Ledare

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Föreliggande temanummer kan, både till form och innehåll, sägas bryta med ett ordinarie nummer av *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift*. Ett brott är dock helt i linje med, och till och med ett uttryck för, det övergripande tema som följande nummer förhåller sig till, nämligen det teoretiska begreppet *händelse*, eller *event*. Mer specifikt handlar samtliga bidrag på olika sätt om relationen mellan begreppet *event* hos den franske filosofen Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) och Jesu död samt kristendomens födelse.

Att Jesu död utgör ett händelsebrott med den tidiga Jesusrörelsen, eller om denna händelse snarare står i linje med utvecklingen hos en tidig kristendom, tillhör en återkommande grundfråga som exempelvis utforskats inom den nytestamentliga exegetiken. Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) formulerade kärnfullt problemet med Jesu död som ett händelsebrott i skillnaden mellan (1) Jesus som gudsrikespredikant (subjekt) och (2) Jesus som objektet för predikan. Det hände, med andra ord, något i och med Jesu död. Mellan Jesu jordiska verksamhet som judisk profet och förkunnare och den religiösa rörelse som tar fart i skuggan av densammes uppståndelse finns således brottet, händelsen. Men vad händer då inom eller med denna händelse? Hur kan vi förstå begreppet händelse eller *event* i relation till Jesu död och kristendomens tillblivelse?

Åberopandet av Deleuze sker just i syfte att förstå denna händelseproblematik. Bakgrunden för denna tillsynes udda sammanlänkning mellan en förståelse av begreppet *event* hos Deleuze och Kristi döds betydelse för den tidiga kristendomen, är ett symposium som gick av stapeln i oktober 2017 på Centrum för teologi och religionsvetenskap vid Lunds universitet. Under rubriken *The Event of Jesus' Death and the Birth of Christianity* presenterades olika perspektiv på spänningen mellan Jesu död som händelse och

kristendomen som framväxande religion. I det följande kommer symposiets innehåll att återges i form av artiklar och korta responsinlägg.

Undertecknad är först ut med bidraget ”The Singular Event of Jesus’ Death in Early Christianity”, vilket efterföljs av respons från Samuel Byrskog. Det övergripande temat angrips genom att först skissera en generell användning av uppståndelsehändelsen inom tidigkristen litteratur (med exempel från Nya testamentet, de apostoliska fäderna och så kallad ”gnostisk litteratur”), för att avslutningsvis fokusera på Markusevangeliet. Det övergripande syftet är att visa hur korshändelsen fungerar avskilt från uppståndelsehändelsen i tidigkristen litteratur och religion. En paulinsk tendens att sammansmälta Jesu död med Kristi uppståndelse, som en sammanhållen händelse, fungerar som ett slags prövosten och kontrast för artikeln att ta spjärn emot. Filosofin hos Deleuze bistår inte bara med en generell teoretisk bakgrund för detta projekt, utan tillhandahåller också avgörande koncept, så som *kroppen utan organ* (”Body-without-Organs”), vilka på ett konkret vis bistår i analysen av korset som enskild händelse, åtskild från det som ”händer” i till exempel uppståndelsehändelsen.

Andreas Seland responderar Petra Carlssons ”The Christ under Reconstruction: From the Face to the Celestial Machine”, som behandlar korshändelsen med hjälp av vad Deleuze (tillsammans med Félix Guattari) kallar en maskin, samt den ryska, konstruktivistiska konstnären Liubov Popova (1889–1924). Genom en analys av Kristus och konstruktivistisk konst, och inte minst det etymologiska förhållandet mellan *deus ex machina* och Jesu kors som en konstruerad händelse, visar Carlsson att korset fungerar som ett slags gudomlig maskin (”celestial machine”). Korset som *deus ex machina* bjöd och bjuder fortfarande in till ett teologiskt, experimentellt deltagande i korshändelsen. Detta perspektiv ställs vidare i kontrast till ett återkommande åtagande både i ikonografin och i konsten att representera Kristus som ett evigt ideal, främst genom att återge Jesu ansikte. Popova erbjuder Carlsson perspektiv för att närma sig Kristi ansikte som ett slags motbild till korset-som-maskin. Eftersom en maskin alltid måste konstrueras, och därmed endast kan sägas bestå genom sina delar, finns faror med att representera Kristi ansikte som en enhetlig och bakomliggande identitet i kontrast till korshändelsen. Likt undertecknads utforskande av korset som en särskild händelse i tidigkristen litteratur, öppnar Carlssons beskrivning av Popovas konstruktionism med hjälp av Deleuze upp för interaktion med en gudomlig maskin och korset betraktas därmed som en kreativ källa för olika typer av teologiskt utforskande.

I kontrast till de ovannämnda lyfter F. LeRon Shults i ”A Germ of Tranquil Atheism” fram punkter där Deleuze erbjuder motstånd till ett teolo-

giserande av Kristi kors som händelse. Shults lyfter också fram termen maskin från Deleuze, men för att visa hur kristendomen genom Jesu död utsöndrar ateism och därmed innehåller ett slags ateistisk maskin inom ramen för ett större teologiskt maskineri. Shults finner en stilla ateistisk grodd (”a germ of tranquil atheism”) som gror inom den större Kristushändelsen, vilken sträcker sig mot och över den framväxande religionen. Shults poängterar Deleuzes kritik mot kristendomen som helhet och utvecklar denna kritik genom att undersöka hur biokulturella vetenskapsperspektiv på religion (”bio-cultural sciences of religion”) kan kasta ljus på den funktion som Kristus har inom den kristna religionen. Särskilt repressiva mekanismer framträder mot bakgrund av denna kristendomskritik. Till sist söker Shults visa hur en kristen religion inte bara utsöndrar ateistiska groddar genom Jesu död utan även att den till sist själv kommer att dö ut på grund av naturalismens och sekularismens genomslag. Den ateistiska maskinen förutspås helt ta över den kristna religionen och Kristus förbli övergiven, evigt hängande på korset. David Capener ger respons på Shults artikel.

Anthony Paul Smith och respondenten Hannah M. Strømmen avslutar lämpligt genom ett fortsatt betraktande av döden och det finala i korshändelsen. I ”Thinking the Scream: Figures and Forms of Death and the Story of Christinity” utforskar Smith tre olika figurer/former för död i relation till den kristna berättelsen (”the story of Christianity”). Kristi död utforskas först som biologisk död (”biological death”), sedan som dödsdrift (”death drive”) och till sist som social död (”social death”). Författaren ställer sedan dessa tre dödsformer/figurer i förbindelse med kristendomen och ”västvärlden” som två överbryggande, döende fenomen. Smith understryker inledningsvis förnekandet av döden hos Kristus genom perspektiv från ekologiska system, där döden är nödvändig för livscykeln. Med hjälp av dödsdriften som beskrivs av Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) och Orlando Pattersons teoretiserande av social död hos slaven går Smith vidare i sin analys och finner ytterligare former genom vilka vi kan förstå Kristi död och döden i kristendomen. Slutligen beskrivs Jesu skrik, och uppgiften att teoretisera det namnlösa vrålet som korshändelsen exemplifierar, som ett sätt att närma sig en grammatik för skriket (”a grammar for screaming”), som ger uttryck för den gemensamma dödshändelse som finns både i Kristus och kristendomen. ▲

THE EVENT OF JESUS' DEATH & THE BIRTH OF CHRISTIANITY

19–20 October 2017

Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University

LUND UNIVERSITY

> For Christianity subjected the form, or rather the Figure, to a fundamental deformation. Insofar as God was incarnated, crucified, ascended to heaven, and so on, the form or the Figure was no longer rigorously linked to essence, but to what, in principle, is its opposite: the event, or even the changeable, the accident.
>
> - Deleuze, Francis Bacon: Logic of Sensation, 124

The death of Jesus, in the event of the crucifixion, casts something of a shadow over the early Jesus movement and emerging Christian religion. Although claiming to be a cruciform religion, the question is whether Christianity is, as Deleuze might have put it, "worthy of the event" of the crucifixion.

The writers of the New Testament, as well as other early, non-canonical theological texts, use different strategies in dealing with this traumatic event. All this is to say that the death of Jesus, the crucifixion-event, is more than a simple pre-cursor to the resurrection, which is but one way of reacting to this event. The death of Jesus is first and foremost an event in and of itself; a becoming.

A standard solution among many 1st and 2nd century Jesus-followers was to overcode the trauma of the crucifixion with a resurrection proclamation, or "kerygma." In the name of the resurrection, the event of Jesus' death gains a dialectical and eschatological meaning that, for instance, comes to drive not only a hope for a future resurrection of all believers but also shapes a grammar of suffering, a specific Christian martyrology.

This aim of this symposium is to reflect on Jesus' death as an event and its relation to the Christian religion.

Speakers

Petra Carlsson Redell - Lecturer in Systematic Theology at Stockholm School of Theology (Stockholm)

Anthony Paul Smith - Assistant Professor in the Department of Religion at La Salle University (Philadelphia)

F. LeRon Shults - Professor of Theology and Philosophy at the University of Agder (Kristiansand)

Joel Kuhlin – doctoral student in NT exegesis at Lund University and organizer of the symposium.

The symposium is open to all and free of charge, but places are limited and must be **booked in advance (by 30th September)**.

To book, please email: joel.kuhlin@ctr.lu.se

The symposium is made possible by a generous grant by Krookska Stiftelsen.

The Singular Event of Jesus' Death in Early Christianity

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Introduction

Toward the end of *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906), Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) beautifully summarizes the story of Jesus the Nazarene:

> There is silence all around. The Baptist appears, and cries: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him. Instead of bringing in the eschatological conditions, He has destroyed them.[1]

This synoptic paraphrase underlines the failure of Jesus' death in terms of not bringing in the promised new age (God's reign), and leaving the crushing machinery of the world intact, postmortem. Further, by describing Christ's death as an undoing of "the eschatological conditions," Schweitzer points to the death-event as an actual messianic endpoint and not as a mere rite of passage toward inevitable resurrection: a messianic ideal dies with Jesus. Most importantly, however, Schweitzer's paraphrase treats Jesus' death

1. Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, London 1910, 370–371.

as a distinct and singular happening not in synthesis with the resurrection, the ascension, or the *parousia*.

In contrast, some expressions of early Christian theologizing, at present described under the rubric Paulinism, actively conjoin Jesus' death and resurrection (D & R) to form a micronarrative.[2] Further, exegetes sometimes describe this messianic micronarrative as essential to a "primitive" Christian kerygma.[3] When Christ's death is grasped via a postmortem, resurrection-happening, the two elements form a sequential bond, where Jesus' cruciform death becomes inseparable from a rising up on the third day. The sequential micronarrative of Jesus' D & R is the essence of what I here call Paulinism.

A problem with this sequential micronarrative, as with the primitive Christian kerygma, is that other expressions of early Christian theologizing from the first through the fourth centuries, do not easily fold back into Paul's Christological vision.[4] In other words, Paulinism is not the core of early Christianity.[5] Regardless of attempts by Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 130–202), a harmonization of the different theological traditions of the New Testament (NT) is only possible against the background of the creative multiplicity that is the make up of early Christian ways of theologizing about Jesus' death in the NT, Apostolic Fathers, and early Gnostic literature.[6] A similar

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2. In exegetical literature, there is no fixed definition of Paulinism, and use of the term ranges from reference to a wider perspective on Paul's ministry and theology (see Ernest DeWitt Burton, "Some Implications of Paulinism", *The Biblical World* 40 (1912), 403–412), to the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Pauline theology (see Markus Vinzent, *Christ's Resurrection in Early Christianity and the Making of the New Testament*, Farnham 2011, 4; Frederik Mulder, "The Reception of Paul's Understanding of Resurrection and Eschatology in the Epistle to Rheginos: Faithful Paulinism, or Further Development?", in Dan Batovici & Kristin De Troyer (eds), *Authoritative Texts and Reception History: Aspects and Approaches*, Leiden 2017, 199.

3. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament: Volume One*, London 1952, 42–43: "[the] kerygma of Jesus as Messiah is the basic and primary thing that gives everything else – the ancient tradition and Jesus' message – its special character. All that went before appears in a new light – new since *the Easter faith in Jesus' resurrection* and founded upon this faith." Via the theories of memory-studies, a recent take on the centrality of Jesus' D & R as a single fundamental event is seen in Jens Schröter, *From Jesus to New Testament: Early Christian Theology and the Origin of the New Testament Canon*, Tübingen 2013, 2, 49–70. See also the well received study by N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, London 2003, 476–479.

4. As seen in the seven undisputed letters, emphasized for instance in Rom. 6 and 1 Cor. 15.

5. The treatment of an *eschatological resurrection of all believers* and *Christ's resurrection* in Wright, *Resurrection*, chap. 9–10, is an excellent example of a Pauline overcoding of significant textual differences in the NT corpus. Summarizing the chapters, Wright states that "there is virtually no spectrum in the New Testament. One might say that, from this point of view, Christianity appears as a united sub-branch of Pharisaic Judaism" (p. 477), which is more or less an elaborate way of saying that early Christianity is a Pauline religion *per se*.

6. Following scholars like Hugo Lundhaug and others, I will treat Gnostic literature, especially from the first to the fourth century, as expressions of *Christian* theology, given that

tendency to unify the equivocal theologizing about Jesus' D & R can be seen more recently in the philosophers Alain Badiou's and Slavoj Žižek's interest in Paul, basically accepting the kerygma as a given for early Christianity.[7]

What do I mean by Paulinism? It is a particular theological sequence of the events of Jesus' death and Jesus' resurrection, constructed from a combination of significant keywords. In Rom. 6:5–11, Paul elaborates a theological identification with Jesus' D & R through a serialization of the noun ἀναστάσις ("resurrection") and the genitive phrase ἐκ νεκρῶν ("from/of the dead") with the infinitive ἐγείρειν ("to stand, raise up"). In some "Pauline" texts, categorized under the rubric of *Corpus Paulinum*, e.g. Ephesians, there is a lack of one element of this series, or a creative elaboration of the formulae of Rom. 6:5–11 and the usage of ἀναστάσις + ἐγείρειν + ἐκ νεκρῶν. There is therefore a difference between "Pauline," "disputed," and "pseudo-Pauline" letters on the one hand, and Paulinism with its specific theological combination of ἀναστάσις + ἐγείρειν + ἐκ νεκρῶν on the other.

Certain broadly Pauline texts, here Ephesians, that lack the elements of Paulinism, of ἀναστάσις, nonetheless, with the aid of the other elements ἐκ νεκρῶν + ἐγείρειν, seem to develop an incorporeal ascension-motif in contrast to the somatic resurrection of all believers as a gritty, earthy happening, e.g. in parallel to 1 Cor. 15. Eph. 2:5–6 can be read as envisioning a raising from the dead of the believer directly to a heavenly realm, distinct from Jesus' appearance in Galilee (Mt.) or elsewhere (Lk., Acts, and 1 Cor.). All this is to say that Paulinism is a particular theological theme or motif, developed in certain Pauline texts, but is not the sum total or an underlying, hidden identity of the entire *Corpus Paulinum*. In the terminology developed below, Paulinism is created by a serialization of particular happenings and forms a distinct theological becoming of Jesus' resurrection, expressed most clearly in 1 Cor. 15 and Rom. 6. This series is then made into a kerygmatic sequence (Jesus' D & R) that is reproduced as a narrative shorthand for Paul.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the ramifications of a possible prolongation of Schweitzer's dark Christology, and its separation of Jesus' death from Christ's resurrection. This prolongation, I argue, will allow the cross-happening in Jesus' death the abilities of a *singular event*. What does this mean?

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one should refrain from speaking about an "Orthodox theology" prior to Byzantium. For a recent discussion on this topic, see Hugo Lundhaug & Lance Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, Tübingen 2015.

7. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, Stanford, CA 2003; Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, Cambridge, MA 2003.

1. On the one hand, singularity conveys the serial, rather than sequential, traits of Jesus' death in early Christianity.[8] Jesus' death is considered here to be irreducible to other (similarly irreducible) happenings, such as resurrection, ascension, and other forms of postmortem appearances. The "Body-without-Organs," or BwO, is used as an image for an assemblage of irreducible happenings. In a sense, a serial happening is isolated from other similar happenings, and an organization of a happening, e.g. in a sequence of Jesus' death and Jesus' resurrection, reveals the gap between such happenings. In short, the BwO connects happenings, as "organs", serially, and makes them interact without reducing them to a pre-established ideal.

2. On the other, the event signifies how a happening functions as a becoming. Events are, in this paper, described as standing in a paradoxical and obscure relation to sequences of events or an encapsulation of sequences of events, e.g. within a narrative. The serial nature of a singular event (such as Jesus' death by crucifixion) is seen as irreducible to other happenings via its paradoxical and obscure nature.

The first section of the paper deals with the singularity of Jesus' death. Using the image of the BwO, this section discusses the organization of Jesus' death within selected early Christian texts (Hebrews, 1 John, the Letter of Barnabas, the Treatise on the Resurrection). The second section focuses on the eventive nature of Jesus' death, by focusing on its instantiation in the Gospel of Mark as accentuating paradox and obscurity. The two sections are connected, in that the firsts section's mapping of singular uses of resurrection-language is exemplified with reference to the becoming of the event with more depth in section two. The seriality of resurrection-language in early Christianity is ultimately inseparable from resurrection as event. The same goes for the BwO, which thrives on events and moves according to the becoming of events.

(Re-)Organizing Jesus' Resurrection

Even though a resurrection motif appears frequently in Christian texts from the first through the fourth centuries, a review of these texts reveals absence of anything like a rigid theological structure securing the primacy of the Jesus' death – Jesus' resurrection sequence.[9] As will be demonstrated below,

8. The present use of "singular event" thus stands in contrast to Badiou's understanding of the event. Badiou is not interested in keeping the multiplicity that the event stems from open, but, to the contrary, in the violence that forces its manifold origin into a uniform mold.

9. See Vinzent, *Christ's Resurrection*, 1–5 for an introduction to the author's chief research

a resurrection[10] discourse, for instance in the theology of early Christian non-Pauline texts, is at times connected and discussed in relation to the Christ (e.g. 1 Pet.), but sometimes not (e.g. Letter of James), which is to say that these texts drew from Jesus' death as an isolated, and distinct force. That is, Jesus' death and texts encircling this happening stand in an open and creative relation to the idea of Christ's resurrection. If this singular and serial notion of Jesus' death, as seen in many early Christian texts, is correct, this also means that a resurrection motif – whether it be a second temple doctrine of believers' resurrection, or specific to the Christ of parts of *Corpus Paulinum* – is irreducible to other theological ideas.

A point of departure for the current paper is found in Markus Vinzent's *Christ's Resurrection in Early Christianity and the Making of the New Testament* (2011), which attempts a provocative re-reading of early Christian materials, allowing Marcion of Sinope (d. 160) a significant role in the shaping of the NT.[11] Influenced by previous research and preceeding hypotheses by Raniero Cantalamessa, Reinhart Staats, and Adalbert Hamman,[12] Vinzent proposes a second-century revival of Paulinism through a rediscovery of the potentiality of a resurrection motif. Vinzent claims that "although a strong belief in Paul, the Resurrection was of little importance to most early Christians," and he considers Paul's theological trump card as fallen out of influence by the second century. It was only with Marcion's theology and his redacted collection of NT texts that a majority of Christian thinkers and philosophers came to appreciate the concept.[13]

Vinzent's genealogical project is provocative, in particular its radical emphasis on the historical centrality of Marcion as a theologian. However, Vinzent's re-reading of early Christian texts nonetheless demonstrates a thought-provoking confrontation with Paulinism's D & R sequence.[14] As such, Vinzent's main contribution is arguably found in his analysis and overview of the NT, Apostolic Fathers, and other Ante-Nicene Christian theological treatises that display an intriguing plurality of early Christologies concerning a resurrection of Christ. Unfortunately, Vinzent employs the structure of this plurality in the service of an anti-Pauline counternarra-

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questions. As will be seen below, sequence is to be understood in terms of a closed causality, in contrast to the open "quasi causality" of the series, as seen in Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, London 2004.

10. Resurrection most often signified via a combination of the noun ἀναστάσις, the genitive phrase ἐκ νεκρῶν and/or the verb ἐγείρειν.

11. Vinzent, of course, stands in a scholarly lineage reaching back to the research of Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) and other Marcionite scholars.

12. Vinzent, *Christ's Resurrection*, 17–18.

13. Vinzent, *Christ's Resurrection*, 1–5.

14. Especially in the first section of the book: Vinzent, *Christ's Resurrection*, 1–76.

tive. The historian's gaze should turn from the influence of Paul to Marcion, Vinzent argues, and thereby effectively misses out on what I consider the main finding of *Christ's Resurrection in Early Christianity*: there was no hierarchical point of reference for early Christian theologizing of Jesus' death and Christ's resurrection.

The lasting contribution of *Christ's Resurrection in Early Christianity* is its emphasis on the potential seriality of Jesus' D & R. Yet caution is also needed when evaluating the monograph, since Vinzent ends up giving the hermeneutical keys to a myth of Christian origins, regularly handed to Paul, to Marcion, and ends up paying too little attention to the signifiance of the non-Pauline texts, in themesleves. In my view, the main problem with Vinzent's hypothesis is that it does not engage in a theoretical discusson on the significance of the main findings, and falls prey to a dialectical argument, substituting the centrality of Paul of Tarsus by advocating for a linear account of Christian origins via Marcion of Sinope. Vinzent's Marcionite counternarrative redeems the arch-heretic at the cost of a more interesting project, namely, the unleashing of the creative potentiality of Jesus' death and Christ's resurrection as irreducible, singular events.

