

*Abstract*

*“LOCUS ISTE: SACRED SPACE AS SACRAMENT”*

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Project under the direction of Professor John Baldovin S.J.

The church often values church buildings simply in terms of their functionality, yet some individuals go beyond this and treat buildings as in some way inherently sacred. This thesis explores the possibilities of understanding church buildings as sacred space and as sacrament in their own right.

Initially I explore some aesthetic and theological ways that the evaluation of sacred space exceeds functionality. Secondly, I both critique and draw on the most significant publication exploring sacred space, *Spiritus Loci* by Bert Daelemans S.J. This work leads to exploring the helpful concept of “saturated phenomenon” advanced by Jean-Luc Marion. Finally, in order to locate this thesis in the broader conversation about sacrament, I consider the concept of sacrament in two writers, David Brown and Louis-Marie Chauvet. With the assistance of these writers I consider the possibility of sacred spaces being considered as sacrament. I conclude that it is, indeed, appropriate to consider sacred spaces as exceeding functional evaluation and as sacraments in their own right.

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*Locus Iste: Sacred Space as Sacrament*

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
List of Figures	iii
Section One:	1
Section Two:	57
Section Three:	119
Section Four:	145
Appendix: Futuna	167
Bibliography	186

## List of Figures

Figure 1.	Ron Mueck. “Youth” 2009. The National Gallery, London.	46
Figure 2.	Diagram of the Structure of Christian Identity	157
Figure 3.	Diagram of Symbolic Exchange	159

## 1.

*Locus iste a Deo factus est,  
inaestimabile sacramentum,  
irreprehensibilis est.*

This place was made by God,  
a priceless sacrament;  
it is without reproach.

This Gradual Hymn, usually sung at the consecration or dedication of a church, holds so much of what this thesis is about. The hymn is usually thought to be inspired by Jacob's response to his dream-cum-divine encounter at Bethel, recounted in Genesis 28. The same is true of this thesis, with the passage as a key biblical prompt. More significantly, the lyrics claim a sacramental status for the church. The legitimacy of this sacramental claim is what this thesis seeks to establish. It is actually far from an uncontroversial claim, for reasons that will be considered below, principally because there is a perennial and deep theological tension that one must be conscious of regarding the absurdity of the very notion of the infinite God dwelling anywhere finite. We are courting idolatry. While this tension runs throughout sacramental thinking in relation to buildings, it is particularly acute, and, interestingly, it is often openly acknowledged, in liturgies of consecration. For instance, it is captured rather beautifully in the opening of the prayer of invocation from 1632 at the consecration of a chapel at Mersham Hatch in Kent:

Thine O Lord is power and greatness and glory for all Heaven and earth are thine, and nothing but Thine own can we give unto Thee. We know also (O God) that Thou tryest harts and hast pleasure in uprightnesse. And this House is offered willingly to thy service. O Glorious God, heaven is thine and earth is Thy footstool, what House then can be built for thee, or place for thee to rest in? ...<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Wickham Legg, *English Orders for Consecrating Churches in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1911), 141.

The theological tension gives rise to another important and standard response. Many a Christian will quickly remind you: if God dwells anywhere on this Earth, it is in the hearts of human beings and whenever two or three are gathered in Christ's name – wherever they are and wherever they gather. The presence of God is essentially an internal matter for the faithful and to be then expressed outwardly in the lives of those faithful. It is not a matter for external expression in material things – timber, bricks, and stone. This is a matter that strikes, not just at the idea of sacred space, but also at the common understandings of sacraments, and I hope to show it is faulty. Nonetheless, it might be said, from many a theological standpoint, that a certain degree of hubris and courage has to be assumed to even imagine that God's faithful could gather for a service of consecration of a church, a specific building. Something of the same hubris and courage (or foolishness?) will need to accompany me as I will ultimately argue that the best way for us to think of such a consecrated building is as a sacrament.

There seems no doubt that Christians throughout the world often place great significance in church buildings. I was reminded of this watching a little B.B.C. documentary piece about one of the most famous rock-hewn churches in northern Ethiopia, Abu Yemata Guh.<sup>2</sup> It showed the “procession” up rocks and cliffs to the precipitous little church for a baptism. Clearly there are considerable risks to all to make the ascent to the church, not least for the infant. The mother, however, commented that “Abu Yemata Guh is an ancient church. The newer churches on the plain are less powerful. That is why we make the climb.” We might wonder then about the meaning of such a statement, and, more

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<sup>2</sup> B.B.C., “The Most Hardcore Baptism You’ll Ever See,” 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/stories-43336959/the-most-hardcore-baptism-you-ll-ever-see>.

generally, about the symbolic meaning of holy places and how it is they obtain and even lose that meaning. This is a thesis about that wondering.

## **Motivations**

I want to note three personal and particular motivations for this study. The first arises from reasonably deep within our national culture and has interested me for some time, the second is a function of experiences I have had as a bishop in the Anglican Church, and the third, more obviously academic, spurred on by reading, particularly in response to my need to understand a little better how we might think of churches and the nature of consecration of churches, which, within Anglican tradition, is solely an episcopal privilege and responsibility.

### *Cultural questioning*

Sometimes Aotearoa/New Zealand is referred to with affection by “Kiwis” as “Godzone,” a reference in part to the untouched beauty of the land and sea and in part to a felt connection to an idealized paradise. Probe deeper, however, and the connection to place turns out to be a vexed cultural question for Pākehā<sup>3</sup> or settler New Zealanders. The issue became evident once second and third generations of settlers started to wonder about their identity as New Zealanders, because there was something odd about claiming, as their forebears had done, that their identity belonged with a place they did not know and had little hope of even visiting. So, saying one was, say, Irish did not seem sensible. Equally, it was not as simple as saying that one was a New Zealander, because the

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<sup>3</sup> “Pākehā” is the name designated by Māori, the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa, to non-Māori, and, in particular, the early colonialist settlers.

cultural references and many of the formative narratives were from elsewhere.

Remarkably, until the middle of last century, it was not uncommon to hear Great Britain referred to as “home.” The tension exists between knowing nowhere else and feeling attached to the landscape and peoples, and yet also being something of an exile. This cultural (almost) malaise and questioning is perhaps best seen expressed in New Zealand poetry, because, as scholars have observed, poetry serves as a key “vehicle for the expression of our identity and consciousness.”<sup>4</sup>

Ursula Bethel provides a great example of this tension in her poem published in 1929 but probably written a good deal earlier than that.

“Detail”

My garage is a structure of excessive plainness,  
It springs from a dry bank in the back garden,  
It is made of corrugated iron,  
And painted all over with brick-red.

But beside it I have planted a green Bay-tree,  
– A sweet Bay, an Olive, and a Turkey Fig,  
– A Fig, an Olive, and a Bay.

The poem appears so matter-of-fact as to not disclose the tension being addressed here. However, as Mac Jackson writes: “The trees, with their time-honoured associations, as living insignia for a whole Christian, humanist, and classical tradition.”<sup>5</sup> These trees are planted next to the corrugated iron, a completely utilitarian piece of shelter that sits uneasily on the “dry bank of the back garden.” In some respects, Bethel might just as well

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Morris et al., *Spirit in a Strange Land: A Selection of New Zealand Spiritual Verse* (Auckland: Random House, 2002), 11.

<sup>5</sup> MacDonald P. Jackson, “Poetry: Beginnings to 1945,” in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, ed. Terry Sturm (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1991), 371.

be describing some of the very simple and most plain structures erected by settlers as churches, though they were often in simple weatherboard and painted a more expensive white rather than the ubiquitous brick red. The point, however, was how the great tradition relates to rather than is grafted onto the new edifices that are beside it and needed to live and belong in this context.

To choose an image that is more contemporary and from another medium, namely, film, John Bluck observes:

The only really hopeful urban symbol of faith I can recall in New Zealand movies comes in Vincent Ward's *The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey*, where the young boy manages to plant a cross of St Patrick's Cathedral in Auckland. But he has to come from the thirteenth century in England to do that and, as if by way of a warning, he falls back into that era again.<sup>6</sup>

In this vein, however, one cannot pass over one of New Zealand's iconic poems, from perhaps our greatest poet, Alan Curnow:

“The Skeleton of the Great Moa in the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch”

The skeleton of the great moa on iron crutches  
Broods over no great waste; a private swamp  
Was where this tree grew feathers once, that hatches  
Its dusty clutch, and guards them from the damp.

Interesting failure to adapt on islands,  
Taller but not more fallen than I, who come  
Bone to his bone, peculiarly New Zealand's.  
The eyes of children flicker round this tomb

Under the skylights, wonder at the huge egg  
Found in a thousand pieces, pieced together  
But with less patience than the bones that dug  
In time deep shelter against ocean weather:

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<sup>6</sup> John Bluck, *Long White and Cloudy* (Christchurch: Hazzard Press, 1998), 53. John Bluck is a retired Anglican Bishop of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and Polynesia. He is a most acute observer of “Kiwi” culture (especially movies). He has written extensively on a “Kiwi” contextual theology/spirituality.

Not I, some child born in a marvellous year,  
Will learn the trick of standing upright here.

The poem is so rich, but the final two lines quintessentially capture the sense of displacement. Curnow published this poem in 1941. Poets of the next and later generations grew somewhat impatient with what I am describing as a cultural tension – the towering figure of James K Baxter spoke of his generation of post-war poets as “free from the schizophrenia of the New Zealander who cannot distinguish himself from his colonial grandfather.”<sup>7</sup> The “return” of New Zealanders who had served in World War 2 in Europe and the Pacific, for instance, deeply altered a whole generation and more – not least because, as with the First World War, so many did not “return.”

It might be true that in the mid-twentieth century, poets and poetry turned to other concerns and themes, but I would argue that the concern for identity in this place, this locus, remains. We might, for instance, just take the title from Robert Sullivan’s critically acclaimed book of poetry *Jazz Waiata* as emblematic. A *waiata* is a Māori song or chant, but the presence and interaction with the global musical phenomenon of jazz (and, of course, other music besides) creates a tension – to be sure, often a creative tension – but the question of cultural integrity and belonging is still in the mix. It is just the digital global culture – styles, aesthetics, and brands – impinges on local place and identity. From that collection, the poem “Message from Mangere,” for instance, is illustrative. Sullivan is observing his local neighborhood from the top of the local mountain, Mangere:

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<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Caffin, “Poetry 1945 - 90” in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, ed. Terry Sturm (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1991), 403.

... My civilization spreads  
six billion miles, where Pioneer X signals its existence. I accept  
the emptiness,  
the huge distances between the lines of the message: it may as well  
broadcast here. And what about Mangere? ....  
the streetkids pop smack, listen to Grandmaster flash, rap Michael

Jackson's BAD LP: ...<sup>8</sup>

The whole Exilic tradition in scripture teaches us, and in facing the terrible current problems both locally and globally of homelessness (and refugees), Jesus teaches us that this is a spiritual problem – “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (see Matt 25:31-40).

One might ask why this apparent digression into poetry. My point is that, at least in Aotearoa/New Zealand, poets have captured in subtle and deep ways an anxiety that exists between place and identity. For New Zealanders, our identity question is surely related to our colonial past and our post-colonial present that generates a sense of dis/placement. I am sure that other nations are working on similar kinds of questions of identity, and those questions may, of course, be expressed in other mediums than poetry – I have already also mentioned film in the case of Aotearoa. I am, however, really only able to speak confidently of my own locus and the possible contextual motivations.

John Inge helpfully picks up on the French phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard, who argues for the importance of locality to be as significant in our minds as it is in the

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Sullivan, “Message from Mangere” in *Jazz Waiata*, ed. Robert Sullivan (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1990), 20–21.

external world. So, according to Inge, Bachelard suggests, for instance, that our childhood home “is our ‘first universe’, and therefore becomes ‘the topography of our intimate being.’ In psychic spatiality, place is everything ‘for a knowing of intimacy, localization in the spaces of our intimacy is more important than dates.’”<sup>9</sup> Of course, this is not just a psychic and physical question but also a spiritual one; the Exodus and the Exilic traditions in scripture, along with at least the great parable of the Prodigal Son, make it clear that homelessness is a deep spiritual question.

Finally, one cannot speak of Pākehā dis/placement without acknowledging the way in which the colonialization process in Aotearoa has dispossessed and disenfranchised Māori in a multitude of unjust and horrendous ways. Interestingly, however, and in counterpoint to Pākehā’s identity questioning, Māori identify very strongly with the land, and particularly the place of their birth or family *marae* (tribal home). This is most clearly evidenced every time a Māori person speaks formally to introduce him or herself, particularly in formal settings. The *whaikorero* (speech) follows a specific form that begins with acknowledging the gift of life and the whole of creation, and then proceeds to speak of the local mountain, the river, then other topographical features and their significance, or even reference to myths or saying associated with those places. At that point, the *whaikorero* turns to speak of ancestors and forbears, human relationships and connections. In a certain fashion, this sureness of placement and identity in the face of enforced physical displacement and injustices throws into great relief the national (both Māori and Pākehā) questioning about identity and place.

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<sup>9</sup> John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 17.

### *A ministry*

In the Anglican tradition, a particular blessing of the episcopal office is that it is reserved for a bishop to consecrate – make holy – buildings. I count myself fortunate to have been called to preside at two such liturgies. On a larger scale, in the Diocese of Auckland we have recently consecrated our cathedral, and, prior to that, dedicated the Selwyn Chapel, which was part of the completion of the whole cathedral complex. These two events were presided over by the diocesan bishop, although the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, was part of the liturgy when we were “breaking ground” and setting the foundation stone of the chapel itself. On a much smaller scale, it is not unusual to ask the bishop to bless some item of furnishing to be placed in a place of worship – perhaps an apparently trivial piece of local piece of art through to a paten (sometimes called an “altar plate”) for the host to rest upon and to be distributed from.<sup>10</sup> To be so close to such liturgies, the grand and the not-so-grand, means that a host of questions what it is we think God might be doing and what we think we are doing all hove into view.

In a period of decline in our church, I do not expect to be asked to consecrate many more buildings. I have, however, presided at two de-consecration liturgies, and I do not expect that these will be the last. On these occasions, a different host of questions hove into view, principally, when the wider local community appear at “closure” meetings and vociferously lay hold to a claim, expressed in words such as, “This place is sacred and it cannot be shut.” So, I have had the experience of working with a small congregation that

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<sup>10</sup> In our diocese (as in many others), in order for any item to be “placed” in a church, it does need to have obtained what is called a “faculty” or special permission from the diocesan bishop. The diocesan bishop has an advisory group that guides him/her through the multitude of issues of form and function that might be apposite in each case. We have no published guidelines about those issues, however.

had resolved together that their life had come to a natural end, and, while they were feeling some considerable grief, they were reconciled to that fact. They also resolved that the church building that they had called their home needed to be disposed of reverently. But, in response to news of the latter, heartfelt opposition came from folk who actually had what could be only be described as a tenuous link to the church (“I was married here forty years ago.” “I attended Sunday School here.”). It is an odd phenomenon, and one is left wondering about who decides and how one should decide about the sacredness of a building. In my experience, Michael Weldon O.F.M. is certainly correct in his study when he observes the strong emotional attachment to sacred space. He writes: “There is a similarity between what people experience when sacred space is threatened, altered, or destroyed and the sense of violation often associated with deep psychological trauma. The descriptions employ similar words and images.”<sup>11</sup> The question is, whether we can fathom anything beyond the emotional responses.

There is no question that there are complex and important pastoral issues that need to be understood better and attended to well. Weldon’s study is a fine exploration of these, and I will not be pursuing these further here. Because there are few liturgical resources or guidelines and this will naturally follow on from the first part of this study, I will present some suggested liturgical resources in the second part.

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Weldon O.F.M., *A Struggle for Holy Ground: Reconciliation and the Rites of Parish Closure* (Collegville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 53.

### *Academic*

The third motivation for this project arises from my study of the academic writing in this subject area. I have pursued it precisely because of the questions and interest generated by the first two motivations. There is almost a twofold motivating delight in the fact that in recent decades scholars are engaging with some of the very questions that I have found arising from my reflection on my ministry experience, and, further, some of the most significant focused contributions are coming from Anglican scholars.

This thesis will not present a full literature review but it will address the works that I take to be particularly significant. At this point, I will comment on two essays that appear in what is essentially a two-volume work that had its origins as addresses offered at Durham Cathedral, England, on the nine hundredth anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone on 11 August 1093. Apart from this anniversary having a particular “placed-ness” which seems appropriate, I have taken this date to be an observable beginning of some new ferment and interest in the theology or sacramentality of space/place. Important writing had, of course, appeared before this point, for instance, Peter Hammond’s seminal book *Liturgy and Architecture*, published in 1960. Nonetheless, 1993 marks the aforementioned anniversary and the production of the work in two volumes edited by David Brown and Ann Loades of Durham University. The same year, Philip Sheldrake delivered a lecture at the University of Notre Dame that became the article, “The Sacredness of Place,” in which he puts forward material that he further advances in the Hulsean Lectures at the University of Cambridge in 2000, and, in turn becomes his book-length treatment *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity*. Following that,

John Inge published his Durham University doctoral thesis in 2003, with a very important contribution to the topic with *A Christian Theology of Place*. The following year, both David Brown's *God and the Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* and Richard Kieckhefer's book, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley*, were published. The year after that saw the publication of R. Kevin Seasoltz's *A Sense of the Sacred: Theological Foundations of Christian Architecture and Art*. More recently, in 2015, Bert Daelemans, SJ published his doctoral thesis, *Spiritus Loci: A Theological Method for Contemporary Church Architecture*. Finally, from here within New Zealand, Murray Rae, an architect and now Professor of Theology at Otago University, has published *Architecture and Theology: The Art of Place*. This list is not an exhaustive one from across the period, but some of them (and I have given titles so that one gets an obvious sense of the thread and focus across them) are very significant pieces of work by scholars of note. Taken together, this represents a considerable body of academic work.

The two essays I will focus on, though, at this point, are from the first volume edited by David Brown and Ann Loades: the first by John Habgood, the other by Susan White.

They contrast with one another, as they represent two dominant threads in the literature.

In "The Sacramentality of the Natural World," John Habgood draws on the work of Alexander Schmemmann and Teilhard de Chardin, as he sets out an expansive sacramentality of the natural world which lies "with its possibility of being thus

transformed.” He actually quotes himself from 30 years prior, and it is worth including his words here, because it captures so much of his perspective.

The characteristic method of Christian worship is to take bits of the ordinary stuff of life – bread and wine and water, and raise them to a new level of significance. The action is not arbitrary. The sacraments are what they are because they stem from Christ; they are ‘given’. But once given, the sacramental principle can be extended to the whole of nature. Natural things can be clothed with new meaning by relating them to Christ. The world, which would be meaningless by itself, becomes a purposeful place as men make it so; and they are enabled to do this because they themselves find a purpose for their lives in the man whose life was wholly one with God. A Christian who thinks like this can then see his vocation as an active process of ‘making sense’ of the world. This is different from the passive attempt to make sense of things, i.e. to understand them. The Christian attitude is to ask what sense we ought to make of them, what their possibilities are in a world responsible to God, and how far they can be made the grounds of worship and thanksgiving.<sup>12</sup>

Unlike some of the writing that follows this route, Habgood acknowledges the existence of natural evils in the world (mosquitoes) and moral evil (human sin). He therefore doesn’t idealize the creation. Further, he writes, “Sacramentalism is about perceiving a deeper meaning in things through the transforming presence of Christ.”<sup>13</sup> Parsing this sentence might actually take some time, but the matter to note here is that creation, and any part thereof, requires the transforming presence of Christ, apparently drawing an overt link between the doctrines of Christology and creation. Exploring this issue further is critical, and will have us attempting to understand one of Rowan Williams’s more enigmatic lines: “Sacramentality is not a general principle that the world is full of

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<sup>12</sup> John Habgood, “The Sacramentality of the Natural World,” in *The Sense of the Sacramental: Movement and Measure in Art and Music, Place and Time*, ed. David Brown and Ann Loades (London: SPCK, 1995), 21.

<sup>13</sup> Habgood.

sacredness. It is the very specific conviction that the world is full of the life of a God whose nature is known in Christ and the Spirit.”<sup>14</sup>

Finally, the transformation of sacramentality creates a moral imperative. That is, Habgood maintains it points us into the world to offer ourselves back to the world, in priestly care and responsibility for the broken and afflicted. He is clearly leaning on Schmemmann here.

The approach offered by Habgood is, to my mind, enormously attractive. There are edges and questions to be explored, and I do this by focusing on the work of David Brown, who sets forth, in a massive five-volume sweep, essentially this perspective. While Habgood doesn't address buildings or sacred space per se, in his piece, David Brown attends to spaces as I am using the term. Habgood does, however, tellingly reflect on the offertory prayer that he laments did not make it into the Church of England's Alternative Service Book. But a version is included in the “Liturgy of Creation and Redemption” of *A New Zealand Prayer Book*: “God of all Creation, you bring forth bread from the Earth and fruit from the vine. By your Holy Spirit this bread and wine will be for us the body and blood of Christ.” Habgood writes:

I find it a profound and satisfying prayer. It contains a subtle balance between recognising God's gift, acknowledging our human role in developing and using it rightly, and accepting its potential as a conveyor of God's own reality. The fundamental support of life, says the prayer, will reveal a new level of meaning, made possible and actual by God's own involvement in material reality through Christ. It will become for us the bread of life, echoing the words of John 6, with

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<sup>14</sup> Rowan Williams, “Foreword,” in *The Cross and Creation in Christian Liturgy and Art*, ed. Geoffrey Rowell and Christine Hall (London: Continuum, 2004), xiii–xiv.

all their overtones of manna in the wilderness, bread for the hungry, and eternal life in Christ Himself. What is true of bread can be true of anything else.<sup>15</sup>

The second essay, by Susan White, is a much more focused discussion of our topic, the theology of sacred space. Amongst the many merits in the article is that she speaks of some concrete examples: the once proposed convent at Auschwitz, Our Lady of Peace Basilica in Yamoussoukro on the Ivory Coast, and Durham Cathedral. The article is also notable because she directly raises matters relating to consecration and deconsecration. Of particular value, however, is the fact that she directly addresses or raises most of the key issues in the discussion. It is also true that the essay borders on being dismissive in the brevity of the responses to those issues (this, of course, might have been deliberate in the context of a conference, in order to encourage debate and discussion). But, as noted, in many respects, she identifies large parts of the agenda before us. One of her final paragraphs essentially captures her position:

If Durham Cathedral is a holy place, a sacred space, it is so because it has been, is now, and God willing, will continue to be used by faithful Christian people, while striving to live according to the gospel, who gather to hear the word of God, and to learn what it means to act upon it; who seek a ministry of reconciliation and seek to draw the cathedral into that ministry in the name of Jesus Christ ... It is sacred because all these things together make it a valid sign, an authentic witness to the sacrificial self-giving love of God for the world ... Every Christian community needs to be involved in the continual work of remembrance, or anamnesis, and to keep in mind the richness of that concept. Anamnesis is not simply a pious memory exercise, but a three-fold enterprise of remembering, embodying and handing on (repeating) the sacred use of the space it inhabits.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Habgood, "The Sacramentality of the Natural World," 23.

<sup>16</sup> Susan White, "The Theology of Sacred Space," in *The Sense of the Sacramental: Movement and Measure in Art and Music, Place and Time* (London: SPCK, 1995), 42.

As White goes on to say, “This leaves the Durham community with a terrible responsibility for the sacredness of its space.”<sup>17</sup> I am wanting to fundamentally take issue with White’s conclusion. I also want to take issue with a number of White’s other assertions. And I will engage with them here at some length, because it will disclose some of my own approach going forward, and it will serve as a preliminary exercise in methodology. As will be argued for below, I am wanting to challenge the idea of there being, as it were, no remainder of sacredness attached to a building after the people of God have done their work, *leitourgia* – the public work of the people. Before we move on, and somewhat facetiously, we have to ask exactly what it is White could mean by “sacredness of its space” when she speaks for Durham, because the holiness she describes in her piece attaches to or belongs to the people, and this is true regardless of where they gather. Essentially, one way of reading the outcome of her argument is that there is no such thing as holiness or sacredness that attaches to a space, there is just that which rests as a responsibility of the people.

Nonetheless, White begins her article by highlighting five reasons for taking the subject of theology of space seriously, and then, of more interest to us, she identifies five categories of difficulty facing the subject. First, there has been a lack of treatment from systematic theologians. Second, the discussion, such as it is, has been dominated by liturgists and not always from explicitly Christian convictions, because they acknowledge interest in how space has operated in other religious traditions. Third, discussion is often focused on historical rather than conceptual issues. Fourth, there is a lack of historical

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<sup>17</sup> White, 42.

theology, and thus a historical perspective on sacred space. Fifth, there has been a failure to link the discussion with issues of justice, mission and evangelism. White also raises a further issue in the midst of her five categories, namely, a criticism with deriving a theology of sacred space from the visual arts and aesthetics, saying, “Worship in the Lord and the beauty of holiness has most often been turned into worship of the Lord and the holiness of beauty.”<sup>18</sup> I address this concern, and the theology of art, separately in the methodological issues below.

I certainly share some of White’s moral concerns, and nobody would ever want to claim that we have paid enough attention to the moral consequences of our actions. We have certainly erred and strayed like lost sheep. It is odd that White doesn’t mention the considerable protest that occurred during the building of Our Lady of Peace Basilica in Yamoussoukro and the considerable cost, given the poverty and economic need on the Ivory Coast.

I offer two observations, though, here. The first is anecdotal and from early in my own ministry, when I was a school chaplain. The dean of our cathedral came to chapel one morning in order to visit the students and tell them (and vicariously told their parents) that they should support the fundraising for the completion of the nave of the cathedral. The students were outraged, and took the strong moral view that any money that should be raised (some millions of dollars) should be used for homes for the homeless. I would dare to suggest that those who have been required to fund buildings, often through the

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<sup>18</sup> White, 34.

provision of their own labor, have experienced a similar kind of concern and even outrage. History, however, is most often told by the victors, and such protests are largely lost, forgotten or suppressed. But that does not mean that there has not been some moral debate, concern, or protest in relation to particular sacred spaces. It's also true that historians today are working hard to discover voices from below.

Secondly, there is not a complete lack of evidence of moral connection to sacred space. For example, from 1638, in the anonymously written *De Templis; A Treatise Wherein it is Discovered the Ancient Manner of Building, Consecrating, and Adorning Churches*, the final three chapters expressly address moral issues. Chapter 23 addresses the church as a sanctuary, a place of refuge for criminals. Chapter 24 speaks of right conduct inside a church, and the last chapter, of the rewards that will come to benefactors of church buildings. We might object to the moral, ethical stance put forward in this document – the last chapter amounts to what we would understand today as a kind of “prosperity gospel.” The point is, however, that within the treatise is a sustained argument, or apology, for church buildings, and moral issues are certainly addressed, albeit from a different moral framework.

White's objection regarding the lack of historical theology, by which she means a discernable history of theological reflection, is just false, and indeed, she answers her own critique within the same article. She writes, “What the church has understood about sacred places you see clearly if you look at the history of the liturgical consecration of churches.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> White, 39.

White's third difficulty is that the formal discussion of sacred space is dominated by architectural writing. This is largely true, especially in relation to contemporary buildings. However, it is also true that liturgical sources, such as historical liturgies, the accompanying rubrics, and ritual manuals, provide a rich resource for the way in which spaces were to be understood and used, right down to directing the processions on feast and fast days. White seems unaware of this historical data. Now, it would be naive to think that congregations, or even clergy, always acted in accordance with such manuals, but they provide a formal starting point for understanding the intentions within and for a building.

White's second difficulty is regarding the dominance of liturgists in the writing and reflection on sacred space. This simply exposes something of a prejudice on her part. She certainly doesn't appear to think of liturgical theology as a rigorous or an academic discipline. I take a different view. I share the perspective argued for by Aidan Kavanagh, David Fagerberg, and others that there is actually a primacy to liturgical theology, and I explore this further in relation to the next objection.

White's related criticism of liturgists and historians of religion is that they too often rely on insights from phenomenology, other social sciences, or even other religions. This simply makes plain her self-declared Barthian perspective, which has a disdain for natural theology. Obviously, this is not a perspective that I share, and I explore it later, particularly in relation to the work of David Brown.

## **Liturgical theology**

White's first difficulty is that she doesn't have any systematic theology on her bookshelf that addresses the issue of sacred buildings directly. This, I accept. In relative terms, the subject of sacred space has certainly received little focused attention across the board. That said, if one were taking a less polemical position and were to grant that Christian communities of all denominations have persisted in blessing, dedicating, or consecrating church buildings in some way or another for centuries, and then grant the principle *widely* agreed to be expressed by *lex orandi, lex credendi*, that the law of prayer is the law of belief, actually operates, then we have a theological tradition of some importance. Indeed, this is the beginning of the position I am taking in this thesis.

Moreover, we note that Geoffrey Wainwright's, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life* (the title says it all, really) is a significant, systematic treatment elucidating what he believes is a strong link between worship and doctrine. He concludes with an invitation to theologians "To continue their thinking," because he recognizes that the link he has made clear is not often to the fore. So, taking up Wainwright's invitation, we might reflect on the way in which significant changes brought about by the liturgical reform movement, such as a heightened role for the assembly, represents shifts in the understanding of the Body of Christ gathered. And this, in turn, connects in deep ways to Christology and ecclesiology. Equally, from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) / United Methodist background of the Brite Divinity School, White must be aware of how the shift to large auditorium theatre-like

worship spaces, with significant sound and lighting assistance, has made the average worshipper more vulnerable to being a passive consumer of a worship product. And this, too, has ecclesiological and Christological ramifications.

The observation that the shape and content of the worship life of the church affects the shape and content of the life of the theologian in the academy is an important but not very surprising one. “Faith seeking understanding” has been seen as the theologian’s vocation, at least since St. Anselm. It is, however, an observation that White seems to barely countenance, but I would hold that in the way in which it is commonly understood, it is just the beginning of a much more significant shift in the proper understanding of liturgical theology that will continue to inform this thesis. As signaled above, my principal guide here is David Fagerberg, as I follow what amounts to a paradigm shift he argues for in his book *Theologia Prima: What is Liturgical Theology?* Fagerberg follows in the footsteps of Alexander Schmemmann, Aidan Kavanagh, and Robert Taft, and he wants us to understand liturgical theology as a much more basic, and, in fact, the deeply foundational activity of Christians. He writes: “To uncover liturgical theology one must begin with the proletarian, quotidian, and communitarian liturgical theology of the rite. This is not a starting point with which academic theology is accustomed.”<sup>20</sup> He helpfully continues, pointing out that:

*Lex orandi* relates to *lex credendi* the way speech relates to grammar: first there are people talking, and then there are grammarians who analyse it. Second order analysis attempts to uncover the structure and basic laws of language, but it does not write these laws or establish these structures.

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<sup>20</sup> David W Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima: What Is Liturgical Theology?* (Chicago, IL: Hilenbrand Books, 2004), 40.

Continuing and quoting Kavanagh:

Philologists do not set the laws that permit language. They study its acts as formalized in words. Editors do not create language. They arrange its acts as formalized in words. Philosophers do not originate language. They formulate intelligibility tests to clarify and bring to greater precision to the implications of its acts as formalized in concepts and words. All three of these honorable activities represent not first but second order enterprises.<sup>21</sup>

Fagerberg's aim is show that fundamentally what people are engaged in in their liturgical life within their communities, in a very proletarian and continually unfolding way, is liturgical theology, and it is prior to the second order activity of what we normally think of as academic theology sitting on bookshelves. He calls this prior activity *theologia prima*, and its priority is akin to the way language or symbol gives rise to the very possibility of thought. *Theologia secunda* is the theorizing about the antecedent praxis and experience labelled by Kavanagh as the experience of (the at once fictional and all-too-real) "Mrs. Murphy" – the average woman in the pew and first liturgist. Fagerberg's further aim is to stress that *theologia prima* is not just raw experience waiting for serious-minded folk in the academy to attend to it theologically; *theologia prima* is itself deeply theological.

A further sense of the depth of the shift in understanding Fagerberg argues for can be seen in the way he wants us to think about liturgy, not in the thin sense as in "how to creatively use liturgy, banners, and stoles," but in the "thick" sense:

Say it this way: Liturgical theology has less to do with liturgy and more to do with *leitourgia*. Following Schmemmann's practice, I can by this distinction tag two tacitly different understandings of the Church's ritual. In the thin sense, liturgy refers to the "how," the order the etiquette, the ceremonial and protocol of worship; in the thick sense, *leitourgia* refers to the deep structures. Liturgy deals

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<sup>21</sup> Fagerberg, 40.

with rubrics; *leitourgia* refers to the “what,” and brings us back to the *ergeia* (work) that people (*laos*) are called to perform on behalf of the many.<sup>22</sup>

It is hard to understate how foundational this activity of *leitourgia* is in this understanding because one “does more than worship in *leitourgia*; one does the world as it was meant to be done (Kavanagh) in behavior that is eschatological and cosmological (Schmemmann).”<sup>23</sup> Fagerberg’s writing gives a sense of how hard he knows he is going to have to work in order for the paradigm shift to be made by his readers.<sup>24</sup> He draws on Andrew Louth at one point, who describes this *leitourgia* as “the amniotic fluid in which our knowledge of God takes form,” and this goes some way to describing how basic *leitourgia* is in the making of Christians.<sup>25</sup>

The following from Fagerberg gives a sense of the magnitude and significance of the claim he is making about *leitourgia* (sometimes he uses the word “liturgy,” but in every one of these instances he clearly has the “thick” sense of the term in view). *Leitourgia* is: (i) Incarnational; it is “Christ’s work that has become ours” (227). It means “sharing the life of Christ (washed in his resurrection, chrismated with his anointing, eating his body) ... His image is made visible in our faces” (233, 234). (ii) Transfiguring; it is “seeing with the eye of the dove the cosmos bathed in Taboric light” (235). (iii) Resurrecting; it is “the restoration of humanity by the resurrection power every eighth day” (237). It “unravels death’s shroud” (234). (iv) Deifying; it is “participation in the life of God. If

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<sup>22</sup> Fagerberg, 110.

<sup>23</sup> Fagerberg, 114.

<sup>24</sup> At one point, he acknowledges that his arguments sounds familiar, but he has, in sense, reiterated by circling around through “the back door.” Fagerberg, 121.

<sup>25</sup> Fagerberg, 109. He cites these words from Louth again (226), indicating the importance of the metaphor.

religion brings one to stand before God, then liturgy brings one to stand within the Trinity. Liturgical life consists in living God's life: deification" (236).

In sum, *leitourgia* is the "source and the summit" of the body of Christ, the church, in motion, living out its vocation. It is, therefore, deeply theological. It is also so much more than the expression of some theological insight or sentiment that might be derived from a mutual relation with doxology – *lex orandi-lex credendi*.<sup>26</sup> Rather, it places what the Christian assembly is living out in *leitourgia* as nothing less than central and foundational. What Fagerberg is setting out really is akin to a Copernican Revolution.

Once one has made the shift in understanding and *leitourgia* becomes both prior and central, then we are left wondering how to understand the so called "deep structures." It is one thing to report on and analyze the "how" of liturgy. We can, for instance, offer commentary on the rubrics of a certain liturgy. This certainly yields useful and oft neglected theological insight, but, as noted, Fagerberg holds this is still mostly a "thin" understanding, even if it is the domain of academic liturgical theology.<sup>27</sup> The deep structures are harder to delineate and describe, and this is because this is a different kind of knowledge/theology. Fagerberg writes,

I mean to imply that knowing how a rite works is not the same as practical knowledge as knowing how to work a rite; that academic knowledge is not the

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<sup>26</sup> Fagerberg wants us to completely revise our understanding of this dyad. Most of the efforts to encourage liturgy and theology to come closer together (as per Wainwright and even some of my comments so far) do not go far enough. He writes that "the formula is still written with a dash that dodges commitment to a priority," 119.

