

# LEIBNIZ AND THE THEOLOGY OF THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

Paul R. Hinlicky

"Critical dogmatics." "The theodicy of faith." "Actual evil." "Impassible passibility." "The Gethsemane of the soul." "Perspectivalism." "Divine complexity." "Beloved Community." In a spate of recent books and articles,<sup>1</sup> I have introduced a number of unusual terms in pursuit of an ecumenical theology from out of the tradition of Luther: the project is, as one recent reviewer put it, "post-Enlightenment, post-Holocaust and

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1. Paul R. Hinlicky, "Luther's Anti-Docetism in the Disputatio de divinitate et humanitate Christi (1540)" in *Creator est creatura: Luthers Christologie als Lehre von der Lätienkommunikation*, ed. O. Bayer and Benjamin Gleede (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2007), 139-85; "Luther's New Language of the Spirit: Theology as Critical Dogmatics," in *The Substance of the Faith: Luther's Doctrinal Theology for Today*, ed. Dennis Bialfeldt, Mickey L. Mattox, and Paul R. Hinlicky (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2008), 131-90[AU>]; "Luther and Liberalism," in *A Report from the Front Lines: Conversations on Public Theology: A Festschrift in Honor of Robert Benne*, ed. Michael Shaban (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 89-104; *Paths Not Taken: Theology from Luther through Leibniz* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); *Luther and the Beloved Community: A Path for Christian Theology after Christendom*, with a foreword by Mickey L. Mattox (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); *Divine Complexity: The Rise of Creedal Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010); "Luther's Atheism," in *The Devil's Whore: The Dilemma of the Lutheran Philosopher*, ed. J. Hockenberry (St Paul, MN: Fortress, 2012); "Authority in the Church: A Plea for Critical Dogmatics," in *New Directions for Lutheranism*, ed. C. Braaten (Delhi, NY: ALP Books, 2010); "A Leibnizian Transformation? Reclaiming the Theodicy of Faith," in *Transformations in Luther's Reformation Theology: Historical and Contemporary Reflections, Arbeiten zur Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte* 32, ed. C. Helmer and B. K. Holm (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2011); "Problems of Evil: For Julius Filo on his Sixtieth Birthday," in *V Službe Obnovy: Vedecký zborník vydaný pri príležitosti 60. Narodením Dr. h.c. prof. Th.Dr. Júliusa Filu*, ed. M. Jurk and J. Benka (Bratislava: Evanjelická bohoslovskeá fakulta, Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave, 2010), 65-74; "Staying Lutheran in the Changing Church(es)," afterword in Mickey L. Mattox and Gregg Roeber, *Changing Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming)[AU>

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(most importantly for Hinlicky) post-Christendom."<sup>2</sup> This comment rightly locates my project in the contemporary situation of Euro-America, as I diagnose it.<sup>3</sup> In the programmatic essay that follows, I offer readers of *Pro Ecclesia* an account of this diagnosis, since it involves an innovative genealogy of the plight of Christian theology in Euro-American modernity and an implicit critique of ecumenism that still trades on the model of restoring Christendom. It tries to forge an alternative path through Leibniz, rather than Kant, beyond the modernity we have known in a bid at once to redeem modernity's genuine achievements and at the same time to discover that new reconclation of the faith and the emergent post-modernity that Bonhoeffer briefly glimpsed in the darkest hours of his resistance.<sup>4</sup> This will be a new relationship of Christ and culture, neither a restoration nor an abdication.<sup>5</sup> In this way my project seeks to continue Bonhoeffer's own ecumenism.<sup>6</sup>

In the trajectory posited between Bonhoeffer and Luther I have discovered Gottfried Leibniz as, so to say, a "missing link."<sup>7</sup> Yet some theologians, especially in my own "tradition of Luther," have expressed bewilderment at my interest in the early Enlightenment theological philosopher. One uncomprehending Lutheran critic complains that the evidence is lacking for the trinitarianism I claim for Leibniz, when the ironic but less than subtle point of my Leibniz study was that the genre of "natural theology" (the product of Leibniz's schooling in Melancthonian Lutheranism) forced him to conceal the Christian mys-

2. Robert C. Sailer, "A Luther for the Whole Church? Paul R. Hinlicky's *Luther and the Beloved Community*," *Cresset* 74, no. 4 (2010): 45. By "post-Christendom," I have in mind not only an empirical account of the predominant modernist and/or secularist ideologies of today, but also Luther's repudiation of the very ideal of the *corpus Christianum* (the political body of Christians) in favor of the *corpus Christi* (the earthly body of the Risen Lord). See William J. Wright, *Martin Luther's Understanding of God's Two Kingdoms: A Response to the Challenge of Skepticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 107–12.

3. Meaning, among other things, that it does not presume to instruct those beyond this civilizational complex and its recent history on how they might pursue Christian theology in their own social and historical contexts, though it surely hopes to be of indirect aid to such endeavors, given the global hegemony of the post-Christendom West and the salutary emergence of postcolonial thought in critical response. Though I have reservations about his theological overdependence on Derrida's apophaticism, see Yñor Westhelle's instructive analysis, *After Heresy: Colonial Practices and Post-Colonial Theologies* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010).

4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. N. H. Smith (New York: MacMillan, 1978), 55–56. See the discussion of this passage in Hinlicky, *Paths Not Taken*, 33–34.

5. Stephan Lösel, "The Kirchenkampf of the Countercultural Colony: A Critical Response," *Theology Today* 67 (Fall 2010): 279–98.

6. Bonhoeffer's engagement in the ecumenical movement delivered him from the parochialism of German Lutheranism. At the same time, this very engagement helped him sharply to discriminate "Reformation" from *Kulturprotestantismus*, as in the indispensable (for American theology!) essay, "Protestantism without Reformation," in *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures, and Notes 1928–1936*, trans. E. H. Robertson and J. Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

7. For this claim, see especially Hinlicky, *Paths Not Taken*, ch. 5.

teries which in fact he presupposed.<sup>8</sup> Another exasperated Lutheran reviewer exclaimed: "it is not useful for apologetics to use a thinker that himself needs an apology!"<sup>9</sup> Yet, my project of "critical dogmatics" resolutely eschews any kind of systematic apologetics; indeed, it diagnoses in just this way the failure of Leibniz's endeavor to provide the "natural theology" that would philosophically safeguard the Christian mysteries in face of the rise of natural science and provide a neutral and rational basis for reconciling the divided Christian confessions. In other words, it is as an apologetic *failure* that Leibniz is instructive for us, while it is as a critical-dogmatic theologian that elements of his innovative metaphysics can still be of help in the ongoing development of Christian doctrine.

As that "most Lutheran" of all theologians, Werner Elert, once noted, Leibniz was heir of Lutheran "optimism" about creation (even if not Luther's "pessimism" in the doctrine of sin).<sup>10</sup> He also noted in this vein that Leibniz defended the doctrine, formulated in the eleventh article of the Formula of Concord following Eph 1, that (as I would paraphrase it) the object of predestination is not a list of individuals but the Beloved Community to be gathered in Christ.<sup>11</sup> Affirming this, Leibniz argued with some passion against a Reformed teaching descending from Theodore Beza of an absolute decree of double predestination.<sup>12</sup> Leibniz saw in such hyper-Calvinism an instance of a theologically and philosophically unacceptable divine voluntarism coupled with an erroneous focus of the question of salvation on the individual as such rather than her reconciliation to the community in the final redemption of the cosmos.<sup>13</sup> With this background in view, I have formulated the chief claim of my own theological project this way: *Christian theology is inquiry in faith from faith for faith concerning the God Who by His Word and in His Spirit makes Himself*

8. Mathew Becker, "Paths Not Taken," *Lutheran Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 200-3. The charge that my Lutheran critics are "uncomprehending" is not mere defensiveness on my part. *Paths Not Taken* is a deconstruction of the received Lutheran self-understanding which has prevailed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; its methodology puzzles those who otherwise know me as seriously "Lutheran."

9. Compare Mark Mattes's "Response to Hinlicky's *Paths Not Taken*" in the May 2010 edition of the online *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* on the matter of "compatibilism" to the author's rejoinder, "Response to Mattes' 'Response'" in the August 2010 edition of the same. I have responded more broadly to Lutheran critics in "A Leibnizian Transformation? Reclaiming the Theodicy of Faith" in my *Transformations in Luther's Reformation Theology*.

