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Praying in the Breach: Worshiping through the End of Metaphysics

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In recent years, discussion has raged within theologies inspired by Continental philosophy of religion regarding the supposed "overcoming" of ontotheology. In this article, I will consider the theological methodology of Louis-Marie Chauvet, a sacramental theologian whose work has been highly influenced by these discussions. For Chauvet, it is the liturgy that provides human beings with the necessary means, not for overcoming ontotheology, but for learning to live with *it in a healthy way. Through the liturgy, we learn to* work through *ontotheology, and thus to hear the call of Being to appropriation and thankful response. This is, however, quite a bit to ask of our liturgies, and I suggest that the only way that Chauvet's method can function is if it is placed in a framework of dialogue. I adopt this framework from Chauvet and expand upon it, which results in an innovative* relecture *of Chauvet's theology.*

Keywords: ontotheology, postmodernism, metaphysics, Chauvet, liturgy, fundamental theology, dialogue, hermeneutics

WITHIN Continental philosophy of religion and the theologies inspired by it, there has been much discussion of the supposed "overcoming" of metaphysics and ontotheology.[1] While not

[1] To offer but a small selection of studies and authors: John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Caputo, *The Folly of God: A Theology of the Unconditional* (Salem, OR: Polebridge Press, 2015); Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Jean-Luc Marion, *Certitudes négatives* (Paris: Ed. Grasset, 2010); Marion, *God without Being: Hors texte,* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); J. Aaron Simmons and Stephen Minister, eds., *Reexamining*

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normally considered a key figure in this regard, the French sacramental theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet's theological method is inspired by these discussions, and he indeed articulates his fundamental theology of the sacramental in the wake of Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics.[2]

Chauvet is concerned with how metaphysics and ontotheology lead one to understand God's relation to human beings in terms of causality, and thereby distort the discussion through a "passion to master the truth," which is always understood statically and conceptually.[3] One must work, therefore, at eradicating such patterns of thought, though he claims that fully overcoming them is "an unachievable task."[4] Rather, Chauvet proposes that we continually *work through* our metaphysical ways of thinking by always striving to go back to the forgotten nature of Being as a *call* that requires human response, rather than something standing outside of human beings as an object to be grasped. The context wherein we learn both to work through our metaphysical thinking and to hear the call of Being is the symbolic network of the church, particularly through the *liturgy*.

Such an approach is, however, not without problems, not the least of which is the fact that it seems a rather tall order for our liturgies to fill. While Chauvet's theological method rightly emphasizes the human element in sacramental mediations, his method does not adequately address how and to what extent this human element can serve to corrupt the mediation of the liturgy itself and, thereby, fail to effectively "work-through" metaphysical thinking. While this criticism has already been made, I offer a different take on it by focusing on an expansion and deepening of the hermeneutical dimension of Chauvet's work.[5] I conclude by suggesting that Chauvet's

Deconstruction and Determinate Religion: Toward a Religion with *Religion* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2012); Joeri Schrijvers, *Ontotheological Turnings? The Decentering of the Modern Subject in Recent French Phenomenology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011); Schrijvers, *Between Faith and Belief: Toward a Contemporary Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016).

[2] See also Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan, SJ, and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 26.

[3] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 28.

[4] Ibid., 48.

[5] See Vincent Miller, "An Abyss at the Heart of Mediation: Louis-Marie Chauvet's Fundamental Theology of Sacramentality," *Horizons* 24, no. 2 (December 1997): 230–47. Lieven Boeve, for his part, notes that Chauvet has "brought theology to the threshold of the Postmodern context," and that it is "from this perspective that Chauvet's endeavor is to be appreciated while at the same time deepened and strengthened." This deepening and fine-tuning take the form of taking seriously contemporary thought's turn to language, and concomitant turn to theological hermeneutics. Lieven Boeve, "Theology in

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model succeeds only if liturgy is placed in a framework of dialogue, a framework I adopt from Chauvet himself, though slightly repositioned. Nevertheless, before arriving at these points, it is first necessary to present Chauvet's understanding of the working-through of ontotheology and metaphysics.

"Working through" Ontotheology with Chauvet

Insofar as the true nature of Being should be that of a *call* requiring human response, Chauvet notes that human beings must undergo a "conversion" whereby they renounce "convok[ing] and measur[ing] being starting from the awareness of self," and thereby "'decenter' themselves *from* themselves, and henceforth understand themselves as always-already infused with the call of being."[6] This speaking of a "call" leads us to acknowledge the importance of *language,* understood as "the house of being where humans live and thereby ex-ist."[7] Human beings are now to be regarded as "shepherds of Being" rather than "Rulers of all entities," meaning, "they exist only when spoken by language and thus only when summoned and convoked by Being, which, in the mediation of language, attracts them as it withdraws and comes into presence in the very movement that conceals it."[8] In other words, Being is mediated to us by means of language, but this revelation is never done without an accompanying movement of concealment.

This double movement is related to Chauvet's understanding of the truth of Being as a playful back-and-forth between event and arrival. The truth of Being is revealed through the event. When the event *arrives,* however, there remains an excessiveness that even the event cannot capture. The moment of truth, then, is a moment of simultaneous revelation and concealment. For Chauvet, this "conciliation between the Event and the Arrival" is "nothing other than tracing the Difference 'back to its essential origin.'"[9]

a Postmodern Context and the Hermeneutical Project of Louis-Marie Chauvet," in *Sacraments: Revelation of the Humanity of God; Engaging the Fundamental Theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet*, ed. Philippe Bordeyne and Bruce T. Morrill (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 6ff. This article is inspired by Boeve's focus on and appeal to hermeneutics and stands in constructive-critical dialogue with Miller's critique, though I do, ultimately, choose to follow the linguistic-hermeneutical route of criticism rather than one influenced by Habermas, as will be discussed below.

[6] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 50 (emphasis in the original); here paraphrasing Martin Heidegger, *Lettre sur l'humanisme—Über den Humanismus* (Paris: Aubier éd. Montaigne, 1970), 104–9.

[7] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 50.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., paraphrasing and quoting Heidegger, "Identité et différence," in *Questions I et II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 299–300.

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This origin is the "'essence of being' as 'the Play itself'; that of 'being considered as *starting from* the difference.'"[10] This play between event and arrival, presence and absence, is a kind of continual teasing, though eventually metaphysics lost sight of the playful intentions of Being and instead clung to Being's representations. Ultimately, this led to Being "being 'reduced to the presence of an available foundation.'"[11]

In order to prevent this, we are required to take a "step backwards," a "jump" into the difference," so as to "*advance by going back* towards this original place where metaphysics has its abode, the play of being in which it has been engaged from the very beginning."[12] This act of *letting go of the desire for foundations* is a task that is never completed, for "we must not conceive of the 'root' or the 'foundation' of metaphysics as something restricted to a single location, such as an object somewhere outside us"; rather, we must remember that this foundation "is everywhere, it lives within us."[13] This is why the key to working through ontotheology is not a simple and singular "solution"; rather, it is "a certain manner of living within the metaphysical tradition, or *recalling* it, this time, however, *by thinking its unthought essence.*"[14]

This is ultimately to recall that not only is metaphysics "the very business of thought"; it is "the very business of *thinkers themselves*, always questioned by metaphysics because they are *involved in it.*"[15] Humans naturally desire objectivity in the sense of seeing each external thing as an object to be known and grasped. This natural desire points to the necessity of the hermeneutical circle, that is, the circle "where questioners pose questions only to the extent that they have already understood, by anticipation, the questioned—because the questioners are contained within the questioned."[16] The hermeneutical circle "corresponds to the very nature of the ex-istance of human beings who cannot comprehend themselves except in relation to the tradition which lives within them," a tradition that opens them to the future insofar as that future is "always-already anticipated in their reading of the past."[17]

[10] Ibid. (emphasis in the original).
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 50–51 (emphasis in the original).
[13] Ibid., quoting and paraphrasing Heidegger, "Identité et différence," 286.
[14] Ibid. (emphasis in the original).
[15] Ibid., 52 (my emphasis; emphasis in the original).
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 52–53. Chauvet does not explicitly refer to Ricoeur here, but one can draw connections with what Ricoeur says at the conclusion of *The Symbolism of Evil* with regard to the movement from the first to the second naïveté—we will return to this below. See

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Conversion, then, needs hermeneutics in order to continually bring us face-to-face with the fact that we do, in fact, need to be converted. It helps us, ultimately, to get back to the original game underlying metaphysics, a game of continual teasing between presence and absence, and thus to the place of *difference*. In the end, the act of thinking must begin "from the uncomfortable *non-place* of a permanent questioning," and thinkers must "give up all 'calculating thinking,' all 'usefulness,' and learn to think starting with this ecstatic *breach* that a human being is."[18] This is, however, an "unachievable" task, indeed "a task whose very essence is its incompleteness"—an incompleteness that implies that our thinking must never close in on itself, and always remain open to the other and the different who serves to remind us of our being in difference, our living in the breach.[19]

All of these insights lead Chauvet to highlighting the importance of mediation, that truth and reality always stand in need of something other than themselves in order to come to us. For Chauvet, this leads to a discussion of the *symbolic order* as the place of mediation, and thus the place of this working-through of metaphysics and ontotheology.