<sup>27</sup> I am holding to Fagerberg's "thin" and "thick," although it easily implies pejorative connotations to the understanding drawn from the "how" questions. I do not think that Fagerberg intends any such connotations and I certainly do not.

same as practical knowledge, and liturgy is a practical thing; ... that people who commit liturgy know more than they can tell; that working a liturgy is the skill possessed by Kavanagh's friend, Mrs. Murphy.<sup>28</sup>

I am not sure if Fagerberg (and Kavanagh) have the work of the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty in mind because there is no direct reference to his name, but his work from the *Phenomenology of Perception* is absolutely applicable here. Merleau-Ponty holds that the body is a form of consciousness, that one's body is able to act and respond to a demand for action without resorting to conscious reflection in order to control or guide one's movements. We often call this bodily perception "motor skills" and Merleau-Ponty uses the example of a typist who "knows" how to type:

One can know how to type without knowing how to indicate where on the keyboard the letters that compose the words are located. Knowing how to type, then is not the same as knowing the location of each letter on the keyboard, nor even having acquired the conditioned reflex for each letter that is triggered upon seeing it.<sup>29</sup>

It is a strange thing, but this bodily effort and skill cannot be translated into objective designations without some considerable effort. We say with Merleau-Ponty, however, that "in the acquisition of a habit it is the body that 'understands.'"<sup>30</sup>

Merleau-Ponty also uses examples of other skills such as an organist and someone driving a car, which is an illustration that many will relate to easily. When one is first learning to drive, there are many aspects that one has to know and learn, especially if one is learning in a manual vehicle rather than one with automatic transmission. All this new

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<sup>28</sup> Fagerberg, 219, 220.

<sup>29</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 145.

<sup>30</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 145.

information has to be thought about and coordinated, and it can seem overwhelming. In time, however, one moves well beyond the learning and to a point of just “knowing” how to drive; it becomes a bodily skill – a kind of “deep structure knowledge,” that is, if one were asked to describe how to do what one is doing (and even adapt to a multitude of novel situations one faces while driving), it demands a shift well beyond the “second nature” bodily perceptions into some objective reflections. A key point is that driving a car well and properly is “skill knowledge,” or, in order to get away from the word “knowledge” here because it implies objective or abstract thought, a deep bodily perception. Good drivers never have to “think” about what they are doing once they have reached a proper level of “skill.”

The parallels are not hard for us to draw here. In a deep sense, individual bodies and the corporate body of Christ, the assembly gathered, come to “know” the liturgy like a driver “knows” the driving of a car. We want to say that knowing the deep structures in *leitourgia* is more than a motor skill, though, because the term risks sounding a little trivial. It is a deep bodily knowledge that the body has, and whether we are speaking of individuals (Mrs. Murphy) or the assembly, it is a knowing that is primarily born of a relationship of love. So, it is helpful to think in terms such as a baby’s and mother’s deep recognition of each other or the mother “knowing” just how to interpret the non-verbal sounds and movements and then hold and comfort the child (Isaiah 49:15, Hosea 11:4). Or we might think of the way lovers “know” intuitively, and in their very bodies, each other, and so the New Testament reaches for the metaphor of the bride and bridegroom as

apposite (Rev. 21: 2, 9-10; Eph. 5:22 -33) or in the Old Testament, the Song of Songs lyricizes about the lover and the beloved.

I mean to suggest that the space in which the body of Christ assembles regularly to some degree shapes and makes the assembly, and it, too, becomes part of the bodily knowing (for good and for ill). Once again, it is useful to think of the driver and car (best, perhaps, to think of a race car and driver). In an important sense, one is an extension of the other. The car both extends the capacities and limits the capacities of the driver. Likewise, the spaces within which we regularly gather, our domestic spaces and our sacred spaces, become part of our life, both limiting us and giving us possibilities for expression and identity. I do not take this to be in any way trivial, but part of the *leitourgia*, the deep structures of our knowing. For this reason, sacred space becomes very significant and beyond the realm of straightforward shelter and functionality.

Finally, it could appear that I have left Susan White's concerns a long way behind. But this is not the case. Along with Fagerberg (and others), I mean to suggest that we need to expand (Fagerberg often uses the word "dilate") our understanding of theology to an activity that occurs in more than within the academy. Moreover, we need to make something of a paradigm shift in understanding the priority and kind of theological "knowing" that characterizes (meaning: bestows and forms "character") the body of Christ through the deep structures of liturgy.<sup>31</sup> With *leitourgia* central and foundational,

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<sup>31</sup> "*Leitourgia* doesn't just make the thinker think doxologically or theologize prayerfully; it forms a believer whose life is theological." Fagerberg, 122.

we come to see that we have not just an assembly or body simpliciter but a *theological* body. And, for fear that we have ignored White's concerns that this body is somehow immoral or uncaring of our witness in the world, this is absolutely not the case, because *leitourgia* "fortifies one's communal identity for servanthood in the world."<sup>32</sup>

### **Sacred space**

The focus of this thesis is "sacred space." In order for the discussion to proceed, it is important that I set out my working understanding of both words, because both can function in a variety of ways in common speech and also in the academic literature. I shall begin by considering what I mean by "space."

"Space" is often used interchangeably with "place" and the two terms sometimes merge with one another. This may be because both space and place operate with a range of meanings, many of them metaphorical. For instance, "I need some space," might be a cry for physical room at the dinner table. It might also be a plea for psychological space in order to think or reflect on a weighty matter. Likewise, "I know my place," could be operating as a physical statement or a psychological lament. In spite of this fluidity, John Inge suggests that, when we pause to consider the distinction, in general:

When we think of space, most of us will tend to think of "outer space" and "infinity," but when we think of place, on the other hand, we tend to think of locality, a particular spot. What is undifferentiated space becomes for us significant place by virtue of our familiarity with it. The two terms might be thought to tending towards opposite ends of the spectrum which has local place at one end and the infinite at the other. Spaces are filled with places.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Fagerberg, 144.

<sup>33</sup>Inge, 1, 2.

In the opening chapter of his book, Inge offers a careful and thorough analysis of place and space as it has been used and defined throughout history. We might pause, for instance, to think of how the theory of relativity has altered our understanding of space and time. Space has become contingent and relative to time, and this isn't just a change in scientific thinking; it is also a socio/cultural phenomenon. The Robert Sullivan poem quoted above has a nice allusion to the way in which globalization, along with present-day communication and travel, has twisted our previous understandings of distances, time, and the world we live in.<sup>34</sup>

The thrust of Inge's argument is that historically, "place," the finite and definite concept, was eclipsed by "space," the infinite and non-particular concept, and then it, in turn, was eclipsed by "time." Progressively, "place" has become lost. He writes that, "Place was lost during modernity, and among the social sciences anthropology can be of great assistance to us reinforcing our understanding of the fact that our own culture has lost a sense of place."<sup>35</sup> Of course, he writes that there are some cultures that have not been as affected by this trend in modernity and are less affected by the loss of place.<sup>36</sup> Inge proposes a reinstatement of the importance and centrality of place within theological reflection. It is worth noting that, with slightly different emphasis and argument, Philip

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<sup>34</sup> "My civilization spreads six billion miles .... I accept the emptiness, the huge distances between the lines of the message: it may as well be broadcast here." See also discussion and analysis in David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 201–210.

<sup>35</sup> Inge, 26.

<sup>36</sup> I take this to be true to my experience of both my limited understanding of *Te Ao Māori* (the Māori worldview) and Solomon Islands culture. The Solomon Islands have a further dimension where different islands within the group have different languages, and thus a linguistic identity as well as an obvious bounded geographical (island) identity.

Sheldrake pushes in the same direction in the first chapter of his own book-length treatment.

Space is our experience of three-dimensional extension or the linear distance between a number of fixed points. This does not make space a completely empty or meaningless void, but, on its own, mere extension has no specific definition. On the other hand, “place,” while certainly involving “space,” implies a great deal more than mere extension or distance. It is a locus, a location, a portion of space with particular significance. “Places” are relational, connected with people, either because they are occupied by them or because they reflect something with human significance. Places have a position in the sense both of location and moral value. To “know your place” implies a sense of identity within a wider framework of people, values or structures. “Place” also carries a sense of appropriateness. To be “in the right place” is to be at home or to be encompassed by what is natural or fitting, and to be “out of place” signifies the opposite.<sup>37</sup>

I share the conclusions of both Inge and Sheldrake.<sup>38</sup> Obviously, I, too, need to begin with underscoring the importance of place. However, I will define “space” and “place” differently and quite distinctly in terms of this paper. “Space” will be understood to be a “three-dimensional extension,” or, to use an Aristotelian notion, a “container.” I am going to focus my attention on constructed structures, namely, church buildings (and a crude

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<sup>37</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred* (London: SCM Press, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> There is not the “space” here to take issue with either and dissect where I might have concerns with any of their premises. I would, for instance, want to say that if Inge were to take into account the (much ignored) study of liturgics (and the flow-on from “liturgical reforms”), it would be easy to trace a high-level consciousness and engagement with place/space since the 1950s.

way to think of these structures is as “containers).” Of course, these spaces have specific locations, are in a particular “locus,” but I need to distinguish between “spaces” and “places;” the later, I take, could be simply a specific “place” in nature or set of coordinates on a map. So, for instance, in Celtic spirituality, a “place” on top of a mountain may be described as “a thin place.” That is, it is a location on earth where it is claimed that “the veil” between heaven and earth is understood to be thin and porous. Biblically, we can think of Mt. Sinai, Mt. Horeb, Mt. Nebo, or, since not all such places are on top of mountains, the River Jordan. The significance of these places is not the construction(s) that might be situated there (although there are often shrines or chapels in such places) but the location, the locus, that is, particular geographical co-ordinates.<sup>39</sup> It should not go without saying that such places often carry a narrative(s) that “frames” the place, and many sociologists would say that the subjective mental construct in an important sense “creates the space.”

The focus in the paper will be on constructed three-dimensional structures, because I think they represent a special, and, importantly, a “hard case” (pun useful here) for any argument for sacred space. Personally, I have been deeply moved by experiences in nature – for instance, the completely immersive experience in the deep blue sea while scuba diving, or standing in the wilderness desert of the Wadi Rum, but I am wanting to draw a line between experiences in “nature” that we might say are more obviously simply given by God and those structures which are made by human beings. In contrast to this

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<sup>39</sup> Mt Nebo is a good case in point: the significance is largely in “the place” on top of the mountain looking out over the Jordan plain. There is also a chapel near the summit of the mountain, which is of interest to this thesis and in my terms I would read as a “space”.

kind of experience, the experience of a structure that obviously has had a human hand in the creation of it presents us squarely up against the theological problem identified at the outset – the problem of idolatry: that humanity could ever contain or portray the infinite God.

It is no straightforward task to define the “sacred” part of our two-part “sacred space,” as it brings up a number of large areas of debate. Faced with the challenging nature of finding a satisfactory definition for religious architecture, or, as I would have it, sacred space, Oskar Veraaik wonders whether the solution is “to give up [on] a substantive definition of religious architecture altogether.”<sup>40</sup> This response comes after considering the ways in which defining features such as “ritual effervescence, a sense of community, or the sensation of the sublime” can be destabilized or deconstructed by observing these same features in other buildings that we do not regard as sacred, such as a sports stadium or an art museum. Perhaps the most unsettling and provocative destabilizing suggestion comes from George Bataille, who paralleled religious sites and slaughterhouses as both being places of sacrifice and as expelled from the main street.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps this is the reason that Philip Sheldrake, having established the importance and centrality of place in the first part of his book, never manages the same clarity with the term “sacred.” In contrast, John Inge, having similarly set out his case for the reinstatement of the importance of place, then rightly moves to set forth his “sacramental approach.” Inge’s work will need some substantive engagement later, since I too want to argue for a sacramental

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<sup>40</sup> Oscar Veraaik, ed., *Religious Architecture: Anthropological Perspectives* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 14.

<sup>41</sup> Veraaik, 16.

understanding of sacred space, but here it is important that a more preliminary understanding is set forth.

What we mean and how we mean it when we use the word “sacred” are distinct but related questions. In some ways, it is easier answer the “how” question. Seasoltz, for instance, avoids setting down exactly what he understands by “sacred” in his book *A Sense of the Sacred* – it seems he takes it that there is a definition that is somehow mutually understood and can be taken for granted. He does comment on Victor Turner’s anthropological work for analyzing the rites by which spaces become sacred spaces:

Following the work of Arnold von Gennep, Turner identifies three phases in these rites: (1) separation of the ritual subjects from their role in the traditional social structures; (2) a marginal, liminal, or transitional stage; and (3) reincorporation of the subject into the traditional social structures but with new roles.

Seasoltz is correct in identifying the merits of Turner’s approach. He writes:

Turner’s theory is indeed helpful for understanding not only social process in general but also liturgical process in particular. Since he focuses his attention not only on fixed social states but on change and on the processual view of society, his insights illuminate the conversion process that is inherent in both Judaism and Christianity, a process that should be reflected in the structures of the sacred places in which the liturgy is celebrated and be deepened and facilitated by those places.<sup>42</sup>

This “processual” understanding is important, but Seasoltz doesn’t explore how rites relate to a space *per se*, but, as we can see, turns to the way space serves in other rites – for instance, the placement of a font in the liturgy of baptism. As noted, though, we do not get a definition of “sacred” either, and in this regard, I turn to the enormously helpful

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<sup>42</sup> R. Kevin Seasoltz, *A Sense of the Sacred: Theological Foundations of Christian Architecture and Art* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 73.

and somewhat provocative essay “Sacred Persons” by Timothy Jenkins.<sup>43</sup> Because Jenkins’s essay is “an exploration of what we mean by ‘sacred persons,’” we might overlook it, but the clarity of his analysis is very useful and applicable to advancing our purposes.

Jenkins acknowledges that his perspective on the “sacred” is not from a religious or theological perspective, but, rather, from a sociological gaze. He derives his concept of the “sacred” from Durkheim, and, fundamentally, I think most writers operate with Durkheim’s distinction between the sacred and profane operating in the background. He writes:

The first thing to say is that we need to separate the idea of the sacred from any notions of experience. ... We are not concerned with any sense of awe, or of mystery, or of the holy, nor are we engaged with gods, spirits or ancestors. These things certainly exist, but they are not our primary concern, for they refer to categories generated by the notion of the individual: they presume the primacy of the individual psyche or mind. [...] We might sum up Durkheim’s account of the sacred by making the following point: the opposition of sacred to profane concerns not two classes of things in the world – so much as uneven distribution of value among things. The world is made up of profane facts but sometimes, in the course of inspecting them, a particular fact will cause you to think, and this is because you have encountered an anomaly that is a pointer to a higher logical level of classification or ordering.<sup>44</sup>

The meaning and the distinction between sacred and profane is produced by collective ratiocination by particular social groupings – “collective representations” – and the sacred is nothing more or less than an “elevation based on contrastive differences: this is worth

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<sup>43</sup> Timothy Jenkins, “Sacred Persons,” in *The Gestures of God*, ed. Geoffrey Rowell and Christine Hall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 57–72.

<sup>44</sup> Jenkins, 58-59.

more than the other.”<sup>45</sup> Jenkins suggests the best intuitive example of the collective representations that produce, use, and develop the distinction between sacred and profane is akin to the institution of human language:

[It] is transmitted and taught without reflection; it contains specific traditions and forms of understanding. And yet it is simultaneously the means for initiative and exploration, the results of which may be shared, evaluated and passed on. The notion of collective representations simultaneously permits the idea of individual vocations and makes social organizations, including their consecration of callings and they endorse sacred persons.<sup>46</sup>

Jenkins’s concise exposition of the sociological perspective is helpful, and, obviously, I think that it applies to consecrated spaces as much as it applies to persons. We note, then, that the collective representation of the sacred is a process and one of “immense labor of intelligence, imagination and collective ratiocination.”<sup>47</sup> Further description and analysis of this process is something that Jenkins does not explore and lies ahead of us, but, again, the fact that the ongoing processual nature of the collective ratiocination is identified allows for the evaluation and significance of a particular item or praxis to shift over time or circumstance.

Related to this is the point that the process is a thoroughly human one, and herein lies the deepest concern about such a singular sociological gaze. When Jenkins wants to effectively bracket experiences of awe or encounters with the Divine/Other as belonging to the individual, we cannot be content to set these experiences entirely to one side. The

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<sup>45</sup> Jenkins, 58.

<sup>46</sup> Jenkins, 59.

<sup>47</sup> Jenkins, 70.

sociological approach gets us so far, and rightly identifies the human response to a thing, an event, or an encounter, but, as noted above, he writes:

The world is made up of profane *facts* but sometimes, in the course of inspecting them, a *particular fact* will cause you to think, and this is because you have *encountered an anomaly* that is a pointer to a higher logical level of classification or ordering.<sup>48</sup>

These “particular facts” cannot, however, be completely bracketed, precisely because they are the experiences that give rise to some question of how they are to be understood, and the evaluation, the collective valuation of them. To be sure, because we are speaking of experiences of the Divine, we can only see and know through the glass, darkly, but our human response is to something, namely, the Divine gesture or disclosure. To continue to make use of Jacob’s encounter at Bethel, we have to be keenly aware of Jacob’s very human response (I hope to show that there is a lovely human and comic edge to it), but the response is to an experience that, while being beyond description and full comprehension by Jacob, it is the experience that gives rise to the possibility of the response/recognition.

There is a constant and consistent theme running through the literature that any encounter with Divine/sacred /sacramental presence always originates with the Divine. So, for instance, in making the point that it is the relationship of the Divine initiative and the human response that makes for revelation/sacrament, Inge quotes Kenan Osborne: “Only divine action and human reaction in a concrete situation form the possible sacramentality.”<sup>49</sup> I think it is important to say, therefore, that God *determines* the

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<sup>48</sup> Jenkins, 60 (italics added).

<sup>49</sup> Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, 80.

possibility of the sacred/sacrament but the human ratiocination *defines* the response (albeit with the assistance of the Holy Spirit). But we cannot risk the possible implication from Jenkins's sociological gaze that the "sacred" is utterly humanly determined. In short, the sacred always has the dimension that is the human response to the Divine/Other, and without the Other, there is only human fabrication.

To this we will need to return when we consider sacrament in further depth, but it is worth noting that Mircea Eliade in his seminal work *The Sacred and the Profane*, a work that directly addresses sacred space and certainly relied on Durkheim's definition, takes a view that is almost the antithesis to the sociological one set forth by Jenkins. Eliade observes that the religious human being lives in "an atmosphere impregnated with the sacred," and, as a result, we should "expect to find a large number of techniques for consecrating sacred space."<sup>50</sup> But he writes:

[Humans] are not free to choose the sacred site, that they only seek for it and find it by the help of mysterious signs. ... [We] must not suppose that it is through his own efforts that man can consecrate a space. In reality the ritual by which he constructs sacred space is efficacious in the measure in which *it reproduces the work of the gods*.<sup>51</sup>

This seems to be too passive a role for the religious community, or individuals from within that community, such as the poet or artist. It is surely right to say that there is more going on from the "human side" of the encounter than mere discovery or detective work. Indeed, while this is one of the most challenging features of any consideration of that

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<sup>50</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959), 28.

<sup>51</sup> Eliade, 27, 28 (italics his).

which is consecrated, the sacred/sacramental, namely, the creative contribution by humans to the Divine gesture/manifestation, there is a human factor.

David Tracy, in his discussion of “The Classic,” takes us helpfully one step further and sheds some light on the “two-sided” problem. What Tracy is interested in as “classics” are particular kinds of “texts, events, images, rituals, symbols and persons” that are in some manner normative in a culture. (Ultimately, his analogical case sets out the nature and interpretation of such a classic, and then, by analogy, the religious classic, before turning to the Christian classic and what is normative in Christianity.) What all of these “classics” share is they are “events of truth.” Importantly, what is meant by this is that in experiencing, say, a work of art or a text, a person does not experience themselves as autonomous over against the object:

I find that my subjectivity is never in control of the experience, nor is the work of art actually experienced as an object with certain qualities over against me. Rather the work of art encounters me with surprise, impact, even shock of reality itself. In experiencing art, I recognize a truth I somehow know but I did not know except through the experience of recognition of the essential compelled by the work of art. I am transformed by its truth when I return to the everyday ... I find I must employ words like “recognize” to describe the impact. Such actual self-transcendence, I also recognize, is not my own achievement. It happens, it occurs, I am caught up in the disclosure of the work. I am in the presence of a truth of recognition...<sup>52</sup>

So, what Tracy offers by using the word “recognition” might help us synthesize the dialectic. It won’t, however, completely do that, because even the word “recognition” runs the risk of appearing to be too passive to take into account the creative and imaginative work that comes from the work of human hands and minds (notwithstanding

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<sup>52</sup> David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 111–112.

the ever-assumed inspiration of the Holy Spirit). This concern is obviated somewhat if we return to Jenkins's article, where he directed us to the institution of human language (see quote above). Language both frames and aids our recognition of the world in general by giving us, in a sense, a collective disposition and understanding, but, to make use of a language-based art, the poet can break open new insights and create new understandings by the way in which he imaginatively applies himself to his art form and by using language in surprising new ways. We know language often fails when it confronts some new fact, at which point, new words and understandings need to be worked out. Only metaphors and similes can assist us at such times. It is also the case that meeting the Divine always stretches language, and what Tracy calls the "limit character" of such experiences always has a sense of the failure of language – with the Divine encounter being at one and the same time both a moment of recognition and non-recognition, both comprehension and beyond-any-comprehension.

When we return to the task of defining the sacred, we can say that the sociological insights are helpful insofar as they make us conscious of the all-too-human description of what we are experiencing and attempting to understand (faith seeking understanding). But we have also noted and held fast to the Divine determination of the sacred. Between the dialectic, there is some synthesis in Tracy's suggestion of "recognition." We have, then, come so far by setting some parameters, but we are still falling somewhat short.

A definition offered by Sarah Hamilton and Andrew Spicer, one that they offer almost in passing at the beginning of their article, is very helpful, though. They write:

The church of the Holy Sepulchre, built on the site of Calvary, a building made holy not only through being the site of the events central to the Christian faith (a liminal space as the locus of Christ's resurrection) but through the rite of consecration, and through the liturgical rites conducted there on a daily basis.<sup>53</sup>

The fact that they are bringing our attention to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre seems doubly appropriate because we would want that locus to be in some way the exemplar of a sacred space.<sup>54</sup> There are three identifiable elements to the Hamilton and Spicer definition:

- I. Divine initiative – some event/s or encounter that, through Christ, the presence and redeeming love of God has been experienced.
- II. Rite of Consecration – the formal rite by which the collective entity of the church recognizes and receives the gift and then sets apart the space (or apropos Jenkins, a person) as sacred.
- III. Regular liturgical life by a faith community – this is work of the people in the fullest sense, and, I think, must include ethical and moral outworking of being a Christian community of faith in the terms that White (above) demands. In time, I think the faithful and fruitful life of the community adds to the layers of (I.) that are associated with or “belong” to the space.

I will take it that these three elements are in some measure necessary, and, working together, make the meaning of “sacred” that I will take forward in the discussion.

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<sup>53</sup> Sarah Hamilton and Andrew Spicer, “Defining the Holy: The Delineation of Sacred Space,” in *Defining the Holy: Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Sarah Hamilton and Andrew Spicer (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005), 1.

<sup>54</sup> We cannot, however, be blind to the sectarian/denominational squabbles that are also, unfortunately, a feature of the building's life and witness. Emblematic of this historic reality is the fact that to resolve the conflicts regarding use and ownership, the key to the church is in the custody of two Muslim families with contracts dating back to the 1500s.

## Architecture for art's sake

This – the One, the Good, the Beautiful – in uniqueness the Cause of the multitudes of the good and the beautiful. (Pseudo-Dionysius)

I indicated in the discussion prompted by Susan White that I would return to the topic of beauty, art, and aesthetics in our consideration of sacred space, even though, as noted,

White wants to sideline the topic with her somewhat disparaging remark:

“Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” has most often been turned into “worship the Lord in the holiness of beauty.” This has meant that most talk about sacred space has been derived from a more general theology of visual arts; so the whole thing has been something of a translation exercise. One important result of this attention to aesthetics has been an almost-exclusive concentration on the great examples of sacred space – like Durham – but this has ignored the very real sense of the holiness of place that people experience in, for example, the 1961 purpose-built Methodist church on the growing fringes of Telford.<sup>55</sup>

Going back to Aristotle and running through to the modern era and Charles Batteux, who, in his treatise *Les beaux arts reduits a un meme principe* (“The fine arts reduced to a single principle”) of 1746, separated the “fine arts” from the “mechanical arts,” there have been some who would hold that architecture, because of the functionality of it, should be seen as a craft or “mechanical art.” This view would lend support to White’s case that “Actions make places sacred.” However, while the functional “craft” element is undeniable, it seems equally undeniable that throughout history, great architecture has a “fine art” quality to it that is not unrelated to painting or sculpture.<sup>56</sup> White actually

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<sup>55</sup> White, 34. It is hard to know which Methodist church in Telford White is referring to as an internet search reveals that there are three in the twenty churches that are part of the Telford circuit that could be dated from 1961. If it is St George’s, Wellington (the location being in the north of Telford), then “blue\_haddock” records on Trip Advisor that, “It’s a fairly modern church nothing special and you really don’t need to visit here”: blue\_haddock, “Trip Advisor,” 2018.

<sup>56</sup> It is the case that many of the great art museums devote space to the exhibiting of “crafts” such as fine furniture. Such collections might include items of mass production, but normally classic designs such as the Eames Fiberglass Armchair (the design was the result of a competition sponsored by the Museum of

inadvertently makes the point against herself by drawing attention to the aesthetic dimension of what she calls “great examples of sacred space.” Indeed, what makes for the greatness are the qualities that are in excess of the functionality, and this might well apply to fine furniture and even the Eames chair referred to below. These aesthetic qualities are quite hard to define, and often, as a result, all we can do is point to best examples to make the case. We should not be surprised by this, because the critical and academic debate that attempts to define the nature of art often centers on exemplars, even if they are examples that destabilize a definition of art, as is the case with Marcel Duchamp’s “Fountain” or Andy Warhol’s “Brillo Box.” There is, then, an inescapable need to at least consider what it is we think makes particular spaces so treasured, and, beyond their functionality (because that is vitally important), one element is certainly the perceived aesthetic or artistic merit.

The relationship between beauty and the Divine goes back to Plato and the Neo-Platonists, who held that there is a perfect form of beauty in which beautiful things of this world participate in some measure. It was a very short step for early Christian writers such as Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius to take the forms to the mind and attributes of God. That is, all beautiful things participate not in some abstract ideal, but in the perfection of God’s beauty. A thread then runs forward through the medieval – Scotus, Anselm, Aquinas – as they continue to nuance and develop their understanding, particularly how to understand earthly beauty, which is perceived by our mutable senses, and divine beauty, which is transcendental and in the immutable perfections of God. The

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Modern Art); nevertheless, while there is certainly a kind of proper appreciation of such works, there is also something odd about moving from Picasso paintings to such pieces.

thread then continues through theologians and philosophers as varied as Hegel and Jonathan Edwards to Tillich and Balthasar. In recent times, and in a popular vein, Richard Harries produced his (Neo-Platonist) book *Art and the Beauty of God*. Obviously drawing on the work of Paul Tillich, who links the artistic and theological in their mutual search for truth, Harries writes:

True beauty is inseparable from the quest for truth and those moral qualities which make for a true quest. In the world of art this means integrity, a refusal to go for easy popularity, for cheap truth; the willingness to transcend the clamant ego, to attend to what is there, in its own terms, however painful. This is why works of art, in whatever medium, as well as having a form which pleases will convey truth that may disturb. The conjunction of beauty with truth and goodness has its origin in God and is what we mean by his glory.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, John Navone SJ sets out a Neo-Thomist theology of beauty in his book-length treatment of the subject. Amongst his “Resume of Presuppositions” are the following:

As the perfect image of God, Jesus Christ is perfectly conformed to God as the Incarnate Word / Light / Love / Beauty of the triune God’s Eternal Word / Light / Love / Beauty. ... Our Christian faith’s apprehension of the glory / beauty of God in Jesus Christ, the beauty of the Incarnate Word / Light / Love, results from the Triune God’s gift of God’s Holy Spirit. ... God’s creating the universe to be beautiful implies God creates it to be delightful; for the beautiful is delightful.<sup>58</sup>

The point of this recitation is to further show that White is probably just too dismissive of the serious and sustained philosophical/theological thread that runs through Christian thinking that links beauty and the Divine. One cannot avoid reminding a self-declared Barthian that Barth “was the only theologian in the continental Protestant tradition who has dared to call God ‘beautiful.’”<sup>59</sup> Barth writes:

If we say now that God is beautiful, and make this statement the final explanation of the assertion that God is glorious, do we not jeopardise, or even deny, the

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<sup>57</sup> Richard Harries, *Art and the Beauty of God: A Christian Understanding* (London: Mowbray, 1993), 62.

<sup>58</sup> John Navone SJ, *Toward a Theology of Beauty* (Collegville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 80, 81.

<sup>59</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology and Joy*, English (London: SCM Press, 1973), 58.

majesty and holiness and righteousness of God's love? Do we not bring God, in a sense in an intimate way, into the sphere of man's oversight and control, into proximity to the ideal of all human striving? Do we not bring contemplation of God into suspicious proximity to that contemplation of the world, which in the last resort is the self-contemplation of an urge for life which does not recognise its limits? Certainly we have every reason to be cautious here. But the question is even more pressing whether we can hesitate indefinitely, whether we can avoid this step.<sup>60</sup>

To this we can add a significant related element of Christian spirituality and meditation.<sup>61</sup>

We might take part of Bernard of Clairvaux's sermon on the Song of Songs as an example:

How beautiful you appear to the angels, Lord Jesus, in the form of God, eternal begotten before the daystar amid the splendours of heaven, "the radiant light of God's glory and the perfect copy of his nature," the unchanging and untarnished brightness of eternal life? How beautiful you are to me, my Lord, even in the very discarding of your beauty!<sup>62</sup>

The background is, of course, the erotic pursuit of a lover and her beloved, but St.

Bernard's praise of Christ's beauty moves to the ecstatic and meditative in a manner than can be found in many others, such as St. Francis of Assisi, St. Theresa of Avila, and Julian of Norwich. This theme is carried forward in contemporary religious poets and hymn writers. Of course, all of these examples are word-centered or literary but the same "transporting" and meditative quality can be and is found in the visual arts, and my

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<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 29.

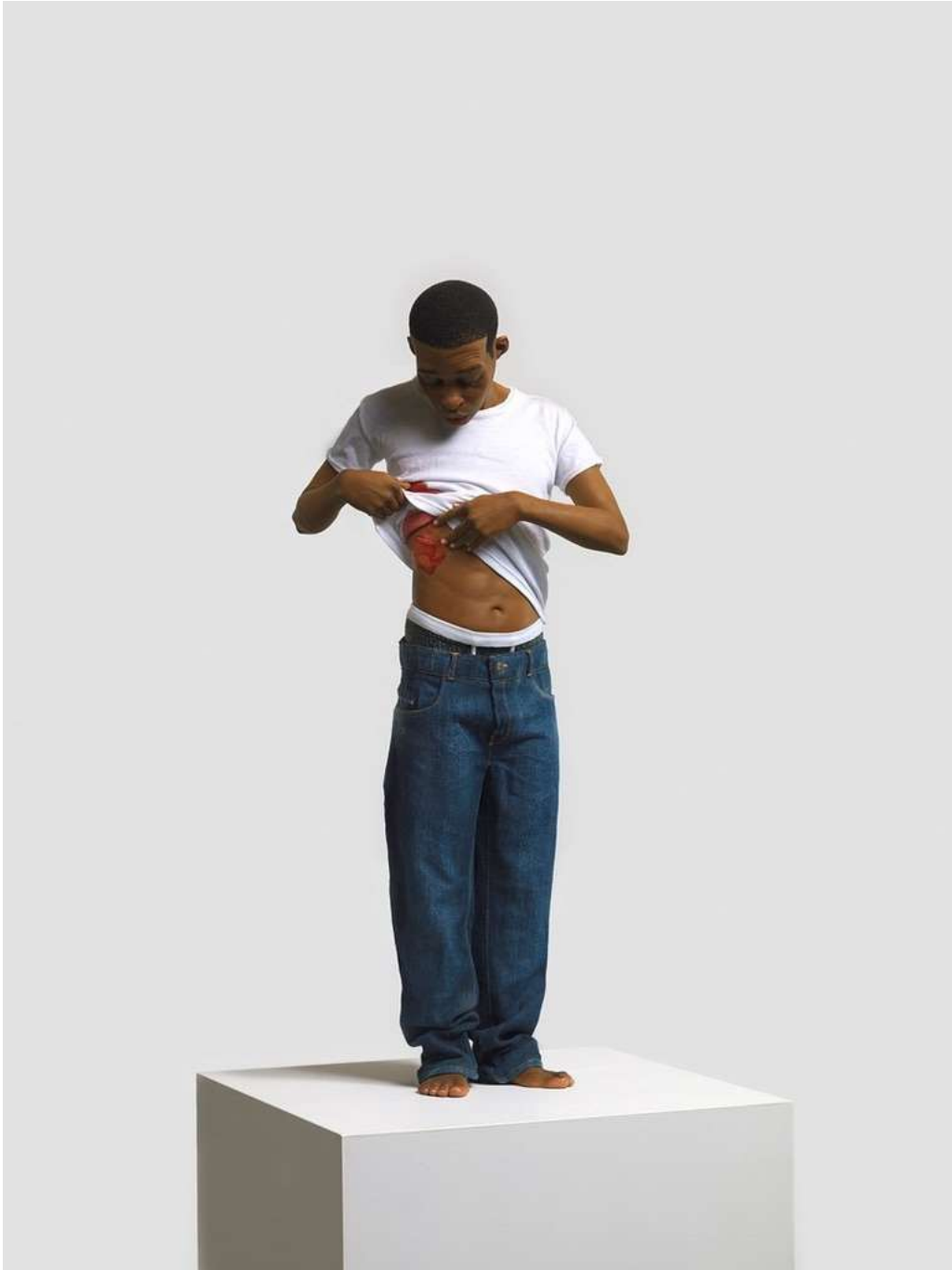
<sup>61</sup> I do not endorse the hard distinction that is often made between theology and spirituality. We can observe, for instance, in the theology of Karl Rahner a strong link between his Ignatian spirituality (he was a respected leader of retreats) and his theology, and to separate them is as mistaken as placing a divide between the prayer life and the academic life of any theologian. John Navone SJ critiques the view that spirituality is merely affective or devotional and without intellectual content: "intellectual content is precisely the praxis of a highly speculative Christian spirituality which cannot be separated from speculative theology." Navone, 73.

<sup>62</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, "On the Song of Songs II," in *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader*, ed. Gesa Elsbeth Theissen (William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 121. The choice of St. Bernard here is intentional, as he was actually quite an iconoclast and deeply critical of excesses in church architecture, yet here he praises beauty.

argument is that architecture, particularly the best of it, participates in the same religious good.

The discussion here risks being a little too abstract, so allow me to divert a little and focus for a moment on a single sculpture to illustrate and ground some of these thoughts. The London-based Australian sculptor, Ron Mueck, is renowned for his hyperreal human figures which disturb our perceptions of the human condition. In 2009, he produced a work entitled “Youth” (see figure 1) which “incarnates” the (im)mortal figure of Christ as a young black man examining his bloody wounded side. His lowered head echoes great classical works such as Donatello’s “Crucifix” in Santa Croce Church, Florence, and Brunelleschi’s “Crucifix” at Santa Maria Novella also in Florence. The “competition” between these two artists as they attempted to create a true to life and genuinely sorrowful figure on the cross is well known, but these works from the 1400s really begin attempts to produce a compelling realism. “Youth” stands alone in that tradition. He disturbs the tradition because, without the cross, this could be a newly inflicted (knife violence?) wound of a dying Christ or it could be a Risen Christ showing Thomas his side. We are not sure which side of death and resurrection he is at. He further disturbs us with his own look of disturbed innocence and his apparent wonderment at what has happened to him. The foolishness of Christ exposed. It is odd to speak of the “achievement” of any work of art, but in re-presenting the innocence of the Christ figure (along with many other things besides), Mueck has done a very difficult thing. But many artworks achieve these “scales falling from our eyes” glimpses. In this case, it is a sculpture, so it is a very visual dis-closure, but I hope to show that if buildings that we

understand to be sacred spaces can allow us to perceive (sight, sound, touch, smell, even taste) something of the Glory of God, then it is no mean achievement, but a sacred one.



