

Toward a Theodicy of the Body: Liturgy and Explanation

JASON M. SMITH*

This essay examines recent attempts to remake the enterprise of theodicy. Both Eleonore Stump and David Burrell analyze the story of Job in an attempt to move theodicy beyond the mode of explanation and into the mode of address. While Mark Scott's theodicy of navigation is a notable advance of this paradigm, such theodicies are still limited to speech and thought. I argue that liturgical practice functions as a sort of "theodicy of the body," a theodicy of address that includes embodied practice as its predominant medium.

Introduction

I once heard my priest tell the story of a fellow priest who went through an intense time of trial. I cannot recall the precise circumstances but, suffice it to say, it was a terrible ordeal of loss and grief—the sort of ordeal that brings one's faith, even one's identity to the brink of undoing. At the time, the man stopped performing Eucharist or giving the homily while he grieved. He still attended the service but found himself unable to participate in almost every aspect of it. He could not sing hymns. He could not join the church in the prayers or the confession. He could not recite the Nicene Creed. He could not respond with the congregation during the liturgy of the table. The priest would have lost faith if not for the two things he could actually do: eat and drink. All the priest found himself able to do, despite his grief, was approach the table and take the bread and the wine. He partook, almost with disdain and contempt, but nevertheless he ate and drank with the rest of the church. This is how the man's faith was saved. Upon hearing this story, my thoughts turned to the enterprise of theodicy, and I marveled at how different seem the priest's story

* Jason M. Smith received his PhD in theological studies from Vanderbilt University. He is currently a Mellon Partners for Humanities Education postdoctoral fellow at Tougaloo College.

and the arguments typically found within theodicy. They look to be not merely cut of a different cloth but almost as if they serve opposing purposes. Something as simple as eating and drinking brought this priest back from the brink of cursing God; in this brief essay, therefore, I want to find a way to probe the implications of this for theodicy.

The allusion to Job here is quite intentional. For my argument begins with two seminal treatments of this story and its place in theodicy. First, I want to explore Eleonore Stump's treatment of the story of Job in her *Wandering in Darkness*; second, I examine David Burrell's work on the same story from *Deconstructing Theodicy*.¹ Stump and Burrell, as is their way, offer clarity on precisely what the problem of theodicy is and hint at what I take to be the most promising way forward: a theodicy of *address*. Thus, I shall assume, along with Burrell, an option for address over explanation as a basic starting point for articulating a type of theodicy that goes beyond an intellectual answer to the problem of evil. While Burrell's argument for a theodicy of address is quite compelling, I take it as my task to expand this notion beyond the brief but lucid treatment he offers. Hence, I want to use Mark Scott's notion of theodicy as "navigation" as a means of adding further dynamism to Burrell's notion of address. Despite this expansion, however, we will still find ourselves limited solely to speech and thought as the tools for theodicy.

In light of this limit, I want to argue that what is at fault for theodicy's tendency to operate solely as explanation is an improper theological anthropology. In other words, we are attempting to *explain* evil because we all too often default to an account of the human subject as nothing more than a disembodied *thinking* thing. While there is still a place for explanation and thought in our attempts at theodicy, I will argue that embracing a theological anthropology that brings embodiment to the fore will require something more. Hence, I will bring in James K. A. Smith's work on theological anthropology to show that a theodicy of address must always be a type of embodied, ritualized navigation, since human identity is constituted not by thinking self-presence but rather by participating in embodied "liturgies." If our

¹ Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); David Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy: Why Job Has Nothing to Say to the Puzzle of Suffering* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008).

theodicy is to be effective, it must begin with a proper understanding of how the human subject makes meaning and this, so I shall argue from Smith, is ultimately through embodied ritual action. This will present us with a horizon for the future of theodicy as “theodicy of the body.”