The Symbolic Order as the Place of Working-Through

Chauvet's starting point is that "reality is never present to us except in a mediated way," that is to say, "*constructed* out of the symbolic network of the culture which fashions us."[20] "This *symbolic order,*" he continues, "designates the system of connections between the different elements and levels of a culture," be they "economic, social, political, [or] ideological," that is, "a system forming a coherent whole that allows the social group and individuals to orient themselves in space, find their place in time, and in general situate themselves in the world in a significant way."[21] In short, the symbolic order is a system by which we come to articulate our identity in the world, though, of course, "there always remains an inexpungible residue of signifiers to which we can never give adequate meanings."[22] Just because we have made a world that makes sense, in other words, does not mean that we can claim that this

Paul Ricoeur, "Conclusion: The Symbol Gives Rise to Thought" in *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 347–57.

[18] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 53 (emphasis in the original). See Martin Heidegger, *Lettre sur l'humanisme, Question 3* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 106.

[19] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 53.

[20] Ibid., 84 (emphasis in the original).

[21] Ibid., 84–85 (emphasis in the original).

[22] Ibid., 85. Here alluding to Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Introduction à l'œuvre de M. Mauss," in M. Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris: PUF, 1973), xlix.

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world has universal significance or can survive without interacting with other worlds of meaning.

While Chauvet would maintain that the object we perceive "*is always-already a constructed object,*" this should not lead us to think that the symbolic order is itself wholly subjective.[23] This is true because human beings are not confronted with a *tabula rasa*, but, instead, with "a *world always already filled with signification,* always already ordered, always already socially filled out."[24] The human subject is not the master and creator of the symbolic order, but, rather, "there is no emergence of subjects without the *subjugation* of each of them to this *law*, this cultural agreement which is the symbolic order."[25] Without this, subjects regress "into the imaginary and neurosis because one fixates on bits or fragments of the world, which—now—... become 'in-significant.'"[26]

This fact of being confronted with a world already full of signification points also to the fact that the world can be said to be "created" by the *word*.[27] This is not a secondary point for Chauvet, but instead points to the fact that this creative dimension of language, more than just offering creative meanings to entities, also has a fundamental-existential dimension: *language creates the subject*.

In order to explain how language does this, Chauvet appeals both to linguistics and to psychoanalysis. His linguistic viewpoint is based here on his reading of Émile Benveniste and Edmond Ortigues, and begins with an emphasis that "every discourse is 'dependent upon the I who states itself there.'"[28] This simply means that, for all discourse, the subject who is speaking (*I*) "is a permanent condition of meaning for the entire discourse because nothing has meaning that does not concern humans conscious of their presence in the world as speaking and acting subjects."[29] The linguistic *I*, however, is not a monodimensional entity, for it "has two 'values' at the same time: as the 'content of the pronouncement,' it is the subject of the

[23] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 85 (emphasis in the original). He continues: "Eating for us [humans] is not simply a matter of absorbing a certain number of calories but of consuming foods that are socially hallowed, so that the meal is the preeminent place for the nourishment of the social body" (ibid.).

[24] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 85 (emphasis in the original), quoting F. Flahault, *La parole intermédiare* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), 84–85 .

[25] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 86 (emphasis in the original).

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 88.

[28] Ibid., 93, quoting Émile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 1:261–62.

[29] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 93, quoting Edmond Ortigues, *Le discours et le symbole* (Paris: Aubier, 1962), 152–53.

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verb; as the 'author of the pronouncement,' it is the subject of the discourse."[30] Furthermore, and more importantly: "This I is not conceivable without a YOU, the reversible partner of the I, so that 'to be whole, the category of person requires the reversibility of the relationship' between the I and the YOU in the discourse."[31] This is not the end, however, as if to say that the essence of discourse consists only in an I and YOU conversing endlessly and, with versatility, continually trading places as I and YOU. To do so is "to deteriorate into a dual relation of mirror images," engaging in a discourse that is completely disconnected from "the influence of a third agent—the social and cosmic world.'"[32] Beyond this there is also the necessary presence of the "impersonal IT, the linguistic mediation that permits the I (in its relation with the YOU) to open itself to the universal."[33]

Chauvet is able to draw important consequences from this rather abstract analysis. First, the YOU and I are not to be seen as two completely separate entities, but, rather, the reversible nature of the I and the YOU in discourse is seen as quite paradoxical, for on one level it "occupies the position opposite the I, from which, as a consequence, it is *the most different*," yet it is "also *the most similar* to the I since it designates the interlocutor," a position that each speaker in turn is able to take.[34] This strange or paradoxical position is only possible with a third, the IT, which is "the social and universal Other under which both the I and the YOU abide," and which, ultimately, "permits them, spoken as they are by the same culture, to 'understand one another.'"[35]

The relationship and difference between the I and the YOU is no longer one that should be understood *metaphysically,* that is, "according to the (meta)physical scheme of *distance-separation*."[36] Difference, rather than being seen as a lack or as something negative, becomes something much more positive. For "if what is most different (I-YOU as opposite and radically other) is also what is most similar (YOU as the reversible of the I)," then we can see anthropological difference not as a "distancing which attenuates or even cuts communication but rather as an *otherness* which makes it possible."[37] All in all then, difference becomes conceived of not as an obstacle to a supposedly transparent truth, but as the place where truth happens through the "play" of difference. The difference between interpretations,

[30] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 93, quoting Ortigues, *Le discours et le symbole,* 153.
[31] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 93, quoting Ortigues, *Le discours et le symbole,* 153.
[32] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 93.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 94 (emphasis in the original).
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid. (emphasis in the original).
[37] Ibid., 94–95 (emphasis in the original).

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then, becomes the very locus of subjectivity and knowledge. The symbolic network thus allows us to gain a positive understanding of difference, an understanding that shows us how we are supposed to learn to live within the metaphysical tradition.

This is, however, only half of the story of Chauvet's analysis of the potential of the symbolic order in this regard. The breach of the subject is also explained by an appeal to Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis, which also shows how the subject is "cleft in two because of the threefold structure of the linguistic subject outside of which the subject cannot develop."[38] Chauvet bases his reflections on Jacques Lacan's description of the Mirror Stage in infantile development, that is, the stage wherein the child begins to notice his/her reflection in the mirror and, importantly, can associate what s/he sees with her/himself. This stage of development, however is also experienced as an *alienation* insofar as the child can begin to experience him/herself as "the captive of its mirror image," a situation which, if not moved beyond, can result in the child being trapped in a cycle of narcissism.[39]

The only way to prevent this is for the infant to "see itself in the mirror as a subject, that is, as forming a symbolic unity of *an order other* than its reflected body."[40] The way that this happens is none other than through *language* insofar as the first stage in breaking out of this cycle is the child hearing his being addressed by his name. Through this, there grows an awareness of an identification between who s/he perceives herself to be and the name she is called; there dawns, indeed, an awareness that the s/he, while being mirrored in the perceived image, also exceeds that very image. An awareness of the I, then, leads to an awareness of an irreducible interiority that is not reducible to the image—yet the image is the mediation of this interiority insofar as the linguistic act of being named, which leads to subjectivity, happens only through the child recognizing her- or himself in the reflected image and connecting her or his selfhood with what she or he sees and hears. The child begins, ultimately, to grow in awareness that what she *is* is more than what she sees reflected in the mirror—she belongs, in fact, to a *symbolic order* that puts her into relation with *difference*. This means further that the subject that emerges here is internally *divided* insofar as there is a difference between the self as perceived through the reflection and the self as forming part of a larger symbolic whole. Paradoxically, however, it is "precisely this lack-in-being, that saves the subject" from

[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid. (emphasis in the original).