*Figure 2. Ron Mueck. "Youth" 2009. The National Gallery, London.*

This brings me to an essay by Nicholas Wolterstorff, in which he actually addresses three issues that are of interest for us here.<sup>63</sup> The first is that he shares a concern White raises by implication, namely, the treatment of art as if it were an absolute, where the veneration of art becomes a quasi-mystical end in itself, a kind of salvific immersion in the aesthetic experience. Wolterstorff protests against that, because, obviously enough, to treat art as the Absolute amounts to idolatry, and many writers are well aware of this. He does add, however, that if we “fail to give adequate place to the artistic heritage of mankind, to this flowering of our creaturely potential, [we] will over and over drive people away from their [our] religions.”<sup>64</sup>

The second matter comes from a distinction that Wolterstorff draws from Max Weber’s typology of religion. Weber proposes that within religions of salvation, there are two fundamental ways they typically offer redemption – where redemption lies in being saved from this world in some way. The first type is “ascetic,” where the believer seeks to transform himself and/or the world in order to bring himself closer to God. The believer becomes an instrument for God and the key concern becomes one of obedience to God’s will for the world. The second type is the “mystic,” where, rather than seeking to be an obedient instrument for God’s will, the believer seeks to make himself a vessel of God through contemplation on “the things of God.” The way in which Weber proposes his distinction, neither type is affirming of this material world. I think we can set this aspect

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<sup>63</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Art, Religion, and the Elite: Reflections on a Passage from Andre Malraux,” in *Art, Creativity, and the Sacred*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (New York: Continuum, 1996), 262–73.

<sup>64</sup> Wolterstorff, 272.

to one side and still see the distinction as something helpful. The manner in which White proposes we understand sacred spaces falls into the ascetic type, since what is at stake for her and the way such spaces are valued is only in terms of the way they facilitate obedient actions. For the mystic, though, a sacred space can be valued insofar as it aids the contemplation of some aspect of God. Obviously, the distinction need not be made manifest in exclusive terms, but it helps clarify something important, and, while I think White is making an exclusive claim and is in error for doing so, I would want to hold that a sacred space is best when it aids in both tasks.

This distinction leads into the third, and probably the most profound issue, not least because it lays bare a deeper worry. Positively, however, it further clarifies a key contention of this thesis. As a way into this, it is worth quoting the whole of a perceptive (and even piercing) paragraph from Richard Viladesau's important book, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art*:

The idea that God is infinite bliss is, of course, a part of the classical Western tradition, yet it seems sometimes to be lost both to theology and our imaginative representations of the Deity. Perhaps this is in part because, in order to underline the ethical imperative, Western religion has emphasized God's justice and anger with the sinful world (an angry person is by definition not happy). This in turn is a natural result of the idea that God has engaged in a historical "dialogue" with the world, in which our responses "make a difference" to God. It would seem to follow (at least to projective imaginative thinking) that God, like us, cannot finally be happy until the eschaton. Thus God's "bliss" appears accidental: a state of being that God must attain, rather than an essential element in the meaning of the word "God." But my contention is that beauty points to the fact that being is in essence joyous: self-presence with delight. And the condition of possibility for finite beauty is the existence of the Beautiful as such.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 138.

Now it is imaginable that someone such as Susan White might look on, and, perhaps over-hastily, dismiss Viladesau as writing from a very particular ecclesial position – a Roman Catholic with Orthodox affections. Of course, I want to strongly object to any such retort. But none other than Jürgen Moltmann, a doyen of twentieth century Protestant theology, registered the same concern as Viladesau in his profound little book already referred to above, *Theology and Joy*. He complained that the “one-sided emphasis on the dominion of God in the Western church, especially in Protestantism, has subjected Christian existence to juridical and moral categories.”<sup>66</sup> What is at stake here is a deep theological worry, and one that is of concern within the Protestant and Barthian tradition, namely, that in an attempt to elevate the supreme freedom and dominion of God, there has been a distortion and a blindness to the glory/beauty of God that, in turn, has caused a reinstatement of a law of obedience for humanity. Paradoxically, as Viladesau deftly exposes, this rests on a hidden premise that somehow God’s glory and happiness is accidental and dependent on humanity’s response. Moltmann writes: “[The] aesthetic categories of new freedom have given way to moral categories of the new law and new obedience.”<sup>67</sup> This is a mistake of considerable proportions, and one that I would hold sits behind the valuation of sacred space solely in terms of its functionality and then in the ethical outpouring of life from that space. To reiterate somewhat, I do not want to lose sight of this ethical and moral dimension that is part of any evaluation of the sacredness of a place. That is not what I am claiming. Nor do I want to suggest that the liturgical functionality (that is unfortunately too often the singular focus of liturgists and liturgical

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<sup>66</sup> Moltmann, 58.

<sup>67</sup> Moltmann, 59.

theologians) should not be an important feature of our understanding of any sacred space. However, this twofold focus on ethical and liturgical functionality, essentially “usefulness,” is a kind of myopic mistake that I believe ultimately comes from a deep theological failing – as if “usefulness” brings us to salvation or sanctification.

Moltmann speaks of “God’s dominion” that needs to be held in balance with “God’s glory” – both need to be held in view. “God’s dominion” gives rise to our rightful concern to be moral and ethical, and “God’s glory,” which is God showing forth splendor, beauty, kindness, and joy, gives rise to the responses of wonder, amazement, praise, and adoration. Obviously, I think art and architecture can both give expression to these human responses and give encouragement to us and give rise to these responses in us. Here is a little example taken from fiction, that great work of art, *The Sopranos*. In the episode called “Cold Stones”, Carmela Soprano goes to Paris with her friend Rosalie Aprile.<sup>68</sup> There is a scene when they are on the Bridge Pont Alexandre III and Carmela is overwhelmed by the sculptures, sights, and the beauty of Paris before her. The dialogue runs: Carmela, “Oh my God!”; Rosalie, “Holy shit!”; Carmela, “Who could have built this?!” The clear implication (given Carmela’s faith is a constant theme in the series, and the signaling in opening of the dialogue in question) is that the marvel of human art and architecture has more than human creativity behind it, and this is cause for further wonder, joy, and thankfulness. I mean to suggest here that Carmela’s experience of the art and architecture in Paris is far from unique, and, at least for those with religious faith, to sense joy and gratitude to God for that kind of experience, or for the experience that

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<sup>68</sup> Tim Van Patten, “The Sopranos: Season 6, Episode 11, ‘Cold Stones’” (HBO, 2006).

gives some new or greater sense of God, is not unusual. Of course, if this were not the case, the scene described from “Cold Stones” would have no resonance with any audience.

A last point relating to this concerns how we think about worship and praise in general. Worship serves a number of good purposes, not least the formation of the body of Christ. There is, however, (possibly) the most significant aspect where praising God in particular serves no purpose at all. David Ford and Daniel Hardy write: “In a society dominated by efficiency and a functional assessment of everything, the whole ethos supports the despising of praise as futile. Praise of God is not necessary, it is an overflow, a generous extravagance of response which is easily seen as useless and deluded.”<sup>69</sup> But as those being ordained affirm:

Glory to God on high, God of power and might.  
You are my God.  
I can neither add to your glory  
nor take away from your power.  
Yet will I wait upon you daily in prayer and praise  
(*A New Zealand Prayer Book*, 895).

There is something, importantly, completely useless about adoration and praise – or in the terms set by Moltmann, glorifying God. When we genuinely offer someone we love praise and adoration, we do not expect anything as a result of it, except, possibly, their joy. It is a response and a gift seeking no return, and if it were otherwise, it would not be adoration and praise for the sake of the beloved but a degraded utilitarian move of some sort. This is no different when it comes to adoring and praising God, except there is the

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<sup>69</sup> David F. Ford and Daniel W. Hardy, *Living in Praise: Worshipping and Knowing God* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005), 15.

added element that we really can give that infinite God nothing he lacks – “neither add to your glory nor take away from your power.” In Schmemmann’s words:

All rational, spiritual and other qualities of man, distinguishing him from all other creatures, have their focus and ultimate fulfillment in this capacity to bless God, to know, so to speak, the meaning of thirst and hunger that constitutes his life. “*Homo sapiens*,” “*homo faber*” ... yes, but first of all, “*homo adorans*.” The first, the basic definition of man is that he is *the priest*. He stands at the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God ...<sup>70</sup>

When it comes to the subject of this thesis, and the creation of sacred space, in an important sense, such spaces are for no useful purpose; they exist first and foremost for adoration and praise of God. It is no mistake that most foundation stones to church buildings bear (in some manner) the inscription “To the Glory of God,” as it is, after all, humanity’s chief end, “to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”<sup>71</sup>

A final comment is demanded about a very particular challenge that Christian art might be said to face in relation to aesthetics and beauty. It helps to think first about the possible purposes of Christian art. Rowan Williams writes:

What Christians believe about salvation is never expressed completely in formulae or creeds. Christian faith has always been enacted, a matter of physical acts and gestures, ritual drama of transformation. And Christian art, in its origins, is not about decorative extras or helpful illustrations of stories and doctrines; it is itself a sort of enacting of faith, a means by which we are brought more fully into the mystery being celebrated.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), 15

<sup>71</sup> Westminster Shorter Catechism.

<sup>72</sup> Rowan Williams, “Foreword,” in Christopher Irvine, *The Cross and Creation in Christian Liturgy and Art* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2013), ix.

Williams indicates that Christian art has a particular overall purpose – that is, Christian art is teleological. We need to be careful that art is not then seen as always and simply a means to an end. The “end,” however, in this case, is participation in the transcendent – “brought more fully into the mystery being celebrated” – and, as such, in a fundamental sense, stands beyond our attainment and is always a gift of the Divine. Nonetheless, Christian art might stand apart from some other genres of art, for instance, the art of advertising or the art of political satire.<sup>73</sup> Many artists would say that the art is “just *there*, it isn’t for any purpose at all.” To some degree, however, Christian art is always reaching for the transcendent. Sometimes, contrary to Williams’s point, it is going to be simply “illustrations,” and this is part of art’s purpose. Robin Jensen holds that Christian art has four functions – sub-functions under our overall purpose – “that might be characterized as exegetical, symbolic, liturgical, and iconic.”<sup>74</sup> She continues:

As exegesis, art interprets scriptures on many different levels, from the literal to the allegorical. As symbol, art acts as a bridge between a familiar reality and one that transcends ordinary expression. As liturgy, art may have performative function and belong to a particular space, time, and ritual actions. Finally, as icon, art brings the viewer into direct contact with the holy, providing the mechanism for epiphany.<sup>75</sup>

All of this is fine and helpful, except, taken together, it seems to open wide the door for the embarrassing reality of Christian kitsch, which also appears to assist many people in all four ways to the same ultimate purpose. In critical circles, kitsch is often not thought to be “beautiful” nor is it thought to be truly “art,” but some lesser kind of expression.

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<sup>73</sup> A case might be made that political satire, insofar as it leads to the emancipation of people, is part of the purposes of God, but this seems a stretch in most cases.

<sup>74</sup> Robin Margeret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 6.

<sup>75</sup> Jensen, 6.

Yet to criticize the person who finds great meaning in the three-dimensional relief of Salvador Dali's "The Sacrament of the Last Supper" or a pastel-rich painting of a plaster statue of Our Lady of Lourdes seems at very least churlish. If the criticism is grounded in some highbrow version of what makes for "art," then it is absolutely unsustainable (possibly on many grounds but especially), given the fact that if we hold that the "end" is achieved, then it eclipses any such judgment.

Frank Burch Brown expressly addresses the issue of kitsch in his book *Good Taste, Bad Taste, and Christian Taste* and a key example he uses to illustrate the phenomenon is "America's Sistine Chapel," namely the Precious Moments Chapel in Missouri.<sup>76</sup> Apparently, thousands of visitors have a meaningful religious experience here, and, passing out through the gift shop, purchase exclusive figurines to take home with them in order to access memories of said experience. So, to judge the religious experience of these believers as mistaken seems wrong in itself and to not see the chapel as an "artful representation of Michelangelo's own Sistine Chapel" is also judgment without justification, given the "end" seems to have been achieved for many. At this point, it seems that one has to concede that matters of aesthetics and beauty are really irrelevant, because, when it comes to "the mystery being celebrated," it is simply "each according to his taste." Brown resists conceding to this complete subjectivity (which would apply to both the appreciation and the creation of art) and offers twelve assumptions or premises

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<sup>76</sup> Precious Moments Foundation, "Precious Moments Chapel," 2019, <https://preciousmomentschapel.org/chapel-gardens/>. Brown's discussion is actually at its strongest in his discussion of various kinds of Christian music. No doubt this is because he is a musician. The basic problem, however, remains the same: accessible populist chorus music versus a complex classic such as Bach's *St. John's Passion*.

which “may be able to guide the fruitful exercise of Christian taste – apperception, appreciation, and appraisal.”<sup>77</sup>

A good number of the premises attend to the proper appreciation of diversity and a stance of Christian charity towards difference in style. He holds that the judgments of the community for whom the style of art is “indigenous” should be privileged, but then the evaluation needs to be “a joint effort between clergy, congregation, and trained artists and musicians.”<sup>78</sup> So, while Brown holds that judgments can apparently be made, he largely demurs from giving us firm grounds for any such judgment. He does object to “Precious Moments Chapel” because the figures/figurines in the chapel are all childlike with “tear-drop eyes,” but he doesn’t press home the substance of this objection. It seems obvious that the overall portrayal of the Christian story in the Precious Moments Chapel (which is what the frescos in Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel attempt to capture) infantilizes all the figures of our faith, and, in so doing, ultimately infantilizes the believer. The experience may be accessible to many, but it diminishes the truth of the gospel and power of the Paschal Mystery.

Brown gets close to expressing an entirely related concern about the way kitsch dumbs down the gospel, but he appears to be so concerned about falling into the sin of pride that he vacillates about saying so, and he doesn’t really proffer his reasons for any aesthetic judgment – in spite of still suggesting that such a thing could be the outcome of a joint

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<sup>77</sup> Frank Burch Brown, *Good Taste, Bad Taste, and Christian Taste* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 251.

<sup>78</sup> Brown, 251.

effort of the Christian community. Yet he is surely correct when he quotes Nicholas Lash: “Serious theological reflection is always hard work, and much of that work is to avoid oversimplification” – and draws a parallel with the appreciation of art.<sup>79</sup> The “mystery being celebrated” in Christian art or in philosophical/theological reflection is truth, and the appreciation or articulation of it is not always easy – unsurprisingly, it requires discipline, application, and training. For all of its approachability, kitsch trades on sentimentality and oversimplification that ultimately diminishes the truth of the gospel, and it is no sin of pride that judges it to be inferior. I mean to suggest, therefore, that we can make judgments about beauty or aesthetic value, however difficult such a judgment may be to arrive at. I think that such judgments can be arrived at through some communitarian process such as Brown set forth. The risk is that courageous or innovative design might be stifled, but the not infrequent process of having a competition with a collective choosing the winning design is a good compromise. What is certain is that when it comes to something as permanent as a building, we have an obligation to reach for a design that itself reaches for the “mystery being celebrated.”

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<sup>79</sup> Brown, 256.

## 2.

These visible churches are not simply gathering places but signify and make visible the Church living in this place, the dwelling of God with humanity reconciled and united in Christ. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1180)

I have already indicated that I wish to show that spaces we regard as sacred allow us to perceive something of the Glory of God. Ultimately, I will affirm more than this: that some sacred spaces can and should be understood as sacraments. To that end it is important to gather some understanding and appreciation of how it is that sacred spaces “work.” I have, to this point, implicitly affirmed a principle of “functional beauty.” So, a sacred space needs to function well to be judged a “success” and to be considered as a sacred space. Departing from Susan White, though, I hold that the aesthetic properties of a building are also important to pointing to its success – the interaction and relationship between these two qualities both contribute to our response to the space. Pope John Paul II writes:

Beauty is a key to the mystery and a call to transcendence. It is an invitation to savor life and to dream of the future. That is why the beauty of created things can never fully satisfy. It stirs that hidden nostalgia for God which a lover of beauty like St. Augustine could express in incomparable terms: “Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you!”<sup>1</sup>

Leaving the relationship and interaction between success and beauty ill-defined and unexplored thus far might hint at the complexity of what we are dealing with in a sacred space.<sup>2</sup> We will certainly see there is more than the interaction of these two characteristics.

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<sup>1</sup> II Pope John Paul, “Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Artists 1999” (Vatican, 1999). § 16.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps it does not go without saying that the sacred work of sacraments is fundamentally a work of God. Nonetheless, we want to explore the human side of the sacramental.

If we think of a sacred space simply as an object, the complexity of that object far exceeds the relative simplicity of other sacred objects such as bread and wine, or oil and water. One reading of what Susan White is trying to achieve is the avoidance/erasure of the complexities by the promotion of a single evaluative criteria – in the case of White, a moral/ethical one. I want to do otherwise. I want to expose and explore at least some of the complexity of these objects and their “workings,” hoping that when we announce (liturgically or otherwise) that a building is sacred, we might have some greater understanding of the many ways in which we can and do engage with them.

Mattijs van de Port arrestingly opens an essay on religious architecture like this:

Although I am slightly embarrassed to admit it, there is no denying the fact that when I entered the Igreja de Sao Francisco in Salvador, Bahia – one of the most famous baroque churches in Brazil – I had an immediate bodily reaction: my nipples hardened. No goose bumps, no gasping for air, no shivers down my spine (bodily reactions which somehow feel more admissible to open an academic discussion) but hard nipples.<sup>3</sup>

This confronts us with the most immediate level of complexity of the objects we are encountering and that is that they appeal to or assault all our senses – and sometimes in ways that are not fully consciously present to us. Architecture books, journals, and magazines, those publications that make up the primary fora for discussion, appreciation, and interpretation of architectural objects/spaces are often replete with beautiful photographs that solely invite a visual response. Even at this level, we are confronted

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<sup>3</sup> Mattijs van de Port, “Golden Storm: The Ecstasy of the Igreja de Sao Paulo in Salvador Da Bahia, Brazil,” in *Religious Architecture: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Oskar Verkaaik (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 63. No doubt many would not want to restrict this kind of reaction to religious architecture.

with multiple features – light and color, edge detection, depth, pattern, symmetry, and more besides. But the sounds, smells, and touch of a space all can and do contribute to what is a multisensory experience. Further, most architectural objects cannot be experienced from a single or static position; rather, they are designed such that the body (individual and corporate) is not just to be positioned in one place but is intended to move around, thus understanding that the designed and actual “circulatory flow” is part of the whole bodily experience.

It is the case then, that we encounter sacred spaces as deeply complex. We relate to and engage with them on multiple levels that easily surpass the experience of, say, even the most profound painting. The question becomes how it is that we can attempt to lay bare our individual and corporate experience of such a complex reality and seek to analyze our interpretation of it. Three caveats immediately present themselves before we start to answer the question. First, the risk here is that one could mistakenly assume that we are only talking about an epistemological event – that we “learn” something *about* God, or some aspect or attribute of God is revealed to us when we are in a particular sacred space. If, however, we allow that sacred space can be a sacrament, then the encounter is so much more than knowing something or learning something *about* God. It can, of course, include that, but I am suggesting it can be much more profound; it can mediate an experience *of* God. I will lay out my understanding of such a sacrament further below, but if we are to begin to appreciate the power and significance of sacred space, we have to be mindful that we are engaging with something more than an epistemological event, and some articulation of the polysemic nature of space has to be carefully set out.

The second caveat presents as something of an extension of the point (above) about the photographs that dominate architectural publications. It is of note that the photographs are often devoid of other human beings, thus encouraging the reader/viewer into a solitary perspective of the space. Moreover, the dominant perspective inherited from (what amounts to a very particular) part of the Western artistic tradition places the beholder alone in another way – at a singular point from which to behold what the painter/photographer would direct the viewer to see. The social dimension of space is thereby doubly removed. When it comes to sacred space, we have to re-member the presence of the individual and the corporate body. The assembly must not be shut out. Our analysis has to be more than an architectural criticism of a space devoid of people.<sup>4</sup>

Third, recalling the discussion about *prima theologia* above, it has to be cautioned that there is always something *secunda* about any theological analysis, including an analysis of space. So, even as I am about to turn to what I believe is the most helpful and insightful theological analysis of sacred space/church architecture, Bert Daelemans's *Spiritus Loci: A Theological Method for Contemporary Church Architecture*, there is always good reason to keep close the primary and immediate raw bodily reaction of erect nipples – perhaps because it disturbs us even more than a little and is sign of the whole body responding.

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<sup>4</sup> That said I am, for the most part, attempting to understand the way sacred spaces work aside from the liturgical assembly. This is not a forgetting or an erasure, but an intentional effort to understand how space works to mediate God's presence aside from the formation of the people of God/Body of Christ.

Daelemans describes his project in the subtitle – *A Theological Method for Contemporary Architecture*. His focus on contemporary architecture is partly born of his desire to redeem recently completed structures from the dismissal they have had, particularly in ecclesiastical quarters, because in certain respects they break with conventions and expectations – they don’t look like (gothic) churches. I follow him inasmuch as I am primarily interested in more contemporary buildings precisely because I too think they represent “hard cases” for any analysis. Daelemans does not make grand claims for his method by pretending that he is laying out something for religious architecture of all time and all contexts. Rather, he leaves such thoughts for others to take forward or make what they will of his work. I acknowledge my indebtedness to Daelemans’s scholarship and the richness of his insight. While I am critical of the book at certain points, my real departure from him is that, while he acknowledges the sacramental value to be found in contemporary architecture, and church buildings in particular, he draws back from saying that they serve as sacrament, and, ultimately his work presents sacred space as an epistemological exercise. Tantalizingly, though, he writes, for instance, of churches being “mystagogic space” inasmuch as the spaces introduce God’s mystery, but he doesn’t embrace the step that Orthodox tradition (which speaks most often of “mystagogy”) does and acknowledge buildings as sacrament.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, the title of his book *Spiritus Loci* is chosen because he wants to indicate what he believes is a relationship between the Holy Spirit and church buildings. He tells us, however, that the purpose of his work is to attend

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<sup>5</sup> Bert Daelemans S.J., *Spiritus Loci: A Theological Method for Contemporary Church Architecture* (Boston: Brill, 2015), 28ff. It is interesting that in one of the standalone quotes at the beginning of a chapter he quotes Denis McNamara: “Through the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, matter becomes the means through which the realities of heaven are mediated sacramentally to us just as they were in the Incarnation itself” (203).

to an epistemological lacuna in theology.<sup>6</sup> So, in the end, he steps away from making the affirmation that I think should be made about sacred spaces, and that is, they should (sometimes) be viewed as sacramental objects in themselves. I will engage with Daelemans's powerful conceptual framework and insight, though, engaging with it and critiquing it to some degree, before proceeding with taking my further sacramental step.

The philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre is the primary inspiration for Daelemans, who further develops the former's methodology for his understanding of space. Before turning to Daelemans proper, therefore, it is worthwhile setting out a little of Lefebvre's own conceptual framework. This is partly because, while Daelemans builds on Lefebvre, the base work is acknowledged as very complex. This is attributable in some measure to Lefebvre's style (for instance, he often uses metaphors from music and his own work seems to perform like an ensemble where he has a number of instruments and lines of thought sounding at once) and also because "he continuously enriched and modified his theory."<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, there are acknowledged translation issues with Lefebvre, and, across the secondary literature, it is conceded that he is a difficult study.<sup>8</sup> It is also

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<sup>6</sup> "Theotopy,' is methodological and epistemological. My major epistemological question is how architecture can be theology. Coining the term theotopy (Gr. Topos, place) allow for an exposition of the embodied specificity of such a non-verbal theology." Daelemans, *Spiritus Loci*, 10. Daelemans is not alone in attending to this important task. Murray Rae, an architect and theologian, has the same focus: "I am interested in the ways in which theology may be developed and enriched through engagement with the built environment, and especially in the ways in which such engagement might prompt new ways of thinking about the subject matter of theology": Murray A Rae, *Architecture and Theology: The Art of Place* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Kristen Hackenbroch, *The Spaciality of Livelihoods: Negotiations of Access to Public Space in Dhaka, Bangladesh* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013), 24 n.11.

<sup>8</sup> "It would be unfair to present Lefebvre without indicating that he is a very tough read ... because he seems to delight in contradiction and forcing his readers beyond their current thinking": Tim B. Rogers, "Henri Lefebvre, Space and Folklore," *Ethnologies* 24, no. 1 (2002): 21–44, <https://doi.org/10.7202/006529ar>, 35 n.34. See also n.22 below.

perceptible that the readers of Lefebvre tend to see something of themselves looking back at them from the bottom of the well – so, Tom Rogers, a psychologist, makes Lefebvre’s third space sound like a therapeutic conversation; Lynn Stewart, a geographer, finds in him a ”human geography.” So, it is no surprise (and no great crime) that Daelemans lifts out particular aspects from Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* that suit his theological project, but in his baptism of Lefebvre, I think some elements are washed away which should be recaptured.

Two thinkers are foundational for Lefebvre: Marx and Hegel. Obviously, Marx himself responded to Hegelian analysis, but the key point to hold in mind for Lefebvre is that he is a committed socialist thinker, and a Marxist critique of “production” permeates all his work, including the work of most interest here, pointedly titled *The Production of Space*.<sup>9</sup> “Production” holds within it notions of socioeconomic production – the production of things – but also reproduction of biological and social relations. He acknowledges that there is a “between the lines” project that runs from the beginning to the end of the work which is emancipatory – “the project of a different society, a different mode of production, where social practice would be governed by different conceptual determinations.”<sup>10</sup> Hegelian analysis – where every concept (thesis) tends towards its negation or contradiction (antithesis) and through the dialectical relationship between the two it leads to an overcoming and a third concept (synthesis) – runs like a constant thread through his work. Lefebvre rejects, however, any completion that might be implied by the

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<sup>9</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Lefebvre, 419.

emergence of the synthesis; for him it is a continuous transforming process, not a perfected end. As his thinking matured, of particular interest to him was the conflict/tension that exists between theory and experience which he thinks situates a bedrock dialectic in academic disciplines as well as wider society. This means that his writing engages with both research disciplines and methods that allow us to understand experience – say, anthropology – and also those disciplines that enable us to do likewise with theory or abstract thought – say, philosophy. Thus, his work traverses many disciplines, but he finds them all wanting in some measure. He is particularly critical (even scathing) of abstract thought systems because it is the dis-embodied discourse of (often dominating) ideology.<sup>11</sup> The two “fields” of thought/mental and practice/physical lead him to the “lost” third synthetic field, which he terms the imaginary/social. So, this is a basic “trialectic” threading through his work – where “trialectic” is the superior term because it denotes Lefebvre’s constant rejection of binaries, his desire to keep all three fields in view in his conceptual framework, and the fact that he holds that the transforming process is always emerging through history.<sup>12</sup>

I need to delay over Lefebvre’s term “imaginary”, which I have lifted up even though it is only used sparingly by Lefebvre, and mostly inferentially in association with a cluster of related words/thoughts under the “third” term.<sup>13</sup> We pause, firstly, because “imagination”

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<sup>11</sup> “Western philosophy has betrayed the body; it has actively participated in the great process of metaphorization that has abandoned the body; and it has denied the body”: Lefebvre, 407.

<sup>12</sup> Acknowledging that she is following the suggestion of Christian Schmid in her reading of Lefebvre, Hackenbroch endorses this term: see *The Spaciality of Livelihoods*, 24.

<sup>13</sup> Notably, in his definition of “Representational Space,” Lefebvre tells us that it is “the imagination [which] seeks to change and appropriate” “dominated” space: see *The Production of Space*, 39, also 236.

becomes significant when we move to David Brown's work, as he holds a key role for imagination in his understanding of sacramentality. In his own estimation, Brown's claims about imagination are amongst his most significant.<sup>14</sup> Essentially, that claim is that the way our minds work (and have been created by a generous God), they are such that we have a capacity to "move" between one world and another: the visible and material to the invisible and heavenly. In religious terms, he calls this "the sacramental imagination."<sup>15</sup> Secondly, the cluster of related words/thoughts – "poetics," "desire," and "utopia" – becomes significant when we consider Daelemans, but it is important that we note the Nietzschean associations. At one point in his book, Lefebvre comments that the "Nietzschean antecedents should be and are intended to be obvious," and this statement can be uttered at many junctures throughout the work.<sup>16</sup> Thus, in a passage where he is objecting to the "sovereignty" given to Logos (that is, language and signs – "the sign has the power of destruction because it has the power of abstraction"<sup>17</sup>) because language always "fails" in the gap/difference between sign and signified, he writes:

For Nietzsche, language has an anaphorical even more than metaphorical character. It always leads beyond presentness, towards an elsewhere, and above

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<sup>14</sup> David Brown, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 366.

<sup>15</sup> David Brown, "The Sacramental World: Why It Matters," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, ed. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 608 ff: "Perhaps the relevance of the point to all imaginative arts can be expressed most clearly by making explicit the parallel between symbol and action, metaphor in writing, and the image in visual arts, and how the theological notion of sacramentality is based on similar structures. ... Each involves that by doing one thing intends another: the consecration of bread and wine to become the body and blood of Christ ... Works of the imagination, irrespective of the medium, appear very similarly founded. The metaphors of the poet are intended to take us from sphere of discourse to another, the images of the artist from one visual image to another ..." (609).

<sup>16</sup> Lefebvre, 394.

<sup>17</sup> Lefebvre, 135. Also, "Although "figures of speech" express much, they lose and overlook, set aside and place parenthesis around even more" (140).

all towards a hypervisualization which eventually destroys it. Prior to knowledge [abstract], and beyond it, are the body: suffering, desire, pleasure. For Nietzsche the poet, poetry overcomes the antagonism between work and play, the poet snatches words from the jaws of death. ... Happily for the poet, he does not fight without succour: musicians, dancers, actors – all travel the same road ...<sup>18</sup>

Notable is that “poetry *overcomes*” with its re-presentation of words and signs which returns them to (what I will call here) “bodily lived-ness.” So, as something of a recap, we have physical/bodily life (individual and corporate) that can be the site of empirical research and study but also the site of subjection, subjugation, and domination; this first field is in a dialectical relationship with the abstract/signification that we might understand through semiotics or logic, but is the means of ideology as it seeks totality and dis-possession of the body, and then, this dialectical tension is overcome by the poetic/imaginary which explodes any imposed unity through the desire for difference which is lived and embodied.<sup>19</sup> To anticipate ourselves somewhat here, and, most importantly, to see this “imaginary overcoming” articulated in positive terms and in relation to buildings and architecture, he writes:

Thus it is that architectural genius has been able to realize spaces dedicated to voluptuousness [note the inference of desire] (the Alhambra of Granada), to contemplation and wisdom (cloisters), to power (castles and chateaux), or to heightened perception (Japanese gardens). Such genius produces spaces full of meaning, spaces which first and foremost escape mortality: enduring, radiant, yet also inhabited by a specific local temporality. Architecture produces living bodies, each with own distinctive traits. The animating principle of such a body, its presence, is neither visible nor legible as such, nor is it the object of any discourse, for it reproduces itself within those who *use* the space in question, within their lived experience.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Lefebvre, 135.

<sup>19</sup> Obviously, there is much to pursue here in relation to incarnation, but space does not allow.

<sup>20</sup> Lefebvre, 137. His italics. He is often very scathing about architecture and architects because they engage in abstraction and thus are defenders of ideology – and even their own ideology. See 396.

Not to get too ahead of ourselves, though, Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* is not the presentation of an architectural theory but is his attempt primarily to describe the sociological, political, and philosophical phenomena occurring in urbanization (and, presciently, before the internet, globalization). As Hackenbroch observes:

He then rooted his spatial theory in a production process: postulating that (social) space is a (social) product, and in particular, a togetherness of productive relationships occurring in history, he defined the task of social analysis as the study of production of space.<sup>21</sup>

So, as Lefebvre reminds his readers, he is ultimately more interested in a process rather than a place: “we are no longer concerned with either the representation of space or with a representational space, but rather with a practice.”<sup>22</sup> The paradox is that to understand the process we have to avoid any abstraction from actual history and assiduously remain with the bodily practice *in place* along with all the significations of place. The question arises, then, as to “how” such space is produced. Early in his book Lefebvre tells us:

[...] confronted by an indefinite multitude of spaces, each piled upon, or perhaps contained within, the next: geographical, economic, demographic, sociological, ecological, political, commercial, national, continental, global [...], the theory we need might be called a “unitary theory”: the aim is to discover or construct a theoretical unity between “fields” which are apprehended separately [...] The fields we are concerned with are, first, the *physical* – nature, the Cosmos; secondly, the, *mental*, including logical and formal abstractions; and thirdly, the *social*. In other words, we are concerned with logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias.<sup>23</sup>

Hackenbroch writes of this third, social space, that it

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<sup>21</sup> Hackenbroch, 29.

<sup>22</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

<sup>23</sup> Lefebvre, 8, 11, 12, (italics his).

is thus a “social practice” led by the imagination and utopias (hence desire) that includes and transposes mental conceptualisations as well physical phenomena on a more complex level, itself constitutionally contradictory and dynamic. As all three so-called fields are objects of three simultaneous and interrelated production processes (material production, knowledge production, production of significance), space is at the same time perceived, conceived and lived ...<sup>24</sup>

How it is that we might disentangle the layers and levels of production presents itself, then, as a formidable challenge, and Lefebvre wonders at one point about the possibility of the creation of grids for the development of an understanding. He tells us, however, that this is doomed because of the (almost) limitless number of possible grids, the concept of grid is “not above reproach,” and any conceptual framework is inevitably reductive in its aim to eliminate contradictions and create cohesiveness.<sup>25</sup>

Lefebvre resists the idea that a method could be developed to analyze space precisely because it would entail an abstraction that would inevitably eliminate the contradiction and ambiguity that is always present.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, in *The Production of Space*, he develops what he calls a “conceptual triad,” and he sets it out at two points early in the book as the book proceeds to develop them.<sup>27</sup> I would describe the three poles as follows:<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Hackenbroch, 30.

<sup>25</sup> Lefebvre, 67.

<sup>26</sup> Again Lefebvre writes: “The perceived-conceived-lived triad (in spatial terms: spatial practice, representations of space, representational spaces) loses all force if it is treated as an abstract ‘model’. If it cannot grasp the concrete (as distinct from the ‘immediate’)” 40.

<sup>27</sup> See Lefebvre, 33, 38, 39. The fact that there are iterations and differences points to the ongoing development (and complexity) of his thinking within the book.

<sup>28</sup> The translation of the three terms here is in itself somewhat contentious. For instance, Tim Rogers writes: “I have found it useful to retain the French names for the ‘spaces’ in what follows because these concepts do not seem to survive translation into our academic ethos very well.” Rogers, 29, n.19.

## 1. Perceived Space - Spatial Practice

This first aspect of space can be appreciated from empirical observation of the “everyday” way in which, through bodily practices, we occupy spaces and are produced and reproduced by the space. Lefebvre is concerned with both passive and active ways that the body is “in space.” In active terms, he speaks of “spatial practice.” “Modern spatial practice might thus be defined – to take an extreme but significant case – by the daily life of a tenant in a government-subsidized high-rise housing project.”<sup>29</sup> Lefebvre uses the words “competence” and “performance” in relation to what is required of occupants of a space, along with a concern for observing the routes and routines within spaces (a motorway is both a route and a space in its own right). Taken together, we might view these as the physical habits, and, in turn, think of both the way habits are the second nature responses – “perception” – of the body (that, say, just knows to turn left here or sit there) and spaces create/produce habits which produce individuals and society.

