbolic rupture of worship, he notes that elements such as place, time, objects, agents, and language take on liminal qualities. They become a threshold between the ordinary and the holy.[315] Worship's holy things move along this continuum, symbols which both stretch into a surplus of meaning and also return back to their source.

Transformation in the public aesthetic occurs through symbolic creation, both in individual elements, where communal activity turns a pool of water into a baptismal font, as well as in the symbols which manifest from the collective itself. Chauvet's work emphasizes the implicative nature of public worship. The interplay of scripture, sacrament, and ethics creates a whole representation of Christ, the original sacrament, to the world. In participation, worshipers perpetuate this representation.[316] Therefore, between Christ's ascension and return, the church carries on Christ’s sacramental activity. Worship represents the pinnacle expression of this activity where involvement in liturgical action outwardly creates a symbolic statement. By joining in ritual, worshipers proclaim something about God by claiming a relational position as children and disciples of God.[317] It creates a public statement in the larger consciousness of the body and the world about who we are as a people, both proclaiming and shaping Christian identity. Chauvet’s exploration reveals the symbolic variety present in in worship and suggests that the trajectory of transformation occurs on different levels within the imaginary’s public aesthetic. The ordinary things of the public invitation take on extraordinary meaning through the worshiper’s activity, the stretch toward significance not only indicating the holiness of the things in worship, but the holiness present in the collective act of worship itself.

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[312] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 240.

[313] Tillich, 1: 241.

[314] Louis–Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 19741995), 111–15.

[315] Chauvet, 330–31.

[316] This is well illustrated in Chauvet's diagram of "the fundamental sacramental mediation of the Church." See Chauvet, 172.

Interactivity Among the Four Quadrants

Thus far I have outlined the different aspects of worship’s imagination space along two continuums, the private/public and ordinary/aesthetic, by examining the four quadrants they create (figure nine summarizes their key attributes). However, as I have indicated throughout, these aspects of the imagination do not operate discretely from one another. Worship’s

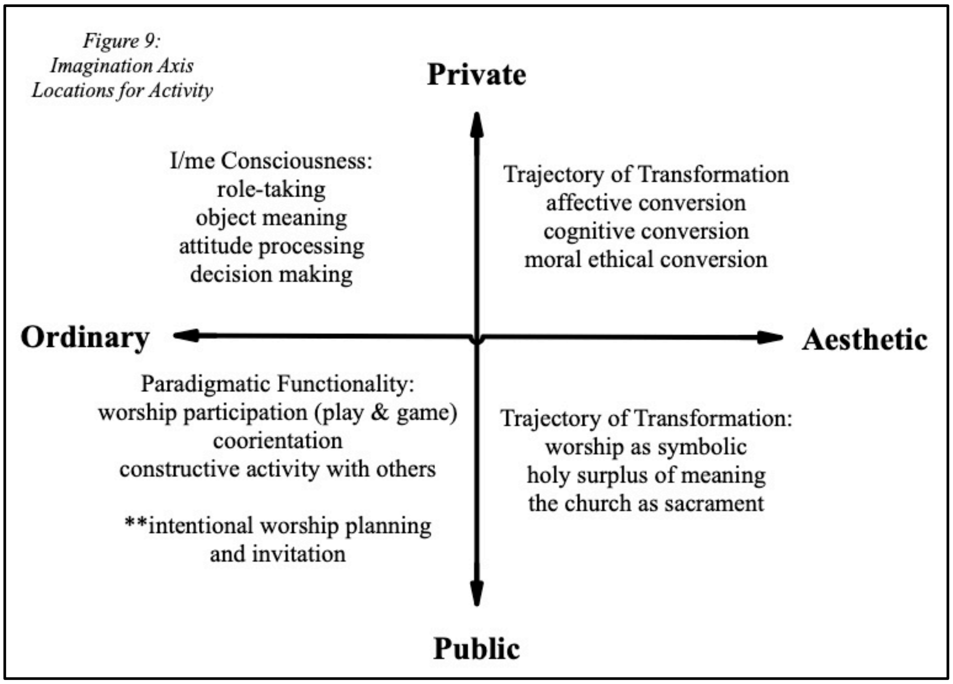
Figure 9: Imagination Axis Locations for Activity
Private
I/me Consciousness:
role-taking
object meaning
attitude processing
decision making
Trajectory of Transformation
affective conversion
cognitive conversion
moral ethical conversion
Ordinary
Aesthetic
Paradigmatic Functionality:
worship participation (play & game)
coorientation
constructive activity with others
**intentional worship planning
and invitation
Trajectory of Transformation:
worship as symbolic
holy surplus of meaning
the church as sacrament
Public

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[317] Chauvet, 427–28.

imagination space cannot be reduced into any one quadrant, nor can any quadrant work independently from the others. For example, a transformational leap in the private aesthetic requires activity down the continuum in the ordinary as the self raises its consciousness to participate in the event. Likewise, that conversion experience returns along the continuum into the ordinary by shaping the historical *I* and affecting all future *me* activity. Activity also runs along the private/public line. Private transformation occurs in connection to society (community), such as new meaning drawn through communal orientation around an object, or new insights about self or others formed through interaction. The private aesthetic pulls from the public aesthetic as the self rearranges according to the shift of horizons. Simultaneously, the public aesthetic takes shape through the contribution of multiple selves joining together to form the community's identity. Worship not only functions through all four quadrants of the imagination space, but mutually moves along the connective lines, where activity in one section raises activity in another.

Consider this example. My childhood church placed a rose on an arm of the pulpit every time a child was born. The social action of this rose present in worship had implications throughout each quadrant, starting with the public ordinary which drew on existing paradigms to place it within worship's invitation. No one I knew remembered how the practice started, but it continued with each birth, a rotating element of worship's game. This leads to the private ordinary action, where worshipers who saw the rose drew from categories of meaning sourced in their memory to understand what the rose meant and participate in its communicative activity. Each worshiper drew from memory sourced in their church experiences, but also from their personal subjective experiences. The variety of particular experience leads to the potential for a private aesthetic response, such as the parent who sees the rose and experiences an overwhelming sense of community, remembering when a rose was placed for their own child; or another person may remember the postpartum depression they suffered after giving birth and commit to checking in on the new parents. Different experiences generate different private aesthetic moments but the public aesthetic occurs in united action, with the rose symbolically celebrating a change in addition to the church family or suggesting something about the collective's identity as a body which values children. The small flower perched at the front of the congregation created social action present throughout the entirety of worship's imagination space.

To use coorientation properly, analysis needs to recognize how social action moves throughout the whole system. Mead's structural framework of self, other, and object risks emphasizing the ordinary quadrants by analyzing "observable" social activity. However, burrowing down here neglects the holy activity which reverberates into the aesthetic. To mitigate this risk, we must be sure to think through the implications of social action along the ordinary/aesthetic continuum in what I have been calling a trajectory of transformation (figure 10). The varying nature of this trajectory, as explored in the aesthetic quadrants above, suggests that deciphering its presence, messaging, and meaning will likely be more difficult than examining the structure of social action. Still, it represents an important aspect of applying coorientation because it makes room for holy interaction. Keeping all four quadrants of worship's embodied imagination space in mind will not only make coorientation more usefully appropriate for worship, but it will

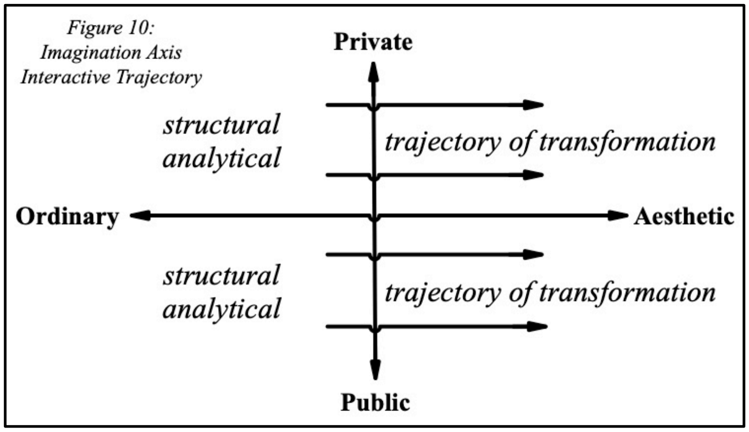
Figure 10: Imagination Axis Interactive Trajectory

also provide insight into the transformational qualities (both desired and experienced) of its social action.

A Final Expansion for Worship's Coorientation Model

Before moving on to explore coorientation application, we must revisit the model one more time. Thus far I have suggested a model with three distinct facets orienting around the object. The self offers the primary point of observation, indicated through the solid lines which suggest direct knowledge within the self's perception. The remainder of the model references both others and the Holy Other, the imagined roles and orientation represented along the dotted lines. However, worship involves another important point within this coorienting circle: the worship leader as an intentional social action guide. This person or group of people varies based on whoever is leading the public invitation, contributing unique coorientative action. The roles of the worship leader also vary in relationship to the congregation, the Psalms offering examples of these different modes. In Psalm 23, the psalmist stands with the people, naming their personal experience of God as a divine shepherd. In Psalm 37, the psalmist stands alongside God, proclaiming the ramifications for human activities. In Psalm 150, the psalmist

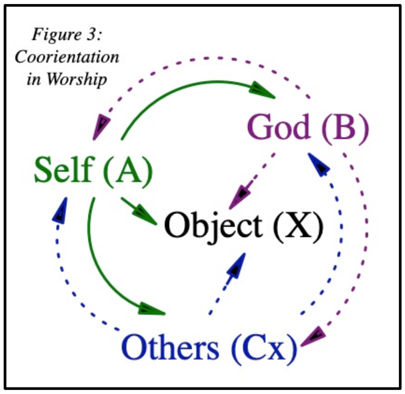
Figure 3: Coorientation in Worship

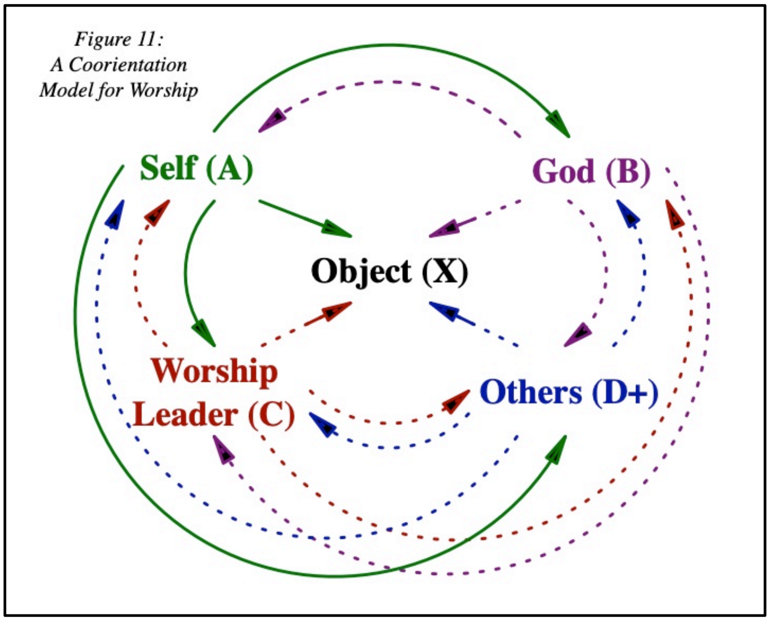
Figure 11: A Coorientation Model for Worship

stands as an intermediary, neither with God nor the people, but a witness exhorting all who breath to praise the Lord with every instrument available to them. Worship leaders take the position of an invitational role-taker whose role shifts throughout the liturgy, offering their own actions and words as examples for others to shape their own role-taking activity around. I will examine the particular nuances of the worship leader's facet further in chapter 5. For now, in applying this model to some practical examples, it is important to note that the worship leader provides enough of a particular presence that they require distinction within the model. Worship leaders are often the conduits who offer invitation into worship and guide participation, a visible presence which contributes to the shape of imaginative activity.

Application for Reflection

I contend that two vantage points exist in applying a coorientation model to worship, the self and the worship leader. The self approaches study as a participant, one of the many who enter into worship, creating an outsider-in perspective. Distance as an outsider varies, from stranger observer to long-term community member. The distinction of this vantage point comes through the approach of one who contributes to worship through present participation but is not part of its ordering. Comparatively, worship leaders approach from an insider-out perspective by ordering and/or leading the public invitation. They role-take with the selves coming to worship, anticipating particular and general participation, to inform their pre-activity in shaping the public imaginary for communal worship. Each perspective provides a helpful approach.[318] An outsider-in can offer some distance from the system as a whole, communicating how they received the invitation to role-take, and offering insight into how their particular location contributed to an aesthetic trajectory. An insider-out can explain how and why they offered certain roles in the public ordinary, sharing their intentions and desires for the trajectory of transformation. The worship leader can analyze their anticipatory action by dissecting the roles and categories they craft into worship. The insider-out carries us behind worship's invitation to coorient in a particular way, whereas the outsider-in can offer details from in front in their experience of coorientation.

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[318] I hold these two perspectives loosely due to the potential third of the casual observer rather than participant, distanced by a lack of personal investment to the process but inquiring for strictly analytical purposes. However, I push back against this third position, which suggests the possibility of a purely objective position when doing the type of qualitative research involved in such a distanced observation. Our self is always present in our research and to deny this reality causes problems in the quality of our research and our personhood. While many disciplines have addressed the Eurocentric objective ideal, Ruth Behar's book usefully addresses these concerns in a way useful to this project. In *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press, [1996] 2019), she addresses the interaction of self with the observing nature of anthropology, addressing the

This section will offer two bird's-eye examples from my own experiences. As an insider-out, I will examine a sermon I preached at a church I know well, but have not attended for several years. As an outsider-in, I will explore the Father's Day greeting from a church I recently started attending. Each section will briefly introduce each church, both in the Christian Reformed Church of North America, before presenting the text with social action coding through coorientation. The coding will use shorthand for the five markers of the coorientation model: S for self, G for God, Ob for object, WL for worship leader, and Ot for other. This coding will then be amassed into two general figures, one which gathers key points observed into the five model markers of coorientation, and another which overlays the findings onto the four quadrants of the embodied imagination space. Finally, I will conclude with some general observations in connection to this exercise. These examples will not go into depth with reference to a particular

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pushes and pulls involved in entering an unfamiliar world. Still, even if there arguably is a third perspective, it aligns within the duo schema I'm proposing here. It simply creates a further echo of the self's "outside-in" perspective because the observer remains outside the planning and crafting process of the public ordinary invitation that worship offers. Further, I embrace this duality as a helpful framework to at least begin using coorientation as an evaluative model.

question. Instead, I aim to briefly show how coorientation can be analytically applied to worship's social activity.

