

A Redemptive Economy: *Corpus Christi* Pageant Cycles as Liturgical Relativization of Secular Time

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1. Modern Secular Time

Charles Taylor has recently argued that in modern societies “we tend to see our lives exclusively within the horizontal flow of secular time,”¹ to the point that time “has become a container, indifferent to what fills it.”² What Taylor means by “secular time” pertains to both contemporary American and European culture and, as globalization continues, other parts of the world, as will be explained below, as well as the culture of the late-medieval period in Europe. Taylor extends his observation by saying,

the disciplines of our modern, civilized order have led us to measure and organize time as never before in human history. Time has become a precious resource, not to be 'wasted.' [...] We have constructed an environment in which we live a uniform, univocal secular time, which we try to measure and control in order to get things done.³

One contemporary way of controlling time is through *speed*, since speed is often conceived as a way of 'beating the clock' so as to not 'waste' the precious resource of time. There is thus a 'need for speed.' And if *speed* is merely an increased rate of movement over a given area of *space* in a specific segment of time (think of MPH, RPM, etc.), then – as the effects of globalization indicate – *speed* necessarily treats the unique particularities of *places* – such as buildings or forests – as ultimately eliminable obstructions to the accelerating progress of goods and capital. In other words, a *need for speed* "displaces" places, flattening and reducing them to the mathematical concept of space, which remains indifferent to its contents. In this sense, space, like secular time, also becomes a homogenous container. Both are problematic inasmuch as they occlude and neglect temporal and local differences, thus emptying times and places of gathered and complex significance.⁴

Such is symptomatic of what William Cavanaugh has called the "global monoculture" of the market. In order to slake the market's 'need for speed,' temporal and local *dedifferentiation* erodes local communities and their trans-local traditions, while responsibility is shirked, on all levels. As John Wright acutely observes, "[w]e've learned that we have to detach our lives from any particular place so that we might be accessible to a global market, career advancement, with no lasting moral ties to anyone. The market place is universal, abstract, not local and particular. By denying the particularity of place, all might supposedly belong, be absorbed into the producer-consumer cycle that continuously repeats, going no where."⁵

Another negative aspect of this ever-accelerating production-consumption cycle is *disembodiment*.⁶ For example, today the global market proffers not a local market *place* (like the *piazza* of a medieval Italian city) but an electronically generated *cyberspace* whereby (and "in" which) disembod-

ied individuals instantaneously “connect,” often to purchasable commodities, in only a “virtual” present. And all the while the homogenous tick-tock of technologically regulated clocks reminds us that time is running out.

Granted, there are benefits to the speed at which information, *via* the internet and other electronic technologies, is afforded to those who can afford them, so to speak. But these advantages in no way outweigh the negative effects of homogenous time and space characteristic of this, “a secular age,” especially considering the damage already and continually done to local communities by the pretensions and consequent expansion of the market, which itself relies on the internet for its extreme instantaneity and global scope. To reiterate, in the context of such expansion, overlapping places and complex remembered times are subjected and dissolved within the meta-physic of a uniform spatial grid (*res extensa*) and the accompanying univocal ‘secular’ time of which Taylor speaks. According to the (Cartesian) logic behind such a grid, every place can be mapped, plotted and even leveled for military or capitalist purposes, while time, as beating to only a single measure, can be regulated with mechanical, and now even digital precision.

In light of this state of affairs, we are led to ask: what sort of community could both differentiate and thus resist, by a means other than acceleration this harmful homogenization, while maintaining individual differences? What *embodied* practices could serve as the means to ‘thicken’ and ‘punctuate’ temporality, and allow the particularity of places to persist peacefully? And what sort of *economic* ‘production-consumption’ cycle would such a community enact as a way of relativizing the secular order?

In order to better reply to these queries, we shall first investigate the early emergence of profit-driven, mechanically implemented ‘secular time’ in late medieval Europe. Based on this brief investigation, we shall describe the dichotomy which Taylor employs, that between secular and what he calls “higher” time(s). We shall then move on to a particular example of a community of the late medieval period which was faced with the emergent technological homogenization of time, and explore how its doxological and economic practices reoriented the emergent possibility of a purely secular temporality by relativizing it in light of the sacred.