## 2. Representations of Space - Conceived Space

This is the dominant mode of the discourse on space in our society and it is the space of “scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers, and social engineers.”<sup>30</sup> As already indicated, this is abstract mental space and works

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<sup>29</sup> Lefebvre, 38.

<sup>30</sup> Lefebvre.

through a system of signs, principally verbal codes and representational forms. To speak of the ordered nature of conceived space carries Lefebvre's double meaning of the logical relations and the imposed or ideological imposition of the thought system. In a sense, however, whenever we pause to reflect and conceptualize our experience, we enter this second space. We appreciate this "signed" space through the likes of hermeneutics and semiotics. Aside from the detachment from our bodies, the problem with this mode is that it characteristically leads to a simultaneous fragmentation and homogenization of space, which ultimately suits a commodification of space – quintessentially thinking here of subdivision mapping that enables and leads to the sale of land.

### 3. Representational Space - Lived Space

This qualitative space is hardest to describe because any definition risks abstraction and it is always a "counter-space."<sup>31</sup> This is a localized and "lived" space and is an embodying of (re)appropriated (and therefore, complex) symbolism. It is an emancipatory/emancipated space that, through the imagination of inhabitants or the vision of the poet, an end is put to all that "shatter the integrity of the individual body, the social body, the corpus of human needs, the corpus of knowledge."<sup>32</sup> There is a here-and-now aspect to this space as it represents values, traditions, and dreams.

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<sup>31</sup> Lefebvre, 83.

<sup>32</sup> Lefebvre, 407.

Some examples might assist our understanding of the third space.<sup>33</sup> First, as noted above, Tim Rogers finds the third space a “special space that affords special kinds of dialogues.”<sup>34</sup> He has in view a ring of seats around a campfire that denotes no hierarchy or designated structure to a potential gathering. His view is that the third space is a “relational and dialogical field that is simultaneously spatial/temporal, natural/cultural, central/marginal and closed/open.”<sup>35</sup> Secondly, Lefebvre is interested in what can be described as the “space of re-creation” as the third space. He is, however, scathing about our obvious thought as we consider re-creation: “leisure activities/spaces.” This is because he sees these two as sites of production – think of the “leisure industry” and gymnasiums and all the associated apparel industry, as well as the way “time off” and “holidays” are proscribed and controlled as part of overall production.<sup>36</sup> The beach, though, is one place/space where Lefebvre holds desire has full play and is a place of festivity and dreams:<sup>37</sup>

The beach is the only place of enjoyment that the human species has discovered in nature. Thanks to its sensory organs, from the sense of smell and from sexuality to sight (without special emphasis being placed on the visual sphere), the body tends to behave as a *differential field*. It behaves, in other words, as a *total* body, breaking out of the temporal and spatial shell developed in response to labour, to the division of labour, to the localizing of work and the specialization of places.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> In using the term “third space,” I don’t mean to imply any kind of linear progression from the first to the third or that the third is any kind of completion.

<sup>34</sup> Rogers, 40.

<sup>35</sup> Rogers, 42.

<sup>36</sup> “As an extension of dominated space, leisure spaces are arranged at once functionally and hierarchically. They serve the reproduction of production relations. Space thus controlled and managed constrains in specific ways, imposing its own rituals and gestures (such as tanning), discursive forms (what should and should not be said), and even models and modulations in space (hotels, chalets – the emphasis being on private life, on the genital order of the family).” Lefebvre, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Lefebvre, 353.

A third and last example is my own, but it is derived from the fact that Lefebvre places some importance on pathways, and, as noted above, is interested in “routes and routines.” He writes: “Paths are more important than the traffic they bear ... such traces embody the ‘values’ assigned to particular routes: danger, safety, waiting, promise.”<sup>39</sup> Since he also suggests that a key example for the first space and spatial practice is to be found in “a government-subsidized high-rise housing project,” we might think of the pathways around such housing projects – they are part of the prescribed/proscribed spaces of production that direct occupants’ movements in particular ways. Then we might think of (what is not an uncommon sight in such housing projects) an informal foot track/path across a grassed common or from the project to an amenity of some sort. As well as routes of convenience, these mud-worn tracks represent sites of resistance and expressions of desire/imagination that explode the prescribed living.

With his interest largely elsewhere, Lefebvre considers completed buildings/architecture per se very little, and reflects on very few actual church buildings. In a positive light, he speaks specifically of *Basílica de la Sagrada Família* (Antoni Gaudi, still under construction), and, in a more general way, “the cloister.” It will be important to quote both passages at length, even as we can only consider them briefly. As indicated, both passages are positive in their evaluation and offer a good many clues about the nature of representational/third space if it were brought to some concrete realization in an actual

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<sup>38</sup> Lefebvre, 384, italics his.

<sup>39</sup> Lefebvre, 118.

building, and they even suggest that every sacred space might attempt to achieve the same madness and heresy.

First, of Sagrada Familia, he writes:

What is the fantasy of art? To lead out of what is present, out of what is close, out of the representations of space, into what is further off, into nature, into symbols, into representational spaces. Gaudi did for architecture what Lautreamont did for poetry: he put it through the bath of madness. He pushed the Baroque as far as it would go, but he did not do so on the basis of accepted doctrines or categorizations. As locus of a risible consecration, one which makes a mockery of the sacred, the Sagrada Familia causes modern space and the archaic space of nature to corrupt one another. The flouting of the established spatial codes in the eruption of a natural and cosmic fertility generate an extraordinary and dizzying ‘infinitization’ of meaning. [...] Sagrada Familia embodies a modernized heresy which disorders representations of space and transforms them into representational space where palms and fronds are the expressions of the divine. The outcome is a virtual eroticisation, one based on the enshrinement of a cruel, sexual-mystical pleasure which is the opposite, but also the reverse, of joy. What is obscene is modern ‘reality’, and here it is so designated by the staging – and Gaudi as stage manager.<sup>40</sup>

In the interests of checking my own reading of this complex and dense passage – as both a positive evaluation and also in line with Lefebvre’s first expression of representational space which is to be, in a sense, so transgressive and creative that there is an element of madness to the poetic liminality – I communicated directly with Bert Daelemans. He offered the following very helpful interpretation:

In my view, after having consulted the original French, Lefebvre speaks of Gaudí and his Sagrada Familia as an example of the best of art, i.e., to introduce into a third space, which is the space of the fantasy, symbols, of madness, of the extreme, of rupture, of eruption, of the cruel erotization and the dizzying infinitization of meaning, of disordering representations of space and transforming them into spaces of representation. He does so not according to the rules and codes of mental space, of the representations of space, of the prescribed codes of revealed religion as Christianity, but lets natural (archaic) space and modern space interact and “corrode” (not so much “corrupt”) each other so as to bring about something new, unforeseen, not belonging to State nor Church nor the

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<sup>40</sup> Lefebvre, 231–232.

individual nor even the “theological divinity” (Lefebvre does not believe in all that) but in something more natural and primordial (nature itself), identified with “divine transcendence” (before any of our human projections upon that transcendence). In this sense, what Gaudi does is a “risible consecration” (*sacralisation dérisoire*): not an actual event as you suggest but rather the whole process of “staging” and overturning the known – in this sense, a contemporary heresy which is good in Lefebvre’s eyes because it brings about the new.<sup>41</sup>

There is nothing that needs to be added to this comment. The point is to understand that the “third space” is characterized by this liminality – madness and cruel erotization – that runs against codes and concepts to the point of being heretical. This is tremendously challenging, and yet, we might reflect on Christ tried as a criminal.

The following is what Lefebvre says about cloisters:

Cloisters are a case in point. What has happened here is that, happily, a gestural space has succeeded in mooring a mental space – a space of contemplation and theological abstraction – to the earth, thus allowing it to express itself symbolically and become part of a practice, the practice of a well-defined society. Here, then, is space in which a life balanced between the contemplation of the self in its finiteness and that of a transcendent infinity may experience a happiness composed of quietude and a fully accepted lack of fulfilment. As a space for contemplatives, a place of promenade and assembly, the cloisters connect a finitude and determinate locality – socially particularized but not unduly restricted to use, albeit definitely controlled by an order or rule – to a theology of the infinite.<sup>42</sup>

Just one large rhetorical question arises after reading this passage: could it be that sacred spaces were such that they manage to hold the same tensions between discipline and freedom, immanent and transcendent, finitude and infinity, all within a bodily practice that at once symbolically expresses the life of a community (the kingdom of God)? The answer has to be: one would hope so.

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<sup>41</sup> Personal email correspondence, 10 September 2019.

<sup>42</sup> Lefebvre, 217.

In Lefebvre's work, we encounter an aspect of space that has not been so obviously considered to this point. Lefebvre establishes that "space" is much more than a geometric object, an empty container, or, for that matter, a container overflowing with signs and symbols. Spaces are also replete with relational dimensions, and, as Lefebvre would tell us, social relations have no existence except in space – "Social relations, which are concrete abstractions, have no real existence save in and through space. *Their underpinning is spatial.*"<sup>43</sup> They are what is called "social space." These are the kinds of spaces we are interested in, and they are not just geometric objects, however complex. Rather, a "social space" is a kind of stage for the production for the living out of relational meaning, and we are interested how that production of meaning is occurring. Lefebvre writes: "(Social) space is a (social) product ... the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action ... in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power."<sup>44</sup> For the liturgical theologian who is interested in sacred space, the implications here are obvious. Lefebvre's insight breaks open the vital interaction that re-produces both a liturgical people and liturgical spaces. It is often said of the sacrament of the Eucharist that "We are what we eat." Lefebvre tells us that "We are where we meet."

According to Lefebvre, social spaces can be understood by attending to three discernable dimensions that he denotes as perceived space, conceived space, and lived space.

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<sup>43</sup> Lefebvre, 404 (*italics his*).

<sup>44</sup> Lefebvre, 26.

Perceived space is much more than that which is perceived through vision; it is of all the senses. It is what Lefebvre refers to as the “practiced space” of the whole body.

Conceived space is abstract space. It is created in the symbolic appeal to the mind. We come to appreciate this aspect of space in the hermeneutical task, and this mode often dominates the discourse, unfortunately ignoring the other aspects of the triad of space.

Lived space, as the name suggests, is the space that is actually “appropriated” in and by the living of the inhabitants. It has a utopian dimension because the lived space includes the space that works in imaginary and creative ways such that the space can even be transformed beyond the design intentions through the actual living out and use.

Daelemans has the following example, which gives some sense of the ways in which the dimensions are actually connected and intertwined with one another:

For instance, people bodily “practice” the *perceived space* of Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. (1917) for its *conceived space* of freedom, union, and hope, as if enshrined in a Greek Temple. On August 28, 1963, this *perceived-conceived* construct became the scene for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to create in the imagination of hundreds of thousands the *lived space* of his dream.<sup>45</sup>

We could extend the thought around the example by considering the manner in which the crowd that assembled that famous day in 1963 appropriated the space and in important sense began living out the dream (it wasn’t just a dream that Martin Luther King Jr. had) simply by gathering in the way and numbers that they did.

Daelemans develops his own theological analysis such that perceived space becomes synaesthetic, conceived becomes kerygmatic, and lived becomes Eucharistic.<sup>46</sup> He holds

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<sup>45</sup> Daelemans, 66–67 (italics his).

<sup>46</sup> Daelemans, 69–70. The fact that he sees his triad connecting to the classical Vitruvian three principles of architecture: *firmitas*, *utilitas*, *venustas* – conventionally translated as structural integrity, utility, and beauty

that each dimension unfolds as a diptych, although, as I will argue, I think this aspect confuses things somewhat, not least in the added complexity. Daelemans adds another three complementary principles to his method – “approaching,” “entering,” and “appropriating.” While these add further richness to the overall picture and the verbs underscore the dynamic event that engaging with a space involves, they imply a purposive three-step process that is a departure from Lefebvre, and these extra elements detract somewhat from the clarity of the predominant use of synaesthetic, kerygmatic, and Eucharistic. Daelemans also sometimes uses the threefold terms “atmosphere, signpost, stage.”<sup>47</sup> Conceptually, this interpretive triad is helpful in its own way too because we can easily think of “feeling the atmosphere” of a space; a space can also signal various concepts or have various symbolic resonances; lastly, a space is a kind of stage for the acting out of life and even our “hoped for” (imaginary) life. He concludes theologically with the following: “I have explored the three spatial metaphors for the Spirit, as *expansion* of Christ the Light for a human body, as *expression* of Christ the Logos for human understanding, and the *expectation* of Christ the Savior for a human community.”<sup>48</sup> As we consider each element of his analysis, we do well to not forget the connection and complementarity of each dimension and the theological description he is reaching for.

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– appeals to him, although Lefebvre is suspicious of Vitruvius providing a semiotic code. See Lefebvre, 273.

<sup>47</sup> Overall clarity is not helped when Daelemans makes use of Jean-Luc Marion’s work in explicating what he means by “synaesthetic” as an event awaiting our indwelling, and the term used by Marion is “stage.” It would have been useful to explicate the differing meanings or have avoided using Marion’s term in association with the first space.

<sup>48</sup> Daelemans, 315.

Synaesthetic space – like Lefebvre’s perceived space – involves all the senses: “Gr *syn* (together) + *aesthesis* (sensation). ... I coined this term in order to indicate the multi-sensory atmosphere of a certain building. ... Synaesthesia is the neurological phenomenon in which one sensory experience is automatically linked to another.”<sup>49</sup>

Daelemans suggests the diptych of “space and light” as disclosive of this element:

“Architecture is first of all a matter of space and light.”<sup>50</sup> The first of these two elements, light, unfortunately risks the reinstatement of the hegemony of the visual which both Lefebvre and Daelemans are so keen to leave behind. Daelemans does, however, draw on Juhani Pallasmaa to tell us:

... architecture is synaesthetic because “qualities of space, matter and scale are measured equally by the eye, ear, nose, skin, tongue, skeleton and muscle. Architecture strengthens the existential experience, one’s sense of being in the world, and this is essentially a strengthened experience of self.”<sup>51</sup>

A neologism that Daelemans takes up from Lefebvre is “architexture.”<sup>52</sup> This is helpful because it brings to the fore at least the sense of touch. Another of our senses that many find deeply evocative is the sense of smell, and actually, in a footnote discussion, Daelemans considers a description by Alphonso Lingis of being in fresh bedsheets and then the idea of sleeping in somebody else’s bedsheets.<sup>53</sup> The idea of the latter evokes in

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<sup>49</sup> Daelemans, 329.

<sup>50</sup> Daelemans, 184.

<sup>51</sup> Daelemans, 183.

<sup>52</sup> Daelemans, 61–67.

<sup>53</sup> Daelemans, 186 n.64.

many a visceral response as somehow “not right,” “indecent and even repulsive.”<sup>54</sup> This visceral and involuntary response puts us in mind of erect nipples again. Textures, smells, tastes, and sounds: if we hold these less dominant senses to the fore, then it is easier to appreciate what is meant by the synaesthetic affect of space, because we do well to think of a space and how it is a complete sensory experience and can even seduce or repulse in a way that comes to us quite viscerally and before we “language” or interpret the experience in any way. So, I use the word “affect” here intentionally because the synaesthetic dimension is about the bodily impact that we sense in/on/through our body. This is prior to any “effect” or any interpretation that we place on the experience. As Daelemans points out: “The body is attentive to what is expressed, not what is represented. The expressed world is found within the sensuous, whereas the represented world separates us from the sensuous.”<sup>55</sup>

It is enormously difficult to offer any description of the materiality of the sensuous experience without falling immediately into some interpretation, which, at its worst, is some conceived abstraction. So, as helpful and right as it is that Daelemans grounds his discussion in the experience of actual buildings, it makes it all too easy for him to make (what I believe) is this mistake. For instance, when considering the Chapel of Reconciliation in Berlin he writes:

The lightness in response to the heaviness is one of the reasons for its success. Its bright emptiness is defined by the grainy clay of the embracing wall. [*embracing?* who says?] The skylight lifts the gaze to the heavens. The embracing gesture of

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<sup>54</sup> The reverse can be true of sheets or clothing of a loved one when the smell can be evocative in a positive way.

<sup>55</sup> Daelemans, 196.

the curved shell evokes archetypes of womb, nest, and hearth [these archetypes are interpretive terms].<sup>56</sup>

Lefebvre would have us be always alert to the risk of abstraction or codification of any sort.<sup>57</sup> In fairness to Daelemans, though, while I think he is too inclined to move to interpret the “texture,” the textures of a space are there to evoke a response. I will explore this a little more below when I consider Daelemans’s kerygmatic space, but there is something in the distinction of the two kinds of knowledge that Lefebvre identifies that might assist with how to approach the interpretive move without removing ambiguity or implying resolved codification.

The greater concern with Daelemans’s development of synaesthetic space is that he allows the active bodily engagement, the spatial practice aspect to fall away in favor of a passive multisensory reception. In concert with Lefebvre, he initially locates perceived space as “active” space: “Hence, *perceived space* comes to the fore not through a distant vision of the physical limits but through actively practicing the place with an assured prereflective spatial competence, even though reflective coherence might be lacking.”<sup>58</sup> Daelemans actually draws a link with Michael de Certeaux’s notion of “practiced place” – space is practiced or “made” by the life lived and the relationships lived within it.<sup>59</sup> But this important spatial practice element is lost, and this is particularly noticeable when we get to his “Practical Guide to Twenty Contemporary Churches,” where there is little or no

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<sup>56</sup> Daelemans, 169.

<sup>57</sup> “New attempts were forever being made to reduce the external to the internal, or the social to the mental, by means of one ingenuous typology or another. Net result? Complete failure! Abstract spatiality and practical spatiality contemplated one another for afar, in the thrall to the visual realm.” Lefebvre, 407.

<sup>58</sup> Daelemans, 62.

<sup>59</sup> Daelemans, 61.

mention of the spatial practice at all.<sup>60</sup> As complex and even as contradictory as he is, Lefebvre would have us retain the way in which “perceived spaces” actively “practice” upon us and we upon them. When it comes to the consideration of sacred space, there will be some edges in which the liturgy has to be considered part of that spatial practice and “production.” One senses, however, that Daelemans is too keen to leave the practice of liturgy to the third Eucharistic space, as well as wash away the Marxist critique that presses against any implications for sacred spaces (including the liturgical life expressed there) and production at this point. Lefebvre reminds us: “But spatial practice – the practice of a repressive and oppressive space – tends to confine time to productive labour time, and simultaneously to diminish living rhythms by defining them in terms of the rationalized and localized gestures of divided labour.”<sup>61</sup>

It seems almost superfluous to mention it, but a standout example here is the way the physical structures and the layout of church buildings were/are intrinsically linked to a prescribed/proscribed spatial practice, which was usually grounded and reinforced in the liturgy, that enabled (amongst other things) a non-reflective acceptance of clericalism and the accompanying power structures/hierarchy in the church. It is, of course, no doubt easier for us to observe the spatial practices of a previous age and even see the way in which they are connected to a particular ideology/theological understanding. It stands to reason, however, that we are just as prone to the same kinds of failure that result in

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<sup>60</sup> Daelemans, 341-356. I accept that there is condensing of thought in this “Guide” but I believe the point still stands.

<sup>61</sup> Lefebvre, 408.

domination for the sake of our own desire for power or our limited theological understanding – however blind we may be to those failings.<sup>62</sup>

In defence of Daelemans, in part, I think the dropping away of the active element in his synaesthetic space is due to another of his methodological commitments – “my inductive method (seeing, judging, acting)”<sup>63</sup> – which places the action (and liturgy) solely in the third space. There is, of course, no requirement for him to be faithful to Lefebvre on any matter, and the simplification that goes with this methodological commitment gives a kind of clarity. I think, however, it is a mistake to lose either the active element of “spatial practice” within synaesthetic space, or, likewise, to forget a critical stance in relation to the structure and experience of “production” in synaesthetic space.

There is a further shortcoming in the chapter under consideration. At the outset of the chapter, Daelemans writes: “Phenomenology seems to be the adequate discipline to give account of the synaesthetic immediacy of non-verbal communication.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, throughout the chapter, he calls on the work of several phenomenologists. Under the subtitle “Event,” he briefly considers the concept of saturated phenomenon that is developed by arguably today’s most significant phenomenologist, Jean Luc Marion.

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<sup>62</sup> I don’t mean to imply here that ecclesial spatial practices (particularly the liturgy that produces space – and are produced in space) are always negative and somehow in the service of oppressive cultural alienation. As is indicated earlier in the discussion of the sacred, Victor Turner makes us aware that one of the functions of sacred ritual (surely, a spatial practice) is to separate the individual (faith community) from the surrounding culture, and the liturgy achieves this too.

<sup>63</sup> Daelemans, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Daelemans, 188–189. The adjective “adequate” seems odd, given it shapes a whole section of his proposal.

Event is but one aspect of saturated phenomenon and I believe the concept demands our fuller attention. I will, however, defer attending to the concept here and will consider this aspect of Marion's work below; to do justice to the concept at this point it would draw us too far away from consideration of Daelemans's work. Herein, of course, lies a problem that it is possible that Daelemans's threefold framework may not have "held" if saturated phenomenon were treated fully.

Daelemans is surely right, however, in the manner that he lifts up the (oft-neglected) whole body/multisensory response and interaction that we have with the "textures" of sacred spaces. Taken together, and because not all of our bodily response is immediately conscious to us, this adds up to a sense of created atmosphere. This might make it sound too ethereal but it is quite the reverse. As he says,

An important conclusion is that Synaesthetic space reveals our embodied self. The more we become aware of Synaesthetic space, the more we become aware of ourselves as embodied beings. ... Synaesthetic space makes us aware of the *Spiritus Loci* by its intimate influence on the body, not only bringing the body closer to the world, in particular to its materiality, but moreover to the experience of oneself as embodied creature.<sup>65</sup>

Daelemans is also surely correct in this claim that this is theologically relevant, and it obviously connects us to the doctrines of creation and incarnation. While the above quotation suggests that synaesthetic space makes us only aware of our embodied-ness as individuals, he surely also means that the synaesthetic makes the assembly gathered aware of their embodied, incarnate presence and their ecclesial identity too. If we were to speak sacramentally, then the synaesthetic response to the "architexture," at its best, can give the whole community a sense of themselves as the embodied Body of Christ, the

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<sup>65</sup> Daelemans, 200.

first sacrament (ecclesial), and, at the same time, a unity with the Body of Christ, the primordial sacrament (Christological). The fullness of the multisensory body, individual and corporate, is not (and cannot be) left to one side then, but through the materiality of sacred spaces the Divine is revealed and made present to us.

Daeleman's articulation of synaesthetic space is enormously powerful and useful. His observations of the textural features in actual buildings serve as superb models in so many ways. The complex feature that we somehow have to recover from Lefebvre's work is the active "spatial practice" that makes up an important element of our bodily perception, while also noting that synaesthetic space is not always as benign as Daelemans's analysis would suggest, but is always subject to human failings and thus open to (a Marxist-inspired) critique. Nonetheless, a development and consciousness of synaesthetic space suggests a vital dimension in which we can say we perceive some edge of the glory of God.

### **Kerygmatic Space**

Daelemans models his kerygmatic space on Lefebvre's conceived space which "gathers the mental representations of space evoked by the place." He identifies three types of spatial representation that together make for the kerygmatic dimension: shape – "the overall shape of the building is kerygmatic in evoking natural, biblical, or anthropological archetypes;"<sup>66</sup> iconography – "cross, crucifix, painting, fresco, tapestry, statue, way of the cross, etc.;"<sup>67</sup> and sacred emptiness – "an apophatic symbol of transcendence."<sup>68</sup> It is

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<sup>66</sup> Daelemans, 205.

<sup>67</sup> Daelemans, 205.

always trivially true that in the sacred buildings of Christianity something of the good news/gospel/kerygma is conveyed through the use of signs, symbols, and icons. There is a straightforward didactic task that is pursued (and in some degree achieved) for the church through chosen images, and this has to be an important and good end that is aimed at through this means. There are a couple of convolutions that Daelemans smooths away from Lefebvre's work that we ought to be alert to, though. As already indicated above, the first is that this "second space," "abstract space," is always problematic in Lefebvre's eyes. In one alternative rendition of his triad it is expressed as "practice, politics, poetry." Conceived space always has this ideological and political dimension that Lefebvre, because of his Marxist/socialist sympathies, holds a continual suspicion about.<sup>69</sup> If we really need Lefebvre to remind us of the fact that signs and symbols can (and sometimes do) serve ideology, or, as we would have it, a false religiosity and even idolatry, then that is what he does for us. It cannot be, however, that institutional or political abstraction is intrinsically and necessarily bad, and, if pressed, Lefebvre would agree.<sup>70</sup>

A related second convolution is that some symbols, images, or icons present a determinate and "closed" meaning. In part, Lefebvre takes a negative stance with regard to abstraction because of this fact. But is this unduly negative in a Christian context? We might accept that some signs or symbols are one-dimensional, and, in a sense, "closed" in

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<sup>68</sup> Daelemans, 205.

<sup>69</sup> "Herein lies the secret of the Logos as foundation of all power and all authority; hence too the growth in Europe of knowledge and technology, industry and imperialism." Lefebvre, 135.

<sup>70</sup> At one point, he suggests that space can be constructed in line with a socialist ideology and that could be a good thing: "Change life! Change society! These ideas lose completely their meaning without producing an appropriate space. A lesson to be learned from Soviet constructivists from the 1920s and 30s, and of their failure, is that new social relations demand a new space, and vice-versa." Lefebvre, 59.

their intended meaning.<sup>71</sup> Some symbols and icons are not closed but have a character that evokes a “more” beyond. Indeed, that is a feature of any true icon – they are written such that they lead the viewer beyond the finite to the infinite and invite the possibility of seeing earth joined to heaven. Equally, we might draw a distinction between language (an abstraction) that is prose versus that which is poetry. For Lefebvre, the poetic belongs to the third space and thus, in terms of faithfulness to Lefebvre, I think Daelemans is diverging, again perhaps for the sake of simplicity because it makes his methodology more straightforward if all signs, symbols, and images are bundled together. Lefebvre’s nuancing of the way signs and symbols work – in an “open” or a “closed way” – is a useful distinction, though, as we consider the shapes and iconography of sacred space. For instance, it relates to the discussion above on kitsch, as I think a distinction between good art and kitsch is that kitsch is sometimes plain idolatrous (a white blue-eyed Jesus) and often has a one-dimensional (often sentimental) character, whereas, in concert with Lefebvre, I would hold that good art explodes the imagination to something “other.”

At this juncture, it is important to make further mention of the work of Jean-Luc Marion. His work on the idol and icons is very apposite here.<sup>72</sup> The distinction and difference he draws out is a theme that runs through Marion’s work and extends through to how he thinks about big topics such as phenomenology, revelation, gift, and Eucharist. We will

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<sup>71</sup> There is no space to pursue here the manner in which “one-dimensional signs” might be deconstructed to show that even with these, there are layers of ambiguity and contradiction.

<sup>72</sup> I do so partly because he is one of the phenomenologists that Daelemans draws on – particularly in relation to synaesthetic space. Marion has also carried his thinking forward into considering the Eucharist and therefore in sacramental theology; so, I will engage with him again in the section on sacraments.

have to return to some of this material below when we consider sacrament. Presently, it is the way in which he delineates between idol and icon that resonates most strongly with Lefebvre's concerns about the closed nature – Marion uses the word “univocal” – of the abstract thinking and signs and symbols of those abstractions that makes them ultimately serve ideology – or idolatry. Marion is not quite as dismissive of the idol as Lefebvre but sees a place for the kerygmatic sign/logos. The problem is that the idol can cause the gaze to be “mortally immobile as coagulated blood.”<sup>73</sup> Indeed, that fixation is what makes the idol/idle:

The idol consigns the divine to the measure of the human gaze. Invisible mirror, mark of the *invisible*, it must be apprehended following its function and evaluated according to the scope of that function. Only then does it become legitimate to ask what the material figure given to the idol by human art represents, what it resembles. ... Thus the spectator, provided that his attitude become religious, will find in the materially fixed idol the brilliance of the first visible whose splendor freezes the gaze. That his attitude should become religious means that, to the brilliance fixed by the material idol, the scope of his gaze exactly corresponds, and hence his gaze, with that brilliance, will receive the first splendor that might stop, fill, and freeze it.<sup>74</sup>

The icon functions differently:

The icon does not result from a vision but provokes one. ... Whereas the idol results from the gaze that it aims at, the icon summons sight in letting the visible be saturated little by little by the invisible.<sup>75</sup>

The icon summons the gaze to surpass itself by never freezing on a visible, since the visible only presents itself here in the view of the invisible. The gaze can never rest or settle if it looks at an icon; it must rebound upon the visible, in order to go back in it up the infinite stream of the invisible. In this sense, the icon makes visible only by giving rise to an infinite gaze.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being*, ed. Thomas A. Carlson (trans.) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 13.

<sup>74</sup> Marion, 14.

<sup>75</sup> Marion, 17.

<sup>76</sup> Marion, 18.

This is immediately helpful when we consider Daelemans's kerygmatic space.

Daelemans thinks that the kerygmatic space can make use of, say, a shape that evokes an archetype – say, a ship (nave). It is the case, of course, that archetypal images are often used in Christianity, and, in an important sense, they are abstractions or part of Lefebvre's conceived space. But archetypes, while they can appear as determinate, they can, and often do, carry with them so many layers of association that they open up the imagination to verge on the poetic. I would be tempted to place evocations through archetypes within the third space. The archetype, a shape, a sign, or a symbol can function as an idol to fix and coagulate the gaze, and it can serve as an icon to summons the invisible and infinite. Marion tells us: "The icon and idol determine two manners of being for beings, not two classes of beings."<sup>77</sup>

So, Marion assists Daelemans to resist Lefebvre's negative evaluation of the inevitable abstraction of conceived space and shifts the issue to the nature of the gaze. Actually, Marion acknowledges that he draws on Dionysian theology as providing a distinction for three ways to God. The first, in parallel with the kerygmatic, is the kataphatic or affirmative way. We use terms and signs and symbols that, often drawing on scripture, affirm something, some attribute or quality, of the Divine. So, we say that God is good, full of wisdom and power, or, to return to Daelemans's notion, that, through its shape and textures, a building symbolically embraces us in a manner that opens us to experience the embrace and compassion of the infinite. These kerygmatic features can be wonderful and vital. We know, however, that these terms and symbols do not and cannot describe God

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<sup>77</sup> Marion, 8.

fully; they can be deceptive and false in their shortcomings. The endless risk is that we can be dazzled to fixed gaze and they can become idols for us. We might, therefore, when it comes to the design and furnishing of our sacred spaces, concern ourselves with the way that items, shapes, words, and symbols, might more evocatively summon as an icon summons, or, conversely, be prone to coagulate and fix our gaze on an idol.

### **Excursus: David Brown on Icons**

Partly because I will turn to the important work of David Brown again below, but mostly because his discussion of Eastern Orthodox iconography and the realism of Renaissance and later Western tradition of art is so apposite to our discussion, I need interpolate some of those thoughts at this point.

Brown is keen to say that he is in no way seeking to “ridicule” Orthodoxy, but, rather to highlight some faults in the tradition of iconography. His central concern is that the icon can become solely a “window to heaven” and an image of an “other and transcendent world.”<sup>78</sup> The distinctive stylized figures and perspectives of iconography are unrealistic precisely because they are meant to show us another world that breaks through and transfigures, alters, and redeems this world.

For it looks as though the whole movement of the icon is seen as decisively in one direction, not towards the world but rather drawing us out of that world into another. This is not to deny the sacramental character, but it is to observe that its mediation of the divine is very much of a participatory pull elsewhere rather than an endorsement of what is already before one’s eyes ...<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> David Brown, *The Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>79</sup> David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 43.

His criticism and concern extend; I quote at length:<sup>80</sup>

One way in which one might justify such attitudes would be to stress the fallenness of our world, that in the presence of sin divine glory cannot be seen except transmogrified under the impact of divine grace. The role of icons, it might then be said, is not to encourage flight from this world but to transfigure that world so that it becomes diaphanous to the glory of God. Certainly that is an element in Orthodox thinking, but as an approach it has, I think, two disadvantages. In the first place, such meaning comes not from the painting itself but externally through church teaching. So one cannot claim that this is what the icon “means,” or how it is in itself experienced. Second, in common with some branches of Christianity (such as Calvinism) that stress a fallen world, such an emphasis seems to separate creation and revelation, as if creation were not already a sphere of divine grace simply in virtue of God being its source. ... The stress on transcendence can sometimes be so great as to make the divine world seem totally set apart from this world rather than integrating with it and so transforming it.<sup>81</sup>

Again, Brown is keen to underscore the value of the tradition of Orthodox iconography as “they draw us into the heavenly reality, while the essential otherness of God in their strict rules about representations of the divine.”<sup>82</sup>

[The] immanence of God, however, must also be claimed: God involved with matter. Christians believe that this happened at the most profound level in the incarnation, but if there is to be a continuing effect this cannot have happened just once, but must relate to all material existence. It is this thought that the Renaissance takes up and defends in its art.<sup>83</sup>

So, taking a well-known example, *The Calling of St. Matthew* by Caravaggio (1599), showing as it does, Christ in (at the time) a recognizably domestic scene and with some of the figures, such as Matthew himself, in anachronistically contemporary dress, makes the whole scene fill with a sense of immanence in a new way; the sense of call in the

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<sup>80</sup> “At length” because of the significance in Brown’s overall project and partly because it will have bearing on further consideration of Marion’s work later.

<sup>81</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 43–44.

<sup>82</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 81.

<sup>83</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 81–82.

present is brought to a new and “realistic” way. However one feels about the (surreal) transgressive features of *The Virgin Spanking the Christ Child before Three Witnesses: Andre Breton, Paul Eluard, and the Painter* by Max Ernst (1926), the picture extends the conventions of realism (compare with the Caravaggio, the angled divine light not catching Mary’s face and the use of the faces of Ernst’s contemporaries as “witnesses” continues a theme of patrons (or enemies) being in Renaissance religious scenes, and confronts us with the humanity of the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child (perhaps after a first attempt at slipping away on his own at the temple?). The painting presents, in a most confronting way, an edge of the reality of being incarnate in this world – even with halo slipped/knocked off. A further example, and one that directly links us to Daelemans’s work, is that of the tapestries in *The Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels*, Los Angeles (Rafael Moneo, 2002). As Daelemans observes, in their “individuality,” “liveliness,” and “contemporariness,” the tapestries “mirror” the worshipping assembly in their own lives.<sup>84</sup>

Brown acknowledges that he offers something of a caricature that “cannot be left quite so stark,” as though Renaissance art were all about immanence and icons are all about transcendence.<sup>85</sup> But his larger point is well made, even as he rightly acknowledges art and imagery of both types within our churches. This, as he says, is not simply about placing them one beside another in a way that can easily cause aesthetically and religiously confused messages. He offers a helpful one-sentence development from the

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<sup>84</sup> Daelemans, 226.

<sup>85</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 82.

late Middle Ages in the West: “Greater naturalism in painting and sculpture went hand in hand with pointed arches and soaring spires, immanence and transcendence affirmed at the one and same time.”<sup>86</sup>

### **The Third Aspect of Kerygmatic Space**

We have not yet exhausted what Daelemans believes are the necessary components of kerygmatic space; there is the third aspect: sacred emptiness that serves as the intentional “apophatic symbol of transcendence.”<sup>87</sup> According to him, sacred emptiness has itself three elements:

1. Breathing space – this is the emptiness that particularly addresses the body and literally creates at least a psychological breathing space, offsetting and feelings of being confined or constrained. “A spaciousness that is at the heart.”<sup>88</sup> It is sad to say that the need for this aspect is often rather obvious and present in its opposite – cluttered and overfull worship spaces.
2. Orientation – the emptiness needs to offer a direction, perhaps a window that frames or is “focusing without naming a goal.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 83.