The task at hand, in this section, therefore is to pick up the place where *Christ's Resurrection in Early Christianity* leaves off, and theorize early Christological D & R series in relation to the fluid structure of Christian thought, demonstrated by Vinzent's analyses. Traversing a Pauline somatology (e.g. in 1 Cor.), what happens to the resurrection motif in early Christianity, if Guattari and Deleuze are brought in to ground Vinzent's reading of the resurrection, as Christological BwO?[15] A privileging of Paulinism's locked link of Jesus' D & R would, with the figure of the BwO, be regarded against the context of the open-ended nature of ancient Christologies.

What is the BwO, and what specifically is a Christ-BwO? Briefly, Guattari & Deleuze described the BwO as the disorganized state and potential of all bodies, prior to and underlying any organ-ization.[16] Christ-

15. See Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London 2013, 20–28. Guattari and Deleuze cite Artaud: "The body is the body / it is all by itself / and has no need of organs / the body is never an organism / organisms are the enemies of body" (p. 20). They contrast the Body, as organism, with the BwO, which is entirely made up by "programs" for organs and body parts, what they call "desiring-machines." The machine draws its energy from wild flows and puts up a sort of resistance to the organization of bodies and flows: "In order to resist organ-machines, the body without organs presents its smooth, slippery, opaque, taut surface as a barrier. In order to resist linked, connected, and interrupted flows, it sets up a counterflow of amorphous, undifferentiated fluid" (p. 20).

16. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis, MN 2011, 151: "The BwO is what remains when you take everything away." The BwO is therefore a concept for how bodies can be organized, with a non-teleological understanding of bodies in mind.

ologies, during the historic period in question, developed similarly to a growing body lacking a definite τέλος. The resurrection is simply one (singular) organ among many that can be organized in relation to other organs, such as the death of Jesus, or the organ of the death of the believer. There is, however, no necessary connection between these organs and a relation established between them, by texts such as Rom. or Eph., will express their relation differently.

As BwOs of Christ, the plurality of early Christologies, seen in early Christian texts, fall back on (un)grounding porosity, where some communities, texts, and theologies develop certain Christological "organs" more fully and differently than others. With the BwO as a theoretical image of thought, no primitive and ideal Christological organization of D & R is needed when addressing the plurality of early Christian texts. Some texts will completely ignore some organs (read happenings), and keep them at the periphery of its body. Once more, there existed no complete image of Christ's BwO, only particular organ*izations* of the Christological organs of resurrection and death.

As a BwO, Jesus' resurrection is one organic happening among many. Further, all early Christological organizations of the BwO functions positively, in some way or another. In short, the Christ's BwO(s) is a fundamentally productive entity, regardless of whether there is a nose, liver, lung, or leg missing, in any particular Christian text or theology. To the contrary, there is never anything missing in the BwOs of Christ. During this formative period, Christ's body is grotesque and open, in that it is always working and operational, even without resurrection-organ(s).

The Letter to the Hebrews[17]

In the homily known as the Letter to the Hebrews, Jesus' death is time and time discussed without reference to resurrection.[18] "Hebrews is different

17. My brief review of early Christian theologizing about Jesus' death and Christ's resurrection is inspired by Markus Vinzent's readings of these texts in Vinzent, *Christ's Resurrection*, 27–70.

18. Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews*, Cambridge 1991, 35–37. Lindars's stance toward Jesus' resurrection in Hebrews follows that of scholars like David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"*, Grand Rapids, MI 2000, 37: "There is [...] a glaring gap in 1:3, inasmuch as the resurrection [of Jesus] is omitted altogether. Moreover, it is never mentioned in the body of the letter. However, it is referred to in the formula of blessing at the end (13:20). If this is an integral part of the letter and not a later interpolation [...] the explanation must be that *it did not seem necessary to mention it separately*, seeing that it is implied by the juxtaposition of death and exaltation" (my italics). This manner of "filling the gap" of an ancient text, instead of working with what's there, is highly problematic. Lindars's argument for the centrality of Jesus' resurrection does not do justice to the text, but to the contrary relies on an "implied" logic that is obviously Pauline to its nature. There is no "gap" in Hebrews, 1 John, Barn. or Treat

from the letters of Paul in that the cross itself had little theological significance, and no mention was made of the resurrection."[19] However, in a closing benediction in the thirteenth chapter, the author unexpectedly writes: "Now may the peace of God, who led up from the dead (ὁ ἀναγαγὼν ἐκ νεκρῶν) our Lord Jesus [...] equip you with everything good" (13:20–21).[20] In light of the insignificance of Jesus' resurrection to the overall soteriological argument of Heb., what are we to make of the phrase ὁ ἀναγαγὼν ἐκ νεκρῶν?

First, Jesus is said to have been "led up" (ἀναγαγών) from the dead and not "raised from the dead" (ἐγερθεὶς ἐκ νεκρῶν: Rom. 6:9). The difference is one of kind and not one of degree, since the corporeal focus in Pauline theology is here completely lacking, in favor of a reinstatement of Christ to God, from the dead, rather than a Pauline resurrection. That is to say, Heb. does not emphasize a corporeal postmortem state of the Christ, but speaks of Christ going directly and ascending to God. Given that the ascension of Christ, in contrast to a Pauline resurrection, is an essential event for Heb.,[21] Christ being "led back" from the dead expresses a "hauntological" theology – to speak with Derrida[22] – and is an example of a spooky, haunting non-dead state of the Messiah. Jesus does not come back in the flesh, as if death never really happened. Rather, an ontologically *Unheimlich* being is now seated at the right hand of God.

Second, there is reason to doubt whether the thirteenth chapter was originally a part of Heb.[23] "Doubts [about] the integrity of 13:20–21 because of its different tone from the rest"[24] would of course explain the theological strangeness of the liturgical benediction given the *ad hoc* appearance of ὁ ἀναγαγὼν ἐκ νεκρῶν. However, since Heb. here displays an interesting similarity to the relation to Christ's resurrection in the Letter of Barnabas, as an example of a liturgical reference in the last instance (which will be discussed more below), there might be something else going on that cannot be explained away by pointing to the redaction history of these texts. More importantly, considering Heb. as displaying a BwO of Christ, the

Res., only a will to fall back upon the familiar theological terrain of Paulinism.

19. George Wesley Buchanan, *To the Hebrews*, New York, 1972.

20. My translation of Ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης, ὁ ἀναγαγὼν ἐκ νεκρῶ … τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν, καταρτίσαι ὑμᾶς ἐν παντὶ ἀγαθῷ (Heb. 13:20–21a).

21. Buchanan, *To the Hebrews*, 253.

22. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, New York, 2012. For Hauntology in NT exegesis, see Denise Kimber Buell, "Hauntology Meets Post-Humanism: Some Payoffs for Biblical Studies", in Jennifer Koosed (ed.), *The Bible and Posthumanism*, Atlanta, GA 2014, 29.

23. Buchanan, *To the Hebrews*, 267–268.

24. Lindars, *Theology of Hebrews*, 37, n. 16.

appearance of ὁ ἀναγαγὼν ἐκ νεκρῶν functions positively to its particular organization and testifies to the non-centrality of Christ's resurrection in the homily. The specific liturgical use of Jesus' resurrection is distinct from a theological account of Jesus' death and ascension, and marks out a territory for Christ's resurrection to a particular part of the textual corpus, and isolates an overcoding tendency of Paulinism. However, this is not the time or place to elaborate on this differentiation.

Regardless, it is safe to say that Jesus' death is a central organ of the theological argument of Heb., and that this homily testifies to the thanatological importance of the Christ, without clinging to Christ's resurrection. The Christology of Heb. functions with Jesus' resurrection existing on its boarders.

The First Letter of John

The First Letter of John is often dated to the late first and early second centuries and attributed to an anonymous Elder (πρεσβύτερος). It treats salvation and eternal life in terms of communal love, revelation, and incarnation – not resurrection.[25] In terms of theology, the πρεσβύτερος writing in 1 Joh. demonstrates a fascination with the opposite concepts of sin (ἁμαρτία) and love (ἀγάπη). Sin is the inability of loving one's "brother," and doing unrighteous acts harmful to the community.[26] Sinners are unbelievers, and in some cases even antichrists, meaning those who do not believe that Jesus is the Christ and has come in the flesh (1 Joh. 2:18, 4:3). Resurrection is not mentioned in the Johannine epistles either as an eschatological event of all believers, or as a proleptic actualization of this event with Christ.[27] Instead, the author is heavily invested in arguing for the possibility of the community of Christ leading a sinless, loving life, now. Such a state of sinlessness was normally only made available at the end times, following a contemporary, standard Jewish perspective.[28] 1 Joh. locates the end times in the here and now: "Children, it is the final hour" (παιδία, ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν 1:18) The Johannine epistles thus theologize a realized eschatology where "the blessings of the age to come are already experienced in the present," with sinlessness for those who follow the commandments of Jesus the Christ.[29] This might be a reason for its silence regarding resurrection.

25. Vinzent, *Christ's Resurrection*, 70.

26. Judith Lieu, *The Theology of the Johannine Epistles*, Cambridge 1991, 59.

27. Since the Second and Third Letters of John (much shorter in length) deviate very little from the theology of the first.

28. Lieu, *Johannine Epistles*, 59.

29. Lieu, *Johannine Epistles*, 58–59.

There are, however, comments on the suffering and sacrifice of Christ, which function as prolegomena, or a past historical fact, for the Johannine eschatological agenda:[30] "My little children, I am writing these things so that you will not sin. But if anybody sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is atonement for our sins, and not only ours, but also for the whole world" (2:1–2).[31] Christ's suffering therefore allocates the forgiveness of sins by his cleansing blood. This cleansing is primarily realized when individual members of the community confess their sins, in public (1:5–10.) This entire process, and the theology behind it, is built around belief in the "name" of the Christ (3:23), when the "brothers" (John's favorite term for the community members) follow the commandments of Christ and thereby "abide" in him (2:3–6).

What are we to make of this talk of atonement (ἱλασμός), and the specific reference to the cleansing properties of Jesus' "blood"? First, it is important to note that the popular soteriological trope of Jesus' cleansing blood is in no need of resurrection in order to work.[32] Secondly, the discourse on forgiveness is rather vague and according to Lieu, "the author has no fixed idea of the significance of Jesus for forgiveness."[33] The letter expresses an ongoing negotiation regarding Jesus' death. Thirdly, drawing from the greater plethora of sacrifices in contemporary Judaism, the machinery of sacrifice can be defined as (1) a gift to God (2) mediated by a religious figure (here, the Son-of-God), (3) representing the guilt and thanks of the community member to God (4) if, and only if, the member partake in the sacrifice via personal labor and/or attachment to the gift (here, belief and abiding in Christ via commandments).[34] In 1 Joh., the fruits of forgiveness is therefore, in summary, given to the Johannine community member without any reference to Jesus' resurrection.

Lastly, even though it is very unlikely that a resurrection of Christ played no part at all in their overall theological *Weltbild*, the Johannine letters could be taken as examples of a Christian-pharisaic theology, without the explicit need for Christ's resurrection. The realized eschatology of eternal

30. Lieu, *Johannine Epistles*, 62.

31. My translation. Τεκνία μου, ταῦτα γράφω ὑμῖν ἵνα μὴ ἁμάρτητε. καὶ ἐάν τις ἁμάρτῃ, παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον· καὶ αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, οὐ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου.

32. That is not to say that resurrection-language could not be added to this imagery (1 Pet. 1:10–11, for instance, explicitly connects Jesus' suffering and death with "subsequent glory").

33. Lieu, *Johannine Epistles*, 63.

34. This list is an abbreviation and paraphrase of the discussion on second temple sacrifices in Daniel G. Reid, "Sacrifice and Temple Service", in Craig A. Evans & Stanley E. Porter (eds), *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, Downers Grove, IL 2010, 1036–1050.

life (1:2) is present now, making talk of resurrection in a sense redundant. A resurrection of the believers might very well happen in the future, but a resurrection-life is already here, for those who believe in and are cleansed by the Christ.

What is the organization of resurrection in the BwO of Christ as seen in 1 Joh.? The resurrection motif is peripheral here just as in Heb., but for somewhat different reasons. While the cross is not mentioned at any point in 1 Joh., Christ's suffering is still said to make a sinless state possible in the here and now, if the brothers are able to love one another and thereby follow the commandments and "walk similar to how he walked" (καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν, καὶ αὐτὸς οὕτως περιπατεῖν 2:6). This homily could thus be said to exemplify an organization of Christ, as a covenantal body, driven by mimesis and inaugurated eschatology.[35] In contrast to Heb., 1 Joh. emphasizes a covenantal theology, without any mention of resurrection-language.

The Letter of Barnabas

According to the author of the Letter of Barnabas (generally dated late first century–early second century),[36] salvation is given to those who follow the path of righteousness (ἐν ὁδῷ δικαιοσύνης 1.4), by having "perfect knowledge" (τελείαν... γνῶσιν).[37] "Barn. is essentially an exegetical work. Its aim on one level is to show that faith of those who follow Jesus is in complete accord with what the author terms 'the scriptures' (the Old Testament in later Christian tradition."[38] The purpose of Barn. aligns with the outline of the tract, since its overall message consists of the spreading of γνῶσις, which can be described briefly as consisting of (1) a specialized exegesis of scripture (corresponding to chapters 2–16) and (2) ethical *parenesis* (corresponding to chapters 17–21).[39] For Barn., γνῶσις is then primarily "a special method of interpreting scripture in which scripture is interpreted in a spiritual way ."[40] The parenthetical section of the tract, thematically centred on the early Christian trope of the "Two Ways," results directly from γνῶσις, as perfect knowledge puts you on the path of righteousness.

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35. I would like to thank Birger Olsson for pointing this out to me.

36. James Carleton Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas: Outlook and Background*, Tübingen 1994, 9–27.

37. The reason behind the letter is summarized in the following sentence: ἐσπούδασα κατὰ μικρὸν ὑμῖν πέμπειν ἵνα μετὰ τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν τελείαν ἔχητε καὶ τὴν γνῶσιν, "I have hastened, then, to send you a brief letter, that you may have perfect knowledge to accompany your faith" (Barn. 1:5). All translations of Barn. from Bart Ehrman.

38. Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, 55.

39. Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, 51, 55, 68–69.

40. Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, 50.

The death of Jesus lies at the centre of the tract's theology.[41] The resurrection of Jesus, however, is only mentioned once, close to the end of a section dedicated to prove a point regarding the Sabbath and its spiritual replacement on the eighth day (15:9).[42] As a result, Jesus' resurrection (ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀνέστη ἐκ νεκρῶν) exists on the periphery of the tract's body and is best described as an "incidental" remark without much value for the main arguments.[43] Instead, Barn. treats the incarnation and death of the Christ as producing a "duality of suffering" – salvation and judgment.[44]

Christ's death, referred to throughout as suffering on a "tree" (ξύλον),[45] is unfortunately, for present purposes, considered a fact rather than elaborated upon. In chapters five and eight, for instance, the author demonstrates an existing typological relation between death-event and the sacrificial imagery from Lev. 16 (specifically, the goat of Azazel) and Numb. 19:17–22 (the red heifer), respectively. Both readings of the Pentateuch should be understood as corresponding to the statement of 5:1 and as an introduction to the larger section 5:1–8:7[46]: "This is why the Lord allowed his flesh to be given over to corruption, that we might be made holy through the forgiveness of sins, which comes in the sprinkling of his blood." The death-event is salvation for those listening to the teaching of γνῶσις, while judgment awaits those who rejected Jesus, gave him up for crucifixion, and lack knowledge of scripture, namely "Israel."[47]

The interesting soteriological mix in Barn. of Christ's incarnation and suffering, flesh and tree, is in no need of Christ's resurrection to do any theological lifting. The forgiveness of sins is available through the event of the crucifixion of the incarnate God (5:1–7), and embraced by listening to the word of the Gospel (8:1–7). A resurrection of all believers is mentioned in relation to Jesus' death, as a reality available after Christ's destruction of

41. Few scholars would today subscribe to the opinion of Barn. as an actual ancient epistle.

42. διὸ καὶ ἄγομεν τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ὀγδόην εἰς εὐφροσύνην ἐν ᾗ καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀνέστη ἐκ νεκρῶν καὶ φανερωθεὶς ἀνέβη εἰς οὐρανούς, "Therefore also we celebrate the eighth day with gladness, for on it Jesus arose from the dead, and appeared, and ascended into heaven" (Barn. 15:9).

43. Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, 179, discussing Klaus Wengst. In note 359 on that same page, Paget brings in the syntax of 15:9 (especially καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς) in support of the reading of Wengst.

44. Reidar Hvalvik, *The Struggle for Scripture and Covenant: The Purpose of the Epistle of Barnabas and Jewish-Christian Competition in the Second Century*, Tübingen 1996, 180.

45. A paraphrase for the cross and crucifixion, with the agenda of actualizing the Hebrew Bible in service of fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus' death happening.

46. Hvalvik, *The Struggle for Scripture*, 177.

47. Hvalvik, *The Struggle for Scripture*, 180: "The most important thing, however, is not that Christ suffered on a tree, but that his crucifixion demonstrated that he was rejected by Israel. Consequently Israel herself was rejected, as Barnabas repeatedly hinted."

death (5:6–7) in the end of days. In short, Barn. only turns to resurrection as a future, salvific benefit for the believer "because the kingdom of Jesus is on the tree, and because those who hope in him will live forever" (8:5).

The focus in Barn. is on how Holy Writ is fundamental, as a BwO. The body of Christ here organizes itself especially through a gnostic relation to the Septuagint corpus, and a resurrection motif is only emphasized insofar as it corresponds to a certain exegetical γνῶσις, revealed in Barn. Jesus' D & R is not particularly Pauline, nor does Barn. represent the kerygma of Paulinism, rather the BwO created by the organization of Barn. moves according to a particular desire to understand and exegete Scripture.

The Treatise on the Resurrection (Letter to Rheginos)

The fourth century collection of Christian manuscripts known as Nag Hammadi (in Codex I 43:25–50:18) contains a Valentinian letter to the Christian Rheginos, possibly from late second century, [48] known as the Treatise on the Resurrection. The letter demonstrates an interesting complexity in relation to themes from Pauline theology – and even refers to him as "the Apostle" at one point.[49] The treatise is best described as deviating from, or better still elaborating on, themes found in Pauline theology, and in particular a Pauline view on resurrection. Not unlike the theological tendencies of Heb., Treat. Res. could be said to spiritualize elements of Paulinism, in line with Middle Platonism.[50] In a word, the treatise is a polemical theological tract against Christians who think they understand the significance of resurrection, but ultimately ends up deviating form the truth of the Word (50:5–11).

Most important for present purposes, the treatise considers the elect as participating in Christ's ascension and developing a realized eschatology by spiritualizing a resurrection-event of Christ into a participatory and communal experience, available for the believer now, at the time of death.[51] In effect, resurrection is similar to the Pauline ascension-event, with the difference of an incorporeal saving of the inner self or the living members

48. Malcolm L. Peel, "The Treatise on the Resurrection: 1:4; 43:25–50:18", in Harold J. Attridge (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Introductions, Texts, Translations, Indices*, Leiden 1985, 146.

49. 45:23–28, quoting 1 Cor. 15:54. "Despite its explicit reference to the 'Apostle,' there is little left from Paul's kerygma of the Risen Christ." Vinzent, *Christ's Resurrection*, 19. For a discussion on Paul and Treat. Res., see Peel, "The Treatise of the Resurrection", 162.

50. "The author of Treat. Res [...] is most accurately characterized as a 'second-century Middle Platonist.'" Peel, "The Treatise on the Resurrection", 135.

51. Peel, "The Treatise on the Resurrection", 162–163. Other Pauline soteriological elements, such as a connection between the baptism and resurrection of Christ, is also lacking. Peel, "The Treatise on the Resurrection", 162.

of the body, rather than the visible members "within" (47:55–48:5). In line with this non-Pauline line of thought, the Lord is said to have once "existed in the flesh" (44:15) ante-mortem, but the treatise discusses somatological aspects of theology by claiming that the spiritual resurrection will do away with "the fleshy" (46:1), distancing the tract from a Pauline understanding of resurrection.[52]

Using the metaphor of light beams and the sun, the author of the treatise describes participation in Christ's resurrection in the following manner: "We are drawn to heaven by him, like beams by the sun, not being restrained by anything. This is the spiritual resurrection."[53] Similar to how sun beams fade into the sun at its setting, so are believers at their death drawn toward Christ and heaven.[54] At the time of death, the elect will thus ascend to heaven and once there partake fully in the heavenly state. In contrast to the First Letter to the Thessalonians, resurrection of the believers happens immediately postmortem and not at the παρουσία, as a spiritual ascension and sharing with Christ's own ascension.[55] Similar to Heb., there seems to be a spiritualization of resurrection, in favor of replacing this event or interpreting it via the event of the ascension to heaven, and therefore Treat. Res. marks a significant deviation from Paul.[56]

According to the treatise, Jesus the Saviour "raised himself up":

> The Savior swallowed death [...] for he put aside the world which is perishing. He transformed [himself] into an imperishable Aeon and raised himself up, having swallowed the visible by the invisible, and gave us the way of our immortality.[57]

In contrast to Paul, God does not raise Jesus. Another point of contrast to Paul is that there are no mentions of the cross or crucifixion as the cause of

52. Vinzent, *Christ's Resurrection*, 18–19, on the peculiar Paulinism in Treat. Res. All translations of Treat. Res. by Peel, as given in James M. Robinson (ed.), *The Coptic Gnostic Library*, vol. 1–5, Leiden 2000.

