

Mulatto Theology: Race, Discipleship, and *Interracial* Existence

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
Religion in the Graduate School
of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

To exist racially “in-between,” being neither entirely of one race nor another, or more simply stated being a mulatto or interracial, has been characterized in the outlook that tends to mark existence in the modern world as a tragic state of being. It is from this outlook of loneliness and isolation that the term the “tragic mulatto” emerged. The dissertation *Mulatto Theology: Race, Discipleship, and Interracial Existence* will theologically interpret these lives so as to interrogate the wider reality of racialized lives that the mulatto’s body makes visible. As such, mulatto bodies are modulations of a racial performance in which all are implicated. The mulatto’s body is significant in that it discloses what is most pronouncedly masked in modern (and particularly white) identities.

Culture, identities (individual and communal) are not only interconnected, but they are mixtures where peoples become presenced in the lives and practices of other “alien” peoples. This mixture requires careful reflection upon the formation of all identities, and the ways in which these identities become visible within the world. Given this arc of identity any reflection upon Christian identity must articulate itself within the inherent tensions of these identities and the practices that mark such identities within the world. Through this work I hope to show how European theology itself has failed to account for its own dominant enclosure of identities, but also how Christian reflection itself might find a way out of this tragic reality.

In examining the formation and performance of mulatto bodies this dissertation suggests these bodies are theologically important for modern Christians and theological reflection in particular. Namely, the mulatto’s body becomes the site for re-imagining

Christian life as a life lived “in-between.” The primary locus of this re-imagination is the body of Christ. A re-examination of theological reflection and Scripture regarding his person and work display his character as uniquely mulatto, or the God-man. But not only is his identity mulatto, but his person also describes the nature of his work, his re-creation of humanity. So understood Christian bodies can be construed as “interracial” bodies -- bodies of flesh and Spirit that disrupt modern formations of race. The Christian body points to a communal reality where hybridity is no longer tragic, but rather constitutive of Christian discipleship. This new, hybrid and “impure” way of existing witnesses to God’s redemptive work in the world.

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Introduction

“Who is my brother and my sister,” asked the disciples to Jesus. In the 20th century alone we are confronted with countless refusals to even ask this most fundamental question. The horror of the holocaust, genocide in Rwanda, Darfur, Sudan, Serbia, the epidemic of HIV/AIDS, the proliferation of weapons (of mass and minor destruction), the blatant trafficking of children and women throughout the world, the abuse of power among religious and secular leaders alike, the continuing de facto segregation of neighborhoods and schools, the increasing population of African Americans and Hispanics in U.S. prisons. And in the midst of these atrocities and transgressions against humanity we can find no clear delineation between those who call themselves by the name of Christ and those who do not.

Theological reflection has surely sought to resist these terrible realities in many ways and yet we, as Christians, have found ourselves terribly complicit or complicitly silent as these challenges seep into our lives. But perhaps the question should not be what have we *said* about these moments, but rather what have these moments revealed about the nature of what we think we are doing. What are we doing when we *do* theology?

Theological reflection undoubtedly must begin with God. And yet this is where the simplicity ends. Does it have to do with who God is? Does it have to do with who we think God is? How do we know? Who gets to decide? These are all important questions answered in so many ways over the last two thousand years. But perhaps in order to get at this question we must perhaps ask the question what does it mean to do theology if theology is understood primarily as an *encounter*. That is, theology is not a reflection upon a God-out-

there or with the religious imagination of a particular group of people grasping for a sense of what lies beyond them. Theology is reflection on an encounter. It is the attempt to discern the shape, significance, and telos of this mysterious encounter with One who is so unlike us yet in whom we bear our most fundamental likeness.

The inability to account for, inhabit, resist, or speak against the horrors of our modern world are bound to theology's refusal to understand itself as articulating an encounter with God in the world or as Karl Barth would say, God with Us (CD IV.1) Theology is the attempt to discern not an idea, but a presence among us. Theology is an attempt to discern the shape, significance and telos of God among us and for us, *as us*. God has transgressed our world, our very bodies even as God has created the world and our very bodies. Accounting for this presence must first begin with an account of how this came to be. It must begin with an account of the transgression that allowed us to discern ourselves and our possibilities.

This significance of transgression for theological inquiry is bound to the significance of theology for our bodies and lives. Without an account of God with Us as its continual focus, without an account of God encountering humanity, theology becomes plagued by the specter of inconsequentiality. Theology must be about our bodies and lives and it must seek to account, discern, and reflect upon the reality that our bodies and lives have been transgressed, for God was and is among us. Insofar as theology has succumbed to the segmentation of its own inquiry it has allowed reflection of this encounter to become siphoned into pieces as theological anthropology, metaphysics, ethics, philosophical theology, etc. As it has done so our comprehension of the decisive object of our reflection

has dimmed as we cut the body in pieces to probe its inner workings. We have cut the body so thoroughly and so deeply that we scarcely acknowledge the mind or ideas having any part of a body or soul. We have dissected the eyes and ears so minutely that we can no longer decipher their significance within a world of sights and sounds. They are organs, tissue, ideas, pieces of knowledge to wonder at and ponder and yet at no point are we confronted with the significance that these pieces, taken together, put forth... God with Us. Theology has to do with bodies and lives encountered by God who is not distant but becomes bound to us so that we ought not be able to consider ourselves apart from God's presence among us.

This dissertation seeks to discern the significance of this claim, that God is with Us, through an explication of bodies that were rendered neither/nor or "mulatto" in the wake of this theological march forward. In the shadow of modernity and the rise of knowledge, bodies and people were born who could not be accounted for within the systems of classification available. These people, these bodies were the fruits of desire that should not have been and their lives displayed tones, capacities, and possibilities that confounded the very discourse of nature and desire that helped to shape the modern world.

To exist racially "in-between," being neither entirely of one race nor another, or more simply stated being a mulatto or interracial, has been characterized in the outlook that tends to mark the modern world as a lonely, tragic state of being. It is from this outlook that the term the "tragic mulatto" emerged. The dissertation *Mulatto Theology: Race, Discipleship, and Interracial Existence* will theologially interpret these lives so as to interrogate the wider reality of racialized lives that the mulatto's body makes visible. The creation of these bodies pose a

theological challenge because it is in the world that creates them that we confess, seek, and serve God. These bodies require us to re-imagine our lives together and the demands our nations make upon us as well as those whom we call *our* people. The constitution of our personhood as one of many requires an identification of a particular many and the means by which we count ourselves among their number. It is this process of identification and conformation that marks the fundamental claim of theological reflection, but is an economy that is inherent within society at large.

I contend that produced through affirmations and refusals, mulatto bodies are modulations of a racial performance in which all are implicated. This is a profound theological challenge. The mulatto's body is significant in that it discloses what is masked to most. This dissertation examines the mulatto's body in such a way as to allow it to disclose the condition of us all. Yet, such an examination goes beyond this critical gesture. It probes the mulatto's body in such a way that the mulatto's body becomes the site for the re-imagining of Christian life as a life lived "in-between." So understood *all* Christian bodies can be construed as "interracial" bodies -- bodies that disrupt modern formations of race. The Christian body points to a communal reality where hybridity is no longer tragic, but rather constitutive of Christian discipleship. This new, hybrid and "impure" way of existing witnesses to God's redemptive work in the world.

These bodies, mulatto, mestizo, mixed-race bodies are the children of the colonial world. They are the children of a world created through an economy of faith, power, and money. These were children of encounter. They were children whose very bodies and lives continually pointed to the transgression of white men against "savage" women. They were

bodies and lives who sought to live into a vast “in-between” world where they were both desired and hated. Their presence was always political and their lives were perpetually a performance. Their lives are significant for theologians in part because our theological inquiry helped to create the world where they were rendered “mixed.” But more importantly, their lives are crucial because they point to the ease of identity that has settled upon modern lives and particularly modern Christians who no longer account for themselves as a people “encountered.”

In this dissertation I display the significance of these bodies created in the wake of the West’s encounter with the non-West so as to illumine both the sinfulness of modern identities grounded upon race, ethnicity and citizenship and the possibility of theological reflection as an encounter with God with Us. To claim that Christ is mulatto is to articulate the claim God with Us within the reality of God’s encountering us.

This theological starting point is necessary for three reasons: First, this claim is bound not only to a faithful description of God’s presence in the world. God enters the world in such a way as to transgress us. God conceives something in and among us. This enfleshment of God must be accounted for in the daily intricacies of lives and patterns of living. We must not only say that God became human, but we must examine the shape and form of the humanity God entered.

Secondly, Christ’s mulattic life points not only to the reality of God’s presence in the world, but also points to the nature of God’s redemptive work. We cannot think of redemption or soteriology apart from God’s person embodied in the world. This is a presence that does not simplify our identities as saved or not saved, but rather disrupts the

very notions of human longing and possibility. The claim Christ is mulatto demonstrates the deep interpenetration of God with God's world in such a way as to refuse the segmentation of theological reflection and necessarily re-member theological inquiry as a task that has to do with one's body, not simply one's mind.

Lastly, Christ's mulattic personhood points to the deepest possibilities regarding our own personhood. It points to the necessity of God's encountering us as giving birth to a profound transgression of our own bodies and lives. It is not merely a claim about what I must confess concerning Christ, but rather it is a confrontation with the reality that God is *with* Us. God abides *in* us. We are *new* creatures. The mulatto Christ points us to a possibility that is beyond ourselves and in doing so seeks to reiterate the deepest sensibilities of theological reflection over the last two thousand years. But more profoundly it is to inhabit Christ's own prayer that we be in him as he is in the Father. Without the language of mixture, transgression, mulatto, hybridity we are left without the difficult but necessary tools to discern the significance, shape, and depth of Christ's prayer in our contemporary world.

This dissertation re-appropriates theological reflection upon the person and work of Christ within the realities and tragedies of the modern condition. Theology must account for the realities of lives lived and how these lives continually negotiate the many claims of nation, race, and culture impressed upon them. I contend that the pressures both to conform or resist are, in fact, essential to human identity but it is the pattern or marks of this negotiation that must be taken more seriously. Here I suggest it is the lives of those who have been deemed in-between that point us most prophetically to the reality of all lives in-between. This contention is not a precursor to a theological insight, but it is itself a

theological claim for at the heart of the gospel claim that God is with us lies an inherent decision, a refusal or an acceptance. Yet this refusal or acceptance is not bound to a certain ideal of life, but rather the life of discipleship is the discerning of the body of God bound to us. This is not an invitation to a certain relativism or open theology. Rather it is a call to return to the body of Jesus and the negotiation of lived lives, not their abstractions.

Bound to this theological claim concerning personhood in this contemporary moment and Christ's historic and eternal personhood is that question and call of Christian personhood. To concern ourselves with Christ is to always and ever ask a question concerning us and our possibilities. In our present moment these questions cannot be asked without attending to the patterns of our daily lives that bear the mark of race. These are not questions for colored folks for white folks to "try to understand." Our world is a racial world that bears structures and bears children who feed, and learn, and act within its walls. From within these walls we must account for Christ's presence among us. The reality of our in-betweenness, or our "mixture" is not a recent innovation, but rather marks the very humanity Christ created and entered into. It is the rhythm of his life and ours that this dissertation seeks to express.

Outline

This study will examine these claims in three parts: (1) Racial Discipleship; or Disciplining the Body; (2) Christ, the Tragic Mulatto; (3) and, Christian Discipleship; or the New Discipline of the Body.

Part I (Renunciation: Racial Discipleship; or Disciplining the Body)

Part I will outline the way in which race is not only a performance, but more precisely a religious performance which can be construed as a mode of distorted discipleship. Through the narration of interracial or mulatto lives we see the unmasking of all racial imaginations and the ways in which modern bodies both are performed upon and perform into modern racial imagination. This section will consist of two chapters. Chapter One will highlight the plight of the “tragic mulatto” with special attention to the peculiarity of the mulatto’s existence as tragic and how such characterizations reveal a broader reality of racial identity and performance within the dialectic of racial imagination. The second chapter will examine the phenomenon of interracial existence through an interrogation of the passing literature of the 19th century. Through these texts the performative nature of race becomes clearly seen and works to show how all racial lives are thus performances of discipleship tragically seeking to respond to modernity’s call to communion.

Part II (Confession: Christ, the Tragic Mulatto)

Part II turns to the person and work Christ, highlighting the way in which Christ’s person must be understood as “mulatto” or hybrid. But it does so in such a way as to show that in his body hybridity, mixture, and impurity are not tragic, for in his flesh these terms do not have “purity” as their binary opposite as is the case with modern racial identities. Chapter 3 reflects upon Christ’s person as the product of the transgression of the divine and human, two realities that were thought to be wholly other. Christ’s body is thus an interracial reality yet his body is not marked by the tragic. Instead, it unveils true humanity as the

hybridity of flesh and spirit. Chapter 4 explores the way in which the claim regarding the person of Christ is fundamentally tied to Christ's work through the incarnation and upon the cross. Christ's very presence becomes humanity's response to God's call through Israel. This responsive presence becomes the basis for humanity's incorporation by the Spirit that overturns the tragic mulatto body by transforming all bodies. This becomes the theological basis for understanding how Christian bodies as mulatto bodies are destined to disrupt modernity's racial imagination and instantiate new possibilities of imagining and incorporating difference within ecclesial life.

Part III (Immersion: Christian Discipleship; or the New Discipline of the Body)

Part III widens the claim regarding the person and work of Jesus by considering Jesus' mulatto body as a social configuration wherein the hybrid life that marks incorporation into his body is constituted by practices of entrance and transformation. Such practices utter humanity's response to Christ's response witnessing to what it means to be incorporated into this body and displaying a politics of mulatto existence. Chapter 5 offers a reflection upon the significance of baptism as an entrance into this life as the re-creation of bodies and life as pneumatological. The re-creation of bodies enters the believer into a life that resists the refusal of intersubjectivity, communion, and peoplehood that marks modern existence and makes racial imagination possible. Chapter 6 concludes the work by re-imagining prayer as a politics, indeed, as a political mode of existence that marks the believer's life as continually open to transformation as they seek to conform themselves, which is to say, their bodies, to Christ's prayer for them in the groans of the Spirit within and

to the lives of those they pray for without. In this way true prayer displays the radicality of hybrid existence where the claim to oneself is always bound to the particular life of Christ and to the lives of those who have been created and re-created in Him. Through the life of prayer the believer becomes conformed into the life of the one who prays for them. In this way the Christological claim that Christ's performance of our lives is transformative, becomes a mode of discipleship wherein our prayers for one another are always signs of the ways in which the Christian life is being performed into the lives of one's brothers and sisters. Such prayers are both private and public and thus reveal true Christian discipleship as a public interruption of modern racial-political lives.

The relationship between Part I, Part II, and Part III is intelligible within the baptismal logic of the church. Renunciation, Confession, and Immersion mark the three fundamental marks of Christian initiation into the church and a life of discipleship. Before entering the life of the church the neophyte must acknowledge the life that she or he is leaving. Not only do they renounce the evil one, but also the patterns of life that are associated with him. In this regard Part I represents an attempt to name the patterns of unfaithfulness that mark our modern world. It also displays the ways lives must negotiate this world in ways that are painful and difficult. Part II moves from a description of our contemporary situation, the reality of our lives to a confession of who Christ is. The confession, "Christ is mulatto" is not an attempt to gain theological inclusion for a certain group of people, but rather articulates how a recognition of our true condition presently makes visible new depths of Christ's person and work. Christ is mulatto is not an anachronistic description of a biological reality, but points to the depth of God's claim upon

and presence among humanity. Lastly, Part III displays the re-creation of humanity given who Christ is. If Christ is the mulatto, his children bear a likeness to him not only in their name, but through a radical claim concerning their birth. Their lives as disciples are lives that must now struggle to negotiate the reality of their births. This tension is the life of prayer born through the waters of baptism.

Method

In addition to theologians and historians, this dissertation is greatly indebted to the intellectual work cultural theorists. In particular, from Stuart Hall, Judith Butler, Homi Bhabha, and Pierre Bourdieu I have synthesized two important observations regarding what I would call the economy of identity: performance and articulation. Performance and articulation both refer processes wherein identities are produced or enacted. Each author, in his or her own way, suggests that identity is not bound to an essential or inherent characteristic such as gender or race. Rather, these ideas of gender and race are just that, ideas that are lived, or performed into.

Through the complicated interrelationship between power, language, and structures ideas concerning what is “natural” become impressed upon the participants of particular societies and cultures. Yet, this impression is not merely one-sided, but rather requires a converse cooperation, articulation, or performance. The places I choose to eat, whom I marry (and who I am *not* supposed to marry), what I wear (and what I should *not* wear), etc. are all bound to certain ideas of what is “natural” or “appropriate” but also become confirmed or lived into through the particular lives people make. Through their decisions to

live into these modes of existence, or their refusals they articulate or perform themselves into collective identities. Through their practices they display their adherence to a national, racial, or cultural peoplehood.

This notion of identity as an identity that is performed from within and without serves as the basis from which I theologically interrogate racial identity as a mode of discipleship as well as argue for a Christian identity that is neither impression upon or attestation to. Rather discipleship encapsulates this dynamic of power and performance in ways that can be seen as either deeply problematic or hopeful and redemptive. Within this structure of performance and discipleship I suggest that Christ is the Word, the structure that structures humanity. But this is not a distant, abstract structuring, but a power which works from within re-structuring humanity *as* humanity. Christian identity is thus bound not to any possible form of life, but to his particular performance of humanity. The life of discipleship is entering into this economy of power, language and structures wherein Christ is the Word which structures humanity through the power of powerlessness. Humanity apprehends and confesses this moment, but must enter into this performance through particular practices and patterns of life. What makes my particular vision of this economy different is that it does not bind Christ's particularity to: a European body, a non-European body, or a docetic non-body. Rather, this economy takes place within an enfolding of all difference back into Christ's own body and thus opening up a particular way of life that is both faithful but continually transforming and being transformed in the new births of Christ's children within the life of the church.

This dissertation represents a highly constructive project. Its interdisciplinary nature provides opportunities for various fields of knowledge to mutually enrich one another. However, this possibility and the constraints of space in a dissertation also require that I forego an extended discussion of the state of research in each field prior to making my argument. The constructive elements of the dissertation represent my research in the various fields. There are many issues specific to each field that could undoubtedly be addressed in the course of this work. I have alluded to the issues I felt pertained most directly to the argument of the dissertation rather than the various arguments in the various fields I have drawn from. It is my hope that I will be able to make more substantive statements regarding these fields in the future.

Vocabulary

I should make some brief remarks regarding the vocabulary of the dissertation. Throughout I will draw upon the language of mulatto. Mulatto is a Spanish term that derived from Arabic describing a product of two different races or species.¹ In this work I will use the word in two basic ways. First, I will use the term to refer to a broad spectrum of people who are generally characterized as having a bi-racial or multi-racial lineage. While the system of classification for mixed-race people was quite expansive I use the term more broadly. Secondly, and relatedly, mulatto refers not only to the biological fact of intermingling, but also serves to signal the discursive space that creates these bodies and that these bodies inhabit. That is, even the notion of intermingling presupposes a difference significant

¹ Early reflections upon race reached varied conclusions on whether or not different races were of the same species.

enough to constitute the fruit of an encounter between the two as a “mixture.” That a child of two “white” parents as not a mixture is to speak of a certain understanding of whiteness. Conversely, that the child of a “mulatto” and a black person is considered black suggests both the fluidity of classification, but also the apparent certainty of race that gives the name mulatto its significance.

In this way mulatto serves as a term to signal a person who is the fruit of an encounter of “difference.” It is through this ontological and discursive space that terms such as hybridity, mixture, and interracial should also be understood within this work. While the terms all carry a certain meaning depending on the field of work they are utilized in (biology, chemistry, etc.) within this work they serve to indicate a specifically discursive and ontic space.

Part I:

Renunciation: Racial Discipleship;
Disciplining the Body

Chapter 1

I Am Your Son White Man! The Mulatto and the Tragic

Mulatto

I am your son, white man!

Georgia dusk
And the turpentine woods.
One of the pillars of the temple fell.

You are my son!
Like Hell!

The moon over the turpentine woods.
The Southern night
Full of stars,
Great big yellow stars.
What's a body but a toy?
Juicy bodies
Of nigger wenches
Blue black
Against black fences.
O, you little bastard boy,
What's a body but a toy?
The scent of pine wood stings the soft
night air.

What's the body of your mother?

Silver moonlight everywhere.

What's the body of your mother?

Sharp pine scent in the evening air.
A nigger night,

A nigger joy,
A little yellow
Bastard boy.

Naw, you ain't my brother.

Niggers ain't my brother.

Not ever.

Niggers ain't my brother.

The Southern night is full of stars,
Great big yellow stars.
O, sweet as earth,
Dusk dark bodies
Give sweet birth
To little yellow bastard boys.

Git on back there in the night
You ain't white

The bright stars scatter everywhere.
Pine wood scent in the evening air.

A nigger night,

A nigger joy.

I am your son, white man!

A little yellow
Bastard boy.

- Langston Hughes

Introduction

Jerrold Seigel suggests the notion of “the self” refers to “whatever it is about each of us that distinguishes you or me from others, draws the parts of our existence together, persists through changes, or opens the way to becoming who we might or should be.”¹ This notion of self or personhood is a difficult and complicated idea but it is also central to the act of Christian reflection and more specifically theology itself. At the heart of Christian confession lies the conviction that the particularity of our personhood is bound to and contained within the Triune God. However, this confession is not so simple. The question of our personhood being contained within or bound to God just as quickly raises important questions. What aspects of our lives are consistent with this reality? What aspects of our lives are unfaithful or sinful? In what ways do we resist or live into this personhood?

We are who we are because we are not God and yet our existence is measured through a drama of incorporation, of relationship with one who is not us. The Christian life is one that abides in this relationship despite its own incapacity to do so and hopes, strives and yearns to become something new in the fullness of time. To confess Christ is to confess the particularity of our lives, our persons within the lives of another.

Yet in modernity, the possibility of this personhood has unfolded within the riddle and tragedy of domination, power, and enslavement. Europe’s colonial project inserted itself throughout the world and into the various peoples of the world in such a way as to assert *European* particularity above all other particularities. We exist in the wake of this modern

¹Jerrold E. Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century*(Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

moment not only as children of particular political or national realities, but as Christians these realities pose a profound theological challenge to our conception of what it might mean to be *in Christ*.

The presence of Europe among the various peoples of the world was not one of mere political or economic expediency, but it served to fundamentally re-create the world. The particularities of any life, those things that bound peoples together, hopes that compelled their lives forward were circumscribed within a European vision of possibility and fulfillment. To account for our lives together, to imagine a vision of Christian discipleship within this world we must first re-imagine the shape of our own unfaithfulness. We must begin to see the shape of our lives born in this “new world” so that we might confess our participation, that we might see the desperation of our situation.

Ironically, we come to see the reality of our identity within the modern world through the bodies of those who are born out of this encounter between the “old” and “new” worlds. Children of rape, illicit desire, and possibly love were born in this encounter. They were in between the categories of colonizer and colonized, human and non-human, slave and free. That these children were even categorized as something in-between indicates the power such distinctions held within these societies. These bodies display and make visible a drama of identity that every body, every life was engaged in during its time and during our time. It is a drama that is not unrelated to our present condition. In fact, our lives are tied to the resistance of living lives in-between and it is in this desperate clinging to belonging and peoplehood that we fall prey to modernity’s racial logic, for we can only gain our lives by losing them.

This chapter will examine the challenge of modern personhood through an examination of the people in the United States described as mixed-race or as they were often described in the 19th century, “tragic mulattos.” In particular, I will examine the peculiarity of the mulatto’s existence as a tragic existence birthed through the realities of violent encounters between men and women. The claims of identity bound to these encounters reveal a broader reality of racial identity and performance within the dialectic of American (and Western) racial imagination. Specifically, mulatto bodies make visible the contours of racial life understood as fundamentally religious in its enactment and aims. Racial life is a mode of discipleship where its adherents live into a logic of racialized life bound to national or racial hope. Within this life, they are circumscribed by the disciplining of desires and bodies that mitigate the claims of this racial telos, white life. The reality of this white hope is illusory and yet its power becomes engrained in the lives and culture of its disciples so as to become incarnate among nations and peoples within the lives of those who have come to believe.

This peculiar, distorted discipleship poses a fundamental, theological challenge to those who profess faith in Christ, for those who confess this name are caught in claims of competing desires and hopes and yet have become disoriented as national hope and its underlying telos of white Western life became equated with salvation. In this modern world we could no longer discern between God and idol. The presence of the mulatto or mixed-race body is the display of this system’s misapprehended assumptions, the disrupting reality of cross-racial desire, and ultimately the shape of life in the Western world as a mode of racial discipleship. Here peoples adopt and live into a certain hope, measuring their steps and

desires all the while assuming these steps, these moments of identification to be their own “natural” impulses.

The color line continues to outline the contours of everyday life in the modern world. While claims to “racial” purity are, on one level, less explicit in contemporary discourse, they continue to be persistently conveyed through the daily exigencies of political and social life in the United States. Although the United States is no longer explicit in its “calculus of color”² the nation (and the Western world in general) nonetheless maintains a certain myth of purity. Our collective and individual desires, marriages, homes, churches, etc. persistently display such myths of purity as matters of tragic inevitability. In the midst of such articulations of race (either its absence or its nature – the colonial deployment or the nationalistic response) what is often unarticulated are the ways these racialized lives are deeply bound to each other in such a way that renders their various claims to purity illusory and tragic.

The tragic bound to mulatto bodies and that reveals a wider participation in this tragedy is located three moments. First, the mulatto’s life is tragic in the utter violence of its conception. During the 18th and 19th centuries mixed race children were more commonly the fruit of violent transgression by colonizers or slave masters. Compounding this violence was the paradox of the act. Those who were little more than beasts, who had no beauty to speak, little intellect to account for, became objects of empowered desire. Secondly, the tragedy of their existence arose from the discursive power of being more than black and less than white. They were commonly a people who sought to differentiate from the darker society

² Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 112.

while being continually refused by white society. This compounded refusal often rendered them isolated, a people without a people. However, this isolation was not entirely created internally for the darker societies and lighter societies also participated in this differentiation through selective exclusion or preferential treatment. In contemporary society such differentiation among ethnic minorities persists. In both of these moments we see the tragic bound to a transgressive desire that bears children with no home. These children, in turn, presence this transgression within their community and are refused participation in its “highest” possibilities. Each community, light and dark alike denies both the desires and the children born of them, thus denying their own interconnectedness and thus rendering their own lives within a profound and tragic self-denial. Their lives, hopes, desire thus rest upon a desire for a world which in fact cannot exist because it is founded upon an illusory assumption of their own purity.

Throughout this work the notion of tragic is bound first to the necessity of bodily or social death bound to the interracial body. The “tragic” so often accounted to them as a bodily inferiority or a profound loneliness is instead seen as the necessity of negotiation within multiple worlds that refuse them or which they themselves refuse. This negotiation is bound to a necessary cleavage of self, brought on by the discursive power of purity that renders them in-between. Tragic lives in this regard are lives that are rendered in-between, whose lives exist continually on the precipice of death, or in perpetual performance. Yet this notion of tragic will come to be understood as not only bound to these particular bodies, but to all bodies in the modern world.

The interracial or mulatto body begins to unveil this tragic illusion.³ The intermixture of cultures has been a constant within the history of peoples. Despite the centrality of these questions for early colonists and citizens alike, historical, critical, or theological investigation of such “mixture” has been notably absent until recently. Discourse regarding intermixture became crucial as the “encounters” of Europeans’ and native or “imported” peoples became a topic of serious scrutiny. Lawmakers, writers, and others sought to account for these encounters but more importantly the children of these encounters. Such accounts gave rise to a complicated system of classification: mulatto, mestizo, mestiza, mestizaje, quadroon, octoroon, etc. These classifications sought to police the lines that had been transgressed. Such classification and transgression began to display an important reality of racial life in the West – purity was something that was not inherent, but was something to be articulated, maintained and upheld.⁴ The precariousness of white claims concerning race is revealed in the various attempts at racial classification. But more importantly, what these interracial bodies display is first the fundamental denial of racial purity and second the ways all bodies have become tragically entangled in the racialization of the world through their own particular racial performance. Racial performance is not only a social phenomenon but can

³ There are a great many problems in attempting to classify encounters of racial and ethnic groups. Biologically there is little that distinguishes one group from another, but we must also account for the many ways in which such distinctions have served to reify racial lines and the political advantages such lines serve. Despite the distinctions these bodies and the generic use of this mixture in this case, mulatto, continually points to the sexual encounters among differing people groups that produce children who defy easy classification. In this work the terms interracial and mulatto serve to signify the product of these encounters although mestizaje, mestizo/a, etc. all might serve just as well. “Interracial” serves as a contemporary description of these encounters while “mulatto” seeks to connect the notion of “interraciality” to its historical antecedent and the problematic that such interracial lives posed to identities national and local.

⁴ See Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1995).

also be construed religiously and thus constitutes a profound theological challenge to Christian discipleship for it is itself a mode of discipleship.⁵

Against the continual assertions of moral or biological purity, mulatto existence points to a certain inevitability of encounters among peoples. But also, the name and those who bear it provoke the unveiling of a deeper contestation. Claims of purity, citizenship, being and non-being are continually present as they negotiate their everyday existence. The literary trope of the tragic mulatto has often pointed to the perpetual homelessness of the mixed body (better than black, not quite white). However, these bodies also indicate the ways in which all lives are marked by the encounter, the union of “different” bodies, as well as how such realities are resisted in modernity’s assertion of purity, rendering all lives tragic.

Through an initial examination of Langston Hughes poem “Mulatto” this chapter will highlight the way racial lives were not only predicated upon difference, but also how

⁵ That racial performance as a social phenomenon is certainly a challenge to Christian discipleship. But to suggest it is a religiously grounded form of being in the world is to suggest a theological response that must be more precise in its description of the problem and the way forward. Racial performance is not simply a sinful behavior that must be avoided, but rather a way of being in the world that is more than difficult to resist for it is the air we breathe. In a way theology must begin to suggest how we become “new creatures,” those who breathe differently. The contention that race is a mode of discipleship will be discussed as the chapter unfolds, but it is important to highlight here why this distinction is important. Recent scholarship has suggested that race is fundamentally a social construction. It is a discursive category rooted not in true biological differences, but in meanings attributed to perceived differences coupled with power that can enact economies and social structures that reinforce and reproduce these categories as “true.” This theory of social construction has been widely accepted, but has struggled to work against the very real perceptions of “natural” or essential differences. This is the view that there are, in fact, biologically distinct people groups each with particular gifts or skills that are particular to them. These gifts or particularities are to be maintained and protected for the maintenance of a particular peoplehood. Each approach to race and ethnicity offers some important insights and neither can be easily dismissed either in the acuity of its approach or the reality of the condition. The notion of discipleship seeks to mitigate these two approaches by suggesting that race and ethnicity is a way of being in the world that seeks to live into something beyond itself. In doing so, it enacts, adopts, and implicitly absorbs certain practices, habits, and desires that allow the person to enter into this aim. The life of discipleship is one that is cognizant of its personhood, but also bound to a certain community. Their lives are thus the negotiation of what it means to be a part of these people and how their individual desires, gifts, etc. are to participate within the wider aims, hopes, desires of their community, nation, race, etc. Discipleship is the deliberate conforming to certain aims, but it is also a more subtle process of being formed to become a citizen or a participant. It is the process wherein citizens may or may not discern themselves as citizens of a nation, but nonetheless their pattern of life is pointed towards and determined by being “a good American.”

such descriptions of difference were deployed in order to articulate the inner life of those who were doing the naming. This articulation of identity through differentiation became articulated through the language of purity. Here purity serves to establish the lines of identity and consequently power which allowed for full participation in Western life. Within the West these articulations of purity were not only articulated through political programs (laws, statutes, etc.), but became instantiated through the very mundane aspects of daily lives as those who participated or desired to participate become slowly immersed in the waters of racial existence. It is through these mundane moments of assertion and denial that racial existence becomes more than an assertion of an essential identity or a construction placed upon a people in order to maintain their inferiority. Rather, it becomes fundamentally a performance that is lived into and then inhabited and re-articulated or given back to the world.

This structure of racial performance is best understood as a mode of religious performance, namely discipleship, wherein racial life is not merely a mode of social organization, but more significantly a form of religious expression and identity that articulates who a person is, but also more than what a person is. It articulates the telos of their life and what they will live into and what they will not. In this regard race becomes a category that organizes and guides the very presumptions peoples make about themselves and their world. However, this performance remains hidden, for the most part, even in the midst of competing visions of racial life.

It is my contention in this chapter that it is through the violation of these boundaries; the contamination of purity, that such performance of race becomes manifest or unveiled. In the sexual encounter between races (violent or tender) the myths of these

performances become apparent and resisted. These claims, bound to these racial lives, are articulated and lived into through the re-negotiation of boundaries and resistance to their transgression. Ultimately, the religiosity of such performances as racial discipleship pose a deep challenge to the sojourn of Christian life and must be resisted not merely as sin, but as deeply idolatrous notions of human striving. They are not merely practices that can be given up, but these lives of racial discipleship can be seen as lives of idolatry that must be confessed and resisted in the lives of those who confess the name of Christ. In this regard interracial existence is seen not as a hope or mediating reality, but rather interracial bodies constitute an interruption of racial “faith” and unveil the illusory notions of racial purity that continually serve to shape and form our social imaginations.

I am Your Son White Man – The Tragic and Transgression

Langston Hughes began his 1927 poem *Mulatto* with the haunting assertion, “I am your son white man!” In the midst of this claim to sonship Hughes displays the tragic reality of mulatto existence as frustrated self-assertion as well as the inevitable reality of sonship that marks American (and Western) society. Through this poem mulatto existence is portrayed not only as a bitter product of the white torment of black women (or the fruit of forbidden love in other cases). Rather mulatto existence is shown to be the very fabric that constitutes southern (and Western) society where conceptions of race and purity are themselves tragic moments of self-assertion and denial built upon a distorted, but constant relationship among light and dark that serves to maintain the certainty of the racial imagination.

Hughes' articulation of the tragic mulatto points us to a broader understanding of the tragic within the modern world that can be described through three important themes regarding interracial existence and the tragic found in Hughes' "Mulatto:" transgression, hybridity, and contestation. These three interrelated themes serve to outline the way interracial or mulatto existence marks the modern world. In attending to the display of these realities we can begin to uncover the various ways racial lives are continually asserted or denied in contemporary societies. The tragedy of mulatto existence is the instantiation of a wider problematic of modern racialized society.

Examined through the poetic imagination of Hughes we see the *tragic* in the tragic mulatto first narrated through the complex and violent transgression of the slave owner upon the slave woman. The nature of the relationship is unstated but within slaveholding society such sexual encounters were common as an assertion of power as well as a means of increasing one's slave population. The presence of the mulatto child on the plantation was a signification of a deeper transgression not only of one person upon another, but also of one people upon another. Here the mulatto's existence, their very bodies witness to the violence of the planter's objectification of the slave woman. Such terror is captured in the haunting account of Harriet Jacobs. Writing of her time as the slave of Dr. Flint in North Carolina she recalls the beginning of her "trials of girlhood"

Soon she will learn to tremble when she hears her master's footfall. She will be compelled to realize that she is no longer a child. If God has bestowed beauty upon her, it will prove her greatest curse. That which commands admiration in the white woman only hastens the degradation of the female slave...My master met me at every turn, reminding me that I belonged to him, and swearing by heaven and earth that he would compel me to submit to him. If I went out for a breath of fresh air, after a day of unwearied toil his footsteps dogged me. If I knelt by my mother's

grave, his dark shadow fell on me even there. The light heart that nature had given me became heavy with sad forebodings.⁶

The stark and brutal reality of these encounters is the dust from which so many mulattoes rose in American “civilization.” But in Jacob’s aversion to Dr. Flint not all white bodies represented death. In another “white unmarried gentleman” who seemed to exhibit a kind of care foreign to her, she found the possibility of relative safety. Here she found “something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment.”⁷ The child she bore out of this encounter remained bound within a distortion of affection and power, but this tragedy is deeply layered with hate and longing that makes visible the interconnections between white and dark bodies in the West.

Jacobs’ account points to a deep tension also found in Hughes’ poem where the vast majority of these encounters in the South were tragically violent. In the midst of these violent encounters there were also more complicated feelings of loathing and desire. Dr. Flint’s desire for Harriet, Harriet’s desire for Mr. ?, the mulatto son’s desire for recognition from his father. These brief instances suggest that the violence of these encounters lay not only in the horrific transgression of white masters upon black slave women, but also in the continually ambivalent tensions that preceded and resulted from these encounters. Such complications are seen especially in the literature that takes place after slavery and the Civil War where such relations are less often forced. Rather, the parties enter into a tenuous

⁶ Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ed. Paul Negri, Dover Thrift Editions (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001), 27.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 40. This relationship is, of course fraught with danger and may or may not exhibit a “true” freedom for Jacobs is still not free. Her description of this gentleman’s affection within the framework of white affection colors her imagination as well, but even given these qualifications the notion of an abiding affection and love between white and “colored” is important here.

relationship of desire and fear. Here the violence is no less, but has now shifted and each encounter becomes pregnant with the possibility of death.

In such haunting and seemingly limitless power Jacobs continually notes the pains with which Dr. Flint will go to hide his desire and pursuit of his young slave.⁸ Here Jacobs also points to the myth of purity that pervades the social moment. Appearances are still important because there are boundaries that must be maintained. Here we see Dr. Flint's transgression not only as one against the body of a young slave woman, but also against a wider Western myth of purity. In such a mythic world the mulatto child's existence becomes a witness to the violent transgression of the white (male) body against the dark black (female) body. The child's very face points back to the violence of white objectification which has rendered the black female, bodies into a dark abyss of pleasure to be hovered over. The products of these transgressions are the "yellow stars that fill the Southern sky" – the yellow stars witness to the violence that begot them while their faces point to a distorted joining of man and woman.

Hughes' descriptions to the moon and stars which hover over the darkness allude to a virtual creation of the modern world as the light of the moon hovers upon the dark night and the dark trees receiving its light, for they are nothing but receptacles. The darkness is that which receives the light and exists to be hovered upon. Yet Hughes "creation" narrative serves to evoke a wider claim in the transgression of a white man upon a dark woman. For Hughes, the tragic is not only bound up within the interpersonal contestation of relationship or the violent transgression of one with another. Here, the tragic for Hughes lay in how the very fabric of Southern (and Western) society is grounded upon the creation of these

⁸ Ibid., 30.

children and the transgressions and denials that constitute them. The night is full of stars. Mulatto bodies are not only the individuals who so desperately seek recognition, or so pitifully fail to embrace their lives as black men or women. They are also iconic bodies witnessing to the transgressions of bodies, myths, and the possibility of any claim to purity.

Thus mulatto refers not only to an individual or a particular location, but also always to the multiplicity and hybridity of relations that constitute identity. These yellow stars point to this violent admixture – their father’s nose, grey eyes, their mother’s cheeks and mouth, etc. Their bodies make their father’s face visible among the slaves, in the night. They reveal the possibility that what was thought “to possess beauty and virtue which have never been black and which is the color of daylight”⁹ is now present among the “least.” The purity of the owner can, in fact, inhabit the “least” in the world.

Yet these faces are tragic for their admixture is suffocated in the claim of purity and denials of paternity and kinship. The father says “Like Hell!” and the brothers reply, “Niggers ain’t my brother/Not ever.” White lives exist in a delusion of their own independence, their own purity, and their own identity as light in the midst of darkness. The tragic refusal of the mulatto is turned upon the claims of the father and brothers who continue to remain deluded as to who they are and who their sons, brothers, and sisters are. The father, son and mulatto are all bound up in a tragic delusion.¹⁰ This delusion is the

⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 45.

¹⁰ Frantz Fanon might point to this poem as the delusion of the mulatto’s own beauty as a dark man in the world. Particularly in *Black Skin, White Masks* such assertions of relation to whiteness are construed in terms of self-hate and desire to ascend. What I want to suggest here is the way in which such assertions and denials exhibit a fundamental connection between the two. To assert and acknowledgment of paternity or kinship is not necessarily a desire to ascend, but rather a desire for a kind of wholeness that is perpetually denied any slave, but particularly the mulatto slave and inversely the myth of wholeness is continually perpetuated in the slave owning families self-deceiving denials. See Franz Fanon. “The Man of Color and the White Woman” in *Ibid.*, 63-82.

reality of their creation together and thus the very social fabric of the South (and West) as one of hybridity. Stuart Hall highlights this complicated interrelation in this way “the play of identity and difference which constructs racism is powered not only by the positioning of blacks as the inferior species but also, and at the same time, by an inexpressible envy and desire.”¹¹ Here Hall points to the way in which identity in the West is continually a movement between assertion and resistance but in fact identity is that these “poles” are in fact continually present within all lives in the Western world “and this is something the recognition of which fundamentally displaces many of our hitherto stable political categories, since it implies a process of identification and otherness which is more complex than hitherto imagined.”¹²

In the midst of these assertions and refusals of hybridity we are left in the tragedy of contestation where the previous two moments of transgression and hybridity become the underlying discourse of Southern society. Modernity is this moment of contestation; of assertion and denial concerning who is who and what are the relations of those in and out of power. Here the mulatto is continually bound up in contestation and self-assertion seeking recognition yet meeting only denial. But in this refusal what cannot be silenced is the very existence of the one who speaks and bears the image of the father and consequently speaks by simply being. The mulatto’s presence contests the father’s denial and reminds him of his transgression, of his desire for dark flesh despite his own claims to moral and bodily purity, while also attesting to the complicated love of a mother who sought to protect them from the violence that begot them. We are reminded here again of the contestation present in

¹¹ Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities” in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, Comedia (London; New York: Routledge, 1996). 444.

¹² *Ibid.* 446.

Harriet Jacobs accounts where Dr. Flint's desire for the appearance of propriety is continually disrupted by his desire for Harriet. There was an understanding that any verbalization of Dr. Flint's pursuit of Jacobs or any other slave was to be met with the severest of consequences. The severity of the punishment belies the seriousness of Dr. Flint's understanding of his own transgression, yet is complicated by his persistent pursuit of that which he ought not want to possess.

While the tragic in mulatto existence becomes visible in the refusal of white recognition, we must also attend to the difficulty of how such bodies become haunting reminders of these transgressions among their own "kin." Historians have continually pointed to the deep racial hierarchy that has penetrated slave plantations as well as black life throughout America's history. Here tragic claims of whiteness serve not only to exclude, but also continually mark black cultural life. High yellow, house/field slaves, etc. mark the internal distinctions such transgressions manifested among slaves in the south and free blacks throughout the United States. Such mulatto bodies continually formed "in-between" societies among themselves or had to navigate often-tenuous relationships among their black brethren.

This reality is evidenced in the literary theme of the tragic mulatto seen throughout 19th and early 20th century literature.¹³ Most often set after the Civil war these texts explore the world "freedom" has created and the negotiation of this freedom by white and black folk alike. In these works the tragic mulatto is one who has been rejected by a white father but

¹³ While the formal theme of the tragic mulatto can be seen emerging in the 19th century, the difficulty of the mixed race figure and the unions that produce them mark literature as early as the 17th and 18th centuries.

who also senses a certain distinction between him or her and the “Negro” race, while yet remaining politically dark and enslaved.

In the development of this theme we see a marked shift in the way the “tragedy” of mulatto existence is envisioned between early 18th and 19th century depictions and those of the Harlem Renaissance of the early 20th century. In these later accounts the tragedy is construed in terms of the mulatto’s weakness (or refusal) to recognize the beauty of their “dark” bodies and thus tragically mimic white life thus living a perpetual self-deception.¹⁴ In each of these moments we see the deep effect of racialized existence penetrating the mulatto body. Ties (both tragically violent and desirous) to white and black bodies are continually present, contested, asserted, and displayed. These interconnections require a cultural negotiation that is not foreign to other bodies of the West, but in the mixed body becomes explicit and visible.

Discipleship – Race as a Modality of Faith

In the midst of these three moments of transgression, hybridity, and contestation within Hughes’ *Mulatto* we are confronted by the deep paradox mulatto existence makes visible. The transgression of purity must be continually refused, avoided, legislated against, for society moves forward upon such belief in white bodies and their antitheses. But this is more than a belief. It is a veritable faith in the possibility and telos of white flesh upon which a great temple had been erected. But in the mulatto body Hughes tells us “a pillar of the

¹⁴ See in particular James Weldon Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. This is a theme prevalent in Harlem Renaissance depictions of the tragic mulatto where such a figure is often marked with a certain level of suspicion. Here the tragedy does not lie in the absence of place, but in the failure to recognize the beauty or belonging of black life. In this regard we see the formalization of Black Nationalist ideals that seek to resist the hegemony of white claims to purity and beauty by asserting a contrary narrative of the beauty of black “purity.”

temple falls” for it reveals that for each verbal refusal there is a secret lust, for every law there is a dark violation, for every obstacle the slave puts up there is a persistent aversion. The mulatto body of the south is the paradox of white loathing and “loving,” the desire for that which one is not.

The mulatto body is the “great yellow star” under which we sleep. But perhaps what is most important to note here is that the tragedy of the mulatto body is the tragedy of racial purity’s claims which render *all* bodies ultimately as lies and false performances. Within modernity all bodies and lives seek to live into something beyond them. This transcendental hope is a religious yearning that is not only bound to faith in God, but was perhaps most incarnate in the racialized societies of the Western world. This yearning that marked the West’s turn into modernity would ultimately have the most immediate and deadly consequences for darker peoples, but it would inevitably kill all for the pure salvation of whiteness is ultimately illusory. The southern moment is merely an intensification of Western transgression and its mulatto children that are not only constituted through political enslavement or through cultural power, but through a profound embodiment of a religious ideal and hope regarding white bodies.

This illusion of purity that the mulatto body renders visible belies a religiosity concerning the telos of white flesh that begins to characterize the movement of all racial lives in the West. Here I am not seeking to make a phenomenological claim concerning the nature of religious yearning. Rather, what I hope to highlight here is the way in which the claim to racial purity can be seen as a “quasi-religious” performance where the ideality of whiteness served as a telos towards which the Western world sought to incorporate its adherents through a particular architecture of legal codes, social mores, and cultural matrices.

That is, while the Western world would articulate its mission through the language of Christendom, what we see in actuality is a certain religious performance of race with whiteness serving as its axis. In this world, the actual modes of existence were continually arbitrated through the language of race. In this way it is not merely a sociological or anthropological phenomenon, but more profoundly a deeply religious moment into which peoples become incorporated and transformed by its claims and its implicit hopes.

As early as the 18th century Africans in America began to sense the deep disparity between the Christianity of their white nation and the “true” God and Creator. David Walker in his *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* draws a parallel between the treatment of heathen nations and “Christian” nations regarding slavery. But in doing so he also implicitly pointed to the deep unfaithfulness of American Christianity. Walker painted American Christianity in clear terms as an idolatrous nation grasping for a glory that was not theirs to claim. He wrote,

While they [Europeans] were heathens they were too ignorant for such barbarity. But being Christians, enlightened and sensible, they are completely prepared for such hellish cruelties. Now suppose God were to give them more sense, what would they do? If it were possible, would they not *dethrone* Jehovah and seat themselves upon his throne?¹⁵

This assertion is not seeking to deride Christianity, but rather make apparent the idolatry American Christianity has fallen into. For Walker, *White* Christianity is no more than a heathen religion that does not worship the God of Israel who brought Israel out of Egypt. It is no better, in fact worse, than the Egyptians who were crushed beneath the waves of the Red Sea.

¹⁵ David Walker and Peter P. Hinks, *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*(University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 16.

The way in which Walker has framed the savagery of American (and Western) slavery is not only in terms of a violation of God's justice, but also as a deep perversion of the Christian faith. Frederick Douglass highlights this disjunction similarly as the incoherence between "slaveholding religion and the Christianity of Christ writing, "for between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference - so wide, that to receive the one as good, pure, and holy is of necessity to reject the other as bad, corrupt, and wicked.... Indeed, I can see no reason, but the one most deceitful one, for calling the religion of this land Christianity."¹⁶

The judgments of David Walker and others such as Frederick Douglass and Henry Highland Garnett seek to uncover the deeply religious character of Western racial society. Their jeremiads utter harsh judgments against a nation whose claims concerning it had been rendered meaningless in light of its extortion of African bodies. The subtext of idolatry makes such prophetic utterances intelligible and renders visible the way white images, grafted upon the flesh of so many Europeans, has usurped God's primacy in the lives of its bearers. What these writers so keenly understood was the way white Christians had been so thoroughly bound to a god other than Jesus. Their political and social realities did not participate within or point to the kingdom of heaven, but were rather a tragic and deadly rejection of God that bore more resemblance to the "heathens" of the world than to Jesus, the Son of God.