<sup>87</sup> Daelemans, 205.

<sup>88</sup> Daelemans, 208.

<sup>89</sup> Daelemans, 208.

3. Inaccessibility – created inaccessibility such as a space that stands vacant and, in some measure, “set apart” or a “vacant throne” thereby creates a healthy tension and a space for the divine majesty.

Practically, Daelemans associates these elements particularly with minimalism (recall, his focus is contemporary spaces), and when experience is “performed” in the right way, it is an aspect that begins to “sing.” He also recognizes that in some minimalist purism there is a “danger of becoming what Lefebvre abhorred as mental space or abstract space – empty containers, but no space that introduces us to mystery.”<sup>90</sup>

There is no doubt that to achieve a sense of emptiness is both very desirable, and, at the same moment, very difficult. On practical, political, and theological levels, say, a vacant throne will “read” as an ambiguous and even unhelpful symbol in this day. Likewise, also on a contemporary practical level, “inaccessible spaces” inside buildings can speak most loudly of inaccessibility, disability, and lack of freedom to someone who is wheelchair bound. Further, an empty throne or a “central emptiness” is not truly inaccessible except by conventions. Emptiness is a complex, if necessary, symbolic element in sacred spaces. Conceptually it is difficult and endlessly compromised too. It strikes at the heart of making the mystery visible or tangible in any way. Daelemans is correct, though, in the likes of *The Church of the Light* by Tadao Ando (1989), where one successfully glimpses, or, shall we say, is profoundly drawn to the transcendence of the light inaccessible of the unknown God.

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<sup>90</sup> Daelemans, 211.

It would be remiss to get to this point and not return to Denys the Areopagite's discussion of the kataphatic and apophatic ways to God, and, in turn, Marion's insightful reading of the saint's writing. Denys, having refined and then extolled the benefits of the affirmative, kataphatic way to God, recognizes that no term or name for the divine can describe or capture God and thus always courts failure and even falsehood. Speech gives way to silence and emptiness – God's silence – and the praxis of the apophatic way.

[...] Divinest Knowledge of God, the which is received through Unknowing, is obtained in that communion which transcends the mind, when the mind, turning away from all things and leaving even itself behind, is united to Dazzling Rays, being from them and in them, illumined by the unsearchable depth of Wisdom.<sup>91</sup>

And in this too we shall be in agreement with the sacred writers; nevertheless the actual truth must still be far beyond us. Hence we have given our preference to the Negative method, because it lifts the soul above things cognate with its finite nature ...<sup>92</sup>

This presents an immediate and pressing problem for the incarnated and immanent sacraments, and, in particular, the very notion that we might construct some edifice and dare to call it a sacred space. In the first instance, however, we need to note another point regarding Denys that he makes along the way:

Negation maintains, to be sure, a relation between God and our language, but employing it only as an inversion and for the inversion it avoids at least the obvious idolatry. In this sense, "with regard to the divine, negations are true, whereas affirmations are deformed". ... Negation, if it remains categorical, remains idolatrous.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology*, ed. C. E. Rolt (trans.), sixth ed. (London: SPCK, 1920), 152 (DN VII, 3).

<sup>92</sup> Areopagite, 188–189 (DN XIII, 3).

<sup>93</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, ed. Thomas A. Carlson (trans.) (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 147.

Both the affirmation and the negation predicate something (or deny predication) of God, and thus there needs to be a third way which allows reference and relation to God who is beyond naming. Marion notes that Denys offers precisely this by pointing out the way of adoration and praise in the last chapter of his *Mystical Theology*.<sup>94</sup> This way will be explored further when we turn to the next section on sacrament. We note immediately, however, that praise and adoration shift the interaction with God from something descriptive to something performative and one that properly maintains distance (a central theme for Marion in *The Idol and Distance*).

### **Eucharistic Space**

The last aspect to be considered from Daelemans's "theological transposition" of Lefebvre is what he calls "Eucharistic Space." Derived from Lefebvre's "lived space," it likewise concerns itself with how a space is appropriated through continued and sustained use by the community in its liturgy and worship. It is spatial aspect that emerges through the complex dialogue of interaction that occurs between a building and the community. Thus, the spatial configurations – where "con-figuration" holds the way a community and a building shape life together – of objects and persons, embodied and lived out, are observed in appropriation.

The term "Eucharistic" carries a number of resonances and is much more than a particular denominational worship service. Daelemans wants to lay hold of the

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<sup>94</sup> Areopagite, 200–201.

definiteness of an actual incarnated expression of worship but he also wants us to see a broader meaning within the term. Etymologically Eucharist is often rendered as from *eu* (good) + *charis* (grace). In this “third” space, “good grace” is welcomed and celebrated. So, it is an eschatological space where the “already present” and the “not yet” of the Kingdom are embodied through the diptych of “dance” and “garden”. “Dance” stands (dances!) for the lens from which we can see the joyous feasting gathered around the altar which overflows even as it awaits. Garden expresses the “new heaven and a new earth” (2 Peter 3:13, also Revelation 21) that is palpable in the life expressed now and is yet postponed. When present, both these elements also turn the assembly to the ethical/sanctified life – out of abundance and plenty, what is justice and mercy? Out of lack and expectation, what do we yearn for?

One of the strengths of *Spiritus Loci* is that Daelemans grounds and embodies his reflection and method in actual examples (often beautifully illustrated with photographs). Eucharist space, “communitarian appropriation,” is difficult to illustrate, and that is evidenced in, for instance, his consideration of the church of *St François de Molitor, Paris* (Corrine Callies, Jean Marie Duthilluel, 2005).<sup>95</sup> A considerable number of words amount to his reflections on synaesthetic and kerygmatic features of space.<sup>96</sup> Nearing the very end of his reflection, he writes:

Now we arrive at the point where we can truly speak of communitarian *appropriation*, that is, where in the dialogue between community and architecture, a particular inculturation of the universal liturgy is born. During the penitential

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<sup>95</sup> Daelemans, 266 ff.

<sup>96</sup> This reflection is continued in relation to his discussion of the “shape” of the “open ring” versus the traditional *ad orientum* orientation. Daelemans, 266 ff.

rite, the whole assembly, people and presider, turn together towards the liturgical East of the garden, literally *versus crucem* and *versus lucem*, ...[and one] may add *versus hortum* and *versus paradism*. The assembly is standing, in embodied symbolism of the eschatological hope in the Resurrection. As such, a simple turn of the body [individual and corporate] is the physical expression of the Spirit of the Risen Lord who prays: *Abba* , Father (Rm 8:15).<sup>97</sup>

Anyone who can imagine this moment (or similar) will recognise this Eucharistic space precisely within the “appropriation.” It is something of a shame that so few such moments are set forth. It is, however, fair to say that such moments are difficult to describe and even locate (in the extended meaning of “locate”). I suspect that the reason for this fact goes back to Lefebvre’s description of “lived space” that holds within it the poetic and even the clandestine. That is, these moments of cultural appropriation, when in a deep sense heaven and earth are joined, appear as poetic moments and even as secret life revealed (dis-closed). To attempt to describe exactly what and how this is occurring in a text as relatively simple as, say, a poem (as opposed to within archi-texture) is difficult enough. Yet to show what and how such moments occur in a good poem, even an inspired (*spiritus* - spirit-filled) poem requires a great deal of description of attendant details in order that one can lay bare what it is that “makes the heart sing.”<sup>98</sup> Since we are talking about reflecting the experience of the divine life in our lives in Eucharistic space, might we call it “loved space”? Somehow “caught” by our discourse, William James’s famous quote about introspection seems entirely apposite: “The attempt at introspective analysis... is in fact like seizing a spinning top to catch its motion, or trying to turn up the gas quickly enough to see the darkness” (*The Principles of Psychology*, 1870).

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<sup>97</sup> Daelemans, 274 (italics his).

<sup>98</sup> Again, because we are attending to something as complex as a space, the kind of holy inscribing that occurs can easily exceed that experienced in a poem.

*Spiritus Loci* could not be commended enough as a book to be read carefully by anyone who wants to take seriously the nuances of the archi-texture of sacred spaces. Daelemans uses the word “methodology” in his subtitle to the book and thus it can and does serve as a well justified methodology for the theological/liturgical interpretation of incredibly complex structures.<sup>99</sup> The book could even serve in the process of the designing of a church. It reaches to take the movement and life produced within and by spaces with the utmost respect and seriousness. His stated intention of “the whole book is to lay bare the interconnection between the three dimensions of space”<sup>100</sup> – synaesthetic, kerygmatic, and Eucharistic – and this is achieved to a very high level indeed. It is more, however, than a “method.” It is sustained theological reflection on the church incarnate which he grounds in Maximus the Confessor (and, of course, in his quick enunciation of Trinitarian theology). It is Maximus that is amongst the first to connect the images of the human body, the liturgy offered, and the very shape of the church building.<sup>101</sup> This rich embodied sense of sacred spaces Daelemans carries forward to contemporary buildings. He successfully shows that the more we can be aware of all the dimensions of space, the more we can be aware of ourselves as embodied beings, the body of Christ.

I have raised some concerns regarding the way Daelemans “smooths” some of the complexity from Lefebvre’s triad. One of the benefits of Lefebvre’s (considerable)

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<sup>99</sup> The idea of a “methodology” would have made Lefebvre shudder.

<sup>100</sup> Daelemans, 206.

<sup>101</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings*, ed. George C. Berthold (trans.) (London: S.P.C.K, 1985). ‘Mystagogy’ 4, 189–190.

complexity is that he maintains a critical/political perspective, particularly on the first two dimensions of space and the way it can be part of the production of space. We have to be alert to these concerns, and yet Daelemans is steadfastly positive in his book.<sup>102</sup>

Returning to the difficulties of describing Eucharistic space, it might be that it is easier to lay hold of moments of failure to point to the hoped-for encounter with the Divine.

In his introduction to sacraments in the Roman Catholic church, Joseph Martos attempts to answer the question: what are the sacraments in contemporary theology? He answers that the list is “extremely diverse”: “signs of grace, as acts of Christ as expressions of the nature of the church, as symbolic actions, as encounters with God, as celebrations of life, and as participations in Jesus’ worship of the Father.”<sup>103</sup> Within *Spiritus Loci*, even in the term itself, Daelemans uses a rich and similar set of terms to describe sacred spaces; however, as already signalled and somewhat strangely, given his final chapter on “The Place of the Spirit”<sup>104</sup> and mystagogic space, he steps back from making the claim that, in three dimensions all working in concert with God’s grace, we can have a sacrament. It is to the consideration of an understanding of sacrament that overtly joins with the thrust of Daelemans’s fine work that I will turn to shortly but before I do that I need to explore a lacuna in Daelemans’ work that I signalled earlier namely Jean-Luc Marion’s concept of saturated phenomenon.

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<sup>102</sup> There are very brief departures. For instance, he is critical of what he sees as the failures in the church in Volkingen. See Daelemans, 210. Also 211 n.6.

<sup>103</sup> Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church*. (Missouri: Ligouri Publications, 2014), 120. The list is not meant to be exhaustive but one has to add “doors to the sacred” (from the title and particularly apposite for this thesis).

<sup>104</sup> Daelemans, 315–319.

## Jean-Luc Marion and Saturated Phenomenon

... I bring my perception under the control as perception of this or that thing because I immediately have concepts at my disposal that allow me to arrange the intuition. Let us suppose that the given that is given as an intuition appears in such a way that I no longer have any appropriate concepts available. What happens? For Kant, concepts will be used anyway because they remain a priori and precede experience. ... Descartes maintains the same thing with “simple natures.” ...

Do we always have a priori concepts available to us, and can we always get to the bottom of every intuitive given with these a priori and manage to organize them in order to constitute them into objects? ... There are circumstances where one cannot settle the signification of a phenomenon, where even the question of an adequate or univocal signification, a sufficient and comprehensive question, makes no sense at all.<sup>105</sup>

This is how Jean Luc Marion introduces conversationally (and therefore somewhat more accessibly) a first thought or first question that gives rise to his concept of saturated phenomenon. As was noted above Daelemans mentions one aspect of this rich and important concept in his articulation of Synaesthetic space but I believe the concept demands our fuller attention. In fact, Daelemans’ reference to saturated phenomenon is so brief and partial as to be problematic because Marion presents us with an incredibly powerful and important feature of phenomenology and one that will apply to key piece of my wider argument about sacred space.

Initially, and while I don’t want to labor the point made in the above quotation, I want to make the connection to my project explicit: I have attempted in my discussion so far to present a consideration of the beautiful and aesthetic qualities of sacred space such that it breaks open one angle on the way that sacred space can give an excess of intuition and exceeds all our concepts - including the concepts captured in the functional and ethical.

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<sup>105</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *The Rigor of Things: Conversations with Dan Arbib* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2017), 87.

Quite simply, Marion's saturated phenomenon helps us to understand, both in greater richness, and in a more fundamental way, what is going on when phenomena (but in our case sacred space) give us an excess of intuition.<sup>106</sup> All the time we are thinking about sacred space and sacrament.

To start at a beginning with phenomenology: typically, we function in the world with a deficit of intuition (or, to use a term from empiricism, a deficit of "sense data"). We drive our cars, for example, without considering all of the intuition that is available to us as we do so. To instance one aspect, consider all the intuition available to us in the functioning of the engine or even the gear box now that we mostly drive automatic cars – but most days we barely consider this "data." We function perfectly adequately, indeed better ("I bring my perception under the control as perception of this or that thing because I

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<sup>106</sup> A general comment about Jean-Luc Marion's work: Firstly, there is a certain excitement and liminality about both his philosophical approach and subjects. Stand-out is probably his book *The Erotic Phenomenon* which, as the title suggests, engages seriously with the nature of love and the erotics of intimate relationship. In a time when "desire" is being discussed in theological works – for instance, Sarah Coakley's *God, Sexuality and the Self* – there is also an apparent coyness that leads to failure to really address erotic desire. Marion has a kind of unflinching approach to engaging these liminal phenomena, including the impossible and the Invisible. As John O'Donohue says: "Jean-Luc Marion's philosophy of God has the excitement, clarity, and danger of something that has issued from the source. On the one hand, it has the imaginative warmth of a poetic sensibility that mines the silence of order to overhear the inner echoes of the transcendent and pierces the visual for tracings on the invisible. On the other, his thinking has the urgency of a blade that wants to cut the divine free from the metaphysical netting of conditional, reflexive thought. He wishes to make a clearance for undreamed dimensions of God to appear..." John O'Donohue, "The Absent Threshold: An Eckhartian Afterword," in *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 258. So, he is interested in whether these liminal or horizon phenomena are possible or, if they are possible, what properties might need to obtain to them. If we had more space we would have to press questions that relate to "common experience" and whether it undoes his proposals. Suffice to say that I do think that that his proposals are tenable and his work should be welcomed by theologians in general but, in the context of this thesis and my fundamental proposal of the space being treated as sacrament, as vital support for thinking the unthinkable (or even the idolatrous).

Secondly, he addresses what we might call "maximal" and "liminal" phenomena. Christina Gschwandtner notes that "he is profoundly interested in the limit cases of saturated phenomena because they open the space that profoundly makes a thought of something beyond strictly philosophical phenomenology possible." Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion: Exceeding Metaphysics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 268 n68. As Gschwandtner's sub-title suggests, and she argues, that phenomenology of saturated phenomena overcomes, or we might say, precedes, metaphysics and ontology.

immediately have concepts at my disposal that allow me to arrange the intuition”), by *not* considering all of the intuition that is available to us at all times. So, there are the times when we have a deficit of intuition – less intuition than the object we might be using can and does provide if we were to pay attention. There are, no doubt times when there is an equivalence of intuition and concept - from a Kantian perspective it said that the very definition of truth is the perfect matching, an equivalence, of the intuition and the concept. But Marion is keen for us to consider those phenomena where the intuition exceeds our concepts. He describes these as “saturated phenomena.”

An example of saturated phenomenon is helpful; the first kind of saturated phenomenon that Marion introduces is “the event.” He has a number of exemplar “events” that he takes from history but perhaps the most contemporary is the destruction of the World Trade Towers on 9/11 in 2001. Marion was actually in Boston teaching at the time and was able to watch with his students what was occurring live on television. Marion writes, “...everyone saw quite well that they were collapsing, nothing was more real, yet at the same time we said that this was impossible. Why, we wanted to say that it was inconceivable, without concept adequate to the enormity (i.e., as absence of any norm) of intuition.”<sup>107</sup>

We know that such events as this have a “beyond our imagination” (or “beyond our worst nightmare!”) aspect to them precisely because they lie outside our capability to frame, categorize, or conceptualize them and yet our lives can be (and are sometimes are) “re-conceived” in the light of them. Colloquially we sometimes say of an event, “well, that

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<sup>107</sup> Marion, *The Rigor of Things: Conversations with Dan Arbib*, 88.

casts everything in a different light.” The “enormity” of these events speaks of a kind of *quantity* present in them – the sheer quantity of intuition. So, these events in our life, and throughout history, are such that they are of such *quantity* – that is, they give us so much intuition that they cannot be held by our conceptualization of them; instead they require from us re-interpretation and re-orientation in relation to them. They are presented (*present–ed* or *given*) to us such that they alter the world as we know it and even as we cannot comprehend fully what is “going on” they actually position us or, in effect, place us in a new world.

“Event” is just one kind of saturated phenomenon – as Marion says: “Yet the event is not the only saturated phenomenon. There is also what I call the idol as the intensity of bedazzlement, the icon as the face of the other, and the flesh as the capacity of being affected.”<sup>108</sup> Nonetheless, and before turning to the other categories of saturated phenomenon, we just need to pause further over what Marion calls the “counter-experience” of the event as saturated phenomenon; it is feature of the other categories too. The idea is captured in the following quote from *In Excess*:

I cannot have vision of these phenomena, because we cannot constitute them starting from a univocal meaning, and even less produce them as objects. What I see of them, if we see anything of that *is*, does not result from the constitution I would assign to them in the visible, but from the effect they produce on me. And, in fact, this happens in reverse so that my look is submerged in a counter-intentional manner. Then I am no longer the transcendental *I* but the witness, constituted by what happens to him or her. Hence the para-dox – inverted *doxa*. In this way, the phenomenon that befalls and happens to us reverses the order of

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<sup>108</sup> Marion, *The Rigor of Things: Conversations with Dan Arbib*, 89. In the seminal essay (and chapter) “The Banality of Saturation” he writes: “What is at stake here is offering legitimacy to nonobjectifiable, even nonbeing phenomena: the event (which exceeds all quantity), the work of art (which exceeds all quality), the flesh (which exceeds all relation), and the face of the other [autrui], (which exceeds all modality).” Jean-Luc Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2008), 121.

visibility in that it no longer results from my intention but from its own counter-intentionality.<sup>109</sup>

It is this reversal of the Kantian notion of me bringing a conception or framework to a phenomena; rather, the phenomena, in its overwhelmingness, constitutes the *I* to be a witness in the event of the saturated phenomena. Moreover, there is another element added to these counter-experiences or para-doxa and it is succinctly captured by Christina Gschwandtner:

The saturated phenomenon is so excessive that we can be quite certain that we can never grasp it fully or give conceptual account of it. This certainty is negative: we can know most certainly we will be able to see it clearly or distinctly, that we will not be able to describe it in terms of quantity, quality, or relation or modality, that it will transcend or overturn all those categories. There will be no doubt about this; we can be quite certain about it. This then, is a kind of knowledge, albeit a negative one.<sup>110</sup>

Marion calls this “negative certainty” and with counter-experience or para-dox all of the categories of saturated phenomena share these features. Key, though, is that saturated phenomena is the effect they have on those who witness them and, in one sense, they “stage” the witness “putting them in a new place,” as it were.<sup>111</sup> I am, of course, wanting

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<sup>109</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*, ed. Robyn (translator) Horner and Vincent (translator) Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 113.

<sup>110</sup> Christina M Gschwandtner, *Marion and Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 69.

<sup>111</sup> Thus, Daelemans does pick up this thread from Marion: that events “stage” us or, as we might say, “produce us” by shifting the very way we think of the world (and ourselves in it) precisely because the experience is given in such quantity that we have to reconsider ourselves in relation to it. My concern with Daelemans is that he picks out this particular thread without really articulating or acknowledging something of the fuller phenomenological theory that Marion is developing. It is an understandable compression of a complex thinker but it is also unfortunate because the theory offers us (and him) so much more. So, it is a little perplexing why Daelemans doesn’t make more of Marion’s work, especially given his declaration that he is drawing on the discipline of phenomenology and Marion is arguably the most significant contemporary figure in the field. As noted above, Daelemans writes: “Phenomenology seems to be the adequate discipline to give an account of this synaesthetic *immediacy* of the non-verbal communication.” Bert Daelemans SJ, *Spiritus Loci: A Theological Method for Contemporary Church Architecture*. (Boston: Brill, 2015), 189 (italics original).

to suggest that these elements can be features of sacred space; so, we will need to consider the other categories of saturated phenomenon because at least one category, ‘the idol’, applies more obviously to our experience of sacred space.<sup>112</sup>

To recap and clarify somewhat before we proceed to the other saturated phenomenon: In the introduction to *Givenness and Revelation*, the published Gifford lectures, Marion, who is always refining and rearticulating his own thought, states that the guiding thread through the lectures, and this is true to a large degree throughout his work, will be the givenness that “performs perfectly.”<sup>113</sup> Marion then reminds us that phenomenology begins with what can be called appearances.<sup>114</sup> Phenomena simply “appear” to us and this we understand, thanks to Husserl but contra Kant, is prior to any concept we have of the phenomena/appearance. Marion points out that our experience of revelation, normally a special or *super*-natural category in natural religion, is first of all an appearance of a phenomenon just like any other except, because it is an appearance of the invisible, it has, paradoxically, the “appearance of appearing” – “a phenomenon coming *from elsewhere* than from the world, the appearing of the pre-eminently inapparent, the visibility of the invisible *as such, and which remains so in its very visibility.*”<sup>115</sup> Nonetheless there is continuity for all phenomenon as they all are present to us as an appearance thus there is

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<sup>112</sup> It is unclear why Daelemans chooses to focus on the category of “event” as “idol” is more obviously connected to sacred spaces.

<sup>113</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, ed. Stephen E Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 7. The ‘Introduction’ in the published lectures is a refined version of the presentation in the Gifford Lecture. See: Jean Luc Marion, “The Aporia of Revelation: The Epistemological Interpretation” (Scotland: University of Glasgow, 2014).

<sup>114</sup> “Appearance” or “manifestation” might be a better term than “intuition” which, in common parlance, implies a “sixth sense.”

<sup>115</sup> Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 5.

no special category for the supernatural and this places us beyond the usual metaphysical or ontological concerns. So, we are concerned with appearances. Marion then follows Heidegger who redefined all phenomena by further ‘radicalizing’ Husserl and arguing that “phenomenon only shows itself to the extent that it *gives itself*.” In this way we get the concept and term “givenness.”<sup>116</sup>

The privilege of appearing in its appearance is also named manifestation – manifestation of the thing starting from *itself* and as itself, privilege of rendering *itself* manifest, of making *itself* visible, of showing *itself*. This compels me to correct my point of departure: in the realm of metaphysics it is a question of proving, in the phenomenological realm it is not a question of simply showing (since in this case the apparition could be the object of a gaze, therefore a mere appearance), but rather of letting apparition show *itself* in its appearance according to its appearing.<sup>117</sup>

What we have then, according to Marion, is a “scale of givenness” according to their degree of manifestation. He writes:

In this way distinctions emerge between objects and events, between poor phenomena, common-law phenomena, and saturated phenomena. And then, among the saturated phenomena, there bursts forth the hypothesis of phenomena that recapitulate and combine the different types of saturation...<sup>118</sup>

So, to the other types of saturation.

## **Idol**

The idol might seem implicitly always negative in a religious setting but here it is positive and is characterized by bedazzlement. Marion tells us:

The privileged occurrence of the idol is obviously the painting. ... Saturation marks the painting essentially. In it intuition always surpasses the concept or the

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<sup>116</sup> Marion argues for this “reduction” in *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* by showing first the possibility of understanding the phenomenon as gift and then going beyond this to givenness. See especially 71-118

<sup>117</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 8.

<sup>118</sup> Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 6.

concepts proposed to welcome it. It is never enough to have seen it just once to have really seen it, in contrast to the technical object and the product. Totally opposite this, each gaze at the painting fails to bring me to perceive what I see, keeping me from taking it into view as such – so that it always again conceals the essential from visibility. ... The intuitive gaze of the idol imposes on us the demand to change our gaze again and again, continually, be this only so as to confront its unbearable bedazzlement.<sup>119</sup>

Of the actual “occurrences” or instantiations that Marion discusses his idea is best conveyed through paintings of Venice by Joseph Turner such as *The Canale della Giudecca Venice, with Santa Maria della Salute, the Campanile of San Marco (St Mark’s)*, and *San Giorgio Maggiore Beyond*, (1840). Marion claims is that what we see occurring in the painting is that the light overwhelms the objects – for instance, the Campanile - and Turner forces the viewer to see the apprehension that “blinds us” such that the objects lie beyond comprehension and conceptualization. So, Marion writes:

By bedazzlement, I mean not only the pain felt by eyes that can no longer look at the excessive light, but also the ordeal of no longer being able to assign a concept, or even an identity, to the giving intuition that in fact gives nothing more than itself (like in a painting by Turner, where the light dissolves the contour of things, and absorbs all the forms in its submerging obscurity), without leaving behind, when it finally draws back, any definitive figure that there may be. So much so that the saturated phenomenon does not offer itself to any direct experience, because it furnishes no object of experience (as in the case of the icon or the face), nor, often, when any entity present in permanence (in particular in the cases of the event or my flesh): at best it allows for a counter experience.<sup>120</sup>

Equally he presents an auditory example in the comparison of the kind of listening that we do when we are listening to an operatic aria where we can be so immersed is the experience that the fact that we do not understand the language of the libretto means it

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<sup>119</sup> Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, 229,230.

<sup>120</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Negative Certainties* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 204.

comes to us genuinely beyond conception, versus the listening to the voice in an airport announcement where we are only concerned to comprehend the signification.<sup>121</sup>

What is at key in this category of saturated phenomena is the *quality* that bedazzles by its excess. What this shows up are two further significant features for us to register. The first is what the phenomenon does to the viewer/ listener/ taster/ and so forth. It is more than simply the bedazzling (as it were), there is another aspect where the term “idol” makes most sense. It is essentially a Lacanian move that Marion makes: because the bedazzlement of the idol is so intense and it forms an “an invisible mirror,” it counters any attempt to constitute or conceptualize it, then our gaze fixes on “the span of our aims – what I set my heart on seeing, what I want to see and do. In short it denudes my desire and my hope. What I look that is visible decides who I am. I am what I can look at. What I admire judges me,”<sup>122</sup> Secondly, the discussion above about “the idol” points us to a feature in each of the categories of saturated phenomenon; we know that they “arrive” (just as in “event”) before and exceed our conceptualization thus yielding a particular “givenness” about such phenomena. So, we can note that, in a deep sense, saturated phenomena arrive as “gift.” We might even say, somewhat smartly, they are a present that bedazzle us with presence. What this “gift” aspect does, in turn, however, is it suggests another aspect of our relation to the saturated phenomena, one that Marion does

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<sup>121</sup> See: Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, 129. He considers all the senses in this essay in order to show that the saturated phenomena is more than the visible – even if the word that dominates is “bedazzlement.”

<sup>122</sup> Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*, 61.

not necessarily want to make initially, namely the theological one – that of r/Revelation and God as the giver of the gift.

## **Flesh**

I do not suffer from the iron – but, because immediately they hurt me, they only hurt me. I suffer myself by them. Between the iron and the fire and me who suffers them, the gap disappears. I can no longer make a retreat into a more withdrawn tower: once the enclosure has been invaded, I am definitively invaded, taken, done. Suffering rivets me to myself as one rivets something to the ground – by earthing. Suffering does not only hurt me, it assigns me especially to myself as flesh.<sup>123</sup>

Fire and iron, implying torture, are very extreme examples of appearing to the flesh yet they are examples that utterly avoid opaqueness because they are meant to bring to mind our own experiences of pain that are always so uniquely our own and, further, we can never distance ourselves from them. In all such experiences, if we attend to the matter, it is possible for us to know the saturated phenomenon of ‘flesh’ - in not just the extremis of pain but in pleasure too. Thus, Marion devotes some effort to the consideration of the flesh under what he calls the Erotic Phenomenon. Building on the phenomenology of Michael Henry and contra Edmund Husserl’s notion that there is, when it comes to our flesh, a distinction between what he calls *noesis* and *noema*, appearance and appearing, flesh is the how/where the gift (phenomenon) appears most directly – “this feeler could never feel without first feeling him- or herself. ... all phenomenalization of the world for me passes through my flesh.”<sup>124</sup> We, or more’s the point, *I*, don’t *have* flesh as much as *I am flesh*. I am utterly connected to my flesh and there is no outside but, rather, my flesh

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<sup>123</sup> Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*, 92.

<sup>124</sup> Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*, 89

“alludes all relation” – “Flesh is referred to itself as it auto-affects itself”.<sup>125</sup> As is the case with the other saturated phenomenon, there is, then, a profound implication for me and it is this directness and the quality of being beyond relation and it is flesh I know all other phenomenon. “I do not give myself my flesh, it is that it gives me to myself. In receiving my flesh, I receive me myself – I am in this way given over to it.”<sup>126</sup>

## **Icon**

In many respects the last of the categories, the icon/face, is the most complex of the four. In part it is Marion’s response and extension to Emmanuel Levinas’ analysis of the phenomenology of the other in *Totality and Infinity*. We might, however, begin by noting the disambiguation that Marion makes between two kinds of viewing the icon/face. Through some etymological analysis (that is more suggestive in the French) he points out that to “see” (*voir*) and to “regard” (*regarder*) are significantly different. “Regard” should be understood in terms of

“to guard or to keep” ...”to keep an eye on, to watch out of the corner of one’s eye, ... gazing, *regarder*, is about being able to keep the visible in visibility, as much as possible without letting it have the initiative in appearing (or disappearing) by forbidding it any variation in intensity that would disturb its inscription in the concept, ...<sup>127</sup>

So, to view/ witness/ encounter the icon or face of an ‘other’ in the sense of “regard” controls and reduces the “other” by not allowing it to exceed the concept. To “see” first of all, however, amounts to allowing the other to “impose itself on sight with such an

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<sup>125</sup> Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*, 100.

<sup>126</sup> Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*, 98.

<sup>127</sup> Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, 214.

excess of intuition that it is no longer reduced” to prior conditions and concept. For Levinas this amounts to heeding the commandment “thou shall not kill” by which he means to relegate the other by “regarding” them, amounts to erasing the other in their difference.<sup>128</sup> This is in keeping with the thread that runs in the other categories of saturated phenomenon.

The more challenging aspect of the icon/face is that Marion argues when we look at the face we are drawn to the eyes and, ultimately, to the pupils where there is nothing to be seen and thus there is an impossibility of seeing anything.<sup>129</sup> He says that the “unique characteristic, which suffices to define the face as what looks at me, dictates that I cannot see it ...”<sup>130</sup> We appreciate that there is, once again, a counter-experience or paradox that to actually see an “other” comes with the recognition that “the gazer takes the place of the gazed upon” precisely because instead of the witness giving the manifestation the other gives it.<sup>131</sup>

We might wonder, however, what is “given” since there is an emptiness and impossibility in the “black holes of the two pupils?”<sup>132</sup> Herein lies the importance of understanding how the encounter with the other reverses intentionality. Extending the notion of the two

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<sup>128</sup> “This face, nobody has ever seen it, except by bringing about its death – since to see it would suppose at once reducing it to the rank of a constituted spectacle, therefore eliminating it as such - ...” Marion, 232, 233.

<sup>129</sup> “In other words, in the face we fix on the sole place where precisely nothing can be seen. Thus, in the face of the other person we precisely the point at which all visible spectacle happens to be impossible, there is nothing [of the] visible” Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*, 115.

<sup>130</sup> Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*, 115.

<sup>131</sup> Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, 232.

<sup>132</sup> Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*.

black holes of the pupils Marion suggests there are two poles to the void. The first is that with the intentionality reversed instead of imposing myself (my conceptualization of the other) on the other, I receive myself from the other – “me, in so far as I receive myself from the very givenness of the irregardable phenomenon, me in so far as I learn of myself from what the gaze of the Other says to me in silence.”<sup>133</sup> The second is that the other in “the act of his unpredictable landing as saturated phenomenon” actually produces no clear understanding (thus, invisibility) but an infinite number of possibilities.

Must the face that envisages me remain an unintelligible phenomenon, because without signification? Not at all. For if the face lacks conceptualizable meaning, it is not by default, but by excess. The face expresses an infinity of meanings at each moment and during an infinite lapse of time.<sup>134</sup>

This means, therefore, that as a saturated phenomenon the face/icon delivers up an infinite hermeneutic of the “other.” Marion also tells us that it gathers together the particular characteristics of the other types of saturated phenomenon. So, the icon /face shares with “the event” an unassignable confrontation of unexpected and excessive phenomenon – as we say, “it is too much to take in.” It shares with the idol a demand “to be seen and reseen” and, in the end, counters and confronts the gaze of the witness.<sup>135</sup> Finally, like the flesh, the face/icon brings about individuation as it demands the other be understood as invisible and, thus rather than being gazed upon, precedes the witness in manifestation and gazes at the witness assigning an identity – that is, reversing the direction of the gaze. Perhaps more than any other of the categories, the phenomenon of

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<sup>133</sup> Marion, 233. It is this thought that Marion develops in an incredibly powerful way in *The Erotic Phenomenon*.

<sup>134</sup> Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*, 122.

<sup>135</sup> Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, 233.

the face gives sight to the subject rather than the subject setting conditions or limitations on the apparition.

While some immediate thoughts of sacred space as saturated phenomenon may have suggested themselves already, we might well press questions about any possible place of the two together. The first and most obvious connection between saturated phenomenon occurs in the category of idol. Given the general fear of buildings becoming idols it is with a certain irony that we should affirm this aspect but the point is that our experience of a constructed space can be every bit as bedazzling as a painting and, as I have already suggested, possibly more so. The icon/face is a less obvious category when it comes to buildings but it is the case that buildings purposely position us in relation to others and the Other. That is, seating and circulatory patterns create opportunities to ‘see, rather than ‘regard’, the O/other. These opportunities or encounters are, of course, importantly amplified by the liturgical life of the community but I am wanting to just be faithful to my requirement that we see the building without the liturgy.<sup>136</sup>

The “flesh” as Marion categorizes it also seems harder to immediately relate to sacred space. With Mattijs van de Port’s and then Daelemans help, however, we have seen that the experience of a building can be utterly visceral – direct and overwhelming. The textures and multisensory experience and even the deprivation of them through silence and darkness can and do function to impose themselves on our flesh.

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<sup>136</sup> It is in the tradition of phenomenology to “bracket” some term so I am continuing to bracket the liturgy that brings the Body of Christ’s presence in a further and fuller way.

