

PHILOSOPHY AND/OFF WORSHIP

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I. Overview

Over the past decade or so we have seen something of a “liturgical turn” in philosophy of religion. Long dominated by a kind of Protestant bias that well fit the default intellectualism of analytic¹ philosophy, philosophy of religion—especially *Christian* philosophy of religion—has tended to fixate on the status of belief. In other words, philosophy of religion has tended to be reduced to epistemology, to assessing and adjudicating matters of faith in terms of rationality, justification, skepticism, coherence, etc. The religious “phenomena” under consideration were textual and propositional: dogmas, doctrines, and ideas. The “religion” of philosophy of religion was the religion believed by *res cogitans*.

The twentieth century saw smatterings of resistance to this epistemic fixation, protesting that religious communities were not mere assemblies of thinking things. There was a phenomenological trajectory from Husserl through Heidegger (whose earliest lectures focused on “a phenomenology of religious life”), finding contemporary expression in the work of Anthony Steinbock (see *Phenomenology and Mysticism*) and Robert Sokolowski. Another school of thought that reconfigured philosophical attention to religious phenomena stems from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s focus on communities of practice, spawning philosophies of meaning and ritual as seen in the work of D. Z. Phillips or O. K. Bouwsma. There has also been a philosophical turn to ritual and liturgy in the work of Jewish scholars such as Peter Ochs and Steven Kepnes. While these streams have different interests, they share a non-reductionistic approach to religious

¹ We should note that contemporary philosophy is somewhat divided between two broad schools of thought (which, in turn, are home to many more schools of thought within these broad orientations). Analytic, or Anglo-American, philosophy is the dominant expression of the discipline in English-speaking countries (and, increasingly, the world). Analytic philosophy is characterized by a distinct interest in conceptual clarity and logical analysis. This is often distinguished from continental philosophy, so named because it has historically looked to philosophical sources in Germany and France, particularly phenomenology (Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Derrida, et. al.) and is associated with “existential” analyses. Both analytic and continental philosophy are indebted to the history of philosophy up through Kant, but their interests tend to diverge in the post-Kantian era. As a result, the canons of twentieth-century philosophy tend to be quite different for analytic vs. continental philosophy. Those philosophers who read Frege, Russell, and A.J. Ayer tend *not* to read Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. However, there have been a number of encouraging signs of bridge-building across this divide. Such bridge-building and border-crossing is often associated with what might be a third school of thought called “pragmatism,” a stream that emerges from figures such as Wittgenstein and Peirce and is developed by philosophers such as Richard Rorty, Robert Brandom, and Charles Taylor. Pragmatists often show a willingness to engage both analytic and continental camps.

Christian philosophy has also tended to reflect these two camps. Much of the “renaissance” in Christian philosophy associated with Alvin Plantinga, Eleonore Stump, William Alston, and others has been solidly within the analytic camp. However, there have also been Christian philosophers working in the continental tradition, such as Paul Ricoeur, Jean-Luc Marion, and Merold Westphal. (Nicholas Wolterstorff has been a bridging figure, even if much of his work has tended to be of a more analytic stripe.) Similarly, the philosophy that theologians have drawn upon also tends to gravitate towards one or the other of these camps (so too, then, *liturgical* theologies). The recent emergence of analytic theology (Crisp & Rea) intentionally brings the disposition and methods of analytic philosophy to bear on distinctly theological questions. In contrast, a movement like Radical Orthodoxy intentionally draws on continental sources to grapple with theological questions. Both have generated philosophical interaction with liturgy.

phenomena that recognizes religion is more than “belief”—that religion is something we *do* more than what we think.

However, philosophy of religion is only one of the subdisciplines of philosophy that bears relevance to understanding worship, ritual, and liturgical practices. The subfields of aesthetics, philosophy of language (semiotics), ethics, and other fields also intersect with—and have the possibility to illuminate and renew—worship. If we imagine a philosophical turn to liturgy, there are several directions that interaction between philosophy and worship can take:

- (1) *Liturgy as philosophical source*: Philosophy can turn to worship as a “form of life” (Wittgenstein) that carries unique, irreducible “know-how” that has something to contribute to wisdom and understanding more generally. In this mode (or on this “axis”), liturgy enriches philosophy by offering a field of consideration—an object of study or a case study—that advances philosophy by pushing it to ask new questions. So, for example, the unique way that worship calls participants to reenact history, to play a role in the rehearsal of the drama of redemption, could actually advance conversations in philosophical aesthetics about “pretense,” fiction, and meaning.² In my own work on speaking in tongues, I suggested that tongues-speech in the context of gathered worship poses a kind of “limit case” for philosophy of language that would make it a topic of interest for philosophers of language more broadly.³ In this way, the philosophical turn to worship and ritual benefits philosophy.
- (2) *Liturgy as philosophical method*: Worship is not only a topic for philosophy; it can also be seen as the condition of possibility for Christian philosophy. In other words, we can imagine not only a philosophy *of* liturgy but also a liturgical philosophy wherein participation in the rituals of Christian worship shape the imagination of the Christian philosopher, priming the theoretical imagination.⁴ In this sense, a liturgical philosophy is simply a more radical development of existing models that advocate for the integrity of religious philosophy—that is, philosophical reflection that unapologetically begins from and is informed by a specific Christian worldview. Wolterstorff has called this the “Anselmian” endeavor of philosophy when it owns up to the fact that it cannot be neutral or unbiased.⁵ If there is an irreducible understanding of the gospel that is carried in the practices of Christian worship, then the philosopher who endeavors to do *Christian* philosophy will need to apprentice herself to the gathered practices of the body of Christ. In this mode, liturgy enriches philosophy by resourcing the imagination of philosophers. There would be little hope for Christian philosophy if Christian philosophers are not formed by the disciplines of the church.
- (3) *Philosophy for liturgical renewal*: Finally, one could imagine a philosophical engagement with worship that is undertaken primarily for the sake of worshipping community, a kind of diaconal exercise in philosophy that aims to serve the church with the unique gifts of philosophical questioning and analysis.⁶ This might include work that

² Cuneo, “Liturgical Immersion.”

³ Smith, “Tongues as Resistant Discourse.”

⁴ I’ve discussed this in more detail in Smith, “Philosophy of Religion Takes Practice.”

⁵ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), xi.

⁶ Note how this parallels Plantinga’s point in “Advice to Christian Philosophers” that Christian philosophers should undertake research agendas that serve the community of believers.

makes explicit (per Brandom) what is implicit in the scripts of the church's worship; provides new frames (such as Jean-Luc Marion's idol/icon distinction as a way to think about the appropriate role that worship leaders should play); or critically/prophetically discloses the incoherence of the accrued amalgam of the church's liturgical repertoire in order to reform and renew it. In this mode, philosophy would contribute to the church's work of liturgical catechesis.

While we might distinguish these three directions or "axes," ultimately it seems to me that they are intertwined: Philosophical inquiry into worship that aims to advance philosophical wisdom [1] could also deepen our understanding and appreciation of worship [3], and philosophers who participate in the liturgy of the body of Christ [2] would hopefully find more and more opportunity to be there *as* philosophers and begin to reflect on those practices [1] and, in turn, be motivated to translate such work for the renewal of the church's worship [3]. One can imagine the (philosophical!) aesthete entering the sanctuary on a level footing with every other worshiper at the foot of the cross, but nonetheless entering the sanctuary *with* her philosophical expertise in how images convey meaning, or how narrative can be true, and thus contemplating the eucharist or the drama of baptism in a posture that is both devotional and theoretical at the same time.

Philosophy brings a range of interests and questions to a consideration of worship, reflective of its many subdisciplines. For just a small sampling of philosophical angles into worship, we might consider the following questions generated from different subdisciplines:

- *Epistemology*: What is the role of truth in worship? Are there ways for something to be true that elude propositional articulation and analysis? What counts as knowledge for the worshiper? Do I need to "know" God and the gospel before I can worship? What would that mean? Or can I enter the practices of worship as a way to know? Is there a kind of knowledge—a know-how—that worshipers have that cannot be articulated?
- *Metaphysics*: There are a host of questions invited by worship's assumption that God can be encountered in the liturgy and that God is active in the liturgy. This is a concentrated microcosm of larger questions of ontology: Is the universe "open" or "closed?" How can an immaterial being influence immaterial reality? Are there constraints on divine action in light of the laws of the material universe?
- *Phenomenology*: One way to understand the phenomenological project of Husserl and Heidegger is in terms of intentional analysis—what does a person or group *mean* (intend) when they do and say X, Y, Z? What understanding of the world, the environment, others, and God is intended in the practices of community Q? This suggests a philosophical analysis akin to a kind of anthropology or ethnography and is a fruitful orientation for a philosophical engagement with worship.
- *Philosophy of Language, Semiotics, and Hermeneutics*: Whether drawing on the more analytic sources in philosophy of language, continental accounts of hermeneutics (Gadamer), semiotics (the philosophy of signs, taken up critically by Derrida and deconstruction, but also by pragmatists like C.S. Peirce), this subdiscipline asks: How does liturgy *mean*? How is significance communicated?
- *Aesthetics*: The philosophy of art asks fundamental questions about the way art *means*. How does literature communicate emotion? How do images affect the imagination? How

can visible, material objects embody the invisible? Can a melody be “true?” Given the ancient intertwinement of the arts in worship, there is a vast opportunity for philosophical aesthetics to contribute to the renewal of worship.

