Embodied Prayer: the practice of prayer as Christian theology

by

Sangwoo Kim

Date: April 22, 2016

Approved:

Geoffrey Wainwright, Supervisor

Randy Maddox

Stanley Hauerwas

Lester Ruth

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor Theology in the Divinity School of Duke University

2016
ABSTRACT

Embodied Prayer: the practice of prayer as Christian theology

by

Sangwoo Kim

Date: April 22, 2016

Approved:

Geoffrey Wainwright, Supervisor

Randy Maddox

Stanley Hauerwas

Lester Ruth

An abstract of a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology in the Divinity School of Duke University

2016
Abstract

This dissertation attempts to retrieve the integration of prayer and theology in the life of the church. Prayer is a spiritual and bodily theological activity that forms Christian identity and virtuous character. The bodily dimension of Christian prayer plays an essential role in theological understanding and moral formation. However, the embodiment of prayer has been mostly neglected in modern academic theology. This study highlights the significance of the body at prayer in theological studies and spiritual formation.

Chapter 1 presents Karl Barth’s theology of prayer as a model of the integration of prayer, theology, and Christian life (lex orandi, lex credendi, lex agendi). However, Barth’s attempt to overcome the dichotomy between theory and practice in theology did not pay much attention to embodiment of prayer. Through ritual studies and phenomenology (Marcel Mauss, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Pierre Bourdieu), chapter 2 shows why the bodily dimension of the practice of prayer should be recovered in theology and ministry; then it explains how Christians in the early and medieval church actually prayed with the body, how their bodily actions were understood in their theological paradigms, and how their actions contributed to the formation of Christian character. Chapter 3 narrows the focus to the formation of the heart in the making of Christian character. The practice of prayer has been emphasized not only as an expression of the inner heart of pray-ers but also as a channel of grace that shapes their affections as enduring dispositions of the heart. Furthermore, historically the bodily practice of prayer gave theological authority to the devout Christians who were marginalized in academic
theology or ecclesiastical hierarchy, and Chapter 4 presents the *lex orandi* of praying women who gained their theological knowledge, wisdom, and authority through their exemplary practices of prayer (Catherine of Siena, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, and Teresa of Avila). These historical examples reveal how Christian communities appreciated and celebrated the theological voices from the margins, which developed from theological embodiments in prayer.

This dissertation concludes that academic theology needs to heed these diverse theological voices, which are nurtured through everyday practice, as an integral part of theological studies. Therefore, it calls for a new paradigm for understanding the relationship between theory and practice in theological education. The integration between theory and bodily practice is necessary for both academic theology and spiritual formation. A more holistic understanding of Christian practices will not only enhance the training of scholars and clergy but also give the laity their own theological voices that will enrich academic theology.
Dedication

To Jung, Ian & Luke
Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgments ......................................................................................................... ix
Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
1. *Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex agendi*: Barth’s paradigm of prayer, theology, and Christian life ................................................................................................. 11
   1. 1 Prayer and the Knowledge of God: Theological Landscape ........................................ 15
   1. 2 Affections, Reason, and Prayer .................................................................................. 26
      1. 2. 1 Wonder and Fear ............................................................................................... 28
      1. 2. 2 Joy, Thanksgiving, and Praise ......................................................................... 30
      1. 2. 3 Liturgical Reasoning ....................................................................................... 32
   1. 3 Prayer and Doctrine: the Trinity .............................................................................. 34
   1. 4 Prayer, Theology, and Christian Life ....................................................................... 46
   1. 5 Embodied Practice of Prayer as Theology: the Weaker Link in Barth’s *lex orandi, lex
credendi* ...................................................................................................................... 54
   1. 6 Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 63
2. The Body at Prayer ..................................................................................................... 66
   2. 1 The Body, *Habitus*, and Practice: conversations with the French—Marcel Mauss,
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Pierre Bourdieu .................................................................. 69
      2. 1. 1 Marcel Mauss ..................................................................................................... 69
      2. 1. 2 Maurice Merleau-Ponty ................................................................................ 75
      2. 1. 3 Pierre Bourdieu .............................................................................................. 81
   2. 2 Prayer, Linguistic *Habitus*, and Paralanguage ......................................................... 90
   2. 3 Ritual Performance, Knowledge, and Formation of the Self .................................... 99
   2. 4 The Body at Prayer: a Historical Survey .................................................................. 109
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor, Geoffrey Wainwright, for his insightful guidance and steady encouragement. I am indebted to his keen interest in my research and his encyclopedic knowledge of liturgy. His ecumenical life and work have shown me how theology, liturgy, and Christian life can be integrated. It has been a great honor to be his last doctoral student.

I am also grateful to Randy Maddox, who embodies the spirit of generosity, for his invaluable advice and unwavering support. Special thanks to my other dissertation committee members: Stanley Hauerwas, and Lester Ruth.

Many teachers have guided me in this long journey. Sarah Coakley, who first taught me the importance of prayer in Christian theology, has been a close mentor over the years; Walter Lowe helped me learn how to have theological conversations with continental thinkers; Don Saliers encouraged me to explore liturgical theology; David Kelsey introduced me to Barth’s theology of prayer.

To my friends, Mindy Makant, Jeffrey Conklin-Miller, and Andrew Stern, I offer my sincere gratitude. Without their friendship and support, this work would not have been possible.

My family have been amazingly supportive throughout this journey. Many thanks to my parents, Dongjoo Kim and Yeonhyuk Lee, and my mother-in-law, Myunghee Park. They taught me how to pray and demonstrated powerful theological voices arising from a life of prayer.
I am grateful to my wife Jung Hyun Choi for her love, courage, and wisdom, and my two boys, Ian and Luke, for their trust in me. It is to them I dedicate this dissertation.
Introduction

“Pastor, would you teach us how to pray?” This was the most frequent question I received in my ministry, but it was also the question my theological education had least prepared me to answer. During my seminary years, prayer was usually a secondary activity, what one practiced privately outside or after rigorous theological thinking. It was not part of either the academic exercise of theological reasoning or the moral vision of Christian life. Prayer came only after abstract thinking was finished and our moral decisions were made. Prayer was at least considered helpful as a subjective exercise that applies the already-established theological ideas to the heart of a self, but it was an optional practice in the making of a theologian. How to engage in theology through prayer and how to nurture Christians through prayer were not among the typical questions on the horizon of academic theology.

However, parishioners expect their pastors to be trained to pray with theological knowledge and wisdom. In their minds, theologians are those who have deep understanding of the traditions of Christian prayer and have profound experience of communion with God in prayer. Feeling helpless and hopeless about their ability to sustain a prayer life (especially in contrast with the daunting commandment to pray without ceasing), they are eager to learn how to pray from the pastor-theologians of their churches.

The discrepancy between these two different expectations puzzled me. I was caught between academic theology and the practice of the church. This experience propelled me into an extensive search for a model of theological education that integrates prayer and theology. I discovered that in the early and medieval church, theologians were
expected to be pray-ers. They prayed, wrote prayers, and taught how to pray as their theological works. More importantly, their theological thinking was deeply embedded in the life of prayer, and their practice of prayer arose from their theological studies. There was no gap between theory and practice in their prayers. Their *lex orandi* was their *lex credendi*, and *vice versa*.

This discovery of the premodern model of the integration of prayer and theology prompted me to investigate how it was lost and whether there were any attempts to retrieve the place of prayer in contemporary theological studies. I reviewed almost all academic works on prayer published across different theological traditions, and Karl Barth’s theology of prayer in particular caught my attention. Barth was one of the rare major Protestant theologians who wrote extensively about prayer. But his importance in the question of *lex orandi, lex credendi* does not lie merely in the fact that he treated the topic of prayer seriously in his theological works. More fundamentally, he asserted that prayer itself is a theological work, and theological study is a liturgical act in essence. For Barth, prayer is the basic posture of a theologian. Theology does not merely begin with prayer, nor is it simply followed by prayer. Theology is prayer through and through.

Barth’s theology shows how deeply prayer is rooted in his overall theological vision. For Barth, prayer is not an extra activity that can be added to the complete closed system of theology. Prayer is a theological activity in which not only a human pray-er but also all three persons of the Trinity participate. Prayer is indispensable in human knowledge of God and of the self. Theology is ever renewed in prayer because a theologian’s continual encounter with the living God brings about a new perspective on divine activity in history. Thus, theology always remains in the mode of prayer.
Barth also envisioned the Christian life being molded and shaped in the life of prayer, more specifically in the act of invoking God. This invocation is more than calling God’s name; it is a basic disposition of the life of faith that waits for and responds to the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Prayer does not simply help one to follow moral rules that are independently established outside the life of prayer. Christian moral character is born out of prayer; all human actions, desires, and thoughts are encompassed in the act of calling upon God. Moreover, Barth viewed prayer (the act of invocation) not as a preparation for a Christian moral action but as the most genuine Christian action itself.

Barth’s integration of prayer, theology, and life (lex orandi, lex credendi, lex agendi) became the leading candidate for the doxological nature of theology and life that I want to retrieve in theological education. The more I read Barth, the more I was surprised at how deeply prayer was woven into the fabric of his theological life. At the same time, however, the more I read Barth, the thirstier I got. Despite his claim that prayer is a theological work, Barth’s teachings on prayer do not discuss much how people actually pray. In particular, he was silent on the dimension of the body at prayer. Barth had a body. He must have prayed with, in, and as the body. However, this obvious fact did not appear in his theology of prayer. He had little interest in the practice of prayer as a concrete bodily action. He did not investigate what the body experiences in prayer, and how the body, as well as the heart, is reshaped through these experiences.

But why is the body important in our discussion of prayer? Is it not the spirit of prayer, rather than the action of the body, that matters to God? It is true that the prophetic traditions highlighted the status of the heart in prayer rather than the actions of prayer, but
they did not categorically reject the significance of the body at prayer. Embodiment is a fundamental human condition. No one can have experience, perception, and thought without or outside the body. Likewise, a pray-er is not an ethereal being. Prayer inevitably involves one’s bodily interaction with the living God and one’s own human conditions. The heart cannot be separated from the body in action. Therefore, without a careful consideration of the body at prayer, our theological understanding of prayer will remain inchoate.

Recognition of the importance of the embodiment of prayer led me to conversations with three French thinkers: Marcel Mauss, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Pierre Bourdieu. Their relentless analyses of the body’s role in the formation of the self were indispensable resources for me in going beyond what Barth’s theology could offer. Marcel Mauss regarded prayer as a bodily and ritual act, which is a social phenomenon, both in form and in content, governed by *habitus*. Mauss argued that human behaviors are highly conditioned by their socio-political contexts, and formation of the body happens through the acquisition of body techniques that are not random and individualistic, but social and cultural. Thus, the body at prayer bears social markers.

Both Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu offered crucial theoretical frameworks for understanding the roles of bodily practices in human perception, reasoning, and identity formation. They deplored that the body was ignored in the body-mind dichotomy of modern Western philosophy. Being in the world requires the body’s constant interaction with its surroundings. The body does not passively absorb information; it is not a mere tool the mind uses to engage in the physical world. The body actively evaluates, negotiates with, and responds to the world through *habitus*, through the complex process
of embodiment of social structures. Bodily practices produce a successful agent who incorporates the social norms of the community. The habituated body “knows” how to act in its field.

These insights of practice theories reinforced my conviction that bodily practices in prayer are not secondary to theological thinking or reasoning. The liturgical body acquires liturgical reasoning which can be enacted only by practices. Bodily actions shape one’s knowledge, reasoning, affections, and character. However, my research showed that the body at prayer was a neglected topic not only in Barth’s theology, but even in liturgical studies focused on the relationship of prayer and faith (lex orandi, lex credendi) that were calling for more scholarly attention to the actual practices of worship. The verbal content of liturgical texts has been carefully analyzed, but not many scholarly resources were available to understand the body in action at prayer. Therefore, I conducted a thorough historical investigation of the bodily practices of prayer, especially in the early and medieval church, so that we can know how Christians actually prayed (using their bodies in their prayers in time and place), and how they understood the roles of bodily practices in the larger contexts of formation of the Christian self.

In this historical study, I noticed two important points. First, there was a deep connection between the practices of prayer and theological understanding in the early and medieval church. How Christians prayed with the body was intertwined with how they believed theologically. Second, there was a pedagogical vision behind the discipline of the body at prayer. Teachers of prayer attempted to train both mind and soul (the whole self) by training their bodies. The practice of prayer was viewed as an indispensable means to produce and promote Christian disciples.
The reshaping of the heart in prayer was also a significant theme in the larger picture of the formation of a theological and moral self. Prayer was seen as a vehicle of not only expressing the inner heart but also molding it in the right direction. Pray-ers engaged in affective interactions with the sacred, and such experiences gradually shaped their affections as the steady dispositions of their souls. The gradual transformation of the heart in prayer was seen as crucial for the development of Christian character.

Early and medieval Christian examples demonstrate how bodily practices of prayer nurtured the theological and moral self with commendable knowledge, wisdom, and character. Communities of faith recognized and celebrated the theological voices of those who successfully embodied these values in the life of prayer. Pray-ers who showed evidence of the works of the Spirit in their practices became spiritual leaders in their communities, although achieving power and authority might not have been the goal of their practices. Indeed, seeking the virtue of humility was one of the guiding principles of the bodily actions in prayer, but the posture of humility became one of the most powerful statements of authentic piety.

As a result of this paradox, bodily practice of prayer could serve to give theological voices to devout Christians who were marginalized in academic theology or ecclesiastical hierarchy. In particular, there has been a pattern across time and cultures of praying women gaining theological authority based on their profound experiences in the practice of prayer. Even when they were not allowed to preach or engage in theological disputation, they could pray with power and authority bestowed upon them by God, and their praying voices and bodies were appreciated and celebrated in and beyond their
communities. Exploring this specific example offers so of the deepest insight into the connection of embodied prayer and theological education.

This theological journey of mine is encapsulated in this dissertation. This is a study of prayer. This is one convoluted answer to the presumably simple request: “teach us how to pray.” Indeed, this was the very request Jesus’ disciples brought him (Luke 11:1). This dissertation highlights the significance of the embodiment of worship and prayer in theological studies and spiritual formation. I contend that the bodily dimension of Christian prayer play an essential role in theological understanding. Christians are shaped through both bodily and spiritual engagement in the practice of prayer; prayer is a corporate and corporeal practice that forms Christian identity and moral character. However, the significance of the embodiment of prayer has been mostly neglected in modern theological studies. My research shows why the bodily dimension of the practice of prayer should be retrieved in systematic theology. Prayer needs to be recognized as a theological activity, in which a pray-er in action gains and transmits theological knowledge and wisdom, and which produces an ethical agent whose life conforms to the moral values inherent in its practice.

In chapter one, I present Barth’s theology as a theology of prayer par excellence, which epitomizes the integration of prayer, theology, and life. As a Protestant (Wesleyan) theologian, who frequently works with Korean Protestant churches where anti-Catholic sentiment is still prevalent, I found it important to demonstrate how major Protestant theologians like Barth can be a leading voice in the discussion of lex orandi, lex credendi, which is often labeled, and hence dismissed, in Protestant circles as a Roman Catholic or
an Eastern Orthodox principle. My conversation with Barth is an important step to show
that the integration of prayer and theology is an ecumenical issue.

Barth refused the sharp dichotomies between prayer and study, between theory
and practice, and between knowledge and life, which have been prevalent in modern
theology. Barth’s integration of prayer and theology is close to the models of theology
found in the premodern Church. For Barth, prayer is not an extraneous activity added to
the self-sufficient theological enterprise. Prayer is deeply integrated with study and life
from beginning to end. Barth’s principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi* is not an empty
slogan. Barth’s example shows how prayer can be understood as theological work, and
theology can be fundamentally a prayerful work. A detailed discussion of his
understanding of prayer as petition shows how prayer is deeply connected with
theological and doctrinal questions, such as the knowledge of God, Christology, the
Trinity, and human agency. In addition, Barth’s theology of prayer is intertwined with the
Christian life (*lex agendi*). Barth’s moral vision is rooted in prayer as the invocation of
God. The petition, “Thy kingdom come,” is a faithful human response to the divine
action, from which all other human actions derive. Barth envisioned this life of prayer as
a communal, not an individualistic, journey; when Christians call, “Our Father”, it creates
not only a theological self, but an ontological “we” who stands united before the living
God.

However, Barth showed little interest in the actual practices of people despite his
claim that prayer is theology. In other words, *lex orandi as lex credendi* is the weaker link
in his otherwise exemplary paradigm of *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex agendi*. Thus,
chapter two begins where Barth left off: the embodiment of prayer. In the first part of this
chapter, I engage the practice theories of three French anthologists and phenomenologists—Mauss, Merleau-Ponty, and Bourdieu—in order to lay a theoretical foundation for discussion of the body in practice. Through the concept of *habitus*, these French thinkers successfully demonstrated how the bodily practices shape what we know, feel, and do, in other words, how the bodily practices make us as who we are. In addition, I briefly discuss why the non-verbal dimension of prayer as speech is important in our understanding of the practice of prayer. I propose that prayer should be interpreted not as a verbal text but as a holistic event of divine-human encounter.

The second part of chapter two is a historical study of the body in prayer. It explains, mostly in chronological order, how Christians in the early and medieval church actually prayed with the body, how their bodily actions were understood in their theological paradigms, and how their actions contributed to the formation of Christian character. This chapter ends at the era of the Reformation because careful attention to the body in action at prayer has been virtually lost in modern academia, especially on the Protestant side.

After demonstrating that the bodily practices of prayer have been significant means of nurturing Christians in chapter two, I narrow the focus to the formation of the heart in the making of Christian character in chapter three. There is a special link between prayer and the heart in the traditions of Christian prayer. The verbal content of prayer, of course, is considered the language of the heart, but the practice of prayer has been emphasized not only as expression of the inner heart of pray-ers but also as a channel of grace that shapes their affections as enduring dispositions of the heart. In this chapter, I show how bodily engagement in ritual actions—liturgical practices (Psalter, prayer
books, meditation)—molds and shapes the heart and consequently the character of a pray-er.

Recognizing the embodiment of pray-er as a significant dimension of Christian thought and action, and admiring the affective bodily engagement in prayer as a transformative practice that forms the virtuous character of Christian disciples, Christian communities honor the theological voices of those who successfully embody theological knowledge and wisdom in their prayer lives. Holy pray-ers might not have formal education or authority to rely on, but their disciplined bodies are the visible locus of their theological authority. In chapter four I focus on a particularly revealing example of this truth. I present the lex orandi of praying women who gained their theological knowledge, wisdom, and authority through their exemplary practices of prayer. Their stories show how marginalized women could raise their voices and find ways to engage in the ministry of the church through their bodily practices. Although I have found the same pattern across Christian traditions, because of the space limit of this project, I focus on some medieval Western women, whose affective piety were well recognized in the wider church: Catherine of Siena, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, and Teresa of Avila.
1. *Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex agendi*: Barth’s paradigm of prayer, theology, and Christian life

*Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.* (Jeremiah 33:3, NRSV)

*MAY I know you, who know me. May I know as I also am known.* (Augustine, *Conessions*, Book X)

*La vraie nature de l'homme, son vrai bien, la vraie vertu et la vraie religion sont choses dont la connaissance est inséparable.* (Pascal, *Pensées*, 442)

I begin with a consideration of Karl Barth’s theology of prayer as a leading modern exemplar of the integration of prayer and theology. Barth regarded the practice of prayer—more particularly, invocation—as a thread weaving Christian theology and life together.¹ I will trace this theme throughout Barth’s writings, placing it in historical context, to demonstrate that Barth’s theology of prayer shifted the overall paradigm of *lex orandi, lex credendi* in modern theology in the right direction. But I will conclude that Barth did not pay enough attention to the bodily practice of prayer itself as a form of theology, and that theology needs to attend to the insights arising from this embodied practice.

In his last years of writing and lecturing, Karl Barth extensively discussed the importance of prayer as the basic posture of Christian theology and life. In lectures in the United States in 1962—published later as *Evangelical Theology*—Barth identified prayer as one of the four elements of theological work, along with study, service, and love.

---

¹ Perry LeFevre rightly argued, “No theologian in the twentieth century has written as much about prayer as Karl Barth, and none has made it as decisive a theme either in theology or for the life of the Christian community as has Barth.” Perry LeFevre, *Understanding of Prayer* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 28.
Barth did not simply list these four elements in parallel. He argued that prayer should be a “keynote” of the other elements of theological work, and that prayer is the “first and basic act of theological work.” Theologians do not merely move on to study and service—leaving prayer, the first act, behind—when a theological work becomes a more academic exercise of faith. Though prayer alone (without study, service, and love) is not theology in the fullest sense, prayer should always remain at the center of theological work as the essential stance of theologians. Barth argued that “theological work does not merely begin with prayer and is not merely accompanied by it; in its totality it is peculiar and characteristic of theology that it can be performed only in the act of prayer.” He concluded that “without prayer there can be no theological work.”

In his last series of lectures at Basel on the ethics of reconciliation, which he was preparing as Church Dogmatics, Volume IV, Part 4—published posthumously as The Christian Life—Barth also turned to prayer as a central theme in his discussion of the commandment of God. Barth asserted that prayer, especially invocation, should be the basic attitude of the Christian life: the “life of calling upon God will be a person’s Christian life.” “Call upon me” (Psalm 50:15) is the divine command through which Christian life of obedience should be practiced. Barth defined the Christian life as a “human life whose purpose, will, and work focuses always on the one action of invocation of God, and which in its deepest and highest needs and desire, in terms of its

---

3 Ibid.
achievements, is to be understood in its totality as a life in invocation of God.” The majority of The Christian Life is devoted to an exposition of the Lord’s Prayer, which Barth called, following Tertullian’s example, a “breviary of the whole gospel.” Although he managed to cover only the first two petitions of the Lord’s Prayer prior to his death, Barth clearly stated his intention to present the Lord’s Prayer as the model of Christian life, in which theology, prayer, and ethics meet together.

Barth’s emphasis on the importance of prayer in Christian theology and life was already present in his earlier works. Between 1947 and 1949 he gave lectures on the Lord’s Prayer at Neuchâtel—published later as Prayer. In this previous commentary on the Lord’s Prayer, Barth followed a long Christian tradition of using the Lord’s Prayer as a basic unit of catechesis, making a clear connection between prayer and theology. In this work, he also equated prayer with a marker of Christian identity: “To be a Christian and to pray are the same thing.” He compared prayer to breathing, a source of life, without which sustaining a Christian life is unthinkable.

Barth opened The Göttingen Dogmatics, which reflects his earlier thoughts, with Thomas Aquinas’s prayer, found at the beginning of Summa Theologica: “Merciful God, I ask that thou wilt grant me, as thou pleasest, to seek earnestly, to investigate carefully, to know truthfully, and to present perfectly, to the glory of thy name, amen.” Then,

---

5 Ibid., 49-50.
6 Ibid., 50.
7 Barth also devoted a section in Church Dogmatics III/4 to discussion of prayer.
Barth warned his students of the danger in the study of dogmatics because the legitimacy of their works depends on the revelation of God, not on human capacity. Theologians should invoke God “not only at the beginning but also in the middle and at the end” of their theological task. The study of dogmatics is different from the scholarly investigation of Christianity. One can study the teachings of Paul, Luther, Schleiermacher, or even the Bible with academic interests and skills. However, dogmatics ultimately should speak about God, who is beyond human reasoning. Although Barth did not keep this prayer of Thomas in his later project, Church Dogmatics, he kept the same sense of dependence on God’s grace in theological study throughout his writings.

Anselm of Canterbury opened his Proslogion with a similar prayer, in which he confessed his inability of knowing the transcendent God and cried out for divine revelation: “Come then, Lord my God, teach my heart where and how to seek You, where and how to find You.” In his commentary on Proslogion, Barth laid out the principles of theological study, in which he endorsed Anselm’s notion that theology and prayer are intertwined. Theology as intellectus fidei boldly takes the impossible task of understanding the incomprehensible God, humbly asking God to grant not only the goal of theology—the knowledge of God—but also strenuous effort to reach this goal. Thus

---

**Cf.** William of Tocco, one of Thomas’s first biographers, wrote that whenever Thomas wished to begin theological works (studying, writing, teaching, or disputing), he first retired into the secret of prayer. He prayed crying in order to discover the divine mysteries. This account suggests that Thomas thought theoretical understanding is a divine gift that theologians should ask for in prayer. Guillaume de Tocco, *L’histoire de saint Thomas d’Aquin* (Paris: Cerf, 2005), 80-81.

---

10 Ibid.

Barth concluded “in the last analysis [theology] is a question of prayer and the answer to prayer.”

1.1 Prayer and the Knowledge of God: Theological Landscape

Barth’s emphasis on the role of prayer in theological understanding is in line with the characteristics of patristic theology. For example, Augustine’s *Confessions*, one of his finest theological works, is one long prayer. This story of his spiritual journey begins with a prayer that makes an explicit connection between knowing God, calling upon God, and believing God:

‘Grant me Lord to know and understand’ which comes first—to call upon you or to praise you, and whether knowing you precedes calling upon you. But who calls upon you when he does not know you? For an ignorant person might call upon someone else instead of the right one. But surely you may be called upon in prayer that you may be known. . . . In seeking him they find him, and in finding they will praise him. Lord, I would seek you, calling upon you—and calling upon you is an act of believing you. (Augustine, *Confessions*, I. 1)

In the following narrative about God’s continual wooing of his heart, Augustine invites readers into his ongoing conversation with God, in which he frankly expressed his love for God, his frustration with the inadequacy of his knowledge, and his hope for God’s grace of illumination. Finally, he concluded this long prayer by acknowledging the great need of divine guidance for the understanding of divine mystery. Invocation and petition were Augustine’s basic postures in his search for the unfathomable divine truth.

---


14 Augustine raised a rhetorical question to God, “What man can enable the human mind to understand this?”; then he answered his own question: “Only you can be asked, only you can be begged,
The integrated relationship between theology and prayer is perfectly captured in Evagrius Ponticus’s succinct words: “If you are a theologian, you will pray truly; and if you pray truly, you will be a theologian.”\(^{15}\) For Evagrius, *theologia* means the contemplation of the Triune God, in which he sought to have experiential knowledge of the divine mysteries.\(^{16}\) The practice of prayer is a way of participating in the life of the Trinity, through which theological knowledge is experienced in the divine revelation. Thus, prayer and intellect are not two separate paths. Knowledge and prayer work together to “awaken the intellectual power of the mind to the contemplation of divine knowledge”;\(^{17}\) prayer is “a state of the intellect, actualized only through the light of the Holy Trinity by means of ecstasy.”\(^{18}\) When people have such spiritual and intellectual transformation in prayer, they are called theologians.\(^{19}\)

Such emphasis on the indispensable connection between theological study and prayer has not been common in contemporary North American theological education that has adopted the German model of the fourfold “theological encyclopedia”—biblical,
historical, systematic, and practical (pastoral) theology. The neatly divided academic disciplines often try to secure theoretical knowledge within the boundaries of their own specialized fields, without having much interaction with other dimensions of Christian life. Edward Farley argued this fragmented approach to the study of theology resulted from the loss of theologia as habitus, a disposition of the soul. The goal of theological education used to be the holistic cultivation of faithful disciples, but it increasingly became “merely a scholarly learning or learning for practice.”

In the fourfold theological encyclopedia, the place of prayer and worship was confined to the narrowly defined realm of practical theology. It became a dominant idea that theoretical knowledge, separately developed in biblical, historical, and philosophical studies, would be applied to the practices of the church in a similar way that theoretical discoveries are utilized in applied science. In addition, the practice of prayer was often dismissed as a private matter of piety lacking a legitimate place in modern academia. In the sharp dichotomy between theory and practice in the modern theological encyclopedia, academic theology and the life of prayer were separated into different realms. Theology belongs to the academy, and prayer belongs to a person of faith or a worshiping community. In this paradigm, one can be a learned theologian without a deep

---

20 This model is an amalgam of the separate academic disciplines that conformed to the rational scientific methodology of the modern academia. Theological study in the modern academy has been pressured to adopt the model of modern science, which, in its epistemological turn, presumed that a correct scientific methodology would guarantee a discovery of the universal truth, independent of particular culture, context, and practice. Edward Farley, Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1994; reprint, Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 110-24. The emergence of theology as science was already signaled in the rise of scholasticism whose hubs of theological education were not churches or monasteries but universities. See Joseph Ratzinger, The Nature and Mission of Theology: Approaches to Understanding Its Role in the Light of Present Controversy, 115-16; Hans Urs von Balthasar, Explorations in Theology I: The Word Made Flesh (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 181-209; Yves Congar, A History of Theology, 137-41.

21 Farley, 194.
commitment to the life of prayer, and one can be a believer acquiring practical skills without much engagement in theological reflection.

This unfortunate separation between prayer and theology aggravates the loss of the spiritual dimension of theological study. Those theologians who subscribe to the strong dichotomy between theory and practice may turn to the practice of prayer too late, if they ever do, only after their theoretical understanding and moral character are already established. However, Christian faith cannot be divided into these two separate categories of theory and practice. Faith entails the reorientation or transformation of the whole self, which happens through the experience of encountering the living God in a deep sense of longing. Barth emphasized that the subject-matter of theology is not something readily available for theoretical analysis, but someone, a personal God, who is beyond human reason and imagination.  

God the Father is “a speaking and hearing subject, a subject that acts personally.” Unfortunately, however, the basic mode of modern academic theology was often an analysis of something, rather than a dynamic engagement with someone. As modern academic knowledge sought a control over its subject-matter in a manner of totality, modern theology was inclined to reduce the concept of God to something that one could analyze within the boundaries of reason. In his criticism of

---


23 Barth added, “[God the Father] is more than a powerful and efficacious object; he is an object only to the extent that a person, an independent subject, can also be an object—that is, by making itself an object to others without ceasing to be a subject.” Barth, *The Christian Life*, 52-53.

ontotheology, Martin Heidegger pointed out that no one could pray or give sacrifice to the concept of God in ontotheology: “Before the *causa sui*, man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god.”

Barth confessed that he used to think of the divinity in abstract and absolute concepts, so his understanding of God was closer to the God of philosophers than to the personal God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Later, he came to see the living God through God’s engagement in humanity “only in the context of His history and His dialogue with man, and thus in His togetherness with man.”

Barth realized that the encounter with God in prayer is fundamentally different from a meeting with a controllable object or a mere reflection of the Cartesian rational self on theoretical knowledge.

Barth articulated his criticism against the tendency of totalization in theology, by drawing attention to the characteristics of prayer inherent in theology. He argued theology must be understood only in the context of divine-human relationship: “Human thought and speech cannot be *about* God, but must be directed *toward* God, called into action by the divine thought and speech directed to men, and following and corresponding to this work of God.”

---


27 Hans Urs von Balthasar expressed a similar point. The God a Christian calls in prayer is not “simply another ‘I’ over against ‘me.’” God transcends the human self, but at the same time God is with and within the self in the most profound way, so that one can confess, “God is more inward to me than I am to myself.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 23.

28 Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 164; Barth contended that “[s]peech *about* God would not suffice; speech *to* God was what was needed.” Barth, *CD* I/1, 75.
to God— that is inspired by the divine speech. Theology is “human’s language to God.”

Theology must not talk about God as a third person who remains outside of the conversation. Theology cannot be “a disinterested non-obedient consideration” of God. Barth insisted that “[t]rue and proper language concerning God will always be a response to God, which overtly or covertly, explicitly or implicitly, thinks and speaks of God exclusively in the second person.” Thus, he concluded that theology should be conducted “in the form of a liturgical act, as invocation of God, and as prayer.”

In prayer, theologians encounter God as “the self-acting Subject-Father” who wants a loving relationship with human beings. This Father speaks to His children and expects them to speak with Him in return. It does not mean that theology should be always done in a form of address to God. Barth’s point is that invoking “our Father” should be the fundamental posture of Christian understanding of God. Even when God is mentioned only in the third person, the invocation of “our Father” must function as the basis and context of those statements. Barth wrote, “If it is a matter of God, then seriously, properly, and strictly Christians cannot speak about the Father but only to

---

29 Barth, *CD* I/1, 54-55.


31 Barth, *CD* II/1, 26-27.

32 Barth, Evangelical Theology, 145.

33 Ibid., 164.


35 Barth, *CD* III/4, 90.
him.” When one loses such sense of divine-human relationship, prayer and theology become a monologue which reduces God into a pious notion.

Theology can begin properly when Christians call upon the personal God. Theologians cannot undertake the task of theology without reflecting on their particular experience in a dynamic relationship with the living God. Their theology cannot be separated from how they address God, what they experience in prayer, and how they express their desires and thoughts in front of God. Prayer resists any attempt to resolve theological questions independently and conclusively apart from a deep ongoing conversation with God. Theology is not a closed but open system; it is always in development. Theology cannot secure its position by relying on the previously answered questions. The living God continues to surprise human beings in a history that is “always freshly in motion,” so that theology must be renewed in prayer. At every moment


37 “This God who is also man’s free partner in a history inaugurated by Him and in a dialogue ruled by Him was in danger of being reduced, along with this history and this dialogue, to a pious notion—to a mystical expression and symbol of a current alternating between a man and his own heights or depths. But whatever truth was gained in this way could be only that of a monologue.” Barth, *The Humanity of God*, 40.

38 John McIntyre rightly pointed out that “discussions about religious epistemology are discussions about the epistemology of prayer; for prayer is how you know God, how you talk to God, yet it is remarkable that so many treatments of religious epistemology totally ignore the question of prayer, and regard the knowledge of God as some kind of inarticulate knowledge.” John McIntyre, *Theology after the Storm*, 189.


Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) also argued theology presupposes “that [the] truth becomes accessible only in the act of faith and that faith is the gift of a new beginning for thought which it is not in our power either to set in existence or to replace.” Joseph Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 56.

40 Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 89.
theology should “begin at the beginning.”  

Barth succinctly described the role of prayer in the renewal of theology: “No knowledge of God can be confirmed (as it may and should be in confession) without being at the same time newly grounded and won (as happens in prayer). One can be God’s witness only by becoming so ever anew. This is just what happens in prayer.”  

Barth viewed theology as a “free science” (befreite Wissenschaft). Theology is “science” because it studies the God of the Gospel with a critical mind. However, it is not science in a modern sense. It is “free” science because it cannot be confined in any academic framework. The freedom of God frees theology from any dependence on academic presuppositions. Therefore, there must be no fossilization in theology. Everyday it is under the judgment of God, its living subject, who newly and freely engages in human history. Instead of seeking to secure its own place in academia, theology should leave its windows toward God’s work open in prayer. Barth called such free science, which humbly but critically studies the God of the Gospel, “spiritual theology.” In Evangelical Theology, Barth introduced some examples of theologians

41 Ibid., 165.

42 Barth, CD III/4, 87. Cf. “[T]he Confession of faith must end with prayer and therefore naturally must begin with prayer too, and that the only prayer possible at this place must be the one found here, ‘Arise, O Lord,’ and ‘give Thy servants strength’—the prayer for God’s Word and Revelation, and the prayer for faith and thus in the first instance and in the second a prayer for God’s own action, which alone makes amends for what we ourselves shall do badly on all occasions, however hard we strive after right knowledge of God and right service of God. The church, by praying and praying thus, declares that she puts her trust not in herself but in the comfort and hope, whose name is Jesus Christ—and in the power of the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the one true God, to whom alone all Honour and Glory is due. By praying and praying thus the Church declares that she is crossing the gulf by the one real bridge. Without prayer of this kind Reformation teaching would have no real foundation.” Karl Barth, The Knowledge of God and the Service of God according to the Teaching of the Reformation (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1939), 244.

43 Barth, Evangelical Theology, 9.

44 Ibid., 161.
who maintained the prayerful posture in their theological study: Anselm, whose
discussion of divine existence and nature took a form of prayer addressed to God, and
David Hollaz of the eighteenth century, who concluded each article of his dogmatics with
prayer. Barth himself, in his earlier commentary on the Lord’s Prayer, frequently
alternated lecture and prayer by praying rather abruptly in the middle of his theological
discourse.

Spiritual theology is in the mode of invocation, “Veni creator Spiritus!” All
teological inquiries and reflections rely on the invocation of the Holy Spirit. Since
theology is always in great need of divine guidance and revelation, invocation has to be
the most basic posture of a theologian. Only when God answers this entreaty can
theological work be a successful work. This is not an invocation of God as general

45 Ibid., 55.

46 Criticizing “scientific” theology for being divorced from prayer, Hans Urs von Balthasar also
turned to Anselm as an exemplar of prayerful theology. Von Balthasar lamented that since the time of
Scholasticism—when theology gradually adopted the methodology of science from the thirteenth century
on—theology increasingly has become detached from the sacred life of the church. In his pithy words,
“theology at desk” replaced “theology at prayer.” However, the saints of the church, who wished to “have
the world explained anew, interpreted afresh, in the light of revelations,” did not seek scientific objectivity
in knowledge through rational exposition, devoid of faith and personal engagement with God. They were
not interested in a static God as ontological being but in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who
actively engage in the world with grace and love. Anselm was still on his knees in the attitude of prayer
when he undertook the task of abstract reasoning. Even when he momentarily suspended the
presuppositions of faith for the sake of rational speculation, he did not assume that the cerebral exercise
would achieve an ultimate answer independent of the guidance of prayer. “Seeking” in fides quarens
intellectum is a “radical, indwelling property of faith which, deprived of it, would cease to be faith.” Faith
by nature desires knowledge. Therefore, the attitude of prayer is “never superseded or outdistanced by the
attitude demanded by knowledge.” For Anselm, there is no sharp distinction between understanding and
faith because he believed reason is given for enhancement of faith. In prayer he sought to understand the
divine revelation as truth. This type of understanding cannot be achieved by the power of reason alone.
Therefore, von Balthasar argued that “Christian dogmatics must express the fact that one whose thinking is
dictated by faith is in a constant relationship of prayer with its object.” Hans Urs von Balthasar,

47 Barth stressed that “even the best theology cannot be anything more or better than this petition
made in the form of resolute work.” Barth, Evangelical Theology, 58.

48 A theologian can have confidence that her invocation will be answered. Barth presented
multiple biblical texts that show both divine command and promise in invocation: “Call on me in the day of
ontological reality, which is universally accessible through reason or consciousness. The gulf between God and human beings is too wide to be overcome by speculation. The knowledge of God is possible only through the concrete and particular event of the revelation of God, that is, Jesus Christ. This is an invocation of God the Father who revealed Himself though Jesus. Jesus invited Christians to join him in his own unique Father-Son relationship with God the Father, calling this God “our Father.” The particular, special event of Christ is the sole ground of all other individual events of faith.

Therefore, Barth argued that prayer is the first and basic act of theological work. The invocation of God never should stop. Theology is not merely accompanied by prayer, but “performed only in the act of prayer.” Barth refused to accept the dichotomy of practice and theory in the theological encyclopedia that tried to establish the theoretical grounds of theology independent of the practice of prayer. Instead, he presented a theology in the making in the act of prayer. Theology moves vertically in prayer and horizontally in study. Were it not for prayer, theological study would be confined within the human realm and in consequence be empty. Barth even compared those theologians who lack the vertical move of prayer to a squirrel moving in a circle in a cage.

---


50 Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 160.

51 Barth, *Prayer*, 35; *Evangelical Theology*, 171.

52 Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 161.
By presenting prayer as an essential, not secondary, part of the event of revelation, Barth drew attention to the significance of human response in the knowledge of God. For a better understanding of Barth’s point, his distinction between “objective knowledge” and “subjective knowledge” needs to be noted. The objective knowledge of God is the revelation of the truth, which is independent of the subjective appreciation by human beings.\(^{53}\) However, the objective knowledge alone is not sufficient for a true event of revelation. Prayer, an act of invocation, anticipates that the objective divine revelation will reign over the subjective realm. Prayer, as subjective movement, does not defile the objectivity of the knowledge of God; rather, it is an act of opening oneself to the revealed truth. The practice of prayer makes the human knowledge of God possible, and at the same time, the knowledge of God makes the practice of prayer inevitable: the “knowledge of God is always compelled to be a prayer of thanksgiving, penitence, and intercession.”\(^{54}\)

Prayer is necessary for the true knowledge of human nature as well. Being confronted with the law and the weakness of their faith, human beings begin to recognize their miserable sinful state. But their experience is still limited and incomplete; hence their understanding of the gravity of sin is still limited. In Barth’s words, they are still “under a veil.” When they pray, however, their hopeless human condition is unveiled to them; they come to a full realization of their brokenness and hope in Christ.\(^{55}\) Upon this revelation, their prayer also becomes a faithful response to this unveiled truth. They

\(^{53}\) It has “cognitive priority over the absence of its realization in subjective acts of knowing” as John Webster explains. John Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1995), 193.

\(^{54}\) Barth, *CD* II/1, 223.

\(^{55}\) Barth, *Prayer*, 18.
praise God for the wonderful event of Christ, confess their hopelessness, and entreat God that God’s righteousness will prevail in their hearts and on the earth.⁵⁶

1.2 Affections, Reason, and Prayer

Theology as prayer heartily embraces religious affections. The modern academic quest for the truth tended to exclude the emotional dimension of faith. A clear distinction between objectivity and subjectivity was a signature of modernity. In its search for the truth, the Enlightenment “age of reason” trusted in the power of objective universal reason, rejecting emotions as being subjective and therefore unreliable. Academic discourse kept its distance from emotions for concern that they might interfere with an

---

⁵⁶ Barth’s theology has sometimes been criticized for putting too much emphasis on epistemology. In other words, gaining the knowledge of God and the knowledge of human nature seems to be the overarching theme of Barth’s soteriology. For example, Alister McGrath argues that Barth discussed knowledge where others expect to find a discussion of salvation and reconciliation, and that Barth’s entire discussion of justification appeared to focus on the epistemic condition of human beings. God’s relationship with humanity is understood in epistemological terms. Salvation already happened from eternity, outside of human knowledge; human beings are ignorant of the true reality of salvation; finally, the subjective awareness brought by revelation is given as the key for realizing salvation. Thus, human consciousness seems at the center of Barth’s dogmatics. Barth’s interest in knowledge seems to eventually shift the focus from revelation to human awareness. Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1998), 369-71; *The Making of Modern German Christology: From the Enlightenment to Pannenberg* (Oxford: Oxford, 1986), 104-16.

For Barth, however, the knowledge of the revealed truth means much more than cognitive awareness. First, his definition of knowledge is much broader than theoretical cognitive knowledge. The practical knowledge of God is engaged in the transformation of an entire human being, including her affections and actions. Secondly, Barth’s focus was not on human awareness but on God’s action. Barth did not simply portray God as the active revealer of the truth and human beings as the passive recipients of the knowledge. Instead, in the Trinitarian context, God works on the both side of the relationship between human and God, and those who pray in solidarity with Christ are invited to participate in the work of God. Thirdly, such criticism on Barth does not show enough consideration of his strong commitment to ethics. Barth argued that prayer is not an idle stage but an active work for the righteousness of God. In prayer, people take an action based on God-given freedom in the covenant relationship. Thus, David Kelsey claimed that Barth’s anthropology made a shift “from the person as patient or subject of consciousness to the person as agent.” David H. Kelsey, “Human Being,” *Christian Theology: An Introduction to its Tradition and Tasks* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 163.
objective process of reasoning. Thus, the languages of heart, emotion, affection, and passion became marginalized in the academic realm.

The modern preference for “objective reason” over “subjective emotion” has recently received a series of criticism from various perspectives. For example, Freudian psychology debunked the modern myth of human beings as rational animals; the image of the stable reign of reason became difficult to uphold in the recognition of the importance of the subconscious. Postmodern and postcolonial theories exposed the hidden power dynamics in which a dominant party exercised power over the other in the name of reason. Feminism also criticized the gender stereotype of “reasonable man” and “emotional woman,” which was used as justification for men’s dominance over women. In the field of theology, the growing number of theologians turned their eyes to the importance of affections in prayer and worship.

Theology as prayer recognizes the need to retrieve the place of affections in theological discourse. It rejects the exclusive privilege of reason and takes seriously the role of the heart in the Christian tradition. The right disposition of the heart is an indispensable element in Christian faith. Christian faith is more than a system of doctrines; it entails the reorientation of affections. Both the knowledge of God and the affections suitable to this knowledge—both the content of faith and the mode of its acceptance—have been crucial in Christian life. Prayer does not shun the expression of joy, shame, gratitude, or sorrow, and theology as prayer strives to integrate affections with reason, instead of separating them from each other.

When Barth presented invocation as the basic posture of theology, he did not regarded “calling upon God” as a practice performed in a manner of composed
speculation. Rather, he discussed “the humble and resolute, the frightened and joyful invocation of the gracious God in gratitude, praise and above all petition.”57 The human relationship to God must be full of affections—love, joy, gratitude, etc.—which are a driving force of religious life. Barth followed Calvin’s view that the heart God desires is “intelligence et affection,” and prayer is the preeminent locus of such affection.58 Barth insists that prayer must be an “act of affection” which entails “allegiance of our heart.”59

1. 2. 1 Wonder and Fear

Christians come before the transcendent, living God in fear and trembling. In prayer, they remain open to awe and wonder and do not try to domesticate them.60 Theologians can undertake their work only in great distress and desperation because their intellect is inadequate for the knowledge of God. At the same time, however, theologians have a great hope in God’s grace. They pray that God’s revelation will continue to guide and enlighten their mind. Therefore, Barth argued that theologians engage in theological works in both humility and boldness; and prayer is at the center of this humble and bold human act.

The humble heart in prayer acknowledges the limits of human knowledge and asks for God’s illuminating grace. In prayers of desperation and anxiety, theologians confess that they cannot fulfill the daunting task of theology without God’s continuing

57 Barth, The Christian Life, 43.
58 Barth, CD III/4, 114.
59 Barth, Prayer, 19.
60 Barth, Evangelical Theology, 65.
grace. Barth urged a theologian to pray that “God’s work and word may not be withdrawn, but may, instead, be disclosed to [her or his] eyes and ears.”\textsuperscript{61} Barth was fond of Anselm’s prayer, a double entreaty for God’s wondrous works: “Revela me de me ad te! Da mihi, ut intelligam!” and “Redde te mihi! Da te ipsum mihi, Deus meus!”\textsuperscript{62}

However, prayer is still a bold act because through it human beings exercise freedom to participate in divine work. They do not remain passive in their interaction with God in prayer. Although they often make inane, sinful requests, Christians have assurance that God will hear and answer appropriately even those prayers. Their corrupt desires repeatedly mar their prayers, but they have faith in God the Father who will purify their requests upon the intercession of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Despite the worry that “the whole of human egoism, the whole of human anxiety, cupidity, desire and passion, or at least the whole of human short-sightedness, unreasonableness and stupidity might flow into prayer,”\textsuperscript{63} Barth, a fierce defender of divine sovereignty, still took the meaning of “answer” seriously, even claiming that “prayer exerts an influence upon God’s action, even upon his existence.”\textsuperscript{64}

According to Barth, the greatest source of wonder and awe in theological inquiry is Jesus Christ. When sinners find themselves placed beside the Word of God, they are surprised at the unfathomable gulf between the holy God and sinful human beings. However, the true surprise is that God has spanned this gulf by coming to human beings

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 169.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Barth, \textit{CD} III/4, 100.
\textsuperscript{64} Barth, \textit{Prayer}, 33.
in Christ. The Son of God emptied himself and came to stand with the humanity as intercessor, healer, and advocate. In Christ, the holy God comes to an unworthy humanity so near that a pray-er finds herself in the closeness of the parent-child relationship.\textsuperscript{65}

In Christ, the sinners, who are now called the children of God, discover the nearness of God, and it is not the remoteness but the nearness of God that truly surprises them. A true encounter with God happens through the particular revelation of Christ; it is different from a general and abstract encounter of the lowly with the holy.\textsuperscript{66} Thus, Barth differentiated Christian prayer from an overwhelming feeling of reverence at the presence of the numinous or a general aspiration for the union with the holy. Christian prayer is not about having “high thoughts about the glory of God” and “deep thoughts about unworthiness” of human beings and then “making the movements which correspond to these thoughts.”\textsuperscript{67} Christian prayer is placed in a very particular story of Christ, which fills the heart with joy and gratitude as well as wonder and awe.

\textbf{1. 2. 2 \textit{Joy, Thanksgiving, and Praise}}

In addition to invocation, praise and thanksgiving are an essential task of theology. The \textit{Westminster Larger Catechism} confesses, “Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever” (Q.1). Barth envisioned theology not only as a gift from God but also as an offering to God.\textsuperscript{68} Theology can be a “really free and

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{65} Barth, \textit{CD} III/3, 268.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 266-68.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 269.}
happy science in a continually new performance of this voluntary offering.”  

In Barth’s view, an important question is not how early or late, following the primary activity of reason, the practice of prayer would enter theological discourse. Instead, the question is how theological study would begin with prayer in praise and thanksgiving. As Barth argued, “every liturgical movement in the Church arrives too late if its theology is not itself a liturgical movement from the very beginning, if it is not set in motion by proskynesis, i.e. by adoration.” Barth also ended his *Evangelical Theology* with the *Gloria Patri*.

The praise of God challenges all human knowledge which is securely enclosed in the self. In worship, the whole human self is subjected to the overwhelming but compassionate presence of God. This spiritual experiential knowledge of God can happen only through one’s participation in it. In praise and thanksgiving, the worshipper does not merely learn about God passively but actively enters a sacred moment and space in which divine grace makes the knowledge of God possible.

In the same vein, David Ford and Daniel Hardy argue for the primacy of worship in theological thinking. They rightly see an organic connection between the knowledge of God and the expression of this knowledge: “There is no simple sequence of recognition of God followed by expression, but expression can lead the way, and often recognition happens in the very act of expression. There is a knowledge of God that can only come in

---

68 Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 166.

69 Ibid., 167.

70 Ibid., 165.
They view this process as “continual spiral reinforcement” because the experience of praise helps worshippers to appreciate why they praise. Biblical accounts present the communal act of praise as a singular public event that reminds the whole community of true character of God. The recognition of God’s wondrous works naturally turns into a flood of thanksgiving and praise; and the spontaneous outburst of joy and gratitude becomes formalized as communal worship, which in return shapes the community to recognize the greatness of God’s works better.

1. 2. 3 Liturgical Reasoning

This emotional dimension of the hermeneutics of prayer should not be separated from reason and study because the experience of encountering God engages in the whole self. Barth had an extensive discussion of prayer in the context of Sabbath. The meaning of Sabbath is the interruption of human work, and in the time of prayer, theologians turn away from their works of *intellectus fidei*. At such moments, they turn exclusively toward the object of theology, God, who is both the greatest threat and hope for human work. However, this is not rejection or neglect of *intellectus fidei*. His emphasis is not on the primacy of prayer over study, but on the integration of prayer and study. Prayer does not obviate the need of study. Theological reflection is not beyond or above the act of prayer.

---


72 Ibid.
Barth argued that “theological work can be done only in the indissoluble unity of prayer and study.”73

Reason in this context is quite different from the universal reason of the Enlightenment. It acknowledges the importance of historical conditions from which a particular form of reasoning emerges. The self that is standing in front of God in prayer is neither a Cartesian self of doubt nor a Kantian autonomous self. According to Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), the theological self undergoes a conversion as “a death-event” in which the old self “ceases to be an autonomous subject standing in itself.”74 The old self has a new beginning in Christ who is “the new ‘I’ which bursts open the limits of subjectivity and the boundaries dividing subject from object, thus enabling [one] to say: ‘It is no longer I who live.’”75 This new self of “no-longer-I” enters into the “we” of the Church, which formulates a communal, liturgical context for theological reasoning.76 In contrast to the universal reason that is supposedly not contingent on any contexts of faith, liturgical reasoning highly values the importance of the performed communal actions of worship for the cultivation of a self in a community of faith.

73 Barth added, “Prayer without study would be empty. Study without prayer would be blind.” Barth, Evangelical Theology, 171; Von Balthasar described this organic unity between the two in a poetic expression: “The flame of worship and obedience must burn through the dispassionateness of speculation, as it always does through the entire Word of God.” Von Balthasar, Explorations in Theology I, 152.

74 The old self “is snatched away from itself and fitted into a new subject.” Joseph Ratzinger, The Nature and Mission of Theology (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 51.