2. Medieval Secular Time

Jacques le Goff, in *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, notes that “[i]n 1355, the royal governor of Artois authorized the people of Aire-sur-la-Lys to build a belfry whose bells would chime the hours of commercial transactions and the working hours of textile workers.”⁷ Like merchants today, so were medieval merchants empowered by the mechanical standardization of time, since “the exact measurement of time”⁸ was “a prime opportunity for profit.”⁹ The Artois governor’s authorization for what le Goff deems the “rationalization of time was [also] responsible for [time’s] secularization,”¹⁰ for “merchants and artisans began replacing Church time with a more accurately measured time useful for profane and secular tasks, clock time.”¹¹ For the purposes of this paper, we shall accept le Goff’s representation of the introduction of the clock-tower as a culturally “discontinuous” event.¹²

Thus, instead of an “imprecise and variable” ecclesially-based temporality in Aire, secular “labor time” was technologically granted autonomy; rather than the monastically rung bells, it functionally presided with mechanical precision over the economic and bodily practices of that community. We are perhaps reminded of Taylor’s description of “an environment in which we live a uniform, univocal secular time, which we try to measure and control in order to get things done,” especially when we acknowledge that one of the effects of the clock-tower, as the harbinger of mechanically regulated time, was the extension of working hours into the night, which had hitherto remained a time of rest and charitable fellowship with kin.¹³

We should now clarify more specifically the meaning of “secular,” a term we have been using much. In the late medieval period, the Latin term *saeculum* denoted a century, or an age, of the temporal world. It is this sense of ‘secular’ which Charles Taylor employed above. Thus ‘secular time’ connoted “ordinary as against higher time.”¹⁴ This distinction between ordinary and higher temporalities is important. In ordinary, secular time, “one thing happens to another, and when something is past, it’s past.”¹⁵ This is a rectilinear, non-recursive model of time, like Deleuze’s Aionic time which, in his own words, is a “*pure empty form of time, which has [...] unwound its own circle, stretching itself out in a straight line.*”¹⁶

In regard to the late medieval period, after the implementation of the clock-tower, the “labor time” of which le Goff speaks was basically aligned

with secular time. In our own day and age, as Taylor contends, secular time is equivalent to the “‘homogenous, empty time’ which [Walter] Benjamin makes central to modernity.”¹⁷ They are ultimately the same in a key philosophical aspect, namely their acknowledgement of only the reality of the ontologically immanent, which is to say the refusal of the valid existence of that which transcends or exceeds their chronometric scope.¹⁸

On the other hand, what Taylor calls ‘higher times’ refer human existence to that which exceeds and thus differentiates time. As he shows, in the late medieval period it was the ontologically transcendent eternity of God which exceeded temporal being and thus imbued it with deeper meaning. But in what way? For Taylor, ‘higher times’ “gathered, assembled, reordered, [and] punctuated profane, ordinary time” [as] “kairotic knots.”¹⁹ ‘Higher times’ even “introduce ‘warps’ and seeming inconsistencies in profane time-ordering [so that] Events which [are] far apart in profane time could nevertheless be closely linked.”²⁰

Circa 1400, such “knots” and “warps” primarily included feasts, fasts and holy-days from the Church’s liturgical calendar. As Taylor argues, “the Church, in its liturgical year, remembers and re-enacts what happened *in illo tempore* when Christ was on earth. Which is why this year’s Good Friday can be closer to the Crucifixion than last year’s mid-summer day. And the Crucifixion itself, since Christ’s action/passion here *participates* in God’s eternity, is closer to all times than they in secular terms are to each other.”²¹

In this sense, eternity and time are not opposed, but temporal being participates in eternity even as the eternal – liturgically acknowledged as it is in the celebratory events of ‘higher times’ - breaks into, gathers and differentiates secular time. Taylor thematizes this multi-layered account: “as well as the ‘horizontal’ dimension of merely secular time, there is a ‘vertical’ dimension, which can allow for the ‘warps’ [...] so that everything relates to more than one kind of time.”²² As the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur contends, “it [is] necessary to confess [eternity as] what is other than time in order to be in a position to give full justice to human temporality and to propose not to abolish it but to probe deeper into it, to hierarchize it, and to unfold it following levels of temporalization.”²³

It was precisely this hierarchically differentiated temporality that in the 14th century was arguably first threatened by the technology of the clock

tower, which - for economic purposes - threatened to reduce this "multiplex time" to a univocal secular time. As le Goff says, "[t]ime was no longer associated with cataclysms or festivals but rather with daily life, a sort of chronological net in which urban life was caught."²⁴ This 'labor' time and the 'higher times' of the Church's liturgical year thus met in opposition. In some cases, a deterritorialization of bodily *praxis* bore witness to this. For example, le Goff notes how the concept of a *schedule*, a method which quickly became crucial for the hourly ordering of daily servile labor, was appropriated from the initial "monastic manner of regulating the use of time," namely the schedule of hours for prayer.²⁵

In light of such an opposition between temporalities, then, in what *embodied* way did particular communities, by reference to 'higher times,' effectively gather and reorder a 'labor' time with mechanically supported pretensions of autonomy?

3. *Corpus Christi* Pageant Cycles as Liturgical Punctuation and Reorientation of Secular Time

While le Goff concludes with resignation, saying, "[h]enceforth, the clock was to be the measure of all things,"²⁶ I want to focus on a particular late medieval urban community's dramatic practices of festivity as a mode of liturgical action which in some degree served to resist the emergence of a secular temporality. That community is the city of York, *circa* 1380. In this case, the reason for its festivity was the feast of *Corpus Christi*, first introduced by Pope Urban IV in 1264 to honor the sacramental body of Christ, the Eucharist.