- *Ethics*: Does liturgy inculcate virtue? What specific virtues are fostered in Christian worship? How might liturgical renewal recover lost virtues?

Finally, a coda. This endeavor will be dogged by a certain ambiguity that stems from the trickiness of distinguishing philosophical from theological engagements with worship and liturgy. Are Thomas Aquinas’s reflections on the metaphysics of substantiation in the eucharist, which draw so heavily on Aristotle, philosophy or theology? What about Reinhard Hütter’s analysis of eucharistic adoration? While Wolterstorff’s *The God We Worship* is billed as *An Exploration in Liturgical Theology*, it is clearly his skills and repertoire as a trained philosopher that are at work in this volume. These are just a few examples that serve to highlight a certain fuzziness of the distinction between philosophy and theology, stemming in part from the fact that for millennia, theology has consciously been dependent upon philosophy—often quite intentionally—whether as handmaiden or preamble [Aquinas] or supplying basic concepts [Heidegger] for theological reflection.⁷ So, distilling uniquely philosophical engagements with worship can get a bit messy. What distinguishes the disciplines of philosophy and theology today are, on the one hand, certain sets of questions or methods and, on the other hand, the canons of disciplinary formation and the bibliographies scholars in the different fields are called to master. If the theologian asks, “How can we know God?”, the philosopher asks, “How can we know what counts as knowledge?” While both the theologian and the philosopher need to know Aristotle, the secondary literature *about* Aristotle will be quite different for the philosopher versus the theologian. There are no hard and fast distinctions when we zoom in to consider works that philosophically engage worship; the very endeavor blurs typical lines of demarcation. So in the survey of work that follows, I have tried to identify contributions that either explicitly prioritize philosophical methods or that, even when undertaken by theologians or offered as theological exercises, nonetheless use philosophical methods, analyses, or conversation partners.

II. Significant Publications

Since this liturgical turn in philosophy is still relatively recent, some of the significant recent contributions are found in articles rather than book-length contributions.⁸ The following summaries are simply arranged alphabetically by author; the order is not a ranking.

Abraham, William J. *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006. (See also: *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church*. Edited by William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers, and Natalie B. Van Kirk. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008.) Abraham’s contribution to a philosophy of worship is oblique but important. In *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation*, he is critical of what he calls the

⁷ We might note Jean-Luc Marion’s recent discussion of Augustine in this regard and the difficulty of locating Augustine in what we now recognize as the disciplines of philosophy or theology (Marion, *In the Self’s Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012], 4–9). Marion settles on Etienne Gilson’s descriptor for the uniquely hybrid corpus of Augustine: “trans-philosophical” (8). Much of the work I’ll summarize below could be similarly described.

⁸ This also reflects the fact that in analytic philosophy, the article is still the “coin of the realm,” so to speak, in academic philosophy.

“standard strategy” in philosophy of religion, which treats all knowing and believing univocally and thus imposes a standard set of criteria for “justified true belief” to all beliefs. Abraham criticizes this one-size-fits-all “methodism” in epistemology and instead argues for a “particularism.” The “particularist” comes to questions of knowledge with a more fine-grained map of the epistemic terrain. She rejects the monolithic (and hegemonic) assumptions of the methodist’s one-size-fits-all epistemology and instead embraces an Aristotelian (29n.10) principle of “appropriate epistemic fit,” which means that she is primed to “look for relevant differences in the way we adjudicate different kinds of claims” (45).⁹ The particularist is an epistemic pluralist and expects to find different habits of belief and justification when we are dealing with different subject matter and objects of belief.

What emerges on the other side of the project is a very thin version of religious belief, a “minimalist version of theism” (10) in which “crucial theological claims are systematically ignored or set aside because they would not fit the schema in hand” (9). Abraham aptly describes this as “the mere theism that normally detains the philosopher of religion” (95): “Rarely, if at all, do these proposals secure the deep content of Christian belief” (9). Furthermore, the “mere theism” of contemporary philosophy of religion, while failing to do justice to the “thickness” and particularity of Christian belief, also fails to do justice to “the way in which a host of Christian believers actually believe” (10, emphasis added). Just what sort of animal is pictured when contemporary philosophy of religion talks about “believers”? Do the believers countenanced in contemporary philosophy of religion ever kneel or sing?¹⁰ Do they ever pray the Rosary? Do they ever respond to an altar call, weeping on their knees? In fact, do *believers* ever really make an appearance in philosophy of religion? Is it not most often taken up instead with *beliefs*? Judging from the shape of the conversation in contemporary philosophy of religion, one would guess that “religion” is a feature of brains in a vat, lingering in a particularly spiritual ether but never really bumping into the grittiness of practices and community. Indeed, one wonders whether such “believers” really even need to go through the hassle of getting up on Sunday morning. Once the beliefs are “deposited,” it’s hard to see what more is needed to be faithful.¹¹