Questioning Traditional Theodicy: Stump and Burrell

The first step in recovery is admitting you have a problem, but, as I imagine any member of a 12-step program will tell you, you have to admit to the *problem that is actually afflicting you*. An alcoholic admitting that he is also a chronic overeater may be a step in the right direction, but it is not quite the completion of the first step. In the same way, theodicy has to be crystal clear about which problem it is trying to combat. Are we seeking an explanation for natural evil and God’s role in preventing or causing it? Or are we perhaps seeking to justify the horrendous moral evils of fellow human beings? I am going to define our “problem” as the sort of evil that was afflicting the person we discussed above: the sort of evil that not only inconveniences us or causes temporary suffering, but the sort that disrupts our very identities as people of faith such that our spiritual life is fundamentally altered. This is what Marilyn McCord Adams called “radical” or “horrendous” evil. The goal of what follows in this section is much the same as hers: how such evil might be “integrated into the participants’ relation to God.”² Now, I make no attempt to define *integrated* here, as that verb will be the focus of my arguments below, particularly just how it is that one would or even could accomplish something of the sort. I hope it is obvious, however, that I am not seeking, and count it as foolhardy to seek, a means of convincing the sufferer that their suffering was somehow for their good. I hope, rather, to offer a means by which the sufferer might come, in their own way, to that conclusion *for themselves* within their own spiritual journey. With that, I now turn to Eleonore Stump’s analysis of the book of Job and, in so doing, I hope to show that the tool needed to overcome such radical evil may be a narrative not an argument.

In her *Wandering in Darkness*, Stump argues that the book of Job, as a narrative, reveals to us the power of narrative over and against

² Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evil and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 155.

an argument. In her treatment of Job, she begins where most theologians often end: with the divine speeches to Job. These speeches are the commonly accepted “climax” of the book of Job, but what makes them so powerful? Stump argues that these speeches do not, as is commonly believed, offer a demonstration of God’s “metaphysical attributes of power and knowledge necessary for God’s creation of the earth.”³ Rather, the speeches show God as “a person, in personal and parental relationships with his creatures.” The divine speeches to Job, thus, are what Stump calls a “second-person account.” In short, second-person accounts function as stories in which the teller relates his or her second-person experience but does so in such a way that the hearer may somehow participate in the storyteller’s encounter. In Job’s case, a second-person account functions this way:

The divine speeches do not consist in non-narrative claims about God’s relations to creation. If they did, they would be a third-person account laying out general theological claims about God’s relations to creatures. Instead, each constitutes a second-person account that lets us participate, to some limited extent, in the perception of God’s relation to inanimate things, plants, and animals.⁴

Through a second-person experience, an experience within a *narrative* as it were, the sufferer’s pains are worked out in a way that an argument or explanation cannot accomplish. Second-person, narrative accounts of suffering invite the hearer into the encounter that gave birth to them in a way that nonnarrative or argumentative forms of discourse do not.

But why would such a third-person account by definition fail to help those who suffer? What is it precisely about propositional arguments that make them so ineffective? Stump explains, “If we boil a story down just to non-narrative propositions, so that all the knowledge it conveys is knowledge *that*, then we lose the knowledge that the story distinctively provides just because we cannot convey by means of expository prose alone even a simulacrum of a second-person experience.”⁵ A third-person account, or an “explanation” as

³ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 187.

⁴ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 190.

⁵ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 78.

I will call it, fails to help the sufferer because it cannot convey the depths of a second-person experience. Thus, Stump points toward the power of a *participatory knowledge* as a means to overcoming suffering. Somehow, and we cannot say quite how just yet, an encounter with God through participation in a sort of narrative serves to integrate our suffering back into our relationship with God. Moreover, and here Stump offers us a unique perspective, by hearing the stories of encounters with God we participate in that encounter such that those narratives invite us to share in the encounter they communicate.

While on the surface this approach might seem quite comforting, it is not without its difficulties, especially within the book of Job. For Job suffers to an excruciating extent and then, somehow, we are meant to be satisfied by a restoration of wealth and, most disturbingly, with a restoration of a “new” family. Read in this way, the story of Job invites the hearer into an encounter that might not, to say the very least, satisfy. Read in its most extreme sense, this ending has led some to speculate whether the second-person account of Job shows us a picture of God as an abusive rather than benevolent parent.⁶ I bring up this objection to get at a key implication that Stump teases out of her account of second-person experience: a narrative might not always satisfy the outside observer.