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drowning in the waves of its own narcissism, and is "the law of *language*, the law of culture, *which anchors the subject by dividing it*."[41]

Chauvet complements his Lacanian reading with an appeal to Sigmund Freud's understanding of the Oedipus complex, whereby he is able to articulate his notion of *symbolic deprivation*. This notion is related to the fact that the child is enjoined by the object of his desire to continually defer the attainment of what is desired. This then leads him to posit, following Claude Lévi-Strauss, that "the prohibition against incest is 'the only one among all the rules that has a universal character' and for this reason 'does not constitute simply one rule among others but rather constitutes … *the fact of the rule itself*.'"[42] This rule is seen as the very foundation of the human community itself insofar as it is seen as "a law of deprivation to force a *disconnecting* from any relation with the immediately coveted object."[43]

In order to become truly human, then, "we must renounce to be everything, to have everything, and right away."[44] This renunciation of our rampant desire is identified as a work of *mourning*, finding "in the Oedipal experience its decisive structural moment."[45] Be that as it may, this act of renunciation "is never fully achieved or achievable"; there is in each of us a narcissistic child being continually reborn.[46] This all leads Chauvet to acknowledge that "the subject's conquest of its liberty and truth is never achieved once and for all"; rather, "it is effected by an *unending process* of costly 'working through' (*Durchärbeitung* [Freud])."[47]

[41] Ibid. (emphasis in the original).

[42] Ibid., 97 (emphasis in the original), quoting Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (Paris: PUF, 1949), 10.

[43] Ibid. (emphasis in the original).

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid. It should be noted that Susan A. Ross offers a very salient feminist critique of Chauvet's project, arguing that Chauvet's use of Lacan and Freud reflects a man's perspective to the detriment of one coming from a woman. She notes: "It is worth raising the question here … whether the dynamics of desire for an unmediated relationship with the (m)other, as understood psychoanalytically by Chauvet, represent a universal desire in human experience, or whether this desire is more the characteristic of men than of women. If one's relationship with one's mother is affected by the dynamics of gender, might this desire for the unmediated be similarly affected? Might this suggest that women's relationship to the symbolic could follow a different journey than that of men?" Susan A. Ross, *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* (London: Continuum, 2001), 145–46.

[46] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 97.

[47] Ibid., 98 (emphasis in the original). In psychoanalytical terms, *Durchärbeitung* refers to "psychic work which enables the subject to accept certain repressed elements and to free himself from the grip of repetitive mechanisms." The process of working-through is most pertinent "at certain phases where the treatment seems to stagnate and where a

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Nevertheless, the process is not a simple path that we can follow to an objective destination—that is, to have worked through our metaphysical and ontotheological thinking once and for all. The goal or "treasure," in this process, notes Chauvet, is "*nothing but the slow self-change whereby the subject succeeds in producing fruit as a result of the painful plowing and tilling of the field of its desire*."[48]

The working-through of our innate desire to think metaphysically and ontotheologically means that we "consent to *never being able to leave mediation behind*," and that we give up all pretentions of laying claim to a possession of the Real.[49] Humans, in other words, are no longer the strong, confident, and fully centered entities bequeathed to us by modernity, but are, rather, subjected to the rule of difference, which is nothing other than the rule of the symbolic and mediated order. We must learn to control the ever-present desire for foundations and, instead, inhabit the simultaneously creative and tensive space of *difference*.

The Liturgy as the Place of Working-Through

It is to completely misunderstand Chauvet if one thinks that this whole process of "working-through" is something that happens in the abstract, or

resistance, while understood, persists." Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, ed. Daniel Lagache, 2nd ed. (Paris: PUF, 1981), https://psycha.ru/fr/dictionnaires/laplanche_et_pontalis/voc211.html). The term's original use, then, refers to the working-through of repressed or subconscious elements, patterns of thought, and behavior, which manage to keep us in their grip even though we have been able to "understand" or interpret them. Interestingly, the French translation of *Durchärbeitung* is *perlaboration*, a word that Chauvet uses as well in his discussion of sacramental grace, wherein he describes the work of grace as follows: "not an object we receive, but rather a symbolic work of *receiving oneself*: a work of 'perlaboration' in the Spirit by which subjects receive themselves from God in Christ as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters" (Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 140). This indicates that working-through is not something we do completely on our own, but is received as a grace that then requires human cooperation to realize fully. In the referenced English translation of *Symbol and Sacrament*, the translators have opted for the word "perlaboration" in the section just referenced rather than a translation of the term as "working-through," probably because it is impossible to smoothly use the translation in the idiom they were translating into (see Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbole et sacrement: Une relecture sacramentelle de l'existence chrétienne* [Paris: Cerf, 1988], 147). Nevertheless, it is important to note the continuity between the discussion in this latter section and the earlier sections wherein *Durchärbeitung* is discussed in relation to the "working-through" of metaphysical thought patterns.

[48] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 98 (emphasis in the original).

[49] Ibid. (emphasis in the original).

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behind our desks or in our reading chairs. For Chauvet, this process's importance is not strictly philosophical but is instead related to the creation of Christian disciples who have a relationship with the God who is both necessarily mediated by yet also exceeds the structures of the visible church. For Chauvet, the mediation par excellence is the fundamental sacrament of the church itself, which is understood as supporting the church's own *symbolic network and structure of Christian identity* that is itself made up of the three interrelated components of *Scripture, Sacrament, and Ethics*.[50] These three elements, contained within and sustained by the fundamental sacrament of the church are to be seen as the structuring components of Christian identity, and thus the structuring components of the life of faith. Faith itself is understood as coming into a relationship with a presence that is not "present" to us in the same way that objects are, and is therefore not something that we as fully centered subjects can have and possess.

Nevertheless, the mediating of this presence takes a proper liturgical form insofar as it is through the sacramental liturgy that the content of the faith we have received (*Scripture*) takes on flesh in our bodies, and thereby compels us to verify the faith we have appropriated by ethical witness and action (*ethics*). The liturgy is, in other words, *central* in Chauvet's theological method as a whole, for it is "the place of deployment of sensible figures which enables the believer to negotiate a structural relationship with God."[51] The liturgy is, in short, not only necessary in order to hear the word of God and then give it a body; it is also the place from whence we are sent to go out into the world in loving ethical service to our brothers and sisters.

The liturgy can do this, however, only if the mode of the relationship with God we come into is such that it is understood in the nonfoundational, open, and non-neurotic way we have described above. The liturgy, through "its visual, auditory, and tactile figures," is "conducive to the creation of a 'good distance' with God" that makes God neither wholly immanent nor transcendent.[52] It is the role of good liturgy, then, to allow the "managing of a double tension" in one's relationship with God, that is, "a 'spatial' tension between presence and absence, between positive theology and negative theology," as well as a "'temporal' tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet.'"[53] This points to the "fundamental function of the liturgy": "to allow the believer

[50] See Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 171–80; Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body,* trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 29–31.

[51] Chauvet, "Présence de Dieu, présence à Dieu dans le jeu liturgique," in *Le corps, chemin de Dieu: Les sacrements* (Paris: Fayard, 2010), 89.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

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to live between two tensions, namely, of a good distance in one's relationship to God and to assume the 'between-time' of eschatology."[54] The liturgy should, then, in other words, help us to come into a relationship with God that is not ontotheological and thereby much more reflective of the eschatological "already-not-yet" nature of time and history.

Such a view of the liturgy is, however, not so evident—least of all for many Christians who approach the liturgy as a kind of "guarantee" of God's presence in a way that would seem to deny God's simultaneous absence. Because of this Chauvet notes that the liturgy understood in this way can be perceived as "an invitation to mourning," especially for those who falsely see the liturgy as "a place of a formidable imaginary hold on God."[55] Nevertheless, for Chauvet, the true nature of the liturgy is "a call for abandonment," and it is for this reason that Chauvet can go so far as to refer to the liturgy as "a kind of 'negative theology in act.'"[56]

The Liturgy as "Negative Theology in Act"

If we understand the working through of ontotheology and metaphysics as the cultivation of a disposition wherein we let go of our desire to conceptually capture God and instead allow our hearing of God's word, sacramentally appropriated, to invite us to a proper becoming that includes a necessary moment of ethical witness, it seems natural to find in the liturgy a kind of "training ground" wherein we are given the means of cultivating such a disposition. Nevertheless, this work is always "oriented to action—the symbolic action of communication—and not that of speculation."[57] Liturgy sends us *out* to the other, not *inward* to ourselves.