⁹ As a way of bridging the analytic/continental divide in philosophy of religion, it might be interesting to note that the young Heidegger, whose theoretical breakthroughs were very much motivated by a desire to do justice to the realities of lived religious experience, was directly influenced by this same Aristotelian principle of finding concepts “appropriate” to the subject matter (*Sache*) under consideration (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094.24–25). (See Martin Heidegger, “Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle: Indication of the Hermeneutic Situation [1922].” Translated by Michael Baur in *Man and World* 25 (1992): 355–393.) For relevant discussion, see James K.A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation* (London: Routledge, 2002), 75–79.

¹⁰ To his credit, it should be noted that in the later Heidegger, believers dance and pray. (See Martin Heidegger, “The Onto-Theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics.” Translated by Joan Stambaugh in *Identity and Difference* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1969], 72.) For further discussion, see Merold Westphal, “Overcoming Onto-Theology,” in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, eds. John D. Caputo and Michael Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 146–163.

¹¹ One might legitimately wonder whether this is an indication of the overwhelmingly Protestant influence in contemporary philosophy of religion. Here I think Abraham’s criticisms of Plantinga are on point, particularly the lingering individualism in Plantinga’s account (49–50). Where is the church in Plantinga’s vision of warranted Christian belief?

It is in this context that Abraham offers “canonical theism” as a thicker, more particularist alternative to the “mere theism” of the standard strategy. Canonical theism is “that rich vision of God, creation, and redemption developed over time in the scriptures, articulated in the Nicene Creed, celebrated in the liturgy of the church, enacted in the lives of the saints, handed over and received in the sacraments, depicted in iconography, articulated by canonical teachers, mulled over in the Father, and treasured, preserved, and guarded by the episcopate” (43).

Benson, Bruce Ellis. *Liturgy as a Way of Life: Embodying the Arts in Christian Worship*, The Church and Postmodern Culture. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013. This little book is an accessible “translation” of several different philosophical subdisciplines of philosophy aimed not only at scholars but at worship leaders and practitioners. Benson draws on aesthetics—and theories of improvisation in philosophy of music in particular—to illuminate the way that worship is an event of what we might call “faithful innovation.” But he also draws on phenomenology, particularly the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jean-Louis Chrétien, to unpack the significance of the dialogical nature of worship. The “call and response” dynamic of liturgy is a mirror of the human condition itself: To be a creature is to be both called and gifted. In this sense, worship shows us how to be human.

Coakley, Sarah. “Beyond ‘Belief’: Liturgy and the Cognitive Apprehension of God.” In *The Vocation of Theology Today: A Festschrift for David Ford*, edited by Tom Greggs, Rachel Muers, and Simeon Zahl, 131–145. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013. Drawing on feminist epistemology, as well as on her own experience as a priest, in this remarkable essay Coakley asks the question: “How can liturgy be *true*?” More specifically, how can we bring the question of *truth* to liturgy without merely treating rituals as the conduits or expressions of propositions? But the Gospels, of course, already intuit the possibility of a non-propositional kind of truth because Christ *is* the truth (cp. Michel Henry). Drawing on Lorraine Code’s account of relational knowing (in conversation with William Alston’s classic *Perceiving God*), Coakley argues that there is a kind of “knowing” in worship that is relational and irreducible to propositional formulation, the cultivation of a “spiritual sense” that knows more than it can say. The result is what we might describe, in an allusion to Kant, as a “liturgical critique of pure reason.”

Cuneo, Terence. *Ritualized Faith: Essays on the Philosophy of Liturgy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. This collection of studies is, to date, the most mature articulation of an analytic philosophical focus on liturgy. The book comprises a collection of studies that can be read independently and nonsequentially. One will find fascinating studies of the role of song in Christian worship, the role of icons as “vehicles of divine speech,” the philosophical significance of the baptismal rite, and more. It is worth noting that Cuneo adopts what he describes as a “particularist” methodology, which is exactly right. Rather than speaking generically or blandly about “Christian liturgy,” Cuneo focuses on the specific repertoire of liturgical practices in his Eastern Orthodox congregation. But this is not an apologetic endeavor, nor does this restrict interest to fellow pilgrims on the Eastern way. Rather, as Cuneo emphasizes, this particularist methodology provides a concrete focus that staves off abstraction and generalities. The particularism makes his project *more* relevant to wider audiences rather than less. By showing how one can undertake philosophical analysis

of a specific Christian tradition, we learn how this could be undertaken in and for other traditions.