53. 45:35–46:1.

54. Peel, "The Treatise on the Resurrection", 163.

55. "[We] who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command [...] And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:15b–17c, Revised Standard Version, 2nd ed.) In short, according to Paul, in this early letter, there will be no resurrection until the Lord descends, but then (similar to Treat. Res.) the dead will rise, and only later the living believers.

56. For a treatment of how Hebrews spiritualizes and Platonizes early Christian traditions and in particular Paulinism, see Martin Wessbrandt, *Transformed Readings: Negotiations of Cult in Paul, Hebrews, and First Clement*, Lund 2017, 89–130.

57. 45:15–25.

suffering and death of the Christ. Nor is there any mentioning of the "third day," Jerusalem, or other essential "kerygmatic elements."

In summary, the letter to Rheginos displays a robust theological tract that thinks of itself as Christian, referring to both the Apostle and the Gospel (48:10: the transfiguration-pericope, where Jesus meets an "ascended" Elijah), yet displays a distinct and non-Pauline resurrection theology. Treat. Res. is clearly part of an ongoing discussion in the second century on the topic of the resurrection of Christ and the believers, displaying similar objections raised against Paul in 1 Cor. 15:12–15 (on the possibility of a bodily resurrection of Christ.) Further, with the treatment of Pauline theology and Jesus-traditions, the author exemplifies theological creativity in relation to a resurrection motif and a relaxed, interpretative posture toward these sources. As with all hitherto discussed texts, resurrection-language acts and is acted upon in relation to a body of terms and theological concepts, displaying difference and movement in relation to other early Christian texts. In short, the BwO of Christ is as active in Treat. Res. as in the other texts previously discussed, but not prefigured after Paulinism.

Other Early Christian Texts, Then?

Before I move on to look closely at Mark, something should be said about other early Christian texts. In the Letter of James, Jesus' D & R are not mentioned at all, similar to the Gospel of Thomas, Shepard of Hermas, and the hypothetical Q-source. In the Didache, where an eschatological resurrection of all believers is discussed, Christ's singular expression of this happening is not mentioned, nor his death. And in other NT texts, such as the Second Letter of Peter and the Letter of Jude, the *parousia* motif is intensified at the cost of a theology focused on resurrection, even though these texts clearly stood in a Pauline tradition in some way.

The above texts from the first to the fourth centuries contain central Christological organs of Paulinism's Christ, but when it comes to Jesus' D & R as sequential, few share the exact organization of *Corpus Paulinum*. Following Vinzent's reading of early Christian theologizing of Jesus' death and Christ's resurrection, the organization of salvation with reference to resurrection can thus be discussed in a non-Pauline manner. In short, identification with Paulinism's Christology and a primitive early Christian kerygma does not do justice to the multiplicity of theologizing about Jesus and salvation.

The Christological Series in Mark

In this last section, I will briefly develop the perspective above by looking closer at Jesus' death as event and its twin aspects of paradox and obscurity, and discuss (1) Jesus' death as a "paradoxical element" in the Markan Gospel, as well as (2) the obscure nature of the Markan death of Jesus by crucifixion, by addressing a Deleuzian call to "becoming worthy of the event."[58] In relation to the previous discussion, paradox and obscurity is a way of expressing seriality and the propelling force that animates the movement of the BwO of Christ. A Deleuzian event is therefore a way of conceptualizing what is going on in texts like Barn. and 1 Joh. when they express resurrection with difference and organize Christ's body accordingly.

In *The Logic of Sense* (Fr. *Logique du sens*, 1969), French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) develops an intriguing theory of the event, and in particular language's ability to express the inner becoming of a happening.[59] Deleuze's event finds its sources in the philosophy of Stoics, Gottfrid Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), Gilbert Simondon (1924–1989), Albert Lautman (1908–1944), and Lacanian psychoanalysis, and "points at the virtual region in which a constant immanent flow of becoming affects the historical present." The event, as a flow of becoming, "make[s] history happen, yet it never reduces itself to a concrete place and time."[60] In short, the Deleuzian event is a philosophical concept describing the expressivity of language as creative and productive, with attention to the becoming-of-things.

If the core of a narrative is defined as "a sequence of events,"[61] Deleuzian events happen in series, located within sequential structures (as with the combination of ἀνάστασις + ἐγείρειν + ἐκ νεκρῶν in the kerygma of Paulinism). This "virtual character" of events, as hiding within and animating narratives, can be seen in elements of paradox and obscurity. With paradox I mean to point to a regressive feature of a narrative, restlessly running through the story without the ability of settling down. In the context of Mk., as will be argued below, Jesus' death expressed via σταυρός/σταυροῦν

58. The stoicism of Deleuzian events is clearly demonstrated in Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 169: "Either morality is senseless, or it means this and nothing more: not to be unworthy of what happens to us. To grasp what happens to us as unjust and unmerited (it is always someone's fault) is, on the contrary, what makes our wounds repugnant – this is resentment in person, resentment against the event."

59. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 170: "The event is not what occurs (an accident), it is rather inside what occurs, the purely expressed." For a thorough presentation of the concept and its relation to the overarching arguments of *Logic of Sense*, see Sean Bowden, *The Priority of Events: Deleuze's* Logic of Sense, Edinburgh 2011.

60. Ilai Rowner, *The Event: Literature and Theory*, Lincoln, NE 2015, 141.

61. For a discussion on "story," see Andreas Seland, *Divine Suspense: On Kierkegaard's* Frygt og Bæven *and the Aesthetics of Suspense*, Lund 2016, 39.

(cross/crucifixion) functions as such a paradox, testifying to its force of becoming. With obscurity, I mean an aspect of indiscernibility of a narrative element, such as the imperative to take up one's σταυρός in Mk., in light of Jesus' non-resurrection. As will be developed below, the cross and crucifixion (as σταυρός/σταυροῦν) is a particularly obscure point of reference and an indistinct form of wounding on many levels that disturbs the audience of Mk.

Jesus' Death as Paradoxical Element

A description of events as paradoxical, in my reading, aptly summarizes the Markan discourse of Jesus' death. In this enigmatic and anonymous first-century text,[62] (1) Jesus a number of times predicts the death of the Son-of-man and a postmortem appearance to the twelve and the world (e.g. 8:31, 9:31, 10:33). After Jesus' death, the promise of a postmortem appearance with its eschatological significance is left hanging in the air, resulting in the suspension of Jesus' message. What does the Markan assemblage known as "the Gospel" mean, when the audience is left without any assurance of Jesus' credibility? (2) No cohesive reason for the death of the Son-of-man is given. In one pericope, the death is said to be "a ransom for many" (10:45). In another pericope, the death is symbolically ritualized with bread, wine, and the idea of a covenant, and all are connected to the coming of God's kingdom (14:22–25). In the end, Jesus is killed because of a controversy about the temple and the title "King of Jews" is attached to Jesus, a name never used by him, or by anybody else in Mk. prior to the meeting with Pilate. In short, the audience is not sure why Jesus dies, or what it is exactly meant to accomplish, in the last instance. (3) An important aspect of Jesus' identity on the last point deserves more attention: given that Jesus is named with many names throughout the Gospel, but ends up betraying the preferred Son-of-man by lack of resurrection; who was Jesus? (4) Lastly, what is the function of the occasional break of the fourth wall with the Markan imperative to "take up their cross and follow me" (8:34) and "let the reader understand" (13:14), when Jesus is left somewhere between life and death, when the Gospel comes to a close? What should the audience do with the Markan text after reading?

Mk. is paradoxical insofar as the text expresses a restless element, with the death of the Nazarene. Mark cuts the sequence of events open with an insufficiently executed, motivated, and explained culmination of the Gospel-story with the death of its protagonist, and is then unwilling to deliver any

62. For a discussion on the isagogics of Mark, see William R. Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, Cambridge 1999, 1–21.

promised closure. The Markan death of Jesus, as the execution of a would-be, failed Messiah promising to bring in the end of the world, continues to hover over the audience as an event vibrating through the Markan series. The report of the shiny man in Mk. 16 proclaiming Jesus' resurrection leaves the wound open and therefore serial, rather than forming a solid sequence between Jesus' death and Christ's resurrection.

Jesus' Death as Obscure Wound

An equally important approach to Jesus' death as event is seen in relation to the function of the σταυρός/σταυροῦν in Mk., and the imperative "to take up the cross and follow me" (8:34). In the language of Deleuze, how does one "become worthy of the event," in light of the utterly paradoxical happening of Jesus' death and subsequent (non-)resurrection? Further, what is the response to an imperative to be wounded by a cross, when the same wound in the happening of crucifixion seemingly breaks the promise of resurrection, given in the same narrative?

Gunnar Samuelsson's philological research on the crucifixion in the monograph *Crucifixion in Antiquity: An Inquiry into the Background and Significance of the New Testament Terminology of Crucifixion* allows for a rich definition of the infinitive, σταυροῦν, and the noun, σταυρός, important for an understanding of the event of Jesus' death. Consider the following summary of σταυροῦν/σταυρός in late antiquity:

> The [NT] texts are not necessarily intended to visualize "the cross" [...] but *any kind* of suspension or torture device used in both ante- and post-mortem suspensions or acts of torture. A device connected with death, pain and shame – in an unspecified way; not with all the distinctive features with which the church later filled the label "crucifixion." A person carrying a σταυρός is not necessarily on the way to Calvary, so to speak, but on a path towards an unspecified execution or torture form. Thus, contra the common view expressed in commentaries, it is not possible to fully define what the texts describe Jesus as talking about.[63]

Following Samuelsson, crucifixion historically signified an obscure suspension-till-death. Joined up with the restless aspect of the Markan story discussed above as paradox, the invitation to share in this obscure death creates a troubling event for the audience to interact with. In the "Twenty-First Series of the Event" in *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze writes "To the extent that

63. Gunnar Samuelsson, *Crucifixion in Antiquity: An Inquiry into the Background and Significance of the New Testament Terminology of Crucifixion*, Tübingen 2011, 242.

events are actualized in us, they wait for us and invite us in. They signal us 'My wound existed before me, I was born to embody it.'"[64] The last line, a quote from Joë Bousquet (1897–1950), is a most fitting description of Jesus' relation to the cross and the happening of crucifixion in Mk. What is the audience left with, after experiencing Jesus' suspension-till-death? An imperative to share the paradoxical and obscure event of cross-wounding: "follow me: be suspended, be worthy of the σταυρός."

In the earliest surviving manuscripts of Mk. 16,[65] Jesus' death is wholly separated form a promised resurrection of the Christ, since the narrative ends with 16:8, and women running away from an empty tomb rather than witnessing a resurrected prophet. The pericope of a resurrected Christ was either cut out, or was never there to begin with. In either case, the earliest surviving versions of the Markan ending demonstrates the seriality of Jesus' D & R in early Christianity. According to the story, resurrection was meant to be a part of the equation of this particular σταυρός-wound, but at present simply remains as a "dark precursor" to something unclear, something that *might* happen. The prophesied sequence of D & R does not hold.

Concluding Reflections

The first section sought to demonstrate differences in early Christian resurrection-language with reference to Jesus and used the image of BwO to emphasize this fact. The second section looked closer at Mk. and a particular organization of Jesus' resurrection, with explicit reference to Jesus' death by crucifixion. With the distinction of crucifixion and σταυροῦν (or cross and σταυρός) from the second section in mind, understood as the difference between serial and sequential, the BwO of Christ finds nourishment from the obscurity and paradoxical elements of suspension-till-death and non-resurrection, in short an event of Jesus' death. The same kind of distinction could be made with all the early Christian texts mentioned above, although this is not the purpose of the present paper.

The BwO of Christ in 1 Joh., Barn., Treat. Res., Heb., and Mk. feeds on events of death and events of resurrection as organs, and is able to move according to the lines of becoming embodied within these texts. The seriality of Christ's resurrection is a manner of conceptually mapping the movement of the BwO in the textual corpora above, while the sequences and the logic of narrative, here discussed as Paulinism, is more like the wake or afterthought of a story's event and its serial movement.[66] The organ of resur-

64. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 169.

65. *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Vaticanus*, generally dated to around mid-fourth century.

66. Following the terminology used by Deleuze outside of *The Logic of Sense*, seriality comes close to "the virtual," while sequentiality is similar to "the actual."

rection was shown to be different from the one of Jesus' death, and that no kerygmatic sequence existed which bound the BwO of Christ to use both Jesus' death and Christ's resurrection serially and thus without referring to the resurrection-logic of Paulinism.

Lastly, I would like to pose the question of what it would mean to take up the serial σταυρός and concepualize its embodiment, more generally. What would it mean to take Jesus' death as a singular becoming, a wound to embody, in relation to early Christianity? Fourth-century Christianity and perhaps also some ante-Nicean early church fathers, have doubtlessly been keen to valorize the cross and crucifixion as the salvific point of mediation, and as a foreshadowing of the resurrection in line with Paulinism. However, as a Deleuzian event expressed in Mk., Jesus' death by suspension cannot be a monumentalized.[67] Rather, the death of Jesus looks to the reincarnation, or re-embodiment of σταυροῦν for the sense of becoming worthy of this event.

Deleuze asks: "What does it mean then to will the event? Is it to accept war, wounds, and death when they occur?" No, "but something *in* that which occurs, something yet to come which would be consistent with what occurs, in accordance with the laws of an obscure, humorous conformity: the Event."[68] The event articulates a particular relation between paradox and obscurity, becoming and difference, and also a call to action, or at least affirming the forces of becoming at work in that which happens. As seen with "to suspend-till-death" and non-resurrection, both in the sense of a paradoxical element and the obscure consequence of σταυροῦν/σταυρός, this happening cannot be bogged down with a singular, simple definition, or even actualized once-and-for-all. As event, Jesus' death in Mk. escapes fixation and remains an open, ongoing happening – hovering and lingering with the Markan audience, even after reading.

As singular events, Jesus' death and Christ's resurrection resist the uniform tendency of locating the essence of Christianity with Paul. Rather, the event animates the BwO of Christ through a becoming awaiting incarnation. To take up an obscure σταυρός of Christ, rather than the pre-established notion of "the cross" as the death of Jesus, for instance, invites ever new creative theological engagements, rather than falling back on an understanding of a monolithic birth of Christianity and a repetition of an essence without difference. ▲

67. On the problem with monumentalizing particular events, especially contemporary black suffering, see Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Durham 2016.

68. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 170.

SUMMARY

This article looks to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze in order to theorize the crucifixion of Jesus as event in early Christian literature. A Deleuzian view on the event is primarily articulated with the distinction between a sequential and a serial understanding of happenings, where the latter forms the basis for singular events. It is argued that Jesus' death is best considered a singular event in early Christianity, meaning that it displays a particular, distinct force in early Christian theologies that is irreducible to other happenings, such as the resurrection. The article's first section investigates the difference between a sequential and serial view on Jesus' death, by comparing a Pauline view of Jesus' death and resurrection, on the one hand, with the function of Jesus' death in a selection of Christian texts from the first to the fourth century, on the other. In the last section, the singularity of Jesus' death in early Christian texts is explored further, by turning to the Gospel of Mark. Returning to the Deleuzian theory of events, Jesus' peculiar death in the Gospel is described with the eventive traits of paradox and obscurity. It is argued that the Markan portrayal of the death of Christ – as a singular event – invites embodiment of Jesus' enigmatic death, in the lives of the Gospel's audience.

The Paradox of the Passion of Jesus

A Response to Joel Kuhlin

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The learned scholarly attempts to synthesize biblical scholarship on the so-called Jesus event with Gilles Deleuze's (1925–1995) concept of event is to be applauded. Biblical scholars of today tend for various reasons to shun the insights of philosophy; likewise, philosophers who claim to interpret biblical texts – often those written by Paul – rarely share the insights of biblical scholarship. Joel Kuhlin's article, and indeed the entire symposium presented in this special issue, provides a possibility to enrich the text-centred and historical readings of biblical studies with sensitive hermeneutical and theological avenues of thinking, without diminishing or misdirecting the multidimensional task of interpreting the signs encoded in the biblical texts. Such thinking makes hermeneutics and theology into something more promising than and substantially different from mere application and re-contextualization or theological apologetics.

Jesus' Death and Resurrection

Kuhlin gives a thoughtful account of the problems involved in too quickly assuming the close interconnection between Jesus' death (crucifixion) and resurrection as a theological dictum. Building on innovative research published a few years ago, he indicates the limited influence of the Pauline schema death–resurrection and insists that this schema is not the core of early Christianity. The soteriological diversity in the New Testament

is clearly attested, and Kuhlin rightly points to the ambivalence of writings such as Hebrews, 1 John, the Letter of Barnabas, the Treatise on the Resurrection, and some other early Christian texts concerning Jesus' death and resurrection.

Kuhlin's over-all argument concerning this ambiguity triggers some reflection. The first one would be the argument from silence. As with many ancient texts, it takes caution to assume that the absence or infrequency of references to resurrection means that the idea was not present to or presupposed by the authors and to claim that they drew from Jesus' death as an isolated and distinct force. After all, if the author of Hebrews and other early Christian writings subsequent to Paul's positively acknowledged letters, the argument needs to be pushed further to indicate that the author actively diminished the importance of the resurrection and maintained the soteriological sufficiency of Jesus' death as a singular event in spite of Paul's emphasis on the resurrected Lord. This is not fully carried out in the present article, and it might not be possible to do so.

Another possibility to consider is that Paul represents and develops the earliest soteriological stratum of the emerging Jesus movement and that his scheme of Jesus' death and resurrection is much earlier and broader than the one present in other (later) writings. I am not sure Kuhlin would deny this, and hermeneutically and theologically we should indeed avoid the naïve idea that what is earlier or original is better. This, of course, also applies to the historical Jesus and the beautiful lines quoted by Kuhlin from Albert Schweitzer's (1875–1965) account of Jesus' destruction of the eschatological conditions by his own death. But from where did Paul receive the scheme? Was it the case that the historical Jesus regarded his death as an endpoint and that Paul invented its intimate linkage to the resurrection?

Probably not. There is indication, not least in the accounts of the last supper,[1] that the historical Jesus awaited some kind of future consummation of God's Kingdom beyond his own death. More importantly, the old hypothesis, going back to C. Harold Dodd (1884–1973) in the early 1930s, argues that the speeches in Acts represent an early kerygma, which is behind the out-line of the Gospel of Mark.[2] To be noted is, regardless of its possible influence on Mark, that Peter's preaching according to the book of Acts binds a close tie between the one they killed by hanging on a pole and the one God raised on the third day (Acts 10:39b–40). Granted these speeches

1. For further discussion, see Samuel Byrskog, "The Meal and the Temple: Probing the Cult-Critical Implications of the Last Supper", in David Hellholm & Dieter Sänger (eds), *The Eucharist – Its Origins and Contexts: Sacred Meal, Communal Meal, Table Fellowship in Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, Tübingen 2017, 444.

2. C. Harold Dodd, *New Testament Studies*, Manchester 1953, 1–11.

are not entirely Lukan, Peter's speech indicates that Paul was not a loner and represented a broader tendency during the earliest period of Christianity to make sense of Jesus' crucifixion by regarding it as the enigmatic but inevitable manifestation of the divine force of resurrection, perhaps with roots in Jesus' own expectation of a final vindication of God's Kingdom.

The Event

Three concepts are crucial to Kuhlin's argument: event, paradox, and obscurity. The expression "Jesus event" has been used carelessly in much English-speaking biblical studies as a way of referring comprehensively to the entire historical occurrence of Jesus, i.e., his birth, activity in word and deed, his death, and the accounts of his resurrection. It has been more theologically and philosophically loaded in the German debate about *Ereignis*, especially among biblical scholars aware of Martin Heidegger's (1889–1976) influential but allusive understanding of the term, developed in the 1930s, as in some way connoting the dynamic emergence or coming into view of Being. This was certainly behind Rudolf Bultmann's (1884–1976) references to the eschatological Jesus event, but the frequent use of the expression today has lost its philosophically loaded connotations and it is, at best, understood in sociological terms, in biblical circles and elsewhere.[3]

Kuhlin helpfully brings us back to a more philosophically sophisticated use of the concept in that he defines it as a happening that functions as a becoming and thus, when serially connected to sequences of events, constitutes the makeup of a narrative. With this definition, the narrative becomes more dynamic and powerful, encapsulating a series of singular events "in becoming" (*im Werden*), not merely a static textual unit, and moves our understanding of narrative toward something that presents various thematic emphasis in the Gospels as constantly evolving entities, as always "in becoming." This helps us avoid the modern Western temptation of defining theological doctrines where no fixed doctrines are to be found but are "in becoming."

This understanding of event can be elaborated from a more text-oriented, or better, text-pragmatic perspective. Where does the event happen, before, within, or after the text? Is it something that the text refers back to or something within the text as narrative or something after the text is written? The event, however we define it, is in biblical scholarship textually mediated. Kuhlin's Deleuzian definition of the event moves in the direction of locat-

3. For a recent comprehensive sociological study of event, see Robin Wagner-Pacifici, *What is an Event?*, Chicago 2017.

ing it before or after the text, but also, when forming sequences, within a narrative.