75 Ibid., 59.

76 Arguing that liturgy is “an underappreciated semiotic form for reasoning,” Steven Kepnes, a Jewish philosopher, argued for “liturgical reasoning.” Kepnes contends that the communal body in worship is the locus of reasoning in Judaism. Liturgical events are dependent upon time, place, and players, so liturgical reasoning is also temporal and spatial. It is always new, never static. It is newly discovered and revealed in every liturgical performance. Steven Kepnes, Jewish Liturgical Reasoning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), viii.
Performance is a locus of communal exercise of reasoning, through which participants foretaste the full knowledge of God. Through participation in worship, believers engage in a concrete particular expression of the truth about God and the world. Even performance of the same liturgy never remains the same; it is newly and freshly experienced in different time and space by a different body of community. Through the holistic experience of body and spirit, liturgy shapes their relationship with God and neighbors. Such active engagement in the praise and confession of the community is indispensable to theological reasoning. One cannot arbitrarily separate thoughts, affections, and actions (which are transformed in these liturgical experiences) in the name of reasoning. Theology does not stay outside of this untamed process of transformation of the self. The worshipping self is under the guidance of the Spirit of God who is “not the mild, diffused, timeless beacon of the Enlightenment always present in the same fashion.” Rather, in worship the self experiences the pouring of the infinite and unfathomable divine love upon the finite vessels, and such ineffable divine grace leads the people of faith to obey and praise God in awe, joy, and reverence.

1.3 Prayer and Doctrine: the Trinity

Immanuel Kant argued that “the doctrine of the Trinity, taken literally, has no practical relevance at all, even if we think we understand it; and it is even more clearly irrelevant if we realize that it transcends all our concepts.—Whether we are to worship

three or ten persons in the Deity makes no difference.”\textsuperscript{78} On the contrary, Eberhard Jüngel contended that the doctrine of the Trinity must be manifest in the experience of worship. He deplored that the doctrine of the Trinity has little influence on the life of the contemporary church and individuals. In Jüngel’s view, prayers can instantiate faith in the Triune God: “prayers have a constitutive significance for the spiritual life of the individual Christian and the gathered congregation. Here, in the prayers of Christian worship, is where the \textit{Mysterium trinitatis} has its \textit{Sitz im Leben} (seating in life).”\textsuperscript{79}

Prayers, addressed to the Triune God, continue to remind worshippers of the identity and work of the three persons of the Trinity.

In his discussion of the divine-human relationship in prayer, Barth paid great attention to its Trinitarian characteristics. Christian prayer takes place in the works of the Trinity. Barth might have been critical of what the title of Vincent Brümmer’s influential book in the study of prayer, \textit{What Are We Doing When We Pray}, would imply.\textsuperscript{80} Barth’s starting point was not “a description of what we do when we pray.”\textsuperscript{81} The main concern


\textsuperscript{80} Brummer’s study of prayer, not accidently, pays little attention to the work of God in the acts of human prayer, namely the intercessory roles of Christ and Spirit who work in pray-ers. As a result, his understanding of God is theistic but not particularly Trinitarian. See, Vincent Brümmer, \textit{What Are We Doing When We Pray?: On Prayer and the Nature of Faith} (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008)

\textsuperscript{81} Barth, \textit{Prayer}, 13.
of the theology of prayer is what God does in our prayer. When identifying invocation and petition as the center of prayer, Barth asked how the sovereign holy God hears the petitions of sinful human beings. Barth’s answer can be summarized with John Calvin’s famous phrase: “We pray with Christ’s mouth.” In order to understand Christian prayer, one should understand the mediating role of Christ in the doctrine of the Trinity.

Barth listed three forms of the dynamic Christian attitude: faith, obedience, and prayer. In principle, faith is prayer, and obedience is also prayer, but there must be a distinctive characteristic of prayer which differentiates it from the other two forms. Although Barth accepted the traditional four components of prayer—praise, thanksgiving, penitence, and petition—he contended that simply putting them together would not make prayer a unique form. Prayer needs a center, “one specific act which constitutes the whole, from which all the rest proceeds and to which it returns, from which alone it receives its meaning and power.” Without this center that distinguishes prayer from faith and obedience, the three forms would be blended and indistinguishable. Barth concluded that petition is this center of prayer.

It does not mean that he disregarded other elements of prayer. Praise is certainly an important part of prayer; the great surprise of the good news of the Christ event must bear the fruit of praise and thanksgiving. In fact, Barth admitted that prayer is “bound up with thanksgiving and grounded in it” and when people offer thanksgiving they are

---

82 As Abraham Heschel argued, “The issue of prayer is not prayer; the issue of prayer is God.” Abraham Heschel, Man’s Quest for God: studies in prayer and symbolism (New York: Scribner, 1954), 87.

83 Barth, CD III/3, 265.

84 Ibid., 266.
“authorized and freed . . . for asking and interceding.”\textsuperscript{85} Penitence is also a crucial element; to pray means to confess fully our sins to God, so those who fail to do this will never pray rightly. Likewise, Christians cannot come to God with petition alone, without praise, thanksgiving, and repentance. Barth agreed that “Christian prayer means thanksgiving and praise, then confession and intercession, and then again thanksgiving and praise.”\textsuperscript{86}

Nevertheless, Barth does not find the essence of prayer in worship or penitence.\textsuperscript{87} It is petition that makes one’s act prayer. Prayer is, in the first instance, “an asking, a seeking, and a knocking directed toward God; a wishing, a desiring, a requesting presented to God.”\textsuperscript{88} Indeed, the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples is a list of “pure petitions.”\textsuperscript{89} Making a petition is a gesture of acknowledging one’s dependence on God. In petition, Barth argued, true Christian situation is expressed.\textsuperscript{90} In petition, “a continual and continually renewed asking,” a Christian confesses, “I have not, and Thou hast; Therefore give me what Thou hast and I have not.” Such confession glorifies God as the Giver.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{85} Barth, \textit{CD III/4}, 95.

\textsuperscript{86} Barth, \textit{CD}, III/3, 252.

\textsuperscript{87} Although Don Saliers has an excellent interpretation of Barth’s prayer, his liturgical theology overlooks Barth’s distinction between worship and prayer. Don Saliers, \textit{Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine} (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), Ch. 4.

\textsuperscript{88} Barth, \textit{CD III/3}, 268.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 267; \textit{CD III/4}, 97.

\textsuperscript{90} Barth, \textit{CD III/3}, 270.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 274.
Petition is not an emergency call to God, seeking divine intervention only when a situation presumably goes out of human control. Rather, it is an ontological statement that those who pray have nothing to claim and must receive everything, including their own existence itself, from God.\(^\text{92}\) In a similar sense, Karl Rahner viewed petition as “supreme degree of submission.”\(^\text{93}\) It is a gesture of surrendering that admits that human beings cannot force or coax, but only beg God. As “an incomprehensible fusion of the greatest boldness with the deepest humility”, petition is “not the lowest, but the highest, the most divinely human form of prayer.”\(^\text{94}\) Rahner agrees with Barth that petition undergirds the whole practice of prayer: “Every prayer of man in his need is always a prayer of petition, even when that man is praising and giving thanks to God, since God is always asked, in prayer, for God.”\(^\text{95}\) It can be summarized in Augustine’s famous phrase: “\textit{Omnes sumus mendici Dei} (we are all beggars of God).”\(^\text{96}\)

Barth’s emphasis on petition presupposes a sincere response from God. God indeed answers prayer; God’s actions can vary when people pray. Barth even argued that prayer can have influence not only on God’s action but also on God’s existence.\(^\text{97}\) This statement might be surprising to those who know Barth only as a vigorous advocate of divine supremacy and sovereignty. Barth’s point is that Christ radically redefined the

\(^{92}\) Ibid., 275.


\(^{94}\) Ibid.


\(^{96}\) Augustine, Sermon 56, 6.9: \textit{Patrologia Latina} 38, 381.

\(^{97}\) Barth, \textit{Prayer}, 33.
meaning of majesty. God answers prayers not by necessity but by freedom. God chooses to yield to human petitions. “On the basis of the freedom of God Himself,” Barth contended, “God is conditioned by the prayer of faith.” 99 It is not a sign of God’s weakness. God’s greatness is not hampered, but rather revealed by it. 100 In Barth’s view, the idea that God loses sovereignty by answering prayer is anthropomorphism. 101 God is immutable, but not in the sense of Greek philosophy, which rules out the possibility of God being conditioned by creatures. God’s majesty, omnipotence, and immutability in the biblical sense include the reality that God can have an interaction with creatures. 102 In prayer, human beings are invited into a partnership with God. Prayer is not a lofty monologue in which human beings experience self-alleviation and self-purification. 103 God is not a self-enclosed and isolated supreme being, “who cannot be codetermined from outside, who is condemned to work alone”; God “let[s] his action be co-determined by his children who have been freed for obedience to him.” 104 In overflowing grace, God freely chooses to have authentic interaction and exchange with God’s children, not merely by appearance.

98 God “lets Himself be touched and moved.” Barth, The Christian Life, 106.

99 Barth, CD II/1, 511.


101 Barth, CD III/4, 108.

102 “God is not so omnipotent or, rather, so impotent, that as they call upon him, liberated and commanded to do so by him, he will not and cannot hear them, letting a new action be occasioned by them, causing his own work and rule and control to correspond to their invocation.” Barth, The Christian Life, 103.

103 Barth suspects it as Schleiermacher’s view of prayer. The Christian Life, 103.

104 Ibid., 104.
Human beings become God’s partners through their allegiance with God’s work in prayer. In this partnership God takes human agency seriously, and human beings are not “engulfed and covered as by a divine landslide or swept by a divine flood.”\(^\text{105}\) The invocation of the Father is not a “venture, a mere gesture, a shot in the dark, an experiment, or a gamble.”\(^\text{106}\) Prayer is firmly grounded on the divine promise that God will listen to the prayers of faith. Through prayer, the children of God participate in the history of divine works as God’s partners.\(^\text{107}\) Therefore, the divine lordship over humanity is not an authoritarian authority. God does not want to reign alone without human beings.\(^\text{108}\) God is willing to hearken (erhören) actively—not merely hear (hören) passively—prayers. It is God’s will that God’s children pray not in “a creaturely freedom, in competition with His sole sovereignty and activity, but in the freedom of friends, a freedom which He has specially given them.”\(^\text{109}\) God can allow Godself to be conditioned by faith in God, and it indicates God’s freedom as creator, not God’s weakness.

However, Barth was cautious when he used the word “partnership.” Barth was still eager to defend divine otherness. God is the wholly other. While God is conditioned

\(^\text{105}\) Barth, CD IV/4, 163.

\(^\text{106}\) Barth, The Christian Life, 104.

\(^\text{107}\) “In obedience the Christian is the servant, in faith he is the child, but in prayer, as the servant and child, he is the friend of God, called to side of God and at side of God, living and ruling and reigning with Him.” Barth, CD III/3, 286; The Children of God “have a part in the history in which God is their partner and they are his partners, in which they are liberated for this action and summoned to it, in which there is also given to them the promise of his corresponding action and therefore of his hearing.” Barth, The Christian Life, 104.

\(^\text{108}\) Barth, Prayer, 27.

\(^\text{109}\) Barth, CD II/1, 512.
by the prayer of faith on the basis of the freedom of God, God by nature is not conditioned by the creature. How did he hold these opposite claims together? God and human beings are distinct partners, but “precisely in their distinction they are partners who are inseparably bound to one another.” This mystery of double agency cannot be understood with general, abstract concepts—even as a general truth found in scripture. Without a specific central biblical testimony, a generality, even as a biblical generality, cannot avoid a subtle synergism. God and the human are not two partners standing on equal footing, or two autonomous partners merely with different levels of capabilities and competences which are different but still autonomous.

---

110 Barth did not answer this question clearly in his theology of prayer. However, one may find an answer in Barth’s treatments of human agency. In the discussion of Barth’s view on human and divine agencies, George Hunsinger suggested that Barth handled the issue of “double agency” of the divine and the human in the Chalcedonian pattern—“asymmetry, intimacy, and integrity” (Hunsinger finds these three characteristics of the Chalcedonian pattern in Church Dogmatics IV/3, 63). George Hunsinger, How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology (Oxford: Oxford, 1991), 186.

These three points can be seen in Barth’s understanding of petitionary prayer:
1) asymmetry in the precedence of God’s will over human will. In his comment on Luther’s Small Catechism, Barth argues that “everything is already there when we address ourselves to God” (Barth, Prayer, 51).
2) intimacy in the humanity’s unity with Christ as intercessor.
3) integrity in the coexistence of two sides without confusion (neither side is transformed into the other). This point is clearly articulated in Barth’s words:

“Let it be asserted primarily that God and man are two subjects in genuine encounter. God and man do in fact confront one another: two partners of different kinds, acting differently, so that they cannot be exchanged or equated. God cannot be compared, confused or intermingled with man, nor man with God. They are totally unlike and remain so not only in their relationship as Creator and creature but also, with specifically sharp contours, in the relationship which now concerns us, their relationship in the covenant of grace and its basis in the action whereby God reconciled the world to himself. God is gracious to man, not man to God. . . . Any reversal or obscuring of the distinction between the two is impossible. It is true that God is an object to man, as man is to God. Yet man’s faith can no more dissolve into a divine act than God can dissolve into the human act of faith. Even in their unity in Jesus Christ himself, God does not cease to be God nor man to be man. Their distinction even in their unity in Jesus Christ typifies the qualitative and definitive distinction between God and every other man.” (Barth, The Christian Life, 29)


112 Barth, CD II/2, 193.
What is this specific biblical reference point Barth speaks of then? It is Jesus Christ, who stands on both sides of the relationship.  

The Word of God is the mediator whose own divinity and humanity make the encounter between God and human beings essentially reciprocal. Christ is “the first and proper suppliant, the representative and substitute, the predecessor, the subject of human prayer.” By going through “the narrow archway of asking,” Christ lifted up the gates for all prayers. Christ, the only one having “the authority and power truly to address [God] as Father” took the human side and became our Brother, raising us as his brothers and sisters to the side of God. In prayer, God the Son as a human exists in the movement toward the Father, representing humanity to God. He stands beside God’s children and intercedes for them. Human prayer is an event, a special history, played out in the light of “the basic event between God and man in Jesus Christ.” Those who pray in the name of Jesus are under Christ’s leadership and responsibility. They will never be separated from Christ; they are always incorporated into him who is in unity with the Father. This surprising presence

---

113 Being “not concerned . . . with . . . a principle, even though the principle be that of grace,” Barth focused on “the living person of Jesus Christ” revealed in Scripture. Barth, CD IV/3.1, 173f

114 Barth, CD III/3, 274-75. Cf. Augustine said, “He [Jesus] prays for us as our priest, prays in us as our Head, and is prayed to by us as our God. Therefore let us acknowledge our voice in him and his in us.” (En. In Ps. 85, 1: PL 37, 1081)

115 Barth, CD III/4, 108.

116 Jesus “not only was but is here and today the man who exists in that movement to the Father, calling upon the Father in the place and at the head of all men.” Barth, The Christian Life, 64.

117 Ibid., 45.

118 Barth, CD III/4, 108.

119 Barth, CD IV/2, 705; our prayer is “a repetition of [Christ’s] petition.” CD III/3, 277.
of the Son in human prayer is at the center of Barth’s understanding of the nature of prayer.

Given that human beings are sinful, and God already knows their hearts and needs better than they do, it is puzzling that Christians still need to make petitions to God. The idea that human wills could affect God’s action is daunting. There is fear that prayers, driven by human desires, might blemish God’s perfect plan for creatures. But Christians take this bold step because God commanded them to do so. God gives them not only permission but also a duty to pray. Barth acknowledged that human sinfulness would flow into prayer as the effluent from the chemical factories of Basel was discharged into the Rhine. However, the reality of prayer is not as disheartening as it appears because true hope lies in God who gives a prayer “the pure and holy form, the ordered and cleaned meaning, which it did not have in our hearts and mouths.” God has already made a promise to hear their petitions when Jesus Christ stands with them. In human prayers, God the Father hears the voice of the interceding Christ. God hears human

---

120 “He who really prays to God has something to say to Him and dares to say it, not because he can, but because he is invited and summoned to do so” (Barth, CD III/4, 90); “The real basis of prayer is man’s freedom before God, the God-given permission to pray, which, because it is given by God, becomes a command and order and therefore a necessity” (Ibid., 92).

121 Barth, CD III/4, 100-101.

122 Ibid., 101. Cf. Rahner identified it as “a kind of divine alchemy by which both our failures and successes are transmuted to the pure currency that wins an eternal reward.” He added, “By means of it, there is a mysterious fusion between the will of man and the Will of God a fusion through which man is lifted to the heights of his true greatness” Although Barth would be uncomfortable with the word “fusion,” he would agree that in prayer such purification of human will happens through Christ. Karl Rahner, On Prayer, 77.

123 Barth, CD III/4, 108.

124 Barth expounded this point: “in the name of God’s Son, their Brother, Jesus Christ, . . . they have access to the Father, that they are adopted into fellowship with his praying. They cannot and will not pray in vain for that for which he has already prayed to the Father; for in their voices with all their false notes the Father hears his pure voice.” Barth, The Christian Life, 108.
prayer, which God has already transformed and purified. It means God’s hearing precedes human’s asking.

However, Jesus’ prayer is not a simple dictation of divine will. Jesus’ own struggle, encapsulated in his prayer at Gethsemane, brings the whole of humanity’s struggle into the Father-Son relationship in the Trinitarian context. The ultimate goal of petitions is not the satisfaction of human desires. In prayers of petition, lamentation, and thanksgiving, human desires undergo radical transformation. But this grinding process of transformation can be excruciating. Surrendering to God’s will—“Thy will be done”—is not passive resignation. Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane is not a momentary crisis that is already forgotten in the eternal Godhead. It might have been a fleeting moment in time, but it was a defining moment in the eternal relationship between God the Father and God the Son, in which the Son raised a question of an alternative way than the path ordained by the Father. It was a moment when there was “a pause and trembling not only on earth and in time, not only in the soul of Jesus, . . . but in a sense in heaven, in the bosom of God Himself.” In Gethsemane, both the Son on the earth and the Father in heaven experienced the crisis of humanity. Jesus’ prayerful struggle in Gethsemane was the epitome of humanity’s struggle in prayer. Thus, in Jesus’s prayer the struggling, crestfallen human hearts find the agonizing path on which Christ has already trodden and will tread again for their sake. Above all, they find that the greatest answer to all prayers

---


126 Barth, *CD III/3*, 270.

127 Cf. Jesus “is not a mere puppet moved this way and that by God. He is not a mere reed used by God as the instrument of His Word. The man Jesus prays. He speaks and acts.” Barth, *CD II/2*, 178.

128 Barth, *CD IV/1*, 265.
is Jesus Christ himself. Jesus in prayer is both humanity’s gift to God and God’s gift to humanity.  

Barth’s Christocentric view is apparent in this Trinitarian thinking. Because of the strong emphasis on the solidarity with Christ in prayer, the Holy Spirit appears to be sidelined in his discussion of divine inspiration and intercession. But while Barth did not accentuate the role of the Spirit in prayer, he did not ignore it either. In his exposition of Romans 8, Barth argued that in prayer “God Himself speaks through His Spirit the true and decisive Word which can be heard and is heard already even though it cannot be attained or uttered by man.” It is the Holy Spirit who enables people to pray. Prayer is not a human achievement but a gift of divine grace coming through the Holy Spirit, who frees and incites God’s children to pray. Thus, the human prayer is essentially a

129 Barth, CD III/3, 271; CD III/4, 107.
130 “Naturally, as the Son of Man is only and altogether a Suppliant because as the Son of God He is altogether the divine gift and answer.” Barth, CD III/3, 275.
131 Barth, CD III/4, 90.

In general, Barth was critical of silent prayer. Since the center of prayer is petition, it needs to have words. Petition may be feeble performance, but the Spirit prays with human beings in this weak form. However, Barth did not categorically dismiss the meaning of silent prayer. He is particularly against a form of silence which denies the need of petition and seeks self-edification, self-help, or self-elevation. He is against a form of contemplation or meditation which replaces a bold and humble act of request. His concern was not just about a form of prayer per se. He was worried about the loss of the proper prayerful attitude: “Even deprivation of God and desire for Him can obviously lead past prayer to the strangest by-ways of individual and collective self-help” (Barth, CD III/4, 91). Prayer as a “gesture of elevation” or “the highest form of religious or Christian self-edification” or “the cultivation of the soul or spirit” puts too much emphasis on the efficacy of human work in spiritual growth and underestimates the importance of Christ’s objective role in prayer. Barth was afraid that silent prayer would become a vague and obscure sense of transcendence: “A matter of mere existence, of a mood, of surrender to a feeling” (Ibid., 89).

I think Barth would accept the meaning of silence that is placed in the larger context of the invocation of God’s grace, the invocation of the Holy Spirit. Barth admits that it could be “already speaking even when it is only sighing and stammering” in a context of divine-human conversation (Ibid., 89). Barth wanted make sure that such prayer occurs in a covenant relationship, in which God “does actually hear this sighing, that there is a definite answer and gift” for it (Barth, CD III/3, 282).

132 Barth, CD III/4, 94. Cf. “Every time we begin to pray to Jesus it is the Holy Spirit who draws us on the way of prayer by his prevenient grace.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, ¶2670)
circular movement which “goes out from God and returns to God.” It is a movement from above to below in which the Spirit opening human heart toward God. It is a movement from below to above in which the Spirit opens God through petition.

1.4 Prayer, Theology, and Christian Life

Barth’s vision of the integration of theology and prayer has another important aspect: Christian life. Barth envisioned that the concrete action of prayer would develop and shape the Christian moral character. Theological ethics cannot ignore the fundamental fact that a worshiper stands before God who confronts her in every moment and dimension of her life. Christian duty, thought, and piety must be interrelated. In his later work, The Christian Life, Barth described Christian duty as “the zeal for the honor of God” and articulated such zeal through his exposition of the Lord’s Prayer. He regarded the Lord’s Prayer as the epitome of the integration of prayer, theology, and life, from which Christians learn how to pray, think, and live.

Barth insisted on the unity among what Christians pray for, what they believe, and what they do: lex orandi, lex credendi, lex agendi. If Christians pray, “Hallowed be...

---

133 Barth, CD III/4, 101.

134 Cf. “our prayer ascends in the Holy Spirit through Christ to the Father—we bless him for having blessed us; it implores the grace of the Holy Spirit that descends through Christ from the Father—he blesses us.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, ¶2627)

135 Barth, following Calvin, argued that “prayer deals with our life and our relation to the exigencies of this world.” Barth, Prayer, 9.

136 Barth, The Christian Life, 44.

137 Ibid., 50. Cf. Von Balthasar stated theology, worship, and life are so interrelated that “the amount of truth in theology . . . must be measured in terms of worship and practical obedience.” Von Balthasar, Explorations in Theology I, 152; Likewise, recent liturgical theologians highlighted the ethical dimension of liturgy. For example, Nathan Mitchell argues that “Christian liturgy begins as ritual practice...
thy name; thy kingdom come,” but do not act for God’s kingdom, such petitions are no more than empty words. What they pray for must guide how they live. However, Barth is cautious not to reduce the meaning of prayer to a tool for moral education. Although it is important to think of prayer’s influence on the actions of pray-ers, the true meaning of prayer should remain in invocation. Prayer must not turn into a lofty monologue or effective self-help. Rather, its most basic meaning should reside in the petition for God’s definitive action.\(^{138}\) In fact, prayer is not a mere preparation for Christian activity but rather the “most intimate and effective form of Christian action.”\(^{139}\) It is “the archetypal form of all human acts of freedom in the church.”\(^{140}\) Every act of faith is founded on the act of prayer.\(^{141}\) Prayer is the true work of the Christian. Unless this true work is done, all other works remain idle. Thus, the most active workers are those most active in prayer.

---

\(^{138}\) Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches prayer as the background of faith, worship, and ethics: “This mystery [of the faith] . . . requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer.” (¶2558)

\(^{139}\) Barth, *CD III/3*, 264.

\(^{140}\) Barth, *CD I/2*, 698. Cf. “In [prayer] man in his whole humanity takes his proper place over against God. In it he does the central thing that precedes, accompanies, and follows all else he does.” Barth, *The Christian Life*, 43.

\(^{141}\) Barth, *CD III/3*, 252.
Such teaching on the integration of theology, prayer, and Christian life raises a serious challenge to modern universal ethics. The Kantian model of ethics and religion, immensely influential on modern philosophy and theology, is a typical example of the modern trend that views ethics as a set of universal moral principles, not contingent upon any particular religious practice. In this ethical model, the particularity of the practice of prayer is considered irrelevant to the development of moral rules, as well as an obstacle to achieving a universal moral perspective. Prayer is useful only for motivating people to follow the universal principles already established outside its practice. Prayer is viewed as a means of self-edification or self-reflection, which follows a prescribed understanding of universal morality. For this purpose, prayer does not have to be directed to God as a conversation partner. It can be a monologue to the self, rather than a dialogue with God.

In Lectures on Ethics, Kant declared that “to wish to converse with God is absurd” because “we cannot talk to one we cannot intuit.”142 From an objective point of view prayer is unnecessary because God is already aware of “our needs” and “the nature of our dispositions.”143 Prayer neither informs God of new information nor moves God to grant human wishes. Nevertheless, Kant appreciated a subjective value of prayer: “To grasp and comprehend his concepts man must clothe them in words: if, therefore, he wants to produce for himself a lively representation of his pious wishes and of his trust in God, he must have recourse to words.”144 The language of prayer articulates and presents moral concepts to the self. It gives words to thoughts, effectively inducing a moral

143 Ibid., 98.
144 Ibid.
disposition. Silent prayer is not suitable for ordinary people because most people need the help of the language of liturgical prayer to clarify their moral stance. Prayer is not a moral action itself, but it is a “devotional exercise” that generates a moral action. In Kant’s view, prayer is a training tool for a moral self, and it is a speculative activity geared toward inner transformation. There is no need to communicate one’s thoughts with the transcendent God.

Similarly, in Religion Within the Limits of Religion Alone Kant limited the meaning of religious rites, “means of grace” (prayer, church-going, baptism, and communion), to a self-edifying function. These rites assist in sustaining one’s attention to the true service for the kingdom of God, that is, the moral ideal. Prayer firmly establishes goodness in those who pray and “repeatedly awakens the disposition of goodness in the heart.” If a praying person attempts to go beyond the boundaries of reason and moral duties, it is “illusory faith” or “fetish-faith.” In the spirit of prayer, which is the disposition to execute all actions in the service of God, people work upon themselves. The verbal prayers that attempt to work upon God do not have complete sincerity found in the spirit of prayer. Kant repeatedly insisted that the benefits of verbal prayer should not be in its act itself but in its ability to educate those who pray. In his view, public

145 “We do not serve God with words, ceremonies and gestures: we serve Him only by actions which reflect our devotion to Him. Prayer trains to act aright: it is merely an exercise for good action, but is not in itself such an action.” Ibid., 100-101.

146 Barth argued that Schleiermacher understood as “the supreme and most intimate act of self-help.” Barth, The Christian Life, 103.


148 Ibid., 181-82.
prayer is better than private prayer because the former is a more formal means of edification.\textsuperscript{149}

Kant’s teaching on prayer makes two basic assumptions. First, the practice of prayer is separate from the development of moral judgment. The moral principles are not contingent on one’s personal relationship with God. Reason alone, transcending any particular tradition, would teach what is universally right. How one understands morality precedes how one experiences a relationship with God in prayer. Second, the moral Christian life does not need prayers directed to God. If one’s moral actions are in “the spirit of prayer,” a particular act of prayer is not needed. The invocation of God is unnecessary because it is unreasonable to expect that the divine power would help people to execute moral rules better. The inferior forms of prayer might mar the perfect status of being in the spirit of prayer or the right disposition.

In the framework of \textit{lex orandi, lex agendi}, however, Barth contended that Christians do not apply universal moral judgments to their practices. Rather their moral character is shaped in the act of prayer. Their moral actions are grounded not on the ideals of an autonomous rational person but on their prayerful relationship with God. The Christian life develops out of their particular experience of God in prayer and worship. More particularly, Barth argued that the Christian life should become the invocation of God’s kingdom. In other words, Christian ethical visions are embedded in their eschatological visions, and prayer is a crucial link between the two. Prayer always embodies an eschatological tension between the broken reality and the promised end, and

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 185.
an eschatological hope that God’s will shall be fulfilled through (and even despite) what Christians do here and now.

In his interpretation of the eschatological petition, “Thy Kingdom come,” Barth retained his claims on the priority of God’s sovereignty and the perpetual difference between creator and creature. Christians cannot “hasten the dawning of the great day” by their action as they move toward it. Christians should not presume to act like God as if they were the subjects who have power and authority to bring in this kingdom. They must remember they are “praying what they are praying.” They are praying that God’s decisive action, which already took place in this world, will complete its goal. Their work for the kingdom is a qualitatively and quantitatively limited action. Their prayer is a modest contribution they can make on the human side in the conflict against injustice.

From the perspective of double agency, however, Barth still took the meaning of the eschatological and ethical petitions seriously. Prayer that reflects on the wonderful new era of God’s kingdom revolts against the disorder and injustice of this era of darkness. The waiting for the kingdom of God in prayer is not merely in a passive mode. It is a form of hastening in the action of waiting. It is the most powerful and effective ethical action human beings can take for the reign of God.

The invocation of God’s kingdom is fundamentally a social and communal matter. Prayer never remains a private enhancement of personal piety. Even one’s personal prayer in a secret chamber cannot be a private talk with God. Prayer is offered for the benefit of the world, and every personal prayer belongs to the prayer of the

150 Barth, The Christian Life, 171. Barth’s emphasis.
151 Barth, CD IV/2, 643.
community. Barth interprets the “we” of the Lord’s Prayer in an ontological way.\textsuperscript{152} The “we” means that one’s personal prayer should have its basis in the prayer of the gathered community: either “we” pray, or “I” pray in the unity of “we.”\textsuperscript{153} The question of true prayer is also the question of how closely one belongs to the church, the particular “we.” The “we” keeps in check “the egoistic character” of personal petitions.\textsuperscript{154} Instead of focusing on the fulfillment of personal desires, prayer lifts up a communal request that God’s will be done on earth. This Christian fellowship is grounded on their solidarity with the human Jesus. The “we” refers to those who stand in Jesus Christ in prayer, but it does not form an exclusive circle. The community, closely bound together but open to all, intercedes for the whole world. When Christians pray for the world, they are in communion with others in the same manner as Jesus is in solidarity with the whole humanity. A Christian prays as a representative of the church, of humankind, and of the world; in this way, her private prayer acquires a genuinely universal character.

Prayer arises from the life in the community, but also “the community is constituted as it prays.”\textsuperscript{155} The church is a “liturgical fellowship” in essence.\textsuperscript{156} The church cannot exist without making a continual petition for its own existence. The church

\textsuperscript{152} Barth, \textit{CD} III/4, 102.

\textsuperscript{153} Even when he argued that the private prayers should be offered in the prayer of community, he affirms that the community consists only of individuals. Even in its assembling, therefore, the community can “only express the real requests of these individuals” (Ibid., 110). He rejected another abstract type of binary distinction: between individual and community, between private and public prayer. What really matters here is that all prayers, whether by individuals or groups, are intercessory in character. In the intercession, driven by the zeal for the honor of God, each individual is inseparable not only from Christian community, but also from the outer world.

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 103.

\textsuperscript{155} Barth, \textit{CD} IV/2, 705.

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 643.
is always an asking community whose existence totally depends on God’s grace, and by
definition, grace cannot be secured but only be requested continually. When the church
does not pray, its all other actions remain empty.

An individual experience or individual reasoning apart from a community of faith
cannot be a foundation of theology. A one-on-one encounter with God in prayer—
however intimate and intense it is—needs to be placed in the experiences of diachronic
and synchronic communities. The diachronic community, the tradition of the church,
offers a historical witness of the revelation of God. The synchronic community shares,
reinterprets, and transmits the tradition together in the ongoing relationship with the
living God. Theology cannot be done by a single intellect isolated from God’s
communities. Those who are shaped in these communities let their affections, judgments,
perspectives be tuned in the communal experiences of the divine love and judgment.¹⁵⁷

To pray in a living tradition mean to be shaped in the Christian narratives of God, God’s
community, and the world. The Christian narratives provide a context in which the life of
holiness can be practiced properly. They are not mere literary tools that motivate
Christians to follow a collection of moral principles established independently. They are
an invitation to a new world revealed in Christ, in which Christians learn and adopt a new
way of understanding and pursuing goodness.

Instead of seeking an ethical theory that attempts to guide all human actions
without any commitment to a particular narrative, theological ethics engages in making

¹⁵⁷ Gavin D’Costa explained this point well: “One can understand doctrines in the practice of those
who lived them, for they were forming an embodied community, and prayer facilitates a complex
cohabitation and participation with a ‘living tradition.’” Gavin D’Costa, *Theology in the Public Square:
Church, Academy and Nation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 119.
faithful disciples who are committed to the life of love and justice revealed in Christ. If the goals of ethics are the formation of theological moral self and the renewal of the community of God, it is not difficult to understand why the practice of piety should be incorporated in theology. The practice of prayer is a continual exercise of the formation of the moral agents, through which the Spirit of God reorients their dispositions and affections (i.e., their moral character). Worshippers are habituated in a liturgical context in which God’s good news is unfolded to them as a new paradigm of life. Barth concluded that the “life of calling upon God will be a person’s Christian life.”

1.5 Embodied Practice of Prayer as Theology: the Weaker Link in Barth’s lex orandi, lex credendi

Barth made a paradigm shift in the modern understanding of the relationship between prayer, theology, and Christian life. Rebutting the dominant trend of the western modern theology that separates these three dimensions of faith into different academic disciplines (namely, practical theology, systematic theology, and ethics), Barth attempted to retrieve theologia as a whole as a prayerful exercise. Highlighting the constructive roles of prayer in theology and ethics, Barth affirmed the indispensable interaction between practice and theology, which is often summarized in the simple Latin phrase, lex orandi, lex credendi. Barth called this traditional aphorism “one of the most profound descriptions of the theological method” and, as we have seen above, added lex agendi to it. Despite his strong emphasis on the mutual relationship between the two “laws” (or

---

158 Barth, The Christian Life, 44.
159 Barth, The Humanity of God, 90.
three laws, with *lex agendi*), however, Barth’s focus was more on theology as prayer than on prayer as theology. He underscored the prayerful attitude of theological study and Christian life through and through, but the idea of *lex orandi* as *lex credendi* was not clearly articulated in Barth’s theology of prayer. Barth did not speak of the actual liturgical experience of the church much—in particular, he was almost silent about the bodily dimension on the practice of prayer. In the last section of this chapter I put Barth’s theology of prayer in conversation with other major views on *lex orandi, lex credendi* in liturgical theology (Alexander Schmemann, Aidan Kavanagh, and Geoffrey Wainwright), arguing that the role of the embodied practices of prayer in theology need more serious attention than Barth provided.

Alexander Schmemann shared Barth’s criticism of the fragmentation of academic theology. Like Barth, he contended that the rupture between theological study and liturgical experience became a chronic disease in the post-patristic theology of the West. Unlike Barth, however, Schmemann had a great interest in the liturgical order as a theological form. If worship should be considered essential in Christian theology, he insisted, a careful study of the liturgical practices themselves should be included. The theological discussion of *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* must be more engaged in the church’s actual practices of prayer, and theology as a whole should be more conscious of the church’s liturgical experience. Liturgical theology is necessary because the church needs a comprehensive understanding of its faith embedded in the liturgical experience. Theological understanding is made possible through participation in worship that invites one to a new life in Christ. Liturgical practice is not merely another source of Christian theology but a condition of theology. Schmemann criticized liturgical studies in the West
for focusing on the question of “how” (how worship is performed according to the rules), rather than on the question of “what” (what is done in worship).\textsuperscript{160} He deplored that the life of the church—more particularly the church’s experience of worship—is almost absent in the contemporary Western theology.\textsuperscript{161}

For Schmemann, it is important to incorporate the rich liturgical tradition of the church into theological reflection. Liturgical theology not only defines theological concepts, which explain faith and doctrine of the church, but also presents the records of liturgical experience as the rule of prayer (\textit{lex orandi}), which abide in the church and determine its rule of faith (\textit{lex credendi}). Liturgical theology begins with historical research on the church’s holistic experience of worship and moves toward a theological synthesis in which the rule of prayer is elucidated as the rule of faith. Schmemann also argued that the purpose of such study is not merely intellectual appreciation of the benefits of worship. Understanding worship is possible only through experiencing it. Therefore, a theologian’s study cannot be separated from the life of worship.

In \textit{On Liturgical Theology}, Aidan Kavanagh accepted Schmemann’s assertion that liturgical practice must be integrated into theology, but he pushed it further, by explicitly insisting on the primacy or priority of liturgy over theology; in other words, liturgy should be \textit{theologia prima}.\textsuperscript{162} He argued that because of the verb “\textit{stutuat}” in Prosper of Aquitaine’s phrase, “\textit{legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi}”, the order of \textit{lex orandi} and


\textsuperscript{161} By worship, Schmemann did not merely mean the liturgical text but the holistic experience of the church, including the words of prayer, singing, liturgical time, and sacraments.

\textsuperscript{162} Aidan Kavanagh, \textit{On Liturgical Theology} (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992)
*lex crendendi* cannot be reversed. Worship gives rise to theological reflection, not *vice versa*. Kavanagh’s key distinction between *theologia prima* and *theologia secunda* became enormously popular in liturgical studies. *Theologia prima* refers to the adjustments in liturgical practices caused by the changes in the community. The experience of God’s presence always has a great impact on the worshipping community that never comes away from it unchanged. The community continuously adjusts its liturgical practices to such changes, and this process of adjustment is how liturgy grows in time. Kavanagh claimed that the community’s continuing adjustment is not just another source of theology but theology itself, and therefore a community’s liturgical act itself should be understood as *theologia prima*. The academic reflection on this *theologia prima* can be theology only in a secondary and derivative sense—hence *theologia secunda*. Kavanagh views the liturgical tradition as a necessary condition of theological reflection. The faith in God is shaped in worship through the experience of God’s presence, so the word of God can be understood properly within liturgical traditions.

Kavanagh argued that modern academic theology failed to recognize the significance of *theologia prima* because it not only neglected *lex orandi* but also allowed the order of *lex orandi, lex crendendi* to be reversed. Kavanagh insisted that *lex crendendi* should be subordinated to the *lex orandi* and criticized theologians who considered the

---

163 Similarly, Don Saliers regards worship as theology, refusing the bifurcation between theological thinking and liturgical participation. He contends that “the continuing worship of God in the assembly is a form of theology.” He adds, “Worship in all its social-cultural idioms is a *theological act*.” Saliers’s understanding of liturgy is broader than the rites of the church. He understands worship in a larger context of Christian life. He is interested in “performed liturgy,” which is the “lived liturgy” that integrates Christian life with a liturgical practice in the assembly. He claims that “it is the worship of God in cultic enactment and service of God in life that constitutes the ‘primary theology.’” Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 15-16.
order of the two laws interchangeable, such as Geoffrey Wainwright. Although they praised Wainwright’s work for his painstaking attention to the close connection between theology and liturgy, they criticized him for allowing the order of *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* to be interchangeable. Kavanagh did not categorically deny the historical influence of *lex credendi* on *lex orandi*, but he still insisted that Prosper’s maxim did not suggest that *lex credendi* could constitute *lex orandi*.

Wainwright argued that theology (God-talk) has three dimensions—talk from God, talk about God, and talk to God. Deploving that modern theology was often reduced to the talk about God, he attempted to retrieve the integration of the three dimensions in liturgical theology. Like Schmemann, he was interested in studying particular liturgical practices, rather than taking liturgy as a whole as a general theological attitude. In his book *Doxology*, Wainwright discussed the meanings of *lex orandi, lex credendi* in theological study extensively, arguing that the “tag” in this phrase makes the order of the two laws interchangeable and offering historical examples that show mutual interaction between worship and doctrine.165

The question of *lex credendi*’s influence on *lex orandi* is the point of disagreement between Wainwright and Kavanagh. Wainwright argues that since the early church, there have been attempts to control or guide liturgy according to the development of doctrinal standards. For example, the anti-Arian influence on the liturgy is noticeable in the fact that liturgical prayers began to be offered to each person of the Trinity more

---

164 For further development of Kavanagh’s argument, see David Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima: What is Liturgical Theology?* (Chicago, Liturgical Training Publications, 2004)

165 Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology*, 218-83; Wainwright argues that there is a “material interplay” taking place in Christian practice: “worship influences doctrine, and doctrine worship.” Wainwright, *Doxology*, 218.
frequently after the Christological controversy of the fourth century. Wainwright illustrated this point well with the example of Basil’s justification of the change of the propositions in traditional doxology, from “Glory to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit” to “Glory to the Father with (meta) the Son, with (sun) the Holy Spirit.” On the Holy Spirit, Basil defended the legitimacy of the latter form, which avoided subordinationism, from a doctrinal point of view. In other words, the Trinitarian doctrine, the law of faith, which developed through the church’s use of the Trinitarian formula in worship, also established the law of prayer.\footnote{166 Wainwright, 229.}

Wainwright’s claim of the mutual influence between the two laws has a stronger historical and hermeneutical basis than Kavanagh’s argument that theologia prima is always prior to theologia secunda in principle. First, it is impossible to retrieve the single original liturgy among the diverse liturgical practices of the early church. Then, on what basis a particular community’s act of worship would be declared as theologia prima? Could one decide which liturgical practice should be considered normative without consulting theologia secunda? Of course, Kavanagh did not deny the historical diversity of liturgical traditions, but he had a tendency to treat them as a monolithic unit because he believed that there is a structure of liturgical ordo hidden behind the diverse traditions. However, he did not attempt to prove such structure indeed exists, and even if it exists, he did not explain how worshippers would identify it. Thus, although Kavanagh was more interested in the overarching structure behind liturgical practices than the actual unity
among them, it is questionable that one can know empirically if a form of practice is faithful to this supposed structure apart from *theologia secunda*.\footnote{Kavanagh’s belief in the structure behind liturgical traditions seems to be an influence of structuralism, and Schmemann also mentioned such overarching structure. Unfortunately, they do not explain in detail how they came to a conclusion that such a structure exists.}

Secondly, there is no liturgical practice that is not already shaped by a doctrinal position. When believers come to worship, they bring their theological expectations already formed by *theologia secunda* because they have been exposed to the catechesis of their own particular tradition over the years. In addition, the liturgical practices they participate in themselves already incorporate doctrinal claims made by *theologia secunda*. When considering this complex relationship between the two laws, it is difficult to insist that *theologia prima* should come first and be a foundation for *theologia secunda*. It makes more sense to acknowledge the ongoing mutual interaction between the two laws and try to balance their dynamics.

Thirdly, if *theologia secunda* cannot establish *theologia prima* as Kavanagh argues, it is not clear how the church can correct a popular practice of worship that has deviated from doctrinal standards. The problem of emending doctrinally dubious practices of worship makes it difficult to maintain that worship must take priority over theology. David Fagerberg argued that it is *theologia prima* that could correct a practice of popular religion, but it is not explicated how *lex orandi* would have a regulative function without *lex credendi*. *Theologia prima* neither automatically generates a right doctrine nor clarifies who will have the teaching authority to decide what is the right or wrong form of worship. In addition, even a sound practice does not guarantee the development of a sound doctrine as one can see in the example of the Arian churches,
which shared the same liturgical practices with the orthodox churches but had a different and rejected view on the divinity of Christ.

It seems to me the main reason Kavanagh was critical of the constitutive function of \textit{lex credendi} is that he equates \textit{theologia secunda} with modern academic theology that makes a sharp distinction between reason and the experience of worship. He is suspicious that making \textit{lex credendi} normative would mean an endorsement of the dichotomy that favors reason over the experience of worship. However, Kavanagh’s criticism of \textit{theologia secunda} does not apply to Barth’s premise that academic theology itself should arise in prayer, integrating worship, doctrine, and ethics. For Barth, the connection of the two laws is not like a synthesis of two separate entities because academic theology should begin in the act of prayer. In Barth’s paradigm, Kavanagh’s contrast between \textit{theologia prima} and \textit{theologia secunda} is too stark. Therefore, although theological study needs to pay more attention to the actual practices of prayer, as Schmemann argued, it does not mean that \textit{lex orandi} should always establish \textit{lex credendi}. As Wainwright argues, the relationship between the two laws is mutual, but not as a mutual interaction between the two independents laws. \textit{Lex credendi} is not merely a speculative exercise, and the two laws have an intrinsic and organic relationship from the beginning to the end.

Having endorsed the emphasis in recent works in liturgical theology of the dynamic interconnection between \textit{lex orandi} and \textit{lex credendi}, I wish to highlight another dynamic relationship that is sometimes overlooked even in this field. Some studies of \textit{lex orandi} focus almost entirely on literary liturgical texts. But attention should also be paid to the bodily practices of prayer. The body cannot help but playing a central role in \textit{lex orandi} because the self that encounters God in prayer is a bodily being. It is the self as
both body and soul—not merely the soul with the body—that stands, sits, kneels, and prostrates before God, speaking, singing, weeping, wailing, listening, and meditating. The body is a fundamental locus of one’s spiritual experience of prayer and worship. Furthermore, this bodily dimension is not restricted to *lex orandi* because one cannot leave the body behind when engaging in the exercise of *lex credendi*. Despite such a conspicuous presence of the body in prayer, however, even those scholars who seek the integration of theology and prayer, like Barth, often make a mistake of overemphasizing the liturgical texts, failing to incorporate the experience of prayer as a whole. They quickly narrow down the meaning of *lex orandi* to an intellectual activity excluding its bodily dimension. They do not raise many questions about what the body experiences, how the body is shaped, and how the reshaped body shapes the theological and moral character in prayer. This is a significant piece of *lex orandi* often missing in the discourses of *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*, and Barth’s theology of prayer is not an exception in this regard. Barth’s otherwise exceptional integration of prayer, theology, and life oddly ignores the entire question of embodiment in prayer and hence is underwhelming when it comes to the discussion of the actual practice of prayer of people (*lex orandi*) as a form of theology, which Shememann, Kavanagh, and Wainwright vehemently tried to retrieve in academic theological discourse.

Faith is more than an intellectual assent to doctrinal propositions; it is a way of living in the presence of the living God. The whole life of the faithful is a liturgy and a holistic theology in practice.168 The life of prayer, rooted in its bodily disciplines, is to be

---

168 Such acclamations of the holy life are also found in Karl Rahner who argued that the ordinary people, “the folk with rosaries, pilgrimages, processions”, have more authentic theological voices than the abstract and spiritless thinkers. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol 3., 209-11.
considered a living text that calls for theological commentary. The bodily experiences and expressions of Christian lives can be understood as a form of theology. The faithful who embody the Christian virtues through practices are to be recognized as theologians. This bodily dimension of *lex orandi* is an underdeveloped theme in Barth’s theology of prayer. But I think the embodied practices of prayer as theology will not only fit Barth’s overall theological paradigm but also greatly enhance the way his theology embraces theological voices of the faithful pra-yers who have been ignored since the rise of modern academic theology.

1.6 Conclusion

I have argued that Barth’s theology of prayer is an example par excellence of the integration of Christian prayer, theology, and life. His theology is not only talk about God but also talk addressed to God. Against the highly fragmented structure of modern academic theology, Barth insisted that there should be the integration of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, and *lex agendi*. Theological study cannot be partitioned into separate disciplines: prayer, doctrine, and ethics. The theological existence, the life in the presence

Ratzinger also argued against the strong contrast between the academic theology and the popular faith and argued for the significance of the faith of the ordinary. Commenting on “the incomprehension of the wise and the understandings of ‘bebes’” in Matthew 11.25, he contended that “Christianity as a popular religion” is “a religious creed without any two-caste system.” “The faith of the simple” is not a theology of simpletons, a downgraded version of academic theology, or “a sort of theology whittled down to the measure of the layman.” Instead, the proclamation of the simple is the measure of theology, and not *vice versa*. Here, Ratzinger’s argument sounds similar to Kavanagh’s insistence on the primacy of *lex orandi*. Overall, however, Ratzinger is more interested in the continuation between the two modes than the primacy of either one. He wants to show that the expression of simple faith, which is available for everyone, is not different from the more sophisticated intellectual theology. The human and divine realities, which are experienced in simple everyday practice, cannot be fully apprehended in theological reflection. Therefore, there is “no distinction of rank between the learned and the simple.” Joseph Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, 62-63.
of God, requires a holistic understanding of faith and knowledge. The practice of piety is not a byproduct of an intellectual quest for divinity. The acts of invocation and praise are the fundamental postures of Christian theology. There needs to be a liturgical turn in theological study.

Barth showed the practice of prayer is deeply ingrained in one’s relationship with the Triune God. Praying is a theological activity in which one gains the knowledge of God and of the self in a continuous interaction with all three persons of the Trinity. The understanding of God is granted to those who seek the divine revelation in the life of prayer, standing with Christ, the eternal mediator. The relationship between human and divine agencies should be understood in the Trinitarian context where God is both the giver and receiver of prayer. In prayer, affections are expressed and remolded in the presence of the Spirit. The life of holiness springs from the life of prayer, through the intercession and empowerment of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in prayer, one’s doctrinal understanding, heart, and life converge.

Barth’s paradigm of *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*, and *lex agendi* was an exemplary step in the right direction, but he did not go far enough to embrace the embodied practice of prayer as a form of theology. In principle, he agreed that *lex orandi* goes hand in hand with *lex credendi*, but in practice, he rarely presented a discussion of actual embodied liturgical practices. Although it is difficult to accept Kavanagh’s claim that *lex orandi* constitutes *lex credendi* and not vice versa, a more careful attention to the embodied liturgical practices will unveil the theological depth of everyday practice of Christian life. This bodily dimension of prayer is particularly important for recognizing the non-academic forms of Christian practice as a proper genre of theology. For a better
understanding of *lex orandi* in practice, theologians need to retrieve the place of Christian bodily practices in theological studies. But how do we attend to such practices? The next chapter will engage recent work in phenomenology in search of insights in this regard.
2. The Body at Prayer

*I bear on my body (τῷ σῶματί μου) the marks (στίγματα) of Jesus.*\(^1\) (Galatians 6:17, RSV)

*In the living tradition of prayer, each Church proposes to its faithful, according to its historic, social, and cultural context, a language for prayer: words, melodies, gestures, iconography.* (Catechism of the Catholic Church, ¶2663)

*There’s language in her eye, her cheek, her lip, Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out At every joint and motive of her body.* (Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, 4.5-55-7)

All human activities involve the body. Prayer is no exception. Every prayer takes a bodily form, whether scripted or extemporaneous, whether vocal or silent.\(^2\) The “language” of prayer is more than words; it includes non-verbal elements of communication. When one prays, one’s whole body—including mouth, feet, hands, eyes, and other sensory organs—is engaged in this spiritual exercise. Thus, prayer is a holistic activity of both body and soul. Moreover, the ritualized actions in prayer not only express theological meanings but also help worshippers to embody those meanings in their lives. Therefore, in the discussion of the role of *lex orandi* in Christian theology, the somatic aspect of prayer must not be ignored.

However, contemporary theologies of prayer have often marginalized embodiment. Although the bodily discipline of prayer was an important theological issue in early and medieval churches, theological discourses on the bodily dimension of prayer largely disappeared in modern academia. Most modern theological works on prayer focus

---

\(^1\) “τὰ στίγματα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σῶματί μου βαστάζω.”

\(^2\) Silent prayer is not bodiless inactivity; rather it is another particular form of bodily activity.
exclusively on the mind, as if the mind could be neatly isolated from one’s bodily existence.\(^3\) Academic theologians rarely discuss prayer, but even when they do, they often reduce the meaning of prayer to its verbal content, focusing on its doctrinal and philosophical implications, such as the relationship between divine providence and petitionary prayer. It is particularly rare for them to study what the body does and experiences in the practice of prayer as an academic topic. It is paralleled by the rise of the modern Cartesian philosophical view that privileges the cerebral activities (i.e. the mind) over all other activities belonging to the body. This dualistic view forgets that the brain is also part of the body conditioned by the physical circumstances, and it creates a false dichotomy between linguistic (mental) and non-linguistic (bodily) exercises.