Perhaps the most emblematic essay is chapter 4, “Liturgical Immersion” (though chapter 8, “Ritual Knowledge,” is also fundamental). Cuneo considers the prominence that Christian liturgy gives to “the activity of liturgical reenactment”—all the ways that worshipers are invited to re-inhabit and reenact the biblical narrative. Why? Is this just a memorial exercise, to remember what has happened in the past? Are the roles we play in such a liturgical script merely pretense, or playing a part? No, says Cuneo; they are cues in the liturgical script that suggest something more. Worshipers assume not only pretense roles but what he calls “target roles”: “When one assumes a target role, one acts the part of being some way for the purpose of *being that way*, becoming like or identifying with that which one imitates” (78). In other words, this isn’t just enacted remembering; it is a kind of mimesis that is aspirational and formative. Such “non-fictive immersion,” as he calls it, changes the actors. “[B]y immersing themselves in the core narrative, participants in the liturgy fundamentally alter their relation to that core narrative. . . . The dominant purpose of immersion is to let participants open themselves up to and appropriate the riches of the narrative” (87). My sense is that helping worshipers understand this would also raise the stakes of worship and perhaps change their angle of entry into the sanctuary.

Ochs, Peter. “Morning Prayer as Redemptive Thinking.” In *Liturgy, Time, and the Politics of Redemption*, edited by C.C. Pecknold and Randi Rashkover, 50–90. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006. In this long essay—part ethnography, part autobiography, part philosophical meditation—Jewish philosopher Peter Ochs carefully explicates the way in which immersion in the ritual of Jewish morning prayer is a mode of “training in how to make judgments.” More specifically, he shows how participation in Jewish morning prayer is a practice of redemptive thinking which “redeems the way we ordinarily misjudge the world”—a way of undoing our socialization into propositional ways of judging the world, which tend to be absolutized and thus fail to do justice to the richness and complexity of this fraught world. Jewish morning prayer, then, is a way to “nurture actual, everyday habits of thinking that are not dominated by this logic,” which translates into a new *philosophical* orientation when they are undertaken by a philosopher. If the philosopher’s work is going to be reparative, it needs to be nurtured by pre-philosophical practices that counter other formative practices of secular culture. As Ochs comments, “the colonialism that is ‘writ large’ into the dominant political and economic institutions of the West displays the binary logic that is ‘writ small’ into the way modern folks learn to make judgments about the world and one another. Morning Prayer shows how other logics can be ‘writ small’ into the ways we learn to make judgments and how prayer can serve as a daily exercise in these ways” (86).

Thus he points to liturgical practices such as Morning Prayer as an “alternative source of nurturance,” where nurturance refers to “a reiterable practice that engenders integrated habits of thinking, feeling, imagining; and it means a practice that is suitable for reforming the ways of older folks, as well as bringing up the young” (86). I receive this exposition and argument as a gift for Christian teachers and learners to imagine how liturgical practices informed by our own scriptural tradition could transform and repair our habits of judgment,

our patterns of discernment, and our openness to divine wisdom. In short, Ochs’s exegesis of the reparative practice of Morning Prayer points to important ways to nurture philosophy otherwise.

Smith, James K.A. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Culture Formation*, The Cultural Liturgies Project: Vol. 1. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009; *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Vol. 2, Baker, 2013; *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology*, Vol. 3, Baker, 2017. This project specifically considers the philosophical anthropology that is assumed by Christian liturgical practice, noting how Protestantism’s unwitting alliance with modern rationalism (the stunted model of the human person suggested by Cartesian “thinking-thing-ism”) contributed to a reconfiguration of worship as largely didactic. Volume 1 lays out this argument in broad strokes, ending with a philosophical exercise of making explicit (per Brandom) what is implicit in the narrative arc of historic Christian worship. Volume 2 delves more deeply into the philosophy of this liturgical anthropology, drawing particularly on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu. Volume 3 brings this liturgical anthropology into conversation with political philosophy, particularly Augustine’s *City of God*, but also contemporary work by Jeffrey Stout and Nicholas Wolterstorff.

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Hearing the Call: Liturgy, Justice, Church, and World*. Edited by Mark Gornik and Gregory Thompson. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011. This book is in many ways an amplification of Wolterstorff’s early contribution to the philosophy/liturgy conversation in chapter 7 of *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (“Justice and Worship: The Tragedy of Liturgy in Protestantism”). Refusing false dichotomies between church/world, worship/mission, or evangelism/justice, Wolterstorff notes how and why historic Christian worship calls for—and propels—the work of justice and the pursuit of shalom for all.