Such an indictment against heathen religion begins to indicate the problematic shape of racialized thinking in the West. While racism, colonialism, etc. ravaged populations and

¹⁶ Frederick Douglass. "Slaveholding Christianity" in Milton C. Sernett, *Afro-American Religious History : A Documentary Witness*(Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 1985), 106.

did much to malign the darker inhabitants of the world these accounts cannot be understood only in terms of power dynamics or social injustice. A theological account of such injustice that suggests it is “simply” humanity’s sinfulness (Race and Idolatry) is perhaps to somewhat oversimplifying the challenge Walker and Douglass present to western Christianity. In their characterizations of Christian “heathen” religion we see what Karl Barth would later characterize as “the sin of unbelief” where “there is no such thing as an undisputed heathendom... heathen religion is shown to be the very opposite of revelation: a false religion of unbelief.”¹⁷ Barth, Like Walker and Douglass understood the world sacrally, as that which either conforms or resists God’s presence and judgment.

Walker’s indictment of Western Christianity is somewhat intensified in Barth’s claim of religion as “unbelief” as not only a rejection of revelation, but also rejection through the formation or participation in something outside of Christ (even if it confesses it is within Christ.)¹⁸ The seemingly rigid formulation of reception and rejection highlights the “religious” nature of every aspect of human life and striving. Even in our most trivial moments we are refusing or seeking God’s revelation. Such a conception then does not require our intelligible attestation of our own greatness or desire to “be like God.” Rather, everyday existence displays particular forms of life that make visible this rejection of God’s revelatory work and our self-understanding as creatures made to “live and move and have our being in Him” (Acts). This structure of unbelief, for Barth, is grounded upon a form of life where “in this loving and choosing and willing, and in the activity determined by it, he

¹⁷ Barth, Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans., Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas Forsyth Torrance, 2d ed.(Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), I.2, 307.

¹⁸ While some have come to draw upon Barth’s discussion of religion to speak to issues of religious pluralism it is my contention that Barth’s framing of religion as unbelief is intended to capture the wider political and social patterns as exemplifying deeply religious moments.

becomes something which is not human but supremely non-human.”¹⁹ Barth’s conception of unbelief has less to do with a set of intellectual denials and more to do with the way in which one or a people’s lives are bound together and to what end. In this way unbelief has a deeply material character that can even pervade “its purest and noblest and perhaps its most pious and philanthropic forms”²⁰

In these ways we see Barth’s conception of unbelief as having a deeply performative character. The performance of unbelief or this heathen religion continually demarcates a certain form of humanity at its center so that

all that he does when he arrogantly assaults the limits marked out for him is to attain pseudo divinity. He does do that. And as a pseudo divinity he secretly worships himself, appearing as such and even outside and deceiving others as he has first deceived himself. Even if man is quite powerless to become anything more than himself, his attempt to do so is real.²¹

The divinity such lives point to may or may not consider themselves “religious” but as with Walker and here in Barth we begin to see the ways in which all lives are continually caught up in such a rejection or reception of one’s life. But what Barth further points to here is the way in which such lives must continually circumscribe the lives of others in order to make them intelligible. Thus unbelief is hardly an individual act, but a deeply communal distortion of the communion of saints.

¹⁹ Barth, IV. 1, 421.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 421-422. Here I am aware that Barth would likely vigorously argue that such a performance of unbelief is the challenge of *all* humanity and that it would be problematic to suggest that one group of people represent this unbelief in a stronger way than another. Yet, it is my hope here to highlight the particular way in which race is seen as a peculiarly religious phenomenon on its own right in that it shares certain commonalities with the ideals and philosophies that Barth so vigorously worked against. In each of these moments Barth is not merely working against an idea, but rather against a certain material existence that becomes evident in these ideas and philosophies.

While the saints are gathered to shout adoration to God and gathered through their own recognition of their devotion and createdness, in a heathen mimicry this communion is the forced gathering of “others” who are gathered not for adoration nor out of their own recognition. Rather they are gathered to form the margin and the limit. Their bodies become the demarcation of the center’s glory.²² In his connection between an internal belief and an external “evangelism” Barth points to the way in which unbelief as a religious performance must continually demarcate itself or assert itself. This assertion or pride that is at the center of unbelief is not only about an individual, but becomes a communal reality seeking to enfold others into its lie and concealment. Such a performance is significant for conceptions of race and what I am seeking to describe as racial performance as a religious performance in that race similarly seeks to forcibly enfold one into a life of worship where the outline of dark bodies make possible the inner “light.” This relationship is one of pure self-centeredness where dark bodies rotate around and constitute white self-assertion. Here the heathendom of unbelief is made possible only by the distinction of light and dark.

This relationship between unbelief and material life is a crucial one. Here again Barth points not only to unbelief as an intellectual rejection of presumption, but more profoundly points to the complicated interrelationship between desire and assertion that is required of

²² Toni Morrison provides a compelling description of this violent incorporation through her novel *The Bluest Eye*. The narrator suggests at the conclusion of the book that “All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers – felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used – to silence our own nightmares. And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength.” Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye: A Novel*, 1st Vintage International ed. (New York: Vintage International, 2007), 205. Here such apostasy slowly inhabits even those who are not at the center of divinity, but in whom such desires become inculcated thereby inflicting its violence and establishing its authority even among those for whom the margins of the claim.... Here the performance of race becomes impressed into every aspects American life together, recapitulating the pattern of differentiation and exclusion.

adherents or believers. Thus this racial-religious performance is certainly a deep instantiation of pride that seeks to resist God's revelation, but Barth points to its deeply performative nature. He suggests "religion is the action of sinful man which will inevitably involve flagrant continuous and confirmations and repetitions of his unfaithfulness and therefore sheer self-contradictions, with the continual rise and influence of the alternatives of doubt and skepticism and atheism."²³ Thus religious performance is not only one among many, but a deep moment of self-assertion with, in this instance, whiteness at its center. This serves to shape and inhabit virtually every aspect of society's daily life. In this regard religious performance inhabits racial idolatry serving to not only frame the assertion of one group over another, but also serve to fundamentally organize society within its outlines.

Racialized life in America and the West becomes then not a statement of biology, but an assertion of belief. The claim of whiteness becomes comprehensible less as provable fact and more as a creed. "I believe" then is not explicit but becomes instantiated in the daily refusals and assertions that would mark daily life in America. The denial of the white father in Hughes' poem "Mulatto" can now be read more powerfully as an attempt on his part to live into this creed regarding himself, his family, and the slave. It is the attempt to affirm and assert his belief and thus his own identity. What his denial makes apparent is the power of the claim the son is making upon him. The father must assert himself and his purity to remain faithful to his race. While some might argue that the father's denial is a question of power I would certainly not disagree, but what is crucial is the question of adherence and fidelity. Thus whiteness serves as an invisible deity imaged through the father and thus rendering who can be called "blessed."

²³ Barth, IV.1, 483.

The religious structure of race can be further delineated through an examination of religious practices and the ways in which these practices are bound up with ideas concerning religion in general. Drawing on the work of Paul Tillich, Kelton Cobb highlights seven aspects of religion: ultimate concern, the holy, moral and ontological faith, revelation and ecstasy, religious symbols, myth, and liminality.²⁴ Of these I would like to highlight particularly Cobb's discussion of ultimate meaning, religious symbol and myth to outline the religious character of Western racial imagination that served as the structure that would give birth to the tragedy of mulatto and all racialized bodies.²⁵

The quest for ultimate concern is characterized by Cobb as the reality that "out of the multitude of things we value in life... something makes an unconditional claim upon us, and we organize our lives and all of our other values in accordance with it."²⁶ Cobb suggests that ultimate concern has a triadic character comprised of demand, threat, and promise. In this triad the object of ultimate concern demands the adherent's surrender and utter loyalty, threatens exclusion from fellowship when disloyalty is discovered and promises fulfillment to those who are faithful.²⁷ The reality of demand, threat, and promise, which mark the

²⁴ Kelton Cobb, *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture*, Blackwell Guides to Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005), 120. It is important to note here why I draw on Cobb's appropriation of Tillich rather than Tillich himself. In Cobb's attempt to articulate the relationship between theology and popular culture he draws upon Tillich in order to serve as an interpretive matrix for cultural practices. In this regard "religion" is less of a phenomenological category, but more the various interconnections of daily practices and the meanings they are given by their practitioners. It is in this regard that I find Cobb's work most illuminating for providing the beginnings of a structural account of race as religious performance.

²⁵ I am not suggesting a fundamental congruity between Cobb (Tillich) and Barth. Rather Cobb expresses, in important ways the ways cultural identity is the codification of practices. Cobb and Tillich use these insights to make a claim concerning religion and culture that is bound to a certain universal notion of religion that I would want to resist. However, their insights concerning how these practices and beliefs constitute a cultural identity inhabited through particular practices is an important observation. For another account of the relationship between practices and cultural memory see Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, Themes in the Social Sciences (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

²⁶ Cobb, 103.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 103-104.

religious expression of an ultimate concern, can be seen as unfolding racially in American (and Western) political and cultural life. Seen through such a matrix demand, threat, and promise can be seen as racially infused within American legal codes, sacrificial lynching, and baptismal practices. In each of these moments racial logic serves not only as a means of control and power, but also as an overarching or “transcendent” reality which enlivens daily existence in the United States (and the West) creating adherents and displaying a certain sacral reality into which all people must live in to.

Such ultimate concern is clearly an integral moment of America’s self-identity. Ultimate concern as a racial religious moment in the West can be seen through Cobb’s triad. Racial logic demanded surrender and loyalty. This demand of loyalty marks the tragic life of the mulatto that Hughes pointed us to earlier. The refusal of the father to acknowledge his son is to confess to his disloyalty, his transgression. Instead one’s loyalty to the race must be continually asserted. Such loyalty is fostered early through subtle moments of training until the neophyte becomes a disciple, mature in their following. Lillian Smith points to such formation in *Killers of the Dream* where as a child she learns early the “lessons” concerning her body and the bodies of those around her. She writes “I do not think our mothers were aware that they were teaching us lessons. It was as if they were revolving mirrors reflecting life outside the home, inside their memory, outside the home, and we were spectators entranced by the bright and terrible images we saw there.”²⁸ One of the first lessons she learned concerned the meaning of her own body in relationship to other bodies and to God. Smith is clear that the shape of these lessons centered upon the meaning of their race and how it was to structure their everyday life. She writes,

²⁸ Lillian Eugenia Smith and Margaret Rose Gladney, *Killers of the Dream* (New York, N.Y.: Norton, 1994), 83.

We were taught in this way to love God, to love our white skin, and to believe in the sanctity of both. We learned at the same time to fear God and to think of Him as having complete power over our lives.... we were learning also to fear a power that was in our body and to fear dark people who were everywhere around us, though the one who came into our home we were taught to love.²⁹

Her life becomes one of discerning the boundaries of loyalty and disloyalty learning who to look at and who not to look at, who to love and who not to love, who you can treat poorly and who you cannot.

Yet all the while such lessons take place under the auspice of something that is continually present yet profoundly distant. Somehow white bodies represent it, but this is never enough, for within this society there is always a proximity to darker bodies that threatens. This proximity is one in which the presence of light and dark bodies are continually gauging the other and negotiating the terms of involvement and appropriate distances. Formation is the process of learning how to negotiate these lines, but more fundamentally it is the process of learning what these lines and practices of negotiation mean for one's life and people's lives together. This is a system that not only inculcates white bodies into its system, but is also continually drawing all differences into itself in order to assert an order and ethos among the people of the Western world.

The demand for loyalty serves to mark the adherents of whiteness, but also serves to mark the boundaries of exclusion. In this way the dark bodies of America are not excluded from participation or loyalty, but are rather forced into a participation from beneath, where their glances, their desires, their daily lives now become enveloped within terms demand for loyalty and surrender, but for dark bodies these rules serve as the conditions of an

²⁹ Ibid.

exclusionary participation. Their bodies and their loyalty are still necessary to uphold the system of belief for white fullness, but their participation is one that requires distance.

Such demands are seen clearly in America's anti-miscegenation legislation. Such legislation against black-white sexual relations remained intact until the 1970's in some southern states and continued to be a *de facto* law throughout the United States for some time after. In these laws we see the way the American legal code begins to outline the conditions of participation, not merely as a means of control or instantiation of power, but as a more profound claim to white purity. The Virginia "Act to Preserve Racial Integrity" of 1924 concludes with the following provision: It shall hereafter be unlawful for any white person in this state to marry any save a white person, or a person with no other admixture of blood other than white and American Indian."³⁰ Higginbotham and Kopytoff note the importance of such legal codes in antebellum Virginia as serving to maintain clear racial boundaries where whites were charged with maintaining racial purity while these laws also served to protect white women from against black men.³¹ In a way analogous to the levitical laws of Israel we see American law serving to preserve a certain notion of purity, not merely maintain order. Here the laws served to outline the shape of participation in the racial order while also providing the means to persecute and beat back that which would defile the hope

³⁰ "The Virginia 'Act to Preserve Racial Integrity' of 1924" in Werner Sollors, *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature, and Law*(Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 24.

³¹ A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr. and Barbara Kopytoff, "Racial Purity and Interracial Sex in the Law of Colonial and Antebellum Virginia" reprinted in *Ibid.*, 82.

of white flesh.³² Such laws served not only as a means of control, but served to discipline and shape the desires of its adherents. The laws served to deepen and shape a distrust of black flesh as heathen, overtly passionate and sexual, and lacking in rationality while the laws emphasis upon white maintenance of purity served to instantiate a vision of white self-control and purity epitomized in the white female body.³³ Here these laws not only provided order, but were inscription of a religious ideal that served to outline the shape of white life and hope.

The legal codes also served an important function not only in maintaining the purity of the “nation,” but perhaps even before this claim these laws sought to govern the appropriate relation among peoples. The purity of the nation was not constituted by the purity of the people themselves. Jacobson notes the ways in which such lines were continually drawn and redrawn as European immigrants flooded the United States. Yet these laws did work to continually govern the proper relations among peoples so as to continually inscribe and re-inscribe the proper relationship. It is the relationship that constituted purity for purity could not be established ontologically or through biological claims or any other claims concerning one’s essential nature (although this was certainly attempted). Rather, the necessity of the legal codes and their enforcement indicate a much deeper awareness that it was in the clear establishment of a borderland that made the interior intelligible. That is, the

³² See also Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color* for an account of how race played a crucial role in the transformation of European immigrants into white Americans. The rhetoric, debates, and laws enacted to protect the United States from being “defiled” reveals the religiosity of race to be not only a reality for American blacks, but envelopes all people when they enter the United States. Immigrants must quickly adapt to the religion of the land and determine what they are willing to surrender and to whom their loyalty lies. This difficult transformation of immigrants into white people provides a powerful example of how racialized lives in the west continually incorporate all peoples. Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

³³ The 1915 film *Birth of a Nation* is a particularly stark example of the logic of racial transgression fueling the formation collective identity.

legal codes served to demarcate what constituted citizenship, whiteness, or civilization. These boundaries could not be drawn through positive accounts of white life alone. They had to be continually drawn through the demonization of black flesh. The legal codes instantiated these ideals concerning white and black flesh fundamentally using black bodies to inscribe an outline whose sole means were intended to highlight a center.

In the midst of this demarcation the tragedy of mulatto existence begins to become visible. Mulatto bodies are those which reveal the boundary and the center to be not only permeable, but more profoundly mulatto bodies reveal the presence of the center in the boundaries and the presence of the boundary in the center. But even further the mulatto body is not merely a momentary tour into the Promised Land or a foray into the exotic, but is the product of these two polarities. Yet its life is incomprehensible within the concrete imagination of racialized lives. It at once interrupts and is summarily crushed even as its body speaks. Its life is continually sacrificed upon the altar of race in order to maintain the illusion of walls and frontiers. The mulatto disrupts the notion of proper relations that the law so fiercely guards for the mulatto body represents both sides of the transgression. It is the inner and the outer in one person. Its life is tragic because it is deemed an impossibility and a degradation.

While the laws served to discipline desire and outline a certain telos or end of adherents striving, they also mark the points of transgression. Such transgressions within this racial space must be accounted for. They must be atoned. Again, Hughes' allusion to the "falling pillar" of the temple points us to the ways in which purity becomes so religiously bound to white identity as well as how the presence of mixed bodies continually threatens such claims. In the face of the possible transgression of the pure with the impure there must

be a sacrifice that might render such impurities pure again. In the face of the law and the hope of white purity transgression must be met with sacrifice and death. Here it is not the exclusion or death of the transgressor that renders atonement, but it is the continual sacrifice of a mediating body. The dark body becomes a ritual sacrifice either abandoned to perpetual slavery despite and because of their white fathers, black men hung on trees and burned, or children lost and “passed” into the white world becoming dead to their mothers, sisters and brothers.

Between 1889 and 1932 over 2,900 African Americans were lynched.³⁴ The rhetoric justifying the vast majority of these sacrifices surrounded a black man’s sexual advances towards a white woman. Ida B. Wells pointed to the great disparity in this rhetoric and the actual circumstances surrounding lynching, but what is important is *how* the rhetoric functioned.³⁵ Here the desire to protect white female bodies represented a deeper desire to protect all white flesh from the impurity of black bodies. White bodies represented the beautiful, the rational, a veritable repository of the image of God and must be protected from the savage aggression of dark bodies which assuredly desire the goodness they do not possess, yet cannot control their own sexual instincts. A particularly stark example of how the rhetoric of the legal codes were bound up with the myth of purity is found in the 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*. A subtext of this film is clearly pronouncing a “higher law” while depicting the heroism of individuals who can uphold them to protect against the threat of

³⁴ Arthur Franklin Raper and Southern Commission on the Study of Lynching, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 480., 480. From Department of Records and Research, Tuskegee Institute.

³⁵ See Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Trudier Harris, *Selected Works of Ida B. Wells-Barnett*, Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). In particular, “Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All its Phases” and “A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States, 1892-1893-1894.”

“heathens.” But what is being protected here is the deification of white bodies and in particular the purity of the white female body that carries with it the promise of the nation.³⁶ Its corruption at the hands of the darker race not only represents a threat to her safety, but also a threat to a larger ideal of what it means to be a member of this nation.³⁷

In the face of such transgressions these bodies were summarily beaten, hung and burned, often with the extremities cut and given as remembrances of the moment. The exclusion and threat that functions here does not threaten the white adherent, but rather the dark outline. The sacrifice was a means to atone and demarcate one’s faithfulness to their identity. The necessity of death on the part of another made possible and continually upheld the myth of whiteness and served to further demarcate what whiteness was, while simultaneously seeking to punish those who had transgressed the conditions of participation set for them. This system of sacrifice, which rendered the “strange fruit” of the South, served to continually instantiate a racial imagination of white goodness while reinforcing the consequences of transgressing this goodness. The material of this sacrifice was not white flesh, but rather a ritual of atonement where the black body was given over to death in order to re-inscribe whiteness. While not all white people participated in these rituals of sacrifice they nonetheless participated in the conditions that made it possible and through their daily interactions within one another and with darker peoples, continually reiterating the necessity and reliance upon such sacrifices.

The religious nature of racial performance not only enveloped the lives of its adherents, but also their practices. In particular, Christianity became co-opted into a larger

³⁶ Willie J. Jennings, *Black Church and Christian Identity*, Duke Divinity School, Spring 2003.

³⁷ This film is also particularly important in considering the mythic nature of white bodies that I will attend to later in this chapter.

narrative of race and was performed in its service. In particular, antebellum baptisms typify such a co-opting and highlight the way in which Cobb's last aspect of ultimate concern, promise, becomes simultaneously injected with demand and threat.

The demand for loyalty and surrender is most distinctly witnessed in the antebellum baptismal rite for slaves as recorded by Anglican Bishop Francis La Jau of South Carolina. In this rite the baptized slave is to confess that

You declare in the Presence of God and before this Congregation that you do not ask for the holy baptism out of any design to free yourself from the Duty and Obedience you owe to your Master while you live, but merely for the good of Your Soul and to Partake of the Graces and Blessings promised to the Members of the Church of Jesus Christ.³⁸

La Jau's confession exemplifies the way in which the presence of God serves not as an entrance into a new kind of community, but rather seeks to concretize one's participation in a racialized community. In this way we see the baptismal moment not only as a practice of spiritual initiation, but rather as a moment of profound cultural encounter where the meaning of blackness and whiteness are being arbitrated through the language of baptism. At stake in La Jau confession is to what extent does this baptism re-arrange the political and cultural realities which blackness and whiteness represent. Here the church and the presence of God are but tools that serve to build up and harden a reality that is deeper and more profound than God and the church, race.³⁹

³⁸ Bishop La Jau. "Slave Conversions in South Carolina" in Sernett, 65.

³⁹ Franz Fanon allows us to call in to question the dynamic of reception that is implicit in such a confession. That is to say the assumption on La Jau's part that because the slaves recite the words he offers that their reception will somehow be the one that La Jau intends. What Fanon helps us point to in this moment is the way in which production and reception are in fact not always identical. In this case we can see Fanon's understanding of dialect begin to imagine that the slaves themselves understand the entirety of the baptismal moment in a radically different way than La Jau intends it.

While this rite is intended for the initiation of black slaves into the church we must attend to the way in which it also serves to incorporate and instantiate whiteness in the world. The initiation of the slave here is not only to the church, but also into a particular institution that is governed and sustained by racial logic over and against any gospel. The slaves themselves understood this as numerous accounts of the “invisible institution” have shown. What becomes evident in these moments is that such baptismal rites is less the binding of a confessor to their God, but rather the sacralizing of a master’s bond to a slave thus instantiating the primacy of white bodies over against dark bodies. The slaves’ surrender and loyalty becomes racially construed and their lives become bound to God *and* master. But here the inverse is also true, whiteness arches above this moment making it sacred not as it relates to God and participation in the church, but rather as it further mediates the participation of black bodies in relation to white bodies. The master’s dominance is baptized, legitimated, and divinized in this moment less through the aspects of the rite, but in the way that racialization has already established the bounds within which the rite might take place and the logic of race determines the efficacy of the rite and its transformative possibilities. The demand is also as threat and a promise. But here even the explicitly religious has been co-opted by a reality that is understood to be prior and primary. The baptism became a rite of race where notions of fulfillment and promise were to be construed strictly through the materiality of white dominance.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Again, Jacobson helps us to see the way in which whiteness serves as a type of promise with the fruits of citizenship attached to it. The shift towards whiteness and away from Irish, Italian, Polish, etc. were attempts lived into on a daily basis in order to achieve the “American Dream” which bore with it material comforts and eased one from the threat of being labeled “dark.”

In the initiation of black bodies into the church the ritual of race serves to bind together black and white bodies within a certain framework of dominance and submission. However, this relationship is one that is continually contested, re-imagined, and lived into. That is, the baptismal moment La Jau makes visible shows the way in which black and white bodies are continually bound to one another in this “religious” performance. Black and white bodies must continually perform into its laws and mores in order to make possible the telos of white life. In order to move toward this telos however, there necessitated the continual sacrifice of dark flesh.

The reality of legal codes, sacrificial death, and racial rites served to form a material reality in which all people in the United States would live. Deeply connected to these material realities, which served to highlight how race fundamentally shaped American (and Western) life as a religious imagination, we move the importance of religious symbols and myth. In Cobb’s consideration of the various aspects of religion religious symbols serve to point beyond them while still participating in that which they are symbolizing. They are not to be artificially produced or created but grow out of the religious identification of an aspect of adherent’s devotion. Connected to the importance of symbols are religious myths that “work with symbols to guide in determining one relationship to the world.”⁴¹ Myths are particularly important in that they begin to make clear the connections and order of the world in which the adherents live and begin to dictate the patterns of relating to others and to the world around them. Cobb notes

Myths feed us our scripts. We imitate the quests and struggles of the dominant figures in the myths and rehearse our lives informed by myth plots. We awaken to a set of sacred stories, and then proceed to apprehend the world and to express

⁴¹ Cobb, 121.

ourselves in terms of these stories. They shape us secretly at a formative age and remain with us, informing the ongoing narrative constructions of our experience. They teach us how to perceive the world as we order our outlooks and choices in terms of their patterns and plots.⁴²

The notion of myth described by Cobb highlights the deeply performative character of religious lives. These aspects correlate to an aspect of daily lives that serve to give it coherence and shape. It is the breadth of these claims and the ways in which they envelope the entirety of a nation that begin to give it its religious character. The claims whiteness makes as an ultimate concern, the myth of white flesh, the practices of daily life in ceremony, law, and incorporation now drip with the claims of white bodies. But these claims are not particular to “white” people, but are continually expanding their reach incorporating all peoples into participation with its claims, even against their will. Again, *The Birth of a Nation* serves as a vivid example of how such myths function to solidify political and social imagination. The myth of a nation’s “birth” is bound to the violent suppression of darker bodies and the coupling (or breeding) of “good” families. Thus the movie does not only suggest a new historical narrative but engenders of vision of personhood and social participation in that is “eschatological.” This is not to say that such a movie was widely accepted (although it was wildly popular), but such a film, only ten years prior to the Hughes poem we have been discussing, does point to the necessary exclusion that is American nationalism is built upon. Such examples indicate an important reinterpretation of Tillich’s formulation in Cobb’s own work where such articulations of religion move from explicitly religious syntax and become embedded within a particular society’s cultural fabric. Yet Cobb

⁴² Ibid., 123.

points to the way in which such “cultural” moments remain deeply religious despite their lack of explicitly religious self-understanding.

This movement is the way in which such racialized lives are never sure or given or even natural, but rather how such lives must be *performed*. That is, while the rhetoric of race in modernity has continually pressed upon racial purity and its inherence or essential character within peoples, the way in which such “natural” lives must be continually maintained begins to make apparent the way in which such “natural” traits are in fact significant acts of strength, struggling to maintain something inherent. Thus they are not natural at all, but rather always contrived and thus “performed” in one’s negotiation of daily life. Judith Butler points to the way in which such claims to one’s essential nature becomes ultimately tied to bitter attempts to control.⁴³ Instead, she highlights the way in which we must attend to the various interconnections and textures of lives in order to see how each performs and thus articulates a certain notion of freedom.

In our previous examination of legal codes, sacrifice and religious ritual we saw the way in which racial imagination served not to under gird the logic of race, but rather sought to provide the means of attaining or participating in racial life. As Butler notes essential aspects of life are not given, but lived into. What we have seen in the various aspects of

⁴³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Thinking Gender (New York: Routledge, 1990), 198. 198. “Indeed, to understand identity as a *practice*, and as a signifying practice, is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life.” Butler’s notion of signification is important for our consideration of the way in which racial lives continually represent moments of articulation or contestation where the mundane aspects of one’s life are continually being interpreted with a wider set of ideals, possibilities, and limitations serving to frame these actions. The awareness (direct or indirect) of such interpretations or assertions is what I am including within the assertion of racial life as a type of performance. Here racial lives are continually indicating more than a particular person, but are always bound up within the racialized structures of political and social life. This totalizing and gathering character of performance is what makes it a religious performance.

racialized cultic practices is not the maintenance of something that is prior, but rather we begin to see the way in which racialized life required adherents. It required those who would participate in the system and make its necessary sacrifices in order to maintain notions of their own purity and their own goodness. Thus racial life had less to do with biology and more to do with participation. Race in the West made disciples who performed into its ideal and sought to transform others.

In this performance the ideality of whiteness was, in fact, never fully attained but was to be continually maintained, protected, and hoped for. Throughout the West the ideal was, but a ghost that was never fully present, yet needed to be continually guarded and served. Here the claim regarding how a people seek to live into a reality that is always beyond them – the racial ideal thus becomes a kind of transcendent category that hovers above, ever present, yet difficult to locate. Yet it becomes articulated through the lives of those who adhere to its possibilities through their desires, their hopes, their religion, their justice, etc.

Conclusion

In each of these moments (law, sacrifice, initiation) we see how notions of purity are legally, sacrificially, and ceremoniously maintained. These moments reflect a profound religious performance where the striving for ideal requires the continual purging or protecting against the perception of imperfection or unfaithfulness to the race. Such performances become engrained within the possibility of citizenship thus whiteness requires not only biology, but also assent or participation. It requires faithfulness and proper participation in the modes of life that allow such myths to maintain their intelligibility. Such lives are marked by the way in which its adherents are *disciples* of race. They are those who

participate, and not only participate, but work to maintain the pillars of the temple through the monitoring of proper participation by their sons and daughters, neighbors or friends under the threat of exclusion and in hopes of the ideal of safety and “good” families.

It is precisely this participatory reality that mulatto existence begins to unveil. For while non-white lives contest these dogmas and claims these are nevertheless continually relegated to a mythic underworld whose lives make possible the white life. Their darkness is perpetually enveloped in this broader racial myth that struggles to uphold the temple of race. Yet, mulatto existence makes apparent the transgression of these seemingly disparate realities and thus begins to unmask its faith and tear down the veil of its inner life showing the presence of darker peoples *within* white lives. These lives unveil the idolatry of white religiosity and require us as Christians to begin to account for the ways in which such religiosity is present among us and whether or not we participate. We are challenged in this moment to begin to re-appraise whether we are saved or if we are heathen.

The mere presence of mulatto bodies in the world begins to fray an already unstable system, but these contestations, passing, and tenuous notions of racial fidelity are revelatory of either: white assertions of dominance or dark refusals that consequently re-assert an illusion of purity and adherence. Interpreted theologically, mulatto bodies reveal the ways in which race is not merely a construction or performance, but a hope that orders the lives of its believers even in spite of themselves. In this way racialized religious performance is best seen not its theoretical construct, but rather through the lens of discipleship.

Within the framework of discipleship the articulations of racial imagination and performance suggested throughout this chapter might now be theologically interpreted in relationship to Christian articulations of entrance into Christian community. Though it lacks

the explicit marks of 4th century paganism racial performance in the West I have sought to show how racial performance in the United States in particular and in the west more broadly displays in inherently religious character. This religious character could be said to share certain marks of pagan ritual common in the early church of the 4th through 6th centuries.

One powerful example can be drawn from the catechetical orations of Cyril of Jerusalem and the renunciation that marked the beginning of the baptismal rite. Here the catechumens of 5th century Jerusalem rejected the Devil, his pomp, his service, and his work.⁴⁴ Each of these aspects of the Evil One had explicit ties to the pagan culture in the Roman Empire. But here Cyril points to the ways such religiosity gets performed within the daily lives of its adherents; marriage, games, meals, shows, etc. all become the ground of a religious identity where one is bound to a particular idea which one must adhere and conform to.

What Hughes' poem has begun to show us is the way racialized lives have become profoundly religious moments of unfaithfulness in the West. The games, laws, foods, shows, almost every aspect of American daily cultural and political life, was saturated with racial logic and aimed towards the maintenance of certain notions of racial purity and hierarchy. Yet, in the midst of these strict assertions and policing of boundaries there was, in fact, a continual voluntary and involuntary transgression of these boundaries. Here mulatto bodies continually witness to the falsity of such claims of purity, but also to the way the aims of such claims are ultimately illusory. This visibility renders not only the life of the mulatto "tragic," but more profoundly witnesses to the tragic in all racialized lives which are caught

⁴⁴ Cyril, *St. Cyril of Jerusalem's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments: The Procatechesis and the Five Mystagogical Catecheses*, trans., F. L. Cross (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Press, 1977), 53-58.

in such perpetual and perilous performances of race in contemporary society. These performances continually delimit the possibilities of personhood, but more profoundly become themselves moments of deep idolatry, binding its adherents into lives that cannot imagine their lives in Christ outside of their own image. Thus discipleship is but a profoundly inward distortion of racial and nationalistic hope. It is a religiosity of desires refracted through the discursive realities of racialized bodies.

Within these illusions all bodies and lives must navigate discerning truth from falsehood. It is this negotiation, this path of racial discipleship that we will turn to next. Looking to the literary portrayals of mulatto lives we see the performance of race and the attempts of these interstitial bodies to claim a real space within their world. But as they do so we see the deepening of these claims upon their lives and the enclosing of race upon their various attempts to find hope in the world.

CHAPTER 2

NEITHER FISH NOR FOWL: PRESENCE AS POLITICS

Identities are, as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always 'knowing' that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a 'lack', across division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate – identical – to the subject processes which are invested in them. – Stuart Hall ¹

You are neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female... Galatians 3:28

Introduction

In this chapter I will explore the ways in which notions concerning racial purity examined in Chapter 1 became embodied in the peculiar figure of the mulatto. In particular I will show how the lives of such interracial figures were construed literarily, displaying such lives as an interruption whose very bodies or presence in the world disorient the claims concerning racialized life in the West and thus can be understood as inherently political. Through these literary moments we see how “inter” lives, created through transgressive desire and discursive refusals, themselves negotiate racial life at once disrupting its claims and norms yet also becoming subject to its claims and hopes.

This chapter will suggest how such interruptions, however hopeful, ultimately fail in the midst of a logic of identity that calls adherents to resist the transformation such bodies

¹ Stuart Hall. “Who Needs Identity?” in Paul Du Gay and Stuart Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity*(London: Sage, 1996), 6.

indicate. Racialized life, even for persons who are interracial, becomes an inherent trap. It continually enfolds identities into moments of competing self-assertions whose primary hope is only to form a tentative negotiation of relations. This negotiation becomes embodied in the mundane and the intimate as white, black, and inter alike discern and are disciplined to resist the implications of such encounters and their possibilities.

In highlighting the peculiar nature of interracial existence I will examine three particular literary iterations of interracial or mulatto existence showing how each exhibits both racial performance and its ultimate tragedy: Charles Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars*, James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-colored Man*, and Nella Larsen's *Passing*. In examining these texts I will also highlight how their bodies and the performance of race through these bodies should be understood as intensely and inherently political. They disrupt because they *are*. Such accounts can be read as varying ways to account for their "whatness."² Chesnutt, Johnson, and Larsen each seek to display a mode negotiating racial life in the United States. While each writer examines the disruptive force of such lives and performances each does so highlighting a unique strategy of conformity or resistance while similarly bearing the mark of tragic refusal and death.

Each author, bound in their own lives by the constraints of color, sought to resist or re-negotiate the means of participation or the ultimate aim of this unfolding drama. Each understood the claims, the fallacies, and the rules of the system in which they operated and yet through the lives of these mixed-race figures sought to articulate the shape, style, and

² C. Eric Lincoln, *Coming through the Fire: Surviving Race and Place in America*(Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 1996).

significance of these disruptions quite differently. To exist within the racialized world was to disrupt it, but how? To what end? These are the questions of racial performance.

Chesnutt seeks to highlight the permeability of these lines where the life of the one who passes into white life and the white life that is passed into carries with it the possibility of mutual transformation. The desire for a racial amalgamation disrupts the claims that construe purities on either side yet still renders the dark body (particularly the female body) lost or dead. Johnson will similarly highlight the ease with which white existence (or any cultural mode of life) can be adapted, learned, performed. Yet Johnson's tale serves to show how such performances must be ultimately rendered for a people, for *your* people. The death of Johnson's adaptation is a death of exile, exclusion, a denial of one's "true" self. Here Johnson expressed a refusal of a "middle existence" where one must embrace their "true" self and live into the promise of one's dark existence for the uplift of all darker peoples. Lastly, Larsen's passing narrative diverges from both of these accounts in its sheer disruptive force. In this work Larsen's mulatto figure defiantly chooses to live in both worlds. In this refusal of the divide Larsen neither hopes for an amalgamation of Chesnutt nor an either/or of Johnson's work. Rather Larsen articulates an existence in both places *at once*. In the process Larsen unveils the lies held in both the white and black worlds but also the impossibility of this defiance. Ultimately both sides refuse her interruption, her mutual occupation and the work concludes with the mulatta lying dead on the street beneath the 3rd story window.

These novels and the lives of those who wrote them indicate the way in which the requirements of race required a response of them. Such accounting is not a strictly intellectual exercise. Their writing pronounces a deeper attempt to struggle with the

adherence to racial discipleship in the midst of their “inter” existence and the seemingly authentic lives of these the dwelled with in the world. While interracial existence itself serves to interrupt or interrogate claims of racial certainty, “passing” serves to again subvert this structure by transgressing the lines that demarcate white/non-white, participation/exclusion. Thus passing as the act of “passing” as white or into white life could be understood as the deepest instantiation of this political embodiment, but continually reverberating through all mulatto and interracial literature marked by continually present notions of participation and alienation.³ It is my hope to suggest that the disruption of the mulatto body and its enactment through the act of passing highlighted by many authors prior to me is a disruption that highlights the articulations of race within a nation but also indicates a fundamental limitation of becoming as the telos of identity.⁴

³ Elaine Ginsberg makes a crucial observation regarding the fictive and historical depictions of passing suggesting, “although little is documented about the actual extent of race passing by blacks in the United States, the specter of passing derives its power not from the number of instances of passing but as a signification that embodies the anxieties and contradictions of a racially stratified society,” 8. Ginsberg’s observation is a crucial distinction. Here the use of these novels is not to delineate from the historical phenomenon of passing certain features. Rather, my aim here is to draw from these literatures both performances of race themselves as they seek to articulate and rearticulate race and as such note the way in which passing serves to reinforce or undermine the conscription of racial adherents into the 20th century. In many ways historical accounts would do little to convey the power of the mulatto figure or the one who passes into white life, for as these authors note the true power of these lives is both the performance of racial life internal to their decisions, but more importantly the reverberations these lives made in the worlds they inhabited. Thus we know historically that these bodies existed, but we draw upon these fictive descriptions to mine for the deeper significance of these lives and their varying receptions.

⁴ The notion of becoming has become a particularly helpful way of resisting the stultifying effects of normative identities in recent cultural theory. Beginning with Judith Butler and more recently articulated by Azoulay and Samira Kawash the notion of becoming seeks to articulate the centrality of identity within a trajectory of possibility where persons must be free to articulate or declare their own personhood without the fetters of normativity delimiting the claims they make for themselves. Such a narrative is, in my view, peculiarly American, but nonetheless problematic in its lack of attendance to the necessary limitations of any life. We are not free to become, but rather we are bound to those we love and those whom we do not in ways that always complicate our hopes for ourselves. In fact, I am not sure it is possible to articulate a hope or a desire without one who has hoped or desired for me or those who have sought to manipulate my hopes or desires. I am very rarely free for I am continuously living into forms of life circumscribed by any number of claims. The question is not a telos of becoming, but what is the telos of becoming.

“Inter” Existence and Literary Performances of Identity

Before I explore these texts in particular it is important to first highlight the relationship between literary articulations of race and racial life in the United States in the 19th and 20th Centuries. The peril and fascination of the interracial was perhaps no less clear in the Western and American imaginations than in the question of “whatness” or racial classification of the early 20th century. The seemingly never ending system of names to describe the various intermixtures of races served to create a discourse through which the children of these interracial encounters might be incorporated into the larger racial polity of the colonial West. This process of classification served to not only define the names, but also discipline or structure their relations as well. That is, while much of the question and desire to name interracial bodies in the 18th and 19th centuries were centered upon biological questions these biological realities were always merely the face of a deeper cultural and political claim. In this regard we begin to see the birth and life of the mulatto (or interracial) child in deeply political terms. The bodies of these children indicate the possibility of something new, which must be continually resisted, contained, or sacrificed.

The very conception and birth of the mulatto child becomes the instantiation of a deep disruption within the religiosity of racial performance and life. The lives of these children who seek to articulate their lives in the midst of these fundamental disjunctures, which characterize their life points to the ways in which, all bodies ultimately perform into such claims. Yet for these mixed bodies the possibility of participation or personhood is continually bound between two impossibilities: they are neither/nor. Here mulatto bodies both point to the performative nature of such lives and at the same time begin to disrupt these performances through their presence and negotiation of racialized life.

Although ethnic and racial intermixture is not an unknown phenomenon in the history of peoples, such intermixture became a subject of profound interest in the West beginning in the 18th century. Such reflections upon racial intermixture became intensified in the United States during the 19th and 20th centuries when the question concerning these hybrid bodies inherently challenged the economic, political and social scaffolding upon which American society had been built.⁵ Judgments concerning the identity of these neither nor bodies were not only questions determining freedom or bondage, but as we examined in the previous chapter the reality of intermixture and the children such encounters produced were continually moments that either threatened or disrupted the racial hierarchy that dominated American social and political realities. While notions concerning racial purity were varied the reality of a radical racial polarity engendered not only a fear, but also a deep fascination with the “hybrid” child.

At this point I should note that while racial themes were continuously present in American fiction and other literary genres the aim here is not to historically trace the development of how the interracial person was viewed or viewed him or herself during this time. Rather, the aim here is to begin to ascertain the *meaning* of these bodies and lives. That is, the continual interpretation of these bodies indicates a profound reality regarding the power of racial formation in the West. The aim here is to begin to articulate a particularly theological interpretation of these bodies and the realities of race they unveil for all of us. The understanding of these children as tragic is construed in a variety of ways by a varying

⁵ The racial lines were continually reinscribed through the legal codification of racial difference. Plessy vs. Ferguson and Brown vs Board of Education served to not only codify the conditions of participation, but also served to highlight the costs of being on the wrong side of the color line. See.... regarding the implications of the color line for mixed race existence...)

number of authors and while these bodies fascinate the public we must also attend to the ways in which these bodies (real and literary) began to articulate, disrupt, and display the utter performativity of all racial subjects as well as points towards the ultimately tragic state of existence for all racialized lives.

The birth of the interracial child perpetually calls to us the refrain of the advent hymn of new birth, “what child is this?” With every birth of a mulatto child the system of classification exerts itself to narrate the child into a certain reality policing its borders and continually re-evaluating its own measure of inclusion. Through the rubric of race and the correlations of purity, whiteness, and being American the mulatto body is both created and disruptive. This disruption derives not from the mulatto’s “hybrid” body as radically different, but rather the way in which this hybridity reverberates within the lives of those who assert their own purity. This refusal of the mulatto is the refusal of the hybridity of all identities. The nature of identity as fundamentally hybrid is as Samira Kawash notes “a force utterly heterogeneous and unrecuperable... Hybridity in its most complex sense is in fact an impossibility; it is not something that one can be...”⁶ The mulatto body is a political presence that continually confronts all claims to a racially (or ethnically) grounded personhood that resists its own realities of mixture. These hybrid bodies thus display not only the subversion of racial knowledge but also the patterns of life born out of those

⁶ Samira Kawash, *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African-American Narrative*(Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 22. The concern of Kawash in *Dislocating* is primarily to highlight the disruption of racial epistemology in the mulatto and the passing body. This is a crucial observation considering the deep connection between knowledge and self-assertion or identity. It is my hope throughout this chapter to press this point more deeply to show how such epistemological assertions are born out through the particularities of peoples lives and the ways in which they structure their lives along these precarious lines.

assertions and assumptions. The mulatto body is created by the radical polarities of colored and white that serve to make possible notions of mixture.

This body is disruptive because of what it indicates as well as the ways in which such bodies must perform through these realities continually pointing back to the falsity of the claims concerning purity. Their lives are sheer performativity – they are constantly negotiating their relationships and realities because their lives are continually negotiating the lines (and practices) that constitute racial lives (either white or black) as well as continually seeking to live into racial space despite the impossibility. Such an attempt to live into such entrenched and powerful modes of identification is a vital aspect of what I am asserting is the inherently political body of the interracial person.

While the first chapter was about the encounter and representation of interracial bodies this chapter seeks to articulate the significance of these bodies and lives themselves. Here I want to suggest that it is not only the performance that gives rise to our identification and thus a vital aspect of our identity, but in the body of the interracial figure we begin to see the impossibility of identification as giving rise to a dissonant performance that is perpetually “neither/nor.” Yet, this body and these lives must be accounted for. They are present in the world. In this way I argue that such lives are inherently *political* even in their passive or not so passive assertions of racial fidelity. For, in claiming a race they are requiring those members of “their” race to either accept or reject that performance. Thus the necessity of reception or rejection that these lives interject into the modern world suggests their inherently political nature or what Josh Toth suggests is their capacity to “deauthenticate

community.”⁷ For to fail to attend to them is to blur the line that gives national identities their very power.

It is in the midst of the totalizing claims of race and the curious category of mulatto existence that we begin to find the phenomenon of “passing.” Passing was the practice of a person of African descent, but who was visibly white would pass into white society or pass as white.⁸ Such instances reveal the fantastic lengths into which some sought to attain a “better” life as well as the way in which such racial constructions bore such concrete realities. Kawash notes the how passing is, in fact, the intensification of the mulatto disruption, “in the figure of the passing body, the signifiers of race are unloosed from the signifieds; the seemingly stable relation between representation and the real collapses, and representation is suddenly dangerous and untrustworthy.”⁹ The mulatto body lives into the patterns of white life disrupting it from within and inscribing white bodies themselves with

⁷ Josh Toth, "Deauthenticating Community: The Passing Intrusion of Clare Kendry in Nella Larsen's *Passing*," *MELUS* 33, no. 1 (2008): 59. Toth suggests the “passing presence resists complete apprehension. She disrupts our illusion of a coherent and stable reality because she refuses to be fixed or understood via a process of symbolization.” Toth interestingly notes the necessity of similarity in establishing an individual’s place within a community. This suggests the mere presence of one who appears but is not serves to upend the logic of a community and the individuals within it.

⁸ What is interesting in both of these terms is the variation of meaning conveying a somewhat nuanced understanding of both that which the subject is entering as well as the way in which the activity of passing was understood. That is, to pass into something is to suggest a boundary that is clearly defined where one might be able to measure one’s being in or not in. The notion of passing in this regard conveys the way in which racial identities were not only personal, but rather social or more precisely spatial as Buscaglia reminds us. Here to pass into the white world is to occupy as space within a social system... to pass from one life to another again reiterating the religiously grounded language discussed in chapter 1. The second meaning of pass indicates the deeply performative nature of racial existence. Here to pass does not indicate necessarily that which one is entering into, but rather the continual performance of the individual to maintain the ruse. The individual must continually display behaviors or actions while suppressing others in order to maintain the illusion of belonging. Yet such notions of passing also indicates the utter impossibility of such a transformation for one can only pretend to be white... there is nothing in this system that allows one to truly become white thus foreclosing the possibility of any real transformation, simply a change in fortune or social possibilities. It is rendered from one life to another, from death to life or life to death.

⁹ Kawash, 131.

the Other. In the passing moment the white body becomes rewritten and interpretable as something which can articulated from within “one who is dark.”

The patterns of life, tastes, education, language, desires, etc. become articulable through bodies rendered “dark” and thus the telos of white life itself. Such practices reveal the intense pressure of racial life and hope in America revealing that “passing” is not the exclusive mode of racial performance. The ability of some folks to pass implies the way in which racial purity and notions of fixed identity require peoples to adhere or live into racial (and cultural) ideals. Such practices do not constitute the entirety of their existence, but also cannot be easily extricated from the mundane choices of daily life. The fact that some “pass” into certain societies only opens up the question to us concerning how we all “pass” for what we are as well as what actions or practices reveal us to be traitors. The disruption of racial knowledge as Kawash observes upends the political processes of becoming that characterize the ontology of American citizenship. The policing of participation becomes subverted through the passing body. Passing fiction seeks to rearticulate bodies “long indicted as a symptom of middle class bias, racial self-hatred, and internalization of white values.”¹⁰ This re-articulation “in African American fiction of the New Negro Renaissance the trope of passing functions instead as an aggressive strategy to reinterpret race as a socio-cultural construct, rather than a biological destiny.”¹¹ African American fiction of the early

¹⁰ M. Giulia Fabi, "Reconstructing the Race: The Novel after Slavery," in *Cambridge Companion to African American Literature*, ed. Maryemma Graham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 39. Fabi here is highlighting the way in which the mulatto body was often caught within an interpretive vice wherein the lightness of their skin afforded them a certain privileged space within the racial hierarchy, yet was also resisted both by darker and lighter bodies. Literature had tended up to this point to highlight the “tragic mulatto” as a figure caught miserably in between without the physical prowess or joy of their darker brethren, but also only able to mimic the lives of their lighter “kin.” For more on the literary representation of mulattos see Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*.

¹¹ Fabi, 39.

20th century sought to re-imagine these racial lines while also seeking to articulate themselves anew within them.

Theologically these lives and the texts that seek to articulate the significance of their bodies to us begin to indicate both the promise and the tragic embedded in their “inter” life. These lives indicate the anemia of Christian belief upon the substance of lives that exist in such profoundly racialized ways. They provide to us an intensification of the daily choices which confront our lives and the hopes we press ourselves into as well as the infidelities we resist. These lives, reverberating through the articulations of white and black life alike in modern America, are articulations of how Christian bodies are both living into and out of racial faithfulness and ultimately marking our lives incongruous the lives baptism wrought upon us.

American literature of the 19th and 20th century continually struggled with the question of racial identity and boundaries. While there are numerous examples of passing in American literature I will examine what I believe to be three crucial depictions of passing which provide significant commentaries on interracial bodies in America. Alternatively, these depictions also open up new interpretive possibilities for naming in clearer relief, the tragic character of racial existence and discipleship. The works I will examine are *The House Behind the Cedars* by Charles Chesnutt, *Autobiography of an Ex-colored Man* by James Weldon Johnson, *Passing* by Nella Larsen. Written over the course of three decades between 1902 and 1927 these three works reflect the deep ambiguity and struggle to interpret the interracial body. From Chesnutt to Johnson to Larsen’s work we see the themes of alienation and loneliness continue to pervade the lives of their mulatto protagonists. Yet, these works also make varying interpretations of these bodies. These interpretations or representations of the mixed

body serve to indicate the possibilities and impossibilities of not only those mulatto bodies, but all bodies within the “crucible” of racial existence in America.¹² In each of these texts we see how interracial lives exhibit a deeply performative character that disrupts the assertions of racial life around them, yet ultimately cannot be sustained against the force of racial assertion subjecting each of the main protagonists to tragic deaths, either social or physical. These lives disrupt the notion of persons, nation and place that are continually articulated within the trope of hopefulness and possibility.

