The Beauty with the Veil:
**Validating the Strategies of Kierkegaardian Indirect Communication
Through a Close Christological Reading of the Hebrew Old Testament**

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Has been approved by his committee as satisfactory completion of

the dissertation requirement of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

This study explores the ways in which the Old Testament complicates and extends Søren Kierkegaard's strategies of indirect communication. It follows a methodology of close reading within a conceptual frame involving: the limitations of direct communication, the dynamics of overhearing, maieutic communication, and the communication of capability. This is an interdisciplinary investigation at the nexus of biblical theology, literary criticism, rhetorical analysis, and communication theory. These come together for an understanding of how the Christological content of the Old Testament relates to the variety of its literary forms. Biblical texts from several genres were selected: parable, historical prose, cultic and prophetic poetry, ritual, apocalyptic, proverbial and non-proverbial wisdom literature, and love song. The major result of this study is that the presence of indirect communication in the Old Testament validates its usefulness for communicating the grace of Christ. The author appeals for research into indirect communication in the New Testament.

Keywords: Kierkegaard, indirect communication, Hebrew, Old Testament, Christianity

Dedication

To Constance

The *sine qua non.*

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Chapter 1 Introduction

We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant [testament] is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. (2 Co 3:13-14, New International Version)

A thousand years before the time of Christ, the most powerful man in the world was David, king of Israel.[1] Although he was a "man after God's heart" (1Sa 13:14), in a vulgar abuse of power he reached for and took the beautiful wife of an officer under his command. The woman became pregnant. Frantic to cover up the affair, the king tried to induce his commander to be intimate with his wife, but the man's guileless nobility prevented him from enjoying her comforts while his men remained on the battlefield. Finally, David gave a treacherous command to his general that would leave the good soldier alone in the thick of the battle. In this way, the man after God's heart compounded the act of adultery with the murder of a man supremely loyal to him. After a respectful time had passed for the woman, Bathsheba, to mourn, he took her into his home as his wife. In other words, he moved on. Clothed in power and insulated by admirers, there would be no consequence or cost, not in his political life, not in his personal life, and not in his own soul. David, King of Israel, was above such things. This was his illusion.

"But the thing David had done displeased the LORD" (2Sa 11:27). The narration is undecorated and we do not attend to the narrator himself, only to the players on the stage. He is

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[1] This vignette of the account of the prophet Nathan and King David traces my own introduction to indirect communication. In my providential first encounter with Dr. Benson Fraser in 2011, he mentioned the term to a cohort of new PhD students at Regent University. I asked what it was and he told this familiar Old Testament story. Indirect communication itself has been hidden in plain sight. This dissertation argues for the significance of finding such a compelling example of the idea within the pages of the Hebrew Bible.

the "hidden persuader" (Sternberg, 1987, p. 238). While the scene boldly plays out in front of us, the narrator is inside us, barely noticed as we read his words in our own inward voice—this thing displeased the LORD—and are infected, not coerced, by his point of view. The story continues:

> The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. (2Sa 12:1-3)

Although sent by the LORD, the prophet Nathan ostensibly approaches the king *without authority*. He does not come making a judgment but seeking one, in effect joining in the illusion that David is qualified to make judgments at all. He does nothing to arm the king's defenses against the truth. Nathan tells a story, and the king's guard is kept down. This is what stories do.

This one drips with irony.[2] Nathan's story imagines two audiences, as irony often does. One accepts the meaning lying plainly on the surface, while for another audience that meaning somehow doesn't work. They sense something *unsaid* in the *said*. King David is the naïve hearer. He accepts the story at face value even as the details accumulate and stretch common sense: this lamb that drinks from a man's cup, sleeps in his arms, and becomes "like a daughter to him." Readers are the ideal audience, complicit with the speaker, and entangled by an uncomfortable understanding. They want to step into the narrative to shout it to the witless king,

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[2] Incidentally, the detection of irony can depend on close reading, the dominant methodology of this study. One example is in order: Nathan ascribes to the slaughtered lamb the same verbs that the murdered Uriah had spoken 20 verses earlier, and in the same order: "How could I go to my house to *eat* and *drink* and *lie* with my wife?" (2Sa 11:11). English translations obscure the fact that the verbs Uriah and Nathan used are identical. Irony is enhanced for the reader who perceives a clue to meaning that the character has missed.

but there is no breaking the "fourth wall." In typical Hebrew style, the story will not be rushed.[3]

> Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him. David burned with anger against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die.' (2Sa 12:4-6)

David's anger is significant. He had not lacked the information, so to speak, of the divine prohibition against murder. However, there is a mood, whether proper or false, that attends every thought that surfaces in the mind. Emotion reveals how the self relates itself to the idea. David's righteous rage was the feeling that fit the situation. All that remained was for the illusion to be shattered so that his passionate judgment could meet its proper object. Nathan gave up his fiction so that David might do the same. To notice again the matter of narrative time, it was a violent puncturing that only took a moment, the time it takes to say in Hebrew, *'attah ha'ish.*[4]

> Nathan said to David, *"You are the man!"*

> Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." (2Sa 12:7, 13)

What just happened? As a skilled indirect communicator, Nathan did not announce his true intentions or explain up front what he was hoping to bring into the awareness of David. Instead, he concealed his true subject matter in order to draw the king into the closest possible subjective contact with a truth he would otherwise have resisted. In the communication of mere

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[3] The text includes many unnecessary words, translated literally: "he *spared to* take from his own flock *and from his own herd*…the traveler *who had come*…the man *who had come…"* What can seem like mere wordiness to a modern reader is, in fact, artful storytelling. Suspense is heightened through deliberate delay.

[4] My Hebrew-to-English transliterations follow *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines* (2nd Edition) (2014). I follow the general purpose style (pp. 58-59) rather than the more technical academic style. Readers with some familiarity with biblical Hebrew may appreciate the access to the original words that I occasionally provide. Others may at least appreciate the native beauty of the language when I demonstrate untranslatable literary devices, such as alliteration, farrago, or paronomasia.

information to a person who is open to receiving it, the communicator can reason, "I told him, so he knows." Nathan was not content to do so. It is self-evident that a subjective response to truth in the inwardness of another person, such as Nathan hoped to effect in David, cannot be communicated directly, since "this is not the sort of thing that telling communicates" (Kellenberger, 1984, p. 154). As Climacus[5] states, "This knowledge cannot be stated directly because the essential in this knowledge is the appropriation itself" (Kierkegaard, 1846/1992, p. 79). It must be awakened or evoked in the other. It must be *reduplicated*.

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) would call this episode a "wounding from behind" (1848/1997, p. 161).[6] In truth, the wound was self-inflicted. With defenses down, the king had taken part in his own persuasion. Having judged himself, there could be no escape. What Nathan had managed to communicate to David was not any new sort of information, but instead, this painful subjectivity and this radical confrontation in inwardness with a faulty self-understanding. This full and unequivocal confession—"I have sinned"—marks a beginning for him, a vital new capability that begins in the ability to say a true thing about himself and to say it with the proper inflection. He no longer possesses the truth. He is possessed *by* it. He learned when learning was the last thing he was expecting to do, and it was devastating.

Nathan did not leave him there, however, nor did he continue to veil his message to David in indirection. The next words are direct. However, for Old Testament readers eavesdropping on the scene, the communication remains profoundly indirect. It comes as a story within a story belonging to someone else and told from a safe distance away, across spaces

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[5] Kierkegaard asked that his pseudonyms be quoted as such. The reasons will become clear in time.

[6] It can be challenging to find in Nathan's communication a strategy of deception not unlike Kierkegaard's "deceiving into the truth" (1848/1962, p. 7). Alter (2011a) refers to this as the "rhetoric of entrapment" (p. 180) and sees it elsewhere in the Old Testament (e.g., the parable in Isaiah 5). To be fair, the deception only prevents (temporarily) the forming of a true belief about the communicator's intentions (Aumann, 2009, p. 49). Communicators will tend to warm up to the ideals of indirectness to the degree they intuit the significance of the psychological resistance receivers may have to the truths that matter most.

measured in centuries and hemispheres. It enters the quiet interior of modern readers through the medium of text. They are left alone to make of it what they will, or it is read aloud in a sanctuary where no dialogue is wanted or permitted. With their own defenses down, just like David's, listeners arrive at a moment of shocking grace, and one that passes quickly amidst the long and detailed account of the grotesque. A boy might yawn against his mother's arm while she checks her phone. Anyone overhearing out of a brokenness of their own might be positively undone.

Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin." (2Sa 12:13)

In the incomprehensible moment of forgiveness and in receiving its warm embrace, "his own wisdom reached the end of its tether" (Bonhoeffer, 1939/1954a, p. 95).[7] The rest of the story reveals the encounter, by loose analogy, as a sort of Socratic midwifery. Nathan only assisted at the birth of a realization he did not give to David directly. It came as a revelation, born of God. I refer to the poems that would pour unbidden from David, raw and exquisite, about this period in his life. Psalm 51 opens with, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgression" (v. 1).

Clearly, David's former way of existing before God, the one that consisted in an ethical compliance to the demands of righteousness, had come to its necessary failure. The self-salvation project was over. "According to your unfailing love" traces an entirely new way of being-in-the-world. This was faith, "a humble receptivity that receives itself from God" (Dalrymple, 2010, p.

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[7] I do not endorse the neo-orthodox theology of Bonhoeffer. I emphatically reject the way he distinguished between the Scriptures and the Word of God, his doubts about whether human language can be the vehicle of divine revelation, and so on. Contrary to the neo-orthodox theologians, I absolutely affirm that the truth of Christ can be set down in propositional form which sanctified human reason can comprehend. While Bonhoeffer's writings are wholesomely provocative, thinkers from the widest imaginable spectrum see fit to make him their champion. That said, *Life Together* (1939/1954a), which I quote often, is a splendid exposition on Christian communication. I rely on this work frequently to bring a widely recognized Lutheran voice to this study. Since he speaks from within the same theological standpoint, Bonhoeffer often provides the most effective corrective for Kierkegaard on such topics as Christian community or the theologically extraverted nature of the Christian. The least we can say is that Kierkegaard is widely misunderstood on these issues.

26). Bonhoeffer (1939/1954a) would call a confession such as David's his "breakthrough to community" (p. 112) as his poetry, his art, goes on to call sinners to join him in Zion, the city of God which God himself would prosper (Ps 51:18). However, from what we know, none of this was present as the content of Nathan's communication. Instead, it was drawn up and birthed in warm blankets from the store of doctrines long available to David in the Torah of Moses, but now taken up into the concreteness of an actual life and poeticized with the passion of a deeper sort of knowing. He wrote as a man alone with God.

> Surely you desire truth in the inner parts
>
> > you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.
>
> Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
>
> > wash me and I will be whiter than snow. (Ps 51:6-7, 12)

The key expressions matter. David called what he had learned, "truth in the inner parts." He is clear about the agency of his education in the way he addresses himself to God—*"You taught me wisdom"*—and in the location of his learning—"in the inmost place." He was the man "after God's heart," but as Kierkegaard would say, this is because *God* was after *his*—"When I turn my soul toward you, you are there first, and thus forever" (as cited in Lefevre, 1963, p. 14). In view of all of the commentary above on the encounter between the king and the prophet, it is difficult to imagine a truer example of the subject of this study. It was an indirect communication.[8] Its presence in the Old Testament is astonishing.

1.1 The Purposes of the Dissertation

As articulated with extraordinary creativity by Kierkegaard, *indirect communication* is an entire constellation of ideas. As to the overarching purpose of this dissertation, it is to

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[8] Westphal (2014) goes so far as to comment wryly that "Nathan must have been reading Climacus" (p. 200), one of Kierkegaard's most important pseudonyms when it comes to indirect communication.

demonstrate that this very constellation revolves also in the Old Testament sky and in combinations every bit as artful and impactful as those that animate Kierkegaard's prolific body of work. We must credit the writer from Copenhagen as a discoverer, not the inventor, of indirect communication. He is not the one who thought of it, only the one who best understood it, extended it, and gave it a name. Indirect communication was "not made up in Copenhagen out of whole cloth" (Crouter, 1994, p. 224), nor is the debt merely, as has been thought, to the German philosophers or to Socrates (whom Kierkegaard credits).

I argue that indirect communication was already alive and well in the history, prophecy, and song of the Hebrew Old Testament. After all, when Christ's disciples wanted to know why he communicated the way he did, he mined his answer from the heart of his Bible and the poet-prophet Isaiah, and it captures precisely the need for indirect communication: "This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand" (Mt 13:13, quoting Isa 6:9). For such an audience, it is no use to go on repeating what they think they already know or to multiply more and better arguments that only falsify the situation. That is to say, "There was no lack of information… something else was lacking." This *something else*, the Dane went on to assert, is a thing "the one cannot directly communicate to the other" (Kierkegaard, 1846/1992, p. 614). When Jesus made his startling accommodation to the willful resistance and self-delusion in his audience, he turned to the practice of indirect communication in its most essential form: "He did not say anything to them without using a parable" (Mt 13:34). In this, he became the fulfillment of prophecy, this time from the ancient Psalms: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things *hidden since the creation of the world* [emphasis added]" (Mt 13:35, quoting Ps 78:2). Jesus was willing to modify the form of his message in response to human defenses as he met them in his day. He found another way in,

and it turns out to be the very one first laid down in "the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the

Psalms" (Lk 24:44). This is how it sounds: "The kingdom of heaven *is like…*"[9]

    1.1.1 **Validation of indirect communication for the church.** If ancient forms of indirect

communication enliven the inspired writing of a Moses or David, a Solomon or a Jeremiah, the

degree to which this would legitimize further exploration into its strategies cannot be overstated,

especially for the church and Christian institutions of higher learning. For adherents of mere

Christianity, indirect communication, with its many Old Testament expressions and

manifestations, would bear the stamp of approval of the Spirit himself. The humble hope behind

this sprawling study is to further in some small way the church's break-out from modernity's

long headlock, the hyper-intellectualism that sees the human problem as an information problem

rather than what it is, a problem of the soul. Divine mystery, grace, and revelation do not reduce

to reasonable sentences and philosophical abstractions. They are a voice crying in the wilderness.

The wildness of Old Testament truth can be domesticated and diminished when room is not

given for its prophets and poets to speak the way they speak: in love song and rescue story,

smoky ritual and visions by the river. I rest my case on an accumulation of biblical examples that

not only smack of Kierkegaard but even more, they set in sharpest contrast the way God might

have addressed himself to humanity (confining himself to the directness of propositions or the

straightforwardness of systems) and the way he did. There is nothing obvious about the God of

the Hebrews. His way is the more powerful by far, and it is the Word of God.

    This dissertation is a humble signpost away from proof and back to beauty, that rare and

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[9] This defenses-lowering expression is extraordinarily significant for indirect communication. The Hebrew word for parable, *mashal*, has as its basic meaning that one thing is said to be *like* another. Similarly, the Greek word for parable, *parabole*, means that one thing is *thrown beside* another to reveal it in a deeper sense. These key words describe the essence of Christ's teaching in which ineffable things are caught alive in the net of his stories. The eschatological realities of the kingdom are hidden in the birds of the air and lilies of the field. So it was for Kierkegaard, as well, as all of his texts were populated with parables.

ancient literary beauty that is to be allowed its full play across the contours of the mind, to

disturb and to entangle, to absolve and to move, all according to its many and various forms. The

goal is to further the conversation about the *meta-how* of uniquely Christian communication.

1.1.2 **Extending Kierkegaard's use of indirect communication.** In bringing the Old

Testament into dialogue with the Kierkegaard literature, I move the scholarly conversation about

both onto new ground. Audience is everything. As Kierkegaard reached a settled assessment of

his contemporaries, he adapted his project of indirect communication to their particular malady

with a relentless intentionality. As I demonstrate the lively presence of indirect communication

in the Old Testament, this lends a timeless quality to its strategies with a promise that they can

reach beyond 19th Century Denmark to apply to a diversity of audiences and conditions.

Grace often comes veiled in indirectness in the Old Testament. For example, I will

demonstrate that many Hebrew narratives "*heal* from behind." Readers imagine themselves to be

listening to one kind of story, one of warning or condemnation, but suddenly find themselves in

quite another and encounter there a surprising power for edification.[10] Further, Old Testament-

style indirectness includes the way Yahweh often turned himself away from Israel to address

himself to those who harmed her. The book of Obadiah, for example, is an angry letter that Israel

read over the shoulder of those who shamelessly betrayed her, and there is a profound and

paradoxical comfort in the very fierceness of Yahweh. The Old Testament version of "showing

not telling" (a general motto of indirect communication) includes many shocking action

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[10] An example for the many to follow: Moses was banned from stepping foot in the Promised Land for striking the rock at Meribah instead of talking to it as he was told. To Kierkegaard, this was a "monstrous severity" (cited in Martens, 2010, p. 95). However, a close reading reveals that God meant the occasion to be a revelation of grace—"What will I not do for you, Israel? Won't I make water pour out of rocks for you?" When Moses turned the occasion into a petulant scolding, the LORD was not amused. The account becomes quite a different story for the one who braces for rebuke—how poorly have *I* obeyed?—and instead, the meaning of God's offense slowly dawns—how serious *he* is about grace (cf. Nu 20). The story changes again, so to speak, when it falls open as a type of Christ, the Rock who was struck and the water that flowed (cf. 1Co 10:4).

prophecies, such as God's command to Hosea to show his love to his betraying wife. "Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites" (Hos 3:1). The man had become "a walking type, an internalization and 'incarnation' of the inner meaning of God's way with Israel" (Hummel, 1979, p. 298). Hosea was, in his own person, an indirect communication.

Although Kierkegaard engaged with the Old Testament text in myriad, fascinating ways, he did not tend to see Christ prefigured in the text of the Old Testament, nor did he trace the Savior's presence there as the pre-incarnate Son of God. Rather, he primarily used its narratives as "illustrations of spiritual dynamics that can potentially occur in the life of any individual" (Engelke, 2010a, p. 102). I argue that it is safest for the Old Testament interpreter to follow the hermeneutical cues laid down by Christ and his apostles. By doing so, I will uncover Christ himself as that which is preeminently hidden in Old Testament revelation as its beating heart, *the Beauty together with the veil.* From this point of view, the Old Testament does not merely contain indirect communication. Rather, in every sentence, every letter, and the spaces in between, it simply *is* an indirect communication.[11] Even the obscurity of ancient dietary laws and festival prescriptions turn out to be "the shadow of the things that were to come." It is a strange kind of knowing: to see because the light has been blocked out in a particular way. As to all that these things point to beyond themselves, "The reality is found in Christ" (Col 2:17).

There is nothing new about asserting that the Hebrew Bible, in prophecy, typology, and its entire historical trajectory, is a revelation of the Christ who was to come. What is new is this

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[11] This is a comment on the overarching purpose of the Old Testament in the view of Christ and the apostles. I include in this sweeping claim those texts which do not implicitly communicate Christ, but rather somehow serve to prepare his way, such as through repentance and the hunger for redemption they would awaken. Its gloomier stories, simply put, make Jesus necessary. According to an apostolic reading of the Old Testament, I engage the text with a mind prepared to encounter Christ there. However, I do not invest all of the particulars of the Christological interpretations to follow with dogmatic certainty, for example, when I raise the issue of Christian typology in the book of Ruth or tentatively connect the Burning Bush theophany with the two natures of Christ, *et al.* People of faith can disagree.

framing of the Old Testament as an indirect communication so as to bring Kierkegaard, with his passion for the communication of capability, into conversation with the sacred writers. The apostle Paul explicitly affirms "training in righteousness" and being "equipped for every good work" as belonging to the very purpose of the Hebrew Scriptures (1Ti 2:16-17).[12] There still sounds in the ancient manuscripts a call for people to inhabit the Bible's grand garden-to-garden story and to find themselves in Adam that they may also find themselves in Christ (Boda, 2012, pp. 133-134). As I demonstrate the presence of Christ casting his shadow backwards across the entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures, refreshing vistas open up in the text, as well as new avenues for chasing down what indirect communication can be.

Ultimately, I offer a scholarly discussion of how indirect communication can serve redemptive purposes that include and move beyond those of Kierkegaard, that is, beyond the task of shaking the complacent to their soul's foundation. His breathtaking severity issues from the primary mission behind his project: "to arouse *restlessness* oriented toward inward deepening" (Kierkegaard, 1851/1990, p. 20). His diagnosis of his particular audience, through the countless miles he walked through Copenhagen's streets—his "people baths"—brought him to an unprecedented program of disturbing his fellow Danes by means of indirect communication. He tried to wake them up to the implications involved with their claiming to be Christians. It was a "devils also believe and tremble" (Jas 2:20) sort of moment so that the love of God might be communicated directly to a place of fear and trembling.

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[12] The idea of the communication of Christian capability could seem to blur the line between things that are best kept distinct, such as the justification and sanctification of the Christian. The capability of repentant faith, as the gift by which we are saved, is something quite different than the capability of love or worship, as the new qualities that flow from living faith. However, while these capabilities are theologically distinct in many crucial ways, they are never separated in actuality, and it is perfectly appropriate to consider and speak of them as together constituting the Christian life. Certainly, every Christian capability is united in the simplicity of Christ's call, "Follow me" (Mt 9:9 *et passim*), and every good thing that becomes actual in a life is to his glory alone.

This is not how it works in the Hebrew Old Testament. Typically, the truth that disturbs

and the one that exhilarates are veiled together, often in a shocking transition-less juxtaposition.

Without a doubt, the latter message, the stunning grace of God, is the one most likely to go

unnoticed or misunderstood in the Old Testament. I will argue that there are other illusions

besides wrongly believing oneself to be a Christian, and other defenses besides intellectualism

and self-righteousness. Consequently, there are as yet undiscovered reasons for attending to the

how and not only the *what* of edifying communication.[13] Guided by the Old Testament historians

and poets, Kierkegaard can inform strategies for a rhetorically charged, yet delicately indirect,

communication of grace to the brokenhearted. It may be perfectly suited for someone caught in a

despair that the Gospel does not seem to touch and who "doesn't want to talk about it." Indeed,

indirect communication is an ideal vehicle for delivering relational messages of encouragement

to a deeper place in the waiting soul and across difficult interpersonal spaces.[14]

Christ is indeed veiled in the Old Testament, not as a *what* or even a *how*, but as a *Who*,

being in his own person the ultimate Indirect Communication as Godhead veiled in ordinary

flesh (Kierkegaard, 1848/1991, p. 127). He is the *Torah* [the Teaching] of God in the warmth of

human skin and the expressiveness of human face. In Kierkegaard's Lutheran theology, God

hides himself, paradoxically, because of his commitment and desire to be known and to be seen

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[13] The divinely revealed doctrine of the Bible is a treasure beyond all telling. The redemptive facts of Christ in his person and work are to be offered unambiguously to anyone who knows their need or recognizes their sinful condition. Christian witness takes what is Christ's and declares this to others. However, a special communication problem is posed by those who have this vital information, all or in part, but who know nothing of the daily dialectic of repentant sorrow and joy. The *how* that concerns me is this: how does the Old Testament, by its diversity of forms, communicate truth in such a way as to provoke the learner's awareness and subjectivity for the sake of relating in Spirit-filled capabilities to that costly *what* of Christian theology.

[14] A man's daughter is a quiet soul of loveliest character, yet there is a risk that she might internalize her quietness to be a sign of worthlessness according to the modern cult of personality. A direct contradictory message is likely to fail at an essential level. For the father to sit opposite her, knees touching, and say, "I love the quiet person God has made you to be, and in Christ, you have much to contribute to this world, more than you can know"—might only exacerbate the false belief. She might resist, arguing in her mind, "If it were true, he would not feel the need to say it." How, then, to tell her? Let it come to her deeply cloaked in an indirection. Give her nothing with which to argue and no occasion to resist. Let her overhear.

to his very heart. Similarly, the ineffable grace that is hidden behind the ancient text so artfully

and deep is made all the more one's own dear possession by the sacred effort and delightful act

of discovery.[15]

1.2 The Reasons for Indirect Communication

Indirect communication captures the imagination of those who have banged their heads

against the wall of communicative directness. One does not simply speak appropriation into the

heart of another. I cannot give directly to anyone the experience of Christ that I have in an

inward drama. There is an inner history shared with him across decades and a love that "spends

itself in time" (Kierkegaard, 1843/1987, p. 140). By its very nature, Christian subjectivity cannot

be made public but is an "essential secret" (Kierkegaard, 1846/1992, p. 79). If faith in Christ

comes to me as a gift as the apostles say (e.g., Ac 11:18 & Eph 2:8-9), then it is not an

achievement. I cannot ground it in myself or put on display to anyone's rational satisfaction the

reasons I am inwardly captivated and compelled. "Your life is now hidden with Christ in God"

(Col 3:3). This life is bound in hiddenness to the dying, rising, and ascending of Christ, a truth

Kierkegaard captured in the image of a spring that feeds a quiet lake from somewhere in the deep

(1847/1995, pp. 9-10). Even if I could describe my earnestness about Christ in anything more

than a "stammering and a stuttering," this is not the same thing as actually *communicating* it

from my inwardness to yours that you should be earnest as well. The issue is not the inability to

turn faith into an exhibition, but rather it is the ache to know that the same thing moves in the

chest of another human being. The "essential secret," the part we cannot give directly to one

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[15] When I speak of veiled meaning in a biblical text, I take that meaning to be its *unus sensus literalis* [one literal sense], rather than that the text has multiple meanings (cf. Hummel, 1979, p. 504). Further, I do not wish to imply that it takes special powers of intellect to see and grasp those theological meanings. I affirm the perspicuity, or clarity, of the Scriptures, the "quality of the biblical text that, as God's communicative act, ensures its meaning is accessible to all who come to it in faith" (Thompson, 2006, pp. 169-170).

another, may yet be a secret shared, "like known by like."[16] In the deepest place, as the one tells

the Story to another, they are the same, and it makes their joy complete (1Jo 1:4).[17]

In truth, the connection of one believer in Christ with another is always indirect, even as

no human being has direct access to the interiority of any other. Although lacking any fusion of

minds—a false, illegitimate hope (Peters, 1999)—the connection they have is no less beautiful

for that reason. Even when one person belongs to Christ in this world and another belongs to him

in eternity, against all sense and sight that are both joined to the same living Lord. They still have

each other and still belong to one another *in him*. What has painfully passed from sensory

experience is not what is most vital. That they are forever lost to one another, this is the illusion.

As to the ability to see the glory of Christ when the whole human cosmos, the "world," exists to

obscure his face, communicating this to the subjectivity of another does not happen directly. To

describe it as such would imply that it is no different than a transmission of everyday information

like, say, a weather forecast or the price of tea. I can give you those. Only God can give his Son.

It is always an indirect communication because it is always mediated by the Word of the gospel,

and "mediated" turns out to be quite an important word (as we will see).

This hiddenness of the Christian life is itself the pale mirror of *Deus Obsconditus*. Divine

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[16] Aumann (2008) cites the ancient thesis I allude to here as going back as far as Pythagoras (p. 144).

[17] The work of the Spirit by his Word is an impenetrable mystery. Kierkegaard was emphatic that human cleverness, eloquence, and authority add nothing to the power of the Gospel. Yet, the Spirit moves in, with, and under psychological processes at play in his Word; these are not beyond the scope of investigation. This study also concerns human illusion and patterns of psychological resistance that problematize communication as it passes between people. Similarly, the nature of the relationship between the Christian teacher and the learning subject is a legitimate concern, as is the learner's posture toward Christian truth. Our interest is simply that the Word of Christ might be attended to and not ignored, considered and not dismissed, perhaps to haunt the dreams of the other to do God only knows what or how. We want the truth of Christ to lodge itself like a seed in memory and imagination the way songs and stories do and abstractions more often do not. To the one who would ask, "Why not simply preach the Word and let the Spirit do his work?", this is precisely my point of view. However, I note that gospel ministry has rarely meant merely reading the biblical text without further commentary, and that Christian preaching and teaching will always be guided by implicit understandings about what it means to communicate Christian truth and apply it to individual spiritual need. This study is a call to bring utmost sensitivity to the forms of the biblical text, to learn better to take our cues from them, and simultaneously, to become ever more audience-centered in our approach to gospel ministry.

hiddenness is God's decision not to come to humanity directly and unveiled. In Kierkegaard's context (quite unlike ours) the phrase "indirect communication" could simply suggest "mediated communication" according to the usage of the Hegelians (McPherson, 2001, p. 161). This makes it quite natural, indeed, to contemplate *divine* indirect communication as the theological underpinning of this study, since God always mediates his presence in this present age. The hiddenness of God is his own merciful condescension to hide the glory humanity could never bear, and to conceal himself in places only faith will find him, that is, behind the masks of creation and coincidence, humble Word and sacrament, the life of Christ and the cross of suffering that comes to all who mean to follow him. This is Luther's "world full of God," the God of breathtaking nearness in Jesus.[18] All of this affirms one scholar's call for a further exploration, through the lens of indirect communication, of all that God can only reveal by a deliberate concealment (Aumann, 2008, p. 169). Kierkegaard's parable of the sovereign prince who wishes to love a lowly maiden (1844/1985b, pp. 165-166) is perhaps his most memorable treatment of divine hiddenness (Gannon, 2014). The story speaks about Christ's chosen and costly unrecognizability as well as his *kenosis* [emptying] on the basis of Philippians 2:5-8.