In order not to confuse text with event, it might be helpful to clarify that the text is made up of interconnected textual signs such as letters and words and sentences, while the event is either something outside the text, and thus obtainable through the referentiality of the text, or entirely embedded in the codes of text or a textual event. The latter aspect could supplement Kuhlin's indications when linked to the contemporary studies of the various media used to enforce the powerful effect of texts on its audience at the moment of its performance, either from a manuscript or from memory. It is at such oral/aural moments that singular events accounted for in the text can come alive and truly make the event recorded in the text into a creative becoming linked to similar events in the narrative, while at the same time remaining irreducible to other events.

To hear the passion narrative being read aloud from the Markan text or from the memory of the Markan text, for instance, creates another kind of passion event that reconfigures and reincarnates the death of Jesus as a singular event at the moment of reading and hearing. How are we to reconcile this explosive and revitalizing potential of a text, even its smallest iota, as performative event, with Deleuze's event as the expressivity of language as creative and positive and with reference to the becoming-of-things? Reflecting more on this could give us a good starting-point for finding common ground between biblical scholarship and Deleuze's concept of event.

Paradox

Kuhlin's discussion of the paradox of Jesus' death in the Gospel of Mark is to be applauded. He rightly avoids focusing on the use of the infinitive *versus* the finite verb forms to indicate the oscillation between pure and particular events embodying the paradox, instead pointing to aspects in the Markan story that scholars with various success have tried to resolve. He mentions the failure to fulfill the promise of postmortem appearances, the mixture of reasons behind Jesus' death, the pluralities of identities of Jesus, and the difficulty for the audience of knowing what to do with the Markan text with Jesus left somewhere between life and death.

Instead of trying to solve these paradoxes, Kuhlin points to a philosophically intriguing way to leave the paradoxes as they are, so that Jesus' death in Mark escapes fixation and remains an ongoing happening. He refers to Deleuze's emphasis on willing the event by accepting wounds and death when they occur without referring them to some explanatory future. I have no critique at this point. For biblical scholars this is a good reminder that

those things in the Gospel narratives that after a century or so of research remain paradoxical enigmas to us might serve precisely as such and might even have been intended as such, because the language expresses, at least from the audience's perspective, that which is not a closed event.

Obscurity

This links, finally, to Kuhlin's concept of obscurity; he speaks of the "obscure wound" and suggests that Jesus' command to take up one's cross and follow him is a Markan way of expressing the Deleuzian notion of becoming worthy of the event, that is, to share the paradoxical and obscure happening of Jesus' death and (non-)resurrection and to share the event of cross-wounding. While obscurity is a fascinating hermeneutical potential for addressing the experience of readers and hearers of a textual event, and while we are uncertain as to what kind of suspension crucifixion signified in pre-Christian times, we should remember that obscurity was according to ancient Greek elementary training to be avoided in any attempt to communicate convincingly. Among the ways of successfully refuting a rhetorical unit was always the possibility of pointing to its obscurity (ἀσάφεια).[4] Clarity was the ideal.

The Markan narrative is not entirely obscure at this point but oscillates creatively between clarity and obscurity. The passion predictions in Mk. 8:31; 9:30–31; 10:33–34 do not use the verb "to crucify" (σταυροῦν). It seems to avoid it, perhaps because it was semantically ambivalent. They refer instead to the awaited event as suffering, rejection, killing, and being handed over – and the disciples fail to understand what is going to happen. The term "cross" (σταυρός) here is not Jesus' cross but the cross of discipleship, each one's cross (8:34).

The verb occurs instead for the first time in 15:13–14, when the crowd twice responds to Pilate "crucify him." And immediately after these two occurrences the author states not merely that he was handed over, as he had done previously, but that he was handed over in order to be crucified. The crowd defines in Mark the means of Jesus' death as crucifixion. Read in connection with the passion predictions, it becomes clear that crucifixion has to do with suffering, betrayal, and death.

So there is clarity within obscurity, clarity in the sense that the crowd introduces the verb "crucify" as the means of his suffering, betrayal, and death, obscurity in the sense that this verb is open to various understandings. The author of Mark seems to oscillate between clarity and obscurity in the narrative, but certainly ending the entire story with an obscure silence

4. ἀνασκευαστέον δὲ ἔτι τὰς χρείας ἐκ τοῦ ἀσαφοῦς. Leonhard von Spengel, *Rhetores Graeci*, vol. 2, Leipzig 1894, 104, lines 15–22. See for further discussion e.g. Catherine Atherton, *The Stoics on Ambiguity*, Cambridge 1993, 347–350.

and openness, and the obscurity of the cross is not so much visible in the enigmatic cross terminology but in that the disciples are to pick up their own cross of discipleship while Jesus' cross signified wound and failure.

The comments above highlight the complexities of close biblical reading. Although some critiques have been levelled, Kuhlin's article is the most focused in the present volume on combining biblical scholarship and Deleuzian philosophy. We still have to find the language and the contours of discourse for continuing this dialogue. Biblical scholarship needs to move beyond its traditional historicism and occasional fear of philosophical hermeneutics; philosophy needs to move beyond its internal paradigms of scholarly debate and hear voices from the outside. Kuhlin's article is a good example of both. ▲

Thinking the Scream

Figures and Forms of Death and the Story of Christianity

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Death is a part of the story of Christianity.[1] By telling a story that weaves in its incoherence, Christianity extends its own coherence. Regardless of claims to coherence or incoherence, these stories are overlaid on the now. Such a now cannot properly be said to be a site of meaning, but to call it meaningless would also be to tell a story and as story it would not refer to its own immanent now but to transcendent narrative structures that place that now in relation to this or that moment. Just as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari think of philosophy, science, and art as all relating to chaos in order to slow down its speed or create relative consistency for thought, the story of Christianity is a way of bringing coherence to the incoherent.[2] And a story must not only have an origin but an end. It must not only come to life, it must also die. While many secular or non-Christian religious studies scholars know that the structure of their own discipline is enthrall to belief and truth, we still seek to ground everything there. Even in the use of genealogy a privilege is given to the site of origin, to the start of where a story is told. It is a fantasy that scholars engage in when they think they can find the essence of Christianity in its origins. As if Christianity had origins. As if there were anything like origins at all, as if there was coherent meaning

1. Special thanks to Meredith Minister and Amaryah Armstrong for comments on an earlier draft.

2. See Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, New York 1994.

behind this concept. What if, instead of origins, there are only accidents? Instead of a coherence secured by history, by a story, be it chronological or not, instead of all of that there is only now – though this now may even feel like nothing since the now resists meaning-making – that nonetheless is encrusted through stories into cultures we each find ourselves trapped and interpolated within?

This essay is a cataloguing and survey of the figures and forms of death that make up the Christian story. They are parts of the story that may "unsettle" or begin to undo the coherence of those stories, but unsettling is how stories work to captivate. This unsettling is how the narrative tension is achieved and such tension is still in the service of narrative. By cataloguing these figures and forms of death in relation to the Christian story we can begin to see their limits as a radical critique of that Christian story and the stories whose structure is inherited from Christianity. Scholars of Christianity are not only concerned with the birth of Christianity but with its decline and presumably its death. There exists social-scientific research, of course, on the decline of Christianity in the so-called West and it is interesting to note that those who call themselves Christians with a certain fervor often do so in the defense of this same West that is also said to be declining. There is so much violence, so much death being dealt today, in a refusal to accept these dual deaths: the death of Christianity and the death of the West. The second of these was itself created and sustained through a politics of death. Death usually of colonized or enslaved others, but sometimes of the West's own internal others. And all of that death was justified as it secured the future of that West, though it is hard to see that fantasy as anything but idiotic today and growing ever more so. Death is said in many ways, just as Aristotle said of nature; itself sustained through death.

In the remainder of this essay I will consider three central theorizations of death as a means of thinking through the event of Christ's death. I will consider Christ's death at the origin of what has become a culture of death or part of a necropolitical order. I will not be considering the origins of Christianity or even the actuality of Christ's death as if we could have some experience of it unmediated through the various traditions that form the world today. Rather, I am interested in what we mean by death and if death can even be an event or only ever part of a dialectical process of world-making. This survey of the forms and figures of death serves a larger project, one beyond the remit of this essay, that works towards a theorization of living in the midst of a now that is foreclosed to meaning and meaninglessness, a

living now that is truly without justification, without theodicy, and thus can only be thought while experincing the vertigo of immanence.[3]

Biological Death

Deleuze, in the midst of writing about Francis Bacon's radical painting of figures that follows the Christian deformation of the figure, tells us: "The figure is dissipated by realizing the prophecy: you will no longer be anything but sand, grass, dust, or a drop of water."[4] This dissipation of the figure is another description of biological or natural death. Our deaths or the deaths of our loved ones can be distinguished from the kind of death that takes place biologically and within an ecological framework. When we look upon the face of someone beloved in the moment of their death we are on the edge of an end. Such a death is the end of our life together, the shared experiences, the presence of that person which will now forever be felt as the absence of their presence haunting us. Love that goes out and finds no love returned. Our own experience of the thought of our death runs up against the same limit in consciousness. Death is the end and since we live without ends, except through certain fantasies of reason, it becomes unthinkable except as what is not.

Yet our deaths do not mark an ecological end at all. The ecosystem is not done with us, regardless of how quickly our names may pass from the lips of others or how unnoticed our deaths may be outside of the small group of people who may be, temporarily, marked by it. When we die our bodies dissipate into the ecosystem. One of the perversities of our relationship to death is the way we attempt to extract our death from ecological systems of the exchange of matter and energy. Most of us who die in Sweden or America, for now, do not find our bodies left for carrion-eaters. We find ourselves instead kept cool and pumped with chemical preservatives to slow down natural processes that might find our bodies burst when left in the heat. Yet all of this is cosmetic as some scavengers will eventually find their way to our flesh and clean it from the bone. Human flesh, human bodies, are extracted from the wider ecosystem, but we cannot deny ecological processes the last word. As Mo Costandi writes in one of the monthly Neurophilosophy

3. On the vertigo of immanence see Christian Kerslake, *Immanence and the Vertigo of Philosophy: From Kant to Deleuze*, Edinburgh 2009. Daniel Colluciello Barber has developed an analysis of vertigo that thinks Deleuzian vertigo and the vertigo of Black social death analyzed in Frank B. Wilderson III, "The Vengeance of Vertigo: Aphasia and Abjection in the Political Trials of Black Insurgents", *InTensions* 5 (2011), http://www.yorku.ca/intent/issue5/articles/frankbwildersoniii.php, accessed 2018-08-16. See Daniel Coluciello Barber, "The Creation of Non-Being", *Rhizomes* 29 (2016), http://www.rhizomes.net/issue29/barber.html, accessed 2018-08-25.

4. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, London 2003, 31.

articles in the Guardian, "Far from being 'dead,' however, a rotting corpse is teeming with life. A growing number of scientists view a rotting corpse as the cornerstone of a vast and complex ecosystem."[5] Some have attempted to create secular rituals of comfort around this ecological "life after death." Yet, attending a secular funeral of remembrance for a loved one, where the mourner will never see that person again, would likely be just as alienating an experience as a Christian funeral where they are told their beloved is not dead, but waits on the other side. For the secular remembrance is predicated on the story that this death is not the complete death of the person. Even though death has come for them as it will come for me, the flesh still lives through its dissipation of the figure, such secular narratives preach. Naturalistic explanations of death still must be narrated for there to be meaning, they still require a world for their comfort to dampen the real of death captured when Deleuze continues to write of a kind of cosmic death of the figure, "now the sand no longer retains any Figure; nor does the grass, earth, or water."[6] At some point, nothing wins, because nothing was never playing the game to begin with.

As with Christians, I cannot pretend to know why those of us in the West relate to death the way we do. Why we preach one thing, like the interconnectedness of all things, and practice another, desperately attempting to exempt human flesh from that interconnectedness. Why it is, like our stories of Jesus, we want to remove ourselves from death just as his flesh was removed from the cycle of ecological exchange and continued to live through the resurrection. Regardless, we know that we may assume the biological death of Christ because that death is found in the canonical Christian Gospels. What we find when we compare the synoptic Gospels is interesting with regard to this biological vision of death and our attempt to distance our experience from it. We find in Matthew 27:50 and Mark 15:37 relatively the same story. Both have scenes of horror, the profoundly faith-shaking cry of "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?" Yet this horror becomes nearly naturalistic, almost like a documentary, when they write of the moment of death. In Luke both the horror and the documentary pass away to create distance from the death. Christ here is more heroic, his death is an example to be emulated. The Real of death is occluded through a story.

The version of Jesus' death given voice in the Gospel of John presents a less heroic story than Luke, but instead we find horror as genre. Not in the moment of Jesus' death, which is almost more demure than in Luke. No, it

5. Mo Castandi, "Life After Death: The Science of Human Decomposition", *The Guardian* 2015-05-05, https://www.theguardian.com/science/neurophilosophy/2015/may/05/life-after-death, accessed 2018-08-16.

6. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 31.

is not in the moment of Christ's death that John writes horror, but in what happens to the body of Jesus after. The two thieves crucified with Jesus have their legs broken, their bodies are further mutilated by legitimate agents of the Roman state so that they would die more quickly. The horror of this scene should be obvious, but the author pays no mind and we hear nothing of their screams. Instead we are witness to a sudden presence of blood and water from the side of Christ, the horror of the scene is one of bloodletting of a dead man who no longer feels pain in his flesh, the sick sound of flesh opening and of the particular viscousness of blood hitting the dirt, while the tortured screams of those who still live are not even excised from the text but are just given no attention at all.

For those who experienced the death of Christ in that moment as the death of their friend, their son, their leader, their teacher, or whatever story of relation that fit for them, this would have been the experience many have in the world of those they love coming to a violent end, to a death at the hands of a legitimate violence, a violence of the state or a violence despite the state. Yet, the way that death comes to be narrated matters for the way such death lives in the world. The way such death, like the death of flesh, nourishes the life of the world.

So we may finally ask, even though Jesus' death was a biological death, how was the experience of that death structured? For that we must turn to the forms of death as narratives of life as found in the death drive analyzed by psychoanalysis and the social death of slavery.

Death Drive

Clearly, to the early Christian community, there was a certain declaration of the end within this death. The death of Jesus was narrated in such a way that we might say Jesus was a figure, not of death, but of the death drive akin to the *sinthomo*sexual described by Lee Edelman. For Edelman, the *sinthomo*sexual is the figure of the death drive in relation to the structure of reproductive futurity that structures all political possibility, right or left, reformist or revolutionary.

In Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, he puts forward the idea that Freud's death drive takes the figure of the queer in the order of the social. Thus the queer as figure represents that "negativity opposed to every form of social viability."[7] The figure who ruthlessly seeks after their own jouissance or enjoyment without end, who give to those what they desire without concern, and who do so without regard for the future, without regard for the image of the reproduced future in the figure of the

7. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Durham 2004, 9.

Child. "The death drive as which the queer figures, then, refuses the calcification of *form* that is reproductive futurism."[8] This death drive is what pushes beyond the biological cycle in which the death of Jesus would simply be found. As Slavoj Žižek explains the death drive is:

> precisely the ultimate Freudian name for the dimension traditional metaphysics designated as that of *immortality* – for a drive, a "thrust," which persists beyond the (biological) cycle of generation and corruption, beyond the "way of all flesh." In other words, in the death drive, the concept "dead" functions in exactly the same way as "heimlich" in the Freudian "unheimlich," as coinciding with its negation: the "death drive" designates the dimension of what horror fiction calls the "undead," a strange, immortal, indestructible life that persists beyond death.[9]

Many in the early Christian community understood the death of Jesus to be heralding just such an antisocial form of life. This particular issue is known to Christians today if they read Paul in 1 Corinthians, where he writes that "it is well for a man not to touch a woman. [...] To the unmarried and widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am" (7:1, 8, NRSV). In the 1970s Christian Jambet and Guy Lardreau argued that a manifestation of the form of cultural revolution could be found in the early Jesus movement, which they looked to to develop a theory of cultural revolution. This form of revolution was one that they counterposed to ideological revolution. The difference between the two of them can be stated simply as ideological revolution wishes to replace one Master with another and cultural revolutions seek to overthrow the very idea of Master altogether. For Jambet and Lardreau the early Jesus movement was caught between an antagonism between an ideological revolution and a cultural one. Oddly enough, the earliest followers of Jesus, those who looked to him to be the political messiah who would overthrow Rome, would be an example of the early desire for Christianity to be ideological and not cultural. The death of Christ, for those heretics and dualists of the early movement, unleashed a cultural revolution the themes of which Jambet and Lardreau believed could be grouped under two main headings: "the radical rejection of work, the hatred of the body along with the refusal of sexual difference." They go on to explain:

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8. Edelman, *No Future*, 48. My italics.

9. Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, London 2008, 294.

> certainly not as production of *one* indifferent sex or of *n* sexes, at work in this revolution was an intelligence too delicate in its desire to allow itself to be taken by these crude decoys, so that it knew, of the sexes, there could only be two.

No, this hatred of the body and refusal of sexual difference was an "abolition of sex itself."[10] That is, abolition of the social order and the future that secures it. For empirical proof of this form of cultural revolution they direct us to the numerous dualistic sects of early Christianity where the followers lived an antisocial life, where they

> refused marriage and refused salvation to married people, gave authority to women to leave their spouses, children their parents, slaves their masters, condemned all ownership, extolled absolute renunciation, these savage hordes of men and women mingled together, living by begging as required or robbery if pushed, women dressed as men, and often at their head, this flood thrown into the streets, an exodus, sleeping here and there in the streets their chaste bodies entangled, these errings that carry males and females without difference, along with shards of broken families.[11]

If the death of Jesus cast this Christ as a queer figure, as a *sinthomo*sexual, it is also clear that Christianity is the name for the affirmation of that same death which determines the negativity of the death drive into a positive form. One where the earthly master comes to be weakened, but where what is Caesar's is still rendered under Caesar and where we suffer the little children unto him (if the reader will forgive such a biblical cut-up). Edelman tells us that the negative is a *force* that affirmation seeks to determine as some stable or positive *form*.[12] The history of Christianity shows us that the force of death as incarnated in the figure of Jesus gives way to a form of death, a death that redeems death from death. Is there something else within the early Christian experience of the death of Jesus that might undo this, that might undo it in an even more thoroughgoing fashion than Edelman's *sinthomo*sexual? So that, as Deleuze writes, "the form is no longer essence, but becomes accident; humankind is an accident"?[13]

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10. Christian Jambet & Guy Lardreau, *L'Ange: Pour une cyégétique du semblant, Ontologie de la révolution 1*, Paris 1976, 100. All translations from the French are my own.

11. Jambet & Lardreau, *L'Ange*, 101.

12. Edelman, *No Future*, 4

13. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 135.

Social Death

There is another form of death that captures within it an antagonism that grounds and thereby structures our very world. It also points more radically to humankind as accidental rather than essential. This form of death structures our very world even beyond reproductive futurity and arguably structures the very jouissance found in the death drive. In this form of death we find the impossibility of coherence even as the death it brings promises to provide coherence to those who are not subject to it. This is death in the form of social death and the figure of such death is the slave.

This is the haunting thesis of Orlando Patterson in his *Slavery and Social Death*. For Patterson the value of the slave to a master is the slave's strangeness to the community she is enslaved within. Yet, it is this very strangeness that is what makes the slave a threat to the community.[14] The slave only has relation to the community through the master and by necessity has no roots in the community. This is the meaning of the slave's natal alienation. The slave is a non-being, an unborn being, and only exists as the living dead.[15] Slavery comes to be defined by Patterson then as the "permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons."[16]

Patterson considers the way in which Christianity developed in relation to the death of Jesus in relation to the figure of slavery. In fact, for the early Christians, slavery "was a major source of metaphors that informed the symbolic structure of Christianity."[17] Paul's theology had these metaphors at its very heart in the themes of redemption, justification, and reconciliation. Patterson notes two contradictory readings of the death of Jesus in relation to the slave. The first says that Jesus' death pays for the sin that led to spiritual enslavement. In this understanding, "the sinner, strictly speaking, was not emancipated, but died anew in Christ, who became his new master. Spiritual freedom was divine enslavement."[18]

The other symbolic interpretation is said by Patterson to be more liberating, but for that its reasoning is far more complex. In Patterson's ontological study of the slave, the slave is one who gives up her freedom by choosing physical life. That is, their freedom is given over to social death and they would only be free had they chosen biological death. The slave, Patterson says, "lacked the courage to make such a choice."[19] What is completely new

14. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, Cambridge 1982, 38.

15. For a full elaboration of the creation of non-being in dialogue with Deleuze's philosophy of immanence, see Barber, "The Creation of Non-Being".

16. Patterson, *Slavery*, 13.

17. Patterson, *Slavery*, 70.

18. Patterson, *Slavery*, 71.

19. Patterson, *Slavery*, 71.

in the death of Jesus is that he annuls the condition of slavery by returning to the origin, "to the original point of enslavement and, on behalf of the sinner about to fall, gave his own life so that the sinner might live and be free."[20] Yet, outside of the symbolic, is this action even imaginable? One cannot die the death of another and this fundamental truth means that the liberating message of Jesus' death is doomed to only be a story of liberation and not liberation itself. The attempt to make Christianity a slave religion that would liberate those slaves is doomed in its attempt to make coherence out of social death, just in the same way that our attempts to fashion coherence out of biological death simply covers over the scream of flesh.