The feast was first introduced in England in 1318 and was "seized on by the authorities as an occasion for the promotion of both charity and Christian catechesis [and] rapidly won popular allegiance."²⁷ Yet the practice upon which I want to focus, namely *Corpus Christi* pageant cycles, first occurred later and thus much nearer in time to the technological institution of 'labor time,' beginning as they did in the late 14th century. In fact, the earliest record of their production places their emergence within twenty years of the technological implementation of 'labor time' at Aire.²⁸

Corpus Christi pageant cycles, in Sarah Beckwith's words, "are best understood as a form of liturgy."²⁹ Speaking of the cycles, Beckwith elaborates: "[t]hrough the resources of theater, ritual and liturgy, they narrate the Christian myth, and in this most fundamental of senses, they remember the life of Christ and the eucharistic imperative the invitation celebrated in the Feast of Corpus Christi: 'Do this in remembrance of me.'"³⁰ The cycles exemplify "the tendency in late medieval England to elaborate and make more explicit the representational and dramatic dimension of the liturgy."³¹ Rather than detailing the structural parallels between the cycles and such high-medieval doxological innovations as the Easter trope, *Quem quaeritis?*, which increasingly formed a part of special holy-week Masses, it suffices for our current purposes to briefly explicate the term 'liturgy' here, despite its marginalization from many modern academic forums due to its ritualistic – and thus supposedly hegemonic – connotations.

Catherine Pickstock destabilizes such connotations: "[t]o say that human life has a fundamentally [...] liturgical character is [...] a way of indicating that the most realistic actions with a pragmatic and functional character nonetheless also exceed themselves by indicating the [...] transcendent, which is the horizon in which they operate."³² Liturgy is a doxological practice which, because of its intricate and necessary bodily involvement, fundamentally stands firm against any gradual cultural proclivity for "'excar-nation', [considered as] a transfer out of embodied, 'enfleshed' forms of religious life, to those which are more 'in the head.'"³³ As Pickstock writes elsewhere,

the liturgy of the Middle Ages was embedded in a culture which was ritual in character. This was a time when the Offertory gifts were not disconnected from the produce of everyday life; indeed, the category itself of 'everyday life' was perforce a thoroughly *liturgical* category. For the community was not something which existed prior to, or in separation from, the Eucharist as a *given* which simply met at regular intervals to receive the Sacrament. Rather, the community as such was seen as flowing from eternity through the sacraments.³⁴

Here we see Pickstock's emphasis on the participation of temporality in eternity *via* liturgy. Indeed, liturgy both relativizes time in light of the eternal and keeps faith grounded in the physically, which is to say visibly contingent reality of embodied human existence; in being a performance which 're-members' the body of Christ, it allows for the non-identically repeated practices so vital for a proper maintenance of individual difference in community through time.³⁵

In the Greek, *leitourgia* etymologically means a 'work' of the 'people,' an *ergon* of the *laos*. The significance of this becomes clear when we recall, with le Goff, that it was precisely an economic, and even ergonomic, shift which resulted from the late-medieval technological standardization of 'labor time.' In relation to a contrast between temporalities, then, we have a parallel contrast between two conceptions of work, which is to say, two *economies*. One is profit driven, and constitutes the practical structure of a form of proto-capitalist social organization reliant on precision and uniformity, while the other pertains no less to work and life, but does so in a way that does not neglect to acknowledge the dependence of the world upon the goodness of the eternal God, which is to say the status of all that temporally is (even monetary profit) as gift.

Context and Performance

Corpus Christi pageant cycles were performed only during the feast of *Corpus Christi*, which occurred once a year, ten days after Pentecost. The pageants themselves dramatically narrated anywhere from fifteen to forty of the more significant events in salvation history, such as the Creation and Fall (of Lucifer and humanity), the Flood, a diverse scattering of other core Old Testament events, the Nativity, sometimes various events from Christ's life, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the Ascension and the Last Judgment. The pageants were staged at varying times on mobile wagons positioned in multiple locations throughout the streets of York, often according to the interlinking of several routes along which groups of people could serially ambulate.

These locations at which people congregated both figuratively *and* topologically instantiated distinct episodes in the narrative of salvation history, so that a unique meshing of time and space was effected. In this way,

not only was an entire portion of the year reordered by a festive cycle of “higher times,” and thus suspended from ‘labor time,’ but the entire particular urban *place* of York was transformed into a network of dramatic performances, a veritable *urbs signorum*. As if on a pilgrimage which nonetheless remained within the city walls, people walked from one stage to the next, reliving as a social body the narrative of the eternal God’s creation and redemption of the temporal world.