The ineffability of religious subjectivity or transcendent mystery does not exhaust the limits of direct communication, that is, communication for which an unambiguous meaning lies plainly on the surface. It also comes down to a very practical matter. Suppose someone lives under an illusion, and further, suppose that this illusion is willful and self-protective. It is the way the self holds at bay some threatening bit of self-knowledge. Further, suppose that this person is supremely confident that there is nothing the communicator could bring that he or she

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[18] As Lutherans, both Kierkegaard and Hegel concerned themselves with controversies over how to interpret the *communicatio idiomatum*, that is, the "communication" or sharing of the divine and human attributes in the person of Christ (McPherson, 2001, p. 161). This conversation about communication was already happening in the first half of the 19th century and it was theologically rooted from the start.

does not fully comprehend already, for example, what it means to love, to be true, or to be the Christian one claims to be. In this scenario, direct communication predictably conjures the opposition of the will. To approach such a person forcefully and from a superior position expecting to extract an admission of wrong is to almost guarantee that the other will merely respond in kind. Anger rises to meet anger. Pride awakens pride. To try to communicate the reality of their situation to them directly may only succeed in arousing their defenses in a patterned response of resistance, or in eliciting a useless consent (Anderson, R. E., 1963, p.6).[19] The result may be that the self-delusion, having been fortified in battle, comes to hold the person in an even stronger grip.

Where indirect communicators recognize self-protecting pride or angry dogmatism, they choose to enter in with *something else*, say, an apology or self-deprecating humor. They are even willing to present themselves Nathan-like as if the other person has what authority there is in the situation. "There is nothing that requires such gentle handling as an illusion if one wishes to dispel it. If anything prompts the prospective captive to set his will in opposition, all is lost" (Kierkegaard, 1848/1962, p. 25). Enter Kierkegaard's strategies of indirect communication.

1.3 An Overview of Strategies for Indirect Communication

Overhearing is a lynchpin to this study, being a strategy that indirect communication and the Old Testament have deeply in common. The account of Kierkegaard in a Danish cemetery (1846/1992, pp. 237-241) can provide an ideal initiation into this world. The young Kierkegaard (smart, worldly, and complacent) found direct Christian appeals to be all too easy to fend off. One day, from a place of concealment, he overheard a grandfather speaking matters of faith

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[19] "If the listener happens to be in an agreeable mood, the effect of directness is that he not only agrees with everything the speaker says but also affirms that he has always believed the same thing...an outcome as useless as outright rejection" (Anderson, R. E, 1963, p. 6).

quietly but insistently to a grandson over the fresh grave of the boy's father who had died in unbelief. The old man knew he would not live long enough to steer the child past the same danger, the lure of worldly wisdom that appeared to have surpassed Christianity like "a wide range of blue mountains, a specious continent, which to the mortal eye looked like a certainty greater than faith" (p. 238). When the grandfather put the child on oath to remain in Christ, the little one dropped to his knees and the old man scooped him up in his arms. It was a scene so sacred that Kierkegaard had no impulse to intrude. Instead, he would spend the rest of his life trying to tap into the power of that moment, the strange influence in being left alone and unaddressed. He experienced in that cemetery an encounter with words and a form of communication that asked nothing from him in terms of answer or argument, but only drew him deeper and deeper inside the talk. He was gripped by its Christian content as never in his life. This was indirect communication.

It is especially this counter-intuitive power of overhearing that commended to Kierkegaard the use of written text for indirect communication, as readers are left alone in Proust's "reading sanctuary," outside the line of fire. God himself showed a similar preference: Ong (1982) notes the "interiorizing drive of the Old Testament" (p. 149) that was something new in the world. The activity of silently reading text isolates people within their own private, interior worlds (Ong, 1982, p. 70). They enjoy a palpable aloneness and anonymity that bring the freedom to reflect, to appropriate or not, and to reach conclusions all on their own (Craddock, 2002, p. 91). It is coercion's polar opposite. Readers are freed to think their own thoughts and feel their own feelings in the condition of hunger to know what is true, and it is this hunger itself that is the hallmark of a successful indirect communication. What is more, Kierkegaard recognized the relationship between the opaqueness of a text and the intensity of the reader's

involvement (Polk, 2010, p. 127).

Kierkegaard singularly cherished the distance which the medium of writing opened up between himself and his readers, doing as much as he could, in fact, to push his readers away.[20] His methods of indirect communication go on to encompass a full and fascinating array of literary means, as he positively saturated his writing with irony and wit, image and pathos, paradox and parable,[21] all drawn from an inexhaustible well. Through the labyrinth strides *incognito* a thoroughly Christian heart. These methods had the intention of defamiliarizing his reader with the things he was most eager to communicate—God's things—in order to make them strange, and to allow them to be seen as for the first time. He wanted nothing more than to restore, if he could, the old shock of revelation to those on whom it had been lost, understanding that "a primitive impression [of Christian truth] can only be acquired with difficulty" (1846/1992, p. 275). Accomplishing this often requires that people should come into contact with something radically and essentially Christian before they realize it is so. Ultimately, no one understands a single thought of Kierkegaard if they do not understand this: he wanted to gain a fresh hearing for the gospel.

Indirect communication strategies go on to include disarming the other of what they think they know through innocent Socratic-style questioning. It can mean firing their imagination for whole worlds of meaning they might inhabit and for the many alternatives that exist for the self

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[20] By casting himself "as one without authority" (1851/1990, p. 3), that is, with nothing new to bring to Christendom, Kierkegaard was being consistent in not wanting to assume an inappropriate role over against the autonomy of another person. He was a writer and did not have formal authority in the church.

[21] Kierkegaard wrote hundreds of parables: gaggles of fat geese who gather weekly to speculate about the glories of flying but turn on the one that dares to try; the philosopher who fascinates only by the bead of sweat hanging from his nose; or the clown who shouts "fire" in a theatre—the louder he cries the harder they laugh, thinking it part of the show. Kierkegaard's parables breathe with irony and stretch with dialectical tension. They pull the rug out and readers feels themselves called into question. Lastly, they are notable for how well they stand up when removed from their original context in Kierkegaard's authorship.

to be a self.[22] Indirect communicators may entangle others in ambiguity and contradiction to create a negative space for awareness to begin.[23] Indirect communication is, in the fullest sense of the term, self-involving. It would draw the spectator of life a little deeper in.

1.4 Maieutic Communication and the Communication of Capability

Of decisive importance to the indirect approach, then, is the art of maieutic communication, meaning that one person elicits wisdom or meaning from the other rather than supplying it to them directly. Indirect communication issues from a deep respect for the essential noetic nature and capacity of other human beings, so that the indirect communicator seeks to draw out of the other what is, on some level, already known by them but is inadequately appropriated. This involves a keen sensitivity to the student-teacher relationship and of the significantly higher gains in learning that attach to what learners draw up, work out, and gain for themselves. This is not a "whatever is true for you" perspective, but concerns unchanging truth to which the self is not being true. This maieutic impulse is vital for making truth actual in the life of the learner as a dear possession. The instinct for communicating in story especially reflects this eagerness to leave a significant part of the sense-making task up to the receiver. (We will see this quality virtually everywhere in Old Testament narrative. Its stories rarely explain themselves. The best stories never do.) Maieutic communication always takes the risk that the other may not *get it* because this *getting it* gets at the essence of communicating subjectivity.

Likewise, respect for the capacity of the learner compels teachers somehow to account

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[22] Gregor (2009) includes a thorough treatment of imagination as the site of struggle against despair that Kierkegaard opens up: "The despairing self never imagines that life could be anything other than it is depicted in the mundane and mediocre mind of the secular world….Imagination is the vessel of possibility, of hope, of the '*What if*…'" (p. 449). Indeed, it is a breaking loose from one's own natural, habitual thinking in order to live in the marvelous freedom of grace and the sanctified creativity that is the imitation of Christ.

[23] This awareness begins in the admission of the *self to itself* that it does not reflect Christ as well as appearances would suggest; without this, no deepening awareness of the fuller dimensions of divine acceptance is possible. Grace runs downhill. When a communicator once allows the intellectual sparring with the listener to heat up, such delicate moments may be strangled in the cradle. The other must be given room.

even for such authority as attaches properly to their position, in order that students may yet think

for themselves and take some sort of stand that is fully theirs. (This is not an absence of authority

but authority that is always inwardly on its knees before Christ from whom it derives.) This is all

of apiece with the ultimate concern of the most artful teachers, that of being in their own person

the truth that is to be taught, reduplicating it however inadequately in their own lived experience.

To be qualified to teach repentance, for example, one must know a thing or two about it, and not

be the swimming instructor in Kierkegaard's parable who teaches swimming on the dry shore

(where the students lounge about as well). Teachers who live to be admired and who have mostly

succeeded cannot meaningfully teach on the matter of sharing in the disgrace of Christ.[24]

    I return to the critical distinction, namely, the information / capability dichotomy. The

occasion and necessary condition for indirect communication is when the other person is not

lacking in the intellectual grasp of information—the indispensable *what*—yet is demonstrating

little capability in actually *living* according to what is known—the all-important *how*. "Though

hearing they do not hear." For Kierkegaard, the eye is *always* to capability (Herrmann, 2008;

Tietjen, 2013). That is, to not merely grasp superficially the content of a borrowed idea, but to

come to a deeper realization of the idea in one's embodied and enacted life. Rather than

multiplying information, the aim of religious teaching is often to provoke an alternative

understanding of even the smallest part of the information the subject already possesses, for

example, the first two words of the Lord's Prayer. There is capability in the sigh, "Our Father"—

the imagination is stirred to think of the life that might be lived in this thought alone. Such is the

inspiration of communicators who are not content with anything less than to see new qualities

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[24] This is from a series of pamphlets Kierkegaard published called *The Instant*: "In the splendid palace chapel a stately court preacher, the cultivated public's elite, advances before an elite circle of fashionable and cultivated people and preaches emotionally on the text of the Apostle, 'God chose the lowly and despised'— and nobody laughs!" (as cited in Moore, 2002, p. xviii).

born into the subject's life. "Telling the truth isn't all there is to it…but then to learn to grieve, to wish, to hope, to yearn—this will mean realizing a new capacity" (Holmer, 2012, p. 10), and the recipe for that is not necessarily more and more scholarship and intellectualism.

The indirect communicator accepts enormous challenges (the cognitive energy, the art of patience, and the difficulties that come with the willingness to be misunderstood), yet the purposes here are modest. One person cannot give birth to the truth in another. That is the Spirit's business. Yet, Christian witnesses can perhaps, in the spirit of Socrates, serve as a kind of midwife to truth. After speaking the necessary word, they "shyly withdraw" (Kierkegaard, 1848/1962, p. 251), not demanding to hear the confession best made in aloneness to God where the self makes an admission to itself. "Repentance does not want spectators" (1844/1985b, p. 121). It is God's gift to a human being, not *vice versa*.[25]

"Indirect communication lies in making the recipient self-active" (Kierkegaard, 1848/1991, p. 125). Rather than continuing to supply and multiply information, it aims merely to make the other person aware in earnestness, interestedness, and heightened self-reflection. This awareness is an intensified self-relation within a quiet and deepened interior, and an enriched capacity for self-examination. The *how* of Christian existence, that was Kierkegaard's obsession, requires a bone-deep understanding of what it would mean to reduplicate even the smallest part of the truth and take that truth up into an actual life. The point is that the Christian subject should at last begin at the task itself, not merely to admire Christ or talk skillfully about him in sound propositions (as vital as that aptitude is), but also to know him and to follow him in love and

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[25] This sensitivity to the face of the other is articulated in the best philosophers of communication (e.g., Levinas, 1969). It is mirrored beautifully in Christian theology wherever is expressed the willingness on the part of a communicator, having spoken a Word of Christ, to leave the other alone with him, indeed, to set the other free. "This spiritual love will speak to Christ about a brother more than to a brother about Christ…the most direct way to others is always through prayer to Christ" (Bonhoeffer, 1939/1954a, p. 36).

trust. This ideal is further articulated by Bonhoeffer[26] as our learning to exist for this world and to live unreservedly in life's realities. This throws us "completely into the arms of God" (1954b, p. 201).

1.5 Indirect Communication as a Uniquely Christian Endeavor

My exposition to this point gives away a central assumption that drives this dissertation. Communicating Christianity is a task like no other. Although debates about Kierkegaard's unprecedented literary program continue, this study proceeds from a "hermeneutic of trust" (Teitjen, 2013, p. 75) in that I take Kierkegaard and his strenuous assertions at face value in his retrospective work, *On the Point of View on My Work as An Author* (1848/1962). Written toward the end of his life (though he could not have known this), there he makes repeated unequivocal assertions about his entire authorship, comprising both his pseudonymous works and those that appear under his own name (or his "signed works"): "The whole of my work as an author is related to Christianity, to the problem 'of becoming a Christian'" (pp. 5-6). In his hands, the strategies for indirect communication only achieve their end when they awaken in the heart of the professing Christian just what it means to be one. The most recent wave of Kierkegaard scholars includes many who assume that Kierkegaard only makes sense when approached from a theological starting point (Evans, 2006; Turnbull, 2008; Tietjen, 2013; Penner, 2013). Rae (2010) argues that without a full grasp on Christ as the gravitational centers of Kierkegaard's work, whatever insights might be gained are set on a faulty foundation: "The important question is whether through his corrective Kierkegaard still…prompts action towards a giving of our

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[26] Bonhoeffer and Kierkegaard had many interests in common. Kirkpatrick (2011) brought the two Lutherans into conversation about the ways Christendom can exist within a secular culture. Bonhoeffer used a Chalcedonic analogy that sees the church in a differentiated unity with the world; the two are distinct but never separate. Kierkegaard is remarkable for meeting the world from a position ostensibly outside of Christendom. Polka (2014) takes up Kierkegaard's unprecedented Christian posture in a secular world.

whole lives, without merit as they are, into the hands of God" (p. 165).

As we have seen, this most vital capability begins with the ability to say something true about oneself, as in the "I have sinned" of King David as birthed through the parable of Nathan. In Kierkegaard's terms, this is a breaking out of the *aesthetic* sphere of existence,[27] a way of being-in-the-world that is characterized by an avoidance of ultimate questions and by a grasping at so-called happiness without self-examination, like the reaching of David for Bathsheba. It is likewise a breaking free from the *ethical* sphere of existence that, while affirming moral values and rejecting the life that revolves around itself, can only end in self-righteousness or despair. Kierkegaard's Lutheran theology sees in this mode of living a thinly veiled "theology of glory."[28] The necessary breaking out is repentance, or what Kierkegaard would call "the self becoming a self that it might be drawn to God" (1848/1991, p. 160). Kierkegaard titled his profound book of Christian psychological insight with a poignant allusion to Jesus' raising of Lazarus (Jn 11): the true sickness that is despair over the self need not become *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849/1980). Capability stretches to its paradoxical heights, not in moral striving but in something quite the opposite, in knowing most fully and unequivocally that, apart from Christ, one can do nothing at all. Kierkegaard captured this paradox of the Christian's abasement in this world, and the simultaneous union with Christ, in the image of the stars reflected in a lake: they appear to be lower than anything else in the world, but all is changed for the ones who look up

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[27] Kierkegaard's idea is that people may assent to Christian truth, but actually have their lives in these other categories (the aesthetic or ethical). In this, he was inspired by Augustine's "three stages" of faith.

[28] The theology of glory, in distinction with the theology of the cross (Luther, 1518/1957a), refers to the activity of the self in seeking its own glory in the form of some righteousness, identity, or meaning that it fashions for itself through its own resources. Hinkson (2001) argues that Kierkegaard lived out his program of indirect communication as 19th century *theologian of the cross.* Kierkegaard's Anti-Climacus "thinks all ordinary attempts to find something upon which to base one's identity fail" (Aumann, 2008, p. 63). Forde (1997) makes an assertion that is particularly significant for this dissertation, namely, that the Old Testament, too, is "cruciform" in its theology, and only comes into its own "in the light of the theology of the cross" (p. 8).

and see their true position (1848/1991, p. 198).[29]

For Kierkegaard, neither the ability to display pious feeling nor to engage in endless abstract theological talk is the sign of faith. More likely, these are the safest places to hide from what the crucifixion of Christ means to do to a human being. "All loopholes are closed so that the believer will in the end simply be cast on that creative love of God, which makes the object of its love out of the nothing to which the sinner has been reduced" (Forde, 1997, p. 12). Rather than that humanity can contribute to its own standing with God, for Kierkegaard the cross is the final farewell to all that has gone before—the ineptitude of the law, the failure of the will, the blindness of sight, the false speaking, the misuse of wisdom. "You must be born again" (Jn 3:7) is the final farewell to all a human being has brought to the table of God. The theology of the cross is straight talk to end all illusion. Much worse than condemning human beings at their worst, it condemns them at their best and undermines any positive assessment of humanity's spiritual capabilities. All pretense is ended in the presence of Christ. One can dare to be sinner. God must act upon a human being in the form of the real death that the cross brings—"I am crucified with Christ and I no longer live" (Gal 2:20)—that he or she should be made alive and set free for a life of service that is spontaneous, joyful, and un-coerced.

The implications for uniquely Christian communication are dramatic. In other words, the cross of Christ is certainly *not* mere information. Information is not nearly so threatening, and any heart that thinks this is what the cross is has yet to be conquered. For the soul in which the Scriptures, as a Means of Grace, has awakened a sense of its own desperate need for the mercy of God, the absolution that issues freely from the cross will never be a matter of, "Oh that? Yes,

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[29]Built into this is an understanding that the only way to become a real human being is to attach oneself in faith to the only One who ever was. By this the believer is covered in Christ's foreign righteousness by faith and is slowly conformed into his likeness in a process that remains partial and incomplete in this life.

yes, we know that already." It is much the opposite for the truly religious:

> Each new experience [of forgiveness] makes us feel that we had no understanding of it at all before. Each time it rises heavenward above all thoughts. As soon as it appears before us, we instinctively say, "This is God's thought." (Billing, 1947, p. 25)

Searching out the implications of salvation by faith in the midst of the cruciform life can never become a finished task this side of eternity. The religious self[30] never advances beyond the cross.

Direct communication implies a closure of meaning. Subjectivity, like sanctification, is never finished in this way but is a becoming.[31] When Kierkegaard complained that Christianity was treated as something objective, he was not questioning that Christian truth exists objectively as something outside of believers, something that is both real and true whether they happen to know it or not. He wrote that "Christianity exists before any Christians exist" (1872/1955, p. 168), and spoke plainly about "the objective reality of Christ's atonement, independent of the subjectivity appropriating this to itself" (1967, 4:4534). His version of subjectivity *assumes* objectivity.[32] His complaint was against a sort of objectifying approach to Christianity, rampant in his day, which gave no thought to subjective appropriation at all. It settled for the sort of certainty that begins and ends with having the proper church membership and a knack for

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[30] The term, "religious self," simply means the self existing before God and viewed in relation to God.

[31] Aumann (2008) offers a helpful understanding of subjectivity as being personally implicated in the relationship between universal truths and oneself (p. 151). *Double reflection* means both to see truth and to apply it to oneself and to put oneself into its categories, that is, not merely to speculate about it. In this point of view, "You are the man!" is what turned David's objectivity to subjectivity. Similarly, compare thinking about death to thinking about *"my* death." It is important to note that Kierkegaard recognized vast differences in the way people deal with themselves and with truth in their private interiority. The much quoted axiom, "truth is subjectivity" essentially opposes treating the relation of truth to life as a matter of indifference. The point of the expression is to drive the religious self somewhere other than the fanatical accumulation of knowledge which King Solomon called "a chasing after the wind" (Ecc 1:17). I will have more to say about it.

[32] Kierkegaard actually safeguarded the objectivity of Christian truth and its subjective appropriation in a careful and necessary dialectic (Edwards, 2014). However, Mann (2003) observes that the issue of subjectivity versus objectivity is "the most misunderstood aspect of Kierkegaard's thought," and that, "twentieth century notions of subjective truth cannot intrude upon his discussions of faith and knowledge without seriously compromising his thought" (p. 25). The point is simple: "The claims of Christianity must be individually appropriated for them to be meaningful, effective, and life changing" (Mann, 2003, p. 125).

whatever recitation this should require.

For Kierkegaard, genuine faith is that which overcomes the terrifying possibility of offense before the *Ultimate Paradox* that is Jesus Christ. He is the *Sign of Contradiction,* one whose true and actual humanity cannot be the sign of what it is truly the sign, namely, undiminished Deity itself. The finite cannot signify the infinite, or temporality the eternal. Yet this one does, and so, true Mystery he remains. It is fallen humanity, not Christ, that is fully found out and seen clean through before this revelation. In the words of Simeon, Jesus is "a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed" (Lk 2:34-35).[33] This is not to say that we each can discover that the scandalous incarnation of God in flesh is quite reasonable after all, rather that the *un*reasonable actually happened, eternity stepping into time (Thompson, 2013). There is no gradual transition into this mystery of Christ along some well-reasoned path—this is the meaning of Kierkegaard's much misunderstood "leap." (He never actually used the phrase "leap of faith.") To put it another way, faith is not the end product of a rational process. Christ must reveal himself. Christ must draw people if they are to come to him at all, and he does it through his Word, though it can seem to human sight like nothing at all. Through it he conveys more than information but his own person and his marvelous free forgiveness, creating and still sustaining the mystic union of sinner and Savior. It is an honor to owe everything to Christ (Kierkegaard, 1844/1945, p. 253).

This owing everything to Christ meant, for Kierkegaard, a sweeping egalitarianism in which no one has an advantage over anyone else. It not more available to the scholar at his books than it is to the farmer on the plow. Every advantage belongs to the child (Lk 18:17). For Kierkegaard, this egalitarianism means owing nothing to one's own intellectual sophistication or

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[33] All of this informs the meaning of the word *sign* for Anti-Climacus (1848/1991): it is "the denied immediacy" (p. 124) or "the denial of all straightforwardness" (p. 136).

gift for philosophy. In Kierkegaard's view, when philosophy is wed to Christianity, Christianity

becomes something other than what it is. Indeed, there can be no debt to philosophy at all.[34]

Further, the religious subject can owe nothing to the eloquence or authority of any human

teacher—Kierkegaard claimed to have no authority—or to the strength of any historical

argument—he held reason-based apologetics as nothing less than a "second Judas' kiss"

(1849/1980, p. 87). By this, he means that reason-based apologetics smuggles in the worst

assumptions of rationalism and ends up arguing more the Enlightenment's totalizing view of

reason than for Christ, "the foolishness of God" (1Co 1:25). God will be known where Christ is

known, and Christ will be known where he makes his own appearance through his Word and

Spirit. There, human reason bends its knees or is broken.[35] Ultimately, it is only his gospel that

changes the soul, creating the wordless, private sigh between believer and God, and the groan in

inwardness, "Abba, Father" (Ro 8:15).

The religious self is a student owing everything to Christ, the one who brings truth to our

untruth. He is a revelation bursting in from the outside.[36] What this Teacher teaches—this

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[34] The dismissal of Kierkegaard by some Christian writers as a useless philosopher is particularly ironic. Aumann (2008) summarizes Kierkegaard's strenuously held view in the acronym, SPUNCA: *"Sophisticated Philosophical Understanding is of No Christianly Advantage"* (p. 238). In his view, "the king of Sodom must never be permitted to say, 'I have made Abraham rich'" (Kierkegaard, 1967, 3:3269). Luther, too, would have been horrified at the blasphemy in the very thought that reason or philosophy should need to rush to the defense of Christian truth (Becker, 1982, p. 147).

[35] As is typical, Kierkegaard's position on Christian apologetics is a provocative exaggeration. Luther would not go as far as Kierkegaard in considering all exploration of historical proofs of Christianity to be harmful to faith. To speak as the apostles did is to passionately argue the eyewitness testimony for the resurrection of Christ, the absolute integrity and authority of the Scriptures, the grounding of morality, meaning, beauty, hope, and love in the reality of God, and so on. The key is that a faithful Christian apologetic relies on a ministerial (not magisterial) use of human reason; reason is necessary for comprehending Christian truth as it is revealed in the Word of God, but must not stand above it as arbiter or judge, or even presume to be its needful defender. For such a task, human reason is incompetent. It can always be overcome, as Kierkegaard understood. The Word of God is infinitely superior to all the rational proofs in the world. While Christian apologetics can play a role in fostering an intellectual climate in which Christian communication is not dismissed out of hand, ultimately, faith in such a world as this means learning to cling to that external, self-authenticating Word against all sense and sight, feeling and experience.

[36] Indirect and direct communication must always exist together. Kierkegaard did not assume that truth is grounded in the individual, as Socrates believed, which would mean that no teaching is required at all, only an awakening of memory. Emmanuel (1991) discusses this point of departure to safeguard "an

Anomaly, this Particularity, this absolute confound to human respectability—is how to exist in relationship to him. It is this Teacher alone who can create in the students the conditions for learning which begin with the miracle that anyone should even want the sort of help that he brings. The offer itself—"Come to me"—is an offense both to human pride and natural reason, as is the one who holds it out. The Christ who calls the wretched to himself in his abasement and offers them forgiveness clearly has "a different conception of what misery is" (Kierkegaard, 1848/1991, p. 61). The only way is the way of the penitent—a drastic change of heart is the gift that makes the student available to this teaching. In this unique case under heaven, the Teacher is not only indispensable to the teaching; the Teacher *is* the teaching.

"When the Son of Man is lifted up, I will draw all people to myself" (Jn 12:32). Having been lifted up to him, drawn by divine grace against all sense and against all sight, how does the dancer touch down again? How, indeed, to live and move and breathe this ineffable knowledge of God in an actual life in this world? How, indeed, to speak such a thing into the life of another? This urgent and penetrating *how* was Kierkegaard's burden.

1.6 Historical Background: Kierkegaard in Context

To begin to understand Kierkegaard, it is necessary to situate him in his historical context. If he is more than anything else a corrective, what precisely is he the corrective to? This overview will include an assessment of the church of Kierkegaard's day, the philosophical

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epistemology based entirely on Christian terms" (p. 145). The indirect communicator knows that no one innately possesses the knowledge of Christ, and so, will always also wear the hat of a witness and will unambiguously provide his truth wherever it is lacking and as a final word (Kierkegaard, 1967, p. 383). Kierkegaard (1967) was explicit about the *limits of maieutic communication:* "The maieutic cannot be the final form….Ultimately, the user of the maieutic will be unable to bear the responsibility, since the maieutic approach still remains rooted in human sagacity, however sanctified and dedicated in fear and trembling this may be. God becomes too powerful for the maieutic practitioner and in the end he is a witness, different from the direct witness only in what he has gone through to become a witness" (2:383). When Christ's disciples ask for the meaning of a parable, it means that the purposes of indirect communication had been served. The moment had been changed, as is demonstrated by the urgency of their question. Under such circumstances, Jesus explained the parable to them directly (e.g., Mt 13:36-43).

climate in which he wrote, and his historical moment understood in terms of modernity.[37] First, however, I will take up the argument of Hampson (2001; 2013) that the whole structure of Kierkegaard's thought is Lutheran, and that this is a decisive but much-neglected key to his authorship. This is not a parochial concern. To situate Kierkegaard theologically has a direct bearing on Kierkegaard's entire stance toward both the Old Testament and the Christian life of faith as he inherited them in large measure from Luther himself.

   1.6.1 **Kierkegaard as a Lutheran.** Rae (2010) concedes that Kierkegaard is "an uncomfortable ally for those who count themselves Christian" (p. 167). The assertion that Kierkegaard is simply "a good Lutheran" (Noll, 1992) require some unpacking. (As a self-conscious irritant, he was not *simply* anything.) The essential agreement between the two theologians is evident as Kierkegaard wrote, "The error from which Luther turned was an exaggeration with regard to works. And he was entirely right; he did not make a mistake—a person is justified solely and only by faith" (1851/1990, p. 33). In fact, Marshall (2013) chronicles the depth of admiration Kierkegaard had for Luther, whom he called "the master of us all" (1967, p. 2898).[38] Kierkegaard even insisted that Denmark's preachers should preach

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[37] I will not be discussing the "earthquakes" in Kierkegaard's personal life: an extreme upbringing, disillusionment with his father, a broken engagement, and the humiliating public disgrace that came out of his battle with a popular Danish tabloid, "The Corsair." Other writers have done so. See, for example, Moore's preface to *Provocations: Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard* (2002, pp. xiii-xix), and Emmanuel (1997) on Kierkegaard's fateful jilting of Regine. This is to say nothing of his curved back, uneven trousers, and the poignant way he used even his physical body (paraded through the cruel streets of Copenhagen) to enact his project of communication. Suffice it to say that Kierkegaard's life was as much a stumble under the cross as any prominent person in Christian church history. His life can only call to mind a line from Bonhoeffer (1959), "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die" (p. 79).