Chesnutt’s articulation of the mixed body serves to both outline the tragic nature of all dark bodies in the United States, but in particular highlights the ways in which such bodies must continually negotiate their own prejudice and malformed expectations which coalesce into a cacophony of incoherent desires and ultimately death. Yet in the midst of this tragic condition however, Chesnutt gestures towards the possibility of transformation and change not only in that which passes but also that which is passed into. In doing so he highlights both illusory nature of racial assumptions and the lives built upon them. This points to the possibility of transformation for not only the dark body, but the light body as well.

In Johnson’s work ten years later the possibility of transformation latent within Chesnutt’s work becomes notably absent and is instead replaced with an account that displays the inherent delusion of race, yet works to concretize the possibility of dark bodies within the burgeoning nationalism of the Harlem Renaissance. His work represents a crucial starting point to what would become the central theme of the Harlem Renaissance, the

¹² Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black/White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

beauty and struggle of black existence.¹³ Maintaining the loss, tragedy and isolation of mulatto existence that has continually marked this genre of literature, Johnson's work rearticulates the tragedy however, not in terms of one's failure to reconcile to inward realities, but rather his failure to reconcile himself to his true, dark self. Lastly, Larsen's work represents a crucial response to Johnson's portrayal highlighting again the tragedy of being caught between two sharp claims upon personhood that ultimately must find a sacrifice in the mixed transgressor, Clare upon the street below. Yet in Larsen's account it is both the possibility of transformation suggested in Chesnutt and the nationalism displayed in Johnson that seem to fail Clare, the tragic mulatto who dies at the conclusion of the text. At the end the mulatto is certainly a tragic figure all who participate in such racial lies are as well.

The theme of tragedy that marks these lives has been noted throughout the literary depictions of mulatto lives. In this regard the representations of the interracial figure have a deep continuity with the articulations of interracial bodies in the 19th and early 20th century that emphasize the neither/nor existence of these bodies. These literatures note the vain attempts to cross over or uplift in order to assert one's peculiar position with the radical claims of American racial life. These lives are marked by the perpetual disruption of norms and expectations, knowledge and certainty that grounded race into everyday existence. Their varied attempts to disrupt or transform and their eventual failures point ultimately to the

¹³ See George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995). Hutchinson provides a helpful discussion of the Harlem Renaissance as a mode of racial production. In particular his discussion of Alain Locke's reflections upon the aims of the Harlem Renaissance are particularly helpful.

tragic nature of all racialized life in modernity, implicating even those who are oblivious to the truth and tragedy of their own lives.¹⁴

Charles Chesnutt – Disruption and the Reciprocity of Desire

Writing in the late 19th and early 20th century Charles Chesnutt wrote a series of short stories and novels reflecting upon African American life. Central to most of these stories were mulatto or interracial characters whose identity as such was central to the arc of the story. His works were lauded for their realistic portrayal of black life and in particular a growing African American middle class that displayed the mixed race men and women and African Americans more generally as capable.¹⁵ Chesnutt has been considered to be a significant precursor to what would become the Harlem Renaissance, but his reception among African Americans and the white community alike is a complicated one.¹⁶ While depicting African Americans in ways that resisted the typical caricatures Chesnutt's work was

¹⁴ The recent work of Emile Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* highlights the tragic mulatta as a moment of empowerment breaking away from the “tragic mulatto” theme articulated by white authors. Here she suggests the mulatta figure of the Harlem Renaissance and its antecedents mark a refusal of the inferiority of these bodies and propose an identification with black bodies that represents a hopefulness inherent to black existence. I quite agree with Townes that the work of African American writers, rearticulated these bodies in profound ways. In many ways these bodies exhibited levels of independence and power seen rarely in literature of the day. Yet Townes also does not account for the recurrence of death that remains in these works. These deaths are sometimes heroic, but more often these deaths or deeply paradoxical. Death surrounds those who hoped to cross over, those who did and refused, as well as those who remained “with their people.” The overwhelming presence of death and exile that pervades these texts marks a distinct pause even within the “people-building” exercise of the Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro Movement. Undoubtedly these texts exhibit the empowerment of darker folk, but they also display the deeply complicated nature of this agency and in doing so question all notions of agency within our racialized world. See Emile Maureen Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 1st ed., Black Religion, Womanist Thought, Social Justice (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 84-89.

¹⁵ Such an articulation of interracial figures was new during this time because of the growing influence of the “scientific” study of mixed race children that oftentimes suggested a certain dilution of characteristics in the hybrid man or woman. This dilution resulted in the effeminate or sterile mulatto man or the stunning, but empty mulatto woman. These figures often enjoyed more notoriety among their own people for their lighter skin, but lacked the moral strength to exercise this “gift” well while their attempts to mimic their white counterparts was seen only as a tragic aping or approximation. See Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*.

¹⁶ Hutchinson.

also read as implicitly suggesting the superiority of lighter skin. However, these readings tend to dismiss the ways in which Chesnut's notion of racial amalgamation served to threaten the seemingly secure notions of whiteness.

Each of his novels as well as his essays therefore must be read not only through a lens of racial uplift, but also racial contamination. Such a contamination results, as Samira Kawash writing on *The Marrow of Tradition* notes, "not with a gradual transformation or amalgamation but with an absolute rupture."¹⁷ What Kawash notes in this particular Chesnut novel could be said of each of his novels as well as his essays. In arguing for a racial amalgamation the possibility of transformation served to tear notions of what was and what could be. Chesnut's racial amalgamation disrupts in its explicit assertion that whiteness might become dark.¹⁸ This possibility of a "darkening" of the white world becomes expressed through the negotiation of mulatto figures who seek to live into a white world yet find its promises unfulfilling. However Chesnut does not stop here. Oftentimes his novels, while following the forms of mulattic literature preceding him typically climax with the reversal of white desire and the refusal of a white world. Ultimately, these gestures become muted, but they nonetheless point to a certain modulation of hope in the mulatto figure that becomes ultimately impossible within the American world.

Articulations of the tragic continued to be present as did themes revolving around the permeability of racial lives as well as themes concerning social uplift. But Chesnut's novels are also marked by a peculiar innovation that was not articulated within the Harlem

¹⁷ Kawash, 123.

¹⁸ This reversal of desire of white to live as dark marks a variety of Chesnut's novels and in particular can be seen in his explicit discussions of race in "The Future American" and "What is a White Man?" These discussions serve to both highlight the absurdity of whiteness as well as suggest the possibility of a "blended" race that does not contaminate, but elevate all people.

Renaissance literature that would follow it: the transformation of white desire and thus a problemization of white purity and the binary logic of race.¹⁹

His novels indicate a nascent, if aborted transformation of borders and people where these lines become amorphous and permeable for both black and white, yet they also remain deadly. The presence of these figures among white and black lives alike become politically weighted with the potential for transformation, but also with the possibility of death given the deep reality of racialized life. For Chesnutt, it seems, death is still inevitable. Within the corpus of his work we see not only the movement of interracial lives into white lives, performing into white racial life, but in several stunning moments we see this decision reversed as white lives are drawn into black lives and hopes. This stuttering illusion to the possibility of white hopes becoming bound to black bodies and black lives become present in a variety of his works such as *Paul Marchand*, *F.M.C.*, *The Colonel's Dream*, and *The Wife of His Youth*. While such depictions of borders are certainly idealistic for their time (and perhaps ours) they are a striking departure from the considerations of mulatto life of Chesnutt's time. This reversal of white hopes into black life marks Chesnutt's truly disruptive gesture. Recent scholarship has rightfully attended to how these depictions destabilize the notions of racial certainty that undergirded American social and political life. However in my view the depiction of exchange or living into dark life unveils the deepest disruptive force of these bodies.

¹⁹ Recent scholarship has sought to redescribe Chesnutt himself as well as his fiction within a more complicated set of interrelationships regarding Chesnutt's relationship to the African American community, white readers, and his representations of white and black alike. For a helpful survey of recent scholarship see Henry B. Wotham, "What Is a Black Author?: A Review of Recent Charles Chesnutt Studies," *American Literary History* 18, no. (October 2006). For a particularly helpful analysis of Chesnutt's major works and his re-conception of race see Dean McWilliams, *Charles W. Chesnutt and the Fictions of Race* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002).

Chesnutt had a difficult time getting his work initially published and some suggest the hesitancy of publishers was the display of black lives as capable and intelligent, but it seems to me the permeability of the racial lines is what made these works so threatening. The idea being that black life was something that could be “chosen” or desired, that somehow white identity could be given up in favor of identification with dark bodies, it is this radical inversion of the passing narrative that marks these texts as particularly unique and threatening in a time when the lines of racial logic were becoming more strongly demarcated. This is not to suggest that Chesnutt’s work is idealistic or overly romantic for even in these works the tragedy of these lives is still pronounced, for such transformation is equally impossible and equally dangerous for all parties involved. Yet its presence and its articulation require some attention. For the purposes of this work I will attend to his 1901 work *The House Behind the Cedars* which exhibits the themes we have discussed previously (the performativity of race and the tragedy of racial performance) but also inverts these tragedies and reverberates them within white lives and bodies binding the tragedy of racial life within both black and white bodies in profound ways, ultimately gesturing to the necessity of an utter transformation engendered through interracial bodies.

The novel takes place in North Carolina and centers upon Rena, a quadroon,²⁰ whose mulatto mother lives in relative isolation, intentionally distanced from African Americans, but not fully white and thus excluded from white life. However, this distance marks the children as colored despite their appearance as white. This gap between classification and appearance renders them utterly in between these societies. Such distancing suggests the way in which mulatto’s themselves tended to live into the “privilege” of their

²⁰ The child of a mulatto and a white person.

hue and thus exhibiting themselves as also recapitulating the performance of race in problematic ways. This is why it is crucial to note that interracial bodies are themselves not a way out, but rather represent or perform a disruption they themselves do not fully understand or live into. Thus their presence is political even if they are not.

Narrating the middle life of this mulatto brother and sister, Rena and John, Chesnutt narrates the presumptions of mulatto existence as well as their perils. In each sibling the hopes of participation and a grander life are bound to a fundamental blindness regarding those who truly love them. Their presence in these worlds leave them both tragically transformed and agents (and victims) of transformation. This transformation offers only a glimmer of promise at the conclusion of the text, but more profoundly outlines the deeply tragic nature of these lives, existing between the boundaries that are imposed both from without and within suggesting that interracial love and desire and the fruits of those scandalous encounters are continually measured, sorted, and disciplined in order to maintain the certainty of the system.

A) Departure and Return – The Performance and Possibility of Race

Rena is reunited with her brother who has “returned from the dead”²¹ after leaving his mother and his sister to pass into white life. In the ten years since he has left he has become a well-respected lawyer and married into a wealthy and established family and become well known within white southern society. However, also during this time his wife has died leaving him to raise his daughter alone. His return is a dangerous one, for if his true

²¹ Charles Waddell Chesnutt, *The House Behind the Cedars*, 2003 Modern Library pbk. ed.(New York: Modern Library, 2003), 14. 14.

identity were found he would surely lose his place within this society. Yet, he returns in order to take Rena with him. In part he seeks to provide a female caregiver for his child, but he also hopes that she might escape the life of stigma that mark his and his sister's life. He returns to ask her to cross over with him into a new world.

The return of John Warwick as one who entered fully into the life of promise is bound to a messianic call to lift his sister up from the darkness of her position "for he was not only a son – a brother – but he represented to them the world from which circumstances had shut them out, and to which distance lent even more than its usual enchantment; and they felt nearer to this far-off world because of the glory Warwick reflected from it."²² However, messianic imagery of John Warwick's return is muted by the cost of this salvation. For Rena to enter into a new life her old life must die. The baptism she must enter into upon immersing herself into white life requires the death of her old self and "henceforth she must be known as Miss Warwick dropping the old name with the old life."²³ Here entrance into the redemption requires sacrifice and death.

Her life was, prior to entry into the white world, one where her darker brothers and sister were to be pitied for their distance from white life. But upon her own rejection from the white world "where once she had seemed able to escape from them, they were now, it appeared, her inalienable race."²⁴ In seeing the ease with which white desire and love could be abandoned she returned to "her people" "new-born [with a] desire to be of service to her

²² Ibid., 16. The theme of the messianic of mediating presence was a theme common to mulatto literature of the 19th century. These novels highlighted the gifts bestowed upon those with a lighter hue and emphasized the responsibility (or burden) to lift up those kin marked by ignorance and oppression. This trope of uplift or what DuBois would later call the talented tenth is certainly an aspect of the fundamental difference articulated by mulatto or light skin African Americans.

²³ Ibid., 31.

²⁴ Ibid., 135.

re-discovered people.”²⁵ Chesnutt’s articulation of departure and return is a fundamental aspect of the passing phenomenon that we will find articulated differently in Johnson and Larsen as well. The power of differentiation serves to elevate giving rise to a sense of departure from shackles and the consequence of departure indicates how classification is a process of association through which a people are subjugated. The departure of Rena and John indicate how escape from classification is indeed possible thus ripping the fragile veil with the ease of a new name. But this possibility, this desire also demonstrates how deeply such logic inhabits even those who can see the fallacy of such distinctions. The depictions of this moment also indicate the sacrifice of Rena and her mother. The isolation of Rena’s life served to make the particular tie between them all the more important. This departure of Rena into a life with no mother reveals the slavery’s distorted reach even in the lives of those who seem to “benefit” from its logic.

The notion of return, however, is not a simple one for this return is continually marked by a fundamental difference. This is a difference that is not necessarily bound to superiority (in Rena’s case), but a recognition of the way in which one’s hue binds one to another people despite one’s own desire. This binding becomes apparent in Rena’s continual attachment to Tryon. In her entry into this world of endless possibilities she, in fact, sees deep limitations. Her participation is always precipitated by an incoherence between who she knows herself to be and whom she represents herself to be. In this moment of incoherence she the desire for Tryon is a desire for recognition that cannot be articulated through economic participation as with her brother, but instead demands the full recognition of the

²⁵ Ibid.

one whom she loves and it is upon that basis that her participation in that world can be rendered full or blessed.

Rena's departure and the possibility of her departure mark a crucial observation regarding the texture or rhythm of interracial existence as the necessity of departure and return continually marks these lives. Participation in one world continually forecloses the possibility of participation in another. Thus the neither/nor that constitutes the life of Rena and John is a life where the possibility of participation lies before. But this participation is always mitigated by the loss or death necessary to make it possible. John's return as one who represents the fullest possibilities of personhood returns to those to whom he was dead. His return is one of being confronted not only with the possibilities of entrance into a world forbidden, but also as a reminder of the limitations inherent in such promises. This life of perpetual departure and arrival where every place lies as a possibility but at once distant is one of ontological exile. Such an exilic existence, characterized by this "habit of dissimulation" is according to Edward Said "both wearying and nerve wrecking. Exile is never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure... a life of exile moves according to a different calendar, and is less seasonal and settled than life at home. Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic de-centered, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew."²⁶ The exilic order of things pointed to in Said is bound to a certain geographical reorientation that must take place continually as one negotiates the daily disruptions of what is known and what is new. But the interracial body takes this de-centering reality and locates it within one's very body. Their bodies become the location of this geographic dislocation. The possibility of departure and return

²⁶ Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 186.

latent in the lives of those who can pass continually reverberates back to the impossibility of a homeland. Rest and longing lay continually beyond one as their very lives, their bodies represent impossibility and incoherence in the union of difference that produced them.

It is this disjuncture of personhood and possibility that form the difficulty of the choice before Rena to leave her mother and follow John into the redemption of white life. Its temptation lays in the “comfort” of her life with her mother. But the temptation of the white world lay also in the incoherence of her life with her mother. They are behind the cedars, veiled from being seen or revealing themselves fully to either peoples. Undoubtedly this quasi-exile from their darker brethren is self-imposed for throughout the narrative the faithfulness of Frank, the darker friend of Rena remains. Yet the constitution of this racial reality marks her as different. This difference she both resents and lives into. She is both its disciple and subject to its discipline.

Entrance into the redemption of white life lies not in the inherent supremacy of the mulatto’s biological heritage, but to the way in which their hue allows for a faithful performance of white life. The possibility of becoming white lies in the inherently performative character of racial existence that requires only a “passable” mark. Rena enters into such a performance even in the midst of her mother’s deep sadness, for the mother realizes that this is not a momentary escape but a cutting off, a new death of her now only child.

The possibility of a new world that sits before Rena is the possibility of becoming. John’s final attempt to convince his mother to let Rena return with him is framed teleologically. Within the confines of the House Behind the Cedars the lives of Rena and John were bound within the impossibility of being white and the refusal to be dark. Their

lives were a nebulous interstitial space that was only perceivable through its negations. Yet the world beyond the cedars represented participation and possibility. Beyond the cedars was a life that could be lived without the fetters of limitation. John was calling Rena to a life without an end. It is the possibility of emerging out of the shadows of non-being for in this world, in the world behind the cedars, the veil, “the [Civil] war has wrought great changes, has put the bottom rail on top, and all that – but it hasn’t wiped that out. Nothing but death can remove that stain, if it does not follow us even beyond the grave. Here she must forever be nobody!”²⁷ The precipice between being and non-being is the color line. The possibility of participation in the social and economic structures of the American dream bestow the possibility of becoming the quintessential mark of Western personhood.²⁸

The possibility of moving from Rena to Rowena Warwick, the possibility of her entrance into the life of her brother’s promise was not one of inheritance, but of training. She would attend boarding school where she would become refined in the manners of her new people. She would become white. Her subsequent life bears the burden of avoiding the marks of a person who does not belong. Her manners, her tone, her nods, her distance with those darker than she and her embrace of her white “kin” now become pregnant with the possibility of betray the “truth” of who she is. Becoming and loss are thus pressed into each moment of Rena’s life and as she descends more deeply into this new personhood her dissimilitude becomes more marked. This descent into a life that is “foreign” to her perpetuates a life fraught with the loneliness of the exile discussed earlier. John expressed

²⁷ Chesnutt, 19-20.

²⁸ Gibel Azoulay’s movement towards becoming as the deepest significance of the interracial body while disrupting some of its logic, in many ways can be understood to be the deepest instantiation of the self in the West.

this exile as having “always been, in a figurative sense, a naturalized foreigner in the world of wide opportunity.”²⁹ The loneliness of this perpetually in-between existence underscores the sheer performativity of the life which John and Rena enter into. They must “live into” this world. They must adopt its customs, its accents. Their daily decisions and refusals are continually marked by the necessity of a performance appropriate to the attestation of who they are.

Rena is confronted with the sheer performativity of her chosen life as she becomes the object of the most eligible bachelor in the city, Tryon ?. They quickly fall in love, but in doing so Rena becomes deeply aware of the consequences of her decision and the risk she enters into should she marry him. She becomes ultimately torn between this man she loves and the possibility of her discovery. Her living into this life is marked by the possibility of discovery and death. Upon Tryon’s proposal the reality of Rena’s isolation and danger awoke,

Stated baldly, it was the consciousness of her secret; the complexity arose out of the various ways in which it seemed to bear upon her future... It had not been difficult for Rena to conform her speech, her manners, and in a measure her modes of thought, to those of the people around her; but when this readjustment went beyond mere externals and concerned vital issues of life, the secret that oppressed her took on a more serious aspect, with tragic possibilities.³⁰

The possibility of binding her life to another now complicated the possibility of participation.

What is particularly fascinating about Chesnutt’s depiction is the way in which such racial performances are so deeply gendered. That is, Rena’s reception into the fullness of this social redemption requires recognition, the incorporation of one into another to be made

²⁹ Chesnutt, 47.

³⁰ Ibid., 52.

whole. It is a life or a performance that must be received and acknowledged to make it “true.” What makes her life and performance so precarious is that she has no means to redeem herself. Her life is continually bound to and subject to another. It is her brother, John’s performance, his participation is precipitated by his assertion concerning who he is.

However, Rena’s participation is mitigated by her expectation of recognition that is not based not upon her vocation or her own self-assertion, but by a certain reception of her full self. “Would he still love me?” is the question she asks of Tryon. Her hesitancy regarding Tryon’s proposal is not an economic concern or based upon its usefulness as entrance into the fullness of a white telos. Rather, Rena’s struggle is grounded upon the necessity of Tryon’s full recognition of her. Chesnut himself seems to cast this desire both as one of great depth as well as a mark of feminine nature where “the fact of human nature makes woman happiest when serving where she loves.”³¹ Despite Chesnut’s own seemingly chauvinistic characterization of Rena’s desire he nonetheless articulates how the interracial body begins to itself disrupt the discipleship of racial life.

Up to this point, John’s mixed presence may disrupt certain assumptions concerning what whiteness is, but this is more of what Johnson’s narrator would describe as a great practical joke on the world. John’s secret is not known and the disruption reverberates only within the loneliness of his own life and the satisfaction of his “place among men.” However, Rena’s performance disrupts more publicly, more profoundly for her aims seek more than economic or social participation. She wishes to be known – to be seen. In her reception of Tryon’s proposal she understands that she is also receiving herself. That is, her personhood in this world is bound to another’s reception of her. Yet she also recognizes the

³¹ Ibid., 57.

incoherence this giving/and reception will mark within her and with her mother as well as in her being bound to this man.

In her hesitancy she begins to disrupt the patterns of racial logic that promote assertion above reception and utility above a fullness of personhood. Rena seeks to exist within this confined space fully. She desires to be received fully. In so doing she begins to work against the disciplining of racial logic and the internal de-centering that has characterized her “redemption” thus far. In Rena’s struggle with Tryon’s proposal and her painful desires to see her mother again Chesnut’s articulates the outlines of an interracial presence that begins to disrupt the order of racialized life and resists its categories of pure appearance and necessary sacrifice. In her desire to be seen and loved fully, to be known and loved marks her resistance to the mode of participation left open to those who might choose to pass. To exist within this system Rena is resisting that internal bifurcation that the color line continually seeks to outline. The possibility of becoming, of participating requires a certain fullness that will necessarily disrupt the very line she transgressed. Thus her performance of white life is marked by a disruptive mode of being that dares to be seen.

The disruptive arc of this resistance, of the politics of presence is thus marked not by a new assertion of in-betweenness or the seizing of a life one is entitled to. Rather, the disruption of the interracial life enters and asks to be received. This reception is bound to the one receiving. Rena does not desire the life of one who “passes” and thus must implicitly fear the world she inhabits. She does not want to be a stranger, but a citizen. She wants to be embraced within this new homeland. Yet the fullness of this personhood, Rena recognizes, is not bound to the perfection of her performance, the attainment of her life (as is the case with her brother), but is rather bound to the depth of desire of the one who is receiving her.

She is not whole without the love of John. This love is not true without his full reception of her. He must receive her fully. Thus her identity is bound to his reception of her.

The mark of Rena's arrival into the white world of promise and its fulfillment as marriage was born with the necessity of death, the sacrifice of her ties to her mother and those she had grown to know and love. Even in her life of promise and fulfillment with desire for a life with Tryon comes also the possibility of loss. John the means of recognition and therefore participation are iterated through the means of assertion, vocation and economic achievement. These means are undoubtedly subject to loss, but they may also be reproduced and thus at heart this endeavor remains coherent with the underlying American value of self-making. This coherence may explain Tryon's hesitancy to reveal John's true identity to the community while still initially distancing himself from Rena. But in Rena the mulatto presence disrupts because it entangles the hopes and desire into one another. Departure and return are now not so clearly articulable. To return is gain and loss, to remain secluded is to die in order to gain. She refuses (or cannot) acquiesce to the sacrifices necessary to keep her whole. This inability will ultimately psychically divide her, but its reverberations will not distill quickly.

b) Border Crossing and Death

The transgression of this line is not one of promise however. Chesnut's rhythm of departure and return is bound to accounts of death. Ultimately John's hope for participation in the fullness of his "inheritance" is understood to be ultimately a delusion for Rena cannot be fully happy in a world where she cannot be fully know and loved. Chesnut reminds us of the consequences of these transgressions. The danger Rena felt so keenly is realized as her

true identity is discovered and Tryon rejects her in disappointment and shame. Rena returns to her mother and determines to use her gifts, her intellect, and her hue to work towards the uplift of “her people.” She inverts the messianic promise of her brother’s arrival to return to her mother and “be of service to her re-discovered people... where once she had seemed able to escape from them, they were now, it appeared, her inalienable race.”³² Her return to “her people” is rendered this time not as heroic, but a descent. Chesnutt portrays the power with which the racial imagination still inflicts even those who may benefit (even partially) from their light position.

This desire, which Rena discovers, is apparently impossible for Tryon as he breaks off the marriage and disavows his former relationship with her. Again, Chesnutt makes the articulation of death visible. Tryon laments upon the discovery of Rena’s true identity, “lost she was, as though she had never been, as she had indeed had no right to be.”³³ The discovery of Rena’s identity here is rendered as a tragedy of death where the one whom he loved was now rendered not only as dead, but as non-being. The theological depth of this moment is crucial for here participation within the white world has been construed now not only as the moment of freedom, but recognition by the white world is what is now constituted as true personhood.

The distortion of racial discipleship rings with an Athanasian echo in the constitution of being and non-being. To recognize oneself as created and live into that form of salvation is to be yet to forget and besmirch the image of God within oneself is to fall into non-being. This again betrays the fundamentally religious or theological structure of racialized society

³² Ibid., 135.

³³ Ibid., 101.

wherein participation and freedom are not social categories, but rather fulfillments of ontological hope. What is so unique to Chesnutt's work is the way in which this characterization of rejection and participation is not a simple one. For here the notion of death is not narrated in terms of murder or anger, but rather lament. Chesnutt continues the description, "[Tryon] burst into tears – bitter tears, that strained his heartstrings. He was only a youth. She was worse than dead to him; for if he had seen her lying on a shroud before him, he could at least have cherished her memory; now even this consolation was denied him."³⁴ Tryon's lament complicated by Rena's being rendered *not* serve to draw Tryon reluctantly into this world of neither/nor. To recognize his love for her would be to indict the authenticity of his own claim to whiteness and the participation it grants him. The complication Chesnutt places within this interracial encounter is the difficulty of a partial disavowal by her white love Tryon with whom she becomes engaged and falls in love with. Their courtship is constantly marked by a fear of discovery and betrayal which ultimately comes. However, Chesnutt complicates Tryon's role in her life with his growing desire to be with her and his inability to forget or leave her or cease to love her. The presence of Rena within Tryon's life was one that was not without effect. That is, in Tryon's recognition of Rena's true person and the subsequent lament over her "death" he ultimately recognizes his own desire for her and his own resistance to the sacrifice necessary to be married to her. In this regard Rena's presence within the white world was one that exerted itself and required it to account for her through the particularity of this relationship. Tryon could not move on. His own possibilities were now inextricably bound to Rena. However, this desire would not be without tragedy.

³⁴ Ibid.

That death seeps even into the lives of those who benefit from this system, it seems to me, is a pervasive and unique claim in Chesnutt's novel. Rena's presence, her way in the life of Tryon served to fundamentally disrupt his own self-understand and move him from a place of assertion to reception. His pursuit of Rena was no longer a pursuit of possession, to grab hold and control, but rather his pursuit was one in which his own sacrifice would be necessary. His life would have to be bound to hers for him to be whole and this meant that he would have to leave the world he knew. In this way the tremor of interracial existence that marks Rena's entry into the white world has now reverberated within Tryon's own world in a way in which he cannot resist. He must become something new. This possibility requires a sacrifice which is now inverted upon the life of the white male who must receive himself from Rena.

But in Chesnutt's view this possibility is ultimately still marked in tragedy. It is an impossibility for Rena has died in the psychic sacrifice of her own soul and yearning. She has been torn in two by two possibilities rendered irreconcilable in this racial world. And yet her death is tragic not only for her mother, for her brother, but for Tryon as well as his life is now marked by the love he refused. Here Chesnutt draws out for us the ways in which nation and race have ordered desire and happiness. Freedom is now construed entirely through a lens of race in which one can either pass and be happy and free or one can sacrificially begin the work of social uplift and thus participate in the attainment of freedom for one's people. What is important to note here is the way in which these categories are fundamentally inscribed with race. To participate in one's nation requires sacrifice and/or purity. Neither of these possibilities are true freedom for each requires the refusal of the other, a delusion, public or private, that suggests these two peoples are impossibilities. This

delusion of certainties and impossibilities render each invisible to the other and ultimately a slave to a racial world, a place of utter non-being.

c) Death for All – Race Disrupted

Rena's foray into whiteness was one, from the beginning, marked by death. Her transgression into the white world and the ease with which she took on the form of one who should inherit the promise of the kingdom itself disrupted the notions of purity, race, and nation. With each step she took and each guest she welcomed her life disrupted the very norms and assumptions which allowed Western society to function along its racial rails.

It was this knowledge of who she truly was that began to disrupt Tryon's conception of himself and the truthfulness of these racial lines. To know her as colored was to disrupt his own judgment and his capacity to see rightly the lines of color that had so long implicitly guided his life and his choices. To be confronted at once with this love of the Other, of the possibility of him binding himself to an Other was to grieve for a love one who had died. Yet Chesnutt does not remain here for the progression of fascination was one where we saw Tryon soon descend into death himself to pursue her. This possibility is one that is again, unique and extraordinary in American literature for at the end Tryon began to reimagine the lines of kinship and possibility.

Of course even this nascent moment of transformation is marked with the tragic for Tryon could only imagine moving to a new town to resume the certainty of a white life. Nonetheless this moment of sacrifice gives view to the disruption wrought through Rena's presence. The possibility of transformation reverberates through each of the main figures of the story yet each succumbs to the tragedy of racial existence and its deep borders. Each of

these figures are bound to its ethos, to its consequences. None can escape the certainty of its sentence for they themselves despite their transgression, their desire for transformation cannot escape the ways in which these possibilities are themselves racially construed. Rena has become new and can no longer remain among her darker kin, John's life is marked by continual loneliness, Tryon has lost the one whom he loves and can know love none other and now knows himself to be one who has loved that which was thought not to be.

The encounter between Tryon and Rena is marked by the tragic lines of desire and color that cannot tear themselves from the incoherence of race. Their encounter leaves them both marked and renders those realities fixed determining those whom they desire to love and those whom they cannot. Their love reveals the control and possession of Tryon and his race and the implicit but present distinction between mulatto and colored. Rena and Tryon cannot love for their loves and the lives are bound to race, "to the sins of their fathers."³⁵

Yet their tragic affair leaves them both different. This is the uniqueness of Chesnut's narrative. Within Tryon's legacy of possession and control he ends with sacrifice, with the possibility of being bound to one whom he knows to be dark. Whether this is an embrace of a wider people is not the question here. Chesnut gestures towards the possibility of white transformation as Tryon subjects himself to the sacrificial economy of racial discipleship. Similarly in Rena we find the sacrificial desire to uplift her people – but Chesnut leaves this not as the exemplar of black selfhood, but as a more complicated tragedy of both her own estimation of those who she sought to serve and the complicated desire for true life which had made such a life so bitter. Here desire for one's people becomes obscured in Chesnut's depiction of the love which tie Rena and Tryon. Hers is not a love for a different people

³⁵ Ibid., 19.

(John) but rather love for a *particular* person. This distortion of kinship serves to underline the tragic in Chesnutt's depiction.

Chesnutt's groundbreaking narratives both reiterated the thematic assertions of the tragic mulatto but also sought to disrupt the very lines that pressed themselves so violently into the lives of all bodies in America. This and his other works exemplified not the threat of such contamination, but the impossible, that whites lives could in fact live into dark, and perhaps more profoundly, that such lines were less certain than we might think (use footnote to discuss the future American and literature on Chesnutt). This assertion was not mere speculation, but a rendering visible the already messy and hybrid reality that was American life. These renderings thus sought to put forward the radical claim of America's existence as an "inter" reality despite America's repeated and emphatic denials.

Chesnutt's implicit appeal to the possibility of transformation and the necessity of integration were measured and sounded clear intonations of doubt regarding its possibility. Chesnutt's work has been alternately lauded for its "realistic" portrayal of black life and critiqued for its apparent attempts to capitulate to an ideal of whiteness (use Kawash and her reading of Marrow hear in footnote. Here re-reading of Marrow of Tradition seeks to resist the way in which white life is seemingly glorified and points to the twinning of American ideals as an indication of the disruption of the white ideal in Chesnutt's own work)

James Weldon Johnson and the Performance of Black American Life

The representation of black life however would see its own concretization in the burgeoning movement of the New Negro and the Harlem Renaissance. Against the haranguing establishment of racial degradation in the North as well as in the South the

Harlem Renaissance in particular would come to articulate a vision of black life grounded in the beauty of its people and their possibility. In this shifting context of assertion and representation the tale of racial transgression is one where the possibility of transformation is a profound temptation. The real of freedom and possibility is articulated most nobly in black life for those who bear the mark. In this way the child of interracial transgression is again poised upon a life of persistent choice and the possibility of alienation. Here alienation is depicted not as an inherent status, but as a resistance to who they truly are. As we noted in Langston Hughes' *Mulatto*, the tragedy is his death and rejection by his father, but there is also an implicit commentary concerning his resistance to "his own people."³⁶

It is my contention that in Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* written just ten years after the publication of Chesnut's *House Behind the Cedars* we see the articulation of a new nationalism in the New Negro in whom the mulatto must now be enfolded into in order to mark his or her "true" freedom. The response is thus still bound within the binary of racial existence. Johnson demonstrates, again the departure and return, isolation, and ultimately death, but these are now reconceived within a nascent black

³⁶ In the background of this claim lay Hughes own fascination with mixed race figures in his poetry and plays. In particular we see the trope of the tragic as refusal of white paternal recognition. This is particularly clear in Hughes's play *Mulatto* where the protagonist refuses to take the place of a servant and asserts his status as a son in the post-reconstruction south. He ultimately kills the father and kills himself as his mother holds off the white mob gathered to lynch him. See Langston Hughes, "Mulatto," (Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street Press, 2003).

nationalism that renders the life of the mulatto no less precarious or disruptive.³⁷ The mulatto body is now conscripted within a more pronounced decision, a calling to perform into black existence. Johnson's work here demonstrates not only the tragic performativity of light living into lighter but how the constitution of racial discipleship re-articulates itself within assertions of "black" identity and particularly the "New Negro" of the Harlem Renaissance. The work itself represents an attempt to resist the hope of amalgamation offered in Chesnutt by reiterating the costs of such blending, the loss of self, the loss of certain identities that can be offered to a cultural people for their uplift and hope. In this way we see how Johnson's assertion of identity becomes the inverse refusal of Langston Hughes' father in "Mulatto." Black identity must now assert itself in such a way as to refuse the refusals of those who desire to enter the white world for those who enter the white world refuse their own.

James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* concludes with the haunting reflection, "It is difficult for me to analyze my feelings concerning my present position in the world. Sometimes it seems to me that I have never really been a Negro, that I have been only a privileged spectator of their inner life; at other times I feel I have been a

³⁷ Ariel Balter suggests *Autobiography* reveals a division of the author despite Johnson's continual assertions that *Auto* was not based on his own life. Butler suggests certain important parallels indicate a "divided self." Yet this assertion regarding a certain division seems to assent to a certain authenticity of African American existence. In my view, Johnson's participation in the African American middle class is no less important but the way in which the concerns of African Americans became articulated *through* this position is crucial. Thus Johnson's own career exemplifies the attempt to display the decisions the narrator continually refused. These opportunities are those before many regardless of their capacity to pass. It is the way in which these tools and endeavors are pursued and for whom that *Autobiography* begins to unveil how Johnson seeks to live into or identify with the African American cause. The extent of this division as narrated through the life of the narrator is the mark of "double-consciousness" so famously discussed by W.E.B. DuBois. This is the mark of dark bodies in the world, but particularly in the United States that cannot be escaped. Thus this division is not a aspect peculiar to Johnson, but to African American existence more universally. See Ariel Balter, "The Color of Money in the *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*," in *Complicating Constructions: Race, Ethnicity, and Hybridity in American Texts*, ed. David S. Goldstein and Audrey B. Thacker, American Ethnic and Cultural Studies (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 50.

coward, a deserter, and I am possessed by a strange longing for my mother's people."³⁸

These musings, of a widowed man living as a white man in France with two children portray several important aspects of racialized life: the possibility of racial performance and its perpetually tragic consequences.

Published in 1912, *Autobiography* received widespread critical acclaim for its deep and seemingly intimate portrayal of black life. First published anonymously it was initially received as the confession of a black man who had "passed" into white life. The autobiography follows the life of a black child, born of a mixed mother and prominent Southern father. The mother and child move to Connecticut where he receives his formative education both intellectually and socially. In the midst of his schooling he is confronted with the reality that he is in fact a "dark" child. As the story unfolds he sets out to re-engage with "his mother's people" by attending school at a prominent Southern university, but is then drawn into a variety of experiences from rolling cigars with Cubans in Jacksonville, FL, to gambling and playing piano in Harlem, to playing privately for a wealthy white aristocrat whom he eventually accompanies to Europe. While there he expands his linguistic and musical repertoire while immersing himself into the refined life of the social elite.

In Europe however, his desire to be reconnected with "his mother's people is again rekindled and he sets off to the United States to immerse himself in the life and music of negro people with the hopes of accumulating the raw material of their soulful and spiritual songs which he seeks to marry to his own refined training and thus create a new musical form. However, during this time in the South as a teacher the narrator is overwhelmed when

³⁸ James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, 1st Vintage Books ed.(New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 153.

he witnesses the lynching and burning of a black man in the community and at that moment decides to “leave” the race.³⁹ He writes, “I had made up my mind that since I was not going to be a Negro I would avail myself of every opportunity to make a white man’s success; and that, if it can be summed up in any words, means ‘money.’”⁴⁰ The narrator eventually marries and has two children with his wife who dies in giving birth to the second. He ultimately moves to France to live as a white man to protect his children from the racial life of America and shield them (and himself) from the contempt of being colored people. Yet this decision to live in exile is not an entirely happy one. The narrator laments,

My love for my children makes me glad that I am what I am and keeps me from desiring to be otherwise: and yet, when I sometimes open a little box in which I still keep my fast yellowing manuscripts, the only tangible remains of a vanishing dream, a dead ambition, a sacrificed talent, I cannot repress the thought that, after all, I have chosen the lesser part, that I have sold my birthright for a mess of pottage.⁴¹

In these concluding lines we see Johnson’s Autobiography display the passing figure’s tragedy as his self-denial. Such a conception is a marked shift in the tragedy of mulatto existence as seen in other literary portrayals prior to the 20th century where the tragedy of the mulatto figure lies in its utter displacement. Yet here Johnson suggests the tragedy lies less in an ontological displacement as it does in the narrator’s refusal of his place among “his” people. Throughout the text Johnson highlights the profound adaptability of the narrator’s musical and linguistic skill. Through the trope of music and language Johnson displays both the capacity and the refusal to perform “his” race. Throughout the novel the decision for or

³⁹ Ibid., 139.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 141.

⁴¹ Ibid., 154.

against his people can be seen as a process of identification.⁴² This process of identification or performance as we have described it in the previous chapter is displayed through the trope of music and language, but is often explicitly stated as we saw in the narrator's decision to be become white.

This adaptability can be read as either a gift or as a lack of character. His gift for learning languages and learning different musical styles is at once a critique of the way race could be construed as an illusion that is easily imitated. However, there is also a certain sense in which the narrator is seen as one who has learned race. He is not seeking to imitate or manipulate, but rather just as he learns to play a new tune he is learning to fill out the possibilities that each situation presents to him. He is learning to be in the world in a variety of ways.

Underlying this adaptability in identification or performance is a marked distance between the narrator and the darker people of the novel. Samira Kawash identifies this distance or vacillation as a type of negation wherein the action of passing, "the true authentic identity of the narrator can only be told as *not* being: the narrator does not name the truth because the truth (authentic, single, essential racial identity) *is not*."⁴³ In Kawash's view the distance is a rather truthful one for the positions of certainty are in fact false. Ultimately, the narrator's decision to pass is only to live into the truthfulness of the falsity. This negation is found even in the narrator's childhood. Growing up in Connecticut the narrator continually

⁴² "Identification is a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination, not a subsumption" Stuart Hall, "Who Needs Identity?" Du Gay and Hall. Here Hall points to the way in which identity is always tied to what he terms a process of identification wherein identity is positional and strategic seeking to place the individual within larger moments of contestation. The central claim here is that such claims are not fixed but being continually negotiated and being pieced together and incorporated into a functional view of oneself and one's position in the world.

⁴³ Kawash, 144.

notes the difficult plight of the darker children in his class, but nonetheless considers them fundamentally different than himself. This belief is so deep that his being grouped with them one day in class is described as a tragic rebirth of sorts where “I did indeed pass into another world.” He continues, “from that time I looked out at the world through other eyes, my thoughts were colored, my words dictated, my actions limited by one dominating, all pervading idea which constantly increased in force and weight until I finally realized in it a great tangible fact.”⁴⁴

Johnson’s ex-colored man makes visible the finality and rigidity of racial lives. That is, the only possibility for the mulatto, quadroon, octaroon, etc. was a life that was either black or not black, colored or ex-colored. Regardless of the various hierarchies that developed within black social life there remained a perceived impenetrable boundary between what it meant to be white and black. These were constants that bound all of those who lived within these social boundaries. Johnson’s depiction of the narrator’s life displays how on the one hand such boundaries are, in fact, permeable and porous but on the other hand how such fluidity is never without consequence and a certain death.

While this new birth enlightened the narrator to the perils of his own existence his revelation served only to help clarify the object to be performed into, but did not serve to overcome the deep distance exhibited even in the earliest days of his childhood. He continues to be one who watches and learns. He displays a certain distance, a certain difference from those he counts himself among. Such moments are reiterated in his references to “his mother’s people,” but are also highlighted by the ease with which he adapts to new languages and new customs whether it is learning Spanish in Jacksonville or

⁴⁴ Johnson, 14.

the rhythms of ragtime in Harlem. These moments of adaptability serve to further outline the absence of a tension in his own life, a rhythm of departure upon entering into these new worlds. Every new world is a new song, a new performance into which the narrator can throw himself. For the narrator racial life is a performance made possible by the congruence of a certain set of skills and the hue of his skin.⁴⁵

Interestingly, Johnson's brother suggested title for this work was Chameleon noting how easily the author could change his "skin" to suit his environment.⁴⁶ It is this adaptability that renders the narrator both perpetually distant and at the same time "at home" among various peoples. This distance is, at times, intentional as he seeks to avoid the perils and disgrace of black existence. In part, this distance is the result of self-preservation and desire not to be classified among such a desperate lot. Yet, Johnson notes this distance not only in terms of self-preservation, but also as a deeper existential distance. Somehow the lives and hopes and pain of these people (even his mother) seem distant from him, something not immediately accessible to him. It is a reality that must be lived into. The mere fact the he feels he must enter into it suggests a kind of fundamental distance that he will never be able to fully overcome. He exists in a space of neither/nor, where on some levels he possesses the possibility of entering fully into a variety of circumstances and by virtue of his own skill, "pick up the tune," but by virtue of his training and his history he is never fully "in" for he always adds to the tune, he is continually hearing something slightly different in the tune and

⁴⁵ His entrance into these lives is marked by a clear lack of tension – the departure is never clear for he is a man without a homeland. This lack of real departure thus gives the title *ex-colored* a deep irony for it was never clear he was truly colored to begin with. This irony serves to strike both at white audiences for whom "one drop" is ontological and for African American readers as an ironic dismissal of the claim *ex-* for he never knew what it meant in the first place.

⁴⁶ James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson*, 1st Da Capo Press ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000).

adding to it seeking to reconcile it to his own varied strands of life and songs. But part of what is perpetually present in this difficulty is the tragedy of his racialized life that allows him to hear but prevents him from learning. These strands of life which he brings into each circumstance cannot be fully reconciled with his present moment for the songs are continually victim to the radical polarity of racialized life in America so that ultimately ragtime and jazz can only be fetishes or momentary oddities or classical music seemingly a music of “white” folks with nothing to say concerning black life. The narrator’s grand hope of reconciling two musical forms become crushed under the impossibility of the task given the reality of black lives that are hung and burned. The narrator would ultimately have to choose. He could not occupy this space of multiplicity because the polarities of race resisted and ultimately he could not bridge a gap between him and “his mother’s people.”

The inevitability of this decision attests to the rigidity of the color line discussed earlier as well as its permeability. Yet in Johnson’s depiction its permeability is not one of hybridity or mutual transformation, but rather utter loyalty and complete assimilation. In this way, even in the lives of interracial figures we see the absolute claims that rendered racial purity as tragic continuing to be modulated through these mixed lives. As the narrator laments his own weakness and willingness to squander his gifts he seems also to lament the sheer impossibility of the task. Given the structure of racial life one cannot live on both sides. The possibility of wholeness is thus an impossibility for the narrator. Kawash notes, “He has transgressed or perverted the natural order, not because he has moved from one position in that order to another, but because his inauthentic (and therefore guilty) relation

to every position upsets the very naturalness of that order.”⁴⁷ The tragic lay in the narrator’s disruption, his continual inauthenticity despite the ease with which he lives into each life.

Crucial in Kawash’s observation is the way in which the necessary depiction of the figure without a people or a personhood requires the response of Johnson’s own life. The relationship of the text to Johnson’s own life is thus not one of autobiographical description, but that of a responsive performance. Johnson’s rootedness within the African American community is thus reciprocated inversely as displacement through the figure of the narrator despite his capacity to live into his race if he would so choose. This distance and ease thus betrays both the specter of the racializing line, but also the assumptions that can be made regarding it. Thus the narrator’s life displays a final tragic performance where the tales of his youth and the love of his mother’s people must remain a distant and bitter memory. In light of the previous chapter we begin to see here the way in which the mulatto body becomes both articulated by and an articulation of deeply racialized lives that require one to continually adapt themselves to its demands but in a way that is not transformative but reifying and consequently always subject to the tragic. In exploring the life of the author we see this text not only as an indictment or cautionary tale, but also as itself a text of discursive racial imagination.

The depiction of the narrator as a “chameleon” of sorts suggests not only the way in which racial lives must be performed for those whose visuality does not clearly indicate their

⁴⁷ Samira Kawash, *Dislocating the Color Line : Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African-American Narrative*(Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 151. Kawash believes the text itself serves to continually disrupt the epistemological rubric of race, thus opening up a space of racial disruption and the possibility of all lives. I differ with her slightly in this reading. While I concur with her assessment of the narrator’s disruptive presence I differ slightly in the aims of an open ended becoming. As I will go on to show the text itself serves as an alternative performance disrupting white notions of race while reifying expectations of black manhood (gendered language intentional here.)

allegiance or place, but rather Johnson's own life indicates the antithesis of his character... namely that racial life... life as a black man is a radical performance that must be embraced, declared and lived into boldly and without reservation. Johnson's own life was one marked by varying levels of public service, but always service to the African American community. He notes in his reflections upon Fisk University that their preparation was not for their own prosperity or well-being, but it was always clear that their training was a training for service.⁴⁸ One cannot help but recall that the anonymous character's failure to attend Atlanta University was in no large part a contributing factor to his moral failure to resist the temptations of white life and service to "his" people.

To see the importance of Johnson's own racial performance we must attend briefly to his own contribution within the larger contextual moment of the Harlem Renaissance and the performativity of race itself displays. The Harlem Renaissance was an artistic movement whose height was seen between 1915 and 1935 where artistic expression centered upon the celebration and careful/truthful depiction of black life. These expressions were poetic, visual, musical. This unique moment saw coalescing of intellectual and artistic assertion of identity and black possibility. These assertions were, according to Houston Baker, instances of a unique African American modernism characterized by strategies of "mastery of form and the deformation of mastery."⁴⁹ Through these practices, artists and intellectuals of the New Negro movement articulated themselves uniquely within the American project, but in so doing rearticulated the meaning and status of American citizenship. The Harlem

⁴⁸ Johnson, *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson*.

⁴⁹ Houston A. Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 15.

Renaissance was a celebration of black life and freedom. Alain Locke, noted theorist and mentor to many renaissance poets and writers would note,

proscription and prejudice have thrown these dissimilar elements into a common area of contact and interactions. Within this area, race sympathy and unity have determined a further fusing of sentimental experience. So what began in terms of segregation becomes more and more as its elements mix and react, the laboratory of a great race-welding.⁵⁰

For Locke the Harlem Renaissance was serving to coalesce the varying expressions of black life in the United States. The Renaissance represented a gathering of stories, resources, and sentiments, but more than that it was the articulation of a new people, thus the term New Negro is not fundamentally a description, but the aim of these writers in many respects. This aim was not the reconstruction of a prototype, but in many ways the New Negro was a re-creation or a performance of a people which not only articulated the past, but served to articulate black lives into itself and thus into a higher possibility. Johnson as a poet, songwriter, and playwright was a central figure at the inception of this movement giving voice to the tragedy and triumphs of black life. But his life exhibited also a deeper ideal embedded within the Harlem Renaissance, a deep dedication to his people. This service led him to significant involvement with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *The Crisis* and public service in politics culminating in his serving as ambassador to Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Azore.