Moreover, when the body in prayer does become a focus of contemporary theological discourse, “praying with the body” generally refers to a particular bodily technique, such as the use of breathing techniques in meditation. These discourses tend to equate the “embodied prayer” with a particular form of prayer that attempts to bypass or transcend the linguistic dimension of prayer. Thus, their discussion of the body in prayer centers on the issues related to meditation or contemplation, as if other forms of prayer were non-bodily prayers. Such attempts to retrieve the body in theology of prayer are a helpful step. However, their narrow interpretation of embodiment misses the crucial point

---

\(^3\) In *Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis made an interesting observation on the body in prayer, through the words of Screwtape, a fictional veteran devil: “At the very least, they can be persuaded that the bodily position makes no difference to their prayers; for they constantly forget, what you must always remember, that they are animals and that whatever their bodies do affects their souls. It is funny how mortals always picture us putting thing into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out.” In this short remark, Lewis correctly identified the common problem of a popular understanding of prayer, which viewed prayer as a practice of the soul (or the mind) alone. I find that such exclusive attention to the soul or mind is the dominant trend in the modern theologies of prayer. C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 16.
that *all prayers* take bodily forms. By confining the significance of the body to certain types of prayer, their deliberate attempt to embrace the body ironically fails to recognize the importance of the body in the practice and theology of prayer as a whole. It is false to presume that only those practices that pay explicit and intentional attention to the body are prayers with the body. There is no such thing as non-bodily prayer.

In this chapter, I begin where Karl Barth left off, namely, the embodied practice of prayer as theological activity. Embodied prayer is a missing piece in Barth’s vision of the integration of prayer, theology, and life. I argue that every form of prayer is an embodied practice, and hence the process of embodiment in prayer is indispensable in spiritual growth at every level of theological intelligence and sensibility. In order to achieve a comprehensive overview of the body in prayer, I first engage in conversations with anthropological and phenomenological studies of the body in practice. These “practice theories” offer a theoretical framework for understanding the interaction between knowledge, performance, and character. Then I present a historical survey of the body at prayer in Christian traditions (mostly in chronological order). This survey shows how Christian “spoke” to God with the body, and what kinds of theological meanings were impressed on the body at prayer. I envision this study of the bodily dimension of prayer as a way to complement Barth’s theology of prayer.
2. 1 The Body, *Habitus*, and Practice: conversations with the French—Marcel Mauss, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Pierre Bourdieu

2. 1. 1 Marcel Mauss

In his doctoral dissertation, *On Prayer*, Marcel Mauss made important suggestions for understanding of the bodily dimension of prayer. In Mauss’s view, prayer is a religious practice that has the characteristics of both ritual and belief because “in prayer the faithful both act and think.”\(^4\) Prayer is a form of speech,\(^5\) and speech entails action and thought. Mauss argued that in the practice of prayer there is a distinctive integration of ritual and belief. The meanings of ritual actions of prayer derive from the content of belief; at the same time, the content of belief is expressed and experienced through the concrete ritual actions of prayer. Prayer is a physical action that conveys a religious narrative full of concepts and images and “gives expression to . . . religious ideas and feelings”; therefore, he contended that “action and thought are closely combined” in prayer, and that prayer is “one of these phenomena where ritual is united in belief.”\(^6\)

In his discussion of the historical development of prayer, Mauss observed a “double evolution” of religious understanding and practice. First, religion has become more interested in the mental aspects than the bodily aspects of rituals. The importance of mental attitudes has grown in rituals while the bodily attitudes have been gradually

---


\(^5\) Like Barth, Mauss basically viewed prayer as a linguistic event, although he later discussed the bodily dimension of contemplative prayer.

\(^6\) Ibid.
sidelined. Secondly, religion has become more individualistic. Religious practices operate on individualistic understanding of rituals, in which the time, place, and actions of performance have less social implications. Thus, the meaning of religion is increasingly reduced to the mental exercises of individuals. Mauss found that this “double evolution” is particularly conspicuous in the practice of prayer. In prayer as a linguistic event, an abstract, private, and interior thought has replaced a ritualized bodily communal activity. Mauss’s evolutionary understanding of prayer is somewhat problematic because his linear view on the history of prayer oversimplifies the complex development of various types of prayer. However, Mauss’s overall characterization of the “double evolution” is especially true for the trend of prayer in the modern European context.

Mauss presented two crucial ideas that deserve more serious attention from theologians. First, Mauss pointed out that prayer is a social phenomenon both in form and in content. He was criticizing other theorists of prayer in his time who treated prayer as an individualistic phenomenon, ignoring its social context. These theorists thought that the actual external practice of prayer was secondary to the mental stance of individuals. They echoed Kant’s argument that what is significant in prayer is the spirit of prayer, not an external practice (or a form). Against such an overly spiritual view of prayer, Mauss argued that every prayer has a material dimension that is conditioned by its social and cultural context. Mauss’s point is evident in a ritualized practice of prayer, in which stylized actions reflect a sophisticated structure of symbolic actions of a larger society. The manners of walking and speaking, for example, are socially constructed, and their symbolic meanings play an important role in ritual practices. The original context, meaning, and intention of ritual actions might have been lost in later generations, but the
practitioners try to be faithful to traditional actions passed down through diachronic communities, believing that the same actions will have consistent ritual efficacy. Mauss even argued that extemporaneous prayer and contemplative prayer, which often claim to be free from an external structure, have such a social dimension. He contended that “even when prayer is individual and free, even when the worshippers choose freely the time and mode of expression, what they say always uses hallowed language and deals with hallowed things, that is, ones endorsed by social tradition.”\(^7\) Furthermore, he pointed out that speculative prayer is similarly in accord with the moral values present in its particular tradition. Therefore, prayers that appear to be free from any social rules in fact subliminally follow a culturally cultivated routine and try to avoid breaking cultural norms. Prayer is commonly more than a formless gush of emotion or a cry that freely pours out a feeling.\(^8\) It is a “fragment of a religion” or “tiny piece of literature” which the experiences of communities permeate by transmitted words. Worshippers may have been trained formally and deliberately through prayer books and liturgical orders, or informally and inadvertently by imitating the extemporaneous practices of the more experienced. In both cases their prayers have been shaped in a cultural and social context, and such cultural shaping happens not only in the mind but also in the body. In other words, prayer is a social practice which expresses how a pray-er has been shaped in body and mind, and through which a pray-er is reshaped in body and mind. The doctrinal traditions surrounding prayer might be too complex for a single individual practitioner to

\(^7\) Ibid., 33.

\(^8\) It does not mean that wordless sigh and cry cannot be prayer. In fact, there was a significant stream of the monastic traditions that viewed one-word exclamation or sigh as a truer form of prayer. Mauss mainly refers to the common practices of prayer.
comprehend. However, a praying person can gradually acquire theological knowledge through her actions. By participating in the communal expression of faith in prayer, one enters an alternative narrative of the community in which a pray-er gradually learns and experiences the different social reality that the ritual actions create.

Secondly, Mauss argued that every prayer is an act. Prayer is not merely a cerebral exercise, but it “always implies an effort, an expenditure of physical and moral energy in order to produce certain results.”⁹ It does not mean that prayer always involves a visible movement of the body, but the absence of a physical action itself is also one’s deliberate choice for the body. Mauss claimed that “even when [prayer] is entirely mental, with no words spoken, with scarcely even a gesture, it is still a [voluntary] movement of an attitude of the soul.”¹⁰ Whether silent or vocal, whether motionless or in motion, the praying body takes a certain posture by choice, and these actions of prayer exist in a form of ritual (more particularly, he emphasized ritual actions, such as “a posture—standing, sitting, kneeling, prostrating, or the way the hands and eyes are used”).¹¹ Mauss understood these bodily ritual acts mostly in a linguistic context, but his definition of language was much broader than spoken words. He was interested in prayer as a linguistic event as a whole, and he viewed a ritual act in prayer as paralanguage, a significant part of this linguistic event. Despite his linguistic focus, however, Mauss did not reduce the meaning of ritual actions to linguistic communication. He admitted that the rationale of bodily performance is not always clear to performers and/or observers. Ritual

---

⁹ Ibid., 54.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 13.
actions often do not arise directly from a known linguistic context because they have been transmitted and transformed through generations as a collective experience of community.

Therefore, it is not surprising to find that Mauss’s later work stressed the importance of bodily habituation in social life. In his seminal article, “Body Techniques,” Mauss introduced a concept of *habitus*. Human behaviors are highly conditioned by socio-political contexts. They are not a collection of random acts or a natural growth of bodily features, but acquired techniques that have developed from social interactions. For example, observing the various ways people walk, sit, run, swim, dance, throw, and jump, Mauss suggested that they are social phenomena that reflect one’s status and location in society. In most cases, people do not learn these bodily techniques deliberately on a conscious level. Since childhood they have grown into them after repeated exposure and adjustment to social structures. For Mauss, there is no simply “natural way” of action for an adult. Bodily techniques are the results of innumerable practices that construct the body as a social and cultural reality that can be identified in a society. They are acquired techniques, rather than the natural development of the body.

Mauss did not deny the predilection of one’s bodily natures; he did not claim that all elements of human behaviors are determined by their cultural context. For example, he was ambivalent about cultural or biological origins of women’s way of throwing, which, in his view, is “not just weak, but always different from that of a man.”

---


13 Ibid., 106; For further discussion on the gendered body, see Iris Marion Yong, *On Female Body Experience: “Throwing like a girl” and other essays* (Oxford: Oxford, 2005).
was not interested in resolving a nature/nurture problem of human development. As Talal Asad explained, Mauss’s goal was “to explore the dynamic constitution of embodied behavior which he wanted to conceptualize as apt behavior.” Mauss’s main interest was to overcome Cartesian dualism in the field of anthropology through careful attention to the body. For Mauss, the body is not a neutral extension of matter, from which one’s mental existence can be detached. The body is the most natural instrument, but it is fundamentally different from other instruments. Human beings use the body by mastering techniques, but at the same time the mastered techniques become part of their bodies. What the body experiences becomes part of the body, and the reshaped body changes how one’s mind interacts with the world. Unlike Cartesian philosophy, therefore, Mauss took seriously the roles of bodily techniques in one’s identity formation.

Naming such a social procedure of bodily learning “habitus,” Mauss wanted to capture the cultural nature of bodily habituation. The formation of the body is not random and individualistic, but rather social and cultural. One can see how his later development of the concept of habitus is closely related to his earlier understanding of prayer as a bodily act, a social phenomenon. But Mauss’s understanding of habitus remained inchoate. For further discussion on the relationship between habitus and the body, two other French thinkers, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu, will be particularly helpful.

---


15 Asad comments on Mauss’s view on body and experience: “an experience of the body becomes an experienced body.” Ibid., 49.
2. 1. 2 Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Merleau-Ponty incorporated the body—the dimension of human reality ignored in Cartesian intellectualism—in his attempt to unravel the question of human perception. Cartesian dualism regarded the body more as another object than as part of oneself. Merleau-Ponty insisted that the body be considered an essential human condition of perception. One’s body is not experienced or perceived merely as another object. A person’s relationship to her own body is fundamentally different from her relationship to her surroundings. Her perception of the world is always mediated through her body, but her relationship to her own body is direct and immediate. Cartesian dualism might have viewed the body as a machine controlled by the mind that is theoretically separated from the physical world, but in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, the body plays an essential role in human perception, understanding, and existence. The body is not another thing in the world but the “carnal condition” for one’s perception.16 Merleau-Ponty said, “[R]ather than a mind and a body, man is a mind with a body, a being who can only get to the truth of things because its body is, as it were, embedded in those things. . . . [W]e can only gain access to them through our body. Clothed in human qualities, they too are a combination of mind and body.”17 In other words, we do not simply have bodies; we are bodies.18

---


18 “I am not a machine with a ghost attached at the pineal gland. Instead, I am a living-conscious body.” Merleau-Ponty, The Primacy of Perception, 84.
Despite his acute criticism of Cartesian dualism, Merleau-Ponty acknowledged that Descartes’s view on the body-mind relationship is not simplistic. Although he made an absolute distinction between mind and body, Descartes himself did not think the soul merely controls the body like a helmsman in a ship. The mind is more closely connected to the body, so that it experiences feelings, pain, and hunger; and the body and the mind constitute a single thing.\textsuperscript{19} But however closely they are connected with each other, the Cartesian human being, the single thing, is still the hybrid of the two separate entities. For Merleau-Ponty, however, the union of mind and body is not a static amalgam of the two mutually external units, subject and object; rather “it is enacted at every instant in the movement of existence.”\textsuperscript{20} By insisting that thinking and perception are anchored in the body, Merleau-Ponty clearly broke away from the Cartesian rationalism. Thought is not purely internal; it does not exist independent of the physical world. Thought depends on perception, and perception is a bodily phenomenon. Unlike Descartes who assumed that perception is mental representation of physical stimuli, Mearleau-Ponty thought perception is the bodily navigation of the environment. To perceive means to have a body in the world. Thus the bodily acts must not be viewed as a mere result of thought processes. Rather, bodily skills and dispositions play a constitutive role in thought.

Merleau-Ponty criticized any rationalism that reduced human experience to the cognitive function of a disembodied subject, free from any biological and social marks. Bodily practices actively sort out sensory stimuli, so perception cannot be free from the


\textsuperscript{20} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{The Primacy of Perception}, 88-89
spatial limitation of bodily movement. Because the situated body constitutes one’s perspective on the world, human thinking bears the traces of the body, which means “the mind’s eye, too, has its blind spot.”\textsuperscript{21} One cannot have perception and understanding in purely abstract terms independent from one’s concrete bodily conditions. One never takes a point of view outside the body. One cannot take multiple perspectives over one’s own body. One can perceive the world only thorough one’s bodily presence. One’s perspective on one’s own body is conditioned by one’s bodily features and by a particular time and location. Therefore, as Merleau-Ponty says, “my body is my point of view on the world.”\textsuperscript{22} This bodily point of view is achieved only through the practice of the body. One cannot understand the bodily functions without enacting them, and the enactment of the body happens through “body schema,” which eventually creates the “habitual body.”

The body schema is “a way of expressing that my body is in the world.”\textsuperscript{23} The body and the world are intertwined. A person becomes aware of her body through the world; at the same time, she becomes aware of the world through the medium of her body. Thus the situation and environment of the body in the world are central in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology. In this sense, he distanced himself from Husserl who thought the body was inserted between object and subject. For Merleau-Ponty, the body is not merely placed in the world but rather belongs to the world; the body is not simply in space and time, but rather inhabits them. Through habitual actions the body becomes

\textsuperscript{21} Maurice Merleau-Ponty, \textit{The Visible and the Invisible} (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1968), 33.

\textsuperscript{22} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{The Primacy of Perception}, 70.

\textsuperscript{23} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Phenomenology of Perception}, 115.
familiar with the place it inhabits. The body is “essentially an expressive space.”

Merleau-Ponty concluded that “the body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be interrelated in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them.”

The body is not a passive receiver of outer sensory stimuli. It does not merely react after the data are transmitted, but rather it actively partakes in construing the context and responds to the stimuli with a predisposition given in the meaning of the context. For example, listening to choral music in worship does not merely result in a passive response to auditory stimuli. The body is already engaged in the interpretation of the context of worship, and its response to the music involves the body’s active construal of the context. One listens to music with excitement, not only because the music stimulates excitement, but also because one is already excited to listen to it. For Merleau-Ponty, “the excitation itself is already a response, not an effect imported from outside the organism; it is the first act of its proper functioning.” The body is already in the middle of assessment of the world, and it is reflected in the body’s response to a stimulus. The body’s interpretation of the world is not a short-circuited process of the mind; the body, without assistance of an explicit cognitive process, interacts with the surrounding context through the body schema.

---

24 Ibid., 169; Merleau-Ponty’s view suggests not only that a body and a place never exist without each other, but also that the body itself is a place. The movement of the body is more than a change of position; it “constitutes place.” See Edward Casey, *Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 235.

25 Ibid., 94.

Gestures, postures, and bodily skills shape one’s self-understanding and interaction with others and the world. The actions of the body (ritual activity) are more than representation of ideas or symbols. They engage body and mind in a way that the body masters its schema.27 When a worshipper walks into a chapel, she does not walk into a neutral physical space. Her body “knows” how the order of worship flows. It knows how to interact with people, pews, and religious symbols like cross, icons, and baptismal font. It knows how to proceed to the communion table and receive the elements.

A biological body has its own physiological conditions and the structure developed within these conditions. The biological body provides “stable organs and pre-established circuits”, and the personal body “sublimates and transforms” the biological body into a situation.28 Merleau-Ponty thought the body could incorporate new performances into the structure. He called this process “habit acquisition.”29 He gave examples of learning to dance and of learning to play a musical instrument. At the beginning of practice, a clumsy body has to pay constant attention to the movement of the different parts of the body. One needs to focus on the steps of feet, the movement of torso and arms, and counting rhythms. When one learns to play the piano, one has to focus on pressing keys, preoccupied with the use of fingers and elbows, instead of making music.

27 The body schema, according to Merleau-Ponty is “vague power against which the gesture and its aim stand out” (Merleau-Ponty, The Primacy of Perception, 101); it makes a “global awareness of my posture in the intersensory world” (Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 100).

28 Merleau-Ponty, Primary of Perception, 84, 87.

29 Ibid., 142.
However, the tools in the hands of experienced artisans are part of their bodies.\footnote{The body schema is so fundamental in the embodied life that its function usually remains unnoticed. It is like Heidegger’s famous example of using a hammer. The less one theorizes it, the more one wields it freely. The mastered skill is not a result of a theoretical knowledge or intentionality. A skilled carpenter does not think of a hammer in her hand while she masterly wields it. When the carpenter is engrossed in her activity, she does not have a subject and object relationship with the surrounding world. In the moments of activity, her self does not stand as a subject in front of her tool and working space as objects. For the body in action, there is no clear distinction between a conscious subject and an object of analysis. The categories of subject and object might exist only in the outside of experience where the context may be detached from the self and where things may be measured and analyzed in quantitative and objective terms. When a broken tool disrupts the rhythm of bodily activity, it is suddenly in the way of the body’s movement. In a relationship with the tool (especially the body for Merleau-Ponty), one cannot be a disengaged subject with a purely objective point of view.} Once the habit acquisition is advanced, these new skills become part of the body schema. The tools become an extension of the physical body as if tools and musical instruments become auxiliary parts of a body. One’s consciousness can focus on the project (dance, building, music, etc.) without dividing their attention to bodily movement. The body schema shows that the practice of the habituated body is not simply repetition of a mindless action, but the produced-body is a result of consciousness’s being engaged in the world.

Critics of ritual might claim that the body schema is a sign of mindless routine acts. However, the mind does not merely take a back seat in the progress of the body schema. Although actions might be taken increasingly on the subliminal level, the development of the body schema is not simply a mindless automation of the body. Body and mind, in a complex and close relationship, learn to navigate a space through familiarization. In the development of the body schema, the mind is not absent in the trained body. The mind is the result of the body’s being in the world.
2. 1. 3 Pierre Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu elaborated this idea of *habitus* more extensively than Mauss. Bourdieu challenged a stance of idealism that elevated the mind’s exercise of reason as the bedrock of a social order. Like Mauss, Bourdieu wanted to avoid being locked in conceptual thinking, by turning to the mundane activities of everyday life as loci of embodiment of cultural *habitus*. Everyday bodily practices, not concepts located in the sequestered realm of the mind, capture the experience of life. He also argued that pattern of postures must not be disregarded as superficial activity because the bodily movements are filled with socio-political values.

Bourdieu, also a critic of Cartesian rationalism, leaned toward a Pascalian view. He criticized the “illusion of the omnipotence of thought”, which believes that one can free oneself from all presuppositions through radical doubt. He argued that people

---

31 Although Bourdieu rarely engaged in Mauss directly, it is reasonable to say that his work on *habitus* shared the same intellectual trajectory of Mauss’s work. William Hanks, an anthropologist, identifies three lines of thinking in Bourdieu’s understanding of *habitus*: 1) Aristotelian idea of *hexis* as individual deposition, 2) the corporeal schema of Mearleau-Ponty (embodiment), 3) Erwin Panofsky’s idea of “habits of mind” or *modus operandi* (found in “the spirit of the age”), which governs the cultural productions (a view based on Panofsky’s observation of the strong parallels between Gothic architecture and scholastic philosophy). For further discussion of the influences on Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*, see William Hanks, “Pierre Bourdieu and the Practices of Language” in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005): 67-83.

32 Edmund Husserl’s famous statement on the importance of experience in knowledge is helpful here: “Our life-world in its originality . . . is not only . . . a world of logical operations, not only the realm of the pregivenness of objects as possible judicative substrates, as possible themes of cognitive activity, but it is also the world of experience in the wholly concrete sense which is commonly tied in with the world ‘experience.’ And his commonplace sense is no way related purely and simply to cognitive behavior; taken in its greatest generality, it is related, rather, to a habituality . . . which lends to him . . . who is ‘experienced,’ assurance in decision and action in the situation of life.” Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgment* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 52.

Husserl’s insight on the importance of experience and habituality was ingenious, but he himself did not fully develop this idea. He looked quite comfortable with working with the traditional conceptual knowledge, rather than delving into the question of the daily praxis. Later anthropologists like Pierre Bourdieu affirmed Husserl’s insight, but they criticized him for remaining shackled by the dichotomy between theory and practice.
subscribe to the categories of thought given in history, culture, and language, which are
inculcated in their mind and body through social education. The power of reason is
limited by its context. Therefore, Bourdieu preferred Blaise Pascal, who recognized the
importance of the bodily habituation in human understanding, to René Descartes, who
sought to find the absolute truth that survives radical doubt through universal reason
alone. For Pascal, human beings are shaped by both practice and intellect; their
understanding and conviction do not solely rely on reasoning. Logical arguments are
important, but they must not exclude the significant role of habituation in making the
human self.  

In Bourdieu’s view, there is “no immaculate conception” in the order of
thought. Human reality is socially conditioned, and the social habituation directs the mind
by the process of automation. Logical knowledge solely based on reason differs from
practical knowledge acquired through the channels of habit.

Bourdieu’s criticism of intellectualism is directed beyond the Cartesian legacy, to
scholasticism in academia. In the rise of scholasticism, philosophy ceased to be a way of
life. Detached from the practices of life, academic study became an abstract and
theoretical exercise, which required its participants to adopt highly technical language
that was available only to specialized elites. This scholastic perspective is not easily
accessible to people without socio-economical privilege that would allow them to acquire
theoretical skills and dispositions necessary for abstract exercises. It gives advantage to

---

33 Pascal pointed out that human beings are “as much automatic as intellectual.” Pascal, Pensées, 252.
35 See Pierre Hadot, Philosophy as a Way of Life: spiritual exercise from Socrates to Foucault
the privileged theoretical point of view, which, detached from practical concerns, has little consideration of the inescapable existential weights of being situated in a particular social context. Although our particular socio-political and historical contexts shape our cognitive dispositions towards the world, a scholastic perspective presupposes a universal “point of view on which no point of view can be taken.” Bourdieu argued that while the universal perspective claims to stand on an objective and neutral ground, it in fact advocates a particular point of view, a linear perspective that conflates the diverse multi-layered worlds into a single dimensional unified world ready to be analyzed by abstract speculation. Intellectualist universalism believes that a universal thinker can liberate all by providing them with equal access to the universal judgment; but in reality it favors a view of elites as a superior universal view and represses the conditions of practical knowledge.

The more the dominance of academic aristocratism grew, the wider the distance between privileged theoretical thinkers and common practitioners gets. Scholars, though sharing the practical mode of thinking in their everyday experiences, are increasingly disconnected from it in their academic life. Being shaped in *habitus* of the scholastic world is a long and slow process of habituation (like all other kinds of *habitus*), so that scholars often forget how unique are their socio-political, economical, and historical locations—which make their so-called objective, natural, and rational view of the world

---

36 Bourdieu criticized phenomenological descriptions for being ahistorical. He argued that the question of social conditions has been ignored in the transcendental anthropology and even in the phenomenology of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. He contended that phenomenologists should return to the analysis of one’s historical presence in the world, asking what kinds of the social schemes an agent employs in order to construct the world because a *habitus* is a product of history.

possible. Scholastic dispositions either dismiss the particularity of practical logic in favor of universality or attempt to assimilate it to the theoretical and abstract mode of thinking. It is often forgotten that there were unique historical conditions behind the emergence of scholastic and modern understandings of reason. The rise of speculative reason in the Enlightenment project was possible in the privileged social contexts that sustained the theoretical mode of thinking, which was believed to be universal but in practice monopolized by a minority. Habitus as incorporated and internalized social structures might look natural, as if they were inherent nature of the person. But in reality the socially privileged can live by the currents of the habitus more comfortably and gracefully than the marginalized, who need to exert themselves to adopt the bodily practices unfamiliar to them.38

In the rigid dichotomy between theory and practice, deeply rooted in the scholastic paradigm, the value of knowledge and wisdom gained through practice is easily dismissed. A unique form of logic embedded in a bodily practice is deemed unreliable. Criticizing this scholastic bias against practice, Bourdieu argued for the need to retrieve practical reason.39 The basis of practical knowledge is not a speculative mind,

---

38 Bourdieu’s criticism is directed to not only modern epistemology but also Kantian aesthetics. Bourdieu argues that Kant’s ascetic judgments (judgments of taste) presupposes “the disinterested play of sensibility” and “the pure exercise of the faculty of feeling.” This “transcendental use of sensibility” is supposed to produce pure aesthetic pleasure that everyone can feel regardless of one’s social location. But Bourdieu argues that this supposedly universal disposition in fact depends on the particular social conditions that make the so-called pure judgment of taste possible; in other words, the particular aesthetic judgment of a privileged minority prevails. While presented as a universal disinterested norm (by stripping its own extraordinary social and economic conditions), the scholastic viewpoint actually promotes its unstated conditions that benefit those who already enjoy them as their own particularity. Taking it for granted that the embodiment of their own particular social structures will be universally accepted, the elite minority promote the cultural norms internalized in their own practices. See, Pascalian Meditation, 73-74.

39 Bourdieu’s position does not deny the significance of reason. It follows Pascal’s middle way which tries to avoid both extremes: unrestrained trust in reason and dismissal of reason. Bourdieu’s criticism is directed to the scholastic bodiless perspective whose triumph in academia detached human
but the practical sense of a *habitus*. *Habitus* is a structure that produces a habituated body that incorporates the social conditions in its disposition and action. It informs social agents of how their social world operates; it has power to mold our mind “without violence, without art, without argument.”\(^{40}\) The form of knowledge created by the dispositions of *habitus* is more practical and experiential than conceptual and discursive. The mastery of practical knowledge is a more subliminal than cognitive process. Bourdieu argued, “the schemes of the *habitus*, the primary forms of classification, owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will.”\(^{41}\) The fundamental levels of socialization happen through mundane, therefore mostly unnoticed, but persistent presence of the power of “the ordinary order of things” on the body, more than by the explicit address of social rules to the mind.\(^{42}\) As a child imitates a parent without even thinking about it, a social agent adopts a way of using the body, including gestures, postures, walking, eating, and talking, that is deemed a *modus vivendi* of successful adults.\(^{43}\) By being placed in the world, social agents inevitably become subject to sense experiences and emotions, and what they experience and feel through the body shape who they are. Through bodily experiences a *habitus* is impressed on the bodies of

---

\(^{40}\) Pascal, *Pensées*, 252.


\(^{42}\) Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 141.

\(^{43}\) “Bodily hexis is political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking.” Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 69-70. (original emphasis)
social agents. The socialized body bears bodily *hexis*, dispositions, which are inscribed on the body like indelible tattoos. Through repeated bodily practices, the social structures are gradually internalized and embodied in one’s practical knowledge of the social world.

Bourdieu sought to overcome the dichotomy between the rigid structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure and the subjectivism of Jean-Paul Sartre. As a middle way between structuralism, which excludes individuality, and existentialism, which ignores the gravity of social structures, he described the constant interaction between *habitus* and individual practice.\(^{44}\) Human agency, as the product of social structures, is conditioned by structural circumstances; but this is not a deterministic view because the interactions of social agents endlessly modify *habitus*.\(^{45}\) The *habitus* is not a static social convention, but rather ongoing social strategies continually renewed by social interactions. The *habitus* does not arise in a vacuum, as its embodiment does not occur in a vacuum; through

---

\(^{44}\) Bourdieu defined *habitus* in this way: “a system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.” Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 53.

Practical knowledge is not merely a passive perception of the world. Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* recognizes the practitioner’s “generating, unifying, constructing, classifying power” to construct social reality. At the same time, it reminds that this power itself is socially constructed. The body in action is not a “transcendental subject” but a “socialized body”, “investing in its practice socially constructed organizing principles that are acquired in the course of a situated and dated social experience” (Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, 136). Social agents cannot randomly pick and choose a *habitus* they like to adopt. The schema through which they construct the world is constructed by the world.

Bourdieu argued that the interplay between social structures and individual practice is not a synthesis of two separate entities. It is “the dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality” (Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 72). He wanted to avoid the dichotomy between society and individual. For him, “the socialized body (what is called the individual or person) is not opposed to society; it is one of its forms of existence.” Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question* (London: SAGE, 1993), 29.

\(^{45}\) Against positive materialism, Bourdieu argued that “the objects of knowledge are constructed, not passively recorded.” Against intellectual idealism. Bourdieu argued that “the principle of this construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions, the *habitus*, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions.” Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 52.
practice, it constantly interfaces with a particular social reality. By conforming the actions of individuals to the structure, the *habitus* preserves a reigning social order. At the same time, the habituated body, in its interactions with other social factors, creates a new social reality, a new objective structure. This is a circular process. Practical knowledge is conditioned by the world that it constructs. It is informed by the world that it informs. It is structured not only by the world from which it arises, but also by the schema generated from the world it creates. It constantly changes in response to new realities and new experiences it generates.\(^46\) Dispositions are not actualized according to a predetermined course of life. Their potentiality can be realized only through a continuous negotiation with a social situation. Therefore, *a* *habitus* is working toward creating the most favorable social contexts for its realization.

*Habitus* is not always logically coherent. It is not always perfectly adapted to its circumstances. Because different situations (fields) coexist in a society, and different roles coexist in one’s life, multiple forms of *habitus* can work simultaneously, sometimes harmoniously but sometimes cacophonously. One *habitus* can collide with another *habitus*, or with an unsuitable condition that prevents it from being actualized. Therefore, the work of *habitus* is not always smooth; it can be chaotic and jerky. It also seems murky because it works not through clear logical reasoning but through the subliminal obscure acquisition of dispositions. The schema of practical knowledge remains obscure

\(^{46}\) Dispositions are always in the process of revision, but the revision rarely breaks radically from the tradition because it draws on the practices instituted by the previous state of the *habitus*. Practical knowledge, gained and exercised through a structure of perception and action, works through continual interactions with social stimuli, which themselves are preconditioned by one’s previous experience of the *habitus*. 
to the agent, so practitioners do not fully understand the mechanism of their own practices.  

Like Mauss and Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu viewed the body as the central locus of practical knowledge. As a body, not merely with a body, one is placed in a social and physical space, which becomes one’s point of view. My body, which I inhabit, is not a mere biological mechanism, an external object I can freely dissect and analyze. My body in action, mostly forgotten unless broken, is not only a medium of my relationship with the world, but also my existence in the world. The body in the world gains knowledge through repeated interactions with the patterns of the world. In direct and close engagement in the world through senses, the body acquires practical understanding of the world, which is different from the speculative reflection constructed in conceptual thinking. Knowledge acquired through action is the product of embodiment of social structures that are constructed by the world in which the agent acts. In order to appreciate the body’s role in understanding of the world, one has to overcome intellectualism, which regards one’s practical relation to the world as a product of mental synthesis of cognitive perceptions and repudiates particularity of practical knowledge as a stumbling block on a road to scientific and objective reality. The dispositions and the presuppositions of habitus, which constitute the practical reasoning of their field, seep through even the supposedly objective disinterested rational thinking.

Because social agents are endlessly negotiating social conditions without deliberate calculation, they never have a complete control of their own practices. The

---

47 But it does not set up the false dichotomy between conscious, deliberate submission to rules and slow and mostly subliminal habituation in unstated social rules. They are not mutually exclusive. It is not an either-or situation.
dispositions, imprinted on the body through years of cultivation, remain hidden until they emerge in action. Even when they are actualized in action, they are rarely noticed because they look so “natural” in their own contexts. The agent in action knows the world not as external separate reality with objectifying distance. She lives in the world, bound up with it. She feels “natural” in her world because the structure of the world, *habitus*, is internalized in her through a long process of bodily practices. She is part of the world. In order to feel “natural” in the world, she needs to acquire “dexterity” (a Hegelian term), the knack of performing the right actions without having to calculate. This practical sense enables social agents to do what they are supposed to do without subscribing to ethical rules, such as the Kantian categorical imperative. The trained body, which internalized the social structure, can find its role and place in the field effortlessly, without even thinking about it.

Bourdieu called the particular social context where the embodiment happens a “field.” The field is not a value-neutral space. It has its own rules and ideals that players should honor. The logic of a particular field determines who will be recognized as a prominent figure on it. Sometimes the logic does not seem “reasonable” to outsiders because they do not understand how the field is working. A field is rarely created by setting up abstract ground rules first. Instead, a field and its *habitus* are formed gradually in practice. Where the field is firmly established, the *habitus* has more power beyond individual preferences. Agents well trained in the schemes of a particular *habitus* can quickly succeed in fields formed by a similar *habitus*, like a trained musician quickly adapts to a different genre of music.
People become successful in a field not simply because they have talents and work hard, but because the promotion of a certain type of excellence creates a field where that particular form of life can flourish. Bourdieu used an example of higher education to demonstrate his point.\(^\text{48}\) Although people can agree that academic excellence should be honored, it depends on the field how the excellence would be defined, how a certain trait would be promoted, and who would have the authority to decide on them. Those who successfully internalized the particular rules of academia through practice (\textit{homo academicus}) will govern how the field should work (the \textit{habitus} of academia).\(^\text{49}\) To take the example that we have been considering, modern academic theology in the West created a field where the mind’s exercise of universal reason is preferred to a bodily practice rooted in a tradition. This ideal of academic theology established itself in the modern university as a formative place, an alternative to the ecclesial communities, and shapes theologians and clergy instilling its own unique \textit{habitus}.

2. 2 Prayer, Linguistic \textit{Habitus}, and Paralanguage

In the Christian liturgical tradition prayer is considered a conversation with the transcendent God. Like other human conversations, this divine-human communication involves the whole person, including both body and spirit. One engages in conversation not only with the content of speech but with speech-act. How the body delivers a message is an essential part of communication. The whole body “speaks” through various


channels, such as gestures, postures, and facial expressions, and these bodily activities play more than a supplementary role in the event of communication. However, most studies on Christian prayer analyze only the texts of prayer, while the role of the body in prayer has drawn little scholarly attention.

In the biblical tradition, prayer was viewed as a form of divine-human communication. Most biblical prayers take the form of speech. Praying persons speak of their desires, fears, joys, and sorrows in front of the living God. God is often depicted as a conversation partner who turns to face human beings. God spoke with Abraham, Moses, and David in their prayers. God spoke to the prophets in order to deliver divine messages to the people of God. The Book of Psalms is full of prayers of praise, thanksgiving, and lamentation directed to God as speech. Jesus addressed God in a vocative form, “Father,” and the records of his prayers show that he communicated his thoughts and emotions with God the Father. The Lord’s Prayer consists of petitions, and by definition petitions presupposes a conversation partner who can listen to and act upon them. Throughout church history, the most salient features of both liturgical and private prayers have been the verbal expressions of praise, penitence, thanksgiving, and petition.

If a main feature of Christian prayer is communication with God, what kind of language would this communication take? Most human communications happen in verbal forms (langue in Saussure’s term), and both written and spoken language play a preeminent role in prayer. However, communication or conversation is more than the

---

50 Shakespeare’s character Ulysses says about Cressida in Troilus and Cressida: “There’s language in her eye, her cheek, her lip, / Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out / At every joint and motive of her body.” (4.5.55-57) In this scene Ulysses makes a negative judgment on Cressida’s character on the basis of what he “reads” in the “language” of her body.

51 Saussure’s distinction between langage, langue, and parole is used in this section.
mere exchange of words. In order to understand a conversation, one needs to consider the whole situation surrounding it. Human beings communicate meaning through diverse channels beyond words, such as facial expressions and body language. Whether one notices it or not, whether one uses it deliberately or not, one’s body is engaged in a conversation in an active and dynamic fashion. Gestures and postures can reveal subtle differences in nuance, which verbal language alone cannot fully express. The absence of these nonverbal cues makes a phone conversation in a foreign language extremely difficult. Body language is such an essential part of communication that a lack of it in a conversation can be a strong “statement” of disengagement or disapproval. Therefore, Abne M. Eisenberg and Ralph R. Smith argue that “analysis of interpersonal communication is incomplete without a consideration of more than mere use of language,” and that “the meaning of each communication is to be found neither in words spoken, nor in the actions, but in both, understood in relationship to one another.” Adam Kendon, another linguist, also contends that “if we think of ‘language’ as a complex of instrumentalities which serve in the expression of ‘thought’ . . . then gesture is a part of ‘language’.” A transcript of some dialogues would not make much sense without tone, gestures, facial expressions associated with the words. If the


53 Ibid., 5.


55 Eisenberg and Smith given simple examples of such dialogues: “Person A: Hello [Cheerfully, with a look of pleasure]: Person B: Glad to see you [With Grimace, eyes to the ground, shoulders slumped]”; Eisenberg and Smith, 5.
important place of the body in communication is taken seriously, it is improper to reduce Christian prayer into a simple mental activity. When a believer comes before God in prayer, she brings her whole self in both body and spirit, and the gamut of her bodily expressions should be considered as a form of prayer. The analysis of a (liturgical) text of prayer only— the written words are also to be spoken with a mouth— is not comprehensive enough, because how one speaks it necessarily changes the dynamic of written words or adds an extra layer of meaning. Liturgical prayer is complete when it is actually performed. Therefore, the language of prayer (langage) must include nonverbal forms of communications: paralanguage and kinesics.

Paralanguage is “articulation of the vocal apparatus, or significant lack of it, i.e. hesitation, between segments of vocal articulation,” which is also called “nonverbal acoustic signs.”56 It includes changing tone, intonation, accent, speech, and pitch of speech, as well as making nonverbal noises, such as hissing, sighing, etc. Kinesics is “articulation of the body, or movements resulting from muscular and skeletal shift.”57 It includes facial expressions, gestures, and postures.58 Typical kinesics in liturgy include turning, bowing, keeling, genuflecting, prostrating, lifting up hands, and making a sign of the cross.59

57 Ibid.
58 “The line between posture and gesture cannot be clearly drawn. . . . Usually, a gesture is thought of a movement of hands and arms, but the whole body is capable of a single gesture,” Eisenberg and Smith, 99; in this chapter, I use the two words interchangeably.
59 Emphasizing the importance of paralanguage and kinesics does not diminish the primacy of verbal language in prayer. It does not claim that verbal language is inadequate for prayer and needs to be substituted with nonverbal language. Nonverbal communication apart from verbal communication has little ability to transmit a message. Thus nonverbal elements of prayer enrich the whole situation of communication in which the verbal language still plays a central role. In this sense, using paralanguage and kinesics along with verbal communication is different from advocating meditative prayer or contemplative
The gestures and postures associated with prayer must be understood as part of its larger linguistic context. Gesture and speech are not mutually exclusive in conversation; they have different but complementary functions. What would be an appropriate form of speech is determined not by a single situation itself but by the larger history of the relationship between a *habitus* and a field. Learning a language means more than hearing and duplicating a type of speech; one learns how to speak by speaking in a particular field through interaction with its *habitus*. The legitimacy of speech does not rely solely on the contents of speech, but the authority given to the language from outside. As J. L. Austin’s idea of “performative utterance” shows, there are speeches that do not simply express a current state of the fact, but transform it by performance. The power of transformation does not come from the language itself, but from the symbolic power delegated to the authorized performers by the *habitus*. The efficacy of ritual prayer, which aims to overcome the limits of language by shunning it. Contemplative prayer chooses silence over speech because of a strong sense of the inadequacy of language in spirituality. Human words not only fail to describe spiritual experiences properly but also confine divine-human communication within the boundaries of a particular language. As a poet creates a profound meaning by breaking a rule of language, silence suspends language to transcend the tiny box of human concepts. When one does not know how to pray in language, the Holy Spirit intercedes with sighs (paralanguage) to deep for words (Rom 8:26). In contemplative prayer silence as *langage* ultimately replaces the language of prayer (*langue*). The development of sign language in the monastic tradition had a similar rationale. It shared with contemplative prayer the reservation about the use of verbal language and viewed silence as a higher form of communication with God. However, its concern was more about the danger of sinful and idle discourses than about the innate limitation of language itself. The monks of the abbey of Cluny pursued a celestial silence by shunning the utterance of any human sound and creating “a silent language of hand signs” that replaced speech and paralanguage. However, their sign “language” did not entirely eliminate linguistic features. Having its own grammatical and lexical structures, this sign language was clearly different from kinesics, which lacks the ability to build a sentence. Scott Bruce, *Silence and Sign Language in Medieval Monasticism: the Cluniac Tradition c.900-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2007), 51-52.

“Symbolic power does not reside in ‘symbolic system’ in the form of an ‘illocutionary force’ but that is defined in and through a given relation between those who exercise power and those who submit to it, i.e. in the very structure of the field in which belief is produced and reproduced.” Ibid., 170.
practices is recognized only when participants acknowledge the delegated power of the authorized performers. The efficacy does not lie in ritual symbolism per se, but only in its representation in a theatrical sense. One’s social location in a community, the level of acceptance of one’s bodily presence, and the level of authority given to one’s expression of spiritual experience determine the sense of one’s own social worth which directs one’s whole physical posture in the community. The “sense of acceptability” is an acquired sense that tells what actions and words are appropriate or not in a given social context. It is deeply inscribed on the body as dispositions. Bodily hexis and language are embodied social markers that remind both actors and spectators of their social positions assigned by the community. Language here does not function merely as a means of communication. It is “a body technique, and specifically linguistic, especially phonetic, competence is a dimension of bodily hexis in which one’s whole relation to the social world, and one’s whole socially informed relation to the world, are expressed.”\(^{62}\)

Language is not the product of an individual mind but a social product in which the complex history of social reality—including gender, class, and ethnicity—is encoded. The convention of language reflects social values and structures that are internalized in the life of people.\(^{63}\) Therefore, “using” a language is different from “using” a tool. The “user” of language is also a “product” of language. The use of gestures and postures instills social values in the body (and the mind, which cannot be separated from the body). By “using” a language, one lives the social reality created by the linguistic

---

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 86.

\(^{63}\) The convention of language may have some characteristics that can be identified across different cultures and generations, but it has unique qualities rising from its own historical and socio-political contexts.
habitus. Since one’s act of speech expresses the social values instilled in language, one’s gesture and posture not only express the status of an individual mind but also reveal the social structures impressed on the body.⁶⁴

There is a noticeable connection between the language of biblical prayer and its social context. For example, the baruk-formula (“blessed are”) of benediction that wishes blessings on God (“Blessed be the Lord.” e.g. Psalm 68:19, 144:1; 1 Sam. 25:32; 1 King 10:9) raises a theological question on the divine nature because this expression can imply that God would be conditioned by an external source of goodness. Moshe Greenberg argues that such use of the barak-formula on God is modeled after the practice of interhuman exchanges of blessings (Ruth 3:10; 2 Sam. 2:5), in which a beneficiary, upon receiving a favor, expresses gratitude by blessing a benefactor (“Blessed be X before YHWH”).⁶⁵ Greenberg concluded that “the biblical narrators all portrayed speech between [humanity] and God on the analogy of speech between humans. Such a procedure accords perfectly with the personal conception of God in the Scriptures; the only analogy available for intercourse with [humanity] was the human-personal.”⁶⁶ The Hebrew prose prayers in scripture follow the patterns of human interaction in similar social circumstances. Therefore, as the verbal content of speech is only one—although major—factor in interpersonal communication (other crucial factors include social and

---

⁶⁴ William Hanks, an anthropologist, well explained how habitus functions in the event of speech: “For language, the habitus bears on the social definition of the speaker, mentally and physically, on routine ways of speaking, on gesture and embodied communicative actions, and on the perspectives inculcated through ordinary referential practice in a given language.” Hanks, “Pierre Bourdieu and the Practices of Language”, 69.


⁶⁶ Ibid., 36.
moral status of the speaker, emotional intensity, and the levels of honesty, transparency, and sincerity), the wording of prayer is not the sole factor in determining the efficacy of prayer. Prayer is a holistic event that encompasses a variety of linguistic and bodily elements.

If we consider that prayer as conversation between God and human are analogous to interhuman conversation, Erving Goffman’s observation of interaction ritual is helpful for us to understand the ritualistic dimension of prayer (including seemingly spontaneous actions of prayer). In his dramaturgical analysis of rituals in everyday human face-to-face interactions, Erving Goffman reminds us that the spontaneous actions used in social encounters are usually standardized habitual practices whose ramifications are often not fully known to the interactants. Normally people are expected to know how to decipher and use the customary facial and gestural expressions of the social groups they belong to or of the social context in which the encounter takes place.67 When one speaks, one does not simply express one’s inner thoughts in a vacuum. A speaker enters the highly regulated structures of social interactions in ritual. This structural aspect of speech is needed to control the speech event because by the act of speech a speaker breaks ritual equilibrium. Regardless of the level of the importance of the message, the speaker places every participant in the conversation in a vulnerable position. She faces the uncertainty of how her message would be received by the other; she takes a risk of being rejected, humiliated, or ignored by her audience. Her conversation partner is also exposed to the danger of being disappointed, insulted, or embarrassed by the speech. He has to be

prepared to defend himself to avoid disgrace, or subdue excessive praise with deft use of modest gestures not to appear arrogant. The face a person presents in human interactions is not a natural development of “inner psychic propensities.” It is something she acquires from her social context, a social construction built on “moral rules that are impressed upon [her] from without.” Therefore, even private conversations rely on the social structures in interaction rituals. It is an important for our understanding of prayers because one’s “private conversation” with God is also deeply rooted in interaction rituals. Of course, the divine-human interaction is not a mere extension of human interactions. Prayer, as spiritual conversation with the divine, does not simply follow a model of inter-human communication. However, since *habitus* of language still undergirds the linguistic event of prayer, the social structures of interaction rituals are ingrained in one’s prayer, a speech to God.

Most gestures in prayer came from larger socio-political contexts, so that their basic meanings are to be understood against these historical backgrounds. The rise and decline of certain liturgical gestures are related to the change of their significance in society. The loss of their semantic cultural contexts rendered many gestures (body language) enigmatic. But some liturgical gestures also went through theological transformation and acquired unique theological meanings found in Christian semantic contexts. Because of the added theological meanings, which transcended particular cultures, they could continue to function as Christian gestures, shaping the Christian bodies at prayer, even when their popularity in society diminished.

---

68 Ibid., 45.
2. 3 Ritual Performance, Knowledge, and Formation of the Self

The rise and dominance of the scholastic point of view in the Western society have a parallel in the history of Christian prayer. Theological discourses on prayer, which used to be interested in its actual practices, increasingly became abstract theoretical discourses in academic theology. The sensory experiences of vision, smell, taste, and touch prominent in patristic and medieval literatures on prayer did not draw much attention in modern theology; the practices of commoners slowly disappeared as a topic of academic theological education. But our earlier conversation with the French anthropologists has shown that the habitus of bodily practices plays an essential role in the development of a self, opening a way to bring the bodily and ritual dimensions of prayer back to academic theological discourse. The habitus as an embodied enduring disposition helps us retrieve the bodily practices of prayer—speaking, standing, kneeling, sitting, or walking—as a constructive way of shaping emotions and thoughts. The postures the body takes, the language the body uses, and the places where the body is presented become part of one’s theological understanding and moral character. In addition, those anthropologists rightly pointed out that these bodily aspects of prayer are social products. The ritualized liturgical actions are sanctioned and preserved by a community, and even the so-called “free” prayer is governed by the habitus of the community. In other words, prayer is a corporeal and corporate practice. Lex orandi includes both liturgical texts and liturgical actions.

The practice of prayer has the characteristics of ritual: it is performed in both private and communal settings; it is usually stylized with symbolic postures and gestures;
there is a repetition of the same words and actions, especially in a liturgical setting; it forms a social body through its cohesion with diachronic and synchronic communities.\(^6^9\)

The premodern view of ritual actions in the formation of Christian identity and character is important for our discussion of the body at prayer. The development of theology of the body in late antiquity is a story of the ambivalent relationship between soul and body, more particularly between the soul’s well-being and the body’s discipline of physical drives, urges, and senses. It was ambivalent because the human body was seen as both a cause of sin and a means of redemption. The body is marred with evil desires; but by becoming flesh, the Son of God took on the whole reality of humanity, even temptation, suffering, and death. There is an ineradicable ontological gap between God and the creatures. However, God crossed the uncrossable gap in divine revelations, ultimately in the Incarnation of Christ, making the spiritual realm accessible to our bodily senses. The Incarnation affirmed the value of the human body, and the resurrection of Christ reaffirmed the eschatological value of the human body. The Christ event is not merely a past event. Christians can still experience the mystery of Christ’s incarnation,

\[^6^9\] I think Roy Rappaport’s definition of ritual as “the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers” fits our conversation on prayer as ritual well. Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 24.

But by ritual I do not exclusively refer to strictly controlled prescribed actions. Rituals must be recognizable as a pattern of actions, but there is still room for flexibility and creativity. Stanley Tambiah called this characteristic of rituals the “duality of ritual.” On the one hand, rituals are “repeated enactments certain seemingly invariant and stereotyped sequences such as formulas chanted, rules of etiquette followed, and so on.” On the other hand, however strictly prescribed, no ritual performance can be identical because there are no identical participants and identical contexts. The rituals with the same texts and the same plans can vary depending on the performers’ style of recitation and movement, “the social characteristics and circumstances of the actors which . . . affect such matters as scale of attendance, audience interest, economic outlay, and so on.” Even if the details of rituals are prescribed, their performance is always intertwined with their contextual meanings. The performers and participants bring their own interests and social contexts to the performance. Ritual actions are essentially performative, and the performance does not occur in a vacuum. Stanley Tambiah, *A Performative Approach to Ritual* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), 115.
passion, and resurrection through the Eucharist, sharing with Christ not only the deplorable conditions of the human body but also the eschatological promise of the glorified body. Thus early Christians, who were under a heavy influence of Platonic/Neoplatonic dualism, did not succumb to a completely dualistic view even when their teachings on prayer emphasized spiritual ascent as a way to be freed from the dragging burden of carnal desires.\(^70\) For example, even Pseudo-Dionysius, who delineated the clear hierarchy between material and immaterial worlds in a Neoplatonic fashion, argued that human beings could not contemplate the heavenly world in a solely incorporeal way without any assistance of physical means.\(^71\) By nature, human beings are bound to material experience, but they can see, through the visible signs, the invisible

---

\(^70\) Of course, the relationship between body and soul in the early church is a complex matter I cannot fully discuss in this dissertation. Here I establish a case that even in the dualistic view of body and mind, the bodily practices played an integral role in the practice and study of *sacra doctrina*. The distinction between the body and the soul in the Platonic tradition was different from the modern Cartesian dualism. The Cartesian dualism, on principle, severed the two separate realms of body and mind, but the Platonic dualism was more interested in a way to control passions, negotiate competing desires, and set one’s priorities in the right order, by subduing the body to the mind. Platonic dualism’s prevalent influence on the Greco-Roman intellectual world was hard to escape. But the Aristotelian epistemology affirmed that all human perceptions are mediated by the body, and Epicureans and Stoics even claimed that the sensory experience is the foundation of all true knowledge.