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015. While this is framed as a contribution to liturgical theology, it is Wolterstorff’s expertise as a philosopher that is doing the work in this volume. Specifically, one could see this as the philosophical exercise of making explicit what is implicit in the lived, enacted practice of the body of Christ in worship.¹² In ways somewhat akin to Philips’s *Concept of Prayer*, Wolterstorff here teases out the specific understanding of God (what some call “theology proper”) that is implicit in Christian worship. Given *how* we worship, prayer, sing, and sup, what must we assume and believe about God?

III. Classic Resources

Aquinas, Thomas. “Treatise on the Sacraments,” in *Summa Theologica*, IIIa.60–90. In which Aquinas deploys his philosophical toolkit to consider the sacraments in general (60–65), baptism (66–71), confirmation (72), the eucharist (73–83), and penance (84–90).

¹² Cp. Brandom, *Making It Explicit*. For a discussion that then relates this to the theology of the “Yale school” (for which we might say Wolterstorff was the “resident philosopher”), see James K.A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Relativism? Community, Contingency, Creaturehood* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), ch. 4 and 5.

Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* [*De doctrina christiana*]. Translated and introduced by Edmund Hill. New York: New City Press, 1996. The common English translation of this work as “On Christian Doctrine” is a misnomer that obfuscates its relevance to philosophy and/of worship. Rather than a compendium of doctrine, this is a manual for preachers. In his role as bishop, Augustine was responsible for the formation and education of priests and preachers, and in this key text we get something like his textbook on homiletics. Drawing on his past as a rhetor, however, what Augustine offers these would-be preachers is a philosophy of language, a semiotics (theory of signs) that in many ways anticipates later discussions in Edmund Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* and Jacques Derrida’s *Speech and Phenomena*. In doing so, Augustine demonstrates why preachers can benefit from the philosophy of language in order to deepen their understanding of how meaning is conveyed, how allegory works (and doesn’t), how analogies function, etc. Edmund Hill’s introduction to the New City Press edition very helpfully situates this work in the context of Stoic semiotics.

Bouwsma, O.K. “Anselm’s Argument.” In *Without Proof or Evidence*, edited by J.L. Craft and Ronald Hustwit, 40–71. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. This fascinating but overlooked study of Anselm’s *Proslogion* is an example of a philosopher in the wake of Wittgenstein’s thinking seriously about religion as a “form of life” and how that transforms our understanding of key artifacts and classics in the history of philosophy. In the *Proslogion*, Anselm offers what has come to be known as “the ontological argument”: If God is “that than which nothing greater can be conceived,” and existence is greater than non-existence, then God must exist. We won’t be detained by an evaluation of the argument here. Instead, what’s interesting about Bouwsma’s reading is the way that he seeks to return this understanding of God to its context in worship.

In some ways, you could say that Bouwsma blames Anselm for being the first analytic philosopher: “He has lifted out of the shouting surroundings ‘with a great shout,’ a shouting sentence. But now there is no shout” (p. 48). Instead what we get is “praise on ice.” This is why Bouwsma is interested in trying to get at Anselm’s *sources*: “Out of what context did Anselm lift that phrase?” (43). In other words, who is this “we” who *know* this is what God is like? And how did we come to think like that? This is why Bouwsma goes through the elaborate ruse of trying to imagine just where this idea came from and how it could later be taken almost as a truism by Anselm.

In pursuing this line, Bouwsma is following through on a Wittgensteinian intuition that meaning is bound up with use—that what a word means is a factor of the community of practice in which we use it. Of course, this is to challenge just how Anselm’s argument has been received and deployed. Those who have some enthusiasm for Anselm’s argument think they have hit upon a distinctly *a priori*—and therefore universal—understanding of God. But if Bouwsma is right, the original source of this definition is far from universal; it is rather “a slightly altered fragment of the language of praise,” particularly as found in the psalms (44–46).

Bouwsma highlights two features of Anselm’s error. First, by lifting the language of praise from its context, Anselm unhooks the superlatives from their context in a people’s *history*

with a God who acts: Praise is bound up with remembering. (In doing so, Anselm misunderstands the *use* of praise [54].) Second, by doing this, Anselm changes the kind of *speech act* involved. “When removed from their surroundings and cooled for the purpose of proof, they maybe be mistaken for sentences *about* God, as though they furnished information or descriptions” (47). It’s then because of this alteration (which *is* the misunderstanding) that Anselm frames the argument as if we are talking about comparables (49–52).