To examine Johnson's life is to, again, look at the antithesis of the ex-colored man. His life exemplified the display of the "best within himself." We see this deep connection and service in giving voice to his people explicitly in his writing of "Lift Every Voice" or

⁵⁰ Alain Locke, *The New Negro* in Henry Louis Gates and Nellie Y. McKay, eds., *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 963.

what would be come know as “The Negro National Anthem.” Written in 1900 the song became widely sung throughout the African American community as a testament to the strength and hope of the people as well as rallying cry to work for greater freedom and equity.

Thus Johnson’s own life points not only to a tremendous dedication to the defense and utterance of black hope, but interpreted alongside the life of the ex-colored man we see his own life as a certain performance of black life. In this regard racial performance and adaptability is not a task peculiar to those whose physicality allows them to “pass” but rather, for Johnson, is a task at the heart of black life (and perhaps all lives in a racialized world.) The prominence of his life and service exemplified in the public and inspiring melody of “Lift Every Voice and Sing” continually stand in stark contrast to the narrator’s yellowing manuscripts laying untouched in France. Johnson displays in his own life what is absent in the narrator’s life, but in doing so also demonstrates that all racial life is performative and thus must be chosen, embraced, and lived into just as all racial lives can live in self-denial and for Johnson this denial is the true tragedy.

Nella Larsen and the Disruption of Identity

Johnson’s account of passing displayed both the possibility of racial performance as well as its costs. Within this depiction of racial performance lay an implicit indictment of those who refused the realities of these lines and thus could be read not only as an example of how racial lives can be expressed but as itself a policing of these boundaries as a cautionary tale about the perils of passing. Written in 1929, 17 years after Johnson’s *Autobiography* Nella Larsen provided her own novel centered upon the phenomenon titled

Passing. This critically acclaimed novel narrated themes that were also found in *Autobiography* and *House Behind the Cedars* such as the permeability of racial lines, the ease with which certain people pass from one racial site to another, the way in which such movement and existence is marked by a certain distance or isolation, as well as how racial life is ultimately lived into and asserted. Yet, in this work Larsen has narrated a set of performances that are more complicated than the narrative of exit offered by Johnson. By “exit” I am suggesting that Johnson’s account of passing depicted a trajectory of departure from the racial reality as a colored man. This notion of exit bears within it a stark dualism of being either in or out. It seeks to negotiate the reality of racial life in America through its binary logic of white and non-white or colored and non-colored.

In Larsen’s work the interracial body and the performance of passing is transgressive on both sides of the binary structure unsettling the social realities built upon these assumptions. The lives that are distinguished by passing and not passing are seen as simultaneously bound to one another and yet are tragically and fundamentally distant. In the midst of these complicated interrelationships the reality of passing and interracial life indicates the way in which such lives are not easily demarcated within the notions of purity that are conceived as “black” or “white” but rather how such lives are continually seeking to live in to the reality of racial hope in complicated ways that ultimately either instantiate or disrupt the racial and social order.

Larsen, herself the child of a Danish mother and a Danish Virgin Island father, continually problematizes the lines of race and transgression depicted in other fictive accounts of passing and their real life counterparts. In *Passing*, the presence of these interracial or passing bodies were inherently disruptive and revealed the performative and

beguiling nature of race in the lives of those around them. The story follows the encounter between Clare Kendry and Irene Redfield. The women are childhood friends who grew up on the south side of Chicago in a segregated African American neighborhood. Clare, a child of a mixed father is sent to live with her distant white relatives after her father's death. In her time here she was continually reminded of her inferior status and relegated to little more than a house servant. When she was nineteen Clare married a white man and passed into white life and keeping her identity as a colored women hidden from her racist husband.

Irene remained in the neighborhood and married an accomplished doctor becoming well established within the black middle class. She too is light enough to pass, but does so only occasionally. It was on one of these occasions, in a restaurant in downtown Chicago that Clare and Irene meet again, at first failing to recognize one another. The encounter begins a series of encounters as Clare seeks to re-establish, albeit secretly, ties with her old acquaintance and her old life. However, this encounter is not entirely welcome by Irene for Clare's presence begins to disrupt the uneasy social arrangements that constitute Irene's life. As Clare becomes more present in Irene's life a deep suspicion arises regarding Clare and her husband. But more profoundly, the ease and lack of care with which Clare moves in and out of these worlds seem to unravel Irene though little is displayed outwardly toward Clare or her husband. George Hutchison observes, "Clare is irritating in large part because she does not have the proper feelings about racial difference: she flouts the protocols of race."⁵¹ This unease and disruption ultimately concludes with Clare's death. She has jumped/fallen/been pushed out of a third story window with Irene nearby and Clare's husband entering the

⁵¹ George Hutchinson, *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line*(Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 300.

apartment upon his discovery of her true identity from an anonymous letter. The book ends with little clarity or indication regarding why or how Clare died but with a definite impression of her life upon the circles she lived in.

As is the case in *Autobiography* and *House Behind the Cedars* more could be said of this text and Larsen's life than the space provided in this chapter (or this dissertation for that matter!) will allow, but from this text we see Larsen depict Clare's very presence as disruptive and in so doing perpetually displaces racial identity. The depiction of explicit disruption serves to highlight the way in which explicit refusals of racial amalgamation or assertion become similarly bound within this mode of racial discipleship. Larsen's depiction of Clare and Irene express how the articulations of white and black identity become mutually necessary sustaining themselves through the articulation of one over the other creating lives of stability and certainty. The entrance of Claire, one who refuses these limitations and their myth of stability binds herself to both worlds in ways that can only be resolved in death. To acquiesce to their presence is to begin to acknowledge the impurity of one's claims to purity. In the world of American racial life it is to become *no one*. Clare seeks to assert a personhood that is without division or confusion. Seeks to exist in the world in such a way as to be full and yet this possibility is closed off to her because within the confines of racial discipleship personhood is understood only within the confines of a particular people despite their actual "interpenetration."

Here Larsen narrates the politics of one who refuses the claims of national identities yet does not ghettoize such identity. Rather she is one whose identity or very presence is political, ironically challenging her racist husband's delusion of purity or directly confronting

the middle-class notions of black provincialism that had derided one who was once poor and black and was now willing to “cross-over” despite her mistreatment among “her own.”

In *Passing*, Larsen displays the complicated interconnections between distance and belonging, devotion and betrayal. It is through the passing figure that such incongruities and tensions are unveiled. Here it is the presence of Clare that makes such tensions rise to the surface becoming apparent in the lives of those who carry them. Clare’s entrance into Irene’s life serves to introduce Irene to herself. Through this encounter Irene must begin to account for herself and her life and the choices that she has made or refuses to make for after her chance meeting with Clare in the hotel restaurant as one who is temporarily passing she must confront the ways in which her own life is not essential or natural to her, but in fact, requires a succession of choices and an exertion of force in order to maintain its appearances.

The first instance of this inner conflict and her own resistance to any further relationship with the one who “crossed over” is seen in Irene’s first encounter with Clare and her own resistance to any further relationship with the one who “crossed over.” Regretting her invitation to Clare to come on a trip with her where many from the old neighborhood had gathered, Clare recalls, “It wasn’t, she assured herself, that she was a snob, that she cared greatly for the petty restrictions and distinctions with which what called itself a Negro society chose to hedge itself about; but that she had a natural and deeply rooted aversion to the kind of notoriety that Clare Kendry’s presence in Idyllwild, as her guest, would expose her to. And here she was, perversely and against all reason inviting her.”⁵² The conflict that rises within Irene at this moment is both deeply personal and communal. Clare’s passing into another world was met with derision, in part for her

⁵² Nella Larsen, *Passing*, 2000 Modern Library ed. (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 23.

apparent refusal of black life, but also for the ways in which it was perceived as a misuse of her body.⁵³

The resistance to Clare is a resistance to the association of Clare, but also a resistance to the way in which Clare's presence creates certain questions about her own life and choices. In the midst of a tea with Clare and another woman passing in Chicago Clare notes her own annoyance admitting "that it arose from a feeling of being outnumbered, a sense of aloneness, in her adherence to her own class and kind; not merely in the great thing of marriage, but in the whole pattern of her life as well."⁵⁴ Irene's feelings towards Clare are fraught bound up with disgust for her choices as well as fear for Clare's own life and choices. And yet in this very moment as three women passing for white, the racist husband rants against black folk he himself becomes deformed into the ridiculous.⁵⁵ But Larsen is clear to indicate that Irene's own life is implicated and unveiled in her encounter with Clare. The feeling of adherence and loyalty is displayed throughout the novel as something more than innate, but that which is lived into, chosen and protected, from Clare or from her husband's desire for a "raceless" South America.⁵⁶ Irene's desire for her people and begrudging acknowledgement of Clare as numbering among them, despite her refusal to do so is placed in continual tension with the tensions she lives into as a woman or an individual. These aspects of her life are never resolved within the novel or collapsed into another. Larsen refuses to subject the characters either to a racial fidelity or individual desire. But in the deep

⁵³ Get note...

⁵⁴ Larsen, 34.

⁵⁵ For a fascinating account of the irony and danger of this encounter see ...

⁵⁶ See Zita C. Nunes, "Phantasmic Brazil: Nella Larsen's *Passing*, American Literary Imagination, and Racial Utopianism," in *Mixing Race, Mixing Culture: Inter-American Literary Dialogues*, ed. Monika Kaup and Debra J. Rosenthal (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

complications of each figure these tensions are continually present and being negotiated in each meeting and with each thought of future meetings.

The continual presence of conflict, inner and external, is continually born out through Irene's negotiation of Clare's interruption, displaying both as profoundly performative moments yet only one recognizing the truth of their disruption and their life. Here the grand weight of the racial life is narrated not in terms of social uplift or devotion to the race versus personal fulfillment, but in a complex interrelation of each. As much as Clare Kendry's choices disturb Irene her life represents one untethered by the burdens of race that seem to creep in on her. Yet, these burdens are also a source of compassion for this poor creature who does not seem to know herself and places herself in so much danger due to her own ignorance.

But through the disruption – the destruction that is Clare Kendry (she herself admits that “she is not safe”⁵⁷ Clare's position serves to highlight both the cognizance of the danger and the refusal to abide by these lines. Clare's honesty about her position – her willful occupation of this space between refusing to acquiesce to the claims and refusals which bind her and distance her from each community represent a significant aspect of her transgression. It is her desire to exist *in* this space that disrupts. As we saw in Rena of *House Behind the Cedars* she aims for an authenticity that is neither/nor. In this assertion she reveals to those lives she has transgressed the precarious nature of racial performance on either side – she reveals inauthenticity to reside outside of her. She is not safe for herself or for those she has attached herself to for the lives she seeks to seep in and out of are not as permeable as she might think. The lines have been drawn hard and fast and must be maintained,

⁵⁷ Larsen, 43.

sacrificed for. It is here that the politics of presence, as it were, becomes deeply imbedded not within Clare's betrayal of her identity, as was the case in Johnson's *Autobiography*, but rather it is Clare's refusal to perform into a specific identity that unveils Irene's negotiation of black life as inherently performed. Hutchinson observes how the very structure of the text serves to image this disruption as one internal to Irene,

By funneling our perceptions of Clare and nearly all of the action of the novel through Irene as the center of consciousness, Larsen makes Irene's defense against the psychic disturbance Clare generates inseparable from our understanding. Irene must do away with Clare, and this erasure, to maintain the order of her world while forgetting her own role in this North American ritual.⁵⁸

The political danger of Clare's life and a disavowal of the danger her presence in the old neighborhood represents is one that touches not only Clare's own life, but also the life of Irene and standard of black life that Irene must work so doggedly to maintain not only against Clare, but also against her husband's repeated desire to leave the racially charged life of America for Brazil.

In the midst of these negotiations both Irene and Clare demonstrate a deep connection with one another but also a profound separation. But each inhabits these paradoxes differently. For Irene the connection to Clare is one of racial consciousness. This consciousness is for one of "her people" despite Clare's apparent betrayal of the choices necessary to live into such a life. Irene's connection to Clare is one that continues to rise up within her even despite herself and the personal costs she understands it will entail. Yet it is the very difference concerning these choices and the patterns of life each has chosen that represents the most significant chasm for Irene. After Irene's return to New York this chasm

⁵⁸ Hutchinson, *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line*, 295.

is described not only in terms of differing patterns of life, but that these patterns come together to image a fundamentally ontological difference. She recalls,

Most likely she and Clare would never meet again. Well, she, for one, could endure that. Since childhood their lives had never really touched. Actually, they were strangers. Strangers in their ways and means of living. Strangers in their desires and ambitions. Strangers in their racial consciousness. Between them the barrier was just as high, just as broad, and just as firm as if in Clare did not run that strain of black blood. In truth it was higher, broader, and firmer; because for her there were no perils, not known or imagined, by those others who had no such secrets to alarm or endanger them.⁵⁹

In her initial sentiments towards Clare two important elements of this distance become apparent. First, the difference regarding choices and ambitions grow not out of an essential racial nature, but are rather lived into. The contrary desires of Irene for her people and Clare for herself (in Irene's view) give each person's identity its trajectory, its telos.⁶⁰ These choices derive not from an inherent connection, but rather a sense of belonging that must be continually confirmed through patterns of life. The divergence of these performances, in Irene's view, is the construction of a barrier, of a difference that borders upon natural, rendering each woman on contrary sides of the color line.

The second aspect of this life Irene observes is the danger inherent in it. The danger for Clare is one of personal safety for her husband is clearly racist and for her to be put out of her home (or worse) would be to be left without anyone in the world. But here Larsen also puts forth a certain foreshadowing of the peril that Clare would enter into not only from her husband, but also from Irene herself. Irene seems to see the lack of knowledge as a profound difference in terms of how one understands themselves (although it is clear

⁵⁹ Larsen, 62.

⁶⁰ For an interesting account of Clare's disruption as one of class and consumption see Martha J. Cutter, "Sliding Significations: Passing as a Narrative and Textual Strategy in Nella Larsen's Fiction," in *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

throughout the novel that she is, in fact, deeply aware of the danger yet refuses to succumb to it which is itself another source of envy and consternation for Irene) for Clare would be in danger not only from her husband, but also from Irene herself. Irene understood the boundaries and had no such secrets and Clare's presence constituted peril for her life as she conceived it.

These deepening inner conflicts and contestations over space and race ultimately conclude in Clare's death, or sacrifice. Irene has contemplated sending or perhaps sent a letter to Clare's husband regarding Clare's life among colored folk and he has unexpectedly arrived at the party Clare was attending with Irene, her husband and others.

Clare stood at the window, as composed as if everyone were not staring at her in curiosity and wonder, as if the whole structure of her life were not lying in fragments before her. She seemed unaware of any danger or uncaring. There was even a faint smile on her full, red lips, and in her shining eyes.

It was that smile that maddened Irene. She ran across the room, her terror tinged with ferocity, and laid a hand on Clare's bare arm. One thought possessed her. She couldn't have her free.

Before them stood John Bellew, speechless now in his hurt and anger. Beyond them the little huddle of other people, and Brian stepping out from among them.

What happened next, Irene Redfield never afterwards allowed herself to remember. Never clearly.

One moment Clare had been there, a vital glowing thing, like a flame of red and gold. The next she was gone.⁶¹

Whether Clare, confronted by the tragedy and the impossibility of her life jumped; or John Bellew's hurt and betrayal pushed; or Irene's desire to protect herself and her life pushed is left unclear. Yet in this confrontation we see the gathering assertions of race and life centering themselves upon one who seemed to refuse to participate in these categories perfectly. Clare longed for lives that she was considered to not want, to not desire. Her death

⁶¹ Larsen, 111.

came as these lives she inserted and re-inserted herself into began to resist her presence in both worlds at the same time.

Through Larsen's account of passing we begin to see the interracial body and the politics of passing as first inherently political, continually disrupting the assertions of race and life which are built upon or negotiated within the binary system of colored and non-colored or white and non-white that are continually upheld by implicit notions of purity and essentialism. Yet Larsen also points to the reality that such lives are fraught with danger and death. This is bound not only to the possibility of death for Clare which is first articulated as a kind of social death upon her leaving the African American neighborhood (as well as her perpetual distance while she was in it), but also the reality of death that her presence opens up for the lives that are predicated upon the denial of such possibilities.

For Irene Redfield and John Bellew Clare's presence in each of their lives opened up the possibility that their racial identity was not as fixed and certain as they had thought. For Irene her life as a black woman must now be protected and asserted over against one who would seemingly enter and exit without a sense of its costs or its requirements. For John Bellew lay the possibility that he is the father of a colored child and that his own whiteness is therefore so much less certain. Here it is not Clare's life that is tragic but rather, her life reveals the tragedy of Irene and Clare's husband's certainty regarding their lives and the fear such an unveiling and disruption might cost them. But this transgression results in the death of the mulatto as the one who passes into a world that is not for them, yet seems unfazed by the boundaries of such as race. The complication of both Irene and Clare's capacity to pass, their representation as mulatta thus more sharply highlights what is being disciplined in this moment. It is not the body but its performance that is refused. Irene seeks

to maintain her position, but in order to do so the mulatta must be black. Clare's refusal highlights this deep transgression. As with the depiction of Rena in *House* the disruption of the passing figure is modulated by a contrary performance of one who could but refuses to disrupt. In my view the author's highlight the continually binding effect of racial discipleship and the refusal of their own bodies and the transgressions which they signify.

The worlds that Clare entered into and were so disrupted by her presence there would ultimately sacrifice her so that their falsities might live. While the novel serves to unveil the fictions and complicated interrelations between racial life and self-assertion it ultimately cedes to its impossibility given the structure of race in the United States. Clare cannot live this life. Neither Irene nor John Bellews will allow her. It is in these bodies that such lives are continually unveiled as assertions, as performances of race and allegiance and family that are continually negotiated and re-negotiated in the midst of competing and overlapping loyalties. As in *Autobiography* the life of racial discipleship does not allow for mixture. One who exists or can exist in both worlds must ultimately betray one (Johnson) or hold an untenable schizophrenia shifting between one and the other for to allow the two to meet one another would surely mean death. Thus the tragic nature of race is again reiterated here not through the social death of racial self-exile, but through the refusal of the one who passes and her eventual sacrifice.

Presence as Politics

What these various figures indicate about how race is performed – transformation (Chesnutt), adaptability (Johnson), and contestation or interruption (Larsen) and given the hardened lines of racial logic such lives were not only fascinating in their peculiarity, but

required the observer or reader to account for themselves. Such accounting was bound to a refusal, a hiding, or a reluctant acceptance of something new. Yet what is also clear in each of these moments is the way in which racial logic continually pressed itself upon these performances so that none of them could be without death. The pressure could not be alleviated by a transformation of the structures or form, but only through an exorcism of the alien. It is not incidental therefore that what dies in each of these novels is a female character – the one through whom such an anomaly might continue to be born – the vessel which represents the receptivity and the production of such disruption.

Such bodies represented a disruption in their “performance,” but rather in their presence modulated through a particular performance of race that resounded dissonance through all of the competing claims made upon them. Their lives in constituted a reality that had to be accounted for and either resisted or destroyed. It could not be allowed to be maintained within the hardened binary system of colored and white, yet its existence as that which resembled, as that which spoke like, as those who were not... could not be ignored themselves. But such lives also required a response on the part of black bodies and lives, particularly in the North when such bodies would be drift in and out of these lives.

Throughout these novels Chesnutt, and Larsen the body of a woman become the locus of such political realities or are the significant subtext of such realities. But in particular these novels themselves become deeply political because their movement from involuntary to voluntary sexual encounters serves as the subtext of these lives. Bost notes the centrality of mulatto women as revolving around the scandal of sexual desire. She suggests, “Throughout popular culture and literature, debates about the nature of mixed-race identity are mapped out on a body of a woman because thinking about racial mixture inevitably leads

to questions of sex and reproduction”⁶² Through the bodies of women mulatto existence is born. Thus the disruption becomes intensified in the man’s desire and the woman’s assent and recapitulating desire– the very existence now intensifies the threat to racial existence. The presence of mulatto bodies are no longer primarily fruits of power or economic interest or even an obscured and rare fetish or deviancy – but possibly an intimate desire or even love.

The presence of these bodies disrupts the idolatry of racial performance, yet still cannot ultimately escape it. They cannot exist between the enormities of this fiction and its structure that their bodies and lives seek to challenge and negotiate

- Rena is torn asunder between mulatto lust and white desire
- The Ex-Colored man lives “exiled” in France
- Clare lies dead in the snow beneath the window

They still share a kind of death that befell Hughes’ tragic mulatto – they defied and died. Thus racial performance of mulatto and interracial bodies makes visible two crucial observations regarding racialized life in the West – it is both illusory and tragic. Its illusions lie in the necessity to “perform” into it and negotiate the ways in which we might conform and be mindful of the outlines, the borders of what it is to be this or that. Interracial bodies and their varying negotiations, the ways in which pigmentation always requires the confirmation of a certain form of life or the illusion of race and its permeability.

In recent scholarship the disruption signified by these bodies has been thought to be a space of hopefulness as they disrupt the problematic assertions of purity and their refusal of dark bodies within the social and political structures of society. Samira Kawash whose

⁶² Suzanne Bost, *Mulattas and Mestizas: Representing Mixed Identities in the Americas, 1850-2000*(Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 2.

profound work has been particularly helpful in this regard understands the culmination of these figures' disrupting work to point towards a certain political engagement with the world where certainties of identity are continually subverted. Gabriel Azoulay similarly interprets the interracial body as one which typifies the possibility of a profound becoming centered upon the biracial body that is "a cognitive and physical process of being in the world – in, and as a result of, a race conscious society, is to be an interruption, to represent a contestation, and to undermine the authority of classification."⁶³ The power of these bodies and lives – the hybridity and passing phenomenon serve to resist the limitations of racial (and gendered) tropes that secure bodies within certain classificatory moments.

Rather the sheer hybridity of these bodies confound the logic of such constructions making a space where all are free to "become." Elaine Ginsberg describes these practices of passing as having the "potential to create a space for creative self-determination and agency: the opportunity to construct new identities, to experiment with multiple subject positions and to cross social and economic boundaries that exclude or oppress."⁶⁴ For each of these theorists the telos of becoming is itself an end, a political way of being in the world yet the tragedies of such transgressions seem to become muted in their conception of a way forward. To become necessitates a certain departure and a certain arrival. While the interracial bodies described in the work of Chesnutt, Johnson, and Larsen exhibit a certain disruption of racial logic to be sure, they also demonstrate the ways in which becoming is always also inhibited by the problematic ways these bodies themselves inhabit the constraints of racial certainty. The possibility of becoming is thus not only delineated externally, but

⁶³ Katya Gibel Azoulay, *Black, Jewish, and Interracial: It's Not the Color of Your Skin, but the Race of Your Kin: And Other Myths of Identity*(Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 188.

⁶⁴ Ginsberg, 16.

inhabited internally. That is, all bodies even in their hybridity, must undergo a certain transformation, a kind of tragic death in order to live into the possibility of anything. The life of becoming if construed as pure freedom is thus a life which constricts through its multiplicity... it is seeking to live into a certain myth of self-creation which itself gave birth to the myth of racial discipleship.

In the recent assessments of interracial existence what is lost is that the disruption of these bodies derive from a certain performance of race that makes their neither/nor public. It is this declarative refusal asserted socially or interpersonally that begins the gears of sacrifice. The possibility of becoming and tearing loose from the binds of reifying sociallogic is surely necessary, but we must always ask in the possibility of becoming, the ontology of interruption, what are we to become? The interracial body, its mere presence and more profoundly its performance is political. It subverts the assumptions of identity that allow the structures of everyday existence to function. In my view these mulatto reveal how the aims of these identities do not escape the consequences of these transgressions or living into a certain mode of racially disciplining existence.

Racialized lives are never fixed but always asserted and made, but these assertions and creations always require communities to make them coherent – to verify the lives of its participants. Intermixture is more of a fact than purity for all people's lives are marked by a variety of loyalties, particularities, etc. That race is illusory is not its present power. The presence of mulatto bodies indicates the depth to which all lives, stories, and cultures are bound up into one another in complicated webs of desire and loathing. Intermixture as a biological category is only the visual indicator of a deeper binding of peoples and desires

which as yet does not know how to account for those individuals who “overlap” or the ways these individuals reveal their own “impurities.”

Interracial bodies begin to unveil the intricacies of Western identity and the difficulty that always arises in such genealogies... that we all are born of a “woman” who transgressed or was transgressed and the presence of these children is a difference that utterly disrupts simply in its presence among us. But such lives further reverberate within the racial substructure when they, even in small ways, refuse to abide by the dictums of racial discipleship even as they are tragically faithful to it. Such lives also indicate the deep tragedy of all lives that are marked by the refusal of such impurities and thus are bound to absurdly assert their own purity.

Conclusion to Part I

Part I has sought to show interracial bodies as signifying a mythic articulation of religious life. The very classification “mulatto” serves to articulate a space between making claims to purity incoherent. These bodies are thus rendered by this racist and racializing logic yet also disrupt it. Mulatto presence disrupts through its revelation of race as performative, as that which must be lived into, but also lives into it. This racial discipleship displays its power as these lives themselves become disciples exhibiting tragic denials and desires in their lives even as their bodies and hopes contest their existence as neither/nor. Ultimately these lives are sacrificed and in these moments highlight the death and deception necessary to refuse these bodies and the incongruence of their performances. Interracial existence as it has been explicated in Part I demonstrates the way it is both response and a way forward. – it is a disruption and an answer. Yet this answer is a dangerous one for these bodies ask us to

give up the certainties regarding our lives together and the neat (or not so neat) if not unequal divisions which mark our lives together. The interracial body requires the recognition that such boundaries have transgressed, that such notions of purity have already been contaminated. Further, these bodies help us to see the lengths to which we will go to deny these transgressions and contaminations in order to continue assert certain aspects of our lives together as “natural.” Lastly, these lives in particular those who have “passed” indicate the ultimate tragedy of all lives that live into such racialized ideals. Such lives are marked not by our innate nature, but rather the subtle lure of a racial discipleship which slowly teaches us the meaning of our marks as well as form lives and patterns of life that begin to instill and harden such ideals in our work, love, and friendship.

In this regard we see the transcendent power of race and difference not merely as a “social” problem or theologically as a vague consequence of sin or some other abstract judgment that can be laid upon us. Rather, such racialized lives must be seen for the Christian, the ones called by the Son’s name, as profound challenges of faith opening up before us the patterns and textures of idolatry that we have all so passively (or actively) lived into. We must see ourselves in a new way and repent – We must face the West and renounce the pomp and works and service of race which allow us to be more certain of what it means to be white or black or Latino, or Serbian in America than what it means to say that Christ calls us His. The interracial body is not an answer nor is it hopeful as a biological entity that can itself resist the power of race, yet the presence of these bodies is a political presence. It is a presence which challenges, unearths, unveils, and unnerves, but to what end? Into what people?

What these bodies are – what these lives show us is the illusion of race and its temptations. These bodies indicate the possibility of thwarting such a large and powerful racial imagination because their bodies are the result of a transgression between two. Such a remaking is not entirely ours to do – it is not enough to be on a road to becoming... we must be reborn. The failure of interracial lives as a final rebuttal to the power of racialization and racism and ethnic division lies in its propensity to simply recalibrate the instrument of race to account for a new variable. Nations such as Brazil or Indonesia whose very cultural and national identities are the legacy of intermixture attest to the flexibility of racial logic to absorb new “breeds” into its calculus of color.

Yet what has not been noted in the literature and research on interracial lives and writing is the possibility of change, of transformation. Resistance to transformation is what drove much of the tragedy found in the narratives examined. Transformation is a latent biological and cultural reality in the midst of encounters of cultural or racial difference. A mother can become “dark” because of her love for a certain man... a father can become dark because of his son... a child can be sold or free because of one parent or another... a person can “act” white thus entering a world that is not meant for them and leaving another. In all of these encounters there lay the possibility of transformation. Such transformation is inevitable although we continually resist it in numerous ways. While this points again to the possibility and the necessity of contemporary notions of interracial existence and becoming but in this endeavor we face the profound challenge of those who claim that that are claimed by Christ, for such a name attests to the fact that such transformation has already come.

In Part II we will examine a Christological foundation for a new Christian longing that suggests discipleship as the conformation into the life of the Holy Mixed One or the

mulatto Christ. That is, Jesus is not the one who made possible human purity – but rather contaminated himself in fleshly existence so as to enmesh us in divinity. We become “new creatures” Thus the interruption bound to interracial existence unveils our own racial idolatry and discipleship so that we might rightly see what we must begin to denounce in our own lives, but also reiterates a lost but important theological claim- we are dust imbued by Spirit through a Word that created a people whose faithfulness and unfaithfulness gave birth to the One who was us but not us so we could become god (but not god).

The Christian life must account for these lives for they echo back to us our own baptisms and the one into whom we are baptized. The Christian life is not one of self-assertion or even a proper performance of Christian life but rather *Another's* performance of our lives. Notions of becoming are now grounded in the one who became us thus our lives our performance is a fundamental response to Christ's person and work upon us. Thus Christian life is a life imbued with the possibility of a dangerous transformation where our very bodies, en-spirited flesh, are political – this transformation is grounded in a fundamental claim – Jesus is mulatto.

Part II:
Confession:
Christ, the Tragic Mulatto

Introduction to Part II

Part I sought to examine the peculiar phenomenon of the mulatto or “mixed-race” body born of the encounter between Europe and the “new worlds.” The birth of these lives and their subsequent negotiation of this precarious world opens up for us important questions regarding identity and in particular the character of Christian personhood. Identity is articulated in the midst of the encounters of difference. In this encounter identity is both expressed and impressed. The notion of personhood is thus not a static moment but becomes visible through the centrifugal force of encounter and difference. The relationship between identity, difference, and encounter cannot be neatly ordered one way or another. Rather identity and encounter are bound in a relationship of reciprocal amplification. The realities of mulatto birth and life point not only to a particular form of life in modernity, but more broadly the drama of identity and identification in the modern West that all participate in. I have suggested this drama of identity becomes apparent through the bodies of mixed-race peoples and their negotiation of this world. It has been my argument that these lives and this world must be theologically interpreted so as to both unveil the challenge of racial discipleship, but also open up a way to re-envision Christian lives in the midst of this drama.

Personhood is the reception of a name and its possibilities, while the meeting (or transgressing) of these possibilities serve to fill out and confirm (or disrupt) this personhood. In the midst of these articulations and encounters the mixed race, mulatto, or hybrid body is

born. It is born out of the encounter, out of two sides expressing and resisting their presence in the other. In this way the peculiarity of the mulatto body is the peculiarity of all difference. It is the difficulty of human identity and difference that can be viewed in the very “identification” of culture itself. These bodies/lives of transgression mark all identities. This notion of difference and “inter” existence is not being imported into Christian thought here for even within Israel’s own life the ger or “resident alien” serves to demarcate Israel’s own promise and limitations. Its promise was bound to the incorporation of strangers, to encounters with the nations that amplified their own calling and demarcated those encountered.

Part I sought to show identity as a performance of identification made visible through those for whom such a performance was ultimately impossible. These lives cannot be simply observed but resonate in our own failed performances, identifications, and illusions of racial certainty that mark personhood in modernity. Yet such a disruption, such an unveiling cannot save us from the tragedy of our own failed assertions, our delusions concerning our lives together, nor can these realities be untangled from the claims we have made regarding our lives in Christ. It is here that mulatto bodies allow us to look upon the life of Christ anew and grasp the depth of his work more profoundly. Through the fissures of discourse that render “mixed bodies” possible we can see Christ’s own life as entering this peculiar personhood, this discursive space.

This interpretive matrix is not one where “mulatto” becomes a new lens that marks

the inclusion or participation of a particular people.¹ This is to misunderstand the point. The examination of mulatto bodies names the participation of all bodies within this interpretive gaze. Identities are formed within this matrix of encounter and articulation. To claim Christ is mulatto is not to suggest one interpretive gaze above another, but rather seeks to take seriously the church's claim regarding Christ's humanity and divinity, his full and utter personhood. This claim however, is a reciprocal claim. Christ's mulattic existence is not for the inclusion of a particular people, but for the re-making of all people. To claim that Christ is mulatto is not to settle a question, but to ask how this is the case and to what end. To claim Christ is mulatto is to make a claim about the humanity Christ gives birth to and nurses in his church.

The reciprocity of identity thus has a particular economy in Christ. It is a personhood that does not successively and tragically fail to identify, but radically identifies so that our identification with God (our deification) becomes possible. To claim Christ is mulatto is to interpret humanity christologically. Part II draws upon the anthropological and discursive claims made visible through the mulatto body so as to reinterpret the claims concerning Christ's personhood but also, and perhaps more centrally to re-articulate the claims concerning how Christ's personhood remakes human lives. It is my contention that

¹ The Black Christ is an attempt to claim Christ's body for the inclusion of a people for whom the "white Christ" was a mark of their own inclusion. See Kelly Brown Douglas, et al. An important counterpoint within such contextual theologies is the contextual invocation of cultural mixture conceived by Virgilio Elizondo whose dissertation *Mestizaje... and Mestizo Christianity* articulate Christ within the context of the North American Borderlands and the peoples who were in one moment citizens of Mexico and in another citizens of a United States territory. His research offers some interesting overlaps concerning the Christianity born of colonial Spanish rule and the Latino culture birthed from its presence and Jesus' location as a Jew in occupied Judea. His work offered an important beginning to the possibility of articulating Jesus as one who broke open a social space where lives could be re-imagined and the subsequent church as a mestizo or hybrid people. See. Virgilio P. Elizondo, *The Future Is Mestizo : Life Where Cultures Meet*, Rev. ed.(Boulder, Colo.: University Press of Colorado, 2000).

the 19th century puzzle concerning the impossibility of a black woman giving birth to a white child is not too distant from the question of whether a woman (much less a virgin) could be the Mother of God. It is in the intimacy of these transgressions and the puzzle of their fruit where we begin to identify personhood or as Homi Bhabha suggests, the “location of culture.”² In the midst of this intimacy, Bhabha suggests, “the recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting.”³ For Bhabha the location of culture is the encounter of these contestations. Importantly, they are not only grand structural battles, but are more deeply felt and displayed in the minutiae of daily existence. The possibilities of humanity are the fruit of this “intricate invasion,” the birth of a child to a young woman. It is this encounter which must be understood, for this claim takes place in the midst of an encounter, but also breaks open the possibility of lives to encounter and be encountered in a radically new way, disrupting the rhythms of daily life and collective aspirations.

The claim that Christ is mulatto reciprocally amplifies both the claims concerning all bodies as well as the claims concerning Christ’s person and work, or his person *as* work, or said differently Christ’s performance of humanity. Part II will examine this impossible possibility suggesting Christ is mulatto, neither/nor-*but*. This identity is not an identity of enclosure nor a contextual identification, but rather the substance of Christ’s person as mission, his soteriological work. This identity is thus exhibited in the politics of his ministry

² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*(London ; New York: Routledge, 1994).

³ *Ibid.*, 13.

and the miraculous scandal of his death and resurrection. In Jesus' mulatto body the tragedy of humanity's refusal (of God and one another) is imbibed and transfigured.

Part II turns to the person and work Christ, highlighting the way in which Christ's person must be understood as "mulatto" or hybrid. But it does so in such a way as to show that in his body hybridity, mixture, and impurity dislocate the tragic, for in his flesh these terms do not have "purity" as their binary opposite as is the case with modern racial identities. In this moment the enfleshment of the word does not succumb to the limitations of such words as mixture or hybridity, but rather bends humanity into a new embodiment of possibilities that these descriptions only faintly, but necessarily express.

Chapter 3 argues Christ's person is the product of the transgression of the divine and human, two realities that were thought to be wholly other. Christ's body is thus an "interracial" reality yet his body and life is marked by the radical incorporation of neither/nor that opens up the possibilities of personhood in him. Unveiling true humanity as the hybridity of flesh and spirit Christ inhabits the world in such a way to transform its tragic refusal of its own en-spirited existence.

Chapter 4 explores the way the claim regarding the person of Christ is fundamentally tied to Christ's work through the incarnation and upon the cross. Christ's very presence becomes humanity's response to God's call through Israel. This responsive presence becomes the basis for humanity's incorporation by the Spirit that overturns the tragic mulatto body by transforming all bodies. This becomes the theological basis for understanding how Christian bodies as mulatto bodies are destined to disrupt modernity's racial imagination and instantiate new possibilities of imagining and incorporating difference within ecclesial life.

Chapter 3

Unto Us a Child is Born *or* “How can this be?” The Mulatto Christ

Christ is a nigger, / Beaten and black: / Oh, bare your back! / Mary is His mother:
Mammy of the South, / Silence your mouth. / God is his father: / White master
above / Grant Him your love. / Most holy bastard/ Of the bleeding mouth, /
Nigger Christ / On the cross/ Of the South.¹

The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the
Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will
be called Son of God. (Luke 1:35)

Introduction

In this chapter I will suggest Christ’s person is the enfleshment of the transgression
of divinity and humanity, two realities that were thought to be wholly other. Through the
expression of Christ’s personhood in the Definition of Chalcedon, Christ’s body both defies
the boundaries of personhood yet somehow establishes the boundaries of humanity through
his incarnation. Christ’s birth and life are thus marked by the limitations of human language.
He is neither/nor, yet this neither/nor serves to create through its disruption. Christ’s body
is thus an “interracial” body both in its genealogy or “biological” union, but more
importantly this fact refuses and unveils a discursive space in which humanity becomes re-
imagined and reconfigured in his very birth and life. Jesus’ life will ultimately succumb to the

¹ Langston Hughes, “Christ in Alabama” in Langston Hughes and others, *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*,
16 vols.(Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001).

tragedy of refusal examined in Part I. However, even this tragedy is disrupted, as Christ's own life and body ultimately take death into itself in the tomb.²

Through Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection the tragedy of mulattic existence is overcome and now marks true humanity as fundamentally mulatto. Christ's life establishes a neither/nor that is not tethered to the illusions of purity that must kill in order to be sustained. Rather through one death, a new humanity is opened up. This new humanity is marked by a neither/nor for its mulattic life is now constituted by the union of flesh and Spirit that gave birth to it through Christ's baptism into humanity (this will be explored more in Chapter 5). This neither/nor is thus no longer a tragic production of discursive refusal, but grounded in the very body of the Creator who became the Created One. In this union neither/nor is now "neither/nor-but." It is an existence of living in-between that is grounded in Christ's own birth and body, his own tragic death, and his blessed resurrection. Such a humanity, grounded in a "neither/nor – but" formulation which echoes the witness of scripture and ecclesial definitions, but through a particular politics of life and longing. It is a life marked not by self-assertion but through reception and incarnation. The claim regarding the mulatto Christ is ultimately a claim concerning our own humanity and its possibilities.

I will first argue that the notion of mulatto existence articulated within a framework of neither/nor begins to give us insight into a deeper reading of the Definition of Chalcedon and its theological implications. This reading is intended to articulate the claims of the definition given the structuring of bodies in modernity and suggest how a claim concerning

² Carter, *Christology*, Duke Divinity School, Spring 2007

Christ's identity as mulatto is bound to our own horizon of human possibility.³ Secondly, I will examine how two Christological controversies (Nestorianism and Apollinarianism) which themselves give rise to Chalcedon's definition can be interpreted as attempts to articulate purity in ways that stabilize human (and divine) identity problematically. Here these Christological controversies serve to highlight and work out this tension – the necessity of a pure divinity or a pure humanity. The controversies arise not from a disagreement over logic or philosophy but from concerns of Jesus' personhood and conversely a certain conception of humanity. These movements aimed at a stabilized identity that could envision Jesus or emulate Jesus within a certain and embodied existence. Such assertions of identity as static or stabilized can thus be read as leaning towards a certain idolatry. As I examined in Part I, in modernity this gesture can be seen as bound to the expansion of racial imperialism into the "New Worlds." These formulations resist that which is itself an interruption, a disruption of human longing that desired salvation as possible only as from entirely within or entirely without.

I will highlight how particularly Cyril of Alexandria's resistance to such challenges sought to maintain the tension inherent within the claims that were eventually found in Chalcedon. Such resistance was ultimately a question of pastoral and ecclesial life that sought to resist the temptations of idolatry and self-assertion within the life of the church. Such resistance was grounded in the possibility of transformation in discipleship as seen in the

³ While some may consider anachronistic a description of the Chalcedon as pointing towards a "Mulatto" Christ, my contention is not to supplant the terms hypostasis and homouosious in the definitions of Nicaea and Chalcedon. However, these terms do not have an inherent meaning, but are rather discursive markers that seek to describe something beyond them. They were attempts, within the language available to them at the time to account for God who had encountered them. They were understood during their time to express a certain character of Christ's person yet Christ was not bound by these terms. It is both a biological and discursive sense that I am employing mulatto. It both gestures towards a certain biological fact of Christ's "mother and father" but also to political embodiment such a presence was and is in the world.

rites of initiation in baptism and sustenance in Eucharist. Lastly, I will highlight how the birth of Christ is the overturning of this moment for the birth of Christ (and thus humanity) is creation through flesh and spirit. In this way the claim concerning Jesus' hybridity is now a dogmatic claim that demands a pneumatological interpretation and resists the stabilization of humanity's assertion concerning itself. Christ is born into flesh and through the Spirit. His person is the intermixture or encounter of high and low in which each becomes bound to the other so that one must now always be considered in relationship to the other.⁴ Thus the incarnation instantiates this encounter of difference inherent to personhood engendering the necessity of transformation in the Christian life. This fills out as one becomes incorporated into Christ's body and receives the communication of this encounter into their very bodies. As Anselm of Canterbury reminds us, the incarnation is that which we must "chew on the honeycomb of his words, suck their flavor which is sweeter than sap, swallow their wholesome sweetness."⁵ The incarnation is that which incorporates us into a life imbued with the divine through a partaking of a particular body and life.

The centrality of becoming demands a certain account of transformation on the part of humanity that God has not resisted. In this encounter of high and low, divine and creation, notions of purity and impurity become radically reconstituted. Such intermixture is no longer bound within a tragic refusal for it is no longer a performance within negation, but rather is a performance of human life and thus transforms the very "poles" purity, creating true humanity through a hybridity of flesh and spirit. The mulatto Christ disrupts the

⁴ This must be qualified to a certain extent. Christ's entry into the world was a presence that was markedly different than in his presence in the world as creator or sustainer.

⁵ Anselm of Canterbury, "Meditation on Human Redemption" in Anselm, *The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm*, trans., Benedicta Ward, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

enclosing assertion of humanity's own possibilities but in falling victim to them breaks them open by incorporating them into himself and establishing the many within his own body. The assertion of a purity that resists transformation and abides in certainty remains bound by the tragic for it resists the possibility inherent in the incarnation. Thus personhood is hybrid and mulatto for true humanity is hybrid / or mulatto. It is a mixture of flesh and spirit that in it's being, its presence in the world occupies space differently and destabilizes the markers of identity that are required in modernity to mark difference.

In the incarnation such markers become continually conflated and re-imagined in their relation with one another and consequently mark participation with the life of Christ inexorably bound to a mulatto existence similarly fusing and breaking markers of identity in new and "impossible" ways creating a new humanity which beckons the world to ask, "How can this be?"

The attempt to work out this impossible possibility, this question, "how can this be?" could be said to be the posture of theological reflection. The various creedal responses to seemingly ill-conceived notions of Christ or the Godhead are themselves attempts to articulate life in the midst of this question – this call posited by God's promise and presence to us. The definition of Chalcedon is representative of a series of attempts to articulate the pattern of God's relation to the world and the identity of relations of the Son to the Father and the Spirit. The definition of Chalcedon is unique in that it seeks to articulate an identity through both its assertions and its denials. Here I will suggest that Chalcedon utters a paradoxical identity wherein it asserts while it negates asserting Jesus is and Jesus is not yet the contents of these assertions are not complimentary, but rather oppositional. It is my contention that such a formula can be understood as having a distinctly "mulattic" character.

The formula of Chalcedon was not the first word nor was it the last word concerning Jesus, but in many respects it represents the sheer complexity of an assertion regarding Christ's person. Chalcedon's formula and Christ's confession of himself displays a fundamentally mulatto character. That is, it displays Jesus' nature as "neither/nor – but" and in doing so we see the tragic nature of mulatto existence pre-figured, but now interpretable not as a theoretical or social challenge, but itself echoing a profound (though distorted) Christological moment. The neither/nor that gives birth to and inheres within the interracial body in the modern West is but an iteration of the fundamental "inter" character of all human lives. These lives are established in creation and re-inscribed upon through the incarnation, yet become distorted within in a racial telos that leads only to the tragic in its ever failing attempt to negotiate the claims of racial purity and cultural essentialism.

"How can this be?" Mary's confession upon the angel's annunciation marked the first question of Christ's identity. Within Mary's question reverberates the call and response of her people. Inhabiting her confession is the echo of Israel's birth and Abraham's similar response to promise of the Lord, "How can this be for I am far in years?" Israel's own life was born in the midst of this call and response. They are a people whose lives are constituted by a question and whose lives witness to this encounter. Their existence is the transgression of God into the world marking the boundaries their possibility within this impossibility. The unfolding of Israel's life is the bending into this promise despite its own impossibility. Its life is marked by miraculous births that defy expectation and mark these people as born of expectation. As Abram's life exists in the gap between YHWH's pronouncement to him and the birth of Isaac to Sarai, the lives of Israel reverberate between this call and response

between the impossibility and the possibility of the promise. They exist within the dissonance of what cannot be yet is.

In the continual unfolding of Israel, its moments of redemption are marked by the re-inscribing of this moment through the birth of children in whom God's promise becomes present in the world. The birth of Isaac becomes reiterated in the birth of Moses. Moses, born of Israel yet raised within the house of Egypt leads "his" people into a promise, birthing Israel through the waters of the Red Sea. Within Mary's confession resounds this melody of salvation. The annunciation to Mary is the fulfillment of a promise of the nation Israel.⁶ The shape of this promise permeates Mary's confession – it is a confession of her own limitation and God's possibility. These two poles of Israel's identity become enfleshed in Mary's womb. In this encounter of limitation and possibility a child will be conceived. It is in Mary's assent that we see creatureliness not asserted or built, but received. Creation is birthed through the impossible, through an incarnation of the promise, the Word, first uttered to Abraham. The promise was the possibility of bearing God within one's own body so that all might be re-born through God's own body. Jesus' person is the call and response to creation.⁷ He is the re-making of humanity through this union of flesh and Spirit fulfilling

⁶ It should be said here that Mary's fulfillment of this promise expresses the deepest mark of Israelite identity. The purity of these people lay not only in their "biological" purity, but rather the way in which they allow their lives to display their peculiar character as a people made from nothing. The unfolding narrative of Israel's birth and dependence (or refusal) of God abiding presence among them is marked at times by biological purity (see ...) while at other times their very existence is redeemed through foreigners whose deep faithfulness in the God of Israel sustains Israel's own existence (see Ruth, etc.) What these disparate accounts reveal is that the cultural reality of Israel's life, the purity of their obedience is not dependent upon racial purity, but rather a purity of obedience displaying the presence and love of God to the world (see Brueggeman). This display itself creates among these Judaic people a space where aliens can reside, can become grafted into a people. Israel is thus a people whose purity is bound to their faithfulness opening them up to contamination. The purification of Israel comes not through a biological intermixture, but rather through encounters that serve to tear Israel away from their own faithfulness that ultimately constitutes who they are.

⁷ Barth?

God's promise to those peculiar people and enfolding humanity itself into this peculiar existence.

From the moment of his conception, through his birth, his ministry, and in his death and resurrection Christ's identity, his person has confounded description. The gospels and epistles of the New Testament are an attempt to witness to the nature of this impossibility and its meaning for creation. The subsequent councils and doctrinal claims concerning Christ's person continue to seek to somehow grasp this impossible possibility (Kierkegaard, ?) In the incarnation the very limits of possibility become transgressed. Again, Mary's confusion, "How can this be?" is our perpetual confusion as we seek to reflect on the meaning and the implications of the claims that Christ makes concerning himself and concerning us.

In the midst of these attempts to interpret and discern the meaning of Christ's body and his claims about himself what has been often overlooked or under-interpreted is the fundamentally "mulattic" or transgressive claims the biblical witness and ecclesial councils give us concerning the nature of Christ's person. There has undoubtedly been deep disagreement regarding these attempts to discern Christ's personhood and my intention here is not to trace the historical development of these claims.⁸ This claim seems rather non-sensical at first in light of Chalcedon's rather explicit denial of an ontological mixture. But as I have suggested in Part I mulatto identity is grounded in the presumptions of purity that give rise to the space that is articulated as "mixture" as well as the intimate encounters of

⁸ It is not my contention by invoking the term hybridity that the discourse concerning Christ is hybrid or an amalgamation of theories and doctrines. The varying attempts to explicate the mystery of Christ's person represent, in my view, an unfolding and narrowing explication of Christ's person rather than a "picking and choosing" of theories that fit an *a priori* philosophical judgment.