10. Literally, "Lutheranismus;" Mathew Becker, "Werner Elert in Retrospect," *Lutheran Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (Autumn 2006): 249-302.

11. I borrow the term Beloved Community from Josiah Royce, who invented it as a paraphrase of Paul's ecclesiology in the Corinthian correspondence; see the discussion of his neglected *The Problem of Christianity* in Hinlicky, *Beloved Community*, 3-17.

12. Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. W. A. Hansen (St Louis, MO: Concordia, 1962), 474-75.

13. Gottfried Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil* #238, trans. E. M. Huggard (Chicago: Open Court, 1998), 274.

*known in the promise of the gospel as the One Who is determined to redeem and fulfill this world as His own creation.*<sup>14</sup>

To be sure, this thesis finds considerable support in Karl Barth's celebrated revision of Reformed teaching in *Church Dogmatics* II/2, although many contemporary theologians in the tradition of Luther are so estranged from their own past that they have hardly recognized the victory in Barth of the old Lutheran contention for the universality of atonement in Christ against any teaching of a "limited" atonement. I attribute this odd loss of memory to modern Lutheranism's captivity to Kantian philosophy, which rendered such traditional dogmatic alternatives from the period of Protestant Orthodoxy mere quibbles, no longer meaningful. In fact these old arguments reflect abiding church-uniting or church-dividing choices in the doctrinal explication of the gospel. But Kantianism's profound revisionist pressure on modern Protestant theology and especially its use of Luther as a source obscures this, a thesis to which many of us were first alerted by Risto Saarinen's seminal study.<sup>15</sup> Yet none of the foregoing is self-evident today, when the discipline of theology is more conflicted than ever.<sup>16</sup>

Hence limning out a "Leibnizian alternative" to Kant as a way through and beyond modernity, the following argument seeks to locate my chief claim about the identity of God in the logical region of possible theologies. In what follows, I make this case in more systematic than historical terms for the fruitfulness of some key ideas of Leibniz as a vehicle for modernizing Luther's theological legacy in an ecumenically intentional way.<sup>17</sup> The result, of course, will be my thinking, not Leibniz's, though it makes use of an emerging consensus in revisionist Leibniz scholarship.<sup>18</sup>

14. See Hinlicky, *Divine Complexity*, ix. To be sure, this chief thesis parallels Karl Barth's rejection of limited atonement in his revision of the Reformed doctrine (see *Church Dogmatics*, II/2), as I have argued extensively in *Paths Not Taken*, 89–95, 112–26.

15. Risto Saarinen, *Gottes Wirken auf Uns: Die transzendente Deutung des Gegenwärtig-Christ-Motivs in der Lutherforschung* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden GMBH, 1989). But see also Oswald Bayer's probing "question" to modern Christology in its reliance on Kant's philosophy in favor of the Luther-dictum, "Significum philosophicum est nota absentis rei, signum theologicum est nota praesentis rei," in *Creator est creatura*, 33–34. The concrete presence of Jesus Christ, as articulated by the doctrine of the communication of idioms, is something that Kantianism in principle regards as unknowable, hence beyond the limits of reason. See also Hinlicky, *Beloved Community*, 60–65.

16. See Westhelle, *After Heresy*, 116, and also the introduction to Hinlicky, *Paths Not Taken*, 1–12.

17. Leibniz, who was schooled in the proto-ecumenical "syncretistic" Lutheran Orthodoxy of George Calixt, is indeed a precedent here. See the outdated but still useful G. J. Jordan, *The Reunion of the Churches: A Study of G. W. Leibnitz and His Great Attempt* (London: Constable & Co., 1927).

18. See especially, Maria Rosa Antognazza, "The Defense of the Mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation: An Example of Leibniz's 'Other Reason,'" *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 9, no. 2 (AU>): 283–309; and, more recently, her important monograph, *Leibniz on the Trinity and the Incarnation: Reason and Revelation in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. G. Parks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). See also Diogenes Allen, "The Theological

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From another angle, readers may recognize the affinity of this project with the effort of the Scottish Reformed theologian T. F. Torrance in the previous generation to reintegrate the patristic and Reformation traditions of thought for today.<sup>19</sup> That meant for Torrance a “reconstruction” that would enable both a rigorous engagement with contemporary science as well as a commitment to the ecumenical movement’s new quest for the reunion of divided Christianity. But compounding the difficulties of Torrance’s unfinished project of “reconstruction in theology” is the emerging recognition that we live today in the unprecedented situation of post-Christendom, where Christianity is not only culturally disestablished in Euro-America but its remnants appear in fragmented forms, often distorted beyond recognition, intellectually suspect and socially marginalized. The need to locate Christian theology today “after modernity, after Kantianism” is thus also the evangelical need resolutely to face this life-threatening spiritual and intellectual situation.

This is the spirit in which I invoke the precedent of Leibniz and his relation to Spinoza as a paradigm for us today. With the collapse of Kantianism we are returned to the argumentative *status quo ante* as argued in *Paths Not Taken*. Here indeed we rediscover a dramatic choice in possible doctrines of God. This article’s thesis is that Euro-American Christian theology today is, or should be, faith in the God identified in the Trinitarian way at work thinking a path between and beyond the rival metaphysics of naturalism and idealism, not to mention inferior forms of behaviorism and constructivism that ultimately depend on such metaphysics. This path of thinking aims at life in expectation of the coming of the Beloved Community, which life together in the Body of Christ is the visible unity of the church—*corpus Christi*, not *corpus Christianum!*

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Relevance of Leibniz’s Theodicy,” *Studia Leibnitiana, Supplementa* 14 (1972); Nicolas Jolley, “Leibniz on Locke and Socinianism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39 (1978): 233–50; Michael Latzer, “Leibniz’s Reading of Augustine,” in *Il Carnociale* (Rome: Carucci, January–April 1999), 17–33; Nicolas Rescher, *The Philosophy of Leibniz* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967); Erwin Schadel, “Monad as a Triadic Structure—Leibniz’s Contribution to Post-nihilistic Search for Identity,” *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* 14, no. 1 (1996): 17–33; Lea F. Schweitz, “The Difference between the Mirror and the One Who Sees: The Theological Anthropology of G. W. Leibniz” (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2008).

19. I acknowledge this affinity in *Divine Complexity*, x, on the basis of Torrance’s masterful *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993). This was before the publication of Torrance’s two-volume *Christology—Incarnation*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), and *Atonement*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009)—came into my hands. Reading confirms this affinity, with only nuances of the traditional Lutheran-Reformed divergence and my embrace of postmodern philosophical perspectives separating our projects.

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 BEYOND NATURALISM AND IDEALISM
 

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Naturalism is a modern metaphysics that resolves the polarity of the subject and object of knowledge on the side of the object, that is, the natural world. Idealism is an alternative metaphysics that resolves this polarity on the side of the subject, that is, the collective human mentality in its historical evolution. Kant (unwittingly) created the conditions for the emergence of this postcritical alternative between naturalism and idealism today when he ruled out of rational bounds traditional dogmatics as cognitive discourse about God.<sup>20</sup> According to the theological tradition, God can be known as the Creator, hence as author of both the subject and the object of knowledge, and so the ultimate basis of their unity and eventual, fully evident correspondence.<sup>21</sup> But Kant precluded this basis for cultural unity in theological knowledge by establishing an unbridgable gap between the sensible object and supersensible subject and making this gap the premise of genuinely critical thinking, “destroying knowledge to make room for faith,” as he disingenuously but influentially claimed after the *Pantheismusstreit* had broken out.<sup>22</sup> The gap actually excluded the Christian claim from rational consideration altogether, in that it limited reason’s cognitive competence to the domain of intramundane possibilities for the correlation of the finite subject and phenomenal object in the synthesis of knowledge. Knowledge was limited to the existing order of things, that is, things in principle visible (sensible). Christian belief in things not (yet) visible accordingly became noncognitive and hence irrational so far as it still claimed to be something of epistemic import.