Preaching Toward Difference

Westwood Christian Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, MI, may sit on a large city street which connects it to the heart of downtown, but its big sprawling lawn pushes the building back from the traffic into the suburban neighborhood its congregation mimics. While it does not belong in the most conservative branch of the denomination, Westwood congregation trends that direction both socially and theologically. Primarily white and middle-class, it is a church body that prioritizes families and works to have programing for each stage of life (except college age), epitomized by their Wednesday night family meal in the gym before every member disperses to activities geared for them. Teams of volunteers lead worship each Sunday; however, the primary worship leader is a staff member, responsible for creating and coordinating worship. As a preacher, I simply supplied the text, title, and a paragraph describing the direction of the message, she planned the rest. I was invited to preach during COVID-19 stay-at-home orders during a season of highly divisive tension. Widely, protesting was everywhere, both against Michigan's lock-down orders, but also in response to George Floyd's murder. I spoke with the lead pastor to find out how I could fit my sermon into their current patterns of worship and learned that he and the worship coordinator were slowly going through Psalm 23, aiming to offer messages of comfort. After some conversations with congregation members and seeing social media postings of others, I determined to go in a different direction. As an insider-out, I wanted to offer a message that would be challenging but accepted, where the listener would at least consider the roles presented in the sermon based on Genesis 11:1-9, the Tower of Babel.

God Created Us Differently

Sermon Text	Coorientation Coding
It’s good to be back in Kalamazoo—driving on familiar roads, seeing familiar buildings, seeing some new buildings around here. Seeing familiar faces, enjoying some Sweetwater donuts. But living in Nashville for the last five years has been a blessing too. Jim and I are surprised with how much we’ve acclimated to the weather—particularly the lack of snow. We're both surprised how easy it was to call this new city home. Each time we left, usually travelling north, back to west Michigan, we looked forward to the day that our car would turn south again, enter Tennessee, and eventually crest that one hill when the skyline of Nashville finally came into view.	WL places herself into Ob position
And Nashville has a unique skyline, mostly because of this one building that you see here. The Batman Building as locals have dubbed it. With twin spires, it indeed looks like the not-so-subtle corporate home of Wayne Enterprises. I would not be surprised if there was a cave filled with utility belts and bat mobiles in the bedrock below.	WL shifts Nashville skyline into Ob position
And we smile at the name, but on the top of that hill, Jim and I relish in its sight. When we see it, we know that the long drive is almost over. When we see it, we can feel the comfort of our own bed. When we see it, we know that we are home. We all have familiar things like that, don’t we? Landmarks, signs, pews in a particular building. They give us comfort, they remind us of home.	WL invites particular orientation toward Ob through similar meaning Ob in S
So can we really blame those nomads in the plains of Shinar? After all their wandering, they wanted a little home, a little security, a skyline of their own. Come, they said to one another. Come, let us make bricks. Come, let us build a city. Come, let us make our own skyline, a place that we can call home.	Ob maintains orientation but generalizes to nonspecific skyline/tower, S invited to role-take with scriptural Ot
And at the center, a tower that would capture the gaze of everyone who had settled there. A tower that would give those nomads a center, a point they could orient themselves toward. This tower kept them there, referring inward, so that no matter where their feet wandered in the plains of Shinar, they would be anchored, they would be home.	

But this tower was also more than a helpful piece of architecture, it had holy connotations. Throughout scripture, we constantly read about the significance of mountains. Early people looked at mountains as a type of ladder. The foot of the mountain firmly rooted on the earth. The head of the mountain reached the clouds, piercing the heavens. Mountains were holy ladders. They were the way that people felt connected with God.	Ob diversifies in meaning through new categorical connection. G presented as distant, but searchable.
This tower, in the plains of Shinar, is much like our own steeples. Not many of us notice steeples anymore, with huge multi-storied buildings a part of our everyday life. But in 18th century England architecture, steeples were meant to draw people's eyes heavenward. And as churches were often close to the center of town, they quickly became a referential point. People would use the steeple as a way to gauge where they were within the city based on where they were in relationship to it. They would orient themselves around that high point, piercing the sky, drawing their eyes heavenward. The tower those nomads were building, acted much like the steeple does on this very church building does. Not only meant to draw people in, but it also represents a holy connection.	S invited to orient around new meaning in own world
That's why I want to give those weary nomads the benefit of the doubt. Some biblical scholars flag this story as a problem with pride. And sure there was pride mixed in here. Is there anything we humans do that doesn't have some element of pride mixed in with it? But I don't think they were pridefully trying to be god, they weren't trying to become gods climbing into heaven. They were trying to find God. There were no mountains in those Plains, no holy hill. So the people created their own. The strove to reach up and connect with God.	WL acting as illustrative role-taker. S invited to role-take with scriptural Ot in context of new Ob meaning. G presented as goal
And that's arguably a good thing, right. But the problem was: That with every brick they baked the people oriented themselves inward. That with every brick they laid, the command from God to go out into the world faded away. The command passed down to them from the beginning. Adam was created with the power to create, and through him humanity was told to be fruitful and multiply. When Noah stepped out of the ark, he heard those same words commissioning him to go out into the world. But these descendants, these nomads in the plains of Shinar were starting to forget.	Ob shift: idea of a problem added Ob problem connects with G, manifesting as neglecting G's command—suggesting G's orientation toward Ob

Their drive for the comfort of their own skyline shrank their world. Our drive for comfort in a familiar skyline can shrink our world—because not all towers are literal structures.	Ob widened further into figurative.
When I was in high school, my concert band went on a trip to New York City. During that trip we had one afternoon when we were dropped off at Columbus Circle, just across from Central Park. We were steps away from Carnegie Hall, The Museum of Art and Design, Bergdorf Goodman, and at least 6 McDonalds.	WL invites S into role-taking action with her memory.
But there were no BigMacs in my future—I saw none of it. We were given four hours to shop, sightsee, but my friends had been told a different story about that skyline. They were told it was dangerous. So dangerous that it forced them to sit on the steps of the very place we were dropped off. Nothing I said changed their minds, even when I begged to at least sit across the street in Central Park, at least somewhere notable, they would not be moved. The rest of my bandmates had dispersed long ago— as soon as the bus door opened and I was stuck sitting there. When people returned hours later clutching bags and telling stories of sights, sounds, and smells they just experienced, I knew that I missed something significant, something special.	Ob narrowed back to particular skyline but also emphasizes the figurative tower of comfort. S invited to role-take not just with WL but also with other actors within the story—requiring more systematic game activity
The comfort of security had a cost. In our fear of the unknown, we sat on those steps, forgetting that we came to see something different, experience something new. The towers in our lives are what hold us "there." The towers in our lives root us in one spot, sitting on the steps of Columbus Circle The towers in our lives turn us inward, at the expense of a greater calling. Not all towers are literal structures.	Ob of comfort expanded to consider negative implications
Pastor April Fiet wrote an essay for the Reformed Journal where she confessed that her tower is overachievement. She writes: “My building materials are not brick and bitumen, but all of the things I do every day. I make another to-do list, write another article, compose another tweet, and fill another moment of silence with the noise of all the doing I do.”[319] Pastor Fiet works on tasks, on projects that may be helpful and fulfilling. They contribute to her identity and give her points of normalcy, of comfort. But in taking on another project, in focusing on another task, these projects begin to isolate her from others.	S invited to role-take with particular Ot: contemporary and reformed

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[319] April Fiet, “The Babel Tower of Overachieving,” *Reformed Journal* (blog), January 27, 2018, https://blog.reformedjournal.com/2018/01/27/the-babel-tower-of-overachieving/.

Isolation isn’t a new feeling for us these days, is it? But I wonder is this feeling as new as we think it is? Or is the COVID crisis just magnifying the distance and separation that already existed between us—highlighting the towers we’ve been building all along? Are we striving to return to the status quo in part, because it covers up those towers?	Ob widens to issue of isolation vs. connectivity.
I think that social distancing is a misnomer—we’ve been saying it wrong for the last several months because we aren’t really social distancing. Sure, we’re physically distant, but thanks to technology, we’re as social as ever. And socially we are still building our towers, still strengthening our city walls.	S invited into reflection about their possible coorientation with Ob thus far presented.
We unite with others who think like us through text messages, news outlets, video calls, and biting memes to build towers of ideas and opinions.	S invited to consider Ob of comfort in connection to other Obs they use to create comfort
It is not a coincidence when you suddenly see ads on Facebook for that new couch you searched for on Google. Computer platforms are designed to figure out what you like and keep showing you more of it. YouTube and TikTok show you videos based on the ones you’ve watched before. Facebook even encourages you to help them curate your feed by blocking or hiding certain posts.	
We swirl down this vortex of news cycle ratings and social media algorithms which affirm our own singular voice and encourage us to proclaim that our tower is the tallest, connected to a heavenly truth. We are suspicious of any idea or opinion that does not align with ours.	S invited to consider their contribution to Ob meaning
We may be physically distant, but socially, we are just as connected as ever folks—to the point where even wearing a mask has become a divisive issue—a marker for where your allegiances lie.	S invited to reflect in connection to particular manifestation of figurative Ob
Like those nomads, we speak one language. We settle “there”, in our own versions of Shinar Shrinking the whole world to the plains of our immediate experience. Finding comfort in our tower, built with one language—one that we speak comfortably.	S invited to role-take with scriptural Ot while still holding onto current Ob

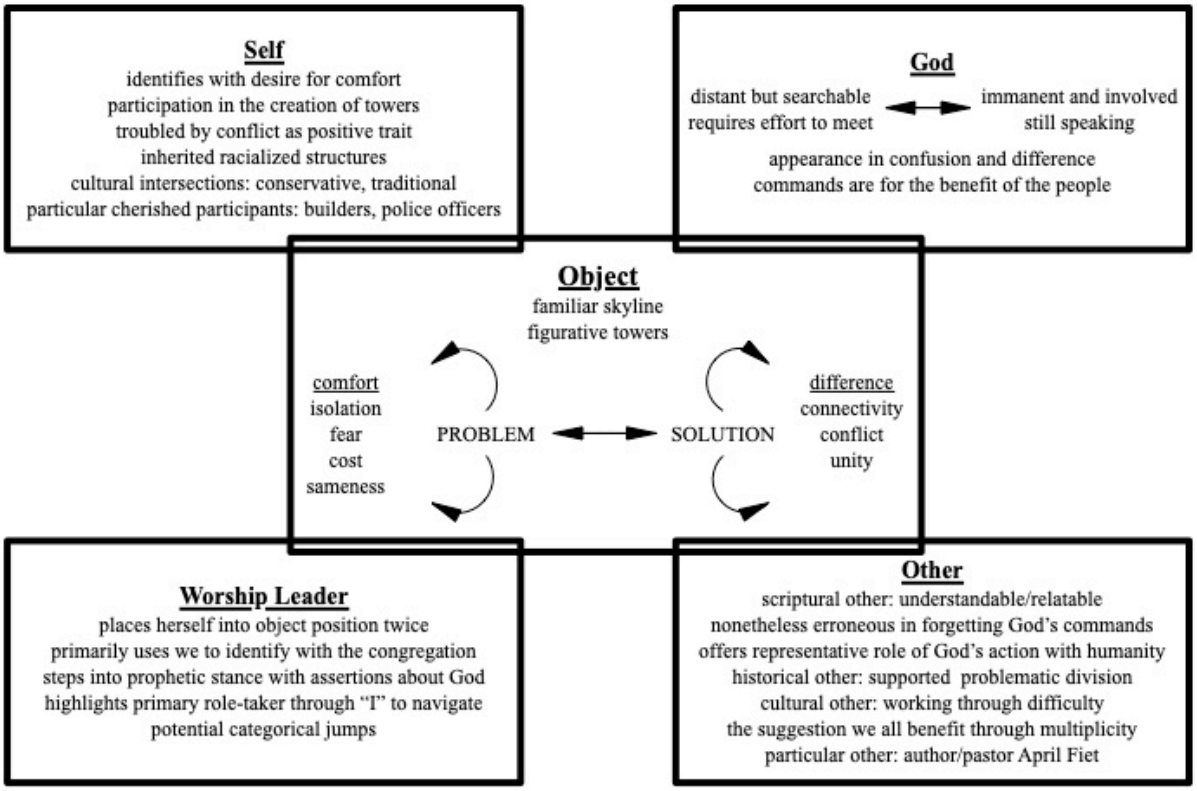
And we shore up our walls, just like their fortified city, as we proclaim "alternative facts" and "prejudice" and "ignorance" rather than be moved from the comfort of our own towers.	
Like those nomads, we forget that we're called to something more. We are also called to go out into the world. We are also called to go out, carry the gospel— and carry with it the fruit of the Spirit. And as we build our towers up, we forget, like those people in the plains of Shinar, that we don't need to reach up to find God—God comes down and reaches us.	G's command provided as alternative to problematic aspect of Ob, suggesting G's orientation to the Ob—the WL indicating that the S can/should orient likewise.
That's the deep irony of this story. The first four verses we read about how they carefully construct, working to build a tower, reaching up to God. But God carefully undoes everything in the next four verses to show people that heaven will come down to them.	G suggested to be present and involved.
This theme is woven into the very Hebrew words of our text today. The letters of the word for brick are literally rearranged to form a new word: confuse. *Lebenah* becomes *Navelah.* God literally rearranges what those people in Shinar were creating to form something new—a confusion that would scatter them out.	
The nomads thought that the bricks they laid would bring a sense of comfort that drew them inward to God. But God's surprising grace in this story is that God reworks our isolating activity to spread us out, scatter us into new possibility. God could have caused the city to crumble like Jericho. God could have sent plagues to drive the city dwellers out. But through this story, God displays Their infinite, creative mercy, by not only reaching down to the people in the plains, but by working through them to fulfill their ultimate calling. To go out and fill the world.	S invited to role-take with scriptural Ot to experience G's interaction.
God spoke in many languages that day and the confusion in this story is also the grace. Because when God came down. A world that was a flat red is suddenly became a multitude of infinite color. A world that was a single melody was suddenly a symphony of tones. A world that was closed in isolating comfort was broken open with possibility.	S activity expands into game, holding G's role across multiple narratives.