“difference” that conceive mulatto children. In this way mulatto identity is both discursive and embodied. The mulatto is not a positive identity, but rather a tragic identity of negation wherein it’s existence is marked by a “neither/nor,” left to negotiate and perform itself into an illusion of purity thereby participating within a wider vision of national or racial hope. Notions of mixture within embodied existence are not displayed in people as dilutions of their mother or their father, but as persons who display the complications of their lineage fully in their presence in the world. The ease with which language of racial, ethnic, or cultural purity has become engrained as an acceptable description of any type of personhood serves to delimit the possibilities of personhood we envisage in Christ’s personhood and consequently his salvific work. It is through the complicating language of mulatto that we can begin to re-examine both the discursive and embodied disruption that is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The Chalcedonian Christ: Neither/Nor – But

The ecumenical councils beginning with Nicaea and leading to Chalcedon are widely understood to have created the primary boundaries of conversation concerning the person and work of Christ or Christ’s relationship to the Father. These councils represent a continual conversation or reflection upon the person of Christ. As such this progression served to highlight more emphatically not necessarily *who* Christ was, but what Christ was *not*. The central addition of the Chalcedonian definition reads

We also teach that we apprehend this one and only Christ-Son, Lord, only-begotten - in two natures; and we do this without confusing the two natures, without transmuting one nature into the other, without dividing them into two separate categories, without contrasting them according to area or function. The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union. Instead, the "properties"

of each nature are conserved and both natures concur in one "person" and in one reality <hypostasis>. They are not divided or cut into two persons, but are together the one and only and only-begotten Word <Logos> of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus have the prophets of old testified; thus the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us; thus the Symbol of Fathers <the Nicene Creed> has handed down to us.⁹

The agreement here regarding the teaching concerning the person of Christ is an addition to the affirmation of Christ asserted at Nicaea. But the agreement centers more upon what or who Christ is *not* rather than who Christ *is*. It is through intermingling of positive and negative assertions that I want to first begin to highlight the possibility of Christ's mulattic nature. In this passage of the definition Christ's identity is rendered in the midst of several negations or boundaries (without confusion, without transmutation, without division, and without contrast). In the midst of the prior assertion of Christ's unity the following assertions seem improbable, if not impossible. In this regard Chalcedon begins to suggest an apophatic identity that transgresses our notions of pure and impure, division and unity and thus any identity grounded upon these assertions that seeks to press one away from difference. Sarah Coakley suggests this complexity must be understood not in terms of assertion but rather through the category of the apophatic. In her view "Chalcedon is strictly speaking, *neither end nor beginning*, but rather a transitional (though still normative) 'horizon' to which we constantly return, but with equal forays backwards and forwards."¹⁰ This framework of Chalcedon's definition as apophatic is crucial in that it offers a way of inhabiting the language of the creed. That is, the definition itself witnesses to a possibility that itself cannot contain. But here I want to push Coakley's point a bit further to suggest

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¹⁰ Sarah Coakley, "What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does It Not? Some Reflections on the Status and Meaning of the Chalcedonian 'Definition'," in *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*, ed. Daniel Kendall Stephen T. Davis, SJ, Gerald O'Collins, SJ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 162.

that in the definition's fundamentally apophatic framework it does in fact begin to assert the shape of Christ's presence in the world and that this shape is not unrelated to Christ's work.

In these negations or boundaries the definition puts forth a certain "neither/nor" as an aspect intrinsic to the identity of Christ. What makes this "neither/nor" so paradoxical however, is the way in which it is continually bound to the unity of Christ. While the seeming impossibility of conceiving of an identity in the midst of such contradictory claims seems difficult, this contradiction in fact marks all identities and thus every identity itself an inflection of "hybridity." What the definition of Chalcedon presses us towards is that the apophaticism does not resist the notion of hybridity within the God-man. He is and he is not. The apophatic speech serves to clarify the center in such a way as to obscure the mystery of the internal workings of the wills, but nevertheless press this internal moment as central to the person. Christ is a full and complete person. The mystery of his lineage, his "biology" can only be sorted out within the confession of Christ's undivided personhood.

The dynamism Christ's inextricable twoness exhibits both the difficulty and the possibility "inter" bodies pose in contemporary society. As we have seen in Part I the interracial body's very existence points to a transgression, an impossibility which requires those who adhere to race to confess the paradoxes of these relations. The white mother and her black child, the white father who's colored children are not sons and daughters. These bodies are rendered neither/nor not through the union of a fundamental difference, but are rather born of the structure of race and discourse that gives birth to these bodies. Their bodies are not rendered mixed, hybrid, or impure because of their biology, but because of the discourse that seeks to make sense of the desires that gave birth to these bodies. As in Chapter 2 the lives of interracial folk inhabit an impossibility. The tragedy of their existence

is the way the space they inhabit is at once disrupted by their presence yet co-opts them into a certain distorted participation. Their lives exist within this space that has rendered them nothing, non-being. In this dissonance their bodies and lives are sacrificed through death or exile.

In the apophaticism of Chalcedon we see this gap of mulatto lives as an echo of Christ's own entrance into the world. The space that Christ inhabits, interpreted through the definition of Chalcedon, can be understood spatially. Cultural theorist Homi Bhabha, while not invoking a Chalcedonian logic, nonetheless suggests culture as a hybrid phenomenon that structures identities through negations that are nonetheless bound to one another and thus hybrid. Bhabha articulates hybrid identity through a spatial language of interstitiality. For Bhabha identities are found not necessarily within pure notions of identity (nation, race, ethnicity, etc) but rather within the spaces that such claims create and the performances of identity that make those spaces possible. Identities are found in a "third space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized and read anew."¹¹ For Bhabha identities are articulated within these various spaces of contestation. While some may understand themselves to occupy a certain position, they are, in fact, imbedded within a larger network of interconnections that are destabilizing their very claims of identity. When one begins to see themselves in the gaps of such an identity they begin to occupy a true self-understanding.

¹¹ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 55

In this assertion of themselves within these spaces they then become disruptive identities in relation to the claims of purity that constitute their borders. The presence of the one who refuses to be absorbed or represent a particular group becomes itself a disruptive force within each of these articulations of identity. Such a conception of identity can be interpreted within Chalcedon's formulation.¹² Bhabha's claim concerning the destabilizing contentions of cultural space is what marks Chalcedon's rhetorical power. It articulates Christ both as an assertion and a refusal. The definition seeks to suggest how Christ is and is not, thus problematizing notions that bind Christ to a particular way of being in the world that is static.

The identity here is one that is not bound within the particularity of one claim or in its genealogical purity, but rather the identity is constituted in its occupation of multiple spaces *at one time* and *in one person*. Maximus the Confessor, clarifying the position of Chalcedon later described Christ's personhood as "a union that realizes one person composite of both natures, inasmuch as it in no way diminishes the essential difference between those natures... For it is fitting for the Creator of the universe, who by the economy of his incarnation became what by nature he was not, to preserve without change both what he himself was by nature and what he became in his incarnation."¹³ What is crucial to note in Maximus' description of Christ's person and work is the inherent tension in seeking to express the duality and the unity of Christ's personhood. Christ's identity is

¹² Here I am not suggesting that the participants at Chalcedon had this notion of interstitial existence or hybridity in mind. Rather I am simply seeking to articulate how Chalcedon might be interpreted within contemporary theology given the challenges hybridity and interracial identity pose to racial and cultural claims regarding life together.

¹³ Maximus, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor*, trans., Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press "Popular Patristics" Series (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 125.

bound between these two claims, yet in this tension humanity becomes interpretable only within this tension.¹⁴ To refuse the tension within Christ's own life is to misinterpret the nature of the new humanity being created in his birth, life, death, and resurrection.

Such claims concerning the identity of Christ could be read as attempting to simply create the borders by which faithful explication of identity might be drawn. The space that the definition creates is not a vacuous space, but rather one that is inhabited. Jesus' incarnation occupies a space that defies possibility and in so doing breaks open all lives and the claims they make of themselves. Humanity, as constituted by its being bound (implicitly or explicitly) to others, is now bound to the divine creating an interstitial reality that is marked not only by contested claims of culture, but also now by a transgression of human and divine possibility. In this regard Chalcedon is an articulation of the incarnation's re-conception of humanity within a seemingly impossible multiplicity.

The person of Christ in Chalcedon then becomes reconceived as the binding of assertion and negation.¹⁵ It is within this moment of simultaneous assertion and negation

¹⁴ Maximus' reiteration of Chalcedon came at a time when Chalcedon itself was being invoked in various Christological controversies seeking to determine Christ's personhood. Maximus' reiteration sought to maintain the tension inherent in Chalcedon's claims. It was within this tension, for Maximus that the redeeming work of Christ was actually found. Within God's own life all difference was found and circumscribed. To seek to resolve some difference as outside of God was to refuse a fundamental aspect of who God was and relatedly who humanity could become. This reading of Maximus is slightly different than some scholars, most notably Hans Urs von Balthasar who suggested Maximus' reiteration of Chalcedon represented more of a synthesis of opposing views. In my view the notion of synthesis is to refuse the possibility of holding seeming contradictions within a unified vision humanity or personhood. Balthasar's description of Maximus's thought as synthesis, is to fundamentally refuse the mystery of mutually present "high and low" in Christ's own person, thus transforming the low into the high. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*(San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003).

¹⁵ Most scholars acknowledge the deep connection between Nicaea and Chalcedon suggesting that the conclusions reached in Chalcedon were not additions, but merely clarifications. In this regard even looking at the early formulations in Nicaea regarding the relationship of the Son to the Father we see this paradoxical formula of negation and assertion in seeking to articulate the divinity of the Son. The Son is God, but the Son is not the Father just as the Father is not the Son. Yet both are God. This difficult admixture of assertion and negation is thus not an innovation in Chalcedon, but simply made most explicit regarding the nature of Christ's person *in se* whereas Nicaea was seeking to assert the identity of Christ through his relationship to the Father.

concerning Christ's person as one and many, one without confusion, one without transmutation, one without division or contrast that both the "high" and the "low" become bound within one person in such a way as to fundamentally disrupt not only our notions of what is possible within creaturely personhood, but within divine personhood.

Chalcedon's struggle to adequately name Christ's personhood was one driven by an understanding of the relation between his person and his work. However, the formulation ultimately put forward in fact describes more powerfully the fundamental reality of all human identities. While the claims concerning the constituent aspects of this identity were different than ours, the process of identification and differentiation are what constitute all notions of personhood. The hybridity or mulatto existence that constitutes Christ's person is thus grounded upon an identity that is "neither/nor." This interstitial space is thus a mark not of Christ in particular, but of the particularity of humanity that Christ takes on fully. This mulattic rhythm of personhood is thus a mark of humanity universally while humanity's history is an unfolding drama of refusals and transgressions.

This drama becomes re-iterated in the varying attempts to classify (and therefore subjugate) interracial offspring. The mulatto of the 19th and 20th centuries arose from the certainty of the identities that gave birth to him. Mulatto is not a positive identity. By this I mean it is not an identity that can posit what it is. Within the binary poles of colored or white interracial bodies could only posit what they were not. Despite the attempts of these mulattos to perform into a kind of whiteness this performance was only an approximation of the purity of their (typically) fathers. Consequently they were colored, but they were not for in their white oppressors they saw the face of their father. Claims concerning who they were continually negotiated between these assertions concerning their biology and the negations

such biology implied. They were neither/nor. But in the midst of this negotiation they also posed a challenge to the very system of black and non-black, colored and non-colored, and all those that get lost in between these polarities that pervades American social and political realities. Mixed bodies posed a challenge to the presumptions of intimate encounters that must inevitably be violent or a disgraceful fetish. Their lives displayed the very blurring of the lines of certainty upon which this structure is built.

It is within this negotiation of assertions and impossibilities that we again enter into the controversies regarding Christ's body. He was, but he was not. To Mary's inquiry, "How can this be?" Chalcedon echoes the constitution of Israel's existence and pre-figures the disruption of the interracial child. Here the incarnation is not the instantiation of neither/nor existence, but rather the re-inscription that perplexes the structures established upon claims of purity. Here the incarnation resists the power of self-assertion and idolatry that began with Adam and Eve and matured in Babel and would ultimately grind down upon the darker inhabitants of the world.

Here we must return again to the claim concerning Abraham's and Sarai's response and the people born of this encounter. Such a confounding is again not initiated in the incarnation, but is rather the culmination of the calling of Abraham in the empty space of tribal self-assertion. God called out Abraham and made a people out of nothing.¹⁶ These were a people whose lives and loyalties confounded the demands and the identities of those around them. They would welcome them at some moments among their number in some moments and at other moments throw them out. They would worship a God without a name and yet proclaim God's presence among them. They were not a people who created

¹⁶ J. Kameron Carter, Lecture, Introduction to Christian Theology, Duke Divinity School, Fall 2008.

their gods, but a people whose very existence was only intelligible inside the God whose name they could not utter.

The very creation of Israel begins the process of assertion and negation, and is ultimately fulfilled in Mary's assent and the birth of Jesus. Thus Mary's question, "How can this be?" is only a recapitulation of Abraham's bewilderment when told by an angel that through him a people would be made. He replied to the angel, "How can this be for I am far along in years." We return again to these two moments because these questions now press us more deeply into the mulattic character of Jesus' person as bound to a mulattic humanity. Jesus' personhood arises out of a people who confound the world. Thus "how can this be" is a question that not only frames Jesus' neither/nor existence, but also always reflects back upon the humanity Jesus' enters into and re-makes. Humanity is now confronted with the puzzle of its own creation, its own inter-existence, and its own mulattic life.

This nameless God would now enter into this space betwixt and between. Through the people who were created only out of a word and one whose lineage, whose heritage was questionable, the fullness of God's presence would enter. Jesus was, and he was not, he was not a mixture of human and divine, nor was he two separable entities trapped in one body, nor was he a communion of human and divine switching internally within. He was and he was not. He was fully God and fully man. In these boundaries we see not only an identity constituted through the limitations of language, a discursive identity that struggles to grasp the power of his presence and the possibility of his flesh for humanity. His life and presence reflect a radical unity of possibility and impossibility that presses itself into humanity in such

a way as to refuse its refusal.¹⁷ He was mulatto not solely because he was “mixture,” but because his very body confounds the boundaries of purity/impurity and humanity/divinity that seemed necessary for us to imagine who we thought we should be. The creed suggests what he is with only minimal clarity, but suggests what he is not unequivocally.

This reconfiguration of humanity is thus reconstituted as conceived in Chalcedon through a neither/nor – *but*” Chalcedon helps us to see the way in which the neither/nor is not merely a method of clearing space and establishing the rules of faithful reflection but is a positive assertion regarding Christ’s personhood. But what must also be noted about Chalcedon is that while it seems to explicitly resist a formula regarding the composition of “mixture” it nonetheless outlines a necessary presence of humanity and divinity that does not resist mixture broadly speaking, but seeks to articulate the form of this “inter-penetration.” It does so less through the explicit or formulaic articulation of what this mixture is constituted by, but more in the articulation of the varying negations’ significance. One is left with a multiplicity of assertions about the nature of this man that abide within one person.

“Mixture” or “hybridity” or “mulatto,” are thus all confessions of the reality of a personhood born of two realities, yet it is a personhood without division. It is a personhood that refuses any attempt to distill the constitutive parts of one’s person as though we could attribute Mary’s laugh to her mother and her nose to her father. Mary’s personhood is certainly bound to these facts concerning her life, yet they are also bound to the interconnections that constitute Sally’s uniqueness her “Maryness.” We do not call Mary a “mixture” because we assume a purity of her parents... human beings thus the constellation

¹⁷ Barth, He judges the no... also Carter.

of traits she receives constitute her, but also do not distinguish her significantly enough. Yet Christ confronts us with a personhood born of utter “difference.” It is a personhood that displays realities that are not of us... these essential differences thus require a qualification in order to understand his relation to us. In what ways is he like us, in what ways is he not. The language of mixture helps us to make sense of this for it seeks to acclimate his personhood more to an understanding of who we imagine ourselves to be. This economy of identification and differentiation only becomes visible in the moments of transgression when those that do not belong produce something that is contrary to what we thought possible for ourselves. This economy produced the mulatto, mestizo, etc.

Christ’s body and life inhabits the neither/nor that marks all human lives, but that is particularly resonant in mulatto bodies. Yet Jesus inhabits this space in a different way. His presence as mulatto re-creates the space around him. He is neither/nor – *but*. Bound to this negation is an assertion that both creates mulattic life and lifts it from its tragic circumstance. In this regard what Chalcedon describes is not entirely apophatic. Its continuity with Nicaea serves to continually establish that Jesus is divine and one with the Father. This assertion is bound in a deep and complex relationship with the boundaries that delimit the possibilities of this claim. Yet the definition also puts forth something that must be said positively concerning this person.

Inherent within this positive assertion of who Jesus is in relation to its accompanying negations is the possibility of asserting Jesus’ mixture or hybridity. In this way I am suggesting the claim that Jesus is mulatto is not a rhetorical or theoretical argument that allows broader participation in his identity through a contextual approximation because he now essentially “looks like” mixed people. Rather, I am suggesting that the claim that Jesus is

mulatto is an ontological claim that does not confirm or stabilize mulatto identity by seeking to deify it, but rather reconfigures what we must consider mulatto or interracial existence and thereby all poles that make “inter” intelligible. This reconfiguration is a Christological moment that opens up the possibility of transformation into an “inter” existence that is established within the pneumatologically grounded humanity Christ’s incarnation reveals to us.

Jesus is mulatto is an ontological claim that suggests the union of flesh and Spirit is a fact of Jesus’ personhood. As I will examine in the following section, Cyril of Alexandria continually refuses the stability of personhood. For him Christ’s life must always be fully constituted by these two realities of his birth – his “father” and his “mother.” Yet, this claim regarding Christ, as mulatto does not stabilize mixed race identity. While mixed-race identity and the discourse that produces them illumines Christ’s personhood, the radical difference of this mulattic life lay in what constitutes these bodies and how these constitutive marks operate in markedly different ways.

The mulatto body’s mixture is the product of an empowered refusal of the very encounter that gave birth to it. These lives are left to live into an impossibility, to “pass” or to abide in the refusal of a parent’s people. The claim concerning Christ’s mulattic life does not seek to include these refused people nor lift their bodies into an identity of stability and rest by re-making Christ in their image. Rather, the constitution of Christ’s “hybridity” reconfigures the very notion of humanity that discursively creates “mixed-race” bodies. That is, in the Creator becoming the Created One humanity’s claims concerning purity and possibility only become intelligible within Christ’s body. In subjecting himself to the discursive limitations of human language regarding themselves or God, Christ renders such

poles incoherent through his birth, life, death and resurrection. He re-creates humanity and renders “inter” existence no longer through poles of race (or ethnicity) that are tragic in their impossibility. Rather “inter” or mulattic existence is laid before humanity as the possibility of new life in the Spirit, as being born of flesh and Spirit, and whose fulfillment is not impossible, but an ever present “already but not yet.”

While not suggested in Chalcedon I believe that the beginning of such an articulation is found in the first accounts regarding Christ’s birth. Mary is told, “the Holy Spirit will come upon you...” (Luke 1:35) Here the text suggests that the child is born both of Mary and the Spirit. The fruit of this encounter is thus the infant Jesus. Born of Word and flesh and pressed into life through Mary. The way in which the divinity and the humanity interact within the person Jesus is certainly a mystery and beyond the scope of this reflection, but what I want to highlight in this moment is the way in which this encounter itself transgresses the assumptions of Israel regarding their God and God’s possibilities and impossibilities.

For in this claim concerning Jesus’ birth is a confession of who Jesus is. Jesus is the contamination of the purity of God with the impurity of flesh. He is the presence of what cannot be contained within the limitation of a body. He is the one who is before all and yet became a child. In these moments the conventional language of boundaries and identities and assertions could no longer be adequately applied to this man. His very presence in the world transformed the boundaries of identity and thus the possibilities how identities might be configured in the world, but especially within his own body.

The power and the threat of this claim is displayed powerfully in Jesus’ invocation of the Tetragrammaton in John 8:58. Following a protracted discussion concerning forgiveness and judgment Jesus reiterates the authority by which he is offering forgiveness and judgment

telling the Pharisees, “Truly, Truly I say unto you before Abraham was, I am.” To this the Pharisees responded with the threat of stones. In this interaction we see first the fundamental claim concerning the perception of some Jews at the time regarding the possibility of divinity dwelling among. While this is the most explicit of encounters even the disciples’ own difficulty in comprehending the claim Jesus was making about himself again suggests the inherent dichotomy that was envisioned between the Creator and creation. God was the one who sent or who spoke through creatures but did not abide with them... God could not look like them. Yet in Jesus’ claim regarding his own beginninglessness such notions of purity and impurity would become disrupted and overcome.¹⁸

Jesus is Mulatto (Cyril Says So)

The conception of Jesus points to the possibility of an intermixture of divine and human that was conceived as impossible, as that which could not be. Yet this claim is implicitly bound up within the boundaries established by Chalcedon as well as throughout the reflections upon Christ’s person by the bishops throughout the church’s early reflections upon Christ. The next section will examine this claim regarding the ontological identity of Jesus as mulatto by briefly examining Nestorius’ challenge to Nicaea as well as Cyril’s response that were initially contested at the Council of Ephesus, but ultimately challenged and refuted in Chalcedon’s definition. In examining Cyril’s refutation of Nestorius as well

¹⁸ I should say here that in suggesting this interpretation of Chalcedon I am not arguing that the members of the councils had “inter” existence or notions of mixture in mind. Yet, in their final formulation what we do see is a certain intuition regarding the paradoxical nature of the incarnation and the ways in which it renders Jesus as a sort of “neither nor – but.” Here the articulations of Jesus’ person seem wary of the claims of purity on either side of the formula whether claims concerning his humanity or his divinity.

as his implicit resistance to Apollinarianism I will show how Chalcedon's assertion regarding Christ's person is not only a rhetorical boundary, but also an ontological claim that is best interpreted within a notion of mulattic hybridity. To be sure, notions of mixture as conceived in Apollinarius are to be vigorously resisted; yet the notion of hybridity or mixture need not follow a similar pattern. Further such a conception of Christ's person, as "hybrid" is necessary to discern for the addendums to Nicaea were not merely additions of political import, but pastoral and ecclesial significance. That is, the refutation of Nestorius, Apollinarus, Arius and their teachings highlight the way in which the early bishops understood the theological *and* pastoral implications of problematic teaching. That is, living into the promise of Christ's birth and life necessitated a faithful articulation of his body and life. Christological formulations were not matters of logic, but were always implicitly or explicitly tied to anthropological claims. A consideration of Christ's identity was always bound to an implication concerning what humanity could become and how it entered into this possibility. In examining Cyril we will attend not only to the necessity of a certain ontological "inter" existence in Christ's person, but also the implications of problematic notions for the body of Christ, those who would seek to participate in his grace and love.

In *Against Nestorius* Cyril makes his most substantial refutation of Nestorius' teachings. This refutation centers upon perhaps the most egregious of Nestorius' errors, his refusal to call Mary the "Mother of God" or *Theotokos*. Outlining his positive affirmation of Christ's person he writes, "...having made his own body which was from a woman, and having been born from her according to the flesh, he recapitulated human birth in himself, he who was with the Father before all ages having come to be with us according to the

flesh."¹⁹ For Cyril, how humanity becomes subsumed or incorporated into divinity through the incarnation's inhabiting a deep, seemingly contradictory, reality. Christ is the one who creates for himself a body and comes forth through the womb of a woman. The conception and birth are real moments in the unfolding of the Word made flesh. The incarnation is thus the recapitulation of birth itself opening up the possibility of redemption for bodily life. But this birth is itself a conception. For Cyril,

The Only-begotten has shined on us from the very substance of God the Father; having in his own nature the fullness of the one who begat him, he became flesh... and mixed himself as it were with our nature by virtue of an inexpressible conjunction and union with this earthly body. So he who is God by nature was called – indeed actually became – a heavenly man (not a god-bearing man as he was called by some who do not correctly understand the profundity of this mystery) so was God and man in one. He made a sort of union in himself of two things which are utterly distinct and remote from one another in nature, and thereby made man to share and participate in divine nature.²⁰

The incarnation binds divinity to humanity in such a way as to conceive humanity anew. The conjunction is what that cannot be expressed perfectly (inexpressible) yet is nonetheless a definitive union of the two. Jesus' personhood is wrought between these "two things which are utterly distinct and remote." The presence of Jesus in this "neither/nor – but" is the constitution of who he is. But in this moment this Jesus' body overturns the impossibility by welcoming the other into his own body just as Mary welcomes the other into her own body. In this reciprocity the creator and the created encounter one another so as to conceive new lives that will burst forth from the womb that will be Jesus' tomb.

The mystery of the incarnation that Chalcedon utters so paradoxically must be understood within the trajectory of the work its object serves to accomplish. The definition

¹⁹ Cyril, *Cyril of Alexandria*, trans., Norman Russell (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 135.

²⁰ Cyril "Commentary on John" in Richard A. Norris, ed. *The Christological Controversy*, Sources of Early Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

of Chalcedon thus lays the foundation of human possibility. The confession of Christ's twoness is to confess the possibility of humanity's becoming. To resist the essential unity of Christ's personhood as holding divine and human within himself is to not only claim a limitation of God, but also the limitation of human life and longing.

Nestorius sought to resist this essential presence suggesting that Christ was not born, but "passed through" Mary's womb.²¹ This resistance arose from a concern that divinity could change or suffer. The unified conjunction of Nestorius' Christological reflection sought to account for this unity while maintaining the fundamental claim of Christ as human. The maintenance of Christ's unity as divine and human was still, for Nestorius, a soteriological question for "the body is the temple of the Son' deity, and a temple united to it by a complete and divine conjunction, so that the nature of the deity associates itself with the things belonging to the body, and the body is acknowledges to be noble and worthy of the wonders related in the Gospels."²² Nestorius' "conjunction" was one that suggested the body and soul of Christ were distinct. That somehow in this union each aspect of the divine and human were somehow incised. The body was thus a biological reality, which infused with divinity made possible the redemption of all bodies. The attributes of Nestorius Christological person attributed his life and works to a fundamental bifurcation which preserved the Word's divinity and humanity's limitation.

Yet in Cyril's view Nestorius' understanding of conjunction exhibited a certain resistance to the radical claim that Christ was fully human and fully divine in such a way that was inseparable suggesting, "that Christ is a God-bearing man and not truly God, a man

²¹ Cyril, *Cyrl of Alexandria*, 136.

²² (Nestorius, Norris, ed. 138)

conjoined with God as if possessing equal status."²³ As with any conjunction such as *don't*, it is a unity of utility and when that utility meets its need it can be disjoined and each part still serve its purpose and recognizable on its own, thus *do not*.

Cyril responds to this problem with an emphasis upon the essential unity of the two within the person of Christ who, "Being God by nature, became man, not simply by a conjunction, as he himself says, that is conceived of as external or incidental, but by a true union that is ineffable and transcends understanding."²⁴ The difference between how Cyril and Nestorius conceive Christ's unity relates, in part, to how Cyril is also seeking to avoid an Apollinarian mixture that was contested in previous years.

As with Cyril, Apollinaris also expressed the paradoxical nature of Christ's person noting that Christ, the one who sanctified and was sanctified, was one person.²⁵ Yet Apollinaris sought to resolve the paradox based on a certain anthropological limitation. He suggested the nature of the one whom the divine intellect indwells is fully human, but merely flesh and thus

it is inconceivable that the same person should be both God and an *entire* man. Rather, he exists in the singleness of an incarnate divine nature which is commingled [with flesh], with the result that worshipers bend their attention to God inseparable from his flesh and not to one who is worship and one who is not.²⁶

The assertion the unity of Christ's unity is made possible through an anthropological limitation. This delimiting of human possibility serves to de-emphasize the flesh in such a way as to render humanity merely a body or flesh and thus asserts Christ as a kind of mixture

²³ Cyril, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 141.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Apollinaris, "On the Union in Christ of the Body with the Godhead," in *The Christological Controversies*, ed. Jr. Richard A. Norris (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), Section 10, 106.

²⁶ Ibid., Para. 9. 108. Emphasis mine.

where certain elements coalesce so as to become something new. Christ is thus a new *kind* of human whose difference is constituted in the mystery of his union with us, that he still sustains us even while he inhabits our vulnerability. In Apollinarus' Christological formula is bound to a problematic anthropological vision that becomes the ground of his soteriological description. The humanity Christ saves becomes enfleshed and thus the transformation made possible is one that is limited to one's ordering of the flesh. This ordering is merely the stabilization of the person's own works, rather than the fundamental transformation of the person.

Both Apollinarus and Nestorius' description of Christ and implicitly humanity departed from some of the earliest Christological assertions that themselves, articulated a certain anthropological vision as well. In particular Athanasius' resistance to Arius clearly maintained the restoration of humanity's rationality as embedded within Christ' incarnational work. This deep impression of the Word upon and into humanity brought forth the possible transformation of those who would gaze upon Christ.²⁷ Such transformation was more explicit in Athanasius where in reflecting upon the word one's rationality became transformed, thus suggesting a wider interpretation of personhood and consequently the possibilities of truly becoming like Christ.

²⁷ The transformation of the one whose reflected and lived into this word is exemplified for Athanasius in the life of St. Antony. His life transfigures, in a sense, the possibility of the mind living into the perfection of the Word where one's life is ordered properly. However, this ordering also becomes impressed into the lives of those who gaze upon the life of one who has been so conformed so as to be drawn, themselves, into this possibility of transformation.

Cyril maintains a certain tension concerning Christ's unity, being sure to avoid the implication of Apollinarus.²⁸ First, his conception of human nature displays a fundamental dissimilarity from Apollinarus. He writes concerning humanity

for a human being is truly one compounded of dissimilar elements, by which I mean soul and body. But it is necessary to note here that we say that the body united to the Word is endowed with a rational soul. And it will also be useful to add the following: the flesh, by principle of its own nature of the Word is essentially different from the flesh. Yet even though the elements just named are conceived of as different and separated into a dissimilarity of natures, Christ is nevertheless conceived of as one from both, the divinity and humanity having come together in a true union.²⁹

Cyril's assertion regarding human nature describes a compound or hybrid creature whose wholeness is constituted through the union of its parts. To suggest a mixture which requires the replacement or emptying of one aspect distorts the identity or the unity of the person. The importance here is crucial for Cyril. In his commentary on John he suggests that an interpretation of John 1:14, "and the word became flesh," suggests flesh to mean humanity or a human being. The assertion that the Word became a human being with a rational soul is an important distinction that implicitly addresses the Apollinarian tendency but also suggests the fundamental assumption that would lay at the heart of Cyril's eventual opposition to Nestorius. What is problematic with Apollinarus' conception of mixture is that it reduces humanity to flesh in order to assert the unity of Christ's person as divine soul or intellect with his human flesh. This resistance to contamination of the divine served to both limit divinity and human possibility. Cyril's assertion of the paradox sought to articulate the incarnation and human possibility as more than mere chemistry.³⁰

²⁸ This is not explicitly stated in the text, but the implication of mixture was a common accusation of the Alexandrians (see Frances Young, *Making of the Creeds*). Frances M. Young, *The Making of the Creeds* (Philadelphia: SCM Press; Trinity Press International, 1991).

²⁹ Cyril, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 142.

³⁰ Young, *The Making of the Creeds*, 79.

Cyril's resistance to Apollinarus helps us then to also frame his resistance to Nestorius. On one side there is an assertion of mixture that is problematic rendering of the body as bifurcated from its soul and intellect thus rendering redemptive transformation as solely within one's flesh and thus renders the intellect or soul unaffected. On the other side Cyril recognizes the difficulty of a language of conjunction that on its face articulates a certain unity, but when pressed suggests a fundamental division as seen most explicitly in the contestation over Mary as *theotokos*. Cyril's conception of Christ' as two in one hypostasis thus serves to press against two assertions of bodily or creaturely possibility or limitation.

The threat of Nestorius is the possibility of human nature being rendered static and implies an embodied existence that cannot escape its creatureliness even in divinity's assumption of it. Mary cannot be the "Mother of God." Human persons are fundamentally limited even in the midst of the incarnation's redemptive work. This deep bifurcation is one that we can see not explicitly in terms of purity and impurity within these conversations but a similar pattern can be seen as a language or distinction between creativity and creatureliness. The emphatic defense of Theotokos is the attempt to preserve the mystery and the tension such a word claims. Theotokos engenders a certain paradox of creativity and creatureliness abiding within the same moment or person. It is this paradox that Nestorius resisted so vigorously in hopes of preserving a certain perception of divinity that he deemed necessary to save us. In doing so he utterly limited the transformative possibilities implicit in the incarnate union of the Word and body.

Apollinarus' conception of hybridity was one that resisted radical notions of change or transformation on the part of the Godhead, but his notion of mixture ("O new creation

and divine mixture! God and flesh completed one and the same nature!”³¹) redacted aspects of each to constitute the whole. This redaction of humanity and divinity served to reify or harden bodily possibilities and thus the mixture he imagines is not for the transformation of human nature or a human person, but for a certain purification of human action. In this way he fundamentally resists the hope of the incarnation, the redemption of humanity’s redemption being grounded in its being taken up by God in its fullness. While Nestorius seeks to articulate this unity in a slightly different way there is similarly a certain hardening of human possibilities.

The tenuous and mysterious unity Cyril articulates is a certain neither/nor that is eventually exhibited in Chalcedon’s language but which must also be understood in relation to his conception of the incarnation and transformation of the human person. In his commentary on John 1 Cyril observes that such a life enters the world for humanity, so that we might “ascend to a dignity that transcends our nature on account of Christ, but we shall not also be sons of God ourselves in exactly the same way as he is, only in relation to him through graces by imitation.”³² The possibility of human participation in Christ is grounded upon a fundamental transformation of our lives beyond what is natural to us. Though humanity is still essentially different from Christ in terms of our origin the very notion of redemption, for Cyril, is bound to an entrance into a life, or a nature that is neither us, but which we participate in and thus is fundamental to who we are.

Christ joins to humanity in such a way as to refuse a human identity without him. In his own person he is the paradoxical neither/nor – *but* wherein his humanity is now bound

³¹ Apollinaris, Para. 10, 108.

³² Cyril, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 91.c, 101.

to his divinity. Our imitation of Christ is located not to our likeness in essence, but our entrance into this neither/nor – but instantiated through his miraculous conception and birth. His life now becomes bound to us in such a way that humanity cannot be understood apart from him and the mysterious union that constitutes his life. Thus mulatto existence is born not only out of encounter, but out of the disruption of discourse that suggests we can be understood in terms apart from another, but for the Christian this discourse is construed in terms of only one other... In this regard we are not, but we are in our imitation, in our living into the space of disruption created for us and in us. This possibility of transformation is reiterated throughout Cyril's letter against Nestorius as the implications of Nestorius' error and Cyril's response are narrated through the implications regarding embodied life where Jesus "being life in virtue of being God, he rendered the body life and life-giving."³³

Such implications for the necessarily transformative nature of Christ's person are again seen in Cyril's explication of the analogy of coal and fire laying on an altar where Christ "is compared to a coal because he is conceived of as being from two things which are unlike each other and yet by a real combination are all but bound together into a unity. For when fire has entered into wood, it transforms it by some means into its own glory and power, while remaining what it was."³⁴ The incarnation is bound inherently to the possibility of transformation of human personhood so that it might take on the form of humanity that has been given through Mary's womb. Cyril's resistance to Nestorius is not one of poor logic or bad chemistry, but one of pastoral concern that binds together Christ's personhood and the personhood of the faithful who gather partake in his body and blood. This partaking draws

³³ Ibid., 174.

³⁴ Ibid., 143.

the believer into the transformation initiated in baptism and binds them to the “neither/nor – but” existence of Christ’s person.

This “neither/nor - but” existence is a “mulattic” existence is drawn in the midst of negations which continually assert what it is not but in the midst of embodying and making those boundaries apparent. This claim also bears witness to the assertion of an identity within that space that draws the boundaries into itself transforming the conceptions of in and out, high and low and thus blurring the ways in which we assert what bodies will and will not be and what they might be transformed into and what they cannot be transformed into. The Body of Christ is further a mulatto body in that it is itself a mysterious union of God and humanity. It is the fullness of each bound to one another, but without division or confusion or dilution. The mulatto body of the 19th and 20th century was repeatedly conceived of as infertile, effeminate neither / nor people who neither exhibited the physical strength or virility of their darker progeny nor the moral or intellectual of their lighter progeny. Their mixture was conceived of as dilution and impurity.

Conclusion

Christ’s existence is the mulattic assertion of utter difference inhered within one person. In Christ this inherence, this hybridity is not tragic, but rather the tragic is overcome. Its union, its identity is not the negative space between illusory assertions of purity or stability, but rather it is the utter union of the creator with the creature that confounds the notions of purity and impurity, in and out. The tragic nature of the mulatto of the 19th and 20th century lay in the impossibility of its resolution. Its life was bound to a performance of betrayal or return. These lives were continually marked by the utter discontinuity of the

violence of their conception or boundaries of death that constituted their personhood. They existed within a world and within classifications that served to perpetually resist their presence in the world.

Yet in Christ, the tragic mulatto's identity is not bound to our descriptions, but rather utterly confounds the claims of possibility and impossibility through his very birth. His conception and birth re-conceives difference, disrupting the rubrics of race and ethnicity, drawing those who can claim his name into a difference wrought through the fire of the Spirit. Jesus' birth re-inscribes the fundamental moment of creation as Adam was formed through the breath of the Spirit and fell asleep to have Eve risen from him. Humanity conceived through the inherence of dirt and Spirit and becomes bound to an identity of participation with the one who breathed upon them.

In Mary's assent the possibility of human redemption was pressed into existence through her hope and her pain. Christ, the tragic mulatto came into this world not through the violence of the master and slave in the night nor through the ill-fated love of a colored man and a white woman, but through the assent of the creature to the encounter with the Creator. The tragic in this moment is overturned not through the destruction of hybridity or the assertion of racial purity, but through the radicality of that hybrid moment through which now all assertions of purity must now be rendered. Creation through flesh and spirit, high and low renders the transformation of the low and the inexorable binding of the high to that which it created. Thus intermixture is no longer construed as tragic for it is a performance of human lives and thus transforms the meaning of purity creating true humanity through a hybridity of flesh and spirit. Thus the tragic is no longer construed in biological impossibility, but rather in the idolatrous assertions of purity which deny the

possibility of transformation that lay in the incarnation which imbues all human personhood with the Spirit, thus through baptism renders all who confess mulatto.

Chapter 4

I Am the Way: Mulatto Redemption and the Politics of Identification

In every case; the mulatto always moves beyond, not by being alter but by being ultra. Indeed in a curious antidote to conquest and reduction, the mulatto subject describes a movement of reverse colonization of the Ideal that is always more and not less, always additive and forever seemingly shifting. The mulatto subject is the true plus ultra of the Atlantic world.¹

Introduction

In the space of Jesus' body, God with us, humanity is performed out of the assertions concerning itself and is welcomed into Jesus' own life. To say Jesus is mulatto is to make a claim concerning the possibility of our own humanity as something with a reality, an identity beyond itself. It is to speak of our lives as necessarily full only in the life of another. This mulattic re-creation is not a synthesis of ideas, a mixture of parts to mitigate two contrary poles. Rather, it is a body that renders the ideas themselves incoherent. Christ's personhood and life does not synthesize but disrupt through his radical unity with humanity. His complete identification does not submit to the "contamination" of human limitation, but submits humanity to this radical space of personhood, God with us.

This chapter will describe the politics of this identification. His life is a presence that makes apparent our refusal of his kinship. His life is a demand upon the disorientation of

¹ José F. Buscaglia-Salgado, *Undoing Empire: Race and Nation in the Mulatto Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xvii. xvii.

our lives that we have so long presumed to be oriented. To name Christ as mulatto is to not only name his person but to express his work. He became that which he created. He is the first human being, as Herbert McCabe suggests. To take this claim seriously we must examine not only the “content” of his personhood, but how this personhood itself performs humanity into God’s life. Here I will argue the shape of our humanity must reiterate the mulattic character of Christ who is our humanity.

In Christ the tragedy of identities circumscribed by a racial, national, or cultural telos becomes overturned by rendering the neither/nor no longer as the basis of exclusion, but now as the opening up into participation. Christ welcomes participants into the impossibility of their own lives with him and the neighbor. He welcomes them into life where a mother, sister, father, brother will be lost and mothers, sisters, brothers, fathers will be added. This exchange is not without pain or difficulty but nor is it without joy or belonging. To enter into the life of Christ is to depart and to enter... to follow is to enter into Christ’s alienation and rise with his acceptance. Christ’s mulattic work is the creation a mulattic community, a new people who are born and live in the Holy Spirit.

Christ is mulatto. He is the mysterious union of God and humanity born of the Spirit and Mary. As Irenaeus reminds us, “why would Christ have come down into her if he was to receive nothing from her?”² To fail to account for this “mixture” within Christ’s own body is to obscure the disruption and promise of his life. To resist Christ as mulatto is to resist the

² Irenaeus of Lyon, "Against Heresies," in *Irenaeus of Lyons*, ed. Robert McQueen Grant, Early Church Fathers (New York: Routledge, 1997), Book III 22.2, 139.

possibility of our own transformation and the politics of that personhood.³ Christ enters into our lives to perform or articulate us into new creatures and a new way of being in the world. This speech, this Word of prayer articulates humanity into a new thing, resisting and disrupting the formations of identity that sought to establish personhood within the confines of race, nation, and culture. Christ's identity as mulatto becomes essential at this point not for his identity but for ours. To confess identity as mulatto is to begin to discern the reality of racial and ethnic formation constitutive our lives together and of our lives as disciples of Christ. Confessing Christ as mulatto is to faithfully confess our location in a world re-made by racial logic.

This chapter will examine the claim Jesus is mulatto now through an examination of the politics of this performance. That is, bound to a certain articulation of Christ's body as "mixture" is an explicit claim concerning the bodies re-created in that enfleshment. These re-born lives display a negotiation of life that Christ's presence inaugurates. I will examine this politics of identification first through a consideration of the relationship between Christ's person and work, or what Hans Urs Von Balthasar considers the relationship between Jesus' identity and mission. This mission creates a "new rhythm" or a pneumatic existence into which humanity must perform into. But before we consider this anthropological re-creation and corresponding politics I will attend more closely to the shape this enactment of humanity takes. More specifically, I will outline how the claim regarding Christ's mulatto

³ The theological tradition of deification has certainly sought to describe this mysterious "new creature." I am not suggesting mulatto as a theological category serves as a contemporary notion of theosis, although I am drawing strongly upon this body of work. In my view, contemporary expressions of deification have outlined the way modernity has formed bodies in ways that are analogous to, yet a distortion of this bodily iconicity and because of this it has not adequately expressed the political realities such a claim makes.

existence is an ontological claim that corresponds to a fundamentally disruptive negotiation of pneumatic personhood.

I will develop the shape of this politics in three ways. First drawing upon Barth and Balthasar I will suggest how Christ's personhood and work are bound together in such a way as to constitute a presence of disruption or a redemptive presence that re-creates humanity pneumatologically within Christ's person. The second aspect of this chapter will outline the shape or rhythm of this performance in Christ's own life displaying the rhythm of his life, its disruptions and its healing as bound to his mulattic personhood. Lastly, his performance of human life articulates humanity into a life of disruption and healing, a mulattic existence of neither/nor, both/and that must correspond itself to the rhythm of Christ's life as it bends itself to the life of its neighbor.

Christ's work takes upon our unlikeness (Barth) so that we may take on Christ's likeness. This radical unity or identification draws us into the life of one who is and is not us, who is us, but is more than us so that we may become more than ourselves. This transformation is one not only of an inner spiritual union but is a transformation of our whole persons such that our lives now call and respond, depart and enter within the rhythm of Christ's life. Our lives become mulattic disruptions of flesh and Spirit, our very wills must now struggle with the presence of Another will within. This correspondence engenders a shift for the claim to be "in Christ" is an identity now inherent to us a renders our lives presences of disruption amidst illusions of certainty.

As we saw in Part I, the reality of transgressive bodies performed or negotiated humanity in such a way as to render claims to race and nation incoherent. Christ's life exhibits a disruption bound not to his assertions but to his person. Through these

enactments Christ both refuses notion of personhood as assertion, but also performs humanity's own life through the Spirit. While the bodies rendered mulatto in the 19th and 20th century would ultimately be bound to a tragic impossibility of their own performances Christ's presence explodes the assertions from within culminating to his own resurrection in the tomb so that even death itself could not be understood apart from life. In this way Christ's mulattic existence does not succumb to an ideal purity, but rather "purifies" all through a holy contamination.

This overturning remodulates the tragic as no longer an oppressive impossibility that renders persons external to it non-beings. Rather in Christ's own body Christ creates a space of perpetual interpenetration, an ecclesial womb through which humanity becomes intermingled with the Spirit, becoming new creatures. This life is not without tragedy for this new birth is the re-ordering of lives, the loss of mother and father, but it is no so unto loneliness or exclusion. It is to be sutured into the community of God. God is with us so that we may be with God.

God With Us- The Presence of Redemptive Disruption, Disruptive Redemption

Theological reflection has resisted articulating the divinity and humanity of Christ in terms of mixture or hybridity for obvious reasons, some of which I have sought to reconsider in Chapter 3. But as I have sought to show thus far the exclusion of a certain construct of hybridity limits a consideration of Christ's work upon and in humanity. Theological reflection must struggle to articulate not only Christ's hybridity or duality but the significance of his personhood reflected in Scripture and the lives of those who would follow him.

Perhaps the most prominent among 20th century Protestant theologians, Karl Barth does not consider Christ in terms of mixture or hybridity, but given a structure of hybridity as neither/nor I believe Barth's work can be read as articulating the mystery of Christ's person in such a way as to point to Christ's fundamentally mulattic character. For Barth

Jesus of the New Testament is supremely true man in the very fact that He does not conform to the later definition, and far from existing as the union of two parts or two 'substances,' He is one whole man, embodied soul and besouled body: the one in the other and never merely beside it; the one never without the other but only with it, and in it present, active and significant...⁴

The implication of this radical personhood can be understood as an intermixture or transgression (for lack of a better word) in Christ's taking on humanity's "no" where "our unholy human existence assumed and adopted by the Word of God is hallowed and therefore a sinless human existence; in our unholy human existence the eternal Word draws near to us. In the hallowing of our unholy human existence He draws supremely and helpfully near to us."⁵ Barth marks the fundamental character of Jesus' healing within Christ's presence of holiness in the midst of our unholiness. As such he renders notions of purity as assertion or attainment not only meaningless, but more precisely unfaithfulness (or as Barth might suggest, "unbelief"). In this way it is Jesus presence in the world that heals. The healing presence, the salvific personhood for Barth is summarized in the refrain concerning Christ, "God with Us."⁶ Contained within this name is the substance and trajectory of Christ's personhood. The claim concerning who Christ is is to always point to what he has done (and is doing). Thus the refrain God with Us also contains the claim We with God.⁷

⁴ Barth, III.2, 327.

⁵ Ibid., I.2, 156.

⁶ Ibid., IV.1, 12.

⁷ Ibid., IV.1, 14.

Christ's personhood is an enactment of those contained within him so that "Although our believing, loving, and hoping themselves and as such are in us, they are not of us, but of their object, basis and content, of God who in that one man not only answers for us with Him but answers for Himself with us, who gives it to us in freedom that we may believe, love and hope"⁸ This rhythm of faith, hope and love that is Christ and the shape of his life opens up a particular shape of Christian life, a pneumatic life.

Christ *as* faith, hope, and love creates faith, hope, and love. His personhood is his work insofar as his work creates our personhood. The power of this presence thus *speaks* humanity into a new mode of being in the world where, as Barth suggests "to be man is to be with God."⁹ This presence of identification is one that is not only bound to Christ's conception but penetrates the unfolding of Christ's life for just as Jesus' birth "births" us so too Jesus' living, speaking, mourning, lives and speaks humanity back into Jesus' own conception and life. As Irenaeus reminds us, "for what has been tied cannot be loosed unless one reverses the ties of the know so that the first ties are undone by the second, and the second free the first."¹⁰ In this way Christ's identification with us is not only classificatory, but performative. Identity or personhood as a process is an identifying with (or from) a

⁸ Ibid., IV.1, 15.

⁹ Ibid., III.2, 133.

¹⁰ Lyon, Book III, 22.4, 140.

particular people so as to declare or “suture”¹¹ one’s personhood in relationship to others.¹²

Similarly, through an explication of Christ’s mission a fundamental connection between the claim concerning Christ’s person and his work is suggested by Balthasar. But Balthasar represents an important clarification of Barth regarding the aim of this identity and mission as the instantiation of a “new rhythm” or “pneumatic personhood.” Balthasar suggests, “the question of his work implies the question of his person: Who *must* he be, to behave and act in this way? [...this leads from] Christ’s overt *function* to his covert *being*.”¹³ The fundamental aspect of this work or function in Balthasar’s view is the in breaking or unveiling a “new reality” wherein Christ reorders the problematically performed tension

¹¹ See Stuart Hall “Who Needs Identity?”