Bouwsma closes the analysis with a sympathetic consideration of the fool (think Rolling Stones, “Sympathy for the Devil”!), one that imagines the existential history that leads him to say, “There is no God.” In doing so, Bouwsma considers the significance of lament as a more genuine response. In sum, Bouwsma’s essay is a provocative example of a philosophy of religion that sympathetically imagines the forms of life and communal worship *behind* the statements and claims of both belief and disbelief. It is a model that deserves emulation.

Hadot, Pierre. *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. Edited by Arnold I. Davidson. Translated by Michael Chase. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995. This classic study offers indirect sources for a philosophy of worship insofar as Hadot offers a decidedly counter- or even anti-Enlightenment history of philosophy that emphasizes philosophy historically being a “discipline” in the more liturgical sense—a spiritual exercise, a formative regimen, a communal pursuit of wisdom bound up with particular practices and rituals that aim to discipline both body and mind.

Marion, Jean-Luc. *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*. Translated by Thomas A. Carlson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. This dense but provocative (and now seminal) work amounts to a phenomenological analysis of the distinction between idols and icons—a kind of chemical reaction that crosses Heidegger with Gregory of Nyssa. While Marion is ostensibly engaged in a phenomenological debate with Heidegger and Derrida about naming, significance, and the conditions of “appearing,” the result is a study in the conditions of *revelation*. Marion distinguishes the experience of phenomena that are subject to the perceptual horizons of the ego (hermeneutics)—the idol—from an experience that is actually an encounter with the transcendent that exceeds personal horizons, that gives itself in such a way that it overwhelms one’s ability to constitute it or interpret it—what Marion will later call a “saturated phenomenon” (the icon). In phenomenological terms, these are two different modes of intentionality: The idol maintains the primacy of the ego’s intentional aim; the icon reverses the arrow of intentionality such that the ego is no longer *constituting* the world but is *constituted* by an Other.¹³ This culminates in chapter 5, where Marion locates “the Eucharistic site of theology.” The second edition (2012) includes an important new chapter on Thomas Aquinas.

Phillips, D. Z. *The Concept of Prayer*. London: Routledge, 2014 [1965]. This is an early example of a “Wittgensteinian” exercise in philosophy of religion that looks not at what religious people believe but instead at what they *do*. While many philosophers of religion would assume that any interest in prayer could only follow after we settle the metaphysical

¹³ In this sense, Marion’s work resonates with that of Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, particularly his critique of Husserl and Heidegger’s account of intentionality in *Totality and Infinity*.

question of God’s existence, Philips takes the opposite tack: The ubiquity of prayer in human experience provides insight into the reality and nature of God. Philips proceeds from Wittgenstein’s conviction that a properly philosophical understanding isn’t just a logical assessment of what people *report* they do but more like an anthropological endeavor of trying to inhabit the activity. “If the philosopher wants to give an account of religion,” Philips argues, “he must pay attention to what religious believers do and say.” This neglected volume, particularly if paired with the provocative (but also overlooked) contributions of O.K. Bouwsma, could jumpstart a rich Wittgensteinian philosophy of worship.

Pickstock, Catherine. *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. Rather notoriously opaque, this study has nonetheless achieved the status of a minor classic of a school of thought known as “Radical Orthodoxy.” The book can be read as something like a liturgical history of philosophy whose constructive goal is to articulate a sacramental ontology—a metaphysics rooted in a theology of creation that is “doxological.” We might think of it as an argument for “generalized sacramentality.” More specifically, it is a critique of the univocal metaphysics of modernity that flattens creation as an autonomous, stand-alone, closed system without reference to transcendence (a metaphysical shift Pickstock traces to the work of Duns Scotus, Descartes, and Peter Ramus). In contrast, Pickstock returns to ancient, decidedly premodern, sources like Plato and Augustine to discover a doxological or liturgical ontology that sees the created order as a sign of the transcendent, a material invitation or ladder to the divine.

Seerveld, Calvin G. *Normative Aesthetics*. Edited by John H. Kok. Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 2014. Seerveld, longtime senior member in philosophical aesthetics at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, is not only one of the premier philosophers of art in the Reformed tradition; he is also a liturgist and hymn writer who has translated Psalms and Song of Songs for worship. Living at the very intersection of philosophy, aesthetics, and worship, Seerveld’s entire corpus repays attention for those interested in how philosophy illuminates liturgy (and vice versa). This volume, part of his *Collected Works*, is a representative collection of his most important work on aesthetics.

IV. Prospects for Future Work

Given that philosophy has only recently (re)turned its attention to worship, the prospects for future work are almost endless. Here I’ve noted just a few possible lines of research (in no particular order), with the hope that these suggestions might spark many more. (Indeed, ideally this section of the paper would be a wiki, inviting others to identify the questions that need to be asked and the ways that philosophy can be of service to the church’s worship.)