In the Quranic response to Christian claims regarding the death of Jesus, we find it written that "they did not slay him; nor did they crucify him, but it appeared so unto them" (4:157).[21] The tradition has come to read this enigmatic ayat in interesting ways, including that one of the followers of Jesus assumed his appearance and died in his stead. Such an idea was horrific to Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (1149–1210), author of *al-Tafsir al-kabir* (*The Great Commentary*), who worried that this suggested we could not rely on our senses to identify individuals.[22] But this is perhaps the only way that the second reading Patterson identified could work. If all people take names that are not names, if one could die for another because everyone is dispossessed of their proper identity, then there would be no stories, and so there would be no social death because there would be no social life. The ethical way of conceiving of death requires that we stop making a story for death. Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) writes of the relationship between naming and death, "Behind what is named, there is the unnamable. It is in fact because it is unnameable, with all the resonances you can give to this name, that it is akin to the quintessential unnameable, that is to say to death."[23] Perhaps we need to find some way to think the unnameable, to think the scream, if we are to have a thought adequate to death.

Writing again about Bacon, Deleuze locates a distinction between pessimism and optimism. Bacon is "cerebrally pessimistic" for he can only see horrors to paint. He is "nervously optimistic," however, because this figuration of horror is secondary and he moves toward painting "Figure without horror."[24] Choose the scream over the horror and paint the scream, not the horror. Writing about Bacon's famous painting of Pope Innocent X (1574–

20. Patterson, *Slavery*, 71.

21. This translation comes from *The Study Quran*, New York 2015.

22. See Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *al-Tafsir al-kabir* as cited in *The Study Quran* 4:157.

23. Jacques Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*, New York 1991, 211.

24. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 61.

1655) screaming, Deleuze writes that we must paint the violence of sensation over the violence of the spectacle. In relation to Edelman's rejection of the future we find Deleuze writing: "The invisible forces, the powers of the future – are they not already upon us, and much more insurmountable than the worse spectacle and even the worst pain? Yes, in a certain sense – every piece of meat testifies to this."[25]

In this work Deleuze is clearly too enthralled to a kind of overturning of the hierarchy of death over life by reversing that hierarchy. In giving attention to this form of death we give attention to the scream, rather than the horror. To the flesh, rather than the body. The slave is unnameable, quite literally. There are no records of the names of those enfleshed as slaves, there is no memory as there is for the victims of the Holocaust. In the social death of the slave we find the form of death and the figure of death only tangental come to matter, and they matter as a meat-thing, a suffering flesh without stories. The form of death is pitiless or inspires nothing and the figure of death draws out pity or compassion from us through the sensation of it. "Sensation is in the body [...] Sensation is what is painted."[26] But if the figure of the slave is a form, it is that form where accidents are essence. Slaveness as inextricably linked to flesh, rather than to personhood or humanity.[27] Rather than looking to the death of Christ as a story of *sinthomo*sexual rebellion or liberation, the true threat to social order is found in the site of the unnameable scream. For the stories of death and life always betray the suffering they claim to speak for, to give meaning to. To provide a grammar for screaming one must give up on coherence, on origins and ends, and instead give attention to the sensations of the flesh, without history, without land, and without kin.[28] ▲

SUMMARY

Death is at the heart of the Christian story. The genesis of the Christian story begins, in part, with the death of Christ. This essay examines the death of Christ and its central role in the genesis of Christian culture and its story. The power of death in the story of Christianity is analyzed through a survey of the death of Christ read through three central theoriziations of death. Biological death is analyzed as the material cessation of a life. The death drive, as conceptualized in psychoanalysis and

25. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 61–62.

26. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 35.

27. This argument is made by Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book", *Diacritics* 17:2 (1987), 64–81.

28. This idea is developed by Jared Sexton, "The Vel of Slavery: Tracking the Figure of the Unsovereign", *Critical Sociology* 42 (2014), 583–597.

queer theory, is analyzed through the figure of the *sinthomo*sexual and the threat this figure of death poses to social order. Social death, a primary concept in the study of racial slavery, is analyzed as a form of death that is itself the foundation or ground of that social order. These disparate forms and figures of death are analyzed through concepts derived from Gilles Deleuze's philosophy, especially his work on figure and form in his study of Francis Bacon, *The Logic of Sensation*.

In the Beginning Was a Screaming Mother

A Response to Anthony Paul Smith

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In this response to Anthony Paul Smith's thought-provoking paper, "Thinking the Scream: Figures and Forms of Death and the Story of Christianity," I would like to pick up on the fantasy of origins Smith refers to by turning to Mark's Gospel and its dying Messiah. I do so to probe the claim Smith puts forward about stories bringing coherence to the incoherent – in particular the Christian story. At the end of his paper, Smith posits that "to provide a grammar for screaming one must give up on coherence, on origins and ends, and instead give attention to the sensations of the flesh." As Smith puts it, "the liberating message of Jesus' death is doomed to *only be a story* of liberation" (my italics). I suggest that Jesus' death transmits intensities not as a story primarily, but as event, as the changeable, the accidental, in living on and acting upon bodies across time and space.

Smith states that scholars – and I would add particularly biblical scholars – fantasize about returning to the origin, to fathom what "it all means" or what "it all meant." As Ward Blanton argues, this fantasy has not simply been an endeavour to accurately determine an ancient reality. Instead, "modernity's depictions of original Christianity must be read as a working through of its own identity."[1] Smith asks: what if instead of origins there are

1. Ward Blanton, *Displacing Christian Origins: Philosophy, Secularity, and the New Testament*, Chicago 2007, 7.

only accidents? Accidents of birth, accidents of death. Are we, as he implies, spinning stories out of what is better left unnameable? Western art has been obsessed with nativity scenes and crucifixion scenes, as if part of the cultural working through of identity is a constant coming to terms with life and death, and, particularly, the iconic life and death of Jesus. Rifling through the beginnings, there are many we could land on, from John's "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1) to Matthew's genealogy (Matthew 1:1–17). Or, we could begin with the scream that presumably emitted from Jesus' mouth before or while he was wrapped in "bands of cloth and laid in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7). Or with the flesh, blood, and gore of child-birth and the screams emitting from Mary's mouth that are not to be found in Luke's Gospel or in much high culture: in the beginning were a screaming Mother and a screaming baby, and their screams were with God, and the scream was God.

The search for singular and secure origins in the biblical archive is doomed to fail because, as Brennan Breed puts it, "biblical texts are, from the very moment of their initial inscription, already sedimented with various semantic, literary, and historical contexts"[2] and biblical literature is and always was "a changing process," "built up over a lengthy span of time and continued to develop and transform until well after any supposedly 'original' period."[3] Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John assemble different Jesus-figures from the scraps of their time, knitting these scraps together into differing fabrics, screwing together different parts and building different Christ-machines: constructions of a historical Jesus that work in different ways and are assembled from different parts (memories, texts, remains). The multiplicity that is Christian origins, and the multiple accounts of Jesus and his death, produce different Christianity-assemblages. An assemblage has no essence; there are no once-and-for-all defining characteristics, only contingent and singular ones.[4] If we want to know what an assemblage is, something like a Christianity-assemblage, "we cannot presume that what we see is the final product nor that this product is somehow independent of the network of social and historical processes to which it is connected."[5] To see Christianity as multiple assemblages forming and reforming over time means suspending the question of what Christianity *is*, and of reflecting instead on how different Christianity-assemblages work, what they work

2. Brennan Breed, *Nomadic Text: A Theory of Biblical Reception History*, Bloomington, IN 2014, 204.

3. Breed, *Nomadic Text*, 12.

4. Thomas Nail, "What is an Assemblage?", *SubStance* 46:1 (2017), 24.

5. Nail, "What is an Assemblage?", 24.

with, with what other machines do they connect or break away from, what domains are territorialized and de-territorialized. Does Jesus' death stand erect in the midst of these Christianity-assemblages, as the monument that territorializes all Christianities? And if so, how does this figure of death work with its harrowing scream at the end: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34)

With Mark we get the earliest extant descriptions of Jesus' death, which Matthew and Luke drew on for their own Gospels. Here we have one of the slippery points of "origin." There is no attention to Jesus' birth, or any scream that may accompany it, although the Gospel is set off with the shriek of John the Baptist in the wilderness (Mark 1:3). Smith argues that "the way that death comes to be narrated matters for the way such death lives in the world. The way such death, like the death of flesh, nourishes the life of the world." How could we say that this earliest of stories about Jesus' death is narrated and lives on? In his reading of Jesus' death, Stephen D. Moore shows how there could be said to be at least two Messiahs that step out of Mark's Gospel, the suffering Messiah and the triumphant Messiah. Both are assemblages, one is "rough hewn, crudely constructed from a few wooden beams, held together by a few nails" while the other is "the glorified Messiah enthroned in his throne assemblage."[6] While the throne-assemblage that was taken up by Christianized Rome under Constantine could certainly be classed as something of a success, Moore suggests that it is Christ on the cross that has become the "hyperaffective" assemblage for the ages.[7] That is, an assemblage of wood and nails and flesh that has become hugely effective – or rather, affective. Affect arises "in the capacities to act and be acted upon"; it

> is the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension.[8]

Thinking for a moment of Mel Gibson's tortured Christ, and the spectators' "repugnance, the retching" at the blood and body fluids – all the "shit that life withstands"[9] – there is simultaneously a powerful attraction to this

6. Stephen D. Moore, *Gospel Jesuses and Other Nonhumans: Biblical Criticism Post-poststructuralism*, Atlanta, GA 2017, 56.

7. Moore, *Gospel Jesuses*, 56.

8. Melissa Gregg & Gregory J. Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers", in Melissa Gregg & Gregory J. Seigworth (eds), *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham, NC 2010, 1.

9. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, New York 1982, 2–3.

death, a pathos as well as a more mundane appropriation of it. Millions of Christians carry the cross around their necks after all. The capacity of the Jesus-cross-assemblage to become hugely effective "inheres in the fact that it is an affective machine, a generator of affects. Arguably, indeed, it is the most powerful affect generator ever assembled."[10] In other words, the assembling of cross and nails and flesh has continued to produce forces and intensities across time and space. Would not this be a way of understanding the figure of Christ as not "linked to essence, but to what, in principle is its opposite: the event, or even the changeable, the accident"?[11]

Smith writes that "the liberating message of Jesus' death is doomed to only be a story of liberation, never liberation itself." No one can "die the death of another." The social death of the slave, discussed by Smith, cannot be made coherent by Jesus' death, and we cannot "fashion coherence out of biological death." If we take on Moore's point about Mark's Christ-assemblage as an affect generator, though, the deaths of Jesus narrated in the Gospels are not perhaps "only stories" that simply seek to provide coherence. As Smith argues, they cannot offer or guarantee liberation. But to millions of flesh-and-blood people the Jesus-cross-assemblage continues to affect different domains of life in very real ways. It is not necessarily a matter of what Jesus' death means or what its essence is, but what it does and what accidents it accelerates: what does it function *with*, and in connection with what other things does it transmit intensities?[12] Figures like Catherine of Siena (1347–1380) and Francis of Assisi (c. 1181–1226) testified to experiences of Christ's wounds on their own body, or of lapping up the blood of these wounds, while millions of Christians all over the world live according to Paul's dictum that they have been crucified with Christ so that it is not they who live but Christ who lives in them (Galatians 2:20).[13] For Paul, death with Christ is a mode of becoming, becoming-birthed anew in Christ. In the scream of Jesus' death, then, we are returned to the screams of birth: in the beginning were a screaming Mother and a screaming baby, and their screams were with God, and the scream was God. ▲

10. Moore, *Gospel Jesuses*, 47.

11. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon and the Logic of Sensation*, New York 2003, 124.

12. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, New York 2013, 2.

13. Moore, *Gospel Jesuses*, 42.

The Christ under Reconstruction

From the Face to the Celestial Machine

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"Everyone knows Jesus: he is the most painted figure in all of world art, identifiable everywhere," states Joan Taylor in her introduction to the history of Jesus' imagery.[1] The image of Jesus Christ, remaining basically the same from the sixth century onwards, is known from innumerable portraits of an always recognizable face. In this image, the features are notably important and thus universally the same; the almond shaped eyes, the high cheekbones, the slim face. Symbols and attributes are hardly needed to indicate his identity, even in the early portraits from the sixth century one immediately sees who it is.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari draw on this historical fact when suggesting a philosophical consequence of the notion of the face. The face of Christ, they argue, is the face with which we compare all other faces. Moreover, they hold, the Christ image – which has become the face of faces – embodies goodness, whiteness and maleness, inseparably; hence, it is the face of the White Man himself.[2] In other words, to Deleuze and Guattari, the face of Christ is the very basis for the universalization of white maleness. Not only does it instigate this particular ideal, however, but it even serves as a ground for the notion of the human ideal a such. The face grounds the very

1. Joan E. Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like?*, London 2018, 1.

2. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London 1999, 177.

idea of a correlate and its deviation. A face is limiting and excluding, they explain, by always instigating an either-or, this-or-that; man or woman, rich or poor, black or white: "Aha, it's not a man and it's not a woman, so it must be a transvestite!"[3] The either-or, in turn, easily falls into judgment. The face grounds identity and begets a *yes* or *no*, thus, in other words, it forms a ground on which to judge. The binary relation may just as easily mark a tolerance as indicate an enemy to be mowed down at all costs, they hold.

In contrast to the notion of the face, Deleuze and Guattari introduce the notion of *the machine*. A machine, as opposed to a face, does not indicate a singular identity, but points instead to a former multiplicity. The face indicates the one whereas the machine indicates the many pieces brought together in its construction. If the face indicates an origin, a birth, as well as an end, the machine, instead, indicates an ongoing process of creation. Hence, taking Deleuze and Guattari's critique of the face of Christ as a starting point, the present article aims toward an experimental theological exploration. By considering the notion of the cross-event as machine, I attempt, if only briefly in this format, to investigate the possibility of exploring the multiplicity rather than the singular identity of the Christ-notion; the ongoing creative aspect rather than the origin–telos spectrum. In the following, the notion of the cross as machine will be introduced by way of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's machine constructions, and through Russian constructivist thinker and artist Liubov Popova (1889–1924). In other words, we shall set out on a theologically experimental journey, inviting non-theological thinkers to throw new light on a theological dilemma: the exclusive and authoritarian aspects of the Christ figure. Finally, we shall return to the history of Christianity to suggest alternative images of Christ.

Machines and Constructivism

When introducing one of their notions of the machine – *the desiring machines* – in *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari write:

> We live today in the age of partial objects, bricks that have been shattered to bits, and leftovers. We no longer believe in the myth of the existence of fragments that, like pieces of an antique statue, are merely waiting for the last one to be turned up, so that they may all be glued back together to create a unity that is precisely the same as the original unity.[4]

3. Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 177.

4. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London 2004, 45.

The notion of the one Origin is lost, they argue in 1972. The very idea that the past can be recovered, or that identity is singular, is lost to their time. "We no longer believe in a primordial totality that once existed, or in a final totality that awaits us at some future day," they continue. Neither the past nor the future will provide us with a unity that explains it all, nor a point where it all comes together:

> We no longer believe in the dull gray outlines of a dreary, colorless dialectic of evolution, aimed at forming a harmonious whole out of heterogeneous bits by rounding off their rough edges. We believe only in totalities that are peripheral.

That is to say, there may be totalities, systems, theories, or organizations that form a whole, a unity, but their organization is contingent, changeable, and consisting of separate pieces: "And if we discover such a totality alongside various separate parts, it is a whole of these particular parts but does not unify them; rather, it is added to them as a new part fabricated separately."[5] In other words, machines, in Deleuze and Guattari's account, are constructions of separate parts. The construction does not unite the parts but organizes them. The construction as such indicates finally nothing but construction itself, the possibility to construct and construction as immanent action. A machine is not a given, it is a construction; an organization of separate elements. A machine is made up of partial objects, forming a whole out of heterogeneous bits – not because they belong together, not because they were meant for each other, but because creation is possible, construction is possible. Nothing is given but the abstract machine which is the very possibility to construct, and construction as immanent action.

If the image of Jesus has remained largely the same from the sixth century until the present day, then follows, according to Deleuze and Guattari's analysis, that representational identity has been used to denote the kernel of Christian faith during that same period. Throughout art history, however, artists have endeavored to break with the logic of depiction and representation. The very idea that there is a true reality that may be depicted, or that the reality depicted is more real than the reality created on the canvas, have been questioned in different ways through the history of art. One such movement, and one that went further than most in this regard, appeared in Russia in the beginning of the last century. Thinker and artist Liubov Popova was one of the leading figures of the Russian Constructivist art movement, founded around 1913. The movement grew out of Cubism,

5. Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 45–46.

Futurism and Suprematism, but what was unique to the Constructivists was their emphasis on technology and machines, mathematics, measuring tools, geometrical shapes; circles, squares, and triangles. In Popova's artistic vision, construction was to replace representation in art; the notion of depiction should, in her regard, give way to a notion of an ongoing construction. The infinite possibilities to construct out of the very elements of life was at the heart of her artistic endeavor. While their endeavors appear separately, with Popova the critique of representation in Deleuze and Guattari as sketched above turns into a concrete artistic practice. This practice, I will argue, may inspire contemporary theology.

Liubov Popova

Liubov Popova was renowned, an undisputed artistic authority yet her work and thought have not been as scholarly scrutinized as that of colleagues like Vladimir Tatlin (1885–1953) or Alexander Rodchenko (1891–1956), nor discussed in relation to the branches of twentieth-century thought to which it has obvious connections. Her gender is one likely reason for the lack of scholarly attention, but another is the often-described incongruence of her contribution: on the one hand she was a political materialist artist yet on the other hand a spiritual artist inspired by the Russian icon tradition and the platonic spirituality of Suprematism and Rayism. What is regarded as an incongruence from an art historical perspective, however, could be a vantage point from a theological perspective. Consequently, we shall enter her work precisely at the intersection of the materialistic and the spiritual; an intersection that relates to the move beyond representation which she shares with Deleuze and Guattari.[6]

In art history, Popova says, there has been a gradual development away from representation and depiction, leading at one stage to what she describes as the distortion of elements.[7] We can think, for instance, of Picasso's cubist faces where the elements that make up the face are taken apart and put back together, reorganized, thus distorting the face depicted.

But distortion was just a stage, Popova continues. The *distortion* of elements later led to *transformation* of the very understanding of elements: to a transformation of the understanding of that which makes up the object as object – the volume, the color, the lines, the weight, and this is Popova's

6. Svetlana Boym, "From the Russian Soul to Post-Communist Nostalgia", *Representations* 49 (1995), 133.

7. Liubov Popova, "The Question of the New Methodology of Instruction (First Discipline of the Basic Department of the Vkhutemas Painting Faculty)", in Dmitri V. Sarabianov & Natalia L. Adaskina (eds), *Popova*, New York 1990, 376.

own artistic vision.[8] As the director of the Inkhuk in Moscow, she repeatedly argues that elements should no longer be regarded as pieces of an object – pieces that one can take apart and put together slightly differently thus still relating to the original object – but as coincidental parts. In Popova's words:

> The object as such is no longer studied and depicted, only the separate formal elements on which it can be laid out and from which it is composed; only that which defines the concept of the object and not all the elements in order of their existence in the object. The artist has gone from an imagination-depiction of the object to an analysis of the concepts comprising the object's essence.[9]

The parts, in turn, she says, must be researched in the laboratories, or analyzed, scientifically, mathematically so that their functions and utilities appear far beyond the confines of former functions or ideas; beyond any idea limited by habitual thinking, by notions of origin and truth, or limited by earlier styles or artistic ideals.[10] Her artistic vision appears to rest on an assumption: if we are to see the possibilities of the objects, we must liberate the elements from habitual representational thought.

Accordingly, applying Popova's account of representation to the depiction of Jesus, to re-interpret the face of Christ, to "rearrange" it in the sense of depicting it outside the common norms and expectations parallels the cubist endeavor, the cubist distortion. As we have seen, however, to Popova distortion was just a stage on the way to transformation since distortion still related to the object rather than to its comprising elements. Subsequently, interpretational twists in relation to the face of Jesus might momentarily open for new ideas of what *the face of faces* might look like, yet it inevitably evokes the original from which it deviates.

Distortions of the face risk letting the original face, that we know so well, stand forth as precisely that; as the original in relation to which the variety is nothing but an exception from the norm. In line with Popova's constructivist thinking, however, the face of faces should not be distorted but completely transformed by attention paid to the parts of its construction, and to the possibility of construction as such. Before attempting to explore the theological implications of such a statement, let us take a closer look at her work and thought to appreciate what such transformation could entail in an artistic context.

8. Popova, "The Question", 376.

9. Popova, "The Question", 375.

10. Liubov Popova, "On the Construction of New Objective and Nonobjective Forms", in Dmitri V. Sarabianov & Natalia L. Adaskina (eds), *Popova*, New York 1990, 349.

Constructing with Spiritual Material

As director of the Inkhuk, Popova is thinking art anew and society along with it. To her, art is political and the political is material, it is concrete; colours, lines, rulers, passers, and machines. In Popova's papers presented at the art institutes in Moscow (Inkhuk and Vkhutemas) during these years, a far-reaching renewal of the very notion of the material takes place, and in her paintings from this period she transgresses the border between the material and the spiritual. From 1920 onwards, Popova left the vocabulary of the spiritually oriented Suprematist movement for that of the politically oriented Constructivist movement, but her notion of matter was not a simple choice between the political and the mystique, the material and the spiritual.[11] Moreover, and unlike other artistic schools in Russia at the time, despite merging the material and the spiritual, her understanding of matter was not grounded on an idealist account. In her early Painterly Architectonics' period, her treatment of space and planarity, colour and layering resembled that of the Russian icon – which remained a source of inspiration for her.[12] In her late paintings labelled Spatial Force Constructions, the spiritual dimension was still present, yet in this part of her oeuvre, which has been named her "rayic" work, she used rays to materialize – to turn into building material – the cosmic infinity earlier treated by Kazimir Malevich (1878–1935), Natalia Goncharova (1881–1962), and Michail Larionov (1881–1964) in explicitly spiritual terms.