But this disbarment also depended for its effective power on exploiting a certain weakness in traditional theology, as we shall see: the Platonic analogy that thought of God in relation to the world like a perfect, supersensible mind to an imperfect, sensible body. Kant too thought in this Platonizing way about God, which allowed him to retain God as the regulative idea of a Perfect Mind intuiting its object creatively, even as it required him to deny the possibility to the finite mind of any intuition of this noumenal divine existence and hence of any human knowledge of it. God thus becomes a mere idea, a morally important idea certainly, yet for us nothing but an idea in the same cognitive category with, say,

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20. I am drawing here on the insightful exposition of George Di Giovanni in *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors: The Vocation of Humankind 1774–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

21. Leroy E. Loentker, *The Struggle for Synthesis: The Seventeenth Century Background of Leibniz’s Synthesis of Order and Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

22. Perhaps Kant himself was confused about this. See Di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion*, 1–10. On the *Pantheismusstreit* see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 44–108.

leprechauns or unicorns. Fundamentally, one continues to agree with Kant if one eschews as beyond the limits of reason the total explanation of metaphysics, that is, a meta-account of the subject-object polarity itself, as in traditional dogmatics, which ascribed this unity to God's creative providence, or as in the postritical naturalist or idealist metaphysics just described, which today have followed the breakdown of Kantianism.

One continues to agree with this Kantian insistence on the limits of reason, which has dominated the modern period until recently, largely for the purpose of a cultural truce which gives nature to science, morals to the humanities and religion to the arts, with philosophy, as the Tribunal of Reason, policing the boundaries and permitting no trespassing between these regions. But this intellectual asceticism of Kant could not last, nor could his artificial segregation of human concerns, nor least of all his conceit about philosophy as culture's cop. What arises from its collapse, however, is not for the most part renewal of the cognitive claim of Christian theology in a new key, but the rival metaphysics of naturalism and idealism that demand a choice today as between *the* rational alternatives (with the accommodationist theologians of the liberal Protestant establishment obediently following).

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#### THE COLLAPSE OF KANT'S CULTURAL TRUCE

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Certainly Kant's insight into the formative power of human reason in constructing its object (but not creating its object *ex nihilo*) renders authoritative forms of dogmatics (such as may be found in decadent forms of Christian tradition) impossible. One cannot appeal to God's Word to settle anything in theology without also asking, Who are you who so appeals? By what epistemic right? How are you taking God's Word? How indeed could you ever recognize a finite word in the world as God's Word? These probing questions of critical philosophy seem not only to reveal the historically conditioned subjectivity of hopelessly contradictory positive or kataphatic theologies at loose in the world, in principle they also make any objective knowledge of God in His Word impossible under the conditions of finitude attending human subjectivity. Thus rationally responsible people should cease and desist—at least in public!<sup>23</sup>

This draconian restriction of scope has not been encouraging for Christian theology. The chief adaptation is the theological agnosticism of "experiential expressivism" (Lindbeck), allowing subjective judgments of value about kataphatic figures, or existential leaps of faith in unknowable supersensibles, in a rapidly shrinking theological discourse evacuated of

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23. Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J Gregor (New York: Abaris Books, 1979).

its traditional dogmatic content. Less rigorously, most nonscientific forms of contemporary Christian theology present themselves as free constructions of healing or redemptive metaphors arising out of religious experience, giving symbolic expression to precognitive, indeed prelinguistic feelings of the ineffable ground or sacred source of being. Rigorously considered, however, Christian theology in such Kantian modes conduces to apophatic silence.

Interestingly, even the great challenge represented by Karl Barth's kataphatic theology accepted the Kantian conditions of human subjectivity<sup>24</sup> and resolved the problem by asserting a sheer miracle: incalculably God becomes object of human knowledge without ceasing to be subject as an event that can never be captured but only described and followed, issuing in a union of moral wills for redemptive action, never any kind of synthesis by which humans can master God with their theological concepts and so put Him in service of their own causes.<sup>25</sup> Profound as was Barth's attempt to conceive of God rigorously as *event*, however, his theology too remains entangled in the sensible-supersensible dualism that Kant, following Descartes, had established as the root dogma of the modern period in Euro-American theology. In particular, Barth denied that the form of the Word of God in earthly language (even of the Bible) is proper to God, that it expresses some fitting relation to God which theology must follow through to understanding.<sup>26</sup> While this denial was critically intended, it caused Barth to mistake, as we shall see, the sense of New Testament language in apocalyptic parable, Pauline paradox, and Johannine enigma, that is, how this earthly language works *as a subversive rhetoric not a logical contradiction* that is as such *proper* to the God of the *gospel*, who is "bringing to naught the things that are" (1 Cor 1:27). Moreover, this disconnect between the form of God's Word and its content may be correlated with Barth's exposition of the event of divine-human encounter with a mental/psychological model of divine personhood, the self-positing "I" of "the Lord" meeting and mastering the self-positing "I" of the human rebel, remaking the latter into a proper "Thou" of the one true "I."<sup>27</sup> Contrary to Barth's best intentions, this model of the divine-human encounter, reminiscent of the Fichtean idealism which it theologically inverts, remains vastly too individualistic and voluntaristic for the theology of the Beloved Community.

Such, in any event, have been the main options in Christian theology in the past two centuries. Kant's cultural truce, as mentioned, was to deed objectivity to the natural sciences while restricting that science

24. Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1995).

25. Hinlicky, *Paths Not Taken*, 131.

26. See further on this criticism of Barth, Hinlicky, *Beloved Community*, 367–68.

27. See further on this criticism of Barth, Hinlicky, *Paths Not Taken*, 133–34.



to the world of appearances, thus positing an unknowable noumenal realm of “God, freedom, and immortality” untouched by scientific discovery but able at least to regulate human reason for moral purposes. By this regulation, Kant thought to safeguard the possibility of meritorious moral agency as spontaneous initiative in the otherwise closed causal system discovered and known by science. Not only has the result been uncongenial to Christian theology, as we have just seen, it has been very unstable also in philosophy, for the simple reason that Reason wants total explanation and cannot remain Luther critically urged in igniting the *Pantheismusstreit*.<sup>28</sup> Already with Fichte, post-Kantian Euro-American thought felt constrained by the rational demand for a comprehensive explanation of reality to account for the subject-object polarity itself. One aspired to an ultimate explanation of explanation, so to say. One had to move forward either into naturalism or idealism (later positivism or phenomenology), even though the choices here appeared arbitrary.<sup>29</sup> Thus, today various forms of behaviorism dominate the social sciences with the exception of critical theory and the sociology of knowledge where the tradition of idealism continues. In Europe the legacy of idealism is stronger, but usually mediated by forms of humanistic Marxism and phenomenology. Few are able to sustain the Kantian balancing act or live on its thin diet.<sup>30</sup>

In this vein, there have been, to be sure, (minority) versions of contemporary Christian theology still aspiring to rigorous science. These follow post-Kantian thought either into naturalism (William James’s “science of religion,”<sup>31</sup> forerather of contemporary “religious studies”) or idealism turned to phenomenology/existentialism (the most influential of which has surely been Bulmann’s *Theology of the New Testament*).<sup>32</sup> Here too the knowledge of God given in the gospel to faith by virtue of the concrete presence of the crucified and risen Christ in the world as Word and Sacrament (as Luther<sup>33</sup> and Bonhoeffer<sup>34</sup> understood it) becomes so much

28. Beiser, *Fate of Reason*, 44–91.

29. Di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion*, 210–25.

30. But see Ned Wisniewski, *God Hides: A Critique of Religion and a Primer for Faith* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010).

31. See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2002), 455; see further my criticism in *Beloved Community*, 17–30.

32. The seminal thinking of this turn can be seen in Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. M. Fritsch and J. A. Gossett-Ferencei (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004). See further my criticism in “Luther and Heidegger,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 78–86.

33. Tuomo Mannema, *Der im Glauben Gegenwärtige Christus: Rechtfertigung und Vergottung Zum oekumenischen Dialog*, Arbeiten zur Geschichte und Theologie des Luthertums, Neue Folge Band 8 (Hannover: Luthersches Verlagshaus, 1989).

34. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center: A New Translation*, trans. E. H. Robertson (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

window dressing in lines of inquiry determined by quite other images or auditions than the gospel's news of the Resurrection of the Crucified—at least where Resurrection denotes presence in new way, not absence.<sup>35</sup>

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#### THE CONTINUITY THESIS<sup>36</sup>

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Contemporaneous theological critics of Kant like the early Jacobi tried unsuccessfully to argue a Leibnizian alternative: God, understood in a rationally warranted faith as Creator of *the best of all possible worlds*, is author and hence unity of both subject and object, that is, both human knowledge in its *historical progression* and the *evolving* natural world unfolded together in a preestablished harmony aimed at the realization of the Beloved Community.<sup>37</sup> This rationally warranted “natural” faith is based for Leibniz on the very un-Kantian doctrine of the monadological (or organic) continuity of the sensible and the supersensible, that is, that conception is already at work in the most primitive of perceptions, that the most sophisticated conception is literally senseless except as an expanded and enriched perception, that each monad (or organic unit) is thus in its own way an integrated or harmonious whole within a whole, reflecting the universe in its own unique way.<sup>38</sup> Truly critical thought then does not merely distinguish the appearance captured in an objective representation from the really real thing-in-itself, that is not the ineluctable “difference” (Derrida) which language inevitably conceals when we construct an object with it. It is true that in philosophy the sign is the note of the absence of the thing,<sup>39</sup> but this, following Luther, is to limit signs to the individual mind’s attempt to put things into language or, more ominously, to make other persons into usable things, into objects. But in the region of theology, the sign is the note of a thing’s personal presence, that is, it is

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35. For this critique of Bultmann, see Hinlicky, *Divine Complexity*, 49–60.

36. This is the proposed topic of Brent Adkin’s first chapter of a book being coauthored with me, *Immanence and Imminence: Rethinking Theology and Philosophy with Deleuze* (forthcoming from Continuum, 2012).

37. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, “David Hume on Faith, or Idealism and Realism, A Dialogue” (1787), in *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi: The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwelts*, trans. G. di Giovanni (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), 253–338. Note well the introduction of the historical by this formulation in comparison to traditional dogmatics, which is the hidden but actual import of Leibniz’s claim that this world is “the best possible,” that is, that it is so in the full sequence of its becoming.

38. Suffice it here to cite the antidualist polemic of “The Monadology” (1714): “This is where the Cartesians have badly failed, since they took no account of the perceptions which we do not perceive. This is also what made them believe that minds alone are monads and there are no animal souls or other entelechies. . . . [They fell] again into the Scholastic prejudice of completely separated souls” (no. 14), in G. W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays*, trans. D. Garber and R. Ariew (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1991), 69.

39. See note 15 above.

a *name* which is to be heard and understood on its own terms, not ours, when it is heard and understood according to the Spirit, in accord with the Named One's own intention.

Thinking from this Lutheran theological background, Leibniz urged that truly critical thought distinguishes the infinity of perspectives [AU: the whole to which all belong. Critical thinking is hermeneutical, requiring us to understand and account (historically!) for the conditions of the possibility of such partial perspectives, which as such must (1) to some degree be confused and inadequate, since finite, and may (2) also be distorted, as sinfully egocentric and oppressive and/or morally oppressed and constricted.<sup>40</sup> Critical thinking thus strives to understand each individual's unique perspective and at the same time is able to critique the naive egocentricity of perception that distorts and hardens into fixed ideas, especially in the social realm of divine-human intersubjectivity. Its aim is to expand the self to see as others see for the purposes of healing estrangement, mutual enrichment, and wider horizons [AU: These come about by means of mutual communication and the cognitive process of interpretation. Critical thinking is hermeneutics, not deconstruction. Or perhaps better: the deconstruction of our confident representations is a crucial moment in coming to the true task of interpreting one mind's take on the world to another mind (where "mind" means "person") for the sake of forging in history new and better community.<sup>41</sup>

As a result of this continuity thesis, there is no mysterious ontological gap between percept and concept, the mysterious synthesis of which must somehow be explained and justified in a Kantian epistemology. Even God, for Leibniz, is monadological, that is, the perfect intellect in that God intuits objects purely and creatively, unlike creatures whose intuition is always dependent on empirical input of external data. Thus, the (infinite, inflexible, hence for Leibniz, metaphysically transcendent) Creator God can be the ontological *arche* of the universe, the sufficient reason why there is something rather than nothing; indeed, God the

40. Leibniz's ambivalence just here on the problem of human agency in sin—for him, finitude is the condition for the possibility of sin but does not necessitate it—reflects a root difficulty, in Lea Schweitz's felicitous formulation, of how to account for the "difference between the mirror and the one who sees." Like an automaton, the mirror reflects what is presented to it, but the seer projects itself into what is seen or yields itself to its allure. It is only the latter "mind" that counts as a rational being capable of relation and society, but just so also capable of sinful egocentricity, also in the form of seduction. Fully admitting the prospect of the paradoxically willful distortion of reality in egocentricity (human voluntarism in imitation of the idol of divine voluntarism!), with all the corresponding cosmic ripple effects which would follow according to the continuity thesis, throws a monkey wrench into the works of the Pre-established Harmony. This is a difficulty that Leibniz never resolved. See Hinlicky, *Paths Not Taken*, 228–59.

41. The germ of this admittedly anachronistic account may be found in Leibniz's "Memoir for Enlightened Persons of Good Intention" (dated in the mid-1690s), in *Leibniz: Political Writings*, ed. P. Riley, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 103–10.

Creator is the reason for this *particular something* that you and I are rather than *something else*. In Leibniz's world, God is thus understood with the Augustinian tradition as the Creator who thinks and wills all others into being in their providential sequence, and, as such, God is the key to the riddle of existence while remaining transcendently an infinite mystery. Consequently, theological knowledge of God's moral *purpose* in authoring the preestablished harmony *causes* human minds to rise up at the right time in the predetermined sequence to embrace their exalted vocation in bringing about the Beloved Community: "God is the Monarch of the Most Perfect Republic, Composed of All Minds, and the Happiness of This City of God Is His Principle Purpose" (*Discourse on Metaphysics*, no. 36); "Jesus Christ Has Revealed to Men the Mystery and Admirable Laws of the Kingdom of Heaven. . . . His gospel has entirely changed the course of human affairs; he has brought us to know the kingdom of heaven" (no. 37).<sup>42</sup> [AU] Reason and revelation harmonize, when Reason is taken as true perception—ultimately God's own creative, intelligible, and benevolent intuition of this natural history of which we are part—and when Revelation in turn is taken as God's sharing with rational creatures "in the fullness of time" the basic principles and purposes of His own creative rationality, the *oikonomia tou theou*.<sup>43</sup>

Traditional indeed as was Leibniz's Christian Platonism, what is distinctly modern about it is the revamped nominalism of his monadology and the corresponding historicizing of the ontological. God superintends all individuals, which are not the eternal atoms of irreducibly hard matter in blind, random motion as his near-contemporary Hobbes imagined. Rather, the basic units of existence are irreducibly complex wholes moving forward toward ever more complex and integrated forms of existence in an orderly development on the way to a divinely appointed goal. Hence, monads do not just timelessly exist (though they are created to be immortal according to Leibniz and would require a corresponding miracle of annihilation to cease to exist). But monads exist in the sequence of time in order to attain harmonization with vast, indeed maximal others in a unidirectional flow, the plotline of which can be uncovered in historical study. As Leonard Smith has rightly emphasized, Leibniz in this way redeems the insight of nominalism into the integrity of the individual and its capacity for community from its captivity in the nihilistic metaphysics of voluntarism.<sup>44</sup> That redemption of nominalism is important, for here

42. Leibniz, "Memoir for Enlightened Persons," 39–41.

43. See Leibniz, *Theodicy*, especially 73–122, where Leibniz lays out the implications of the continuity thesis for the relation of theology and philosophy. This matter is located in the tradition of Melancthon's "theological philosophy" (G. Frank) and discussed extensively in "General Pneumatology: The Sublimation of the Spirit into Progressive Christian Culture," ch. 5 in Hinlicky, *Paths Not Taken*, 177–22.

44. Leonard S. Smith, *Religion and the Rise of History: Martin Luther and the Cultural Revolution in Germany, 1760–1810* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009) 104, 109–11.

individuals do not appear (as in essentialism) as accidental modifications of some idea that is considered to be more real than the individual itself. On the contrary, each individual is the concrete essence, the existential essent[AU], so to speak, in glorious idiosyncrasy (albeit in the full course of its history and in a fulfillment often hidden from view). Hence, in this monadological vision of reality, the real and urgent problem is not imposing a timeless order on wayward individuals, nor is it liberation from such hegemonies for anarchical freedom on the supposition that mere chaos is god. No, the real and urgent task is one of achieving harmony, justice, love.