Nemesius of Emesa, who criticized the Aristotelian tradition for making the soul dependent on the body, claimed that the immortal soul must be self-subsistent. But even in the tradition of Platonic dichotomy of body and soul (against Aristotelian anthropology), Nemesius described the body as an instrument of the soul in *De Natura Hominis*. As composites of body and soul, human beings were standing at the unique position between the bodily world and the spiritual world: “Man’s being is on the boundary between the intelligible order and the phenomenal order. As touching his body and its faculties, he is on a par with the irrational animate and with the inanimate creatures. As touching his rational faculties he claims kinship with incorporeal beings.” Human beings are the link between the two worlds. Nemesius of Emesa, *On the Nature of Man*, I.1.

\(^71\) In *The Celestial Hierarchy*, Pseudo-Dionysius defended the sense experience for understanding of the heavenly things: “For it is quite impossible that we humans should, in any immaterial way, rise up to imitate and to contemplate the heavenly hierarchies without the aid of those material means capable of guiding us as our nature requires. Hence, any thinking person realizes that the appearances of beauty are signs of an invisible loveliness. The beautiful odors which strike the senses are representations of a conceptual diffusion. Material lights are the image of the outpouring of an immaterial gift of life.” Pseudo-Dionysius, *Pseudo-Dionysius: the Complete Works* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1987), 146.
beauty of God. The sacred liturgy is a place where heaven comes down to the earth. The liturgy presents the invisible and impalpable reality of heaven to the physical senses. The body in prayer is placed at the juncture between the corporeal senses and spiritual knowledge, which is embedded in, not separated from, corporeal experience. The practices of prayer in the early and medieval church were lavished with sensory experiences, and theologians embraced them as a means to reveal the nature and presence of God. Sensory experience was not merely a secondary addition to the spoken words. The bodily senses were viewed as essential channels through which pray-ers could encounter the divinity.

But what is important is not merely that early Christians valued the sensory dimension of the divine and human interaction, but that they believed there is a type of knowledge uniquely acquired and conveyed by bodily experience. Although it is still the soul that can have the transcendental understanding of God, there is the correlation between one’s physical experience and spiritual knowledge. The knowledge contained in the principles of the spiritual world is revealed in figures in the physical world. Although Christian theologians produced various versions of these theories of knowledge, they generally regarded sensory experience as an important physical medium through which

---

72 Similarly, Maximus Confessor, who shared Pseudo-Dionysius’s Neoplatonic view, also affirmed that symbolic representation of the spiritual world through the physical world: “For the whole spiritual world seems mystically imprinted on the whole sensible world in symbolic forms, for those who are capable of seeing this, and conversely the whole sensible world is spiritually explained in the mind in the principles which it contains. In the spiritual world it is in principles, in the sensible world it is in figures.” Maximus Confessor, Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1985), 189.

73 Wainwright made another important contribution to the discussion of Lex orandi, lex credendi, by drawing attention to the embodiment of worship—more particularly the senses’ engagement in worship. He rightly pointed out the rectification of senses occurring in liturgy. Wainwright views the transformation of senses in three types of human response. First, a return offering of ourselves to God (worship); second, love toward God is matched by love toward the neighbor (ethics); third, the gradual transformation of our senses prepares us for the final resurrection. See Geoffrey Wainwright, For Our Salvation: Two Approaches to the Work of Christ (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Pub., 1997)
finite creatures can get incomplete but valid knowledge of the transcendent God. The bodily senses were deemed valuable for understanding both the physical world and the incorporeal world revealed by the grace of God. Christian understanding does not precede but comes with and/or after bodily experience. The sensory experience does not merely vivify what one already knows or believes but provides the type of knowledge to which only the body in practice could gain access. The main function of religious practices was not to perform beliefs already established by speculation but to elicit affective bodily and spiritual experience, whose embodiment produces a new religious self. In baptism in the early church, for example, a body underwent transformation when it performed a series of ritual actions, from being stripped naked, to being clothed in white robe as a symbol of purity; from eating ritual food (milk and honey), to touch with aromatic oil, which sometimes was followed by foot washing. The whole experience of baptism, which included not only the soul but every part of the body, is full of symbolic meanings that could be vividly represented and instilled only through the bodily enactment. This bodily experience did not merely affirm intellectual transformation from a non-believer to a believer; it created a new Christian identity.

Ancient and medieval people were interested in not only expressing but also shaping their mind through their bodily postures and gestures, such as facial expressions, movements of hands and head, gaits, directions of gaze, and length of eye contact. There

---

74 However, modern theology no longer viewed the movement of the body as the movement of the soul; the meaning of the bodily expressions was reduced to semantic and psychological intention without spiritual connotations.

was a crucial link between the knowledge of a self and the training of a self in Greco-Roman culture; self-knowledge was considered an achievement of self-care in body and mind. Medieval monastics carefully designed bodily actions in order to nurture an ideal person who could control their excessive desires of the flesh with the virtue of moderation. Even later in the Victorian era, the elites of society created an elaborate set of postures and gestures to instill their social ideals in their youth. For the Church Fathers, who were solicitous about the formation of Christian moral character, the bodily disciplines in ancient traditions of virtue were readily available resources. Through the discipline of bodily actions, Christians sought to guide the soul towards God. Spiritual maturity was pursued not outside the body but in and through the body.

Prayer’s creation of a liturgical body has a twofold meaning. First, metaphorically speaking, it creates a body of the liturgical community; secondly, it forms the ritualized body of a pray-er. The communal action of prayer creates a sense of community. Praying in unison in a liturgical setting means that a community of people are prodded to share the same desires, make the same confessions and petitions, and use the same gestures and postures. Even in the case of communal practice of extemporaneous prayer, which does not recite the same words together, passionate petitions for a common goal can create a strong sense of community. The communal practices of prayer might not magically erase divisions in a community, but they can enhance solidarity among participants.

76 Tertullian emphasized the importance of the community united at prayer: “We meet together as an assembly and congregation, that, offering up prayer to God as with united force, we may wrestle with him in our supplication. Such power God delights in.” Tertullian, Apology 39.1-2.

77 e.g. Tongsung Kido (통성기도, 通聲祈禱) in Korea, extemporary prayers spoken aloud simultaneously in a group.
Despite the lack of intellectual consensus, people can still experience a sense of camaraderie through ritual practices.\textsuperscript{78} Ritual practices train and socialize members of a community. Especially for a new or young member of a community, ritualization is an important process of acclimation. The routine actions instill the social values of a community in the body. This process of ritualization produces an individual liturgical body.\textsuperscript{79}

Through ritualization, the logic of ritual is internalized in a body. The embodied patterns and rhythms of a ritual help a participant immerse herself in the condensed narratives incorporated in ritual actions. Those actions, which are carefully planned, preserved, and transmitted in a community, can articulate, foster, and deepen one’s deep emotional engagement in the teachings of a tradition. Ritual actions create a qualitatively different symbolic space where their participants are reshaped in the unique values made perceptible in the ritual. When seeking divine intercession, empowerment, and assistance in the eschatological hope for the divine justice, prayer creates a liturgical space where pray-ers are habituated in right affections and thoughts. Thus a successful ritual creates a

\textsuperscript{78} As we saw in the previous chapter, Barth argued that Christians from different traditions could pray together despite their theological disagreements.

\textsuperscript{79} Catherine Bell, in line with Bourdieu, argued that the goal of ritualization is the production of a ritualized social body. Bell is influenced by Foucault who saw the body not as a private matter but as a political field. The power dynamics of society are reflected on the body which is, through performance, constantly marked, monitored, trained, and disciplined. Ritualization develops a “political technology of the body” (Foucault’s term) through which a body is molded into a political entity. A social body has gender, class, and cultural markers. The ritual creates, stabilizes, perpetuates, and/or reveals one’s socio-political identity. The interactions of the bodies in a hierarchy reinforce or reinstitute one’s social location. In the case of the stylized and regulated symbolic gestures and postures, the collective process of ritualization instills a more formally constituted identity. In the case of extemporary “freestyle” worship, one is still habituated—instead of being “free” from social conventions—in the \textit{habitus} of one’s community or tradition. The body is not a mere instrument of the mind. Embodiment of rituals represents the complex “irreducible phenomenon, namely, \textit{the social person}.” Catherine Bell, \textit{Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 76, 98, 202.
new social and spiritual reality for the community, and by shaping their members with a new identity, it enables them to navigate the new reality with the incorporated sense of ritual. The body in ritual is not merely a passive recipient of fixed rules produced in a static social structure. By speaking, moving, and interacting with others in a particular time and space, a ritualized body actively creates a temporal field of communal reasoning, in which the shared words and actions of traditional ritual are freshly reinterpreted.80

The logic of a particular way of habituation might not be always clear to the practitioners.81 People do not always have rational understanding of how practices shape their body and mind. As the grammatical rules of language are not always made explicit in advance—sometimes the rules do not even make much sense—the meanings of bodily practices and their embodied schemata are not always recognized clearly. However, one does not need to understand every detail of the logic of embodiment; the overly rational

---

80 In “On Ritual Knowledge,” Theodore Jennings argues for ritually based epistemology. For Jennings, ritual action is not secondary or supplementary to theological thinking. To overcome the dichotomy between the thinking mind and the acting body, he contends that the body has its own way of knowing, and ritual is the locus of this way of knowledge. Ritual is not a senseless and mindless repetition of activity, but it performs noetic functions. Through ritual actions the performers construct and construe their world. Jennings suggests three functions of ritual. Through ritual actions, one first gains knowledge, secondly, transmits this knowledge (pedagogical function), and thirdly, invites observers to understand it. Ritual knowledge is gained not through a disembodied exercise of the mind, but through the action of the body. This process is not a mere embodiment of abstract thinking. The body in ritual action engages in the transformation of the world, of which knowledge one can acquire only in the action. Thus, one can neither learn nor teach this knowledge without bodily engagement in ritual. Furthermore, one can transmit it only through ritual actions. The transmission of knowledge (pedagogy) is not merely concerned about teaching particular ritual actions. The ritual action incites both imitation and response, by which ritual sets a pattern of action (ethics). Jennings explains this process further with an example of the Lord’s Prayer. The Lord’s Prayer, recited in liturgy, sets a pattern of all prayers beyond its liturgical settings, and this pattern eventually governs all the actions people take before God. Therefore, the church traditionally taught that one could not become a Christian without participating in ritual practices, such as Baptism, Eucharist, and the practice of public and private prayers. Theodore Jennings, “On Ritual Knowledge,” in Readings in Ritual Studies, ed. Ronald Grimes (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 324-34.

81 Bourdieu argued that “agents never know completely what they are doing that what they do has more sense than they know.” Bourdieu, Logic of Practice, 69.
interpretation of symbolic images and actions is the pitfall of idealism. The overemphasis on literacy and reason over ritual practices excluded corporeal experience of ordinary believers in training from theological discourses. *Habitus*, being structured by the world in which it operates, produces actions that work together to achieve the shared goals of a community even without conscious and deliberate collaboration. The body in practice acquires practical knowledge that can be actualized in action.

Bodily movement is a way of understanding the world. There is connection between the map of the mind and the movement of the body. The mental schemata become inculcated in the body in action. Through motions and gestures—sometimes of refined disciplines, but mostly of ordinary practices—the body becomes a cultural production of a society.\(^82\) The disciplines of the body become the habits of the mind. Bodily activities not only express what they already think, believe, and feel, but also constitute physical schemata that shape one’s rationality. In light of the recent development of cognitive science, the philosophy of the mind affirms the anthropologists’ view on the relationship between body and mind: carnal epistemology.\(^83\) Antonio Damasio, a neuroscientist in the field of emotion studies, argues that external signals (or sense stimuli) are not directly registered in the brain. The external world is presented to the mind always through the mediation of the body. But the body is not a fixed channel of information. In its constant mutual interaction with the mind, the body is

---

\(^82\) It reminds us of David Kertzer’s famous dictum, “Socially and politically speaking, we are what we do, not what we think.” David Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale, 1988), 68.

\(^83\) One of the most important examples is Mark Johnson who said, “Movement is thus one of the principal way by which we learn the meaning of things and acquire our ever-growing sense of what our world is like. This learning about the possibilities for different types of experience and action that comes from moving within various environments occurs mostly beneath the level of consciousness.” Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 21.
constantly reshaped through its experience, and the reshaping (or re-formation) of the body is mapped in the mind.\textsuperscript{84} Therefore, the mind’s understanding of the world is inseparable from the body’s particular presence in the world. Thoughts in the mind trigger bodily reactions; at the same time, the changes in the body alter the map of the mind. In other words, a bodily experience, caused by the brain’s activity, remaps the brain.\textsuperscript{85}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{84} Damasio offers cognitive science’s explanation of the mutual interaction between mind and body: “the brain states, which correspond to certain mental states, cause particular body states to occur; body states are then mapped in the brain and incorporated in the ongoing mental states. A small alteration on the brain side of the system can have major consequences for the body state (think of the release of any hormone); likewise, a small change on the body side (think a broken tooth fillings) can have a major effect on the mind once the change is mapped and perceived as acute pain.” Antonio Damasio, \textit{Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain} (New York: Vintage, 2010), 96.

Recent psychosocial studies discovered that taking a particular posture results in changes in behaviors and neuroendocrine levels. See Dana Carney, Amy Cuddy, and Andy Yap, “Power Posing: Brief Nonverbal Displays Affect Neuroendocrine Levels and Risk Tolerance,” \textit{Psychological Science} 21, no. 10 (October 2010): 1363-68.

\textsuperscript{85} There is a neurological link between bodily actions and memory. Damasio argues that one’s characteristic movements (motions) are stored in our memory and recalled by “an appropriate visual counterpart for that particular musculoskeletal image.” A visual presentation of a musculoskeletal image of a unique gesture can recover relevant memories without engagement of a cognitive process. The bodily movement is stored as a form of somatosensory representation, and a visual representation of the movement can recall memories. Ibid., 105-106.

A link between the praying body and memory is also prominent in liturgy. The ritual actions are engraved on the body as a mnemonic device. John Mombaer’s device of “hand of memory”, \textit{Chiropsalterium}, is an extreme example of the explicit use of the praying body for memory. Adopting the \textit{memoria} devices of classical rhetoric, Mombaer assigned theological meanings to different parts of a praying hand. For example, the joints of the little finger were labeled as “obsecratio, oratio, and deprecation” following the well-known Pauline classification of prayer. For the base of the little finger, he used the structures of classical rhetoric: “questio, responsio, and refutatio.” The end joint of the thumb was labeled as “laudation”; its base was used to remind the pray-er of the traditional three ways of meditation: “purgative, illuminative, and perfective.” For further discussion on medieval prayer and neuroscience, see Sara Ritchey, “Manual thinking: John Mombaer’s meditations, the neuroscience of the imagination and the future of the humanities,” \textit{Postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies} 3, 3 (2012), 341-54.
\end{flushright}
2. 4 The Body at Prayer: a Historical Survey

The practice of prayer nurtures Christians, both in words and in actions. The language of liturgical prayers teaches pray-ers the contents of faith through the explicit theological expositions of those prayers—e.g., teachings on the Lord’s Prayer have been a fundamental curriculum for training of catechumen since the early church—and by implicit enculturation through repeated recitation. In addition to the verbal content, the bodily performance of prayer—through postures and gestures—was also understood as a means to shape Christian identity, morality, and community.

The early church showed a great interest in the harmony between the intention, words, and gestures of prayer. The following questions were often discussed in their theological writings: What kind of actions should be performed to foster the spirit of prayer? What are the meanings of the central gestures and postures of prayer? What bodily senses are to be used or avoided? In ancient and medieval cultures, which relied more on ritual actions than written contracts for social covenants or contracts, gestures were seen a more direct way to engage the whole person than writings can normally do. The power of gestures could be felt more immediately, intensely, and palpably than that of written words. Writings can preserve messages across time, but temporal gestures were believed to give ritual actions the power to tie one’s will to the body. Bodily actions in ritual could produce and manifest religious and/or political power in a perceivable way. Ritual gestures adorned with symbolic meaning and sacred power can create a physical

---

86 Such traditional emphasis on the integrity between internal and external dimensions of prayer is also found in the contemporary teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, which teaches that “[God] wants the external expression that associates the body with interior prayer, for it renders [God] that perfect homage which is [God’s] due.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, ¶2703)
condition in which a community can enact a sacred covenant that serves as a ground for social cohesion. The vivid visual presentation of gestures makes the social binding more public. Ceremonial gestures can change the status of a person—e.g. laying on hands by a bishop for confirmation, baptism, or ordination—and display loyalty deepening one’s allegiance to a community. Gestures not only generate physical interaction between people but also create physical contact with sacred objects.

As fundamentally social actions, gestures are cultural products. The common contemporary gestures and postures of prayer—e.g. folded hands, closed eyes, and bowed head—are not a “natural” development of a human body. They are culturally-shaped actions even though their origins and original meanings might be forgotten. The praying body does not take a neutral stance, devoid of meaning and cultural or theological influence; the praying body, even when people think they have spontaneous expression of the outburst of emotions, is in fact shaped, consciously and subconsciously, by cultural and conventional norms. In ritual, nothing is entirely “free” expression of the body. Gestures are engraved on the body so seamlessly that they seem natural features of the body. But they look natural not because they developed from an innate biological nature of the body, but because people in the same society who share the same habitus consider the customary behaviors natural. Gestures are socially constructed practices acquired by both conscious training and subliminal habituation. The body, by gradual acquisition through innumerable practices, learns how to use gestures in its particular

---

87 Ronald Grimes made a helpful distinction between decorum and ceremony: “Whereas decorum is of secondary, or at least of unofficial, importance and is a means of expressing one’s character and recognizing other participants in the occasion . . . , ceremony has imperative force; it symbolizes respect for the offices, histories, and causes that are condensed into its gestures, objects, and actions” (my italics). Ronald Grime, Beginnings in Ritual Studies (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 42.
social context without thinking. The gestures and postures of prayer are also the product of *habitus*. The encoding and decoding of the messages in ritual actions are culturally bound. Those who share the same cultural background immediately understand what is communicated through the actions without putting much thought into it. Those who are disconnected from the original context in which the messages were encoded need training in order to see the gestures rightly.  

Symbolic actions, with their highly stylized and formalized performance, instill symbolic meanings on the body. Mary Carruthers made an insightful observation of the link between training in prayer and shaping of the mind in the ancient and medieval churches. Those who were experienced at reciting or chanting prayers in a liturgical setting with rich sensory experience could almost re-experience the visual and auditory dimension of prayers even when they had solitary silent prayer. When one continues to pray, one’s body remembers it. The body remembers how it speaks or keeps silence before God; it remembers its gaze to the cross from the posture of kneeling; it remembers its hands being lifted or put together; it remembers the smells of incense and the taste of bread and wine. Gestures reveal the inner state of the mind; at the same time, disciplines

---

88 The meanings of ritual actions do not remain static. In a different cultural situation, a different interpretation can be attached or become more prominent (diachronic changes). The added layers of symbolic meanings makes the study of liturgical actions an archeological work. The same action that originated from a biblical root can take a new meaning in a Hellenistic culture. For example, “the imposition of the sign of the cross, the *sphragis*, was first interpreted in relation to the Jewish rites of circumcision, but later was compared to the brand or sign with which sheep, soldiers and priests were marked.” Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 7.

89 “It is likely that many ancient and medieval people, trained in oratory and/or in chant and prayer, ‘heard’ and ‘saw’ a piece performed in their minds even if they were reading it silently. In the case of ancient oratory, previsualizing exercises and subvocal rehearsals were part of the preparation for speaking.” Mary Carruthers, “The concept of ductus” in *Rhetoric Beyond Words*, ed. Mary Carruthers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010), 197.
of gestures can tame the soul and elevate it to God. Teaching on the bodily discipline supposes a close link between soul and the body. The invisible inner dimension of the soul is not separated from the visual and even theatrical dimension of the body. Gesture functions as a bridge between the two realms, between invisible and visible, between divinity and humanity. Joseph Ratzinger nicely summarized this point: “The body has a place within the divine worship of the Word made flesh, and it is expressed liturgically in a certain discipline of the body, in gestures that have developed out of the liturgy’s inner demands and that make the essence of the liturgy, as it were, bodily visible.”

The Judeo-Christian traditions in antiquity considered prayer both a bodily and spiritual activity. Not only what pray-ers said, but also what they did in prayer drew great attention. Rabbinic literature carefully reviewed what the body should do and should not do in prayer in terms of postures, gestures, and orientation. Practical questions—such as what to do with faces, eyes, and hands, what to wear, and how to use vocal tones in prayer—were treated as serious theological questions in the rabbinic tradition.

The verbal content of prayer was still considered central, but the nonverbal expressions were regarded as a significant part of Jewish life of prayer. Amidah, one of the most important Jewish prayers, literally means “standing.”

The use of prayer shawl (tallith) and phylactery (tefillin) added a visual and textile quality. The Book of Psalms have

---


91 For further discussion on the bodily dimension of Jewish liturgical prayer, see Uri Ehrlich, The Nonverbal Language of Prayer: A New Approach to Jewish Liturgy (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

92 “Prayer has many names: tefillah (petition), tehinah (beseeching), ze’akah (shouting), ze’akah (cry), shavah (cry for help), pegg’ah (plea), nefilah (falling down), amidah (standing)” (Tanhuma, Va-ethanan 3). Cited in Uri Ehrlich, The Nonverbal Language of Prayer: A New Approach to Jewish Liturgy, vii.
numerous references to various bodily expressions in corporate settings: bowing down and kneeling (Ps. 95:6), lifting hands (Ps. 141:2), clapping hands (Ps. 47:1), lifting eyes (Ps. 123:1), and dancing (Ps. 149:3).

Early Christians prayed prostrating (probably a Persian influence on Jewish customs), standing (a popular image of a supplicant in the Roman court),\textsuperscript{93} orans, kneeling, and laying hands on others.\textsuperscript{94} Jesus looked up to heaven in prayer (John 17:1). The most popular gesture of prayer from the early to high medieval church was orans, a standing posture with stretched arms. The author of 1 Timothy, traditionally attributed to Paul, urged people to pray lifting up their holy hands at every place or opportunity (1 Tim. 2:8). In fact, orans was a widespread form of prayer in the ancient world.\textsuperscript{95} The Greeks regarded raised hands as a universal gesture of prayer.\textsuperscript{96} For example, Pseudo-Aristotle claimed that all human beings at prayer stretch out their hands to the heaven.\textsuperscript{97} But Christians added a Christological interpretation to orans, viewing a pray-er with

\textsuperscript{93} Christians viewed the posture of standing as a posture that turns one’s attention to heaven to listen to the voice of God, based on the biblical references, such as Ezekiel 2:1, “The Lord says, ‘Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I will speak with you.’” (RSV)

\textsuperscript{94} The Vulgate did not have the term gestus or gesticulatio. Therefore, although Christians found various meaningful gestures in the Bible, they did not conceptualize the term as Romans did. The Bible simply shows the particular gestures, but it does not give a theory of gestures. When Christian theologians tried to develop a Christian theory of gestures, they heavily relied on the classical theories of rhetoric. For further discussion, see Jean-Claude Schmitt, La raison des gestes dans l’Occident medieval (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 60.

\textsuperscript{95} It even appears in prehistoric art. See Johannes Maringer, “Adorants in Prehistoric Art: Prehistoric Attitudes and Gestures of Prayer” Numen (Vol. XXVI, Fasc. 2): 217-230.

\textsuperscript{96} For Greeks, the direction of their hands meant the direction of their prayer, and their hands and gaze were extended in the direction where their gods were thought to reside. When praying to the dead or underworld deities, their palms faced down to the ground. It also mattered which hand they would use: the right hand for the Olympian gods in heaven and the left hand for the chthonic gods in Hades. Simon Pulleyn, Prayer in Greek Religion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 189.

\textsuperscript{97} Pseudo-Aristotle, De mundo 400a.16; De mundo was traditionally ascribed to Aristotle, but recent scholarship considers it a pseudo-Aristotelian work.
spread arms as a mirror image of the crucified Christ. By taking the posture of *orans*, a pray-er imitated the posture of the Christ on the Cross. It was literally a bodily identification with Christ, through bodily imitation.

*Orans* was usually accompanied by open eyes: looking up to heaven or looking at the sacred objects, such as icons or relics. The pray-ers’ gaze was often fixed on a cross (at an altar of a basilica or on the east wall of a house) or sacred art. Seeing in prayer was a formative exercise for a worshipper. Although the scriptures were the backbone of Christian teaching, the majority of early and medieval Christians were nurtured more by images than books. They learned in worship by looking at images on altars, walls, and stained glasses of the church—even paintings in the catacombs in earlier days—which depicted biblical events or the lives of saints, and by listening to sermons that offered preachers’ interpretation of those images. In prayer, they carefully investigated the biblical narratives unfolding in front of their eyes in those sacred arts. What the bodily eyes see become what the spiritual eyes can see.

---

98 Christ’s stretched arms on the cross were viewed not only as a posture of prayer but also a posture of embrace. For example, Cyril of Jerusalem argued that Christ who established the heaven with his spiritual hands stretched out human hands on the cross to “embrace the ends of the world.” Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, 13.28.


100 Looking up to heaven was common but not universal. Aphrahat, a Syriac monk in the mid-fourth century, taught to pray, raising the heart upwards and lowering the eyes downwards—an introspective movement of entering one’s “inner person.” Ed. Sebastian Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1987), 17.

101 Of course, there were legitimate concerns about the quality of education through images. For example, Augustine noticed that many in Rome thought that Christ were contemporary with Paul and Peter and martyred together because of the paintings representing the apostle in the presence of Christ. He warned against those who sought “Christ and his apostles not in the holy writings, but on painted walls” and were “misled by the painters.” Augustine, *De consensu evangeliistarum*, 1.10.16.
The hands play a special role in embodied thought, and hands in Christian traditions signified power and authority. Deliverance and protection of God was represented by the helping and guiding hand of God (manus dei), especially the right hand of God (dextra domini). In early Christian arts the invisible God the Father often appeared as a hand. The appearance of the hand in a painting indicated God’s blessing, revelation, or victory. The hand of God also represented God’s judgment upon evil people. When pray-ers in desperation lift and stretch out their hands to God, God in response stretches the divine hand to them. The exchange of the gesture of stretched hands between God and human signifies the mutual relationship between divinity and humanity. God holds human hands as a sign of God’s blessing and presence, and pray-ers holding the hands of one another is a sign of solidarity among the people of God.

Spiritual power was associated with praying hands. Palladius of Galatia reports that Macarius of Alexandria performed exorcism by praying “putting one hand on his

---

102 Jean-Louis Chrétien highlighted the prominent place of the hand in human work. “Every human work is manual: always and everywhere it is our hands that work, even when they do not labor. Heidegger can say, profoundly, that even thought is Handwerk, work of the hand. The hands think and thought handles: this is the very humanity of man. . . . The forgetting of the hand, despite the apparent exaltation that accompanies it, is the forgetting of man, and of the world with which our have their dealings.” Jean-Louis Chrétien, Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 124.

103 Christ in John of Patmos’s vision held the seven stars in his right hand. (Rev. 1:16)

104 Exodus 15:6, 12; Psalm 17:7, 18:35, 138:7; Isaiah 41:10.

105 Exodus 6:6; Psalm 21:8; Psalm 89:42. The Book of Isaiah repeatedly used the image of God’s stretched hands as an expression of divine punishment. “I will turn my hand against you; I will smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy” (Isaiah 1:25); “Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people, and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them; the mountains quaked, and their corpses were like refuse in the streets. For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still” (Isaiah 5:25); “For all this his anger has not turned away; his hand is stretched out still.” (Isaiah. 9:12b; 17b)

106 Psalm 73:23.
head and the other on his heart.” Some liturgical gestures of hands rooted in the Roman culture gained theological meanings. *Manus pante*, a traditional hand gesture of early Roman times, might mean, “I am wise,” “I am a judge,” or “I teach.” Christians adopted this hand gesture from imperial Rome, but it soon became established as the Christian sign of benediction. In the medieval church, the meaning of *manus pante* became more theologically sophisticated: the thumb representing God; the index finger representing the Holy Spirit, standing between the Father and the Son; the third finger representing the divine nature of Christ and the fourth the human nature of Christ. 

Gregory of Nyssa regarded the upright structure of human body as a “mark” of God’s sovereignty imprinted on humanity. Unlike the crawling bodies of beasts that bend downwards, the human body extends upwards towards heaven with a higher level of dignity. According to Gregory, the hands hold a special place in the rational characteristics of the unique upright posture of the human body: “the ministration of hands is a special property of the rational nature.” Human gestures can play linguistic and paralinguistic functions; they can even preserve sounds by writing letters. More importantly, however, it is the hand that allows the human body to use language and reason. Without the hand, other parts of human body should have resembled those of beasts; the shapes of face and mouth, which should have taken the task of hands, would not be appropriate for articulation of words. Without the hand, there would be no speech; without language (speech), there would be no complex reasoning. The human physiology

---


of speech is made possible because of the dexterity of human hands. A human being is a rational animal, so the human body is created suitable for the use of reason; and the hand is the most remarkable natural human trait, which accounts for all the other peculiarities of the human body. Therefore, for Gregory, a hand is more than a tool to enrich communication; it is a foundation of reason, of which special role is indispensable for understanding of the image of God.

Making a sign of the cross (signum crucis) with a hand is closely associated with Christian identity. Although many cultures use the symbol of a cross, its explicit Christological and Trinitarian references made the sign of the cross at prayer a unique gesture of Christianity. This gesture opens a prayer with a mark of Christ on the bodies of pray-ers, and it evokes the names of the three persons of the Trinity: in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Since the early church, the sign of the cross has been made on the forehead of catechumen at baptism as a sign of their new identity in Christ and in their Christian community. It was also encouraged to use this gesture in every activity as a seal that marks Christians as God’s people. The sign of the cross was also used as a

---


111 Cyril of Jerusalem wrote, “We should boldly trace the cross with our fingers as a seal on our forehead and over everything: over the bread we eat, the cups we drink, when we come in and when we go out, before we go to sleep, when we go to bed and when we get up, on journeys and at rest.” Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 13. 36 in ed. Edward Yarnold, *Cyril of Jerusalem* (London: Routledge, 2000), 160-61.

112 Tertullian argued, “At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign [of the cross].” Tertullian, *De Corona*, ANF 3, 94-95.

Ephrem the Syrian added, “With the sign of the living cross, seal all thy doings, my son. Go not forth from the door of thy house till thou hast signed the cross. Whether in eating or in drinking, whether in
symbol of divine protection. From the perspective of prayer as spiritual armor, making the sign of the cross on the forehead at prayer was viewed as a visual action of equipping oneself with divine power against evil. Making a sign of the cross clearly signals an opening of prayer, so that it alerts the body and the mind to dispel distractions and concentrate on prayer.

The knee is another body part that was traditionally associated with prayer. Although it is evident that Greeks fell to their knees in supplication to both God and

sleeping or in waking, whether in thy house or on the road, or again in the season of leisure, neglect not this sign; for there is no guardian like it. It shall be unto thee as a wall, in the forefront of all thy doings. And teach this to thy children, that heedfully they be conformed to it.” Ephrem the Syrian, *Homily on Admonition and Repentance*, NPNF2-13, 335.

John Chrysostom also taught that “from earliest life encompass [children] with spiritual armor and instruct them to seal the forehead with the hand: and before they are able to do this with their own hand, do you imprint upon them the Cross.” John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, NPNF1-12, 72.

Cyril of Jerusalem called it “a powerful protection.” (Catechesis 13. 36). In his *Baptismal Instructions*, John Chrysostom urged Christians to pray, “I renounce thee, Satan, thy pomp and service, and I enter into thy service, O Christ” and then make the sign of the cross, whenever crossing the threshold of a doorway on their way to a marketplace. Chrysostom believed that this act of prayer would be a weapon and an armor to protect them from evil. This is a seal which makes a well-prepared soldier. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1963), 191.

Chrysostom, Ibid.; *The Syriac Fathers*, 174; Chrysostom taught that entering a synagogue, one should make the sign of the cross on the forehead to fend off the evil power dwelling there. (PG 48, 940)

In the early church, the sign of the cross was made on the forehead. Later, the sign became bigger covering the upper body: from forehead to chest, from right shoulder to left shoulder, with three fingers, which is still practiced in the Eastern traditions. In the Western church, the sign was made with the whole open hand, from forehead to chest, from left shoulder to right shoulder. In “De Sacro altaris mysterio”, the Pope Innocent III of gave a theological explanation of the gesture. Regarding the traditional Eastern practice, he explained that the sign of the cross is made with three fingers because it invokes the Trinity. The sign is made from above to below, and from the right to the left, because Christ descended from the heaven to the earth and was passed to the Gentiles by the Jews. Regarding the western practice of making the sign from the left to the right, Innocent III explained it was because we must pass over from misery to glory, just as Christ passed over from death to life, and from hell to paradise.

“Est autem signum crucis tribus digitis exprimendum, quia sub invocatione Trinitatis imprimitur, de qua dicit propheta: Quis appendit tribus digitis molem terrae? (Isa. XL.) ita quod a superiori descendat in inferius, et a dextra transeat ad sinistram, quia Christus de coelo descendit in terram, et a Judaeis transivit ad gentes. Quidam tamen signum crucis a sinistra producunt in dextram; quia de miseria transire debemus ad gloriam, sicut et Christus transivit de morte ad vitam, et de inferno ad paradisum.” (Innocent III, PL, CCXVII, 0825D-0826A)

112 Cyril of Jerusalem called it “a powerful protection.” (Catechesis 13. 36).

113 Chrysostom, Ibid.; *The Syriac Fathers*, 174;

114 In the early church, the sign of the cross was made on the forehead. Later, the sign became bigger covering the upper body: from forehead to chest, from right shoulder to left shoulder, with three fingers, which is still practiced in the Eastern traditions. In the Western church, the sign was made with the whole open hand, from forehead to chest, from left shoulder to right shoulder. In “De Sacro altaris mysterio”, the Pope Innocent III gave a theological explanation of the gesture. Regarding the traditional Eastern practice, he explained that the sign of the cross is made with three fingers because it invokes the Trinity. The sign is made from above to below, and from the right to the left, because Christ descended from the heaven to the earth and was passed to the Gentiles by the Jews. Regarding the western practice of making the sign from the left to the right, Innocent III explained it was because we must pass over from misery to glory, just as Christ passed over from death to life, and from hell to paradise.
human beings, kneeling was not a common posture of prayer in Greek religion.\textsuperscript{115} Greeks denounced kneeling at prayer as an act of indignity or effeminacy, and prostration was even criticized as a barbarian practice.\textsuperscript{116} Romans, who viewed any physical contact with an object involved in prayer as important, prayed to gods of the earth sitting and making contact with the earth. The strong emphasis on submission in Christian prayer shifted the goal of the Roman practice of prayer from contact with deity to submission to God, which was reflected in the growing popularity of kneeling and genuflection. Genuflection was customarily done with the torso bent forward and the head bowed. Christians used prostration, kneeling, and genuflection as signs of total surrender and humility.

Paul mentioned in Ephesians 3.14: “I bow my knees before the Father”.\textsuperscript{117} The extensive practice of kneeling in prayer is evidenced in Eusebius’ quotation from Hegesippus’s report on James the Just, the brother of Jesus. According to Hegesippus, “He used to enter the temple alone and was often found kneeling and imploring forgiveness for the people, so that his knees became hard like a camel’s from his continual kneeling in worship of God and in prayer for the people.”\textsuperscript{118} Such physical

\textsuperscript{115} Pulleyn, 194.

\textsuperscript{116} Modern scholars do not know what Greeks meant by proskuneo when it did not refer to the barbarian prostration. Pulleyn, 191.

\textsuperscript{117} Paul also used the action of bending knees as a sign of reverence (Phil. 2:10); bended knees and raised hands were mentioned as Solomon’s posture of prayer (1 King 8:54-55; “Now when Solomon finished offering all this prayer and this plea to the Lord, he arose from facing the altar of the Lord, where he had knelt with hands outstretched towards heaven; he stood and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice.”) Stephen praying at the moment of his death (Acts 8:54, “Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice”); in his sermon on Stephen’s martyrdom, Augustine wrote, “Quare pro illis genua fixit? Quia pro sceleratis orabat.” (Augustine, Sermon 316, 3.3).

\textsuperscript{118} Hegesippus (thus Eusebius) makes a close connection between his ascetic lifestyle, prayer, and righteousness. After the description of his habits of eating, grooming, and dressing, his extensive practice of intercessory prayer for the people was given as a mark of his righteousness (hence he was called “the Just” and “Bulwark of the People” and “Righteousness”). Eusebius, \textit{The Church History: A New Translation with Commentary} (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 81.
marks (camel’s knees), caused by bodily practices, were perceived as a physical manifestation of spiritual maturity. They themselves do not guarantee spiritual power, but they can be a visible sign of one’s enduring relationship with God or a reminder of one’s ongoing interaction with God.

In the early patristic era, Northern African fathers—Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen—wrote about the bodily dimension of prayer. Cyprian urged a Christian at prayer to remember that he was standing before the face of God in prayer, so that “both the posture of [his] body and the modulation of [his] voice should be pleasing to the divine eyes.” Tertullian in De oration argued genuflection is a proper sign of penitence. He insisted that “no prayer is to be observed without kneeling,” a posture of humility. But standing is an appropriate posture for celebrating Christ’s resurrection, so one should not kneel on the Lord’s Day and the period of the

For Eusebius’ use of Hegesippus’ Memoranda, see John Painter, Just James: the Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 118-32; For further discussion on James’ clothing habit and his priestly role at prayer in the temple, see Robert Eisenman, James the Brother of Jesus: the key to unlocking the secrets of early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls (New York: Viking, 1997), 310-52.

119 Camel’s knees are natural marks of piety on the body. The medieval church recognized the marks (stigmata) of Christ supernaturally developed on the bodies of saints as a sign of extraordinary piety. The close connection between knees and piety is also found in the case of “prayer-bones”, an American colloquial term for “knees.”

120 One of the ironies in the study of the body in antiquity is that it mainly remains in the study of words. Scholars mostly learn about the bodily experiences of early Christians through their written texts. However, the evidence of the importance of the bodily discipline is found not only in literature, but also in archeological discoveries. A group of archeologists studied a collection of skeletal remains found in the Byzantine monastery of St Stephen in Jerusalem, an influential monastic center from the fifth to the seventh centuries, and they found that these bones have biological markers, which indicate sustained repetitive keeling for prayer. The study of the Christian bodies themselves revealed that the bodily disciplines in prayer were so central to monastic life that they literally altered their bodies. See Michael S. Driscoll and Susan Guise Sheridan, “Every Knee Shall Bend: A Biocultural Reconstruction of Liturgical and Ascetical Prayer in V-VII Century Palestine,” Worship (2000, vol. 74, no. 5): 453-68.

Pentecost. Tertullian criticized those who sit down “when the prayer is sealed” because he thought it was disrespectful to sit down in the presence of the living God. In all of these gestures and postures, moderation and humility functioned as a guiding principle for Tertullian. Regarding the hands of prayer, he added that Christian should spread them out (orans) in a temperate and sober way. Tertullian argued that Christians did not need to wash their hands before prayer because their whole bodies washed in Christ (a reference to Baptism) were already clean. He also thought that in this way Christians could reverse the pattern of hand-washing set by Pilate who delivered up Christ.

Physical contact among pray-ers was highlighted as well. Tertullian made a connection between prayer and the kiss of peace, by calling the latter “the seal of prayer.” He suggested that the kiss of fasting worshippers can be beneficial to others. By sharing the kiss of peace, “those who have broken their fast may share in that work of ours, as their brothers lend something of their peace.” Tertullian implied that the spiritual benefits gained by fasting can be transmitted to fellow worshippers by the physical contact of kiss.

---

122 Tertullian, On Prayer, 23. Cf. This position was affirmed later at the First Nicene Council as an official rule of the church: “Forasmuch as there are certain persons who kneel on the Lord's Day and in the days of Pentecost, therefore, to the intent that all things may be uniformly observed everywhere (in every parish), it seems good to the holy Synod that prayer be made to God standing.” (Canon XX); even later John Cassian also reported that Egyptian monks neither knelt nor fasted from the evening of Saturday until the evening of Sunday and also from Easter to Pentecost.

123 Ibid., 16. Cf. Tertullian thought even beasts pray to God, bending their knees and looking to heaven. Ibid., 64.

124 Ibid., 14-17.

125 Ibid., 13. Cf. The Epistle of James makes a connection between washing of hands and purity of the heart: “Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” (James 4:8)

126 Ibid. 18.
Early Christians’ interest in the body in prayer was closely related to their appreciation of education through bodily discipline. In *Paedagogus (the Instructor)*, Clement of Alexandria emphasized the importance of the bodily dimension in training of Christians. Clement insisted that it is education in the Word that teaches Christians the love of excellence and the truth in God, and that it is the Word that transforms them to achieve moral excellence and be like God. However, he also contended that there is a type of bodily actions that is suitable for the moral life of a disciple of Christ.

There is one mode of training for philosophers, another for orators, and another for athletes; so is there a generous disposition, suitable to the choice that is set upon moral loveliness, resulting from the training of Christ. And in the case of those who have been trained according to this influence, their gait in walking, their sitting at table, their food, their sleep, their going to bed, their regimen, and the rest of their mode of life, acquire a superior dignity.\(^\text{127}\)

Modesty is the criterion of the manners of all actions, including drinking, speaking, and even sneezing: “Let the look be steady, and the turning and movement of the neck, and the motions of the hands in conversation, be decorous. In a word, the Christian is characterized by composure, tranquility, calmness, and peace.”\(^\text{128}\) The goal of education was not to eradicate natural features of human beings but to “impose on them limits and suitable times.”\(^\text{129}\) It is natural for human beings to laugh, but when they do, it is important for them to control themselves as “rational beings.”\(^\text{130}\)

---


\(^{128}\) Ibid., 2.7.

\(^{129}\) Ibid., 2.5.

\(^{130}\) Ibid.
recommended types of dress, ornament, and shoes appropriate for Christian life, and he
gave specific instructions on apposite behaviors, which are culturally conditioned with a
strong gender-bias.\textsuperscript{131}

Likewise, Clement envisioned the proper formation of the body for proper
worship of God. He interpreted various musical instruments used in praise in Psalms as
figurative references to human body parts. The Spirit sings praise to God through the
body. The body is like a musical instrument. The human tongue is “the psaltery of the
Lord”, and the mouth is a lyre. The body is an organ and its nerves are the strings, which
generate voices of praise when struck by the Spirit. The tongue is also the “cymbal of the
mouth,” which resounds with the “pulsation of the lips.”\textsuperscript{132} His view on the training of
the body is important for our discussion of the embodied prayer because he wrote one of
the first theological discourses that covers the postures and gestures of prayer. Clement
defined prayer as a conversation with God, while acknowledging whispering or silence as
an adequate form of prayer in which God continually hears our inner talk. He thought it
was appropriate to turn towards the east where the sun rises (a symbol of light against
darkness) and “raise the head and lift the hands to heaven, and set the feet in motion at
the closing utterance of the prayer.”\textsuperscript{133} This action is an embodiment of spirit’s desire to

\textsuperscript{131} “[L]et the men, fixing their eyes on the couch, and leaning without moving on their elbows, be
present with their ears alone; and if they sit, let them not have their feet crossed, nor place one thigh on
another, nor apply the hand to the chin. For it is vulgar not to bear one’s self without support, and
consequently a fault in a young man. And perpetually moving and changing one’s position is a sign of
frivolousness. It is the part of a temperate man also, in eating and drinking, to take a small portion, and
deliberately, not eagerly, both at the beginning and during the courses, and to leave off betimes, and so
show his indifference.” Ibid., 2.7.

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 2.4.

\textsuperscript{133} Clement of Alexandria, \textit{Stomata}, 7.7.
move toward the “intellectual essence” and “the region of holiness”, being freed from the earthly concerns.\(^{134}\) The ultimate goal of bodily action is to overcome the bodily limitation, which reflects Clement’s dualistic view on spirit and flesh.

Similarly, Origen, who was also deeply influenced by Platonism, began his treatise on prayer denouncing the body: “For a corruptible body weighs down the soul, and earthly dwelling-place burdens a mind that ponders many things.”\(^{135}\) He added, “the soul which is lifted up and which, separated from the body, follows the Spirit . . . is surely putting off its existence as a soul and becoming spiritual.”\(^{136}\) Based on these comments alone, Origen seems to advocate the separation between the body and the soul in prayer. Nevertheless, he insists on the close connection between pray-er’s disposition of the mind and posture of the body: “Disposition is a matter of the soul, and posture of the body.”\(^{137}\) For him, the questions of place, direction, and time of prayer are not insignificant matters. While arguing that the extension of the soul must precede the extension of the hands, Origen contended that taking a particular posture in prayer would shape a certain disposition of the soul: “one thereby wears on the body the image of the characteristics which are becoming to the soul in prayer.”\(^{138}\) Origen used the example of Paul’s prayer gesture of lifted hands (1 Tim 2:8), which he presumed came from the practices in Psalms (e.g. Psalm 141:2). Standing with hands extended and eyes upraised

---

\(^{134}\) Ibid.


\(^{136}\) Ibid., 9.2.

\(^{137}\) Ibid., 31.1.

\(^{138}\) Ibid., 31.2.
is the preferred practice of prayer for Origen, and kneeling was also considered essential as a “symbol of humility and submission” in reference to Pauline texts (Eph. 3:14-15; Phi. 2:10). Sitting or lying down is acceptable in special circumstances, such as illness or physical disabilities. The best place for prayer is where believers gather together, because the angelic powers are present in the assembly of the faithful; the two churches, angelic and human, pray together in unity. Origen insisted on praying toward the east, the direction of sunrise, because it has the “symbolic implication that the soul is facing the rising of the true light.”

These teachings on prayer not only offered practical guides, but also provided theological interpretation of the practice. Moreover, they used the body in prayer as the unique markers of Christian identity. By turning to the east, rather than to Jerusalem, Christian made a deliberate and explicit Christological claim in their bodily practices, distinguishing themselves from Jews. Tertullian added a Christological meaning to the pray-er’s body, by interpreting the spread hands in prayer as an imitation of the passion of Christ (the crossed arms also referred to passion of Christ on the cross). In addition, Tertullian criticized the practice of removing coats for prayer as a custom of Gentiles; he insisted upon the uniqueness of Christian practice of prayer. These examples show that

---

139 Regarding the Phil 2:10, Origen argued that “every knee should bow” meant “rational kneeling” because heavenly beings do not have corporeal knees to bend. Ibid., 31.3.

140 Ibid., 32.

141 In addition to an argument based on nature (the rising Sun), Origen made an eschatological connection to Christ who was believed to return from the east (Zech. 6:12; Mal. 3:20). Origen, Homilies on Leviticus, 9.10. Cf. Clement of Alexandria, Stomata, 7.7.

142 His Christological interpretation of the posture of orans is also applied to birds, which “arise, lifting themselves to heaven, spreading out their wings like a cross whilst uttering what appears to be a prayer.” Tertullian, On Prayer, 29.
particular postures and gestures in Christian prayer were not only the products of Christian faith but also the sources of Christian identity.

To be sure, these patristic theologians did not think the meaning of every gesture and posture of worship could be logically explained, or that those meanings would be recognized by most people. In *Homilies on Numbers*, Origen acknowledged that the meanings of the actions of worship were mystical in nature, so that even early Christians did not know for sure why certain actions were required in prayer, such as kneeling and turning to the east, whose meanings he explained in *On Prayer*. In addition, these teachings on the bodily actions of prayer did not attempt to put prayer in a straitjacket of prescribed liturgical forms. Church fathers like Chrysostom, who viewed *orans* as the standard posture of prayer, insisted that other mundane bodily forms are still adequate for fervent prayers: “For wherever you are, you are able to set up your altar for the place and timed do not matter. Even if you don’t bend your knees, nor beat your chest, nor stretch the hands towards heaven, you can complete every part of prayer if you demonstrate the fervent thought alone.” Chrysostom added that one can pray fervently “even while rushing into marketplace or strolling alone, . . . or seated in a shop,” and “while buying, going up and down, and cooking.” Their attention to the bodily dimension of prayer

143 “Moreover, in the ecclesiastical observances there are some things of this sort, which everyone is obliged to do so, and yet not everyone understands the reason for them. For the fact that we kneel to pray, for instance, and that of all the quarters of the heavens, the east is the only direction we turn to when we pour our prayer, the reasons for this, I think, are not easily discovered by anyone” (5.1). Origen, *Homilies on Numbers*, trans. Thomas Scheck (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 17.


How to keep the commandment to pray without ceasing was a central theme in the discussion of the proper time, place, and postures of prayer. Interpreting the disposition of the heart as prayer, Babai in the eastern (Syriac) church wrote, “Pray not just when you are standing in prayer, but also when you are moving around or doing something, and even when you are asleep, and when you are eating.” Even when the body is engaged in other mundane activities, the mind can be engrossed in prayer. Prayer can guard the body from temptations and passions. *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, 149.
was based more on their firm belief in the close connection between soul and body than on rigid rules of appropriate actions.

In *On the Duties of the Clergy*, after the fashion of Cicero’s *De Officiis*, Bishop Ambrose offered instructions to newly ordained clergy. Like Clement, Ambrose viewed the virtue of modesty as the most important principle of the acts of speech or silence, which include prayer.\(^{145}\) Every aspect of the body should follow the principle of modesty and moderation, which can be found in nature, and the body should appear to be “natural”—e.g. one’s voice should not be too weak or too rough.\(^{146}\) He claimed that modesty is the most pleasing element of prayer, for which God grants grace. Prayer of sinners should not be boastful but “veiled . . . with the blush of shame”, so that they may receive a greater degree of grace.\(^{147}\) This expression of modesty should be found not only in words but also in actions, in movements, gestures, and gait. For the attitude of the body reveals the state of the mind, the inner self hidden in the gestures of modesty could be considered pure and trustworthy. Ambrose concluded that “the movement of the body is a sort of voice of the soul.”\(^{148}\) Thus he once rejected an assiduous candidate for clergy

\(^{145}\) “Silence . . . wherein all the other virtues rest, is the chief act of modesty” Ambrose, *On the Duties of the Clergy*, 18.68.

\(^{146}\) Ambrose believed the nature could offer a principle for training of the body. But there was little attention to cultural and gender biases hidden in one’s understanding of what it means to be “natural.” For example, he taught that one’s voice should not be “womanish.”

\(^{147}\) Ibid., 18.70.

\(^{148}\) Ibid., 18.71.
whose gestures he found inappropriate, and he shunned a clergyperson who had an arrogant gait. Ambrose argued that their gait betrayed the “faithlessness of their hearts,” and his judgment was justified later when these two left the church.\footnote{Ibid., 18.72.}

John Cassian in the \textit{Conferences} of Abbot Isaac on prayer taught that one’s prayer should be free from carnal concerns. This teaching was based on his recognition of the body’s influence on the mind in prayer. The soul is not a freestanding entity. The power of memory is so strong that the actions and words taken before the time of prayer can affect the state of the soul in prayer.\footnote{John Cassian, \textit{Conferences}, 9.3, 10.14.} Cassian’s ideal prayer is contemplation—“ineffable prayer” without words—which transcends consciousness and human speech. God pays attention to the heart, not words. But the words of prayer, especially the Lord’s Prayer, and the movement of the body can lead praying people to the stage of contemplative prayer.

In his \textit{Institutes} on the life of cenobites, Cassian offered fairly detailed description of the practices of prayer in the East and the West. When monks celebrated their daily rites and prayers in Egypt, one monk rose up in the middle of chanting Psalms while others were all sitting according to their Egyptian custom, focusing their attention on the words of the chanter. When the prayers of Psalms are over, they did not hurry at once to kneel down.\footnote{In Cassian’s country, when one concludes the singing of Psalms, others standing and singing together with a loud voice, “Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost.” This practice was not found in the East, where all kept silence and a signer offered prayer.} Cassian compared this practice with that of some monks in his own country who make haste to prostrate themselves for prayer before the chanting of Psalms.
is ended, in their hurry to finish the service as quickly as possible. According to Cassian, although the number of their prayers exceeded the fixed number of the ancient liturgy, they rushed to finish the service, thinking of the refreshment of the wearied body rather than looking for the greater profits and benefits of prayer. In comparison, the Egyptian monks prayed for a few moments before they bent their knees, and they spent the greater part of their time of prayer standing; then they prostrated to the ground briefly, rose up, and stood upright with outspread hands, still focusing on their prayers. They prostrated only momentarily because they thought monks lying on the ground for a long period of time were more susceptible to wandering thoughts and slumber. The whole community closely followed the leader’s movements (rising up, bending knees, etc.) without rush or delay, so that the leader would not be seen praying independently from the community. The carefully planned choreography is a sign of unity in the praying community. The actions of individuals were melted into the movements of the group. The Egyptian monks, in Cassian’s view, by judiciously controlling the movement of their bodies in prayer, deepened their piety and enhanced the sense of community.