[38] Kierkegaard could also write scathingly about Luther in his *Journals and Papers* (published in seven volumes in 1967) where he perceived Luther to be acting politically. More often, he recognized the problem Lutheranism can have when no Luther is present to display the life that was married to the thought. What he cherished in Luther is summed up in the words, *for you*. For Luther, a person could have stood twenty feet from the spot where the Lord of Glory was crucified in place of the world—such is the nature of God—and yet could have walked away empty. Something else is required. The self yet needs some Word from God saying, "Take this. This is *for you!*" Kierkegaard celebrated this edifying *for you* as Luther's emphasis on the subjective hearing of the Gospel, and made it the theme of his book, *Either/Or* (1843/1987).

Luther's sermons instead of their own "in order to show how far the preaching nowadays is from

Christianity" (1967, p. 2516). Again from Edwards (2015):

> What Kierkegaard hoped to achieve was not a rejection of what Luther stressed but to
>
> bring back something of what Luther actually felt before his epiphany over justification,
>
> all in the hope that one might feel the power of grace as forcefully as Luther himself had.
>
> (p. 240)[39]

This is the key to affirming Kierkegaard as a "good Lutheran." By Luther's famous

standard, Kierkegaard deserves the title "Doctor of Theology" because of his proper distinction

between Law and Gospel. "Only the anguished conscience understands Christianity"

(Kierkegaard, 1967, p. 2461) as it moves beyond detachment, speculation, and the unedifying *"I-*

it" relation.[40] I will demonstrate that here lies the key for readers to find themselves personally

addressed, implicated, and absolved in the pages of the Old Testament.

With this understanding of Kierkegaard's ultimate objectives, many of the common

potshots taken at him miss their mark, for example, that he ushered in a "subjective captivity of

the church" (cited in Craddock, 2002, p. 45), turned the story of Christianity from *his story* into

my story, and turned the self toward a stultifying obsession with itself. Kierkegaard refers to the

subjectivity of infinite resignation, suffering, and consciousness of guilt as "Religion A." It

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[39] Kierkegaard saw that he and Luther were engaged in very different battles, each in their day. "It is important to note that Kierkegaard emphasized the importance of a Christian's actions not because he did not believe in justification by grace through faith….Far from disbelieving Luther's doctrine, *Kierkegaard felt that justification could no longer be heard in his particular context"* [emphasis added]. Rather, the context needed to be re-prepared to hear the significance of that important truth" (Edwards, 2015, p. 240). It was for Luther to wage war on works righteousness and Kierkegaard on worldly complacency (Mann, 2003, p. 116).

[40] In the absence of this, nothing could be more *un*Lutheran than if Kierkegaard had served up the rich banquet of *Sola Gratia* and *Sola Fide* as food to those who were not hungry. "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, only the sick" (Lk 5:31). For Kierkegaard, this anguish once awakened is only extinguished "by the paradoxical forgiveness of the Atonement" (Edwards, 2014, p. 239), and one can sense the final-word quality in the constant resorting to grace in his signed works: "I will seek my refuge within the crucified one to save me from myself" (cited in Marshall, 2013).

means knowing, at last, who we are. It is preparation for "Religion B." Lefevre (1963) explains:

> Religion A fails when one comes to the realization that God is not to be found within the inner life of man: that there is no identity of man's spirit and God…man does not become aware of this from within (and this is the sense in which subjectivity is untruth); he becomes aware of it only through Revelation, through the conviction that what is wholly unacceptable to reason has actually taken place. (p. 165)

It bears repeating: "the sense in which subjectivity is *un*truth." C.S. Lewis might have been expanding on Lefevre's observation when he wrote the closing lines of *Mere Christianity* (1952), "Look to yourself and you will find in the end only hatred, loneliness, despair, ruin, decay and death. Look to Christ and you will find him, and with him everything else thrown in" (p. 190). It will come as a surprise among Kierkegaard's Lutheran detractors (those who would dismiss him as a Pietist with a morbid fascination with the self)[41] to recognize this note in which the poor sinner with a terrified conscience is explicitly called away from itself, to look only to Christ.[42] I argue for understanding Kierkegaard as Lutheran to his soul, according to his own time and in his own terms. By his reading of those times, he believed that his task was to make

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[41] Kierkegaard left an unclear legacy on issues of concern for Lutherans. Mann (2003, pp. 105-182) discusses these at length, primarily volitionalism and Christian freedom. (Kierkegaard certainly rejected the idea of a disinterested will that is ever objective or neutral.) A further assessment would discuss his view of baptism, conversion, and other important issues about which Kierkegaard said little. The Dane was not as doctrinally indifferent, anti-creedal, or anti-institutional as some would like him to be, and does not deserve to be made the champion of the "Emergent Church" (*cf.* Roberts, 2013). This movement is a study in false dichotomies, e.g., pitting religious authenticity against a love for sound doctrine. Emmanuel (1989) demonstrates that Kierkegaard's spiritual concern is for those who are content merely to learn the "language game" of church teaching (p. 378). It is doctrine divorced from life that he opposes. At any rate, Mann's ultimate conclusion (and this from a conservative Lutheran) is that "it is unfortunate that more of Lutheranism has not engaged his thought" (p. 137).

[42] Hong (1972) expands on the point: "There is nothing more dangerous, more paralyzing than a certain isolating self-scrutiny where one sits and constantly stares at his own navel, and one's whole life, all one's relationships, become infected with self, poisoned by self. But this is not true at all of the self-scrutiny before God….You make a clean and honest admission. You need God, you need Grace. You will always need Grace to receive Grace…To speak of God's Grace is to speak indirectly of one's own nothingness, unworthiness….What are saints but weak things filled with the boundless Grace of God" (pp. 56-57).

room for the grace of God, and to do so as one without authority, willing to suffer. This is the burden that defined Kierkegaard, the one that sends the best of us to our knees:

> What good would it do me to…construct a world in which I did not live, but only held up to the view of others; what good would it do me to be able to explain the meaning of Christianity if it had no deeper significance for me and for my life….I certainly do not deny that I still recognize an imperative of understanding and that through it one can work upon men, but it must be taken up into my life, and that is what I now recognize as the most important thing. (1967, p. 774)

1.6.2 **The church of Kierkegaard's day**. This reading of Kierkegaard is reinforced upon close inspection of the religiosity of 19th Century Denmark. It is necessary to see close up just what boiled his blood. His religious context was that of a state church lead by a fat professional clergy presiding over a delusional laity. Their delusion consisted in assuming that they were Christian simply by virtue of their nationality and church membership. The delusion was held in place by an indolent habit in which, to all appearances, the great mass of Christendom could not be bothered about winning the truth for themselves or translating it into the medium of existence. "They communicated…in their sweet, sentimental expressions of the life and work of Jesus—an image of Jesus that Kierkegaard could find nowhere in his own New Testament" (Mann, 2003, p. 107). One did not hear any yearning to embody or enact this Christian truth, or on failing at that, any cry of grief from the self discovering that it cannot change itself. For Kierkegaard, it is a "frightful illusion" (1848/1962, p. 23). In fact, "the crowd is untruth" (1848/1962, p. 114) for the way it reduced to a minuscule fraction each person's responsibility for what they knew. His burden was to "reintroduce Christianity into Christendom" (1848/1962, p. 23) and to edify its soul on the old terminology restored with all of its traditional meanings.

Kierkegaard did not take up the war between Christian orthodoxy and heterodoxy. He wanted to start a new one in the inwardness of the professing Christian who is never troubled by the clarion call of Christ—"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23). It was appalling to him that the soul-shaking event, the drawing of our humanity into the second person of God, could be dissected with scholarly detachment or tamed down to a form that scandalized no one. Where there is no sense of the "drama in the dogma" (Sayers, 2004), Kierkegaard recognized an "error in modulation just as disturbing as an error in the development of thought" (1844/1957, p. 38).[43] Christ is not an abstraction to be turned into more and more sentences. He is not to be studied like a strange bird or shiny rock. He must not become an object, a thing one talks about without a most consequential personal involvement. In Kierkegaard's day, and perhaps it happens also in ours, it was as if speculative discussion had become the beginning and end of the Christian task, instead of recognizing in Christ "the idea for which I am willing to live and die" (2008, p. 22) a truth to lend everyday existence its proper coloring and shape.

Again, the issue of *how* versus *what* is decisive. "There is no lack of information in a Christian land; something else is lacking, and this is a something which one cannot directly communicate to the other" (Kierkegaard, 1846/1992, p. 614). Teitjen (2013) captures well a malady that is not confined to Kierkegaard's narrow context:

Most religious people lack a decisive religious "impression," the weighty realization of religious truth in the "present," in the midst of a life right now. Religiousness is sought for another day's use; in the meantime, they have their lives in other categories. (p. 12)

Kierkegaard (1872/1998) insists that most "*have* religiousness but they are not *had* by it (p. 107).

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[43] This recalls Milton who recognized that it is possible to be a "heretic in the truth."

1.6.3 **The philosophy of Kierkegaard's day.** The objects of Kierkegaard's contempt

were the Hegelian philosophers as those who epitomized for him that penchant for emphasizing

the *what,* the content of thought, to the complete exclusion of the *how*. They had constructed an

elaborate system of abstract thought like an "immense high-vaulted palace" and then chose not to

live in it themselves, but "in a barn alongside of it, or in a dog kennel" (Kierkegaard, 1849/1980,

p. 176). For Kierkegaard, what folks think ought to have some sort of bearing on how they live.

What was most dreadful to Kierkegaard was that Hegel, a shameless "adaptor" of the language

of orthodoxy, had so captivated the imagination of the Danish intelligentsia. The old words

found slippery new meanings (Evans, 2006, p. 105). *Der Liebe Gott* [the dear God] had become

Das Geist [the Ghost], the distant, nebulous spirit of the age. The Christological paradox was

dissolved, no more to shame the sophisticated or trouble their dreams.

The disingenuousness was maddening to Kierkegaard, this unholy marriage of

philosophy and Christianity, now distorted beyond all recognition. So dawned an age of

Christian antinomianism (Hampson, 2001, p. 266) which left nominal Christians comfortable in

their empty admiration for Christ.[44] Not only was their *what* all wrong, but the *how* of being a

Christian was a complete irrelevance to them, comparable to the *how* of inventing gunpowder—

the discovery was made sometime in the past and need never be bothered with again

(Kierkegaard, 1848/1991, pp. 207-208). The rest of us can copy it down like someone else's

homework. While justification by faith occurs in a moment, Kierkegaard is reacting to the notion

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[44] Lutheranism always navigates between the "Scylla and Charybdis" (the rocks and the whirlpool) of antinomianism and Pietism. In Luther's image, the drunken peasant falls off the mule first on one side, then on the other. Mann (2003) describes Kierkegaard's efforts as painting "such a magnificent picture of the Christian faith as to remind the reader of her own dismal approximation of these virtues….By engendering such humility, Kierkegaard hoped to eliminate spiritual complacency, the chief architect of antinomianism" (p. 105). Mann sees in Kierkegaard "a qualitative break" with Pietism (p. 110) by his accent on the imitation of Christ as a synecdoche with the law of God. The call to emulate Christ (cf. Eph 5:1-2) is a power first for repentance (showing humanity its weakness) and then, in grace, it is the idea for which one may "live and die." The self sinks beneath the ideal and it is Christ who lifts it up. This is "Religion C" (Tietjen, 2016, p. 14).

that what it means to live as a Christian could be acquired in a single hour, when for him, this is what lifetimes are for.

1.6.4 **Kierkegaard and modernity.** As far as context goes, it is important to understand Kierkegaard as a peculiarly sensitive Christian who stood at the heights of modernity. Modernity would cut humanity off from any source of truth outside itself, and so, from the very possibility of divine revelation.[45] (This is to say nothing of the bifurcation of truth from imagination or human pathos, or of things best told in story, image, or work of art.) No longer would human mind and the universe exist together within the divine *Logos* [the Word/Deed/Mind of God]; mere *logic* would make its demand to be heard and to arbitrate truth in the court of the individual human mind. Modernity would allow God to enter into our situation only on human terms and in ways that make sense to our finite understanding and to the satisfaction of our own socially situated reason.[46] Christians who are taken in by a modernistic view of reason will experience steady societal pressure to justify their belief. To do what is expected of them would mean grounding the reality of Christ in their own powers of rational argument or, in failing that, surrendering it as a viable proposition. It is tragic. The apostolic way was to emphasize their own crushing inadequacy to be any such ground in themselves in order to accent the adequacy of Christ and the Word that comes from him. If it seems like a weak thing not to scaffold the communication of his truth in full-blown rational rigor, that is because it is supposed to be, all so

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[45] The church worries about the dangers of postmodernity as if modernity has somehow been kind to orthodox theology. It is right to oppose the relativism of Postmodernism. However, thinkers such as Foucault, Derrida, Rorty, and Lyotard, for all harm they do, can at least be credited with pointing out what the Christian church should have known, namely, the failure of modernity to ground ultimate truth in human reason. What is at stake is the Christian audacity of staking one's soul, not on oneself, but on the absolute reliability of a set of ancient manuscripts. Bartholomew (2012) even credits postmodernism as providing "an opportunity to reassess the foundations of biblical interpretation in the academy" (p. xxv.).

[46] To adapt Nietzsche, God may as well be dead if he is given no place, no voice, and no influence unless the likes of us declares it sensible. As to socially situated reason, visit any professional conference on Darwinian evolution, for example, and notice how *what counts as reasonable* changes from one social context to another. This is one measure of reason's limitations and its need to be dethroned in the presence of God.

that the power of Christ might rest upon communication and communicator alike (cf. 2Co 12:9).

Kierkegaard was no fideist.[47] He argued quite reasonably for the *suspension* of reason in regard to the deepest matters of Christian faith. Reason is inadequate for plumbing the depths of reality, given the gaping red wound in its side. This comes as a result of humanity's fall, the depth of which is itself a matter of faith. Human beings are simply not adequate to discover the most important truths about themselves, about God, or about the world they inhabit (Penner, 2013, p. 67). [48] Worse, fallen human reason is another form of pride, blinding humanity to the God who chose to hide himself in Christ. "It is alone the recognition of our neediness that opens us up to hearing the gospel. The gospel speaks…to the one who is heavy laden" (Hampson, 2013, p. 23-24). This is why, for Kierkegaard, people converted by intellectual argument have only a superficial, passionless grasp on a borrowed truth. More likely, they are not yet converted at all. When they are, reason is fully involved, not set aside. In fact, it is reborn. "Faith is a new thinking and a new reasoning. The intellect gains a truer way of seeing and understanding the world" (Thompson, 2013, p. 18). Humanity's hunger for truth can never be satisfied apart from the reality of divine revelation by Word and Spirit.[49] This was Kierkegaard's "hill to die on."

Kierkegaard must be taken in context. He saw firsthand the emergence of historical criticism that radically questioned the authority of the biblical texts, seeing them as human

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[47] Emmanuel (1991) effectively rescues Kierkegaard from all who would read him as maintaining that, since revelation cannot be explained within the finite categories of human reason, it is therefore irrational to become a Christian (p. 301). We simply come to know Christ on other grounds.

[48] "The conviction that faith is always engaged in a lopsided struggle is a major contribution that Luther makes to Kierkegaard's thought" (Marshall, 2013, p. 346). What does not work on paper—it is too contradictory—works in the life of the believer who, after all, has a contradictory heart (Becker, 1982, p. 232). For Kierkegaard, it is the struggle that educates, and which can only resolve in the capability by which reason comes to know its perpetual crucifixion. "We take every thought captive to Christ" (2Co 10:5). In practical terms, we do not apologize for not having a solution when two aspects of his Word seem to conflict. We accept both truths and the apparent contradiction as well. Every stream of biblical doctrine empties out in mystery.

[49] All of this is consistent with a Lutheran understanding of faith as consisting of: *scientia* [the necessary knowledge of God in Christ], *assentia* [intellectual assent], and *fiducia* [personal trust].

developments and casting off Christian thought as a passing phase of human evolution. This was modernity's view of the Scriptures. The Enlightenment offered up a disenchanted universe that would permit no one-of-a-kind intrusion into history's causal chain by the One who exists outside of it. This is the Scandal of Particularity: that God should have come in at a particular time and no other, and in a particular place, and to a particular people. An unchallenged modernity and an increasingly secular social imaginary would render this unthinkable for those caught in the trap. Further, Kierkegaard saw the foundation for modern ethics laid down by Kant as one which required no reference to God and no resort to grace. In this, the nerve of the Gospel was cut, and gone was the pathos and passion of Christ calling: "'*Come here!'* Alas, but if there is someone so wretched that he cannot come, oh, a sigh is enough" (Kierkegaard, 1848/1991, p. 22). Kierkegaard claimed nothing for himself except that he believed he knew what Christianity actually is, and he took seriously the threat that the one true religion was being ushered right out of this world while no one noticed at all (Hampson, 2013, p. 18). Notice he did.

1.6.5 **A note of admiration.** It was vital to situate Kierkegaard in his historical and theological contexts before tentatively borrowing from his Christian thought. Hampson (2013) writes, "Kierkegaard grasped the challenge that modernity represents to Christian claims, recasting how Christianity must present itself in the light of it….We are in fascinating territory; that one who lived so recently could think so differently"(p. 2). A little later she ups the ante:

As it must have seemed…were there to be any future for Christianity it must be given

back its independent, transcendent reality. It must claim a revelation and speak of a

commensurate faculty which was not that of reason, which would allow a human

response to this otherness. But all this must stand in contradiction to modernity. (p. 62)

The point is to give the Danish Christian writer his due. He restated the tenets of pre-

modern orthodox Christianity in a fresh and stunningly provocative way in the very midst of the

Enlightenment and, as Hampson argues, he drew it up from a uniquely Hebraic thought world.

> When punitive justice here in this world or in judgment in the next seeks a place where I,
>
> a sinner, stand with all my guilt, with my many sins—it does not find me. I no longer
>
> stand in that place. I stand saved beside this other one, beside him, my Redeemer, who
>
> put himself completely in my place. (Kierkegaard, 1978-1998, 18:123)

To reintroduce so essential a version of Christianity into Christendom, he felt there must be

another way besides repeating to people what they thought they already knew, and which they

took for something rather elementary.[50] That other way is indirect communication.

1.7 Kierkegaard and Communication Theory

Indirect communication is a *strategy*, not a theory. Therefore, this study of indirect

communication can have no single theoretical perspective, nor is its purpose to contribute

explicitly to communication theory building. However, this study of the Old Testament does not

happen in a vacuum but exhibits the influence of a wide variety of communication concepts as

they intersect with my chosen texts. Therefore, I include an accounting of the long neglect of

Kierkegaard in communication scholarship and bring that story up to date.

Kierkegaard was quite simply "the first major writer to explore communication in both

breadth and depth" (McPherson, 2001, p. 160). In the early days of communication studies, the

neglect of him was at least understandable. While his thought was invading philosophy, English,

and theology departments, communication was working hard to distinguish itself as an academic

discipline (Herrmann, 2008, p. 72). However, the way communication theorists still continue to

ignore Kierkegaard is surprising for a number of reasons. The first is the undelivered lectures in

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[50] Johannes de Silentio (1843/1985a), complained in *Fear and Trembling* that people took Hegel for a worthy challenge, while the faith of Abraham willing to slay Isaac kept no one up at night (p. 42).

his *Journals & Papers* (Volume 1) (1967) in which he discusses *Meddelelse* [communication] in terms of: object, communicator, receiver and communication (p. 306f) a century before Lasswell did. The attention he gave to context and audience was ahead of his time as well. His obsession with indirect communication as the maieutic communication of subjectivity is widely known, as articulated at length in *Concluding Unscientific Postscripts* (1846/1992), *Practice in Christianity* (1848/1991), and *The Point of View on My Work As An Author* (1848/1962). Also well-known is his dominant concern for the *how* of communication: "Everywhere people are preoccupied with the *what* which is to be communicated. What occupies me, on the other hand, is: 'What does it mean to communicate?" (1967, p. 304) He wrote this in 1847.[51]

Things are changing in terms of Kierkegaard's place at the table of communication scholarship. Herrmann (2008) notices Kierkegaard's concept of *levelling*: mass media creates the social construction of objective definitions of self that reduce individuals to interchangeable parts in a crowd. This is the precise opposite of capability. Garrett (2012) outlines the voice Kierkegaard ought to have in a wide range of theoretical concerns: media studies, organizational studies, dialogic theory, communication ethics, and philosophy. Kierkegaard understood the self as a self-relation, an "I-I," and this opens up possibilities for integration with Martin Buber and his familiar construal of the "I-Thou" encounter. Indeed, a decade's old interest in Kierkegaard as

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[51] Modest efforts in the 1960s and 70s (Anderson, R. E., 1963; Scott, 1967; Stewart, 1972) to work out a Kierkegaardian theory of communication are being revived. Bellinger (1996) contends that Kierkegaard was the social scientist of his time as he engaged in extended anthropological reflection. Peters (1999) examined Kierkegaard's authorship from the perspective of information as a "mode of revealing and concealing" (p. 129) not of information exchange. This accents Kierkegaard's prescient critique of positivism's correspondence theory and its transmission model of communication. Peters credits Kierkegaard as a keen observer of shifting modes of seeing and hearing that mass media brings (1999, p. 128). Houe (2002) pulled on the same thread in describing the debt McLuhan owed to Kierkegaard in connection with the familiar axiom of media ecology, "the medium is the message." This is reversed in the unique case of Christ, for whom "the message is the medium." McLuhan and Kierkegaard "converge in speaking the unspeakable" (p. 28).

a phenomenologist (McCarthy, 1978) is being revived (Strawler, 2014).[52]

In another close cousin with communication study, many scholars do not fail to discuss the influence Kierkegaard could have on evolving pedagogical practice (Aumann, 2008; Herrmann, 2008; McPherson, 2001; Garrett, 2013; Nowacheck, 2014). An understanding of education as a most artful and delicate communication aligns well with Kierkegaard's project of indirect communication. Recognizing this can bring a range of scholars together in a similarity of concerns: the communication of capability and of new qualities in the life of the receiver; discontentment with a superficial or rote grasp of information, the interest in training emotion rather than dismissing it; the calling for teachers not be superficial themselves; and the art by which they may humbly join students in their understanding and to collaborate in the learning task. Such high ideals call for something other than, "I've told them, so they know." All in all, the present study argues for a much broader space for Kierkegaard in the field of communication.

1.8 Kierkegaard Today

For anyone who recognizes the gospel heart in Kierkegaard's work, it is heartening to think that he is widely read today. Many who read him likely do so the way a young C.S. Lewis read his George MacDonald or G.K. Chesterton. The Christian element in them may have been wrong, or so he reasoned, "but the rest were all bores" (Lewis, 1955, p. 206). Countless readers still come to Kierkegaard for reasons literary and philosophical. They acquire a taste and fondness for him in spite of the Christianity for which they choose to forgive him. They can only

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[52] Communication remains a crossroads for many disciplines. The field of psychology was an early adopter of Kierkegaard because of the insights into the "study of soul" that he advanced in *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849/1980), making him an unrivaled candidate for the title, "father of Christian psychology."[52] Beginning with Sonneman (1954) and running through Ramsland (1989), psychotherapists and counselors were the quickest to recognize the power of indirect communication. Shchyttsova (2014) relies heavily on Kierkegaard for a new approach to group therapy. Pittenger (2014) asks whether therapists might not take a "leap of faith" when they listen to client narratives. Interest in Kierkegaard for the helping professions has included those with special Christian concerns (Podmore, 2009), even pastoral ones (Evans, 1990) related to forgiveness and despair, the defining human malady in *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849/1980).

take it for an accidental flaw in his otherwise brilliant thought, rather than something essential. This reveals Kierkegaard's writing as an art form. Even as it perplexes, it leaves an indelible impression that "something is going on here that counts" (Sayers, 2004, p. 162). It is the definition of indirect communication, the way readers of Kierkegaard, lovers of philosophy, are suddenly confronted by the meaning of the Christian existence. When theatre-goers in Copenhagen, mostly secularists, can still sit spellbound, now pin drop quiet, and now "falling about in laughter" (Hampson, 2013, p. 9) before an actor under a spotlight spouting lines from Kierkegaard, those with Christian concerns must at least be curious.[53]

This dissertation will explore this fascinating communication territory. I will be among the first to use literature to enliven a fresh understanding of indirect communication, and I will do so on the basis of the most important text to influence Western thought at its very foundations, namely, the Hebrew Old Testament.

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[53] The prayers of the Dane are the real Kierkegaard, speaking in his own voice, unguarded before God, transparent, and extremely direct. Yet in another way, it still comes as an overhearing as the man turns away from his readers to speak only to God: "O Lord Jesus Christ…homeless wert Thou upon earth, and yet a hiding place, the only one, where a sinner could flee. And so today Thou are still the hiding place; when the sinner flees to Thee, hides himself in Thee, is hidden in Thee—then he is eternally defended, then 'love' hides a multitude of sins" (cited in Lefevre, 1963, p. 85). This is that form of communication that calls up no argument and insists on no reply. Kierkegaard pats the chair beside him. "You may listen a while if you like."

Chapter 2 Scholarly Contributions

If to call the Bible Scripture means that the text has not just a past but a future, and that future is toward the reader/listener, then communication is a necessary dimension of biblical study. Before the world, inner and outer, of the hearer, most biblical scholars stand, drawn and challenged by territory unexplored. Kierkegaard will help us. He is unparalleled as an explorer of the realm of the hearer. (Craddock, 2002, p. 63)

Three scholarly contributions justify the present study. *1) The Old Testament will occasion new insight into indirect communication.* I will discuss the reasons the Old Testament has special potential for significantly advancing our scholarly understanding of indirect communication. *2) Indirect communication can, in turn, cause the Hebrew Old Testament to fall open in a fresh way.* I will articulate an approach to the Old Testament which is true to its nature and brings it into meaningful conversation with Kierkegaard research. *3) This study can serve to introduce the much neglected Kierkegaard to readers who have theological interests in communication.* Among the many ways Kierkegaard is read, I will offer an assessment that takes him as he asked to be taken, and which construes him as a provocative guide for this journey.

To set the stage, I will draw on seminal and recent literature to locate this study within two diverse areas of inquiry. If you will, scholarship of the Old Testament is a vast, slow-moving river. It runs for miles, with slow currents and trends that cannot be ignored if I am to situate my study in this stream. By contrast, Kierkegaard scholarship is all whitewater rapids. It has treacherous drops, hidden rocks, and sudden changes in course. Indirect communication has emerged as the ideal place for these two streams of scholarship to join.

2.1 Contribution #1: Insights in Indirect Communication Through the Hebrew Text

There are two complementary reasons that the Hebrew Scriptures are ideal for exploring indirect communication by literary means. The first has to do with the matter of genre. If Christ is veiled in the Old Testament, its multiplicity of forms is his bursting wardrobe. The second reason is that the Old Testament played a pivotal role in Kierkegaard's fundamental understanding of God by virtue of his attraction to the "deeply Hebraic Martin Luther" (Hampson, 2013, p. 31).[54]

2.1.1 **The genres of the Old Testament.** "In the past God spoke to our forefathers, the prophets, at many time *and in various ways* [emphasis added]…" (Heb 1:1) My exploration of indirect communication in the Old Testament has taken me to texts selected to represent its predominant genres: narrative, poetry, ritual, and so on. The hermeneutical distance here is vast and invaluable. The very eccentricity of these literary forms for the modern reader enhances their power to defamiliarize the truth for which they serve as vehicles, all to see still more of Christ than can be seen when the Old Testament is ignored. This is the key to its power to occasion the fresh hearing that Kierkegaard was always after, though it is a task that "taxes all faculties of thought and imagination" (Craddock, 2002, p. 81). This is grace made lovely in foreign melodies and accents, worn on other faces, and wearing other clothes.