This practice of staging active representations of the biblical narrative operated along the ‘vertical’ dimension of which Taylor speaks, and thereby constitute precisely one of those “kairotic knots” of ‘higher times’ which thicken and reorient secular time.³⁶ Moreover, by theatrically signifying the core events of the Christian narrative (particularly the “historical” *corpus Christi* itself as the body of an actor), the York cycle of pageants comprised an interactive arena in which every citizen could conceive and (in the sense of Ricoeur’s “forward-directed reference”) consequently proceed to enact the stories of their own lives within the determinative yet ‘open’ context of that larger narrative.³⁷

Indeed, besides signifying God’s body on stage, the pageant cycles, by involving the participation of the entire socio-ecclesial body, also made present the *corpus Christi* off stage, as the gathered local community. Corpus Christi theatre, as Eamon Duffy notes, “encourag[es] an ever deeper or immediate sense of imaginative participation in the biblical event[s] by gild members than that offered by the prescribed liturgy.”³⁸ It is in this sense that some scholars have called the pageant cycles a sacrament of theatre, as something more than mere spectacle. Sarah Beckwith convincingly contends that “these plays actualize the body of Christ.”³⁹ Duffy, too, goes on to describe the feast of Corpus Christi as “conceived and presented in late medieval communities as a celebration of the corporate life of the body social, created and ordered by the presence of the Body of Christ among them.”⁴⁰ We would do well to remember here, however, that the presence of Christ’s *corpus* is always already manifold and complex, with historical, sacramental, ecclesial dimensions. During the feast of Corpus Christi, a uniquely theatrical dimension was added, and the concomitant affectivity altered the dynamic of the other three, as I argue below.

Reconciliatory Affectivity

It was a unique admixture of relation between the latter three of these dimensions – sacramental, ecclesial and theatrical – that actively encouraged a common move toward penance in the form of *embodied* reconciliation between persons. As a total, open-ended series of affective events, “*Corpus Christi* theatre explores [...] the embodiment of forgiveness.”⁴¹ As the initiative for the feast, the sacramental *corpus Christi* held a position of prominence. Indeed, as Beckwith articulates, the underlying impetus for social reconciliation was the consumption of the Eucharist: “preparation of the soul and reconciliation [...] entailed not merely self-examination but actually restoring damaged bonds of love between people.”⁴² Here we can recall Pickstock’s earlier point regarding the community as being given through the sacraments. But with the pageant cycles, the theatrical supplements this: “[*Corpus Christi* theatre] animates the intersubjective dimensions of theater to show that the presence of Christ and his absence are utterly bound up with our presence to each other in bonds of charity.”⁴³ This, in turn, leads to an emphasis on the socio-ecclesial aspect, so that “confession and penance are acts that concern the community as a whole.”⁴⁴

Yet we must interject here with the qualification that in the late medieval period, even while (as Duffy indicates) “the Host [...] was the source of human community,”⁴⁵ the doctrinal emphasis of the Mass had shifted, from a participatory and mysterious event to a more causal mediation of grace received visually.⁴⁶ This is what makes the pageant cycles so interesting, with their parallel aspects of communal participation and theatrical spectacle. The tensions here between participation and causality mirror those in the very late medieval Mass itself; after all, and as we mentioned above, the cycles themselves grew out of the liturgical tropes during the Mass.

I thus propose that the pageant cycles represent a lay desire for a participatory eucharistic schema whose recognition of the re-membering and congregating of the ecclesial *corpus Christi* each week was somehow absent from the structure of the Mass itself, having been “displaced” by a terminological inclination toward the causal power of Sacrament as *the* “enchanted” object. The form of participation which the cycles foregrounded was primarily economic.⁴⁷

An Alternate Production-Consumption Cycle

In other words, the bonds of charity Beckwith mentions were fundamentally economic bonds, involving merchants and artisans who joined together in producing these plays. To begin with, as a feast, on Corpus Christi “total or partial abstention from servile work was required and the laity were expected to observe the Sunday pattern of attendance at matins, Mass, and evensong, fasting on the preceding eve.”⁴⁸ In this sense, “labor time” and its “servile work” are utterly suspended and relativized by the feast, as an instance of ‘higher times.’ Moreover, each pageant was funded by York’s artisan guilds, so that the pageant cycle unified the local economy with a common practice to which each guild uniquely contributed. For instance, the shipwrights’ guild was in charge of the ‘Building of Noah’s Ark’ pageant, the Baker’s guild of the Last Supper pageant, etc.⁴⁹ Funding was also donated from annually accumulated earnings and so was returned to the entire community.

Granted, “[c]raft guilds and urban corporations saw in the ritual order of the great [Corpus Christi] processions associated with the feast an opportunity for civic and social iconography, the display of piety an opportunity for the display of the worship and the social clout of those involved.” Yet it is in materially engaging both the work and time of the citizens of York that *Corpus Christi* pageant cycles proffer a radical critique of the regulation of time for the sake of monetary profit, particularly in light of the late-medieval possibility of an emergent autonomous secular temporality.