Unlike Malevich's Suprematism and Larionov's and Goncharova's Rayism, however, Popova's lines, or rays, did not aim to capture the ideal truth of reality. Rayism was grounded in a certain metaphysics, in an idea of the inner structure of reality. Malevich's Suprematism, in turn, shared with Wassily Kandinsky's (1866–1944) notion of the "spiritual in art," the "inner necessity," the aspect of being grounded in a platonic idea of the true forms of reality. Contrary to both of these movements, Popova did not aim to achieve reality but to construct reality in accordance with the Constructivists' slogan: "Life-building; not life-knowing."[13] To Popova, the material with which to build life was not, however, stable and lifeless, but rayic, changeable, and flexible. "This is the opportune moment to create," she states at The Institute for Artistic Culture in Moscow in 1921. "Out of the constant old elements – old only because in the end we have only the same concrete matter – a new organization of these elements is created." The loss of origin, the leaving behind of representation, opens the "old" elements

11. Dmitri V. Sarabianov, "Painting", in Dmitri V. Sarabianov & Natalia L. Adaskina (eds), *Popova*, New York 1990, 142.

12. Sarabianov, "Painting", 137.

13. Sarabianov, "Painting", 141.

to the endless possibilities of construction, her reasoning goes, why now is the time to create. As an artist, she described herself as "not an artist," but *a constructor* – a constructor of concepts and elements. To that extent, she was also replaceable. Anyone deeply acquainted with the elements, anyone having entered into the elements, and who had left behind the ideas of representation, of external realities, of styles as theoretical meta-structures and, instead, had studied the elements from within, could do what she did. It was not about artistic ingenuity, not about her own subjective mind.[14] Constructivism was an art of the ruler and the passer, not of the genius artist's hand. The artist was, of course – we must remember again the time, the setting – *a worker*, *an engineer* constructing artistic machines. After 1921, the constructivists consequently officially rejected easel painting. Art, they said, was no longer for canvases and galleries but for life, for the people. Artists like themselves, who were acquainted with the immanence of the elements, who could construct reality anew and from within should do so in order to serve utility, to serve the requirements of everyday life; constructing stoves, clothes, and kitchen things. Even after the official rejection of easel painting, however, Popova herself kept painting and whether a coincidence or not this inconsistency corresponds to another paradoxical aspect of her work and thought: repeatedly she pronounces the new, while simultaneously underlining that while all is new, nothing ever is. Opening one of her lectures at The Higher State Art-Technical Studios she articulates the paradox: "Now what? What's next? That is the eternal question."

Popova never lived to encounter the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari but the emphasis on construction as a constant becoming beyond the logic of representation is an assumption shared among the three. The constructivist ideas were also spread in Europe in the early and mid-twentieth century.[15] In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari describe what they call *the abstract machine*: "The abstract machine does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality." The abstract machine, to them, is the very unfolding of complexity, a blooming of multiplicity inseparable from life which, in turn, resembles Popova's visionary account of construction.

To use Popova as a source of inspiration for political theology is at once questionable and important. For several reasons, but for one reason in particular: she was a key voice in the Russian Avant-Garde and thus supported the Russian revolution. She wanted the revolution and was initially happy

14. Briony Fer, "What's in a Line? Gender and Modernity", *Oxford Art Journal* 13:1 (1990), 87.

15. The breadth of the movement is depicted in Barrett Watten, *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics*, Middletown, CT 2003.

for it, she believed in it. She never lived to see the terrible consequences, however, as she died of scarlet fever in 1924. Artists like her later had to flee from Russia, as nonobjective art was banned in 1932. Yet we cannot know for sure that her ideas would have made a difference – there is no vaccine against totalitarianism. She supported the people's revolt against the establishment and the people succeeded, but they ended up with a more totalitarian regime than the one they had left behind. It is vital to keep the result in mind, and to digest their ideas, since Popova's time resembles ours as a time of in-between, where old authorities are weakened, questioned, and the political scene is changing and open for change. Popova was desperate for new political solutions, for a vision for the future and, from her artistic perspective, she suggested a way forward: a humble approach to the elements of reality in order to take part in the ongoing construction of the world, and to explore yet unseen possibilities of the materials.

Aware of the seeds of totalitarianism that may be detected in the constructivist thought, yet with an openness to rethink contemporary notions of Christ, what could theology bring from this artistic trajectory? What could be brought from Deleuze and Guattari's critique of the imagery of Jesus' face? A theology that would invite the critique of representation in Popova and in Deleuze and Guattari could, possibly, draw close to a contemporary form of iconoclasm with a constructive aim. Together with Deleuze and Guattari, as above, it would note the limits of depiction and the normative boundaries it sets up; with Popova, it would note the possibility to construct out of old elements, yet beyond habitual objectives. In the final section of this article, I will take these insights into regard and consider imagery from the Christian theological tradition that, contrary to the image of Jesus' face, could open theology to the notion of an ongoing construction.

The Celestial Machine

According to Giorgio Agamben, the notion of the machine is not new to Christian theology; it was used in early Christianity to designate the cross-event. Pseudo-Athanasius and Ignatius of Antioch (35–108), he argues, used the notion of the machine or *the celestial machine* to describe the cross, the cross as a machine.[16] The expression refers to the ancient machine, *mechane*, that gave us the word machine as such, which was a construction at the Greek theatre, a wooden arm that lifted a god onto the stage. The *mechane* lifted the god or god-actor up from behind the scene, lowered him or her in the actors' midst and then, after the plot was changed by the divine presence

16. Giorgio Agamben, *The Mystery of Evil: Benedict XVI and the End of Days*, Stanford, CA 2017, 32.

the *mechane* lifted god back up again, off the stage until the next performance. The expression *deus ex machina* refers to this machine – the expression used in literature and filmmaking to designate the unexpected rescuer, the saviour suddenly placed in the hopeless reality of the main characters. *Deus ex machina* – "god from the machine" – from the Greek *mechane* is also referred to as *the celestial machine*. According to Agamben, the celestial machine, in turn, with its connotations to the Greek theatre construction, was brought into early Christian theology as a reference to 1 Cor. 4:9: "We have become a theater for the world, of angels and human beings."[17] I am not suggesting that the early uses of machine imagery in Christianity carry the same meaning as expressed above, but I will suggest that it makes a difference if Christ is a face or if Christ is a machine – if the kernel of Christianity is described through figurative depiction or through mechanical imagery.

First, if the cross-event is a machine – a celestial machine – rather than a face, then the cross-event, Christ as event, becomes action rather than identity. The cross-event as celestial machine is what it does – constantly moving, stuck in its repetitious motion, persistently repeating its motion of sinking/rising, dying/resurrecting through history, liturgy, theological analysis, and art, as well as through collective and individual experiences of faith. Hence, the repetition of the cross-event also becomes a repetition of difference. Not a repetition of the original event connected to the one recognizable identity, but a perpetual event recognizable through its action, its motion. Moreover, following Popova, we as *theology-mechanics* or *theology-constructors*, may take part in constructing. We may take part and take apart; deconstruct the theological constructions, piece by piece; analyze them in the laboratories: what is *to die*, *to sink*, *to rise*, *to live*, if we take one plug, one plank at the time? What is to sink if detached from the possibility of rising, what is to rise detached from the possibility of sinking? What is *to live* without *to die*? What is to repeat without death, without the end of repetition? What is movement? What is movement without height and depth? Then, to reconstruct, to nail movement onto dying, to hammer rising onto repeating, to glue living onto sinking. Perhaps also to dig deep among the old elements and unveil fragments of constructivism in the Christian past, as with the ancient Christian symbol of the wheel, earlier than the face as discussed above, from the time when the depiction of a face was not only limiting but possibly even blasphemous. The Greek letters of *Ichtys* are brought together constructing a wheel of the separate parts, with the cross at its centre as one element among several.

17. Agamben, *The Mystery of Evil*, 32.

Inspired by the critique of representation developed outside the theological sphere in the twentieth century, we may unearth related notions in the history of theology where the discussion of the possibility to depict the divine has been an ongoing debate. Here, I merely suggest two such notions but there are more to be uncovered or constructed. Whether it begets a transformation or merely a distortion, I believe that experimenting with the notions of theology as a constructivist practice and the cross as a *celestial machine* does open new spaces for theological thought. Through the notion of the cross as a die-and-live-again-machine, forever repeating death-and-life, forever killing God, forever reviving God in this world; a repetitious death and resurrection repeated in infinite varieties in theology, art, music, film, and church life, Christ stands forth as an immanent and concrete movement with incalculable implications.

If there is no origin, however, no original identity in the sense of a norm in relation to which expressions vary, are there no limits? Is not reality as machine, Christianity as machine, open to anything? Well, a quick look around the contemporary political reality with its many different Christian alliances within the political right as well as the political left suggests that the Christianity machine is more complex and multifaceted than the different fractions often acknowledge. There is, as stated above, no vaccine against totalitarianism; it may grow in Christian theology, in communism, constructivism, trumpism, and deleuzianism, but *if* that is where an experimental theology beyond representation would end up, it would be because it had forgotten the only principle we have encountered in this thinking thus far. There is a principle shared by Popova and Deleuze and Guattari: Construction is the only given. The process of constructing, or of becoming, is the given, not the representations that aim to reveal the one identity. Hence, if we are to take part in such a theological construction we must acquire a deep humility in relation to construction as such, to its endless possibilities, and, Popova would add, in relation to the elements. A deep acquaintance with what constitutes us, our space, volume, color, weight, as well as the fragments of knowledge, the bits of world, historical, political, and theological leftovers that make up our thinking. For us, as theology-constructors, the material with which to work are the texts, the liturgy, the dogma, the history, the experiences, the narratives, and the elements they comprise. While construction is endless and the material changes through history, the theological building material nonetheless marks the limits of our theological constructions in each time. Hence, only with a deep and humble acquaintance can we truly begin to reorganize the fragments, while they,

of course, also reorganize us, whatever we were, reorganize our mechanic appearances and performances. ▲

SUMMARY

Starting in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's critique of the image of the face of Christ, the article experimentally explores the notion of the cross-event as machine. Through an encounter between Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the abstract machine and Russian avant-garde artist and thinker Liubov Popova's notion of construction, the article explores the multiplicity rather than the singular identity of the Christ-notion; the ongoing creative aspect rather than the origin–telos spectrum. Thus, the article invites non-theological thinkers to throw new light on a theological dilemma: the exclusive and authoritarian aspects of the Christ figure. Finally, alternative images of Christ to be found in the history of Christianity are suggested.

Reconstruction Deconstructed

A Response to Petra Carlsson

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The aim of her article, Petra Carlsson tells us, is to "suggest alternative images of Christ." She wishes to "regard and consider imagery from the Christian theological tradition that, contrary to the image of Jesus' face, could open theology to the notion of an ongoing construction." Hence, her focus is the depiction of Christ, but the depiction of Christ as symptomatic of a theological position.

The article starts off with a consideration of Christ's face, its pictorial rendition, but moves from this, via the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, to a consideration of faciality. "The face," we are told, "grounds the very idea of a correlate and its deviation." Further on: "The face grounds identity."

Point being: The face of Christ is symptomatic of a theology of (Platonic) truth.[1] Christ is a clear-cut figure, with a clear-cut message, that clear-cuts the world ("The face grounds identity [...] it forms a ground on which to judge"). The face of Christ, as Carlsson makes it out, anchors a metatheological position that sees theology as a harbinger of an idea that is fixed and final and forever the same. A Platonic idea, of sorts.

She then goes on to contrast the concept of a face with the concept of

1. Carlsson: "If the image of Jesus has remained largely the same from the sixth century until the present day, then follows, according to Deleuze and Guattari's analysis, that representational identity has been used to denote the kernel of Christian faith during that same period."

machine: "A machine, as opposed to a face, does not indicate a singular identity, but points instead to a former multiplicity." In other words, identity *versus* multiplicity. The clear-cut figure, with the clear-cut message, contra *the construction*, the assembled Christ (Deleuze *versus* Plato).

At the same time, another shift occurs. Alongside the shift from face to machine, Carlsson shifts from face to cross:

> Hence, taking Deleuze and Guattari's critique of the face of Christ as a starting point, the present article aims toward an experimental theological exploration. By considering the notion of the cross-event as machine, I attempt, if only briefly in this format, to investigate the possibility of exploring the multiplicity rather than the singular identity of the Christ-notion; the ongoing creative aspect rather than the origin-telos spectrum.

The idea Carlsson pursues, therefore, is not related to *the image* of Christ in terms of depiction – though it may seem that way – but, rather, the image in terms of symbolization (face/cross), and how that symbolization encodes and anchors a metatheological view.

It is important to note this, because after the above explained clarifications, Carlsson goes on to a consideration of construction *versus* depiction. Building upon the Russian painter Liubov Popova's (1889–1924) theory of art, Carlsson argues that depiction has been challenged and contested from within art itself. Artists have wanted to free themselves from unnecessary constraints. The ideal of representationality has come to be viewed as an unnecessary inhibition. Why depict and represent, when one can *create*? Art, Popova argues, should be "life-building; not life-knowing." (Note the Marxist undertones in this, just see Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*.[2])

There is a radical vision in Popova, a sort of self-conscious radical vision. She believes painting is impossible without a fundamental openness to what is to come, without continual deconstruction and reconstruction. As Carlsson quotes her: "Now what? What's next? That is the eternal question." There is no endgame to art, no grand, final conclusions, no Hegelian crescendo. Art is marked by a blind striving toward continual creation, toward construction and the free play of its elements. A logic thwarted by the always identical depiction of Christ.

So, what if, Carlsson asks, if we, as theologians, take our cue from Popova? What would happen if we "rethink contemporary notions of Christ,

2. "Theses on Feuerbach", in Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, Moscow 1969, 13–15.

what could theology bring from this artistic trajectory?" Put another way, what happens if we no longer view the image of Christ in terms of depiction, but rather as a *machine*? A funny thing happens. The machine is namely already in place at the heart of theology. The word "machine" comes from the Greek *mechane*, denoting the contraption (the construction) used to lift gods unto the stage in Greek tragic plays. The use of this machine is tantamount to what we know as the plot device: *deus ex machina,* where the abrupt appearance of something extraordinary solves the unsolvable.

Associatively speaking, it is a short jump from the idea of a contraption lifting a god unto the stage and the cross – lifting Christ unto the stage of death and resurrection. And "if the cross-event is a machine – a celestial machine – rather than a face, then the cross-event, Christ as event, becomes action rather than identity."

This approach to Christ allows us to see theology in a new light, or this is what Carlsson suggests. The approach allows us to see theology *machinically*. To think of Christ – and to think of *the thought* of Christ, the image or symbolization – as a machine, as something that whirrs and hums and operates and moves:

> Through the notion of the cross as a die-and-live-again-machine, forever repeating death-and-life, forever killing God, forever reviving God in this world; a repetitious death and resurrection repeated in infinite varieties in theology, art, music, film, and church life, Christ stands forth as an immanent and concrete movement with incalculable implications.

Moreover, as something that is constructed, built through the combination of bits and pieces, it is an assemblage, and not something that *re*-presents. The position Carlsson describes reminds of what Samuel Beckett (1906–1989) wrote about James Joyce's (1882–1941) *Ulysses*: "His writing is not *about* something, *it is that something itself*."[3] The machinic Christ is not about something, it is something.

Metatheologically, this forces us to reflect upon the nature of this machine that we construct: What is included in our cross-event? How do we build it? What does it do?

If anything, these latter questions seem to be the heart of what Carlsson is getting at in her article: "Hence, if we are to take part in such a theological construction we must acquire a deep humility in relation to construction as

3. "Dante... Bruno. Vico... Joyce", in Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellanous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, New York 1984, 27.

such, to its endless possibilities, and, Popova would add, in relation to the elements."

Though undoubtedly bold and experimental, or precisely because it is bold and experimental, Carlsson's article leaves me with some unanswered questions: What, for example, motivates the shift from Christ's face to the cross? What in the concept of the machine, other than the associative leap through the *mechane*, is it that connects the machine to the cross more than the face? Cannot the face be a machine? What, exactly, *is* a machine? How, exactly, is the machinic instantiated in Christ, or the image of Christ? Put differently, what, exactly, is it that the Christ-machine *does*? Bring us hope? Well, no, not in Carlsson's model, seeing it as if the Christ-machine is wholly immanent, there is nothing to hope *for*. And if we, metatheologically, approach theology as a wholly immanent, open-ended endeavor, as Popova does art, what is the point? To unlock something continually new? Why? What is the value of novelty? What is the value of reconstruction? ▲

A Germ of Tranquil Atheism

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Introduction

The Lund conference on *The Event of Jesus' Death and the Birth of Christianity*, at which an early draft of this article was presented, was announced by posters that prominently displayed the following quote from Gilles Deleuze's (1925–1995) *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*:

> For Christianity subjected the form, or rather the Figure, to a fundamental deformation. Insofar as God was incarnated, crucified, ascended to heaven, and so on, the form or the Figure was no longer rigorously linked to essence, but to what, in principle, is its opposite: the event, or even the changeable, the accident.[1]

I begin by widening the frame and observing the context within which this quote occurs. This reframing, I will argue, provides a new perspective on the theme, a perspective that encourages us to playfully invert (or, Deleuze might say, to pervert) it: the birth of "Christ" and the death of "Christianity." I borrowed my title for this article from the sentence that immediately follows the one cited in the quotation from Deleuze above: "Christianity contains *a germ of tranquil atheism* that will nurture painting; the painter can easily be indifferent to the religious subject he is asked to represent" (my

1. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, New York 2005, 124.

italics). Deleuze begins the paragraph that follows these lines by emphasizing that he "only took Christianity as a first point of reference that it would be necessary to look beyond."

Looking beyond. This, for Deleuze, is the only point in referring to Christianity. Instead of remaining transfixed by the image of a crucified (or resurrected) Jesus, or any other religious Figure for that matter, constantly trying to reinterpret the privileged Icons of one's in-group in light of the latest scientific findings and philosophical fashions, as liberal theologians are so often wont to do, we can (to use Deleuzian terminology) take Christian traditions and other monotheistic molarities seriously enough to extract the atheist machine they contain (and constrain) and then look beyond them, extending the lines of flight opened up by their molecularization.

This article takes three steps. First, I highlight the significance of the event of Christianity for Deleuze, which has almost nothing to do with Jesus' death (or life, or message, or resurrection), and almost everything to do with the secretion of atheism. Second, I explain how Deleuze's critique of the repressive and oppressive mechanisms of Christianity (the poster child for the Despotic machine) and of the symbol of Christ (the poster child for the White Face) can be complemented and strengthened by insights from the bio-cultural sciences of religion. The notion of "Christ" was *born* in human minds and *borne* in human cultures in the same basic way that every other supernatural agent imaginatively engaged in rituals by a religious in-group has been conceived and nurtured throughout history.

Third, like all such assemblages held together by shared belief in imagined punitive gods, Christianity, along with its obsession with the religious Figure of Christ, will eventually die – either sooner (if we take demographic projections seriously) or later (if we take astronomical projections seriously). The question, then, is whether we can be worthy of *that* event: the death of Christianity, whose timely demise, ironically, is hurried along by that "germ of tranquil atheism" that it could not help but secrete.

Deleuze and the Secretion of Atheism

I have written on these themes in more detail elsewhere,[2] so here I will set out the main points briefly. When I was a Christian theologian, all those many years ago, and first encountered the work of Gilles Deleuze, I tried

2. F. LeRon Shults, *Iconoclastic Theology: Gilles Deleuze and the Secretion of Atheism*, Edinburgh 2014; F. LeRon Shults, *Theology after the Birth of God: Atheist Conceptions in Cognition and Culture*, New York 2014; F. LeRon Shults, "How to Survive the Anthropocene: Adaptive Atheism and the Evolution of Homo Deiparensis", *Religions* 6 (2015), 1–18; F. LeRon Shults, "The Atheist Machine", in F. LeRon Shults & Lindsay Powell-Jones (eds), *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Religion*, London 2016, 163–192; F. LeRon Shults, *Practicing Safe Sects: Religious Reproduction in Scientific and Philosophical Perspective*, Leiden 2018.

to do what (relatively liberal) Christian theologians have always done with non-Christian philosophers whom they find fascinating: borrow insights from his corpus that could be adopted and adapted to fit into – or "re-form" – the version of Christianity maintained in the social networks within which I found myself (American evangelicalism).[3]

The more I read Deleuze, however, the more I realized that the atheist force of his philosophy cannot be so easily tamed. It resists the domestication of sacerdotal theology. It breaks transcendent Images that shackle thought. It escapes the priestly curse on desire. Or, at least, it motivated me to do so. I became or, better, I am becoming atheist. After decades of experience as a Christian theologian, I am not so naïve as to think that my erstwhile colleagues will (soon) stop borrowing from Deleuze as they try to find ways to postpone the death of Christianity. My goal in this section is far less ambitious. I simply want to point out that this sort of attempt at the apologetic absorption of Deleuzian concepts into Christianity is self-defeating: those concepts were created in order to release the germs of tranquil atheism contained with religion. Some of the most interesting inventions in the Deleuzian corpus are explicitly linked to atheism. Here I offer just a few examples to support this contention.