¹² Here I am drawing again on Stuart Hall’s important synthesis of critical theory that shows how identities are, in fact, the sum of discourse or processes of naming and differentiation that are both explicit and implicit. Hall’s description of the process of articulating identity serves to highlight two important observations regarding the creative power of discourse and its corresponding reception in the formation of identity within realities of difference and power. Such theoretical tools can (and perhaps already are) observable within theology’s claims concerning the person and work of Christ as I am conceiving them here. First, the creative power of discourse is the use of words and description to *create* peoples. The creation of *mulatto* people was an example of this examined in Part I. These descriptions served to referentially maintain whiteness through a classificatory system of descent. Through the erection of social and legal codes these bodies were continuously created by the refusals that constituted their bodies. Yet these discursive spaces were also inhabited, lived into by so-called mixed bodies in an attempt to correspond to the world of whiteness. Thus speech both created bodies and bodies sought to perform into or articulate themselves within these discursive spaces. The claims concerning Christ’s person and work can be understood powerfully within this interplay of Word and reception. Here Christ *is* the Word. His enfleshment is the creative speech that first spoke humanity into existence and in so doing uttered not only humanity’s difference, but also their similarity. In Christ, this speech itself becomes enfleshed, present in the world and as it does so the very discursive space of Christ’s body serves to describe the limits and possibilities of human bodies. But what is crucial to see here is the way in which such a difference is not maintained in this speech, but is rather transgressed. The speech takes the Other into himself so as to eradicate the difference. Yet in this radical unity, this mulattic personhood Christ also becomes humanity’s response. He becomes humanity’s reception of this Word and corresponds humanity into this Word of promise spoken to it. In this way his reception is the *articulation* of humanity, his life is the spoken, lived response of this call. His articulation of humanity is the performance of humanity, the re-creation of humanity that humanity must now itself live into. Performance then refers to the mode of human enactment that takes place through the *identification* of the Word to humanity. The incarnation is an identification that takes humanity’s difference and its self-induced exclusion into God’s own very life so that identities are now articulated through a radical unity that eradicates the “dividing wall of hostility” and incorporates humanity into God’s own life as God’s incorporation into us incorporates us into the loves of one another.

¹³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, 5 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), III, 149.

between finite and infinite freedom and humanity's efforts to resist this tension. Here humanity, particularly pre-Christian, live out these tension tensions in problematic ways on a number of fronts such as between man and woman, body and spirit, and the individual and community.

The work of Christ, in Balthasar's view, opens up a new reality of the Christian life predicated upon the in-breaking of the Word into human existence and life and radically transforming the nature of human life and human possibilities. The new rhythm is understood to be the calling of the individual by name, the choosing and sending, or the giving of a new name. In each of these ways the individual becomes a person recognizing their own createdness and finding their origin in God. However this is only possible through the person of Christ. That is, through the person of Christ, whose mission was to take the form of humanity and transform it, he transformed all human possibilities.

While Barth suggests the essential connection between the incarnation, the person of Christ, and reconciliation, Balthasar suggests this connection more explicitly as the transformation of persons and lives.¹⁴ For him, the person of Christ illumines human possibility. This is not to say that absolute likeness is possible for individuals, but rather that Christ's personhood ushers in a new possibility for created personhood, namely a pneumatic existence in which the Body of Christ participates in the life of God. Balthasar reminds us that "this purely human subject cannot surmise and seize his mission, or God's will for him,

¹⁴ This is not to suggest this transformation is not present in Barth, but in my view is continually suppressed beneath the utter power and totality of God's Word. This Word and this reconciliation is certainly transformative, but one must work a bit harder to discern the nature of the transformed life in Barth. Balthasar's conception of this unity of person and work I take to be deeply indebted and congruous with Barth and thus the implied transformation, but I understand Balthasar's clarity of this transformation and the clear connection of this transformed life to a life in the Spirit to be crucial here.

or the idea God has of him through his own autonomous power; man must open up to something that is infused into him from above, something that is laid upon him as a task."¹⁵

The relationship between the person and mission of Christ and human personhood are not to be confused as identical possibilities. Rather, Christ's person and mission breaks open the frontier of possibility for individuals and through the Holy Spirit make participation possible, although only participation in the sense that what was created can commune with its Creator in the fullest way it was created to do so.

Christ's person and mission reflect not only a radical self-giving, but also a radical receptivity to the Father's will. Thus the personhood that is opened up expresses a perichoretic nature wherein each person is radically receiving and giving to the other. To confess Christ as mulatto is to confess Jesus' mission and personhood as bound to another. He is the one who is not us, but in us in such a way as to re-create us in him (though we are not him). His mission adheres humanity to himself in such a way that our lives can only be uttered within his own life. To suggest Christ is mulatto is on the one hand to make a claim concerning Christ's own "hybridity." On the other hand this claim also implies the inhering of Christ to humanity. Balthasar's language of mission and personhood help us to articulate a fundamental relationship between Christ's personhood and the re-creation of human love and life. Through such a mulattic framework this personhood and mission can be seen in the mutual adherence and transgression of humanity and divinity, divinity and humanity. This reciprocity marks human lives that participate in Christ's person and work as mulatto, as participating in the life of the mulatto Christ.

¹⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, III, 510.

In the person of Christ the human possibility of participation in the Triune life is expressed through a radical receptivity and self-giving (to God and to the community) of the individual in response to the unique call of God through the unique person of Christ. The mission of Christ was not merely to make a way for creation to know God and recognize God, but to share in God's life, to re-create humanity as a "holy mixture." As such to become a "person" in this sense is to accept Christ's call, when "finite conscious subjects identify themselves with the qualitatively unique mission that has been designed for them and that lies within the mission of Christ."¹⁶ This mission derives from the eternal love of the Father for the creature.

The nature of this love and mission and humanity's response is captured in Balthasar's description of love where "the eternal priority of the divine word conceals itself in a weakness that accords priority to the one loved. God's love for his children awakens love in them, so that his love itself can become a child, be born of its mother and awakened to incarnate love." He continues, "The word of God calls for man's answer by becoming an answering love which leaves the initiative to the world. The circle is complete and eternal: conceived and realized by God who is always above the world and for that reason remains at its center."¹⁷ Through God's love the individual is awakened not only to God's call to them individually, but also inherent in that call is a mission to "love as I have loved you." (get reference) To love and be loved is to enter into a communion with God.

The reciprocity of love described by Balthasar constitutes the bounds or basis of this new reality or new rhythm of human life constituted in and by Christ's life. It is through his

¹⁶ Ibid., III, 509.

¹⁷ Balthasar. *Love Alone*. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969). 117.

presence and his life that humanity is loved and through whom this love is offered back to God. Christ's conception and presence ushers humanity into a life of the Spirit, a pneumatic existence which is bound through its continual reception with and correspondence to a life of the Spirit (we will explore this more in Part III). At this point it must be clear that this rhythm is bound to Christ's very body as itself is conceived in this rhythm of call and response and its mode of life itself performs humanity in its identification, in the Word enfleshed.

This communion does not constitute a purely intellectual or posture of rationality, nor a set of practices that are properly ordered. It may begin through these practices or in the midst of deep contemplation, but this does not constitute the fullness of the call or the shape of discipleship. To love and be loved is to be encountered by the eternal one. It is to be transgressed and in this union be reborn. Through this encounter the child can no longer be accounted for as within or without, but neither/nor for they are in Christ, but they are not Christ. Their lives are measured by a presence within the very life of God but it is also marked by the continual attenuation of this life to the one into whom and out of whom they are born.

Christ's person not only breaks open the possibility of participation with God, but also displays the shape of this participation. Through love the "theological" person participates in the life of God and in this way the individual and community become radically joined in mutual service to each other. In Christ the one incorporates the many. The lives of the many are now measured in their relationship to the one through their mutual incorporation into Christ's own life. Christ's work serves to break open identities that were once enclosed, but now are marked by a rhythm of redemption that reiterates an

identity of love and pro-creation through the transgression of incorporation. To participate in Christ's life is to welcome the many and the transformation of practices, lives, and culture that such mutual incorporation requires. The mulattic life then is one that welcomes lives into a pattern of transformation and unfolding. In Christ the neither/nor opens up to a both/and where hybridity is not only the negation of personhood but the radical incorporation of distinctions which create something new, something beyond. Buscaglia-Salgado's description of mulatto life that opened this chapter is worth reiterating here.

In every case; the mulatto always moves beyond, not by being alter but by being ultra. Indeed in a curious antidote to conquest and reduction, the mulatto subject describes a movement of reverse colonization of the Ideal that is always more and not less, always additive and forever seemingly shifting. The mulatto subject is the true plus ultra of the Atlantic world.¹⁸

The mulatto life, while rendered visible through the negation of possibilities in fact inhabits all possibilities within its own performance of life. Christ's performance of mulattic existence overturns the tragic negation of personhood and the illusions of certain identities so as to incorporate all peoples into himself and through this identification expands the possibilities of identity of those who live into him. Christ's personhood as mulatto is bound to his

¹⁸ Buscaglia-Salgado, xvii. Buscaglia-Salgado's observation regarding the nature of mulatto existence in the nascent life of Spanish colonial life and what would eventually become Caribbean identity contains an important point of difference with the development of mulatto identity in the United States. The Caribbean (and some might suggest Latino) cultures which arise from these mixtures would eventually find themselves independent of the physical presence of such colonial markers as Western colonizers eventually returned to their "homeland." The consequence was the negotiation or development of identities that existed in the shadows of their fathers, but without their explicit presence. This is an important difference for while these cultures are still marked by a profound "calculus of color" (see interview with Stuart Hall for one example) they nonetheless developed a certain amalgamation of cultural forms that would soon constitute their own particularities (Jamaican, Bermudian, Trinidadian, etc.) These particularities could still be understood as seeking to perform out of a certain problematic relationship with the West, yet also represent a fruit of this encounter that is *more than* what the parts that gave birth to it. That is, there is a real sense in which to not understand the colonial and colonized figures and nations of these nation's birth is to misapprehend the personhood that constitutes them. They are *more than*. This mulattic structure articulated as birth becomes radicalized, in my view, in the birth of Christ and the performance of his life as he gathers up the articulations of his people and those whom he encounters and performs them into himself re-articulating our own lives and hopes, himself becoming something new so that we might become something new.

mission incorporating all into himself, articulating their lives in his own, performing these lives into the very life of God through the Spirit and bearing new creatures in his womb.

Christ's Person as Pneumatic Performance

Christ's conception and life opens up the possibility of humanity's own conception and life. The interconnection between Christ's person and work make it difficult to speak clearly of one without the other. In this section we will attend more carefully to the particular shape of Christ's performance of humanity. That is, if it is not only Christ's person that redeems, but his life that performs us into redemption the shape and rhythm of his life disclose a mode of being in the world that is bound to the kind of people we become. Christ's mulattic life is bound to the creation of mulattic people. These people are not only those born of flesh and Spirit, but people whose lives constituted as such bear witness to this identity in the world through a particular politics, through a particular way of inhabiting the world, disrupting the claims of its citizens and ultimately overcoming the tragic articulations of human longing racially and nationally construed through a peculiar death and re-birth of familial hope and life. To begin to see the shape of our own lives we must therefore attend to the conception and arc of Christ the tragic mulatto.

The claim that Christ is Mulatto serves to express how Christ's identity is the person and the work occupying a space and performing themselves and others into racialized articulations. Christ's mulattic personhood occupies a space that performs those around him into himself. The aim here is to suggest how Christ's mulattic personhood, his neither/nor – but existence (which is visible as such through the structure and performance of modern mulatto identity) creates humanity even as society's refusal of this claim seeks to subject him

to death. Mulatto existence refers to lives bound to a peculiar existence rendered neither/nor and consequently gives rise to a particular negotiation of daily realities that fundamentally iterate a deeper claim of identity.

In Matthew 1-3 there are a constellation of three claims regarding Christ through which I want to articulate the connection between the identity or person of Christ and the work of Christ. In highlighting Matthew 1-3 I am not suggesting such a constellation of claims is not present in the other gospels or epistles. My intent in highlighting Matthew is, in part due to constraints of space as this is not a survey of biblical interpretations of Jesus' birth. Primarily the centrality of the genealogy as well as the discussion of Jesus' conception make for clear markers of identity and which, in modernity, have constituted the basis of classification, exclusion, and oppression. Such markers in the United States would become the basis of anti-miscegenation legislation as well as in determining whether a person was colored or white and thus determining whether the mode of participation within American political and social structures. In this regard the way in which Jesus' personhood is established both fundamentally disrupts notions of Jewish ethnic identity and theological presuppositions regarding the possibility of creaturely existence and divine presence in the world. In this regard Matthew 1-3 provides a powerful display and prefiguring of the challenge interracial or mulatto existence poses to modern notions of race and ethnicity.

In Chapter 3 I examined the significance of the incarnation as the Word entering into the world and creating a discursive space which itself re-articulates human possibility. Mary's question "how can this be?" both confesses the reality of the human condition as limited and finite, yet also points to the impossible possibility that this transgression will inaugurate. But here I want to attend to the way in which such a scandalous birth itself

begins to both overturn the tragedy of self-assertion while such a presence also begins to iterate a different mode of being in the world.

Matthew describes not only the annunciation of the angel to Mary, but also the revelation of this promise to Joseph in a dream. Mary's scandalous revelation could only mean the transgression of her own purity either on her own part or on the part of another. Her body was one that was not one that could be joined to another. Yet in Joseph's "redemption" of Mary it is not his "redeeming" of Mary that is so interesting, but rather the way Joseph's reception of God's call joins him in a life of following his wife. Joseph's "redemption" of Mary is thus not manifest through his power or his means to protect, but now through his posture of reception. He must listen to the one "who has heard." It is Mary who has been spoken to. It is Mary who has encountered God. It is Mary who will be the "mother of God." Joseph's marriage to Mary is not one of redemption, but one of living into God. Joseph's very life, fleeing for Egypt, returning to Bethlehem, now become circumscribed within the promise spoken to his young wife. The shape of his life is now bent around and towards the words spoken and birthed in his wife. His life as a husband and as a man can no longer be articulated around notions of certainty, power, or the "salvation" of his scandalized wife. His manhood is now predicated upon his submission to a Word spoken to his wife.

But within the re-ordering of this marital relationship the "impurity" of Jesus' genealogy highlighted Matthew 1 serves to punctuate both how Jesus' mission as Messiah is not bound within articulations of national purity, but rather arise out of the contamination faithfulness engenders. Through the faith of one outside, the purity of Israel's faithfulness

was maintained. As one “having heard” Ruth would bind herself to Naomi, her people and her God and thus come to participate in the redemption of the very world.¹⁹

The intermingling of flesh and Spirit intimated in the Mary’s encounter with God, as the Holy Spirit would come upon her. (Luke 1:35) Matthew 1-3 provides an important progression of events that highlight the way in which the previous claims concerning Jesus’ genealogy and conception, typically essential markers of identity which are thereby employed in the process of identification, become explicitly bound to what would come to be understood as the nature of Jesus’ work as one descended from Abraham and David, as one who “would save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21), and then seen in the initiation of Jesus’ ministry and his baptism by John.

John’s confession concerning the one who would follow him was that he would be the one who “will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” (Matthew 3:11) Upon Jesus’ own baptism “heavens were opened and [Jesus] saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16-17) The initiation of Jesus’ work was thus marked by two important realities that are bound to the reconfiguration of personhood found in his body.

First, Jesus’ identity is not one that is asserted or declared by him. Rather, his identity is given to him, first through the reception of the name his parents were to give him and his assent to being formed not only in the whom, but also to being reared and named by his

¹⁹ Interestingly, the fact that Ruth is included in the Davidic line that constitutes Joseph’s lineage also serves to both disrupt notions of identity that are biologically constituted, but nonetheless become present in the constellation of relationships that mark Jesus’ life. He is not “of” Joseph, and yet Joseph’s listening to Mary binds him to the promise and the fulfillment of the promise as now coming forth through him and his faithfulness.

parents.²⁰ Here personhood is not asserted or constructed, but rather received. Such a reception would be later highlighted in Jesus' characterization of himself as being sent. The humanity Christ performs or enters into is not the triumph of the self-made man, but rather it is a humanity that is continually seeking to be conformed into the will of God, being impressed upon with a name and the hope attached to that name.

Secondly, Jesus' ministry would be imbued with the Holy Spirit. Such a continual presence of the Spirit in Jesus' conception, initiation and ministry can simply not be ignored. Yet, what is important to note here is the way in which the Spirit is essential not as a tool to be wielded by Christ, but rather as that through which Christ's very presence enters the world as well as that which participates in Christ's work and ministry. In this regard the work of Christ is bound to the work of the Spirit and is at the same time preparing for the coming of the Spirit. The person of Christ then is intimately bound to a claim concerning the movement of the Spirit and the Spirit is bound to the claims regarding Christ's work. Throughout his ministry of healing and preaching his words and his actions form the basis of his personhood as conceived in Mary through the Holy Spirit. This claim regarding his identity, his personhood then must continually serve as the hermeneutic through which his life and actions are interpreted. In this way Christ's work and person are seen not as two aspects or two separate modes of inquiry, but are bound together for Christ's presence is his work and his works are his person. Each claim is continually pointing to the other claim

²⁰ Willie James Jennings. *The Black Church and Christian Identity*. Duke Divinity School. Spring 2003.

where a description of his person points one to his works and a reflection upon his works points back to his person.²¹

In Christ the reciprocity between person and work, Spirit and flesh are not moments of self-creation and thus trapped within the tragedy of an illusory horizon. Christ's work is an invitation. It is an outpouring that re-creates as if it offers. Christ's identity is *pro me*.²² This reciprocity is necessarily pneumatological wherein Christ's person is born through the Spirit and his ministry is the process of incorporating creation into the life of God through the Spirit. Thus Christ's presence is a participatory presence that must be pneumatologically interpreted. We see the ontological claims concerning Jesus as mulatto not as incidental to his ministry of atonement and redemption, but as central to the promise of redemption, his work. The work of Christ flows out of the claim of Jesus identity as a mulattic identity that disrupts the idolatry of creatures and the self-assertions built upon such claims. From this constellation of markers concerning Jesus' identity we will be able to examine the ways in which salvation is construed not only through his work, but through the particularity of his person as mulatto or "inter." Such a claim then points not only to the means by which redemption enters into the world, but also the means by which humanity participates or receives Christ's redemptive work. His preaching and his ministry now exhibit this disruptive character unveiling the nature of human redemption as the incorporation into Christ's

²¹ The relationship between personhood and works or practices, in some regards, is not isolated to a Christological inquiry. As we saw in Chapter 2 mulatto lives echo between these claims of personhood made upon them and asserted by them. These assertions are articulated by practices or performances of identity that serve to either deny or confirm the identities they desire or are resisting. The lives of Rena, John, the Ex-Colored Man, Claire, and Irene are identities articulated through practices or works of race. Each decision, departure or return, cadence, or adaptation serves to resist the disorientation of his or her bodies and lives. Their works or practices of life are a work of "redemption," of "reconciliation" of their "true" selves to the world's discourse concerning them. These lives, despite their resistance, cannot escape the tragic because the horizon of this self-creation is itself illusory and impossible.

²² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, trans., Eberhard Bethge (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

transgressive body thus themselves transgressing racial and ethnic stipulations to enter into and be conformed into the will of the Father.

The transformation from individual to a theological person or one living a pneumatic existence is the ground of Christ's encompassing person. The identity of Christ as one born of Spirit and flesh is the work of Christ whose identity opens up humanity's identity as theological persons. This work of transformation becomes clearly evident in the gospel narratives immediately following Jesus' baptism by John in Matthew 5 with the Sermon on the Mount. Through these teachings we are given the way in which Jesus' person not only exemplifies and opens up human birth and participation, but also the way in which such births open onto a way of life that disrupts notions of personhood that have become bound within self-assertion. Jesus' preaching exemplifies the disruption or transgressive nature of his person while his subsequent ministry demonstrates how this disruption reverberates the transgression of Word and body while also opening up the means by which humanity might be incorporated into his person and into God's own life.

The Sermon on the Mount's apparent dichotomies (the poor will inherit the kingdom, those who mourn will be comforted, the meek shall inherit) point to the first important aspect of Jesus' ministry and person. The kingdom of God is that in which notions of power and entitlement become inverted through a certain conflation of high and low. Thus poverty and inheritance, weakness and power become bound to one another in Christ's person and through him those who dwell in the "lower" are bound to the "higher." Such a binding of higher to lower is not a transformative reality where low and high are blended so as to create a redemptive middle. Rather Jesus becomes the space in which high and low are present and presently bound to one another. This confession of God's presence

on both sides²³ in Christ is not a discourse that requires the rendering of one to make another intelligible. Both are present and in this moment Christ's peculiar presence draws humanity itself into this disruptive mode of being in the world.

As Chapter 1 noted the assertion of purity is the actual illusion and thus what the Sermon on the Mount begins to unveil is on the one hand the way in which the high and the low are intrinsically bound together. Such a binding is not merely a social description, but rather is made intelligible in Christ's own body. The position of the poor in the kingdom, the comforting of those who mourn, the inheritance of the meek are not only modes of life, but are also descriptions of Christ's own person, his action of taking as divine and eternal Word, fully taking on the reality of human striving and yearning. In this regard the message indicates the mode of participation, but also the means by which such participation is possible, Christ's own body as a transgression of those possibilities which seemed foreign to one another.

This transgression unveils a second important aspect concerning these promises. Not only are the high and the low bound to one another, now their relationship is fundamentally inverted. As echoed in the Christ hymn of Phillipians "He did not, but emptied himself taking on the ..." Christ's preaching is here a confession of his own person, as well as the prophetic declaration of how such relationship of power, high and low, with and without become fused. These "poles," continually deployed in order to include and exclude determine the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion were now being disrupted, utterly distorting and confusing the way these dichotomies could be inflected. In Christ's person the

²³ Karl Barth expresses this idea of Jesus as the Judge and the Judged...

high and the low flowed together in a fundamental unity so as to make it impossible to distinguish whether the high or the low was primary in a particular moment.

This confusion is exhibited clearly in the early church's continual attempts to name which aspect of Christ was active during various moments of weakness or strength. When he performed miracles it was his divinity and when he mourned we saw his flesh they would speculate.²⁴ Yet in the Sermon on the Mount the declarations regarding the high and the low, the dispossessed and those who would inherit the promise were now utterly confused. The confusion and reorientation of identity becomes more explicit as Jesus explicated the law setting forth the means by which Israel might participate with their God. In so doing he did not abolish the law but intensified its possibilities. These intensifications display how Christ's presence in the world becomes modulated through a different inhabitation of the law. This mode of life reveals the distortion of the law which had turned faithfulness into a performance of religious assertion rather than faithful reception.

Four such clarifications or intensifications can be found in Matthew 5 and 6 whose couplet structure can be read as forming a baseline or rhythm of this pneumatic existence that disrupts and opens up the follower into the life of the other:

- v. 21-22: you shall not kill... but I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.
- v. 27-28: you have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
- v. 38-39: You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also...
- v. 43-45a: You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

²⁴ See Chapter 3.

These four intensifications are then followed by an injunction against public piety (6:1), the ostentatious prayer of hypocrites in public (6:5) and the accumulation of treasures and desire for status and wealth (6:19). Read with these injunctions Jesus' words indicate not only a conflation of the high and low, but also an exposition of how religious identity can become the grounds for assertion wherein identity and personhood is asserted through one's accomplishment and religious performance. Such performance highlights not one's createdness that is always implicit in the confession of one's descent from Abraham, but rather outlines one's own justification.

The structure of these intensifications bears witness to the fundamental aspect of the law that requires one to be subject to and reflect the glory of God. These intensifications or reversals do not constitute an abolition of the law, but rather must be understood confessionally as the institution of the law that is now Christ's person. Insofar as Christ inhabits these intensifications his presence also uncovers the distortion of the law that thwarted the fulfillment of Israel's presence in the world as God's elect.

In Christ the possibility of the law is now seen more clearly not in the public piety of strict observance, but in the deepest recesses of one's being bound to and seeking the Father. Here Christ points to the law not as codes for fulfillment, but means of participation.²⁵ Insofar as these laws indicate the possibility of participation, they necessarily require and call those who hear to a fundamentally new way of being in the world where they "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness." (Matt. 6.33) The transformation of the law is a confession of Jesus' own identity and personhood thus also calls the people of Israel

²⁵ Jay Kameron Carter. Introduction to Christian Theology. Duke Divinity School. Fall 2008.

(and ultimately the world) to the possibility of its own transformation and its own possibilities through their participation with God in Christ through the Spirit.

Such confession regarding Christ's own person and his declaration of Israel's participation with God *as* their identity however is only further intensified in Jesus' subsequent ministry pointing to the profundity of Christ's healing. In so doing the divine encounters the sick and in this proximity the ill are awakened to the possibility of new life. Christ's body and presence in the world clarifies and bears witness to the embodiment of the Sermon on the Mount in such a way as to impress itself upon Israel. Impressing himself upon all humanity, Christ incorporates into himself such utter differences that all people become reconfigured individually and corporately within Christ. His presence among Israel incorporated lepers, the blind, the poor, tax collectors and the prominent and in this incorporation each became present to one another in radically different ways. Each partook in Jesus' healing or his forgiveness or his mercy and in doing so became enveloped within his mission, his acts, and thus his very person. In their reception from him their own lives took on the very flavor of desperation and dependence which softened them to the transformation Jesus' presence calls for and makes possible

The incorporation of these disparate figures into Jesus' own life serves to disrupt the very notions of purity upon which religious self-assertion was predicated. Matthew 12:1-8 displays the threat in which Jesus' presence and teaching posed to these assertions. The question regarding whether healing (or plucking grains to eat) was permissible on the Sabbath was posed to Jesus. These objections were raised, undoubtedly, to undermine Jesus, but they betray an understanding of the law as that which can be fulfilled unto purity and that which can be wielded to determine the conditions of exclusion. The accusation seeks to

reveal Jesus' own impurity in his disobedience of the law. Yet Jesus' response again indicates the deeper significance of the law, redemption. His healing of the leper at the synagogue only serves to reiterate his confession earlier that "something greater than the temple is here" (Mt 12:6) "and that mercy not sacrifice is desired" (Mt 12:7). These moments taken together indicate Jesus person to be the healing and thus further deepen the apparent intermixture of perfection and imperfection that is Jesus' body.

Reading Christ's life and ministry through this lens of a transgressive holiness we see Christ's presence among the people on the Sabbath as fundamentally disrupting notions of work or healing on the day of rest. Rather, Christ's very body, his very presence *is* his work, his healing. He cannot *not* work on the holy day because his person is the presence of utter holiness in the midst of Israel and the nation's destitute condition. Purity now becomes reconfigured in his body. Purity here is constituted or performed through his work as purity becomes, not an assertion or a sacrifice, as that which distinguishes the one who can participate from the one who cannot, into a love, into mercy which makes one subject to another and displays a love which incorporates disparate peoples into itself.

This reconfiguration must be understood not as a new way of understanding or a new set of ethical precepts that must be enacted through love, but as calling those who hear to a fundamental transformation of life and desire. This reconfiguration is seen most explicitly in the conclusion of (chapter?) 46-50. "While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." The

transformation made possible through Jesus body and life is a transformation that culminates in the reordering of familial bonds. This transformation is not only a reordering of commitments along lines of obedience or ethical obligation, but rather a fundamental, or one might say ontological rebirth.

Through this examination of Jesus' mulattic character, his reordering of desire culminating in the questioning of the family can begin to see the reciprocal interpretation began in Hughes' "Mulatto" discussed in Chapter 1. Kinship and familial identity become disrupted upon the presence and the disruptive assertions of these mulatto children. Yet in their assertions and disruptions we see the timbre of mulattic presence in Christ resonating differently than in that of Hughes' "Mulatto." Hughes' mulatto is bound within a rhythm of assertion and denial, "you are my father... you are my brother..." while his father and kin deny "Hell no, You are not my son" "ain't no nigger our brother." The mulatto of America is engulfed within his own refusals and the refusals of the world. His mulatto presence marks him within both peoples while the structures that create these people articulate him into a space in between. To seek his father is to refuse his mother, to seek his mother is to refuse the truth of his own paternity and acquiesce to a system predicated upon his own internal division.

Hughes' mulatto is bound between these assertions and refusals revealing the continual delusion of white purity. Christ's question "who is my mother and my brother" (and presence) creates a refusal through opening up this neither/nor to those who will believe, to those who do the will of the Father (but those who do the will of my Father). Jesus' mulattic presence disrupts the delusion of purity and calls those who hear into a life of pneumatic contamination, a life sullied by the will of the Father. This contamination renders

the participant neither/nor and calls them into a space where they may now be refused... their personhood denied. In this way Jesus calls hearers into the life of the tragic mulatto, to be hated by their father and their brother. Yet, Jesus occupies or *becomes* this space so as to create a communion of neither/nor where those who are refused are refused because they have become new creatures, members of a new family. They are crushed beneath the weight of exclusion but rather incorporated into a truthful existence. This existence is marked not by the leaving of mothers and brothers, but by the adding of mothers and brothers. The mulattic life then becomes a life of multiplication. A community of those outside. Jesus' presence invites the believer into a space where their own family becomes strangers and strangers become family. Hughes' mulatto is marked by the tragic refusal of the white father and his own refusal of black life rendering him without a people, a non-being in a world of color.

In Christ this tragedy is overturned by rendering the neither/nor the basis of participation, not exclusion and he welcomes participants into the impossibility of their own lives with Christ or the neighbor. He welcomes them into life where a mother, sister, father, brother will be lost and mothers, sisters, brothers, fathers will be added. This exchange is not without pain or difficulty but nor is it without joy or belonging. To enter into the life of Christ is to depart and to enter... to follow is to enter into Christ's alienation and rise with his acceptance.

Such a radical rebirth into this new family is one wherein adoption is performed through entrance into the will of the "Father." It is here that we return to Balthasar's pneumatic life of love but can express this creative interaction more particularly through a consideration of Augustine's Trinitarian reflection upon the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as

lover, loved, and love. Interpreted through this Trinitarian lens the will of the father is the desire for or movement towards that which the Father loves. Entrance into the will of the Father becomes the rhythm or shape of this mulattic existence. Augustine's reflection upon the Trinity suggest that such movement towards or the love of the lover for the loved is not a tool of the lover, but rather the fullest expression, the hypostasis of the lover's desire for the loved. This love, Augustine suggests, is the Spirit.

The Spirit is a person insofar as it exists within the eternal relations of the one who loves and the one who is loved. Augustine suggests, "And while love is referred to the mind loving, whose love it is, nonetheless it is also love with reference to itself, so that it is also in itself, because love too is loved, not can it be loved with anything but love, that is with itself."²⁶ This Trinitarian reflection is bound to a particular form of life wherein "brotherly love... is proclaimed on the highest authority not only to be from God but also simply to be God. When we therefore love our brother out of love, we love out of God; and it is impossible that we should not love especially the love that we love our brothers with."²⁷ The connection between God as love and the love of neighbor is participatory. To love is to enter into the activity of the Trinitarian life. It is to participate, through the Spirit, in a communion "foreign" to us, yet naturalizes us in its own extension of word and love to us. This participation then not only allows us participation as strangers, but family (That they may love as I love).

The lover sees another and offers, adores, reaches out to the other while the one loved acknowledges the love adoration that is offered, reciprocates and in each moment love

²⁶ Augustine, *The Trinity* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), IX.8, 275.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, VIII.12, 254.

is offered and returned. For humanity as creatures this exchange must unfold in time. It requires an encounter with the other and a “getting to know” and an acknowledgement, etc. Each of these moments requires the completion of another moment in order to unfold. But within Augustine’s conception of the eternity of the relations this exchange simply *is*. The persons *are* in relation and the shape of this relation is eternal, without time, without progression or unfolding. Yet it is this implicit willing, desire, movement towards that, in Augustine’s work, bears the mark or the work of the Spirit.

Christ’s presence and person articulates that Trinitarian rhythm within humanity *as* humanity. To do the will of the Father is to participate, receive, and follow. The patterns of kinship revealed in Christ’s life and work instantiate this rhythm within the very structure of human life and longing. Intensifying the participatory nature of the law given to Israel, Christ birth and life ushers this participation of God with man (God with us) as the God-man. Christ’s life makes possible an entrance into this life and will through the incorporation of one’s life and body into the life and body of Christ.

We see this yearning for participation, this being drawn into a life of God that continually re-orders Augustine’s own desires in his *Confessions*.²⁸ Here we witness the rather desperate groping for reciprocation of the love that has been extended to him. Yet it is in Augustine’s willing toward God, his attempt to receive this love that we are reminded of Christ’s mark of kinship, “the one who does the will of my Father.” The impossibility of *doing* the will of the Father in a way that is complete and full is certainly impossible just as the admonishment to be Holy as He is Holy. But what could be meant by such a test of kinship?

²⁸ Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans., Maria Boulding, 1st ed., Vintage Spiritual Classics (New York: Vintage Books, 1998).

Such a test of kinship is not the completion of the requirement, but the desire for those who are loved to enter into an identity of desire and dependence. This desire and dependence is not one of juvenile romantic fantasy, but rather it is a desire grounded in the recognition, there is one without whom we are not. It is entrance into Paul's reminder to the Ephesians that there was a time when we were no people, without God in the world (get reference). Such a desire is not grounded upon a certainty regarding who we are and thus an assertion of what we ought to accumulate or venture into based on that certainty. Rather, such an identity, such a pneumatic existence is predicated upon the assertion that without the will of the Father, the presence of the Spirit which bore me into this new life, my life is illusory and is not. It is a life that hangs upon the recognition that it is in Christ's *willing* our lives that we do not slip into non-being²⁹ (Athanasius, on the incarnation, get ref).

Thus pneumatic existence is existence born in the Spirit of the Father who sent his Son to re-create human life and lives. Such lives bear the mark of the Spirit and the mark of this new creation insofar as they live into the Father's will. But this willing is the mark not of rationality or intellectual assent, but sheer apprehension (to draw upon Barth's notion of faith) of one's true position in the world. This apprehension though does not leave one unchanged with merely a new outlook on life and a new set of precepts by which to guide one's life. Entrance into the will of the Father is the entrance into a new familial structure where kinship is now reconfigured not through biological, ethnic, or genealogical ties, but is rather stitched together through a common birth and food. Through the baptismal waters the believer enters into a new world through the womb of the will. The will of God is not a distant reality here but a presence which impresses itself upon humanity, taking it up into

²⁹ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*(Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 30.

itself and as it does so healing of its wounds of resistance and unfaithfulness. Christ's life and work opens up the possibility of this existence as "neither/nor – but." It is re-creating human life welcoming humanity into the reciprocity of his own life with the Father through the Spirit.

In these moments of radical receptivity we see again Augustine's deeply Trinitarian claim particularly expressed in his prayers. It is through these prayers that we not only see humanity seeking to open itself to God, but we also see Augustine's description of God's eternity pressing into time. We find this in particular when we examine Augustine's account of time, eternity and memory in the latter chapters of *Confessions* in light of his Trinitarian conception. Here the analogy of the singer and lyrics where God is the one who does not strain to recall what has come nor is God straining to think of what will come, but rather the song rests perfectly within Him unfolding upon the object of those God sings of. Pneumatic existence abides in the perfection of song sung to us and of us. It abides in the new song, the new rhythm of humanity present among us in Christ and his re-creation of humanity.

Thus pneumatic existence is the mark of a deep transgression wherein divinity took upon it flesh and in doing so reconfigured the possibilities of human participation with God. Such a pneumatic existence us thus a mulattic existence. It is an existence of mixture and the fruit of a blessed transgression which renders the child no longer Jew, nor Greek, male nor female. (get ref.) This is the work of the Son which is the mission of the Son. The mixed breed Jesus bears children who can no longer be marked by the biological essentialism of the world for their life is now bound up to the life of the Spirit. Its very body, its very presence in the world is the conflation of what could not be with what is. Jesus' mulatto body is the creation of this new reality, this pneumatic family which continually thwarts the assertion of

religious and biological identity through a desire for the will of the Father, for an abiding in the Spirit of God, for seeking to exist in the midst of the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father.

Jesus' Performance of Humanity

Jesus' ministry bears out not only the embrace or abiding with the poor, the different, or any other group in isolation. In his presence among them, his feeding of them, his healing of them, his love and desire for them, these actions are not moments of identification wherein we might take solace or comfort in his being like us. In his presence, his healing, his desire he is continually incorporating those disparate peoples into himself transforming them and bearing from his womb a new people.³⁰ It is now in light of this consideration of Christ's life and work we must now conclude with still deeper reflection of Christ's performative person. It is a performance that leads unto death and brings death to death rendering the tragedy of our disillusioned identities no longer along lines of racial or national inclusion or exclusion but through the life of incorporation and the many sorrows

³⁰ It is at this point that this theology should be understood as markedly different than the contextual Christologies and their accompanying theologies of the last 40 years. Claims regarding the Black Christ or Jesus as liberator of the poor are on one level attempts to articulate Jesus' voice in the midst of a particular human situation and as this investigation has sought to show this is not extraneous to his person. Yet, his life is marked by a more profound entry into such disparate lives that such claims do not serve to transform identity, but to reify and harden identity while transforming societies reception of that identity. The claim regarding Christ's identity is one that both transforms the political space, the reception of identity through a reconfiguration of where God can abide, yet it also transforms those who participate in this presence by incorporating them into his own life wherein a personal transformation also takes place. Here the personal becomes bound to the communal life of Christ, the church. Such a transformation is necessarily understood within Christ's person and thus resists any attempts implicit (European theology) or explicit (contextual theologies) to assert an identity as dominant within the person of Christ that does not hold within it the transgression of identity and the patterns of life and loving that are bound to those identities.

and departures this life will inevitably mean.³¹ The mulattic character of Jesus is thus not one in which peoples of mixed heritage may take solace or confirmation of their existence for his mulattic life ushers in the transformation of all biological claims of certainty requiring them to succumb to the transgression and transformation of the Spirit. His life is ontologically marked by the “neither/nor – but” that incorporates humanity into a fundamentally “inter” life whose points are fixed by the Spirit’s presence and their identity in the birth and sustenance of the life of the church.

In some regards the preceding reflection has tended to move to a more anthropological reflection about Christ’s effect upon humanity. Yet this tendency reveals the fundamental character of Christ’s work and person as the reformation or transformation of human kind. Barth’s iteration of the Christological formula discussed previously that “Christ is very God and very Man, that the Word of God *is* reconciliation” becomes more radically interpreted here suggesting that humanity is not a reality apart from God which in its distance must be brought close to God through the mediating work of the Christ. Rather, the reconciling work is the transformation of that which is already present in God yet denies and thwarts its own participation in this life.

It is important to note here Barth’s conception of participation that centers around the themes of faith, love, and hope. Within each of these the decisiveness of a complete act is already latent within each theme. The possibility of faith, love, and hope are grounded in the reality of Christ’s person and work. Each aspect are in themselves full and complete

³¹ That Jesus reminds us that those who mourn will be comforted could be understood within this trajectory. It is both the inevitability of loss, the death of “family” as one is incorporated into a new family. This among other marks of death and loss are marks of a life in Christ that does not overcome the tragic by bypassing it, but it is entered into and comforted as those who lose, gain a life of wider possibilities, neighbors, mothers, brothers, sisters, fathers.

insofar as they arise out of Jesus' faith, hope and love or more precisely out of the reality that Jesus is faith, hope and love. But if each of these aspects of humanity is already full we return again to the question of how one can participate within such fullness and how are such themes operative within humanity's reconciliation with God?

The faith, hope, and love of Christ establish the possibility of faith hope and love in humanity's participation with God. In Christ's life and work not only are the conditions of participation broken open, extending the possibility to become what one is not, but Christ's work is a *performance* of our lives. His faith, hope, and love create, performing humanity into its possibilities. The tragedy of our mulattic and racialized life becomes finally overturned for it frees us from the burden of tragically performing ourselves into a perfection or possibility that is beyond us. It frees us to live into one another and in doing so live into Christ. It is through this performative reality of Christ's person and work that we see the finality of the tragic overturned. Our lives, our racially circumscribed lives are no longer left to be performed into or out of on our own part. We are not left to establish our own ends and the means by which we will attain them and consequently recapitulate the deathly discourse that ultimately created the mulatto body.

Christ's birth life, death and resurrection performs us and performs upon us inviting us into a performance of a life opened up into the possibility of participation with God. It is a performance that welcomes us into the freedom of hybridity, mixture and becoming dangerously new. This performance is a performance of faith, hope, and love springing out of God's own life, instantiated in Christ's birth and life, welcoming humanity into what has already been accomplished.

The person of Jesus *as* reconciliation, as faith, hope, and love impresses himself upon humanity his infinitude and freedom coming upon humanity's finitude and creatureliness and binding himself to it. This binding or inhering of the Word to flesh engenders a new reality as we have noted in Balthasar's language which opens up a reality of transformation. The life of Christian hope is the life of transformation, of becoming, of entering into holiness. Yet this becoming and hope always walks before us incorporating us into the work that has already been achieved in his body.

The transformation made possible here is one that must be understood to be inherent to the claim regarding Jesus mulatto existence. The claim concerning his person being born of Spirit and flesh is the mystery of his work which reconfigures notions of high and low, obedience and disobedience, finitude and infinitude, purity and contamination. Barth's own considerations centered upon the dilemma concerning Christ's freedom and human freedom and in his anthropological work we see the work of Christ making possible human apprehension of its own condition. Yet in this apprehension there remains an implicit transformation. This transformation is made not through our work, but in our apprehension we come to recognize ourselves as we are. Such a recognition is, in fact, a type of transformation, but one whose implications must be more deeply interrogated for the apprehension of one's true life and self must be given a deeply pneumatological reading for as we have noted earlier it is through the work of the Spirit that humanity enters into this apprehension and participates in Christ's enacting of our life and faith.

Such a transformation becomes present in the world through the transgression that is Emmanuel, God with us. The power of this proclamation is the power of the mulatto body that is both divine and human, disrupting the claims to human self-assertion and

transforming those assertions into an apprehension. Such an apprehension is an entrance into the life of faith, a willing towards the One who has been willed towards us. Thus this life of faith, this life of apprehension is a pneumatic existence. A life of Spirit and flesh that is not merely opened through an act of Christ or the arc of his life, but through his person and his enacting of our lives, our refusals and ultimately our apprehensions. Barth suggests the presence, this reality of Christ

is that God Himself in person is actively present in the flesh. God Himself in person is the Subject of a real human being and acting... And in being what we are He is God's Word. Thus as one of us, yet the one of us who is Himself God's Word in person. He represents God to us and He represents us to God. In this way He is God's revelation to us and our reconciliation with God.³²

The power of this representation thus is an enacting, a performance of human lives and response. The possibility of participation then is mediating through a certain performance. The performance of human assent impresses itself upon humanity who once denied and resisted.

This performance of life is bound to the drama of encounter between the one who is created and the one who creates, between the one who exerts power and the one who is exerted upon. Yet this encounter does not exhibit the tragic betrayal or coercion of the slave master and the bondwoman or the child that is produced in such horror. Rather, the instantiation of this mulatto presence comes through the assent of a lowly girl. This assent is not the victimization of the powerless, but the uplifting of the oppressed to be the temple, the Mother of God. In Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection the nature of his person works upon the world in such a way as to *perform* us. That is, the representation indicated by Barth could be said to still rest too much faith in the possibility of our sight, our

³² Barth, 1.2, 134.

apprehension as an intellectual possibility. Rather, Christ the mulatto child reverberates the gift and the disruption of this life through his ministry. His life and ministry are not a work of redemption, but his life is the performance of our redemption, which, in the language of Ireneaus, slowly unties the knot of our disobedience.

This new body offers participation not as an example, but rather it is itself a performance of human life and faithfulness which humanity performs back into. Thus our performance is a response of conformation that has been offered in modernity as white faces and forms of life and participation in the structures of power and oppression and where the children of these rapes are crushed in order to assert and preserve its own power. Instead Christ is given not to crush, but to live into so as to expand human possibilities distorting and interrupting the rhythms of white hope and assertion and their counterpoints. Thus in Christ's performance of human life the tragedy of self-assertion, the illusion of idolatry becomes shattered beneath the Holy Mixed one who fragments us only to make us whole and welcome us into his body as new people, whole through the Spirit and engrafted into one another through his body.

This performance culminates in the death of Christ upon the cross and the glory of his resurrection and his ascension. In his resurrection the culmination of Jesus life is marked by the same pneumatic wonder that saw his life conceived. The drama of his life is marked by this movement as redemption and performance which itself is preparing the way for "another counselor." The resurrection is the culmination of his life and ministry as well as the ushering in of that, which will incorporate humanity into his presence. This life as a pneumatic "inter" existence opens up for its followers the possibility of participation with him not through his bodily presence, but through a pneumatological presence that marked

his life and the life he welcomed his disciples into. This life is the life of the will of the Father, the seeking and conforming and loving which marked his own life not as an intellectual assent, but as a witness to the eternal unity of the son to the Father and the love that binds that which is offered to humanity, but only offered through their own rebirth, their own transformation.

But prior to this moment of sending of the Spirit we must face the cross. It is in the cross where the tragedy of mulatto existence is marked and visible for it is here where the refusal of humanity to assent to the presence of Emmanuel is met with a deadly refusal. The tragedy here would be echoed in the sacrificial moments of interracial life examined in Chapter 2 where social death (*Autobiography*) or physical death (Rena, Clare, the Mulatto of Hughes' poems and plays) marked the reality of mulatto life. Their lives are crushed between the competing assertions of purity and wholeness and the continual costs of participation. The tragedy of these lives are marked by the mourning of the mother's who lose their children to this call, who forsake all to enter into the promise of white life and rid themselves of their human stain.³³

In so many ways Christ, the tragic mulatto enters into this tragedy as well. Upon the cross he succumbs to the deathly consequence of human self-assertion. This assertion is bound to the powers who refuse to acknowledge the faith of the powerless and the assertions of the powerless who must assert themselves in order to maintain themselves. Upon the cross he takes death itself as the fruit of a distorted assertion of purity (washing his hands of guilt) and succumbs to it. In his death he triumphs over the final assertion of possibility and impossibility. He takes death as that which can no longer be overcome and

³³ Philip Roth, *The Human Stain*(Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

binds it to his own life.³⁴ Upon his death the end of life becomes bound to the one who gives life. This union of beginning and end is the culmination of this mulattic disruption. It is the final transformation of assertions and their sting into possibility and becoming.

In his resurrection from the tomb the power of the Spirit again conceives new life for in his resurrected body he performs our own pneumatic births. His resurrection transforms the stench of death and the tomb of mourning into a womb of promise and the birth of our new selves. Thus his resurrection is the performance of our new birth, our lives and their possibilities in him for he is both the object of our lives, the end of our hopes, and the womb through which we are named anew. As the Spirit raises him from the dead the reality of mulattic existence is not confined to a miracle or a promise to a young girl, but rather is extended and impressed upon all humanity ushering those who might believe, who might apprehend their lives and the calling of the father into a life transfigured, transformed and incorporated into Christ's own body. This body has a shape that is not definitive, but rather a form of life characterized by the continual willing for the Father that one is mysteriously transformed into a new person, whose family is now marked no longer by biology but by strange tongues and miracles of relationally.

³⁴ Jay Kameron Carter, *Christology*, Duke Divinity School, Spring 2008.

Part III

Immersion: Christian Discipleship; or the New Discipline of the Body

Part I examined the tragic creation and existence of mulatto bodies and lives born out of the discursive transgression of racial certainties. These bodies disrupt and reveal the performance of racial discipleship yet cannot escape their own tragic death or exile. Through this structure of mulattic existence Part II examined how the creation of modern mulatto bodies recapitulate the creation and re-creation of bodies through Israel in Jesus' own conception and birth. In Jesus' mulatto body we see the encounter of finite and infinite, flesh and Spirit. He is the "inter" existence that draws humanity into God's own life. Christ's conception is the creation of new/old bodies and lives that are themselves mulattic, transgressing the limitations and boundaries of human difference.

Part III will examine how humanity became incorporated into this hybrid life – how they are re-born mulatto. This new birth engenders a politics of presence bearing witness through an ecclesial communion that is continually unfolding and enfolding difference within its own body. It is a body bound to Christ that is continually binding itself to those who bind themselves to it marking communal and individual Christian lives as a continual confirmation through perpetual transformation. The first of these moments is baptism, through which the believer is incorporated into the life of Christ. The second moment is the life of prayer where this conformation seeks to correspond or be conjoined to the Spirit

within and in doing so they become enfolded into the life of God and into the lives of those for whom they pray. This encounter of prayer produces people whose desires become continually bound to the lives of another thus transforming their own hopes practices and patterns of life together.

Chapter 5

You Must Be Reborn: Baptism and Mulatto Re-Birth

And at that self-same moment, ye died and were born; and that Water of salvation was at once your grave and your mother.¹

Introduction

The baptismal moment is the ushering in of the radical presence of God that transforms its participants into something that they once were not. More profoundly the baptismal moment also transforms their lives into an extension of this moment. Baptism creates lives that utter the possibility that God is with us even now and we must humbly seek to conform to such a presence in our lives, hopes, and prayers for each of these become declarations of God's transformative work enacted by Christ's immersion into us. Baptism is entrance into the work of Christ's person. It is the initiation into his body *and his people*. As such, this entrance marks the renunciation of the world's claims upon the baptized as well as the renewal – or rebirth of the person. It is an entrance that requires a departure from the racial economy of the West and its children.