The people are confused, and probably uncomfortable in this new reality. But that discomfort, that confusion is God’s gift. It showed those nomads that comfort doesn’t come in a familiar skyline	Emphasizing categories of disruption in G’s role.
It showed them that connection with God does not need a tower. The Spirit is not bound by the bricks and mortar. Not by the literal or figurative ones. In fact, the Spirit in this story is found in the chaos and the confusion. The Spirit of God is found in the difference of the people there. The Spirit does not point inward, but scatters outward.	Centers new Ob of difference and confusion in conjunction with figurative towers of comfort and sameness
And that’s a hard gospel truth to hear if you really think it through. Our hope is confusion? Our grace is difference? It’s hard to hear because we like messages of peace and unity. Those are much more comforting gifts. We almost want to ask God: Did you keep the receipt? Is there any exchange program here? No offence, but I don’t want the solution.	Names G’s power and participation in confusion to suggest G’s orientation toward difference.
But I wonder, what if we’re looking at unity wrong? What if our unity doesn't come in a single language or idea. But is found in celebrating how God manifests Themself through all of our differences. It’s an unnerving place to be. We know it’s unnerving because in our discomfort we constantly look for familiar skylines. It’s easier to hang out with, to read, to look up to people who are similar to us, isn't it? In fact, Christians have even historically used this passage to argue that God uses difference to separate us into different groups. Theological arguments were crafted in support of movements like Apartheid in South Africa, and Jim Crowe laws here in the U.S. And these theological arguments still abound today, proclaiming that God wants us to thrive in our own little enclaves, separate from anyone who does not look, speak, or think like we do. But be wary about those words that come from false prophets.	WL offers S a space for difficulty in possible adjustment to offered orientation, both role-taking with G and toward object of difference. New Ob of unity—linking category to other Ob of difference and chaos Role-taking with historical Ot to address problematic Ob—the use of text
Because when you pay attention to this story, you see that God rejects the isolation that a single language creates. God gifts us with diversity. God challenges the world to be filled with difference.	Suggests correction for perception of G’s orientation.
To find unity in our calling, not in our language. Conflict wakes us up to new ideas, new insights that we’ve never considered before. And it is not pleasant, but it is a God given reality that challenges us, that moves into new understanding.	Affirms G’s particular orientation toward Ob and Ot.

Like Proverbs reminds us, **iron sharpens iron.** We grow when we connect with others. It's like after a really good workout at the gym. Your muscles are sore, but that soreness reminds you that you are building strength. It's like after a long day of pouring a foundation or raising a wall. You are exhausted from the work, but your exhaustion is connected to that home you are building. The hard conversations we have around our differences might leave us raw, but that rawness is the result of new insights. When we open ourselves up to the scary potential of difference, we come away sharper, with new revelations about God, about others, about ourselves.	S invited to reach into experience for positive engagement with difficulty through examples of cultural Ot
I have often wondered, What if those nomads listened to each other? Or did they listen? Is that actually why they scattered, because it reminded them of their call?	S invited to role-take with scriptural Ot in particular posture
What if we listened to one another? Really listened to one another. Not just listened, but heard one another. Would it remind us of our call to love and mercy and justice?	S invited to role-take with general cultural Ot in particular posture
A while ago, I heard a story about an unusual meeting in a convenience store. It was toward the beginning of the Black Lives Matter movement, which was swelling in protest of Eric Garner's death, choked during physical restraint by a police officer. And tensions were flying high as rhetoric between different groups were flying at each other, lobbing at each other like bombs. And nothing seemed to stick as people got more and more divided. Still are divided. Those same tensions were flying high in the convenience store that day when a white police officer walked up to the counter, next to a black man who was already standing there. After a moment's pause, the officer broke the tension and said, "it's really hard being either one of us these days, isn't it?" And in that moment, the rhetoric of isolated groups dispersed, and they were able to hear one another. Hear the pain of systematic racism that still oppresses people of color today. Hear the pain of those charged with maintaining law and justice in our world, who have to work within a flawed system. That meeting, that conversation wasn't suddenly easy or comfortable. Realities of compassion and justice were still present forces for both men involved. But in truly hearing one another new	S invited into multi-role game scenario holding different cultural peers: Eric Garner, police department, Black Lives Matter movement, Blue Lives Matter movement, media outlets, particular unnamed officer and shopper. Obs take shape within the particular narrative.

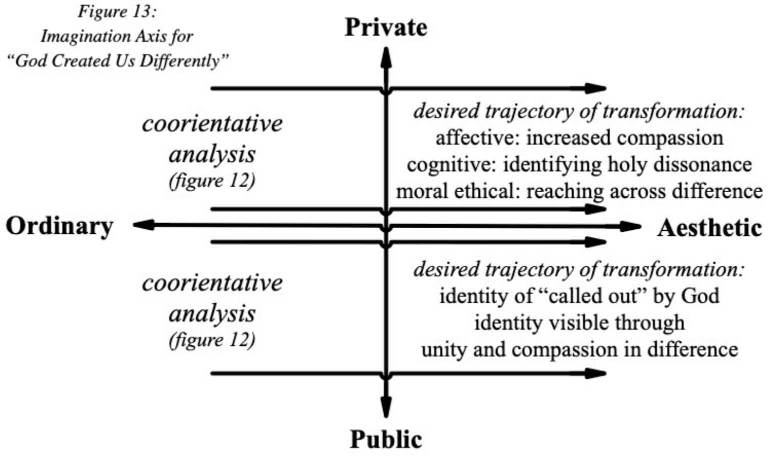
connection was found, new understanding was made possible. And I hope both walked away changed that day.	
This is God’s gift to us. Hard and strange as it might be. God has created this world with difference. God has given us the opportunity to see situations, to see creation through eyes that are not our own. This gift prevents us from creating a flat perspective. This gift offers us a multifaceted view of the gospel. This gift reminds us that we don’t find God in an isolated tower, but God finds us as we move out into the world.	G’s orientation to Ob and to Ot which suggests how the S should also orient
And the comfort we long for is not found by turning toward a familiar skyline, to a familiar city, to familiar tower. Our comfort is in God’s promise to go with us. The Spirit is not found in bricks and mortar, but within us, moving us, connecting us with one another.	Returning to Ob of comfort in context of Ob of difference et al.
God spoke in many different languages in the plains of Shinar that day as They sent the nomads out to be God’s voice in different tones to the very ends of the world. God spoke in many different languages at Pentecost as the Holy Spirit once again moved in and around people and spoke through them carrying the good news of Christ’s resurrection.	S invited to role-take with G through scripture around Ob of difference
God is still speaking in many different languages around the world today, gifting us with many voices, many perspectives, many songs. We are not united by towers, or buildings, or similarities, or even physical proximity to one another. But by the very Spirit who sends us out into the confusion, who challenges us with difference, and fills our world with miraculous colors. Through God’s gracious gift at the Tower of Babel, we continue to be both many and one, reflecting God's own triune being.	S invited to carry role-taking action with G into the present.

Figure 12:
Coorientative Analysis for
"Got Created Us Differently"



Self
identifies with desire for comfort
participation in the creation of towers
troubled by conflict as positive trait
inherited racialized structures
cultural intersections: conservative, traditional
particular cherished participants: builders, police officers
God
distant but searchable
requires effort to meet
immanent and involved
still speaking
appearance in confusion and difference
commands are for the benefit of the people
Object
familiar skyline
figurative towers
comfort
isolation
fear
cost
sameness
PROBLEM
SOLUTION
difference
connectivity
conflict
unity
Worship Leader
places herself into object position twice
primarily uses we to identify with the congregation
steps into prophetic stance with assertions about God
highlights primary role-taker through "I" to navigate
potential categorical jumps
Other
scriptural other: understandable/relatable
nonetheless erroneous in forgetting God's commands
offers representative role of God's action with humanity
historical other: supported problematic division
cultural other: working through difficulty
the suggestion we all benefit through multiplicity
particular other: author/pastor April Fiet

Figure 13:
Imagination Axis for
"God Created Us Differently"



Private
coorientative analysis (figure 12)
desired trajectory of transformation:
affective: increased compassion
cognitive: identifying holy dissonance
moral ethical: reaching across difference
Ordinary
Aesthetic
coorientative analysis (figure 12)
desired trajectory of transformation:
identity of "called out" by God
identity visible through
unity and compassion in difference
Public

The insider-out perspective enables worship leaders to explore their design of worship's public invitation through coorientation, delineating the potential activity throughout all four quadrants of the imagination. Figure 12 shows how the qualitative material of the above sermon sorts into the model itself by coalescing the material of each facet. Figure 13 brings that coorientative analysis to bear in the ordinary function and indicates how it works with a desired trajectory of transformation. While any move toward the aesthetic cannot be controlled,[320] worship leaders consider the participants when shaping the invitation to offer dialogue in the outer world to prompt some form of a particular inner dialogue. In the language of Gaarden's Third Room, preachers do not construct the room alone or control the response, but they do offer their own words to the conversation occurring therein.[321] In this sermon, I shaped the message to offer a particular dialogue. By juxtaposing certain roles and categories, I wanted to offer a space that potentially provoked a particular trajectory of transformation.

This returns to the four actions I proposed in chapter two, of deconstructing, reifying, shifting, and creation. While we cannot control the reception or transformation of roles or categories, we can habitually engage them in a way that continually brings them to the self's attention. The coorientative analysis for this sermon sketched out the roles and objects for a single sermon. How might these roles fit in with the others presented regularly in this congregation? Would a continual return to some of these particular roles create a shift through continual dialogue? Which roles reaffirm a repetitive trope? Should that trope be repetitive? These are just a few questions of the many that could be asked, especially because social activity represents a seemingly infinite amount of threads sourced in multiple people with multiple life experiences. This brief and general sermon analysis reveals the importance of framing coorientative study in a way that narrows its parameters, as I suggested in chapter one. By limiting the study, analysis can zoom in with greater detail, missing fewer roles and categories, and presenting a fuller picture of the embodied imagination space.

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[320] Chauvet contends that the generation and efficacy of symbols cannot be controlled. See *Symbol and Sacrament*, 329.

[321] Gaarden, *The Third Room of Preaching*, 122–23.

Finally, this exercise helped me, as a preacher, reflect on the clarity of social action in the sermon. For example, analyzing the object helped me realize that it became muddled in the moves between literal and figurative skylines. Immediately after suggesting that not all skylines represented literal towers, I offered a literal illustration. I presented a figurative object—a tower of fear, in the context of a literal object—the unfamiliar skyline of New York City, bouncing between the two. While the thrust of this project has focused on analyzing social action to intentionally create relational connectivity and change in worship, coorientation can also act as a reflective tool for improving communication. Coorientation empowers worship leaders to examine their craft of worship's public invitation. As an insider-out, they examine the design of social action from a contributor's perspective, supplying the outward shape of worship's invitation. The next example of outsider-in does not have access to the intention behind the juxtaposition of categories and roles, but in participation has access to the reception of them.

A Father's Day Greeting

Sunrise Community Church in Austin, TX, has adopted its city's unofficial slogan "Keep Austin Weird" into its identity. This "weirdest little church in Texas"[322] represents the more progressive wing of the Christian Reformed denomination, and despite its small size offers an affordable child care solution, addiction recovery support groups, and a city-recognized homeless services program. These identity markers have resulted in cultural, racial, and socio-economic diversity in worship, which occurs in three spaces on its small campus so people can participate where they feel most comfortable. Coming upon the church on Sunday mornings, you will see a crowd which carries worship from the sanctuary onto the lawn where people can smoke and chat in conjunction with the service. The other side of the building offers a fenced-in playground where children play while parents watch their children while worshiping from picnic tables. The sanctuary contains a visual variety of worn chairs and couches seemingly gathered over decades into nontraditional pew lines directed toward a large wooden cross at the front, surrounded on the stage by more amps and instruments than are typically used in a service. This includes an electric keyboard nestled into a hollowed-out upright piano marked with a plaque which announces that the ashes of a worship leader who died on the streets years before are interned inside. Worshipers wander between these spaces as they wish. There are several primary worship leaders who rotate planning and leading each week. These volunteers work in conjunction with two pastors on staff, dividing the service into discrete sections to work on independently before bringing them together on Sunday morning. This Father's Day greeting was led by the volunteer worship leader and her music team in the first part of the service, after a general greeting and several songs. As I was elatively new to this congregation, the sense of "outside" was very pronounced and contributed to the distance of my outsider-in perspective.

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[322] "Why We're Weird," Sunrise Community Church, accessed January 25, 2021, https://sunriseaustin.org/about/why-were-weird.

A Father's Day Greeting[323]

Text	Coorientation Coding
Congregational singing: *Reckless Love* written and originally performed by Cory Asbury[324] Lyrics: *Verses* Before I spoke a word, You were singing over me You have been so, so good to me Before I took a breath, You breathed your life in me You have been so, so kind to me When I was your foe, still your love fought for me You have been so, so good to me	Role formation for G and S through primary OB of pursuit categorical markers:

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[323] Sunrise Community Church, "Sunrise Live Worship– 6/20/21," 7:05-18:45, Facebook, June 20, 2021, https://fb.watch/7aubtJFvPT/.

[324] Cory Asbury, Caleb Culver, Ran Jackson, "Reckless Love," track 1 on *Reckless Love,* Bethel Music, 2018, iTunes Music.

When I felt no worth, You paid it all for me You have been so, so kind to me	G: kind, good, fighter, willing to do whatever it takes into recklessness
Chorus Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending reckless love of God It chases me down, fights 'til I'm found, leaves the ninety-nine I couldn't earn it, I don't deserve it, still you give Yourself away Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God	S: foe, undeserving, lost, liar, rescued, loved
Bridge There's no shadow you won't light up Mountain you won't climb up Coming after me There's no wall you won't kick down No lie you won't tear down Coming after me	
(congregation cheers and claps)	congregational Ot assents to the offered action
I wanted to say happy Father's Day to all of the fathers, all of the…	WL shifts cultural celebration (Father's Day) to Ob
(drummer interrupts with fill) ***Laughs* Wahoo! There's a father back there. (drummer answers with short fill)	WL$_2$ contributes to Ob, accenting the occasion—offering levity, WL role-takes with WL$_2$ and suggests his orientation toward object, inviting S to understand similarly
There's a whole lotta different kinds of fathers. I've got a mother who was also a father, I gave her Father's Day cards.	WL focuses the Ob on fatherhood and expands the category
You may be one of those, you may be an uncle that is the only father figure that nephew has. You may be a big brother, you may just be a really good friend or role model to somebody else that you don't even know. And I want to tell you that you are honored today and that you are cherished. We are very grateful for the great fathers out there because it's not easy and so we see you whether you are one now, whether you will be in future, whether maybe you don't know that you are.	WL invites the S to join her posture toward Ob, draws on quick category to suggest why

(cheers and laughter from the congregation) May you have a great day today (More interaction from the crowd)	WL returns to Ob, continuing to open the category for inclusivity, congregational Ot interprets her “whether maybe you don’t know that you are” within their identity context and shift that to Ob position
(echoes the crowd): hashtag Sunrise —weird sunrise We love you all Please enjoy your day, please give a father some love, And I’m sorry that I don’t have flowers for each one of you today I apologize But let’s go ahead and keep going to rejoice in the greatest example that we have of a father’s love.	WL recognizes how the congregation has shifted the Ob and joins their activity by naming identity markers before bringing the former Ob back to the center and brings G into Ob with fatherhood, connecting G with previous social activity
Song—*How Deep the Father’s Love* originally performed by Stuart Townend[325] Lyrics:	
How deep the Father’s love for us, How vast beyond all measure, That He should give His only Son To make a wretch His treasure. How great the pain of searing loss – The Father turns His face away, As wounds which mar the Chosen One Bring many sons to glory.	Ob tied to specific sacrifice
Behold the man upon a cross, My sin upon His shoulders; Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice Call out among the scoffers. It was my sin that held Him there Until it was accomplished; His dying breath has brought me life – I know that it is finished.	Ob shifts to focus on sacrifice. S culpable in this exchange.