The role of genre in Old Testament hermeneutics has occupied prominent Old Testament scholars for some time (Gunkel, 1967; Childs, 1979/2011; Von Rad, 2001). Genre recognition has come to all but defines literary competence (Barton, 1996, pp. 16-17). It is this crucial aptitude that informs the sort of questions that can be sensibly asked of a literary work. Apocalyptic and historical prose, for example, call for radically different interrogations. To miss

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[54] The reformers took to the study of biblical Hebrew against many religious currents of their day. At the same time, they accepted the influence of the Renaissance in its appeal to go *ad fontes* [back to the sources] of Western civilization in antiquity. This included a recovery of the original languages of the Bible.

a note of irony or fail to get the joke results in a breakdown of interpretation at this most fundamental level. A person who mistakes a proverb of Solomon for a promise may feel lied to, in the end, all for a simple failure in genre identification.[55]

Attention to a dizzying diversity of literary forms makes it possible to see the content of the Old Testament as more unified behind its enigmatic curtains than most scholars have imagined. This recognition spills beyond the borders of the sacred page and lays the groundwork "for a more coherent view of life, with different situations fitting into a larger, identifiable pattern" (Sandy & Geise, 1995, p. 43). That is, there is to the Hebrew Bible a single grand story: *The good world was lost, shattered in pain, and venting rage, so he promised his Son. Some were captivated by the astonishing promise and others were not. Those who were, an Israel within Israel, quieted their hearts and waited in hope.* The believing life imitates this art, meaning that the veiled coherence of the biblical meta-narrative is similar in kind to the coherence to life beneath the bewildering complexities of experience. There is a world of difference in applying the Old Testament to one's life when this unity within the diversity of genre is assumed.

What happens fluidly and unconsciously when it comes to genres to which the reader has been socialized may only come with great effort when dealing with ancient texts. Some Old Testament genres manage to engage the uninitiated, but only in part, for example, temple rituals or oracles of judgment. Others are likely to evade modern readers entirely, for example, the

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[55] Sandy and Geise (1995) present an accessible example. A passenger in a car pesters the driver with a steady stream of tips for better driving. The driver exclaims, "I will give you a thousand dollars to stop talking!" Notice that an exegesis of the utterance in its etymologies and grammatical structure—hermeneutics on the micro level—would not bring an investigator any closer to its meaning. Similarly, a macro-level interrogation of economics or transportation would add nothing. Only the identification of genre—he is being sarcastic—would be useful for interpreting the sentence (p. 7). The writers contend that genre recognition does not replace exegesis or biblical theology, but enhances them at a crucial middle level of meaning. (After all, literary critics find great meaning in the minutiae: the repetition of a word, the meaning of a name, etc. Proponents of canonical criticism find meaning in the total harmony of revelation, and in situating each story within the meta-narrative.) The example above illustrates the similarity of genre with Wittgenstein's "language games," yielding the insight that no communication, textual or otherwise, is genre-less.

surprising communicative power of Old Testament genealogy. Meanings are easily lost, for example, because a modern reader has no feel for the ancient Hebrew impulse (in some genres) to put whatever they were most eager to communicate at the structural center of their compositions. In particular, the indispensable role these forms play in the total meaning of the biblical text will tend to be elusive to readers who do not consciously break free from the ways modern literature has formed their sensitivities (Sandy & Geise, 1995, pp.13-14). Watching television, we know, without necessarily knowing how we know, that playing before us is a commercial or a news show or a situation comedy. This goes to the *how* of watching TV. This dissertation will advance a special sort of socialization into the unfamiliar literary genres of Moses and David, Solomon and Ezekiel, as the separate veils of their longed-for *Yeshua'*.

   2.1.1.1 Hebrew narrative. We may know a thing or two about how to read stories. However, we are likely to encounter the ambiguity and repetition of Old Testament historical prose as a cross-cultural communication from an extremely high context culture to the comparatively low context culture of American readers. These qualities make the ancient Scripture all too prone to something like cultural misattribution. Where the biblical style is extraordinarily complex, it can instead come off as something stylistically crude and primitive. Modern Christians are prone to neglect the Old Testament (except for a few pretty verses collected up like cut flowers) for reasons that include the perception that its narratives represent an uncrossable cultural gap for modern sensibilities.[56] Pilch (2012) builds a cross-cultural

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[56] The Christian reader may be embarrassed about Old Testament prose in another way. Readers can tend to miss the grace in the Old Testament just as they do it amid the "blood and dead bodies" of a Flannery O'Connor short story. (The strong element of the grotesque in her writing is not so different than the uglier elements of the Hebrew Scriptures—they are necessary if only to make evil recognizable.) The so-called "new atheists" relish casting dark aspersions on the God of the Old Testament. In his massive work on Christian apologetics, Groothuis (2011) takes up the Old Testament as a site of struggle, debunking minimalist readings of biblical history and countering the claim that genocide is somehow sanctioned in the Old Testament (pp. 662-676). Other scholars seek to rehabilitate the Old Testament under such titles as Romer's, *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament's Troubling Legacy* (2012), Seibert's, *Dark God: Cruelty, Sex, and*

approach to the entire Hebrew Bible on this assumption.

The ancient narrative style is indeed sparse with explicit information. As literary critic, Erich Auerbach famously commented, its characters are, "Fraught with background" (1953, p. 12). We meet people in the Old Testament just as we meet people in real life: there is the gradual unveiling through uncertainty reduction, then social penetration, then a slow recognition of some shared "human stuff." It comes after the narrator has introduced them to us with delicately indirect clues to their character (Erfrat, 1984, p. 117). Then, as the story unfolds, we often learn things about a biblical character in a moment of perception that we share with another character within the narrative, thus enhancing a sort of literary parasocial relationship. As we will see, the biblical actors carry with them weighty matters both implicit and indirect.

In terms of Walter Fisher's Narrative Paradigm (with its groundbreaking concept of *narrative rationality* to challenge the *rational world paradigm*), we may find that the categories of *coherence* and *fidelity* themselves are differently constructed within the Hebrew narrative style, given its ancient roots. That is, before even considering how the ancient writers exploited the power of narrative, it is useful to consider what it once meant for a story to "ring true" and "hang together" in the first place. For example, at a time when orality still dominated human perception, what role might repetition or phonicity (how the words sound) play at the very basement level of narrative influence? By rejecting the Epic form and creating something new in the world called historical prose, how did Old Testament writers participate in constructing the very criteria of narrative fidelity against which all other stories (and the "good reasons" they

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*Violence in the Old Testament (*2014), and Provan's, *Seriously Dangerous Religion: What the Old Testament Really Says and Why It Matter* (2014). The meaning of this last title is that Old Testament theology is more dangerous than its detractors realize as it collides with the modern secular worldview. In *Beneath the Surface: Reclaiming the Old Testament for Today's Christian* (2013), Callen seeks remedies for the neglectful Christian audience. There is a need for contemporary society to meet the now alien God of the Old Testament.

provide for how it is best to live) would be unconsciously tested? The challenge is to try to

understand how such narratives achieve their timeless impact and their penetration past every

imaginable curtain of culture across the centuries. When Joseph weeps as he calls his brothers to

himself, why in the world do we? We barely know them. Just what is it that we think we're

seeing, as C.S. Lewis would say, "along the beam?"[57]

2.1.1.2 Hebrew poetry. We may have read our share of poetry, but things are happening

"in stereo" through Hebrew parallelism that tends to evade an untrained modern consciousness.

This often involves the heightening and play between the two or three stitches in most poetic

lines. Defamiliarization is everywhere in the poetic Hebrew convention: the sea is a "whale

road" and wine is the "blood of grapes" (Alter, 2011b, p. 16). Shklovksy (1917/1965) explains

that the purpose of the writer is to "create the vision which results from a deautomatized

perception" (p. 10). The effect is that perception is deliberately slowed down or impeded in a

way that causes the reader to linger over the object. This perfectly matches the ideals of indirect

communication. At bottom, it is a device for deepening interiority and for making the other

person aware.

Like most poetry, the Hebrew kind positively abounds in metaphor as an indirect

communication of the ineffable "*thisness of that* and the *thatness of this*" (Burke, 1969a, p. 503).

We are getting at essences as we learn to we see one thing in light of another, and as it first

resists then surrenders to its new label (Craddock, 2002, p. 62). However, biblical images are

drawn from an ancient and foreign well: the stones fastened onto the chest of the priest who

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[57] This is an allusion to Lewis' essay, "Meditations in a toolshed" (1970, pp. 212-215). Cognitive analysis of art or story is like looking *at* a dusty beam of light. However, to step inside the beam to look *along* it brings into view the branches, and the birds, and the sun millions of miles beyond. This is his analogy for stepping inside of story or art in an imaginative immersion in order to see all that they point to beyond themselves when the beam, like the edges of a movie screen, disappears. I will return to this insight often.

passes through the curtain, the incense that curls around him in the Most Holy Place, and so on.
In *Prophetic Imagination*, Walter Brueggemann (2001) argues that the battle for our culture (and for a numbed Christendom) calls for a new level of immersed participation and imaginative involvement in the images of the Old Testament, not to mention its rituals, poem, and songs. This is the call, indeed, to linger, and it affirms the message of an aptly titled book by Gutiérrez (1984), *We Drink from Our Own Wells*. The issue is larger than cultural identity. To make a meaningful claim to a Judeo-Christian heritage, there must be a thoughtful engagement with Hebrew poetry in order to hang its images like new portraits in the basement gallery of the heart.

    2.1.1.3 The Relationship between theology and genre. There is much still to be learned about the ways theology is embedded within genre. "In the Hebrew Bible the literary medium is not merely a means of 'conveying' doctrinal positions but an adventurous occasion for deepening doctrine through the play of literary resources" (Alter & Kermode, 1987, p. 15). This dissertation concerns the ways theology is *experienced* in narrative time, or how it constitutes the *atmosphere* within the worlds of meaning to which we are transported,[58] or how it is *sung* into our very bodies by the privileged route that music has (Smith, 2009, p. 171). These are the things that move the *imagination*, and the way I use this term throughout this study has nothing to do with pretending or make-believe. Instead, imagination is the cognitive faculty for conceiving what we cannot see. That is, it serves for the very construing of our world on a pre-cognitive level. Thus the "imaginative" aspect of the Old Testament is a way to speak of its massive yet hidden influence as relates to the entirety of human inwardness in intellect, emotion, and will.

    Biblical actors deserve their place in the spotlight. "Doctrine and promise are incarnate in

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[58] This idea is found already in Longinus (1st Century AD/2002, p. 57). This narrative stealing away can be called, not deductive or inductive, but *abductive reasoning*. Indirect communication is inherent in the places we go when we think we are reading a book. Greene (2004) discusses this at length in *Transportation into Narrative Worlds.*

them and inseparable from them; for that very reason they are mysterious, containing a second concealed meaning" (Polka, 2015, p. 274). Even as language transcends direct sensory experience for a fuller and richer grasp of reality,[59] the Old Testament opens other ways of knowing, such as through *empathy* with a sorrowing prophet or exalting poet or in *identification* with ancient characters in overheard conversation. The prophetic tears, when the banks of inwardness flood over, are an indirect communication marked by a limited reliance on words. Observing from the outside, we can only wonder what they see— better, *how* they see—that we do not, and if we did, what it might do to us. It is a showing, not a telling.

2.1.2 **The Old Testament flavor of Kierkegaard's thought.** The Old Testament, as literature, is uniquely useful for studying indirect communication for another reason (and it brings Luther into consideration one more time). As has been mentioned, Kierkegaard's program of indirect communication was primarily a literary one. In fact, there is a small precedent for using literature other than Kierkegaard's to explore his themes (cf. Tietjen, 2013, pp. 126-130). What sets the Old Testament apart for my purposes is the degree to which Kierkegaard's thought has its roots in the Hebrew soil, as came to him through Luther's deep influence.

Luther ushered Kierkegaard around the neo-Platonist and Aristotelean systems of thought toward a very different core influence. For Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), the human is a fragment of the divine, so that the shock of the Incarnation is significantly dulled—why should there not be gods walking among men? There is a truth that throbs in Kierkegaard's writing that is missing wherever Christendom is bound up in a humanistic thought world. That truth is the "infinite qualitative difference" between God and humanity (1849/1980, p. 126). From the Old Testament,

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[59] Jacques Ellul's, *The Humiliation of the Word* (1985), is a fascinating siren call for privileging the verbal over the visual for the sake of the Church, even as God himself once did in choosing to communicate to the world through the spoken and written Word. Unlike the eye, the ear receives communication in a temporal sequence as characterizes any story and any life.

Luther acquired an overwhelming sense of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* [overwhelming mystery][60] of divine majesty and of the inability of a human being to stand *coram deo* [in the presence of God]. Sinners meet God in an *Anfechtung* [contesting] as ones who are "fought against," pinned down like insects on a board or hemmed in like birds in a cage (Kierkegaard, 1846/1992, p. 432). This theme is prevalent in Luther precisely because it is an aspect of the Old Testament atmosphere, and so it became the theological air Kierkegaard breathed as well.[61] He was impressed that "there once lived a people who had a profound understanding of the divine; this people thought that no man could see the God and live" (1844/1985b, p. 37).

Against this backdrop is it possible to grasp what Kierkegaard most wants people to know, that is, the full offense of the Apostle John's staggering motif: *"The Word became flesh and lived among us"*(Jn 1:14). This, in turn, makes it possible to understand why divine revelation can only burst in as a collision with unconverted human understanding. The heartbeat of revelation, discoverable in no other way, is that God not only hides himself in this Christ but that God accepts sinners solely on the basis of his Son. Paradoxically, the sinner must flee *into* the arms of this unfathomable Deity and not away from him, clinging relentlessly to God made known in Christ. This is the transcendent yet immanent God of the Hebrews and Luther's God, *Wholly Other* yet always stooping down. "He is only available to us in Christ, for outside of

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[60] It is a mystery before which humanity "trembles and is fascinated," both repelled and attracted.
[61] Podmore (2006) writes about the meaning of spiritual trial for Luther and Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's "Lutheran nostalgia" had to do with the absence of any anguished conscience in Christendom as he met it. "Spiritual trial is literally never spoken of any more" (1967, 6:6459). Mann (2003) describes the so-called philosophical "advances" that rendered the dark night of soul unnecessary (p. 109). Podmore discusses this in terms of people who miss the "lightning and earthquake" (referring to crises in the lives of Luther and Kierkegaard in turn). Edwards (2015) wants to avoid a misconception: "It is not that Kierkegaard believes the anguished conscience is, by necessity, an essential prerequisite to God's gracious offer of justification. It is rather that, in Christendom, one's reception of justification must occur in light of such failed striving if it is to be free from the corrosive influence of Christendom's 'idea' of grace'" (p. 245).

Jesus, God has locked up his heart and hidden his will. Whoever wants to know him must listen to Mary's son" (Becker, 1982, p. 20). The journey to God always involves a detour, a constant turning away from nature, as C.S. Lewis (1960) wrote, in order to "pass from the dawn-lit field into some dusty little church…back to our studies, to church, to our Bibles, to our knees" (p. 38).

The Old Testament deserves attention in any attempt to understand Kierkegaard as one who imbibed the dialectical spirit of the Hebraic Luther. Kierkegaard experienced himself and his God in fear and trembling. We might as well understand where it came from. [62]

2.2 Contribution #2: Insight into the Scriptures Through Indirect Communication

Just as the Old Testament shows extraordinary promise for yielding fresh insight into indirect communication, Kierkegaard's concept of communication, in turn, is ideal for opening up a fresh conversation about the Old Testament. First, it is necessary to situate this study along two contested fronts in biblical criticism. This dissertation leans on a literary approach to the Old Testament, and it does so not as an extension of dominant historical-critical methodologies, but as a decisive break from them. Second, this study represents a reading of the Old Testament that is consistent with Kierkegaard's view in recognizing the organic unity the Old Testament shares with the New. Higher negative historical criticism has tended to leave the soul unaddressed by the Spirit of Christ speaking in his Word. Without him, the Old Testament is a broken promise.

2.2.1 **Beyond historical criticism.** Craddock (2002) is emphatic that "the story of the separation of biblical studies from the humanities (that is, from a lively interest in form, style, and art) reads like a tragedy" (p. 57). The trajectory of Old Testament criticism originates with

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[62] The structure of Kierkegaard's thought is classically Lutheran in terms of the contrast between the Lutheran *dialectic* and the *linear* Augustinian view (Hampson, 2002). The dialectical view is captured in the axiom, *simul iustus et peccator* [simultaneously saint and sinner]. In this understanding, the Christian has a double view of self as both fully sinful and fully redeemed. This dialectic is an antidote both to the terrified conscience and to illusions about how far one has advanced in Christian living. Progress in edification has more to do with entering deeper into the realities of the cruciform life than with meeting an expectation of constant linear progress out of the realities of the *peccator* [sinner] and into the status of the *iustus* [saint].

the dawning of modernity, beginning in Spinoza (1632-1677) and characterized by the

dislocation of Scripture from revelation. The prevailing Cartesian framework of ideas was

devastating to a Word-centered Christian piety, jarring loose the Bible from the pre-modern

thought world in which it could speak on its own terms. This not only negated the very

possibility of revelation but also meant a rejection of miracles and a denial of the supernatural as

a matter of course. Modernity ushered in a full secularization of biblical scholarship (Becker,

1975). "The fact that the marginalization of the literary and theological dimensions [of the Old

Testament] took place simultaneously is probably of significance" (Beldman, 1975, p. 69).

Something happened to the Bible on its way between the sanctuary and the university, something

that seriously compromised it as any sort of reliable ground on which to build a life of

transcendent faith.

This arch of Old Testament scholarship as it passed through the hands of Astruc, Semler,

Eichhorn, Wellhausen, and Gunkel (to name a few who have towered over the field) left the

world with a thoroughly atomized text. The Hebrew Bible was torn apart into hypothetical pre-

existing fragments and earlier forms. Hummel (1979) has an exhaustive scholarly treatment that

traverses the entire Old Testament, revealing the breathtaking conjecture and subjectivity of this

approach (by one who had once practiced it himself).[63] He is by no means alone in writing from

a place of deep alarm because of the consequences to Christian faith (Richardson, 1963; Becker,

1975; Hays & Ansberry, 2013, et al.). The documentary hypothesis, form criticism, source

criticism and other trends in biblical criticism have in common the way they treat the biblical text

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[63] In his scholarly tome, *The Word Becoming Flesh: An Introduction to the Origin, Purpose, and Meaning of the Old Testament*, Hummel walks through the entire corpus of the Old Testament book by book to refute the documentary hypothesis as "a shipwreck," "a house of cards," "hypothesis upon hypothesis," and "concentric circles of circular reasons." In *The Seeing Eye* (1967) C.S. Lewis offers an ironic and devastating critique of New Testament historical criticism at the hands of Bultmann and Tillich; his observations can be applied *mutatis mutandi* to Old Testament higher negative criticism.

as an impediment standing in the way of what is deemed more worthwhile, that is, a speculative reconstruction of the cultural forms and life settings that gave rise to the text.

Historical criticism, if unchecked, dramatically alters how the reader reads or becomes subjectively involved with the biblical text. The approach is dominated by an assumption that multiple incompatible theologies compete in the pages of the Old Testament, rather than that a multi-faceted theological unity unfolds itself in an ever more colorful bloom of revelation. "Critical scholarship has often been united in its almost universal reflexive rejection at any attempt of harmonization of the Scriptures into an overarching unity" (Hummel, 1979, p. 27). This approach is tone deaf, for example, in pitting the Old Testament priests and prophets against one another (as if the former cared nothing about justice and the latter cared nothing about worship). Readers of such criticism are persuaded to view every open Bible suspiciously, and as something primitive, incoherent, and crudely constructed. They will experience frustration with the ambiguities in the text rather than engage with them as a key to the Old Testament genius. They will tend to continue the governing flaws in the historical-critical view by taking a critical posture above the sacred text and by tending to judge the ancient stories and poems according to contemporary literary standards (Watson & Hauser, 1994, p. 4). It is as if something is always wrong with the inspired text, never the modern reader. This is not the recipe for edification.

Kierkegaard might chalk it up to the danger in letting "geniuses" handle the Scripture, doing the hard work for the rest of us with an air of superiority, when the real need is for "apostles" who hold it in trembling hands and repeat it in trembling voice (cf. Isa 66:2). Speaking and expounding the Word of God is a very different speech act when it happens in the university as opposed to the believing community gathered in the humble receptivity of worship. There in the moment of hearing the daily lessons, the Church takes her proper place in relation to

God—a performative ontology—and at the feet of her only Teacher—a performative epistemology. In the counter-formation of worship, she learns to kneel and to pray, to sing and genuflect her worldview. The motions of liturgy carry inside an apostolic understanding of the world (Smith, 2009, p. 230), the one often missing in the theology department at the university.

2.2.2. **In support of a literary approach to the Old Testament.** Of all the approaches to the Old Testament still competing for legitimacy, the literary approach is most useful to this study because of the attention it pays to the *form* of communication in the biblical text. The value of this advantage cannot be overstated. "The more the [critic] concentrates on the ways in which thought has been woven into linguistic patterns, the better able he is to think the thoughts of the biblical writer after him" (Muilenburg, 1969, p.7).[64] In contrast, by failing to appreciate the shifting modes of communication that characterize the Scriptures, great violence can be done to the text and a great disservice to biblical readers. A professional clergy can lecture on what sort of corn the Prodigal Son fed to what sort of pigs and quite effectively break the spell of the story. The literary *how* is thus spent and discarded once the information has been excavated.

The point is not to cancel the exegete's concern for cognitive meaning. The two approaches must coexist. I only ask whether it is our place to go on vivisecting what God gave to us in the form of a heartrending poem or a prophet's shriek of pain, that is, to work tirelessly at communicating with practiced directness where God has done something else entirely?[65] Sometimes we might do better to savor the ineffable than treat the literary vehicle as some sort of

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[64] This affirmation of the literary approach to the Old Testament is not to suggest blanket approval for all of biblical scholarship where it is found. Within this camp, the Bible may still be viewed the way Alter (2011a) does, as art, and only art. To him it is "historicized prose fiction" (p.27).

[65] Additionally, to lecture with erudition the supposedly finished meaning of a biblical narrative may leave no room for the lively and unending conversation in which people are given room to grow in their own aptitude for interpreting the Word of God in harmony with itself and with a deep sensitivity to its Christological content. The meaning for which they have struggled or suffered will be all the more available for life. I suggest that this is just as the writers intended and one reason they wrote the way they did.

mistake, or proceed as if only the explanation of a text (figuring it out and dragging its secret into the light) can make it worthwhile.

Craddock articulates the ways in which receiving the Scriptures as literature taps their power for reaching us indirectly. He proposes a dialectic of accepting the *distance* between the modern reader and the ancient text while simultaneously *participating* in it. Distance and participation can come together in an encounter with the Word of God, just as an audience is drawn into the action on the stage. Indirect does not mean uninvolving. This combination of distance and participation is the key to approaching the biblical corpus as that strangely impactful experience of overhearing, being both addressed and left alone in a quiet space (Craddock, 2002, p. 98). This is the healthy corrective to those who stab some random page in the Bible with a finger to see "what God has to say to me today," thus evading what was obvious to Childs (1970): "What the text 'meant' is determined in large measure by its relation to the one to whom it is directed" (p. 141). The dynamics of overhearing become significant once we recognize how the great bulk of the Bible comes to us as "someone else's mail." We listen in as the Lord talks some matter over with his complaining prophets, or as the psalmist pants for God just as we would if we were better people. Craddock (2002) explains that faithful readers need not fear acknowledging the overheard character of much of their cherished Scriptures— experience suggests that the Spirit of God gets around to us soon enough (p. 109).

Clines (1980) resolves the dialectic of distance and participation in a way that is much reminiscent of Kierkegaard's way of communication:

> We do not make the leap into the past, we do not have to devise some scheme for bridging the gap between the "then" of the text and the "now" of the hearer. Literature worth the name jumps the time-gap of its own accord. What is happening in literature is

the creation of worlds alternative to our present reality….our way is not the only way for

humans to be. If we are fascinated into acknowledging the alternative world as part of

what we would want to have as our own real world, the two horizons merge. (p. 127)

There is nothing about asking how the form of the Old Testament contributes to total

meaning, cognitive relevance, and communicative significance that inherently questions its

inspiration or authority.[66] Instead, biblical insights only become clearer and more confidently

defended when the scholar grasps the thought that makes the text's patterns of expression most

meaningful. Literary form is analogous to music as a vehicle for words, and no one can deny the

inexpressible power of a tune to deliver a message home. (The book of Ruth will occasion a

further exploration of the immediate, visceral response to biblical artistry, compared to the

slower and always fragmented way of cognitive analysis.) It is the "beauty of holiness" in these

texts at least as much as their exposition that brings us back to them over and over. Like the play

of color in a Rembrandt or an angle in a building by Frank Lloyd Wright, non-discursive

symbols are felt as qualities. The way Weiss (2012) describes indirect communication, in

general, applies here: "A genuine communication does take place even though it cannot be

consciously cognized or systematically stated by either the communicator or the receiver" (p.

120).[67]

This study offers an additional contribution by reasserting aspects of the literary approach

to Scripture which is now being overshadowed in favor of feminist, post-colonial, ideological

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[66] Sternberg (1987) properly challenges this quite unnecessary either/or, that is, that the Bible must *either* be read as a literary achievement *or* as a sacred text (p. 35).

[67] This does bring in a subtle risk to the literary critic. C.S. Lewis (1970) comments, "Beauty exalts, but beauty also lulls….we may only sigh with tranquil veneration when we ought to be burning with shame or struck down with terror or carried out of ourselves by ravishing hopes and adorations" (p. 231). Kierkegaard would have rather seen Denmark give all its Bibles back to God than perpetuate a situation in which the Bible is approached as an aesthetic masterpiece, rather than for what it is most essentially: the "highway signs" (1967. p. 43) pointing to Christ.

criticism, and imaginist perspectives. What is new here is the use of indirect communication as an interpretative lens to enhance the literary approach to the Old Testament. The necessary starting point and a point of departure from the whole tenor of historical criticism is to display a glimmer of respect for the biblical text as an achievement in its own right:

> The telling [of the biblical story] has a shapeliness whose subtleties we are only beginning to understand, and it was undertaken by writers with the most brilliant gifts for intimating character, defining scenes, fashioning dialogue, elaborating motifs, balancing near and distant episodes, just as the God-intoxicated poems of the psalmists and prophets evince a dazzling virtuosity in their arabesques of soundplay and syntax, wordplay and image. (Altman & Kermode, 1987, p. 15)[68]

Certainly, the literary beauty of the Old Testament is not apparent to all, "just as a woman's beauty will be concealed from everyone and only disclosed to the beloved" (Kierkegaard, 1846/1992, p. 237). Many continue to dismiss these Scriptures for the very reason Kierkegaard appreciated them: "This is the reason my soul always turns back to the Old Testament and to Shakespeare. I feel that those who speak there are at least human beings: they hate, they love, they murder their enemies, and curse their descendants throughout all generations, they sin" (1843/1987, p. 22). The young Augustine, a student of rhetoric, found its language blunt and repulsive. He dismissed it, and only later as one reading from a position of faith would he recognize its "sublime simplicity" and what he termed its "inwardness." You might say that Augustine and Kierkegaard belong in the long line of those who, in the end, did

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[68] Another highly regarded literary critic concurs: "As regards sophistication, the Bible is second to none and no allowances need be made for it. The opening and timing of gaps, the processing of information and response, the interlinkage of the different levels, the play of hypotheses with sanctions against premature closure, the clues and models that guide interpretive procedure, the roles fulfilled by ambiguity: all these show a rare mastery of the narrative medium" (Sternberg, 1987, p. 230).

not miss the grace among all the blood and dead bodies of the Old Testament. Ultimately, the splendor of the Old Testament, for them and for me, is Christ. The Beauty is *deeper in.*

    2.2.3 **The vital link between the two Testaments.** The long debated relationship between the Old and New Testaments is a matter of extraordinary significance for this dissertation. Already in the second Century, Marcion (84-160), an influential bishop, insisted that the God of the Old Testament is another god, inferior to the God of Jesus Christ. This idea persists in a modern scholarly complaint. We are asked to regret "the Christian triumph over the Hebrew Bible, a triumph which produced that captive work, the 'Old Testament'" (Alter & Kermode, 1987, p. 11). In other words, for scholars of this persuasion, the fact that clarity forces them to constantly refer to the Hebrew Scriptures as the *Old* Testament is galling.

    In *Answer to Faustus, a Manichean* (410/2007), Augustine worked out his towering hermeneutic whereby the two Testaments are taken together as a "unified witness to God's love" (p. 19). There he famously stated the relationship of the Testaments in terms of hiddenness and a subsequent unveiling: "The New Testament is concealed in the Old, while the Old is revealed in the New" (p. 23).[69] The implication of this axiom is that the New Testament cannot be fully appreciated without its Old Testament roots, while the Old Testament finds its full meaning in the Christological reading upon which the New Testament stubbornly insists. For his part, Augustine refused to allow Christians to regard the Old Testament dispassionately, as a past religious tradition that may as well have been pagan. After all, this was never the apostolic way. Boda (2012) marks in the New Testament epistles the "ubiquitous inner-biblical citation and

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[69] Startling examples of what might seem to be mature New Testament theology already expressed in the Torah include: the teaching of justification by faith (Gn 15:6) and the universal priesthood of all believers (Exo 19:6). The book of Hebrews builds its Christology on a whole tapestry of Old Testament quotations and allusions, leaning heavily on the book of Psalms. Other cherished Christian doctrines in the Old Testament, such as the Trinity and the resurrection to eternal life, only become fully apparent when seen in the hindsight of New Testament revelation. In truth, they were there all along, hidden in plain sight.

allusion to earlier Old Testament passages" (p. 127). The methods the New Testament writers use when drawing on the Old Testament is a matter of renewed scholarly interest (Moyise, 2008, 2010; Beale, 2012; Kruse, 2014). The apostles insisted, for example, that when David wrote about a body that would not rot in the grave, *he was not speaking about himself* (Ac 2:25-28).