¹ Cyril, *St. Cyril of Jerusalem's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments: The Procathechesis and the Five Mystagogical Catecheses*, 61..4

To be baptized is to enter into Christ's mulattic personhood and an economy of negotiation that such a presence is necessarily bound to. I must stress here that the notion of mulattic personhood is more than a clever device for us to imagine a particular people as the ideal of Christian perfection or one among many ways to imagine Christian existence. Mulatto existence is a claim that encapsulates both the negotiation of identity inherent in our claim to be "in Christ" bound to and iterated within a world where race and ethnic difference is continually and tragically bound to everyone's assertion of identity and belonging. The modern world is a racial world. It is a world whose economies are driven by the processes of identification and differentiation. Even within the societies of "single races," ethnic and cultural differences continually torment their inhabitants. And within these societies Christians are not only victims but also perpetrators, killers and killed alike.

Mulattic Christianity seeks not a spiritualized account of our life in Christ, but seeks to name the embodied challenge to a life in Christ through a description of the kind of people we become. The baptismal moment does not accomplish something for us, but draws us into a drama of God's presence in this world. It is a transgressive presence, a presence that is neither/nor-but, it is a presence that is in-between continually disrupting the claims we make about ourselves. Mulattic Christianity is not to articulate some bodies into the life of Christ, but to re-articulate *all* Christian bodies as a disruptive presencing of God in the world. It is necessary because it points not only to a spiritual reality, but confesses the nature of our world struggling to account for the remnants of its colonial creation.

This chapter claims that this moment is a moment of "unnatural" transformation wherein the person immersed, dipped, or sprinkled is reborn. They are immersed into the immersion of Christ into us. Thus we are immersed into a performance of Christ's

performance of humanity. We are reborn as new people and into a new life made for us which is a true existence, a true humanity marked uniquely by the intermixture of flesh and Spirit. This intermixture is now the constitution of our persons, of a Christian's "mulattic" character. However, such a transformation does not constitute the reception of a benefit of Christ's work, but rather *is* Christ's work. More precisely it is the remaking of us into Christ's image and person. This remaking creates lives that gather the fragments of particularity, undoing the tragic nature of their confinement within claims of biological or cultural purity to become transfigured within Christ's person and work.

This transformation does not enclose the person within yet another claim of totality or racial/religious purity, but rather into a purity of God's will toward us. This will is one in which the life of faith us the ever-unfolding transformation of our selves and our neighbors into Christ's mixed likeness. That is, the life of the baptized is a life transformation and conformation. The unfolding of one's discipleship is marked fundamentally by faithful transformation which does not enclose the boundaries of a people around an illusory, vacuous space of identity. Rather identity born through the waters of baptism disrupts from within, fragmenting the particular and ecclesial identities and re-constitutes them again through Christ's own body.

This process of transformation continues as more are reborn requiring the life of faithfulness be punctuated not only by conformity to Christ's life, but the community's reconstitution around those born within it. In this way baptism not only marks the transformation of the individual within a mulattic rhythm of flesh and Spirit, faithfulness and conformity which requires their own fragmentation, denial, and renewal, but also the fragmentation, denial, and renewal of the body. The birth of the child is the rebirth of the

ecclesial community. Its patterns and culture must shift to welcome that new life into its walls. As a man and woman become a mother and a father they become bound to that person whom they welcome and nurture. To give birth is to become something new just as to be born is walk in newness. The transformative reality of baptism as the incorporation into Christ's immersion into us is both a particular and a communal act. It is the transformation of both aspects within the miracle of Christ's incarnate womb.

I should say here briefly that this conception of baptism seeks to make room for traditions of infant and believer's baptism. As I will show in the unfolding of this chapter the baptismal moment is one grounded in Christ's baptism into us and thus has its efficacy not in its own mode or timing, but rather in its instantiation through the Word's incarnate presence among us. The question is not what is the way we enter into this presence, but rather what kind of people does this practice create.

This chapter will develop this argument through four reflections upon this transformation: new –birth, new person, neither/nor existence, new people. First I will consider the child of new birth where baptism is the creation of hybrid bodies and entrance into the social configuration of Jesus' mulatto existence. Baptism is the pneumatological and biological entrance into Jesus' response or performance of human lives. Baptism is the immersion into Christ's immersion into us.

Next, I will consider how, in this baptism, children are born of an unholy union. The underside of the claim in Part II concerning the person and the work of the mulatto Christ now becomes clear in its performance or re-creation of human persons. In this way a consideration of human personhood cannot be construed through the confines of limit and unlimited, eternal and temporal (i.e. Barth) but rather the way in which Christ's immersion

into us constitutes our personhood and thus rendering personhood apart from the Spirit is to fail to fully account for the Christian life born in baptism.

The third aspect of this chapter, consequently, notes how the personhood born through baptism is marked by the neither/nor of Christ's mulatto existence. Such a life is marked by the Spirit where one can no longer know one's self apart from the Spirit and one is now marked by a continual refusal. It is a life marked by its continual living in between, in but not of. Yet this in between is not the negotiation of competing ideals, but rather the fundamental disruption of one's person, their very body and its inherence with the Spirit. Such a refusal requires the refusal of purity construed in cultural, biological, or ethnic terms. For those baptized, "You must leave your father and your mother."

Lastly, I will examine how this refusal is not marked by the tragedy of mulatto existence described in Part I for this "neither/nor" existence is marked not by its tragic exclusion from claims of purity which its body paradoxically represents, yet disrupts. Rather, the neither/nor of Christian existence born through baptism is an entrance into a new people where the coherence of such *inter* lives can only be narrated through the particularity of Jesus' mulatto body and those bound to him. *Inter* lives, which is to say, Christian lives, are an ecclesial reality, people born and bound by the Spirit to their Creator, to those who are "in Christ" and tentatively, but inextricably bound to the world.

Immersion into Christ's Immersion into Us

Christ's immersion into human life is an enacting of human life. In the language of Barth, Christ's incarnation is humanity's response.² This response is one that is not external to human bodies and lives but is rather radically uttered from within humanity. This internal utterance is not only humanity's response, its assent to its own sinfulness, and an affirmation of what it is not, but more fundamentally this utterance, Christ's presence *as* response is the very transformation of humanity itself. Athanasius described this transformation as a renewal of the portrait of humanity's *imago dei*, a re-inscribing of the lines of the image of God upon human bodies.³ (get citation) This re-drawing is now done through Christ's own body and in the incarnation the nature of this body has been filled out. This fullness of the *imago dei*, of the clay animated by Spirit is Christ, the one conceived through the Spirit and born of Mary. Christ is the transgression of the temporal and the eternal, created and uncreated. His person is the neither/nor-but that re-creates humanity and whose life, imbued and enacted with the Spirit, displays the perfection of createdness and performs its possibilities and its rhythms. Christ's presence sings the song of human life. It is through the waters of baptism that these children of flesh and spirit are born and ushered into the world.

Jesus' life, his immersion into humanity, his performance of humanity was the beginning of the baptismal moment. His life was the gestation of those in the womb and who were and will be birthed. The transformative possibility of the baptismal moment lies fundamentally within the claim we make regarding the power of Christ's incarnation. In the Middle Ages the immersive sense of incarnation in Athanasius is expressed again in the

² Barth.

³ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation : The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*(Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996).

theologian Bonaventure's Christological reflections and his subsequent theological explication of the life of Saint Francis. In *The Tree of Life* Bonaventure's description of the incarnation can be read itself is an archetype, the very structure of baptism that is the foundation of baptismal transformation. In the incarnation Christ is immersed within the waters of humanity and in this immersion the human waters become endowed with the possibility of the participation. Bonaventure's reflection on Jesus as the tree of life traces the rather normative explication of his life in the gospels yet in this discussion Bonaventure portrays his life as one of deep humility wherein humanity is thus drawn out of its own desperate condition. Not only is Christ's incarnation significant, but also his life becomes a deepening or impression of the divine upon humanity which humanity must itself receive.

This reciprocal movement exemplifies how the Bonaventure's language draws upon a communication of attributes that expresses not only in the significance of the incarnation of the Word. The incarnation, establishes the significance of the baptismal moment wherein the attributes or qualities of Jesus' life become pressed into humanity not only in the moment of the incarnation, but through a life of humility which Jesus enters into. As we examined in Chapter 5 Christ's life not only witnesses to the coming kingdom, but also performs humanity's response. His life is the enactment of all lives, to follow Christ is to participate in the drama of his life, it is to pray, to heal, to serve, to die, to be risen. Each aspect of Jesus' ministry not only served to display, but to create, to open up a way of existing in the world "in him."

This process of impression and corresponding conformation forms the structure of *The Tree of Life*. Here Jesus – whose origins are fundamentally different than humanity's – is progressively described as taking on the full aspects of human existence. The first fruits

emphasize his identity as divine – his origins as eternal and end with a description of humanity's life enveloped in Christ's fullness. The process of Christ's life is a progressive deepening of himself into humanity (and humanity into him). This process culminates upon the cross as the crucial turning point in this transference seen in Bonaventure's description of Jesus' life and suffering. Bonaventure writes,

See now, my soul
How he who is God is blessed above all things
Is totally submerged
In the waters of suffering
From the sole of the foot to the top of the head⁴

As Jesus is nailed to the cross his immersion into Christian existence is now complete, but here it is the making of baptism's power – In his submersion into the water... into humanity he sanctifies the water – humanity.

Each of the fruits of the tree of life is a description of an aspect of this submersion and is followed with a description of a sufficient human response. These responses indicate how the moments of Christ's life correlate to humanity's participation in their life. It is here that the language of fruit seems to represent this idea of transference. As one partakes – there is a subsequent effect. The incarnation is the immersion of the eternal Word into humanity and humanity's incorporation into the eternal Word.⁵ Here the baptismal imagery is fundamentally Christocentric where we see the ground of transformation as the Son's incarnation. The response to such an immersion into us is a subsequent conformation into

⁴ Bonaventure and Ewert H. Cousins, *Bonaventure*(New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 149.

⁵ However in Bonaventure this communication is seen not in universal terms as we see in Athanasius in terms of the incarnation of the word. Rather suffering is the means of this communication. The possibility of this embodiment or communication is seen most clearly for Bonaventure in the life of St. Francis who so succumbed to the fruits of Christ's work in him that he himself began to exhibit the qualities of the word of God upon his very body through the stigmata. But here the stigmata is only the intensification of a wider set of markers which were evident in the life of Francis – healing, devotion, sacrifice, wisdom, sight, etc.

Christ. Baptism is the initiation not only into a community of faith and a life of following, but it is entrance into Christ's entrance into humanity. It is the transformation of one's body and life and marked as something new. Through the Spirit baptism enfleshes the Word within the participant allowing them to be named anew upon their ascent. As Cyril of Jerusalem suggests, they rise from the water and "Being there made partakers of Christ, ye are properly called Christs."⁶ We see the possibility of the deification of the body. Rising from the waters they are now bound to another. They are the children of this union, of this performance.

The Birth of En-spirited People

In the baptism established through Christ's incarnation, or immersion into humanity children of flesh and Spirit are born. These are children who bear the image of God, but now through their renunciation and their confession they seek to press themselves into the life of their creator and open themselves to be impressed upon by the Spirit. Theirs is a life now marked by a fundamental hybridity. They are mulatto. To be Christian, to enter into the waters of baptism is to become something new. (Scripture on new creatures in footnote)

Zizioulas describes this moment of initiation or entrance as the establishment of an "ecclesial hypostasis" where "man can henceforth himself 'subsist,' can affirm his existence as personal not on the basis of the immutable laws of his nature, but on the basis of a relationship with God which is identified with what the Christ in freedom and love possesses as Son of God with the Father. This adoption of man by God, the identification of his

⁶Cyril, *St. Cyril of Jerusalem's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments: The Procatechesis and the Five Mystagogical Catecheses*, 63.

hypostasis with the hypostasis of the Son of God, is the essence of baptism.”⁷ For Zizioulas the baptized person becomes a “hypostasis” bound not to biological necessity (kinship or the passions) but by a fundamental relation to God.

His description serves to highlight here the way in which baptism ushers in a radical transformation of the relations based upon racial and cultural assertion which now must be radically overturned. No longer can the tragic assertions predicated upon biological difference mediate one’s relations with another for what constitutes the baptized is now a relationship to God that is so fundamental to their person it is constitutive of them. One’s identity then becomes grounded through the historical expression of this relationship, the church.⁸ In this overturning Zizioulas stresses that “as an ecclesial hypostasis man thus proves that what is valid for God can also be valid for man: that nature does not determine the person; the person enables the nature to exist; freedom is identified with the being of man.”⁹ The possibility of this freedom becomes grounded in the life of the church, no longer bound to sustaining its own biological or “natural” personhood, but free to love beyond the bounds of exclusivity. Kinship can now be drawn more widely. This possibility of love derives from what I see in Zizioulas as an attempt to articulate human personhood in terms of a more complicated “inter” existence which is marked by the movement of a certain person from falsity to truthfulness where to be truly human is to be in relation to God allowing one to stretch past the confines of a biological hypostasis and its limitations to an eternal relationship in its identification with Christ. The mixture of one’s life is bound to a

⁷ Jean Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Contemporary Greek Theologians; No. 4 (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 56.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 57.

fundamental relationship. This account leaves the Spirit to be a participant more in the communal life one enters into rather than highlighting its participation within the transformation of the person from falsity to truthfulness as well as the way in which the Spirit is subsequently constitutive of this person.

The relationship of the person to God is certainly constitutive of their “hypostasis” or person, but a pneumatological reading of this transformation must press this point further to make an assertion concerning one’s ontological transformation. They are different than what they were before not merely because they live in a new, house, but they have been given “garments of skin.”¹⁰ That is, the robes of the one lifted out of the waters signify the anointing or the cohering of the Spirit with the believer. The Christian is the one who is “in Christ” not because of their confession but because of the person’s union with Christ in baptism through the Spirit. This union is not momentary, but now becomes constitutive of the person they are flesh *and* Spirit. The child newly born through the baptismal waters is one whose person cannot be understood apart from Christ. But this relationship is not an abstract position of relations, but rather the real instantiation of a presence. The Spirit who came upon the virgin Mary, hovered above Jesus’ baptism, lifted Jesus from the tomb is the self-same Spirit which binds itself to the child of baptism conceiving their adoption and making them sons and daughters.

This relation is not one of posture but personhood. They are new creatures born of flesh and Spirit whose lives must now press into the form of Christ, in whose image they were made. They must now walk in an existence of neither/nor-but where their biological,

¹⁰ Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: The Nature of the Human Person*, ed. Christos Yannaros, trans., Norman Russell, Contemporary Greek Theologians, vol. 5 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997).

racial, cultural marks are not be hidden, but are now marked with new political possibilities. Their lives can no longer press for purity of relations, of kinship but now the purity of their faith calls them to a life of contamination, transgression and transformation. Conformation is the pressing into the life of Christ and defiance of cultural idolatry and self-assertion. It is the conformation of the Father's will and love for God's creation opening the newborn unto a life of contamination.

This is a life of transgressing expected boundaries, learning new languages, cultures and peoples colliding, encountering, and producing new and strange looking children who confound their society's estimation of what is proper and good. This process of conformation leads to transgression and ultimately transformation where the life of the children become punctuated by the inclusions of fragments seeming disparate, yet they are incorporated in such a way as to continually transform the follower's estimation of themselves and their own faithfulness, their own purity. Here the hybridity of the Christian child is not an end that encloses and becomes final, but rather the mulattic existence of these children of flesh and Spirit is marked by continual transgression and transformation. They are lives that open themselves up to difference for they are the fruit of difference.

The new creations of baptism are born into a community of faith inhabiting particular habits and patterns of existing in the world. Yet here we must be pressed even further the question put to Jesus and his response, "How is possible that one can be reborn" In Jesus' reply to Nicodemus, "you must be reborn" we are immediately confronted with the strangeness and improbability of the baptismal claim. We claim that through the baptismal waters the participant's life becomes truly new. While the church's understanding of Jesus' claim regarding rebirth has been a continual point of contention and reinterpretation

throughout the centuries, its nature as transformative of not only our patterns and habits, but our very bodies must be taken seriously. Is this moment a sign of a previous efficacious moment? Is it the impartation of grace? Is it purely a moment of initiation into the church that is the true means of grace given by God? The difficulty of these questions within the traditions of Christian reflection and faith stem not only from the nature of the act, but also questions of what the act produces.

So far I have highlighted how a Christo-centric reading of baptism suggests that baptism is a moment of initiation into an already, but not yet existence where the salvific work of Christ is both complete within the life of the one cleansed, yet also to be realized by the participant through a life of discipleship. Thus the moment is both real and a sign.¹¹ But it is a sign in way that differs from all others because of what and who it signifies. In this way we see the transformative made possible through the nature of the one we are baptized into and his presence through the Spirit, while the participants life is itself transformed into a pneumatological witness of an eternal presence in the world. This transformation is one in which the eternal is pressed into the temporal, embodied life we live wherein our lives become baptized realities... lives of already not yet which are dripping with the eternal and in our prayers, meals, service, and praise the baptismal moment becomes reenacted

¹¹ Here Calvin's understanding of baptism's initiatory function is helpful. For Calvin, baptism is an initiation not only into the life of the Church, but more profoundly an initiation into Christ's life and work. The power of such a moment is its fundamental reality. The baptismal moment is complete insofar as Christ's work is already complete within the life of the one who participates in the rite. Here the nature of the transformation is less a consideration of the believer's state of mind or "faith" as one who is capable of knowing, but rather the nature of Christ's salvific work is what makes the baptismal moment efficacious. It is a complete moment in which the believer must participate. It is a sign not of what preceded in the life of the believer, but rather it is a sign of transformation that entered the world through Christ.

witnessing to the possibility of God's participation with the world and the creation's response.

What makes baptism's transformative work possible is not something disconnected to it, but it is in fact present within it. The difference here is that the "sign" of baptism has a fundamentally different character than any other notion of symbolic. The sign which baptism points to is not present through a rational idea or memory, but that which the sign indicates is present through the Spirit. Thus baptism is a sign to the incarnation as the initiation of a baptismal reality, but it is also a sign that such a presence is not distant, but present in the life of the one who is going to enter into the water.

The baptismal moment is one in which the participant is not only ushered into Christ's body, but they themselves become instantiations of such a reality within the world. Through the Spirit's binding to them and their binding to the Spirit their life in the church becomes a presence of God in the world that attests to a different possibility, but also the fulfillment of that possibility in time.

Here Zizioulas seems to echo the claim Cyril makes in his catechetical lectures that through the baptismal waters "you are christos."¹² Such a dramatic claim is possible only with a pneumatological movement wherein the Spirit is bound to us through the baptismal waters and Christ is present with us. But here again the peculiarity of such a sign or presence must be made. Christ is not present in part, but always wholly. Thus the claim that the Spirit abides with us is the claim that Christ's presence is full, all in all. And thus our rebirth is the presence of God entering into the world afresh through our bodies and lives together within the communion of God.

¹² Cyril, *St. Cyril of Jerusalem's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments: The Procatechesis and the Five Mystagogical Catecheses*.

The question of baptism is consequently also a soteriological question. It is an explication of the movement from being with God in the world to having God.” The centrality of baptism to the question of soteriology is a moment of recreation not in its own validity but the sign to which it points. How baptism is explicated in this regard is thus an explication of the significance of this moment grounded in Christ’s salvific work and the subsequent establishment of the baptismal rite. Baptism is the entrance into this new life. Before us in the remainder of this section is a consideration of *what* or what is created, what is born from the womb of Christ’s life, death and resurrection.

The difficulty of this question rests in the impossibility of the claim concerning the self, who we are and what is re-created. What is transformed and what is renewed? The questions of our renewal always point to assertions concerning what we were or what we were intended to be. It is not my intention here to trace the development of the self in order to articulate the transformation that is wrought through the baptismal waters. The transformation or renewal brought about in the baptismal moment is both a restoration and a fulfillment that is yet to be filled. The person becomes immersed, imbued, inhabited with the Spirit in a way that is both profoundly unique and essential. It is a commingling that does not suggest the body’s equality with that which abides in it, yet the body can no longer be understood apart from it.

As I suggested earlier this ecclesial hypostasis, in Zizioulas’s description is less a claim of an essential relationship, but rather in the language of P. Nellas, it is an ontological claim where “the biological existence does not exhaust man. Man is understood,

ontologically, by the Fathers only as a theological being. His ontology is iconic.”¹³ Through the baptismal waters the Spirit descends, transforms, and abides with the participants so as to draw them from within to the fullness of that which its image now indicates. The indwelling of the Spirit is a life in Christ, but in this claim the centrality of the Spirit to the claim of personhood must not be lost. Baptism reforms personhood as flesh and Spirit, it is an identity that is human in the deepest sense. It is a personhood that is neither/nor for though we are bound to our fellow creatures we are neither, though we are bound to Christ, to the divine, we are not identifiable as Christ. The identity of the baptized is a life between where the fullness of God abides in us and our conformity is measured not only to an external example but to the groans of the Spirit within. We are neither mortal, nor immortal, we are neither fulfilled or incomplete, we are full, but yet filled. The life in Christ is the opening up of the tensive freedom to be in Christ. Our humanity as limited, mortal, and fallible is now bound to that which is unlimited, immortal, and perfect. This presence is not a transcendent presence or connection made through the incarnation alone, thus creating an existential connection between the divine and human, but rather becomes a real presence of Christ imbued within us in the baptismal moment.

This life is one where personhood can no longer be articulated either individually or relationally. The identity of the one baptized is now an internal reality. It is an identity grounded within the assertion that the Spirit, God of heaven and Earth dwells among you and *in* you. Selfhood is now possible not through the assertion of who one is or through an articulation of a network of relationships, but a relationship that must be received and articulated from within. Being grafted onto the tree of life the baptized is now a part of the

¹³ Nellas, 33-34.

tree and their person is identified with bearing the fruits of that tree. Baptism is this moment of transformation where identity is no longer tragically performed into with the impossibility of reception of perfection, but rather the performance of this identity is entering into Christ's performance of us. This identity is one that is received and imbued so as to internalize the reality of God upholding of all.

The structure of the baptized life is fundamentally not an addition or new creation, but rather a restoration of what Nellas calls the theological structure of humanity. Here

Man was the first portion of creation – ‘dust of the earth’ (Gen 2:7) – which was really and truly bound to God, thanks to the ‘in the image’; he was the first form of biological life and manifestly the highest that existed on earth on the sixth day of creation which thanks to the breath of the Spirit was raised to spiritual life, that is, to a life really and truly theocentric. Created matter, the ‘dust of the earth,’ was thus organized theologically; the material creation acquired a form and structure in the image of God; life on earth becomes conscious, free, and personal.¹⁴

Nellas describes the centrality to the incarnate Word as the archetype of this creation. What is crucial to note in Nellas' observation is the way in which humanity is continually imbued with a presence that is beyond itself. Its creation “in the image” is not an inherent biological quality, but the uniqueness of its creation and its identity as bearing the image of that which creates it. Its identity points continually beyond itself and yet is inherent to the person. The baptismal moment is a profound intensification of this moment, but more than that it is its filling out, its fulfillment such that the Spirit now not only organizes the life and gives it its structure, but now abides within and becomes constitutive of that identity. Identity now becomes an articulation of a relationship that is internal. It is a conforming to the one who is within and without. This process of conforming is process that both transformative, but at the same time complete.

¹⁴ Ibid., 32.

This transformative reality is complete insofar as Christ is its beginning and its end we must still be reminded that such a transformation is also not fully realized within time or that time (humanity) does not yet recognize that which has happened to it. In the baptismal moment there is a full work within us that we must still yet live into. To reflect upon the wonder of the baptismal moment is to be confronted with the question of who we are. It is to be called into a confession of our own impossibility. It is to utter the question of Abraham and Mary anew, “How can this be?” Such a yearning that is both internal and external is profoundly displayed in Teresa of Avila’s *Interior Castle*. While her work does not explicitly speak to the mystery of baptism, its underlying force is the question of how one lives into the reality the baptismal moment breaks open for the participant. Her work exemplifies a certain Thomistic baptismal logic wherein baptism is at once a moment and a journey or unfolding reality within the life of the believer. The question, “How can this be?” is, for Teresa, the question of our own personhood and possibilities. She warns,

It is no small pity, and should cause us no little shame, that, through our own fault, we do not understand ourselves, or know who we are. Would it not be a sign of great ignorance, my daughters, if a person were asked who he was and could not say, and had no idea who his father or his mother was, or from what country he came?¹⁵

This question of identity is aroused through the baptismal moment which Teresa wants to press her sisters into more profoundly leading them away from the exterior of the castle to the interior so that they may “attempt to discover *what* we are, and only know that we are living in these bodies...because we have heard it and because our Faith tells us so, that we possess souls. As to what good qualities there may be in our souls, or Who dwells within

¹⁵ Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, trans., E. Allison Peers (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 29.

them, or how precious they are – those are things which we seldom consider.”¹⁶ The imagery of body and soul is particularly striking given the profound limitations of women in the 16th century. The movement of identity from bodies to soul does not constitute a departure from the material world, but a reconfiguration of the “whatness” of personhood that now transfigures the lives of these women into more than their bodies might indicate in the society they participate in. Here she provides a picture of the yearning that a baptismal life must enter into that does not mark a stasis of the body, but rather breaks open the possibility of a profound transformation.

For Teresa the interior life is one of yearning and humility where the baptismal moment could be understood as the moment of initiation into this life of yearning and seeking. Yet at each turn this work is not only ours but is a submission to the calling of God, perpetually laying down those marks of pride that might prevent us from proceeding further into the life of God. Here I find Teresa more helpful in regards to the imagery of baptism because the Teresa’s work exemplifies the necessity of the Spirit as both pulling and prodding and the thus the life of the one initiated is not a life ordering, but rather a life of submission to the one calling. In the midst of this response and submission there is also a transformation that occurs to us and through us. The rationality of Thomas Aquinas that seems to be a fundamental mark of human seeking after God explodes within the life of the contemplative as the transformation of the baptismal moment is unfolds and becomes evident throughout one’s life.

The culmination of this yearning which serves to transform the shape of one’s life unites the faithful with God “like rain falling from the heavens into a river or spring; there is

¹⁶ Ibid. Emphasis mine.

nothing but water there and it is impossible to divide or separate the water belonging to the river from that which fell from the heavens.”¹⁷ This union, this marriage in Teresa’s language is the intermingling of flesh and Spirit conceived in the baptismal waters commingling the rain from heaven and the rivers of the earth calling creation back to itself, transforming the very rivers and streams that constitute our humanity. Such a transformation also necessitates a fundamentally different way of being in the world and here we can return again to Cyril of Jerusalem.

The transformation becomes a moment of interior regeneration arising in the fundamental hybridity of the participant. It should be said here that this moment of hybridity is not a hybrid moment identical to that of Christ discusses in Chapter 3. Rather this hybridity is one that is not marked by the fullness of humanity and divinity within one hypostasis. The hybridity rendered in the baptismal moment is one in which the person is lifted out of the confines of humanity as simply biologically classifiable. The identity with Christ is not complete because the perfection of the participant is not generated internally, but rather is constituted through the identification of Christ with them, which the baptized approximates in their immersion into Christ’s death and resurrection, but through this sign, the body is also immersed into Christ’s immersion into us. Thus not only does the water signify the participation of one in the dying and rising, but the signification points to the very real presence that marks this moment as more than a bath. The signification points to the transformation of the participant into something more than what they were prior to their immersion. This difference one that my imperceptible, but the faithfulness of God requires

¹⁷ Ibid., 214.

the moment to be understood as marking the entrance of one into an embodiment of this new life in Christ.

The resistance to this transformation is what rendered the baptismal practices of slave Christianity so deeply problematic and ultimately idolatrous. In the moment of the most profound transformation, baptism was used to concretize or harden one's relationship to the world and was seen as having no impact upon the embodied life of the participant. The soul was something distinct from the body and the Spirit's participation was resisted. Yet, even in the attempts of slave Christianity to police the transformative power of these practices we see the baptismal moment being a moment of radical transformation in the lives of Christian slaves themselves. (Use parts of BCS lecture on baptism)

Cyril of Jerusalem's central image for the baptismal moment is one of grafting. In the baptismal moment the participant is being shorn from their former life and grafted onto the tree of life. The rite of Jerusalem highlights not only the moment of grafting, but also the cutting necessary in order to be grafted. Prior to approaching the font the catechumen is asked to face the West and reject Satan, his work, his pomp, and his service. But here these rejections are not spiritual moments, but in fact are very embodied realities which now must be rejected as exterior to the life of Christ. In this way the baptismal moment is not merely the transformation of an interior reality, but rather is grounded in an embodied existence that resists the power of the evil one in the world.

The transformation of the believer through their participation in the baptismal waters is one that marks them as new creatures and ones who no longer are marked by the economics, the joys, the passions, or the politics of the Roman world, but rather their first activities as infants in Christ is to partake in the banquet of Christ's body. But even here

transformation is not only in the location of eating, but eating in the politics of eating. The participants take part in the kiss of peace and speak together the Lord's prayer, provide for one another's needs. In these moments the transformed reality of the baptismal moment becomes present in the forgiveness, eating, and prayers of the believers.

But what is important to note here is that the significance of the baptismal moment is not that it makes these realities possible, but that baptism marks the perpetual presence of the Spirit and Christ within these moments of the believer. In these ways acts of prayer, service, hospitality, eating, are profound extensions of the baptismal moment, not merely practices that are made possible by an act of initiation. Here we see the necessary connection between a rigorously christo-centric conception of baptism. If baptism is not a real presence which transforms and usher into time God's eternal presence and Spirit, then the subsequent practices of the church are merely folks playing, seeking to signify something that has past.

Neither/Nor: Mulattic (Pneumatic) Christian Personhood

In baptism the believer is immersed into an interstitial existence wherein the life is an in-between or spatial moment that is articulated between old (without God in the world) and new (you are Christ.) Yet, this space is not a vacuous space that resists or erases identity but binds that which is to that which is not. The hybridity of the moment is a union w/ the creator through an inhabiting or indwelling. This indwelling transforms the notions of the self so that the one who dwells is, in fact, closer truer than the one dwelled within. Nicholas Cabasilas suggests this union is one of profound mystery where "His union with those whom he loves surpasses every union of which one might conceive, and cannot be

compared with ant model.”¹⁸ Cabasilas goes on to name how various unions due not truly represent the union with Christ. The reason for this lack of proper analogy lies in the mystery that “it appears that the members of Christ are more closely joined to Him than to their own head, and that it is even more by Him that they live than by their concord with it.”¹⁹ The mystery for Cabasilas lay in the possibility of a union where the personhood becomes enveloped within Christ. This presence, or personhood is not the intellectual, reasoned apprehension of a distant truth which allows one true sight, but rather is a recognition of this reality as embodied and transforming one’s very self. Christ is *in* you.

This presence or transgression of the person and Christ in the baptismal moment is not marked by the tragic entrapment or assertion of purity that cannot be attained. Rather the possibility of purity, of the indwelling of the Spirit is the fullness of God that has entered that space or that person. Purity then is construed through a greater conformity to the transgression that made the indwelling possibility. That is, the purity of obedience and desire is not the continual refusal of difference grounded in racial or ethnic differentiations that require a continual performance and refusal to make them intelligible. Instead, the purity wrought through union with Christ is the conflation of impossibility and possibility within one’s own body. The body becomes iconic of the possibility of transformation and the movement of being one to becoming another. This transformation becomes the mark of the baptized for the very name, which one then claims, *Christian*, is the confession of a transformation and the transgression which Mary bore and Word incarnate brings to fruition.

¹⁸ Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*(Greenwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1974), 46.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Union with Christ in this moment therefore establishes or what we might say deepens the claim concerning the hybridity of the Christian body and the ecclesial community as both an ontological and a relational moment. Ontologically baptism is the filling out of this union animating body and soul with the Spirit of God which led the baptized into that moment and leads them from it. Baptism is the establishment or sealing of this moment where the creature is “more than,” neither/nor. The union of body and soul to the Spirit in this moment cannot be named through a rationalistic or biological paradigm. These bodies now rendered Christologically defy these very structures or typologies for they are wrought in the image of the Son, who as we examined in Chapter 3 is the fullness of neither/nor-but where the interaction or the structure of the person is both neither/nor, with and without. His structure refuses the duality of divinity and creation and thus expands the possibility of humanity. Or as we have noted in Nellas and Zizioulas, displays true and full humanity. This fullness of this baptismal moment is a participatory one wherein the body enters and is entered into. It is possessed.

In charismatic or pentacostal tradition such a moment is marked not by an intellectual assent concerning who one is or is not, but rather there is a baptism of the Spirit which is either present with baptism or subsequent to it. The power of this moment is the filling out of the baptismal moment in an encounter with the Holy One. It is a filling up where the external becomes constitutive of the internal. That is to say the person upon whom the Spirit comes cannot know themselves apart from that moment or the one who

filled or the one who dwells within.²⁰

Through this filling the baptized enters into a personhood of communion grounded in the Trinitarian love and movement of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the lover, the loved, and the love.²¹ This characterization does not seek to articulate the complex disagreements among charismatic and pentecostal theologians regarding the necessity of such a moment, its content or its timing. My point here is to indicate a) the movement of external to internal is not external to Christian tradition and b) such a moment indicates not an exception of Christian spirituality or a faulty reading of Scripture, but points to a deep and significant display of the transformation God calls those to in the church. This transformation is not one of simply posture, political maneuvering, or intellectual imagination, but something that comes upon one becomes a bodily reality within that moment. The notion of a moment following baptism wherein the person comes to share in or experience the indwelling of the Spirit is by no means a modern invention. The baptismal rites of the East in particular point to the progression or deepening of one's bodily entrance into the church and the life of Christ through the rites that preceded and followed baptism. In this case, the chrismation that followed the immersion into the water marked the

²⁰ The importance baptism's efficacy in this conflation of bodily and spiritual identity is one that does not require the assent of adult baptism or the infused grace of infant baptism. In this view baptism is an initiation into the life of transformation. This transformation is wrought through the baptismal waters and requires the continual participation in the life of the community to convey and infuse the transformation of one's identity. This process is either a fully participatory one in the case of adult baptism because the new believer participates in the transformation of this self-understanding. In the case of infant baptism the child is conformed into these identities through the participatory confession and witness of the community. In both cases the transformative reality requires the cumulative witness of a community which claims them and to which they see themselves as having been engrafted to. In this regard the community itself becomes transformed in the addition to the child of God regardless of its baptism as an infant or adult, for it is the process of discipleship that is both a personal and a communal reality into which the child of God is born.

²¹ Augustine, *The Trinity*.

“partaking or moment of deification.”²² This secondary moment or in the words of Cabasilas the “activation of energies” marks the continual filling out of the baptismal moment. Here the impressing of the Spirit upon the person is the person’s being drawn into Christ. The imposition of the hands and the anointing with oil signifies a deeper coalescing of Spirit with the body as it absorbs the divine into the very pores.

This reception of the Spirit grounds identity now not within a statement one can offer about oneself, but with a statement regarding what has happened to me, what has come upon me. Identity and personhood must now be expressed not through a fundamental relationship, but through a transformation of what constitutes one’s person. It is not about a set of beliefs guiding one’s actions or moral life, but rather the baptismal moment is the initiation into God’s own life and the impressing of God into the participant’s life. The baptized is no longer their own.

I have previously noted how Teresa of Avila articulates such a transformation as not entirely external to us or internal to us, but rather the transformation is the recognition or apprehension of the external calling us from within. The transformation is that God now abides with us and has become the perfect end to which calls and shapes us. The implication of this transformation now sees the political, familial, and as we have noted the racial structures of one’s life and community. The possibility of lives lived together, of patterns of kinship now also bear the mark of one grafted onto a foreign tree.

Jesus enjoined his disciples that they must leave their brothers and sisters, that they must be understood here not merely in terms of familial bonds but within the confines of

²² Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*, trans., Carmino J. deCatanzaro (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1974), 103. Book III.1

deeper structures of relationship and identity which serve to circumscribe self-understanding in one's society. The establishment of one's personhood often requires a network of relationships – in the midst of these relationships are certain governing or mediating norms which establish the boundaries of participation. As we noted in Chapter 1 these boundaries and modes of participation were grounded upon and within a deeply racialized consciousness wherein whiteness was conceived as an indicator of a profound inner capacity and ultimately a certain purity. Such a conception served as ultimately a religious performance that served to coalesce disparate peoples around a common self-estimation while continually perpetuating the boundary of blackness allowing the interior identity to remain intelligible. Through the life of the interracial or mulatto body we saw how these performances became incoherent and ultimately false yet continued to perform upon peoples as they performed within these claims.

In baptism the body becomes recreated in such a way as to confound such assertions and binds to kinship predicated upon race by transfiguring the complex particularities of personhood within Christ's performance of us. That is, baptism at once requires our renunciation of those idolatrous modes of participation that are predicated upon external mediating realities which require radical difference to make them coherent. In baptism the individual participates in the radical conflation of time and eternity, divine and human, male and female, death and life by entering into Christ's immersion into us. The baptismal moment is a moment of transgression transforming the fragments of our tragic lives of denial and resistance, possibility and promise. Through the water these pieces or particularities become broken and reconfigured within Christ's own body. The difference inherent to one is not negated or erased as in the racial performance predicated upon an

external purity or a mythic transcendental perfection encapsulated in a certain cultural mode or reality. But still these fragments are changed. They are not placed within genres not though “natural.” They are vocations reoriented from the accumulation of wealth towards the eradication of poverty. They are songs of grandmothers and great-grandfathers sung with new rhythm’s and cadences once thought alien to them.

Baptism is the transgression of flesh and Spirit that requires assertions of cultural or racial purity to be resisted and renounced. But in this baptismal moment there also lies the profound transformation of the community, for with every new member comes the possibility of transformation, change, adaptation in its inclusion not only for the one welcomed, but for those who welcome. The body of Christ shifts and moves and learns new languages as it adds new members. Its body becomes new as the person becomes new. This transformation is not without shape or purpose. It is a body that recognizes it exists within that in which all difference is found. The church is that transgression of God’s mercy against humanity’s refusal and disobedience. It is God’s presence in the midst of humanity’s unfaithfulness. The church thus witnesses to the possibility of creation’s transformation in its own transformation and its own incorporation of difference within itself.

New People: Baptism and Mulattic Peoplehood

A consideration of the baptized’s personhood as now hybrid or mulatto, as one cannot be known apart from God, who is flesh and Spirit, who has Christ as their head despite their own fallibility and limitation is grafted into a communal witness of this transformed possibility. They seek to live into Christ’s performance of humanity in their present. The paradox or wonder of this moment again is grounded in the miracle of Christ’s

personhood who is at once an individual and “all in all.” He is the one who establishes the community, yet also constitutes the community through his personhood. To enter into this ecclesial moment is to enter Christ’s both being person and persons. It is this difficulty of identity in which all personhood conceived within the life of the church becomes configured around this person, yet does not become atomized into individual moments or professions of faith. Christ’s entrance into the world transforms the communal witness of Israel, expanding its gaze and its possibilities, sometimes despite itself. The incorporation into this ecclesial life is the incorporation into Jesus’ response to Israel, to the promise of God given to Israel. Yet this response required Israel’s transformation. The incorporation of Israel by the Word required them to become something they thought not possible. As we explored in Chapter 4 this transformation was articulated through the understanding of whom God could and could not be, the expectations of participation with God via the law, and the understanding of who is incorporated and transformed with us.

The body of Christ as the church becomes the expression of this possibility. It is the display of Christ’s incorporation of us and our subsequent incorporation of those who will come to believe and follow. This incorporation has a deeply Christological structure where the standard of faithfulness does not lie in the propriety of the confession, but rather requires a twofold movement of the people towards the person and the person towards the people. That is, Christ’s movement towards us was not one of unilateral movement, but one where the movement was twofold from without and from within. We *had* to respond, transform, conform. This process was not initiated by a decree that remained distant and apart but was engendered through the conformation of the Word to *us*. This is not to say that Christ is radically other from us for our personhood is contained *within* God’s own life

and not apart from it. But the point should be clear here. The movement towards us was a transgression of what seemed possible and appropriate to God and to humanity. The incorporation of the newly baptized into the community of faith likewise is contained within this moment. It is a moment of conformation requiring both the loved and the lover to enter into one another so as to produce something new. The identity of the church and the identity of the person become enraptured within one another so that the child conceived through the water is utterly bound to the body and the body is bound to the child.

In this regard to examine baptism within a mulattic structure is to not only examine the transformation of the body and the life that participates in baptism, but it is to examine the effect of this incorporation upon the body itself. Here we must draw again upon the image of performance and discipleship. The baptismal moment is the performance into Christ's performance of humanity and of the individual. It is an assent to the life made possible through his incarnation and the desire to open oneself to a transformation of life and desire. As the formation of mulattic personhood, flesh and spirit, baptism is the entrance into Christ's performance of us. It is a sign and a declaration of discipleship, but in its most profound sense, wherein the participant begins to perform into the utter truthfulness of human yearning and striving, that of the humanity of its archetype.

This transformation, this incorporation however is not an individual moment that can be expressed through the description of what happens in the formation of an individual. The performance of baptism in Christ by the participant is a performance that must be received, heard and lived into by the congregation. The possibility of the baptismal moment is one in which incorporation into Christ is incorporation into a community of persons who have similarly been transformed and are seeking to perform into the perfection of Christ's

life. This communal performance, this harmonic of Christian discipleship is added to in the baptismal moment as the baptized *becomes* a song added to the hymn of faith. In the congregation the song is heard and received and echoed back to the participant as they are welcomed into the tree of life, as they are initiated into a people who are neither/nor - but.

However, the nature, the timbre of the song carries with it a particularity that is not simply incorporated into the harmony without an improvisation in the communal song. The reception of the individual is the reception of their particularity and requires the reimagining of communal identity. It is here that the Christological claims regarding Christ's mulattic character and the necessity of transformation become exhibited through the baptismal moment. For the body of Christ is not a static moment that is lived into the through erasure of the self, but is rather a moment wherein personhood is transformed through a transfiguration. That is, the particularity of the individual is made to radiate God's glory and presence in the world so as to point to the possibilities of creation in relationship to and inhabited by God's Spirit. The incorporation of the new does not necessitate their utter erasure. Instead, the communal aspects of this transformation and incorporation also demonstrate this transfigurative moment. The reception of the individual into the communal body of Christ is a transformation of both the participant and the community. The community itself must adapt its timbre, its instrumentation, its arrangement in its incorporation of the newly born.

This transformation is not to suggest that the communities must continually adapt themselves to the whims and fancies of the newly born. But here I am trying to highlight the way in which the mulattic character and spirituality of being incorporated into Christ's person is mediated through not an incorporation into similitude, but rather it is the reception

of difference that produces something new. The possibility of transformation engendered through the incarnation was the overcoming of the concretization of human forms as idols. The transgression of this moment is a transformative one where to be made into the image of Christ is to be opened up to the possibility of the Spirit where one might speak “in new tongues.” The language of tongues is certainly controversial and not universally accepted in the Christian tradition. But the power of tongues speaking in this context is its conveyance of the possibility of one possessing languages and insights that are alien to them. The possibility of being “born of Spirit” is to enter into a life where those things that were once foreign are now native and things that were once native are now foreign. This possibility is not an isolated moment that occurs within the baptismal font for the individual participant.

The creation of an embodied tongue, a living language in the world through the baptismal font displays the confounding of language and knowledge that would, in the early church and in some contemporary communities, be instantiated as glossolalia, or speaking in tongues. To pray in tongues expresses the hybridity of our nature as flesh and Spirit. It displays baptism’s transformative work, this rebirth where one inhabits, *becomes* a language that confounds the very structure of language and life. The one who utters the words does not know of what they speak and they are left to press into them, yearning, searching for the meaning that their bodies seem to be producing. These utterances must be interpreted by another. They must rely on another to discern the meaning of the words they speak. Here the structures of certainty and the meaning of words is not a market of exchange or a discourse of power but an economy of listening, of hearing, of softening oneself to the Word which comes upon us.

Yet it should be said that this exchange of utterance and interpretation is not merely a moment of translation for two individuals, but rather the entire conversation is for the sake of the community. These lives, their speaking and interpretation is for the sake of all. It is God's word to them, through their bodies, their speaking and hearing.²³

We are a people who receive words we do not know the meaning of. And yet we are a people whose language, whose utterances, whose bodies are for the sake of the world. There are those of us who do not yet live into the possibility of this pneumatic existence. Baptism is entrance into life as mulattic speech, prayer in tongues,²⁴ to *be* a strange tongue in the world where our presence disrupts the very structures that seem to make the world coherent. Yet it is not only our language, but the grammars that shape and mark our lives... race, gender, nation, class, ethnicity... these are the languages we speak and these are what

²³ I should say here that we must be wary of making speaking in tongues an achievement, a "necessity" of our humanity which somehow marks us as qualified. For example in Mary, her humanity was revealed in her apprehension, her reception of God. Her life was received. Her own humanity was filled out in her own womb. Tongues is not a mark of our accomplishment, but a witness to our humanity, the possibility of our lives bearing God. In this way it is not a necessity for our humanity is not established in our acts, but rather in God's bearing us. Our humanity is filled out in the Word, the strange tongues uttered to us. Our speaking in tongues is not achieving our humanity, but rather living into it. There are any number of ways in which we resist this just as those who speak in tongues resists, but nonetheless this possibility of speaking, the possibility of interpretation, of healing, etc. must always lie before us as a possibility that may come upon us (and may we hope expectantly for them.) What this points us to is that our humanity was established and made full in Christ. It is his person that is our full humanity... it is this intermingling of flesh and spirit that enlivens us, that marks our humanity and our possibilities. The reception of these possibilities is the reception and formation of lives whose very presence, whose utterances of desire, hope, faith and love, disrupt the patterns of certainty and injustice in the world.

²⁴ Again, the claim "to be human is to speak in tongues" does not seek to suggest that those who speak in tongues are "more human" than those who do not. The possibility that we might pray in tongues suggests that our humanity must be understood in relationship to the ways in which our bodies are enlivened and imbued with the Spirit. That one speaks in tongues does not give them a claim to a status higher than others. If it is wielded in ways that serve to determine what another cannot become is to ignore the necessity of their own interpretation. This gap and misuse is certainly present in some Pentecostal and charismatic churches just as it becomes present in many other churches. The claim being made here is not intended to uplift the superiority of certain bodies, but rather suggest that Christian lives must be intelligible in terms of the impression upon them by the Spirit of God. This impression thus leaves no body or life complete or fixed, but opens it to be transformed. Thus communities seeking to conform into Christ's struggle to live into this possibility and marks the struggle of all bodies to be conformed into this image and whose bodies continually indicate their fullness through the One who is beyond them and within them.

could become confounded by Christian lives... burning bushes and tongues of fire, bodies set ablaze with the Spirit.

Baptism is the entrance into a life of transformation. It is entrance into a life pregnant with the possibility of speaking in new tongues and receiving those people and those practices that once seemed alien. It is the possibility of receiving a new people and in that reception becoming a new people in Christ.

This life of conformation as the possibility of the new is the baptismal moment as a communal reality. The reception of a person requires the possibility of a reception of their particularity and their hopes, the fullness of their despair and their triumphs. It is these that are added to the people of God and in the midst of these additions the entirety of a people become something new as they receive and incorporate new people into their midst. The performativity of the baptismal moment is mediated through the instantiation of the practice through Christ's or Christ's call to us in his incarnation, baptism, death and resurrection and then through the communal response or reception of the participant's performance. The participant's reception is the community's response to the call of Christ. The newly baptized is received into the community. But this reception is again not only marked by a moment of gathering around the table of the Lord, but by the continual practices of the Lord's Supper, of prayer, confession and forgiveness. The reception of the initiate is the slow grafting of their lives into the life of the community including the slow transformation of the community itself as the difficulties, challenges, and hopes of that person or those people become received by the community.

This process of absorption is the continual performance of Christ's work on us as the community lives into Christ's absorption of our pain and grief, our disobedience, and

our resistance. The ecclesial community similarly takes on the life of its newly born and turns itself to them as itself becomes something new in the process.

But what is this church of change and transformation? Surely there is something that stays the same, something that grounds the identities of the participants? The character of this ecclesial community, this body of mulattos and half-breeds is no longer the assertion of identity upon similitude or proper articulation of practices that can be traced throughout time. Rather the identity of the mulatto is seen as the living into the neither/nor that is grounded upon the reality of the transgression that gave birth to it. It is an identity bound by the in-between yet grounded in the reality of those people and the practices that constituted their lives. For the ecclesial community a mulattic identity is grounded upon the claim of one's body as bearing the image of the incarnate Word, as being people of flesh and Spirit whose very lives are the fruits of an unnatural union. This unnatural union can find no grounding in a history of ideas or a history of a people except for their constant intermixture and continual reconstitution over time. The practices that bind these people together are those that brought them into being. In baptism a child is born, but with baptism the community is reborn and the ecclesia must bend itself again towards another and look to God's work in the newly born and God's work in the community through the newly added. The estimation of gifts and talents, challenges and pains become added to a people producing new possibilities and new marks of unfaithfulness. The baptismal moment is a moment of reminder regarding each member of the community's birth as a new creature. The community is bound together by the Lord's Supper as they are joined in the memory of the one who became us so that we might exceed our nature and our failures. The Eucharistic moment is the moment of feeding upon the one who is different from us, but who *is* us. It is

the nourishment of our lives as more than flesh and desires, but it is the nourishment of a body animated and enlivened by Spirit. The Eucharistic moment thus becomes a marker of what we are and what we are to become, what Christ became and what he makes us into. The community is upheld by prayer which will be explored in the next chapter, but here it should be said that prayer is that through which the community seeks to conform itself into the will of God and into the lives of one another. These practices mark what it means to be a child of God. They constitute personhood not through the assertion of their own purity or the maintenance of their modes, but they maintain the identity of the person and the community through their conformation into Christ and their transfiguration into the people of Christ. They become a burning bush whose presence, whose fearsome aberrant beauty declares the glory of God and disrupts assertions of identity and purity in its midst

Chapter 6

The Politics of Presence: Prayer and Discipleship

“it has to do with one who is simply and solely nothing else but a groaner.”¹

Introduction

Prayer is a politic, a political mode of existence that marks the believer’s life as continually open to transformation as they seek to conform themselves, which is to say, their bodies, to Christ’s prayer for them in the groans of the Spirit within and to the lives of those they pray for without. In this way true prayer displays the radicality of hybrid existence where the claim to oneself is always bound to the particular life of Christ and to the lives of those who have been created and re-created in Him. Through the life of prayer the believer becomes conformed into the life of the one who prays for them. In this way the Christological claim that Christ’s performance of our lives is mulattic and transformative, becomes a mode of discipleship wherein our prayers for one another are always signs of the ways in which the Christian life is being performed into the lives of one’s brothers and sisters. Such prayers are both private and public and thus reveal true Christian discipleship as a public interruption of modern racial-political lives.