When faced with the ending of Job, one might argue that Job should be further enraged by God’s insolence in assuming that Job would be satisfied merely by God showing divine power and restoring Job’s material wealth. How could Job ever be satisfied by such a raw deal? He lost everything, but now he is satisfied after receiving a lot that, in our minds, is not even remotely equivalent to what he lost. The problem, according to Stump, is the difficulty in explaining not just *what* someone knows—in this case, that God loves Job and is still faithful to him—but *how* the teller knows what they know. This sort of knowledge surely cannot be conveyed by a set of propositions. The best we can do is to tell a story, and through the story the *how* of such knowledge becomes available. Yet it is important to note that the point is not to *convince* the outside observer who hears the story. Rather, the point is to alleviate Job of his suffering and then

⁶ For examples of this argument, see both Louise Antony, “Does God Love Us?,” in *Divine Evil? The Moral Character of the God of Abraham*, ed. Michael Bergmann, Michael J. Murray, and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 29–47, and Nehama Verbin, *Divinely Abused: A Philosophical Perspective on Job and His Kin* (New York: Continuum Publishing Group, 2010).

to attempt to convey how this works to others. Ultimately, a second-person account will inevitably be “disappointing to some readers or hearers of the story,” but the point is that the account works *for Job*. Asking anything more is not the right of the outside observer.⁷

Faced with the problem of convincing or explaining this sort of reconciliation to someone, I think it is helpful to introduce David Burrell’s distinction between explaining and addressing. Burrell contends that the story of Job mediates between two opposing views of theodicy: explanation (Job’s friends) and address (Job). The mode of address, as I take it, is very much in line with Stump’s privileging of second-person experience. The essential thing about the divine speeches, for Burrell, is not “*what* the voice from the whirlwind said,” rather the important thing is “*that* God responded” to Job.⁸ The problem with Job’s friends is that they remained entirely committed to explanation rather than address. Burrell makes the following, powerful distinction: Job’s friends only “speak *about*” God, while Job dares to “speak *to*” God. It is this address to God that causes the second-person experience of God addressing Job that ultimately leads to the resolution of Job’s suffering.

What precisely does this response cause? What Burrell wants to argue is that a theodicy of address offers us “new ways” of making suffering intelligible. As Burrell writes,

Here *theodicy*—if we can continue to call it that—does not pretend to offer an explanation. Yet it can direct us to ways of activating that “non-reciprocal relation of dependence” that defines our very creaturehood, thereby transforming the *fact* of our existing into an undeserved gift.⁹

It is in addressing the Creator and then, most importantly, in being addressed that our sufferings can begin to be integrated back into the narrative of our lives.

⁷ It is important to note here that Stump sees what she is doing not as a theodicy per se, but as a “defense.” For more on the significance of this distinction see William Hasker, “Light in the Darkness? Reflections on Eleonore Stump’s Theodicy,” *Faith and Philosophy* 28, no. 4 (October 2011): 432–50.

⁸ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 124.

⁹ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 125.

In summary, Stump and Burrell have offered us ample prodding to shift our emphasis in theodicy from argumentation to narrative, and Burrell in particular has given us a helpful moniker under which to couch this shift: a theodicy of address. Yet, how exactly this theodicy of address might function, beyond what has already been said, is not fully articulated by Burrell. I propose to expand his notion of theodicy as address in two ways: first, a theodicy of address must fundamentally become a type of “navigation.” We will take up this notion from Mark Scott to argue for a theodicy of address as a heuristic enterprise of meaning making through the power of narrative. Second, I want to argue that a theodicy of address must have at its root a theological anthropology that views the human subject as a fundamentally embodied, imaginative creature whose identity is shaped more by enacted ritual practice than by rational argumentation. Given this properly theological vision of the human person, theodicy then comes to be seen as the search for *ritual* ways of cultivating and performing those types of addresses that will help the sufferer integrate his suffering into his relationship with God. I see this effort bearing out in both rituals of lamentful remembrance as well as a liberative praxis that seeks to alleviate the suffering that would lead to such lament in the first place. For now, I turn to Mark Scott’s notion that theodicy might be conceived as a sort of navigation.