Prompted by Daelemans, we began by considering the category of “event” and moved to a fuller exposition of saturated phenomenon that has now been discussed sufficiently to at least suggest that there is fruitful wondering to be had about the saturated phenomenon and (to use Daelemans’ title) *Spiritus Loci*. If we consider an example though it may further assist. If one has had the privilege of visiting the Sistine Chapel then one will also know that the entrance usually comes through a side door and there is no warning when one comes through, at least for me, of the quite overwhelming volume and the immersive experience of being cast into the massive flood of all the imagery of salvation history. To ascribe “event” to that moment is, to my mind, entirely apposite. I do not believe that I am alone in having such an experience – if not in the Sistine Chapel, then elsewhere.<sup>137</sup> I have had such an experience of sacred space even after some time of being in and out of the space a number of times without it particularly registering anything on first visits, then, it just “struck” me in a particular moment. I am not suggesting that this is an “all times and for all people” experience of any particular place. I do want to suggest, however, that, say, the Sistine Chapel has been designed and decorated so that it would create and lead to an overwhelming plenitude in the quantity of the intuition, thus can be understood as a purposefully created saturated phenomenon. Obviously, this is a further affect that is brought about in large part by the category of icon with painting after painting along the walls and then just the whole of the ceiling constituting an experience of bedazzlement. The height of the ceiling, however, also creates a certain somatic or fleshly experience of making one feel diminutive in relation to the whole. Probably betraying the possibilities of some experience of “the other”/the face is that for many

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<sup>137</sup> Today the principle “event” that the Chapel stands for and is the space that it is used for is the Conclave of Cardinals that discerns a new Pope.

today the reality is there are long and difficult lines in tour to view the space. I count myself fortunate to have been in the space with few people and the silence was broken by gasps and then seeing the others see me taking in the experience opened the door to possibilities of what they might be gazing upon too. I would want, therefore, to point to the possibility that the space works in a fullness of saturated phenomenon and this segues into the question of revelation or even Revelation and sacrament.

### **r/Revelation**

The saturated phenomenon therefore culminates in the type of paradox I call revelation, one that concentrates in itself – as figure of Christ establishes its possibility – an event, an idol, a flesh, and an icon, all at the same time. Saturation passes beyond itself, exceeds the very concept of maximum, and finally gives its phenomenon without remainder or reserve.<sup>138</sup>

I deliberately considered the example of the Sistine Chapel before turning to Marion's fifth category of saturated phenomenon. Having considered the other four categories of saturated phenomenon, each of which takes us to a kind of phenomenal horizon, Marion considers the surpassing of all possibility with a phenomenon that transcends all horizons and eclipses every category at once. Such a phenomenon would combine all four the categories and it is saturated "to the second degree" surpassing all limits it becomes a "paradox of paradoxes." Marion distinguishes between the possibility of such a phenomenon- that is, revelation – and providing a paradigmatic example – that is, Christ a specific Revelation.

This exploration of Marion was prompted by the fact that Daelemans made specific mention of Marion's concept of saturated phenomenon. The concern was expressed that

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<sup>138</sup> Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, 241.

Daelemans has made too brief a mention of what is a phenomenological articulation of our encounter with what might be seen as our most complex and richest phenomena – from art works to encountering other people. We can be glad of the prompt because, casting our minds back to a “thicker” description of the liturgy, Marion gives us a “thicker” phenomenological framework with which to understand sacred space.

## **Gift**

There is a further feature of Marion’s work, the concept of “the gift,” that we should consider here because it will be particularly apposite when we turn to Louis-Marie Chauvet’s work. It is impossible in the space available in this thesis to do justice to the fullness of Marion’s discussion. However, we start in 1923 when the sociologist Marcel Mauss published an essay on observations he had made of native peoples in the western Pacific. Mauss observed that, in times of conflict, if two parties or tribes were to avoid war, one party had to risk giving a gift. If the gift were accepted and war avoided and after some time had passed the recipients of the gift were obliged to give a return gift of slightly higher value and thus a cycle of “gift-giving” ensued. As Marion highlights, the title of Mauss’ essay says it all: “The Gift: the Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies.” Jacques Derrida picked up on aspects of Mauss’ work and noted that notion of gift is destroyed by anything that implied exchange or obliged a response. Yet a simple “thank you” or similar acknowledgement is an exchange of sorts. The very notion of economy of the gift, the practice that always involves some sort of reciprocity and/or debt, is problematized by Derrida to the point of the claiming the “impossibility of the gift.” Marion acknowledges that Derrida’s critique of the gift is both radical and

convincing.<sup>139</sup> Marion, however, seeks to show that gift is not doomed to an economy of exchange and reciprocity.

Marion proceeds by recourse to a standard phenomenological move – reduction. If it is the case that economy of exchange needs three terms - giver, givee, and gift – then if one of those terms can be suppressed then it would show that there is no exchange and it would expose a logic of the gift rather than a logic of exchange. So, in turn Marion considers whether the gift is possible without one of the terms. Thus he shows that the gift is possible without the giver – the classic case is in the case of inheritance where the giver must be dead. The logic of the gift is possible without the givee if, for instance, one gives anonymously to an organization so that the gift goes to the cause or persons who are in need. The most provocative example that Marion suggest is that if one heeds the injunction of Jesus to give to your enemy he will take the gift and deny your existence and not repay you. The obvious response is that in such a case you have the benefit in exchange of feeling that you are the better person. However, again Jesus’ advice is to not let your right hand know what the left hand is doing (Matthew 6:3). If it appears that it is not possible to not be aware of what or to whom you are giving, then he cites the case of teachers and artists who often do not know the identity, occasion, or nature of the gift they give. Thus, Jesus advice is not just rhetorical nor is the logic of the gift. Lastly, he questions whether the logic of the gift can be sustained without the gift. The answer is, yes. This is particularly apposite when we get to Chauvet because Marion points out that

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<sup>139</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, “The Gift and the Economy: Part 1,” 38th Annual Philosophy-Theology Symposium (Canton: Walsh University, 2013). 18:12. This lecture is a particularly clear exposition and introduction by Marion on his thinking on gift although he writes on gift in a number of publications. The key text is: Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*.

much of the time the gift is not given as such and “what is given is only the first name of the gift but it is the last name that is most important.”<sup>140</sup> This is the case with a gift that is a symbol - such as a ring in a marriage. So, symbol can properly be part of the logic of gift as long as one is thinking of the “last name” not the thing – the woman who only thinks of the size of the diamond is thinking of the thing and remains in the logic of exchange. In the logic of the gift the thing that symbolizes the gift is usually much more than the thing – “this ring represents my commitment to love you for as long as I live.” The real gift remains absent.

Marion notes three positive aspects or privileges of the gift: firstly, the gift is not reciprocal and cannot be so. This is particularly so in what he calls the erotic phenomenon where the lover has to risk loving on the uncertain chance that she may not be loved back. The lover who considers whether the love given will be returned or returned in some equal measure has entered the logic of exchange and instantly destroyed the love. Further, still within the erotic phenomenon, the child is the outstanding instance of being a gift that cannot be reciprocated. A child, who might be utterly devoted to the care of her/his parents, cannot ever repay her/his parents the gift of life. The best that one might do as a child is give the same gift to another.<sup>141</sup> Secondly, contrary to the logic of exchange where the endless reciprocity keeps a kind of stasis or evenness thus it is orientated to repeating itself, the gift is a non-repeatable event that creates history. Thirdly, the gift is without reason, it has no “why?” We choose to chance love always *without sufficient reason*. In a certain sense the giver answers to the gift – it is like the gift calls to giver, “this I should give to him”. There is no reason for the gift and to consider a “why” would be to enter the logic of exchange.

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<sup>140</sup> Marion, “The Gift and the Economy: Part 1,” 38:00

<sup>141</sup> When it comes to the consideration of Chauvet’s “return gift” to God this is particularly important.

### 3.

In scope of this thesis I cannot offer a survey of the nature and meaning of sacrament throughout the Christian tradition. Moreover, so much of any such exposition of the development would also require embedding them within the metaphysical underpinnings alongside (often) the very particular historical/pastoral concerns of the time. So, early texts and understandings of baptism, for instance, occur against the background of the problem of how to view the baptism of apostate believers. Equally, much of the medieval discussion on the sacraments in general and Eucharist in particular focused on metaphysical questions of how sacraments work, on efficaciousness and effectiveness, on causality and the effects of valid sacrament versus the defects of an inadequate sacrament. This would be a whole other thesis or book.

Today a study of sacrament, particularly from a more Protestant leaning, might well begin with a survey of scripture and build from there. The fact is, however, that sacrament does not appear in scripture and, while we can see threads and hear resonances within scripture, sacrament is not strictly a scriptural concept. Kimberly Belcher elegantly captures my (and her own) working understanding in relation to this:

Sacrament is a theological concept that developed gradually in order to account for the church's early and abiding experience, in which certain rituals were a particularly significant participation in the economy of salvation, of the great plan by which God the Father was reconciling human beings to himself through the work of Christ in the Holy Spirit. Like the Trinity itself and other concepts later understood to be indispensable to the Christian faith, sacramentality is rooted in the New Testament texts, develops in patristic exegesis and reflection, and continues to be the subject of theological analysis thereafter.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kimberley Hope Belcher, *Efficacious Engagement: Sacramental Participation in the Trinitarian Mystery* (Collegville, Minnesota.: Liturgical Press., 2011), 23. While space does not allow me to argue the case, I

I would want to question Belcher's sole focus on the New Testament because the Old Testament too offers wisdom and revelation on these matters, but her larger point remains. So, extending it, and choosing a sacrament rather than a doctrine, we see in the development of the sacrament of ordination and the emergence of the three orders of bishop, priest, and deacon that it occurs well after the closure of the canon of scripture. We look, though, to many biblical texts, for example, Numbers 11: 16-17, 24-25b and the "gathering of the elders" and their "consecration" or Ezekiel being called as "a sentinel for the house of Israel" in Ezekiel 33:1-9;<sup>2</sup> these form part of the larger and unfolding tradition – in these two cases even from before the life of Jesus of Nazareth – that continues to develop about the sacrament of ordination.

The two scholars that I follow in this section at least bracket or overtly set aside the metaphysical and ontological matters and I will do the same. I will also follow them in as much as each of them is very definitely of this side of Vatican II and the liturgical reform movement that shifted the emphasis to understanding the nature of symbol. That said, I do not think the questions and concerns about "how" a sacrament works have lost all meaning as we try and get to the heart of matters and seek understanding for our faithful experience. As David Brown says, "But however inadequate Aquinas' use of Aristotelian

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entirely concur with David Brown: "In essence my argument is that to describe one period of the community of faith's history as revelation and the rest as mere tradition generates a contrast that cannot be sustained": David Brown, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 112. Later he writes: "So far from thinking about the Bible as the already fully painted canvas and the traditions of the later church as offering at most some optional extra colouring, we need to think of a continuous dynamic of tradition operating within the Bible and beyond": Brown, *Tradition and Imagination*, 365.

<sup>2</sup> Both of these texts are lections set for "The Ordination of Priests" in The Church of the Province of New Zealand: Te Haahi o te Porowini Nui Tireni, *A New Zealand Prayer Book: He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa* (Auckland: William Collins, 1989), 902.

metaphysics is judged to be, it is surely worth investigating what Aquinas was attempting to achieve through his defense of such terminology.”<sup>3</sup> So, without getting into the constricting and destructive theological pedantry of some of the medieval discussion, we might still wonder usefully about matter/form/effect in relation to the sacrament of space; we might still also ask: *what grace is mediated* in a sacred space that is understood as a sacrament? (I suggest the answer is a sense of God’s presence, what I will call “an abiding presence.”) Equally, I have rather obviously been attempting to understand, especially through Lefebvre, Daelemans, and Marion, the sacrament in part through understanding sacred spaces, particularly church buildings, as the “matter” or object in itself – element, *res* (Latin) – albeit largely through the way the element functions as a symbol in a complex set of symbolic relations.

The two writers that I address in this section are David Brown, and Louis-Marie Chauvet.<sup>4</sup> Because each and every one of these theologians is a prodigious writer and wide-ranging thinker, I can only attempt to note some elements from their work that will assist with our understanding of a *Locus Iste*, sacred space. The early church Fathers, looking for commonality and unity, built the early catechetical understandings (doctrine) on sacrament and this process continued to the Middle ages. Following the manner in

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<sup>3</sup> David Brown, *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 409. So, I discuss below why Marion wants to hold fast to the very traditional notion of transubstantiation.

<sup>4</sup> The real contrast between the two authors is that Chauvet is obviously in the Continental Phenomenological tradition and Brown is not - in spite of his approach in the works we address. It also has to be said that there is quite a lacuna in Brown’s impressive range of knowledge and interest that also sets him apart. He states that, “For too long liturgical study has been treated as the Cinderella of theological study, concerned, as it were, with prettifying the agenda but not with the heart of what theology is about.” Brown, *God and Grace of Body*, 390. His indexes, however, for all the names that appear there, only name one significant liturgical theologian – Don Saliers – and, at best, he seems uninterested in the liturgical reform movement and the scholarship that has emerged from that work.

which those early church Fathers used one sacrament in order to throw light on the others, I will particularly look to what each of the three writers says about Eucharist – it is the central sacrament and it encapsulates much of the power of metaphor, image, and symbol in such a bodily/visceral/material way. Again, the hope is to see what light might be shed on the sacrament of space. Finally, having done that I will attempt to provide a summary of “carry-forward points” for “sacred space as sacrament.”

Before I turn, however, to the first of the focus scholars, David Brown, I will attend to what I believe is a key biblical text. The reason for setting it in the midst of the discussion rather than at the opening section of the thesis is because it arises from points just made. We seek to understand what the Spirit is saying to the church in and through scripture in the midst of larger task of discernment – ultimately, it is how I believe we best engage with scripture.

### **Beth- El**

A thorough survey of holy place in scripture is outside of the scope of this project. However, precisely because we are drawing on Chauvet, and he argues that the dynamic between the three elements of scripture, sacrament, and ethics is fundamental, and that “the sacraments are like the precipitate (in the chemical sense) of the Scriptures as word,”<sup>5</sup> we must engage with scripture at least in some measure. So, as Chauvet’s discussion of sacraments treats some texts as particularly emblematic, the encounter of Jacob at ‘a certain place’ on his way from Beersheba to Haran shall, likewise, be treated

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<sup>5</sup> Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of God* (Collegville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 28. (See diagram below.)

as emblematic. In Jacob's nighttime dream at Bethel earth and heaven are joined (Gen 28:10 - 22). When he wakes in the morning he declares that "Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!" (Gen 28:16) and "This is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven" (Gen 28:17). There are so many layers to this remarkable story but our interest here is in the way the story might function in understanding sanctification of place.<sup>6</sup>

The story of the Tower of Babel serves as one prelude (very much in a minor key) to this aspect of Jacob's story and this is signaled when he declares that "this is the gate of heaven." (Babel – 'gate of God.')

The Hebrew word *sullam* meaning "ramp" or "stairway" (better than "ladder") evokes "the Babylonian ziggurat, the temple tower familiar from the Tower of Babel story in chapter 11 [of Genesis]. The edifice was equipped with an external stairway or ramp linking each stage of the tower with the next until 'its top reached the sky.'"<sup>7</sup> The ramp is used only by angels who actually do not communicate with Jacob and, we note, Jacob does not attempt to climb it, which might surprise us as it is against his otherwise grasping disposition when conscious (although we would have to add that he struggled against Esau in their mother's womb). God does not call Jacob into the heavenly realm either, but comes right beside him. It is absolutely God's initiative, which is further underscored by Jacob's own amazement. So, while the prelude is Babel, and we are in a state of alert about what will occur in this place, as it

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<sup>6</sup> Some of those layers are religio-political but many are more plainly textual. See Ebbard Blum's article below that discusses the dense features that emerge from source and historical criticism.

<sup>7</sup> Nahum N. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 1st ed. (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 2001), 197.

turns out there will be nothing in this encounter that echoes the hubris, the blasphemy, or grasping of that situation, nor the hubris and grasping we have come to expect of Jacob.

Ebhard Blum comments that it “would be difficult to find in biblical prose a passage surpassing the density of our scene description.”<sup>8</sup> According to Blum each of the scene’s three elements – the ramp, the divine messengers, and YHWH – are all introduced in the same way with a “behold” but each of the sentences gets progressively shorter forming a stepped pattern in the text that “mirrors – so to speak – the imagined ramp/stairway, but also the conceptual climax leading from the heavenly ramp to the divine messengers and finally to the Deity himself.”<sup>9</sup> Actually, the pattern leads downwards possibly to underscore the fact that God comes to earth and is beside Jacob. Once beside him, God addresses Jacob directly in a manner that David Cotter suggests is very personal. Cotter says, that the NRSV’s “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac ...” (Gen 28:13) is better rendered as “I, YHWH, am the God of Abraham ...”<sup>10</sup> This subtle difference is an important underlining of the intimacy in the divine encounter.

We know that Abraham erected an altar at Bethel but it is the divine mention of Jacob’s forebear that brings Abraham and that event to front of mind. This, in turn, pulls into focus what is a reverse parallel that is occurring between the characters and their respective journeys – Abraham as one full of faith and the years of life, Jacob full of

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<sup>8</sup> Ebhard Blum, “The Jacob Tradition,” in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L. Petersen (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 181–212.

<sup>9</sup> Blum, 198.

<sup>10</sup>David W Cotter O.S.B., *Genesis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 214.

trickery and youthfulness. Abraham stops first near Bethel in Canaan (Gen 12:7-8) builds an altar and then “invokes the name of the Lord.” Abraham worships there again at the same “place” on his way out of Egypt doubling the importance of the site. The echoes between the story are further present because, according to Sarna, the same Hebrew word for place (*makom*), which “frequently has the connotation of ‘a sacred site,’”<sup>11</sup> is used in both occasions that Abraham worships and six times in the account of Jacob’s encounter at Bethel, thus serving to amplify our questions about the nature of this place in particular.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, Jacob arrives on the edge of darkness falling and apparently devoid of any knowledge about the site and he departs full of astonishment that “this is the gateway to heaven” (Genesis 28:17).

We cannot escape the various layers of humor and irony that run through the story. It seems, for instance, ironic that God should come so powerfully and intimately to Jacob whose moral character is so obviously questionable and apparently undeserving of divine blessing. Jacob is not seeking God, God comes to him. It might, however, be pointed out that the very first angelic visitation is to Hagar, the Egyptian slave woman, and, of course, that Moses is a murderer. Jacob is blessed so mightily and unreservedly by God

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<sup>11</sup> Sarna, 197.

<sup>12</sup> Sarna, 10. Reading the likes of Sarna’s commentary one can’t miss the layers of religious and political tension around Jacob being at Bethel because: first, it raises the spectre of Jacob worshipping at a Canaanite site; and, second, that there might be a sanctuary that competes with Jerusalem. So, Sarna declares that with “great subtlety the narrative dissociates absolutely the sanctity of the place from its pagan antecedents” (400). But he justifies the declaration because Jacob apparently simply stumbles upon the place (surely that might well play into the hands of those who want to claim the prior sanctity and drawing-power of the place?) and that he uses any stone for a pillow and this becomes the pillar (again, this might be explained that all the stones belong to an existing and holy temple site). A simpler explanation, as I contend, is that God comes to Jacob in absolute freedom and as utter gift and there is no absolute dissociation and this tension (along with others) is inescapable.

and then, perplexingly, Jacob deflects the blessing. First, he deflects the blessing on himself – after all, God says, “Know that I am with *you* and will keep *you* wherever *you* go, and will bring *you* back to this land; for I will not leave *you* until I have done what I have promised *you*.” (Gen 28:15) – to announce that the place (not he) is blessed – “This is none other than the house of God...” (Gen 28:17). Second there is no moral or character transformation as a result of this stunning divine encounter. Rather, we see that Jacob seems to remain true to form as a trickster and announces his conditional response to God’s unconditional blessing – “*If* God will be with me ...” This conditionality is glaring and Cotter notices it too: “If God is with him ... If all of this happens, then – and one assumes this means only then – will Jacob serve the God revealed at Bethel.”<sup>13</sup> But the reservations by Jacob are also problematic for some and we can see it in a more pious Jewish commentary wrestling with the fact. So, in Sarna’s Torah commentary he first parallels Jacob’s vow with Jephthah’s (Judges 11:30-31), Hannah’s (1 Sam 1:11), and Absalom’s (2 Sam 15:8) but the comparisons are not valid and he can’t quite elide over the fact that “Jacob’s vow is unique.” So, his suggested solutions are first “that the true sequence of events are transposed in the narrative so that, in reality, the theophany becomes a response to Jacob’s vow, which actually preceded it.”<sup>14</sup> Second, “Jacob’s vow cannot be understood as bargaining since all he asks for has already been given.”<sup>15</sup> Both of these explanations are a stretch and the plain reading of the narrative is that Jacob is still bargaining to his advantage. In fact, we see no real change in Jacob’s character until

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<sup>13</sup> Cotter, 217.

<sup>14</sup> Sarna, 200.

<sup>15</sup> Sarna, 200

he comes with his new family and bows before his brother Esau. (This, of course, is after years in service to Laban, who turns the table on Jacob and gives him a taste of trickery in return by giving Leah instead of Rachel. One might speculate that this is when Jacob sees the error of his own ways, but that is not obvious from the text.)

It might be asked why detain ourselves over the aspects of the story that pertain to Jacob and not so obviously to the matter in mind, sacred place. The answer is twofold. Firstly, following Chauvet (and, as already discussed, Susan White), we *are* wanting to pay attention to the role of morality and ethics in our overall sacramentality. Secondly, everything points to Jacob's theophany being pure gift; gratuitous and beyond any sense of expectation, planning, or dessert. This is a theme that both Chauvet and Marion will assist us to take further in our discussion. Noting both these aspects is worth pausing further over in a text we are taking as key.

There is, then, one further humorous edge to the story that is noteworthy. It is impossible to really know if the pun that we hear around Jacob *taking a rock for his head* would have also been heard by the writer and early hearers. They well could have, since it was common to play off the sound links provided by the Hebrew system of trilateral stems. There is an etymological link between head and headrest in that both come from *r'osh*.<sup>16</sup> The pun, which is certainly there in our English translations, fits well with the thread in the story that is overturning of Jacob's conniving and calculating character so that he

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<sup>16</sup> I owe this point to a discussion with Dr. Tim Meadowcroft

should be so silly as to have not heard the blessing that was for him. Then he is so foolish as to think that he could conditionally set terms for a God who comes so unconditionally.

Jacob stumbles across the place at the beginning and seems so mistaken about the nature of the blessing at the end. This overall trajectory of the story seems to undermine the significance of the “place” but I do not believe that this is so. Firstly, if we examine Jacob’s blessing we see that it is unlike that of his forbears, Abraham and Isaac, who both lived to a ripe old age (Gen 25:8; 35:29). “Few and hard have been the years of my life,” (Gen 47:9) he tells Pharaoh. Moreover, as he stands before Pharaoh with his first-born son, Joseph, his favored and beloved wife, Rachel has been lost to him for years. Rachel has already died in childbirth with their second child and this after years of inability to bear children. Jacob’s first and only daughter (Dinah) has been raped and manipulated into marriage with a foreigner. All this, and more, undermines the goods that actually come to Jacob. To be sure God’s promise to Jacob is literally delivered, but he endures untold suffering; and yet we are left with the glaring feature of the incredible (and infinite) good that has come to Jacob through being in God’s presence. Of course, being in God’s presence does not just occur at Bethel: he communicates with an angel in a dream, then he wrestles with the angel/God at Penuel, and then again God speaks to him at Bethel. Bethel is primary though. Secondly, on his deathbed Jacob will recollect this first appearance of God to him at Bethel (Gen 48:3). Thirdly, we have the significant intentional erecting and anointing of the rock (pillar). This event is also momentous enough for even God to recall it (Gen 31:13).

The pouring of oil on the stone is slightly problematic – and not just to Rabbis who wondered where Jacob would have obtained the oil in such a time and place! (The reply was made by them that it must have “streamed down from heaven in quantity just sufficient for the purpose”<sup>17</sup>). Sarna says the meaning of the anointing is “uncertain.” He favors the idea that it was to see the stone as a “witness stone” and the pouring of the oil was “a symbolic act establishing the contractual bond between Jacob and God.”<sup>18</sup> He states that there is “evidence from the ancient Near east for the use of oil in international treaty relationships and in effectuating business contracts.”<sup>19</sup> This might be so, although how an act of Jacob could be thought to effectuate some divine utterance is in itself problematic and we can also note that the pact between Laban and Jacob has them erect a stone as a witness, others are then invited to mound a stone beside it, but there is no anointing of the stone. We might accept that the stone does serve as a witness to the vows – although, once again, we have to note Jacob’s vows are at odds with God’s vows, so there is this ongoing tension. Primarily the anointing serves as a witness to the event, the divine revelation, that occurs in that place and thus should be viewed as a sacrament. In that vein Moses is given detailed instructions by God to mix oil and perfumes for “holy anointing oil” (Exodus 30:22) and the first purpose of this oil is to anoint, not a human person, but the tent of meeting and the arc of the covenant, the altar and the altar furniture. He is told, “You shall consecrate them, so that they may be most holy; whatever touches them will be holy” (Exodus 30:29). After this Aaron and his sons are

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<sup>17</sup> George A. Barton and Kaufmann Kohler, “Anointing,” *JewishEncyclopedia.Com*, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Sarna, 200.

<sup>19</sup> Sarna, 200.

anointed “that they may serve as priests.” Given this, and the many scriptural associations with the anointing of priests and kings, it seems most obvious that the meaning of the anointing is the designation of the place as holy. Bethel is, after all, the place that represents (and stands witness to) God being present on earth in a profound way.

Jacob’s nighttime dream joins heaven and earth. In the morning he declares that, “Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!” and “This is none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven” (Gen 28:16, 17). But the uncertainty of where this “certain place” exactly is captures the tension and deep ambivalence in the notion of “Beth-El” – where is God’s place on earth? The story is full of irony and displacement. We cannot help but note that it is Jacob who is blessed by God; so obvious because he has previously stolen a blessing from his father, so seems supremely underserving of this divine blessing. Ironically Jacob does not himself receive the blessing – after all he has “a rock for his head!” Instead, he “consecrates” (with oil) the place – that is, he recognizes the place as blessed, not his person. Then, in a manner that risks to truly disturb the blessing, he only conditionally pledges his belonging to God. We might take it in a positive light that he knows that there can be no return gift for the grace of this encounter and he does not try – only that he lives out his life and further acknowledges the gift with his tithe.<sup>20</sup>

Jacob’s ladder, then, is a story that delights and disturbs and locates person and place in a tension that, when it comes to understanding holy place, runs right through scripture.

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<sup>20</sup> This might, however, be read Jacob in an overly generous light, and one that anticipates Chauvet’s proposed symbolic response to God’s gratuitous gift too much.

Writ large we see this story in the delight of being in the “certain place” most characteristically of Temple:

One thing I asked of the Lord,  
that will I seek after:  
to live in the house of the Lord  
all the days of my life,  
to behold the beauty of the Lord,  
and to inquire in his temple. (Ps 27:4)

We note the efficacy of worshipping there:

I cry aloud to the Lord  
and he answers me from his holy hill. (Ps 3:4)

Let me abide in your tent forever,  
Find refuge under the shelter of your wings. (Ps 61:4)

The Temple really is the place of divine residence, the place of presence: “I have built you an exalted house, a place you for you to dwell forever” (1 Kings 8:13). The Temple has, of course, its precursor in the construction of the Tabernacle in Exodus in order that God may abide in the midst of the God’s people: “I will dwell among the Israelites, and I will be their God.” (Exodus 29:45). If we were to titrate all of this cultic material we surely have a “precipitate” which is a testimony to “presence in place.”

On the other hand, we know well the prophet Nathan’s words that drip with a similar irony present in Jacob’s ladder:

Go and tell my servant David: Thus, says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?” (2 Samuel 7:5 -7)

This turns to polemic in the words of other prophets:

I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity.  
Your new moons and your appointed festivals  
my soul hates;  
they have become a burden to me,  
I am weary of bearing them.  
When you stretch out your hands,  
I will hide my eyes from you;  
even though you make many prayers,  
I will not listen;  
your hands are full of blood. (Isaiah 1: 14,15)

As Walter Brueggemann writes:

The claim for Yahweh as Real presence in the Temple was endlessly problematic for Israel. ... Israel did not want to deny that the Temple was the place of Yahweh's intense presence from which Israel might properly expect succour. At the same time, however, exploitation and domestication of Yahweh evoked in Israel reform and protest sought to reorder the cult ...<sup>21</sup>

To be sure, the criticism of the cult was mostly about the excesses and ethical failings, and it seems the critics did not imagine the complete abandonment of the cult. When we turn to the New Testament though, we inevitably meet the words in John's Gospel: "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Jesus placed himself in some important ways over against the Temple and in so doing recast how Christians understand sacred place. Thus, Chauvet himself succinctly captures the usual Christian response to Temple: God is not restricted to residing in the Jerusalem Temple made of material stones; God is present in the spiritual temple formed by Christians, "living stones" built upon the foundation stone which is Christ (1 Pet 2:4). For as Paul writes, "We are the temple of the living God" (2 Cor 6:16); and "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (1 Cor 3:16).

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<sup>21</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (New York: Fortress Press, 2012), 675.

It would appear, then, that we can describe scripture providing a kind of trajectory that moves from God journeying with the people to God's presence being in a place, through to ambivalence (or, shall we say, "uncertainty about a 'certain place'"); to sacred place being controversial; to the notion of sacred place being a mistake and that the blessing of the site of the sacred should be understood as dwelling within us.

This trajectory might be thought to point to the end of any physical sacred place for Christians as it is has become an "in spirit and truth" internal psycho-spiritual space. However, the reply might well be that, just like Jacob, we are still left with the place of divine encounter. To which, again, it seems the right Christian attitude is as to the empty tomb – that it can only be place of absence since "He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said" (Matt 28:6). Thus, there can be no satisfaction or settling on any place of presence since it is always an absence. This might be the end of the matter (pun intended) but we notice that the angel greets the Mary Magdalene and the other Mary with a fuller statement: "He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay." The full statement is important because in the final words we see the pointer to holy place and the tension between absence and presence resumes.

Returning to Beth-El: Jacob's story as it testifies to the place of divine encounter is emblematic of our w/hole. There are a number of ways in which the place is certainly honored as place of divine presence and is always not "a certain place". There is also the ironic way in which the blessing is primarily to Jacob so we actually have a person as "site of the sacred" or as the "Temple of the Spirit" not the place. It is no place – like an

empty tomb or a hole. But the revelation has itself fixed the place of divine interaction and thus a symbol of the relationship. As Mircea Eliade has it in his seminal work:

For religious man, space is not homogeneous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others. “Draw not nigh hither,” says the Lord to Moses; “put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Exod 3:5). There is, then, a sacred space, and hence a strong significant space ...<sup>22</sup>

So, the place of divine encounter both is and is not Beth-El, both a place of presence and a place of absence, and it remains the holy place to be marked by something significant and foolish like a stone. The stone that is consecrated is a symbol that in an important way enables participation in something of the same divine encounter and it is a joke (“a rock for Jacob’s head”) and “no-thing” and, thus, it always remains a “precarious stone”.<sup>23</sup>

## David Brown

[My] inclination would be to identify any experience of the natural world that involves an encounter with God as itself inherently sacramental, whether or not it is redemptive and whether or not the terminology as such is employed.<sup>24</sup>

When setting out my motivations at the outset of this thesis I identified a position in sacramentality set forth John Habgood and I stated that that I had a great deal of sympathy with it. I contrasted that with the position taken by Susan White. I take both of these writers as exemplars and, while I have discussed and critiqued the views held by

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<sup>22</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959), 20.

<sup>23</sup> Hence, the title of this section, which also draws on Chauvet’s comment: ‘Furthermore, isn’t the precarious character of liturgical space connected, as the etymology of the word indicates, with its relationship to the one who prays (Latin *precarious*)?’ Louis-Marie Chauvet, “The Liturgy in It’s Symbolic Space,” in *Liturgy and the Body*, ed. Louis Chauvet and Francois Kabasele (London: SCM, 1995), 29–39.

<sup>24</sup> David Brown, “The Sacramental World: Why It Matters,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, ed. Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 606.

White, I have made little comment or critique on the view held by Habgood and recently very eloquently advanced by David Brown. I have made mention of Brown at a number of points in the thesis, especially in relation to imagination which he takes to be that (graced) capacity in the human mind to analogically bridge the immanent earthly world where we are and the transcendent heavenly world which we experience and yet “passeth all our understanding.” We now attend more fully to Brown.

Along with William Abraham, I think Brown’s work should be received as “a seminal contribution to the epistemology of theology.”<sup>25</sup> Rowan Williams describes the first volume of his work, *Tradition and Imagination*, as “a major achievement, ... opening doors into all sorts of fresh insights ... The implications of the argument for liturgy and ethics as well as theology are large.”<sup>26</sup> Quite where to begin with someone who has produced nearly two thousand pages across his five linked volumes is a challenge – the sheer range of subjects covered is vast and the amount of detail is prodigious. Moreover, his approach across those volumes is a self-declared reverse methodology: “... my intention became deliberately to reverse my own order of writing: to explore the

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<sup>25</sup> William J Abraham, “Scripture, Tradition, and Revelation: An Appreciative Critique of David Brown,” in *Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture: Responses to the Work of David Brown*, ed. Robert McSwain and Taylor Worley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 27. Abraham reads Brown as sitting alongside “Reformed epistemology” – however, Brown self-describes his work as a work of form of natural theology and a project in phenomenology. I think it should be seen as such.

<sup>26</sup> As an Anglican I must note (with some delight) that while W. Taylor Stevenson famously said, “There is not now, and there never has been, a distinctive Anglican theology,” it is quite lovely to have a Jesuit inform us that there is something identifiably Anglican as well as something truly commendable about Brown’s work: “Brown has brought Anglican theology to a whole new level of achievement.” See W. Taylor Stevenson, “Lex Orandi - Lex Credendi,” in *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen Sykes, John Booty, and Jonathon Knight, Revised Edition (London: S.P.C.K, 1998), 188; and Edward T. Oaks S.J., “Review of David Brown, *Tradition and Imagination* and *Discipleship and Imagination*,” *Theological Studies* 62 (2001), 386.

phenomenology first as it were, before generating a theory.”<sup>27</sup> The approach is very much to begin with people’s lives. He continues:

So, while of course I could not entirely escape theory in the course of writing, it emerges incidentally rather than as a carefully worked out project. That is why terms like revelation, natural theology, sacramentality or enchantment, though endorsed, have yet received no precise definition, though my hope is that this will follow in two books currently being written.<sup>28</sup>

So, the important terms and criteria at stake in the work are, as he says, allowed “to emerge implicitly.”<sup>29</sup> On many levels this does not make our task of moving to our own theoretical thinking about sacrament any easier. His undergirding theological convictions are clear though: the generosity of God and a (radical) version of kenotic Christology.<sup>30</sup> Together they amount to a deep affirmation of the commitment of God to humanity and this world. So, he asks rhetorically: “if God is truly generous, would we not expect to find him at work everywhere and in such a way that all human beings could not only respond to him, however implicitly, but also develop insights from which even Christians could learn?”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> David Brown, “The Power of the Image to Effect Change,” *Society for the Arts in Religious and Theological Studies* 25, no. 2 (2014), 2. He indicates that two volumes that will present theoretical insights are to come.

<sup>28</sup> Brown, “The Power of the Image to Effect Change,” 2.

<sup>29</sup> David Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination: Christian Tradition and Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 389.

<sup>30</sup> Space does not allow for the discussion of Brown’s latest expression of Christology: David Brown, *Divine Humanity: Kenosis and the Construction of Christian Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011). His approach has been read as radical but the general point that sacramental theology has to be grounded in a deep understanding of the incarnation is widely accepted. See the discussion of his approach in Lizette Larson-Miller, *Sacramentality Renewed: Contemporary Conversations in Sacramental Theology* (Collegville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

<sup>31</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 8.

This being his conviction his approach follows. It begins by attending to the world as if it really is “charged with the grandeur of God” (Hopkins) and in and through that world God wants to be known, responded to, and seeks to gather us *bodily* into the redeeming Triune love. This absolutely comports with the position developed within this thesis thus far and a stance that amounts to seriously heeding the wonderful Denise Levertov:

“O Taste and See”

The world is  
not with us enough  
**O taste and see**

the subway Bible poster said,  
meaning **The Lord**, meaning  
if anything all that lives  
to the imagination’s tongue,

grief, mercy, language,  
tangerine, weather, to  
breathe them, bite,  
savor, chew, swallow, transform

into our flesh our  
deaths, crossing the street, plum, quince,  
living in the orchard and being

hungry, and plucking  
the fruit.<sup>32</sup>

It is then a stance that heeds the human emotional and sensual experience as important, to be deeply engaged with and, at times, considered genuinely mediating, revelatory, and sacramental.