- There could be a very rich conversation between certain philosophical challenges to theodicy and the so-called “problem of evil” that would resonate with the biblical pattern of lament, which has received renewed attention in liturgy of late. This conversation could draw on Paul Ricoeur’s critique of rationalist approaches to evil (1985) and Eleonore Stump’s criticism of the reductionism that characterizes too many theodicies that treat evil as a puzzle to be solved rather than an existential horror that is lived. The

tensions between philosophical “solutions” to the problem of evil and the biblical genre and practice of lament are powerfully articulated in Richard Middleton’s little-known essay “Why the ‘Greater Good’ Isn’t a Defense.”

- Paul Ricoeur’s philosophical analysis of time, narrative, and how narrative works to configure meaning would be a suggestive catalyst for thinking through the narrative arc of Christian worship and how the drama of redemption is rehearsed in a worship service. Ricoeur’s account of the mimetic function of narrative would be particularly suggestive for thinking about the formative dynamics of Christian worship.
- Similarly, Christian worship exhibits a unique relationship to time that invites further reflection in light of philosophies of time articulated from Augustine (*Confessions*, Book XI) to Husserl (*The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*).¹⁴ Christian worship inhabits time in several different ways: On one axis, it is deeply historical, invested in memory and the rehearsal of historical events from the past; on another axis, it is inherently eschatological, stretched in hope toward a future. Both suggest a rather straightforward, linear relationship to time. But there is yet a third axis or angle of Christian worship’s relationship to time that is almost cyclical—as seen, for instance, in the rhythms of the liturgical calendar and lectionary which repeat such remembering and hoping over and over again. Grappling with related questions would both enrich philosophical reflection on time and could serve as an exercise of liturgical catechesis.
- Just as Sarah Coakley’s *Religion and the Body* offers a comparative look at how different religions understand and approach the body, so too philosophy of liturgy could profit from comparative analysis, not just for an understanding of “the other” but also as a catalyst to deepen understanding of one’s own tradition. Some conversation between Jewish and Christian philosophers has already begun along these lines (see, for example, the work of Peter Ochs, or Terence Cuneo’s engagement with Howard Wettstein). One hopes that this conversation could expand to include Muslim philosophers.
- Phenomenology and cognitive science, including “experimental philosophy.” Religion as a form of life (what we *do*) confirms important developments in philosophy of mind, cognitive science, and neuroplasticity, which emphasizes the ways and extent to which our comportment to the world happens at the level of the bodily, tactile, and pre-conscious. Philosophy of religion has yet to engage these conversations, but a turn to liturgy provides the catalyst for such explorations. A particularly fruitful front for engagement is the expanding work at the intersection of phenomenology of cognitive science (see Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, and the journal *Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*). This just comes down to requiring that philosophy of religion take embodiment seriously. For an important beginning, see Sarah Coakley, ed., *Religion and the Body*.
- There is a rich and growing body of literature in philosophy about the nature of “know-how”—a kind of prepropositional, prediscursive knowing that is more like riding a bike than parsing a syllogism or understanding a theory. We can see this in the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, the more analytic articulation of Jason Stanley’s recent work, or more culturally-engaged models like Matthew Crawford’s *The World Beyond Your Head* (to name just a few). Given that there is an irreducible kind of

¹⁴ This tradition of philosophical reflection on time is provocatively engaged in David Wood, *The Deconstruction of Time* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001).

knowledge of God uniquely nourished by worship, this philosophical work on “know-how” could be a fruitful lens for a philosophical consideration of worship.

- There remains much work to be done on worship from the perspective of philosophy of language. The speech act theory of J. L. Austin (*How to Do Things with Words*) as well as the pragmatism of C. S. Peirce or Robert Brandom seem especially fruitful lines of inquiry. One can see a start from the former in Nicholas Wolterstorff’s *Divine Discourse*, which could be extended to think about Scripture reading, sermons, and litanies as instances of divine speech acts. And in *Worship as Meaning*, Graham Hughes has sketched a direction for a pragmatic, semiotic consideration of how worship “means.”
- If Christian worship is formative, then there obviously is a rich conversation to be had between ethics and worship. Hauerwas and Wells’ *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* is organized around this very thesis, but doesn’t quite come with the philosophical repertoire we’ve tried to emphasize here. Cuneo makes a start to this (chapters 1 and 5) in ways that are more promising.
- There are lots of opportunities to expand the conversation between philosophical aesthetics and worship. Witvliet (1996) has already sketched avenues for this. To highlight just one example, Lambert Zuidervart’s rich account of “artistic truth” invites reflection on the way that worship exhibits something similar, perhaps what we might want to entertain as “liturgical truth” (akin to what Cuneo calls “ritual knowing”).

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