Theodicy on the Way: Scott and the Ship

Mark Scott sees theodicy as, fundamentally, an exercise in *meaning making*. When faced with the imperfections of creation or with the horrific actions of human beings toward their brothers and sisters, the meaning we get from our faith in a God of cosmic order is disrupted. The ultimate paradigm of how the world works—God is in control, say—no longer has any meaning unless the cognitive dissonance we face can be overcome. Thus, theodicy serves as a means to keep hold of the meaning we previously believed the world held. We use theodicy as a tool to make meaning out of our lives, because without it the ills of the world would rob us of the meaning garnered from our faith.

What then of navigation? While the idea of theodicy as meaning making utilizes some vital aspects of the human condition (the need for a sense of the cosmic order to orient our lives toward meaning),

it does not account for the dynamic character of human experience. Humans are beings always already in motion and flux. Thus, according to Scott, we need a concept of theodicy that not only gives us a sense of “cosmic order” but that also gives us a sense of “journey.”¹⁰ Scott argues that navigation is an apt way to bring such dynamism into theodicy. Rather than laying out this claim in a series of propositions, Scott offers us this metaphor to flesh out what he means by theodicy as navigation:

Imagine a ship caught in a violent storm at sea. Tossed by the winds, buffeted by waves, and taking on water the ship finds itself in utter peril—on the brink of total destruction. In order to salvage the ship the crew must find its bearing and sail for calm waters. But the ferocity of the storm has left the crew disoriented and taken the ship off course. . . . Since they cannot navigate by the stars, they must use the resources they have on board to travel to safety. Thus, with a variety of navigational instruments in hand, they begin to traverse the perilous waters, a journey that will strain the nerves of the crew and the sturdiness of the ship. At stake in the journey is the integrity of their ship and their lives.¹¹

The storm of evil and suffering imperils our ship—or our “core, orientating worldviews and values”—and we must utilize any and all resources available to us to salvage our journey. Scott notes what some of these tools might be: “their compass (sacred texts) maps (theology), and knowledge of the sea (tradition).”¹² All of these tools play a central role and none can take precedence over the other. After all, it would be foolish to say that only a compass ought to save our lives. If our lives are in danger any tool that saves them is the right tool.

Taken as a whole, then, Scott offers “an interpretive movement from the crisis of evil to intellectual and existential resolution” as a paradigm for theodicy. As it is with avoiding a storm, there is a singular goal for all but an allowance for varied means to reach it. We can

¹⁰ Mark S. M. Scott, “Theorizing Theodicy in the Study of Religion,” *The Religion and Culture Web Forum* (November 2009): 13, <https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/imce/pdfs/webforum/112009/Theorizing%20Theodicy%20final.pdf>. Subsequent references will be included in the text.

¹¹ Scott, “Theorizing Theodicy,” 13–14.

¹² Scott, “Theorizing Theodicy,” 15.

expect to find “countless varieties of theodicy within each religion” as there are that many ways to avoid a terrible storm at sea.¹³ Moreover, Scott’s account highlights “the narrative aspect of theodicy,” returning to something like Stump’s insistence on the power of second-person accounts. Scott argues that the narrative aspect of theodicy is fruitful for the enterprise in that it preserves the subjectivity of the sufferer within theodicy. Theodicy done in a purely analytic mode—the sort of theodicy whose purpose is to defend the proposition that God is good despite the presence of evil—can lend itself to the perception of utter disinterestedness, often despite the explicit intentions of the authors. The suffering subject within this mode of theodicy seems dissolved or occluded behind categories that rob both the subject and the evil they suffer of the dynamism they mutually possess. Scott offers us an expansion of Stump’s analysis of second-person accounts by showing how the narrative aspect of theodicy not only presents greater meaning than third-person accounts but also preserves the subjectivity of the teller and hearer. Thus, if we seek relief for a human subject we have to accomplish it through the means that protects, to the greatest extent, the dignity of human subjectivity.

Yet, one wonders if we do not approach a dangerous elision of theodicy into theology in general. After all, is there any moment in the life of the sailors where they are not navigating? If we take theodicy to be an enterprise producing a second-person encounter with God that aids in our task of navigating the veritable storm that is radical suffering, then ought there to be a difference between theodicy and theology? I think not, and, more importantly, I believe theodicy uniquely shows the deep unity within theology between embodied practice and idea.