The Christian New Testament is unequivocal about the fact that Christ is the hermeneutical key to every major Old Testament division and genre, that is if the risen Lord can be trusted in his comments in the upper room. "Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in *the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms* [emphasis added]" (Lk 24:44).[70] The period between Christ's resurrection and ascension has been called his "forty day Old Testament hermeneutics seminar" because of the attention he gave to the way the faithful could know him through a proper involvement with the Hebrew Scriptures. Yet, the Old Testament is capable of being studied and dissected, chanted and prayed by countless millions without any reference to Christ at all, so heavy can be the veil "when Moses is read" (2Co 3:15). I take as decisive the hermeneutical keys to the Old Testament about which Christ himself was unequivocal. Jesus told the Pharisees, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (Jn 5:39).

It was also in the hands of his apostles that the Old Testament fell open as a book about Jesus, with all of its plot lines—the making of a nation, finding it a home, giving it a king— culminating in him. The book of the Acts of the Apostles repeatedly depicts Paul in dialogue with his fellow Jews "reasoning from the Scriptures" (17:2) and trying to "convince them about

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[70] This was the traditional way of speaking about the entire corpus of the Old Testament in its *three* broadest categories. Jewish people still refer to the Hebrew Bible by this three-part division with the acronym *Tanak*—the *Torah*, the *Nevi'im*, and the *Ketuvim* [the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings].

Jesus from *the Law of Moses and from the Prophets*[71] [emphasis added]" (28:23) The primitive

church became accustomed to sustaining the claims of Christ on the basis of the Old Testament.

By her liturgies, she established a dynamic relationship with the Old Testament as the place

where the same God who revealed himself in Christ still addresses his dear people in the

community.

The confessional posture toward the Old Testament is a well occupied scholarly space.

C.S. Lewis was bold in recognizing that Christ is mysteriously the true spiritual center, climax,

coherence, sum, and substance of the Old Testament (1958, p. 117-119).[72] This is also

acknowledged from within the rhetorical branch of Old Testament criticism:

> [John's Gospel] reworks the Old Testament as a whole, from beginning to end,
>
> reconstructing it in its true meaning around the focal theme of Christ as the Word which
>
> fulfills and absorbs the Scriptures and which confronts the fallen world as light in
>
> darkness. (Warner, 1990, p. 25)

The bold assertion that the meaning of the Old Testament, from beginning to end, is Christ,

Christ, and only Christ, has implications beyond searching out. For Bonhoeffer (1939/1954a), it

was not going too far to read the entirety of the Psalms as the prayer of Christ himself.

Even though Bultmann saw some value in the Old Testament for historical purposes, for

him it remained a history that was over and done with, bound to a people of another time and

place (Richardson, 1963, p. 42). The answer to this consists in recognizing both an

eschatological and Christological dimension to the Old Testament as history:

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[71] This was the traditional way of speaking about the entire corpus of the Old Testament in its *two* broadest categories, as is testified to indirectly on the Mount of Transfiguration. Witness Christ in conversation with *Moses* and *Elijah*, according to Matthew 17.

[72] C.S. Lewis had a complicated view of the Old Testament and ignored the markings of genre in some portions of the Old Testament which he mistook for myth. This is surprising given his observations on the New Testament: "I have been reading poems, romances, vision-literature, legends, myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know that not one of them is like this [the Gospel of John]" (1967, p. 207).

The *Old Testament history really is our history by Christ* [emphasis added]. It too was

accomplished for us and for our salvation, and into it too we were baptized. Since Christ

is "Israel reduced to one," and since Israel's inner history was all recapitulated and

consummated in him, the new Israel, the church, expresses its identity and mission in

terms of the promises given the old Israel. (Hummel, 1979, p. 17)

A fresh hearing of the Old Testament is available as the believing reader participates

through Christ in its enduring narratives and poems. "The Christian affirms that the God of the

Old Testament is *our* God and that Israel's life-story is, in a profound sense, the story of *our* life"

(Anderson, B. W., 1963, p. 242). It is this simultaneous participation both with the

defamiliarized Christ and with the ancient Hebrew text that gets at the very nature of the Old

Testament as an indirect communication. This is precisely what it means to peer behind the

curtain, or in an allusion to C.S. Lewis, to steal past those watchful seraphim.[73]

This does not mean that Christian understanding is not possible without the Old

Testament, yet how much poorer we would be without it:

While the new reality in Christ is central to Christian understanding, its full

comprehension demands the articulation of life and the problems of God's dealing with

the world, both of which are exhibited with great poignancy in the Old Testament. The

message of the New Testament may grasp and transform one's life without reference to

the Old Testament; but the riches of that message will not be apparent without the whole

range of possibilities—those both of God and or man—exhibited in a pilgrimage which,

however interpreted, is unique in history. *The riches of faith demand the Old Testament*

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[73] Lewis's expression, "to steal past those watchful dragons," (1966, p. 47) expresses the possibility that truth may evade the inhibitions of reason or religious duty when dressed in imaginative forms.

[emphasis added]. (Dillenberger, 1963, p. 161)[74]

Christianity itself has a past that can still deepen the interior and enlarge the experience of the contemporary Christian soul. Without a depth of background in the Old Testament, our reading of the New is indeed impoverished. We may encounter Christ as our New Testament "Redeemer," but the image will be missing the full dimensions and depth of its inner history. There will be no Ruth pleading "Cover me" to her kinsman redeemer—her *go'el*—and no Job clinging stubbornly to his Redeemer in nothingness and ashes. We would miss the extraordinary power that images gain through their many echoes across a stream of changing contexts and fail to find our story in the timeless story they tell in Passover and Exodus, Captivity and Promised Land. These are the stuff of a blended Judea-Christian consciousness. For the biblically literate, Christianity is a "Mona Lisa," lovely in her cracking paint. That is, there is beauty in its very history and age. Christians can ignore the Old Testament, but not without a cost.

2.3 Contribution #3: Reading Kierkegaard in a Hermeneutic of Trust

In Chapter One I argued for taking Kierkegaard in context. Here, I address the contested issue of how properly to read him. As a third contribution, I hope to model his usefulness for anyone who wishes to think deeply about what it means to communicate as a Christian in a decidedly secular age.[75] Mention of his name is likely to elicit a quick dismissal—"Kierkegaard? Why do you bother with him?" This matches a "general close-mindedness to his thought by many in the United States conservative evangelical community" (McKim, 1998, p. 335).

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[74] The Christological coherence of the Old Testament is affirmed by other scholars of note, including Brevard Childs (2011, p. 671), Emil Bruner (1963, p. 246), and Wolfhart Pannenberg, who commented that "the history of Israel is the history of God's self-revelation, seen in all its manifestations in the *indirectness* [emphasis added] of disclosure and finding its fulfillment in Christ" (1963, p. 300).

[75] Taylor (2007) explores what is different about believing in God in a context in which many *apparently* viable alternatives are available. The Old Testament may yet offer a camel's nose into the postmodern tent in its capacity for sanctifying the mundane in reference to the long-promised Christ. "On that day *Holy to the LORD* will be inscribed on the bells of the horses….Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the LORD Almighty" (Zec 14:20-21). The Old Testament resists the secular/sacred bifurcation.

Kierkegaard's value to the present study is as a provocative thinker on the subject of the uniquely Christian task of communication. I will take Kierkegaard just as he always asked to be taken. We are to believe nothing just because Kierkegaard said so: "My dear reader…you will gain the strongest impression that you have only yourself to consider, not me, who, after all, am 'without authority'" (1851/1990, p. 3). If this dissertation is successful, it will not be because of a judgment that Kierkegaard's theology is sound in every way. It will because the Old Testament examples of indirect communication themselves are compelling. Ultimately, the challenge I offer the church by studying indirect communication in the much overlooked pages of the Hebrew Old Testament is that the Christian church would do well to take its cues for communicating Christ from the wealth of forms that fill the rolling reservoir of the Scriptures themselves.

Even more, by appreciating the indirectness of the Scriptures, Christian communicators can learn to more deeply rely, with sensitively and confidence, on the Biblical text itself, just as it is. This speaks to the seldom recognized, counter-intuitive problem of being over-communicative.[76] What a thing it is, for example, to slowly read Psalm 13 to the broken hearted, and to let the words themselves just sort of hang in the air. What a thing it is to make Christ present, so to speak, by the way you spin the Bible around so that it faces the anguished soul across from you: "I'd like you to read from here to here. I'll wait."

That being said, what are we to make of Kierkegaard? He is a daunting writer. It is beyond the purpose of this study to bring every aspect of Kierkegaard scholarship up to date. Of most interest to the present study is the long tradition of misreading Kierkegaard when it comes

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[76] Ong (1982) comments that "biblical study has generated what is doubtlessly the most massive body of textual commentary in the world" (p. 170), causing the thinking person to wonder if Jesus wants or needs all that commentary, or all the energy Christendom expends at the task of translating the Word of God into another conceptuality. Alexander Pope's expression, "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread," in context, struck a rarely heard note about a sort of unthinking talkativeness on the subject of God.

to Christian theology, as has been done through a facile dismissal of him as an existentialist entangled in the morass of 19th Century philosophy. This cannot stand.[77]

Francis Schaeffer, in spite of other worthwhile contributions (notably his development of an apologetic especially suited for the situation of modernist despair) succeeded in turning the evangelical world away from Kierkegaard with his influential book, *The God Who is There* (1968). He misread Kierkegaard as wanting to ground Christianity in an irrational leap into the absurd and dismissed him as an existentialist philosopher and fideist. Apparently, Schaeffer was influenced by interpretations of Kierkegaard dating back to his discovery by the intellectual world in the 1940s and 1950s. He had become practically unknown outside of Scandinavia for decades following his untimely death in 1855. Kierkegaard's early translators misrepresented him as solipsistic, anti-reason, and narcissistically unconcerned about society or human relationships (Herrmann, 2008, p. 72). Those ideas persist.

As better translations of Kierkegaard emerged piecemeal, he was cast as the "father of existentialism" and the antecedent of Heidegger, Sarte, and Camus. To be sure, Kierkegaard's ability to engage and preoccupy as diverse an audience as he has (secular existentialists and post-modernists, neo-orthodox and dialectical Christian theologians) is a testament to his genius (Evans, 2006, pp. 3-4). The misreading here does not involve failing to grasp the philosophical points he was making, just as he intended them, and as he gave them a voice in his

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[77] In this dissertation, I risk using the term *existential* in a positive sense, mindful of the philosophical baggage the word carries. The Christian exists outside of himself or herself in the timeless death and resurrection of Christ, and in their perpetual reenactment in repentance and faith (Pannenberg, 2001). Also, there is a proper accent in Christina theology on following Christ in the Now as the gift of faith conquers both the shames of the past and fears about the future. God unfolds his will in time through the callings of vocation and the needs of the neighbor as they meet the religious self moment-by-moment. Further, what happens in inwardness self-evidently matters, in spite of the limits to how well it can be either investigated or communicated. However, like Hummel (1979) who shares my view, I also part company with so-called theological existentialists for whom "God has long since been banished to the inner life, and for whom the essence of 'revelation' is personal encounter" (p. 231) that is, without assent to revealed propositional truth. See Hinkson (2002) for a further, careful treatment of the "existential pathos of Luther" (p. 75).

pseudonymous writings. What is missed or mired in controversy is the method to his literary

madness. His pseudonyms represent a dizzying array of alternative perspectives for existing in

this world, and all are offered ostensibly from outside of Christendom and without any

unambiguous clues about where, in the Kierkegaardian cacophony, a reader could safely discern

his actual point of view. Johannes de Silentio, Climacus, Judge William, and all the rest are self-

cancelling voices—the emptying of the jar—designed to make readers aware of the bankruptcy

of philosophy and the fact that the humanist position is utterly irreconcilable with Christian

belief (Hampson, 2013, p. 30). As a distancing device, the pseudonyms push his readers away to

cause them to turn inward, to ask new questions about the false ultimates by which they have

lived, and to seek the answers outside of the books themselves.[78]

Unfortunately, there are those scholars who still side with the Danish theologian, Joakim

Garff, in seeing little reason to trust Kierkegaard's own essentially Christian account of his

authorship. Garff (1998) goes so far as to call all such commentary by Kierkegaard on the

subject of Kierkegaard as a "fictive documentation" or a "documenta(fic)tion" (p. 86). Ferriera

(2009), though milder in her skepticism, announces, "I do not give Kierkegaard's retrospective

accounts any privileged status" (p. 191). Poole (1993) makes the casual assumption that anyone

who writes with the irony and "jest" that Kierkegaard does cannot, at the same time, be up to

anything truly serious. Poole believes that the entirety of Kierkegaard's authorship was merely

"for his own amusement" (p. 14). He demonstrates the same hermeneutic of suspicion as the

others by dismissing Kierkegaard's right to explain his life's work even after he abandoned

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[78] McPherson (2001) puts it this way: "The pseudonyms can function…to suggest the radical incompetence of all human authorship, authority and responsibility in the light of divine communication in the Word (the creative Logos) become suffering, dying, human flesh on behalf of others" (p. 61). I add that Kierkegaard's pseudonyms are much like characters in literature, none of which perfectly express the view of the novelist, but of course, the novelist is always in there somewhere.

indirect communication late in his life. His perspective is revealed as well by a distinct focus on

Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works to the exclusion of his far more transparently Christian

works, for example, *the Edifying Discourses* (1843/1943; 1844/1945)—the jar filled full.[79]

Tietjen (2013) surmises that something else is going on with the deconstructing Kierkegaard:

> [This suspicion] seems equally against the general enterprise of faith as it is against
>
> Kierkegaard's self-understanding through the eyes of faith….It really chastises the
>
> "believing soul," the one who takes at face value what Kierkegaard tells his readers in
>
> *The Point of View on My Work As An Author*. (p. 74)

The two streams of his authorship, the disorienting pseudonyms, and the soul-stirring

Edifying Discourses, collide in a startling depth of commitment to indirect communication. Even

if his project was not so neatly thought out at the beginning (as he admits), it is reasonable to

conclude that his fondest hope was that readers would move from his *noms de plume* to his

signed works to see where the trail led (as from his busy mind to his settled heart), and to know

him as he wished to be known. While *Fear and Trembling* and *Philosophical Fragments* made

him famous, his longing eye was ever on his humble, Christ-saturated sermons. "I staked my

case on the *Two Edifying Discourses*, but I understood very well that only very few understood

them" (1848/1962, p. 20). They were the fragile flower hidden in a great wood waiting for his

ideal reader to come along. Already in his lifetime he found it ironic (and rather painful) that

philosophical brilliance was what thrust him into the spotlight, when it was all merely "the

disguise" (1848/1962, p. 14) in which the religious author hid himself like a spy.[80] He

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[79] An exception is Poole's discussion of Kierkegaard's communion discourses (1993, pp. 233-247).

[80] *"*I am like a spy in a higher service, the service of the idea. I have nothing new to proclaim; I am without authority, being myself hidden in a deceit; I do not go to work straightforwardly but with indirect cunning; I am not a holy man; in short, I am a spy who in his spying, in learning to know all about questionable conduct and allusions and suspicious characters, all the while he is making inspection is himself under the closest inspection*"* (Kierkegaard, 1848/1962, p. viii).

understood himself to be involved in a "deceit in the service of Christianity" (1848/1962, p. 6).

Thankfully, the impulse to dismiss the religious content of Kierkegaard's authorship does not go uncontested. This dissertation will continue to draw on Kierkegaard scholars of a more sympathetic and, arguably, a more ethical disposition, for example: Steven Emmanuel,[81] Jeffrey Mann, Stephen Evans, Mark Tietjen, Myron Penner, Fred Craddock, Merold Westphal, and Christopher Barnett. Without apology, I will privilege these Kierkegaard scholars and others like them who are willing to enter the world of his authorship with the good will to take him as he asks to be taken and who are minded to examine his *On My Work As An Author* (1848/1962) for real insight into his authorship (and not see it as just more irony on top of irony intended to throw his readers off the scent). Craddock (2001; 2002) can be credited for initiating this trend by offering Christian clergy a popular introduction to Kierkegaard in the practical terms of their preaching and teaching task. Most recently, Torrance (2014) has added his voice to debunk the idea that Kierkegaard's version of faith is individualistic, anthropocentric, and anti-social.

Rather than defend Kierkegaard against every charge, it is better to recognize that he knew there was a price to pay for a role he seemed born to play. He was an irritant in the church, a corrective who would one day need correcting, and an intentional exaggeration for the purpose of calling forth a reaction. For Kierkegaard, the only response that wouldn't do was the admiration of the crowd; it was not to be trusted by one who cared for his own soul. He was dialectical to his core. It was not his way to provide bland balance to his best provocations or to pepper his paragraphs with, "Now then, lest I be misunderstood…" His way was to delight in pushing to full throttle his argument for whatever truth was most neglected, while bringing

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[81] Emmanuel (1992) rejects the finding that Kierkegaard is ultimately insincere, or that an indeterminacy of meaning attaches to this work. The same writer continues to offer the most nuanced approach to Kierkegaard's retrospective, marking "a remarkable consistency in his thinking" (2007, p. 489, et cf. 2006, p. 21) in the point of view he offers on his own authorship.

nothing new to the faith at all. His is a style that laughs and sings, that drips in the craft of irony

honed in an ironic life and moves to an astonishing current of human pathos. He would attack the

false bottoms of Christendom with his gifted pen so as to save it from its misguided defenders if

he could (Kierkegaard, 1848/1991, p. 230). While the only thing Kierkegaard ultimately claimed

for himself was that he knew what it means to be a Christian, he was willing to be taken for the

only person in all of Denmark who wasn't one. He made it his calling to be a "Sign of

Contradiction" writ small. Although bound to be misunderstood just as Christ himself was, he

remained determined that people would reveal themselves by the way they responded to him.

2.4 Kierkegaard's Use of the Old Testament

Kierkegaard alluded to the Bible in over fifteen hundred places, not even counting his

Journals and Papers (Pederson, 1978, p. 27). One might assume that there is nothing new about

studying indirect communication by means of the Hebrew Scriptures. Kierkegaard certainly used

the sacred text in an unprecedented way in the interest of his program. This is to be expected

since he was "an intensively scripturally shaped writer whose natural idiom was the language of

the Bible, and who viewed the world through biblical lenses" (Barrett & Stewart, 2010, p. ix).

This scriptural shaping was the result of the long habit of a dynamic participation with the Old

Testament, especially with its narratives. "Kierkegaard dives in, immersing himself fully in the

pathos of the biblical stories, imagining himself in the story and giving himself to their paradoxes

in order that he might be transformed" (Unger Brandt, 2010, p. 244).[82]

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[82] Incidentally, Kierkegaard rose high above the fray of the higher negative criticism of the biblical
texts that ran rampant in his day. If he could, he would have hermetically sealed off the Scriptures as if the
entire course of biblical criticism, beginning with its roots in the Enlightenment, had never happened at all.
Hans Brøchner, reports a conversation in which he told Kierkegaard, his older relative, how he was reading
the New Testament in order to find primitive Christianity in the text and follow its successive development.
Kierkegaard turned sadly away. Brøchner writes: "To him such an investigation bordered on the offensive…
he was unable to relate himself to the Scriptures in such a way that they became the object of critical
investigation. He could not do this in part because the Scriptures were to him a whole, an integral expression
of Christianity into which he would not introduce any distinctions" (cited in Kirmmse, 1996, p. 243).

Discerning Kierkegaard's view of the Old Testament is complicated by the question about how and to what degree the perspective in his pseudonymous writings can be ascribed to him. A pseudonym writing from the aesthetic sphere reads the Old Testament just as a person reads Shakespeare, that is, as literature alone. Out of the ethical sphere, the Old Testament is read as fodder for the self-justifying project. "The aesthete and the ethicist instantiate ways of engaging the Old Testament that seem to take it seriously but fail to approximate its Christian use" (Unger Brandt, 2010, p. 248). When writing in his own voice, the Old Testament was a fertile source for "paradoxically confounding human categories and pointing the church to a new and deeper relationship with God" (Unger Brandt, 2010, p. 240).

What is most original of Kierkegaard's many uses of the Old Testament is his unique method of interpretation that Engelke (2010a) terms "experimental hermeneutics" (p. 106). By this he refers to Kierkegaard's penchant for recasting biblical narratives with alternate plot twists and giving them dramatically altered endings.[83] Damgaard (2010) explains:

> Kierkegaard bases his writing strategy on the assumption that the reader's participation in the Christian tradition has made the reader so accustomed to the biblical texts that they will automatically engage them as harmless pieces of cultural heritage and will no longer by challenged by their radical nature….He produces an alienating disstanciation that deconstructs our familiarity with the narratives…to help us to rediscover them. (p. 225)

This was all of apiece with Kierkegaard's intent to subvert the domesticated Christianity of his day. He described this strategy as a way to "give by taking away" (1846/1992, p. 275),

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[83] In *Fear and Trembling* (1843/1985a), Johannes de Silentio imagines alternative plot lines once Abraham, Kierkegaard's "Knight of Faith," is commanded by God to sacrifice his son. In one example, de Silentio's Abraham plays the part of a monster so that Isaac would hate him and not God. In *Stages on Life's Way*, (1845/1988) Frater Taciturnus take a similar license with the story of the prophet Nathan confronting King David with his sin. David and Nathan discuss the literary merits of Nathan's parable, so that David can escape its existential significance behind a fascination with its aesthetic form.

ironically picturing his audience as people whose mouths were already so full that any eating was impossible. In this case, what he takes away is the comfortable flannel-graph versions of familiar Bible characters and their every tired association. The exegesis he performed on a text often included what it might have said but did not, a technique that could be remarkably revealing. If he used elements of a biblical text at cross purposes with the writer, it was when the thought was being abused in Christendom. He emphatically denied himself any authority, thereby seizing permission to experiment with the biblical narratives and the characters that populate them. The purpose was to cause his readers to turn urgently back to the original text to engage with it, one way or another, in a truer way. If one of Kierkegaard's dominant metaphors for dealing seriously with the Old Testament is that of wrestling with a stranger (Damgaard, 2010, p. 207), he dared simply to teach that stranger a few moves of his own.

Another aspect to Kierkegaard's unique handling the Old Testament is nicely described by Polk (2010) as the "epidemiological model" (p. 127). Just how does one foster a religious passion in the reader? Perhaps the text carries within it a hidden contagion. Perhaps the mood of the text can be caught, as Kierkegaard commented, so that the reader might "become ill with the sickness one reads about" (1843/1983, p. 202). He hopes for a new epidemic. Under consideration one more time is that "error in modulation" (Kierkegaard, 1844/1957, p. 38). As we have seen, the feeling that occurs concurrently with an idea, as accurate as the idea may be, can reveal that the person relates to the idea in a way that is existentially false. Kierkegaard felt this danger keenly. Biblical scholarship "easily slipped into an attitude foreign to that which enables the Bible to function as Scripture" (Polk, 2010, p. 116). Catching the mood of the biblical text and its writer is the *sine qua non* for falling under its deep influence (Unger Brandt, 2010, p. 243). This ideal especially characterizes his treatment of Job in the *Edifying Discourses*.

Kierkegaard's epidemiological model belongs to the *how* of Old Testament study. Like much in Kierkegaard, this, too, is a reaction. He responded to an extreme propositionalism that asks of every Bible verse, "What does it teach?" (perhaps in the interest of theological combat), but never "What does it do to you?" or "How does it move and play on your mind?" This view imagines that propositional truths are spread evenly throughout the Scriptures.[84] This observation "is not to marginalize the cognitive, propositional aspect of God's communication, but it is to insist that an important aspect of truth gets lost when testimony is 'objectified.' Simply to preserve the content is to catch only half the sacred fish" (Vanhoozer, 2005, p. 288).

There are many prominent themes in Kierkegaard's authorship that turn out to be drawn straightforwardly from the Old Testament. He took its message seriously and authoritatively. For example, he rooted his psychological work, *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849/1980), in the Garden of Eden, as Anti-Climacus[85] locates the deadly spiritual disease in the first Adam. This is the source of Kierkegaard's robust understanding of the human condition, including that of the Christian. In *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844/1957), the pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis invites his readers to first find themselves in Adam so that they may find their real selves in Christ

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[84] Vanhoozer (2005) refers to this as "one verse, one vote" and explains, "One cannot do justice to all that is happening in language and literature by reducing it to statements about states of affairs" (p. 271). I may still seem to some to be concealing a negative view of propositional truth or to be downplaying the importance of doctrine drawn responsibly from the Old Testament. This is not the case. Christianity is a religion of propositions. "Indeed, one must delight in assertions to be Christian at all" (Luther, 1525/1957b, p. 66). However, this particular study is focused on aspects of divine revelation that have been less emphasized. Christian communication itself suffers when its communicators exempt themselves from striving to make their theology "get up and dance." The gospel is worth more than an attitude of, "I told them, so they know," as if it is safe to assume that "once the truth is known, personal and communal appropriation of it will fall as naturally as night follows day" (Craddock, 2002, p. 8). Such a theory cannot explain the lives or communication of the biblical writers. Extreme propositional can make the Christian church seem irrelevant as if everything the individual Christian needs can be found in a theological textbook. In truth, the community that gathers around the Word and speaks it to one another does much to help Saul remain Paul (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 158).

[85] Anti-Climacus is Kierkegaard's pseudonym for expressing Christianity according to the highest ideals. If works such as *Practice in Christianity* and *The Sickness Undo Death* are not among his signed works, it is because he was not willing to claim that he had personally lived up to those ideals.

(Dalrymple, 2010, p. 15). Kierkegaard learned much about human nature from David and Solomon: humanity's general unwillingness to engage in self-examination, the failure to accept one's pervasive guilt without inevitably trying to exonerate ourselves—we are "continually in the wrong before God" (Kierkegaard, 1847/1993, p. 243)—and the inability on our own to thoroughly repent and open ourselves to God's grace (Engelke, 2010a, p. 111). On the basis of Job, he saw through the insidious trap into which theodicy easily falls in its attempts to "legitimate talk of God's love and justice in situations of theological dissonance" (Polk, 2010, p. 115), that is, to justify the ways of God. The trap consists in slipping into a wrong relationship with God, or suspending it entirely, in the very act of playing his defender.[86]

Most edifying about Kierkegaard's relationship with the Old Testament is his accent on how properly to read it. "When you read God's Word, in everything you read, continually say to yourself: It is I to whom it is speaking, it is I about whom it is speaking—this is earnestness, precisely this is earnestness" (1851/1990, p. 36).[87] Likewise, Bartholomew (2012) argues that "listening to God's address is the *telos* of interpretation" (p. 21). Kierkegaard would add that biblical readers may often realize that they are being personally addressed only after a significant delay during which the Word has achieved the closest communicative contact before that "shock of recognition." In his hands, the text is not a source of instructions; rather, it never fails to find its proper dialogic potential. His whole engagement with the Hebrew Scriptures has the goal of enabling the reader to see themselves as contemporary with the characters in the scene and in

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[86] In addition to Kierkegaard's more extraordinary methods, he could often teach on the Old Testament and use it in a very straightforward way, for example, his delving with simple earnestness into the book of Ecclesiastes—he did not need to bring his ironic stance to a place where the irony is already in full bloom. This straightforwardness extends to a telling example of the way Kierkegaard stood virtually alone in his context in eschewing all the assumptions of historical-critical scholarship: he took Nebuchadnezzar (Da 4) for a real person who found his sanity in a place of aloneness with God (Engelke, 2010b, p. 195).

[87] Kierkegaard used the word *earnestness* to press on the religious subject the awareness that knowing is one thing and willing quite another. For Kierkegaard, then, the realization of being personally addressed by God himself is a critical component for jumping the gap by the power that is from God alone.

urgent conversation with them, rather than objectifying them into interesting topics of discussion. Readers do not inhabit the biblical world or share a narrative space, for example, with Abraham and Isaac at the *Akedah* [the Binding], if they unconsciously allow themselves the "historical fast-forward," and if "the ending is allowed to scatter its smile back over the long torturous path" (Craddock, 2002, p. 118). That is, there is something false about blunting a historical account by the vague thought, "Well, we know how *that* turned out." Abraham had to wait and see.