How are such real individuals to enter into the Beloved Community? Leibniz the philosopher here finally and expressly pointed beyond his philosophical heremenutics to revealed theology, to Jesus Christ the Redeemer, as the way into the Beloved Community. This *Trine* God, for Leibniz the theological philosopher, and *this* God, as Creator of the entire, still unfinished sequence on the way to the best of all possible worlds, has a “full and complete concept” of every individual (this restriction of the full knowledge of the individual to God alone is the sense of the notorious, and notoriously misunderstood, metaphor of the “windowless” monad). Knowing God’s knowledge of us in Jesus Christ, though not knowing fully yet in the ambiguities of earthly existence what we shall be (1 John 3:2), thinking believers may trust with a rationally warranted belief in the fulfillment of God’s purpose for their lives. “Not a sparrow falls to the ground.”

Leibniz’s baroque penchant for metaphysical poetry should not obscure for us the critical modern insight embedded in it into reality as history[AU]. Yet metaphysical poetry it is in its confused blending of philosophy and theology. The obvious objection, given classical expression in Voltaire’s bitter parody, lifts up the rational absurdity of actual evil in the supposedly best of all possible worlds. This is evil that cannot be harmonized even by just punishment, evil which then defies the existence of Leibniz’s wise, powerful, and benevolent Deity superintending the world’s upward progress toward the best possible. The alternative path through modernity that Leibniz represents therefore does not entail that Leibniz’s own attempt to secure a philosophical discipline of natural theology could or should be resuscitated today. Theologically, Leibniz was still too much inclined by the tradition of Christian Platonism to think God analogically like Mind to Body. This diminished and misleading view of divine transcendence, which also led Leibniz into the irresolvable dilemmas of protoology regarding predestination and theodicy, stands behind the failure of his project to secure philosophically the reconciliation of Christian Europe, as Leibniz himself had hoped.<sup>45</sup> Christendom is finished,

45. See “Protological Dilemmas: Two Versions of Leibniz’s Failure,” ch. 5 in Hinlicky, *Paths Not Taken*, 223–82. [AU]

[AU: Note that chapter 5 in nd3 above has a different title?>

and with it Leibniz's last, best attempt to save it. And it is finished because the actuality of evil in human experience has discredited the idea of God in Christian Platonism.

For us today, the Leibnizian alternative means rather that the rationality of Christian belief about God as Creator can and should be argued over against naturalist and idealist alternatives in and as the critical dogmatics of Christian theology, that is, on its own "eschatological" terms, not as some alleged "natural theology," which could be rationally persuasive apart from the acquisition of theological subjectivity in repentance and faith. This means eschewing Leibniz's apologetic strategy, as if the alternative metaphysics of naturalism or idealism could somehow be exposed as holding at bottom tacitly Christian presuppositions honest persons would thus be forced to own up to, since otherwise naturalism or idealism are said to bear dire moral implications. In fact, it was Leibniz who unconsciously smuggled in Christian dogma under the guise of natural reason, which the rigorous naturalism of Spinoza's tradition in time exposed and disallowed. Certainly, naturalism and idealism bear other moral and political implications than Christian theology and attaining clarity about these differences is imperative. But one offers Christian theological interpretations of nature and theory in the conviction that for the interim these interpretations prove more satisfying intellectually, ethically, aesthetically, and spiritually. If so, Christian interpretations practically put us to work in lives of actual holiness in struggle with actual evil—or, if they dissatisfy, they make clear the problem of our problematic subjectivity.

In the realm of theology, in any event, persuasive power is not compelling, but inspiring: it is the poetry of the Spirit capturing our imaginations in anticipation of the Beloved Community, not a deduction from first principles that anyone can follow. Such is the *cognition* of faith, not sight (or better, a new way of seeing in faith, as in John 9). This move from natural theology to revealed theology entails a break from protology; it requires, as per Rom 8, thinking of creation eschatologically: not only as the act of origin by which all that follows is causally determined from its *arche*, but rather as also the cosmic acts of redemption and fulfillment in the *oikonomia* of God toward which the frustrated creation strains in eager longing. Leibniz, to be sure, may be credited with beginning this historicizing of the ontological as well as with the redemption of the modern recognition of the infinite value of each unique individual by locating individuals within wholes which ought to be harmonies of justice and love but which in fact are besieged and disrupted by actual evil.

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#### THE THEODICY OF FAITH

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In Leibnizian light of the continuity thesis, we ought to be able to see the false opposition between evolution and creationism, which has so mud-

dled the matter of faith in God as Creator since Darwin. The muddle arose on account of a predominantly non-Trinitarian account of deity reduced to the abstract deistic notion of "intelligent design" along with an equally ahistorical view of nature.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, this false opposition obscured the theological problem of evil and the corresponding theodicy of faith. The massive and dangerous hubris of modernity's "sovereign self"<sup>47</sup> consists in its categorical demand to eliminate "meaningless" suffering (that is, the "natural evil," which, in Leibniz's analysis following Augustine,<sup>48</sup> attends any conceivable creature and as such attends the history of the evolution of life). Predominantly, this hubris finds theological apologists rather than prophetic critics of what is little more than a "secular" rationalization of privilege and greed.<sup>49</sup> The "technological imperative" becomes the juggernaut of godless Euro-America, its magical cybernetic fantasy for solutions to problems that are matters of justice and love, not power alone. Yet this Tower of Babel is not "destiny" (Heidegger), if the God of Pentecost but sits anew, moved by the sighing of the frustrated creation.

The deistic account, which may be traced back to Aristotle,<sup>50</sup> makes "a happy science [= protological metaphysics] out of a sad creation" (Luther).<sup>51</sup> Romans 8 provides Christian theology with its alternative conception of a creation subjected to futility until the time of the revelation of the glorious liberty of the children of God in the coming of the Beloved Community. The creation of the Triune God is eschatological; hence it is rightly *suffered* during this interregnum in the "theodicy of faith." This faith that justifies God in His judgment is the life obediently lived in trust that all things work for good to them that love God, who are called according to His purpose, for whom the sufferings of this present age cannot be compared to the glory that is to be revealed.<sup>52</sup> Leibniz thought out of this theological tradition in his pioneering probe after the theological intelligibility of the statement of faith that God created this world on which the cross of His Son would stand as the one that is good, indeed

46. For an alternative I have embraced see George L. Murphy, *The Cosmos in the Light of the Cross* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003).

47. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 67–99. Jean Bethke Elishain, *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self, The Gifford Lectures* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

48. E.g., *City of God*, I:18;33, III:1.

49. With the notable exceptions of Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), and Fritz Oehlschlaeger, *Procrastine Ethics: Philosophical and Christian Approaches to Questions at the Beginning of Life* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 253–67.

50. Adam Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers as Theologians: The Divine Arche* (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 182–83.

51. *Luthers Works: The American Edition*, 58 volumes (St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955–2011), 25: 362 (hereafter cited as LW followed by volume and page number).

52. Karl Holl rightly identified the importance of this motif in the formation of Luther's theology, though he failed to recognize it as the reiteration of Augustinianism. See Karl Holl, *What Did Luther Understand by Religion?*, trans. F. W. Meuser and W. R. Wietzke (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

best of all possible. This, not the technological juggernaut as rationalization of imperial privilege and insatiable greed, is the alternative destiny of our common world for which Christian theology of the Beloved Community substantively and ethically contends today.

We can appropriately Leibniz's argument theologically as follows: This God is antecedently and eternally the primordial Beloved Community, the love of the Father and the Son in the Spirit. It is as such that God *comes* the Creator of all that is other than God.<sup>53</sup> God, who is eternally the blessed life of the Father and the Son in the Spirit, "becomes" the Creator of the creation freely out of abundance, not of out necessity, poverty, or unfulfilled desire. In some distinction from Augustine on whom Leibniz otherwise drew, this "becoming" of God already in the very act of origin (as something "new" also for God) makes it necessary and intelligible to ascribe to the Trine God an eternity that is both "spacelike" and "timelike."<sup>54</sup> This is fitting, in that the Trine God experiences personal otherness within His own eternal life as movement or procession in being. As this eternity that is not the abstract antithesis of our space-time but its encompassing condition, the Trine God can be intelligibly thought to come to the decision to act *ad extra* in one way rather than another. Therein lies Leibniz's great insight: not just that there is or could be a Creator, but that if there is a Creator, this world of ours must be its free, wise, and loving *choice*, hence, the "best possible."