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<sup>32</sup> Denise Levertov, *The Collected Poems of Denise Levertov*, ed. Paul Lacey and Anne Dewey (New York: New Directions Books, 2013), 213.

One of the key reasons that we must attend to Brown is that he stands out as a theologian who argues that religious buildings should be understood as mediating an experience of God; rather than existing to merely serve as an adjunct to some other functional purpose such as the liturgy (in the narrower sense of the term) or creating “a sense of community.” Thus, he says, “But suppose the aim is not means but expression. Then something quite different comes to be at stake, whether architecture aids an experience of God or not.”<sup>33</sup> Again, his discussion of sacred space is largely focused on specific features (phenomena) of actual buildings and, often, how they serve to mediate something of the experience of both the transcendence and the immanence of God.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, and this is so important in relation to sacred spaces as constructed “objects” and sacraments, he makes the important claim that the human artefact as much as the natural environment can be visible and material mediations of God’s invisible presence.<sup>35</sup>

As in the above quotation, Brown’s study leads him to affirm that “my inclination would be to identify any experience of the natural world that involves an encounter with God is inherently sacramental”<sup>36</sup> and that the sacramental should be seen as “a major, and perhaps even the primary, way of exploring God’s relationship to our world.”<sup>37</sup> However, it appears that the term “sacrament” loses some of its meaning at this point because it can

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<sup>33</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 22.

<sup>34</sup> See especially Chapter 5, “Contemporary Styles: Architectural Aims and Wider Setting” and Chapter 6, “The Contemporary Context: House and Church as Mediator” in *God and Enchantment of Place*.

<sup>35</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 24 and 25. Obviously, this claim is so important because it faces squarely into the issue of idolatry.

<sup>36</sup> Brown, “The Sacramental World: Why It Matters”, 606.

<sup>37</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 6.

be applied to anything and everything. To be sure his stated intention is to move from an “essentially ecclesiastical or narrowly Christian” understanding of sacrament and, while I want to absolutely affirm this project and the breadth of vision that it entails, there are two points of tension here. Firstly, we hear Rowan Williams’s admonition:

“Sacramentality is not a general principle that the world is full of sacredness: it is the very specific conviction that the world is full of a life of a God whose nature is known in Christ and the Spirit.”<sup>38</sup> I take this to mean that Williams is holding that there is still something important in the classic distinction between the doctrines of creation and salvation. So, while it is true that the goodness and blessedness of creation can and does bring us to reflect on and experience something of God, the Creator, the sacraments belong to the salvific life and work of Christ (the primordial sacrament) and it is only through Christ that sacraments have their authority/ being/ standing – a “specific conviction.” So, the tension is between Brown’s avowed commitment to natural religion which would seem to put him at some odds with William’s more traditional position. That said, it is not clear cut because so much of what Brown holds regarding his “kenotic Christology” and the centrality of the incarnation – and it is this that gives to him (and us) a conviction that the transcendent and invisible nature of God is mediated and made known in a true and immanent and visible/bodily way. This suggests that he is still importantly committed to a Christological criterion not that dissimilar in position to Williams’s. Secondly, I am aware that this general principle is in tension with my claim above that there is an institutional element such that, in the case of the church, a sacrament is in some measure “made so by virtue of a formal “act of recognition,” a

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<sup>38</sup> Rowan Williams, “Foreword,” in *The Gestures of God*, ed. Geoffrey Rowell and Christine Hall (London: Continuum, 2004), xiii.

ritual, by the church.<sup>39</sup> So, I need to draw the distinction between the sacraments per se, which, amongst other aspects entails a ritual, and a principle of sacramentality which undergirds our thinking about sacraments and even the whole of creation.

Joining these two points: I take it that the Spirit of God is present in creation from the beginning and the act of creation stands as an act of divine self-communication.

Moreover, that Divine perichoretic overflowing desire of/for communication and love entails that a transcendent God must make symbolic use of material things in order to mediate with the immanent incarnate/human world. I further take it that this divine overflowing desire came to fullest meaning in the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, Jesus the Christ, and reaches consummation in his incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension. As part of the human response to this communication that comes to the whole of creation through the second person of the Trinity the church enacts its liturgy and sometimes a feature of this liturgy is the formalizing in response (a ritual) to the saving acts and the presence of the Spirit in our world and our lives. There is, necessarily, a distinctiveness to the divine communication in and through Christ (and Christians take it to be determinative) and also the human response. It is this human response that is, in important ways, explicitly both Christological and ritualized.

The working definition for sacrament that Brown offers at the beginning of *God and Enchantment of Place* is: “the symbolic mediation of the divine in and through the

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<sup>39</sup> I am not denying here that another religion might determine in some fashion that a material object should be (or “shall be”) from their perspective a sacrament. Nor am I denying that Christianity has much to learn from the insights and praxis of other religions.

material.”<sup>40</sup> In fact, we might say the definition does a lot of work as it carries him through until the end of *God and Mystery in Words*.<sup>41</sup> However, he doesn’t really need to develop it because it is so workable and he adheres to his stated aim of being descriptive and phenomenological rather than theoretical. He does tell us that symbols are “enacted metaphors”<sup>42</sup> that enable us to imaginatively move/think “through the material into a different type of reality.”<sup>43</sup> In terms of the mediation he writes that

...[while] advocating a return to a wider sense of sacrament that allows sacraments to be seen as particular instances of a more general phenomenon, God acting through the material universe. “Acting,” however, is not always quite the right word. Sometimes it might perhaps be better to speak of human beings tapping into presence, as it were, rather than God having to do anything in addition.<sup>44</sup>

This places some responsibility for the “reception” of a more constant presence on human beings, which gives at least one *raison d’être* for sacraments and the repetition of sacramental acts - as a way of facilitating and mediating *from the human side* that gives an openness and receptivity to the transcendent. In relation to the eucharist he says that sacraments are “the means whereby Christ’s human presence is mediated to the believer once more”<sup>45</sup> which underscores this repeatability element. It is the case that he speaks of “sacramental imagination” being “an appeal no longer to the fundamental nature of our

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<sup>40</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 30.

<sup>41</sup> He writes that there “might seem to require an immediate push towards criteria. I take a different view, not because I think the issue is unimportant but because it seems that a more fundamental aim has to be achieved first: the need to take such experience seriously in the first place.” Brown, *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary*, 2.

<sup>42</sup> David Brown, *God and Mystery in Words: Experience Through Metaphor and Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9.

<sup>43</sup> Brown, *God and Mystery in Words*, 19.

<sup>44</sup> Brown, *God and Mystery in Words*, 267, 268.

<sup>45</sup> Brown, *God and Mystery in Words*, 9.

minds but rather to *how those minds work*.”<sup>46</sup> The implication across the volumes is that we can develop this sacramental capacity such that we can more easily “establish new wholes”<sup>47</sup> – and thus we see joined together the human and divine in our lives and the life of the world: “Grace operates everywhere, if only our minds and hearts can be generous enough to allow our eyes to perceive it.”<sup>48</sup> The theological risk (heresy) here is that sacrament and sacramental mediation might be thought of as solely a human achievement. The following quotation from Brown answers the concern – it is “God who is willing to focus his presence”<sup>49</sup> – and it also enables us to transition to some of what Brown offers about the sacrament of the eucharist.

We are most interested in the way in which Brown’s points about eucharist might lend themselves to thinking about sacraments generally:

So, the eucharist is best viewed as the supreme sacrament not because it offers a complete contrast to the way the world is, but rather because it represents the culmination of how God is perceived to act elsewhere in his world, through material reality. ... [F]undamentally, the dynamic of transcendence and immanence that [...] can for the Christian be seen to find its appropriate culmination in a God who is willing to focus his presence in a tiny wafer yet is at the same time someone whom the heavens cannot contain. So, there is simultaneously a drawing close and yet an immeasurable distance remaining.<sup>50</sup>

Notable here are Brown’s constant theme of material reality being the means by which God is being perceived/felt/sensed to act in the focused presence of the

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<sup>46</sup> Brown, “The Power of the Image to Effect Change”, 2 (italics mine).

<sup>47</sup> Brown, “The Power of the Image to Effect Change,” 2.

<sup>48</sup> Brown, *God and Grace of Body*, 423.

<sup>49</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 409.

<sup>50</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 409.

insignificant/highly significant/deeply symbolic piece of wafer that “enables participation” and engagement with the transcendent Divine. The phrase he uses of Christ as (primordial) sacrament is that the transcendent is present in “a deep enmeshing of the ordinary conditions of human existence.”<sup>51</sup>

The activity of God is everywhere in the material world that is his creation, and not an isolated phenomenon. That is why it seems to me no accident that Christianity’s central sacrament focuses on body and human body at that. It is not mere spiritual presence that is on offer in the eucharist but one envisaged in definitely material terms. Earthly reality is present not just in the bread and wine but also through the whole of humanity of Christ becoming once more available, ...<sup>52</sup>

Of the eucharist Brown specifically devotes a whole chapter to the symbolic resonances of consuming food and drink in a general way and that sets the scene for some of the joy and friendship that was a feature of Jesus’ meal fellowship – it is about deep community. Thus, he points out on several occasions that the means and setting of the eucharist is the celebration of the whole assembly – not just the work of the priest or the words of institution. Further, he lifts up the oft forgotten (today) dimension in the Eucharist being the “medicine of immortality” and a remedy against eternal death.<sup>53</sup> Another dimension explored is the Jewish background, not least that blood, which was once surrounded in prohibitions and deemed only the province of God who gives life, is now to be consumed by human beings, at least symbolically. He also draws out some of the salvific and liberation resonances with the Passover. Finally, he points out that “the Christian eucharist rightly focuses on the body of a particular human being who was both God and

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<sup>51</sup> Brown, “The Sacramental World: Why It Matters”, 612.

<sup>52</sup> Brown, *God and Grace of Body*, 4.

<sup>53</sup> Brown, *God and Grace of Body*, 392.

man.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, by the Spirit at work within us we return to and remain with the very real and gutsy body of Christ – as the whole assembly gathered in a whole celebration of joy and remembrance, as individual members, beautiful and ugly, and as the second person of the Trinity incarnate.

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<sup>54</sup> Brown, *God and Grace of Body*, 421.

#### 4.

Walls, there are walls all over: houses have walls, buildings have walls, works of fortification have walls. And yet, there was THE wall ... This wall was an eminent symbol.<sup>1</sup>

In *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of God*, as Chauvet sets up his discussion of what is meant by “symbol,” his first example is of a stone from “THE wall” – the Berlin Wall. The fragment evokes much and serves as a symbol, as a kind of “precipitate,” “of the totalitarianism of the communist regimes.”<sup>2</sup> To be sure, he goes on to state that “any element, verbal, visual, olfactory, tactile, and so on, can, depending on circumstances, function as symbol.”<sup>3</sup> In the context of this thesis, however, it does not seem insignificant that he first leans on a physical site as a quintessential symbol. These symbols “enable us to situate ourselves as subjects within culturally organized, socially organized world, that is to say, a world in which we find our bearings.”<sup>4</sup> This notion of the symbol is pursued in a similar fashion in his discussion of the underground cellar in his hometown of Vendee.<sup>5</sup> This underground space (again, so useful in parallel thoughts of constructed spaces and it even evokes the Holy Sepulchre) operates in a very complex manner such that it orients and positions the guest as one who “belongs” to the community or not. The space is a symbol revealing and confirming identity. This is to get

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<sup>1</sup> Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegville, Minnesota.: Liturgical Press., 2001), 69.

<sup>2</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 72.

<sup>3</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 70.

<sup>4</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 70. This quote actually takes me back to my beginning about identity and belonging in Aotearoa/NZ.

<sup>5</sup> Louis-Marie Chauvet, “The Liturgy in Its Symbolic Space,” in *Liturgy and the Body*, ed. Louis Chauvet and Francois Kabasele (London: SCM, 1995), 32–33.

ahead of ourselves slightly, yet the place to begin with Chauvet is with his consideration of “symbol”.

Chauvet identifies four initial traits of the symbol which he calls “(1) fitting together, (2) crystallization, (3) recognition (or identification), and (4) submission to the communal Other.”<sup>6</sup> We need to consider these and at the same time suggest how these traits are expressed in a sacred space. This will help approach both an understanding of sacred space and, importantly, it will identify some edges of the failure of sacred spaces, that is when they become empty symbols or, worse, focal points of idolatry.

(1) fitting together – it is the nature of symbol that it belongs to a whole. If someone appears with a piece of concrete from the Berlin Wall there is a fitting together with the whole of the wall and all that it “stood for” and symbolized. In a like manner my desk has rocks from Mt. Sinai and Iona and they too fit as part of a respective whole. These examples serve as obvious and actual “parts of a whole” and therefore the “fitting together” that is relevant. Further they make the point that if the element is isolated from the whole it loses meaning or is destroyed, or as Chauvet puts it “it does not function symbolically but *imaginarily*.”<sup>7</sup> So, a person picking up a little stone from my desk may have the stone suggest nothing without the sense of the relation to the whole – in this case, Iona. So, what

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<sup>6</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 70

<sup>7</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 71. (italics in original)

“characterizes the symbol is not its material value in quantity or quality but its relation with the whole to which it belongs.”<sup>8</sup>

- (2) crystallization - Chauvet revisits his word “precipitate” as the way in which a symbol crystallizes the whole. The symbol may not really have been a part of the whole in the way in which the piece of concrete was really part of the wall, but in another, more important sense the symbol really *re-presents* the whole. So, he points to the way in which a miniature Empire State Building or a flag is the United States; or in the same way a crucifix, large or small, beautiful or ugly, is Christianity. We will need to consider the nature of participation below but we can see that each of these symbols participates in and is a precipitate of the whole – so, the piece of concrete participates in and is a precipitate of the Berlin Wall that, in turn participates in and is a precipitate of the broken communist regime; or, the cross participates in and is a precipitate of the paschal mystery that is Christianity.
- (3) recognition – Chauvet draws on the notion that in antiquity one of the ways symbols were used is as a way of recognizing parties in a contract. Two halves of a broken object, say, served to identify the respective parties to the contract. (“‘Symbol’ comes from the Greek sym-ballein which means ‘to put together,’ to place side by side the elements of the the whole, ...”<sup>9</sup>) This, according to Chauvet, is a major way symbols function: situating the subjects and their relationship to one another.

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<sup>8</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*. 71

<sup>9</sup> Chauvet. *The Sacraments*. 14

(4) submission to the communal Other – a symbol operates in as much as it is part of a larger symbolic order which is shared. In this manner the symbol is under the agency of a communal “Other” where this Other can be a legal system, an ideology, or religion. The symbol both creates community by mediating relationship and depends upon the communal “Other.” When we think of a sacred space this can be particularly true of a building where the building works as a symbol of the church (as in assembly) and depends upon the church (as in assembly) and its wider symbolic order.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, we can see another symbol, say a Paschal Candle, being a symbol in its own right of the Risen Light of Christ and, simultaneously depending upon and holding the complex relation of all the symbols of the Paschal mysteries and the Great Three Days.

In each of these four elements there is a “gathering together” or “putting together” and Chauvet reminds us that the “Greek verb *symballein* literally [means] ‘to throw together’”.<sup>11</sup> Importantly, and we see this most acutely in the last two of the four characteristics, the symbol is a bringing together of subjects and thus is a mediator of relationship and identity. Of course, to speak of symbol in the singular is a mistake because symbols never stand completely alone but are always part of the network and it is this whole symbolic order that mediates a greater whole.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Of course, a church building will be symbolic of much more than that embodied in the current assembly that gathers there.

<sup>11</sup> Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacraments: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press., 1995), 122.

<sup>12</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 74.

The above expresses in positive and basic terms how Chauvet understands symbol. It is also important in order to comprehend Chauvet to understand what he is reacting against and what symbol is not. As noted above, he is attempting to avoid “the many problems and deadlocks of the question of the real presence in the Eucharist” and the fruitless talk of sign and cause of the Scholastic discourse.<sup>13</sup> He is also wanting to escape any implication that the sacraments could be about instrumentality or the production of grace. Thus, he sets his face against the 1950 catechism which taught that the sacraments are “visible signs instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ to produce and increase grace in our souls.”<sup>14</sup> In the understanding of sacrament, sign and instrument will be replaced by Chauvet to the language of symbol as mediation. Chauvet argues that “symbolic mediation” gives us

an understanding of the faith that enables us to see the sacramental mystery is simultaneously *a revealer and an agent of Christian identity*. It is primarily symbolic dimension, ... language discharges the twofold function simultaneously. Furthermore, the symbol, like grace is outside the value system. For these two reasons, the symbolic route seems to supply an approach much more akin to the sacraments than that of the instrumentality employed by the Scholastics of the twelfth century, and still dominant in our own day.<sup>15</sup>

So, at their best, the sacraments become revealers of Christian identity as participants recognize themselves as in Christ through them and, at the same time, they are agents of that identity effecting it as the sacraments are celebrated.<sup>16</sup> Chauvet writes: “By making

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<sup>13</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacraments*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, xiv.

<sup>15</sup> Chauvet. *The Sacraments*, 95 (italics mine).

<sup>16</sup> This efficacy always belongs to the order of language.

these [symbolic] gestures again and again, Christians ‘realize’ little by little what to be Jesus’ disciples really means.”<sup>17</sup>

Symbolic mediation doesn’t always work. Chauvet brings to our attention how symbols can fail and it comes from an insight and a term he derives from Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory. The symbolic can become part of what he calls the “imaginary.” This occurs when the symbol is isolated from the symbolic order of which it is a part.

This means that whereas the symbolic spaces the real at a distance by representing it and thus enabling it to be integrated in into a culturally significant and coherent whole, the imaginary tends to erase this distance in order to regain the immediate contact with things. As a consequence, things are only the mirror into which the subject projects itself ...<sup>18</sup>

Of course, what he is describing is the creation of an idol and for our purposes we can note that physical objects, including church buildings, stand at great risk of the imaginary as they become the focus of subjective projection. So, we see church buildings becoming something less than a structure that belongs to a whole symbolic order and, usually at its foundation, for the glory of God to becoming a shrine for the collection of family memories (and held all the more tightly for the sake of those memories or nostalgic evocations).

Kimberly Belcher critiques Chauvet on the grounds that his notion is not as comprehensive as he claims. Her critique and a response to it assists us to see some further aspects of symbol. She posits: “[H]uman experience begins before symbolism and

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<sup>17</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 91.

<sup>18</sup> Chauvet, 15.

the human experience of salvation is greater than the symbolic. Christian ritual is not just about constructing a symbolic world for the human person to inhabit; it is about constructing a human body that can inhabit the Christian world.”<sup>19</sup> Belcher, in short, thinks that Chauvet’s writing is limited to a linguistic understanding of symbolism and that there is a need to “go on beyond – or behind – symbolic models for sacramental action.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the “linguistic turn” risks ignoring embodiment, bodily expression, and response. Given the concern within this thesis for these features, we also ought to be alert to such a failure.

We might set aside the glaring question that is begged here; namely, how it might be that we could go beyond or get behind language?<sup>21</sup> Three motivations ground her critique though: (i) “extra linguistic grace (especially God’s gift to prelinguistic children and the developmentally disabled”); (ii) “the importance of the body in the human relationship”;<sup>22</sup> (iii) the embodied nature of rites and rituals.<sup>23</sup> This critique of Chauvet is, however, somewhat misdirected. First, we note that the flowering of scholarship focusing on the body and related topics such as desire is actually a particular feature of the last twenty-five years. It is, therefore, somewhat anachronistic to find failings in Chauvet on the matter. On one level his work anticipates this work and even prepares the way for it and on another level the critical issue has to be whether or not Chauvet’s work is conducive to

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<sup>19</sup> Belcher, *Efficacious Engagement*, 36.

<sup>20</sup> Belcher, *Efficacious Engagement*, 36.

<sup>21</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Belcher, *Efficacious Engagement*, 36.

<sup>23</sup> Belcher, *Efficacious Engagement*, 36.

these contemporary developments and how his thinking might be developed sympathetically and I believe this is more than possible. Secondly, we might concede the point that Chauvet appears to be predominantly focused on linguistic features, but Belcher is failing to apprehend that we are in the mode of symbolic mediation rather than that of instrumentality. So, “humans do not exist except as *corporality* whose concrete place is always their *own bodies*. Corporality is the body’s very speech.”<sup>24</sup> Moreover, “the human being does not have a body, but is body.”<sup>25</sup> This body is not an atomistic thing but belongs with and as part of a corporate body: “each person’s own body is structured by the system of values or symbolic network of the group of which each person belongs and which makes up his or her social and cultural body. It is equally and simultaneously spoken by an historic tradition whose foundation is more or less mythic”.<sup>26</sup>

The corporate body that the Christian belongs to has, according to Chauvet, three poles to its identity – scripture, sacrament, and ethics. Of the sacraments Chauvet writes:

The sacraments, which inscribe the faith in the body of the participants, symbolically give a role to play to all these modalities of the human being as “speaking body”: the body of desire is given a role through the enjoyment of the complaint or the jubilation, of the cry or the silence, of the prostration or the hands lifted to the heavens; ... The sacraments thus serve as buffer which repels every temptation Christians might have to ignore the body, history, society in order enter without mediation into communion with God.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacraments*, 146.

<sup>25</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacraments*, 149.

<sup>26</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacraments*, 150.

<sup>27</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 114.

Third and finally, Chauvet is careful to bring to our attention to the active (and, therefore, bodily) element of ritual and liturgy: “One of the major characteristics of rituality is surely that it aims at being operative. In contrast to scientific discourses, which pertain to ‘-ology,’ that is structured discourse (biology, sociology, musicology, theology, and so on), the liturgy pertains to ‘-urgy,’ a term that comes from the Greek *ergon*, designated precisely ‘action’ or ‘work,’ in contradistinction to *logos*.”<sup>28</sup> Further, Chauvet’s ethical turn of the “return gift.” is clearly about a bodily (both individual and corporate) response. To return to Belcher’s key concern for a pre-linguistic child, it simply remains beyond our ken to interpret any bodily response, which might occur years later.<sup>29</sup>

### **Excursus: The Journey to Emmaus.**

Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. Luke 24:31

Chauvet discusses the Journey to Emmaus (Luke 24:13 -35) in both of his books.<sup>30</sup> In the interests of space available here he usefully points us to three decisive “turns in

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<sup>28</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 99.

<sup>29</sup> One only has to have attended (or in my case, officiated at) a number of baptisms to be aware of the various “interpretations” that are offered for a child that does or does not cry. Quite what to make of this pre-linguistic response is, of course, impossible to discern and only a matter of projection. It remains, of course, for the corporate body to shape a response over time.

<sup>30</sup> There are many resonances between the work of Chauvet and Marion. Published a decade before *Symbol and Sacrament* (1987), Chauvet notes Marion’s *The Idol and the Distance* (1977) in his own discussion of idolatry but that is the extent of the open acknowledgement of each other’s work: see Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacraments: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, 216. It is hard, however, to imagine them not being cognisant of each other on many levels – not least as devout Roman Catholics. It would be a whole other study to attempt to draw all the parallels in their work and, given Marion’s ongoing productivity, then carrying forward any of Chauvet’s symbolic sacramentality, and (if it mattered) one might even research any actual historical interactions these scholars had with each other. A singular and obvious point of connection, however, is their respective readings of the Journey to Emmaus. For both of them this passage is emblematic of fundamental features in their understanding of the sacrament of the Eucharist. Marion’s first discussion of the Emmaus story is in relation to his consideration of the Ascension and ‘The Gift of Presence’ in *Prolegomena to Charity* published in French in 1986: Jean-Luc Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2002). His most explicit treatment of

recognition” in the return trip which relate to stops in time and they can assist to focus the main points.

- (i) “they stood still looking sad” (v17) This is the place of death, stillness and sadness. As Chauvet tells us of Cleopas and his companion (surely the companion is a placeholder for the reader/ listener?), here they “know everything about him but understand nothing.”<sup>31</sup> It is as if they are wandering in the tomb looking for a dead body; it reprises the women who went to the tomb but, as Chauvet tells us, the story sits alongside two other Lucan moments in “the time of the church”<sup>32</sup> that of the Ethiopian’s baptism (Acts 8:26-40) and Saul’s conversion (Acts 9:1-20) – that is, Jerusalem to Emmaus; Jerusalem to Gaza; Jerusalem to Damascus.<sup>33</sup>

The unblocking of the impasse begins at the moment they let the stranger take the initiative and speak, an initiative characterized by the appeal to the scriptures.<sup>34</sup> If we actually take this to be the foundational discourse of the

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the Journey was first published in French in 2001 and in English in 2002: Jean-Luc Marion, “They Recognised Him; and He Became Invisible to Them,” in *Believing in Order to See: On the Rationality of Revelation and the Irrationality of Some Believers*, ed. Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 136–43.

<sup>31</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 23.

<sup>32</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 21.

<sup>33</sup> While it is apparent that these moments are about a failure to recognize the Messiah in the scriptures and thus offer some hermeneutical teaching they are in each instance about the sacramental symbol too. Thus Chauvet writes: “... there is no possible access to faith, according to our texts, without what will be later called the sacraments of the Church. There breaking of the bread at Emmaus, the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, the imposition of hands to call down the Holy Spirit on Saul, all characterize the passage from non-faith to faith. These ritual gestures are not mere accessories, but structuring elements of the faith.” Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacraments*, 163.

<sup>34</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 24.

church (its kerygma) we perceive here, behind the discourse of the risen Jesus on the scriptures, the issue which dominates the whole of our story: you cannot arrive at the recognition of the risen Jesus unless you renounce seeing/ touching/finding him by undeniable proofs. Faith begins precisely with such a renunciation of the immediacy of the seeing/ knowing and with the assent of the mediation of the church.<sup>35</sup>

“[B]eginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (v27). Here they begin to “hear but not quite understand” but Christ provides the hermeneutic. Luke’s / the Reader’s key question could be understood to be “Is it true?” and here the journey turns to addressing that catechetical task.

- (ii) “[H]e went in to stay with them” – here the key is their invitation that Christ might come and “abide” with them (v29) and, finally, then comes the moment of recognition; “he took bread, blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them.” According to Chauvet: “What Luke tells us is that each time the church takes bread, pronounces the blessing, breaks, and gives it in memory of the Lord Jesus, it is he who does it through the church. The gestures the church makes, the words it pronounces are his gestures and his words. In the fullest sense of

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<sup>35</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 25.

the word it is the sacrament.”<sup>36</sup> Thus faith remains incomplete unless and until it participates in the sacrament.

At the moment of his appearance he suddenly disappears (v31). For Chauvet in this “time of the church” Christ’s presence is simultaneously marked by his absence. “Their eyes open on an *emptiness* – he vanished from their sight – but an emptiness full of a presence.”<sup>37</sup> Chauvet explains this absence as a feature of the “in-between time” as we await the eschaton.<sup>38</sup> The “presence of an absence” is also the moment that Chauvet holds we consent to the mediation of the church – “To consent to the presence of the absence is to consent to never being able to leave mediation behind – mediation of the symbolic order that always-already precedes human beings.”<sup>39</sup>

- (iii) “That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem” (v33) – the two disciples have their own “rising” after the eucharistic appearance/disappearance of Christ that sends them (back?) to Jerusalem to share the “good news”, to engage in mission and is the “ethical turn.”

The threefold movement comports with Chauvet’s understanding of the Christian identity which holds scripture, sacrament, and ethics in a dynamic balance.

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<sup>36</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacraments*, 170.

<sup>37</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacraments*, 170.

<sup>38</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacraments*, 171, 546.

<sup>39</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacraments*, 170.

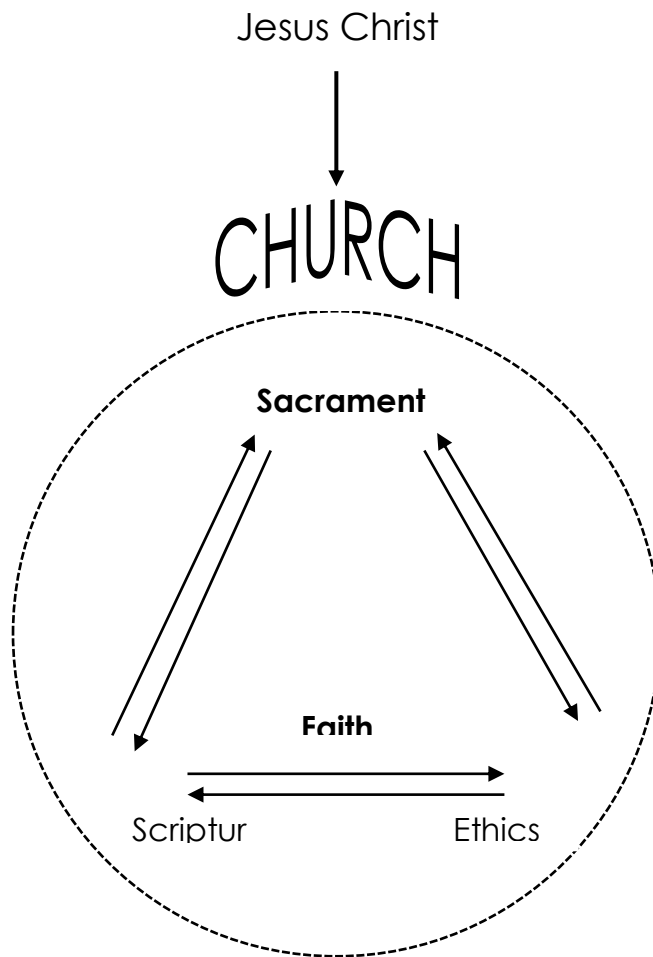


Figure 2: Diagram of the Structure of Christian Identity<sup>40</sup>

While there is a certain feeling of Chauvet pressing the Emmaus story into the service of his model it still provides valuable insight. One of the aspects that he draws out in his discussion is how no aspect (or pole) can be overemphasized without some loss in the Christian life. What is of great interest to us in our forthcoming discussion is whether the

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<sup>40</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 28.

strong relation between each of the poles can be framed without invoking the problematic notion of obligation. The idea of presence/absence is also of considerable interest to us. I think it is valuable to consider absence not just an eschatological necessity, nor as simply affirming the need for the mediation of the church, but because we consider every human attempt to celebrate a sacrament has an implicit edge and risk of failure to it. We are very conscious of the failure of any building to contain the presence of God. I am suggesting that, while this is correct, the implicit failure (absence) is present in every sacrament and thus a characteristic that sacred spaces have in common with every sacrament.

There is a great deal more one might say about Chauvet's argument but we have before us the key aspects such that when we move to understanding sacrament in the mode of symbol rather than instrument, we are in realm of belonging, identity, and relationship. Moreover, if we also move from a static understanding of the symbol being simply an object that stands for something and consider the further notion of the exchange of the symbolic in a "theology of sacramentality" we apprehend that we are necessarily speaking of the exchange or sharing of identity – unsurprisingly the ultimate words used in this kind of Christian exchange are, "this is my body". We need then to make the move to considering the dynamic relation of the exchange between God and believers in the sacraments and, hopefully, some conception of the exchange that occurs in "sacred space." As Chauvet says: "The sacraments are the ecclesial mediations of the exchange between humanity and God."<sup>41</sup> Chauvet diagrams the symbolic exchange in the following way:

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<sup>41</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 123.

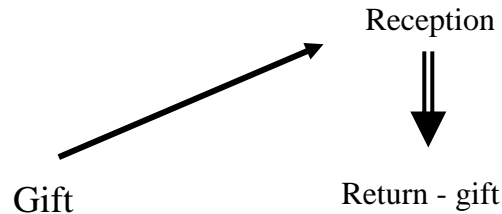


Figure 3: Diagram of Symbolic Exchange<sup>42</sup>

We see symbolic exchange is in the mode gift giving and it has three “moments.” In the context of this exchange the first moment is unidirectional which acknowledges everything that comes from God, comes as gift. It is worth noting we see this in our emblematic story of Jacob’s dream, where the encounter – the joining of heaven and earth, the vision, the blessing – comes to him in a time of when he is genuinely doing nothing – nothing but sleeping – so he does not work for it or deserve it. We also see it in Chauvet’s biblical touchstones: manna in the desert and, importantly, Christ’s revelatory presence at Emmaus. Chauvet holds that it is “especially visible in the Eucharistic prayer.”<sup>43</sup> So, the “moments” are: First the gift comes as God’s pure initiative, it is what Chauvet notes as the “gratuitousness” of God. Second the receipt of God’s grace comes as grace and not as something earned or deserved nor as something to be seized at but as grace and, therefore, as something which gives rise to the third moment, a return-gift of

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<sup>42</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 121.

<sup>43</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 122.

some conversion, faith, and love – God and neighbor. We note that Chauvet points out that “the ‘validity’ of the sacrament depends on God, its ‘fecundity’ depends on the believing subject. ... “The gift is received as such only if it elicits the return-gift or gratitude, thanksgiving, increase in love.”<sup>44</sup> The feature we have to note about the return gift is that, because God does not need even our thanks and praise, there really is nothing we can return to God, our reception of the gratuitous gifting of God becomes a kind of “pay it forward” to another subject and not a direct returning to God. The example of the gift of God’s forgiveness is most helpful in capturing what is meant by “return-gift.” He states that in the ministry of reconciliation the forgiveness that is pronounced by the priest “is not received as forgiveness if they do not repent of their sins.”<sup>45</sup> We then might press the question of what does it mean to repent? The answer, according to Chauvet, is that it involves some real conversion, some amendment of life, in short for Chauvet an ethical outcome where ethics is “all that pertains to action in the name of the gospel.”<sup>46</sup> The return-gift is the verification of sacrament and we might say that it occurs (or not) in its vivification. Failure of the sacrament at this point amounts to a failure of the “fruits test” (Matthew 7:15 -20). Chauvet summarizes:

If every sacramental celebration thus implements the same process of gift/reception/return-gift, a process concretely corresponding to the figure Scriptures/Sacrament/Ethics, this cannot be by pure chance. In fact, such a process can be understood as the very process of Christian identity. In other words, every sacrament shows us how to see and live what transforms our human existence into a properly Christian existence.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Chauvet. *The Sacraments*, 124.

<sup>45</sup> Chauvet. *The Sacraments*, 124.

<sup>46</sup> Chauvet. *The Sacraments*, 31.

<sup>47</sup> Chauvet. *The Sacraments*, 145.

Considering Chauvet's conception of a gift next to Marion's exposes a significant difference. Almost to make Derrida's point regarding the impossibility of a gift Chauvet insists that there *must* be a "return."

... every gift obligates; there is no reception of anything *as a gift* which does not require some return-gift as a sign of gratitude, at the very least a "thank you" or some facial expression. Which is to say that by the very structure of the exchange, the gratuitousness of the gift *carries the obligation of the return gift of a response*.<sup>48</sup>

To a large extent intuition is on Chauvet's side since we can imagine someone (A) who, as a sign of their love and affection of another person (B), shows endless generous and sensitive affection and yet to have not a single response or acknowledgement of any kind from (B). At some point in time it would be incomprehensible for (A) to hear (B) say, "Of course I love you (A)." It seems obvious that there needs to be some response or acknowledgement for there to be meaning to (B)'s comment. It also seems clear that in such a situation the relationship is dead or non-existent.<sup>49</sup> Further, Chauvet is insistent that return-gift, as he describes it, disrupts and stands outside the "value exchange" which dominates our society. Gift belongs to "symbolic exchange" where what is being offered and received is "nothing" in real value – it is "free of charge" – but it forges "relationship of alliance, friendship, affection, recognition" between parties. So, taken together the response on behalf of Chauvet is that: "gift belongs to a symbolic logic not to a value logic, and secondly, if there were not these symbolic exchanges then relationships would suffer and break down."<sup>50</sup> This would be unlikely to assuage someone sharing Derrida's

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<sup>48</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacraments*, 108.