An anonymous author of The Book of Steps of the late fourth century showed a deep interest in harmony between mind and body in the monastic tradition of Persian Christianity. He taught to pray with both heart and body following the examples set by Christ himself, who “blessed and prayed in body and spirit,” and the apostles and prophets. The body is a visible temple of the invisible heavenly temple; prayer of

152 According to Cassian, the standing posture with orans was the default prayer posture of the Egyptian cenobites.

153 Cassian agreed with this view by claiming that his people wished to prostrate on the ground longer for resting, not for prayer.

154 The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life. 45.
hearts and bodies at visible altars functions as a link between the visible church and the invisible church. The visible church gives birth to children of God, who grow to “knowledge that belongs both to the body and the heart.” Bodily action in prayer shapes the heart. In imitation of Christ’s prayer at Gethsemane, Christians should shed tears and groan in anguish in prayer—lifting their hands—which drives sin and evil thoughts out of the heart. The pure heart cannot be achieved without the prayer of tears like Christ’s.

Monastic guides like the Rule of the Master and St. Benedict’s Rule aim to foster humility, through bodily habitus, as the basic spiritual and physical disposition of monks. Christian education took place through words and actions. Monks gradually learned how to act by deliberate imitation of bodily movement, by total immersion in a community, and by participation in the liturgy of their community. A novice not only listens to what a master teaches but repeatedly practices all the little controlled actions until they become his habits. The regulated gestures and movements of the body were considered both a sign of humility and a means to instill humility. Old worldly habits of the body should be replaced by the proper postures and gestures of bowing, staring, standing, walking, dressing, and eating. Monks sought to improve and protect the internal dimension of piety by mastering how to control its external forms. The gestures of prayer were deeply embedded in the pedagogy of making monks and, more broadly, faithful Christians.

---

155 Ibid., 46-48.
156 Ibid., 56-57.
Many in monastic traditions regarded contemplative prayer as the highest form of prayer because they believed that contemplation transcends the bodily, particularly the linguistic level, of prayer. But in most cases contemplative prayer was not seen as incompatible with sensory experience. For example, Pseudo-Macarius’ homily shows the delicate balance between the spiritual and physical senses. When he taught that Christians should pray “not according to any bodily habit nor with a habit of loud noise nor out of a custom of silence or on bended knees”, it sounds like he was rejecting the importance of the body in prayer. However, it is immediately followed by his affirmation of the bodily senses: “we ought soberly to have an attentive mind, waiting expectantly on God until he comes and visits the soul by means of all of its openings and its paths and senses.” Despite their teachings on the superiority of spiritual senses over physical senses, the actual practices of prayer they employed were deeply rooted in bodily exercises, rich with physical sensory experience. Instead of taking an individualistic and inward turn, their practices of prayers built a strong connection between the inner mental activity of contemplative prayer and the outer communal liturgical practices of the church. The rich sensory experience in prayer opens spiritual senses, and the awakened spiritual senses deepen one’s knowledge of God.

The differences between the liturgical actions of the eastern monks and the western monks Cassian reported reflect the localized development of the liturgical body. According to the Greek tradition, entering a church without crossing one’s hands on the

---


158 Ibid.
breast was a grave sin, and Bulgarians made enquiry about this practice to the Pope Nicholas I in the ninth century. The Pope answered that it was not a sin because there was no such command issued by the church on this practice. However, viewing this gesture as an action of humility, he did not ban it either. The Pope agreed that it is appropriate to express utmost humility and respect in front of God. The posture of binding one’s own hands before God means that they submit themselves to God’s sovereignty and punishment: “Lord, do not order my hands to be bound, that I be cast into the outer darkness, because I have already bound them and behold, I am prepared for my beating.”

At the same time, the Pope did not recommend this posture as a universal practice of the church because he understood that gestures and postures of humility might differ according to their cultural contexts. There might not be a universal posture of humility acceptable in every context; therefore, one’s criterion should be whether a gesture can be recognized as a sincere expression of resignation in one’s own culture.

Nicholas I offered an example of beating breasts as a gesture of penance in his own church—a form of self-punishment with which one pleads with God not to bring God’s eternal punishment upon them for their iniquities.

Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana* is one of the most influential works that applied classical rhetorical principles to Christian practices. In *De Doctrina Christiana* 2.5, Augustine discussed the value of the signs in communicating thoughts through various senses. The chief means of communication are words and the sense of hearing, but other

---

159 Pope Nicholas I, Letter 99, LIV.

160 In the following chapter in the letter, Nicholas I also discussed a question on the bodily practice in the Eucharist. Bulgarians told the Pope that the Greeks forbade them to receive communion without wearing belts. The Pope could not find any compelling reason for this rule.
senses, especially sight, play a significant role.\textsuperscript{161} Gestures of individuals, such as nodding and hand movements, and visual signs of a community, such as military signals, are a kind of visible words (\textit{verba visibilia}). Christ used all senses when he “gave a sign through the odor of the ointment which was poured out upon His feet; and in the sacrament of His body and blood He signified His will through the sense of taste; and when by touching the hem of His garment the woman was made whole, the act was not wanting in significance.”\textsuperscript{162} By a movement of the head (nodding), people give signs to others with whom they want to communicate. By hand gestures, some people can make a variety of signs. The technical gestures of mime, which use every part of body, can deliver an even greater number of messages to connoisseurs. Augustine considerably modified the classical rhetoric by shifting its purpose to knowing and preaching the truth; the value of rhetorical skills lies in understanding and teaching of Scripture and in a communication with God.

When the performative character of prayer is considered seriously, it raises an inevitable question about the problem of ostentatious hypocritical actions in performance. Pray-ers were reminded that the words and actions of prayer alone cannot be effective without sincerity of the heart. Augustine, who was especially concerned about the correlation between action and intention, warned against hypocrisy: “for hypocrites are

\textsuperscript{161} Augustine discussed the function of pictorial representation (sight) among non-verbal signs. He concluded, “To give them as much credit as possible, words have force only to the extent that they remind us to look for things; they don’t display them for us to know. Yet someone who presents what I want to know to my eyes, or to any of my bodily senses, or even to my mind itself, does teach me something.” Augustine, \textit{The Teacher}, 11.36 in \textit{Against the Academicians: The Teacher} (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 137.

\textsuperscript{162} Augustine, \textit{De Doctrina Christina}, 2.3.4.
pretenders, as it were setters of other characters, just as in the plays of the theatre."163

Indeed, Jesus criticized those who prayed in public to show their outer acts of piety (Matthew 6:5-6). At first glance, Augustine seems to deny a possibility of growing spiritually through performative actions, but he also recognized the positive side of the theatrical characteristics of liturgical actions. Liturgical actions themselves might not have the ultimate power to transform the heart, but they can aid the process of transformation as a spiritual exercise that gradually habituates one in theological virtue. Augustine’s warning against theatrical actions of prayer was about a problem of seeking human praise by hypocritical actions, rather than one’s desire to seek spiritual growth through imperfect actions. Augustine affirmed that by praying with words we admonish and arouse ourselves more eagerly to practice virtues.164 His emphasis on our dependency on God’s grace does not mean a denial of the role of practice in spiritual growth. Christian virtue can be practiced insofar as it is fundamentally a response to the divine grace that makes sinners turning away from the love of the self to the love of God. The practice of prayer effectively transforms the lives of pray-ers, but the true ground of their transformation is not their actions, but God’s grace. In his exposition of the use of orans in Psalms, Augustine made the Christological argument similar to Tertuallian’s: “Lift up therefore hands in prayer. Our Lord has lifted up for us His hands on the Cross, and stretched out were His hands for us, and therefore were His hands stretched out on the Cross, in order that our hands might be stretched out unto good works.”165 By lifting

163 Augustine, On the Sermon on the Mount, 2.5.
164 Augustine, Letter 130, 9.
165 Augustine, Ennarationes in Psalmos, LXII.13.
hands, Christ offered himself as a sacrifice for all. Christians lift their hands in the
imitation of Christ’s action, not for the sake of good works per se but for opening one’s
mind for good works. In Christ’s name, they can raise their hands with a hope that they
would be transformed to be a person they pray to be.

In On the Care of the Dead (De cura pro mortuis gerenda), Augustine discussed
the place of the body in prayer.\textsuperscript{166} His basic advice was that praying people should use
the postures and gestures they consider appropriate for prayer.\textsuperscript{167} Then he cautiously
admitted that the bodily actions of prayer play a role in the soul’s movement from the
material and bodily realm to the spiritual realm, from sensory perception to
contemplation of God. Even though God already knows their desires even before their act
of prayer, Christians still perform visible bodily actions—such as kneeling, out-stretched
hands, or prostration—as if God will then know the invisible desire and intention of their

\textsuperscript{166} Augustine, De cura pro mortuis gerenda, 5.7; Paula J. Rose, A Commentary on Augustine’s De

\textsuperscript{167} Again, which actions would be considered suitable for prayer depends on its cultural context.
In Ad Simplicianum de diversis quaestionibus, Augustine declined to prescribe a particular posture of
prayer because he believed that one should choose a posture deemed appropriate to a movement of the soul.
He found David’s and Elijah’s sitting in prayer appropriate. He argued, “We are made aware by a number
of examples that there is no objection to how the body is positioned for prayer, as long as the mind is
present to God and fixes its attention [upon God]” \textit{(dum animus deo praesens peragat intentionem suam)}.
He gave the biblical examples of standing, kneeling, sitting, and even lying down. Augustine advised not
to delay in response to the praying heart in order to find a right posture and location for prayer. He added:

For when someone seeks to pray, he arranges his limbs just as it occurs to him at the time that his
body is best disposed to arouse his mind. But inasmuch as the desire to pray comes not from
seeking but from being bestowed, when a person suddenly thinks of something that with wordless
groans incites the desire to pray, however it may have found that person, prayer should by no
means put off so that we may look for a place to sit down or to stand or to throw ourselves down.
For the mind’s attentiveness creates a solitude for itself, and it is often even unaware, at the time
when it occurs, of where it is facing or of the body’s position.

City Press, 2008), 228-29.
heart. By taking these postures of prayer, a praying person rouses herself to pray and groan even more humbly and more fervently. But as one of the strongest advocates of the Platonic idea that the soul should precede the body, not *vice versa*, Augustine struggled to explain how the body can have such influence on the soul. Augustine added:

I know not how it is, that, while these motions of the body cannot be made but by a motion of the mind preceding, yet by the same being outwardly in visible sort made, that inward invisible one which made them is increased: and thereby the heart’s affection which preceded that they might be made, groweth because they are made.

It does not mean that the bodily actions are necessary for prayers. The lack of outer actions does not necessarily mean that the “inner” self is not praying. Instead, the inner self might have thrown itself in contrition on the ground of the “most secret chamber” of the heart. The most important element is the intention of pray-er, which only God knows.

Moaning and sighing were commonly considered a genuine expression of the heart. Caesarius of Arles of the sixth century advised praying in silence with only moans, sighs, and groans, not to disturb pray-ers standing next to them. This admonition was more about being considerate in the presence of fellow Christians in prayer than being

---

168 Augustine, *De cura pro mortuis*, 7.22. (NPNF-1. vol. 3)

169 Ibid.

170 In his sermon on the Gospel of John, Augustine maintained the priority of love (desire) for God over the bodily mark. Without love for God, the knees worn by kneeling cannot guarantee piety. “Behold, I worship God, daily I run to church, my knees are worn with prayers [*genua mihi trita sunt in orationibus*], and yet I am constantly sick: there are men who commit murders, who are guilty of robberies, and yet they exult and have abundance; it is well with them. Was it such things that you sought from God? Surely you belonged to grace. If, therefore, God gave to you grace, because He gave freely, love freely. Do not for the sake of reward love God; let Him be the reward.” Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 3.21.
critical of the language of prayer. If someone prays aloud in a chattering fashion, others cannot concentrate on their prayers.\textsuperscript{171} Caesarius mentioned the prayer postures of standing, prostrating, and bowing, and particularly emphasized genuflection. If a physical challenge prevents them from genuflecting, they should at least bend their backs or bow their heads. Singing psalms is like sowing, kneeling down in prayer is like covering the ground. Using the example of the prayers of Pharisee and tax collector, Caesarius advocated the practice of bowing the head at the altar and criticized the Pharisee’s arrogant posture of standing.\textsuperscript{172} The bowed head and bended knees are signs of repentance. Those who do not bend their knees, either neglecting the guilt of their sins or being afraid of ruining precious cloths, put their souls at risk. Christ, the Great Physician, prostrated himself on the ground to pray setting up an example for the sick sinners. Caesarius bemoaned that most people remain standing when a deacon says, “Let us kneel down” (flectamus genua). He thought worshippers should bow not only their hearts but also their heads. Those who bow down humbly are like a valley that receives the rain of blessings.

Medieval theologians added symbolic meanings, drawn from biblical texts, to gestures and postures. For example, in De Universe, Hrabanus Maurus of the eighth century expounded the spiritual meanings of each body part and its movements. Knees can signify humility as they traditionally did, and they can be also understood as “the members of Christ.”\textsuperscript{173} The stability of the body depends on the knees; the weakened

\textsuperscript{171} Caesarius of Arles, Sermon 72. Cf. This is a typical criticism against Tongsungkido, loud extemporary prayer in Korea.

\textsuperscript{172} It was not a categorical criticism against the standing posture.

\textsuperscript{173} Hrabanus Maurus, De Universe: the Peculiar Properties of Words and Their Mystical Significance (Charlotte, Vt.: MedievalMS, 2009), 185.
shaking knees can signify the wavering members of the church. Hrabanus also offered a theological interpretation of the habits of the human body, using biblical references to its movements and postures: standing means “to be firm in faith”; walking means “to tend toward God”; sitting means “to rest humbly in God”; lying means “to succumb to vices or temptation”; running can mean either “to prosper in good works” or “running to evil”; ascending can mean either “progress toward God” or “the presumption of pride”; descending means “a defection from God.”

In the Medieval church, in the eleventh or twelfth century, bended knees with clasped hands and bowed head became the most prominent posture of prayer. This new posture of prayer probably came from a gesture of fidelity in the feudal society. The clasped hands in prayer represented not only the humble subjection to the divine Lord but also the mutual exchange of affection. It became increasingly popular to kneel down with joined hands in front of the sacred objects, such as the cross, the Host, and icons, which offered the spatial orientation of prayer as a visible material manifestation of the invisible presence of God. The standing posture was now viewed as less pious than

174 Ibid.

175 Gerhart Ladner deduced from the prayer-postures in the medieval portraits of Popes that the shift from orans to the new posture with folded hands and bended knees happened around eleventh or twelfth century. Gerhart B. Ladner, Images and Ideas in the Middle Ages (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1983), 209-37.

176 The Canon XXV of the Second Council of Lyon (1274) ordered peaceful and respectful actions in the Church. People who gather for worship should praise Christ with an act of special respect. Whenever the name of Christ, to whom every knee should be bowed, is mentioned, worshippers must genuflect or at least bow their head as a sign of bending of the knees of their hearts: “Each should fulfil in himself that which is written for all that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow; whenever that glorious name is recalled, especially during the sacred mysteries of the mass, everyone should bow the knees of his heart, which he can do even by a bow of his head. In churches the sacred solemnities should possess the whole heart and mind; the whole attention should be given to prayer.”
genuflection. The traditional prohibition of kneeling from Easter to Pentecost was not heeded strictly. Bended knees and joined hands replaced orans as the quintessential image of a pray-er in the religious paintings. While the ancient posture of orans unfolded and stretched the body, the popular medieval posture of prayer folded and constricted the body, which coincided with the development of introspective medieval piety.

In the twelfth century, Hugh of St. Victor underscored discipline as a way of living well and honestly (*Disciplina est conversatio bona et honesta*).\(^{177}\) Discipline does not merely avoid doing bad things but strives to be impeccable in all things. Discipline is the orderly movement (*motus ordinatus*) and the proper disposition (*disposition decens*) in all habits and action (*in omni habitu et actione*). It is a shackle to greed, a prison for evil desires, and a yoke for pride. It strangles all disorderly movement of the mind and the illicit appetites. Hugh argued that discipline is not only useful but also necessary. No one can reach happiness without the means of virtue, and virtue cannot be truly achieved without discipline. The practice of discipline moves the soul toward virtue, and virtue leads it to happiness.

Discipline in gestures is a crucial means of this formation of virtue.\(^{178}\) Gesture is the movement and figuration of the bodily parts that results in proper actions and dispositions.\(^{179}\) Lax postures bear laziness and indolence; disorderly gestures bear corrupt

---

\(^{177}\) Hugh of St. Victor, *De Institutione novitiorum*, ch.X.

\(^{178}\) Gesture is an important theme for Hugh. His elaborate system of gestures cannot be covered fully here. I focus on its relevance to the practice of prayer.

\(^{179}\) “*Gestus est modus et figuratio membrorum corporis ad omnem agendi et habendi modum*” Hugh of St. Victor, *De Institutione novitiorum*, ch.XII.
body and dissolute spirit; brusque gestures bear pride. Hugh also offered detailed advice on disciplines for speech acts, including what to speak, to whom to speak, and when and where to speak. The same principle is relevant to the action of prayer as speech to God, but speaking to God is different from other forms of speech because God already knows the needs of a speaker. The act of speech is pleasing to God, but it also greatly benefits a pray-er herself because the specific action makes her desires more visible to herself, so that she can ponder them in her heart more concretely. Thus, the bodily action of prayer can contribute to the spiritual growth of the pray-er. In monastic life, the carefully regulated actions are engraven on the body, so that the corresponding virtues can be instilled in the life.

The Greco-Roman view of prayer as persuasion was echoed in the early and medieval church’s understanding of prayer as speech seeking a favor of the divine judge in the heavenly court. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, teachings on Christian practices of prayer increasingly drew from the classical rhetorical theories: the rhetorical tradition paying a careful attention to ethos and pathos in speech and the gestures and actions of orators. These teachings on the rhetoric of prayer initially appeared in prayer

---

180 Hugh used Biblical references, such as crooked mouth, winking eyes, shuffling feet, and pointing fingers (Proverb 6:12-13), which reveal the perverted evil mind of a villain.

181 There is a strong connection between knowledge and prayer in Hugh’s writings. Meditation generates knowledge (scientia). Illuminating knowledge pushes away ignorance and brings about compunction, which consequently leads to devotion. Devotion, which is a movement of love toward God, perfects prayer.

182 William of Auvergne, 337a; In thirteenth century, Gunther of Paris in Prayer, Fasting, and Alms (De oratione, jejunio, et eleemosyna) wrote, “For what rhetorical speech does before an earthly judge, Catholic speech does in the presence of the heavenly one in a more truthful and better way (quod enim agit rhetorica oratio apud terrenum judicem, hoc apud coelestem catholica verius ac melius agit oratio)” (PL 212:105); Thomas Aquinas viewed prayer as petition delivered to the divine judge: “Because public addresses contain arguments which are meant to persuade people, they too are called ‘speeches’ and those who make them are called ‘speakers’ (oratores). And because these speeches, particularly those involved in the kind of case we call a lawsuit, have it as their objective to ask a judge for something—which is why
manuals written for members of religious orders, but in the fourteenth century, prayer manuals for private devotions of the laity also became common. In these works, prayers were advised to employ rhetorical strategies found in classical teachings on oration—such as Cicero’s *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*—for better presentation of a case to the divine judge. These medieval works viewed prayer as a theological activity that demands rhetorical strategies, and they considered the gestures and postures a significant element in making a pray-er (*orator*) a good orator (*orator*).

Aristotle advised poets to incorporate gestures into their poems, which would help them to convince their audience not only at intellectual but also at an emotional level. Quintilian also stressed the body’s role in persuasion. In order to move an audience, an orator should stir them up by a masterful use of voice tones, facial expressions, postures, and gestures. The category of “pathetic” (*conquestio*) in Cicero’s rhetorical theory had a great influence on how people expressed their sorrow and pain in prayer. For the “pathetic tone of amplification”, advised Cicero, an orator shall “use a restrained voice,

lawyers call advocates’ speeches ‘pleas’—the word *oratio* was taken over to refer also to petitions made to God, as to the judge who is concerned with our activities.” Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, *Albert and Thomas: selected writings*, ed. Simon Tugwell (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), 367.

Although it was not used by medieval writers themselves, scholars uses the term, *Artes Orandi*, to refer to this genre of medieval writing. See Barbara H. Jaye, “Artes Orandi” in *Artes praedicandi. Artes orandi (Typologie des Sources du Moyen Âge Occidental, 61)* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1992), 79-118.

In Latin, *orator* can mean either orator or pray-er (the second meaning came from *oratio*). Augustine punned on the two meanings of *orator*, when he famously wrote, “Let him be a pray-er before being a speaker,” *(sit orator antequam dictor)* in his teaching on preaching in *De Doctrina Christiana*. Tertullian’s word choice for prayer, *oratio* (not *prex* and *votum*), a term linked to Ciceronian oratory, shows that prayer was mainly understood as speech (oration, mostly petition) although contemplative prayer was not excluded.

“So far as possible, the poet should even include gestures in the process of composition: for, assuming the same natural talent, the most convincing effect comes from those who actually enter into the emotional states.” Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1455a22-31.

Quintillian, *Institutio Oratoria*, III.XV.27.
deep tone, frequent intermissions, long pauses, and marked changes” and one should “slap one’s thigh and beat one’s head, and sometimes to use a calm and uniform gesticulation and a sad and disturbed expression.”

A good delivery of speech ensures that what the orator is speaking appears to come from his heart (ut res ex animo agi videatur). Remigius of Auxerre of the ninth century taught that a message is delivered in voice, motion, and gesture (in voce et in motu et in gestu), and that the gesture is “a habit of voice” (gestu autem vocis est habitus). Thus, an orator should employ a dramatic change of the tone of voice, and the gestures of the body, to enrich the delivery of the message. When adopting such rhetorical theories of oration and gesture in the practice of Christian prayer, Christian writers did not mean that pray-ers could sway God through outer actions. God who already knows one’s innermost thoughts and feelings does not rely on the words and actions of pray-ers. However, it does not negate the pray-ers’ duty to present their best cases earnestly. The rhetorical devices help them to set a right tone for their prayers.

---

187 Ibid.

188 He also spoke of the three elements of speech: “Voice in mouth, movement of the whole body, and gesture of hands” (vox enim in ore, motus in toto corpore, gestus in manibus). Remigius of Auxerre, Commentum in Martianum Capelolam, 218.5.

189 In his Poetria nova—one of the most influential Medieval treatises on the theory and practice of rhetoric—Geoffrey of Vinsauf (a thirteenth century theorist of rhetoric, who was influenced by the classical rhetorical theories, such as Cicero’s Rhetorica ad Herennium and Horace’s Ars poetica) identified the three tongues (languages) an orator speaks: voice, facial expression, and gesture. The three languages should work together harmoniously for an effective delivery of a message. There should be a sign of the correspondence between inward and outward emotions. As words and voice should represent what an orator intends to say, gestures of the orator should be in accordance with the subject matter: “Therefore, let a voice controlled by good taste, seasoned with the two spices of facial expression and gestures.” Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Poetria nova, trans. Margaret F. Mins (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2010), 78-79
Prayer was viewed not only as a message but also as a messenger sent to God, and the teachers of prayer wanted their people to dispatch their messengers in the best possible manner. William of Auvergne in *Rhetorica Divina* wrote, “For no one wise sends to a distant region a messenger who cannot walk.” A praying person wants to send God a swift runner as her messenger. William developed a divine rhetoric (*rhetorica divina*) to formulate prayers with a better structure and to deliver them in a more effective and persuasive way. But he did not think these technical improvements would automatically enhance the effectiveness of prayer. William, of course, finds a major difference between spiritual speech (prayer) and worldly speech. Despite his extensive discussion of the art of prayer, which is designed to make a request more acceptable in the eyes of the divine judge, William maintained that the ultimate goal of a pray-er, or “spiritual orator,” is not to change God but rather to transform the praying self to become more suitable for what it asks for. He added that prayer flies to God on the “wings of fear and hope”, and God prefers the united voice of people (even of sinners) humbly praying together to the eloquent prayers of pious individuals.

---


191 Ibid., 2.338a-338b.

192 Traditionally the two wings of prayer were also identified as fasting and charity (almsgiving). Fasting is another important bodily aspect of prayer. A unique connection between fasting and efficacy of prayer was often emphasized (e.g. Mark 9.29). Tertullian thought that prayer “ascends with the additional commendation of this good work [i.e. fasting]”, suggesting that fasting makes the prayer of the individual more acceptable to God (Tertullian, *De oration*, 18). Many Protestant theologians might feel uncomfortable with its implication that bodily disciplines and moral status of a pray-er can affect the outcome of prayer. But the biblical narratives and early Christians rather casually suggest that one’s moral character (shown in almsgiving) and bodily practices (fasting) makes one’s prayer more acceptable to God. This was the route women often took to claim their spiritual authority. They argued that God answered their prayers, revealed them the divine mystery, and gave them spiritual gifts because of their life of chastity and charity.
William tried to find a balance between the art of rhetoric and the words of prayer.\textsuperscript{193} The sincere and genuine words of the heart are most important. People mostly learn to pray by praying written prayers—especially praying the “exquisite prayers” of the Psalter—not by learning the art of praying or by “philosophizing” it. Prayer is a gift of God, not a skill to master. But it does not mean that there are no benefits of learning the art or skill of prayer. Knowing the skills and customs of prayer is not necessary but helpful for living a prayerful life. It is the church’s solemn task and responsibility to teach how to pray: “The Church herself, which is schooled and taught by heavenly or rather divine teachings, teaches us to pray in this way, that is to say, to send such a messenger or that sort of messenger to the heavenly court in order to solicit all those standing before God and each one of them on our behalf.”\textsuperscript{194}

William described the position and arrangement of the body as an important part of prayer. He recommended “prostration of the body, kneeling of the same, stretching out of one’s hands, raising them, and similarly lifting the eyes toward heaven” as appropriate postures of prayer, and he was confident that each of these actions could enhance prayer to be “more devout and more resolute.”\textsuperscript{195} However, taking a bodily posture does not

\textsuperscript{193} “Perhaps because we learn to pray by praying rather than by philosophizing, one must believe that they did not hand down the art or skill of praying, but many authentic written prayers for those who pray, as is clearly seen in the Book of Psalms, which is filled with very exquisite prayers. If someone were to say, however, that prayer is a gift of God and for this reason is not to be sought from art or teaching, but rather from its giver, he certainly speaks the truth. But if someone says that such prayer has not only its most important element, but is greater part from a divine gift and grace and for this reason there is nothing for it from the art and teaching of such human beings, I reply that justice . . . has . . . everything that is or has from a divine gift and grace. Still legal expertise . . . is similarly enlightened and directed by the knowledge of different customs and the handling of cases and negotiations. It is that way also with prayer.” William of Auvergne, \textit{Rhetorica divina}, 1.336b.

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 39.377a.

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 26.365a.
automatically improve one’s prayer. There is no one-size-fit-all universal postures for everybody. William advised that in prayer one should adopt a bodily position that feels most helpful. Physically challenging postures, such as kneeling and frequent reflections, could be an impediment to prayer because the laborious actions might “steal something for themselves from our thoughts.” They might prevent the human heart from a total engagement with God. ¹⁹⁶

In the eyes of God, the best pray-er is not a lofty speaker but a beggar, and it is most appropriate for a beggar to extend a hand to whom his or her petitions are made. According to William’s observation, stretching arms was the posture of all beggars seeking benefits in his culture. The direction of hands is significant because “it is very well known . . . that the hand is extended in that direction toward which one’s action also moves.”¹⁹⁷ It is unacceptable for a pray-er to seek God’s benefit by voice, while extending his or her hands to the devil. Therefore, it is natural for a praying beggar to move toward God by both voice and hands; his or her stretched arms are pleasing to God.

William also highlighted the benefits of other sensory experiences in prayer, including the “smoke of incense” and the “powder of the perfumer”, which stimulate the visual and olfactory senses. Incense helps pray-ers to express their prayer of supplication with a higher level of intensity and urgency. They watch the smoke of incense rising upwards as a symbol of their great desire to reach for the merciful God, and they smell the scent as a reminder of God’s promise to delight in receiving their prayers. The rising smoke is a material sign of prayer’s upward spiritual movement toward the heavenly

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 26.365b.
¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 39.380b.
God. Incense helps the praying body to experience prayer’s invisible journey to its
destination and provides the body with a way to engage in communication with God
beyond the level of spoken words.\textsuperscript{198}

Peter the Chanter of the twelfth century, whose illustrated prayer manual became
popular in the high medieval church (especially in monastic communities), viewed prayer
as performative speech. He taught that one should pray with both heart and body ("\textit{quod
idem dicendum est corde et corpora}\textsuperscript{199}") and described the seven basic postures of
Christian prayer: (1) lifting and extending arms over the head (hands joined), looking
toward heaven (standing);\textsuperscript{200} (2) cruciform (the hands and arms extended in a fashion
similar to a cross; standing);\textsuperscript{201} (3) the hands clasped together in front of the eyes
(standing);\textsuperscript{202} (4) keeling; (5) prostration; (6) bowing the head in a standing position;\textsuperscript{203}
and (7) the “custom of camels” (\textit{camelorum more}), a kneeling position with elbows

\textsuperscript{198}William also added spiritual and moral meanings to the incense. He argued that the “four
spices”, which are necessary for prayer, are the four cardinal virtues. (William was referring to the four
spices of “stacte, onycha, galbanum, frankincense” on the altar of incense in Exodus 30:22-38). \textit{Ibid.},
42.384b-387a.

The connection between incense and virtue can be traced back to patristic theology. Clement of
Alexandria argued that “the righteous soul is the truly sacred altar, and . . . incense arising from it is holy
prayer.” Like William, Clement gave a spiritual interpretation of the “compounded incense” in the Mosaic
law. The incense means, according to Clement, the united faith presented in different voices and tongues in
prayer; it is “brought together in praises, with a pure mind, and just and right conduct, from holy works and

\textsuperscript{199}Peter the Chanter, \textit{De Oratione et Speciebus Illius}, 964.

\textsuperscript{200}"\textit{videlicet brachia et ambas manus coniunctas et extensas supra caput tuum versus celum,

\textsuperscript{201}"\textit{fieri manibus et ulnis expansis ad modum atque similitudinem cruces}\textsuperscript{201}.” \textit{Ibid.}, 456-57.

\textsuperscript{202}“\textit{habens manus complosas, et contiguas, extensas, ac directas coram oculis suis.}” \textit{Ibid.}, 513-14.

\textsuperscript{203}“\textit{cum orans, stans eitam erectus, toto corpore inclinat caput suum ante sacrum et sanctum
altare.}” \textit{Ibid.}, 722-23.
touching the ground. Interestingly, he denounced sitting as an inappropriate posture of lazy pray-ers (pigri oratores). 

Peter the Chanter argued that the gesture of the body is a testimony of the inner devotion of the spirit; at the same time, the attitude of our human exterior instructs interior desires (“Status autem exterioris hominis instruit nos de humilitate et affectu interioris”). As we have seen above, such a view on the mutual interaction between soul and body in prayer was not original to Peter. What was unique in the medieval prayer manuals was the level of technical details in the instructions on the gestures of prayer. Now a pray-er (orator) was viewed as an artisan (artifex) who knew how to use the body correctly as a natural instrument. Peter offered body techniques as models for an artisan to emulate and contemplate, making a close connection between doctrinal training and the practice of prayer. Pray-ers in action paid careful attention to the theological meanings of their gestures and postures. Peter contended that school should be a place where one not only learns doctrines as a principle of spiritual life but also practices how to pray rightly. At schools pray-ers were trained to master the various modes of prayer in which sacra doctrina is embedded. Learning how to pray is a practice of memorizing and performing both verbal and corporal actions, and Peter thought that bodily memory in prayer would mold the moral character of Christians at prayer.

204 “longe orationis usu in cubitis et genibus, camelorum more”. Peter the Chanter gave an example of Gregory of the Great’s aunt (father’s sister), who developed callouses by praying longtime in this posture. Like the “camel’s knees” of James the Just, this physical mark acquired by lifelong practice of prayer, was viewed as a sign of spiritual maturity. This example is particularly interesting because it shows how the physical mark made a woman’s piety recognizable. Ibid., 769-70.

205 Sitting is a posture of a judge, which is not suitable for penitence or supplication. Ibid., 524-34.

206 Ibid., 395-96.
The Nine Ways of Saint Dominic, the work of an anonymous author of the thirteenth century, offers a glimpse at the bodily dimension of the prayer life of St. Dominic, and thereby helped set the model for the Dominican practice of prayer. The author emphasized the mutual interaction between soul and body in Dominic’s prayer: “the soul, as it causes the body to move, is in turn moved by the body.” He elaborated this point by describing Dominic’s practices:

[T]his manner of praying stirs up devotion, the soul stirring the body, and the body in turn stirring the soul. Praying this way used to make Saint Dominic dissolve utterly into weeping, and it so kindled the fervor of his good will that he could not contain it: his devotion showed quite plainly in his bodily members. So, as he prayed, his mind would rise up from time to time in petitions and entreaties and in thanksgiving.

The author added that such interaction of soul and body can lead to ecstasy (like Paul’s) or rapture (like David’s), making its connections to the prophetic traditions of scripture and early church. This work suggested that nine postures and gestures of prayer can develop the specific inner states corresponding to bodily actions.

(1) The first way of St. Dominic’s prayer was to bow a head standing erect before the altar, “as if Christ, whom the altar signifies, were really and personally present, and not just in a symbolic way.” Dominic taught his brethren to express their humility by

---


209 Ibid., 15.
bowing before a crucifix, a visual representation of the humiliation of Christ, whenever they passed it. He added that this posture needed to be done in honor of the Trinity whenever the doxology was recited. (2) The second way was prostration, which makes a pray-er’s heart be pierced with contrition; in this posture, Dominic prayed loudly, weeping and groaning passionately, for his own and others’ sins. (3) The third way was to beat oneself as a gesture of discipline. (4) The fourth way was to stand before the altar, fixing a gaze on the crucifix, and repeatedly kneel down.\footnote{James the Just was mentioned as its example.} In this prayer of kneeling, Dominic often had emotional outbursts and even appeared to enter into ecstasy. Showing intense desires and sudden emotional changes, such as tears followed by joy, was a characteristic of this practice. Dominic loved to use this posture anytime and anywhere, and the author of The Nine Ways opined that Dominic taught others by this bodily action more than by what he said. (5) The fifth way was a posture of contemplation. This ritual performance engaged in the contemplative practices of reading, watching, and listening. He stood before the altar, sometimes opening his hands in front of his chest, “as if he were reading [an open book] in the actual presence of God.”\footnote{Ibid., 30.} Sometimes he raised his joined hands in front of his eyes, and sometimes he lifted up his hands to his shoulders “as if he wanted to fix his ears more attentively on something being spoken from the altar.”\footnote{Ibid.} (6) The sixth way was orans, which was explained as how Christ prayed on the cross. Orans was the posture Dominic took when he performed miracles. Interestingly, this traditional prayer posture of the early church was now considered so special that
Dominic used it only when he knew by divine inspiration that a miracle was about to happen “by virtue of his prayer.” It was no longer considered an ordinary posture of prayer, so that to others, including monks, nuns, cardinals, and nobility, it looked both “strange and wonderful.” Among the nine postures of prayer, orans was the only one Dominic did not encourage others to practice although he did not forbid it. It was reserved for prayer that sought an extraordinary power and grace of God. (7) The seventh way was to stretch up the whole body, “like an arrow being shot straight up in the air”; hands were raised above the head, “either held together or open as if to receive something from heaven.” This posture was closely related Dominic’s receiving the spiritual gifts in rapture. (8) The eighth way was to sit and be immersed in devotional reading, which always began with the sign of the cross. In this posture, Dominic not only quietly listened to the inner voice, but discussed, argued, laughed, wept, and beat his breast. After reading was done, he showed his respect to the book, bowing and kissing it. (9) The ninth way was to walk in prayer while traveling; the author believed that the sign of the cross Dominic made in prayer had mystical power to dispel ashes and flies.

In *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas discussed the relationship between body and soul in worship in the section on adoration (*de adoratione*), which follows his discussion of prayer (*de oratione*). Regarding the question, whether “adoration

---

213 Ibid., 33.

214 But it is also possible that others found his way of using orans, especially his way of talking in this posture, “strange and wonderful” than orans itself. In either way, it is clear that people in Dominic’s time did not see orans as an ordinary way of praying. Ibid., 34.

215 Ibid., 38.

216 Ibid., 42.

217 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2a2ae. 84.
impl[ies] an interior and exterior action”, Thomas reviewed the claim that worship does not imply bodily activity (*actum corporalem*) because true worshippers should worship God in spirit (John 4:22), and the spirit’s activity is not related to the bodily activity. This argument goes on saying that the word, “*adoratio*” (adoration), derived from “*oratio*” (prayer), and prayer is principally an internal activity; furthermore, while the acts of the body entail bodily senses, God can be approached by mental senses only. Against this argument Thomas asserted the importance of the outward bodily dimension of worship. Worshippers offer God a twofold adoration, spiritual and corporeal, according to the twofold human nature of intellect and senses. The bodily actions of humility are an outer expression of the internal worship; thus the interior spiritual dimension is still primary, and the bodily actions are secondary. However, the bodily actions do not always follow the interior orientation. Like Augustine, Thomas affirmed the body’s influence on the mind. The bodily actions can excite the desire (*affectus*) to submit oneself to God. For human beings naturally (*connaturale*) proceed from the realm of senses (*sensibilia*) to the realm of intelligence (*intelligibilia*), sensible signs (*sensibilia signa*) can cause the mind to extend itself towards God. In *Contra Gentiles*, Thomas explains that sensible objects (*sensibilia*) can direct the human mind toward God. Since human beings connaturally receive knowledge through bodily senses, it is difficult to transcend the sensible world (*sensibilia*). Sensible things work as a reminder of divine things, so that even those who are not inclined to contemplate divinity would benefit from the use of sensible things.218

218 "Exercentur etiam ab hominibus quaedam sensibilia opera, non quibus Deum excitet, sed quibus seipsum provocet in divina: sicut prostrationes, genuflexiones, vocales clamores, et cantus. Quae non fiunt quasi Deus his indiget, qui omnia novit, et cuius voluntas est immutabilis, et affectum mentis, non motum corporis propter se acceptat: sed ea propter nos facimus, ut per haec sensibilia opera intentio nostra dirigatur in Deum, et affectio accendatur. Simul etiam per haec Deum profitemur animae et
Thus, bodily actions have mutual interactions with spiritual activity. Bodily worship can be done “in spirit” by proceeding from and being directed to spiritual devotion, and the spiritual senses can be deepened by bodily actions.

Regarding particular gestures and postures of worship, Thomas explained that genuflection is an act of confessing one’s weakness, and prostration expresses one’s acknowledgment of the state of being nothing. Thomas also affirmed the importance of the spatial dimension of worship. Bodily signs (*corporalia signa*) have to take place in a particular place and position. Therefore, having a designated place for worship is important, although it might not be necessary. Turning toward the east is suitable for worship because the movement of the heavens indicates that divine majesty comes from the east, and because paradise, to which Christians seek return, is located in the east, and because Christ, the “light of the world”, will return from the east.  

There were pedagogical visions behind these medieval teachings on the gestures and postures of prayer. The body these actions produced also bore the markers of Christian identity. In the medieval church, the laity was advised to kneel down for prayer, stand during Gospel reading, and bow their head with folded hands during the elevation of the Host. The posture of kneeling became a sign of acceptance of the church’s official teachings on the Eucharist. In his guide for inquisitors, Bernard Gui of the fourteenth century argued that heretics (Beguins) could be identified by their actions (how they spoke, greeted, arrived at a house, etc.). Especially how they prayed were different:

---


219 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2a2ae.84.3.ad3.
“When they pray in a church or elsewhere they sit crouching down, hoods over their heads, facing an opposite wall or something similar or looking down to the ground. They are not often seen on bended knees and with folded hands, like other people.” Praying in a different way was viewed as an outward mark of the different belief. Not kneeling down was most likely interpreted as a sign of disobedience.

Of course, however, not all teachings on prayer prescribed proper gestures and postures. John Ruusbroec in the fourteenth century contended that the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit is manifested through outlandish bodily actions. When the grace of God touches a heart, love and joy pierce “through heart and senses, through flesh and blood, and the whole bodily nature, and cause a pressure and restlessness in all his members, so that he is often at his wit's end.” In spiritual drunkenness, pray-ers enter a strange state in which they cannot control their own bodies. They “lift up their heads and gaze with wide-opened eyes towards heaven; now joying, now weeping; now singing, now crying; . . . running and jumping, laughing, clapping their hands, kneeling, bowing down.”

---

220 He added, “At dinner time too, after table has been blessed, those who know the Gloria in excelsis Deo kneel and sing it while the rest listen. At supper time, however, those who know it kneel and repeat Salve Regina.” Bernard Gui, The Inquisitor's Guide: a Medieval Manual on Heretics (Welwyn Garden City, UK: Ravenhall, 2006), 95-96.

221 Similarly, kneeling was considered a marker of Methodist public prayer. Lester Ruth argues that “unwillingness to kneel . . . indicated an individual’s denial of a Methodist prayer.” Lester Ruth, A Little Heaven Below: Worship at Early Methodist Quarterly Meetings, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 86-87.


Overall, however, rhetoricians in the Greco-Roman world used a sophisticated system of gestures in order to persuade others, and communication with finger postures were widely used in the ancient society. The culture of the Middle Ages was also called a “culture of gestures.” In medieval feudal society, gestures had legally-binding power. Since very few people could write, most people had to make commitment through “ritual gestures, formal words, and symbolic objects.” However, the significance of ritual gestures greatly diminished in modern Western society in general. This cultural shift resulted in the loss of thick and rich semantic contexts of gestures. In consequence, interest in the bodily actions in prayer has waned. The decline is more apparent in private prayer than liturgical prayer since the latter is regulated by the tradition of the church. The eclipse of the gestures and postures of prayer can be explained more as a symptom of a growing cultural shift in the larger society than a direct result of theological reasoning. A rising tide of non-gestural culture in the modern age was so high that most liturgical gestures could not avoid losing their cultural semantic contexts. The meaning of the bodily discipline has shifted from a means of spiritual perfection to a social means of manners.

223 See Gregory S. Aldrete, *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1999)


225 Ibid., 78.

226 There are some exceptions though. For example, the gesture of taking oath in court still has political power.
It is also true that many Reformers who disdained the magical use of ritual actions neglected the non-verbal dimension of prayer. But spiritual power in ritual gestures was not categorically rejected by the Reformers like Martin Luther, who firmly believed in the spiritual benefits of making the sign of the cross in prayer. In his *Small Catechism*, Luther advised people to begin daily morning and evening prayers with the sign of the cross, invoking the Trinity (“God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit watch over me”), and then to recite the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and a short prayer in the posture of kneeling or standing.²²² For Luther, a sign of the cross is an act of confessing faith in Christ and a symbol of victory over death. Those who have faith in Christ who conquered death should “cling to his neck or to his garment” and say, “I am a Christian and will conquer”, making a sign of the cross, then they will “find that death will be vanquished.”²²⁸ Luther also used the sign of the cross as a powerful sign of renouncement of evil power²²⁹ and false teachings (such as those of “papists” and Jews)²³⁰, and as an action of dispelling self-doubt.²³¹


²²³ Luther’s Works, 22, 356.

²²⁴ Luther spoke of the sign of the cross against Mammon in “The Sermon on the Mount.” *Luther’s Works*, 21 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 191; He urged to make a sign of the cross and trust God in the case of experiencing the signs of evil spirits. *Luther’s Works*. 52, 178-79.

²²⁵ *Luther’s Works*, 39, 202; 47, 214; 58, 83-84.

²³¹ When one becomes worried about one’s own worthiness to receive the sacraments, one should dispel the doubt by making a sign of the cross. *Luther’s Works*, 42, 109-10.
Although such comments on the body at prayer sporadically appear,\(^{232}\) the traditional theological interest in the bodily dimension of Christian prayer virtually disappeared in modern academic theology, especially in Protestant circles. The typical modern Protestant teaching on prayer was to follow the flow of the heart and take any posture suitable for it.\(^{233}\) This stance was based on the belief that the praying heart or the spirit of prayer moves the body, not vice versa. So, the direction of influence is usually from heart to body, not vice versa.

\(^{232}\) Jürgen Moltmann is one of the most recent examples of Protestant theology’s treatment of the body at prayer. In his interpretation of Christ’s commandment to “watch and pray,” Moltmann made an interesting remark on the connection between bodily posture of prayer and Christian attitude toward life. He criticized that the common prayer posture of the contemporary church—closed and lowered eyes, folded hands, and bended knees—does not represent the ethos of watchfulness.

He interpreted “watching” as a vigilant attitude toward the troubles in the world (in contrast to numbness). Moltmann argued that “real prayer to God awakens all our senses and alerts our minds and spirits.” A praying person is one who “lives more attentively.” He saw the orans as an outward posture (standing, outstretching) that is ready for action. Orans “reflects tense expectation, not quite heart searching.” In orans, pray-ers “are watching God’s advent. With tense attention, we open all our sense for the coming of God into our lives, into our society, to this earth.” The orans represents the “attentive life”, a posture of waiting for the daybreak, which is different from the introspective attitude of the common contemporary prayer posture.

However, Moltmann’s theological interpretation of the postures of prayer appears to be inconsistent. When criticizing the bodily practice of closed eyes for its inward (introspective) direction, and interpreting the meaning of open eyes as one’s attentiveness to the world’s problems and anticipation of God’s advent, Moltmann treated the bodily postures not in physical terms. Although he began his arguments with a focus on the bodily dimension of prayer, the closing and opening of eyes were interpreted only figuratively. He neither explained why those who pray with closed eyes would not be attentive to the same issues around them, nor showed how praying with the open eyes can be so. In other words, Moltmann was right at noticing the significance of body language in prayer, but by moving too quickly to figurative (or spiritual) interpretation of the “open eyes”, he overlooked the question of embodiment which he himself raised initially (Cf. Marjorie Procter-Smith made a similar move in her figurative interpretation of the open eyes, when she says, “In times of persecution, it is advisable not to close one’s eyes to one’s own personal risk or to what is going on around us.” Marjorie Procter-Smith, Praying with Our Eyes Open, (Nashville, Abingdon, 1995), 12). In order to discuss the bodily dimension of prayer—more particularly, eyes, in this case—, one cannot avoid asking what the open eyes would actually see and how seeing would transform the viewers. But Moltmann and Proctor-Smith failed to recognize how extensively these questions were discussed in the ancient and medieval devotional practices.


\(^{233}\) It usually means closed eyes, slightly vowed head, and folded hands, which (as we have seen above) became the most common prayer posture of the western church in the high medieval period.
2. 5 Conclusion

How do we make Christians? The early and medieval church said, “By teaching how to pray, both in words and in actions.” They said, “Let us feed people with the words of prayer” and “Let us teach them how to use and train their bodies and souls in prayer.” The practices of prayer functioned as the church’s important pedagogical means for cultivating a Christian self. Therefore, the church was deeply interested in teaching Christians how to pray rightly with the body.

We pray with the body, but we are also the praying bodies. The body at prayer does not idly and passively receive what the mind offers. Rather, bodily actions in prayer form characters, deepen knowledge, enhance the heart, clarify identity, and make spiritual authority recognizable. Despite the dualistic tendency of classical anthropology under Platonism, the patristic and medieval traditions took the bodily dimension of prayer seriously as a theological issue, a crucial link between senses, heart, and knowledge.

Ritual is fundamentally an embodied practice. The postures and gestures of a ritual are not accidental or secondary. The controlled physical demeanors constitute one’s mental or spiritual attitude. In other words, the physical postures that worshippers adopt in liturgy not only reflect but also foster one’s mental or spiritual dispositions. These embodied dispositions become a formative force that permeates and transforms the intellectual, spiritual, and socio-political dimensions of the lives of practitioners. Actions and sensory experiences in prayer might not automatically produce a moral and theological agent, but they make a significant contribution to the development of one’s theological understanding and character. To gain practical knowledge, one should participate in the practice; taking a spectator’s stance is not sufficient. The dormant
power of *habitus* is wielded only through the agents’ participation in practices that construct the social world in which the *habitus* finds its adequate forms. In this way, the bodily practices play the epistemological and ethical functions (gaining of theological knowledge and nurturing right dispositions). Prayer-s who are habituated in the prayer of the church can tap the reservoir of theological wisdom accessible to experienced bodies.
3. Prayer and the Hearts of Disciples

Calling of the disciples is a prayer event [Gebetsereignis]; it is as if they were begotten in prayer, in intimacy with the Father. (Benedict XVI, Jesus of Nazareth)

Wonder is the feeling of a philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder. (Plato, Theaetetus, 155)

That prayer has great power which a person makes with all his might. It makes a bitter heart sweet / A sad heart happy / A poor heart rich / A foolish heart wise / A faltering heart bold / A weak heart strong / A blind heart seeing / A cold soul burning. It draws great God down into a small heart. (Mechthild of Magdeburg, The Flowing Light of the Godhead)

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how important the embodiment of prayer had been for both theological knowledge and spiritual growth in the ancient and medieval church. In this chapter, I focus on the strong connection between the bodily practices in prayer and the formation of emotions (or affections). The church has understood prayer

1 Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) viewed the whole Christ event as a Gebetsgeschehen (prayer-event) between the Father and the Son, and he argued that the invitation to Christian discipleship is an invitation to the unique relationship between the Father and the Son. Joseph Ratzinger, Principles of Catholic Theology (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987), 20.

2 “μάλα γὰρ φιλοσόφου τούτο τὸ πάθος, τὸ θαυμάζειν ὅγαρ ἄλλη ἀρχή φιλοσοφίας ἢ αὐτή” Similarly, Aristotle viewed “wonder” (θαυμάζειν) as the starting point of philosophy: “It is through wonder that men [sic] now begin and originally began to philosophize” (διὰ γάρ τὸ θαυμάζειν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ νῦν καὶ τὸ πρῶτον ἦρξαντο φιλοσοφεῖν). Aristotle, Metaphysics, 982b.

As we have seen in Chapter 1, Karl Barth also emphasized wonder as a crucial source of theological studies.


4 Robert Solomon criticized the problematic dichotomy between emotion and reason in Western modern society. He rightly called for a more holistic view of emotion, intellect, and judgment. However, in his proposal for an integrated model of feeling and judgment, he failed to recognize how close his own view was to the premodern philosophical and theological discourses on “affections” which included cognitive and ethical dimensions. Thomas Dixon successfully demonstrated how the term, “emotion,” was invented in modern psychology as a secular alternative of the traditional category of “affection.” In this chapter I use the term, “emotion,” because it is the term most commonly used in the contemporary discourses, but my usage of this term is close to the traditional notion of affections. See Thomas Dixon, From Passion to Emotions: the Creation of a Secular Psychological Category (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)
as a means of grace that not only expresses but also fosters emotions. Shaping the proper
dispositions or habits of the heart in prayer is an essential part of making faithful
disciples of Christ.

In the traditional teachings of the church, the practice of prayer plays a central
role in the restoration of the divine image in human beings. For example, the Roman
Catholic Church asserts that “prayer restores [people] to God’s likeness and enables
[them] to share in the power of God’s love that saves the multitude.” Such
transformation is made possible in the “the life of prayer,” which is defined as “the habit
of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him.”

At the center of the restoration of the divine image is the transformation of the
heart, and at the center of the transformation of the heart is love, the most desirable
theological virtue. Love is the primary reason to pray. Because of the love of God, pray-
ers seek to commune with God. Because of the love of their neighbors, pray-ers pour out
their hearts in intercession and supplication.