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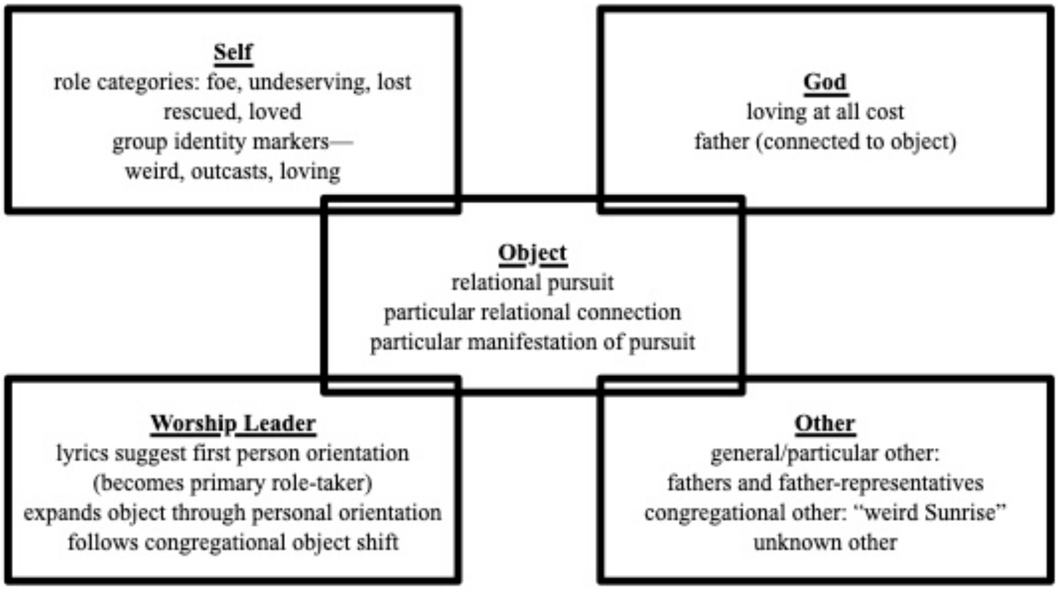
[325] Stuart Townend, “How Deep the Father’s Love,” Thankyou Music, 1995, https://www.stuarttownend.co.uk/song/how-deep-the-fathers-love-for-us/.

I will not boast in anything, No gifts, no power, no wisdom; But I will boast in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection. Why should I gain from His reward? I cannot give an answer; But this I know with all my heart – His wounds have paid my ransom.	suggests particular orientation toward Ob

Figure 14:
Coorientative Analysis for
"A Father's Day Greeting"


Self
role categories: foe, undeserving, lost
rescued, loved
group identity markers—
weird, outcasts, loving
God
loving at all cost
father (connected to object)
Object
relational pursuit
particular relational connection
particular manifestation of pursuit
Worship Leader
lyrics suggest first person orientation
(becomes primary role-taker)
expands object through personal orientation
follows congregational object shift
Other
general/particular other:
fathers and father-representatives
congregational other: "weird Sunrise"
unknown other

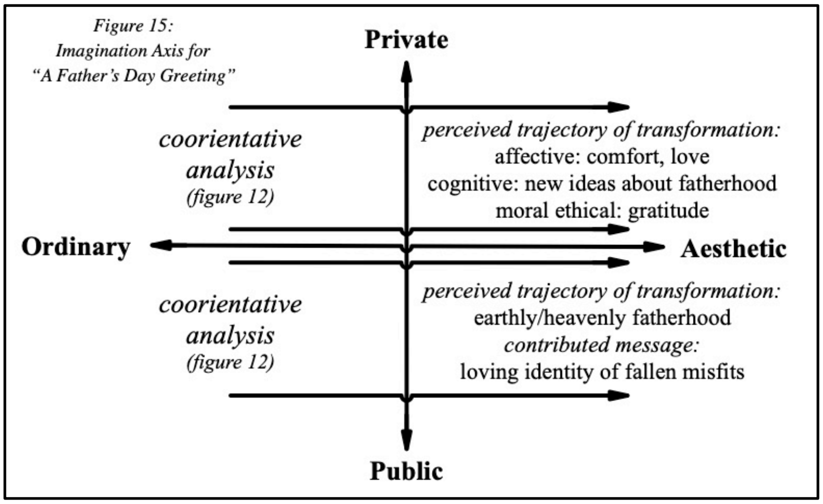


Figure 15:
Imagination Axis for
"A Father's Day Greeting"
Private
coorientative analysis (figure 12)
perceived trajectory of transformation:
affective: comfort, love
cognitive: new ideas about fatherhood
moral ethical: gratitude
Ordinary
Aesthetic
coorientative analysis (figure 12)
perceived trajectory of transformation:
earthly/heavenly fatherhood
contributed message:
loving identity of fallen misfits
Public

The outsider-in perspective not only analyzes the design of social activity in worship, but also implicates their positionality in the reception and interpretation of the analysis. This does not render the analytical analysis wrong or faulty, but suggests the importance of raising one's own consciousness of positionality. For example, the song *Reckless Love* precedes the greeting in a way that I connected God's love with the ideal of fatherhood. The worship leader did not directly connect the song to the greeting in any other way than placing them side by side and my positionality precludes me from perceiving how or why worship is shaped this way. Perhaps she incorporated this song in connection to the sermon, or to fulfill an administrative concern, or to please a specific worshiper, or simply because she liked it. My role as outsider-in only has access to how I receive the invitation. This shifts how the coorientative analysis in the ordinary connects into the aesthetic. Rather than implicating a desired trajectory of transformation, the outsider-in can communicate the perceived trajectory of transformation.

The change of insight into the aesthetic emphasizes the importance of understanding the positionality of one's own self. The observer should anticipate a variety of similarities and differences among worshipers in reception. My analysis would likely look different from someone doing the same exercise, in describing the trajectory activity or any categorical engagement. A better understanding of self in this process will help parse the particularity of reception. When the worship leader incorporated her experience of giving Father's Day cards to her mother in a single parent household, she engaged with the categorical structure of the fatherhood paradigm that not only deconstructed the sole idea of a two-parent household, but also invited categorical breadth beyond its heteronormativity. I resonated with this move because it reified existing egalitarian categories and continued to deconstruct patriarchal, gendered, and heterosexist norms. Others may not welcome or name this shifting action in the same way as I did, drawing from their own self formation. For some it may have passed without any notice at all. The usefulness of analysis from the outside-in explores the multi-faceted interaction with worship's public ordinary invitation. The uniqueness of the self helpfully offers a particular point of reception, but also suggests that the outsider-in can beneficially widen through the exploration of the tandem reception of multiple selves. Which roles resulted in consensus? Are there shared experiences that contributed to that consensus? Did the differences in response create distance between worshipers or draw them together? How so?

The particularity of the self and the multiplicity of responses suggest that engagement with social action does not simplify into a binary of acceptance or rejection. Acceptance ranges from full commitment to begrudging or problematic. Rejection ranges from thwarted desire to disgusted refusal. For example, when the congregational responses shifted the object from fatherhood to the church's identity as "weird Sunrise," I personally experienced a rejection of the public ordinary's invitation. After attending a few more weeks, I began to learn more about the church's identity categories, their emphasis on welcoming people who feel rejected by other church communities, and their unabashed incorporation of church taboos. I could not join into the coorientative move around the identity "weird Sunrise" because I didn't understand the associated roles. I could not adopt the role, even though the clear celebration of the role made me want to. Rejection of an invitation in worship does not automatically equate problematic just as acceptance does not equate positive. These interactions simply add layers to coorientative analysis. Why did rejection occur? Are there trends in rejection? Are there roles people unquestionably accept? Should they? How might acceptance or rejection of this worship element affect the self's participation throughout the rest of the event? Rejection and acceptance reveal yet another point of multiplicity in reception, displaying the richness of an outsider-in perspective. As an outsider-in, the self can observe social action along the solid lines of the model to offer direct insight into the trajectory of transformation.

Scope and Future Directions

These bird-eye examples simply show a basic application of coorientation through the two analytical perspectives of insider-out and outsider in. As I suggested above, limiting the scope of the project will not only limit the material for analysis, but concentrate on the model's inquiry for application. For example, in the sermon above I opened with self disclosure to build connection as a guest preacher with the listener. A scoping question would wonder at how guest, itinerant, or new preachers build connection with the listener. Is self disclosure typical or is there another method? How effective are these methods? Does it vary across traditions? This would require gathering examples of guest preaching to create observable units to focus the coding analysis on social activity aimed at building ethos. Social activity thickly weaves throughout worship with multiple points of interconnection from diverse directions. Limiting the scope will begin to offer insights into patterns by focusing on relevant strands.

Scoping inquiry can also include broad approaches, building questions around different facets of the model to gauge its particular activity. In the case of the self, one might wonder what categories do worship leaders typically use to build connection? (or) How might role formation contribute to personal identity in conjunction with a particular community? A broad scope could also consider the movement around the quadrants of the imagination space. Are there habitual disconnections the self must navigate along the continuum of the private/public ordinary? Is there an overemphasis on the private aesthetic at the expense of the public aesthetic? Scoping could also expand through comparison, looking at a narrow question, but analyzing from both an insider-out and an outsider-in perspective, comparing desired messaging with received messaging or seeing the effects of attempted deconstructive activity. Becoming familiar with role-taking and coorientation raises the attentiveness of the intentional worship leader. It allows for the type of generalized coding I offered above. However, coorientation in scoped application can offer so much more. Scoping analysis into observable units will enable leaders to understand the dynamics of a particular aspect of worship in a way that enables them to curate future worship more effectively.

Curating with an Ecological Consciousness

This chapter has thus far focused on analysis and reflection, so with this final section it makes the turn toward creation. Simply reflecting on social activity through coorientation will raise the worship leader's consciousness and suggest ways to shape the design of the public invitation. They can also use coorientation to ask a particular question and discern a way forward in its answer. Like a preacher who realizes that most sermon illustrations incorporate distant or abstract others and begins to incorporate local stories help the church situate itself in the community. Or a song leader recognizes that she has divided God's personhood against Themself after analyzing the last several months of congregational singing and adjusts the schedules to incorporate songs which broaden theological categories to reflect Triune unity. Analytical activity can reveal paths for intentional engagement with categories, paradigms, and messaging through a particular formation of the public ordinary. Historical reflection reveals future coorientative directions in curating worship.[326]

However, worship leaders must resist flattening any of the five facets of coorientation's model in the curating process. Overly simplistic analysis will create caricatures in the roles, resulting in a narrow dialectical message. H. Richard Niebuhr warns against this tendency in an accusation he lobbies at Mead’s generalized other which, as he reads it, represents an abstract construction determined by the self.[327] Rather than engaging the consistencies appearing among a diverse set of players, the generalized other becomes a single other which the self creates to flatly engage in a two-way dialectic.[328] Religious philosopher Joshua Daniel suggests that this interpretation may not entirely be fair, especially as he sees a great deal of agreement between Niebuhr and Mead. In outlining points of connection between the thinkers, Daniel describes an ecological consciousness that emerges in their work, where the self draws upon different, multifaceted communities in the formation of its being.[329] The ecological self exists in a fluctuation of negotiation, navigating various roles within a community while also navigating the presence of multiple communities contained within the self. The conscience can recognize a plural generalized other because it exists in its own plurality, bringing together multiple points of belonging. Therefore, the self does not impose a flat idea on the generalized other, but is drawn into its force, “in a communal form of life constituted by patterns of responsive relationship, which promote particular expectations and aspirations.”[330]

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[326] Homiletical theologian Jacob D. Myers helpfully outlines the curation activity involved in worship by addressing how ministry can interact with culture to form messages that both conserve and transform both church and culture. His comparative illustrations to art curation reflect the multidimensional approach to creating a curatorial imagination. See: Jacob D. Myers, *Curating Church: Strategies for Innovative Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018).

Daniel’s introduction of an ecological consciousness in connection to Mead’s and Niebhur’s work helpfully offers a guide for curating coorientation. Reducing the complexity in any of the facets, not just in regard to (generalized) others, will flatten worship's invitation into a narrow dialectic that prevents others from joining into creative activity and will ultimately limit the message. Flattening the object of grace to a particular moment of rescue creates a dialectal message for interaction, where all roles then flatten into one-who-must-be-rescued. Flattening God's identity into gendered norms through the sole use of gendered pronouns and images creates a theological dialectic that shapes foundational worship paradigms. Narrow dialectics limit worship's invitation in a harmful cycle. The flattened dialectic problematically excludes the multiplicity, which in turn keeps worship itself flat and shallow. Instead, an ecological consciousness leans into the complexity present in each of the different facets of coorientation, recognizing and creating worship in honor of the multiplicity present. In connecting Niebuhr's religious conscious to Mead's social one to form the ecological conscious, Daniel explains:

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[327] Niebuhr’s warning is not specific to worship, but generally in Mead’s theory. I also used Niebuhr in chapter three, incorporating his articulation of a radical monotheistic faith as a means to consider how the diverse lives of worshipers contribute to a transcendent statement about Holy participation in worship to deconstruct the constructivist/phenomenology binary.

[328] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self; An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 76–79; clearly connected to Mead and outlined by Joshua Daniel, “H. Richard Niebuhr’s Reading of George Herbert Mead: Correcting, Completing, and Looking Ahead,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 44, no. 1 (2016): 94–95, https://doi.org/10.1111/jore.12133.

[329] The label “ecological conscious” is unique to Daniel.

[330] Daniel, “H. Richard Niebuhr’s Reading of George Herbert Mead,” 97. This quote directly engages Niebuhr’s scholarship, but appears in Daniel’s building argument that shows congruency between the scholars, particularly in connection to Mead’s I/me aspect of the self.

> [T]he work of the religious dimension of conscience is not to override the clamor of our social consciences, but rather to re-ecologize our many social roles, that is, to enact them in such a way that they are not merely fitting within their particular finite ecologies of roles and patterns of responsive relations, but more significantly fitting to each other within the wider and longer history and the vaster network of interconnections with past and present, remote and immediate social forces and relations, that constitute God's realm.[331]

A dialogical understanding of social voices is not enough, but worship leaders must engage both holistic person and holistic community by encompassing meaning that configures whole selves into patterned relationships. Worship embraces the diverse presence of differentiated yet connected selves, and instead of creating a unified role through a flat message for all people to "try on" to see if it fits,[332] it invites ordinary participation within a holy pattern that potentially incites a trajectory of transformation in both the private and public aesthetic. Here the self can come in its plural formation and participate by re-ecologizing its roles through holy interaction. This not only impacts the self, but the transformation sends tremors of holy meaning down the connected strands into the multiple communities present in this moment. Worship leaders may curate toward a desired transformation, but they do so by engaging the multiplicity present throughout the model and allowing the contribution of worshipers to shape and carry that aesthetic message into their own communal significance. Worship leaders offer the invitation, but the worshiping body does the work.