In the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project with Félix Guattari (1930–1992), Deleuze made it clear that the goal of schizoanalysis is to challenge the striations and segmentations of the socius effected by priestly figures, whether psychoanalytic or religious. Escaping Oedipus, they argued, involves attaining "those regions of an auto-production of the unconscious where the unconscious is no less atheist than orphan – immediately atheist, immediately orphan."[4] For the schizoanalyst, the unconscious is not mediated by Oedipus or Christ (or any other religious Figure): it is *immediately* orphan *and* atheist. Atheism and schizoanalysis cannot be separated. "For the unconscious of schizoanalysis is unaware of persons, aggregates, and laws, and of images, structures, and symbols. It is an orphan, just as it is an anarchist and an *atheist.*"[5] In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they observed that "nomads do not provide a favorable terrain for religion; the man of war is always committing an offense against the priest or the god. [...] The nomads have a sense of the absolute, but a singularly *atheistic* one."[6]

3. F. LeRon Shults, "De-Oedipalizing Theology: Desire, Difference, and Deleuze", in F. LeRon Shults & Jan-Olav Henriksen (eds), *Saving Desire: The Seduction of Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI 2011, 73–104.

4. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, New York 2004, 65–66.

5. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis, MN 1983, 342.

6. Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 422.

In *What is Philosophy?,* also co-authored with Guattari, Deleuze argued that "there is always an atheism to be extracted from religion." In fact, Christianity is singled out as that religion that *secretes atheism* "more than any other religion."[7] However, Deleuze and Guattari explicitly separate *all* religion from philosophy, art, and science. The latter three "cast planes over the chaos. [They] want us to tear open the firmament and plunge into the chaos. We defeat it only at this price."[8] Each of these "daughters" of chaos struggles with the latter in its own way, "bringing back" varieties (art), variables (science), or variations (philosophy).

The efforts of all three of these "disciplines" (which Deleuze and Guattari explicitly oppose to the efforts of "religion") are always and already bound up in the struggle against *opinion* – especially opinions woven into sacred canopies defended by religious hierarchies.

> Wherever there is transcendence, vertical Being, imperial State in the sky or on earth, there is *religion*; and there is Philosophy only where there is immanence [...] only friends can set out a plane of immanence as *a ground from which idols have been cleared.*[9]

Deleuze and Guattari express astonishment that so many philosophers still find the death of God tragic. "Atheism," they insist, "is not a drama but the philosopher's *serenity* and philosophy's *achievement.*" For them, however, the dissolution of God is not a problem. "Problems begin only afterward, when the *atheism* of the concept has been attained."[10] Why, then, would they continue to devote attention to religious ideas, such as concepts of God within monotheisms like Christianity? Of course, engaging such repressive representations critically is valuable in and of itself. In another context, however, Deleuze suggests a deeper motivation for poking around religious and theological edifices. "Religions," he argues, "are worth much less than the nobility and the courage of the *atheisms that they inspire.*"[11]

Already in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze insisted that we should not judge the atheist from the point of view of the belief that supposedly drives him, but rather judge the believer "by the *violent atheist* by which he is inhabited, the *Antichrist* eternally given 'once and for all' within

7. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, New York 1996, 92. My italics.

8. Deleuze & Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 202.

9. Deleuze & Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 43. My italics.

10. Deleuze & Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 92. My italics.

11. Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975–1995*, New York 2007, 364.

grace."[12] In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze insists that there has only ever been one ethics, the *amor fati* of the humor-actor who is "an anti-God (*contra-dieu*)" – the Stoic sage who "belongs to the Aion" and opposes the "divine present of Chronos."[13] This link between philosophy and atheism will come as no surprise to those familiar with Deleuze's earlier single-authored philosophical portraits, in which he consistently hammered away at religious ressentiment and traditional notions of God, and celebrated the atheistic effects of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), David Hume (1711–1776), and even Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).

Atheism is in fact being secreted and spread throughout the globe, especially in the West, where the intellectual plausibility and political dominance of Christianity continues to be undermined as naturalistic explanations of the world and secular inscriptions of society grow in popularity. Demographic projections, mathematical modeling, and computer simulations predict that non-religious worldviews will continue to expand in the human population,[14] at least in contexts where people have access to education and governments provide a basic sense of existential security. But what does any of this have to do with Jesus? This brings us to the next stage of the argument.

How Christ Was Born(e)

The main focus of the conference that generated the articles in this special issue was on the death of Jesus and the role it may have played in the emergence of the Christian religion. To be more precise: how did reflection on the trauma of this event shape the formation of the early followers of Jesus into a recognizable religious sect? Even if I were convinced that a man called Jesus of Nazareth was crucified in a way that resembled one of the (contradictory) Gospel narratives (even after elements such as dead people wandering around Jerusalem had been excised by scholarly biblical criti-

12. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, revised ed., New York 1995, 96.

13. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, New York 2004, 170–171.

14. Pew Research Center, "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010–2050", http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/, accessed 2018-07-11; Jean M. Twenge et al., "Generational and Time Period Differences in American Adolescents' Religious Orientation, 1966–2014", *PLOS ONE* 10:5 (2015), 1–17; Barry A. Kosmin & Ariela Keysar, "Religious, Spiritual and Secular: The Emergence of Three Distinct Worldviews among American College Students", *American Religious Identification Survey*, Hartford, CT 2013; John Stinespring & Ryan T. Cragun, "Simple Markov Model for Estimating the Growth of Nonreligion in the United States", *Science, Religion and Culture* 2:3 (2015), 96–103; Ross Gore et al., "Forecasting Changes in Religiosity and Existential Security with an Agent-Based Model", *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation* 21 (2018), 1–31; F. LeRon Shults et al., "Why Do the Godless Prosper? Modeling the Cognitive and Coalitional Mechanisms That Promote Atheism", *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, forthcoming.

cism), I would have no reason to think this event had any more metaphysical significance than the death of other members of our species. I leave it to scholars of the late second Temple period and the New Testament to debate the extent to which stories about the *death* of "Jesus" may have impacted the earliest (Pauline) followers of the Way.

Instead I focus here on the *conception* of "Christ," which arguably played a far more dominant role in the construction of early Christianity. The key, in my view, is understanding how this notion was *born* in the minds of early followers of Paul and other apostles, and how it was *borne* in the rituals and devotional behaviours that came to characterize diverse expressions of this religious sect. "Christ" was born(e) in the same basic way that all other supernatural agent conceptions are engendered and sustained: as a result of the natural deliverances of cognitive and coalitional biases that once provided a survival advantage to (some) hominids in an early human ancestral environment, biases that have been passed on to us.[15]

From the point of view of scholars who study religion using empirical data and theoretical frameworks in fields like cognitive science, evolutionary biology, archaeology, experimental psychology, and cultural anthropology, the conception of "Christ" is just the sort of counter-intuitive or ontologically-confused idea that one would expect to find widely shared among members of a newly formed religious in-group.

First, research in the bio-cultural sciences of religion suggests that supernatural agent conceptions are *born* in human minds as the result of evolved hyper-active *cognitive* mechanisms that are part of our phylogenetic inheritance. Although the tendency to over-detect human-like agents regularly leads to mistaken perceptions, such as seeing faces in the clouds, it would have been naturally selected in the upper Paleolithic environment of our African ancestors because it would have given survival advantage to those who, when confronted by an ambiguous pattern or movement in the forest, immediately jumped at the guess "hidden agent." Those who lazily guessed "just the wind" when it was really a predator (or a prey) would have been more likely to be eaten (or failed to eat). Notions of hard-to-detect, disembodied intentional forces lurking around are relatively easily and naturally conceived in the human mind.

When it comes to *raising* gods, however, it takes a village. Second, then, we also need to recognize that supernatural agent conceptions are *borne* in human groups as a result of evolved hyper-active *coalitional* mechanisms that are also part of our phylogenetic (and cultural) inheritance. Ideas about

15. For a fuller exposition of the scientific research that supports the following claims, see Shults, *Practicing Safe Sects*.

gods multiply like rabbits in the human Imaginarium, reproducing rapidly in fertile cognitive fields cultivated by participation in religious rituals. But only some of these ideas have been domesticated and bred across generations; the most easily reproduced god conceptions are typically those that somehow facilitate a rigid protection of in-group norms among those engaged in religious sects.

If the members of a coalition really believe that there are disembodied punitive agents around who are watching out for cheaters, freeloaders, or potential defectors, they are more likely to cooperate and stay committed to the norms of the group. These sorts of beliefs are reinforced by regular participation in emotionally arousing rituals that involve synchronic and causally opaque movements, and allegedly provide a way of engaging or manipulating such mysterious agents (e.g., ancestor-ghosts or the spirit of a deceased savior). Groups whose members continuously shared in this kind of ritual would have been more likely to cooperate and hold together in the upper Paleolithic, and so better able to out-compete groups that could not "bear" gods.

Supernatural agents who are cared for and ritually engaged within a coalition then become easy imaginative targets for the easily triggered agency detection mechanisms of each new generation. In the environment of our early ancestors the selective advantage went to hominids whose cognitive capacities led them to quickly *infer* the presence of hidden (possibly punitive) agents and to strongly *prefer* the parochial norms monitored by the supernatural authorities of their coalition, especially when they felt confused or threatened. The early followers of the Way, evolved hominids like the rest of us, felt extremely confused by the death of a man whom the leaders of their sect took to be supernaturally sanctioned, and extremely threatened by ridicule and persecution from all sides.

Jesus Christ. Yes, he is just the type of supernatural agent that one would expect to find born(e) within the mental and social space of a religious coalition under this sort of pressure. Within two or three decades after his death, stories about the birth, ministry, and resurrection of "the Christ" emerged in which Jesus was portrayed in very much the same way as other gods are portrayed: contingently-embodied (walking through walls, walking on water, ascending to the clouds) and morally-concerned about the behaviour of the members of the group (watching, preparing, coming soon to judge, and so on). Such conceptions are easy to remember and transmit from one generation to another – as long as they are reinforced by rituals that consistently motivate coalition members to manifest costly signals of their commitment to the in-group.

And this is exactly what we find in the ritual commonly called the "Eucharist." Paul's warnings to the Corinthians about their practice of the "Lord's Supper" are illuminative in this regard (1 Cor. 11:17–32). He is not surprised at the factions among them, since such conflict is necessary to determine who among them is "genuine." Participation in the ritual is a proclamation of "the Lord's death until he comes." However, Paul admonishes them for not examining themselves adequately before participating, and insists that they are eating and drinking "judgment against themselves." "For this reason," he argues, "many of you are weak and ill, and some have died." Paul concludes: "if we judged ourselves we would not be judged, but when we are judged by the Lord we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world."

In other words, early Christians were warned that their weakness and illness were caused by their failure to detect the real presence of a judgmental supernatural agent who was returning soon to reveal who was genuinely part of the in-group and who would be eternally condemned. Although it promotes anxious self-judgment and antipathy toward out-groups, this is just the sort of ritual that holds a new religious movement together.

And so the birth of "Christ" helps to explain the emergence of Christianity, just as the regular arrival of new claims to have (re)discovered the "correct" understanding of this supposedly transcendent religious Figure helps to explain the fragmentation of Christianity throughout church history. As long as some groups of *Homo sapiens* continue to imaginatively engage in shared ritual interactions that they interpret as mediating some relationship with a supernatural agent associated with one of these fragmented traditions, "Christianity" will survive.

How Christianity Will Die

All religions eventually die. No one takes Baal or Zeus seriously anymore. Of course, there may well be a new religious movement whose recent emergence I have missed, whose members are devoted to supernatural agents they call "Baal" or "Zeus," but it is highly unlikely they engage them using the same sort of animal sacrifices common among the ancient Canaanites or the ancient Greeks. Most of the manifold expressions of the Christian tradition over the centuries have also died, and those that remain continually reinvent themselves to survive. Eventually all forms of Christianity will die. What would it mean to become worthy of *this* event – the death of Christianity?

But, first, let us back up and clarify how and why this religion (among others) is already dying, at least in the West, and what this has to do with

the "germ of tranquil atheism" that Deleuze perceived as secreting from Christianity. As I have argued elsewhere,[16] the emergence of *theology* in the wake of the axial age (800–200 BCE) introduced a conceptual (and political) crack out of which atheism could grow and eventually thrive. For most of human history supernatural agents were typically imagined as finite in knowledge and power, and with relatively provincial interests (e.g., animal spirits, ancestor-ghosts, and war gods). For most of human history, supernatural rituals were typically performed only within relatively small groups, and had relatively provincial purposes (e.g., mediating the group's success in hunting, child-raising, and battle).

During the first millennium BCE, however, a new sort of god-concept was born in the minds of intellectual and priestly elites within the largest and most complex literate states across east, south, and west Asia: an all-encompassing Supernatural Agency whose influence was universal and in relation to whom all behaviour was punished (or rewarded). The most common ideas about an ultimate Reality that emerged in east and south Asia during this period did not explicitly (or unambiguously) involve the attribution of anthropomorphic agency to an infinite Force. Dao and Dharma, for example, were typically portrayed as morally relevant for all human beings, but most Chinese and Indian religious scholars seriously questioned whether such Realities should be primarily conceived as person-like and coalition-favoring.

The priestly and theological elite of the monotheistic religions that flowed out of the *west* Asian axial age, on the other hand, were far more willing to make this sort of attribution. Insofar as they took seriously the narratives of their holy texts, as well as the lived experience of the religious communities to which they belonged, they affirmed that the gods they worshiped and feared were hidden agents who favored their own coalitions, and who were capable of meting out temporal punishments (or rewards). All of this was easily born(e) by the evolved cognitive and coalitional biases discussed above. However, most theologians in these Abrahamic (or Adamic) traditions have also wanted to claim that the Supernatural Agent of their ingroup is the one true "God" upon whom all of creation is wholly dependent. It has been revealed in holy texts curated by their Group that there is an invisible Person with *infinite* knowledge and power who is concerned about the punishment (or reward) of everyone for all *eternity*.

This idea of "God" was tentatively born(e) in the minds of theologians who pressed the anthropomorphic and ethnocentric biases (described above) as far as they would go – but this turned out to be too far. If God is

16. Shults, "The Atheist Machine".

so transcendent that he cannot even be represented, then he cannot be conceived (or perceived) as a human-like agent (or anything else). If God eternally fore-knows and pre-ordains everything, then it is hard to understand the point of praying to or ritually engaging him. Throughout the centuries, monotheistic theologians have worked hard to defend hypotheses about the existential conditions for human life that utilize symbols (or Icons) of the divine that try to uphold both the infinite transcendence of God and his immanence within (or to) a finite world.

As readers of this journal will know, the concept of Christ as the Logos (Image, Son, Face, and so on) of God was intended to solve this dilemma, but this led to interminable debates among philosophical factions within the church, and an increasing chasm between lay piety toward Jesus and "theologically correct" notions of an infinite Son of God.[17] I suggest that the "germ of tranquil atheism" within Christianity is perhaps best expressed in the impossible task of trying to *represent* "Christ" in doctrine – as well as in painting – in such a way that he is supposed to depict both the essence of an infinite Father in the quodlibetal arguments of theologians, while simultaneously being "besieged, even replaced"[18] by accidents in ways that can be identified within the quotidian life of the Oedipalized laity.

The problem (for priests and theologians invested in keeping their in-group's religious doctrines and rituals alive) is that the evolved cognitive tendency to detect hidden finite supernatural agents crumples under the pressure of trying to think an infinite intentional Entity. The evolved coalitional biases for protecting in-groups sustained by idiosyncratic religious rituals implode (or explode) under the stress of trying to live together in complex literate states.

It is not hard to understand why and how atheism could emerge (albeit rarely, slowly, and tentatively) as a more attractive option as monotheism took over within large-scale, pluralistic societies. Strangers living around me have very different views about other gods, whom they appear to think care primarily about their own in-groups. These groups try to explain the natural world in superstitious ways that make no sense to me, and to regulate the social world in segregative ways that make it difficult for me and those I love. Moreover, abstract descriptions of the Divine defended by rabbis, priests, and imams seem to have little direct relevance for daily life.

Perhaps we can make sense of the world and act sensibly in society without God – or any other finite supernatural agents preferred by other religious sects. So the atheist machine was born(e), opening up lines of flight that

17. For an analysis, see Shults, *Iconoclastic Theology*.

18. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 101.

were previously unimaginable. As more and more minds and cultures were freed of god-bearing cognitive and coalitional biases, atheist machinic assemblages have expanded within mental and social spaces previously dominated by the despotic machines of Abrahamic monotheism.

In the contemporary West (and the online global village), atheism is rapidly secreting. The secret is out: none of the (contradictory) supernatural ideas proposed by competing religions are necessary for interpreting nature and none of the (contradictory) supernatural norms authorized by their holy texts are needed for organizing the social field. Segregative inscriptions of the latter based on superstitious beliefs about punitive (or otherwise axiologically relevant) gods are becoming more and more problematic in our pluralistic, globalizing context. A growing number of people, especially young people, are finding it increasingly easy to evaluate explanatory hypotheses and normative proposals without the need for supernatural agents as causal powers or moral regulators.

In other words, the secretion of atheism (from Christianity and other religions) has facilitated the production of *naturalism* and *secularism*. These god-dissolving forces help people challenge the evolved god-bearing biases discussed above. They learn to solve problems related to initially confusing natural phenomena through critical reflection and the scientific method. They learn to resolve problems related to initially frightening social phenomena by constructing and maintaining non-religious legislative and judicial institutions. They learn to lay out plan(e)s of immanence within socio-ecological niches in which survival no longer depends on the detection and protection of the gods of any particular in-group.

In such contexts, day by day, Christianity dies a thousand little deaths. Theologians with expertise in the anatomy of this moribund monotheism have at least two options. They can struggle to keep (some version of) it on life support by constantly repairing or replacing its exhausted despotic religious machinery. Or they can nurture the germ of atheism that is being secreted by its demise, releasing and spreading naturalism and secularism, which are increasingly contagious in populations characterized by relatively easy access to scientific education and social welfare provided by relatively transparent, stable governments.

Deleuze urged us to create rhizomes, not to prop up and idealize arboreal religious Figures. For me, the question is not whether we can be worthy of the event of someone else's crucifixion. It is whether we can be worthy of what Deleuze called the *Eventum tantum* of all events, the "eternal return" of the Different, the infinite expression of accidental singularities, the univocity of being that flattens any and all hierarchical claims to represent

a transcendent Logos (in painting, thought, or politics). Atheist tranquility is slowly germinating across the plane of pure immanence in which we live and move and have our psycho-social becoming. We do not yet know all that naturalistic-secularistic bodies can do. But we are learning. ▲

SUMMARY

This article playfully inverts the theme of this special issue, exploring the relationship between the birth of "Christ" and the death of "Christianity." Its title is borrowed from a phrase found in the writing of philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who suggests that Christianity contains "a germ of tranquil atheism." The first section highlights the significance of "the event" of Christianity for Deleuze, which has almost nothing to do with Jesus' death and almost everything to do with the secretion of atheism. Section two explains how Deleuze's critique of the repressive and oppressive mechanisms of Christianity (the poster child for the Despotic machine) and of the symbol of Christ (the poster child for the White Face) can be complemented and strengthened by insights from the bio-cultural sciences of religion. Like all religious assemblages held together by shared belief in imagined punitive gods, Christianity, along with its obsession with the religious Figure of Christ, will eventually die. Can we be worthy of that event: the death of Christianity, whose timely demise, ironically, is hurried along by that "germ of tranquil atheism" that it could not help but secrete.

The Germ of Anarcho-Atheistic-Syndicalism Harbouring within Christianity

A Response to F. LeRon Shults

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God is a construct of the imagination that relativizes our understanding of the world. The god you profess to worship is the god you are. Gun-God; homophobe-God; left-God; right-God; Trump-God; money-God – repeat to fade. Yet the banal platitude echoes: God is dead. God is not dead for he (yes, "he") never was. Lest we forget Paul Tillich's (1886–1965) oft repeated phrase that it is as atheistic to say that God exists as it is to say that he does not. God does not exist; nor is he dead. He is as alive as the imaginations of those who keep his image alive. God is not dead; he is a ghost, haunting the world that his followers have constructed in his name.

F. LeRon Shults is correct in his assertion, following Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995), that Christianity harbours the germ of a tranquil atheism – although what one means by tranquil is unclear. Is there such a thing as a tranquil atheism? No more or less than there is the possibility of a tranquil theism. What is tranquil about theism? It is nothing but anguish, a painful scar of nothingness activated as Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991) once wrote.[1] Likewise the many atheisms are no different – nothingness activated. The atheisms at the core of Christianity, as Ernst Bloch (1885–1977) perhaps more adequately showed, are anything but tranquil.[2] They are tempestuous; its believers (yes,

1. Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, London 2002, 239.
2. Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, London 2009, 220.