The notion of course is widely misunderstood, especially when the measure of "good" is the convenience expected and demanded by human egocentricity. All things are possible to God but not all things are wise or good (cf. 1 Cor 6:12–20). So Leibniz reasoned against Spinoza, in what in fact was his lifelong polemic against voluntarism in theology, the lineage of which he traced back from Spinoza through Descartes to Occam.<sup>55</sup> Certainly, Spinoza pushed voluntarism to its logical self-cancellation, arguing that it is gross anthropomorphism to imagine God making choices like a human being (let alone a party of three). God's will is rather God's infinite and impersonal desire to express all possibilities in a corresponding infinity of forms unfolding like an algorithm without beginning or end. God is the ever-productive Chaos (*aperion*). In this sense, whatever is must be. It cannot be otherwise. Leibniz did not deny the lawful necessity of events in time and space, but argued that this very ordered sequence of the definite time and space in which we find ourselves is the contingent but fitting choice of the tripersonal God, reflecting the infinite harmony

53. So also Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 87–89.

54. Famously, Augustine in the *Confessions*, XI–XIII, found baffling the Bible's first verse: How did God begin to create before time existed?

55. For a useful popularization, which illustrates how contemporary the question is, see Matthew Stewart, *The Counter and the Heretic: Leibniz, Spinoza, and the Fate of God in the Modern World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).



of power, wisdom, and love which this God is. In admitted anthropomorphism, God is thus kaphatically imagined in the act of origin to survey all possible worlds and to choose the one of these which would be the best.<sup>56</sup> The "best" metaphysically would be the one which achieves maximally compossible idiosyncrasy. The "best" morally would be the one that achieves the harmony of justice through the redemption in Christ, since the latter justice makes good out of evil, rendering even evil ultimately an instrument for the coming of the Beloved Community. In all this protological reflection, the Triune God "becomes" the Creator, who in the fullness of time would "become" flesh in the person of the Son, and so likewise "become" the Temple of the Beloved Community by outpouring the Spirit on all flesh.

The fruitfulness of this thinking after the Triune God's decision in the act of origin is that it allows theology to render an account of evil not only as ontologically privative, but as ontically actual, as Karl Barth endeavored to say in his teaching on *das Nichtige*.<sup>57</sup> Leibniz's distinction between "metaphysical evil," expressed in physical and spiritual pain, and "moral evil," expressed in sin and crime, at its best serves to clarify what these are and especially to show how sorrow is to be borne in faith even as sin is to be exposed as moral evil, repented, endured, opposed, and finally defeated.<sup>58</sup> Thus, Barth rightly interpreted Leibniz's meaning: "that the real created world is the best does not mean that it is absolutely good and perfect. If this were so, it would not be the created world. From its being as such, the non-divinity of its existence, there follows necessarily its imperfection."<sup>59</sup> This "non-divinity" of the creation is what Leibniz means by the term "metaphysical evil," that is, the ontological vulnerability to nonbeing of *any* conceivable creature that by definition (given the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*) arises "out of nothing." This imperfection of creation in the metaphysical sense of the nondivinity of the creature, on the other hand, "confirms the good will of God to reflect His glory in the best and most perfect way in this other being." The intended reflection of divine glory in the imperfect creature attests to the good and gracious will of God, if only in faith the creature learns to trust in it. But just here we detect the very origins of moral evil: we do not trust, but "we dispute both this good will of God and the actual but limited perfection of creation if we try to dispense with metaphysical evil."<sup>60</sup> Refusing to endure our sufferings ecologically or to act for public rather than private good, we become morally evil disputants whose egocentric unhappiness fueled

56. But see Luther's combination of apophatic and kataphatic moves mutually qualifying each other in the Genesis commentary, for instance, LW 1:11, 14.

57. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/3: 289–368. See my discussion and criticism in *Paths Not Taken*, 107–12.

58. Diogenes Allen, *Temptation* (Princeton, NJ: Caroline Press, 1986).

59. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/3: 289–368.

60. *Ibid.*

[AU: ex-  
propriation?>

by envy or greed drives us to rend the web of life in aggressive acts of exappropriation[AU]—the moral evil that I highlight by calling it “actual evil” in distinction from (but not in contradiction to) the venerable private account of “natural” evil in the Augustinian tradition.

The critical and prophetic edge of the theodicy of faith is thus to resist blanning the body, which is good, for the evil desires of the soul; it is to resist using God for human purposes and instead surrendering to God’s purposes in the trial of faith, the Gethsemane of the soul. Idolatry is thus seen to be such use of God for human purposes, not the mere misrepresentation of the unknowable Infinite by finite images, but the abuse of God, especially God’s revealed Name, for contra-divine purposes, preeminently in the cult of expiation that offers sacrifices to leverage the Deity (Girard).<sup>61</sup> But the theodicy of faith justifies God in His judgment. The theodicy of faith is not an optimistic rationalization of moral evil on the basis of natural experience within the horizon of the intramundane; as in Rom 8, it is hope against hope in the God who promises to find the way to make something out of nothing, wisdom out of folly, good out of evil in the actual providence of the ever-innovating Holy Spirit on the way to the Beloved Community. This theological hope takes flight when optimism is crushed and when pessimism seems realistic, as in Euro-America today. The theodicy of faith is indeed the true creation faith, as may be seen in Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount, for it trusts in the heavenly Father who causes His rain to fall on the just and the unjust equally. It is the hopeful life of those who judge the material world good, who accept as their own then the natural evils that attend material existence as divine limits placed upon them, who trust through their inevitable sufferings in a wisdom and benevolence that surpasses their finite understanding, who believe that all things are made to work together for good in a world divinely determined at last to enter through many trials and tribulations the Beloved Community.

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#### NEITHER UNIVOCITY NOR ANALOGY BUT PARABLE

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Any theology that does not flatly identify the creation and the creator requires some doctrine of analogy. The questions are *what* analogy and how *this* particular analogy is justified as befitting its divine object, the God of the gospel. There are two problems regarding the suitability of the traditional notion of the analogy of being for the theology of the Beloved Community. First, Dietrich Bonhoeffer put his finger on the bibli-

61. See Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979); for the critical distinction between expiation and appropriation, see Hinlicky, *Beloved Community*, 96–104.

cal issue in his theological exegesis of creation and Fall when he urged that the classical text, Gen 1:26–28, suggests an *analogia relationis*: as God the Creator rules the cosmos, so the male and female in partnership are to rule the earth as God's own image.<sup>62</sup> The second problem consists in an ontological presumption, that is, that the notion of being as the most abstract and universal encompasses both Creator and creation, even if in the case of God far more dissimilarity than similarity is implied. There are two aspects to the problem at issue here. One has been identified and consistently argued over the years by Robert Jenson: the “unbaptized” notion of “being” betrays an unbiblical metaphysics of “persistence” over biblical eschatology, which implies a metaphysics of “anticipation.” The difference here is between a religious desire to evade temporality and the courage to embrace becoming.<sup>63</sup> The second aspect at issue reflects the difference between “unbaptized” and “baptized” thinking of God: they are fallen creatures who, with their false notion of deity as pure persistence, “want to be God and do not want God to be God” (Luther). How are they to have epistemic access to the biblical image of God, that is, to a true self-knowledge as per Gen 1:26–28? Jesus Christ is the image of God, the Bridegroom of the church, the beloved Son who reveals the Father's heart where and when their Spirit evokes a new theological subjectivity on the earth. He is the very divine Word who in the fullness of time *became* flesh, whose Spirit *comes* into time and space by the Word of Jesus to make the assembly of believers the living Temple of the Lord in anticipation of the final victory of the Father's reign.

Much more needs to be argued here, as I intend in a forthcoming work.<sup>64</sup> This much can be indicated here. By means of such believing interpretation, the theodicy of faith offers a cognitive path between and beyond idealism and naturalism. It does so without the terrible cost of sheer denial of the truths in fact and theory these alternatives represent, rather more fruitfully putting these truths into its better perspective of

62. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, vol. 3, trans. D. S. Bax (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997), 60–67.

63. Robert W. Jenson, *Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1992); Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vol. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1: 207–23.