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[331] Daniel, 111.

[332] Larry Day suggests something similar in children's faith development. They grow up learning particular dialectical patterns about God and their faith community, until one day they try on the role only to realize that it does not fit who they understand themselves to be. Some may change the dialectical role or look elsewhere for a different role interpretation that fits better, but many will abandon it altogether. Larry G Day, "The Development of the God Concept: A Symbolic Interaction Approach," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 3, no. 3 (1975): 172–78.

The engagement and incorporation of multiplicity in worship is complex and requires "balance and negotiation" in integration.[333] A song, a scripture passage, a creed, a leader, a sacrament, they all take on meaning within the constellation of paradigms and communities present in worship. John McClure offers an appropriate metaphor to help balance and negotiate the movement of this communal constellation by suggesting lived religion mimics a song mashup. He articulates the process as it exists in most modern music creation, where artists can compose thick sounds through combining tracks in a digital audio workstation. The weave of loops and samples are critical to the creation of the song. "Each sound, sequence of sounds, or track must be investigated for its own unique sonic character and possibilities and placed within the right sonic space and time. Different ways of juxtaposing and layering audio create very different end results."[334] This reveals a counter illustration to the solely linear approach to invention by widening it into layers. Rather than only focusing on what horizontally comes *next*, the artist also simultaneously weaves sounds and silence together along a vertical axis. McClure carries the idea into religious material by suggesting that music mixing and sermon creation both do something similar. Theologians create multitrack compositions, incorporating different submixes of theology, message, culture, and scripture.[335] We can carry McClure's ideas into the coorientative activity of creating worship. When curating the public ordinary, worship leaders must navigate the thickness of the invitation as well as the momentum. For worship leaders to effectively coorient the congregation around an object, they must anticipate the simultaneous reverberations into all other facets of the model. Some questions the leader may ask include: Who are the different selves present and how will they relate to the object? How does God appear in relationship to the object and does it suggest something about God's connection to the self or others? What others are connected to or represented in the object, and who might be left out? How does the worship leader's embodied presence contribute to the object and does it require a particular mix?

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[333] Daniel, "H. Richard Niebuhr's Reading of George Herbert Mead," 112.

[334] John S. McClure, *Mashup Religion: Pop Music and Theological Invention* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 46.

Several years ago I had lunch with another female preacher in a relatively conservative tradition who shared her frustration that some members criticized her recent sermon, contending that she was pushing a "feminist agenda." In a moment of catharsis, we swapped stories about being the first or near-first female preacher in many pulpits, sharing both the funny and tragic moments. For these congregations, our gender automatically contributes to the message we bring and, for many, adds a layer of suspicion that we needed to anticipate, balance, and navigate. Any iconoclastic social activity we present must be carefully swaddled in familiar and palatable material if the invitation is going to be accepted. Understanding this conversation through coorientation with an ecological consciousness, our unusual (for these churches) embodiment automatically contributed a track, if not multiple tracks, to the vertical layering occurring in social action. Any object presented by us in the sermon comes connected both to who we are as people and to a flattened feminist generalized other in these types of spaces. The listening self not only held a particular connection to this feminist other, but also ascribed connection onto us through role-taking activity.

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[335] McClure, 49–56.

This example highlights the type of constellation movement that occurs throughout all of worship, which builds thick coorientative experiences around invitational objects. As worship moves horizontally forward, it also layers vertically, weaving different tracks through all of coorientation's different facets. It is the job of worship leaders to discover and negotiate these constellations, paying attention to the resonating harmonics as they craft toward a message. The more one understands the weave of worship, the more they can incorporate thick strands into the object to invite a pluralistic response. The worship leader may disagree with the community representations brought into worship, as exhibited by the anti-feminist listener and the female pastor, but as a preacher, she had to contend with this pluralistic reality present within worship.[336] Creating a multifaceted invitation requires reaching for a full ecological conscious *before* shifting, deconstructing, reifying, and constructing categories and paradigms that give shape to the ordinary public expression of worship.

Conclusion

In Isaiah 55:10–11 we hear God proclaim through the prophets:

> For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
> and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
> making it bring forth and sprout,
> giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
> so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth,

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[336] I use the phrase "had to" in the sense that to offer a message to this listener, this preacher needed to contend with these realities. Truthfully, the preacher gets to choose how much to engage these paradigms, especially toxic ones inscribed onto their bodies.

> it shall not return to me empty,
> but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
> and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

God’s word will never return empty, but its creative power moves through the world, affecting all that it touches. This chapter suggests that the crafted invitation of public worship mimics the Creator who inspires it. Worship leaders offer a word, perhaps through song, sermon, and sacrament, which takes on life as it is picked up by the worshipers who respond to it, carry it, and build it through their participation. The word weaves the body together in a collective imagination space, offering aesthetic moments of transformation that range from private to public manifestations. Privately the word multiplies in the self, who carries their transformation into their different communities, re-ecologizing their different roles in line with the patterns they experience in a holy encounter. Publicly the word grows through communal attestation to holy paradigms which say something about God’s activity in the world and who we are as holy people. Coorientation offers a means for studying this word and shaping the invitation. It allows worship leaders to parse the social activity for insight into the selves and others present, the objects offered, the phenomenological expectations and/or attributes of God presence, and the worship leader’s own role within this mix. While worship leaders cannot control the ultimate messages that emerge in the embodied imagination of the congregation, understanding these dynamics can help them balance and navigate the plurality present so that their cultivating action can reach out in new ways to widen the invitation and offer possibility for deeper transformation.

Chapter 5

Invitational Role-Taking:
Strategic Practical Theology and Worship Leadership

Lost, a television hit that ran from 2004 to 2010, provided entertainment that puzzled its audience through season-long puzzles, jungle polar bears, and a troubling smoke monster that ticked its way around a mysterious island. One character in particular contributes to the enigmatic aura, driving plot points before we see them in a single captured frame. The character Benjamin Linus, portrayed by Michael Emerson, cleverly manipulates every other character on the show as he shifts roles between ally and villain, sage and liar, murderer and savior.[337] A quick scene summarizes his ethos as he enters a foreboding room with the purpose of finding a way back to the hidden island. Another lead character in the scene, Jack Shephard, directly questions him: "Did you know about this place?" Linus guilelessly looks back and replies with a shake and an earnest, "No—no, I didn't." Shephard turns his head to another: "Is he telling the truth?" to which she pitifully suggests, "Probably not." The camera returns back to Linus, a close-up shot of his emotionless face, and the audience is left to wonder.[338] No one in the show or watching it can anticipate *who* Linus will be next. He reveals drips of information tied to partial truths from a seemingly endless reserve of information through a constant shift of roles and alliances. However, as the show nears its end, you begin to realize that Linus's traits never settle into a particular role because his character is tied to the island itself. When the island is threatened, he becomes a villain. When it needs people to stay, he becomes a friend. You cannot entirely determine who Linus will be because his role constantly shifts in light of what the island requires of him.

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[337] "Lost," IMDb.com, Inc., accessed November 18, 2021, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0411008/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1.

[338] *Lost*, season 5, episode 6, "316," directed by Stephen Williams, featuring Michael Emerson, Matthew Fox, and Fionnula Flanagan, aired February 18, 2009 on ABC, https://www.hulu.com/series/lost-466b3994-b574-44f1-88bc-63707507a6cb.

The first four chapters built a strategic practical theology to examining worship through the lens of coorientation. This chapter turns to the people who instrumentally guide social action and the particular roles they take to initiate worship's public ordinary invitation. While much of Ben Linus's problematic character does not deserve imitation, his shifting persona indicates what happens when a person takes on roles in service to something outside of themself. The worshiper's role, exploratory as it may be, constantly returns to the self as the self coorients with others around the object. The worship leader's role is different, shifting in response to a pull from outside of the self: worship's public ordinary. The worship leader becomes the *invitational role-taker*, but as I suggested in chapter four, this role is comprised of fluid movement between three different roles. As *illustrative role-takers*, worship leaders align themselves with the worshiping body in reference to the object. As *representational role-takers*, they align themself with God in reference to the object, offering a word from the Lord like the prophets. As *arbitrating role-takers*, they align with others, giving testimony from an outsider perspective. These different roles appear in connection to the object and the invitation requires for coorientation.

While the dynamics of role-taking from a worship leader's perspective could constitute another project, I will highlight three key aspects here as initial points of discovery, aiming to encourage in exploration those who step into a position as invitational role-taker in worship with an awareness of how they function within its coorientative action. First, I will explore particular aspects of these different roles, why they exist, their impact, and how they function through some brief examples. Then, I will explore the theological and ethical responsibilities of the worship leader in crafting worship itself. The invitation into social action, the adoption of these different roles, and the suggestion of particular orientation comes with a great deal of power in choice and voice. As a practical theologian, I will argue that a spiral image of deeper relational connection, through the impetus of love in light of a Triune *imago Dei,* will help the worship leader craft worship responsibly.[339] Finally, I will address the overwhelming difficulty that comes with being an intentional invitational role-taker and suggest that God's perfecting action joins into the ordinary invitation and carries it into transformative places. Through this brief exploration, I hope to equip worship leaders with confidence, humility, and hope in their shifting invitational roles, encouraging them as worship leaders to guide coorientative activity that forms deeper and wider relationships.

Navigating the Fluidity of Roles

The phrase "*Stilte…de dominee gaat voorbij"* has a historical place within my Dutch, Christian Reformed tradition. These words, translating to "Be quiet…the minister is passing by,"[340] indicate an inherited holy reverence for pastors that extended past the pulpit, into their embodied training and holy call. However, the idiom no longer circulates with any real degree of frequency, not only because the denomination has become less ethnically particular, but also because the pastor's role has changed. This reality expresses itself through some worship leaders replacing neck ties with graphic tees, books with apps, and the pulpit with a tall coffeehouse table. Others' expressions have held onto inherited styles of worship, but incorporate role changes through worship creation itself, manifesting in new language, imagery, and ideas.

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[339] This returns to the relational self I propose in chapter one, an undergirding ethic that drives the pursuit of wider and deeper inclusive connectivity in worship.

[340] The Dutch spelling and English translation provided by Alice Peddie.

Christian Reformers are not alone in seeing a shift within ministerial roles, as different churches share similar social cultural worlds. In his introduction to *Ministry to Word and Sacraments: History and Theology*, Catholic theologian Bernard Cooke outlines changes occurring around authority and ministerial identity in the early-mid 20th century. He traces the conversation about ministerial identity through intra-church exchange (such as Vatican II, the formulation of the World Council of Churches, etc.—and the subsequent connected research and writing) and extra-church socio-historical reality. Cooke points to key moments where the general milieu of change becomes visible, including ministerial authority concerning contraception and ministerial identity in the question of ordaining women to the priesthood.[341] He expands on the later by summarizing: "While the acceleration of 'women's liberation' in human society has unquestionably been a major psychological impulse in the discussion about ordination of women, the major theological impulse may very well be the post-World War II rediscovery of the laity."[342] Cooke arguably undersells the implications of the women's liberation movement, especially because he does not connect it to the issue of contraceptive use. Still, he marks recent ministerial role shifts in connection with social events and shifts resonating inside and outside churches.

At about the same time, homiletician Fred Craddock also notes the implications of social shifting. He contends that critical inquiry, mistrust of traditional religious language, and changes in sensory expectation due to media all contribute to the "decline of the pulpit."[343] His solution simultaneously names and contributes to a turn toward the listener in preaching, a part of what became known as the North American New Homiletic. Sermons cease to find relevance simply in an inherent authority, but instead bring the listener along in an inductive method to build their interest and investment. This shift relocates authority from the preaching event itself to the relationship between the preacher and listener. Marianne Gaarden's Third Room qualitatively outlines this relationship. Even though the ethos of the preacher was not an initial part of the research design, Gaarden shares that all listeners "spontaneously talked about their experience of the preacher," even in cases of radio-cast worship where the interviewees did not know their preacher personally.[344] The experience of the preacher sits within two qualifiers: an authenticity of self—where the content of the sermon ties to the preacher's own personhood;[345] and attitude toward others—where the preacher indicates being open-minded, respectful, and non-judgmental of the congregation.[346] She summarizes, "The personal engagement of the authentic preacher seems to activate and stimulate the listener's interaction with the text and the sermon, and thereby the preacher's faith influences the churchgoers' outcome of the preaching event."[347] The shifts in ministerial roles and their emphasized relational capacity indicate a reality we have explored along all the other facets of the coorientation model. The intersectionality of diverse roles (present in the self, other, and God) also appear in the worship leader. As a result, this project is not concerned with arguing for a particular type of ministerial manifestation or their institutional authority.[348] In fact, the roles here are not even tied to ordained ministry, but also include those laity called out from the worshiping body to lead worship's public invitation.[349] In this way, coorientation examines the functional nature of leadership roles through a social lens and the relational component which cannot be severed from either the leader's self or the worshiping community.

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[341] Bernard J Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacraments: History and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, [1976] 1984), 15–18.

[342] Cooke, 18.

[343] Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 4th ed. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 6–11.

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[344] Gaarden, *The Third Room of Preaching*, 55–56.

[345] Gaarden, 58.

[346] Gaarden, 60. Gaarden's insights delineate the relational nature of preaching. However, it must be noted that her findings suggest a particular kind of church culture, especially in the pastor's attitude toward the church. The investigative podcast *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill* illustrates a large church that relationally connected with pastor Mark Driscoll who verbally abused them. While the podcast does not focus solely on worship or abuse, its clips and interviews throughout suggest this attitude was certainly present in worship. Even the podcast's weekly introduction uses a clip from one of Driscoll's sermons. He screams "How dare you?!?...Who do you think you are?!?" at the congregation. (The entire series engages different layers of this relationship, but for a particularly poignant episode see: Mike Cosper, "I am Jack's Raging Bile Duct," July 15, 2021, in *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill,* produced by *Christianity Today*, podcast, audio, 53:44, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/rise-and-fall-of-mars-hill/.) I am not contending that Gaarden's findings are incorrect, nor that this podcast series offers valid qualitative research. I only hold them in comparison to suggest that the roles and attitudes which connect the preacher and listener reflect all types of relationships in terms of complexity and that further qualitative research would likely reveal this variety occurring in the Third Room.

[347] Gaarden, *The Third Room of Preaching,* 68.