In *For Self-Examination*, (1851/1990) we are meant to learn that the art of faithful biblical reading involves examining oneself in that needful earnestness. This requires learning "distrust of oneself, to treat oneself as a suspicious character, as a financier treats an unreliable client, saying, 'Well, these big promises are not much help; I would rather have a small part of the total right away'" (p. 44). This stance is the opposite of convenient delay or self-justification by means of the text.[88] In a fundamental hermeneutic reversal, for Kierkegaard, it is the biblical text that interrogates, interprets, and unveils the reader, never *vice versa*. We are not reading the Old Testament unless the moment is characterized both by an "I" encountering a "Thou," and by a *self encountering itself* in the deep and silent interior. Kierkegaard writes, "It is precisely this silence we need if God's Word is to gain a little power over people" (1851/1990, p. 47).

Lastly, we are not properly reading the Old Testament if, for all its power to disturb, puzzle or offend, our reading does not ultimately edify the Christian heart. Kierkegaard ached for the whisper of Yahweh to somehow overcome the thunder of Sinai—"You are still my child"— and was not disappointed. Pyper (2014) uncovers a stubborn and pervasive Kierkegaardian joy in the writer often thought of as "the gloomy Dane," arguing that a single word sums up the entire

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[88] Kierkegaard worried that readers who do not hold themselves constantly suspect can improperly identify with the characters (Polk, 2010, p. 112). It is possible, for example, to hear with self-congratulation the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector: "I thank you, Lord, that I am not like that Pharisee."

Hebrew Scripture. It is a word that plays prominently in the *Edifying Discourses*, entering in

only after all sorrow, pain, and despair are given their proper due. That word is "nevertheless."

2.5 A Research Question to Fill the Current Gap

Kierkegaard used the Old Testament as a deep well of inspiration for his own creative

project in indirect communication as is entirely natural for one so steeped in ancient Israel's

vocabulary of faith. However, Kierkegaard used its characters as exemplars for Christian

disciples, but only rarely as prefigurements or types of Christ (Engelke, 2010a, p. 102). I do not

dismiss Kierkegaard's use of characters as examples, but would rather see them transcended for

the honor of Christ, the *truer and better* Adam, Abel, and Aaron. I depart from Kierkegaard

when I open up a view of the Old Testament in its entirety as an indirect communication, and in

claiming that it is Christ himself that we spot out of the corner of our eye serving at the table of

showbread, bouncing on Naomi's knee, wooing a bride in Solomon's court, and so on.[89]

The very thought of explaining indirect communication was for Kierkegaard a matter of

pure ambivalence and a performative contradiction, "like wanting to paint Mars in the armor that

makes him invisible" (1846/1992, p. 174). His idea was best realized in a showing, not a telling.

Likewise, in spite of his immersion in the Old Testament as a Christian writer at play, he left

considerable ground untraveled. Neither Kierkegaard nor any scholar since has set out to

discover fresh insight into indirect communication through the Old Testament in its own

unaltered form. Neither Kierkegaard nor any scholar since has used indirect communication as a

lens for peering behind the temple curtain of the Old Testament for its own sake. Missing in

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[89] By type of Christ, I refer to a genre of Messianic prophecy in which characters, objects, institutions or events of the Old Testament have an intended correspondence with Christ in the New Testament—Jonah in his fishy tomb, the Rock that was struck, the royal kingship, or the year of Jubilee. "The Old Testament is being relived in the New Testament" (Boda, 2012, p. 141). It is, of course, irresponsible to see Christian typology behind every Old Testament bush. Later, I discuss this particular *how* of biblical criticism.

biblical scholarship is any careful, sustained attempt to borrow from Kierkegaard in order to speak in a new and revealing away about the inspired text. This study addresses both the Old Testament and the strategies of indirect communication in an unprecedented way and at a significant gap in existing research. To speak into that gap, I have been guided by this question:

RQ: How does the Hebrew Old Testament, across its various genres, challenge or complicate, enhance or extend a scholarly understanding of indirect communication as drawn from the authorship of Søren Kierkegaard?

Chapter 3 Methodology

The essential task of exegesis is to apply everything to the mystery of Christ. He is the one center where all the lines of the biblical universe meet….It is not so much a matter of reading a book as of seeking Someone: with all its ardor, the Church seeks in Scripture the One whom she loves. The meaning of Scripture is not impersonal truth but the fascination with the figure of Christ. (Magrassi, 1998, p. 44)

By its methodology, the present study is designed to occupy a middle position at a divide within the practice of rhetorical criticism. On the one hand are staunch advocates of "theoretical productivity" as the sole objective that validates rhetorical criticism; on the other hand, are proponents of *close reading*, or *text in context*, for a "penetrating understanding of individual cases" (Lucas, 1988, p. 256). Close reading results in an engaging style of scholarly writing that is analogous to the "thick description" of culture. Of the two alternatives, this study leans toward the latter. However, this is not a typical study in the model of close reading in that I have performed my investigation of selected Old Testament texts within a distinct conceptual frame. That frame consists, of course, in the strategies and ideals of indirect communication. Although it is atypical, this methodology has precedents. Jasinski (2001) terms it "conceptually-oriented criticism" and describes it as a "clear alternative to methodologically-driven criticism and the social science model of theoretical development that it tends to entail" (p. 266).

This approach allows me to adapt a useful metaphor according to which the Old Testament test is construed as the *territory* to be explored, indirect communication is the *map* to that territory (a function assigned to theory in the social science model), and the techniques of close reading constitutes the *vehicle* for traveling deep into the ancient literary landscape (rather

than relying on rigid adherence to any established rhetorical methodology). I will develop each of these three elements below as I establish the interpretive tools and assumptions that have guided this study. First, I will give voice to a set of rhetorical ideals that characterize this study.

3.1 Values for Rhetorical Study.

What is true of cultures and cathedrals (Geertz, 1973, p. 50-51) is equally true of good books and the best stories. The particularity of a great text, not its sameness to every other, is what makes it irreplaceable. It is not the generalizations that keep us up at night. My argument that the Old Testament is a veiled and indirect communication of Christ is a broad example of what Leff (1986) calls a "theory of the particular case" (p. 378). The Old Testament is a phenomenon never seen before and never to be repeated. My goal has been to write about it in a way that is not unlike an ethnographer penetrating the curtain of culture. I have visited the old country to "explore the meaning structures beyond what is immediately experienced, gaining a dimension of depth" (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 152). This traveler returns, not with measurements or proofs, but to tell the story of where he has been, the resistance he encountered, and the way in that he found. He offers an argument he hopes will have the right quality for engaging his readers in a perception that he hopes they will come to share, whether little by little or in a sudden "aha!"

To be sure, there is a general sense in which every study of this kind is theoretical because it looks for explanations that will add to an understanding of rhetorical patterns that might then be recognized in other artifacts.[90] However, when close reading is also referred to as *reading in context*, this is to be understood in distinction to rhetorical analysis that is performed solely for the discovery of disembodied theoretical principles (Leff & Sachs, 1990, p. 256). As useful as rhetorical theory can be when it functions as a lens for noticing certain features of an

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[90] Theory, whether literary or rhetorical, is unavoidable. People are essentially arguing about theory, whether they realize it or not, any time they disagree about the meaning of a text (Sharp, 2009, p. 10).

artifact, a myopic reliance on a given rhetorical theory is also a way of *not* seeing.

> To demand that all critical studies make an explicit connection with and contribution to some specific theory would be to devalue rhetorical analysis that helps us to understand what is unique in any given situation….To limit your perspective is a sure way to miss the mosaic. (Andrews, Leff & Terrill, 1998, p. 20)

This result seems all too possible in connection with the storehouse of rhetorical possibility that is the ancient Hebrew text. After all, it was composed by writers who had no exposure to any articulated rhetorical system such as emerged after their day in the Greek-speaking world.[91] The present study does not careen map-less into the wild Old Testament landscape, nor does it come without a deep commitment to a particular conceptual lens. However, this conceptually-oriented criticism will involve a constant "circular movement" (Solomon, 2003) between the Old Testament and the Kierkegaard literature, as well as a "never-ending oscillation" (Leff, 2003, p. 169) between critical distance and a penetrating personal engagement with the text. Jasinski (2001) expresses this ideal in a way that characterizes the present study:

> It proceeds more through a process of *abduction* which might be thought of as a back and forth tacking movement between text and the concepts that are being investigated simultaneously….Conceptually oriented criticism proceeds through the constant interaction of careful reading and rigorous conceptual reflection. (p. 256)

Methodology is a means to an end. In the case of the present study, the end is to gain a new and

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[91] As to studying rhetoric in the Old Testament, Burke (1970) broadens our understanding of the persuasive element inherent in all communication by human beings as "symbol-using animals" (p. 1, *et passim*) so that we perceive all language as shot through with motivation. It not fatal, then, to this study to note that the biblical writers had no access to an Aristotle to inform them. If life itself is rhetorical, then rhetoric did not begin with the Greeks; they only began the systematization of what was there all along and will be present in any important text.

thickened understanding of the Old Testament as a communication.

Nothstine, Blair, and Copeland (2003) blame the preoccupation some rhetorical critics have with generating or contributing to theory to a "culture of professionalism" (p. 8) that knows only how to write for itself, creating content so esoteric that it does not serve for the provocation and engagement of any broader community. This perspective energetically challenges both Foss and Brockriede by revealing the way false claims about the power of methodology support a "cult of objectivity" (p. 23) according to the myth of the "pure perceiver" (p. 36). For Nothstine and his associates, this represents a misplaced faith in consistent social scientific progress through theory testing and construction (p. 23).[92] These ideals belong to the "scientizing of criticism" (p. 31) and the "epistemology of modernity" (p. 32). Nothstine borrows the term "modernistic rhetoric" from Leff (p. 31), and characterizes this school by its constricted attention to testable results and its misplaced valuing of predictability and reproducibility.

These impulses do not merely limit the scope of study. Worse, they cripple the imagination. Ironically, the best practitioners of the harder sciences do not shrink from characterizing their work in terms of passion and hunches, inspiration and profound emotion (Nothstine, Blair, & Copeland, 2003, p. 26). Similarly, a liberated brand of rhetorical criticism is emboldened to debunk the ideal of the neutral stance in favor of critics who turn their attention to works that touch them at the very ground of their being. Through it all breathes a passion that their work "is essential to the symbolic afterlife of the artistry it contemplates" (Osborn, 2003, p. 84). The ethos of *Verstehen* holds that studying human communication is unlike studying anything else in the universe. Accordingly, the literary artistry that is the Old Testament resists unveiling its mysteries, both human and divine, to a sterile empirical ideal.

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[92] In actual practice, no rhetorical theory is ever abandoned because of empirical failures resulting from a given study.

Another intimately related value of rhetorical criticism finds repeated expression among proponents of close reading and text in context: *only great texts are worthy of close reading* (Lucas, 1988; Gaonkar, 1990). Leff, in particular, "elects to examine exemplary manifestations so as to decipher the possibilities of rhetoric as art" (Gaonkar, 1990, p. 291). He does this to understand the rhetorical discourse itself in terms of "its effectivity (how it works), its artistry (how it is wrought), and its responsiveness to situation (how it is inscribed)" (Gaonkar, 1990, p. 291). It should be self-evident that the Old Testament, in which the particularity of its revelation achieves scandalous dimensions, is an ideal candidate for close reading by this criterion of a "great text." In addition, this measure links to a powerfully heuristic theory of literary criticism.

Ronald Dworkin (1985) advanced his *aesthetic hypothesis* as a way of naming what critics are disagreeing about when they have come to read texts differently from one another. He explains his theory this way: "An interpretation of a piece of literature attempts to show which way of reading…the text reveals it as the best work of art" (p. 149). To interpret the text *as the best text it can be* relies on a critical assessment as to "what the text in its entirety, construed consistently and naturally, taken in its fullest and most profound sense, can communicate" (Patrick & Scult, 1990, p. 21).[93] This can mean reading closely for the way a text "rings true and hangs together"—more on Fisher below—especially when these are not immediately apparent. This can yield "symmetry and meaning of a most delicate sort" (p. 90). The beauty is deeper in.

I embrace Dworkin's aesthetic hypothesis and strenuously assert that reading the ancient Hebrew Scriptures as the best text it can be includes reading it as true and encountering it from a

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[93] Criteria for arriving at a "best text" interpretation include: comprehensiveness, consistency, cogency, plenitude, and profundity. As to these last two categories, *plenitude* refers to a cumulative meaning that incorporates all a great text has signified through time and across changing contexts—a best text means all that it has ever meant. *Profundity* validates the ideal by which critics write for an inter-disciplinary audience and a wider interpretive community.

posture of faith.[94] A fictive reading limits the communication effects to a pretended identification—more on Burke below—through a suspension of disbelief. As the best possible text, the Old Testament with its overt and implicit claims of actuality is not to be approached from a deconstructionist agenda or read against itself as a convenient evasion:

> The events portrayed in a historical narrative happened in the real world and so have a forward movement that carries directly into the world of the reader. He or she exists in the same world as the events portrayed and so is part of the same unfolding story. Rather than "This is something which *might have* happened to someone *like you or me*," the claim is "This *is* what happened to *us*." It is our story. (Patrick & Scult, 1990, pp. 48, 50)

Clearly, the apostolic, Christological reading of the Old Testament is just such a "best text" reading writ large. It is the Word of God whether anyone still thinks so or not. However, I will argue throughout this study that the Old Testament becomes all that it can for its readers only when Christ is recognized there, and when the call of the *incognito* meets their inward "Amen."

3.2 The Old Testament Text as Rhetorical Territory.

This study answers a call on the part of Wolters (2012): "The time is ripe for a renewed, unabashedly Christian, scholarly appropriation of the Old Testament, which is in touch with the 'pre-critical' Christian past, and simultaneously equipped to handle discerningly the critical tools and resources of modern scholarship" (p. 44). Having critiqued the general thrust of the higher negative historical criticism of the Old Testament, I now situate myself within the milieu of Old Testament scholarship. The *Biblical Theology Movement* has the strongest affinity among competing schools with the ideals of this study. As a corrective to a myopic focus on individual

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[94] It is a question of genre: "Were the (biblical) narratives written or read as fiction, then God would turn from the lord of history into a creature of imagination with the most disastrous results....Hence the Bible's determination to sanctify and compel literal belief in the past" (Sternberg, 1987, p. 32).

narratives that has sometimes characterized literary criticism of the Hebrew text, the Biblical

Theology Movement affirms the total harmony of the Old Testament as revelation.[95] Although

the terrain is multi-faceted and extraordinarily complex, it remains a single, wild country.

Based on this assumption, practitioners in this movement often explore a specific motif as

it passes through the porous borders of multiple Old Testament books in which successive

writers have collaborated on the theme. This endorses a prominent feature of my methodology,

namely, the selection of key texts from across the entire Old Testament canon according to an

assumed inner harmony. Moberly (2013) demonstrates how Biblical Theology avoids the bias

that jars selected texts loose from the traditional harmonious reading of the Old Testament and

avoids inflicting interpretative schemes on them that are foreign to their canonical settings.

Scholars in the Biblical Theology Movement mean to visit the Hebrew culture that once gathered

around these texts as a Word-centered community with its eye on God, longing for redemption.

All this is to recognize a paradox Kierkegaard loved to exploit. He never questioned the overall

harmony of the Scriptures taken at face value, yet he gravitated toward particular texts that

occupy unique provocative spaces over against all the rest (as have I in this study).

Brevard Childs[96] (1979/2011) extended the ideals of biblical theology to a wholesome

movement in its own right called *canonical criticism.* This is a post-critical approach to the Bible

that tries to understand every separate text in the context of the whole, and (in a clean break from

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[95] To be clear, the term, "Biblical Theology," can be ambiguous since proponents may either be given to an effort to understand the divinely inspired theology of the biblical writers (the view I affirm), or to that of constructing a modern theology that is only loosely compatible with theirs (the view I reject) (Ebeling, 1955, p. 79).

[96] Childs (1985) is the champion for exploring the biblical text in the form in which it survives. Although he does not actively undermine the assumptions of historical criticism, his contribution is enormous, and his sympathy with Kierkegaard is unmistakable: "It is constitutive of human sinfulness to turn the witness to God through the Scriptures into a manageable object and thus fail to reckon with revelation as a means to encountering the living God on his own terms….I do not come to the Old Testament to learn about someone else's God, but about the God we confess, who made himself known to Israel, to Abraham, Isaac and to Jacob….and we confess that he has also broken into our lives" (pp. 26-28).

historical criticism) views the meaning of any text to subsequent communities as being as important as their meaning in the original setting. "When seen from the context of the canon both the question of what the text *meant* and what it *means* are inseparably linked and both belong to the task of the interpretation of the Bible as Scripture" (Childs, 1970, p. 141). The marriage of canonical criticism and reading in context promised to be a happy one from the beginning.

Child's has unveiled an additional ground-laying assumption. "The concept of canon was not a late, ecclesiastical ordering which was basically foreign to the material itself…but canon-consciousness lay deep within the formation of the literature" (2002, p. 39). In other words, the Old Testament writers themselves signal not only that they wrote under divine inspiration— *"This is what the LORD says…"*—but also that they were self-consciously contributing to the corpus on the shoulders of earlier writers and in sympathy with one another.[97] As a result, "Canon establishes the theological context in which the tradition continues to function authoritatively for us today" (p. 40). In this way, Childs preserves the familiar Old Testament voice from radical deconstruction at the hands of secularized biblical scholarship. In this Childs confronts what he calls "one of the disastrous legacies of the Enlightenment," namely:

> The new confidence of standing outside the stream of time and with clear rationality being able to distinguish truth from error, light from darkness….By accepting the Scriptures as normative for the obedient life of the church, the Old Testament theologian takes his stance within the circle of tradition, and thus identifies himself with Israel as the community of faith. (1985, pp. 14-15)

It is all meant to "free the Old Testament for a more powerful theological role within the life of

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[97] Likewise, Patrick & Scult (1990): "(The biblical writers) offered their own works to the community as an extension of a tradition already known and allowed the bearers of that tradition to assess the fittingness of their writing to the common faith and life. In other words, they sought to blend into the choir" (p. 132).

the Christian church" (Childs, 1985, p. 6) as is in perfect keeping with the values of the present study.

3.3 Indirect Communication as Rhetorical Map.

Indirect communication constitutes the map for navigating those literary landmarks that can especially satisfy the burdens of this dissertation.[98] As indicated earlier, I have selected specific texts from the Old Testament in order to represent a rich diversity of genre and to illustrate an overall Christological approach. These are also the texts which exemplify the full range of indirect communication strategies according to my own working definition:

Indirect communication is a set of strategies for veiling meaning in order to avoid arousing resistance in the receiver, to penetrate illusion, and to promote awareness, pathos, and increasing depths of concern and involvement. Its ultimate goal is to communicate the capability of living by the truth rather than to repeat information which the receiver already possesses but does not appropriate. The strategies of indirect communication include but are not limited to: literary forms and devices (e.g., narrative, imagery, irony, or humor), strategic ambiguity, and the creation of the conditions and communication spaces for messages to be overheard. Indirect communicators are self-consciously maieutic, wanting for themselves only the delicate helping role, like a Socratic midwife assisting at the birth of subjectively realized truth of which they are not the source. This reveals a respect for the meaning-making capability of the receiver, and, even more, for the God who alone can reveal himself to the inwardness of the other by his Spirit working through his Word.

I was also guided in my text selections by Foss (2009, p. 10) to privilege texts that create

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[98] Bringing a conceptual scheme to the Old Testament calls for tentativeness. "All maps distort and omit in order to simplify and clarify" (Wright, 2006, p. 69; see also Sharp, 2009).

an enduring visceral response which defies easy explanation since this indicates the presence of indirect communication. For those who are drawn into the worlds of meaning constructed in the Old Testament, it is no simple matter to articulate why its forms act upon us as they do. To be entangled by a symbol without being able to describe not only *that* it moves you, but *how* it does, indicates that we are stuck at a simplistic understanding. The goal, from a rhetorical perspective, is to learn to engage with the texts in question in a more sophisticated way than that, finding the reason for its influence aesthetically, psychologically, or otherwise (Brummett, 2010, p. 19). It is understood, in regard to the sacred text, that these processes move across the surface of the deep and inscrutable work of the Spirit of God. All in all, Kierkegaard would certainly approve of this focus, given the way he was consumed by the *how* versus the *what* of communication.[99]

3.4 Close Reading as Methodological Vehicle.

Brummett (2010) strongly associates close reading with the specific techniques that constitute the "knack you use 'on the ground' once inside the text" (p. 28). He also describes the purpose succinctly: "*Close reading* is mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to a deeper understanding of its meanings" (p. 9). Since I will not claim to have found anything in the Old Testament that has not been seen before by others, I lean heavily on Brummett's affirmation that the ability to speak in new terms about a great text constitutes new knowledge (p. 35). Close reading is an end to itself. As a result of a successful close reading of a familiar text, it will be as if we were "hearing it for the first time" (Clines, 1980, p. 37). To put this more vividly still, "The

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[99] Sellnow (2013) explains that rhetorical analysis is most fruitful at "sites of struggle" (p. 12). These are the instances in which a humanly constructed artifact conceals something that the rhetor implicitly assumes about the "oughtness" of life (p. 3) in a way that challenges the taken-for-grantedness of a prevailing ideology. The power of symbols to smuggle in implicit meaning is evidence that communication at its most influential tends to be indirect. This agonistic quality is another useful criterion for the texts I have selected (e.g., Isaiah's idolatry polemic and the non-proverbial wisdom of Solomon). In the current study, the site of struggle moves into the inwardness of the biblical reader where the Spirit-given text collides with ways of believing, thinking, and living that are merely human.

reader wonders: will it ever be the same to me?"[100] I could only hope for so much in connection

with readers of the Old Testament who have not previously recognized Christ in its pages.

Concern for the relationship between form and content commends close reading as the

methodology for this study. Leff & Sachs (1990) explain how close reading resists the

form/content dichotomy (p. 255) and "disarms that tension and thus opens the way toward a

more fluid understanding of rhetorical action" (p. 256). In connection with this dichotomy,

Brummett (2010) argues counter-intuitively that "form moves people more than content does,"

with the result that he ranks the detection of form as the most vital of all close reading techniques

(p. 51). This translates into a keen attention that is paid to narrative, genre, and persona.[101]

For the purposes of biblical studies, in particular, Wendland (2014) identifies the practice

of close reading with the term *Formalism* (p. 7)[102] and then breaks this methodology down into

several distinct categories that, in addition to those of Brummett, include poetics, linguistics, and

canonical considerations. The close reader draws inferences about what the work in question is

designed to do, and how it is designed to do it (Leff & Sachs, 1990, p. 256). This is in every way

consistent with the ideals I've ascribed to the present study, that of providing a thickened

description of the Hebrew Old Testament as the best text it can be.

The accent on subjectivity among the advocates of close reading and indirect

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[100] I attribute this insight to commentary by Dr. Michael Graves about a close reading by Lucas (1988) of the *Preamble to the Declaration of Independence*.

[101] A *persona* is one of the many possible roles people may play in connection with texts. For example, they may naively accept, overtly challenge, or more subtly undermine the point of view of the text; or they may imagine it to be addressing some other audience rather than themselves (Brummett, 2010, pp. 65-69).

[102] Formalism stands in marked contrast to Receptionism (or reader response criticism) as well as Postmodernism (or deconstructionist criticism) (Wendland, 2014, pp. 7-9). Formalism concerns itself with rhetorical features that are confined within the borders of the text, holding that "a text must be understood from within rather than without" (House, 1992, p. 13). Close reading is performed according to the context that the text sets up internally (Brummett, 1999, p. 10; Lucas, 1998, p. 249). This approach scrupulously avoids speculating on the *Sitz im Leben* behind the text or on supposed etiological motivations; these approaches separate content and form because of the way they step away from the particularities of the text.

communicators alike also commends the methodology as my vehicle into the Hebrew text. Hariman (1989) speaks of the "transfer of consciousness created…within the text…into the world outside the text" (p. 213). Benson (1980) shows a similar interest in the inwardness of the receivers by his comment that the close reading critic "inquires into the states of thought and feeling an audience is invited to experience" (p. 235). Although it is fanciful, Brummett (2010) exalts in the humanistic play of close reading so that "critic and reader dance together on the floor of the text" (p. 35). In the present case, the music is supplied by Kierkegaard himself.

3.5 Guides for the Journey.

To extend the methodological metaphor, I construe a diversity of scholars as *guides* to accompany me in the methodological vehicle, with Kierkegaard on the passenger side. This is ultimately a communication study, and I have already previewed the fact that my analysis is informed by scholars interested in phenomenology, linguistics, hermeneutics, social construction, ethical influence, and interpersonal communication. Here I will also make mention of additional scholars representing Christian theology and both literary and rhetorical criticism.

3.5.1 **Theologians.** Theologians can make significant contributions to communication scholarship and deserve their voice in this conversation. Christian orthodoxy has been thinking deeply about communication for centuries; witness St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and his 4th century model for semiotics based on a Trinitarian formula and a Chalcedonian Christology.[103] The influence of Bonhoeffer will continue in the present study. Martin Luther deserves prominence in connection with hiddenness of God as it relates to indirect communication (as I will explore in Chapter 4). In this dissertation's *Findings & Discussions* I will give a full

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[103] Augustine's starting point was Christ the Word of God. Just as a thought does not lose itself in the oral symbol, so divinity is not diminished when God speaks his Son. The Son experiences "no change of nature" (397/1987, p. 14).

accounting of the contributions that have come to this dissertation through a recognition of the shared interests of Christian theologians and communication theorists. There I will distil my implicit argument for the place, Kierkegaard, as a theologian of the cross, ought to have at the communication table even as I draw out the implications of this study for the church's unique communicative tasks.

3.5.2 **Biblical literary theorists.** There are far more literary theorists who specialize in the Old Testament than the handful of rhetorical critics who do so. In terms of literary theory, I draw exclusively on biblical specialists (e.g., David Clines and Paul House). They have served this study by the attention they pay to form. However, I have relied even more on literary critics who have further specialized according to the broad genres of biblical narrative and poetry.

3.5.2.1 Narrative. To paraphrase Flannery O'Connor (1970), God tells a story because a statement would be inadequate (p. 96). When the text in question has a narrative form, my analysis will be guided by the seminal work of Robert Alter (2011a) in *The Art of Biblical Narrative.* Narrative analysis focusses on: the relationship of literary structure to literary motif, the way literary units of analysis are bracketed and identified within the larger text, the means used by the narrator to manipulate narrative space and time (and to what ends), the indirect ways Old Testament actors are characterized, the communication function of scene and dialogue, and how truth is nestled within these narrative features. Shimon Bar-Erfrat, author of *Narrative Art in the Bible* (1984), will join Alter as a guide to the historical prose in the Old Testament, and I value most his brilliant analysis of the narrator's voice as an ultimate site of the indirect communication of theology in the genre of Old Testament narrative.[104]

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[104] Other scholars highlight the importance of the biblical narrator in complementary ways. Beldman (2012) contends that the biblical narrator "never deceives" (p. 80). Rhetorical scholars of the Old Testament agree in a presumption of truthfulness versus disingenuousness in connection with Old Testament narrators (Patrick & Scult, 1990, p. 103; Warner, 1990, p. 7). Straightforwardness is another matter entirely.

There is a reason for my reliance on those narrative scholars who have specialized in the Old Testament, such as Meir Sternberg in *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative (*1987). Earlier I introduced features of biblical narrative that are unique to the ancient Hebrew style. Among them, repetition is a surprisingly subtle literary tool. Repeating key words exploits their full semantic range and allow images to gather power over subsequent occurrences. Think, for example of *yatsliakh* [prosper] in the Joseph narratives or *'esh* [fire] in connection with Samson. The same device brings multiple stories into conversation or signals larger literary units.[105] In terms of intertextuality, a narrative effect is achieved through the subtle variation of type-scenes across a variety of contexts, for example, flights into the wilderness or meeting a spouse at a well. Like the gunfight in any typical "Western," the key elements are there, but always with some twist on how the thing has always gone before. Type-scenes are simultaneously familiar and new. By their brilliant permutations, they attach the newly unfolding moment to the larger pattern of theological meaning and are worked deeply into the whole Old Testament fabric.

Similarly, the special ambiguity of Old Testament narrative has much to do with the gaps the narrator leaves for the reader to fill in. Sternberg (1987) explains: "Arising from a lack in the telling, gaps give rise to a fullness in the reading: the Bible presses this universal of literary communication to extremes undreamt of before modernism" (p. 230). However, the same writer earlier provides the corrective if this literary feature would seem to translate into ultimate undecidability about the meaning of the text:

To emphasize the active role played by the reader in constructing the world of a literary work is by no means to imply that gap-filling is an arbitrary process. On the contrary, in

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[105] The most compelling example may be Moses' use of the word *toledot* [generations / subsequent history] to indicate the literary structure of the book of Genesis. The detection of these twelve well-crafted literary units ought to occasion a total revision of Genesis scholarship by higher negative critics.

this as in other operations of reading, [Old Testament] literature is remarkable for its

power of control and validation. (p. 188)[106]

Leitworts, type scenes, and gapping only constitute a subset of the ways biblical narrative is set

apart from the broader field of narrative analysis.