The political theologian Johann Baptist Metz is a great champion of this point. In his *A Passion for God*, Metz wants to argue that all theology must recognize that it finds itself in the “situation *after Auschwitz*.”¹⁴ To ignore this new situation for theology is essentially to engage in a “situationless talk” that results in “empty and blind” discourse. To do theology without any attention to the present situation is, thus, to do something akin to a “subjectless” theology, as all subjects are ever situated within a historical context. The narrative

¹³ Scott, “Theorizing Theodicy,” 16–17.

¹⁴ Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God: The Mystical Political Dimension of Christianity*, ed. and trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 54.

aspect of theodicy cannot allow us to do theodicy from this standpoint. Metz, however, has in mind extending the bounds of theodicy into all of theology.

In situating theology as a discourse done after Auschwitz, Metz is arguing that the question of suffering must now be the primary way in which we ask the “God question.” In other words, the object of theology after Auschwitz (the God question) is forever entwined with the question of salvation for those who suffer. Metz puts it this way:

As I became conscious of the situation after Auschwitz, the God-question forced itself on me in its strangest, most ancient, and most controversial form, as the theodicy question. . . . For discourse about God is either about a vision and promise of universal justice, touching even the sufferings of the past, or it is empty and void of promise, even for those alive today. The question immanent to this discourse about God is first and foremost the question about the salvation of those who suffer unjustly.¹⁵

Theology becomes an enterprise that is always asking the theodicy question because it is being done within a context that *must* be ever asking this question. Does this mean that all theology must ever be a question about suffering? I do not think so. Yet the answer to that question is probably more yes than no, in that any theology that does not have this question at its foundation, though it engages other seemingly unrelated queries, risks being blind to its context.

Metz has noted something in the above quotation that I think adds more nuance to Scott’s metaphor of the ship. Metz argues that our theology—and here we will simply equate theology with theodicy for the sake of argument—must touch upon “even the sufferings of the past.” What does this mean for our ship lost at sea? I imagine that Metz would want to remind us continually to remember the context from which we are navigating, namely a time after Auschwitz. If such is the case, we might imagine our ship’s crew not only trapped in a storm but also *surrounded by the wreckage of previously sunken vessels*. This might seem like we are overcomplicating our metaphor, but I mention it so that we may recognize the following: if there were wrecked ships surrounding our endangered crew, then they would

¹⁵ Metz, *Passion for God*, 55.

be fools to continue navigating as if they were in a different situation entirely. In fact, it would be their duty to not only be aware of their situation but to remember those wrecked ships from time gone by and report their location to other crews who might be endangered.

Here, then, we reach a critical addition to Scott's account of theodicy as navigation: navigation must always be attuned to not only the power of narrative but also the power of *memory*. One might object that this is what Scott means by *tradition*, but I think we mean more than that. For while Scott equated tradition simply with "knowledge of the sea," our aside into Metz's political theology teaches us that memory encompasses more than just recalling the tales of those sunken vessels. Somehow, the memory of these sunken vessels *charges* our navigation in the present, creating a practical effect within the actions of the crew. Here we see the beginnings of how an adequate theodicy might require more than just narratives; it might also lead to, even just *be*, a type of praxis.

Still, we must ask, could an explanation, or a third-person account, really not be a heuristic need of our human condition? What if we continue to try our hand at explanation because that is the tool that gets us out of the storm, although we just do not realize it? I cannot deny that this could be the case.¹⁶ It is possible that some believers might need an explanation at a certain point in their navigating radical evil, but I would argue that this is an inferior tool in the ultimate aim of theodicy. In answering this objection, then, we come to the key turn in our discourse: we have seen that narrative can communicate truth in a way that argument is unable to do, but the reason this is possible is not due to the nature of narrative as much as it is due to the *nature of the human subject*. For what Metz and Scott call one to take note of is that the *type of subject* for whom our arguments or our narratives attempt to make meaning is just as vital as the type of argument or narrative we create. Narratives create greater truth for us, it would seem, because we are created uniquely attuned to story. This is not to say that argument can provide no truth to us with regard to

¹⁶ I further cannot deny that some of the traditional writers of theodicy have not been aware of the heuristic nature of their endeavor, only that we habitually forget that such is the nature of theodicy more often than not. Leibniz and many coming after him, for example, were clearly responding to a present crisis: the Lisbon earthquake. For an in-depth analysis of how early modern thought responded to present suffering, see Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

the problem of evil. Rather, it is only to say that instances of evil often exhaust this capacity or bring it to its limit. Thus, I would argue that if we are to avoid the trappings of theodicy as explanation we have to take account of the theological anthropology behind our theodicy. In other words, articulating an adequate theological anthropology is the only way to an adequate theodicy.