¹ Karl Barth, *The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life: The Theological Basis of Ethics*, trans., Robin W. Lovin, 1st ed., Library of Theological Ethics (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 67.

This chapter will develop this claim through an examination of Christ's own prayer life highlighting the way Christ's prayers and his life *as* prayer both establish the act of prayer and the presence of prayer in the life of the believer. I will examine Christ's prayer life as a witness of identity, a performance of humanity, and opening up the life of discipleship as one of receptivity and transformation. Through the prayer life of Jesus we see the person and work of Christ to be the basis of our own prayers and our own lives. Lives as prayer thus witness to one's identity in another, seek to perform their own lives into the life of the one who prayed for them and whose lives become marked by the reception of others into their lives as they are transformed in their mutual encounter with the Son of God. This life of discipleship can be rendered only through the mulattic shape of its birth and life. It is a life of interruption confessing its participation within the claims of racial and cultural particularity and subject those particularities to the fire of the Spirit. Christian bodies are thus lives of prayer, lives transfigured through the Spirit, lives that cannot be known apart from the one who abides in them, who groans within them and into him they seek to live and move and have their being.

Upon emerging from the baptismal waters the believer is re-born and re-made. They are ushered into a life where they bodies are bound to one within them and outside of them. They are inextricably bound to a people to who are likewise bound to them. They exist in the world in ways that disrupt the patterns of racial discipleship, cultural maintenance, or national loyalty. As the "Letter to Diognetus" suggests, they become a strange people who "live in their own countries, but only as aliens. Every foreign land is their fatherland, and yet

for them every fatherland is a foreign land.”² Baptism gives rise to a personhood marked by a peculiar peoplehood imbued with a miraculous and extraordinary presence in and among them. Their lives are now bound together and into the one from whom they were born and into whom they live. This departure and return is the life of discipleship.

This life of discipleship birthed in the baptismal moment us bound to the very bread of life, the Lord’s Supper or Eucharist. Discipleship is the daily existence arising out of and stretching towards. This yearning, conforming between these moments is filled out and marked by the life of prayer, of Christian lives *as* prayer displaying daily, constantly, a mulattic re-creation and disruption conceived in the desire of the Father for us, birthed through the womb of Christ, and enfolded within the enduring presence of the Spirit in our very bodies. This daily display of mulattic creation and disruption is bound, in my view, to the life of prayer.

The life of discipleship is bound to the life of Christ through the Spirit, given birth through the waters of baptism and given definition through the community of believers who have understand themselves as bound to Christ and to one another. Such a life of discipleship is given definition through the continual confession of their unfaithfulness and their continual praise of God’s faithfulness despite their own lives. In these moments of confession and praise they become bound to one another. Such a life of binding and opening is marked by a perpetual interpenetration that welcomes and transfigures the lives of its inhabitants into people who display the calling of God in the wilderness of contemporary society.

² "Letter to Diognetus," in *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. Cyril C. Richardson (New York: Collier), 217..5
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In the midst of such an ecclesial life it is my contention that prayer should be understood as one of the fundamentally constitutive practices of Christian discipleship. It is an act that is individual and communal, divine and temporal. In moments of prayer we see both the dogmatic and the ethical bound up together in the life of discipleship in a way that is not only located within the life of the church, but explicitly locates the life of the church within the life of the individual, the family, the communal house, the hospital, etc.³ This claim is most perceptible through an examination of Jesus' own prayer life. In his prayers and his desire to pray we begin to see both a dogmatic claim concerning Christ's person and work, as well as the implications of prayer in the life of the disciple.

To be follower of Christ is to pray. Prayer is an aspect of discipleship wherein the believer's life is continually pointed beyond itself yet through itself. It is through the cares, the joys, the yearnings of one's prayer life that we begin to see the in breaking of the kingdom into the world through those who follow Jesus. It could be said that prayer is one of the most fundamental acts of Christian discipleship for it is in the prayer of the believer and the believers struggle to conform and apprehend the Spirit's groan's within them that their lives become shaped within the life of the ecclesial community. The life of prayer is a life of conformation into the Christ's image and bound to the lives of those who love him and whom He loves.

But what does it mean that Jesus prayed? The brief glimpses of Jesus' prayer life indicate to us three important moments. They offer a glimpse into Jesus' nature, the nature of prayer,

³ This is not to suggest that baptism and Eucharist are not fundamental to the Christian life or identity, but neither can be located within the daily life of the disciple in the way that prayer can. In this regard prayer does the work of extended the power and the possibility of the baptismal and Eucharistic moment while also adding a certain texture to the claims often made about baptism and Eucharist.

and prayer's transformative possibilities in and through the life of the disciples. The Christological nature of Jesus' prayer life exhibit not only important aspects to who Jesus was, but also display the pattern of his work upon humanity and the ways in which humanity participates or enters into this work through their own lives, baptized into the immersion of Christ into us. Prayer is a constitutive mark of participation, but more profoundly, it is the display of a hybrid life, a mulatto discipleship wherein the one who prays seeks to conform to the Spirit of God who constitutes their life and person. This process of transformation not only draws one into the life of God, itself a display of mulatto life, but also prayer bleeds the boundaries of one into the life of another.

In particular, we see in Jesus' most explicit prayers in Gethsemane profound revelations of Jesus' Sonship and this Sonship grounds the lives of those who are created in Him through the waters of baptism. Here the prayer life of Jesus indicates a) the fundamental relationship of the Word to the Father b) the performance of human loving which is both uttered towards us and for us and c) the ground of desire and reception which marks the Triune God and human participation within the life of God. Each of these marks of Jesus' prayer mark the lives of those who would follow him and become his disciples.

The prayer life as a witness of sonship

In the prayer life of Jesus we begin to see a witness to the Sonship of the Word to the Father. Through the submission of will of one to the other and the continual return throughout Jesus' ministry to solitary moments of prayer we begin to see that the Son is the one who desires to do the will of the Father. He is the one who knows the will, but even more profoundly he is fulfillment of the Father's will. The ground of what it is to be the Son

is not only to be in relation – for even creation is in relation, but more profoundly to be the Son is to be bound to the will of God in such a way as to continually bend oneself to it. To be the will of God or to be follow the will of God is a claim that is made that constitute the entirety of one’s personhood. The possibility of the an identity fixed upon a reality external to this singular claim begins a process of deformation. The shape of Christ’s life is constituted by the will of the Father towards those who are loved. As we noted in Chapter 3. Jesus very birth is the fulfillment of a promise to and in Israel regarding the possibility of a people made from nothing. The will of God was for their restoration filled and given in that child in the manger.

Jesus’ life is bound to the will of the Father. The perfection of this obedience and the perfection of his living into are undoubtedly tied to the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son. The Son is God. It is not his coherence with the will that marks his divinity as though it was apart from him. But at the same time the will of the Father is understood by Jesus to be that which he must obey, he must live into it. He must follow it. His plea in the garden, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt,” (Matthew 26:39) demonstrates both the centrality of the Father’s will to who he is as well as the way in which his desire, his love is oriented towards the Father. The centrality of the will here is that it is central to Jesus’ personhood. The display of his sonship is given in his obedience. His obedience is offered to us through his prayers as he asks the Father to forgive them, to let this cup pass, as he prays for those who follow him and who will follow him.

The prayer life here indicates what it means to be the only begotten Son. He is the one who knows the will of the father. It is in his knowledge and desire to conform that is not

only witnessed to in his prayer life, but it is in fact the nature of Jesus' prayer life. In his prayers Jesus confesses himself, makes himself known. His life is prayer.

For those who would follow him, for those who begin to apprehend the world around them as God's creation and their lives as upheld and bound to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is to enter into the identity or personhood wrought through the baptismal waters. To be a child of God is to pray. It is to enter into a life of yearning and conforming. Yet the act of prayer is the confession of what is and what will be. The mark of discipleship as prayer thus begins to indicate a crucial aspect of mulattic existence. The hybridity of flesh and Spirit formed through the baptismal waters and fed through the sharing of the Lord's Supper becomes displayed through the life of prayer. Here prayer becomes a mark of this new personhood. It is a sign or indication of one's new kinship.

Prayer as a sign of personhood begins with the suggestion *that* we pray signifies who we are, *that* we pray confesses something of we understand who we ought to be. Here the very act of praying begins to demonstrate a fundamental claim regarding the birth of a hybrid people. Prayer is the assertion of an identity that must be received. This reception is not of a reality external to one, but is an identity bound to and inherent to the fact of one's baptism. It is the confession of who we are... Our prayers seek to utter and conform to the groans of the Spirit within us. We must receive ourselves, our hopes, our ends, from one who is not external to us, but is us. The act is both individual and communal. They are words uttered or reflected individually, but always have an origin and an end both within and without us. Prayer is communion with those who utter words with us and those who utter words for us. It is communion with Christ who is our prayer who is the one who hears us and lifts us up

and utters his own life for us. Our prayer is the assent to that reality and the attempt to live into that prayer that has already been uttered, lived, and received in Christ's life.

That we pray indicates the possibility of being bound to something beyond us, confesses our own limitations and creatureliness, but more profoundly begins to articulate the mystery that *is* us. That is, prayer is grounded not in the certainty of the world or who we are in the world in relation to one another, but it is a moment of vulnerability requiring us to ask God who we are, to confess the marks of infidelity that riddle our lives and begin to live into those realizations. Prayer is the constellation of moments that mark our utter dependence upon God, but also begin to reckon with the reality that that God who is so distant and so other, in fact, constitutes who I am and who I am not. But even more radically, this God of perfection does not see my body as that which is apart from God's own life, but through the baptismal waters, in the life of the ecclesial body, through the indwelling of God's very Spirit, my body is now a temple, a living sacrifice. Prayer is the display of this wonder which confounds notions of personhood constituted either through the articulation of relations or claims of nature. In prayer we see the relation *to be* the natural. The relation *is* the essential.

It is here that theology must be wary of where it enters the discourse concerning essential identities and identities as social constructions. The confession, Christ is Lord is to claim something essential about god and thereby to live into an essential claim concerning who we are – we belong to Christ. It is essential, because it is now fundamentally constitutive of who we understand ourselves to be. This presence, this relationship constitutes who we are in such a way as to be without would be to render us without an identity, personless. Yet, this essentialism is not something inherent to us, something “natural” that we can point to but is rather made possible by Christ's “construction” of us

through his identification with us. Thus this essential claim is enacted through a dynamic performance of humanity which we must struggle to correspond to. The resulting identity is thus both essential and “made,” neither/nor and “more than.

To be a disciple, to be one who dwells in and with God who desires to be in his will and to confess those moments when we are out of this will is to pray. Prayer is the mark of this fellowship that constitutes who we are as followers. These are not acts that are done in order to slowly discipline our habits (although this is certainly an aspect of the process), but rather prayer is the display of what is natural, essential to us. Here *that* we pray becomes a mark of the Spirit that constitutes our lives. The act of prayer is indicative of who we are. The content and forms of these prayers, their ends and our formation or a process complicated and difficult, but *that* we pray indicates something inherent about who we are. It is not the totality or representative of a kind of perfection, but nonetheless marks and aspect of our personhood that is essential and tied to the nature of the Christian body as a mulatto body, as a neither/nor body, as a conflation of flesh and Spirit established and fulfilled in the incarnation of the Word, Jesus.

Such a claim concerning prayer as an act constitutive of who we are serves to display the fundamental shift or transformation that has occurred through the baptismal waters. For to pray is to acknowledge that we are children of God and that we might call out to God and that God has heard us.⁴ A mark of personhood, prayer describes us not only in terms of who we were as a historical people, or who we are, as a people wrought through the waters of baptism and now an admixture of flesh and Spirit, but prayer is that confession the display of who we will be. Prayer expresses personhood as not only biologically different, culturally

⁴ Barth, *The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life: The Theological Basis of Ethics*, 67.

different, but now temporally different. We are a people who are bound between time and eternity. We are a people who are stretching into the fullness of God's own eternity yet still moving through a temporal existence. Prayer is the confession of lives constituted and marked by hope and "therefore in their present life they live as those who belong to the future. That which is promised and He who is promised are seen and heard by them in all their futurity."⁵ The neither/nor that marks Christian existence now begins to take shape not only through the body formed through the Holy Spirit, or the community into which the baptized is initiated. Now in the life of prayer the internal reality of the Holy Spirit and the conformation of the one who prays to the groans of the Spirit within are marked by the confusion of time. Mulatto bodies are marked by hope.

The tragedy of interracial existence which saw Rena and Clare die at the impossibility of their lives becomes overturned for the possibility of one's life is no longer bound to the illusion of purity or the negotiation of polarities which require opposition to remain intelligible rendering the middle a vacuous space of non-being. The internal, the space, the transgression is life, it is possibility, it is the promise. Prayer is the confession that the one who is other has heard us. It is the confession that the one who is other is present with us. It is the possibility that the Otherness of God is not to be uttered against me, but it has been offered to me.

Prayer is the daily marking of this life where one begins to enter into the possibility of a hybrid existence that continually resists the claims of purity requiring the sacrifice of transgressors and transforms the obedient themselves into blessed transgressions. The transgression that makes prayer possible is thus rendered upon the life of the one who prays

⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 120.IV.1

thus turning their life into one of conformation. This conformation to the will becomes the identity grounded in obedience to the will of the Father. It is an obedience grounded in the conformation of one's will, desires, hopes to the will, hopes, desires, of the Father. It is an apprehension of one's creatureliness and possibilities. It is an opening up wherein a reconfiguring becomes evident. The gospels speak of this reordering in Jesus' questioning, "who is my brother and my mother but the one who does the will of my Father?" As we see the will of the Father is the life of hope, the life of prayer, lives as prayer. This life of prayer is pneumatological yearning and a bodily witness. Here prayer is the conformation to the *will of God* is a pneumatological claim concerning participation. It is performing into Christ's performance of us through a life being impressed into the Spirit's groans within us. It is the extension of the baptismal moment in its immersion into the will of God.

In the act of prayer as confession and hope it is a profession of identity, an articulation of one's relationship to and in Christ made possible through Christ's calling to them, through the indwelling of the Spirit which stirs them to recall the promises of God and the promise of God which they are. The act of prayer is itself a display of the fact of Christ and the possibility of who one is and will be in him. This preliminary reflection is to suggest the act of prayer itself is an act displaying the hybridity of discipleship, the mixture inherent to the claim that one is called after the name of Christ. This articulation of identity through the groaning of prayer and the conformation to the Spirit is to perform into Christ's performance of us. This performance of prayer is the reception of the name and the articulation that one is called, is heard, is seen, and it is in this being heard which marks one's being in the world. The performance of prayer is the process of conformation into Christ's life, into his prayer for us and in us. Thus discipleship is the life of prayer seeking to press

into Him who has pressed himself into us. The act of prayer is the intermixture of our hopes, the subjection of ourselves, our lives, our bodies, to his will so that we are not only moving after, but that our very bodies become the prayerful groaning of his coming kingdom both present and possible, already, but not yet. The prayer life of Jesus at once declares his identity, his sonship and establishes our identities, our adoptions. Our prayers declare our identity *in* Christ and God *in* us. It is the confession and display of our new bodies, our new mulattic birth.

The prayer life as a performance

In the prayer life of Jesus indicates not only the dogmatic claim that Jesus is God, but also inhabits the accompanying claim that Jesus is fully man. In this moment we see the two claims bound together where as Barth reminds us Jesus' prayers are not only God's desires for us, but also humanity's confession and reception of God's own life in such a way as humanity could not utter itself. As we examined in Chapter 4 the work of Christ was located in his personhood wherein his work was the performance of all personhood, all humanity. The performativity of Jesus' prayer life presses his personhood, his work into the lives of those who believed and would believe. It is through prayer Christians attune themselves to this work and listen for the false notes their lives declare. Lastly, through prayer they bind themselves to the lives of those whom Christ loves.

As Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane for those who have followed him and those who would come to follow him his prayer that they be in him as he is in the father is visible only within the dogmatic claim concerning the incarnation. "O righteous father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee; and these know that thou hast sent me. I

made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17: 25-26) The prayer concerning the disciples being in him is the hope for their incorporation into his presence in the world at that very moment. That his disciples might be “in Him” suggests not only the desire to obey and follow, but also such a living into him that their very lives become subsumed into his very person. That their very identities are bound to this coming out of and going in. That their lives become bound to the person of Christ such that they come to see their identities grounded in mission and calling. They are people who are called, who call upon the Lord.

The transformation of these lives from autonomous individuals into the very prayers of Jesus, into those who are the mission of God in the world requires more than an intellectual assent or prayers habitually spoken even with the earnest belief that God hears us. The possibility of prayer is the possibility of the very lives of the one who utters and groans becoming like a burning bush. The possibility of prayer is the possibility of transformation found throughout Scripture, but in particular in the life of Moses whose life, spared from the massacre of children to be adopted by the cradle of power, whose life was marked by the familiar tongue of his mother’s people and the privilege of Egyptian power. His presence among the enslaved was a testament to the possibility of redemption, to the possibility of God hearing his people’s cry; it is a sign of God’s presence among them. Yet in Moses life we see an intensification of this presence when he happens upon that tree so many years later.

Giving up the privilege of his position, betraying his adopted people, yet remaining a stranger to his mother’s people he happens upon a miraculous sight. The bush was burning but was not consumed. Even before a word is uttered Moses is given an image of what

would become of him. He, a bush of a man who does not know nor understand the power that would inhabit him would come to articulate God's redemption to the nations. His life would become transfigured in that moment as his life becomes articulated no longer by the language of his people or the food of his youth, but rather the entirety of his person is bound to his mission, this transfiguration. His life would become one devoted to listening and speaking, to hearing and following, to failing to understand, yet following. His life would become one whose coming and going is predicated upon listening and uttering strange and difficult truths to a resistant world. His very presence before Pharaoh thus indicates the transformation that has been wrought in that miraculous moment in the mountains.

In Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, his prayer for those who follow him and those who follow him we see the utterance of a possibility for following that is grounded in the transfiguration of their very lives. In his prayer any possibility that we have for life, for following him lies in the living into to a simple but profound reality... the Son is in us. God is in us. We are simple creatures whom God has saw fit to set on fire. The life of discipleship is the life of prayer that seeks to live into this profound possibility. This possibility does not rest in the fact of our doing, but in the performance of Christ's performance of us. It is his life that has transfigured all lives. It is his birth that has rendered all lives possible, all lives truthful. The life of the prayer is the living into his response on our behalf. It is a life where

Christian do not merely see things differently from other. From God's point of view they are different from others, just as they are different from others in relation to the divine verdict and direction when the Holy Spirit awakens them to faith and love. They do not merely live under the promise, which could be said of all men. They live in and with and by the promise. They seize it. They apprehend it, they conform themselves to it. And therefore they live as those who belong to the future.⁶

⁶ Ibid. IV.1. 120.

The life of being different is the life marked by the reality which prayer attests to and seeks to live into. Christ's being for us (Bonhoeffer) and as us the performance of our lives and hopes. In the prayer's of Jesus we see Barth's dogmatic construct of the Word as elector and elected. Present on both sides of the redemptive puzzle the prayers of Jesus perform upon humanity and within humanity.⁷ Christ's prayer in Gethsemane demonstrates at once the act of this reality and its content. It is the formation of our lives and its is the end of our hope. His prayer in Gethsemane forms the outlines of our transfiguration. It is the establishment of that baptismal moment which our subsequent prayers seek to articulate and repeat and utter through our lives.

Here humanity cannot utter anything beyond what Jesus has uttered in his own prayers. Humanity is left only to conform itself into the perfection that was Jesus' prayer for us and within us which abides within us through the groaning of His Spirit within us. Human prayers can only ask that God's will be done in us, that we abide in Christ as Christ abides in the Father, that we not be a cause for God's work to be obstructed in the world, that his kingdom come in us and through us.⁸ It is the act of confession that seeks to know those aspects that do not conform. It is the forgive me and deliver me from evil – it is discipleship/performance.

⁷ Ibid.IV.1 Here I will draw upon Barth's consideration of reconciliation and in particular the way he constructs Christ as "God with us." In this formulation we see the way in which the prayer life of Jesus is both working upon humanity and for humanity. It both confirms Jesus' Sonship, yet instantiates something real within humanity that will later become the gift of the Spirit that utters prayers from within.

⁸ Ibid., IV.2.Barth is again instructive here as he narrates the ways in which humanity seeks to assert itself even in the midst of God's redemptive work. This theme, ubiquitous in the *Church Dogmatics*, will be drawn upon heavily to outline the way in which racial lives are an aspect of such self-assertion. Also instructive here will be various enlightenment accounts of the self (Kant, Hegel) which outline the way in which the mind's relationship to the body orders identity and the shape of daily life.

Prayer as performance is the centering of one's life upon the will of God in such a way as to render one's hopes and possibilities to another. Prayer is the performance of Christ's life in that it enters into the fundamental loss of assertion. It is a continual confession of one's necessary obedience. Here the prayers of the two in the temple indicate how prayer is not merely speech directed towards God, but rather it is a bending oneself towards God. In this bending one is approached by their own incapacities and their lives are laid down before the one who has prayed for them, who has made this knowledge of them possible. The Pharisee prayed Thank you lord that I am not like that man over there... His life of prayer was not confession but an assertion. It was an attempt to delineate his selfhood upon the denial of another. His prayer was the prayer of assertion that sought not to love into the performance of another, but sought to perform himself into God's presence. It was a prayer to idols imaged and molded in his image of righteousness, precipitated upon a self-knowledge and a presumption of his own possibilities.

Prayer as a performance begins with the sinner. It begins with the confession that God has in fact seen us as we are. The prayer of the sinner, "Forgive me, a sinner," begins with the confession of one's incapacity to assert themselves as anything other than one who is in need of God, as one who is in need of another, not as the negative boundary which makes possible an illusory center or purity, but rather this prayer recognizes its acting in the world as that boundary, as that which has sought to resist God's calling and purpose. The prayer of the sinner here is more than his words and his utterances, but his groaning, his desperation, his confession of the need to be something new.

In this way we see prayer as the moment in which mulattic existence exhibits an identity bound to others, as a personhood grounded in a relationality that is not predicated upon a

purity of will or obedience, but rather is predicated upon the transgression of God that makes that prayer possible. It is the prayer of Jesus, Jesus' life that makes our confession possible, that makes our apprehension possible. His life instantiates and renews the infusion of flesh and Spirit that makes true personhood more than flesh and mind. Prayer is the confession that God is not only calling us to God's self, but rather it is the recognition that this calling is bound to the body. Bending oneself to the will of God is a moment of straining to hear the words rightly, to attune oneself to that which calls from within. It is the Tuning of one's life and the melodic ringing of the Spirit which groans a within to the revelation of Scripture, the word preached and the prayers of our neighbors.

Augustine writes of this bending, this listening as a process of hearing a song which God

sings with perfection, but we must strain within the confines of time to hear and utter.⁹ This tension of expectation and recollection Augustine describes “ Prayer as performance is the struggling to grasp the eternal in the temporal. It is the seeking after the incarnation and living into it. It is the possibility of the eternal seeping into one’s life. As it does so the eternal presses itself into the life of the one who prays and as it does so it does not lift up the one who prays, but serves to remind them of their own creatureliness and the impossibility of their own act and their own life. This impossibility is the song of God’s eternal perfection beginning to be uttered through our prayers. Contemplative prayer, or attentive listening, pressing and receiving is the mark of a mulattic Christian existence which

⁹ For Augustine there can be little distinction between eternity and the Trinitarian relations. These relations constitute eternity inasmuch as eternity describes the relationships. It is this distinction between time and eternity which thus serves as the basis of our understanding of creaturely existence. Yet, this is not something distinct from the triune God, but rather time is that which is made possible through the triune God whose triune relationship constitutes eternity. The fundamental mark of creation is its createdness. The *imago dei* rests in its abiding in God’s eternity wherein it could love God and move towards God without hesitation.

In this way the fall marks the corruption of eternity in time... the presence of a gap between one’s conception of God and one’s movement towards God. As one begins to love this gap or distance they become more deluded in the possibility that a fullness of desire or knowledge might actually lie within one’s own knowing or loving... one’s desires.

In this way many of Augustine’s primary conceptions of the Christian life in *Confessions*... the proper ordering of rationality, memory, love, will are as much a matter of time as they are about being properly disciplined. Or to be more precise their disciplining arises out of their proper conception of time as that which in many ways stands between them and an eternal participation with the triune God. In this way the restlessness Augustine speaks so eloquently of in the beginning of the *Confessions* is in fact speaking of that gap between time and eternity wherein one can either recognize their own creatureliness and in so doing begin to allow the eternal God begin to press in upon them and as they do so their memory, their love, their thought, their hope becomes drawn into a simplicity of loving and thinking and willing that is the *imago dei*... the perfect relations of the father to the son in the spirit that are without time. To be sure, for Augustine this moment of the eternal pressing in upon time is one that is continually resisted in the creature’s own pride. Thus at every turn there lies the possibility of continuing to wallow in this gap, within time as though it represents the fullness of their desires, their thinking, and their hope.

The relationship between anthropology and the triune God for Augustine is thus a relationship between time and eternity wherein the eternal is the triune and time is the creature. The creature’s pride seeks to suggest its time is something more than it is yet when it accedes to its own reality as that which is created by the eternal it is lifted up out of its own condition where the gaps that exist between knowing and willing, hoping and loving, etc. begin.

is continually underscored by its marked difference yet utter connection to those they are in relation with. It is similarity and distance bound up within singular moments that are not reconciled, but whose interplay reveals the truthfulness of one's life.

The life of prayer is the display of this unity and disjuncture where the one who prays is bound to God, but utterly different. Yet this difference is not one to be overcome or constructed in order to maintain one's personhood. The truthfulness of one's body and life evidenced in prayer is the confession of one's being bound to the One who is different, who is utterly Other. Performance here thus is not the mastery of knowledge that is external, but rather the living into a song that is strange, but has been given. This song is both internal and external, within and without. The struggle of the flesh spoken so often of by Paul is the disjointedness of this duality. The Spirit within calls us to the image of our creator yet our desires are disordered and wayward. The life of the discipleship is the pressing into that song despite ourselves without the certainty of our overcoming, but with the promise of Christ's perfection which resides and calls us from within and from without.

This attuning is not a moment of simple piety, but rather the fear and trembling of faith where we must live into that which is impossible. It is Abraham climbing the mountain seeking to reconcile these two contradictory words given to him; you will be a father and take your son... The recognition of God calling us from within ourselves, of God's Spirit becoming fundamentally a part of us is not a moment of certainty or establishment, but enters the disciple into a life of continual instability. It is a perpetually disrupting moment that continually offsets the claims we make concerning ourselves for at any moment our certainty is called into question when God calls us to take our sons and daughters up the mountain.

Prayer is the possibility of this transformation, of this change. Reflections on the Lord's Prayer continually point to this mode of subjection, of the subjugation and transformation of wills being bent into the will of the Father. It is the resistance to evil and confession of sin. It is the pressing into hope for God's kingdom that has come and is coming. But these prayers are not only individual moments of pining and hope bound within the confines of an individual and their God. Here prayer is the performance of hybridity and the extension of the baptismal moment into the life of discipleship because in prayer one is entwined with the hope and pain of others as they seek to conform to the groans of the spirit within them. As such these communal lives seek to be the witness to the Spirit in the world calling it to conform.

Conformity in this sense is not only the conformity of God's will for the individual, but God's will for re-creation. The possibility of prayer lies in the intertwining of those who pray and those who are prayed for. We are those who receive pray as well as those who offer prayers. This dialectic of offering and receiving continually resists the postures of certainty that presuppose and establish the idolatry of racial hierarchy. The one who prays is not the one who knows what ought to be prayed for and mediates on behalf of those who lack knowledge or understanding. Rather, prayer is offered with the understanding that we are also in need of prayer. It is both a sign of our understanding of who we are and our confession of who we are not. But here again offering prayers and receiving prayers are more than moments of words strung together, but rather prayers are the bending our selves into the lives of those who we pray for just as we bend ourselves into the will of the One who prays for us.

This posture of entrance into the lives of those whom we love or hate, those whom we mourn for or whose lives fill us with worry are not the objects of our words, but become the objects of our hopes. Our hopes are grounded in our hope in the world, in the one who has become hope to the world. Through the moments of prayer, through lives filled with prayerful thought and contemplation our lives become entwined with the one who hopes for us and became a prayer for us. Christ' life, his performance of us was his bending himself towards. It was his entrance into us as us that prayer in this instance seeks to follow and participate in. This participation is not only in God's Trinitarian life, but rather we participate in creation in a new way as we become bound to God's creation as recipients of God's grace and those who bear the mark of the Spirit upon our lives and hearts. This bending and transformation marks the final aspect of prayer as a life of receptivity and the possibility of transformation.

The prayer life as receptivity and transformation

In the prayers of Jesus and the witness of his identity as the one who does the will of the Father we see this not only as a moment which bears witness to a relationship, but we also in this moment see within these prayers profound moments of transformation grounded in the reality of receptivity and desire. In the prayers of Jesus we are encountered that the will of the Father could not be fulfilled from a distance, but through a radical binding. The one who does the will of the Father must also become bound to the object of the Father's love and desire. Here creation is undoubtedly the object of the Word's desire as will, but here the central claim is that in the life of prayer the one who subjects themselves to the will of God

does not remain unchanged, but rather becomes bound to that within God's own life so that the unfolding of that object becomes bound up with the believer's own life.¹⁰

Their lives become bound to those they pray for as they become bound to the one they pray to. Their very lives become transformed, commingled with the Spirit, these peculiar people, and even strangers to become something new. This binding requires not only an attentiveness to law or deeds, but also an embodiment of Christ's desire *for* us. This embodiment opens the one who prays to the possibility of transformation, of becoming something new.

The shape of this new life is seen in the very first of those whom Christ called to follow him and in particular in the life of Simon who would become Peter. Jesus saw Peter and called out to him. In this regard Simon "had heard" and left his nets in obedience. Yet what Simon does not know is that in this new life Jesus has asked him into obedience is not enough. His life struggles to see discern Jesus' law and conform to it, yet is continually rebuffed. His desire is for the fulfillment of the law, not an embrace of the life of the one whom he follows. Simply following the law is not enough.

In this new reality the obedient one will be crushed and re-membered. That is to say that for Simon the "one that has heard" must find himself crushed and failed until there is only Jesus to hold onto. For Simon to live into his new name his hearing must be transformed. The fragmented pieces of his life must bear heat and pressure until they are transformed into something new. Peter, this rock will not simply appear. It begins as sand and sediment and

¹⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*. The notion of the Christian life reborn in God as a new rhythm is crucial here where the entirety of one's movement, their material reality is caught up within a new time, a new way of counting which renders previous rhythms dissonant or "off" in such a way as can be *felt* within the texture of their life.

loose pieces of dirt which are swept away easily by the rain and waters or gusts. To become rock they begin to get ground into the earth and piled upon. Rock is a material that is formed under tremendous pressure causing the individual particles to begin to give up their particular natures and being solidified into granite or sandstone or marble. The life of discipleship is succumbing to this pressure, this fragmentation so as to be re-made within the womb of Christ's body, within the furnace of the Spirit that dwells within us calling us out of and into our selves.

And this was so in Peter's life. When Jesus called him Peter it was not that momentary shift but the beginning of an arduous process of being ground down and made into something new. But Jesus called Simon, "Peter" not with an instantaneous transformation in mind, but with a calling to become, to transfix his eyes on the possibilities that God has for him – I will make you a fisher of men. But we cannot jump to that end too quickly. Jesus' calling to Peter was itself the performativity of prayer, a calling out to those whom would hear. Peter's own life of following is a life that seeks to correspond to this calling, to succumb to the pressure, but in doing so he will ultimately find himself pressed into the lives of those he once thought strangers.

The life of prayer begins with Simon. It begins with "one who has heard." It begins with a people to whom God has said, "I will be your God and you will be my people." And so to pray is to enter into the discipleship of Simon Peter. We must begin to hear the calling of God gently or not so gently seeking our gaze so that we may begin to envision a true existence, a real future, and a presence with Him. And upon hearing we must obey – we must follow and seek to conform and bind our lives to the others who have heard. The life of prayer is being pressed into something new, being collected and impressed upon.

Just as the Word's desire or will for us brought about the impression of the divine upon us, our desires bent towards the will of the Father and the Father's will in our neighbors life opens us up to the transformation of our own lives as our lives become marked by a missional identity. It is a life that is now marked by a constellation of peoples and commitments that resist classification and continually confound the world. We are a new people not simply because a biological identity or the transformation of a relational identity. To be a new people, to be marked by the mulattic is to enter into a life that is continually resisting the claims of purity and cultural forms that become idolatrous through their traditioning.

The power of the gospel and the new people wrought through the baptismal waters and those who come continually pray and bend themselves into the will of the Father and into the lives of one another become a people who cannot imagine themselves apart from these new strange people. In this transfiguration their lives become bound to one another in such a way as to sing new songs and sing old songs in new ways. It is to incorporate the wealth of dances, foods, tastes, and ways of embracing in new ways. The accumulation of these moments is to create a people who are neither/nor but. They can no longer return to their former people for they speak with a new accent, their lives are marked by new rhythms, enemies have become friends, and friends have become enemies.

This mulattic Christian existence is one that is continually unfolding and enfolding those who are called into its doors. They are a people who are not entrapped by the totalizing claims of a false purity for they know themselves to exist on both sides. They are in and not of, they are part and they are distinct for there is one in them who is their beginning and their end. They do not order their steps but rather their lives are marked by the miracle of

their birth and their new life, continually impressed with the memory of what they once were and the hope of what they are to become. Their life of discipleship is the life of becoming what Christ has made them already. It is the struggle to discern what is to be left behind and what is to be transformed.

The mulattic life is a transfigured life that is continually pressing into receptivity. It is continually seeking that which has been prepared and as it does so it received those who are new and called. It does not resist these people or their ways for they were once strangers in a strange land. The possibility of these new people only serves to remind them of who they once were and the strangeness of who they are to become. For Christ is not captured in the perfection of one people, but in the transfiguration of these peoples lives together. They are Christ's body incorporated, transformed and sent. They are a people whose personhood is received from the one whose life they live into and those they live into it with.

Transformation is not something to resist for it is transformation, transgression, "impurity" that makes our lives possible. Baptism is the birth of the bastard child, the one born through the waters of many and who struggles into a world that receives him not and insists his cultural and racial desire be disciplined within the confines of racial propriety. The mixture is an anomaly, a fetish that is entered into by those who do not appreciate the depth of their culture or who hate themselves. In our modern world such claims are sadly true. But they are true because the possibility of any life is continually pressed into the boundaries of a racialized existence. To be dark is to struggle against the specter of white beauty. To be white is to be continually deluded into your own normativity. The baptism moment gives birth to those who can no longer live into such tragic realities. Their lives are conceived in the womb of a holy transgression. Their lives are marked by a hybridity requiring the betrayal of a

people (Jennings). It is the entrance into a life that requires not the upholding of a new, stable personhood, but to enter into a prayerful existence where God continually calls us into the lives of our neighbors and our enemies, where we are called from Simon to Peter, where we are confronted with the loss of our children to receive them.

Prayer is the inhabitation of this transformation and this danger. It is the promise of change, of becoming something new. Prayer is the political presence of a transformed and transforming people. It is the instantiation and the mark of a transformative reality that resists the temptations of racial coherence and witnesses to the hybrid nature of being a “new creature.” Prayer continually opens one up to becoming something different thus ecclesial spaces bear witness to the vulnerability of such transformed and transforming lives, never the assertion of their finality or purity. Ecclesial life is prayer life, thus ecclesial life is mulatto existence.

As we examined in our discussion of baptism the moment for the individual is always a moment of ecclesial and communal witness. The politics of presence is to continually confront the world with the question, “what are you?” where are you from? It is the life marked by rhythms and rituals of incorporation that continually defy and redefine the possibilities of societal life. Shared existence in this mulattic space is not the competing assertions of a multicultural people who must be “represented” in order to be seen, but rather it is marked by the continual offering and reception of a people whose gifts and lives are being bent into the glorification, the transfiguration of a people.

The lives of these new creatures are political through their presence for they refuse to be named within the confines of racial or ethnic singularity for these ideas cannot attune themselves to the songs of their ecclesial being. The names of cultural and racial personhood

must continually resist innovation and change to preserve them. Yet the Christian life is one perpetuated by its adaptation, its continual impressing and openness to being impressed upon. It is a community marked by prayer, by baptism, by a feast of flesh and blood. It is a people marked by songs and new songs. It is a people whose lives are not marked by the certainty of their melody but the possibility improvisation.

As Paul teaches us “there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ.” (Galatians 3.29) Paul’s construction of identity here is neither the erasure of particularity nor the establishment of a new kind of racial certainty.¹¹ To be in Christ in this moment is to occupy a space of utter disruption. It is to enter into a body that is neither/nor – but. It is the transfiguration of particularity so as to burn off its idolatry and its certainty, but still declare God’s mercy and justice to the world. It is the offer of grace *through*. The mediatory possibility of our body is one that cannot be spoken through without change, without transformation. The necessity of transformation, the necessity of death, and the promise of new life is the political presence of the inter body. It is the filling out of the Israel struggle with the alien. It is the incorporation of the peoples into the Body. It is the creation of a new people who are all people and no people. They are neither/nor –but.

¹¹ This is the fundamental problem with articulations of Christian identity as a “third race.” It reproduces an identity bound within terms outside of Christ’s own body. Racial identity is one bound intrinsically to a particular aspect of one’s body or at the very least a certain description of a body. Here identity is bound to Christ’s body and identity is thus external to one’s personhood. Thus the constellation of particularities that forge “a people” are both external and internal, but in ways that are continually shifting, but perpetually tied to the abiding and eternal of presence of God within and without.

Conclusion

The life of prayer in Jesus here indicates the possibility that is held for any who prays. Prayer is a life receptivity, desire, and transformation wherein the one who prays becomes subject to becoming something different in their desire for God and for the will of God in the lives of those they pray for. The life of prayer is not one of distance, but it is to acknowledge the reality of a God who is near both to the one who prays as well as to the one who is being prayed for. In this unity the distance is overcome and both become open to the possibility of being transformed into something new.¹²

Thus prayer is a kind of intercourse or union where new birth is always possible. The intent here is desire for God and God's will. Its intent is to enter into communion with God, but this communion is not without the risk of procreation, the possibility of becoming mother and father to strange looking children and connections to people who were once not your brothers and mothers and sisters and daughters.

Jesus' own prayer life is the instantiation of this profound possibility in that it is in his prayers that we are born. It is through his prayers, his being the one who does the will of the Father that we might be in Him as He as in the Father. In this way we see the prayer life of Jesus as a foundational aspect of a theological anthropology. Here prayer becomes a witness to the Christological claim that Jesus was both human and divine and that in our prayers our

¹² Nellas. and Zizioulas. In both of these works the pneumatological aspects of anthropology are crucial. Each will help to highlight the ways in which the dogmatic claims concerning Christ's life give shape to the claims being made about human lives and specifically the pneumatological claims explicit within a reflection made about prayer.

humanity indicates something beyond itself. In our prayers we attest to the presence of the Spirit within us and to the transformation wrought through the baptismal waters within us. Here the prayer is not a constitutive practice in the sense that it is one among many practices that constitute a “cultural reality.” Rather, in moments of prayer we bear witness to the one who prayed for us and from us. Prayer is in itself an iconic reality that is continually pointing beyond itself and through the one who utters words familiar and strange.¹³

In these prayers the believer confesses the reality that their torments and cares, joys and hopes have been taken up within God’s own life. This is a moment that does not only indicate that we are heard, but that we are *in* Christ and that Christ is in our prayers. Prayer here is a testament to the reality that in the incarnation one’s very life has been taken up completely within the life of God. Here again the moment of prayer a seeking to conform to that in which the believer already exists. They seek to conform to the will and purposes of God unfolding in the midst of them while confessing to the possibility that their will is not that of the Father and that they may in fact be uttering words incoherent with the one who prays on their behalf.¹⁴

Here it is not only entering into God’s taking up the concerns of the believer, but as the believer seeks to enter into the will of God they are themselves taken into God’s concern for the world, for their neighbor, for their enemies. As we inhabit Christ’s desires and prayers

¹³ Drawing again upon Barth’s emphasis on Jesus presence on both sides of the equation I want to highlight here the way in which the ontological must be political. Specifically, Christian claims concerning politics must outline forms of life with who we *are* in light of who Christ is. Such claims are inherently political because they require not only a response by the world, but the continual attempt to conform to such realities within our own bodies. Thus the claim is both witnessing in its confession and confessing in its witness.

¹⁴ Augustine, *The Confessions*. Here the way in which the dogmatic claims are ever-present within the prayers of *Confession* as well as its very structure as a prayer highlight the Christian life as the continual seeking to conform to those that are both without and within it. It points to the life of discipleship as the continual prayer for faithfulness, a life of hope which itself witnesses to the possibility that we can become things radically different than we once were.

for us we begin to re-imagine our relationship and desires for those for whom Christ prays. Here the desires for God's will and to become conformed into the image of the one who does God's will binds us to those whom God loves transforming our desires for ourselves into desire for our neighbors. In these prayers my hopes and joys become bound to the hopes joys and fears of my neighbors in this encounter the one who prays becomes transformed. Recall here the literary illustrations provided by Charles Chesnutt, James Weldon Johnson, and Nella Larsen where Chesnutt, in contrast to Johnson and Larsen, highlight climactic moments where it is not the one who "passes" who is transformed, but rather it is often a white individual choosing to forsake the advantages of their race in order to pursue a love for a "colored" love interest.

This transformation is not instantaneous, but nonetheless in these moments of prayer the object of such prayers become bound to an ecclesial identity.¹⁵ They become brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers. In these moments of prayer the baptismal moment becomes rearticulated and inflected anew as one arises out of prayer able to see new possibilities and new tragedies in their midst. Through these moments of prayer we begin to imagine ourselves in the world

Yet these prayers do not allow solely for an intellectual assent or a perpetual distance, but rather are profound moments of presence through Christ. They are moments of entering into strange realities and becoming burdened with new weights that begin to alter the

¹⁵ Zizioulas.

relationships of the church and those within the church.¹⁶ The reality of Christ's presence among them through their prayers and their prayers as repetitions of Jesus prayer are not moments of reflective mourning, but of bodily desire and yearning that participate in the formation of those who see themselves as strangers in the world and begin to read its text with eyes of foreigners.¹⁷

Through the prayers of the faithful and the transformation possible in these moments the participants themselves enter into the risk of the One who prayed for them. The prayers of the faithful lead us to enter into a transgress love that requires our relationships and desire confront and disrupt. This disruption is intentional, but also a profound presence in the world that continually defies. Its presence in the world is the divine child born of a virgin whose very presence in the world confronts the world with the reality of redemption and its presence among the faithful whose lives are defined only by a reception of the call, a "Yes" to God's promise.

Such a transformation within the believer becomes the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer for those who would believe that they might be in him as he is in the father. Such a transformation could be understood as transfigurative. That is, in the transformation wrought through prayer the believer's life becomes a reality that continually points to God's call to the world. The prayer and the one praying are transfigured into God's presence in the

¹⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.1. Here I am drawing on Barth's language of apprehension to highlight the way in which such a life of discipleship refuses the tendency toward self-creation that is often a defining characteristic of interracial life as well as contextual theology. What will be important to highlight here is the radical way in which receptivity is a politics and it is in prayer that such a politics becomes bound necessarily to a spirituality within the life of discipleship.

¹⁷ "Letter to Diognetus." and Ephesians 3. Both of these texts highlight the way in which Christian life is characterized through its presence and distance. Such lives are marked by neither the absence of "cultural" engagement nor the articulation of a contrary culture, but rather a peculiar relation to and within marks these lives.

world, God's beckoning that those who are of dirt might become burning bushes, bodies that hold within them and their desires God's hope and possibility within the world.

It is in inhabiting a life of prayer that we begin to see the profound implications for a formation of a political vision of identity. Such a transfiguration is political. These praying bodies become presences. Such bodies seek to inhabit the lives of those who seek, hurt, and yearn in such a way as they become welcomed into God's very body and in these moments both those who embody and those who receive such a presence become further transformed. The prayers of the people articulate both their strangeness to the world, the way in which the world is sometimes utterly apart from them, and yet they are the world, they are the object of these prayers, of God's mercies. Prayer is always disrupting and articulating. It disrupts the sensibilities and hopes we have concerning ourselves. It is a mode of language that continually requires the reception of who we are. It is a practice groping to listen to hear, to be named and to hear the words of forgiveness. It is the practice of seeking guidance of discerning a way in the world. As such it confesses that though we are of this world it is not our possession. It is not that which we order and establish. We must find our way through it. It is a place that is strange to us. And yet prayer also articulates. It articulates the world as a creation and us as creatures. It declares the possibilities of the world as not within its own possibilities but bound to the possibilities of God who has bound God's own Word to it eternally.

Prayers are the yearnings of exiles that have come to call this new place home. They are the utterances and desires for the comfort of the One who knows them and speaks to them softly in their own tongue. Prayers are those lives bent to their author and sing lowly the melodies of their mothers, but now with new timbres and new accents. Prayers are the

lives of those who are redeemed and declare to the world in their refusals the possibilities of redemption.

Through the life of the prayer the reality of bodies is revealed to be dirt enlivened by the breath of God. It is through the life of prayer that such lives become softened to the reality of the life of God in the “other” and in that reality the particularities of human lives become interwoven and sutured together.¹⁸ They become Peters. It is in these moments that lives become softened to the fire of the Spirit and once malleable blend into one another creating new particularities that themselves will come to display the glory of God’s presence in the world. The politics of presence refuses the dichotomies of identity that render lives upon illusions of difference. It refuses these illusions through their perpetual transgression. In these transgressions these, “mixed” bodies re-imagine lives together through their desire for one another that refuses conceptions of difference as unsurpassable. The fruit of these children, these en-spirited bodies, these mulatto children exist in the world as a witness not only to the illusion of enclosed, certain identities, but more profoundly to God’s refusal to abide within these enclosures. Mulatto bodies witness to the transfiguration of all bodies, to the transgression not only of cultures and races, but of divine and created, eternal and temporal calling all people into the certainty of their own transformation into God’s children.

¹⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986). Balthasar’s continual connection between the life of transformation and contemplative prayer are important here. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Religious Instruction*. Nyssa provides a profound image of wax melting as it encounters the light of the Word made flesh. Here I want to press this image further in a communal sense where such softening is a perpetual mark of the church where its members are continually becoming softening to one another and each member becomes a “hybrid” of those they are near as they all seek to conform to the image of Christ who is among them in the Spirit.

To call upon the name of Jesus, to be re-born, to pray, to serve, is to conform to the Spirit, to acknowledge the truth of our personhood as bound to the one who both abides in us and calls us from without. The politics of presence is to refuse the marks of race and ethnicity by living into this new birth and the form of life that calls us not to maintain these lines, but subject them to the possibility of becoming something new.

O Lord my God, my one hope, listen to me, lest through weariness I be unwilling to seek You, "but that I may always ardently seek Your face." You give strength to seek, You who have made me find You, and have given the hope of finding You more and more. My strength and my weakness are in Your sight: preserve the one, and heal the other. My knowledge and my ignorance are in Your sight; where You have opened to me, receive me as I enter; where You have closed, open to me as I knock. May I remember You, understand You, love You. Increase these things in me, until You refashion me wholly. Amen¹⁹

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Biography

A native of Germantown, MD, Brian graduated in 1997 from Houghton College in New York with a Bachelors of Arts in American History. Upon graduation he taught history at a Christian school in Philadelphia and served in a local church's youth ministry. Brian came to Duke University in 1999 and received his Masters of Theological Studies from the Divinity School in 2002. He remained in the Divinity School for three years serving as a Teaching Assistant before entering the Graduate Program in Religion as a doctoral candidate in theology in the Fall of 2005. Brian and his wife Gail have three children.