---

5 The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), ¶2572. The CCC is one of the rich and accessible
theological resources that delineate prayer’s functions in the formation of disciples (especially the
formation of their hearts).

6 CCC, ¶2565.

7 John Wesley, who defined prayer as “the lifting up of the heart to God” succinctly stated, “We
pray, because we love.” See, John Wesley, Sermon 26, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount VI” in
Abingdon, 1976-), 575-79.

In his sermon, “The New Birth,” Wesley described this communion with God as breathing. God
continually breathes upon the soul, and the soul breathes back to God. This is a vertical movement, in
which “Grace is descending into [the] heart, and prayer and praise ascending to heaven.” Wesley
continued, “by this intercourse between God and man, this fellowship with the Father and the Son, as by a
kind of spiritual respiration, the life of God in the soul is sustained: and the child grows up, till he comes to
Prayer should begin with love, but at the same time, the practice of prayer in the presence of the Holy Spirit can fill the apathetic heart with love. Both personal and communal prayers—practiced in the prudent guidance of faithful communities, diachronic and synchronic—can reshape the heart of a pray-er in love.\(^8\) Even when love does not prevail in the heart as the driving force of prayer, a pray-er expects that the language and performance of liturgy will direct her heart toward the deeper love of God and of neighbors in the Spirit. Participating in the liturgical prayers of the church, she embodies her tradition of faith through words, gestures, sounds, and even smells. Her holistic immersion in the liturgical experience evokes appropriate emotions, which, with continuous practices, will gradually become the lasting disposition of her heart. When her desires are remolded in the Holy Spirit, love governs both her prayer and her whole life.\(^9\) The transformation of the heart in prayer eventually leads to the change of identity because it is what one loves, even more than what one knows or thinks, that determines who one really is and how one lives.\(^10\)

---

\(^8\) *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which identifies love as the source of prayer, describes how such love can be fostered through prayer in the liturgical life: “Prayer formed by the liturgical life, draws everything into the love by which we are loved in Christ and which enables us to respond to him by loving as he has loved us. Love is the source of prayer.” (*CCC*, ¶2658)

\(^9\) “Prayer and *Christian life are inseparable*, for they concern the same love and the same renunciation, proceeding from love; the same filial and loving conformity with the Father’s plan of love; the same transforming union in the Holy Spirit who conforms us more and more to Christ Jesus; the same love for all [people], the love with which Jesus has loved us.” (*CCC*, ¶2745).

\(^10\) This is an Augustinian view of the self. One’s desires shapes one’s identity. I am what I love more than what I think: “such is each one as is his love (*quia talis est quisque, qualis eius diletio est*)” Augustine, *In Epistolam Ioannis ad Parthos Tractatus Decem* 2.14.
3.1 Heart, Habits, and Practice

The performative use of the words of prayers reshapes the disposition of the heart. Reading and reciting of liturgical prayers—activities considered a faithful gateway to contemplation—nourish, inspire, and transform one’s heart. Moreover, the traditions of Christian prayer reflect the stories of praying people who cherished the divine economy of grace but had to wrestle with the discrepancy between the promised end and the painful reality of human life. People come to God not only in fear, doubt, disappointment, or shame, but also in hope that their broken hearts will be renewed—whether dramatically or gradually—in their encounters with God. Therefore, the traditions of prayer are not merely an intellectual history but a history of faith unfolding through people’s cries and laughter, pain and joy, and despair and desire.

Before Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practice gained traction, Emile Durkheim (and Marcel Mauss, his nephew, as we have seen in the previous chapter) highlighted the concept of *habitus* in his view on education. Durkheim claimed that the end of education should not be merely to raise consciousness or give more information but to transform habits, which are “the real forces which govern” people. Habits are the internalized “rules of conduct”, which become one’s acquired second nature through repeated

---

11 “Seek in reading and you will find in meditation. Knock in prayer and it will be opened to you in contemplation (*Quaerite legendo, et invenietis meditando. Pulsate orando, et aperietur vobis contemplando*).” Guigo the Carthusian, *Scala Paradisi*, PL 40.998.

12 “It is not enough to direct our attention to the superficial portion of our consciousness; for the sentiments, the ideas which come to the surface are not, by far, those which have the most influence on our conduct. What must be reached are the habits...; these are the real forces which govern us.” Emile Durkheim, *Education and Sociology*, trans. Sherwood Fox (New York: Free Press, 1956), 152.
practices. In Durkheim’s view, although not all elements of moral actions require habits, a successful moral education entails an acquisition of proper habits. The habits themselves would not be sufficient to produce a virtuous self that would successfully embody moral principles, but the formation of one’s moral character is heavily dependent on the fundamental habits, such as self-control, which are often established in early childhood education. Durkheim argued that educators in the early church noticed that there were profound underlying conditions of the mind that would determine a person’s moral perspective and disposition. The Roman educators of late antiquity were interested in transmitting a set of specific skills that students would need in order to work successfully in their society. But Christian educators believed that an amalgam of separate pieces of knowledge would not constitute a coherent moral character. They were less concerned about imparting ideas than cultivating “the general disposition of the mind and the will which make [their students] see things in general in a particular light.”

Durkheim’s view on education of the mind resonates with the traditional teachings on Christian prayer. Achieving the purity of the heart, which runs deeper than the level of consciousness, is the holy grail of ascetic ritual practices. One becomes a Christian not merely through a verbal confession but also through ritual actions in which the body becomes a locus of spiritual transformation. By transforming the heart and creating a new identity, ritual actions function as a material and spiritual means of

---

13 “There are certain ways of reacting upon one another which, being more in accordance with the nature of things, are repeated more often and become habits. Then the habits, as they grow in strength, are transformed into rules of conduct.” Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 2014), 286.

forming a new moral self.\textsuperscript{15} The bodily practices of rituals strive to train the heart to
develop spiritual and moral virtues, and the ritual actions in liturgy serves as a crucial
pedagogical instrument for the acquisition of Christian virtues. Especially in monastic
communities, the liturgical actions of prayer—along with other mundane actions, such as
walking, eating, and sleeping—discipline the body, aiming at fostering proper moral
disposition.\textsuperscript{16}

Bourdieu contended that this process of bodily habituation entails “affective
transactions with the environment”; the body’s interaction with the world may be “more
or less dramatic but is always largely marked by affectivity.”\textsuperscript{17} Thus, his theory of
practice pays close attention to the power of emotion in the works of \textit{habitus}. Bourdieu
argued that “we are disposed because we are exposed.”\textsuperscript{18} Being in the world means
having constant interactions with the surrounding world for survival. The vulnerable
body faces dangers in the world, not only physical but also emotional threats, and in
order to survive and even succeed in this world, the body needs to acquire dispositions,
so that it would effectively negotiate with the social structures of the world where it is
located. Emotion plays a crucial role in this process of habituation because there is

\textsuperscript{15} Margaret Miles highlighted the significance of the bodily practices in the creation of the new
Christian self: “The key to a victory of Christianity in the life of the person is the physical practices—
fasting, sexual abstinence, vigils, prayers, and exorcisms—that effectively deconstruct the person’s
physical and social habits and make possible the reconstruction of a new orientation. Just as the unbaptized
were seen as the property of the devil, bearing evil in their bodies, so the baptized became, body and soul,
flesh of Christ’s flesh and bone of his bone.” Margaret Miles, \textit{Carnal Knowing} (Boston: Beacon, 1989), 40.

\textsuperscript{16} Asad argued that the body in the monastic community is “an assemblage of embodied aptitudes,
not . . . a medium of symbolic meanings.” Talal Asad, \textit{Genealogies of Religion} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins
University Press, 1993), 75.

\textsuperscript{17} Bourdieu, \textit{Pascalian Meditation}, 141.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 140.
nothing “more serious than emotion, which touches the depths of our organic being.”\textsuperscript{19}

Therefore, one must not underestimate the power of the constant and persistent pressure of the ordinary (seemingly mundane) practices on the self. At the deepest level of the heart, the bodily practices that cause emotional realignments function as a powerful means of socialization, more than intellectual discourses alone can do. The continuous accretion of emotional experiences eventually turns into a stable disposition of the heart.

Bourdieu emphasized the importance of “bodily emotion” in the formation of the moral self.\textsuperscript{20} The self would never completely understand the logic and goal of its own practices. The hidden dimensions of practices might remain invisible to the agents themselves, but the ritual actions can still produce agents who develop the “practical sense” which allows them to act as they should “without positing or executing a Kantian ‘should’, a rule of conduct.”\textsuperscript{21} The practices leave lasting impressions on the body, which become one’s enduring dispositions, emotional character, and ultimately a way of living. These emotional dispositions are not inert passive powers which are triggered only by outer stimuli; they are the basic structures of moral character, the rudiments that build up one’s stable moral dispositions. They are so fundamental to human nature that these traits usually remain unnoticed, not only by others but even by the agents themselves, until they appear in action. Even when they become visible through actions, they rarely draw much attention because they look self-evident, natural, or necessary in their own

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 141.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 169.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 139.
contexts. But in an extraordinary circumstance, one’s exceptional dispositions and emotional maturity stand out, revealing one’s true character.

Emotions do not simply happen to us. They are not a series of random fire or an unpredictable fluctuation of feelings. Rather, emotions are organized traits of human character. They can be directed and shaped by reigning ideas, deep desires, and overarching narratives. An emotional aptitude is not a blind and passive biological reaction; it is always in the process of interpretation. The overreaching Cartesian rationalism excluded emotion from the search for the truth. But emotions are not the opposite of reason. Emotion, thought, and bodily action constantly interact with one another. Emotions are deeply connected to how one interprets the world; value judgments are inherently involved in emotional responses. Emotions reveal what the

---


23 Human desires and tastes are highly conditioned by their socio-political settings. There is no universal taste or universal standard of beauty with which all cultures should comply. The dispositions of the heart are the products of cultural and social acclimation. Bourdieu criticized Kantian aesthetic universalism for its failure to take social circumstances of people’s aesthetic tastes into consideration. So-called “pure” judgment does not belong to all people across cultural and social boundaries. A particular disposition toward a “pure pleasure” reflects a taste of a particular social group, the elites of the modern Western society. Bourdieu argued that Kant failed to notice the unique privileged social condition behind “the pure pleasure that must be able to be felt by every man.” Bourdieu, Pascalian Meditations, 73.

24 There are rich scientific evidences that emotions are not simply given but cultivated through bodily practices. Antonio Damasio offered a physiological explanation of empathy by the scientific discovery of mirror neurons. Feeling empathy is literally a result of mapping of the body because the body becomes hardwired by mirror neurons to have ability to feel and share emotions of others. However, it is not a linear but a circular process because the brain mapped by the bodily emotional activity becomes more prone to have thoughts that would evoke the particular emotions, and these emotions arising in this mapped brain subsequently remap the brain. Damasio called this mutual, endless interaction between mind and body a “continuous interactive dance” between brain and body. Antonio Damasio, Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain, 102.

25 Roberts’s proposal for the definition of emotions is helpful: “emotions are concern-based construals.” This idea goes back to Aristotle’s view that passions have a cognitive dimension. Roberts, Spiritual Emotions, 11.

heart really values because the heart rarely shows strong emotional responses to the issues it finds unimportant or irrelevant. Human beings are not slaves or victims of emotions but rather active partakers in them, even though they will never have full control over them.26

The ancient Greeks did not consider emotions incompatible with the democratic ideals of rational debates. Emotions functioned as a crucial means for moral actions in the Greek philosophical and political traditions. Especially, the cultivation of empathy and imagination was their key political interest. Logical arguments were necessary but not sufficient conditions of their political discussion. When moral decisions were to be made, in order to determine the fate of other human beings, they needed to understand the reality the others would undergo, and such understanding was inconceivable without imagination and empathy. Tragic and comic dramas at festivals in the ancient society were crucial opportunities to foster collective theatrical imagination. Dramas could enrich and expand one’s imagination of the fate of others who were located in different socio-political, cultural circumstances. Greek tragedies provided an emotional perspective on the difficulty of dealing with moral dilemmas. They presented the sufferings of others in

26 The Kantian approach to emotions and reasons focuses on controlling and constraining irrational emotions so that they would not to interfere with the logical functions of reason and will. Kant was concerned that emotions might mar the purity of reason and the freedom of will, the two pillars of human autonomy. Although the Kantian view does not deny the benefit of having appropriate emotions, such as empathy, in the execution of moral ideals, emotions play only secondary roles in moral decisions. However, the Aristotelian approach to emotions and virtues focuses on directing passions toward virtues, rather than suppressing them. Passions contribute to one’s moral character. Excessive fear makes one a coward; the lack of fear results in a reckless person; a proper amount of fear can make one a cautious person, at the same time allowing him or her to pluck up courage. The Aristotelian view is less concerned about evaluating the inherent value of a particular passion; it is more interested in cultivating virtues by channeling the power of passions toward the generation of virtuous actions. Passions—working not against, but along with reason and will—orient a person to the pursuit of excellence in virtue. Therefore, affections have a unique function in moral judgment and action, which intellectual training cannot replace.
a more perceptible way, so that people could have a better understanding of the pain and sufferings of others.

Aristotle’s theory of rhetoric paid close attention to how an orator’s emotional state can draw an emotional response—whether favorable or hostile—from an audience. A proper use of emotions is essential in an orator’s attempt to present his own mindset and set a right tone for discernment and judgment. Because the ultimate goal of rhetoric is not merely to give information but to persuade the audience, the orator should carefully review not only the logic of his arguments but also a manner of presentation of his own character. In order to gain trust of the audience, the orator needs to develop three important elements: “good sense, good moral character, and goodwill.” The successful orator knows what emotions are, who are prone to have them, and how to arouse them. In other words, the orator is a master of emotions, both of his own and of others’. The emotional status of the orator should appear right to the audience because having right feelings is a significant part of the audience’s decision-making process. This classical rhetorical theory had a great influence on later Christian understanding of a pray-er as an orator in two ways. First, the pray-er should know how to express himself or herself genuinely in front of the divine judge, so rhetorical skills were taught for a proper use of emotional expressions. Secondly, the emotional training of a pray-er as an orator was emphasized in the formation of Christian character.

A classic theological problem of human behavior is that people know what they should do but fail to do it (Rom. 7:15-25). Enabling people to do what they consider right

---

27 In Aristotle’s historical context, of course, an orator was a man.

is a holy grail of theological education. Therefore, the goal of theological education is not merely to increase theological knowledge but to integrate it with Christian life by forming an emotionally mature, moral agent. Preachers do not stop at giving right instructions but, using rhetorical and practical skills, deliver their messages in a way that will change people’s heart and ultimately their actions. Christians need the transformation of affections, which go beyond the intellectual level of understanding, and the Spirit of God should form the right disposition of heart in the means of grace. For Augustine, who recognized the power of affections—such as delight, pleasure, and amazement—as a critical element in the connection between belief and action, prayer is an essential spiritual means that moves the heart upward (sursum cor), towards the things above (Col. 3:2).

Such emphasis on the integration between knowing and feeling is found in classical ethical teachings, such as Aristotle who advocated wisdom (phronesis), which combines correct reasoning (or perception) with correct desire, and also in Pauline epistemology, which made a distinction between right and wrong ways of knowing.

---

29 Augustine adopted Cicero’s rhetorical theory: “Teaching your audience is a matter of necessity, delighting them a matter of being agreeable, swaying them a matter of victory.” The content of teaching is found in what is said, but the last two things (delighting and swaying) depend on how the speech is delivered. Augustine, Teaching Christianity (De Doctrina Christiana), trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2007), 215.

30 The Latin phrase, “sursum corda”, (literally, “upward hearts”; commonly translated as “lift up your heart”) is the opening statement of the traditional eucharistic prayer.

31 Aristotle wrote, “[S]ince excellence of character is a disposition issuing in decisions, and decision is a desire informed by deliberation, in consequence both what issues from reason must be true and the desire must be correct for decision to be a good one, and reason must assert and desire pursue the same things.” The truth in practical wisdom, which is distinguished from theoretical thought in Aristotelian epistemology, corresponds to right desire. Desire leads decision, which consequently leads to action. One’s character as dispositions of desires, therefore, plays an important role in wisdom. Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, VI. 2, 1139a22-1139b4
drawing attention to the close relationship between emotion, knowledge, and wisdom.\textsuperscript{32} Even though sharing the same information, people may have different kinds of knowledge; some have knowledge in the proper sense, and some in an improper sense.\textsuperscript{33} Proper knowledge requires proper emotional conditions. By acquiring more information, one’s understanding might increase to a certain degree, but proper knowledge should be accompanied by appropriate affections.\textsuperscript{34} Wisdom is more than having catechetical knowledge. A wise person not only knows what is the right thing to do but also has proper desires and concerns for doing it. In other words, a theologically mature person is equipped with right desires to act upon right knowledge. One’s proper disposition is formed through integration between theological propositions, desires to achieve the goals stated in the catechetical knowledge, and emotional maturity to sustain one’s momentum towards the goals.

\textsuperscript{32} For example, in Ephesians 1:17-18 (NRSV), Paul wrote, “I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints.” In these words on prayer, Paul combined the major themes of this chapter: prayer, wisdom, revelation, knowledge, eyes, and heart. Similarly, by praying that “love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment” (Phil. 1:9, RSV), Paul’s prayer connects heart, knowledge, and insight.

\textsuperscript{33} In his discussion of the issue of meat sacrificial to idols, Paul criticized a Corinthian slogan, “we all possess knowledge” because this knowledge “puffs up” without love. He added, “If any one imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know”, suggesting that there is the right way of knowing (1 Cor. 8:2, RSV).

\textsuperscript{34} There is an affective dimension of knowledge. Pascal added, “The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing: we know this in countless way” (\textit{Pensées}, 423). These well-known words of Pascal do not promote, as often misunderstood, sentimentality as a polar opposite of reason. Pascal did not argue for dichotomy between the heart and reason, lifting up the heart over reason. Rather, he recognized the heart’s own reasons although the “reasons” in this context may be different from “reason” in modern philosophy. Knowing through the heart is different from knowing through reason alone. How one gets to know someone or something in affective relationship is different from how one gets to know an object through analysis.
The practice of prayer seeks to foster bodily emotions that truly correspond with catechetical knowledge. Talal Asad argued that the bodily disciplines of monastic practices “aimed to construct and reorganize distinctive emotions . . . on which the central Christian virtue of obedience to God depended.” The reformation (re-formation) of desires is a prominent theme in the practice of prayer. For example, Teresa of Avila advised not to restrain but to pour out desires in prayer with the confidence in God who will make pray-ers holy by gradually transforming their desires. The bodily disciplines in spiritual transformation seek to produce a moral self whose whole being—both mind in the body—is transformed to embody the moral principles inherent in their practices.

The formation of the heart is not an individualistic process. Ritual practices unite people at an emotional level. Performative cooperation enhances a sense of community. The rituals strengthen solidarity among participants: not only between performers and observers, but also between performers and between observers. A ritual both fosters and controls emotions of the community. If emotions are too weak to engage in a rite properly at an affective level, the ritual actions incite them through sensory experience, using images, sounds, smells, and rhythms. If overpowering emotions threaten to thwart the communal movement of the rite, the same ritual actions can channel the emotions through the structured layers of narratives and symbols in the rite. Ritual practices integrate private and communal emotions, creating a sacred space where participants can release their emotions without fear or shame, and a tactical communal strategy for

35 Asad, 134.

36 “Have great confidence, for it is necessary not to hold back one’s desires, but to believe in God that if we try we shall little by little, even though it may not be soon, reach the state the saints did with His help.” Teresa of Avila, The Book of Her Life, 13.2.
catharsis, in which various expressions of grief and joy, and despair and hope can cooperate under the guidance of the community.

3.2 Prayer and the Heart

The Bible makes a strong emphasis on the sincere heart in prayer. It urges a believer to pour out the heart in prayer, opening up her innermost self, and earnestly and honestly confiding in God all of her concerns without disguising or suppressing her emotions. Teachings on prayer also stress that the action of prayer should agree with the heart. Although the heart should be at the center of attention, biblical prayers do not ignore the body as an extraneous matter. For example, the desperate heart seeking God’s grace is accompanied with the gesture of stretching hands out and the action of mourning. Prophetic voices criticized mindless ritual actions of prayer; it is better to rend one’s heart than clothes (Joel 2:13). But it is even better to rend one’s heart and clothes. Criticism of the overreliance on the efficacy of ritual actions does not categorically deny the benefits of rituals.

Gregory of Nyssa was one of the preeminent church fathers who highlighted the close correlation between prayer, heart, and moral actions. According to Gregory, knowing about virtues and vices is not sufficient for living a virtuous life; one needs to

---

37 Greenberg argues that “the requirement of sincerity in prayer derives from its social nature as a transaction between persons. One affects another person not so much by a form of words as by the spirit that is perceived to animate them.” Greenberg, Biblical Prose Prayer, 50.

38 In Job 11:13, Zophar says: “if you have directed your heart . . . then outspread your hands to him [in prayer].” The King Solomon prayed in 1 King 8:38: “whatever prayer, whatever plea there is from any individual or from all your people Israel, all knowing the afflictions of their own hearts so that they stretch out their hands toward this house.”
develop desires for virtues and hatred of vices. Prayer deepens one’s relationship with God and transforms one’s heart to desire virtues and eschew vices. Gregory called prayer a “leader of a chorus of the virtues.” Speaking of mutual reinforcement among various virtues, Gregory emphasized prayer’s leading role. In prayer, one seeks other virtues from God “through a mystical holiness, and a spiritual energy and an inexpressible disposition.” The Holy Spirit guides a pray-er’s heart towards a love of the Lord, and one’s praying soul is kindled with desire of the good. Prayer unites one with God, and being in union with God means being separated from evil. When the heart in prayer stays in union with God, and therefore is filled with the thought of God, sinful desires no longer can govern a pray-er’s mind. The transformed heart enables her to make right judgments and act justly according to God’s decrees. In this way, Gregory argued, prayer “prevents [one] from committing sin.” Because of the inner changes of a pray-er, the soul is no longer dragged down by a wrong passion, an uncontrolled evil desire.

39 “Therefore we must learn first of all that we ought always to pray and not to faint. For the effect of prayer is union with God, and if someone is with God, he is separated from the enemy. Through prayer we guard our chastity, control our temper, and rid ourselves of vanity; it makes us forget injuries, overcomes envy, defeats injustice, and makes amends for sin.” Gregory of Nyssa, The Lord’s Prayer, The Beatitudes (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1954), 24.

Clement of Alexandria argued that “in prayer the character is sifted.” A pray-er prays that “he may never fall from virtue; giving his most strenuous co-operation in order that he may become infallible.” Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, 7.7.


41 Ibid, 152.

42 “If work is preceded by prayer, sin will find no entrance into the soul. For when the consciousness of God is firmly established in the heart, the devices of the devil remain sterile, and matters of dispute will always be settled according to justice. Prayer prevents the framer from committing sin, for his fruit will multiply even on a small plot of land, so that sin no longer enters together with the desire for more. . . . Whatever anyone may set out to do, if it is done with prayer the undertaking will prosper and he will be kept from sin, because there is nothing to oppose him and drag the soul into passion.” Gregory of Nyssa, The Lord’s Prayer, The Beatitudes., 23.
Therefore, whatever actions the faithful take in the spirit of prayer, Gregory thought, they would not succumb to temptation. Pray-ers who trust that God will take care of their basic needs will not be swayed by greed. Radical renovation of the heart and a correlated radical transformation of life occur to those who are united with God in prayer.

Similarly, Origen underscored prayer’s power to foster virtues. When speaking to God as an act of presenting a whole self in the presence of God, a pray-er “adorns” herself “through [her] very disposition for prayer.” When this act of devotion is repeatedly practiced, this disposition for prayer becomes the praying person’s lasting character. He argued that “those who have given themselves over to prayer with great constancy know by experience how many sins it prevents and how many virtuous actions it brings about.”\footnote{Origen, \textit{On Prayer}, 8.2.} For Origen, prayer and virtuous life have mutual influence on each other. A prayerful meditation on Christ is impossible without being grounded in a virtuous life, but at the same time, virtues take roots in the life through transformation of the heart occurring in the meditation on Christ. When a pray-er meditates on the image of God revealed in Christ and in saints, a virtuous character is developed in her. Origen argued the mutual influence will eventually lead to integration of the two, and when such integration happens a pray-er’s whole life becomes an unceasing prayer. He wrote, “Since works of virtue and the keeping of the commandments have a part in prayer, the person who prays ‘ceaselessly’ is the one who integrates prayer with good works and
noble actions with prayer." Praying without ceasing becomes possible when “the whole life of the saint” becomes “one mighty, integrated prayer.”

Augustine described the relationship between God and human beings with the language of the heart. Recalling that from the beginning of his journey in faith, God’s hands gradually warmed up his heart, he prayed, “You pierced my heart with the arrow of your love, and we carried your words transfixing my innermost being.” For Augustine, it is the heart where the sensory perceptions of grace converge. Sensory experience evokes emotional responses in the pray-ers, which can lead to a more intimate relationship with God. He described the vivid sensory experience in worship: “How I wept during your hymns and songs! I was deeply moved by the music of the sweet chants

---

44 Ibid., 12.2.

45 Ibid.

It has been debated, especially in monastic communities, how to fulfill Paul’s instruction of praying without ceasing. From literal interpretation to figurative interpretation, devout Christians attempted to keep the seemingly impossible commandment of Paul faithfully. One of the common figurative interpretation is to view a life in the spirit of prayer as a whole as unceasing prayer. Recently, Nicolas Wolterstorff identified “a rhythmic alternation of work and worship, labor and liturgy” as “one of the significant distinguishing feature of the Christian’s way of being-in-the-world.” Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 147. A popular Benedictine motto, *ora et labora* (which is often incorrectly attributed to St. Benedict himself) is a well-known example of such attempt. In the contemporary popular usage of this idea, however, it is often misused as an excuse for the lack of praying time. The life as prayer is not seen as an extension of a solid habit of prayer; rather people claim that they do not need to assign time for prayer because their whole life is already prayer. But the life as prayer is possible only as expansion of the rhythm of habitual prayer, not replacement of it. The Roman Catholic Church warns that it is impossible to pray “at all times” without praying “at specific times, consciously willing it” (CCC, ¶2697). John Calvin, commenting on Daniel’s habit of prayer, stated the importance of the routine of prayer: “Unless we fix certain hours in the day for prayer, it easily slips from our memory” (Calvin, *Commentary on Daniel*, 6:10).

46 “Then little by little, Lord, with a most gentle and merciful hand you touched and calmed my heart.” Augustine, *Confessions*, 6.5.7.

47 “sagittaveras tu cor nostrum caritate tua et gestabamus verba tua transfixa visceribus.” Augustine, *Confessions*, 9.2.3. Cf. In iconography, a heart pierced by an arrow represents Augustine and his traditions.

48 “In the flesh, you hear in one place, see in another. . . . [I]n your heart, where you see, there you hear.” Augustine, *Commentary on John*, 18.10.
of your Church. The sounds flowed into my ears and the truth was distilled into my heart. This caused the feelings of devotion to overflow. Tears ran, and it was good for me to have that experience.”  

The Confessions is a long prayer of the yearning heart. By addressing God as the second person, Augustine tells a story about his heartfelt interaction with the God who has persistently wooed him. This prayer is a story of his heart being seduced, astonished, and mesmerized by the unfathomable grace of God. Such affective performative action of prayer brings his heart closer to not only its maker but also his own innermost self.

Therefore, it is little wonder the heart is at the center of Augustine’s understanding of prayer: “the cry which attains to God is not a cry of the voice but a cry of the heart.” Augustine, who was interested in the tempest of desires in the heart, noticed the crucial link between prayer and desires. Paraphrasing “praying without ceasing” as “having desire without intermission”, Augustine argued that incessant prayer is to have a constant desire for God, the only source of eternal happiness. Prayer has to be a “fervent attention of the soul” to God, and spending significant time in prayer is necessary to maintain such attention. But praying without ceasing is different from a

---


50 Augustine, Ennarationes in Psalmos, III. 23: CCL 38.220.

51 Similarly, Clement of Alexandria saw desires as the principal motives of prayer: “The objects . . . of desires and aspirations, and in a word, of the mind’s impulses, are the subjects of prayers. The subjects of our prayers, then, are the subjects of our requests, and the subjects of requests are the objects of desires.” Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, 7.7.

52 Augustine, Letter 130, 9.18.

53 Ibid., 10.20. Cf. Although Augustine advocated the prayer of desires, he affirmed the need of praying verbally “at certain stated hours and seasons.” Although the strength of prayer lies not in words but in desire, the action of verbal prayer is beneficial to the soul; it exhorts, enlightens, and strengthens a self. Ibid., 9.18.
babbling lengthy talk, which Christ denounced; a prolonged prayer should mean to “have the heart throbbing with continued pious emotion towards [God] to whom we pray.”

Even though God already knows what pray-ers need, Augustine insisted that they should pour out all the desires, both good and evil, honestly, because in prayer their desires will be remolded and trained, so the praying hearts become ready to receive what God wills to give them. God answers the humble prayer by purifying, transforming, and expanding the heart. God prepares great gifts that are too big for a small heart to receive; by “the simplicity of [its] faith, the firmness of [its] hope, and the ardour of [its] desire”, an expanded and stretched self will be better prepared to receive the splendid divine gifts.

John Cassian also emphasized the unique “mutual and undivided link” between bodily discipline and contrition of heart, between virtues and prayer. Virtues lift up the heart to “perfect prayer”, but no virtue can last if it is not supported by the “crown of prayer.” In other words, one cannot have either one without the other. The “endless, unstirring calm of prayer” can “neither be achieved nor consummated without these virtues”; on the other hand, the virtues as “the prerequisite foundation of prayer” cannot be “effected without prayer.” Virtue and prayer can gradually ascend together by continuous practices in the Spirit.

---

54 Ibid., 10.20.

55 Ibid.

56 Cassian wrote, “For just as the edifice of all the virtues strives upward toward perfect prayer so will all these virtues be neither sturdy nor enduring unless they are drawn firmly together by the crown of prayer.” John Cassian, Conferences, 9.2.

57 Ibid.
Medieval teachings on prayer inherited these biblical and patristic views on the formation of the heart in prayer. Like Augustine, in De virtute orandi, Hugh of St. Victor emphasized the ineffable desire and affection for God as true prayer. Thinking that “all power of prayer lies in the affection of piety (in affectibus pietatis est omnis virtus orandi),” Hugh listed different kinds of affections that arise in prayers, such as flame of love, admiration, joy, humility, and sadness.\(^58\) The action of verbal prayer is an attempt to express the hidden inner affections: “Let us show by words that we have inside the affection of devotion toward God (Ostendamus foris verbis habere nos intus erga Deum affectum devotionis).”\(^59\) But in his methodical categorization of prayer, he also drew attention to the pedagogical function of the outward expression for development of inward affection for God. Liturgical texts and actions deepen theological knowledge, and then the knowledge soundly grounded on this liturgical foundation intensifies desires for God. Hugh saw a deep connection between the external words of prayer and the heart, although the contemplative desire for God transcends the linguistic realm.

William of Auvergne’s Rhetorica Divina is a great example of medieval rhetorical practice that promotes heartfelt prayer through sensory experience. William’s teachings on prayer are full of sensory metaphors. He described prayer as “an ointment that mitigates all the sorrows of the heart, that heals all its diseases and wounds, that drenches and gladdens it with a marvelous and incredible sweetness, and that is scented and breathes with a fragrance and a most ample grace of sweetness even beyond all


\(^{59}\) Ibid., 150.
William used the vivid image of a tomb as a metaphor for the “depth of vices”; like Mary Magdalene standing at Jesus’ tomb, a penitent sinner should stand weeping at the imaginary tomb in prayer and conscientiously look at it “with the eyes of his heart.” As “having died from his heart”, the sinner “mourns there for himself [sic] as someone dead and for Christ the Lord.”

The olfactory imagery is prominent in Williams’s theology on prayer. He pointed out a strong correlation between heart, prayer, and moral life using the metaphor of scent. The “smoke of incense” goes up towards heaven arising from prayer as the “powder of the perfumer”, and the scents get richer by the mixture of the “four spices” of the four cardinal virtues. Prayer is a process of grinding these spices, which examines the heart to “grind and break” anything displeasing to God in it. The heart itself might not to be ground “in its essence”, but it can be refined by grinding the impurity of “erroneous intellect and perverse will”. The works of mercy are essential for prayer because God hear the “voices of good works and also of evil ones” loud and strong.

People might say the same words of prayer, but true prayer requires the transformed heart that finds joy and peace only in the presence of God. William regarded delight in God as “a powerful means of assistance to prayer.” God tastes bitter for the corrupt “palate of the heart” ruined by sin. Unless the healthy palate develops, the heart

---


61 Ibid., 38.375a.

62 Ibid., 42.385a.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid., 39.379a.
cannot savor God, the eternal “fountain of sweetness.” Restoring the health of the palate from the “fever of iniquity” is not possible by the “work of human power and effort.” It is given to us as the most “supereminent gift of the omnipotent power” of God.\(^{65}\) It is given not through an individualistic private esoteric experience that is separated from synchronic and diachronic communities but rather through the church, which teaches individuals how to pray.\(^{66}\)

Thus, praying well is not a natural thing. The weight of the labor of prayer is not easy to carry. William lamented that believers often struggle to pray the Lord’s Prayer once per week or at least a portion of it daily. He even heard of a priest who barely managed to finish the whole seven petitions of the Lord’s Prayer in a week reciting one petition per day.\(^{67}\) William identified “heaviness of our bodies” (propter gravitatem corporum nostrorum) as the reason for human weakness in prayer. The gravity of corruption pulls down pray-ers. A beginner may be able to pray a short prayer only, but with the assistance of divine grace, a regimen of prayer uplifts both body and spirit so that the pray-er gradually becomes healthier and is enabled to have a deeper communion with God. Although their sinful souls lack virtues yet, God blesses those who are at prayer with right thoughts and affections.\(^{68}\) The Spirit of God must guide one’s prayer

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 37.374b; “you should keep watch with zeal and ask with all the efforts of your heart for the gift of prayer pleasing to God. For it is he alone who teaches to pray those he wants and gives so precious a gift of prayer.” Ibid., 39.376b.

\(^{66}\) “The Church herself, which is schooled and taught by heavenly or rather divine teachings, teaches us to pray in this way, that is to say, to send such a messenger or that sort of messenger to the heavenly court in order to solicit all those standing before God and each one of them on our behalf.” Ibid., 39.377a.

\(^{67}\) William criticized clerics who do not produce vocal sounds off prayer, but sleep through the Matins as if in a dormitory. He called them thieves and robbers of “the stipends of a prayerful office.” Ibid., 41.384b.

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 40.380b-381a.
because the evil desires rampage in the heart. Indeed, the true voice of prayer is desire (*vox orationis desiderium*); prayer without desire is mute; the feeble desire or a “mere wish” is “hoarseness in the voice of prayer”. 69 William describes a variety of bodily actions that can reveal and change the status of the heart. 70 Groaning, a sound of inner grief, is a sign of genuine compunction. Sighing is a “feeble breathing” (faint or diminished breathing) of the weary soul who cannot formulate words of prayer. Sobbing, striking of one’s own breast, is a profound sign of repentance.

Singing is another crucial means through which prayer engages the affections. William interpreted the lute that Isaiah urged to take up to sing songs (Isaiah 23:16) as a metaphor for the humble heart of a pray-er that sings with the strings of good affections and thoughts. The lyre of the heart has ten such strings, which represent ten kinds of affection. 71 Among the affections, it is humility that makes the music of prayer mellifluous; as the “concavity and depth” in musical instruments improve their sounds, humility can enrich the sound of the heart. 72 The strings of faith, unless broken or weak, produce music that is lifted up to God, without ceasing. When singing or listening to others sing, praying bodies are driven into spiritual motions of dances by the Holy Spirit, which shows the close connection between prayer, heart, and body.

69 Ibid., 39.380b.

70 The seven external sounds of penitents are “Groans, sighs, wailing, mourning, shouting (which is like wailing), and finally sobbing, and roaring.” Ibid., 40.382a.

71 Ibid., 40.381b.

72 Ibid., 40.381a.
It is important to remember that warming of the heart is not a prerequisite of coming to God in prayer. The action of prayer can precede a feeling of affections of the heart. The Holy Spirit is a furnace of spiritual ardor, and it is foolish to notice the “coldness of [one’s] own heart” but refuse to come near to the furnace until the heart is warmed up first. Such fools do not understand that by praying first, their hearts will “warm up, then become hot, and finally are ablaze.” The Holy Spirit is the source of the affection, healing, and grace that one can access by prayer. The sick heart finds healing in the Holy Spirit through the ointment of prayer. By prayer, a bucket of the thirsty heart draws water from the Spirit, the fountain of all grace.

3.3 Heart and Psalms

Christian prayer shapes emotions, desires, and characters. This formative aspect of prayer is most prominently seen in the church’s use of the Book of Psalms. The Psalter has been a backbone of Christian prayer both in public liturgy and private devotion. The Psalms are regularly read and sung in Christian worship; daily prayers in traditional prayer books (e.g. Liturgy of the Hours and the Book of Common Prayer) revolve around Psalter readings. Psalms have been deeply ingrained in personal private devotion (e.g. Alcun’s De Psalmorum Usu). The singular place of the Psalms in Christian prayer is

73 Ibid., 41.384a.

74 Ibid., 41.383b.

Cf. On the Orthodox side, Nicholas Cabasilas (14th century) argued that some liturgical actions have only figurative meanings without practical purposes, and they present the divine work of salvation in a perceptible way so that holy sentiments and affections can be inspired, preserved, renewed, and increased. Nicholas Cabasilas, A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1977), 28-30.
particularly important for our purpose because of the strong connection between emotions and prayer in the Psalter. The prayers in the Psalter are prayers of the heart.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer challenged a popular modern Protestant view that prayer should not be taught but naturally overflow from the heart.\(^75\) He warned that people might easily confuse the experience of feelings—“wishing, hoping, sighing, lamenting, rejoicing”—with praying. He argued that prayer should be more than pouring out the heart because praying hearts struggle with their own sinful desires.\(^76\) Developing occasional outbursts of emotions into a steady stream of genuine prayer is difficult because “every cry remains enclosed within one’s own self.”\(^77\) In order to have a true conversation with God in prayer, a human heart needs divine assistance, more specifically the help of Christ. Only in Jesus Christ, who not only taught us how to pray but also prays with us, can we truly pray a prayer that will be heard by God.\(^78\)

Bonhoeffer argued that Christians should learn how to pray by learning the language of prayer, the “clear and pure” language of God revealed in the Scriptures, especially in the Book of Psalms, which he called the “Prayerbook of the Bible” (*Das Gebetbuch der Bibel*).\(^79\) The Psalms do not merely offer a rhetorical tool to embellish the sinful requests of the shallow hearts. The profound words of God in these prayers purify,

\(^{75}\) Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together; Prayerbook of the Bible* (Minneapolis, Fortress, 2005), 155.

\(^{76}\) Ibid., 157.

\(^{77}\) Ibid., 155.

\(^{78}\) Like Barth, Bonhoeffer emphasized the Christological foundation of prayer. When one prays through Jesus’ mouth, one’s human word turns into the divine word, and in the prayer of Christ, the divine word becomes a human word. Ibid., 157.

\(^{79}\) The Christian prayers are based on God’s speech to human beings. Bonhoeffer explained, “In the language of the Father in heaven God’s children learn to speak with God.” Ibid., 156.
deepen, and transform hearts curved in on themselves. In addition to the benefits of moral and spiritual edification, Bonhoeffer noted the Christological dimension of praying the Psalms. He argued that the Book of Psalms is Christ’s own prayer. He meant not only that Christ on earth prayed with the Psalms, but more importantly, Christ himself spoke through David, a forerunner of Christ, in the Psalter.\(^8\) Therefore, when Christians pray the Psalms, Christ dwells in them too, praying for them on their side, “pour[ing] out the heart of all humanity before God.”\(^8\) Praying the Psalms, David and the whole Christian community are united with Christ. Christians pray “with, in, and through” Christ, participating in his own thanksgiving, joy, and lament expressed in the Psalms.\(^8\)

Similarly, Augustine argued that Christ speaks to his people through Psalms, and Christians “pray to Him, through Him, in Him; and we speak with Him, and He speaks with us; we speak in Him, He speaks in us the prayer of this Psalm.”\(^8\)

Athanasius in his letter to Marcellinus highlighted the singular impact the singing or reciting of Psalms has on the heart. The Psalter articulates all emotions of the soul with exceptional clarity; it “contains even the emotions of each soul, and it has the changes

\(^8\) “David prayed not only out of the personal raptures of his heart, but from the Christ dwelling in him. To be sure, the one who prays these psalms, David, remains himself; but Christ dwells in him and with him.” Ibid., 159.

More broadly, Bonhoeffer argued that every prayer in the scriptures is enclosed in the Lord’s Prayer. Such a Christological basis of prayer claim is deeply rooted in his Lutheran tradition. See Martin Luther, “Vorrede zur Neuburger Psalterausgabe von 1545”, Luthers Werke, WA, DB, 10. II, 155.

\(^8\) The Roman Catholic Church offers a similar Christological reading of the Psalms: “The Psalter is the book in which the Word of God becomes man’s prayer. . . . Christ will unite the two [God’s work and man’s response]. In him, the psalms continue to teach us how to pray.” (CCC, ¶2587)

\(^8\) Bonhoeffer, 164.

\(^8\) Augustine, Exposition on Psalm 86.
and rectifications of these delineated and regulated in itself.”

The “divine hymns” are “appointed” for the emotional transformation of pray-ers. Other books in the Bible mainly offers information (about laws, historical events, or prophesy), but the Psalms not only give instructions but also invite readers to feel and experience the emotions of the Psalmists as their own. Thus, pray-ers may sing and recite the Psalms “as if they were [their] own songs.” The words of the Psalms are like a “mirror” to those who sing them, so that the pray-ers can have a better understanding of their own emotions and experience the healing of their passion. The same Holy Spirit that moved the Psalmists to compose the songs refreshes, remolds, and reawakens the hearts of those who sing them.

Similarly, John Cassian argued that pray-ers experience the sentiments expressed in the Psalms as if they look into a mirror. The emotions of Psalmists resonate with the hearts of pray-ers who are “seized” by the same feelings in which the Psalms were written.

Hugh of Saint Victor discussed extensively the link between the Psalms and affections in his teaching on the power of prayer (de virtute orandi). He illustrated the Psalter’s great influence on the heart, highlighting examples of prayers in the Psalms that exudes powerful affections. Hugh explained that a Psalm does not always elevate a single dominant affection. Because the heart in prayer usually moves from one affection to another following the lead of the Spirit, those who pray with psalms encounter a variety

---


85 Ibid.

86 Ibid., 11.

87 Ibid., 12.

88 John Cassian, Conferences, 10.11.
of affections in the Psalter, even in a single Psalm.\textsuperscript{89} Indeed, the Book of the Psalms passionately expresses the whole gamut of emotion in prayers: joy, anger, agony, hope, peace, desire, and despair. John Calvin called the Psalms “an anatomy of all the parts of the soul” because every recognized emotion is represented there as “in a mirror.”\textsuperscript{90}

Therefore, praying the Psalms offers a unique opportunity to shed light on the hidden dimensions of the heart. By uncovering the layers of self-deception and self-denial, it can lead to a candid encounter with—or even a surprising discovery of—one’s own self. The inspiring examples of Psalmists, who called God in the midst of doubt, fear, shame, pain, or despair, keep drawing disheartened pray-ers back to the transformative grace of God working in their prayers. Calvin praised the Book of Psalms as an unparalleled resource for spiritual formation, in which the divine work for the people of God is “celebrated with such splendor of diction”; the Psalter not only offers a superb teaching on prayer but also powerfully inspires the “performance of this religious exercise”, articulating the innermost desires, affections, and thoughts.\textsuperscript{91}

The connection between knowledge, emotion, and practice in prayer is a prominent theme in Evagrius Ponticus’s understanding of spiritual growth from practice (praktike) to knowledge (gnostike). Evagrius argued that God gives an arduous pray-er the gift of the theological virtue of love, which is accompanied by another spiritual gift of apatheia. Apatheia in Greek literally means “no passion,” but by this term, Evagrius did not mean a stage without any feeling, temptation, or impulse; he acknowledged that


\textsuperscript{90} John Calvin, \textit{Commentary on Psalms}, Preface.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
human life would never be completely free from passion. The practices of prayer do not eliminate the power of passion; instead they channel it in the right direction under the control of the Spirit, so that the heart in prayer would not be easily swayed by the overpowering, compulsive evil desires. The goal of ascetic practices is not to eradicate all passions, but to subdue negative passions and develop positive ones. It is necessary to pray without ceasing because the evil desires never stop afflicting the heart. Even though Evagrius advocated the spiritual advancement from praktike to gnostike, he did not regard the stage of praktike as a temporary phase that can be completely surpassed. 

Praktike is an indispensable stage in which the skills necessary for spiritual growth are learned, honed, and practiced continually throughout life.

In De Oratione, Evagrius expounded the nexus between passions, body, and mind in prayer more, especially regarding the Psalms. Interestingly, he made a distinction between psalmody and prayer by associating the former with the body and the latter with the mind. Psalmody is an ascetical discipline of the praktike, while prayer is associated with the singular grace of contemplation; psalms can becalm the rebellious desires of the body, and prayer draws the mind closer to spiritual matters, away from earthly concerns. Evagrius argued prayer is a practice suitable for the “the superior and pure

92 “The soul possesses impassibility, not by virtue of the fact it experiences no passion with respect to objects, but because it remains untroubled even with regard to the memories of them” (Praktikos, 67)

93 Psalmody is an ascetical discipline of the praktike, while prayer is associated with the privileged grace of contemplation.

94 “Psalmody puts the passions to sleep and works to calm the incontinence of the body; prayer prepares the mind to exercise the activity that is proper to it.” (De Oratione, 83). Basil of Caesaria and Gregory of Nyssa used the same term, “kateunazo” to describe the calming effects of hymns. See Luke Dysinger, Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 92-93.
activity and use of the mind.” Evagrius clearly prioritized the mind over the body in his theology of prayer. But his body/mind dualism does not lead to ignoring of the body in spiritual life. The discipline of the body is still indispensable in his spiritual paradigm because the body is the gateway to the mind. If the demon fails to distract the mind with memory, it disturbs the body’s temperament in order to evoke unhealthy fantasy in the mind.  

Therefore, Evagrius was interested in how chanting the Psalms—more specifically, the melody of the Psalms—would change the condition of the body. In his advice for monks, Praktikos—The Monks: A Treatise on the Practical Life, he stressed that singing psalms and hymns calm evil desires and foster virtues in the mind. He recommended psalmody and prayer as a means to subdue the wandering heart laden with the eight vices—gluttony, fornication, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, and pride. The inexperienced need the guidance of the experienced because “appropriate times” and “due measure” are to be used for these spiritual practices to be more effective.

---

95 Evagrius, De Oratione 84.

96 Ibid., 86.

97 Ibid., 68.


99 “The demonic songs set our desire in motion and cast the soul into shameful fantasies, but psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19) call the mind to the constant remembrance of virtue, cooling our boiling instability and extinguishing our desires.” Evagrius, Praktikos, 71.

100 “When the mind wanders, reading, vigils, and prayer bring it to a standstill. . . . When the irascible part becomes agitated, psalmody, patience, and mercy calm it.” Ibid., 15.
For Evagrius, the change of the heart in ascetic practices is a necessary part of the mind’s upward progress toward the infinite God. Evagrius’s famous dictum, “If you are a theologian, you will pray truly; and if you pray truly, you will be a theologian”, should be understood in this larger context of spiritual progress. The dictum does not mean that every prayer automatically becomes theology. The background of this simple sentence is a complex view on the relationship between ascetical practices and spiritual knowledge. By “prayer” here Evagrius refers to contemplative prayer or “pure prayer” which awakens *nous* to the knowledge of the Trinity. More importantly, he meant the *practice* of prayer, which is an activity that is not isolated from the ascetic Christian life but functions as a driving force of ascetic life, which awakens, transforms, and lifts up one’s heart for theological understanding.

Thomas Aquinas also paid close attention to the heart in prayer in the Psalter. He called the human heart a “profound and inscrutable” abyss. A pray-er can neither fully understand nor control her own unfathomable heart, but with mercy and patience God listens to the deepest desire of the imperfect heart when it is humbly and honestly presented in prayer. Thomas wrote, “when the petition is from the innermost desire of the heart, then it is accepted by God (*quando petito est ex intimo desiderio cordis, tunc est Deo accepta, sed tunc non os tantum immo cor petit.*” It is not lofty words and thoughts but a pray-er’s devotion (*devotio*), the inner “cry of the heart” (*clamor cordis*), that draws God’s attention. In prayers, especially the ones found in the Book of


102 Ibid., Psalm 26.

103 “*Devotio est causa, quod audiatur a Deo aliquis. Devotio est clamor cordis, qui excitat Deum ad audiendum; et ideo dicit, Exaudi: quia clamavi non exterius, sed interius.*” Ibid.
Psalms, humble petitioners experience profound transformation of the heart. Prayers in tribulation bear the spiritual fruit of joy and consequently burst into praise, resulting in an expansion of the heart.¹⁰⁴ By drawing a troubled heart nearer to God, the sole source of true happiness, prayer banishes sadness and increases hope.¹⁰⁵

The goal of the Book of Psalms is to make people pray.¹⁰⁶ Thomas defined prayer as petition, an expression of desire. It is an act of both intellect and affection. It is an act of intellect and reason because it is speech, but it is an act of affection because it is speech arising from inner desires of the heart.¹⁰⁷ Christians cast all their anxieties on God, bringing their humble requests in the action of prayer.¹⁰⁸ Thomas found the benefits of praying for specific things not in providing new information to the omniscient God but in positive changes in praying hearts. Lifting up specific petitions helps pray-ers to concentrate on prayer, to uncover the desires of their own enigmatic hearts, and to pray more fervently.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ “laetitia dicit latitudinem cordis, unde signat interius gaudium” Ibid., Psalm 34.

¹⁰⁵ “Primus effectus est, quia per orationem ascendit mens hominis in Deum; et quia Deus est summe bonus; quando anima inhaeret ei, sentit delectationem maximam, et delectatio pellit tristitiam vel diminuit: et ideo dicit, quare tristis es etc. ex quo oravi.” Ibid., Psalm 41.

¹⁰⁶ “The goal of this work of Scripture is prayer, which is elevation of the mind in God” (Huius Scripturae finis est oratio, quae est elevatio mentis in Deum). Thomas Aquinas, “Proemium” in Postilla super psalmos.

¹⁰⁷ “What is revealed by outward prayer is inner prayer. So inner prayer is nothing other than inner desire, and as such it is a matter of our affections.” Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, Albert &Thomas: Selected Writings, ed., trans. Simon Tugwell (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1988), 364.

¹⁰⁸ See Thomas’ comment on Phil. 4.6 in Super Epistolam ad Philippenses lectura.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas pointed out the practical difference the petitions can make in pray-ers: “the more precisely we concentrate our attention on particular good things, the more earnestly we desire them” Albert and Thomas, Albert &Thomas: Selected Writings, 397.
Thomas urged pray-ers not to hide their desires (*sensualitas*) before God. Like the forthright prayer of the anguishing Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, their prayers should reflect their fear, need, and desire arising in their animal conditions. Prayers must not be limited to praise, thanksgiving, or honorable petitions for noble matters; they must lift up their mundane concerns, things they desire according to their animal needs. It is acceptable for human beings to have an animal desire, but to acknowledge the desire and speak honestly about it is just a beginning of prayer. In the action of bringing their petitions to God, their desires are re-evaluated, purified, and drawn nearer to the divine will by the Holy Spirit. Through this dynamic interaction between human desire and the divine will, pray-ers discover their own true self and true desires that have been hidden from themselves. Christians are commanded to disclose their desires in prayer not because they need to inform God of what they want but because their affections, desires, and intellect should be redirected toward God.\(^{110}\) In the prayer of desires, starkly juxtaposed with the divine will, pray-ers are simultaneously humbled, challenged, and moved. In prayer, “the plagues of [the] mind” are healed, and the new disposition towards contemplation takes root through moral virtues.\(^{111}\)

Praying the Psalms and other liturgical prayers internalizes the words of prayers and fosters a new disposition of life. Experienced pray-ers are not the ones who have acquired good skills of prayers but those who have been transformed in the Spirit and show the signs of the virtuous life. Prayer is the school for emotional maturity, and the community of faith recognizes the spiritual authority of those who are committed to the

\(^{110}\) Ibid., 375.