How then, do these relational roles appear and intersect? Modern scholarly conversations offer a wide array of role comparisons to illuminate different facets of worship leadership. Tom Long suggests the simile of preacher as witness.[350] Constance Cherry reaches for architect to describe worship planning and leadership.[351] Kirk Byron Jones lifts up jazz music, both in hearing and performing, to inform preaching.[352] Robert Reid's edited *Slow of Speech and Unclean Lips* brings together eight voices with eight images for the preacher, including "lover," "fisher," and "ridiculous person."[353] From coach to co-pilot to conductor, these illustrations help worship leaders draw from different categories of understanding to shape their own embodied role identity. These metaphors help clarify roles, but also fall short as their inherent qualities intentionally use the incongruous to reach new imaginative depths.[354] The roles are appropriate in their inappropriateness, and the differences reveal the shifting roles worship leaders must navigate. For example, Jana Childers proposes similarities between preaching and the process of giving birth while Elaine Ramshaw metaphorically draws from the same experience, but from the different vantage point of a midwife.[355] Both these illustrations ring true despite their very different perspectives because worship requires different role postures from those leading throughout its event.

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[348] This has been done at length elsewhere. As I have noted, Cooke's introduction traces, in depth, the conversations about ministry through the late 1960s. His book, *Ministry to Word and Sacrament* also represents one of the many texts which builds a theological history of ministry identity. Jackson Carroll's work illustrates those who address modern concerns of ministerial authority and leadership in his *As One with Authority* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011). Karoline M. Lewis's *She: Five Keys to Unlock the Power of Women in Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016) illustrates how some authors address the particular needs pertaining to ministerial roles and identity formation. William H. Willimon builds identity through practicality in *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002).

[349] Notably, the majority of engaged scholarship in this chapter alludes to the ordained capacity of pastoral leadership, but is used because it provides insight into the movement and multiplicity of roles. However, this multiplicity is not limited to ordained leadership, but occurs in lay leaders as well. Thus, any reference to worship leader refers to, as worship theologian Kimberly Bracken-Long elucidates, any person "called out from the midst of a community of believers to ensure that the Word is proclaimed and the Sacraments enacted." – "Speaking Grace, Making Space: The Art of Worship Leadership," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 7, no. 1 (2008): 37.

[350] Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, Third Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016).

[351] Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

It may seem odd, even chaotic, to navigate the fluctuation of roles, especially those which seem to contradict one another. Pastoral psychotherapist J. Randall Nichols's treatment of the traditional dichotomy of priest and prophet reveals that this process does not need to be anxiety-inducing. In fact, these seemingly contradictory scriptural roles helpfully inform each other. He writes:

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[352] Kirk Byron Jones, *The Jazz of Preaching: How to Preach with Great Freedom and Joy* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004).

[353] Robert Reid, *Slow of Speech and Unclean Lips: Contemporary Images of Preaching Identity* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010).

[354] McFague, *Models of God*, 33.

[355] Jana Childers, ed., *Birthing the Sermon: Women Preachers on the Creative Process* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), ix–x; Elaine Ramshaw, *Ritual and Pastoral Care*, ed. Don S. Browning, Theology and Pastoral Care Series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 22.

> Whenever I talk to ministers or seminary students about pastoral preaching I can be morally certain that one question will come up in discussion. In its most straightforward version it goes something like this: "All well and good, but what about *proclaiming the gospel?* All this talk about personal process notwithstanding, we do have a prophetic Word to peach, don't we?[356]

Nichols argues that this question falls into the traditional trap of choosing one communicative voice over the other, debating whether to speak *prophetically or priestly.* But these two are not at odds with one another, rather, they exist in a healthy tension that must be sustained. Leaning into this tension will create dialectical balance, whereas preaching wholly on one side or the other "would so distort reality as to foreclose the communicative work of the very things we wish to cultivate."[357] The perspective of prophet and priest are roles which inform each other as poles between which preaching resides. Carrying Nichol's ideas even further into the relational capacity of worship leadership, the listener also contributes to the role itself. What might be a prophetic word in one ear might ring priestly in another. A prophetic prayer against gun violence that lifts up the image of beating swords into ploughshares may challenge a gun enthusiast's orientation toward the object while priestly interceding for a victim. Nichols' concept of leaning into the tension articulates that a worship leader's role does not land in one particular place, but exists in a continual process.

Gordon Lathrop maintains that the navigation and interplay of multiplicity is an inherent part of worship leadership and represents a core spiritual discipline. His book, *The Pastor: A Spirituality,* directly addresses how pastors live among symbols, hold them for their communities, and use them as primary material. In turn, pastors become symbols themselves. While roles and symbols are not necessarily synonymous, his definition of a symbol elucidates how roles for worship leaders function. He defines it as "*a gathering place for communal encounter with larger meaning* or *a thing that enables participation in that to which it refers.*"[358] Without speaking a word, the pastor's presence can communicate something in connection to their surroundings. Lathrop further creates nuance for the symbol, arguing that the pastor's symbol participates, like the Christian identity itself, in the crucifixion and thus represents a broken symbol, fraught with reversals and paradox. The inherent identity of the symbol builds on the foundation of *to live is to die*.[359] This challenges the pastor to hold their own symbol loosely, with intention and curiosity. Lathrop writes, "Whatever a spirituality for pastors may turn out to be, it will surely include the lifelong relearning of the symbols with which pastors deal and also, along with that relearning, the lifelong venture—and danger—of living as a symbol."[360] A coorientation model does not add a new metaphor, role, or symbol suggestion for worship leadership. Instead, it offers a means to do what Lathrop suggests here, to look at the movement, change, and function of our roles.

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[356] J. Randall Nichols, *The Restoring Word: Preaching as Pastoral Communication* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 19872003), 49.

[357] Nichols, 59.

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[358] Gordon Lathrop, *The Pastor: A Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 4. Emphasis original.

[359] Lathrop, 13–15.

[360] Lathrop, 1.

Three Coorientative Roles in Worship Leadership

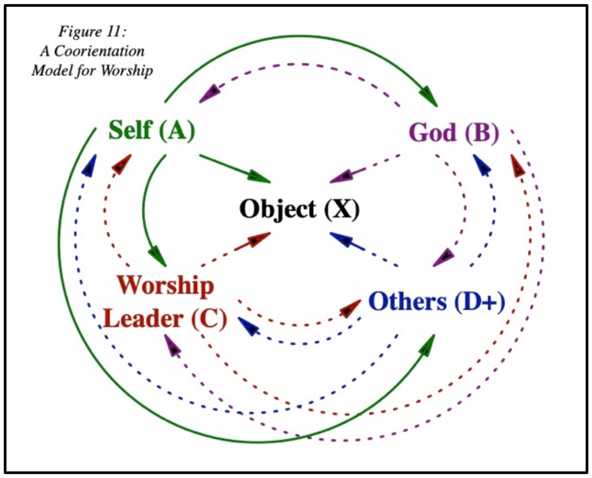

Figure 11:
A Coorientation Model for Worship

The worship leader(s)'s role is tied to the invitation occurring in the public ordinary of worship. From the highly ordered Mass, to the silence of the Friends, the worship leader takes an *invitational role* to guide the activity of worshipers. However, when we look at the worship leader's movement within the coorientation model, we can see three types of functionality emerge in the invitational action. The worship leader moves around the model, aligning with the three different facets for self, other, and God, creating three different role modalities: *illustrative, representational,* and *arbitrating.* As they move through these different modalities, they not only invite the congregation into participation, but they invite the congregation to see them through a particular role. Consider the following liturgical examples from Cláudio Carvalhaes's *Liturgies from Below: Praying with People at the Ends of the World.*

Example 1: An Invitation into the Eucharist

> We the Peasant community invite our mother and father, we invite our aunt, brother, and sister to celebrate in solidarity with us—the oppressed, crushed, and marginalized community. The fellowship and sharing of fish and buko juice are expressions of remembrance of the suffering Christ who died for the weak, the lowly, and the nobody to give them life, which is sufficient. Your participation and presence in this gathering are both a prayer and a commitment to the struggle of the peasants and the fisherfolks—us.[361]

This example demonstrates the modality of *illustrative* role-taker as the worship leader stands alongside the congregation before God and the world. When the worship leader identifies with the congregation, they move within the model to align with the participating self, who then sees themself in the worship leader. In this way, the worship leader becomes an illustrative role-taker who invites the self to mimic their orientation toward the object. In this example portion of the liturgy, the worship leader aligns themself with the listener and names characteristics that they suffer together. In camaraderie, the worship leader names a posture of remembrance to suggest a similar approach to the table with the expectation of finding visibility, comfort, and hope. The final "us" represents a firm alignment with the self, and invites the self to find solidarity with the worship leader and therefore mimic their role orientation toward the object.

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[361] Claudio Carvalhaes, *Liturgies From Below: Praying with People at the Ends of the World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), 130.

Example 2: A Blessing

> With the gift of love and hospitality that God has blessed us with,
> go out there and share the love you have experienced
> so that, with those whom [you] encounter
> you may bear witness to the gift from Africa.
> Amen.[362]

Although it sometimes hints at a role, the pronoun "us" does not necessarily align the worship leader with the self as seen in this example. While the first-person plural does acknowledge a common reception of love and hospitality, the mode of this blessing connotates a different type of social activity. Here the worship leader borrows from scriptural paradigms to communicate a commissioning challenge and in doing so, aligns with God's facet in the coorientation model. The worship leader becomes a *representational* role-taker in the command to go and share. They suggest a particular holy orientation in reference to the object, one which does not illustrate a role to follow, but rather a role which prophetically names something about the object indicating God's own orientation to the object as well.

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[362] Carvalhaes, 61. Word added to create flow.

Example 3: An Intercessory Prayer

> God of mercy and justice, we come before you; we are crying out in a violent and bully-ridden land in the Philippines, crying and asking for peace. Our brothers and sisters are suffering under the drug war unjustly; we share their pain and suffering.
> Lord, have mercy on them and restore the victims their dignity. These people have no hope for the future, yet there is hope for them, and you can grant them their hope and a peaceful life. Lord, hear our prayer.[363]

At the beginning of this prayer, we see an initial glimpse of the illustrative role-taker who names the collective action of prayer. However, as the prayer continues, we begin to see the worship leader incorporate perspectives distinct from both the self and from God. This indicates that they have become an *arbitrating* role-taker, moving toward the others' facet in the model and becoming an intermediary. They incorporate those not present into worship through stories, experiences, vantage points. Here, the prayer names particular suffering of those at a distance with a petition for restoration and hope. This intentional incorporation of voices beyond the self requires the worship leader to ethically step closer to the other, emphasizing their perspective within the social activity. This can increase in difficulty when insufficient or incorrect understandings of the other predetermine aspects of reception, indicating the importance of arbitrating the voice of the other, so that those not present in worship are still valued for their unique personhood. The power of arbitration in worship comes through the ability to amplify voices which exist at the fringes or outside of the body. The worship leader acts as an intermediary observer, intentionally building connection. By intentionally incorporating these others, the worship leader stands alongside them, maintaining that they are worth consideration.

The worship leader's role fluctuates throughout worship, arguably even throughout individual elements of worship. An awareness of how coorientation functions enables leaders to reflect on their representation in worship and the balance between the different modes of their overall invitational action. Danger exists in overdeveloping any of the three. When worship leaders overly align with the people as illustrative role-takers, they diminish the “called out” nature that empowers them to bring in an outside word either from God or others. Overemphasis of the representational modality can result in a preacher distanced from their congregation and creates a hierarchy that places the worship leader above the worshipers. When a worship leader overly aligns with others as an arbitrator, they can create isolation from the congregation. This can feed into an individual sense of having a unique and superior way of seeing things, creating a righteousness around the role in contrast to the community’s need for change. Each of these roles represent a modality of invitational role-taking. Awareness of the dynamics of coorientation encourages the worship leader to understand how the roles they are taking for themselves, God, and others are functioning, equipping them to navigate the tension between them in balance and fluidity. Just as every other facet of the coorientation model requires multifaceted representation and nuance, so too, does the worship leader. Coorientation provides a tool which enables such reflections and curation.

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[363] Carvalhaes, 83.

Crafting Worship which Spirals

The spiral image represents incremental growth which builds on work accomplished in a previous pass. Intentional social activity toward greater relational connectivity reflects this movement in worship. The public ordinary invitation must first create an access point that can then be built toward unknown or undervalued spaces. As an initial paradigm it can shift over time as each role-taking pass makes progress in generating greater connectivity for worshipers, both internally as a particular community and outwardly as a community situated within a wider context. To make this role-taking spiral intentional, the worship leader must simultaneously act as an empathic insider and an outsider of the community, each position generating insight to enable this type of movement. In her succinct primer on interpreting and incorporating scripture into preaching, New Testament scholar Mary Foskett articulates the careful approach a preacher must take. Interpreting scripture requires engaging multiple communities, from those represented in scripture through to those present in the congregation hearing the proclaimed word. She writes:

> Distinctly positioned among readers and interpreters of the biblical text, preachers read both with and for their congregations. Reading *with* the congregation, the preacher engages the text with sensitivity and the aim of developing pastoral insight. Reading *for* the congregation, she or he searches the text for a prophetic word.[364]

Foskett names the preacher's distinct position in reading scripture, where exegesis must include both the congregation and perspectives beyond it. Homiletician Lenora Tubbs Tisdale carries this idea further in her book *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, arguing that preachers need to exegete their congregation as a part of their craft. Similar to Foskett, she names an insider/outsider approach to reading the congregation itself. As an insider, one learns how to bring an accessible word to the congregation, encoding "the message in language and symbols familiar to the speaker, and may choose to do so in a very esoteric way."[365] However, too much emphasis on the insider will breed a myopic stance; thus the preacher's exegesis of a congregation must also include the outsider, representing the perspective of someone separate. For some leaders, this is easier than others. Newer leaders automatically function as an outsider whereas long-term leaders or those who inherit congregations they were raised in will have to work harder to adopt this lens. Regardless of length of time, the role of outsider, in part, must bring a different awareness into the congregation, by incorporating wider narratives of people who exist outside of the congregation.[366] The worship leader is responsible for crafting a public ordinary invitation that aligns with the congregation, speaking their particular language to meet their needs, but must not be limited by it if they want to transformatively spiral.

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[364] Mary F. Foskett, *Interpreting the Bible: Approaching the Text in Preparation for Preaching*, Elements of Preaching (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 33.

[365] Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, Fortress Resources for Preaching (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 45.

Here we again see the different modal functions of the worship leader balanced within healthy worship. Both insider and outsider attributes enable worship leaders to create intentional spiraling social activity. As insiders, worship leaders not only understand how to shape an appropriate invitation in the public ordinary that will echo throughout the imaginative activity of participants, but also can see the dynamics of the congregation and appropriately respond. I broached the concept of insider and outsider in chapter four through the method of applying coorientation to worship in order to examine its social structure from different perspectives. The idea here is slightly different, where the two perspectives must be held by the same person, a worship leader committed to considering the ethical implications of the invitation. As insider the worship leader works to encounter and engage the congregation's social paradigms and can create worship to work from these paradigms. However, the worship leader must also act as an outsider, inquiring how these paradigms might be narrow, faulty, or disillusioned, harmfully inhibiting relationships with God, others, and even the self. To create worship that invites a congregation into deeper and wider relational connection, an outsider perspective investigates limitations in a congregation's engagement with the work of God within current social activity and potential new directions that role-taking needs to take. The outsider asks: who is being ignored, undervalued, or even diminished? They then intentionally bring this to bear on coorientative activity, both by emphasizing particular others joining into the activity and by selecting particular objects for the group to gather around.