3.5.2.2 Poetry. When the text in view is poetic, namely, selections from Ecclesiastes,

Isaiah, Psalms, and the Song of Solomon, the same Robert Alter (2011b) will be the principle

guide by means of his less celebrated work, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. His main contribution to

my thesis here involves the dynamics of Hebrew parallelism having to do with the relationship

between the echoing stitches in any poetic line. This includes frequent semantic intensification

whereby, for example, the act of despising someone in the first half of a verse becomes "not

sparing their spit" in the second half (Job 30:10). Other literary critics, especially Wendland

(2014), inform this study whenever I take up the function of a vast array of literary devices.

These include: chiasm, inclusio, synecdoche, metonymy, apostrophe, poetic centering, elision

(also called gapping), and much more.[107] These will become important when I take up the way

Kierkegaard now and then equated indirect communication with the presence of literary devices.

In the end, according to the guidance of literary critics of the Old Testament, it is not

surprising that many of the most endearing texts of the Old Testament should come from its

inspired poets. It has been fascinating to consider why the harshest critiques of Old Testament

society should come in the form of poetry, as is the case of most of the prophetic literature.

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[106] How does biblical repetition work together with its logic of gapping, or as Sternberg (1987) put it, "How does loquacity go with reticence, overtreatment with undertreatment" (p. 365) For my purposes, it is enough to acknowledge that I do ascribe both to the text, and will demonstrate how meaningful each can be.

[107] Phonicity, or the special artistry of literary sound and oral patterning, has special significance, especially if the past 500 years of print dominance will prove to be a parenthesis in the totality of how Christians have experienced the Word of God across history. The Hebrew text gives evidence of having been written for the ear. (The practice of a silent reading of the Word of God was still something of an anomaly as late as St. Augustine.)

3.5.3 Rhetorical Critics. Rhetoric effects reality, not by exerting energy directly on objects, but by creating discourse that can change the perception of reality through its symbols and forms. To distinguish *literary* criticism and *rhetorical* criticism of the Old Testament, the former attempts to understand the conventions of ancient literary composition while the latter investigates the persuasive dynamics of those forms and how they manage the speaker-audience relationship (Watson & Hauser, p.1994, pp. 3-4). Wichelns famous essay, "The Literary Criticism of Oratory" (1925/1995) tried to harden the boundary between the two, arguing that literature reaches timelessly beyond itself while rhetoric is situated before an audience in a particular time and place. Burke blurred the line between poetic and rhetoric for a more flexible critical response (Medhurst & Benson, 1984, p. xviii). He strayed from traditional frameworks into a view of literature as symbolic action, seeking to understand how words achieve their ends. He is the first on a short list of rhetorical critics that merit special attention.

3.5.3.1 Kenneth Burke. In Burke's landmark, *Rhetoric of Motives* (1950/1969b), he unpacked his key term *identification* (pp. xiii, 19-25). Burke's identification begins in the problem of inward isolation—we each have aches and pains that are all our own. Communication, as he sees it, is "partly embodied in material conditions and partly frustrated by these same conditions" (1950/1969b, p. 22). He understands the communication phenomena of overlapping identity and the sharing of substance—"human stuff"—as key to all persuasion.

> Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity. If men were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communication would be of man's very essence…as natural, spontaneous, and total as with those ideal prototypes of communication, the theologian's angels, or "messengers." (p. 22)

This speaks to the communication of subjectivity. Although inwardness is an "essential secret" (Kierkegaard, 1846/1992, p. 79), as the ancients say, "like is known by like." This is confirmed in the enigmatic Hebrew proverb, (literally) "Like water face to face / thus the heart of man to man" (Pr 27:19). I can know something of the inwardness of another by what I see in my own reflection. Indirect communication is an irrevocable part of life related to the boundary between the interior and exterior world. Burke could scarcely refrain from casting his ideas in religious colors, thus: "Rhetoric is concerned with the state of Babel after the Fall" (1950/1969b, p. 23). Similarly, in *A Grammar of Motives* (1945/1969a), he argued for the particular sort of inter-subjectivity that applies best to Christianity, making it essential to his idea: "In Christ's poetry, peace was a substance, *the* substance—and only insofar as one was consubstantial with it was he truly alive" (p. 333). The word *shalom* captures the essence of it.[108]

3.5.3.2 Walter Fisher. Fisher's groundbreaking ideas in *Human Communication as Narration*, (1989) both affirm and extend Burke's work. They are familiar to communication scholars. To be a human being is to be a storytelling creature [*homo narrans*]:

> Rationality is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings—their inherent awareness of *narrative probability*, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing *narrative fidelity*, whether or not the stories they experience ring true with the story they know to be true in their lives….*Good reasons* are the stuff of stories, the means by which humans realize their nature. (pp. 64-65).

In this way, Fisher undermines the *rational world paradigm* that encounters the world as a set of logical puzzles to be solved through subject-matter knowledge and the application of reason. In

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[108] There is, of course, much more to Burke that fits hand in glove with the ideals of close reading: linguistic filters, terministic screens, associational clusters, the dramatic pentad and the ratios among its elements (for unveiling motivations), and so on.

this mode of persuasion, solutions are argued according to the varying capacity of individuals and the constraints of rational argument (1989, p. 59). This view privileges information that is directly communicated and unambiguously received. Participating in this sort of rational discourse has historically been the mission of education in the West.

In sharp contrast, "One does not have to be taught narrative probability and narrative fidelity; one culturally acquires them through a universal faculty and experience" (Fisher, 1989, p. 75) It is "the practical wisdom of all persons" (p. 99). Fisher's understanding would have won the admiration of Kierkegaard for recognizing the true egalitarianism inherent in God's preferred communication form, his self-evident love for story. Whereas the Rational World Paradigm privileges the voice of experts—Kierkegaard would call them *genius*—and reduces the rest to mute passivity within the realm of public discourse, by the narrative form of the great bulk of the Old Testament, the inspired writers advance Divinity's argument in the way best available to all.

Although *Human Communication as Narration* does not mention Kierkegaard, the working of indirect communication come unavoidably to mind in Fisher's argument that story works through suggestion and identification. "We learn truths by dwelling in the characters in the story" (p.78). In a chapter devoted explicitly to the way literature communicates and persuades, Fisher uses the term "felt-belief" to describe a reader's sense of a piece's message that is at first aesthetic (p. 161). It is an immediate, emotional, intuitive response.[109] Narrative heals the bifurcation of the human person that modernity had brought about: "The [narrative] paradigm is a ground for resolving the dualisms of modernism: fact-value, intellect-imagination, reason-emotion, and so on. Stories are enactments of the whole mind in concert with itself" (Fisher,

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[109] Even technical discourse becomes "an episode in the story of life" (p. 85), and this gets at the true nature of the influence even that form of communication has for human beings who are hard-wired to think narratively. When science, for example, is persuasive, it is ultimately because of the story it tells, especially as it has bearing on existential questions, such as that of identity or of finding one's place in the universe.

1989, p. 68). Incidentally, this was precisely C.S. Lewis' view.[110]

The relevance of Fisher for this study should be apparent. There is more than a hint of the existentialist in his belief that rationality is not the only or even the primary mode of human understanding and relating to the world. The world itself is a story, and the Hebrew Scriptures reveal the moment story first came into being: "And God said, 'Let there be light'…" (Gn 1:3). Narrative rationality—how the Old Testament story rings true and how it hangs together—is a fresh way indeed to speak about the overwhelming significance of finding Christ defamiliarized in the Hebrew stories, poems, and songs. In him, they live and move and have their being.

3.5.3.3 Rhetorical critics of the Bible. There is an essay that exercised influence in the world of biblical studies that mirrors the role Wichelns' famous essay played in the field of rhetoric. Muilenburg's Presidential Address to the Society of Biblical Literature, "Form Criticism and Beyond" (1969), called for a revival of an older form of analysis at a time when biblical study had become overtly scholastic. (It was a similar malaise to the one that had caused the theological explosion in Kierkegaard's private study a hundred years earlier.) A thunderbolt at the time, Muhlenberg proposed a name for the new emphasis in biblical study: "rhetorical criticism." In harmony with the ideals of close reading, the impulse was toward a deeper penetration into the particularity and concreteness of the text. More recently, the need has been felt for biblical rhetorical criticism to go beyond stylistic devices to encompass the whole range of linguistic instrumentalities (Patrick & Scult, 1990, p. 12). For this reason, I add to the names of Burke and Fisher such scholars as John Barton, Martin Warner, and Dale Patrick for the

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[110] The narrative paradigm is not relativistic. The word *story* need not imply fabrication. In terms of truth, Fisher aligns himself with the doctrine of correspondence (p. 76): there clearly are both good and bad, true and untrue stories among the cacophony of narratives that compete for the heart and mind of the hearer. As human beings exercise the vital capacity to arbitrate among the stories vying for their attention, universes hang in the balance. Fisher further believed that the best and most persuasive stories are not only the true ones but the ones that elevate the human spirit, or as Kierkegaard would say, they edify.

insights they will provide for this study in the Old Testament's rhetorical shape and influence.

3.6 Scholarly Reflexivity.

For a final reference to my methodological vehicle, here I reveal my own perspectives as the one who is driving the bus, so to speak. I will distill in one place my guiding Old Testament hermeneutic, offer my working definition of communication into which indirect communication comfortably fits, and I will comment on a persistent false dichotomy in biblical scholarship that I mean to erase for the purposes of this study, namely, the harmful divide between engaging the Bible as a scholar and engaging it as a person of faith.

3.6.1 **A hermeneutic of *what* and *how*.** The centerpiece of my methodology is the hermeneutic I have followed. Interestingly enough, Reformation hermeneutics anticipated Kierkegaard by over two centuries in its concern for distinguishing the *what* from the *how* of biblical revelation. For the content or subject matter of its communication, the reformers used the Latin term *res* [the thing], and for its manner of expression, they spoke of its *verba* [the words].[111] What is true of any conversation is profoundly enhanced in literature because of the separation of communicator and receiver: one must know what the other is speaking about before any conclusion can be drawn about the manner of their speaking, even if the meaning of every particular word were quite clear. Franzmann (1969) observed that even calling the Bible the "Word of God" or the "Record of Revelation" will not by itself open the door of the Scriptures.

> The great question remains: "*How* does He talk to me and *what* does He disclose to me?"
> The ability to make a hermeneutical breakthrough…is intrinsically bound up with the
> theological breakthrough, to see the *res* of the Bible with charismatic clarity so as to see
> its relation to the Biblical *verba.* (Franzmann, 1969, p. 3)

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[111] Wilken (2003) even traces the roots of these ideas back to the ancient church fathers, most notably Origen and Augustine (pp. 71-72).

The key is that the *res* has to come first. This is the reason I am establishing that Christ is the very meaning of the Old Testament. I do so with the frank admission that all of the analysis to follow will stand or fall on the strength of this prior assumption. For the reformers this was a showing, not a telling: "What the reformers had to say on Scriptures could best be said obliquely, in the way in which they actually dealt with Scripture in given cases in their 'Christocentric handling' of texts, their 'total soteriological attitude'" (Franzmann, 1969, p. 3).

What is the defining subject matter of the Old Testament?[112] We might properly say that it is the doctrine of justification by faith. However, this need not be expressed in Lutheran terms.

> It may be well to state the radical Gospel…in the broadest possible way: God, to whom man can find no way, has in Christ (the hidden center of the Old Testament and the manifested center of the New) creatively opened the way which man may and must go. (Franzmann, 1969, p. 4)

This revelation is not so much an isolated doctrine or biblical touchstone. It is *the* hermeneutic of the Word of God itself. To interpret all of Scripture from the standpoint of the unconditional gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ is the key interpretive insight of the Reformation (Wendland, 2013). It is "the *cantus firmus* [preexisting melody] to which all the prodigal variety of the Scriptural voices stand in contrapuntal relationship" (Franzmann, 1969, p. 6). In other words, "Only the witness to Christ makes a Bible out of the Bible, just as it is the sun that turns daytime into day" (Sasse, 1938, p. 62). This orientation gives the interpreter light to work by. In this light, it is possible to see both the part and the whole and their relationship to each other.[113]

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[112] Franzmann (1969) astutely considers and dismisses other viable candidates for defining the essential subject matter of the Bible. The *res* is not merely an attribute of God, such as his ability to act sovereignly, but must include *how* he has acted and is acting. Likewise, to say that he is "is up to something" is pale and bland before the explicit reality that "he is seeking you." The *res* is not merely the fact that God self-discloses but that "the Word is an arrow…aimed at you; it will kill you, in order that you may live" (p. 10).

[113] Mocan (2014) argues that an evangelical approach to the Old Testament is an overarching methodology in its own right. I bring without apology an eagerness of see Christ my surety there.

If a hermeneutic of the Old Testament is Christological, then it is thoroughly Trinitarian. It is the inspired revelation to which the Spirit of God continues to bind himself, through which the Father is unveiled as passionate Creator, and in which Christ Redeemer is still freshly found. "A Trinitarian hermeneutic opens up the feast of Scripture with its endless possibility of fecund, theological interpretation" (Bartholomew, 2012, p. 19). Neuhaus (1995) offers a vivid contrast:

> Here [in the Trinitarian reading of the Old Testament] are arguments you can sink your teeth into, conceptual flights of intoxicating complexity and truths to die for. Far from the table, over there, *way* over there, is American theological education, where prodigal academics feed starving students on the dry husks of their clever unbelief. (p. 10)

If we can get the hermeneutics right, the Old Testament has a unique and continuing role to play in Christian piety, inwardness, and the communication of capability.[114]

Biblical realism (as well represented by Kierkegaard) is the approach in which theologians of the Word of God immerse themselves in the world of the text, recognizing it as real and historical. Once they have accepted and understood it on its own terms, only then will they attempt to make applications to their own situation. This is precisely Kierkegaard's way. His authentic Christian hermeneutic is one in which "Scripture defines the world, not the other way around" (Polk, 1997, p. 79). Conservative Christian commentators have presuppositions. All scholars do. The difference is that biblical realists are able to argue that theirs are uniquely fueled from within the Bible itself, whether demonstrated or stated directly. The key difference between

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[114] This view of the Old Testament is certainly not "a view from nowhere," or from some imagined space of neutral objectivity (which does not exist for human beings). It does, however, solve the interpretive dilemma in which biblical scholars find themselves. The false choice on the one side is the barren historicism that removes Christ from Scripture, accepting that he is historically unrecoverable. The false choice on the other side is a gloomy postmodernism that reduces every truth to something culturally determined in the absence of any privileged position to adjudicate multiple truth perspectives. The solution is hidden in plain sight. The Scriptures tell us what their nature is. The Scriptures tell us what their purpose is. This presents us with an unavoidable either/or. Something like C.S. Lewis' "liar, lunatic, Lord" argument about the reality of Christ can be applied *mutatis mutandi* to the Bible. We accept the Bible on its own terms or we do not.

biblical interpretation and all other forms of hermeneutics consists in the fact that this book

comes to us claiming to be God's voice in its scripturalized form through the stylus and ink of its

ancient human authors. It is no use to ignore this simple reality of the biblical text.

3.6.2 **Authorial intention.** As I alluded to earlier, it is critical to understand the creep of

pessimism within the evolution of hermeneutics, and the doubt that has been cast on whether an

author's intended meanings are knowable. Sharp (2009) is unequivocal about the falseness of

applying Reader Response Theory, with its "death of the author," to the Old Testament:

> It is both intellectually unsound and unethical to argue that the testimony of authors and
>
> texts is fully and only constructed by the reader….The radical-constructionist position
>
> renders ancient and contemporary authors voiceless not only to a certain degree in
>
> practice, but intentionally and fully in theory as well, which in my view is ethically
>
> untenable. (pp. 17-18).[115]

Wendland (2013) offers this sensible balance to the pervasive scholarly pessimism about

language (recognizing that it actually serves to coordinate meaning and action quite wonderfully

most of the time): when freed from the volumes of academic jargon, hermeneutics is simply the

art of understanding. In our daily lived experience, a *loving heart* and a *shared context* are the

essential requirements if we are to understand one another, and these turn out to be the guiding

principles for understanding the biblical text on its own terms, in a hermeneutic of trust. Our

conclusions will often be tentative;[116] however, it is not too much to assert that, when it comes to

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[115] The point matters greatly, so to take it a step further: for Stanley Fish the text is a Rorschach test. This is the essence of Reader Response Theory: readers can only ever project their own meanings onto any text. For Fish, nothing can be learned about the author's intentions, nor does the question hold any interest. If higher criticism of the biblical texts involves looking *behind* the world of the text (as an impediment) in order to construct a supposedly truer history, too much modern biblical criticism cares only for the world *in front of* the text. We are left looking at ourselves (Wendland, 2013).

[116] To be sure, the matter of what a writer means can be extremely subtle when it comes to indirect communication, because it often concerns a meaning that emerges at the convergence, or ironic divergence, between the *said* and the *unsaid* of a text. "The not saying of something (or the pretending not to say it) is an

grasping a biblical author's intended meaning, there is no reason to give up.

> Holy Scripture is clear; but because it is a matter to which we must be reconciled, readers can only discern its clarity if *their* darkness is illuminated….Interpretation of the clear Word of God is therefore not first of all an act of clarification but the event of being clarified. Reading, therefore, always includes a humbling of the reader, the breaking of the will in which there is acted out the struggle to detach our apprehension of the text from the idolatrous schemas which we inevitably take to it, and by which we seek to command or suppress it or render it convenient to us. (Webster, 2005, pp. 63-64)

I do not take an extreme position. It is understood that the very nature of written text allows it to live on as a communication that has become separated from its original speaker and context. Naturally, in the absence of the authors elaborating in person on what they meant, it is the text itself that speaks. In the new context and in dialogue with a new audience, the text certainly can spark in an individual soul a unique response. (There is little to this commonsense assertion besides the fact that people are different.) However, all the more does the *hermeneutic circle* become a useful process by which the interpreter circles from the particulars within the text itself to the overall meaning that forms in the mind, then back to the text to test that meaning by attending to still more of its inexhaustible features, and so on.

Earlier in his career, Ricoeur (1973) offered a balanced point of view that is helpful here. While he based his theory of hermeneutics on the separation between the original communicator and subsequent contexts—he termed this *disstanciation*[117]—his original view insisted that

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ancient rhetorical device" (Alter, 1988, p. 156). For example: when we're told that Saul was tall of *stature* (1Sa 9:2), are there other respects in which he did not tower quite so much? The writer isn't saying.

[117] Of course, we do well to respect the distance between their situation and that of a Moses or David or Paul. Indeed, we encounter Christ first as a first-century Jew, an actual human being born to a particular time and place, and in particular religious heritage, or else we fail to encounter him at all as one who transcends his Jewishness like new wine in old wineskins. Edersheim (1993) develops this point (pp. xi-xiii).

multiple readings are comparable to the multiple interpretations of a musical score (1976, p. 75). The key to the analogy is that interpretations are not unlimited. Instead, they are constrained by the musical notations so that whatever the musical dynamics, listeners do not doubt that they have encountered the genius of Bach or Mozart. Most importantly, the composers are by no means indifferent to what others make of their work. What this makes clear is that the appropriation of meanings intended by the writers remains a legitimate pursuit that calls for a humble openness and receptivity on the part of the readers to meanings *other than their own*.[118]

In *The Fall of Interpretation* (2012), James Smith introduces a novel use of some old Lutheran terms in asserting the "real presence" of the biblical writer "in, with, and under" the words themselves, so that the intended meaning of the biblical writers is by no means absent, but is deeply embedded within the things they wrote (p. 217). In fact, Kepnes (1988) traces a fascinating insight as it moved from Dilthey to Buber to Gadamer, namely, that we "encounter a 'Thou' in a text" (p. 194). This *Thou* is not an object but a person who enters a relationship with the reader. This makes possible the "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 272) of the worlds represented by author and reader, in spite of the spaces between them.[119] Although this fanciful hermeneutical theory is intended for non-biblical texts, the idea of encountering "a Thou" in the text becomes transcendent when applied to sacred Scripture. When we look into the Bible, a book like no other in the world, Someone is looking back. Someone is calling, "Come to me." Kierkegaard would call this "contemporaneity with Christ" (1848/1991, p. 62f), as something no

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[118] Unfortunately, it has been the way of most hermeneutical scholars, including Ricoeur and Gadamer, to apply unmodified the phenomenological, sociopsychological, and scientific discoveries of literary hermeneutics to the field of biblical study (Briggs, 2006). Thompson (2006) mounts an energetic protest against the contemporary hermeneutic agenda that resists the perspicuity of Scripture (pp. 132-141). In truth, the Scriptures are a "mask of God"—one of the things he has placed in between—and a site of divine hiddenness. This view "leaves the interpreter open to both the overwhelming *divinum* and the tough *humanum* of Scripture" (Franzmann, 1969. p. 11).

[119] A "horizon" is a person's standpoint; in a "fusion of horizons" the reality of the text becomes a part of the reader whose own situatedness is overcome in an event of understanding (Gadamer, 1989, p. 272).

less available to the modern believer (mediated through the Word) as it was to those who encountered the scandal of Immanuel—*God With Us*—face-to-face.

Jesus said, "The words I speak to you are Spirit and they are life" (John 6:63). When Bonhoeffer (1939/1954a) wrote that Christ is strong in the Word that comes from a brother (p. 23), he was expressing himself literally. The words of God are symbols, but not symbols only. They convey God himself and his things, creating the mystic union between Christ and believer. The conjoining of Word and Spirit is the solution to hermeneutical disstanciation wherever it is problematized. The Scriptures are a unique text in a world of texts in this: the Author behind the authors remains the always present interpreter. As the living voice of God, "Divine inspiration… is a permanent attribute of Holy Scripture. It was not only 'God-breathed' at the time it was written; it *is* 'God-breathing'" (Bavinck, 2003, pp. 384-385). The Spirit remains involved with his Word at every moment beginning at its composition. Every reading happens in his presence. This does not eliminate the work of interpretation, but Barth had this part right (if his words can be taken at face value).[120] His answer to the problem of disstanciation was to put the accent on the way the believer is thrown upon Christ and his Spirit to open up to us the meanings originally invested in that Word (Dempsey, 2007).

> This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness…they are discerned only through the Spirit. (1Co 2:13-14)

This is extraordinarily relevant to an exploration of Old Testament-style indirect communication.

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[120] I draw on Barth with caution because of the slipperiness of the language of neo-Orthodoxy in general. Most troubling is his applying the language of "meta-historical" or "suprahistorical" to the miraculous events of the gospel (virgin birth, resurrection, et al.)

3.6.3 **Definition of communication.** Another note of scholarly reflexivity is to offer my own working definition of human communication in general in order to provide the over-arching frame for the narrower species of indirect communication:

Communication is the vehicle of human connection and that which alone answers to the most profound of human needs, to know and be known. Communication is vital for the realization of the highest human capacity, namely, to bear the very image of a communicative God who is the personal, relational, symbol-using, storytelling, reality-creating Ground of all Being. In pale reflection of him, and in spite of the Fallenness of our situation, communication remains a perpetual mystery and miracle, characterized by embodiment, by intersubjectivity mediated by signs, and by the co-creation of social reality. It can achieve its highest purposes and ideals—the enjoyment of God who is the ultimate object of love, joy, and worship, and the reconciliation of any brother and sister in a community of the broken—only in, with and through Jesus Christ.[121]

I mean for my definition to include the "alleluia" and sense of wonder I see in the best communication scholars: Geertz, Carey, Dewey, Fisher, Burke, and others. I mean to bring theology fully to bear on the question of communication, and this means taking an unflinching look at humanity's sinful plight. Even more, it means that the best conversation about communication is the one that circles the cross, not resisting what can happen only there.

3.6.4 **Erasing the False Dichotomy in Biblical Scholarship.** There is an additional

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[121] I privilege the view of communication as embodied. Theology has something to say about the current tendency toward anonymous, impersonal, disconnected "community" with its "lost memory of skin" (Frost, 2014, p. 12). My definition does not exclude a transmission model but fully transcends it in a constructivist view. Robert Inchausti (2004), in *Breaking the Cultural Trance*, writes about the moment in the "Miracle Worker" when Anne Sullivan, witnessing the euphoria of Helen Keller, simply whispers, "She knows" What does she know? She knows what words are, and with that comes the knowledge of that shared, bottomless, fathomless intersubjectivity, the living of people in common within social worlds. This epiphany pierces her isolation. Finally, I note that every use of language *other than to edify* is out of bounds (Eph 4:29).

reason to appreciate Kierkegaard that will have application to the tone of this entire dissertation. This concerns the relationship between "Bible study" and "biblical studies." There is a false dichotomy between holding the Scripture in deep Christian reverence and holding to the best of scholarly ideals. Bruce Waltke, the author of highly regarded professional tools for working in biblical Hebrew, rebuts the notion that being a scholar and being a child of God by faith in Jesus are inimical. "It is highly mischievous to pit a devotional study of the Bible against an academic study of it" (2013, p. 183). The paradox is resolved in this: "A student cannot say he is devoted to God who carelessly treats the empirical data in which he revealed himself" (p. 184).

In Kierkegaard, one finds the paradigm-shifting concept that it is impossible to understand the texts of sacred Scriptures apart from a passionate devotion to their divine authorship.[122] "Everyone is the best interpreter of his own words, it is said. And next comes the lover, and in relation to God the true believer" (1967, 1:85). As we have seen, the alternative is to make of what passes for theology the best place to hide from the painful and healing operation of the cross. The modernist habit is to abstract truth away from oneself by intellectualizing the mystery involved with the encounter with God in his Word. This is that "error in modulation" when there is no succumbing to the contagion of the text—no humility, no infinite concern, no joy, no passion—as is appropriate to the thing itself. It is the essence of the Kierkegaardian ethic that to treat such matters as topics of discussion and nothing more is to fundamentally misunderstand them. To open up this sort of scholarly distance is to falsify the situation whenever the Bible is read. Not so the Emmaus disciples. They would recall the experience of having the veil pulled back from the Old Testament, and their language anticipates Kierkegaard's concern that the life lived in Christ should know something about inward passion even as the

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[122] This reiterates much that one reads in St. Augustine's, *Concerning Christian Doctrine* (397/1987).

scales fall away. "Were not our hearts burning within us while he…opened the Scriptures to us?" (Lk 24:32).

3.7 Preview of Dissertation Chapters

The following are the separate studies of indirect communication in the Old Testament that comprise this dissertation, as well as a preview of its concluding chapter:

Chapter 4: Historical Prose—selections from the book of Exodus.

Chapter 5: Historiographic Short Story—the book of Ruth.

Chapter 6: Poetry—selections from the poems of King David and the prophet Isaiah.

Chapter 7: Special Sub-Genres—selections from the ritual portions of Exodus, from

Chapter 8: Findings & Discussion—a summary of scholarly contributions, the implications for interdisciplinary biblical research, and for the church's communicative tasks. I will also assess the limitations of the study and point the way to future research.

In the pages to follow, I will trace each narrative plot line and poetic motif to reveal their inner harmony and organic unity. I offer it all to the praise and glory of Christ, the truer and better Moses, the truer and better Elijah, the truer and better David. I surrender to the contagion that is the infinite interest of the ancient writers. Their passion was to see all that is hidden beneath the surface of the very texts they had produced; it is mirrored in the ache of angels:

The prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow…even angels long to look into these things. (1Pe 1:11-12)

Chapter 4 "I Am who I Am": Indirect Communication in Hebrew Historical Prose

> Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: '*I Am* has sent me to you.'" (Ex 3:13-14).

There is more to Christ than can ever be said about him. To grasp what this means for indirect communication, imagine a father you have never met. He has been described to you by every possible proposition. You have heard all the unambiguous information that can be said about him. Then you meet him. Now you know him. And what you have gained in the face-to-face encounter is precisely the truth of him that is *not* propositional and which was unable to be communicated directly. Now imagine a different scenario. This time, someone has *told you a story* about this long lost father of yours, a memory narrated with deep pathos and grainy particularity. What you are gaining as you identify with this father-bringer and catch the contagion of the mood, the affection and the trust, lodging sideways in your throat, is similarly ineffable and irreducible. The storied experience offers surprising access to the distant father—what it's like to be in the room with him—through the vehicle of your empathy and identification with the one who tells it. However, if the presence of the man is to be felt in the storyteller's spell, one thing is required: you would need to believe her. You would need to take the story as true.