We can describe the content of this critique in noting how, by means of their complex and pervasive dramaturgical series of “kairotic” performances, Corpus Christi cycles relativized the “everyday” (*i.e.* secular time) in light of the eternal God. This liturgical relativization relied upon the freely offered resources stemming from a vital economic base, and constituted a reemphasis on the participatory nature of the eucharistic *corpus Christi* as a socio-ecclesial event.

Therefore, in contrast to the capitalist production-consumption cycle operative in the context of modern secular time, which was first emerging in the late-medieval period by way of technological advancement, late-medieval *Corpus Christi* pageant cycles embody an alternative production-consumption cycle: the *production* of dramatic performances which, in en-

couraging the move to penance and communal reconciliation, restored the bonds of charity necessary for the proper *consumption* of the Eucharist. And this cycle fits within the divine *economy* of redemption whose very narrative the plays perform. It is in this way, then, that *Corpus Christi* pageant cycles truly are a 'work of the people,' a liturgy, to the point that they pervade, relativize and thereby reorient the temporal economy of York, reconciling people in ways which balance communal corporeality and appearance with differential variety in celebration and individual penitential piety.⁵⁰ We can accordingly describe the cycles as imperfect embodiments of a redemptive economy.

Conclusion: A Redemptive Economy

Like the Sacrament they celebrate, *Corpus Christi* theatre, in William Cavanaugh's words, "performs a narrative of cosmic proportions, from the death and resurrection of Christ, to the new covenant formed in his blood, to the future destiny of all creation."⁵¹ And, to indicate their relevance for modern temporality, with the reorientation of secular time that *Corpus Christi* theatre affects, "[t]he consumer of the Eucharist is [thus] no longer the schizophrenic subject of global capitalism, awash in a sea of unrelated present [moments], but walks in a story with a past, present, and future."⁵²

By enacting the pageant cycles – without any 'need for speed' or 'ex-carnation' – the community of York was "[p]articipating now in a new, dynamic economy [...namely] the relations that constitute the body of Christ."⁵³ As an alternate, yet no less 'economic' production-consumption cycle which freed time from the clock-tower, *Corpus Christi* theatre differentiated time in relation to the eternal and reoriented human existence within the narrative context of God's incarnate entrance into and redemption of temporal being.⁵⁴ This narrative is contrasted to the exploitive trajectories of early capitalist organizations of labor. The festive performance of the pageant cycles thus reestablished the community of York⁵⁵ as first and foremost a pilgrim people of God, travelling principally through time in productive cycles of penitence and reconciliation, rather than standardizing temporality for profit.

In closing, we can hope that a contemporary recognition of the reductive nature of strictly secular "labor time," and a resultant desire for tempo-

reality's differentiation will animate the production of equally creative models of social *praxis* such as *Corpus Christi* theatre embodied in late medieval York.⁵⁶

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ENDNOTES

¹ Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007. p. 59

² Ibid. p. 58

³ Ibid. p. 59

⁴ From this stem negative psycho-somatic effects. As Wendell Berry notes, “we seem to grant to our high-speed roads and our airlines the rather thoughtless assumption that people can change places as rapidly as their bodies can be transported [...] the faster one goes, the more strain there is on the senses, the more they fail to take in, the more confusion they must tolerate or gloss over – and the longer it takes to bring the mind to a stop in the presence of anything” (Berry 672).

⁵ Wright, John. “The Mission of the Church of the Nazarene in Mid-City, Sermon #3.” October 22, 2007. http://www.pastorjohnwright.org/archives/2007/10/the_mission_of.html#more

⁶ In regard to Christian religious *praxis*, Charles Taylor has coined the term “excarnation” (Taylor 554); this term will be advantageous for us below.

⁷ Le Goff, Jacques. *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. p. 35

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. p. 30

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 36

¹¹ Ibid. Le Goff argues that “once commercial networks were organized [...] time became an object of measurement” (35). We see similarities here with Taylor’s argument concerning the secular time of today.

¹² I am implying Gordon Leff’s usage of ‘discontinuous’ here, as opposed to ‘continuous’. See Leff, Gordon, *The Dissolution of the Medieval Outlook : An Essay on Intellectual and Spiritual Change in the Fourteenth Century*. New York: New York University Press, 1976.

¹³ This encroachment on the nocturnal has of course exponentially increased today, so that now 24-hour stores are common, and the city, as they say, never sleeps. Such represents a distortion of even a purely mundane time, that is, a time based only upon the movements and rhythms of the seasons and processes of the world. With this in mind, the secular time of the clock-tower is doubly problematic, for it threatens to usurp and displace both the liturgical temporality of the ecclesial calendar, as well as the ‘natural’ oscillations of cosmic temporality.

¹⁴ Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. p. 55

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Deleuze, Gilles. *Logic of Sense*. Trans. by Mark Lester with Charles Stivale. Ed. by Constantin V. Boundas. New York : Columbia University Press, 1990. p. 165

¹⁷ Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. p. 54

¹⁸ Within the medieval period, the mutual indifference of secular time, regardless of what happens ‘within’ it, arguably proffers a parody of the Augustinian-Boethian doctrine of God’s immutable “present,” which “contains” all times; secular time does so by constituting a rival schema that, like a Scotist univocal ontology, posits itself as a “container,” albeit a totalizing one.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 55

²¹ Ibid. p. 58 My italics.

²² Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. p. 57

²³ Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Vol. 1. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984. p. 30

²⁴ Le Goff, Jacques. *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*. p. 48

²⁵ Ibid. p. 51

²⁶ Ibid. p. 52

²⁷ Duffy, Eamon. *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*. 2nd Edition. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005. pp. 43-4

²⁸ I am aware at the ‘leap’ I am making by linking such geographical distances without further research; I hope to extend my study – which is at this point preliminary – in the future in order to build upon these potential lacunae. To continue, the clock-tower began in 1355 and the York cycles were first performed circa 1375. But we must underline that the reasons for the institution of the Corpus Christi feast itself are complex, and involve a shift in understanding regarding the Eucharist itself, which – considered as the true body of Christ – was the celebrated object of this week long feast. Henri de Lubac’s *Corpus Mysticum* traces the high-medieval doctrinal shifts that led to this consideration. In brief, for approximately a thousand years, the body of Christ was considered in three ways, which were nonetheless unified. First, there was the historical body, which was Jesus Christ, God the Son incarnated as a particular Jew in first century Palestine and raised from the dead. The second corpus Christi was that of the Church which after Christ’s ascension, was considered as the real, or true body, the *corpus verum*. The third corpus Christi was the sacrament of the Eucharist, which was considered the *corpus mysticum*, or the mystical body. William of St. Thierry puts it this way:

Whenever the intelligent reader finds in a book anything about the flesh or body of the divine Jesus, he may apply this threefold definition of his flesh or body [...] For he must think *in one way* of that flesh or body which hung on the Cross and is sacrificed on the altar, *in another way* of his flesh or body which is abiding life to the person who received it in Communion, and *in yet another way* of that flesh or body which is the Church...Not that we would depict Christ as having three bodies, like Geryon in the fable, since the Apostle

testifies that the body of Christ is one. But the mind or heart makes the distinction with a certain relation to faith, though the reality maintains the undefiled truth in its simplicity. (*On the Sacrament of the Altar*, c. 12 {PL 180, 361-2}; quoted from Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*. p. 388)

During the first millennium or so of the Christian tradition, the constitution of the latter two bodies (ecclesial and sacramental) occurred as a reciprocal event, as both a physical assemblage in a single geographic location and a consecrated liturgical transformation which, in their shared relation to the risen historical body of Christ ('which hung on the Cross'), were kept in a tension that defied conceptualization, and thus avoided a binary opposition in which one was privileged over the other.

However, as Michel de Certeau notes, "after the twelfth century, the expression [*corpus mysticum*] no longer designated the Eucharist, as it had previously, but the Church. Conversely, '*corpus verum*' no longer designated the Church but the Eucharist. The adjectives '*mysticus*' (hidden) and '*verus*' (truthful, real and knowable as such) were reversed [...] the change was in the form of a chiasmus between the signifier and the signified" (de Certeau *Mystic Fable* 82). Accordingly, instead of the *visible* body of the church and the *invisible* sacramental body, after this reversal "the Church, the social 'body' of Christ, is henceforth the (hidden) signified of a sacramental 'body' held to be a visible signifier, because it is the showing of a presence beneath the 'species' (or appearances) of the consecrated bread and wine" (82).

No longer were Church and the Sacrament held in a fruitful tension as ontologically equidistant from the historical 'body' of the risen Christ. Rather, the sacrament, as the third 'body,' came to be more closely associated with the historical 'body,' to the exclusion of the social, ecclesial 'body.' It was this emphasis on the Eucharist as the 'true' body that led to the institution of the Corpus Christi feast, which honors the object of the Sacrament with a revered status it traditionally did not possess. But there were other, politically significant repercussions, not the least of which was a move from a doctrine which was grounded in salvation as participation, or incorporation, whereby those socially gathered were considered the visibly 'real' ecclesial *corpus Christi*, to one reliant upon efficient causality, whereby emphasis was placed on the priest, who was seemingly endowed with a power to 'make' the 'real' sacramental *corpus Christi*, and which itself, in turn, was held to have transmitted the force of grace to the sacrament's consumer.

When abused, this shift transformed the laity, during the mass, into a mere audience who waited expectantly for the ringing of the bell (during the *epiclesis*) and the elevation of the host as the spectacle of spectacles. In this sense, the term 'liturgy,' which in Greek etymologically denotes a 'work' of the 'people', (an *ergon* of the *laos*) arguably no longer applied accurately to the Mass. An unnecessary opposition was thereby established between the ecclesial 'body,' and the clerics, who were associated with the Eucharist. It was

this seeming opposition against which Wyclif reacted, but it concerned an issue which would have been nonexistent in an earlier period.