A Ceremonious Animal: Smith and Liturgies

I turn now to what I take to be one of the most helpful articulations of theological anthropology in the contemporary debate: James K. A. Smith's account of the human subject as a liturgical animal in his *Cultural Liturgies Project*. Smith begins by setting his anthropology against a picture of the human being as either a "thinker" or a "believer." Smith finds these models unsatisfactory because they fail to take full account of our embodied nature. Ultimately, both of these models of the human subject result in a disembodied and intellectualist subject at the center of one's anthropology. The body becomes either something superfluous (thinker model) or a sinful force that ultimately must be opposed (believer model). Now if the human subject is not predominantly a thinker or a believer then a key implication follows: propositional arguments are not the way to go about forming or healing this type of subject. In other words, explanation presupposes a picture of a human subject who is seeking a proposition that will make the suffering he or she is experiencing *intelligible*. Yet, what help can this type of argument really offer an *embodied* being? In order to combat these harmful paradigms, Smith wants to argue for the notion of the self as *lover* rather than thinker or believer.

There are four features to this new model of the human person: intentionality, teleology, habits, and practices. First, Smith wants to argue that our being in the world as human subjects is characterized always by intentionality. We do not just think; we think *of* something, and more often than not we think *toward* something. Now all this talk of thinking might lead one to believe that Smith is backhandedly embracing the primacy of cognitive ways of being. It is, in fact, the opposite. For even in centering our being-in-the-world around intentionality, Smith wants to argue, via Heidegger, that our intentionality is worked out in a noncognitive way—through love or desire. As he writes,

To be human is to be just such a lover—a creature whose orientation and form of life is more primordially shaped by

what one loves as ultimate, which constitutes an affective, gut-like orientation to the world that is prior to reflection and even eludes conceptual articulation. To say that humans are, at root, lovers is to emphasize that we are the sorts of animals for whom things *matter* in ways that we often don't (and can't) articulate.¹⁷

Next, if we, as human beings, are always intending in the world, then what constitutes our identity to the greatest degree is our *ultimate* love or desire. Thus, Smith argues that human beings are teleological creatures. We are captured by our ultimate "telos," what Smith refers to as "the kingdom," and it is around this fundamental desire that we orient our lives. Note, again, that this telos is not a cognitive goal, not a mere proposition placed in the forefront of our minds. Rather, our telos is a *picture* of what human flourishing looks like. Smith describes it this way:

It's not so much that we're intellectually convinced and then muster the willpower to pursue what we ought; rather, at a precognitive level, we are attracted to a vision of the good life that has been painted for us in stories and myths, images and icons. It is not primarily our minds that are captivated but rather our *imagination*s that are captured, and when our imagination is hooked, we're hooked.¹⁸

Thus, the notion that a simple shift in ideas will serve in forming the identity of a human subject is shortsighted. Human beings need a *picture* but it must be a picture that becomes embodied, and this is where our habits and practices enter.

Habits might be better described as "dispositions" as they form the "*fulcrum* of our desire," meaning they predispose our desire toward certain pictures of the good life. One might object that this is still describing a human being lost in the "ether" of consciousness. All we are really doing is still confined to the brain. Here we make the crucial connection to our embodiment: our habits and dispositions are not shaped by argumentation but by *practices*. In other words, our

¹⁷ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Group, 2009), 51.

¹⁸ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 54.

dispositions are formed by our embodied actions in the world. Smith paints this picture of the process:

Habits are inscribed in our heart through bodily practices and rituals that train the heart, as it were, to desire certain ends. This is a noncognitive sort of training, a kind of education that is shaping us often without our realization. . . . Over time, rituals and practices—often in tandem with aesthetic phenomena like pictures and stories—model and shape our precognitive disposition to the world by training our desires.¹⁹

This process describes something like the development of a *habitus*, or, the phrase I prefer, a type of “know-how” for being in the world. For practices are not empty in this picture of the human being; rather, practices are “pedagogical” in that they teach us the picture of the human flourishing that they carry.