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[366] Tubbs Tisdale, 49–53.

This intentional inclusive spiral activity reveals the intersubjective and communicative ethic within coorientation. Influential philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas contends that Mead was the first to create an "inter-subjective model of the socially produced ego" by rejecting the "reflection-model" in favor of interaction for self development.[367] The resulting self is socially constituted and cannot detach from its context into abstraction.[368] This suggests that ethical action emerges through a method of communication toward a communal consensus because the self's identity does not simply form in social systems, but finds stability in "relationships of reciprocal recognition."[369] The well-being of the self and others can simultaneously progress through intersubjective communication, all people growing and benefiting from increasingly empathic role-taking, each self finding full being as it acknowledges and values the selfhood of others. Habermas highlights Mead's method of connective development through language, where the self does not necessarily agree with others, but learns to recognize their unique and irreplaceable personhood. Every act of communication suggests acknowledgment, to at least some degree, in presuming communicative reciprocity. In extending a word to another, the self displays a base recognition of the other in the expectation of reception and recognition by the other in turn.[370] This cooperative communication toward consensus is partly why John McClure centers Habermas' theory in exploring liturgy's "distinctive social and communicative orientation…, identifying non-deceptive, nonmanipulative, non-ends-oriented modalities of speaking and listening that are self-consciously oriented toward new and more comprehensive forms of moral understanding."[371] In worship, we build worlds through communicative action, language certainly, but also non-verbal symbols and cues. To come to worship and participate in the public ordinary represents, at the very least, a willingness to witness, if not contribute into cooperative communication. Leaders who create worship's public ordinary invitation have a responsibility in crafting its cooperative meeting point, which carries ethical and effective implications.

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[367] Jürgen Habermas, "Individuation Through Socialization: On George Herbert Mead's Theory of Subjectivity," in *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 170.

[368] Habermas, 183.

[369] Habermas, 184.

[370] Habermas, 184–8.

However, McClure suggests that Habermas's approach falls short in underlining motivation, relying on Eurocentric cognitive and rational assumptions which presume that communicative action focuses on achieving mutual understanding and agreement.[372] He addresses this weakness by expanding Habermas's "lifeworld" beyond the linguistically semantic to the pragmatic and performative, grounding it theologically as communicative development within God's redemptive lifeworld. I similarly suggest grounding the ethical drive theologically: in the scriptural call to love God, love neighbor, and love self. This type of intersubjective ethic goes beyond the golden rule, which, as political scientist Eva Erman points out, reduces flatly into a social contract existing solely within self reasoning.[373] Building on Habermas, Levinas, and Axel Honneth, Erman explores how modifying our view of recognition can thicken the *inter* of intersubjectivity. She writes:

> Golden Rule thinking within the western philosophical tradition implies a monological symmetry between subjects—where 'between' cannot imply 'inter' since intersubjectivity requires interaction and thus the recognition of acting subjects—whereas Habermas emphasizes a dialogical symmetry. Against monological symmetry, which

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[371] John S. McClure, *Speaking Together and with God: Liturgy and Communicative Ethics* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018), xvi.

[372] McClure, xx–xxii.

[373] Eva Erman, "Reconciling Communicative Action with Recognition: Thickening the 'Inter' of Intersubjectivity," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 32, no. 3 (May 1, 2006): 380, https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453706063214.

> must start out from the ‘I’, Levinas approaches ‘inter’ from the perspective of the Other and puts asymmetry in the limelight. What I have suggested is that communicative action understood in terms of mutuality includes both symmetrical and asymmetrical dimensions within discourse ethics. Apart from Habermas’ validity claims, communicative rationality harbours another source of validity consisting of counterfactual discourse rules, which are better captured by mutuality than symmetry. In fact, since mutuality can include symmetry but not the other way around, it can embrace both these two sources of validity—jointly constituting the rationale of communicative rationality.[374]

Her solution thickens interaction by emphasizing a mutual method of discourse rather than potential universalizing conclusions. We come into relationship not just as a self, but also as an other, contributing to the self-actualization of our others. Mutual recognition makes room for both sameness and difference because the claim recedes in importance compared to the action of the parties involved. The process of knowing the other directly ties to self-understanding and both forms of knowing intertwine in relationship, as understanding something about the other connects to the understanding of self and vice versa. In chapter two, I cited Yep’s article “The Violence of Heteronormativity in Communication Studies,” which addresses toxic homophobia and its damaging effects, affecting both the attacked and also the attacker in the sense that the understanding of other coincides with the understanding of self. The harm inflicted by the attacker holds negative ramifications for their own self world, even if they do not perceive it as such. While the balance in the harm stated is by no means equal, Yep’s examples reveal how homophobia strengthens toxic heteronormative stereotypes. The self forms in relationship to the other. To laugh at a joke not only tells the other that they’re funny, but informs or reinforces self knowledge about one’s own sense of humor. To stand and applaud a performance communicates gratitude and appreciation externally and confirms those feelings internally. Mutual recognition thickens the inter of intersubjectivity through an emphasis on the process rather than concluding claims. This does not discount that validity claims are possible through communicative action, but changes the focus from conclusions to the method itself, making room for asymmetry and difference because value situates with knowledge *of* the other rather than consensus *with* the other.

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[374] Erman, 391–2.

Mutual recognition echoes theologically in the scriptural call to love God, love neighbor, and love self.[375] It generates both a motivating drive for ethical intersubjectivity as well as insight into these commands. Mutual recognition in this context explains that a loving act toward an other also extends loving action toward the self. Seeing the other as worthy of love reinforces one's own *imago Dei*, a being loved by God and worthy of love from others. Acknowledging and loving the *imago Dei* in the diversity of humanity brings us into deeper knowledge of God.[376] God calls humanity to mimic God's own divine nature with the call to love God, love others, and love self—as God loves us. An intersubjective ethic reveals the complexity of this this call:

- to know and love God is to love my neighbor and love myself.
- to know and love my neighbor is to love God and love myself.
- to know and love myself is to love God and love my neighbor.

God's call to love reveals the interconnected nature of relationship, as the care we extend to any one part of the self, other, and Other has an impact throughout the entire system. Loving another exists in a process rather than a product, where the action of love shapes the self and desires to see others thrive.

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[375] Matthew 22:37–39, Mark 12:30–31, and Luke 10:27

[376] This interconnection returns to God's own triune nature, where multifaceted difference finds unity in deeper knowledge of each member.

Recognition as *loving* role-taking action creates a life-giving impact in the development of selfhood, including our material being. In the opening of her book *Poetics of the Flesh,* theologian Mayra Rivera writes, “Words…become flesh. Words mark, wound, elevate, or shatter bodies. Social discourses divide the world and mark bodies differently.”[377] Building on the work of Édouard Glissant, she explains that the poetic does not simply refer to writing style or genre, but extends to “modes of knowing, being, and acting in the world.”[378] Thus, totalizing forms of thought cannot exist because knowledge is inherently tied to continually changing beings. A poetic method seeks to know another, fully recognizing that the other can never be fully known. Rather than a weakness, this inability provides a foundational strength, a force of necessary, constant relation-making. The only weakness is not attempting to know another at all.[379] Rivera attests that feminist theological scholarship has done the work of creating a relational approach to reevaluate and attribute value to bodies in a way that unites mind and body. Still, we must revisit this work because encountering the opposition has “revealed additional challenges pertaining to the relations between the body and the socio-material world.”[380] We work to see others, to see God, and to see ourselves because the interrelated nature of love and compassion ties to our material existence. Seeking eco-justice for polluted streams loves my neighbor by seeing their need for potable drinking water, but also loves God through a valuing of creation, and loves self by contributing to and affirming features of one’s own identity. A person who sets up a healthy boundary to protect themself from an abusive other loves the self by valuing their own personhood, loves the other by disengaging in a way which challenges them toward introspection, and loves God by valuing the *imago Dei*. Intersubjective communication rooted in love finds gains value in actions rather than conclusions because loving action positively ripples through all relational connection points. Thus, the call to love is more than simply an emotive task, but it ethically participates in the thriving of whole people, from their inner selfhood, to their physical bodies, to their social and material realities.

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[377] Mayra Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 2.

[378] Rivera, 2.

[379] Rivera, 3.

[380] Rivera, 7.

Carrying loving mutual recognition specifically into worship, ministerial leaders take responsibility for crafting a public invitation which recognizes God's call to love God, self, and others in a simultaneous action. As an insider the worship leader knows not only how to communicate with the congregation, but how to lovingly encourage and challenge the congregation to spiral inward and grow closer together by ensuring that all members of the body are seen, valued, and loved. It draws the congregation together and strengthens bonds where each person can exist as an equal and differentiated self. Similarly, as outsider, the worship leader works to grow the purview of the congregation beyond the community by selecting different roles which stretch the congregation into wider arcs of knowledge. Love is vital to the process, prohibiting abuse which reduces mutual recognition into monological reasoning. When incorporating the stories of others into worship, we must be careful to incorporate the full personhood of others, including their material realities, and reach out through love with a desire to see them thrive. In this process worship leaders must guard against picking and choosing the qualities of others for the purpose of building up our own selfhood, love exchanged for consumerism. Loving others requires something of us in mutual recognition, involving a full spectrum of responses that may include navigating difficult tensions, or painfully deconstructing paradigms. Loving action can appear in lament and sorrow as the self reflects on its own participating in toxic attitudes and behaviors. The goal is not consensus or harmony, rather the loving process which affects all persons involved. Worship leaders who guide the coorientative activity of the congregation must understand the intersubjective resonances of social activity in worship. This comes with a responsibility to reflect on why and how they bring certain objects to the center of the public invitation.[381] Coorientation creates the opportunity to do so in positive ways, through a motivation of mutual recognition rooted in God's call to love—God, one another, and ourselves.

Trusting in God's Perfecting Action

When I took my first ministerial position as a worship coordinator fresh out of college, I dove into the task of creating worship and strove for excellence through careful rehearsals. Any person with a leadership part, large or small, would come into church to practice with me beforehand. Worship team practices lengthened as we would repeat songs or parts of songs over and over again until the intros were tight, tricky rhythms were crisp, and the whole song had dynamic flow. People often joked about how detail oriented I was. Then one week I had a singer rush up to me after the service with a stream of apologies for missing a vocal entrance we had rehearsed *ad nauseum* beforehand. She couldn't believe her mistake or the assurances I gave her that it all went ok. It was then that I realized my training of these volunteers was missing a key element—worship. I began to reframe my rehearsals, still encouraging excellence, but also constantly reminding them that when it came time to lead, our preparations turned into offerings, where even errors become part of what we're meant to bring. As this project draws to a close, I feel a similar tug of fretfulness in the complexity of shaping social action and return to the foundation: worship.

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[381] This suggested orientation toward the object in worship is not necessarily coercive, although an argument can certainly be made for the pressures of social coercion in different contexts. However, from an analytical perspective, the pressure toward conformity, as I suggested in chapter two, comes through pressure to find balance. If a person is drawn more to the object, or a competing object to the one offered by the worship leader, the congregant may reject the coorientative action. However, the sheer presence of a person inquiring after worship's public invitation suggests that there is some presumptive pressure or sway held by the worship leader and/or the liturgical space itself.

It seems daunting to examine the countless threads, sourced from diverse communities represented in each self, intersecting within worship. How do worship leaders engage such multiplicity without falling into either extreme action or inaction? Some worship leaders may work to control the social action of worship to such a degree that they form a narrow dialectical message that flattens all participants into caricatures, where prayers begin to feel manipulative and preachers turn into lobbyists. Others may see the layers of social meaning and feel overwhelmed into inaction, perhaps in light of the effort required to examine them, or the fear that pulling on one thread might unravel another. The solution to guard against danger in either extreme can be found Joshua Daniel's ecological consciousness, which I partially introduced in chapter four. Building on his ideas, I argued that we curate worship as a constantly shifting constellation of thick experiences that invite pluralistic access points into the public invitation. However, two other aspects of Daniel's ecological consciousness can aid the worship leader through an emphasis on "epistemic humility, not certainty."[382] He argues that an ecological consciousness presumes fallibility in its creation. A localized group or idea cannot fully represent God's community or communicate God's own being. In this way, worship itself functions like a metaphor, inherently correct and incorrect. Presuming fallibility may seem like it adds another daunting measure to the worship leader's task of planning and leading worship, making perfection in the craft impossible, but the inverse is true. The reality of imperfection relieves the pressure of achievement and shifts worship from goal orientation to the process itself. We never expect to arrive at perfection in worship, but seek to do our best in the process. Tragedy complements fallibility because the complexity of the systems we encounter require decision making. In choosing what object should be pulled into communal social action, worship leaders choose not to include others. Even more, decisions do not necessarily waver between right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate. Our decision-making in worship might require opting between two goods, involving tragedy in using one and not the other.[383] This emphasizes the need for humility and repentance on the part of the worship leader who navigates complex systems in their decision-making for worship creation. Tragedy presents a reality that worship leaders must learn to endure as a part of their work, aiming for but never achieving perfection in representation. Accepting this reality will lead us into greater freedom of experimentation and expression.

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[382] Daniel, "H. Richard Niebuhr's Reading of George Herbert Mead," 112.

Embracing the fallibility and tragedy of an ecological consciousness in worship encourages the type of play that liturgical scholar Janet Walton describes. Play allows worship leaders to hold symbols loosely, knowing that what happens depends on the other members of the community.[384] She writes, “We work together, we play together, to glimpse more and more dimensions of our relationship with God, with one another and with our created world.”[385] Through communal activity, she argues, we improvise together in a creative process that carries memories of inherited faith tradition and mixes them imaginatively together. Doing so within a framework of fallibility requires turning to the phenomenological aspect of the coorientation model. God not only appears as a representational facet within coorientation, but God participates in the social action as well. In worship, leaders center an object and guide coorientation, the self participates in worship and processes its own activity, and the other interacts in a relational capacity. God contributes to social action by transforming this interactivity into what it needs to become, overcoming the fallibility inherent in human construction. Consider Paul's description of God's perfecting action within the eschatological realization of life between Christ's past and coming action, where creation still *groans* but also offers glimpses of glory in the Spirit. Romans 8: 24–28 (NRSV) proclaims:

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[383] Daniel, 113.

[384] Walton, “Improvisation and Imagination,” 292.

[385] Walton, 294.

> For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to [God's] purpose.

Paul's description of what occurs in prayer here illustrates the Spirit's redemptive action for our historical season of in-between, revealing how God contributes to the social action of worship. We hold symbols loosely, not because we do not trust them or ourselves to elucidate truth. Nor do we withhold our greatest effort. Rather, we understand that our fallibility renders our action incomplete without others, especially God, to create transformative meaning. In this way, our fallibility becomes an asset in simultaneously releasing the bonds of perfection through expectation for God's perfecting action.