See also John Milbank, "The Last of the Last: Theology in the Church." *Conflicting Allegiances: The Church-Based University in a Liberal-Democratic University*. Ed. Michael L. Budde & John W. Wright. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004.

²⁹ Beckwith, Sarah. *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays*.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. p. 100

³⁰ Beckwith, Sarah. *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays*. p. 3

³¹ Duffy, Eamon. *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*. p. 20

³² Pickstock, Catherine. "Liturgy, Art and Politics." *Modern Theology* 16.2 (2000): 159-180. p. 160 This distinction between the ontologically transcendent and immanent parallels the eternal/temporal relation. Another way of saying this is that "the liturgical relativises the everyday without denying its value" (161).

³³ Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. p. 554.

³⁴ Pickstock, Catherine. *After Writing*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998. pp. 170-1

³⁵ In regard to the positive nature of liturgical repetition, Pickstock's words are worth including here: "It is a quotidian error to suppose that repetition requires identity between things [...] Positive repetition, then, emerges from difference, and it constitutes development; each new assertion of an element, over and against the disparate world, has absolute significance in relation to what has gone before [...] Commemorative repetition cannot be dissociated from the event to which it refers. There was repetition in the original event of the Last Supper, not simply in the parallelism of Jesus' words, but also in his repetitive call to repeat and remember. Without that provision for repetition, the event itself would be incomplete. [...] While in the quotidian aren paratactic repetition signals a decline in meaning, proliferation forming a broad-scale grammaticalization, sacral repetition produces an intensification of meaning, a perpetual lexical reassertion, the cumulative effect of which is the suspension of mundane time. Events are transposed from linear time into a perspective of eternity" ("Liturgy and Language: The Sacred Polis." *Liturgy in Dialogue*. Ed. Paul Bradshaw & Bryan Spinks. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994. pp. 136-7). In the same article, Pickstock extends the significance of non-identical repetition in relation to mundane, or secular, time: "The Eucharistic present does not persistently enter the repeated interstices of our diurnal order to reside passively in them, but rather to transpose the horizontal into the vertical, the quantitative into the qualitative, *chromos* into *kairos*. [...] Repetition in the sacred polis seeks to harness the present not by annihilating the past, but rather by vivifying it, and by setting the present in the context of eternity. The cumulative effect of such recursive present moments is to suspend the ravages of mundane time and to establish a vertical plane where each event points simultaneously behind and in front of itself, filling each moment of history with meaning and purpose" (137). In regard to this, we can recall Taylor's similar mention of the twin axes of horizontal (ontologically imma-

nent/secular/finite) and vertical (ontologically transcendent/sacred/eternal) times, the latter imbuing the former with 'meaning', and thus disallowing nihilism.

³⁶ And this in part by materially involving the formation of 'kairotic knots' or locative clusters of 'pilgrims' at multiple urban positions. In Michel de Certeau's words, a 'kairotic knot' "mediates spatial transformations. In the mode of the 'right point in time' (kairos), it produces a founding rupture or break. [...] modifies the local order. The goal of the series is thus an operation that transforms the visible organization. But this change requires the invisible resources of a time which obeys other laws (*The Practice of Everyday Life* 85). For the 'series' of *Corpus Christi* pageants, such an 'other' time is the eternal which, in de Certeau's words, 'produces a founding rupture or break.' And the resultant transformation of visible organization which Certeau considers essential to the enactment of narration occurs in the production *and* reception of the pageants themselves, as I shall argue below.

³⁷ What Paul Ricoeur notes in regard to the narrative of Augustine's *Confessions* applies here: "the attraction of the eternity of the [divine] Word felt by temporal experience is not such as to plunge the narration, which is still temporal, into a contemplation free from the constraints of time" (Ricoeur 29). Moreover, the residual nihilism which accompanies an over-emphasis on the capacity for independent self-determination (arguably *the* myth of modernity), as opposed to dependence on others and God, is avoided (a emphasis which we see emerge, for example, with Chaucer's 'self-narrating' pilgrims, also in the late 14th century).

³⁸ Duffy, Eamon. *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*. p. 21 I should note here that Duffy is specifically referring to Candlemas celebrations, but says in the succeeding paragraph that "it is the liturgical celebration which shaped and defined such gild observances, and the same centrality of pattern of the liturgy is evident in a number of the surviving Corpus Christi plays of the Purification" (Duffy 21).

³⁹ Beckwith, Sarah. *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays*. p. 116

⁴⁰ Duffy, Eamon. *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*. p. 26

⁴¹ Sarah Beckwith *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings*. London: Routledge, 1993. p. 91

⁴² Ibid. p. 92

⁴³ Ibid. p. 101

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Duffy, Eamon. *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*. p. 92

⁴⁶ The history of this doctrinal emphasis is traced briefly above. See note 25

⁴⁷ This was in part due to the terminological shifts which both de Lubac traces in *Corpus Mysticum* and de Certeau retraces in *The Mystic Fable* regarding the threefold body of Christ. See note 26 above. Whether there exist substantial links between the univocity of secular time and the "loss" of participation remains to be explored. If said temporal uni-

vocacy stems from Scotus's univocal ontology (which disallowed metaphysical participation), then this exploration would certainly bear fruit.