The liturgical experience can indeed be said to engender a kind of attitude of negativity with regard to God's transcendence and mystery, but this negativity should not be understood in an internalized or "intellectual" way, which is where Chauvet thinks that things began to go awry in the apophatic tradition.[58]

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., 90.

[57] Ibid., 91.

[58] Chauvet notes that while the *via negativa* is an "obligatory rite of passage" for any theology worthy of the name, "this cannot mean that the *primordial task* of Christian theology is to purify through analogy the concepts that we use about God—so that we can reach 'knowledge under the mode of unknowing' (Dionysius)." Chauvet instead follows Eberhard Jüngel's suggestion that the main task of theology is, instead, to consider "the gospel itself as a form of analogy, that is, as a type of *parabolic* language whose distinctive characteristic is 'to insert human beings, insofar as they are summoned, into being about which they are speaking.'" Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 41–42 (emphasis in

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For example, in the liturgy we proclaim that God is thrice holy, or "in the highest," or we call to mind the various orders of angels surrounding God's throne in the eucharistic preface, but these descriptions are not intended to be understood primarily as a kind of "raw material" out of which we can construct grand theological theories. They are, contrarily, orientated to "the symbolic experience," that is, an experience of creative appropriation that always ends with the moment of ethical witness and response as a "verification" of the gift we have received.[59] Nevertheless, before we can appropriate and respond, we have to *receive* God's word, and that can happen only if we abandon our supposed claims of mastery, and instead allow ourselves to be "mastered," as it were, by the mediation of the liturgy. In the end, the liturgy is nothing other than "the symbolic space of a fundamental passivity which is the dispossession of the subject."[60] The liturgy, in other words, is the place where the modern subject becomes *decentered* so that she or he can receive the gift of God's word, which, if appropriated, becomes a grace working in and through the subject.

In coming to justify the liturgy as such a space, Chauvet relies on three criteria that he derives from the shape of the liturgy itself—namely, the priority of the "we" to the "I" in the structure of the majority of the prayers, the "precedence" given to tradition, and the priority of "exteriority" over "interiority."[61] One could say that the first two criteria testify to the creation of "a liturgical *habitus* throughout the course of the centuries," which reminds the individual subject that his or her needs or experience are not what matters most when it comes to liturgical prayer.[62] For example, the fact that the prayers of the liturgy are mostly formulated in the first-person plural includes all members of the assembly in the content of the prayers, whether a participant "wants" to be included or feels emotionally connected to the prayers being recited, or not. For example, the collect for the thirtieth week in Ordinary Time asks God to "increase our faith, hope, and charity" and to "make us love what you command" whether or not our personal moods, needs, and dispositions are really attuned to this request.[63] In a similar way, the liturgical rhythms of the seasons along with liturgical gestures all

the original), quoting Eberhard Jüngel, *Dieu mystère du monde: Fondement de la théologie du Crucifié dans le débat entre théisme et athéisme*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Cerf, 1983), 102, 108.

[59] See Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 260–61.

[60] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 91.

[61] Ibid., 92–93.

[62] Ibid., 93.

[63] "Collecta: Dominica XXX per annum," in *Missale romanum ex decreto sacrosancti oecumenici Conciliii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Pauli pp. VI promulgatum* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1975), 369 (my trans.).

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likewise point to the fact that the subject stands secondary to the logic and rhythm of the liturgy itself.

The third criterion—the priority of the exterior to the interior—has to do with the process of *hearing*, which opens the way both to the development of a proper disposition of "detachment" and, potentially, to *appropriation*. The majority of the liturgy—certainly since the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council—is recited or chanted in an audible tone of voice. This fact leads Chauvet, following Jean-Louis Chrétien's phenomenology of prayer, to note that the priority of this external vocalization of liturgical prayer is tied to the logical appropriation: "By reciting, I am quoted to appear *by* what I say and *before* what I say."[64] In other words, by reciting something out loud, we are no longer called before what is said; we actually hear ourselves saying it in our own names—even if the request is not something that we would normally say. Quoting John Cassian's discussion of the monastic praying of the Psalms in choir, Chauvet notes that one is indeed singing them "'as if one is their author,'" and that "in this sense, praying the psalms is less a matter of interpreting them and more one of being interpreted by them."[65] Liturgical prayer, then, by privileging the external over the internal in the matter of recitation, not only encourages the prayer or reciter *to do* something, but assumes that she or he is also *hearing* something, and by that hearing something is *being done* to him or her: she or he is becoming decentered, and by that decentering, a person is enabled to enter into a symbolic space where the faith can be bodily appropriated (sacrament), which then leads to the gift's verification in ethical praxis (ethics).

An Approach Partially Positive

In summing up, one could say that in Chauvet's method of "working through" ontotheology and metaphysics, what is most important is to live in the breach, that is, the symbolic space that is opened up to us when we allow the liturgy to decenter us. By living in this space, we learn to live "in a mature proximity to absence," which allows us to cultivate a proper relationship to God that sees the faith as a threefold dynamic process (Scripture-

[64] Chauvet, "Présence de Dieu, présence à Dieu," 94, quoting Jean-Louis Chrétien, "La parole blessée: Phénoménologie de la prière," in *Phénoménologie et théologie*, ed. J.-F. Courtine (Paris: Criterion, 1992), 74 (emphasis added).

[65] Chauvet, "Présence de Dieu, présence à Dieu," 94. See John Cassian, "Chapter 11: Of the Perfection of Prayer to Which We Can Rise by the System Described," in *The Second Conference of Abbot Isaac on Prayer*, New Advent, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/350810.htm.

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Sacrament-Ethics) rather than as an objectified conceptual content.[66] We "work through" ontotheology, then, when we enter into the symbolic universe of the church that happens by way of our liturgical participation. The internal "logic" of the liturgy works to decenter us, not for its own sake, or in order to render us passive before a power and immensity that overwhelms us, but to decenter us *for* something—namely, for offering back to God the return-gift of our ethical witness that results in the continual building up of a body of brothers and sisters in the world.

One of the more obvious positive dimensions of this approach is that, in contrast to some other approaches to overcoming ontotheology from a more Derridean-deconstructionist nature, it takes the particularity of the Christian tradition quite seriously—even the things that might seem to be rather mundane (liturgical gestures, colors, etc.).[67] Rather than seeking to do away with the elements of Christian particularity in order to find a supposedly "pure" kernel of authentic Christian truth, Chauvet's approach forces us to "work through" the elements of our particularity, realizing that we cannot just simply wipe them away in order to arrive at a "purer" form of Christianity, for such a form of Christianity has never and never will exist. We work through our metaphysical Christian "baggage," but like any good psychotherapist will tell you, the baggage always exists in one form or another even after we have worked through it. Like an addiction to gambling or alcohol for recovering addict, the propensity for metaphysical thinking will always remain wedded to the Christian theological tradition, able to raise its head at any moment. Christians should always work on cultivating the attitudes necessary for a mature proximity to absence whenever we speak of God's presence and thereby position ourselves in the symbolic space of *receiving* God's communication, *appropriating* it bodily, and then *verifying* it by the return-gift of our ethical action. Nevertheless, we must realize that "old habits die hard," as it were: just to think we have "arrived" at this mature proximity to absence is to admit that we still have quite a way to go. Furthermore, the disposition to think metaphysically is not something that can ever be gotten over once

[66] See Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 58–63.

[67] John Caputo, for example, draws too firm a line between the practice of hospitality that marks the coming of the Kingdom of God and the dogmas and sacramental practices that would quell that hospitality. He notes that what is needed is a church as "Ikon," that is, "a non-conventional and experimental church, an alternative church," which "tries to reinvent the tradition, to reimagine classical theology, to rethink God and Christ and church, not so much on the level of doctrine or dogmatics but as a practice, a performance, indeed as a certain experimental theo-drama, a parasitical, postmodern liturgy." John Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 135.

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and for all, for the "baggage" of this way of thinking sits entrenched in our collective ecclesial subconscious, ready to come to the surface when we are not properly on guard—a situation that occurs somewhat regularly thanks to our human finitude, not to mention the presence of sin.

Such an advantage aside, there is a disadvantage to such a methodology that is discussed in what follows.