64. “Apocalyptic Parable, Pauline Paradox, Johannine Enigma” is the title of one of this author's chapters in our forthcoming coauthored text on the theology-philosophy relationship (see note 36 above). It argues that Heidegger's interpretation of religious experience was appropriated wholesale by Bultmann and others and in this way came to dominate contemporary Christian theology. A retutation of this move can be made by returning to one of Hegel's and Barth's significant sources, Martin Luther's work on the “necessary equivocation” that transpires when theology distinguishes itself from philosophy by virtue of apocalyptic parable, Pauline paradox, and Johannine enigma. This retutation also involves a certain Luther[AU] argument in theological method: grammar before dialectic, dialectic in service of grammar. Kataphatic theology then must be conceived as a kind of immanent discourse that depends causally on the experienced presence in faith of One who breaks into locked house and binds up the strong man in order to plunder his goods (Mark 3:27).

[AU: Lutherant?>

the approaching reign of God known through faith in Jesus Christ. Theology can do this because most basically it thinks the God of the gospel in the Trinitarian way, as the self-communicating and self-interpreting God who by His Word and Spirit both gives Himself to faith and makes Himself known as this Gift. Fundamentally, however, this move to theological cognition as interpretation has to claim—controversially—to resolve a fundamental ambiguity in the history of Christian thought regarding language about God: as we have hinted throughout this essay, it models God not as a disembodied Mind to be known in the achieving individual's theoretical contemplation but as the advent/event of Beloved Community, whose coming by the gospel brings the new and saving interpretation of nature and history, beginning with the fact that it causes believers to think of themselves as justified sinners renewed in the image of God along with all the others for whom Jesus lived and died. This is a practical knowledge of God that aims not to comprehend God in His essence (where, instead, it meets a limit that cannot be transgressed, the true apophaticism) but rather to enjoy Him in the fellowship of His own personal relations by obedient confession and mission, anticipating the eternal doxology.

As mentioned, Leibniz, who rightly maintained the organic continuity between the sensible and supersensible, misconstrued the significance of this biblical holism insofar as he continued to think God on the Platonic analogy of mind to body as merely a deistic *intelligentia extra mundam*. Despite this, the Trinitarian knowledge of God is present in the monadological vision, informs it in important ways, and qualifies Leibniz's Platonism. For, according to the latter, God is to be thought as a dynamic harmony of power, wisdom, and love, like a life and not like a thing, the Creator of all that is other than God through the entire time-space sequence up to and including the eschaton, not the mere former or shaper of eternal matter at the temporal and/or logical origin (i.e., Plato's Demurge, the deistic god of the philosophers).<sup>65</sup> In this latter respect, Leibniz was drawing on a Melancthonian theological tradition descending from the opening article of the Augsburg Confession. Here the traditional *via negation*, "eternal, incorporeal, indivisible," was used as a rule, not an insight, to identify God merely as other than all that is not God, as Creator to creature (not as mind to body). Hence the traditional *via eminentia*, "immeasurable power, wisdom, and goodness," was next used to identify God as "the creator and preserver of all things, visible and invisible," linking God positively to this material world of both body and mind, both sensible and supersensible, this earth where such words are spoken and heard. Crucially, this trinity of attributes in their harmony was immediately correlated with the "three persons," the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, noting explicitly that the term "person" here means "not

65. See "The Confrontation of Biblical and Philosophical Monotheism," ch. 5 in Hinlicky, *Divine Complexity*, 159–200.

a part or a quality in another but that which subsists in itself," a relation that in God nonetheless constitutes a real agency.<sup>66</sup> Thus the attributes of God are thought in the Trinitarian way; even divine unity is thought as a living harmony rather than a dead self-identity. God is not thought as fundamentally a(n) intellectual) substance with essential qualities, as in the Platonic disembodied Mind with its essential mental operations of intellection, volition, and desire (though, of course, for extreme Platonism even this is too anthropomorphic by far). Rather, God is thought as the primordial Beloved Community, the Trinity of persons whose unity is not a metaphysical given (as per the ambiguous doctrine of divine simplicity) but an eternal action and passion of love in the Spirit of the Father and the Son.<sup>67</sup> The trinity of attributes—power, wisdom, and love—is thus properly appropriated to the respective real agencies named Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The alternative notion that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit merely personify power, wisdom, and love, which in themselves are inef-  
fably singular, is not in view.

To succeed in making this "Leibnizian" counterclaim today, such knowledge of God has to be distinguished properly from the various knowledges of the world and then rightly related to them. Spinoza, as mentioned, represents the real challenge here, with his resolute repudiation of all anthropomorphism in theology and insistence that God, like anything else, be thought univocally, that is, strictly on the "plane of immanence" (Deleuze).<sup>68</sup> Then "God" becomes nature conceived as acting rather than as acted upon. Rejecting such pantheism, which had been known from Stoicism, the theological tradition had tried to make this distinction between the knowledge of God and the knowledges of the world by rejecting univocity and affirming analogy. Univocity forces God to be an object like any other object in the world, that is, it reduces God to His kataphatic appearances—to what Deleuze and Guattari calls the "figures" of religion.<sup>69</sup> But the resulting anthropomorphism amounts to a reduction to polytheistic absurdity, if anything is intended like Christianity's traditional One who is Creator in relation to all others as creatures. Under univocity, God becomes the quarreling gods, reducible then to philosophical

66. See Luther's theses 1–17 in the "Promotionsdisputation of Petrus Hegemon," translated in the appendix of *The Substance of the Faith: Luther's Doctrinal Theology for Today*, ed. Dennis Bielfeldt, Mickey L. Mattox, and Paul R. Hinlicky (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2008), 205–7.

67. See the running critique of the doctrine of divine simplicity in my counteritled *Divine Complexity*, especially 167–83.

68. See Jonathan I. Israel, *Rational Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), and Hinlicky, *Paths Not Taken*, 76–82. For an illuminating alternative approach to understanding Spinoza as therapy rather than theory, see (my esteemed colleague) Brent Adkins, *True Freedom: Spinoza's Practical Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).

69. Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* trans. H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 91–92.

concepts by demythologization as in Stoicism or, ultimately, to Epicurus's virtual atheism (as Deleuze and Guattari explicitly affirm).

Caught on the horns of this dilemma—either the quarreling gods or divine Nature—analogy held that God as Creator is somehow like the creation, but not identical with it. How? God is *intelligentia extra mundum*, a Mind without body, hence Perfect Mind, Thought thinking itself. God is the pure actuality of intellect in Aristotle's more apophatic conception or, in the more mythological deistic-Platonic iteration, Thought thinking itself by the refraction of a plentitude of finite images forming the visible world in the great chain of being. In either case, analogy de facto articulated a mental-psychological model of transcendence: God is to the world as the mind is (and, chiefly, is not) to the body. God causes the effects in the world like the brain tells the muscles to do this or that, without then being one of its effects or intramundane (secondary) causes. Religiously, disembodied Mind is what we would all like to be, that Perfection in being toward which we strive (to parody Whitehead: our desire for unaffected causal power being the worship It inspires).

Strictly speaking, this model excludes the missions of the Son and the Spirit as causes within the immanent world, or it must at least diminish the deity of the Son and the Spirit in mission on the earth. This is a problem. Indeed, it is the Arian problem.<sup>70</sup> The intention of analogy to affirm that the God of the Bible is like the creation though not identical with it is certainly correct, since the Trinity as known from the gospel cannot be conceived to create either incompetently, stupidly, or maliciously. In principle, a created world, so far as we have the Trinity in mind as its Creator, cannot be unsuited to the communication of God's glory, to act instead as might Descartes's demon. The problem is that under the conditions of the existing order of reality we do not know ourselves truly as God's creation; hence, the proper analogue of the *imago Dei* (which we indeed indelibly are, cf. Gen 9:6) becomes unavailable to us. It is only recovered by our redemption through Christ, the New Adam, the true analogue of God on the earth as the Man for Others (Bonhoeffer). Otherwise, "we want to be God and do not want God to be God" (Luther) according to our own fantasies about divine clout.<sup>71</sup> Under the false assumption that analogy is available to us, we are led, if not to crude and brutal projection of human fantasies for domination, then to the Platonic model of transcendence as disembodied Mind in rapt self-possession untouched by any other, forming all others without itself being affected in any sense.