\(^{111}\) Ibid., 410.
life of prayer and reveal the fruits of wisdom and virtues through their lives. In his prayer for virtues, Thomas identified God as the giver and sustainer of the virtues (virtutum donator et conservator), confessing that a heart of contrition, vigilance, and freedom comes from God.  

3. 4 Images, Meditation, and Affective Piety

Anselm of Canterbury marks an important watershed in the history of Christian prayer. He is considered one of the major theologians who opened the door for medieval affective piety in prayer, which advocated dramatic imagination in meditation. He ushered in a devotional practice that used concrete, tangible, vivid imagery as a leitmotif of prayer. His prayers were designed to evoke particular emotional responses. In his writings to Countess Mathilda of Tuscany, Anselm explained that he arranged his prayers in this particular way in order to stir up love or fear of God in one’s mind, and he encouraged Mathilda and her brothers to learn how to pray with affections by imitating and internalizing his examples.


114 Similarly, Bernard of Clairvaux regarded his emotional and sensory practice of meditation on the humanity of Jesus as a crucial path towards the spiritual union with God. The relationship between vivid mental images and affective meditation was strong in the Cistercian tradition.
The affective devotional practices of the medieval church increasingly drew on visual aids for prayers and meditations. Illustrated prayer books, icons, and paintings of biblical scenes enhanced emotional engagement in worship, prayer, and meditation. This artwork presented not only teachings on Christian doctrines and life but also bodily examples of ideal prayer. Medieval Christians learned how to use their bodies in prayer by observing how saintly figures prayed in paintings or sculptures. They believed that imitation of the saints at prayer would lead them to the imitation of Christ at prayer because they thought the saints successfully imitated Christ’s practice of prayer. They strongly believed that their bodies would follow Christ’s example by following the steps of the saints whose life and practice were fashioned after Christ’s practice.

In the images of praying saints, they saw Christ in prayer; following the steps of the saints, they sought to follow Christ himself both in words and actions. Such visual association between Christ and saints can be traced back to late antiquity. Origen saw the image of Christ in the saints. In his discourse of prayerful meditations on the images of Christ and saints, Origen argued that a saint is “an image of an image, that of the Son.”

The saints are “stamped with sonship” and are “conformed” to Christ and his “glorified body.” The saints are images of Christ through which pray-ers could experience encouragement and enlightenment, and the ordinary Christians’ association with saints led them to the larger community of prayer. In prayer, they imagined themselves surrounded by great intercessors—not only human intercessors, but also heavenly hosts, angels and Christ himself. Images of angels, who watch over human

---


116 Ibid.
beings at prayer and behold the face of God the Father in heaven for their sake, were vivid reminders of the heavenly assistance.\textsuperscript{117} The visual imagination of the praying cohort—saints, angels, and Christ—lifted up disheartened hearts.

The ancient and medieval use of images in prayer was grafted into the broader adaptation of classical rhetorical theories in the practice of prayer. As we noted in the previous chapter, medieval rhetorical theories, which borrowed heavily from Cicero’s principles of rhetoric, had a significant influence on the practice of prayer as a form of delivering a message to God. Classical rhetorical practice provided Christian pray-ers with various structures and tools for effective oration. One point I want to highlight in this context is classical rhetoric’s ingenious use of images. Rhetorical techniques of visual imagination were designed to both enhance one’s thinking process and stimulate emotional responses of the audience. The mimetic functions of images can help people connect their memories to the larger cultural and communal repository of metaphors. For example, regarding the role of images in the formation of character, Cicero in \textit{Rhetorica ad Herennium}\textsuperscript{118} discussed two kinds of memory: natural (\textit{naturalis}) and artificial (\textit{artificiosa}).\textsuperscript{119} The former is formed in mind simultaneously with thought (\textit{simul cum cogitatione nata}), and the latter is acquired by training (\textit{aritificiosa est ea, quam confirmat induction quaedam et ratio praeceptionis}). This does not mean that training is helpful only for artificial memory; although the natural memory is dependent on a natural talent, a discipline (\textit{praeceptione}) can enhance it to a certain degree. Cicero’s point is that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{117} Origen, 11.5.
\item \textsuperscript{118} This became one of the most influential book in medieval rhetoric. Scholars now question the authorship of Cicero, but medieval Christians accepted his authorship.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Cicero, \textit{Rhetorica ad Herennium}, III.16.
\end{itemize}
artificial memory benefits more from rhetorical devices, such as images and their backgrounds (*loci*). One can memorize a large number of mental images by placing them in concrete scenes and arranging those scenes in order. A successful orator can recreate an “image of the whole matter” in detail, vividly capturing the moods and textures of the scene.\(^{120}\)

This artistic arrangement of mental images, a mimetic skill of a classical orator, became a crucial pedagogical tool in medieval devotional practices that used devotional images for doctrinal teachings and emotional training.\(^{121}\) By the use of imagination, pray-ers recreated religious scenes, and the vivid, almost tangible images awakened their senses. Immersed in those mental images, pray-ers could hear, touch, and smell saintly figures and empathize with them. These mental images were carved on their minds through repeated practices of prayer and meditation.

One of the most popular themes of affective devotional prayers in the medieval church was Christ’s Passion. Pray-ers were directed to meditate on the wounds of Christ and his seven words on the Cross. They were particularly attracted to the side wound of Christ as “a symbol of refuge in his love” because it was believed that “it gave access to

\(^{120}\) Ibid., II. 20.

\(^{121}\) Paul Connerton rightly argues that human memory is socially constructed. Memory does not exclusively belong to the mental realm. It is a mental faculty (mental retention and reconstruction of information), but it is also an embodied social practice. This point is more conspicuous in the case of “habit memory”, which is acquired and expressed through the bodily movements in ritual performances. Their incorporated habits in practices are crucial for building one’s own identity and one’s relationship with others. Connerton made a helpful distinction between “incorporating practices” and “inscribing practices.” The inscribing practices use an abstract discursive form of communication that can last without being attached to any bodily presentation, but in the case of incorporating practices, information is transmitted by actions, especially ritual actions, and understood by actions in the specific ritual contexts. Learning happens by observing and imitating the exemplary practices of the advanced practitioners. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 72-104.
Christ’s heart.”122 The gruesome image of Christ’s suffering moved the cold and dry hearts of sinners to realize the gravity of sin and feel a deeper appreciation of his grace. The wounds of Christ revealed his humanity to pray-ers, drawing them closer to the life of Jesus.

The meditative experience of pathos was linked to the development of empathy. Commiseration with the suffering Christ was captured in pictorial presentations of the dramatic gestures of despair in paintings, such as Giotto’s.123 Those expressive gestures functioned as visual cues that evoked emotional responses in pray-ers. Watching and meditating on the suffering Christ and the wailing disciples and angels, pray-ers participated in the passion narrative as if they were in the scene. The images they engaged in their prayers served as the mind’s mirror to which one’s heart gradually assimilated. The rise of this affective style of devotion in the twelfth century coincided with the rise of such images that vividly depicted emotional expressions of religious characters.

The visual and emotional approach to prayer is well evidenced in the Franciscan interplay between ethos and pathos in meditation that deepens the psychological dimension of prayer. In the tradition of Francis of Assisi’s meditative practice a pray-er recreates a visual scene of a biblical or historical event in imagination and places himself or herself in it. The vivid creative mental image reconstructs a past event as a present event, and in this visual imagination, a pray-er turns from an onlooker into an active


participant in the event. This mental activity is also a bodily practice that places one’s body in a concrete situation to experience the tangible textures of an event. The visual imagination opens up other senses, so that the whole body of the pray-er would perceive the event. The practice of anachronic re-imagination of the past event focuses on the reformation of the heart of the meditator. It produces a spiritual and moral agent who is energized by emotionally charged prayers.

The formation of the heart through emotional engagements in prayer took place not only in virtual but also in physical space. A crucial example of the connection between emotions in prayer and sacred space was the medieval practice of routes of prayer. The *ductus*, the path worshippers traversed in prayer in a Medieval church, was designed to produce a desired outcome, *skopos*, with a careful arrangement of paintings, stained glasses, and statues. Walking and praying in the sacred space, worshippers not only learned the teachings of the church presented in the images but also experienced bodily and emotional interactions with the messages. In their frequent pilgrimage through the path (*ductus*), pray-ers repeatedly encountered the heroic stories of the martyrs, the gospel narratives, and the eschatological hope for the Parousia. The prayerful experience of the stories was inscribed on their hearts. Mary Carruthers argues that contemporary

---


125 Carruthers thinks “historians have tended to map the ductus of a church intellectually and dogmatically, as reflecting ideas of rebirth or conversion, or indeed ideological systems . . . far more abstract than these. But in monastic practice, the impelling force, the energy for the journey, is emotional. . . . The ductus of monastic churches, perhaps particularly (in the early twelfth century) those of the monasteries influenced by Cluny, was designed not just to mark out, but to recall and evoke these emotions coloring the ‘way’.” Ibid., 263.

In a medieval rhetorical theory, *ductus* also refers to the flow of reading. How to channel the flow (*ductus*) of the mind in reading toward a *skopos* in a right manner (*modus*) is a crucial theme of monastic practice of meditative reading.
scholarship on medieval piety too narrowly focuses on conceptual interpretation (or “reading”) of the *ductus*, overlooking the significance of its affective dimension in medieval piety. She calls for more attention to the emotions that were developed in the pray-ers’ bodily interactions with sacred space. Those emotions, not being separated from theological development, led the heart to a greater appreciation of doctrinal knowledge and a better preparation for moral actions. Thus, Carruthers argues, the affections that were intensified in the bodily practices were “the primary engines of the way” (*ductus*), and the sacred space of the church functioned not merely as an “edifice” but as an “engine of prayer.”  

Ignatius of Loyola’s spiritual exercises emerged in this tradition of affective prayer and visual imagination. Ignatius used mental images that were placed in the larger framework of the narrative of Jesus’ life, aiming at reorienting affections. The Ignatian exercises were designed to purge evil affections, discern the divine, and restore right order in life.  

Ignatius envisioned the practice of prayer—either vocal or mental communication with God—that would take a holistic approach to spirituality, using “the acts of the intellect in reasoning and of the will in eliciting acts of the affections.” The affective acts of prayer, “which spring from the will”, require “greater reverence” than other practices that use merely “the intellect to understand.”

126 Ibid.  

127 “Any means of preparing and disposing our soul to rid itself of all its disordered affections, and then, after their removal, of seeking and finding God’s will in the ordering of our life for the salvation of our soul.” Ignatius of Loyola, *Ignatius of Loyola: the Spiritual exercises and selected works* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1991), 121.  

128 Ibid., 122.
The visual practice of prayer, centered on the attentive looking (either real or virtual), was a crucial means for training the self as an emotionally mature moral agent. This formative exercise in visual affective piety did not exclusively belong to male religious elites. The visual approach appealed to a wide audience, especially women, either illiterate or literate, either in or outside a religious order. The power of embodied prayer was widely accessible, regardless of gender, educational level, and social status. Most worshippers could gain a good sense of the underlying themes in the series of images and have emotional engagements with them. The stories unfolding in front of their eyes were instilled in the minds of the pray-ers.

3. 5 Affections and the Use of Prayer Books

Affective devotions deeply penetrated the everyday lives of Christians through devotional practices with primers. The Liturgy of the Hours, which initially began as a voluntary devotion, became a mandatory practice for priests and those in monastic communities. The enormous popularity of the Book of Hours, an abbreviated form of the Liturgy of the Hours, in the medieval church among laity suggests that ordinary people had a desire to emulate the piety of the spiritual leaders who were required to pray the Divine Office on behalf of the church. For the laity who admired the intimate relationship with God in the rhythm of monastic prayer life, the Book of Hours was a favored resource for implementing the rhythm of sacred time within secular time. Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline, which closely followed the canonical hours, established a rhythm of daily life that sought to fulfill the ideal of praying without ceasing. Prayer books furnished laity not only with the intense, intimate, and
introspective language of prayer but also with the elaborate pictures of religious figures or scenes as visual aids for meditation.

The Book of Hours was cherished as an epitome of personal piety. At first only the nobility could afford to commission a highly personalized Book of Hours, which usually included portraits of patrons, who were portrayed as devout people at prayer surrounded by martyrs and saints, coats of arms, monograms, and the personalized Latin prayers, which were specifically written or modified for the patrons by incorporating personal Christian names. In the fifteenth century, however, cheaper mass-produced copies of the Book of Hours became available for the rising merchant class. These copies were less personalized at the time of production, but in their daily uses, they still became highly personal items that people deeply cherished (often personalized with additions, such as baptismal records and marginal notes, and inherited in the family). People not only used them in private devotions but also brought them to the church to join in its public prayers. The prayer books even became sacred objects of affection to which pray-ers showed gestures of reverence and affection, such as kneeling and kissing.

The Book of Hours was enormously influential on medieval lay piety even though they were written in Latin. Ordinary lay people did not have formal education in Latin, but they probably could recite Latin prayers with a basic level of comprehension because of their lifelong participation in the Latin liturgy. In addition, the Book of Hours

---

129 Praying in Latin was often criticized, especially by those who advocated extempore prayer, as an evidence of dispassionate prayer perfunctorily recited by rote. However, many laypersons wanted to use the Latin prayers because they wanted to participate in the official Latin liturgy of the Church. As the sacred language of the church—the language of the Bible and the language of liturgy for the medieval church of the west—Latin was donned with sacred glamour, which lay people desired to savor in their own personal practices. By using the same prayers in the official language, they envisioned themselves joining the public worship of the entire Church. The laity who heard the clergy reciting the prayers at church were prepared to pray the same Latin prayers by themselves, and as a result of their personal practices, they were
offered a bodily and visual approach to prayer. The inserted illustrations depicted not only relevant biblical scenes but also ideal examples of prayer. They portrayed a praying person, gazing at the cross with meditative expression, on knees with a prayer book in hand. Dispirited people found comfort and encouragement in pictures of saints and angels coming to aid the pray-ers. Many personalized prayer books contained portraits of the owners in postures of prayer. Sometimes these portraits of owners—often female—appeared inside pictures of biblical or historic events. Their locations suggest that they were praying not merely outside the events as observers but in the events as participants. For those who prayed with these prayer books, for example, the scenes of crucifixion did not belong to a distant past but to the very moment of their prayer. They imagined themselves standing or kneeling among the crowds, next to the crucified God, as if they could hear, see, and smell the very event of crucifixion.

By praying the Book of Hours, pray-ers were deeply immersed in Gospel narratives. Selections of the four gospels were arranged according to the liturgical seasons. They began with the Logos in John’s Gospel (*verbum caro factum est*); then, the annunciation in Luke; the birth narrative and epiphany in Matthew; Christ’s commissioning of disciples and ascension in Mark. The passion narrative got special

more prepared to understand and enjoy in the liturgy of the church. However, the laity did not restrict themselves to the official liturgy; they added vernacular prayers as supplements to the liturgical materials.


131 While the Divine Office follows a liturgical order, the Book of Hours follows the chronological order of the Gospel narrative.
attention as a large separate section, the Hours of the Cross. The Hours of the Cross (or the Hours of Passion, its longer version) led pray-ers through the major steps in the Passion narrative, from betrayal to entombment, from Matins to Compline. Some manuscripts of the Book of Hours connected the theme of suffering with the theme of hope and empowerment, by juxtaposing the Hours of the Cross with the Hours of the Holy Spirit, which included stories of Christ’s resurrection and ascension, Pentecost, and the acts of empowered apostles. When praying the Hours of the Virgin, which included the Infant Narrative, the Hours of the Cross, and the Hours of the Holy Spirit, pray-ers walked through the entire salvation story of Christ. By constantly moving between these liturgical prayers, they could weave the Gospel stories into their prayer life.

The illustrations in prayer books enriched the pray-er’s experience of reading and praying the written prayers. Images of some popular themes (such as Nativity, Passion, the Sacred Heart, the Holy Face, and the Five Holy Wounds) also took independent form as focal points of contemplation. These pictures had more than an aesthetic or an informative function. Whether attached to a particular prayer or not, they served as spiritual props that aroused emotional engagement with God. In contemplation, which is traditionally called a “gaze of faith”, pray-ers carefully gazed at the images, meditating on their every minute detail; in the prayer of gazing, the vivid mental images evoked intense religious affections. Such pictorial presentation, and reception through the prayer books, were particularly important for those who had only limited understanding of Latin. As a result of their lifelong participation in worship, they vaguely knew what

---

132 Teresa of Avila specifically mentioned that her lack of intellectual training necessitated the contemplative use of images in prayer: “This is the method of prayer I then used: since I could not reflect discursively with the intellect, I strove to represent Christ within me, and it did me greater good—in my
was happening in liturgical or biblical texts, but their “reading” of the pictures could fill the gaps with the details of the messages.

The significance of the Book of Hours in the history of Christian prayer is evident at multiple levels, but for our purposes, I highlight two significant points. First, the history of the Book of Hours shows how important the practice of prayer was in the development of lay spirituality of the medieval church. The production and use of the Book of Hours were predominantly driven by the laity. They reflected the laity’s noble desire to emulate the complex liturgy of the church in their mundane lives. By imitating the daily prayer of the clergy (the Divine Office; Breviary), the Book of Hours offered the laity an opportunity to approach God and saints directly without relying on the clergy. The rising popularity of the Book of Hours reflected the development of the laity’s *artes orandi* in the late middle ages and early Renaissance. The new genre of *artes orandi* written for individual laypersons directed their spiritual practices and consequently their daily lives; the laypersons’ practices of prayer are crucial windows on their way of living.

Second, it is noteworthy that the Book of Hours was closely associated with women’s spirituality. From the beginning women made up a greater part of the lay users, and female patrons were actively involved in the commissioning and production of the

---

133 For example, the Book of Hours’s contribution to the growing popularity of the medieval Marian piety is noteworthy.

134 Eamon Duffy argues that the Book of Hours could be understood as “the physical embodiment of a remarkable medieval laicization of clerical forms of prayer.” Duffy also acknowledges that depending on how one views it, it can be regarded as “the imprisonment of medieval lay devotion within the constrictions of an inappropriate clerical straitjacket.” Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, 5.
personalized copies. The copies commissioned by women often had personalized prayers that used feminine forms of Latin words. Many medieval portraits of women show them holding their prayer books. Women’s strong and intimate relationship with their prayer books is a great evidence that women sought to have a more direct and more intimate relationship with God through their own practices of prayer. For pious women outside a religious order, the Book of Hours opened a new gateway to access monastic and liturgical practices of piety. Literate women who earnestly sought spiritual discipline could experience religious affections and receive theological guidance through these prayer books, without being subjected to tight control of the male clergy. This was certainly a liberating experience for women.  

The Book of Hours belonged to both private and public domains. It was private as a highly personalized prayer book, which was designed for intimate and private usage. However, it was essentially a communal experience. From a practical point of view, prayer books were read not only in private but also in communal contexts. In a family setting, members of the same household recited prayers together using multiple copies of the same printed prayer book. In a church setting, people gathered together in the morning to recite Matins, part of the Church’s official ministry of daily prayer. From a theological point of view, the prayer book united pray-ers scattered around the world through shared words and images. It was a great example of corporate and corporeal practice; people prayed with the church through their bodily engagement with the book. It

135 However, the motive behind the success of the Book of Hours might not be always favorable to women. The women’s use of the Book of Hours might be supported and encouraged by the patronizing male clergy who thought women, unlike rational men, would need the pictorial aid for their spiritual practices. It could be viewed another way to control the “irrational” women under the directions of the male writers.
was a personal means to discipline the body and the soul in the larger rubric of liturgical prayers. Medieval lay people rarely prayed with their own words. Their personal prayers mostly depended on liturgical prayers, which themselves heavily drew on the words in Scripture. Those who advocated extempore prayer in the modern era condemned the use of prayer books for being lifeless, passive, and uninspiring; but the use of the fixed words did not necessarily result in emotionless prayers. For those who cherished the Book of Hours, the emotions in the written, prescribed prayers reverberated in their hearts. By reciting the Psalms and canticles they could articulate their joy, despair, fear, and hope. The carefully crafted written prayers and images channeled emotions to flow in the right direction. They functioned as a pedagogical means which eventually turned the flow into lasting dispositions of the hearts. Traditional practices of liturgical prayers produced people whose identities lay in the confessional language of the larger community of faith, not isolated individual minds which look only inwardly. Readers of prayer books heartily adopted the lofty but practical language that covered their concerns from mundane to divine; and the church’s prayers invited them into intimate relationship not only with God but also with the heavenly community (angels and the community of saints) who stood with them in their daily prayers.136

136 Duffy argues that “if we go to the prayers of the late medieval laity, we find not growing individualism, social anomie, and alienation, but the signs of individual participation in a varied but coherent public religious culture, in which private intensities are nourished by and consciously related to the public practices of religion.” Duffy, Marking the Hours, 118.
3.6 Rituals and the Heart Praying *ex tempore*

Affective piety in prayer met another watershed in the rise of romanticism, which celebrated spontaneity as the genuine sign of the spirit of prayer, in contrast to the “dead words” of liturgical prayers. This was a new trend, unheard of in the history of prayer, which had taken for granted written ritual scripts as a principal means to tap the heart. For example, in the thirteenth century, Stephen of Sawley wrote a treatise, “On the Recitation of the Divine Office”, praising the written prayers’ benefits on the heart. The liturgical prayers “keep the mind in harmony with the voice” and put a “check on the mind’s wandering.”\(^{137}\) However, such high views of liturgical practices came under heavy attack in the early modern era when Romantic writers criticized prayer books for the lack of affections. This criticism seemed ironic to the defenders of the use of prayer books, who thought liturgical practices were geared for the formation of proper affections. But the champions of “heart religion” of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries raised systematic challenges to the genuineness of the heart in rituals.

One of the top agenda items of the English Puritans was to purge the church of rituals they deemed superstitious. When the Act of Uniformity was declared in 1662, many reformers opposed the use of the Book of Common Prayer or other forms of set prayers in general. Although they did not attempt to get rid of rituals altogether, their negative reactions against the prayer books sowed seeds for the development of emotionally charged “free” worship style among later dissenters. In the eighteenth century, with the rise of Romanticism, a seismic cultural shift was on the horizon. The

popular view of poetry began to shift from a communal ritual performance of a text to an impromptu expression of an individual’s inspired heart. Literary and liturgical circles began to put a great emphasis on the close relationship between spontaneity and genuineness. They viewed spontaneity as a direct path to unprompted, unmediated, raw emotions, which they believed to reveal one’s true heart, free from the shackles of social convention or restriction. For example, William Wordsworth described the ideal poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” The rise of extempore prayer coincided with this larger cultural shift from rituals to spontaneity. As emotional effusion was celebrated in romantic poetry, emotive extempore prayers were commended as an unparalleled means of experiencing and expressing powerful emotional eruption.

Criticism of routine rote prayers that were disconnected from the heart was not new. In fact, it was the reason why the affective dimension of prayer drew so much attention early on. The heart’s engagement in prayer was stressed to guard against a magical understanding of the power of prayer. This critical view of a ritualistic approach to prayer was in line with the prophetic traditions of the Hebrew prophets and Jesus who criticized the overconfidence in the efficacy of prayer as mechanical power. However, although the prophetic tradition raised criticism against over-reliance on ritual actions, it did not reject the sui generis value of ritual performances. Their criticism was directed more toward hypocritical practices that placed excessive confidence in ritual actions themselves.

What was new in the rise of extempore prayer in the Romantic era was a systematic attack on the use of liturgical texts in general. Considering the long history of

---

Christian worship that treasured the recitation of written prayer texts, this was a dramatic break from the traditional view of public prayer as a ritual. For more than a millennium, rituals in liturgy played a formative role as a foundation of Christian life, by shaping both body and mind through actions and rhythms. But the pre-modern confidence in the efficacy of ritual practices gave way to growing trust in the ethical and aesthetic superiority of spontaneity. Ritual practices were suddenly criticized for being not only an insipid repetition of ineffective superstitious actions but also obstacles that prevented the spirit from flowing freely in the hearts. Ritual actions, which had been trusted as a channel of God’s grace, came under fire for suspicion that they suppressed or suffocated the spirit, and the effusions of feelings and desires in extempore prayer were celebrated as an alternative, more genuine, revelation of the heart.

In this new literary and liturgical context, where spontaneous outpouring of emotions in extempore prayer was considered the true sign of the condition of one’s heart, the meaning of actions in prayer was evaluated on an individual basis unlike the efficacy of the communal actions of rituals. The preference of spontaneity over rituals signaled a break from a performative understanding of faith, which had a deep interest in the formation of the self through actions. While rituals connect the self with diachronic and synchronic communities, spontaneous practices tend to focus on an individual’s immediate connection with God. The self expressed in spontaneous responses was imagined to be the pure work of the spirit, not marred by the artificial constructions of

---

I do not mean that there was no element of extemporary prayer in the previous traditions of Christian prayer. Indeed, there was, especially in monastic traditions and mystic traditions, a strong emphasis on the immediate effusion of emotions in prayer. But the public extemporary prayer replacing liturgical prayer as a better way to communicate genuine desires was a new development in the modern Protestant churches.
social norms. The new wave of impromptu practices resulted in not only the devaluation of traditional rituals but also the creation of a new paradigm that found a sense of assurance in spontaneity.

Extempore prayer became the new non-ritualistic “ritual of spontaneity”, which was believed to stimulate heartfelt moral actions induced by the outpouring of emotions. Extempore prayer that does not require the involvement of the church hierarchy was envisioned as an egalitarian, democratic, and empirical approach to divinity. Such focus on individual spontaneous responses led to extra scrutiny of one’s heart. The difficulty in maintaining the freshness of one’s initial spontaneous reactions raised the level of anxiety about keeping the individual’s responses vibrant with energy. How to translate a succession of ephemeral moments into an enduring character became a challenging question for advocates of spontaneity. The question of the transition from transient spontaneity to moral character put to the test the assumption that those who had the genuine experience of emotional effusion would naturally achieve moral authenticity.

In seventeenth century England some defenders of liturgical prayers made an argument against extempore prayer based on the social decorum of English society. They argued that extempore public prayer was discourteous. Especially unruly emotional interjections, which were incomprehensible to their audience, were criticized for the lack of elegance. The social expectation in interhuman relationships (manners) was used as a criterion for the proper attitude in one’s speech to God. It was not a trivial argument because, as I have argued in the previous chapter, the *habitus* of prayer mirrors the *habitus* of its social backgrounds.
But theologically stronger arguments for the written liturgy were made on a pedagogical basis. John Prideaux, a strong advocate of written prayers in the seventeenth century, contended in *The Doctrine of Prayer* that set forms of biblical prayer had been transmitted through the church’s prayer books, and through participation in the liturgy, ordinary people would join up with the priest to pray as one community of faith. By repeatedly listening to the same prayers of the church, argued Prideaux, children and the less educated would be ready to participate in the liturgy more actively, no longer being “spectators to a Theatre, to hear much, learn little, and do nothing.”\(^\text{140}\) It was a stout affirmation of the role of liturgy as tutor. For a society where the basic pedagogical model was for an apprentice to practice repeatedly under a master’s guidance, it was a compelling argument that one should learn to pray by repeating the words and actions of prayer as a corporate activity. For the defenders of prayer books, reciting communal prayers was a God-given means for laypeople to draw theological knowledge and wisdom from the great reservoir of the liturgy. They believed that shared liturgical experience would add a communal dimension to the Christian life both diachronically and synchronically.

Although advocates of extempore prayer argued that praying impromptu would manifest the true work of the Holy Spirit, their opponents typically contested that impressive extempore prayer was not a spiritual gift but merely a human gift of eloquent speech. They argued that the true spirit of prayer could be discovered not in an individual’s newly inspired wording of prayer but in one’s trust in God who wants to meet those who sincerely seek divine presence through the church’s prayers.

\(^{140}\) John Prideaux, *Euchologia or The Doctrine of Practical Prayer* (1656), 216.
In the seventeenth century, against the rising popularity of extempore prayer, Jeremy Taylor made a case for the use of liturgical texts in *A Discourse concerning Prayer Ex tempore* and *An Apology for Authorized and Set Forms of Liturgie*. In his view, so-called “free” spontaneous prayer was a product of education and practices. Taylor was not convinced either that the words of free prayer came directly from the Spirit or that the immediate inspiration of the Spirit was needed for true prayer, because he thought traditional prayers—both biblical prayers and liturgical prayers based on scriptures—were already the inspired words of the Spirit readily available for use. Thus, Taylor argued that prayer books are better for education of nation, family, and individuals than extempore prayers.

Advocates of prayer books also charged that so-called “free” prayers were not truly free from forms. They contended that although the advocates of extempore prayer got rid of written prayers in worship in order to pray freely as the Holy Spirit dictated, their prayers were no less scripted than the liturgical prayers. They argued that despite the claims of free flowing Spirit, those supposedly spontaneous words were settling on stable forms present in their liturgical experiences and tended to become routine or even stale. Such criticism of the “form” of “free” prayers was echoed by John Wesley in the

141 “Whatever this ‘gift’ is, or this ‘spirit of prayer,’ it is to be acquired by human industry, by learning of the scriptures, by reading, by conference, by whatsoever else faculties are improved, and habits enlarged.” Jeremy Taylor, *An Apology for Authorized and Set Forms of Liturgie*, §33.

142 “No man can assure me that the words of his *ex tempore* prayer are the words of the Holy Spirit. it is not reason nor modesty to expect such immediate assistance to so little purpose, He having supplied us with abilities more than enough to express our desires *ailiunde*, otherwise than by immediate dictate. But if we will take David’s psalter, or the other hymns of holy Scripture, or any of the prayers which are respersed over the Bible, we are sure enough that they are the words of Gods spirit.” Ibid., §49.

143 The advocates of extempore prayer also admitted that it is not completely free of a template. Dissenting ministers’ guidebooks to extempore prayer recommended pray-ers to collect “scripture phrases” to arm themselves against the nervous silence that threatened to quash free prayer.
eighteenth century. He criticized Quakers who wanted to get rid of formality in both private and public prayer. Quakers believed that the set structures of formal worship would prevent the Spirit from working freely, but Wesley argued that even their prayers, supposedly free from any forms, had a pattern of superficial repetition, so he wrote, “I myself find more life in the Church Prayers, than in any formal extemporary prayers of Dissenters.”

Indeed, John Wesley was one of the early evangelicals who observed the seismic shift of cultural expectations on spontaneity and genuineness; and he attempted to harmonize the rational approach to faith through traditional, formal liturgical practices and the increasingly popular emotionally charged spontaneous practices. His Methodist movement was known to pray loudly ex tempore. But Wesley was more interested in the fruits of the Spirit as they were manifested in prayer than in the style of prayer itself. So he recommended that his followers use all types of prayer to enjoy the various benefits that different styles can offer. Although Wesley preferred to use forms of prayer, he rejected any attempt to use a single “superior” style exclusively. He believed that, despite the differences of styles, the people of God could achieve harmony. Thus, in his sermon “Catholic Spirit,” he showed his flexible view on the style of prayer: “It appears to me that forms of prayer are of excellent use, particularly in the great congregation. If you judge extemporary prayer to be of more use, act suitably to your own judgment.” What Wesley focused on was to make their prayers the prayers of the heart, and their religion

144 John Wesley, Works (Jackson), 13:34.

to be the religion of the heart. Whatever form one may use, prayer should be a process of discovering one’s desires and reshaping them.

The relationship between ritual, spontaneity, and heart continued to be a central topic in modern anthropological study of rituals. As the spontaneous movements in musical improvisation still have patterns that have been instilled through practices and rehearsals, extemporary prayers have the undergirding structures of understanding, beauty, and emotions. All social interactions involve ritual elements, however explicitly they are stated and controlled. Some cultures have more rigid and explicit rules of actions, and others have more flexible and implicit rules. As a social form of the interaction with God and fellow worshippers, even the little-controlled practice of extempore prayer entails the elements of ritual. Both types of prayer—ritualized liturgical practices and spontaneous expressions—are the products of socialization. It might be easier to recognize the social structures in liturgical actions as highly regulated bodily

---

146 The language of the heart is prominent in Wesley’s teachings on prayer. “Prayer is the lifting up of the heart to God”; “it be thy one design to commune with God, to lift up thy heart to him, to pour out thy soul before him.” (“Sermon on the Mount, VI,” 575). “The end of your praying is not to inform God, as though he knew not your wants already; but rather to inform yourselves; to fix the sense of those wants more deeply in your hearts, and the sense of your continual dependence on him who only is able to supply all your wants. It is not so much to move God . . . as to move yourselves, that you may be willing and ready to receive the good things he has prepared for you.” (577).

Wesley recommended the bodily discipline of fasting as a valuable aid to private prayer. Fasting helps a pray-er redirect her affections toward things above (Sermon 27, IV.1).

“And it is chiefly, as it is a help to prayer, that it has so frequently been found a means, in the hand of God, of confirming and increasing, not one virtue, not chastity only, (as some have idly imagined, without any ground either from Scripture, reason, or experience,) but also seriousness of spirit, earnestness, sensibility and tenderness of conscience, deadness to the world, and consequently the love of God, and every holy and heavenly affection.”

148 “[T]he improvisations of the pianist or the so-called freestyle figures of the gymnast are never performed without a certain presence of mind, as we say, a certain form of thought or even of practical reflection, the reflection in situation and in action which is necessary to evaluate instantly the action or posture just produced and to correct a wrong position of the body, to recover an imperfect movement.” Bourdieu, Pascalian Meditations, 162.
movements full of symbolic meaning and power, but the spontaneous actions of extemporaneous prayer are also governed by *habitus* of the society. The so-called “free” flow of the Spirit has a conventional structure given in a social and communal context. In other words, extemporaneous prayer finds its expression still in the invisible structures of ritual.

The undergirding social structures give prayer stability, but at the same time, its dependence on a routine raises concerns about the absence of conscious attention to the ritual actions. Since people cannot always maintain a high level of attention to their actions, worshippers might find themselves perfunctorily engaging in some ritual activities. It is an inevitable phenomenon because human nature depends on a certain level of bodily automation. Even when participants in a ritual try to ruminate on the symbolic and metaphoric meanings of every action, they would not be able to process cognitively every detail of the ritual. The intensity of their attention to ritual actions during worship cannot but fluctuate according to the levels of significance of the actions or their physical conditions. Relative lack of attention does not necessarily indicate an obliviousness to the symbolic meanings of bodily actions; rather, the actions of prayer, such as bowing, genuflection, and folded hands, can function as a safeguard to prevent the mind from drifting away. More positively stated, the actions ingrained in the body can carry symbolic imagery whose meaning and power resurface in the mind more vividly. By placing the body in a symbolically rich field, the performance of ritual actions can increase the participants’ awareness of the symbolic meanings of the event.

Thus, Mary Douglas rightly criticized the pejorative use of the term, “ritualist”, which sociologists used in the mid-twentieth century to refer to a person “who performs
external gestures without inner commitment to the ideas and values being expressed.”

Douglas observed that the sentiments of anti-ritualism were widespread across Christian traditions in the mid-twentieth century, which shared the assumption that a “free” and spontaneous action is more authentic and truer to the self. Such a bias against liturgical prayer was strongly present in Fredrich Heiler’s work, in which he made a sharp dichotomy between the “original, simple prayer of the heart” and the “formal, literary prayers”, which is merely the “weak reflection” of the simple prayer. He viewed the development of liturgical prayer as a process of deterioration. Prayer is “at first a spontaneous emotional discharge, a free outpouring of the heart”, then it became “a fixed formula which people recite without feeling or mood of devotion, untouched both in heart and mind.” For Heiler, the major issue of prayer was the sincere engagement of the heart, which he thought could be found only in spontaneity. He argued that “primitive prayer expresses always a vital, mutual relation between God and man [sic]” although “coldness and estrangement unavoidably enter in” the “formally constrained” liturgical prayer.

A ritual can provoke an outburst of emotions. But it does not do so often, and it is not its primary goal either. Ritual actions articulate the meanings of feelings, and such an articulation does not intend to rekindle the spontaneous cathartic experiences or express the current emotional status of individuals. Rituals are interested in creating a structured

---


151 Ibid., 65.

152 Ibid., 70.
disposition of the heart, which can be experienced as a communal value. This lasting disposition, which is established through worshippers’ recurring emotional encounters with the sacred, becomes a principal moral character that governs the way individuals live in the community. Hence, rituals might appear far from a free, immediate, and spontaneous expression of emotions, but they are not the antithesis of emotion. The ritualized body continually monitors and reshapes emotional attitudes. The affective elements in gestures, postures, movement, odor, and sound of prayer—as either explicit or implicit rules of conduct (habitus)—become the ingrained attitudes of modus vivendi.

3. 7 Conclusion

Sanctification entails a reorientation of the self, a qualitative shift in both perspective and action, which is intensified by mesmerizing attraction to God. The enchantment of God’s beauty is not a polar opposite of rationality. Emotion is not arbitrary or irrational, but rather based on a construal. Emotions are not merely passive uncontrollable responses to stimuli, so human beings, to a great extent—though never in full control—can direct the flows of emotions, by tactical use of physiological strategies, either conscious or subliminal. In other words, emotions are an outcome of habitual actions.153 The interests of life, on which one’s resources and attention are invested, can rewire one’s bodily mechanism for apposite emotional straits. A constant remapping of the body eventually becomes one’s enduring attitude toward the surrounding world. The

choices human beings make on a long-term or regular basis have a resonating impact on who they are emotionally. Premodern educators, without the benefits of neuroscience, did not know the physiological mechanism of the emotional mapping of the brain, but they knew by experience how social and religious actions could mold one’s personality. Things they choose—what they listen to and read, what they pray for, what they sing, with whom they were associated, etc.—gradually become part of their body. This is particularly true for one’s interaction with the sacred in prayer, in an encounter with the personal God.

Christian traditions of prayer had a deep interest in the link between prayer, heart, and character. Fostering proper desires and affections is similar to developing an acquired taste. Sinful human beings struggling with corrupt desires do not have a natural proclivity for the good. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that molds proper desires in a pray-er, but people of prayer do not passively receive this gift. They continually open their hearts up to the transforming works of God, through liturgical prayer, contemplation, or prayer ex tempore. Those who acquire holy character through these spiritual and bodily practices of prayer are recognized as divine agents in a community.
4. *Lex Orandi* in the Bodies of Women at Prayer

*And find your pleasure in prayer, where you will come to a better knowledge of both yourself and God* (Catherine of Siena)

I have argued that the principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi* needs to embrace the embodiment of prayer as a significant dimension of Christian thought and action. Affective and transformative bodily engagement in prayer has been a main means of shaping the virtuous character of Christian disciples. In this chapter, I present historical cases that show how Christian communities recognized and honored the exceptional voices of the faithful who formed and revealed their theological knowledge, wisdom, and authority through exemplary practices of prayer.

It might sound ironic that Christians could gain authority and power through prayers. Christian teachings on prayer consistently warn against the ulterior motives of hypocrites’ prayers that seek power and fame by a deliberate display of their practices. Pray-ers were reminded that “true” prayers are the prayers of humble hearts which would not seek a personal gain of power. The words and actions of prayer should be directed to God, not to surrounding people, so pray-ers were solemnly commanded not to parade their practices to attract publicity (Matthew 6:5-6). The foremost goal of prayer should be to deepen their relationships with God, not to promote their social and political status. Nevertheless, because deepened relationship with God transformed their whole lives, their practices inevitably drew the attention of their communities. Recognizing their extraordinary actions as external evidences of the presence of the Spirit, communities looked at the pray-ers with reverence and heeded their voices. Therefore, even though
gaining power and authority had not been the intended goal of prayer, their rigorous practices that revealed spiritual, emotional, and moral maturity elevated them as leaders of their communities.¹

An ascetic body can speak louder than words. Even though one avoids a presumptuous display of piety, the disciplined body cannot help but exhibit one’s pious dispositions. When people devoted themselves to God in prayer, its spiritual benefits were expected to appear in their bodily sensations. The state of the body was perceived as a visible indicator of spiritual condition, not only available to others but to oneself. The bodily experiences were viewed as a sign that authenticated the presence of the Holy Spirit. The bodily senses of smell, touch, taste, and hearing were believed to capture the spiritual reality lying behind the physical practices. Even though such a view was not free from a dualistic distrust of the body, it affirmed the value of somatic knowledge of the spiritual matters, which were acquired through bodily, affective, and sensuous experiences. The intense experiences of ascetic bodies produce somatic knowledge that could not be adequately processed within the domain of consciousness alone. Thus, the ascetic body becomes a “text” to be read.² The affective experiences of theological wisdom and knowledge become visible through the actions and features of praying

---

¹ Alasdair McIntrye’s distinction between “internal goods” and “external goods” of practices is helpful here. Praye-ers focus on communion with God, spiritual knowledge, and transformation of the self as the “internal goods” of prayer, but their exceptional practice allowed them to gain spiritual authority as the “external goods” of prayer. Those who use the practice of prayer only as a means to obtain the external goods would not be able to experience the integral goods. Alasdair McIntrye, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 187-96.

² In his discussion of Wittgenstein’s epistemology (*Philosophical Investigation*, §411), Stanley Cavell argued that to know someone’s mind is to “read” the human body (or to “read” a physiognomy) because the human body is “the best picture of the human soul” and the “field of expression of the soul.” Stanley Cavell, *Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 29.
bodies. The praying women to be discussed below were admired for their embodied experiences, and those who “read” them were hoping not only to tap their spiritual power but also to embody those “texts” in their own experiences.

In this chapter, I analyze several stories of women who gained and exercised significant theological authority in a social and ecclesial setting where women rarely had formal theological education sanctioned by the church or held a position of authority in the church hierarchy. These stories show how devout Christians who were marginalized in academic theology or ecclesiastical hierarchy could find their voices through their bodily practice of prayer, and how their communities appreciated and celebrated theological voices from the margin.³

Across time and culture woman have raised their voices in prayers. However, this does not mean that women’s prayer always functioned as a source of liberation. For example, the problematic gender dichotomy between “emotional women” and “rational men” persisted in the dominant popular view on prayer; it denied women’s leadership roles in the presumably rational realms of doctrines by confining them to presumably emotional, hence “irrational”, practices like prayer. It was suggested that a pictorial approach to piety—icons, the Book of Hours, which was heavily loaded with images, and mental images—would be more suitable for women on the assumption that “emotional women” were more inclined to visual stimulation or that “irrational” women, lacking intellectual ability, needed visual aids. Therefore, celebrating women’s piety has not necessarily led to an advancement of their leadership roles in a wider community. Often

³ By illustrating these women’s experiences, I do not seek to prove that there was direct influence of one experience over another. Rather, I intend to take snapshots of historical cases where the similar patterns of women’s authority appeared.
times the limits on women’s leadership were justified by the presumption of women’s “irrational,” hence “inferior” practices of piety, which should be regulated by the rational standards of official hierarchy.

The admiration of affective piety in women’s prayer was often based on the gender stereotype about women being more emotional than men. For many philosophically and theologically trained men, who felt bound to reason and detached from affections, women’s alleged emotional capacity to engage in affective prayer was a special gift of God. They respected and even felt envious of the women’s affective piety. The volatile “emotional women” could be too dangerous to control, but if directed by rational men, they would fulfill the potential to be an archetype of heartfelt faith.

In this complex landscape of gender stereotypes, I do not want to make an essentialist claim that a certain type of prayer intrinsically fits a particular nature of women’s spirituality better. Instead, I argue that there is a convincing pattern that women’s rigorous practices of prayer functioned as a crucial means for them to find their own theological voices and to circumvent the unfavorable structures of patriarchal church and society. The practice of prayer has been one of the most powerful religious activities that have offered women reprieve and liberation from their traditional gender roles. My focus is on how tactically women could claim their authority through their devotional practices.4

---

4 As I have discussed above, it does not mean that women saw prayer only as a tactic for their political gain. They insisted that the primary goal of prayer was to communicate with God.
4. 1 The Authority of Women at Prayer

The special link between a woman’s voice in a community and her prayer can be traced back to biblical narratives. In the rare cases where women’s words were recorded as exemplary, we hear them praying and/or singing. The song of Miriam (Exodus 15:21), juxtaposed with the song of Moses, the greatest prophet, shows the role of women singing and dancing in Israelite worship. Hannah’s prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10), which praises the power of the saving God, serves as a framework of another great woman’s prayer, Mary’s Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), arguably the most influential biblical prayer after the Lord’s Prayer. In apocryphal literature, Esther’s leadership is revealed in her actions of “humbling” her body and offering prayer (Esther 14), and Judith’s saga ends with a scene where she prays a psalm of thanksgiving and praise in front of all Israelites, and the people join in her prayer (Judith 16:1-17).\(^5\) Whether portrayed as an individual woman’s private prayer (Hannah’s and Mary’s prayers) or a public prayer led by a woman (Miriam’s and Judith’s), these biblical prayers have become the official voice of the church by being incorporated into its liturgical practices.

In addition to the authoritative prayers of famous women, the Bible underscores ordinary women’s special places in the ministry of prayer. The author of the First Epistle to Timothy defined a “true widow” of the church as one who “continues in supplications and prayers night and day” (1 Tim. 5:5).\(^6\) Such expectation for the prayers of widows was

\(^5\) Unlike the other prayers of women, which were presented as the individual women’s own voices, the poetic voice of Judith’s prayer is the people of Israel, personified as a woman, and Judith herself was referred to in the third person. But it does not diminish Judith’s authority and voice in this prayer that was attributed to her own mouth.

\(^6\) In the biblical and patristic literatures, “praying day and night” usually means “praying continuously.”
echoed by Polycarp, who gave a special instruction to widows—calling them “the altar of God”—to pray incessantly for all people. 7 Augustine in his letter to Proba, a wealthy widow, praised her inquiry about the practice of prayer, arguing that the most “suitable business” of a widow is to pray day and night. 8

The widows’ honorable duty to intercede for everyone was certainly an important ground of their informal authority. The community respected and trusted their exemplary practices of supplication and intercession. On the other hand, it might have functioned as the patriarchal church’s means to control women’s voices. The church that did not allow widows to receive official theological training or to have teaching authority in the church could confine their voices within the private realm of personal prayers. For example, when instructing widows to be “meek, quite, gentle, . . . not hasty of speech”, Apostolic Constitutions added, “If she see or hear anything that is not right, let her be as one that does not see, and as one that does not hear.” 9 The widows were forbidden to answer most doctrinal questions, except questions about polytheism and God’s monarchy. They were not permitted to teach in the church but only to pray. Like Polycarp, Apostolic Constitutions called a widow the “altar of God” and argued that as an altar, she should not wander but be fixed in one place, namely, her house. Similar teachings are found in Didascalia Apostolorum, which strictly forbade widows to speak up or teach about ecclesial or doctrinal issues at church and commanded them to silently obey church

7 Polycarp, Epistle to the Philippians, 4.3.
8 Augustine, Letter 130, 1.3. Augustine quoted 1 Tim. 5:5 there.
9 Apostolic Constitutions, 3.1.5; the image of an altar did not belong to female pray-ers exclusively, Clement of Alexandria called “the congregation of those who devote themselves to prayers” (united in one voice and mind) the terrestrial altar. Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, 7.6.
officials. Widows were instructed to sit at home making intercessions without ceasing and praying day and night, and promised that when they do so modestly with all their hearts, their prayers would be answered.\textsuperscript{10} These instructions reveal not only the church’s recognition of the widows’ special commitment to the ministry of prayer but also its anxiety about losing a firm control over women’s voices. In such a complex political context, women had to be careful about striking a balance between raising their unique voices and staying within the conventional boundaries set by their church and society.

The roles of praying women became more prominent towards the end of High Middle Ages when the popularity grew (as shown in the previous chapter) of an affective practice of prayer, which sought a more personal and intimate relationship with God. Men had mixed feelings about the eccentric actions and gestures of these women. On the one hand, they suspected the women’s unscripted behaviors that did not follow traditional gender roles would be too dangerous to control. On the other hand, they were attracted to their spirituality as a singular expression of divine grace. Kings and church officials were drawn to their peculiar gestures and visions in prayer.

William of Auvergne in \textit{Rhetorica divina} argued that the authority of the teaching offices of church (“teachers, preachers, and ecclesiastical judges”) do not solely depend on either intellectual training or ecclesiastical hierarchy. Unless the power of prayer (\textit{virtus orationis}) continually helps and directs (\textit{adjuvet et dirigat incessanter}) them, their teachings cannot be truthful and inspiring.\textsuperscript{11} Such an interest in prayer as a source of wisdom, knowledge, and faith was widely shared among medieval Christians. It did not

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Didascalia Apostolorum}, chs.14-15.

\textsuperscript{11} William of Auvergne, \textit{Rhetorica divina}, 336a.
directly mention women’s prayer, but this kind of sentiment was opening a door for the voices of the humble who dedicated their entire lives to prayer. Women themselves pointed out a direct correlation between theological knowledge, affection, and prayer. Catherine of Sienna in her letter to the widow Madonna Jacoma urged her to pray: “find your pleasure in prayer, where you will come to a better knowledge of both yourself and God.”

For these women, learning about both self and God was not merely a speculative exercise. True knowledge comes from affective embodied experiences, not from mere accumulation of information. But this did not mean prayer could simply replace study. Teresa of Avila argued that study and prayer should go hand in hand, advising nuns to find a learned confessor with both knowledge and spiritual experience; the more advanced a prayer life, the more it needs a solid foundation of knowledge.

Medieval women mystics prayed with extraordinary passion and discipline. Their outstanding practices of prayer were not simply a matter of private and personal piety; they were deeply related to their exercise of spiritual authority and their understanding of divine and human agency in their mission. Medieval women could exercise their authority in their religious orders. Although their authority was still relatively limited, the church hierarchy usually recognized their positions of authority within monastic communities. Outside monastic communities, however, women could not have teaching authority over the public, especially over powerful men in civil government and the church. Only men had the privilege to receive formal theological education that was

---


13 “Learning is a great help for shedding light upon every matter. It will be possible to find both learning and goodness in some persons. And the more the Lord favors you in prayer, the more necessary it will be that your prayer and good works have a good foundation.” Teresa of Avila, The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1980), 60.
connected to their teaching offices in the church. Therefore, these praying women, without the authorization of the church and strong educational backgrounds, needed to resort to creative ways to claim their theological authority.

A typical rhetoric they used was to emphasize their humility, reminding men of their humble origins as women.\textsuperscript{14} In her letter to Bernard of Clairvaux, Hildegard of Bingen wrote, “I am wretched and more than wretched in my existence as a woman.”\textsuperscript{15} Julian of Norwich described herself as “a woman, ignorant, weak and frail.”\textsuperscript{16} They tried to demonstrate that they were driven to speak and write not by their own personal ambition but by the inescapable divine commandment to speak of the spiritual inspiration they received in prayer. By contrasting their weakness with divine power, they claimed that their extraordinary spiritual gifts originated solely from the will of God. It was God who insisted they should carry on with the task they were unwilling to take. Such claims implied that those who rejected the voices of women outright were challenging the authority of God who called them personally.

Many male supporters of these women used the same line of argument. In order to defend Catherine of Siena’s sincerity, Raymond of Capua, her biographer, quoted Catherine saying: “How can anyone like me, feeble and no account, do any good for

\begin{small}
\begin{enumerate}
\item I acknowledge that many of these women’s claims of humility were cases of internalized sexism. It is little wonder that many women considered themselves inferior to men in a patriarchal society, especially considering the strong misogynistic teachings in patristic and medieval theologies on the body. The misogynist views on women’s bodies were prevalent in not only men’s but also women’s writings. My point here is not that these women completely overcame the internalized sexism, but that their claims of their own lowliness ironically were the strongest basis of their authority.

\item Hildegard of Bingen, “Letter One: Hildegard to Bernard of Clairvaux”, 271.