⁴⁸ Duffy, Eamon. *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*. p. 42

⁴⁹ Duffy notes that "the gilds, not the clerks, took over the management of the processions." Ibid. p. 44.

⁵⁰ They also provide an opportunity for the lively education of the mostly illiterate, yet increasingly literate, late medieval laity. As Duffy observes, "[w]hatever their precise content, these plays clearly involved massive corporate effort by the laity of York to foster knowledge of the elements of the faith" (Ibid. p. 67).

⁵¹ Cavanaugh, William T. *Theopolitical Imagination*. London: T&T Clark, 2005. p. 118

⁵² Ibid. Moreover, during the 'higher time' of the *Corpus Christi* feast, the future of all persons itself is made visible in the final pageant, the Last Judgment, as the gathering of all peoples and time itself into eternity at the *eschaton*, which, as Beckwith notes, is the "crucial horizon in these plays": "[a]s an eschatological feast, the future breaks into the present [...] it has happened already and is yet to come" (Beckwith 113).

⁵³ Ward, Graham. *Christ and Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. p. 84

⁵⁴ In this vein, *Corpus Christi* theatre arguably functions as a quasi-liminal result of the dialectical relation between medieval academic doctrine, occupying the Bakhtinian authoritative primary genre of the treatise or *summa* (always composed in Latin), and vernacular, 'literary' texts, themselves occupying various secondary genres. Indeed, liturgy is arguably the a priori conflation of these two, as a communally enacted praxis of doctrinal poesis. But, while *Corpus Christi* plays stem from liturgy, they come more and more to respond to the doctrinal and ecclesial shifts first occurring in the late medieval period (regarding the Eucharist and the overall increase in clericalization).

Thus, by commenting on the consequences of certain doctrinal shifts – that is, the transference of the phrase 'corpus verum' from the ecclesial body to the sacramental body - *Corpus Christi* theatre constitutes a founding moment in the historical and cultural dialectic between texts of hierarchically differentiated genres, on the (Bakhtinian) primary and secondary levels. And such interaction in this case precisely exposes on the level of culture the displaced role of liturgy as a mode by which immanent 'everday' life is relativized and made meaningful in reference to the transcendent. The very production of *Corpus Christi* cycles, then, when considered as culturally enacted yet ecclesially sanctioned, summons a community – in this case York - to hearken back to the previous balance between the three-fold body of Christ, which is to say back to a time when the social *Corpus Christi* received equivalent emphasis with the sacramental *Corpus Christi*, bears witness to the threat of a loss of a liturgical way of life. The trajectory of this loss, in all its manifold aspects, and this hearkening back functions as a principal motivator of the transition from the late medieval to the early modern periods, respectively.

⁵⁵ Which was more definitively determined by the fact that the minster of York, like the respective cathedrals of all medieval towns, was presided over by a single bishop.

⁵⁶ Interestingly, such has arguably occurred; the York Corpus Christi pageant cycles have, since the mid-twentieth century (although more so in the last two decades), once again become an aspect of cultural life in York, however contrived. Do they serve the same function? Of course not. A valid inquisition, then, would concern the worth of the performance of these pageants if, for example, they do not function simultaneously both as a genuine celebratory expression of an ecclesial feast and as an artistic medium for the encouragement of penance and communal reconciliation. Must they inevitably be construed as a nostalgic form of entertainment which ambivalently pays homage to a 'lost past'? How lost, in fact, is this past? Or, rather, could the initial function(s) of Corpus Christi theatre be legitimately reinstated, so that their performance occurred within a cultural context which itself gave primacy to the ecclesial and doctrinal ties? Would such a move require the fundamentally private, and thus supposedly 'sectarian', nature of these performances, or not? Such investigations regarding the modern resuscitation of the pageant cycles should be undertaken, insofar as suggested conclusions may indicate the contemporary significance of these cycles, and thus assist in determining the nature of their alteration and outlining their current function in more detail.

In fact, Sarah Beckwith has outlined in detail the various complications and ambiguities surrounding the 20th century stagings of the 'mystery plays' in York, particularly during the 1951 Festival of Britain which, as Beckwith quotes one author as having argued, was to be both a post-war cultural exhibition and "a concerted attempt to construct a 'new secular mythology' through which to constitute a future" (Beckwith *Signifying God* 5). Beckwith further contends that these post-WWII stagings were intended, *via* the "revisiting [of Britain's] own ancientness" (180), to contribute a positive *ethos* within "the twin contexts of populism and nationalism and state subsidy in England after 1945" (180-1). Surely this is a far cry from the cycles' original, late-medieval functions.