The Need for a More Critical Theological Hermeneutics

Advantages aside, one could also say that Chauvet's approach in working through ontotheology and metaphysics trusts too much in the ability of ecclesial and sacramental mediations to engender the kind of healthy proximity to absence that we have been discussing. Particularly, one notes that Chauvet's reliance on the liturgy as the place of this working-through and as a place of "abandonment" displays a certain level of naïveté about the ability of the liturgy to accomplish this, especially insofar as the liturgy can also be experienced by people as a hindrance to coming into relationship with God. The reason for this is related to the fact that liturgical symbols themselves can become corrupted and in need of reform and renewal—a fact that Chauvet's approach does not seem to adequately acknowledge.

This critique has been already made by Vincent Miller, who noted that "Chauvet emphasizes the consequences of being 'spoken' to the detriment of the activity of 'speaking,'" and that Chauvet, in his overemphasis on "mediation" fails to "adequately address important dimensions of human existence that are at work in the handing on of the Christian faith" besides this.[68] This points ultimately to the need for a hermeneutics of suspicion that is extended to sacramental mediations themselves. Miller focuses his critique by noting that Chauvet does not offer any "resources to evaluate symbols that have become distorted," and that "it seems that it would favour the continuation of a distorted practice because that is what has been handed on in the tradition and has formed the identity of generations of Christians."[69] This then

[68] Miller, "An Abyss at the Heart of Mediation," 239.

[69] Ibid. The first half of this statement is not altogether accurate, as Chauvet has, indeed, provided the means for evaluating liturgical symbols: they must always sit between the extremes of *hieratism* and *trivialization,* and also with a bit of *eschatological reserve* (see Chauvet, "Eschatologie et sacrement," *La Maison Dieu* 220 [1990], 47–78). Timothy M. Brunk helpfully points this out, though he also makes the assertion that Miller was incorrect in claiming that Chauvet provides no resources for the evaluation of corrupted symbols (Timothy M. Brunk, *Liturgy and Life: The Unity of Sacrament and Ethics in the Theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet* [Brussels: Peter Lang, 2007], 118).

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leads Miller to accuse Chauvet of not properly accounting "for cultural and historical changes," a fact related to his "inadequate and naïve account of the origin of historical change."[70] Ultimately, "the Christian church and its sacraments are not purely divine entities; they exist within human society and culture and are thus susceptible to its shortcomings."[71] An overly idealized notion of the church and sacraments hovers over Chauvet's entire theological approach, it seems, and while its logic does provide a sensible means of working through ontotheology, the price one has to pay is a bit too high, particularly if one encounters sacramental mediations that have become corrupted by various forms of ideology.

To deal with these criticisms, Miller suggests using Jürgen Habermas' critical theory and deepening language's creative potential through an appeal to Paul Ricoeur. Miller finds Habermas' theory provides "important insights into the broader context of the human symbol world and highlights the hegemonic influence of political and economic forces upon it."[72] To illustrate this, Miller notes Habermas' disagreement with Hans-Georg Gadamer about how to account for change within a given tradition. Habermas believed that "Gadamer had succumbed to an 'idealism of linguisticality' which did not adequately address the fact of language's dependence on social processes."[73] For his part, Habermas "used historical materialism to show that language is influenced both by systems of domination and [by] the organization of social labour and vice versa," and if we speak of a "happening of tradition" or "mediation" it is always "relative to the systems of labour and domination."[74]

After highlighting the advantages of utilizing Habermas to articulate the way a mature human subject could relate to symbols and language, Miller then turns to Ricoeur's understanding of metaphor as providing another tool to further elucidate this. Miller notes that for Ricoeur, metaphor is "presented as a semantic innovation," which results in the "creation of new

Just because Chauvet has given us the criteria, however, does not mean that he has provided us with the means for doing anything constructive with it.

[70] Miller, "An Abyss at the Heart of Mediation," 239–40. Miller relates this to Chauvet's "purely optimistic reading of the later Heidegger," wherein "cultures and historical epochs are interpreted positively as manifestations of being" without taking into account that cultures and history also contain "much that is violent, oppressive, and evil" (240).

[71] Miller, "An Abyss at the Heart of Mediation," 241. Miller concedes that Chauvet would agree with this sentiment as "evidenced by his frequent reference to the human desire to encompass truth and confine Christ within ideologies"; he concludes, however, that "his position lacks the resources to deal with this problem" (ibid.).

[72] Miller, "An Abyss at the Heart of Mediation," 241.

[73] Ibid., 243.

[74] Ibid.

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meanings by expanding the boundaries of the linguistic system in question."[75] Metaphor, so understood, enables one "to transcend the limits of the sign system of one's own language," and by so doing brings "two unrelated signs together in tension to express something that has no directly translatable equivalent in the given language."[76]

Whereas the contributions of Habermas are related to a human subject's encounter with structural factors that serve to ideologically distort symbols, the use of Ricoeur is related to dealing with interactions on a more interpersonal level. Ricoeur, on my understanding, offers the possibility that a new shade of meaning may come forth from an encounter with difference that not only is applicable to what is new and different, but also reveals that the difference has been a component of what was already "known" all along. The result is not only an expanded horizon of truth; it also reveals that difference itself is a constitutive component of any conceptual knowledge. Concepts are thus redefined as being open-ended, able to be interrupted, challenged, and broken open by the encounter with difference. Metaphors thus possess an "ontological vehemence" that fulfills this interruptive function, constantly helping what is old, known, and "tried and true" to be broken open, to reveal a plethora of shades of meaning.[77]

Metaphor, of course, must be properly placed and understood within the rest of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, as for Ricoeur the end result of symbols and metaphor is to be, as Ivana Dolejšová describes it, a "symbolic 'redescription' of the world."[78] Recalling Ricoeur's discussion of the movement from the first to the second naïveté at the conclusion of *The Symbolism of Evil*, we note that for Ricoeur the "first naivete" is understood as a "primitive naivete" wherein we have—or we *think* we have—an "immediacy of belief."[79] In other words, the first stage of coming to understand something is characterized by taking things at face value: God exists; the world is good; human beings are free. Nevertheless, such a childish naïveté cannot last long, especially as conflicts and questions begin to arise. "As we experience tensions and conflicts," Dolejšová notes, "doubts arise, and we have to re-evaluate the identity of our image of reality and to distance ourselves from non-problematic faith, immediacy, and meaning, as we find ourselves disoriented."[80] It is at this stage of

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

[77] See Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. Robert Czerny et al. (London: Routledge, 2003), 354.

[78] Ivana Dolejšová, "The Symbolic Nature of Christian Existence According to Ricoeur and Chauvet," *Communio Viatorum* 43, no. 1 (2001): 46.

[79] Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 351.

[80] Dolejšová, "The Symbolic Nature of Christian Existence," 46.

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disorientation and questioning that we arrive at the moment of "criticism" whereby we interpret our symbols "so that we can hear again."[81] This interpretive criticism is the moment of *hermeneutics* whereby "the symbol's gift of meaning and the endeavour to understand by deciphering are knotted together": the symbol gives a meaning, in other words, but that meaning has to be appropriated hermeneutically.[82]

Before moving on to describe how Ricoeur understands the movement from critical hermeneutics to the second naïveté, it seems appropriate to explore this moment of hermeneutics a bit more. In a later interview with Richard Kearney wherein he discusses the way one can change symbols and narratives that have become corrupted, Ricoeur notes that we should not simply change individual narratives, for to do this is to "reduce [a] culture to its explicit functions," and thereby delude ourselves into thinking that a "culture is wholly transparent."[83] Rather, we must go deeper, down to what he calls "the hidden nucleus which determines and rules the *distribution* of these transparent functions and institutions."[84] This nucleus he identifies as "the foundational mytho-poetic nucleus of society," the analysis by which "a society comes to a true understanding of itself."[85] This foundational myth should not be confused with one of the functional narratives of society, but is actually the fact that society is founded on language as creative and therefore includes an appeal to *poesis* and metaphor.[86] Timo Helenius makes the important observation that for Ricoeur this mytho-poetic "essence of culture enables self-recognition in cultural objects," and this implies that ultimately "the quest for finding the essence of humanity rests on symbolization, or, put differently, on mytho-poetic creativity."[87] Our various cultural objects—including our functional narratives—should be then interpreted as "symbols of liberating human creativity that is essentially

[81] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil,* 351.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Paul Ricoeur and Richard Kearney, "Myth as the Bearer of Possible Worlds: Interview with Paul Ricoeur," *Crane Bag* 2 (1978): 112.

[84] Ibid. (emphasis in the original).

[85] Ibid.