Yet, one might object, is this not a very simplistic picture of the human subject? For this picture of the subject seems to be formed only by what one considers to be “ultimate,” but surely brushing my teeth is not a practice containing my “ultimate desire.” How to keep in place this practice-oriented vision of the human being but also capture the vast matrix of stakes involved in, as Wittgenstein put it, the “whole hurly-burly of human action”?²⁰ Here Smith introduces a helpful distinction—some practices are *thick*, other practices are *thin*. Thick practices are concerned with our highest good, and they form our identity to complement and participate in that picture of human flourishing. Thin practices, like making a piece of toast, say, are mundane and “are not the sorts of things that tend to touch on our identities.”²¹ Thus, thin practices do not get at our love or desire and thereby do not form our identities. Yet Smith notes that this distinction is always “hard to draw.” There will always be habits we want to characterize as thin—say, going to the gym, to use Smith’s example—but are actually connecting to an ultimate desire: perhaps extending our time with our families or cultivating wholeness. Thus, we have to

¹⁹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 58.

²⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 99.

²¹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 82.

recognize that there are no neutral practices, only those that can more easily be turned toward other ends through our thickest practices.²²

These “thickest” practices are what Smith refers to as *liturgies*. Not all practices under this definition would be liturgies, as not all practices are thick or identity forming. Yet, for what Smith calls our “rituals of *ultimate concern*,” the term *liturgies* is a fitting one. As he describes them, liturgies are

rituals that are formative for identity, that inculcate particular visions of the good life, and do so in a way that means to trump other ritual formations. Admittedly, this might include rituals not associated with traditional religions (e.g. rituals of Nazi fascism or other rituals of totalizing nationalism). . . . Our thickest practices—which are not necessarily linked to institutional religion—have a *liturgical* function insofar as they are a certain species of ritual practice that aim to do nothing less than shape our identity by shaping our desire for what we envision as the kingdom—the ideal of human flourishing.²³

Smith’s notion of liturgy then implies that bodily practices of *worship* are the most important means of Christian identity formation.

Hence, the question now becomes, “What will theodicy look like if it is to help *this subject* navigate radical suffering?” I think there are quite a few things to say in this regard. First, there seems to be reason to shift attention from propositional arguments toward bodily practices as the means to construct an adequate theodicy. Taking from Smith’s anthropology, this means attending to the ways ritual might become our primary tool for theodicy. Now Scott, to his credit, does point to the potential for ritual to aid us in our task of navigation.²⁴ I hinted at something like this in Burrell’s theodicy of address, in that we were meant to somehow address and be addressed by God. Smith’s work now allows a chance to answer the “somehow” of that statement. I address God and am addressed back through the liturgies, both sacramental and otherwise, that constitute my being as human.

²² Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 84.

²³ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 87.

²⁴ Scott, “Theorizing Theodicy,” 18–19.

To put this in the context of the metaphor of the ship, I would point out that there is a *liturgical* aspect of navigation. The crew has a set way of doing things. Each one has a defined role, and only by carrying out those repeated, embodied actions will the crew be saved. Furthermore, the liturgies that the crew are engaged in during times of peace are just as vital as those they must engage with in order to save their lives. One might say this is glaringly obvious, but note the vital implication of this for theodicy: conducting the liturgies of the ship during times of peace has molded the sailors into *the sorts of people* that have the resources available to weather the storm. In other words, navigation is about much more than just “doing your job.” It is about forming us into people who navigate.

Smith, therefore, has pushed the importance of embodiment to the forefront for any theodicy of address. Thus I can, at last, offer a preliminary definition of a theodicy of the body: a theodicy of the body would be a theodicy of address that defines *address* as bodily practices of worship that help us navigate from radical suffering to meaning. This means that theodicy would no longer be the sorts of arguments that were intellectually satisfying, but would rather become an analysis of and participation in the practices that mold us into the *sorts of people* who possess a *theodical habitus*. This would be vital, I think, in combating an inherent temptation in any theodicy of address, namely when we shift our focus to practices we might be prone to focusing on the “truth” contained within those practices. The problem here, as I see it, would be making theodicy into nothing more than an explanation of liturgies, rather than an account of practical means to navigate our lives.