\item Julian of Norwich, \textit{Showings}, ST, ch. 6.
\end{enumerate}
\end{small}
souls? My sex, as I need not tell you, puts many obstacles in the way.” Raymond argued that Catherine’s voice deserved to be heard not only due to the extraordinary manifestation of spiritual gifts in her life but also for her great humility. Similarly, Heinrich, who wrote the prologue to Mechthild of Magdeburg’s *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, contended that God who chooses “what is weak in the world to confound what is stronger for its good” handpicked Mechthild as a prophetess.

These women’s authority as spiritual leaders was based not on their advancement of their political status, but on the practices of self-emptying and self-transcendence. This does not necessarily mean that the women held no political aspiration. It means that they had to tread on unconventional paths for their authority claim, with a different view of personal achievement. Their practices of prayer did not promote their original selves as they were; but rather they attempted to remold them by the process of deconstruction and reconstruction of their bodies in the Spirit. The whole gamut of spiritual disciplines, such as unceasing prayer, meditation, and fasting, were impressed on their bodies, effectively changing their gestures, affections, and dispositions. The deconstruction of habits, and ultimately of a self, put these women in a place without power and status, but their reconstructed bodies reflected knowledge, visions, wisdom, and actions, remolded by the spiritual disciplines. The rigorous practices of prayer that emptied women’s bodies paradoxically lifted them up as living texts filled with vision and prophecies, which were revered as a sign of divine power and grace.

Divine revelation made these women God’s prophetesses despite their humble nature as women, and the practice of prayer was at the center of their experience of

---

revelation. They saw visions and heard God’s voice in their prayers. They received God’s messages to people for whom they were praying. Hildegard of Bingen’s letters show that when she was praying for particular persons, she frequently saw visions which she considered divine messages given to them. Mechthild, who often saw visions in prayer, began many accounts of her visions by stating, “I was at prayer.”\textsuperscript{18} According to Catherine’s biographer, her book was written in ecstasy, which was part of her practice of prayer. Their practices of prayer were accompanied by extraordinary spiritual experiences, which people recognized as signs of the presence of God upon these women. In this way, prayer could offer the women exceptional spiritual authority outside of the church hierarchy.

The importance of prayer in these women’s claiming of authority can be found as well in their male supporters’ writings. To defend the spiritual authority of Mechthild, Heinrich compared her to Deborah and Huldah. Heinrich pointed out the parallel between Mechthild and these biblical prophetesses in the fact that people came to these women seeking divine judgment, guidance, and secret counsels. Heinrich found an example of women’s authority in Huldah’s power in prayer. Huldah prayed on behalf of king Josiah upon his request, and Josiah gained solace and mercy through Huldah’s prayer and advice.\textsuperscript{19} Heinrich suggested that Mechthild was exercising a similar spiritual authority when she prayed for other people.

Mechthild also alluded to an interesting parallel between herself and other spiritual leaders at prayer, past and present. When she described her visions of spiritual


\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 31-32.
heroes, such as Mary, Enoch, and the pope, Mechthild portrayed them at prayer; and those descriptions were placed next to the accounts of her role as pray-er. Readers of her book could easily see Mechthild at prayer playing similar heroic roles, especially in her intercessory prayers for the salvation of others.

Catherine of Siena regarded the practice of prayer as a crucial criterion of one’s spiritual leadership and authority. On one hand, she rigorously defended the ecclesial hierarchy. She insisted that people should pay reverence to priests, whom she called “christs,” because the reverence they paid ultimately would go to God. In her vision, God told her, “The reverence belongs not to the ministers, but to me and to the glorious blood made one thing with me because of the union of divinity with humanity.” Thus, Catherine argued that no one could make such excuse: “I am doing no harm, nor am I rebelling against Holy Church. I am simply acting against the sins of evil pastors.” It is God’s right alone to punish unfaithful priests. On the other hand, she sharply criticized priests who failed to follow God’s commandments. Among many commandments, she emphasized priests’ duty for the Divine Office and charity. Catherine repeatedly came back to the issue of the Divine Office, which shows how essential she thought prayer was to the ministry of a priest. In one of her visions, God said, “I have appointed [my priests] to sing psalms and hymns through the night by praying the Divine Office.”

---

20 Ibid., 197, 244, 250.
22 Ibid., 216.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 259.
insisted that what God wants from priests are “the divine office and the incense of humble devoted prayer.”

What is interesting here is not simply that Catherine criticized priests who neglected their duties of prayer, but that Catherine viewed the practice of prayer so highly that it could change the power dynamic between her and priests. Those prayer-less priests might have less spiritual authority than a humble woman who devoted herself to constant intercessory prayer. God was using faithful women like Catherine to humble and edify unfaithful clergy. This does not mean that those spiritual women had direct authority over clergy. Rather, it shows God has given faithful women a special mission to pray for the sake of the whole sinful world. In Catherine’s vision, God deplored that all people—even religious and clerics—were “contaminated in mind and body” by sin. But the merciful God put a small number of God’s “servants who are healthy and not leprous” among them to pray continuously for the sinners. These humble servants were God’s chosen ones, to whom the miserable sins of others were revealed, so that they could pray for others with greater compassion and sorrow. God was holding back God’s justice because of these righteous servants praying among the wicked (which might be an allusion to Abraham’s intercession for the people in Sodom and Gomorrah). When praying for the world, faithful women like Catherine played a role almost like that of a priest. Although an official authority within the church hierarchy was not given to them, spiritual women were commissioned by God to pray for the salvation of the wretched.

---

25 Ibid., 261.

26 Ibid., 235-38.

27 Ibid., 238.
Margery Kempe claimed that she was commissioned directly by Christ to pray for the world. In her vision, Christ told her to pray “as if all the world were saved by [her] good will and [her] prayer”; Christ promised her that “many thousand souls [would] be saved through [her] prayers” because her prayer and tears were “very sweet and acceptable” to him.\(^{28}\) Christ called Margery a “daughter, mother, and sister of Christ” \(^{29}\) and “a chosen one and pillar of the church.”\(^{30}\) He even told her he had “ordained” her to “kneel before the Trinity to pray for the whole world.” This ordination does not replace the ordination of the church, but it affirmed the special power in her prayer that could save numerous souls. Christ told Margery, “[D]aughter, ask what you wish, and I shall grant you what you ask.”\(^{31}\)

When she was challenged for breaking a rule of the church that forbade women to preach, Margery protested that she was only having conversation, not preaching.\(^{32}\) But her authority was more positively recognized when she prayed. She considered weeping and praying for others to be a God-given mission for her. Although she was often denounced by priests for her critical messages on the clergy, not only laypersons but also priests and bishops asked her to pray for them on numerous occasions.\(^{33}\) A priest asked her to pray for a sick woman, acknowledging the healing power of her intercessory


\(^{29}\) Ibid., 67.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 65.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 54-55.

\(^{32}\) “She… said, ‘I do not preach, sir; I do not go into any pulpit. I use only conversation and good words, and that I will do while I live.’” Ibid., 164.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 61, 64, 70, 71, 88, 90.
prayer. When Margery was acquitted of heresy after a tense trial, even Henry Bowet, the Archbishop of York, who was not fond of Margery’s public actions, asked her to pray for him when she knelt down on her knees and asked his blessing at her dismissal.

Some people even brought Margery gifts (gold and silver) to solicit her prayer. When there were accidents, such as a fire at a church, people begged her to continue her unrestrained and even frenzied prayer, “fully trusting and believing that through her crying and weeping [the] Lord would take them to mercy.” Her confessor believed that God miraculously delivered them out of the great danger because of her fervent devout prayer. The power of her prayer appealed even to those who did not like her excessive weeping or crying; despite their abhorrence of her outlandish crying “during their lifetimes,” they desired for the power of her weeping and crying when they were dying, and Margery did not decline to act on their behalf.

4.2 Mission and Intercessory Prayer

The power and efficacy of intercessory prayers allowed women to engage in the social and ecclesial issues more actively. Their confidence in the power of prayer was not

---

34 Ibid., 89.

35 Given his overall dismissive attitude towards Margery, this could be merely a simple gesture of superficial courtesy. But I found it interesting that her account of the trial ends with his blessing and his request for her prayer. From Margery’s perspective, the archbishop’s blessing and request could be seen as validation of her mission. Ibid., 166.

36 Ibid., 61, 167. Cf. It was common that people brought gifts to the pious women to solicit their prayers. Didascalia Apostolorum strictly forbade widows to receive any monetary gifts in exchange of their prayers, reminding them that God would take care of their financial needs. (Ch. 15)

37 Ibid., 202-203.

38 Ibid., 213.
based on their own power and status but on their trust in the merciful God who promised to listen to their humble requests. With faith in God’s promise and covenant that were often revealed to them in their prayers, the women intensely prayed for the salvation of the whole world. Even in the case of Julian of Norwich, an anchoress who lived alone in a small room, her private spiritual life was not disconnected from the outer world. She thought that her devotional life would benefit the whole world: “So we pray for all our fellow Christians, and for every kind of person as God wishes, for it is our wish that every kind of man and woman might be in the same state of virtue and grace as we ought to wish for ourselves.”

Similarly, Catherine of Siena heard God saying in her vision, “You must offer me constant prayer for the Church and for every creature, giving birth to virtue through your neighbors.” As we have seen above, Catherine thought the prayers of the chosen ones were the hope of the corrupt church and the evil world. She prayed not only for her own soul but also for the renewal of the holy church, for the salvation of the whole world, and for the specific divine guidance for particular situations. She thought “the medicine by which [God] willed to heal the whole world and to soothe his wrath and divine justice was humble, constant, holy prayer.” It is a Christian duty to pray for neighbors; one’s negligence of prayer can harm neighbors because it “depriv[es] them of the prayer and loving desires [one] should be offering to God on their behalf.” She believed that the

39 Julian of Norwich, Showings, ST, ch.19.
40 Catherine of Siena, The Dialogue, 159.
41 Ibid., 26.
42 Ibid., 57
43 Ibid., 34
prayer of God’s humble servants had power to win over God.\textsuperscript{44} God is bound to listen to their prayers not because God lacks freedom, but because God freely chooses to listen to them with grace and mercy. Divine love is at the center of divine response to humble prayers; hence, God spoke to Catherine: “I am constrained to this by the same immeasurable love with which I created them, as well as by prayers and desires and sufferings of my servants. I do not spurn their tears and sweat and humble prayers; no, I accept them, since it is I who make them love and fill them with grief over the damnation of souls.”\textsuperscript{45}

From a theological point of view, however, there were remaining questions about human agency in the divine salvific work. What does it mean that human prayers can exert influence on God’s action? If God has decided to save someone, what kind of effect might one’s prayer have on divine providence? The women prophets were not always clear about their positions on this issue, partly because this was not their major concern. They generally agreed that God’s salvific work requires human participation through prayer, without discussing further the question of divine providence. The God in Catherine’s visions sometimes appears to need to hear human prayers in order to act in a certain way. For example, God said to Catherine, “I want you to pray for me for them so that I can be merciful to them,”\textsuperscript{46} “I beg you to pray to me on behalf of these people,”\textsuperscript{47} and “Never cease offering me the incense of fragrant prayers for the salvation of souls,

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 72.
for I want to be merciful to the world.”  

Reflecting on these divine commandments, Catherine made a bold statement to God, “though you created us without our help, it is not your will to save us without our help.” This is similar to Augustine’s famous dictum, “God created us without us, but he did not will to save us without us.” It is not clear how much Catherine was familiar with Augustine’s theology or how directly her saying was influenced by his dictum. Typically, Augustine’s words are taken as emphasis on the need of human inner response to divine grace, but by specifying the need of “our help,” Catherine seems to take a further step suggesting that the divine work needs human actions to be fulfilled.

Mechthild even contended: “[W]hen a person prays in Christian faith with a heart so humble that one cannot endure a single creature to be beneath one, and with a soul so detached that all things but God alone disappear when one is praying, then a person is a divine God with the heavenly Father…. [H]e or she] is a human God with Christ.”

Mechthild’s claim in this passage seems bolder than that of Catherine, but overall she agreed with Catherine on the salvific power in humble supplications. Prayers have power

---

48 Ibid., 159.

49 Ibid., 276.

50 The quote is slight modification of his saying in Sermon 169: “Sed sine te fecit te Deus. Non enim adhibuisti aliquem consensum, ut te faceret Deus. Quomodo consentiebas qui non eras? Qui ergo fecit te sine te, non te iustificat sine te. Ergo fecit nescientem, injustificat volentem.” (Augustine, Sermon 169, 11.13)

51 Interestingly, this saying of Catherine was immediately followed by her plea to God to override human freedom: “I beg you to force their wills and dispose them to want what they do not want.” Ibid., 276.

52 Mechthild, 225.
to awaken dead souls, and God gave Christians the duty to pray for all souls. Mechthild thought that praying for all souls should include prayers for the dead in purgatory. When God showed her the painful and horrible scenes of purgatory, Mechthild’s “spirit was so fiercely moved that she embraced the whole of purgatory in her arms,” and God urged her to pray: “You should bathe [the poor souls] in tears of love that now flow from the eyes of your body.” Mechthild reported a case in which she prayed for a soul in purgatory for three months with anguished heart, and God enjoyed her prayers and said to her, “prayer in common appeases my heart. . . . I hear with pleasure the prayers of religious people who mean it from the heart.”

In her vision Mechthild saw a friar in purgatory asking her to have women (virgins or female members of a religious order) and priests pray for him. This request reflects the sentiment that women’s prayer is as effective as that of priests. Although women were patronized as weak and irrational, needing men’s protection in both body and mind, their prayers were coveted as powerful weapons against evil and effective means to plead to God’s mercy. Women at prayer were favored advocates for the church and the whole society.

These medieval women believed that their prayers could influence God. In spite of their claim of humility, these women, who were supposed to behave modestly in their

---

53 cf. “I invite you and all my other servants to weep over these dead.” Catherine of Siena, The Dialogue, 272.

54 Mechthild, 77-78.

55 Ibid., 284.

culture, took the boldest action toward God in the form of petition and lamentation. Mechthild admitted her boldness in prayer: “I became so bold in my prayers.”57 In this picture, God seems to be portrayed as the listener to pray-ers, who acts passively upon their requests. However, these women made it clear that it was God who inspired them to pray in order to fulfill the divine will. Despite their strong words about human influence on God’s providence, they avoided claiming that they were adding something lacking in God. Instead, God already decided to act in love and grace for human beings and asked Christians to participate in the God-ordained ministry through prayers.

They found peace and comfort in the fact that God is the true source of their prayer. Julian wrote, “the more we know this, the more shall we beseech.”58 The confession that God is the foundation of their prayer had strong Trinitarian implications. Julian affirmed that Christ himself is the “first receiver” of prayer, but as intercessor he “sends it up above” to God the Father.59 Therefore, human petitions do not solely belong to the human side, but rather the second person of the Trinity joins their petitions before the first person of the Trinity;60 human prayers become an event within the Triune God. In addition, they emphasized that it was God who inspired them to pray. The strength and vitality to pray comes from God. Julian viewed herself as a “partner” of God in the divine work, but her

57 Mechthild, 216.

58 Julian, Showings, LT, ch.41.

59 Ibid.

60 We have seen the same understanding of Christ’s intercessory role in Barth’s theology above in Chapter 1. Cf. Mechthild prayed that Christ’s payers would be fulfilled: “Fulfill now, Lord, your prayers in us and sanctify us in truth.” Mechthild, 291.
understanding of partnership presupposes God’s initiative action. She could pray with confidence and boldness because from all eternity God has already ordained everything that God makes her to beseech. Catherine pleaded with God to listen to prayers, pointing out that it was God who made them cry out.

4. 3 Prayer, Virtue, and Perfection

Praying women were fully aware of the traditional connection between prayer and virtue. They warned that even intense emotional intercessions and supplications would be powerless without being supported by a life of virtue. They followed the traditional view of prayer as a means of grace that reshapes the heart.

Catherine made explicit connections between virtue and prayer: “the soul learns every virtue in constant and faithful humble prayer.” In prayer, one gains the true knowledge of self, and in true prayer made in this self-knowledge, one can taste the angelic food of the soul, God’s own desire given to the human heart. This angelic food “catches the fragrance of the virtues” of the crucified Christ and draws divine and human desires together. In prayer, selfish love is replaced by a divine love that makes a soul

61 When Julian argued that “God’s love is so great that [God] regards us as partners in his good work,” she also reminded that “[God] moves us to pray for what it pleases him to do, for whatever prayer or good desire comes to us by his gift he will repay us for, and give us eternal reward.” Julian of Norwich, Showings, ST, ch.19.

62 Ibid., Showings, LT, ch.41.

63 Catherine of Siena, The Dialogue, 275.

64 Ibid., 122.

65 Ibid., 193.

66 Catherine of Siena, Letters of Catherine of Siena, 4:191-95.
patiently endure sufferings and find glory in Christ’s cross. In prayer, one’s faith, hope, and love in God—the theological virtues—are molded and expressed.\textsuperscript{67} Prayer bears the fruits of love of friendship, charity, humility, and self-sacrifice. Therefore, Catherine called prayer a soul’s nurturing mother.\textsuperscript{68} This mother “conceives the virtues as her children, bringing them to birth in charity”; she fills the human heart with Christ’s blood in “blazing love.”\textsuperscript{69}

Catherine not only emphasized the importance of prayer being accompanied with virtue but also contended that the life of virtue itself is a form of prayer: “Whatever you do in word or deed for the good of your neighbor is a real prayer.”\textsuperscript{70} It reflected the monastic teaching of \textit{orare et laborare}, a view that the ideal of incessant prayer could be fulfilled when all activities are done rightly in the prayerful heart. Catherine continued, “Apart from your prayers of obligation, . . . everything you do can be a prayer, whether in itself or in the form of charity to your neighbors, because of the way you use the situation at hand.”\textsuperscript{71} For Catherine, her service for the poor and the sick, her loving charity, was continual prayer. However, Catherine was worried that this extended definition of prayer could be misused as an excuse for neglecting the actual practice of prayer. The ideal of \textit{orare et laborare} developed as an earnest effort to fulfill the Pauline commandment to pray without ceasing, so that it presupposed the practice of prayer is already centered in

\textsuperscript{67} Catherine of Siena, \textit{Letters of Catherine of Siena}, 4:195.

\textsuperscript{68} Catherine, \textit{The Dialogue}, 127; Catherine of Siena, \textit{Letters of Catherine of Siena}, 4:193-95.

\textsuperscript{69} Catherine of Siena, \textit{Letters of Catherine of Siena}, 4:194-95.

\textsuperscript{70} Catherine, \textit{The Dialogue}, 127.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
one’s life. Thus, Catherine added, “I am assuming that you actually pray as such at that appointed time.”

Catherine underlined the practice of watching and praying as a path toward perfection. In watching and constant prayer, a soul waits for the Holy Spirit, shutting itself up in the “house of self-knowledge.” A soul prays without ceasing by carefully watching, with both spiritual and bodily eyes, in the knowledge of Christ and of the self. Christ told Catherine that this is the soul’s “prayer of a good and holy will” and “continuous prayer.” In watching and constant humble prayer, a soul moves from ignorance to knowledge, from sin to virtue, from imperfection to perfection.

Her vision of perfection entailed a crucial transition from vocal prayer to mental prayer. Catherine advised that in the persistent practices of virtues, in the spirit of contemplation, one transcends vocal prayer and finally reaches the ideal stage of mental prayer where one experiences a perfect union with God in affectionate love. When the soul is imperfect, its prayer is also imperfect. But vocal prayer can lead one to advance gradually toward perfection, and then the continuous mental prayer of the soul will spring from the contemplative life, full of holy desire and will. Catherine regarded mental prayer as being in the stage of perfection. Entering into a union with God in mental prayer is like

---

72 Ibid., 126.

73 But the soul’s constant prayer in watching does not replace the acts of prayer. Christ reminded Catherine that the soul “watches also in acts of prayer—prayer . . . that is made at the regular times ordained by holy Church.” Ibid., 120.

74 Catherine of Siena, Letters of Catherine of Siena, 4:195

75 Catherine distinguished the three types of prayer: prayer of continual holy desire (incessant prayer), vocal prayer, and mental prayer.

76 Catherine of Siena, The Dialogue, 124.
entering Christ’s open side and being fused into the blood of the Lamb.\textsuperscript{77}

Regarding this transition from vocal to mental prayer, Catherine maintained two important points. First, even the life of mental prayer should not entirely leave behind vocal prayer. The soul in the body cannot remain in the perfect stage forever, so the imperfect soul must continue to benefit from the practice of imperfect vocal prayer. Catherine advised that one resume vocal prayer after mental prayer, if time permits.\textsuperscript{78} In addition, vocal prayer is of service to all humanity. Intercessory vocal prayers were the works of mission that women continually participated in at every stage of spiritual growth. Catherine also urged priests to keep their duty for the Divine Office even when they enjoy the perfect stage of mental prayer because praying the Divine Office benefits not only the pray-ers themselves but also the entire community.

Secondly, Catherine clarified that spiritual progress into mental prayer is possible only when the Spirit of God comes upon the pray-er. Mental prayer is not a technique one can master to advance to a higher spiritual stage. A pray-er can prepare herself for the presence of God through the practices of charity and vocal prayer, but it is only God who makes her soul proceed from vocal to mental prayer. The pray-er always remains in the posture of yearning for God’s grace.

Julian of Norwich shared a similar view on prayer and perfection. Prayer makes harmony between God and a broken soul. The soul, which is “like God in nature and substance”, is not like God “in condition” because of sin, and prayer restores the soul’s

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 138.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 126.
condition to its original form. Such experience of restoration is made possible in one’s contemplation, when accompanied with proper desires and affections.

When our courteous Lord of his special grace shows himself to our soul, we have what we desire, and then for that time we do not see what more we should pray for, but all our intention and all our powers are wholly directed to contemplating him. And as I see it, this is an exalted and imperceptible prayer; for the whole reason why we pray is to be united into the vision and contemplation of him to whom we pray, wonderfully rejoicing with reverent fear, and with so much sweetness and delight in him that we cannot pray at all except as he moves us at that time.

In these ideals of prayer—mental prayer or contemplation—in Catherine and Julian, the embodiment of prayer becomes a complicated issue. On one hand, the body still plays a significant role as the locus of their spiritual experience. They recognized that active bodily engagement in the practice of prayer was at the center of their theological authority. Their extraordinary disciplines of the body in prayer drew people’s attention. They experienced vision and ecstasy through, not apart from, their bodies. On the other hand, when they describe the nature of perfect prayer—mental prayer or contemplation—they identified the body as a source of problems. They thought that they could not stay in the union with God in contemplation because they were imprisoned in the body.

According to Catherine and Julian, the problem of the body is twofold. First, the body is sinful in nature. The sinful body drives away the soul from the holy God. Second, the body is finite, and thus one’s union with the infinite God cannot last long. They did not articulate theological differences between the corporeal body and the sinful human nature. The early church made a distinction between body (soma) and flesh (sarx). Even

---

79 Julian, Showings, ST, ch.19.
80 Julian, Showings, LT, ch.43.
though the distinction is not always clear, *soma* tends to represent the material body (morally neutral) while *sarx* (morally negative) describes the sinful human nature in the body. For example, although Paul lamented he was confined in the body (*soma*) of death (Rom. 7:24), the subtle distinction between the two terms allowed him to acknowledge the importance of the body in creation (*soma*) while condemning the sinful nature of humanity (*sarx*). Such a distinction was virtually lost in these women’s writings, which led them to conclude that the corporeal body itself was a problem from which the soul should escape. Of course, the issue was more than a linguistic difference. The medieval understanding of the body was under the heavy influence of Platonic dualism, which believed that the immortal soul was imprisoned in the body.

This dualistic understanding of a human being put these women in a difficult situation to navigate. By downplaying or even rejecting the bodily dimension of spirituality, these women undermined their own theological ground. Given that the body played a central role in their spiritual life, their hostility to the body inevitably undercut the authority of their bodily experience of spiritual power, which happened to be a significant source of their theological authority. By succumbing to the Platonic dualism and failing to maintain the difference between body (*soma*) and flesh (*sarx*), they often failed to see how fundamental the bodily dimension was in their existence. In other words, they often forgot that human beings do not simply *have* the body, but they *are* the body.

---

81 Catherine seemed to differentiate between body and flesh, when she said, “[L]earn to keep your body in check by disciplining your flesh when it would war against the spirit”, but overall she did not explore the distinction between the two notions in her theology of prayer. Catherine of Siena, *the Dialogues*, 43.
4.4 Prayer of Tears

Prayer with tears is a significant theme of Christian teachings on embodied prayer. Tears are a powerful means for a heart to reach out to God with all sincerity. Prayer of tears, transcending the linguistic dimension, can express the ineffable thoughts and feelings of the heart. Tears of contrition and tears of suffering resonate with the compassion of God; God takes pity on those who weep before God and answers their prayers (Psalm 6:6-9). Tears of joy in prayer are viewed as a genuine expression of happiness in God.

John Cassian explained the different types of tears in prayer. Some tears overflow from the heart that is “stirred by the thorn of our sins.” Some tears spring from “the contemplation of the goods of eternity” and from “the longing for its coming glory”; this type of tears flows “more abundantly” because of great happiness and limitless joy the thirsty soul finds in God. Some tears flow from fear of divine judgment, and some from the concerns and anxiety about the sins of the “hard-heartedness and the sins of others.”

The diversity in the sources of tears is the reason for John Climacus, who called prayer “the mother and daughter of tears,” to think that the “problem of tears” is a “very obscure matter and hard to analyze.” It is not easy to distinguish between “spiritual

---


84 Tears can flow “from nature, from God, from suffering good and bad, from vainglory, from licentiousness, from love, from the remembrance of death, and from numerous other causes.” Climacus, 139-40. Cf. Thomas Aquinas was also interested in the sources of tears in relation to the benefits of devotion (*devotion*); he rejected the false dichotomy between joy and tears, by arguing that tears rush not only from sadness (*ex tristitia*) but also from a “certain tenderness of the affections” (*ex quadam affectus teneritudine*)—especially regarding joy mixed with suffering. Therefore, Thomas concluded that tears can flow from devotion because of both joy in God’s goodness and pain in human fallenness (*Summa Theologiae* II. II. q. 82, a.4, ad 3).
“tears” and “natural tears” partly because the line between the two is not always clear and partly because one type of tears can turn into the other depending on the change of the heart. Even in the case of “spiritual tears”, however, Climaus envisioned them as a bodily practice that has concrete physical manifestation, rather than a spiritualized abstract form. Physiological experience is neither extraneous nor burdensome, but rather a critical component of spiritual tears.

Of course, how the weeping body works with the spirit to purify the heart and present its desires to God in earnest is more important than whether physical tears are present in prayer. Cassian warned against the “hardened” heart’s contrived attempts to squeeze tears “out of dry eyes” even though such tears would not be entirely “fruitless.”

Climacus also compared those who “take pride in” their tears and despise those who do not shed tears in prayer to a person who commits suicide with a weapon he receives from a king to fight against the enemy. The tears of a beggar are powerful, but at the same time, because of its power, they can easily lead to spiritual pride. Such dynamics between bodily tears and spiritual pride is commonly found in women’s stories when they attempted to claim spiritual authority arising from their bodily experiences.

Although tears were not exclusively attributed to women, tearful prayer was frequently associated with women. Images of weeping women, such as the weeping Rachel (Jer. 31:15; Matthew 2:18) and the wailing “daughters of Jerusalem” (Luke

---

85 The direction of the eyes of a soul find its concrete and embodied expression in the tears of bodily eyes: “Blessed is the monk who can lift up the eyes of his soul to the power of heaven. And truly safe from lapse is the man . . . who moistens his cheeks with living tears from his bodily eyes.” Climaus, 140.

86 Cassian, 119.
23:27-31), are prominent in biblical prophecies. Augustine, who experienced intense weeping as a pivotal step toward his conversion, mentioned two women—Hannah and Mary Magdalene—as the superb examples of holy tears in his prayer for the grace of tears (gratia lachrymarum). Furthermore, for Augustine, his mother Monica was a living example of the embodiment of the gift of tears. In Confessions, Augustine repeatedly praised the prayers of the weeping Monica as an exemplary form of piety. He found the power of Monica’s prayer in her tears that poured out of her dejected heart, evoking God’s mercy and compassion. He prayed, “For my mother, your faithful servant, wept for me before you more than mothers weep when lamenting their dead children.” Augustine admired the “faith and spiritual discernment” she had received from God and her intimate relationship with God. God heard her prayers without “despis[ing] her tears which poured forth to wet the ground under her eyes in every place where she prayed.” Such tearful prayer was answered by the assurance of divine grace, which was revealed to her through a vision.

87 Augustine, Confessions 8.12. 28-29
Augustine viewed groaning and tears as genuine prayer of the heart: “in most cases prayer consists more in groaning than in speaking, in tears rather than in words.” Augustine, Letter 130, 10.20.

88 Augustine, “Meditatione”, ch. 36 (PL 40:936-938). In this prayer for the grace of tears, Augustine expressed his desire to receive the ever-flowing fountain of tears as the visible sign of God’s love. Cf. Evagrius recommended that monks pray for the gift of tears because the tears of contrition would help them to “mollify the wildness” in their souls (Prayer, §5). The admiration of tears continued in the medieval teachings on prayer; William of Auvergne praised tears in prayer as a sign of the genuine heart, a precious gift of God, which “those at prayer should seek” with “diligence and all their efforts.” It is God who gives pray-ers the gift of sorrow or grace of tears, but they should not passively wait for this gift. William taught about bodily means to solicit this gift, believing that “bodily affliction is good for obtaining tears” (Rhetorica Divina, ch. 29).

89 Augustine, Confessions 3.11.19.

90 Ibid. Throughout Christian history, prayers of weeping women were often accompanied by vision and prophecy.
Tearful prayers of women, especially of widows, which could find favor before God’s compassionate countenance, were considered exceptionally effective for not only their own but also others’ spiritual growth. Augustine thought that Monica’s tears played a significant role in his salvation, a role predestined by divine providence; God graciously gave Monica the gift of tears, so that her tearful prayers for her son’s salvation could be heard by God. Augustine thought that Monica’s tears played a significant role in his salvation, a role predestined by divine providence; God graciously gave Monica the gift of tears, so that her tearful prayers for her son’s salvation could be heard by God. God grants the prayer of weeping women the salvific power not for their noble social status or intellectual talents but for their faith and humility revealed in the gift of tears.

The tradition of holy tears in Christianity adopted more dramatic—often ritualized—forms in the late medieval church. Many people at prayer still shed tears privately in a modest manner, but more visible and audible public expressions (shouting, screaming, crying out, and collapsing) became increasingly popular, especially among religious women. Margery Kempe was one of the most famous and controversial mystic women who claimed to have the gift of uncontrollable tears. She cried out, roared, wept with abundant tears; she even fell down to the ground and contorted her body, making

---

Augustine prayed, “Could you, who gave her this character, despise and repel from your assistance tears by which she sought of you, not gold and silver nor any inconstant or transitory benefit but the salvation of her son’s soul? By no means, O Lord! Yes, you were present to help her, and you graciously heard her, and you did this in the order in which you had predestined it to be done” ([Confessions 5.9.17]).

There were people admired and followed for these exceptional expression of passion in prayer. At the same time, the public display of weeping drew controversy and suspicion. Fr. Rodulf, Abbot of St. Paul at Narbonne, who was deeply impressed by St. Dominic’s devotional life, reported, “I never saw anyone pray so much, nor anyone who wept so much. And when he was at prayer he used to pray so loudly that he could be heard everywhere.” Although Dominic himself was admired for often roaring when he prayed, the novices were advised not to make a roaring in prayer (not to disturb others in prayer). Simon Tugwell, introduction to [The Nine Ways of Prayer of Saint Dominic], 6.

William of Auvergne discussed the benefits of various emotional bodily practices of prayer: shouting, wailing (like the cry of infants calling for their parents), roaring, mourning, groaning, sighing, and sobbing. William of Auvergne, *Rhetorica Divina*, ch. 38.
strange facial expressions and gestures. She ascribed her outlandish behaviors to the fire of love burning in her heart. When she contemplated her own sins, the sins of the world, and the sufferings of humanity and, most importantly, of Christ, the flame of fire came upon her breast, so that the “tears of compunction, devotion and compassions”, the “highest” gifts of Christ, could flow. The vision of Christ was so vivid that she almost felt that she was watching his passion with “her bodily eyes.”

Margery’s excessive weeping was a singular example of affective, embodied prayer that elicited both abhorrence and admiration. People criticized her eccentric behavior as a form of acting for self-promotion and publicity. Many people thought she was a hypocrite who “could weep and leave off when she wanted” but made spectacle of herself for her own “advantage and profit.” When she drew people’s attention, the church authority suspected that she attempted to preach and teach without its authorization. She devoted herself to spiritual disciplines (fasting, keeping vigil, praying at church from two or three o’clock in the morning through the whole afternoon), but her critics accused her of subjecting her body to an overly strict routine. Her rigorous practices of prayer, accompanied by weeping and vision, made her body publicly visible, but since her body defied conventional social norms, she had to navigate carefully through treacherous water.

---

93 Margery Kempe, 186. It was reported that she “fell down and twisted and wrenched her body about, and made remarkable faces and gestures, with vehement sobbings and great abundance of tears” (75), and “she fell down because she could not stand or kneel, but writhed and wrestled with her body, spreading her arms out wide, and cried with a loud voice as though her heart would have burst apart” (104).

94 Ibid., 66.

95 Ibid., 177.

96 Ibid., 48.
Margery claimed that the flame of fire in her heart was unquenchable, and her body could not hide the effects of this spiritual experience. Moreover, she did not appear to try to hide those physical manifestation of the Spirit. Rather, she considered her public display of piety as what Christ wanted to show to the world. Although she claimed that she did not preach, her prayer, testimony, and admonition were a public speech; indeed, her weeping body was the most powerful speech she offered to the public. Margery’s theological authority came directly from divine revelation; God the Trinity and saints spoke to her in her vision, and the extraordinary physical signs were an external evidence of her internal experience. She argued the “tears of contrition, devotion or compassion” are a strong evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul because the Holy Spirit, who prays with “mourning and weeping unspeakable”, inspires people to pray “with mourning and weeping so plentifully that the tears may not be numbered” (Margery’s exegesis of Romans 8:26-27). She also denied the possibility of the evil origin of the tears, citing Jerome view that “tears torment the devil more than do the pains of hell.” Such engagement in biblical and patristic texts was an remarkable achievement for an illiterate woman like Margery.

Margery pondered over the tears of Marie of Oignies, a beguine who also wept uncontrollably meditating on Christ’s passion, and the tears of Mary Magdalene, the

---

97 I think it is not an accident that Margery’s book vividly described how people prayed with their bodies (not only her weeping, but also her own and others’ prayer postures). For Margery and other mystics whose bodies were always on display, their actions and postures were intrinsic to their spiritual experiences. Margery portrayed herself with an ideal of image of the praying medieval woman (kneeling, holding her head down, with her book in her hand). Ibid, 56. Cf. standing (250), kneeling (137), “kneeling before an altar of the Cross and saying a prayer, her eyelids kept closing together, as though she would have slept” (247).

98 Ibid., 78.
Virgin Mary, and other women who wept at Christ’s crucifixion. By reminding her audience of these exemplary weeping women, Margery not only defended her theological authority against her critics but also convinced herself of Christ’s calling. However, she was not an unwavering self-righteous maverick; she expressed self-doubt on her special vocation and distrust of her own feelings. It was not only the vision of Christ himself but also her reviews of other exemplar lives of women—especially a conversation with her contemporary praying woman, Julian of Norwich—that assured her the Holy Spirit indeed called on unimportant woman like herself.  

The physical display of her tears was a public means of communication. Her weeping was contagious, moving her audience and her scribe to weep. But the physical manifestation of the presence of God was not always present. Sometimes God withdrew the feeling of grace from Margery. This raised her anxiety because the intense feeling she liked to experience was directly related her sense of calling and authority. She wondered how she could continue her mission when her body was no longer undergoing the physical sensation. But Christ repeatedly assured her that his grace was present in her whether the physical sensation was present or not.

Christ promised Margery that if she offered him her whole heart, he would give his heart to her, and if she was obedience to his will, he would be obedient to her will. This exchange of hearts made her Christ’s companion (or “partner” in Julian’s terms). Because of her request, her confessor could collect half of her tears; people were

---

99 Ibid., 68, 70.
100 Ibid., 66.
101 Ibid., 260.
“rewarded” for her weeping.\textsuperscript{102} Her weeping was a “singular” and “special” gift from God, by which many should be saved.\textsuperscript{103} Christ appreciated that God the Father, the Holy Mother, and saints frequently drank the tears of her eyes.\textsuperscript{104}  

As we have seen in other women’s somatic knowledge in prayer, Margery’s theological understanding was refined when the affective nature of her bodily experiences changed. Her own intense physical experience of Christ’s passion in humanity was a forerunner of her deeper understanding of Christ’s divinity. She claimed that when she grew more mature and obedient, her affection was drawn into Christ’s Godhead, which was “more fervent in love and desire, and more subtle in understanding” than was his humanity. In this higher level of theological knowledge and affection of divinity, “the fire of love increased in her, and her understanding was more enlightened and her devotion more fervent than it was before.”\textsuperscript{105} Her tears were as abundant as before, but the manner of crying changed into a subtler and softer form.\textsuperscript{106}  

Margery’s prayers transcended the linguistic dimension. God gave her “holy thoughts” and “holy speeches” in her soul, which were too profound to repeat in “her bodily tongue just as she felt them.”\textsuperscript{107} But the God-given thoughts were not entirely

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 257-58.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 136.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 250.
\textsuperscript{106} The move from Christ’s humanity to divinity in affective mediation was a popular theme in the Cistercian tradition. Beaud of Clairvaux thought one begins with carnal love and moves towards spiritual love in prayer. The vivid images of the humanity of Christ can bring about carnal love, but the deeper understanding of Christ’s divinity transforms it to spiritual love. See, Bernard of Clairvaux, \textit{On the Song of Songs I} in \textit{The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux} 2:150-52.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 242.
\end{flushright}
beyond her comprehension. She could understand them but could not express them fully in human language. Margery believed prayer was a practice of exchanging thoughts with God.\textsuperscript{108} God received the thoughts in her heart and instilled holy thoughts in them. Even when she did not hear Christ’s voice, he gave her understanding. “Every good thought and every good desire” of the heart is “the speech of God”, which one shall contemplate in prayer.\textsuperscript{109} Listening to the speech of God in silence pleases God more than repeating the Lord’s prayer a thousand times daily.\textsuperscript{110} Christ encouraged her to confess desires in her heart first and to “lie still and speak to [him] in thought,” instead of praying too many beads, and he promised to reward her with the blessings of meditation and contemplation.\textsuperscript{111} “Thinking, weeping, and high contemplation is the best life on earth”; one year of thinking in your mind is more beneficial than a thousand years of praying with words.\textsuperscript{112}

4. 5 Conclusion

Through the embodied practices of prayer, Christians through the ages have gained theological wisdom and knowledge and experienced a profound transformation of the heart. Their spiritual development took place through their bodily engagement with

\textsuperscript{108} Christ told Margery, “Daughter, when you pray by thought, you yourself understand what you ask of me, and you also understand what I say to you, and you understand what I promise to you and yours, and to all your confessors.” Ibid., 257.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 185, 246.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 125.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 52.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 126.
the sacred in prayer. Those who manifested the signs of spiritual gifts in their bodies at prayer drew the attention and respect of their communities. People began to heed their voices and recognize their special power and wisdom in their prayers. Such a somatic ground of theological authority has been particularly important for the marginalized, who have been excluded from formal theological training.

The *lex orandi* in women’s bodies were an important locus of their theological authority. Their theological claims were not based on intellectual or ecclesial credentials but on the somatic experience of spiritual gifts. In prayer, they could find their theological voices. Through their visions, prophecies, and intercessions, they could build a relationship of mutual respect with ecclesial and social hierarchies. Because they firmly believed in the efficacy of their petitionary prayers, they did not think that their lives—even the secluded ones—were disconnected from their communities and from the world.

These women’s spiritual authority in prayer were celebrated and recognized by their supporters and those who sought their spiritual advice.113 People found the prayers of these prophetic women powerful and effective. They regarded the women’s

---

113 The respect of women’s spiritual authority in prayer is also found in Boniface and Lullus’s (anglo-saxon missionaries in Germany in the eighth century) relationship with Eadburg, abbess of the monastery of Minster on the Isle of Thanet. Eadburg, respected for her intellect and spirituality, sent books and vestments to support Boniface’s missionary work. She taught Leoba, relative of Boniface, who joined his mission in Germany. Leoba (considered a founder of female monasticism in Germany) was also well known for her incessant prayer. Eadburg corresponded with both Boniface and Lullus. Their letters provide a rare glimpse of the interaction between high-minded religious men and women in the early medieval period. Sarah Foot argues that although Boniface and Lullus deeply respected Eadburg’s intellect, “what lay at the heart of this correspondence, and thus seemingly at the core of the relationship between the devout woman and these to clerics, was prayer.” In his letters to Eadburg, Boniface asked her to pray for his faith and mission, and his prayer requests show how the missionaries trusted the power of this holy woman’s prayers. Holy women engaged in the life and work of missionaries not only through material supports but also through their intercessory prayers, and the missionaries believed that they would benefit from Eadburg’s exceptional dedication to prayer and study. Sarah Foot, “Women, Prayer and Preaching in the Early English Church” in *Prayer and Thought in Monastic Tradition*, eds. Santha Bhattacharji, Rowan Williams, and Dominic Mattos (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 72-73.
extraordinary practice of prayer as a genuine sign of their intimate relationship with God. Supporters trusted the specific messages the women claimed to receive directly from God in their prayers.

The praying women we have surveyed found legitimate spiritual authority outside (not necessarily against) the male-dominated church hierarchy. Although they were not as educated as male leaders, they thought the Holy Spirit directly inspired them in their prayer, so that they could understand the divine mystery through divine revelation.

But their voices were not universally welcomed. The gender bias against women forced them to find a creative way to answer their callings to a mission for the church and the world, and their practices of prayer were a crucial means of expressing their theological ideas and actively engaging in the ministries of the church even in their patriarchal contexts. These examples of lex orandi of women show how their embodied practices of prayer can be recognized as lex credendi of the church.\footnote{The Roman Catholic Church officially recognized Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, and Thérèse of Lisieux as “Doctors of the Church” for their contributions to the theology and doctrine of the church. Their teaching authority is based on knowledge and wisdom they gained through their embodied practices of prayer.}
A theologian seeks to know God in prayer. The knowledge of God entails an encounter with God as the living subject in a relationship, and this encounter results in the experience of wonder, gratitude, joy, and even fear. This experiential knowledge enhances, challenges, and intensifies catechetical knowledge.

Catechetical knowledge is of course an important basis of one’s spiritual growth. Without *lex credendi*, a Christian would not know to whom she is praying, singing, and listening. But the end of theological education is not to transmit catechetical knowledge but to transform a whole self standing in the face of God. Learning theology is more than acquiring theological information. It leads one to live a life of holiness with reformed convictions, reshaped desires, and faithful actions. In the practices of faith, one’s understanding of catechetical knowledge deepens; the desire for the eternal love of God gradually replaces corrupt desires for ephemeral satisfaction; and one learns how to embody theological knowledge in faithful activities of everyday life. Growing as a disciple of Christ is a continual process of realignment. Through theological teaching, individual and communal practices of worship and prayer, and a life of service, one’s dispositions are realigned toward God.

---


2 Similarly, for John Wesley, faith “is not barely a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head; but also a disposition of the heart.” (John Wesley, Sermon 1, “Salvation by Faith”, §1.4)
Spiritual growth involves the deepening of experiential knowledge of God and the development of virtues in life. Knowledge and wisdom, cultivated by the emotional interactions with God in prayer (often through sacred texts and images), are not a mere extension of speculative knowledge; they bring a qualitative difference to one’s engagement in speculative knowledge. Therefore, Karl Barth rightly contended that faith seeking understanding should be always in the posture of prayer waiting for the revelation of God. This mature experiential knowledge of the spirit eventually transcends catechetical knowledge, but it does not make theoretical/catechetical knowledge dispensable. In order to have proper affections, and to make right judgments and wise, informed decisions, one still needs to engage catechetical knowledge. Experiential knowledge in prayer and catechetical knowledge go hand in hand in spiritual growth. In other words, lex orandi and lex credendi should work together to nurture a theologically and morally mature Christian.

In the school of prayer (scola orandi), Christians gain the knowledge of God and of the self and experience transformation of affections. The practice of prayer remolds a theological self by instilling catechetical knowledge through scriptural and liturgical texts, and by renovating the heart through affective experiences of God. The practice of prayer enhances affections for God, desires for God’s kingdom, self-understanding as a sinful creature, and a sense of duty as a disciple of Christ. This is not a blind trust in the

---

3 Philosophical discourses on the knowledge in the experience of art raise a similar point. For example, Louis Althusser argued that “Art . . . does not give us a knowledge in the strict sense, it therefore does not replace knowledge (in the modern sense: scientific knowledge), but what it gives us does nevertheless maintain a certain specific relationship with knowledge (in the modern sense: scientific knowledge).” His description of such “specific relationship with knowledge” is similar to the theological insight worshippers gain through their artistic engagement in worship. Louis Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 152.
power and efficacy of bodily ritual practices. Pray-ers enter an alternative narrative in which they reinterpret the world from the prayerful perspective of faith, and it consequently changes how their hearts interact with the world. They pray not only to express their belief but also to believe. Their senses soaked in liturgical experiences evoke emotional responses, which can lead to a more intimate relationship with God. By speaking the church’s language of prayer, by keeling down or standing, pray-ers places themselves in a specific field of the *habitus*, engaging in its unique ethos of their synchronic and diachronic communities at prayer.

The “re-formation” of emotions is an essential means of incorporating Christian catechetical teachings into the life of holiness. Emotions establish the heart’s lasting disposition toward God. Well-established, mature emotions are fundamental to virtues. But building emotional character is like practicing a craft; it does not happen overnight. Ritual bodily actions in prayer are crucial for emotional and spiritual maturity because they can evoke affective responses that run deeper than the verbal dimension. Gestures and actions in a ritual context, often performed in specific time and place, shape particular emotional responses. These powerful emotions arising from ritual actions can reach the realm of human nature that language alone cannot adequately address. Tears, sighs, laughs, and other bodily movements in prayer can penetrate and mold the innermost heart. Gestures (*gestus*) can foster and regulate one’s passionate desires (*gestire*).

But the affective bodily dimension of prayer has been neglected in modern academic discourses on prayer because of the unfortunate dichotomies between mind and body, between reason and emotion. Because the depth of emotions defies a linguistic
description, it is not surprising that emotional expressions of prayer are often accused of being irrational (hence unreliable and even dangerous) against the background of modern rationalism. But emotions and knowledge are intertwined. The affections that work as a foundation of wisdom are established not by random feelings on arbitrary matters but by targeted practices repeatedly fired in the right direction in the guidance of knowledge. The mutual influence among belief, desire, and practice creates a circular movement. Belief and practice shape right desires; the desires deepen one’s belief and energize one’s practice; practice embodies belief and desire in the faithful life. The theological virtues, developed in the life of prayer, deepen and increase one’s understanding of the grace of God.

The bodily practice of prayer functions as a spiritual trellis that supports and trains the vines of the mind. The disciplined actions of the body, including postures and gestures in prayer, are more than expressions of the mind; they are the instruments of moral education through which pray-ers subdue disorderly movements of the mind and develop moral aptitudes for virtues. The body in practice is not merely a passive recipient of external stimuli or mental commands; rather, it actively participates in the social construction of a self. The bodily discipline was viewed as a gradual process of habituation which builds up moral character.

Prayer and life are inseparable. Prayers shapes how pray-ers live; how they live is reflected in their prayers. They cannot pray habitually in the spirit of Christ if their lives are not habituated in virtues. Through transformation of the heart in prayer, Christian doctrines take root in the Christian life. From a Christian perspective, of course, such integration cannot be achieved solely by human practices. The theological virtues of
faith, hope, and love are the gifts of God. Christians at prayer seek the presence of the Spirit that can foster proper affections, the affections that are shaped in their understanding of God which itself is developed in their prayerful relationship with God.

When praying Christians, through virtuous acts, reveal their hearts rightly shaped in Christian teachings, their communities recognize the depth of their theological knowledge and wisdom. Their profound encounters with God in prayer are recognized as the sources of their theological authority. This positive view on practical knowledge opens an opportunity for less educated and less privileged Christians to claim theological authority. They might lack official education in theoretical knowledge, sanctioned by the official hierarchy of the church or academia, but their experiential knowledge, gained through their lifelong practices, is celebrated as a voice of wisdom. They become spiritually perspicacious by experiencing God in their everyday practices. Their communities respect and honor their practical knowledge, spiritual power and insight, and virtuous actions.

The marginalization of prayer in academia meant a significant loss of these theological voices of pray-ers in theology. The loss is keenly felt by women at prayer. Prayer is one of the theological activities women have traditionally performed with excellence but the authoritative theological discourses of men have neglected. Although prayer is an essential practice of spirituality for both men and women, women often find it a powerful way of expressing themselves in public space. Praying women have been honored as the leaders of communities; the practice of prayer which is accompanied by mystical experiences has offered marginalized women spiritual authority even over learned men (even though these women often face the resistance of formal authority).
Although I have focused on women in the early and medieval church in this dissertation, I find the same pattern recurring across time and traditions. However, the strong presence of the praying women in church history hardly resonates in modern theology. The spiritual experiences of those women are considered too erratic or illogical to be “reasonable” in the modern sense. They are also viewed as too extreme or too particular to be part of “universal” truth. This problem is not limited to the “extraordinary” experiences of women. Historically women are more involved in everyday practices of spirituality than men; women usually participate in the ministry of prayer at their churches more often and more rigorously than men do. These “ordinary” experiences are also an important venue of women’s spiritual voices. Therefore, whether the practices of prayer in “ordinary” life or the “extraordinary” experiences like mystics, their absence in Christian theology means a significant loss for women’s theological presence.

By recognizing their practice of prayer as practical theology, theologians can retrieve the marginalized voices in academic theology. Their practices have theological value as *lex orandi* and *lex agendi*, and they do not need to be conformed to the social and ecclesial elites’ voices that have dominated the academic field. What the

---

4 In numerous cases, praying women gained theological and spiritual authority in their communities. They were not allowed to preach, but they prayed with power and authority. I found such stories of praying women in monastic communities, Moravians, Quakers, Methodists, and contemporary evangelical churches.

Such leadership roles of women in the practice of prayer are particularly important in the churches in East Asia, where women still struggle with the patriarchal social hierarchy. For example, praying women at a Prayer Mountain in Korea (often widows without social and economic support) lack formal theological education or sanction of authority. Their authority comes not from their educational backgrounds but from their lifetime practice of prayer. Their testimonies about the rigorous practice of prayers inspired by the spirit are a public form of teaching. They lead a gathering of thousands of people with long extemporaneous prayers, combined with singing, shouting, wailing, dancing, and patting. In this place of praying women, the traditional hierarchy between men and women is suspended. The women’s bodily practices create a different field of *habitus*, in which unordained women have authority over ordained men.

Introducing these historical examples of praying women’s leadership is my next project.
marginalized perform with their bodies is as important as what academics explain in their thoughts. Their practices are no less valuable than theological reflection as lex credendi. However, it is an enormous challenge for theologians to find an adequate method to represent the practices of ordinary believers in academia. The conventional four-fold disciplines in the theological encyclopedia do not seem sufficient to cover the depth of their practices. Thus, this dissertation calls for a new paradigm for understanding the relationship between theory and practice, and between thoughts and bodily practices, in theological education. The embodiment of everyday practice of Christians has been overlooked in academic theology. My study shows that the integration of theory and bodily practice is necessary for both academic theology and spiritual formation. A more holistic understanding of Christian practices will not only change the way seminaries train scholars and clergy but also give the laity theological voices that will enrich academic theology.
Selected Bibliography


________. *The Bible and the Liturgy* Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956.


Biography

Sangwoo Kim was born in Seoul, Korea and studied religion and theology at Seoul National University (B.A.), Harvard University (M.Div.), Emory University (Th.M.), and Yale University (non-degree).