[86] This appeal to metaphor and *poesis* is directly connected to Ricoeur's own criticism of ontotheology in *The Rule of Metaphor*. The ontotheological tradition (exemplified by the Scholastic *analogia entis*) served "to establish theological discourse at the level of science and thereby to free it completely from the poetical forms of religious discourse, even at the price of severing the science of God from biblical hermeneutics" (Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 322).

[87] Timo Helenius, *Ricoeur, Culture, and Recognition: A Hermeneutic of Cultural Subjectivity* (London: Lexington Books, 2016), 153.

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poetic."[88] Nevertheless, this movement of liberating creativity that takes us to the mytho-poetic nucleus can be expressed only in limited, culturally conditioned forms, and therefore we need hermeneutics in order to evaluate them properly.

Just as in the movement between the first naïveté and the moment of hermeneutics, Ricoeur notes here that one is compelled to go down to this nucleus when faced with "boundary situations such as war, suffering, guilt, death, etc." that trigger "a fundamental existential crisis."[89] Nevertheless, when faced with such crises we should continue to creatively and imaginatively use language to *attest* to a truth and reality, which, by definition, still manage to elude our grasp. Indeed, as Ricoeur notes in *From Text to Action*, we recall that such a relationship with the real is such that while "the power of a text is to open a dimension of reality," this "implies in principle a recourse against any given reality and thereby the possibility of a critique of the real."[90] Such a real is best attested in poetic discourse, wherein "this subversive power is most alive."[91] The stories that we tell, in other words, constitute the path of creative-imaginative redescription that is nothing other than "the creation of a *mythos*, of a 'fable,'" which "is the path of *mimesis*, of creative imitation.[92] It is, in the end, this path that brings out the "subversive power of the imaginary" that critiques any ideology, which, by claiming to have a hold on the real, quells this imaginative process of mimesis.[93]

This movement wherein we then attest to the truth without claiming to fully grasp or encapsulate it could also be seen as the moment wherein we move to the second naïveté, that is, the moment wherein we realize and accept that the only way to believe or to come to truth is via hermeneutics.[94] In the second naïveté, we have finally become adults after we have passed through the simple childhood of the first naïveté and the rebellious adolescence of hermeneutics. It is a space of openness and unanswered questions,

[88] Ibid. It should be noted in passing that this mytho-poetic nucleus is also connected to ethics, for, as Helenius observes, "for Ricoeur, the poetic pertains to social action" (ibid., 183). See also Paul Ricoeur, "Civilisation universelle et cultures nationales," *Esprit* 29, no. 10 (1961): 445.

[89] Ricoeur, *The Crane Bag*, 113.

[90] Paul Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology" in *From Text to Action*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (London: Continuum, 2008), 292.

[91] Ibid. Ricoeur continues: "The strategy of this discourse involves holding two moments in equilibrium: suspending the reference or ordinary language and releasing a second-order reference, which is another name for … the world opened up by the work" (ibid.).

[92] Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," 293.

[93] Ibid.

[94] See Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 352.

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contradictions and tensions. Nevertheless, as Dolejšová notes, "it is a space where aporias are present, and yet do not distance us from the contact with reality, from belief, immediacy and the plenitude of meaning."[95] We have passed, in other words, from a childlike faith that was founded on the naïve assumption of immediacy and transparency to an adult faith where we realize that faith is a complicated business mixed with a whole gamut of human and structural factors that make faith an ambiguous mixture of human and divine elements. Nevertheless, we cannot delude ourselves into thinking that a kind of "pure" faith would exist if we would eliminate all of the "contaminating" mediations—an adult faith is to live in the tensive space of hermeneutics without thinking that, through these hermeneutics, we can somehow deconstruct and toss away the messiness of the mediations without, thereby, tossing away faith itself. A child lives thinking he can communicate directly with reality unmediated; an adolescent realizes that the reality he is dealing with is complicated, throwing the suppositions of his childhood into question; an adult learns to live in the breach, to realize it is just as deluded to live with childlike faith as it is with an adolescent "rage against the machine." One must live and work through the messiness of mediations in order to come into a relationship with reality, which, even though deprived of its original childlike innocence, still attests to the real.

Referring this discussion of Ricoeur back to Miller's critique, it seems that we can perhaps note a bit of an inconsistency. While noting that Ricoeur's theory of metaphor can help to reveal language's creative potentiality, helping a mature human subject deal creatively with difference, Miller does not adequately place this notion within the totality of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, and instead places it alongside Habermas' critical lens, which emphasizes language's contamination by structural ideologies.[96] Such a move seems to amount to a focusing on what Ricoeur referred to as individual "functional" narratives rather than allowing conflicts to push us to the mytho-poetic nucleus of our society, which reminds us of language's poetic and metaphorical nature. In being pushed to this level, we are not deluded into thinking that a culture can ever be fully transparent, that structural ideologies can be fully

[95] Dolejšová, "The Symbolic Nature of Christian Existence," 47.

[96] It is also helpful to consult the already-referenced "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," which, while articulating Ricoeur's position in dialogue with Gadamer and Habermas, ends by noting the necessity for both hermeneutics and critique rather than allowing one to dominate the other, for this would establish them as "no more than … ideologies" (Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," 299). Miller does not reference this text even though it would seem to be directly related to his topic, and it would have been useful in helping to expand upon his appropriation and situating of Ricoeur, which does seem to pale by comparison to his use of Habermas.

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or easily swept away, but rather we are compelled to go to the roots of *our own identity*, to the place of creative speaking and imagining wherein we learn to work through any ideology that would claim a transparent hold on reality.

Applying Insights to Chauvet

In applying these insights to Chauvet's project, particularly to the problematic lack of a critical hermeneutics with regard to corrupted mediations, it seems that the hermeneutical circle could be a good heuristic tool, particularly as Chauvet himself (as we have seen) already appeals to this structure. Indeed, we can say that the moment of first naïveté relates to the metaphysical/ontotheological way of conceptualizing the divine; then comes the hermeneutical interruption of this certainty by an appeal to psychoanalysis, anthropology, and other human sciences; finally, we arrive at the second naïveté wherein we are able to live in close proximity to absence without, thereby, thinking that the absence is a completely Godless, purposeless void. However, we arrive at the second naïveté when we allow God to speak to us, and this can occur only in the symbolic universe of the church and particularly through the church's liturgy. Yet it is important to note that the liturgy and sacraments are not confined merely to the level of learning to speak anew in the second naïveté, but also open onto what Chauvet refers to as a *third* naïveté.[97] This third naïveté is what places the Christian liturgy on an *eschatological horizon* where, through the power of the Holy Spirit, which was let into the world through the whole of the paschal mystery, our work of building up a body of brothers and sisters in the world is given a hope-filled eschatological depth.

Clearly, for Chauvet, the hermeneutical endeavor does not extend to the level of this particular mediation as thoroughly as it does to others, though he has good reason to hold to such a position. Chauvet notes that the liturgy, particularly through the metaphors it has preserved in its *lex orandi*, has served to preserve the *lex credendi* from being completely overtaken by Scholastic and modern attempts to reduce faith to metaphysical categories. Chauvet goes so far as to praise the liturgy's "conservativism which allowed ancient metaphorical expressions of the celebration to reach us," even as theological language became more academic and less grounded in the church's liturgical praxis.[98] These ancient liturgical metaphors thus kept attesting to a "presence" of God that "was not an 'available presence' in the Gnostic mode, but a presence in the mode of 'passage' between the yesterday

[97] See Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 265.
[98] Chauvet, "Présence de Dieu, présence à Dieu," 100.

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of the cross and the tomorrow of the Parousia."[99] It is, in short, the repository for a kind of sacramental memory that sits in the tensive eschatological time between the already and the not-yet, proclaiming, "This is my body" just before it calls to mind the Parousia in the anamnesis.[100] The mediation of the liturgy, then, is characterized by a "happy conservatism" that "serves the 'negative theology in act,'" which Chauvet attributes to the liturgy insofar as "it leaves open a vacant space which allows the negotiation of a communion within a healthy distance to God and toward God."[101]

Perhaps, then, Chauvet is correct in not submitting the liturgical mediation to the same level of critical hermeneutics as he would the schemes of metaphysical thinking. These criticisms, in fact, are made in service to his primary theological concern, which is to "afford the sacraments their rightful place in the life of Christians," a place that does not trap them in a conceptual idolatry, but fuels them for action and witness in the world.[102] The working through of ontotheology, then, is not for its own sake: it is to enable Christian believers to come into a correct relationship with God, which always occurs sacramentally/liturgically and ecclesially. Metaphysicians and ontotheologians are enjoined, as it were, to go to church and pray the liturgy properly, and this will then lead to their moving from the first to the second naïveté. But is it really that simple?