Aside from the Trinitarian objection to this alluded above, this venerable but dualistic model of transcendence founders on powerful objections today from both naturalism and idealism, which are equally antidualist and as such undermine from within the very point of the

70. See Hinlicky, *Divine Complexity*, chs. 5 and 6.

71. "Disputation against Scholastic Theology" (1517) in LW 31: 10.

traditional analogy in the mind's supposed ontological superiority to the body. For naturalists, matter comes to think in an evolutionary development. For idealists, thought thinks itself, indeed, as history, generating its own material embodiment in the course of its progressive unfolding. If these alternatives to traditional theological analogy were not sufficiently powerful objections to the fantastic (and today, given the technological juggernaut, the dangerous) idea of perfect being as Mind without body, the mental model of divine transcendence is pressed from within by its own essentially negative dialectic, stemming from the Platonic tradition, which achieves transcendence by negating the alleged imperfections of immanence.<sup>72</sup> That is the very recipe, given the anthropological turn of the modern theology, for abolishing *Lebens unwertes Lebens*.<sup>73</sup> This same logic pushes talk about God ultimately to apophatic self-cancellation, to the reification of a "No-thing" that Nietzsche both abhorred and mocked.<sup>74</sup> But if the eternity of the Trinity, as suggested above, is both "timelike" and "space-life," [AU] then the Trinity's perfection in being is not as disembodied Mind, but its own Life as a "spiritual body" in the eternal *circum-incessio* of the Three. Jungel put it rightly: God's being is in becoming.<sup>75</sup>

Consequently, the region of theology (the referent of our analogies) in the landscape of human knowledge need not be imagined as giving nothing but [AU] the unhappy choice between kataphatic polytheism and apophatic silence. The social model of the Trinity,<sup>76</sup> derived from the kataphatic figures of the gospel narrative, represents God's creative transcendence as *imminence* [AU] to the things that are, that is, the existing world, as the promised and in faith effected *coming* of the Beloved Community.<sup>77</sup> Its biblical basis in language lies in the distinctive forms of New Testament discourse in apocalyptic parable, Pauline paradox, and Johannine enigma; these riddles are rightly unlocked in theological explication as referring to the imminent [AU], redemptive, fulfilling reign of God. In that case, the region of theology is indeed not the metaphysician's *arche*, the protological first cause of all effects at the beginning, logically or tem-

[AU: space-  
like?>

[AU: To  
avoid dou-  
ble nega-  
tive: giving  
only?>

[AU: im-  
manence?>

72. Deidre Carabine, *The Unknown God: Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eriugena*, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs 19 (Louvain: Peeters Press and W. B. Eerdmans, no date).

73. Richard Weiskart, *From Hitler to Darwin: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004).

74. This "dialectical self-cancellation" of traditional theology was the probing moral of Jenson's early study of Barth's Romans Commentary. See Robert Jenson, *God after God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future, Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969).

75. Eberhard Jungel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being Is in Becoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

76. Cornelius Plantinga Jr., "Gregory of Nyssa and the Social Analogy of the Trinity," *Thomist* 50, no. 3 (1986).

77. Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 161; see also Hinkley, *Divine Complexity*, 26–27.

porally, which one posits and pursues in the quest to deduce metaphysical totality. Rather, the region of theology is eschatology, the region of putative final causes for which the world exists, the possible redemptions and fulfillments that connect the dots of time into a coherent and saving narrative. Eschatology is the field of the prospective judgments and justifications of the world fallen away but now reclaimed for its divinely appointed destiny. For Christianity, this destiny is the Beloved Community. It is only and strictly by making this differentiation between the lights of nature and of glory that Christian theology can criticize naturalism and idealism appropriately in the light of the grace that is "at hand, but not in hand" (C. Morse) in Jesus Christ. As mentioned previously, such eschatological theology does not compete with fact or theory (offering an alternative Christian "worldview" as if theology were philosophy, like naturalism or idealism, holding, say, a physics of "intelligent design" or an ethics of "the brotherhood of man"). Rather, the identification of God as the One who is determined to redeem and fulfill us all interprets fact and theory as historical creations of God (or corruptions of God's creation) in an ongoing process of discernment, even as its tests its own belief by its coherence with just such other beliefs we hold as true.<sup>78</sup>

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#### CONCLUSION

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There is price for this division of labor, which I trace back to Luther, that the region of theology is eschatology in distinction from the protological orientation of metaphysics.[AU]It is a sharp delimitation: the one cognitive claim of the Christian gospel is that the true God is the One who is earth that will be made new, the same earth on which the cross of Christ once stood.<sup>79</sup> The truth of this claim is the actual coming of the Beloved Community. In this interregnum, however, it is *the* Christian dogma to which critical dogmatics attends, and it stands in a determinative relation to the various articles of traditional dogmatics. In other words, there is no independent doctrine of, say, the Virgin Birth, Original Sin, the Second Coming of Christ, and so on that confronts us as facts demanding recognition or as theories compelling intellectual assent, then to be assembled like pearls on a string or systematized on the basis of some other foundational metaphysics. Rather, all such traditional dogmas are received

78. Bruce D. Marshall, *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 79. "The Bethel Confession" (August draft) in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Berlin: 1932-1933*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, vol. 12, ed. L. Rasmussen (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009), 423. See my forthcoming "Verbum Externum: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Bethel Confession," in *International Bonhoeffer Interpretations*, ed. R. Wüstenberg (Peter Lang, 2012).



as beliefs justified in cohering with *the dogma* concerning the God of the gospel who is determined by His Son and in His Spirit to redeem and fulfill the creation (or these traditional dogmas do not cohere). Each must be tested and received in this way (or reformed or even rejected by this way).

To put the matter epistemically: Christian beliefs about God reduce neither to the percepts that inform naturalism nor the concepts by which idealism constructs them into usable objects, but rather they exist as interpretive articulations of the new perspective that arises from audition of the gospel. For example, Jesus in His person marks a new beginning in humanity (i.e., the doctrine of the Virgin Birth), or Jesus in His death is not merely a victim, nor a punishment bearer, but the innocent and voluntary bearer of the sin of the world with all its consequences as His own (i.e., the doctrine of the Atonement). Neither of these truths can be known naturally or historically, but only theologically, that is, precisely as the (divine) interpretation of the Jesus of nature and history in the perspective of His Resurrection from the dead as that takes hold of new theological subjects in repentance and faith. This new perspective of the gospel, taking form in such basic Christian beliefs, in turn yields further theological interpretations of fact and theory in the common world, where facts or theories are now seen as creatures of God (or, perhaps, as actual evils, diabolic corruptions of God's creation in actualizing possibilities that God has rejected). For example, Jesus's new beginning of humanity in His person forbids us to think of existence any longer as being-toward-death (Heidegger) but instead requires us to think of our authentic existence as being-toward-death-and-resurrection (Luke 14:12–4). Or, Jesus's bearing the sin of the world forbids us any longer to evade or project onto others the evil consequences of our sin, but rather leads us to be saved from our own sin by dying in the Spirit with Jesus to rise, forgiven and freed, to newness of life (Rom 6). That is what the dogmatic beliefs of the Christian creed are: articulations of the new perspective of the gospel in the world, which interpret common experience, first, of Jesus, and then, of us in Jesus. Such belief is taken up and extended in the work of critical dogmatics, interpretation upon interpretation upon interpretation until the eschaton of interpretation, the Day of the Lord.

This delimitation of theology's cognitive claim reflects the relative autonomy of Christian theology as a human but nonspeculative "thinking after" (*Nachdenken*) the gospel's discourse about God even with respect to its own, often ambiguous tradition. The right relating of theology to philosophy in this connection is, first, to distinguish metaphysical, historical, or natural claims, which have their own integrity and relative autonomy, from theological claims, but then, second, to bring theological claims to bear cognitively as interpretation of them in view of the promised coming of the Beloved Community. Such ongoing, pragmatic, revisable interpretation would be a kind of "Christian philosophy," an explication

of the new perspective of Christian belief in the world, such as I called for in the conclusion of *Paths Not Taken*.<sup>80</sup> Critical dogmatics, as I envision it, provides a “tool kit” for this task. But critical dogmatics itself arises in the Easter revisioning of the executed Jesus who died as a blasphemer on the imperial stake, *sub contrario*, just so bringing the Beloved Community to the unloved and unlovable. This cognitive task of interpretation, as identified in the conclusion of *Beloved Community*, reflects the new self-interpretation of the theological subject as a sinner nevertheless justified and renewed by faith in Jesus, the present and effective Agent of the Beloved Community.<sup>81</sup>

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80. Hinlicky, *Paths Not Taken*, 293–94.

81. Hinlicky, *Beloved Community*, 373–74.