<sup>49</sup> Theologically the parallel is obvious. If we hold that God's love is always and already giving to us – life itself – then some response is required to make the relationship real.

<sup>50</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacraments*, 107.

perspective who will not doubt say that Chauvet's definition of gift is not a gift since a true gift implies the recipient really owes nothing in return and "obligation" betrays gift.

Even we accept Chauvet's definition, Chauvet writes: "the recognition of another as a subject entails the recognition of this person as *obligated*. On contrast to necessity, obligation belongs to ethical relation."<sup>51</sup> Then, addressing the gracious gift of God, Chauvet explicitly says that this gift is "gratuitous" and the proper response for the believer is respond "to love by love and not by calculation."<sup>52</sup> The problem is that Chauvet's "obligation" has a demandingness and compulsory edge to it and this, along with the "ethical" aspect, even suggests some kind of "works-based" piety. There is, therefore, a significant tension between the necessity of the ethical obligation (especially to an Infinitely gracious giver) and a response "to love by love." This takes us back to the beginning of the thesis as Chauvet looks like a strong support for the position advocated by Susan White and already set aside by me.

It would have to be said that one cannot "oblige" anyone to love; that there is (shall we say?) heterogeneity between the language of obligation and the language of love. In the *Erotic Phenomenon* Marion explores the language and logic of love.<sup>53</sup> The way the book proceeds is as follows: firstly, I insist that the other love me, this proves impossible so then I attempt to love myself which also fails so I then attempt to love the other – without

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<sup>51</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 125.

<sup>52</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 125.

<sup>53</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

conditions or expectations of response. By the end of the journey I discover myself loved by the other and this is actually prior to any attempts of my own. At the end I find myself loved. The point being that the language and logic of love follows a quite different course than that of the language of exchange and obligation, which has to be rejected in this context. I think that Chauvet's position (and diagram) can, however, be saved if one were to read the relations between scripture-sacrament-ethics as one that operates differently than by obligation. If we take the Emmaus story to be emblematic for us then the final appearance of Christ leaves the two disciples overwhelmed and overflowing with the experience. Christ has made (yet another) kenotic gift of himself. Like the lover awaiting a response Christ might hope for a response and for the disciples to go and share the good news – to kenotically give themselves – but this will come not through him saying, “you are now obliged to go ...”, it will come through their own sense of fullness and thankfulness. Whatever else is entailed or meant by the realization that the disciples had after Jesus disappeared – “Were not our hearts burning within us” (v32) – it gives the kind of energy for mission/ethics.

In typical polemical fashion Alexander Schmemmann writes :

What is required is a return on our part to that source of energy, in the deepest sense of the word, which the Church possessed when it was conquering the world. ... The joy of the kingdom: it always worries me that, in the multivolume systems of dogmatic theology that we have inherited, almost every term is explained and discussed except the one word that Christian Gospel opens and closes. “For behold, I bring you tidings of great joy” (Luke 2:10) – so the Gospel begins, with the message of the angels. “And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy” (Luke 24:52) – so the Gospel ends.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, “Liturgy and Eschatology,” *Eschatologia: An Orthodox Christian Examination of the Last Things*, 2016, <http://www.eschatologia.com/2016/09/liturgy-and-eschatology-fr-alexander.html>.

The joy of love – of its anticipation and its fulfilment – creates the kind of energy and relation that Chauvet needs to save his tripolar relation. Joy is the energy – energy without obligation – that drives and directs ethics from the sacramental and scriptural.

It is possible, therefore, to “save” Chauvet’s model from the fatal flaw of obligation and for us to continue to hold the framework he offers to be of use to us as we think further about sacred space as sacrament.

Recall that symbol mediates identity and relationship. It is also worth bringing to mind that Chauvet has a wide and inclusive understanding of “sacrament” – “it is everything that pertains to the *thankfulness* which the church expresses to God.”<sup>55</sup> It is a short step to hold that sacred space is a symbol that mediates identity and relationship and therefore should be understood as sacrament. It is precisely this move that Chauvet makes in his article on sacred space; he writes:

[L]iturgical space speaks... It speaks as the initiatory matrix in which everyone arrives at his or identity as a Christian; it speaks as illocutory space which informs, by its evocative symbolism, the giving and receiving of the Christian message which is delivered there; it speaks as transitional space which allows us to negotiate the right distance from the hidden God.<sup>56</sup>

In many respects we have covered in different language these three features that Chauvet mentions with the possible exception of “transitional space.” He takes this aspect from D. W. Winnicott who observes that the function of a teddy bear (in an otherwise healthy and balanced child) is that allows the child to “make the transition from a state of union with

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<sup>55</sup> Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 30 (italics original).

<sup>56</sup> Chauvet, “The Liturgy in Its Symbolic Space,” 36.

its mother to state that relates to her as one who is external and separate ... This transition requires both internal and external reality to be both separated and linked.”<sup>57</sup> The idea is that as a human develops he or she naturally develops other transitional objects and, in time, transitional spaces which are the “location of cultural experience or creative play” all the time these transitional objects and spaces allow for the negotiation between internal and external reality to be worked out. Thus, Chauvet’s contention is that liturgical space allows for “negotiating the right distance between human beings and God, between presence and absence.”<sup>58</sup> The thought that is assisted here is the notion that sacred space is always both about presence and absence and this is a feature of its sacramental function.

Nonetheless Chauvet concludes that sacred space – as he calls it “symbolic space” – is “eminently part of the *sacramentum*.”<sup>59</sup> In sacred spaces the church does express its thankfulness to God, it experiences the joy of hearts burning within, it experiences the presence and absence of God. This element of the church’s life is distinct from the ethical or missional aspect of its life – even if they are related and find meaning in their relation. Sacred space always has a precarious character to it, always on the edge of glory and edge of failure; as Chauvet says, “the etymology of the word indicates, with its

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<sup>57</sup> Chauvet, “The Liturgy in It’s Symbolic Space,” 34.

<sup>58</sup> Chauvet, “The Liturgy in It’s Symbolic Space,” 35.

<sup>59</sup> He continues, “But if it [the church] is not to allow itself to be fascinated by the seven rites which ‘cause what they signify’ and thus imprison itself too narrowly in the problem of the ‘specific difference’ between the seven sacraments and other acts of worship, it must not forget to derive the concept from its living source: the symbols deployed by liturgical action.” Chauvet, Chauvet, “The Liturgy in It’s Symbolic Space, 37.

relationship to the one who prays (Latin *precarius*).”<sup>60</sup> This is the nature of all sacraments but no less sacred space which is a sacrament mediating God’s presence with us.

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<sup>60</sup> Chauvet, “The Liturgy in It’s Symbolic Space, 35.

## Appendix: St Joseph's Chapel – 'Futuna' – a visit

On an overcast day I slipped into the back carpark attempting to take Futuna somewhat by surprise. Fact is that the building has always expected some to come by this way – maybe like Nicodemus by night? – because there is a square red light that was eternally on to bid you and a large looming cross cast on the outside of the concrete structure to sign you in.

The actual entrance to the building is around the western side and up a few steps past a (now drained) reflection pool to find two small doors, reminiscent of the small portal into a *wharenui* (meeting house) or the Humility Door on the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Before I knew it I was there; I was thrust right at the *pou tokomanawa*, the heart pole, of the building. To be delivered so directly through the doors right to this *axis mundi* was truly impressive. Pressing my hand against this tree of life, I looked up to the roof/s to find I was holding the giant shaft of an umbrella which had been broken by the wind – pushed up to the west behind me and collapsing in front of me to the east.<sup>1</sup>

Holding the pole forced me to consider where I was and how it was I had arrived. There is an immediacy about being in the space; a directness of contact. Here. Now.

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<sup>1</sup> The image of an umbrella in the wind may be most apposite because, apparently, in terms of the structural purpose, the centre pole is actually holding the roof *down*. See Nick Bevan and Gregory O'Brien, "Present and Future," in *Futuna: Life of Building*, ed. Nick Bevan and Gregory O'Brien (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2016), 135–43, 138. I was pleased to discover, after my visit, the line in Gregory O'Brien's poem 'Ode to Futuna' "... the centre pole – an umbrella shaft, reminding us of a storm-tossed world ..." Gregory O'Brien, "Ode to Futuna," in *Futuna*, ed. Nick Bevan and Gregory O'Brien, 111–14.



There, just a short distance past this *powhenua*, in the eastern corner with the roof folding down, maybe wind lashed or the sheer weight of heaven pressing down to earth, is the massive stone altar. Dried-blood red it is raised up on a stepped platform. A slightly larger than life-sized mahogany corpus with a recognizable Polynesian form overlooks from a large wooden crucifix.

From the *powhenua* one can go left or right to one or other set of solid built pews. The pews are raised up one step off the floor, each making a part of an ‘L’ shape. So these two *waka* (canoe) head to meet at the altar; each nave (Medieval Latin *navis*, “ship”) or transept (are they transepts? actually “cross” shaped?) is lifted up above the sea green of the polished pounamu (jade) paving and keeping one a safe distance from the reefs of the rough-cast concrete wall.

Light. Sitting and taking the space in, even on a dull day outside, one can appreciate the light; the presence and play of light throughout the building. The high colored windows promise so much. Most impressive this day was the back-lit frieze wrapping around the top rim of the walls – the Stations of the Cross. Since one can’t see all of the Stations from one seat – indeed, the L-shape makes one more-or-less blind to some part of the building – one would have to move about to devote oneself to them all – *Via Dolorosa*. These Stations appear to be the only procession the building really contemplated since there is no center-aisle. The space invites mostly sitting, eliciting a stillness and contemplation.



There was really no taking this building by surprise. It is probably the most reflected upon and written about building in Aotearoa.<sup>2</sup> It is no surprise that Bill McKay's *Worship: A History of New Zealand Church Design* has it as the cover photograph. It is a building of considerable significance generally let alone religiously. I carried some of this writing and reflection with me up the first flight of the temple steps.

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<sup>2</sup>Mark Southcombe writes: "Futuna Chapel's significance for New Zealand Architecture cannot be understated. It is regarded as the key work of John Scott, New Zealand's first Maori Architect to achieve national recognition for the quality of his work. The project received an NZIA Gold medal in 1968 and a NZIA 25 year Award in 1986 and was the subject of a major book *Voices of Silence* by Russell Walden in 1987. The book was awarded a NZIA National Award for Architecture in 1993 and remains the only book ever to achieve this milestone. There is extensive architectural writing and material around the chapel and its historicity including the Pacific Symposium held at the chapel in 2008" Mark Southcombe, "Silent Voices," Proceedings of the 26<sup>th</sup> International SAHANZ Conference Cultural Crossroads: 2-5 July 2009. southcombe.co.nz, accessed April 24, 2019. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a28c0e68c56a8ed657dc973/t/5a33067fec212d3032bfb2e/1513293444664/090429+silent+voices.pdf>. see Endnote 8. Since Southcombe made that observation the Chapel has been discussed in a number of publications including Deirdre Brown's *Maori Architecture: from Fale to Wharenui and Beyond* and in 2015 was part of the New Zealand Pavilion's exhibit at the 14<sup>th</sup> International Architectural Exhibition in Venice. It receives the further (beautiful) book length treatment in Nick Bevan and Gregory O'Brien, eds., *Futuna: Life of Building* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2016).

The building is said to have elements that refer to indigenous Maori *wharenui* (Maori meeting house) and Pacific *fale* (meeting house) and it has gothic roof angles/lines, it has resonances and elements from Le Corbusier's *Chapelle Notre-Dame-du-Haut de Ronchamp* and Matisse's *Chapelle du Rosaire de Vence*, and for the architect, John Scott, the New Zealand woolshed was the quintessentially successful building because it is so deeply functional, it represents a collaborative effort, and is "a symbol for all New Zealanders."<sup>3</sup> So, Russell Walden is glad to elegize the same intentions in Futuna. It is, of course, all of these things; as John Scott described it, it is "a conglomerate mess."<sup>4</sup> Walden announces: "Here we can view our true identity as New Zealanders."<sup>5</sup>

I wanted to set aside all of this "foreknowledge" in my visit, and experience the text/texture of the building afresh.<sup>6</sup> It is, however, an inescapable feature of many religious/sacred spaces that they are "saturated spaces" – saturated with layers of story, polyphonic and even discordant resonances form a chorus, and we often bring them with us, or, indeed, it is exactly what draws us to the space. It was unclear to me whether and how I might engage with the many texts that make up the legend of "Futuna" but when it came to leaving Futuna I could not let a number of matters rest easy, not just because it was "Futuna," but because they impinged directly on central concerns of my study.<sup>7</sup> To

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with John Scott quoted in Russell Walden, *Voices of Silence* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1987), 149.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with John Scott quoted in Russell Walden, *Voices of Silence* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1987), 149.

<sup>5</sup> Walden, 157.

<sup>6</sup> I had not actually read the reflection by Niall McLaughlin before my own visit but there are some resonances between his and mine, which is gratifying. See Niall McLaughlin, "A Personal Perspective," in *Futuna*, ed. Bevan and O'Brien, 103–8.

two related matters I turn my attention; they pivot on the departure of the Society of Mary and the ongoing status of the Chapel of St Joseph (to give it its proper title), and what should have happened after the Society left.

An outline of some relevant history is important:<sup>8</sup>

**1841 – 28 April** – Father Peter Chanel is martyred on the island of Futuna; the first martyr in Oceania.

**1842 – 3 February** – body of Father Peter Chanel arrives in Bay of Islands for burial at Pompallier House.

**1850** – remains of Father Peter Chanel arrive at Mother House of Society of Mary in Lyons, France.

**1889 – 17 November** – Father Peter Chanel is declared a martyr and beatified by Pope Leo XII. Small fragments of bone are distributed as relics.

**1947** – Society of Mary purchase the site at Karori.

**1948** – Futuna Retreat Centre is opened.

**1954 – 12 June** – Father Peter Chanel is Canonized as first Roman Catholic Saint of Oceania.

**1958** – John Scott first visits site

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<sup>7</sup> It was not my intention in these short reflections on my encounters with various buildings to engage past that point. In the case of Futuna, however, it is building of such great significance that it demanded my attention. Deidre Brown writes: ‘Futuna Chapel is arguably the most significant New Zealand building of the 20th century’: Deidre Brown, “Māori Architecture - Whare Māori,” *Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, 2014, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/maori-architecture-whare-maori/page-1>. There is also a vast amount (in relative terms) of literature on the building and I was left with some very particular questions that led me to contact various people in the hope of finding the answers. I am enormously grateful to a number of people, especially: Elizabeth Charlton, Archivist from the Marist Archives; Paul Holm, Archivist from the Archdiocese of Wellington; The Honorable Chris Findlayson; Fr. Ezio Blasoni SM; Professor Mike Austin, Mark Southcombe; and other members of the Society of Mary who preferred to remain anonymous. Of course, the conversations and communications make up part of my ongoing experience of the building.

<sup>8</sup> Most of this is attributable to the much more comprehensive chronology in Bevan and O’Brien, 144-149.

**1959 – 22 April** – Society of Mary approve Scott’s design. 12 August – Society Superior in Rome grants approval for chapel to be built. September – Construction begins with a team of six Brothers led by Brother Joseph Kelly.

**1961 – 19 March** – Feast of St Joseph - Futuna Chapel is blessed and opened by his Grace Archbishop P.T.B. McKeefrey.

**1977 – 28 April** - bones of St Peter Chanel returned from France to Futuna.

**1986 – 13 April** – Futuna Chapel is Dedicated by His Eminence Cardinal Tom Williams and this includes the titular Dedication of the Chapel to St Joseph.

**1986 – 6 November**, 150 years after first missionaries arrived in Futuna, the skull of St Peter Chanel returned to Futuna.

- Futuna Chapel receives the inaugural New Zealand Institute of Architects 25 Year Award.<sup>9</sup>

**1987** – Russel Walden’s *Voices of Silence: New Zealand’s Chapel of Futuna* is published.

**1999** – Futuna Chapel registered by Historic Places Trust ‘Category 1’.

**2001 – 19 February** – Society of Mary sell the whole Futuna Retreat Centre to property developers, Prime Properties Limited. The developers move with some haste and start removing items from the chapel including dismantling and removing the pews. The Corpus is removed from the crucifix by persons and reasons unknown.

**2002** – an urgent enforcement order is issued by the Environment Court to protect the interior of the Chapel.

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<sup>9</sup> The chapel is judged “a building of timeless quality. It is a place of tranquillity, yet it is emotion-charged. Futuna affects people.” Bevan and O’Brien.

**2003** – Trust Deed for Friends of Futuna Trust is signed.

**2006 – 31 July** - Futuna Trust signs sale agreement for the purchase of Futuna Chapel from Prime Properties Limited.

**2012 – 6 September** – Corpus is returned to Chapel (it was subsequently taken for restoration and then reinstalled 15 March, 2013).

**2016** – publication of Nick Bevan’s and Gregory O’Brien’s *Futuna: Life of Building*.

### **Consecrated: to be or not to be**

There is some confusion as to whether the Chapel of St. Joseph is “consecrated” or not. Part of the confusion is that “Consecration” is not a term in any Roman Catholic official usage at this time and the word “Dedication” has been preferred for a while.<sup>10</sup> So, the actual term for the permanent setting aside of a religious building in the Roman Catholic Church is “Dedication”. Canon 1217§5 makes it clear that a church (chapel) is “to be dedicated or at least blessed as soon as possible.” Canon 1217§2 stipulates that a cathedral or church (rather than a chapel) shall follow “the solemn rite” suggesting that with chapels for religious communities (such as St Joseph’s) there is a little more flexibility. St Joseph’s Chapel was “Blessed” on the Feast of St Joseph in 1961 as is required.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, Bevan and O’Brien record that: “Brother Joseph said to Russell

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<sup>10</sup> The Editor of the Marist Messenger writes a postscript to his article of May, 1961: “A correspondent has pointed out that the church at Makara would seem to have been the first church liturgically “consecrated.” We are enquiring into this, but as the building appears to lack the qualification for consecrating, it is probable that the word “consecration” was loosely used in its regard instead of “blessing.” In a way this makes my point about the confusion around the term “consecration.”

<sup>11</sup> Notwithstanding that the Canons cited here are from 1983, it is reasonable to assume considerable continuity with Canonical requirements prevailing at the time.

Walden that no bishop could be bothered fasting for 24 hours (as the ritual requires) so that is why it had never been done! In fact Father Beban admits that he was getting a bit tired and never got round to it. The Chapel was blessed in March 1961 and was dedicated to St Joseph in 1968 [sic].”<sup>12</sup>

This is not the case. It is not permissible to Dedicate a building if it is not debt free and it was for this reason that the Chapel was simply “Blessed” in 1961. Walden (correctly) writes, “Under church law no religious building can be consecrated until it is debt free.”<sup>13</sup> It is also clear that the Chapel was still short of completion when it was opened. The mosaics for the side chapels were not finished, it was awaiting the completion of the sculpted/carved corpus for the crucifix and it was not installed until August 1961. What is unclear is whether or when the relics were placed in the altar/s. No such event is formally reported. However, the *Marist Messenger* of May 1961, reporting on the March Opening and Blessing records: “As might be expected, the three-and-a-half ton altar will contain relics of St. Peter Chanel.” So, it was the clear (and obvious) expectation that relics from the saint of Futuna would be placed in (at least) the main altar.<sup>14</sup> One might assume that at the time of the Opening the Society was still awaiting possession of appropriate relics.<sup>15</sup> I think it reasonable to believe that relics of St. Peter Chanel were placed in the

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<sup>12</sup> Bevan and O’Brien, 76.

<sup>13</sup> Walden, 125.

<sup>14</sup> As one of the side altars is dedicated to St Peter Chanel one would think it very odd for it contain relics of another saint. The ‘reliquary’ on that altar appeared properly sealed upon my visit.

<sup>15</sup> There have been two main efforts to return relics of St. Peter Chanel to Futuna but relics remain “well distributed” and rest in the altars of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Auckland, and the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Christchurch, and at the Marist Seminary in Auckland.

altars at some point.<sup>16</sup> I had the following email correspondence from Br. Robert Johnsen S.M.:

I was the last person out of the chapel – I turned out the lights and locked the doors on settlement day [2001] when Fr John Fitzsimmons (RIP) vacated the property. I have no knowledge of the main altar relic being removed nor the relics in the four side altars being removed. I did visit the chapel later when the Futuna Trust got underway and had open visiting. I made it my business to inspect the altars for relics and I detected no change in appearance to the sealed relic inserts.<sup>17</sup>

It was, then, the understanding of members of the Society that relics had been deposited at some point in time after the opening. The “reliquaries” in the altars still appear to be properly sealed with a permanent sealant/mortar.

In 1986 the Chapel was Dedicated by Cardinal Tom Williams. Again there is a little confusion because the term “Dedication” applies here in two related senses: it refers to the solemn dedication that permanently sets aside the building for sacred use, and it also refers to the fact that the chapel is “dedicated” (“named”) for St. Joseph.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, the Anointing of the Altar and the Consecration Stones, which is arguably the distinctive and central liturgical actions of a Dedication, occurred that day.<sup>19</sup> In sum, it is the case

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<sup>16</sup> Short of conclusive historical evidence coming to light, the only definitive check would entail opening the reliquaries.

<sup>17</sup> Personal email correspondence via Elizabeth Charleton, Archivist Society of St Mary, 11 March, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> The early Brothers were referred to as the Brothers of St. Joseph.

<sup>19</sup> It is also the case that Eucharist was celebrated (as required for a Dedication) whereas in 1961 the Blessed sacrament was processed for a Blessing (understandable on one level with a crowd of 2000 sitting outside). The 1986 liturgical handout (see appendix X) includes a direct introductory quotation from the “Rite of Dedication of Church and an Altar” making it clear that this was the intention of the gathering. In terms of the relics of St. Peter Chanel: it is worth noting that the liturgy included the Litany of the Saints. This is when relics would be processed for placement in an altar if that were to take place. We can assume, however, that this had already taken place as there is no reportage of such a significant event nor any mention in the liturgical handout.

that the Chapel was “Blessed” in 1961, as was proper, and then “Dedicated” as the Chapel of St. Joseph in 1986. It seems almost certain that relics of St. Peter Chanel were placed in the altars at some point between these dates. In the terms that the Roman Catholic Church understands it, the status of the chapel was that it was as sacred as it could have possibly been.

In 2001 the Society of Mary sold the whole Futuna Retreat Centre site including the Chapel of St. Joseph. The reason expressed for doing so was a desire to recommit to the distinctive charism of the Society alongside the fact of the significant decline in the number of vocations to the Order.<sup>20</sup> In short, with limited and diminishing resources, it was not possible for the Society to continue to maintain their ministry as they had known it in Karori. It seems though that, having made the decision, the Society just “walked away.” In terms of the Chapel there is no record of a Liturgy of “Deconsecration” or as it is termed in the 1983 Canons, “Relegation to profane use” (Canon 1222§1).<sup>21</sup> Obviously, some sacred items were removed (Tabernacle, chalices) but significantly the relics of St. Peter Chanel remained.<sup>22</sup> Also remaining was the crucifix and corpus. It is fascinating (and wonderful) that some person(s) removed – stole? – the corpus and, as it turned out, “saved” it from major damage or destruction.<sup>23</sup> It is, however, perplexing that such a

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<sup>20</sup> Marilyn Pryor, “Futuna Retreat Centre to Close,” *Wel-Com*, July 1998.

<sup>21</sup> This would have been an “act of the Bishop” (as we term it in the Anglican Church), but there is no record in the archives of the Archdiocese of any such “relegation.”

<sup>22</sup> While there is no Canon stipulating such, for obvious reasons, some guidelines suggest the removal / destruction of the altar should occur at “relegation.”

<sup>23</sup> The sculpture was removed in 2001 and disappeared. It was returned in 2012 after a Radio NZ interview prompted an anonymous listener. See Bevan and O’Brien, 148. The photographs of the NZ Police returning the figure swathed in red cloth look like they are from a Passion play! See 131, 134.

significant piece of religious sculpture was left by the Marists, and it is ironic that it should be someone else who would secrete the artwork away for safe keeping, but it is much more perplexing (although less obvious to the casual observer in the Chapel) that the relics were left behind. Bevan and O'Brien write that the fact that "sacred items were left in the chapel at the time of sale suggests either negligence or, as the Marists themselves claim, a misplaced belief that the developers would be suitable custodians."<sup>24</sup>

### **Grave causes**

The 1983 Canons speak of "grave causes" for the closure of church. It could not be said that the Society of Mary took their closing of St. Joseph's with anything like the gravity that they should have. The questions that arise are: what has happened to the chapel? and what should have happened to it? Because the chapel can rightly be considered iconic the answers and issues seem particularly complex.

What has happened to the chapel is that it has been "saved" by the Futuna Trust. The Trust has volunteered many hours, raised thousands of dollars and overseen considerable repair and restoration works. What has been achieved is truly remarkable and a testament to both the way in which the building is valued by the wider community and, as is the way, the dedication of some very generous individuals. Today the Trust host "Open Days" so that people can view the chapel and they make the building available to the wider community for concerts and the like. It has also been a central venue for a number

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<sup>24</sup> Bevan and O'Brien, 123. In hindsight the Marists' confidence in the developers looks naïve at best although in my conversation with Father Enzo Blasoni SM he spoke of the hope that some held in the Society that "somehow" the Chapel could be used in conjunction with an ongoing ministry of spiritual direction.

of architectural conferences/events. It is this last function that points to what I will venture is the actual purpose of the chapel today – an icon for the architectural community.

The stunning, and now emblematic, photographs by Gavin Woodward, first presented in Walden's book and then in Bevan and O'Brien, are now the primary images of the chapel.<sup>25</sup> For these photographs the ambo and president's chair were removed. While these items were central to functioning of the building, they were not part of the original design, and not part of the preferred and "staged image."<sup>26</sup> Changes in the furniture in the chapel were required after Vatican II; this included moving the altar from the wall to accommodate changes from *ad orientum* to *versus populum* and the placement of an ambo and a president's chair. The first was made and would have been awkward to

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<sup>25</sup> Gavin Woodward's death is noted as part of the building's life – appropriate as his photographs are now a central and authoritative 'text' of Futuna. Bevan and O'Brien, 147.

<sup>26</sup> While Walden is unstinting in his praise of the design and holds that Scott anticipated the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, this claim is simply not sustainable. The single most significant development for liturgical theology from Vatican II was the move away from individualism and to the reinstatement of the importance of the assembly as "the primary sacrament," the Body of Christ gathered. Scott's L-shaped design, which broke the assembly onto two islands/waka where some literally a hidden from view from others, shows a singular failure to anticipate Vatican II and stand as the building's biggest failure. Scott cannot be blamed for this failure, as it was up to the Marists to brief him on such matters. Of course, one might say that the Marists/Scott were/was designing a building prior to Vatican II. It is well acknowledged, however, that the liturgical reforms of Vatican II were largely an imprimatur to changes that had been underway since Pope Pius X and the turn of the century – the beginning of the Liturgical Movement is famously dated with the reading of a paper by Dom Lambert Beaudin, a Benedictine monk, in 1909 at the Malines Conference: see John Fenwick and Bryan Spinks, *Worship in Transition: The Liturgical Movement in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 23. By the time Vatican II occurred both liturgical thinking and church design had actually changed considerably. In fact, Scott's second built church, Our Lady of Lourdes, 1960, does show a good awareness of liturgical reform so it is not unreasonable to think he understood the "brief" to be quite different for that building. If, however, Scott really thought a building's success and importance depended on its capacity to complement its purpose (see his letter in Walden, *Voices of Silence*, 149) then a central purpose was always to be thwarted by his design. This does not mean that the building is not a success as a place of retreat and reflection, it clearly is a remarkable success in that way. As a Eucharistic space, however, it represents a pre-Vatican (even medieval) individual piety. The side altars confirm this piety of another era.

“restore” for the photographs, but the other two important functional realities were thought to be awkward and no doubt did not suit “the original” image; thus, they are erased from the photographs.<sup>27</sup> The concern with for “the original” gives an explanation for the ceremony around the return of the corpus in 2003. The significant change to the building is that on each of the side altars, where once the elements of the Eucharist were placed, there is now an architectural model of the chapel for ocular devotion and for the receipt of blessing.<sup>28</sup>

Taken together the building now “reads” as a chapel of devotion to ‘J C’, as in John Scott, the Architect.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps in a wider sense it is now a chapel to “the architect as hero, the great designer.” I do not think that this is an outcome that Scott would have endorsed or welcomed in any way. His correspondence with Jim Allen (who is responsible for the design of the Stations of the Cross and the colored windows and hence the much (and rightly) lauded features of light within the chapel) makes it clear that he considers him an equal partner in the design enterprise.<sup>30</sup> Symbolically the dust jacket to Walden’s book places their photos alongside each other and this is in line with this thinking. I think it also the case that Scott would share credit with the “building brothers” whose remarkable

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<sup>27</sup> Father Enzo Blasoni S.M. said that both of these items and the functioning of them were quite “comfortable” in the day-to-day use of the chapel.

<sup>28</sup> Given the Society’s laissez-faire departure from the chapel, it is hard to be offended by this “development” but it is still troubling.

<sup>29</sup> John Scott was referred to as ‘J C’ in his home region of Hawke’s Bay. Walden, 155.

<sup>30</sup> Walden, 128-131. The letter is quoted at length. At the time of writing Allen had not completed the sculpture of Christ.

achievement – given they were essentially “amateurs” – is too easily forgotten and buried.

### **Raised/Razed**

The second question that arises is what should have happened to the chapel? I will venture a very provocative answer and it is prompted by the claim that the building represents something important in a bicultural sense – “it speaks powerfully to Māori and Pākeha consciousness.”<sup>31</sup> Scott writes: “The wharepuni has a spiritual basis and the building itself is unimportant. What is important is that the building represents a person and without this it has no value in terms of its spiritual purpose of the Maori.”<sup>32</sup> Scott uses the term *wharepuni* (sleeping house) for a generic Maori building. Other terms are *wharenui* (big house), *whare hui* (meeting house), *whare whakairo* (decorated or ceremonial house). These are thought of as akin to an ancestor and have a *mauri* (life force) that belongs to them. Deidre Brown writes: “These beautiful houses are often named after – and seen as the personification of – ancestors.”<sup>33</sup> What is usual for a *wharenui* if it is no longer used is that it is razed to the ground. Pihopa Te Kitohi Pikaahu writes: “When a whare nui or a papa kāinga (homestead) has concluded its purpose and use, it is disposed of either by burning it and burying the ashes on the site it was built; or

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<sup>31</sup> Walden, 157. In the TV series *The Elegant Shed* David Mitchell announced that it was an “iconic bicultural building”: Bevan and O’Brien, 146.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with John Scott quoted in Walden, 149.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, “Māori Architecture - Whare Māori.”

the building is pulled down and the materials, especially the timber is buried in some ordered fashion.”<sup>34</sup>

There is a simple analogy here for non-Māori to see and appreciate. If the building is seen as akin to an ancestor and having its own “life,” then on completion of that life, the body should be properly disposed of in a manner such as burial.<sup>35</sup> As it turns out, amongst Māori, taking a proactive but seemingly violent step to pull a building down is often too much for any one person to take on such a responsibility – it is impossible to find someone whose personal mana is such that they could take such an initiative. As has been explained to me, this is why some Māori buildings that are no longer used are simply abandoned and left to fall into complete disrepair.<sup>36</sup> So, while it will be no doubt seen as “sacrilegious” to some, ironically it can be seen that Prime Properties Limited, the property developers who set about razing the chapel, might have been actually doing the right and proper thing.<sup>37</sup> The counter point, however, being that as it currently stands there is something deeply sacrilegious to the *mauri* of the space that it continues as it is. This is, after all, a space that is named for St. Joseph, which houses the bones of a great ancestor of the faith as well as works of art of religious devotion (particularly the corpus) and the altars themselves (particularly the main altar), which is so intimately associated

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<sup>34</sup> Personal email correspondence.

<sup>35</sup> It is worth noting that other sacred materials are required to be obliterated - elements of the eucharist must be consumed or in the case of Holy Oils they are to be burned.

<sup>36</sup> Personal correspondence with Pihopa Te Kitohi Pikaahu.

<sup>37</sup> The permanent removal of the kneelers actually can be read as a good (but insufficient) symbol of the removal of the life of prayer that was once the purpose of the chapel.

with, and symbolizes on some levels, the body of Christ. It is a consecrated sacred space that is now used for other purposes.

I am aware that sensibilities in Aotearoa/New Zealand are such that we are likely to afford Māori spirituality and worldviews a kind of respect and concern that would not currently be afforded to Christian spirituality, but my claim is that the building should have genuinely ceased and ended its previous consecrated life and then have been freed for some other use that somehow is mindful of its previous life and, therefore, continued sacred associations.<sup>38</sup> A building of this kind, needs to be enabled to be a new thing that will, in fact, be at the same time a ruin of its previous life.<sup>39</sup> I think that there should have been a proper “Liturgy of Relegation” and sacred items, including the removal of relics. I think the altar should have been removed or destroyed.<sup>40</sup>

At one point the architects Novak+Middleton were awarded runner-up in a design competition that presented the chapel uplifted and moved to the Wellington waterfront to stand beside Te Papa Tongawera (Museum of New Zealand) as a permanent “art” work.<sup>41</sup> No doubt some architects would shudder at the notion that the building could be removed

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<sup>38</sup> In 2011 there was a 50<sup>th</sup>-anniversary Mass held in the Chapel on St. Joseph’s Day. Because the Chapel is still dedicated (and the altar blessed) it is still permissible for the priest to preside at the Eucharist but my contention is that it should not be permissible because the space (altar) should be “relegated.”

<sup>39</sup> I am well aware that ruins are almost a category of interest in architecture.

<sup>40</sup> The altar is actually seen as an integral part of the design (which, of course, it was) and the removal would be more than some committed to “the original” could countenance. It might, therefore be broken or fractured in a way such that it could remain but now a ruin.

<sup>41</sup> Bevan and O’Brien, 127.

from the site because in some “essential” way it would cease to be what it is, but that is the point.<sup>42</sup> It would have become something else in a very obvious way. As it turns out it has become (is becoming) an “icon” for architecture and there is a great deal of effort to conserve the building as well as honor the profession with regular architecture conferences.<sup>43</sup> Having been properly “relegated” it would be, however, then up to some officiant of the Institute of Architects to set about dedicating the chapel to that purpose and give it a new name – because it will no longer be the “Chapel of St. Joseph”, for architects it has always been called “Futuna”, which is an island on which Peter Channel died.

## **Coda**

There is a most interesting coda that should be heard here and it involves another of John Scott’s other public buildings. Called Aniwaniwani, 1970 – 76, the building served as the visitor centre to the Tūhoe peoples’, Lake Waikaremoana, which is administered by Department of Conservation. The scope of this thesis does not allow discussion of the design elements and so forth. The point of particular interest is that the building fell into some disrepair, most obviously because it seemed no longer fit for purpose. It was “condemned” by local council in 2008. Considerable “damage” was done to the building when the Colin McCahon painting *Urewera Mural* (1975) was “stolen” by Tūhoe activists in the 1990s to protest against the government stealing land and not returning it.

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<sup>42</sup> The “site” is actually unrecognizable now – it is recontoured and now in the midst of the retirement community rather than the original retreat community buildings.

<sup>43</sup> I take these to be good outcomes. The word “icon” seems appropriate given the quasi-religious dedication to the place and purpose that it now has.

It also seems clear that the Tūhoe people did not continue to feel connected enough with it or resourced to manage the upkeep of the building. The ultimate point from our perspective is that, while some timbers were salvaged for the new visitors' Centre, in September 2016 it was razed and buried by diggers.<sup>44</sup>



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<sup>44</sup> See David Straight, *John Scott Works* (Auckland: Massey University Press, 2019).

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