It seems more likely that the obstinate ontotheologian will find more reasons to stay in his first naïveté than to move beyond it, especially if one takes into account that the liturgy requires human beings to *do* it. The liturgy, indeed, just does not fall out of the sky, its metaphors waiting only to be properly heard by the participants, to compel them to give up their metaphysical concepts. The liturgical metaphors have to be *recited* by either a priest or the assembly, and there is no guarantee that these individuals have moved to the place of living in the mature proximity to absence that Chauvet advocates.[103] Indeed, especially insofar as the homily could be

[99] Ibid., 99.

[100] See "Prex Eucharistica III," in *Missale romanum*, 463.

[101] Chauvet, "Présence de Dieu, Présence à Dieu dans le Jeu Liturgique," 100.

[102] Louis-Marie Chauvet, "Den Sakramenten den ihnen zustehenden Platz einräumen: Interview mit Louis-Marie Chauvet, Thomas Fries, im Gespräch mit Louis-Marie Chauvet," in *Fundamental-theologie des Sakramentalen: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Louis-Marie Chauvets "Symbol und Sakrament"* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2015), 210.

[103] One should also observe that much of Chauvet's work was published before the 2001 promulgation of *Liturgicam Authenticam,* which initiated the ongoing process of the National Episcopal Conference's evaluation and retranslation of their liturgical texts in order to supposedly better reflect the original Latin. Glenn P. Ambrose, in commenting on the November 2011 promulgation of revised English liturgical translations, notes that "their close adherence to the Latin in some instances may only further reinforce metaphysical tendencies," and that there is a need to "compose and refine texts and

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preached by such a person, the notion that the prayers of the liturgy attesting to a "negative theology in act" could be allowed to function in the way Chauvet claims seems to be more than slightly naïve.[104]

There has to be, in short, a way to hermeneutically interrupt the sacramental mediation itself in a manner that does justice to the fact that the liturgical metaphors themselves are often deployed by individuals who operate according to the conceptual schemes of metaphysics that Chauvet rightfully rejects. Such an interruption needs to go beyond the merely functional and penetrate the mytho-poetic nucleus, which reminds us that our languages have to reveal new shades of meaning and open onto new possible worlds. In conclusion, we offer a preliminary model of how the presence of *otherness* could serve to interrupt the sacramental mediation, prompting the liturgical actors to reach down to that mytho-poetic nucleus, and dare to dream new possibilities that serve to break open their conceptual horizons.

The Interruption of the Other and the Working-Through of Metaphysics

In coming to conceptualize what the interruption of the other would look like, it is important to emphasize that its necessity is a thoroughly

prayers that better facilitate the 'overcoming' of onto-theology" (Glenn P. Ambrose, *The Theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet: Overcoming Onto-Theology with the Sacramental Tradition* [Farnham: Ashgate, 2012], 192).

[104] Ricoeur, for his part, in one of the few times in his oeuvre that he explicitly speaks of the liturgy, explicitly ties it to hermeneutics as well as the moment of coming into the second naïveté. He notes that the meaning of the liturgy is such that it is drawn from the moment of hermeneutics; however, this meaning remains an idea and is not realized unless it is expressed in the liturgical action itself. He notes, "The liturgy in terms of representation accomplishes something of the post-critical naiveté that I have sometimes called the second naiveté and which must remain an erudite naiveté (*docte naïveté*)." For this reason, Ricoeur continues, the game of the liturgy (*jeu liturgique*) does not extinguish the search because the figure remains a figure; it makes the circle with reflection." In other words, the liturgy, insofar as it makes use of symbols and figures, brings one to the moment of second naïveté, which is always aware of the need to critically appropriate the liturgical representations—even though we need those very representations in order to realize this. Chauvet, as we have seen, does not have the means to evaluate hermeneutically the liturgical mediations themselves, a fact not unlikely related to the fact that Ricoeur as a Protestant had less difficulty understanding the Word's potency as being able to have a more direct relationship with human beings, not requiring ecclesial and sacramental mediations in the same way as Chauvet the Catholic would. Nevertheless, the two approaches need each other, it seems, and do not mutually exclude one another. (Paul Ricoeur, "Postface," in Jean-Marie Paupert, *Taizé et l'église de demain* [Paris: Le Signe/Fayard, 1967], 250).

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theological one: it is *God* who interrupts because God has revealed Godself as s/he who interrupts.[105] Lieven Boeve notes, for example, that this is true insofar as "the God professed by Christians repeatedly breaks open narratives of human beings and communities, including narratives about Godself," a fact attested to in many scriptural narratives from Exodus to Jesus' own "continuing interruption of closed narratives."[106] The theological functioning of the category of interruption finds its paradigm in the paschal mystery, for "God interrupts the closing of Jesus' narrative by the religious and political authorities and radically opens it."[107] The narrative of the Risen One is one that is not closed even by death, and therefore "following Jesus means engaging the challenge of the other who interrupts our narratives," interrupts our certainties that what we think we know about God is fully determined and closed.[108] Chauvet, for his part, includes a narrative of such an interruption when he describes the movement from nonfaith to faith—namely, the narrative of the apostles on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35).[109]

In the first part of the story (vv. 13-24), the two disciples, whom we can understand as representing the community of the church, are portrayed as defeated and inward looking. They are portrayed as talking "between themselves, each a sort of mirror-image of the other, tossing back and forth the same expression of a definite postmortem on the failed mission of their Master."[110] The Master and Teacher was dead; the movement they had devoted their lives to was, in their eyes, completely over and destroyed. The two are portrayed as existing in a closed circle that serves only to reinforce their supposed certainties: there is no way to salvage the movement, it died along with its Master.

Then, all of a sudden, a stranger shows up next to them. One can imagine that he probably walked for a bit listening to the gloom and doom being talked about secretly, with a bit of irony and humor. Then at verses 25-26 comes the moment of interruption: "Oh how foolish you are! How slow of heart to

[105] I borrow this concept from the work of Lieven Boeve, who has developed it as a methodological tool or "motor of a concrete theological hermeneutics of faith, tradition, and context" (Lieven Boeve, "A New Method: Recontextualization Leads to Interruption," in *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* [London: Continuum, 2007], 31).

[106] Boeve, "A New Method," 46.

[107] Ibid., 46–47.

[108] Ibid., 47.

[109] All in all, the importance of this narrative for Chauvet lies in the fact that "the passage to faith thus requires that one let go of the desire to see-touch-find, to accept in its place the hearing of a word," a word that is proclaimed by an odd stranger who actually ends up being the risen Lord Himself (Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 162).

[110] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament,* 162.

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believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (NAB). Chauvet describes this moment as "characterized by a transition from a dualistic relation to a triangular relation: instead of speaking to each other, in a closed circle, they open themselves to this stranger who has joined them."[111]

One can further imagine that this was not an episode that went over very well with the disciples, who believed themselves to be in the position of knowledge. Who was this strange yokel? "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" (Luke 24:18) Nevertheless, they are portrayed as listening to this stranger, as "he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures (Luke 24:27)—namely, that the Son of God must be condemned, killed, and raised by God on the third day. This is a place that they could not have arrived at on their own; indeed it is not possible as long as they "keep the initiative in the discussion and thereby remain in a position of knowledge," thinking they "know all there is to know about Jesus of Nazareth."[112]

This leads Chauvet to then state that "faith requires an act of dispossession, a reversal of initiative": they must *hear* and *receive* a word that comes to them from the other.[113] It is also important to note here that the other doesn't just show up speaking on his own initiative; rather, he comes to them interpreting the *Scriptures*. For Chauvet, the Scriptures play the role of "*a third agency*," enabling the disciples "to enter into an understanding of the 'real' different from what they previously thought evident": maybe they didn't know everything about Jesus after all.[114] The other, then, is occupying the role of hermeneut, interpreting the tradition and, thereby, challenging the interpretations of the supposed "experts." The other *challenges*, then, but she uses resources from within the tradition to break open the tradition itself.

This is not the end of the story, of course, because at this point the disciples still don't realize that the one doing the talking is actually Jesus. The disciples realize this only when, after they have invited him inside to stay with them, he *took, blessed, and broke* the bread. At that point, "their eyes were opened and they recognized him," though at that very moment of recognition "he vanished from their sight" (Luke 24:31). Chauvet notes that the eyes of the disciples "open on an *emptiness*," but it is "an emptiness full of a presence."[115]

[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid., 168.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid. (emphasis in the original).
[115] Ibid., 170 (emphasis in the original).