"believers," for there is no place of non-faith, just faith of different kinds) cut adrift in its open seas. For Bloch there is only one thing that believers of atheism have and that is the search for a handhold and the feeling that one may find it. It is this searching, this feeling, that is the antidote to the many disappointments of atheism. But this is no place for those who still walk the Damascus road believing that they might see a light and hear a voice. They, writes Bloch, need ready-cooked food from on high. Bloch knows; this is no tranquil atheism, it is less than being in the good safe hands of an imaginary father, but it is more than any prescribed (and therefore false) handhold can provide, and it has a far higher view of man. It is better, too, than any of those ready-made, pre-flavoured foods that only go to ruin one's real appetite – the appetite for more. The question that Shults's paper leaves me with is this: what might the (un)tranquil atheism harbouring within Christianity do? What might it actualize? As Marx would ask: how does it make philosophy material? Or Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1930–1992): how might it inscribe itself geophilosophically on the plane of immanence? I propose that one possibility for the actualization of an (un)tranquil atheism is itself harboured within Christianity and what I consider to be a more accurate reading of Shults's misreading of 1 Cor. 11:17–32, namely the counter empire impulse of the pre-Constantinian Christian community – an anarcho-atheistic-syndicalism.

Shults's reading of the text as the Christians' "failure to detect the real presence of a judgmental supernatural agent who was returning soon" fails to recognize the germ of radical anarcho-atheistic-syndicalism present in the early anti-Caesar rituals of the early Christian community. "For when you are eating," writes the author(s) of the text, "some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk."[3] Amongst the many exclusive tables of the Roman Empire – only open to the rich and wealthy, and generally male – a new egalitarian table was to form the centre of the Christian community. This new table was to be a profound critique of the top-down, economic system of the Roman Empire that perpetuated social inequalities. Those who turned up early, to eat, drink, and consume, leaving nothing for those who were actually in need were bringing an ethical judgment upon themselves. At the core of this early Christian ritual was an immanent materiality – an ethical impulse for the least among them. The question then, for atheists, theists, and agnostics alike is this: amongst the many tables of late-integrated-capitalism and the multitude of inequalities that it perpetuates, what tables are we setting?

3. 1 Cor. 11:21.

Our age needs a thought that strips away the intricate simulacra of clarity that infests modern philosophy and religious reflection. The clarion call is this: "wake up from your enlightenment coma; realize that the demon was Descartes all along." For to think the thought pregnant with anarcho-atheistic-syndicalism is to stumble; not upwards; not in transcendent figments of wild other-worldly imagination – fairy tales; Unicorns and gods. To think like this (to act like this) is to stumble onto the surface, to fall over, and with dirt in our hands remember – we are always someone, saying something, about something, from somewhere. There is no thinking a thought outside of thinking itself. We are here, and here matters. Thinking must matter now or it does not matter at all. This is anarcho-atheistic-syndicalism, tranquil or not.

This is an immanent endeavour, its direction not toward a detached transcendent realm, constructed in the imaginations of those who lay claim to special insight or revelation; those content on partying like its 1399. The subject matter of this kind of thinking is now – it is here. Nothing can slip through the net of this enquiry. There is no gap between a sacred and secular realm. There are realms intricately folded into each other – a weaving together of possibility, promise, disappointment, and hope. This is what it means to think in the presence of an absence of a god who never was. To think like this is to realize that the surface of the ordinary world looks different in the context of unrestricted questioning. The hands of those who enquire like this are dirty. Their thinking is one that exploits the strategic deracination of ordinariness, that begins in the middle of experience. This task does not begin and it does not end – it is and it insists. God is a construct of the imagination that relativizes our understanding of the world. May we walk the Damascus road and realize that there is no light and there is no voice, just the dust beneath our feet – a luminous immanence. ▲

Lars Hartman. *Bara Markus: Text- och läsarorienterade studier av Markusevangeliet*. Knivsta: Eravnå. 2018. 160 s.

Då och då funderar jag över vilka forskningsfrågor som kommer att bestå under den tid då jag är verksam inom forskningen. Vilka svar kommer jag att hålla fast vid och vad kommer jag mena är särskilt angeläget erfarenhetens och tidens tyngd till trots? Som doktorand finner jag det ofta svårt att navigera genom det fält som bibelvetenskapen utgör, även om det ”bara” handlar om Nya testamentet, eller till och med ”bara” om Markusevangeliet.

Lars Hartmans bok handlar bara om Markus, och jag läser denna korta och lättlästa monografi som ett sätt att särskilt betona vissa aspekter av detta evangelium, med all den erfarenhet som bokens författare samlat under sina år som forskare och professor. Redan titeln sätter ramarna för den skildring som följer, Markus placeras in i ett historiskt skede där textens historiska läsare enbart – bara – har Markusevangeliets berättelse att förhålla sig till. Dessa läsare, eller åhörare som Hartman förtydligar, läser Markus på ett sätt som beror på den egna kontexten. Relationen till och jämförelserna med synoptiska och andra texters parallella skildringar är därmed av sekundär betydelse (men inte obetydliga) för den undersökning av texten med dess läsare som är bokens huvudspår.

Boken är lättillgänglig och populärt skriven, den har ett personligt tilltal och leder läsaren genom Markusevangeliets genre, språk och innehåll på ett tydligt manér. Även om boken inte innehåller några referenser (undantag finns och forskare nämns) så är det ingen banal framställning. Ibland indikeras ett större forskningssammanhang och ofta kan det anas ett större isberg under det som syns. Boken fungerar mycket väl som en introduktion till Markusevangeliet, men kan också utgöra underlag för vidare diskussion och reflektion.

Boken består av nio korta kapitel som kan läsas efter varandra eller som fristående delar. Ett första kapitel, ”…som kallas evangelier”, behandlar Markusevangeliets genre. Redan här är läsaren i centrum för förståelsen av vad evangeliet är för typ av text i och med det sammanhang som texten varit en del av, nämligen gudstjänsten.

Det andra kapitlet ”Olika sätt att läsa” visar på hur olika sammanhang i och mellan texter formar en förståelsehorisont för läsaren då denne närmar sig texten. Hartman lyfter fram det kanoniska sammanhanget, med de fyra evangelierna samlade och hur detta bjuder in till både jämförelser och harmonisering. Men här diskuteras också hur Markusevangeliets större delar förhåller sig till varandra. Hartman tycks mena att det finns markörer i texten som knyter samman delar, som för ihop motiv och temata som strukturerar berättelsen.

Någonting sägs också om författaren till Markusevangeliet, men i det tredje kapitlet ”Författaren – den diskrete, allvetande instruktören” är det inte så mycket en verklig författare som diskuteras, utan bilden av den författare som träder fram genom texten, en författare som vänder sig till sina läsare, uppmanar dem och ger dem kunskap, ibland exklusiv sådan.

Kapitel 4 ställer frågan om vilka dessa läsare är. Hartman diskuterar och kategoriserar läsare utifrån deras geografiska och, vad vi kallar, religiösa identitet. Utifrån textens struktur och hur fromhet och moraliskt leverne knyts samman och förkunnas genom evangeliet ser Hartman Markusevangeliets läsare som hednakristna ”som finns ett stycke åt väster i medelhavsområdet från Judeen och Galileen sett” (s. 39).

Kapitel 5, ”Block för block”, är en genomgång av Markusevangeliet och dess olika delar. Det är det kapitel som mest liknar en kortare kommentar. Men utrymmet gör förstås att det inte är några detaljer som tas upp här utan det är en tematisk framställning av evangeliet.

Det sjätte kapitlet ”Just ’bara Markus’” diskuterar Markusevangeliets text utifrån vad som inte står där, och vad en läsare möjligtvis läser in hos Markus utifrån en vetskap om de övriga evangelierna. Jesu mor, Johannes döparen, passionsberättelsen och uppståndelsen är karaktärer och delar som ter sig annorlunda hos Markus än hos övriga evangelister. En grupp karaktärer som framstår på andra sätt i andra evangelier är också en grupp som behandlas i kapitel 7, ”Lärjungarna i Markusevangeliet”, vilkas beteende uppvisar den tvetydighet som Markus evangelium är så intimt förknippad med.

I det åttonde kapitlet, ”Några problematiska ställen i Markusevangeliet”, diskuteras det textmaterial vi har att tillgå, handskrifterna från 300-talet och framåt. Kapitel 9, ”Några drag i det goda budskapet enligt Markus”, avslutar boken. Här återkommer vissa frågor, och en av dessa som jag finner särskilt intressant är hur Hartman ser läsarna som indragna i en undervisning om moral och hur den inbegriper två sidor: plikten mot Gud och den mot människor. Jesu lidande och död kan ses som en del av det, där gränserna mellan de två suddas ut: ”Jesu sätt att vara blir grunden och normen för ett liv som anstår Guds rike. Så blir det också omöjligt att skilja plikterna enligt det ena av de båda buden från dem som krävs i det andra; de flyter in i varandra” (s. 141). Med de hednakristna läsarna i åtanke är det en radikal bild som målas upp, en bild som blir än mer radikal i Jesu död. Varför måste Jesus dö enligt Markus? Enligt Hartman så tycks ett nytt förbund vara svaret på den frågan, och uppståndelsen bör därför ses som den nya början som också innefattar Markus läsare.

Bara Markus är en liten bok med stora frågor. Textteori, historia och teologi flyter samman på ett lättillgängligt sätt och jag kan se hur denna bok kan användas i kyrkor, samfund och i bibelstudiegrupper som vill diskutera Markusevangeliet. I undervisning skulle boken fungera som en introduktion till Markusevangeliet och till frågor som behandlar betydelsen av textens läsare. I min egen läsning har jag ibland saknat en notapparat, särskilt i kapitel 9, men inser samtidigt att det skulle påverka just denna framställning negativt.

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Mattias Martinson. *Sekularism, populism, xenofobi: En essä om religionsdebatten*. Malmö: Eskaton. 2017. 237 s.

Vi religionshistoriker brukar plural: judendomar, kristendomar, islamer, buddhismer, för att så undvika essentialism i talet om religion. Motsättningar och känslor av andlig gemenskap följer inte vad som traditionellt ses som religionsgränser.

För mig som gammal islamologiprofessor var detta så tydligt när några på den politiska och religiösa högerkanten 2016 lanserade en kampanj kallad ”mitt kors”. Efter att en islamistisk extremist (med psykiska problem) mördat prästen Jacques Hamel menade de att man borde visa solidaritet med förföljda kristna genom att bära ett kors som symbol. Jag reagerade negativt. Av flera skäl. De graderade mänskligt lidande efter grupptillhörighet. Det absolut största antalet offer för det jihadistiska våldet är muslimer. Jag menar (som Jesus förkunnade) att vi bör sträva efter solidaritet med varje lidande människa oberoende av formell tillhörighet. Ett annat skäl var att de förteg att muslimer i gemen fördömde mordet på Hamel, och tar avstånd från jihadisterna.

Men det viktigaste skälet för min reaktion var korssymbolens semiotiska ambivalens. De hävdade att korset stod för godhet och kärlek och solidaritet med andra kristna. Men är det så det uppfattas? Korset på kläderna var symbolen vid korståg. Mina tankar gick till påven Urban II:s (1035–1099) korstågspredikan och till det vidriga våldet med religiös legitimering. Korsfararna var 1100-talets motsvarighet till dagens IS och Boko Haram. Var personerna bakom ”mitt kors”-kampanjen omedvetna om detta? Jag

minns hur Ingmar Ström (1912–2003) valde att inte bära sitt biskopskors när han besökte en judisk gemenskap. Han var medveten om vilken antijudisk symbolisk funktion korset haft.

Läsningen av Mattias Martinsons bok om religionsdebatten gjorde mig glad. Där får ”mitt kors”-kampanjen och liknande sin idéhistoriska plats och granskas i 21 små kapitel – och i 49 sidor sakrika noter med belägg och tips för mer kunskap.

Attentaten den 11 september 2001 ledde till en ny rädsla för religiöst legitimerat våld. Religionskritiken ändrade karaktär. Tro och vetande-debattens kritik mot teologi och kyrka trädde tillbaka. Kritiken riktas nu mot det som ”kommer utifrån”. Det främmande. Som tidigare hävdar man, men med ännu mer emfas, att religion bör hållas utanför det offentliga rummet. Den ska inte synas och höras. Så kan vi förstå kampanjen mot böneutrop. Klockringning kan få vara kvar för att den (a) är svensk tradition och (b) påstås inte innehålla något religiöst budskap. Här igen tycks man vara omedveten om symbolers semiotiska funktion!

Martinson kritiserar schablonartade resonemang, påpekar sakfel och retoriska knep. Han analyserar språkbruket som närmat sig den främlingsfientliga populismen, det vill säga den nationalistiska högerextremismens tes att ”vår” europeiska egenart är hotad. Detta medför en sorts försvar för ”kristendom”. Men det leder också till idén om en svensk sekulär front mot ”främmande” religion (”kultur”, ”värderingar”). Också inom socialdemokratin finns en bild av ”den svenska modellen” som lätt glider över till Sverigedemokraternas spel på rädslan för det främmande ”som hotar välfärden”.

Belysande var kravet att omskärelse av pojkar skulle förbjudas. Den uttalade motiveringen var att skydda barnet mot ett medicinskt icke motiverat ingrepp. Effekten blev att judar och muslimer pekades ut som representanter för icke-svensk irrationalitet.

Sverigedemokraternas manifest inför kyrkovalet 2013 talade dels om Svenska kyrkans betydelse för ”det gemensamma kulturarvet”, dels om islam-faran. Kyrkan som det konservativa. Problemet för Sverigedemokraterna – och för den politiska högern generellt – är att Svenska kyrkans ledning, teologi och aktiva är ganska klart politiskt och religiöst ”vänster”, kritiserar främlingsfientlighet och visar öppenhet för utomkristen religiös erfarenhet.

En personlig notis: Jag har under mitt liv så många gånger märkt att fromma människor av olika religionstillhörigheter faktiskt upplever andlig samhörighet.

Framför allt är det högerpolitikern och prästen Annika Borg som angriper kyrkans ledning och teologi för dialogen med muslimskt teologiskt tänkande.

Martinson går igenom den tydliga bristen i kunskapsteori och visar på bruket av förvrängda och stympade citat, draget av maktspel, ingången till det politiska etablissemanget och påståendet om avstånd mellan ”elit” och ”folk”.

Högern (till exempel Annika Borg och Ann Heberlein) går i front mot den gamla kulturvänstern (där de ledande i kyrkan utgör en del). Detta förenas med en tydlig islamofobi i det Martinson kallar ”den xenofoba gråzonen”.

Detta är kontexten till ”mitt kors”-initiativet 2016 av Annika Borg, Johanna Andersson och Helena Edlund. Kampanjen påhejades av andra med islamofobiska tendenser: Marcus Birro, Ivar Arpi och Fredrik Malm. Jag tror att ”mitt kors”-triaden inte förutsåg styrkan i den negativa reaktionen. Jag satte stort värde på ärkebiskop Antje Jackeléns stronga ställningstagande. Och Martinsons kritik är på kornet.

Angreppen på Julupropet 2016 (från Sveriges kristna råd) för en humanare flyktingpolitik analyseras likaså. Annika Borg har här åberopat Luther och den lutherska tvåregementsläran för att kritisera kyrkoledningens agerande. Kyrkan ska inte lägga sig i politiken. Martinson påvisar resonemangets brist på kontextualitet: Det är skillnad på hur stat och samhälle såg ut

på Luthers tid och i dag. För att belysa frågan redovisar han den teologiska debatten i Sverige under trettiotalets strid mellan Bekännelsekyrkan och *Deutsche Christen* i Tyskland. Särskilt tar han fram Arvid Runestams (1887–1962) resonemang om kyrkans plikt att uttala sig i etiska frågor även som kritik av statens agerande. Martinsons slutsats: Borg vill inte ha en humanare flyktingpolitik.

Ann Heberleins islamofobi tycks vara äkta. Hon är faktiskt rädd för ”islam”. En gammal islamologiprofessor blir undrande och bedrövad. Vad är det för religion de islamofoba aktörerna har? Det är i vart fall inte samma som min.

Debatten, dess innehåll och uttryckssätt, premisser och idéhistoriska kontext analyseras i boken. Den kunde gärna studeras även ur sociologiskt och psykologiskt perspektiv.

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Chad Meister & Paul K. Moser (red.). *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2017. 273 s.

Själva ämnet för den här volymen kan verka avskräckande stort på mer än ett sätt. Redaktörerna avgränsar dock området något genom att inledningsvis deklarera sitt fokus på ondskans problem för teismen även om dess problem för ateismen också nämns. Boken är indelad i två delar och består av tretton artiklar som alla på något sätt speglar det övergripande ämnet. Första delen är tänkt att belysa begreppsmässiga frågeställningar och kontroverser, medan andra delen tar upp mer interdisciplinära frågor såsom problemets relation till kosmisk evolution och var och en av de tre abrahamitiska religionerna.

Av de sju artiklarna i första delen väger det numerärt jämt mellan teistiska och ateistiska utgångspunkter. Artikelförfattaren Graham Oppy intar nämligen en agnostisk hållning, då han behandlar de logiska argumenten (mot teism) från det onda samt försvar mot dessa utifrån den fria viljan. Själv underkänner han här hållbarheten i argumenten på båda sidor av dispyten. Men även om det rent numerärt råder jämvikt mellan bidragen från teister och ateister upplever jag (som övertygad teist) att argumentationen från ateisterna är mycket vassare än den från teisterna, huvudsakligen med anledning av att den ateistiska argumentationen är mer logiskt orienterad jämfört med den teistiska, vilken mer berör värderingsfrågor som skönhet och meningen med livet.

Vidare gör skillnaderna i argumentens natur att merparten av dessa får stå helt oemotsagda. Undantaget är Charles Taliaferros artikel ”Beauty and the Problem of Evil” vars hållning måste ses som en form av den så kallade skeptiska teismen, då den är skeptisk till människans förmåga att bedöma om ondskan vi ser uppvägs av något större gott. Det är nämligen just den hållningen som kritiseras av Timothy Perrine och Stephen J. Wykstra som menar att vi ändå måste utgå från den empiri vi har att tillgå. Även detta bidrar till att den ateistiska argumentationen upplevs som den starkare. Flera av artiklarna tar upp teisten Alvin Plantingas tankegångar, men alltid ur ett kritiskt perspektiv. Ett sätt att få till jämvikt hade därför varit att även låta dessa tankar presenteras från ett inifrånperspektiv.

En stor svaghet hos flera artiklar i första delen är att läsaren varken i rubrik eller i inledning upplyses om vilken övertygelse artikeln propagerar för. Vad säger till exempel rubriken ”God, Evil, and the Nature of Light” om att denna text starkt argumenterar mot teismen? Detta gör argumentationen i sin helhet svåröverskådlig, vilket sannolikt i min läsning förstärker känslan av den kvalitativa övervikten av de ateistiska perspektiven i bokens första del.

Det föreligger emellertid en kvantitativ övervikt av artiklar som tar ställning för teismen i bokens andra del. Av de sex artiklarna vigs tre explicit till att ta upp de abrahamitiska religionernas förhållningssätt till det

onda. Därutöver är Christopher Southgates bidrag ”Cosmic Evolution and Evil” skrivet helt utifrån ett kristet perspektiv. Han vidareutvecklar nämligen argumentationen kring kosmisk evolution och ondska som vanligen bygger på att de processer som skapar det fysiskt onda kan vara nödvändiga för utvecklingen av människan som moraliskt ansvarstagande. Southgate lägger till att även om så ej skulle vara fallet så kan de ha varit nödvändiga för inkarnationen och återlösningen. För mig tycks det emellertid krystat att något av detta skulle vara nödvändigt för en allsmäktig Gud. Southgates tanke återfinns också i Paul S. Fiddes ”Christianity, Atonement and Evil” där den relateras till olika försoningsläror. Han menar att Kristi offer behövdes objektivt sett, men att det måste bejakas av den subjektiva människan. Detta innebär att för att den lidande människan ska kunna finna mening i lidandet har Kristus försonat världen genom just sådant lidande, som den lidande kan identifiera sig med.

Den enda verkligt uttalat ateistiska infallsvinkeln i andra delen finner vi hos Michael Ruse som argumenterar för metodologisk och metafysisk naturalism. Han gör det däremot på ett sätt som snarare liknar stilen i den första delen än den i den andra. Då passar Margo Kitts bidrag ”Ancient Near Eastern Perspectives on Evil and Terror” bättre in i andra delens stil. Även om det inte direkt är uttalat ateistiskt är det inte heller teistiskt. Hennes ärende är i stället att från ett religionshistoriskt perspektiv beskriva hur man i antika Främre Orienten avhumaniserade det som man uppfattade som hotfullt genom att hänföra det till monster, demoner eller ondsinta gudar.

När det kommer till behandlingen av judendomens och islams förhållande till problemet med det onda, blir framställningarna alltför selektiva. Trots att Lenn E. Goodmans huvudpoäng är att judendomen ser det huvudsakliga problemet med ondskan som de oskyldigas lidande, förbigås helt hanteringen av lidandet under nazismen och andra världskriget. I stället uppmärksammas näst intill uteslutande Skriften och den medeltida judiska tänkaren Maimonides (1138–1204). Hanteringen av det i tid mycket mer närliggande traumat hade varit verkligt relevant att ta upp.

I Timothy Winters bidrag om islams syn på ondskans problem begränsar han sig i princip helt till sitt eget sunnitiska perspektiv där lidande ses som straff för eller förebyggande skydd mot personlig synd. Trots att shiitisk islam har en långt mer utvecklad teologi kring lidande, inte minst i form av martyrskap, förbigås dessa perspektiv helt.

Sammanfattningsvis får ändå sägas att redaktörerna har gjort en god ansats i försöket att inom ett begränsat utrymme täcka in detta omfångsrika ämnesområde. Emellertid hade framställningen, som ovan nämnts, vunnit på att i artikelrubrikerna eller inledningarna i den första delen tydligare signalera respektive författares hållning.

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