Second, Metz’s emphasis on the power of narrative and memory can now be seen in a new light. Narrative and memory occupy a central place in a theodicy of address because they are essential aspects of any liturgy. When we participate in practices of worship, the Eucharist for instance, we are stepping into a narrative that is being embodied. There is a picture, as Smith notes, of what the “kingdom” will look like, and our participation in the ritual turns us into actors in this narrative. Not only that, but with the Eucharist in particular we are *remembering* the second-person account of Jesus Christ. Metz calls this remembering “with a practical intent.” In other words, our remembering the sacrifice of Jesus with an embodied ritual both allows entry into a vision of human flourishing and *provokes us* to take

up a liberative praxis that will see that vision come to life, however imperfectly.²⁵

A final aspect to which I have to attend is the eschatological orientation inherent in Smith's anthropology. This horizon is vital in that it addresses one of the most potent objections against most traditional theodicies: Ivan Karamazov's insistence that a glorious end cannot wash the suffering of innocent children away. Ivan's objection begs us to consider precisely whether the privileging of eschatology in any theodical endeavor is sustainable. Otherwise, we will be left, like Ivan, wanting to "give back our ticket" to any kingdom that would be built on the backs of tortured and abused children.²⁶

I think a theodicy of the body can say two things here. First, I ought to note that Smith is not, necessarily, arguing that there *will be* a dramatic reversal of eschatological proportions that justifies the suffering of innocents, only that liturgical subjects always already *imagine a coming kingdom* when they worship. The idea of a glorious reversal of all suffering, thus, is the sort of argument that helps us navigate radical evil, but is not necessarily a literal vision of what will occur. A theodicy of the body is not committed to a particular eschatological reversal, but is rather constituted, as we saw from Metz, by the memory of the future enacted in the liturgies of ultimate concern that restore our identity as worshipers.

Second, the final telos of a theodicy of the body is apocalyptic rather than eschatological. Metz is again quite helpful here. For Metz, theology oriented to the apocalyptic rather than the eschatological turns its questions back to God *without resolving them*.²⁷ We have, perhaps, hinted at this aspect of irresolution in earlier moments of this argument, but it is essential to note here. The Eucharist, I take it, is a characteristic example of this irresolution. As another Roman Catholic would put it, the eucharistic elements do not offer to us an *unmediated presence* to heal our suffering, but rather the *presence of an absence* that ever provokes the question, "What is God waiting

²⁵ For an excellent account of how the Eucharist in particular turns us toward a liberative praxis, see M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

²⁶ See Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004), 219–28.

²⁷ Metz, *Passion for God*, 97.

for?”²⁸ To put it in our ship’s terms, the crew might navigate the storm safely, they might even know much of the weather patterns that led to their ordeal, but they never really can answer the question, “Why did this storm occur?” Or, more importantly, the questions “Why did this storm come for *us*?” and “Where was God?” There is a false sense that an embrace of such lament-like questioning would leave one paralyzed, unable to continue navigating on account of our nursing an interminable grief. Yet, I would argue the opposite actually occurs. A potent sense of the apocalyptic will actually *charge our liturgies* with a renewed sense of hope for the present age. Asking the question “God, where are you?” ought to inevitably lead to the follow-up question, “Where was *I*? And where was the church?” The memory of suffering presses upon liturgical subjects the importance of acting to end suffering in the here and now. A theodicy of the body, therefore, is not an empty exhortation that one turn away from theory and toward practice. It is rather the contention that a theological anthropology centered on liturgy sees ideas and explanation as inseparably joined to embodied practice. Hence, a theodicy of the body is grounded in the “explanations” inherent in practices of *worship* and liberative *praxis*.

²⁸ Metz holds that this question is the fundamental question of Christianity. For his argument, see Metz, *Passion for God*, 84. The phrase *presence of absence* is an allusion to the arguments of Louis-Marie Chauvet, found in *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont and Patrick Madigan, SJ (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1987).