God joins into our action within worship and contributes God's own creative activity. Theologian Majorie Hewitt Suchocki explores this specifically regarding preaching in her book, *The Whispered Word: A Theology of Preaching.* A process theologian, Suchocki examines worship from the perspective that the name Creator does not describe a one-time action at the beginning of history, but rather God's continual creative action of calling things into existence, including in and through preaching and the sacraments.[386] These elements participate in the revelation of Jesus Christ by re-presenting Christ's redemptive activity and its impact within our specific historical contexts. Preaching (and we can extend to all of worship) proclaims Christ in our very midst.[387] For this representation to be complete, Suchocki contends that the symbol extended must also be received, comprehended by the hearer of the event. This means that God's contribution impacts differently in the distinct ear of the listener, creating transformation unique to the life of each self. Multiplicity in hearing does not isolate the self into individualism, but ties selves to others in the transformative aspect of a shared symbol, making it a unifying event.[388] The preacher then must let go of the sermon, understanding that it remains inherently unfinished until received.[389] Worship finishes through the Spirit's activity within the participants. Perhaps this is the true meaning of *leitourgia*, the work of the people who must receive the public invitation in the Spirit and participate in the transforming holy action it inspires.

Creating and leading worship through intentional consideration of social action can be an intimidating task. But we can exchange intimidation for excitement through the lens of an ecological consciousness which frees us with the presumption of fallibility and the willingness to embrace tragedy. These elements emphasize humility, where we hold symbols within the public invitation of the embodied imaginary loosely, knowing that they require God's perfecting action to carry them into the transformative aesthetic. We construct worship recognizing that we do not do so alone, but that the Spirit joins our work, through planning, through preparing, through leading, and through reception. From start to finish, the creative activity in the public ordinary finds fullness as it joins with the people's work and the Creator's perfecting work in worship.

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[386] Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Whispered Word: A Theology of Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 3.

[387] Suchocki, 17–21.

[388] Suchocki, 27–32.

[389] Suchocki, 67.

Conclusion

I remember the final Sunday at my first church, after nine full years of planning and leading. Worship was bright and full of bittersweet emotion. Lunch afterwards provided delicious bites between big hugs and tearful goodbyes. My heart was bursting as I drove away from that church building. Then my phone buzzed with a new email and I looked down to see a new message from a congregational member who had (not ironically) decided to send me a point-by-point description of the errors in worship that morning, from song choices to my sermon. I laughed and hit the delete button, releasing the work of navigating the complex craft of worship for this worshiping body. Overall, this project has spent a great deal of time dissecting the seemingly infinite strands of social reality which intersect in worship, implying how the worship leader can utilize coorientation to assess and create worship which inspires deeper and wider relational connectivity. However, it would not be complete without examining the particular contribution of the worship leader as invitational role-taker. A multifaceted self in its own right, the worship leader also functionally moves through illustrative, representational, and arbitrating roles to craft and lead the public invitation of worship. Through introspection, the coorientation model can help leaders navigate and balance this movement. While not easy, the worship leader can guide social activity with hopeful and humble expectation, knowing the invitation they hold out remains gloriously incomplete without the work of the people or God. Building on an intersubjective ethic of love, worship comes to life amid the interaction of each coorientative facet, including the particular contribution of its leaders.

Concluding Thoughts

A Hopeful Polyphonic Naming

Three Communion Memories

I do not remember how old I was, but I do remember being upset—prevented from taking a little glass cup filled with burgundy liquid from the sparkling silver platters that passed by. Apparently, I had been enough of a nuisance at previous celebrations of the Lord's Supper that my mother came prepared. She pressed two peppermints into my palm and invited me to participate with these elements instead. I remember waiting for the words, anticipating the moment, and joining in with the hands lifting around me to pop the candy into my mouth.

I stood there with a piece of bread soaked in wine, remembering what I had heard in class the previous week. The professor had linked the cup of wrath in Jeremiah 25 to Christ's action in Matthew 26, where Jesus throws himself down to the ground in Gethsemane and desperately prays for the cup to pass. I lifted the Eucharistic cup to my lips, its bitterness stinging my tongue as I joined Christ in the bitterness of that moment.

My voice lifted with others to create a chorus surrounding those gathered at the large sacramental table. I happily sang praises, waiting for my turn to process forward and join the circle. I imagined our voices joining in with God who rejoices over us with loud singing (Zeph. 3:17), weaving a tapestry of beauty over the table. Once I approached the table myself, I carried this image with me as I looked around the circle at each face, some familiar but many strange. We joined together beneath this fabric of celebration, passing the bread and the cup to one another with the words, "This is the body… this is the blood." In that moment I sensed our lives weaving together in the same way, our unity in Christ connecting us not only in that moment, but stretching us out, our lives joining in with all others who had ever held this memorial cup and loaf.

I offer these three vignettes to reveal how the varied social action within a repeated ritual brought about new insights about myself, others, and God. My communities of home and school interacted with my world of worship to create lasting formative experiences that shaped my future action inside and outside the ritual itself. Not every sacramental moment is as memorable as these three, but even those still contributed to my formation. Like a nutritious (or not so nutritious) meal creates implications for our bodies, our social activity similarly shapes us over time. I had witnessed the passing silver platter enough times that I didn't simply want the glass, but wanted to be a part of the motions of the body. I had heard the narrative of Christ's suffering enough times that the bitterness of the garden moment could land at the table's edge. My knowledge and love of music brought the tapestry to life, encouraging me to look into the faces of others.

Coorientation produces a means for examining the social action occurring throughout the different facets of word and sacrament, understanding that role participation formatively impacts the way we understand and interact with our self, others, and God. The public invitation of worship invites individuals to collectively gather around objects to simultaneously orient into patterns which link all facets of the model, the self connecting to the object, the worship leader, others, and God. The first part of this project built a coorientation model for worship. Chapter one presented a basis for using role-taking in worship, exploring George H. Mead's social developmental theory, particularly role-taking, before applying it to collective communicative action. Chapter two addressed the influences of social action and how coorientation can effectively engage categorization to deconstruct, solidify, shift, and create accessible and egalitarian worship. Chapter three revealed how a social development model can appropriately examine worship by deconstructing the binary between constructivism and phenomenology. Together these chapters articulated a model which I then applied to worship. The second part turned toward the practical, beginning by situating coorientative analysis in within worship's embodied imagination space in chapter four, showing how action moved along two continuums, private/public and ordinary/aesthetic, through two examples. The final chapter narrowed in on the worship leader as an important facet which guides coorientative activity and its socially formative implications.

Throughout I have contended that coorientation can help us live into our *imago Dei* by reflecting the loving relationship of God's own being. It brings us into deeper relationships with both God and others by intentionally incorporating multifaceted role-taking, occurring when we draw out new biblical roles for God and others that have been minimized or overlooked altogether. Practical theologian and liturgical scholar Stephanie Budwey invites insight from the position of those overlooked in worship. After interviewing German intersex Christians, she lifts up the impact of their lack of representation in both church and society to the point of erasure which rendered one interviewee to name feeling like a monster.[390] This violence reveals the importance of incorporating diverse images of God, so that all humans can live into their identity of being created in God's image. Budwey argues that "a limited vision of God leads to a limited image of humanity."[391] She emphasizes that we have the capacity to imagine God outside gender constraints and can make room for these diverse images.[392]

This necessity of multiplicity echoes Ricoeur's essay "Naming God," which contends that biblical genre diversity empowers us to understand the multifaceted nature of divine life. Referring to God requires drawing from "the entire context of narratives, prophecies, laws, wisdom writings, psalms, and so on."[393] Naming God occurs at the convergence of many tones into a polyphonic sound. Each note generates an incomplete picture, but together they refer to that which cannot be fully named. Ricoeur's polyphonic naming of God relies on the genre diversity of scripture, which Budwey's argument does not discount. However, her practical approach through the stories of those overlooked emphasizes how creation itself interacts with the naming process. She rightly declares: "It is time that we begin to use and create different theological language and images for God and Christ that embrace the multiplicity of creation, leading to different behavior."[394] In this expansion, we see the symbiotic relationship between a polyphonic naming of God in conjuncture with a polyphonic naming of us. To say that humanity, individually and collectively, reflects God's image suggests that naming something about one also names something about the other. Both carry polyphonic resonances, God in a singular being, and humanity throughout a collective identity. Thus, to know God better requires that we name ourselves in multifaceted ways, and to know ourselves better requires that we name God in multifaceted ways. If either becomes flattened into a monotone, it indicates something about the other, suggesting that we pursue polyphony in both.

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[390] Stephanie A. Budwey, "'God Is the Creator of All Life and the Energy of This World': German Intersex Christians' Reflection on the Image of God and Being Created in God's Image," *Theology & Sexuality* 24, no. 2 (April 2018): 87, https://doi.org/10.1080/13558358.2018.1463643.

[391] Budwey, 88.

[392] Budwey, 92.

[393] Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 227.

Our homiletical and liturgical activity expresses who we are as a people and the nature of the God we gather to worship. Coorientation's parsing of our activity holds up a mirror to reflect our socially formed activity. It critically shows the interactive range of worship's notes and constructively suggests how we can pursue a polyphonic naming, which spirals out in deeper and wider relational activity. This impacts our own self identity, the roles we don in connection to multifaceted O/others contributing to the continual creation of self. This impacts our world, proliferating bonds in love, which holistically sees others' own *imago Dei* and desires their flourishing. This impacts our connection with God, who increasingly reveals elements of Their Being through these interactions. When done intentionally, honestly, and courageously, coorientation enables us to pursue wider and deeper worship that ripples a positive trajectory of transformation in all directions.

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[394] Budwey, "'God Is the Creator of All Life and the Energy of This World'" 92.

Considering Potential Next Steps

This project outlines the initial steps in using coorientation to study and shape worship. However, its impact suggests many directions left to explore, some of which include the following:

- The holistic perspective of both the person and the embodied imagination space of worship suggest that affect theory can contribute to this model. How does emotion and affect interplay with category creation and influence relational connection within community?
- As social action works along relational lines, a coorientation model inevitably encounters sites of trauma. Such instances range from the personal to the institutional, from a small trespass to largescale-abuse. How does relationship-breaking impact coorientation and how does the concept of forgiveness interact with social action? Where does forgiveness occur? Is communication forever changed through new roles or categorical associations? Is there social pressure to forgive and if so, why?
- What do healthy boundaries look like in seeking deeper and wider relationships with others? Do we have relational capacity limits?
- How does the worship leader's self form through their particular facet of the model, especially for leaders who primarily engage worship in this way (such as ordained clergy)? Do shifting roles impact formation differently than worshiping selves? How do pastoral identities take shape in and through their leadership? For example, how do preachers shape their own identity through the coorientative action of their sermons?
- How does worship incorporate diverse roles and what are the implications of doing so? What does it mean to bring perspectives not physically present into object position

ethically? How do we mitigate our action against consumerist usage or abuse? What does equity look like in these situations? For example, how do white congregations bring in others (in person or narrative) of color without further perpetuating the harm of using their experience to exclusively benefit the white worshipers?

- In what ways does worship's messaging interact with digital media? How do the roles manifesting worship interact with the immense and diverse roles available online? Does direct messaging in online groups affect worship's communication? Is coorientation weakened or strengthened? Do worship leaders need to increase direct messaging as a result?

A Final Word About Hope

To close this project, I must mention the thread of hope weaving throughout the call to intentionally consider and shape the social action of worship. Mead has been accused of being overly idealistic. His passion for social justice manifests in his work, if not a bit naively, through an emphasis on the democratic method and its ability create a better society. His developmental model proposes that we can relationally understand our way into better humanity. I must confess that in working with his method, Mead's idealism has been contagious. While I have addressed some pragmatic issues, such as perpetuating harmful paradigms and issues of power in earlier chapters, I also realize that my project contains similar tones of hope for a positive trajectory of transformational change in both individuals and whole communities. However, the hopeful ideas moving through these pages exist in interrelated connection and must not be confused with a simplistic idealism that glosses over the local reality of experience.

Christian hope can be problematic. As theologian and social ethicist Miguel A. De La Torre articulates, hope produces violence when it provides a false catharsis and acts like a balm which allows the gaze to turn from an imposing problem toward a “salvific future where every wrong will be righted and every tear wiped away.”[395] The ability to be hopeful denotes a point of privilege, where a person’s circumstances grant them the ability to focus on a future utopia rather than present issues. In this instance, hope numbs away any motivation to act—especially when addressing the problem requires radical action. For those without privilege in the midst of oppression, hope becomes counterproductive to survival, especially because those espousing a theology of hope are often responsible for constructing the oppression.[396] Instead, De La Torre suggests embracing hopelessness, where realizing “that there is nothing to lose becomes a catalyst for praxis.”[397] Desperation becomes the point of working out salvation/liberation. Therefore, standing in solidarity with the other, the hopeless, cannot be an “egocentric project,” but requires embracing their reality in a way that affects the praxis of our own.[398] As a verse of his poetic epilogue beautifully summarizes:

> So offer not your words of hope.
> Offer your praxis for justice.
> Shower me not with God’s future promises.
> Show God’s present grace through your loving mercy.[399]

De La Torre’s insight into hope and hopelessness frames the type of hope necessary for this project. Transformative coorientation seeks out the other, especially those oppressed and invisible, and brings them into the social activity of worship—not to coopt their identity for investment in individual identities, but rather to embrace the revolutionary impact of relationship. To truly engage the other in coorientative activity means honestly addressing the connectivity between whole selves, including the ways each contributes to the other's reality. In this way, hope does not act as a cognitive balm, but appears along the relational lines of coorientative action, where worshipers reach wider into new and invisible spaces, and deeper into the whole reality of the other. The hope weaving through this project does not reside in a utopian ideal, but dives into the messiness of relationships. It seeks new roles in worship to provide a formative space for selves to develop, connecting through increasing bonds of empathetic insight which directly impact praxis. Consider:

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[395] Miguel A. De La Torre, *Embracing Hopelessness* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 5.

[396] De La Torre, 117–18.

[397] De La Torre, 6.

[398] De La Torre, 140.

[399] De La Torre, 159.

> What might it mean for a congregation who relies heavily on war imagery in their worship to coorient with a non-violent God?
>
> What might it mean for a predominantly white congregation to coorient with the Black Lives Matter movement?
>
> What might it mean for a congregation who values *right* behavior to coorient with a God who honors deceptive acts like those committed by Jacob or Tamar?
>
> What might it mean for a middle-class working congregation to coorient with people dangerously trekking across the Mexico-United States border?

Hope manifests relationally in worship by pursuing new and underutilized roles for God and humanity, forming the self in connection with others through deeper and wider bonds. Through intentional coorientative activity, we can communicate more effectively, shape our imagination for better public theology, and live into our full *imago Dei* as a collective of diverse human beings. By embracing and engaging the multiplicity of roles littered throughout our world, we can name our polyphonic existence as a reverberation of God's own tremendous multifaceted Being.

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