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The story shows that "in the time of the Church in which our story takes place, Jesus the Christ is absent as 'the same;' he is no longer present except as 'the Other.'"[116] When we recognize Jesus, then, we cannot see his body; we can touch it only as mediated to us through the Scriptures enfleshed in the sacraments, and leading to the creation of a new family of brothers and sisters through ethical action.

The structure of faith, then, while based on the hearing of a word, is, interestingly, dependent on a word that is spoken by someone perceived to be a stranger, an other. The other, however, by referring back to the Scriptures and then by *breaking the bread* affirms that the place of faith is, indeed, the church, but it is a church that has been interrupted by the other who has come to turn that ecclesial world on its head.[117] The other, in short, interrupts concepts that have become closed, deconstructing their certainty, and showing that truth is a matter of disclosure leading to ethical response. The presence of the other, in short, compels us to work through our metaphysical concepts, accepting their partial nature, and remaining open to an otherness that always manages to catch us off guard.[118]

[116] Ibid.

[117] We must, of course, remember that the church is not, for Chauvet, a closed circle, but one that is "made up of dotted lines." The church is the *sacrament* of God's reign, but must never be confused with being the reign itself, which remains larger than it within the world (Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 29). Chauvet also understands the moment of the breaking of the bread, the *fraction*, as showing that while "the presence of Christ is indeed inscribed (*inscrite*) in the bread and wine, that presence is not confined (*circonscrite*) to them." The breaking of the Eucharistic bread, then, points to the presence of God being an "open place," which shows "that one is not able to assign God a residence." God is, indeed, present, but he is present as being physically absent, standing in need of the other to make him tangible (Chauvet, "Le pain rompu comme figure théologique" in *Le corps, chemin de Dieu,* 221).

[118] It should be noted that this being caught off guard is something that happened to Jesus as well when he found himself "interrupted" by the Syro-Phoenecian woman (Mark 7:24-30). Jesus' first response to the woman—"Let the children be fed first. For it is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs" (v. 27)—is met by the woman's surprising response—"Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's scraps" (v. 28). Boeve notes that "at that moment Jesus' narrative about God is interrupted and he learns how to open it further in such a way that others, including non-Jews, have a place therein" (Lieven Boeve, "Conclusion: The Shortest Definition of Religion; Interruption," in *God Interrupts History*, 206). Jesus reveals himself not only as the interrupter, but also as one who allows himself to be interrupted. This leads to the conclusion that the only appropriate *imitatio Christi* is "a praxis of being both interrupted and interrupting" (Boeve, "A New Method," 48).

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An Interruption at the Heart of Mediation Itself

As we noted above, the structure of faith that Chauvet sketches for us is both amenable to and inspired by Ricoeur's movement from the first to the second naïveté. What we can now say, however, is that the hermeneutical moment that leads one through this process is prompted by an other who comes from the outside, unrecognized and not included. Such an assertion, while not explicitly articulated by Chauvet, seems to be amenable to the *third naïveté*, wherein he positions the sacramental liturgy insofar as the eschatological horizon of liturgical prayer is connected to a future *to come*, uncontainable, and unpredictable: "Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour; go out to meet him and say, 'tell us, are you He that should come?'"[119]

Indeed, this other is *unrecognized* and is presumably even perceived by the apostles as being, if not a direct threat, a "poor misguided outsider" who has to be taught the truth about Jesus of Nazareth. This outsider then is so bold as to interpret the tradition to the supposed experts—so convincingly, that after some time the disciples invite the stranger to stay the evening with them, where he fulfills his hermeneutical exegesis by breaking the bread and, thereby, vanishing from sight, revealing the vacant space of God's presence.[120] The unrecognized, unexpected other is the one who comes to the church and brings her to faith, and this is a faith that is oriented to witness and ethical service to the world.

We should also keep in mind that this interruption took the form of a *dialogue*. The stranger shows up and engages the disciples in a dialogue, a playful back-and-forth of asking questions and listening to their "expert" answers. The moment of interruption comes in the course of this dialogue, and the disciples are portrayed as being silent listeners until they approach the village and ask the stranger to stay with them. The church, then, allows itself to be engaged in dialogue, and through this dialogue becomes more and more hospitable to the point that the one perceived as the most *outside* is invited *inside*.[121]

[119] Matt. 25:13 and "The Office of Readings: First Sunday of Advent," *The Liturgy of the Hours*, http://www.liturgies.net/Liturgies/Catholic/loh/advent/week1sundayor.htm.

[120] See Chauvet, "Le pain rompu comme figure théologique," 220–24.

[121] Dialogue, similar to interruption, should be also understood as a properly theological category and not merely as a functional one. For example, if one interprets the very structure of revelation in terms of God's dialogue with humanity, this should lead to one valuing dialogue itself insofar as dialogue can be a means of interruption. See Boeve's commentary on *Dei Verbum:* Lieven Boeve, "Foundation: Revelation as God's Dialogue with People and History," in *Theology at the Crossroads of University,*

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The seeming monologue by the stranger could be understood as him providing a whole supply of new predicates to what they took to be a closed matter: the dead one is the Living One; a god of unassailable and untouchable impassibility is the God who bled, died, and was raised; and on top of all of this, the tradition itself is what points to this.[122] The disciples don't immediately know what to do with this new information, yet they are compelled to invite the stranger in and continue to learn from him. Yet after the bread is broken, the disciples realize that the stranger was the Lord, and that he is now present as physically absent himself, but taking on flesh in the unknown other. At this moment, the disciples—who had been forced to come into contact with the mytho-poetic space of dialogue and difference—are ready to emerge into the second naïveté, finally using a metaphor to describe the experience: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures for us?" (Luke 24:32) The viability of this metaphor is shown in the fact that its proclamation is not the end of the story; rather, it is the beginning of witness and mission: "So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem … then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24:33, 35).

Liturgy as the Place of Encounter with Otherness and the Working-Through of Ontotheology

All of this leads us to the conclusion that the liturgy should be seen as a place that is always open to the interruption of an otherness who comes to challenge certainties and thereby keeps our concepts open. We recall that for Chauvet the episode of Emmaus portrays the coming to authentic faith, and that this is always a faith mediated ecclesially, sacramentally, and, therefore *liturgically*. Taking into account the critique we have here articulated, this should then lead us to understand the liturgy as a place that should be the privileged place for encounter with an otherness that challenges us. Liturgy should not, then, be a wholly comfortable and manageable affair; rather, it should include the possibility of being interrupted by forms of otherness that challenge us to reevaluate our comfortable concepts.

Practically speaking, this sometimes might take the form of an affluent parish intentionally bringing speakers to provide witness and testimony to

Church, and Society: Dialogue, Difference, and Catholic Identity (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 15–32.

[122] We are here thinking of Ricoeur's discussion of metaphor and how it functions to supply new predicates to words that thereby serve to offer new and expanded shades of meaning. See Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 353.

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contexts that are marked by a vastly different socioeconomic situation. It could and should also involve the local parish priest himself not shying away from homilies that bring out elements of Catholic social teaching that would challenge a particular parish's bourgeois ideals and comfortable middle-class existence. It could also take the form of a parish community engaging the otherness in its own midst in the form of individuals who are divorced and remarried or living in a same-sex partnership. How many of our parishes allow such individuals to hermeneutically interpret the tradition from their experience, allowing that interpretation to interrupt the parish's comfortable quiet existence? How many of our parishes allow the Table of God's word and body to be accessible to as many people as possible, and how many instead see the Eucharist as "a prize for the perfect"?[123]

Only then can the liturgy function as the place where we work through our metaphysical and ontotheological concepts, the place where we learn to live in a healthy proximity to absence. The presence of an otherness that challenges our conceptual surety forces us to think of new ways to address this otherness. This presupposes, however, that this otherness is allowed to be welcomed home into the liturgical assembly in the same way that the disciples welcomed the stranger to spend the night with them. This makes for vulnerability to be sure, but it is a vulnerability that has been shown to us in the life of the Lord we gather to worship. We allow the other to tell us her story out of the gospel and tradition, welcoming her to the table, to share in the breaking of the bread, attesting to the uncontainable breadth of the reign of God, to which our liturgy sacramentally points.

[123] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel; Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis* (Dublin: Veritas, 2013), 31 (§47).

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