This suggests one way in which the divinely inspired Old Testament story jumps the gap from the propositional to the *something More*. Rea (2009) offers this dynamic as the link between the revelation of the hidden God and biblical narrative. Rea's theory involves the

phenomenon of quasi-memory (or *q-memory*) in which narrated memories of the experiences of others can come to *feel like* memories of our own experiences.[123] This traces a psychological narrative effect that fictional stories cannot simulate. The mediating of the divine presence through absorption in the biblical narrative depends on the receiver having a "conscious awareness of another person as a person" (p. 24) and on the receiver taking those narrations "to be reporting real experiences of God" (p. 27). The connection Rea makes with the hiddenness of God is that this function of biblical narrative makes the real experience of God "*widely* and *readily* accessible [author's emphasis]" (p. 22). Of course, it also does so *indirectly.*

The account of Moses and the Burning Bush is uniquely capable of epidemiological influence by means of its special numinous quality, an effect that persists "however much [critics] may try to ask only historical-critical questions about it" (Barton, 1996, p. 117). Thus it exemplifies the narratively mediated presence of the divine. "God is rendered as a persona in interaction with creatures….God is addressed by name, and has an inner life of thoughts and emotions, exemplifying a particular character. The rendering itself confronts readers with a presence" (Patrick, 1999, p. 204). What the Burning Bush narrative especially represents to readers is an alternate path to knowing that which cannot be taught but only inwardly discovered: the "infinite qualitative difference" between themselves and this God in flames. Without this revelation, religion "neither wounds nor heals deeply enough" (Kierkegaard, 1848/1991, p. 140). At the same time, God who is *Wholly Other* is capable of a startling solidarity with a people screaming in pain (Ex 2:23). This knowledge does not come as a theological treatise. It comes in a story wrapped around an image, that of a Moses covering his face before an insoluble contradiction, a bush that burns but does not burn up. It is the contradiction that draws him in.

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[123] Cognitive scientists understand the constructedness of memory; the act of remembering is nothing like replaying a sort of mental video recording.

In the narrative elements that surround the Burning Bush, indirect communication comes in overlapping modes: divine communication to a human agent, interpersonal communication, intrapersonal communication, and communication between the narrator and his audiences, both near and remote. The communication is designed to overcome the full range of limitations we ascribed to direct communication, especially those resulting from human forgetfulness, illusion, and divine ineffability. In particular, multiple levels of resistance are interacting in the book of Exodus. There is the resistance on the part of Moses that he disguises as the resistance he anticipates among the Hebrews, and there is resistance more pernicious still that persists in the modern critical reader. This text will hide its truth from those who stand critically above it and reveal its secrets to the ones whose sandals still come off. The textual ground is holy. For them, the Burning Bush is an iconic symbol of revelation and the ideal vehicle for communicating the universal yearning for the mountaintop to those who have confined themselves to the plains.

4.1 Chapter Preview

The analysis to follow takes up both the dominant Old Testament genre, historical prose, and the dominant indirect communication form, that is, narrative. All that I asserted earlier about both will be tied to original analysis of selected texts from Exodus. After a literature review and some preliminary analysis (in which support for my thesis already accumulates), I will take up three primary arguments. 1) *Detecting indirect communication in Hebrew-style historical prose depends upon the reader paying minute attention to the narrative choices that are reflected in the text*. Biblical close reading takes none of them to be thoughtless or accidental. 2) *"I Am who I Am" speaks to the hiddenness of God as the central theological component for understanding indirect communication.* Just as God paradoxically hides himself to reveal himself, his apparent refusal to answer the central question in the Old Testament—the very problem of God—becomes

an indirect answer of astonishing density and depth. 3) *Performative utterance is a key to the communication of capability in Old Testament historical prose.* The context in which the account of the Burning Bush is set includes richly textured examples of communication that does not so much transmit information as it ushers in a new state of affairs. My four examples spotlight redemptive grace as a constant subject of indirect communication in the Old Testament. Before taking up these arguments, I will supplement the exhaustive literature I have already cited by taking up the scholarly conversation specific to the genre and text under consideration.

4.2 Review of Literature of Exodus Scholarship and Historical Prose.

Hebrew historical prose is not fiction. On this premise all the arguments to follow stand or fall. This genre is a communication to be received according to the truth claims it presents about the events it mediates—in a particular time and in a particular place, *this happened.* The qualities that inhere in the absolute reliability of the biblical meta-narrative, considered as a whole, touch on the most basic of existential questions. As Alistair MacIntyre has written: "…to ask who we are, is to ask of what story we are a part" (1981, p. 201). The Old Testament pushes itself forward to recount identity-forming events within what transparently purports to be the story of the world, and so, every reader's story as well. The Christian community is still taught to sing the song of Moses, to remember the Passover Lamb, and to say with every true son of Abraham, *"We* were in Egypt." Thus "we are invited to make the world the Scripture projects our own, to find our place in it, and to indwell it" (Bartholomew, 2012, p. 76).

For such a project, the literary forms that were available to the biblical historians were apparently inadequate to say what they wanted to say, with a result that the arrival of the Torah (the five books of Moses, also called the Pentateuch) was something completely new in the world (Patrick & Scult, 1990, p. 36). The Chronicle form (e.g., an ancient pharaoh listing his

achievements) lacked narrative sinews for connecting events in order to contextualize them or

indicate their significance. The Epic form (e.g., the Akkadian account of creation known as

Enuma Elish) was too bound up with polytheism; these epics were cultural artifacts attributed

with magical power to influence the gods through ritual reenactment, gods who could be used.

The biblical writers must have felt something deeply wrong with telling the story of *I Am* in such

a way. The narratives they created were meant to take quite a different place in people's lives:

> Where the Mesopotamians put amulets and icons to ward off evil, the Israelites are
>
> commanded to symbolically place the story of Exodus. And where the central epics of
>
> Mesopotamian polytheism were employed in magical ceremonies, the Hebrews are
>
> commanded to tell the story of the Exodus in a rhetorical celebration of Passover.
>
> (Patrick & Scult, 1990, p. 38)

Old Testament narratives mirror the way their hearers encounter their world within a

lived experience of sequence and movement, a sense of time and of place. In other words, story

is the form for the communication of truth that is most like life and is the most effective for

permeating social contexts and for revealing truth's relational dimensions. Preeminent Christian

scholar Clifford Christians (2002) speaks of this way of knowing as one that is "close to the bone

in the creaturely fabric of everyday life" (p. xi). Biblical historical prose is deceptively

straightforward. An ingenious verisimilitude attaches to the way it simulates the ambiguities of

life and the complexities of human nature, characterized as it is by ubiquitous narrative gaps for

readers to fill in and bundles of motivations for them to sort out (Bartholomew, 2012, p. 83;

Alter, 2011a, p. 115).[124] Such is the account of Moses. Such, indeed, is life.

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[124] For one example to stand for many: at the Burning Bush Moses tried to disqualify himself for his mission by saying (literally), "I am not a man of words….I am heavy of speech and heavy of tongue" (4:10). Does this refer to a speech impediment, a lack of eloquence, a language barrier? Each of these can be argued on the basis of a close reading of this and parallel texts. The issue is not that questions such as these cannot

These features are all "caught in a translucent net of language" (Alter, 2011a, p. 110) and are an effective hedge against any attempt by commentators at final closures of meaning in relation to the biblical text, all but guaranteeing that the narratives will provoke a perpetually unfinished conversation. Yet historical prose in the Hebrew style accomplishes it all "through a rigorous economy of means" (Alter, 2011a, p. 24). As such, this genre positively beckons for a methodology of close reading according to a simple ideal: *notice everything*. For example, at the Burning Bush, the repetition of the words, *vayy'omer Adonay* [and the LORD said] in the middle of the divine utterance indicates that God had paused after telling Moses that the ground was holy (3:6). This invites a mental reconstruction of the scene: Moses picking at the thongs of his sandals—how well would *your* fingers be working?—as Yahweh patiently waits. To put it simply, in Biblical storytelling, if there is a staff in the hand of Moses, it is there for a reason.

Only a pre-critical reading of biblical historical prose that is sensitive to its narrative logic answers Ricoeur's appeal (1969), "Beyond the desert of criticism we wish to be called again" (p. 349). Conservative biblical scholars have used literary analysis to argue for the thematic unity of Exodus to varying results. Kim (2004) sees the worship of Yahweh as the book's purpose. Blackburn (2012) insists that the Exodus narrative finds cohesion in the God who makes himself known, which would commend our lingering at the Burning Bush as a sort of literary touchstone. Both constructions have merit. However, best among scholars of Exodus is Hummel (1979) in view of his comments on its "towering significance theologically":

> The book plays a role in the Old Testament comparable to the Gospels in the New. The
>
> exodus event is the heart of the Old Testament "gospel," and the word "redeem" comes to

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ever be resolved, but that the effort is worthwhile. In the case of Moses, the reader can only conclude that whatever strange power moves within the utterances of Moses, the man "powerful in speech" (Ac 7:22), native ability has little to do with it. The larger point is that Hebrew historical prose functions at the far end of the maieutic continuum as an aspect of its inherent indirectness.

be forever bound to it. It becomes a major type of, and hence is recapitulatively

incorporated into our Lord's "way out" on Easter morning. (p. 70)

Redemption is what the book of Exodus is about according to the constant *Nacherzahlen*

[retelling] of that great act of deliverance in the prophets and the psalms (e.g., Ps 136:10-15 &

Hos 11:1-4). An accumulation of the biblical data establishes that we have in Moses and in

Israel, in Passover and Tabernacle, a soul-nourishing banquet of Christological typology.

4.3 Preliminary Analysis: Genre Characteristics and Mosaic Authorship

The early chapters of Exodus receive attention in this chapter purely according to the

accident of their proximity to the account of the Burning Bush, which is a sort of "ground zero"

for divine indirect communication of the Old Testament kind (as we shall see). For this reason,

these chapters are something of a random sampling of Old Testament historical prose, yet a close

reading reveals examples of literary delicacy and characteristics of the genre that can only be

described as indirect communication. There is always more going on in biblical narrative that

any reader can realize on a single pass. For each of the following qualities, I will allow myself a

single footnoted example to stand for countless more. The narrative style is replete with irony.[125]

The characterizations are extraordinarily subtle.[126] Moses demonstrates a steady commitment to

a maieutic style of communication, content to let only the most attentive readers catch on to

meanings that others are likely to miss.[127] He is capable of sublime restraint as scenes of highest

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[125] When Moses hears Yahweh calling, "Moses, Moses," his reply of *hinneni* [here I am] (3:4) will echo in later prophets. It is the way they indicate their total availability to the call of God (e.g. 1Sa 3:4-16 & Isa 6:8). This is not what Moses means. There is a loud *unsaid* in the said.

[126] Moses names his son Gershom (2:22), and we assume it echoes the word *garash* [drive away] from verses earlier (2:17) when he "drove away" some men at a well, revealing himself as a man of action. Instead, he explains the name as a compound word, *Ger-sham* [sojourner there] and is unclear as to whether he refers to his time in Egypt or Midian. This draws readers into the inwardness of a man we realize *was never really home,* and it adds poignancy to his poem: "Lord, you have been our dwelling place…" (Ps 90:1).

[127] Exodus opens with a report that *seventy* Hebrews first went down to Egypt. (Parallel texts indicate that there are various ways to arrive at a defensible count). Moses' "table of nations" (Gn 10) names *seventy* people groups. As to Israel becoming a nation, the verbs recall the language of creation: "they were fruitful

poignancy are all the more moving for the narrator's bare reportage of the facts.[128] He has a

special love for wordplay.[129] The imagination is stirred. The sensitive reader, the one who stops

and takes the time, colors in these minimalist black and white sketches, these barest of lines, and

is quietly overwhelmed. In the midst of all this artful indirectness, one issue requires some

attention before taking up the three arguments of this chapter. To whom, humanly speaking, are

we to ascribe the remarkable aesthetic achievement that is this book of Exodus?

The question of Mosaic authorship is not incidental to the analysis that follows. I have

argued that taking the book of Exodus at face value is the *sine qua non* for the sacred Scriptures

to have their intended rhetorical influence according to several critical dynamics. The mediating

of the hidden God is possible through readers' identification with a real Moses on his knees

before a real Lord in the real world. For these reasons, it is necessary to trace the development of

a theory of the Pentateuch that has won the day in academia where biblical realism is seldom

assumed, and where it is taken for granted that none of the biblical books are what they purport

to be. The hermeneutic of suspicion finds a sure way to dismantle the *mysterium tremendum*

[overwhelming mystery] of the Burning Bush by commonly dismissing its historicity out of hand

(e.g., Robinson, 1997; Philips & Philips, 1998; Davies, 2006; Anderson, 2011; et al.).

The Torah resists the assumptions of modernistic genre recognition, with its disorienting

juxtapositions (for modern readers) of historical narrative and moral code, song and ceremonial

law, poetry and genealogy, and so on. Just what sort of literature is this? As a solution to this

assumed literary problem, the *documentary hypothesis* was developed among biblical scholars in

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and multiplied, they teamed, they swarmed, the earth was filled" (1:7). Thus, Israel is *the* nation among nations and a new world within the world. A 600-year old promise has come true (cf. Gn 15).

[128] When the two brothers, Moses and Aaron, meet each other as old men after 40 hard years apart, the recollection is restraint itself: "And [Aaron] met him on the Mountain of God and he kissed him" (4:27).

[129] In Exodus 2:3, baby Moses floats in the Nile inside a "chest of reeds." The hope that rests on this child is sparked by the word *tevah* [chest] which is otherwise *only* used for Noah's "ark" (and by the same writer). It sets up fascinating layers of resonance for readers who bring their hearts along.

the 17th and 18th century, and began to hold the critical field in the late 19th century through the championing of Julius Wellhausen.[130] This theory continues to provide the framework for Old Testament study but has more recently taken an interesting turn.

Scholars of the past thirty years have found it necessary to propose a *fifth* documentary source, referred to as R, which stands for the *redactor*. This refers to the hypothetical person who stitched sources together and who, it is assumed, must have inserted some material of his own. Ten years into this movement called *Redaction Criticism*, a curious thing began to happen. Scholars found themselves admiring the redactor for managing to create out of such disparate sources a document in which a greater cohesiveness, finer artistry, and a deeper structure exist than had formerly been detected. Insights began mounting that a certain genius was at work, for example, in the insertion of the genealogy of Moses into Exodus 6 to smuggle in a subtle but brilliant argument about his pedigree at a place that serves the narrative supremely well. John Barton (1996) still promotes the JEDP theory, yet he makes a candid admission that recognizing this formerly unnoticed coherence radically undermines the documentary hypothesis itself.[131]

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[130] The documentary hypothesis, or JEDP theory, proposed four sources for the Torah (the *Jahwist*, the *Elohist*, the *Deuteronomic* and the *Priestly* source) each representing narrative histories of Israel that emerged in different periods. The hypothetical Elohist (E) and Jahwist (J) sources are identified, in part, by the particular names of God in the text; Jean Astruc was the first to problematize the divine names in the Torah. It is assumed that J is the only source to use the name *Yahweh* for God until the Burning Bush narrative. The Deuteronomic (D) source is thought to contain material that upholds justice in society and the moral life. The Priestly (P) source prescribes the worship practices of Israel. P and D are assumed to be at odds; the documentary hypothesis conceives of the Old Testament as a tangle of irreconcilable theologies. Challenging the documentary hypothesis does not mean denying that certain biblical writers may have had other sources in front of them as they wrote. It simply accepts their work as everything it purports to be.

[131] The irony is delicious for any conservative biblical scholar: "The more impressive the critic makes the redactor's work appear, the more he succeeds in showing that the redactor has, by subtle and delicate artistry, produced a simple and coherent text out of the diverse materials before him; the more also he reduces the evidence on which the existence of those sources was established in the first place….Thus, if redaction criticism plays its hand too confidently, we end up with a piece of writing so coherent that no division into sources is warranted any longer; and the sources and the redactor vanish together in a puff of smoke, leaving a single, freely composed narrative with, no doubt, a single author….When the magic box that contained the redactor is opened, not only is the redactor gone, but *Moses himself has stepped into his shoes: a very frightening prospect indeed for a higher critic of any kind* [emphasis added]" (Barton, 1996, p. 57).

In the current critical milieu, I will be content if the reader can manage at least to wonder "What if?" If the book of Exodus is a pious fiction, so is the entire range of capabilities it would communicate. My assumption is that we do, in fact, encounter here the harmonious text of a single writer in the genre of historical prose (composed for purposes intensely theological).[132] After all, Jesus understood Exodus 3 in just this way—"Have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, 'I am…?'" (Mk 12:26). In the view of this writer, the whole world can be wrong. Not him.[133]

4.4 Paying Attention to Narrative Choices

Detecting indirect communication in Hebrew historical prose depends upon the reader paying minute attention to the narrative choices that are reflected in the text in order to access its motifs. There are, for example, subtle changes of narrative pace, abrupt changes of scene, small movements of dialogue, repetitions, omissions, substitutions of words, sound-play, unusual syntax, and those rare moments when the narrator calls attention to himself. This brings us to the first of the three key arguments of this chapter. According to the narrative axiom, "There are a thousand ways to tell any story," the question, "So why tell it *this* way?" yields steady fruits of discovery. The question carries a latent respect for the undemonstrative sophistication of the text, assuming as it does that a keen intentionality reveals itself in the finest features of the story. Beldman (2012) expresses this in terms that resonate with the present study:

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[132] Accepting the integrity of the text gives a close reader interesting things to ponder. For example, when the staff belonging to Moses is suddenly referred to as "the staff of God" (Ex 4:20), rather than assuming that this is evidence for conflicting documentary sources, the better reader contemplates this as an indirect symbol of Moses as the mediator between God and his people.

[133] Although JEDP Theory has not yet crumbled under its own weight, resting as it does on the books, careers, and academic departments of the scholars who maintain it, no external evidence for these sources has been found. Barton (1996) concedes that it is impossible to say what sort of literature containing what blend of genres was possible at the inception of historical prose (p. 55). The text Moses created simply had no antecedents. To cast doubts about the Torah's coherence and integrity on the basis of the genre-bending nature of the text is to rely too much on the dim anachronistic lights of modernist literary criticism.

We do well to attend not only to *what* is being narrative but also *how* the narrative is told. Through the point of view of the narrator we see the world of the Old Testament through divine eyes, and in the narrator's voice we hear the voice of God. (p. 81)

Clearly, if these myriad small narrative decisions were mere accidents, they would be meaningless in terms of indirect communication understood as a decision to veil what might have been expressed directly. Maieutic communication takes the risk, as I have said, that the other may not *get it* because this *getting it* gets at the essence of communicating subjectivity.

Exodus 1-2 provides revealing examples of the principle of the "thousand ways." There is a genius in narrative features that call little attention to themselves. For example, close reading habitually attends to a writer's manipulation of narrative space and time. In Exodus 1, hundreds of years of national oppression pass in a single sentence—a dramatic contrast between *narrated* and *narrating* time—before the reader is whisked away to the rushes along the Nile River so that a bottle of ink can be spilled on a single morning when a young girl watches a basket floating along. In the same chapter, when we are told the names of two brave Hebrew midwives in the early pages of Exodus (1:15), the name of the pharaoh of Egypt, a god among men, is withheld.

This is the stuff of literary indirectness, how consequential, yet unnoticed, is the pointing of the narrative camera where the real story is happening contrary to the normal biases of human sight. At scenes moving outward from the Burning Bush—the threshing floor in Bethlehem, Jerusalem in flames, a riverside in Babylon—this study will continue to be consumed with the subtlest of ways the ancient story rings true and hangs together. *Why tell it this way?* My leading example has the narrator holding back of the name of God only to release it dramatically into the symbolic universe—both Israel's and ours—in a thundering repetition.

4.4.1 **Introducing God.** It is remarkable that the hiddenness of God is so vividly

rendered by the narrative choices displayed in Exodus 1 and 2 as the lead up to the Burning Bush where that same doctrine is brilliantly at play. The writer accomplishes this by the conspicuous absence of any reference to God in all of Exodus 1-2 in connection with the centuries of national oppression, the desperate flight of Moses, and with his forty years of exile in Midian. In all of this, *God is textually and narratively absent.* Empathic readers experience this absence just as the captives themselves did, the story conforming to the stories they have lived; this is a key insight of the narrative paradigm (Fisher, 1989, p. 24). The personal meets the universal. All struggles overlap. Where, after all, is God?

If one purpose of indirect communication is to address illusion and resistance in the heart of the receiver, the literary shaping of Exodus 1 suggests that the children of Israel were under the illusion (common to many who suffer) that they were abandoned and alone in their wretchedness. The pathos of Israel's crisis of faith informs the heartening moment at the end of chapter 4 when the people first heard from Moses and Aaron that "the Lord was concerned for them" (4:31). An exquisite tension prepared this moment through the litany of Moses' fears— "They won't believe me!" Witness the cathartic release in the image of a crowd of lined faces bending as one toward the ground. Apparently, the narrated memory of Moses, told in the fear and trembling of Sinai, managed to mediate the divine presence from the very start.

Kierkegaard (1846/1992) refers to God as "negatively present" (p. 53). God is found in the longing for God, known by his absence, by the very inward shape and feel of its edges. Immediately before the account of the Burning Bush, when that narrative absence of God is most painfully felt, the silence of God is suddenly shattered in one of the most dramatic narrative choices Moses ever made, namely, to positively cram five mentions of the divine name, *'Elohim* [God], in the space of only three lines of Hebrew text, beating through them like an urgent

heartbeat: "And their scream went up to *'Elohim*, and *'Elohim* heard their groan, and *'Elohim* remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and *'Elohim* saw the sons of Israel, and *'Elohim* knew" (Ex 2:23b-25, my translation). The silence of God was a 400-year "listening silence" (Vanhoozer, 2010, p. 356) all the way down to this sudden epiphany and divine break-in. *Aslan was on the move.* English translations cannot maintain the repetition and pass for good style at the same time. In the original language, the effect is unbearably sweet.

Also easily missed by the modern reader is how rich and dense these particular verbs happen to be: "God *heard*…God *remembered* …God *saw*…God *knew."* I consider this last verb, *yada'* [he knew] to be the most important *Leitwort* in Exodus.[134] The expression, "God knew" (2:25), is extraordinary for lack of a direct object, rare for this particular Hebrew verb. It is not "God knew such and such…" but simply, "God *knew."* By the conspicuous grammar, Hebrew ears would ring with the unsaid and revel in the semantic depth. The fact that the narrator claims insight into the heart of God, as is unusual, only turns up the rhetorical volume on this verse.

Such a dramatic introduction of the divine into so painful a human story exemplifies the function of biblical introductions in general. The manner in which new characters step onto the Old Testament stage is often a way "to help the reader to make a transition between the issues in his own world and those about which the author will be writing; it opens the door into the narrative world" (Kurle, 2014, p. 5). In this case, it is a world charged with the reality of God.

  ***4.4.2* "Like a breeze blowing overhead."** The first actual encounter with God in the

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[134] The word is far more personal and relational than its English counterpart, and is first introduced in the characterization of the new Egyptian pharaoh who "did not *know* Joseph" (Ex 1:8). It means he did not *acknowledge* Joseph; the old Hebrew rescuer *meant nothing* to pharaoh. Later Yahweh will declare that when the great exodus is accomplished, then Israel "will *know* that I am the LORD" (6:7 *et passim*). That is, they will comprehend his character by experience, not merely as information. Additionally, this Hebrew root is one of three that most often combine with special moments of divine revelation in the Old Testament. The semantic range of *yada'* can include *knowing* what is a mystery undiscoverable to finite minds; that of *galah* includes the *revealing* of what has long been concealed from humanity; *ra'ah* can mean *seeing* what is unavailable to human sight. (All three occur together with these special senses in Psalm 98:2-3.)

book of Exodus takes place in a moment of perception that readers share with Moses (a feature of biblical narrative that I discussed earlier). The moment is emphasized with delicate subtlety in several ways. The word *hinneh* [look!] introduces Moses' first perception of the distant glow of the bush and the surprise of it somehow not burning up (3:2). Alter (2011b) describes this word (translated "Behold" in archaic translations) as creating "a sense of immediate witnessing" (p. 194). Its rhetorical function is to draw readers into the perception of the biblical character. We are not Moses but may read his narrated memories *as if*. Next, we overhear Moses speaking to himself. [135] His self-talk, "I will go over and see this strange sight" (3:3), includes in the Hebrew the particle, *na'*, that is usually translated "please." That does not fit the context, so here it must further enhance the fact of his own intense inward deliberation. What becomes clear is that Moses wants to draw his readers fully into his experience on Sinai, both outwardly and inwardly.

This is a seminal moment in a history belonging to both reader and writer. Its whole feel is that of a heart-pounding curiosity that would draw us away from all that burns and *does* burn up. We are to move with Moses through the intervening spaces to a place of aloneness with God. It is a startling gentleness on the part of Yahweh, this care not to overwhelm, but rather to strangely draw and to inwardly compel. Apparently, better than a bullhorn in the street is a bush set on fire at night, just to see who shows up. It is at least reminiscent of Kierkegaard's idea of indirect communication as a "breeze blowing overhead." The indirect communicator tries to "say something to a passer-by in passing, without…delaying the other, without persuading him to go the same way" (1846/1992, p. 247). Christian communicators, at their best, are no vague believers. They commit unreservedly to the truth of Christ. Yet they take care to force it on no

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[135] There is significance even in the simple observation that Moses' inward deliberation is described in these terms: "And Moses said…." "Spoken language is the substratum of everything human and divine that transpires in the Bible, and the Hebrew tendency to transpose what is preverbal or nonverbal into speech is finally a technique for getting at the essence of things, for obtruding their substratum" (Alter, 2011a, p. 87).

one. They cannot explain why it inwardly warms them as it does—they are a mystery to themselves—so no exercise of mere human influence can stoke that fire in another. What they can do is remember the mountaintop, and trust the story simply to be what it is.

4.4.3 **"And Moses hid his face."** The need for a gentle rather than coercive communication is exemplified when it turns out that God is not the only one who hides. When Moses covers his face at the sound of the divine voice (3:6), this small detail may outwardly manifest his own need to be drawn out of hiding, and to speak the question that lies at the bottom of his soul. A connotation easily lost on the modern reader is how accusatory is Moses' question before the flame, "They will ask for your name! What will I tell them?" (3:13). In the ancient Hebrew thought-world, the *name* of God is not the noise of a one-word label; his name is his total self-revelation. His very character and essence are the boundless content densely packed within his many appellations (a set of ultimate holy ideographs).[136] Consequently, "Lord, they don't even know your name" translates as, "Lord, this people knows nothing of your character to suggest that they should trust you now." In the extremity of the situation and the scrambling to evade his calling, Moses gave himself away. He put into words the ultimate existential crisis in a life lived under God. "Who even are you!?" Kierkegaard has an insight that can comment revealingly on the Burning Bush: God makes himself a riddle to cause the beloved to disclose himself (1848/1991, p. 142). Moses is revealed before the *"Flame of Yah"* (SS 8:6).[137]

Moses' small action of covering his face, "afraid to look at God" (3:6), is not to be dismissed as the sort of thing anyone would have done. Nor is it a throwaway detail such as

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[136] Similar expressions—"Then they will know that I am Yahweh"—continue no matter how much divine history has intervened (Jer 16:21, Isa 52:6, Eze 20:44, 36:23, 39:7, et al.). Indeed, the entire Old Testament canon is God's self-naming (Vanhoozer, 2010, p. 12). Especially interesting (and chilling) is the expression (literally): "I am not 'I Am' to you" (Hos 1:9).

[137] This mysterious name marks the pivotal theological reveal in the book of Songs (cf. Chapter 7).

characterizes the literature of modern realism. Moses covering his face is best thought of as a stage direction that a director would underline in red. It is the essential narration of his fear and trembling that mediates for the reader that "infinite qualitative difference" between the human and the divine, the full and humbling sense of creatureliness that belongs to the phenomenology of the truly religious. Further, it demonstrates that God, as agent, is providing Moses with what the Dane would call the "conditions for learning" what God alone can teach. The bitter struggle of Moses against his life's calling is the "struggle that educates."[138] The one who drew Moses, God's beloved, in the first place and ultimately lured him out of hiding was the "Ultimate Paradox" and "Sign of Contradiction" that is the person of Christ, as I will demonstrate next.

4.4.4 The Angel of the LORD. Close reading is the key to unravelling the most significant exegetical question at the Burning Bush on which depends the veiled Christological significance of the iconic scene. It is critically important to specify the identity of the *Mal'akh Adonay* [the Angel of the LORD] (3:3 *et passim*). This question has dogged Jewish interpreters, and their inability to resolve their puzzlement within an anti-Trinitarian point of view is instructive. Yet again a matter of high significance hinges on a minute observation.

The writers of the *Jewish Publication Society Commentary on the book of Exodus* (Sarnah, 1991) throw up their hands at this question in Exodus 3, mentioning how this and no less than six other extended Old Testament narratives display "a hopeless confusion between God and an angel" (p. 22). What troubles Jewish interpreters is the way the name for God, *'Elohim* or *Yahweh*, is used interchangeably with the expression *Mal'akh Adonay* [the Angel of the LORD]. The wording in Exodus 3 is typical of the conundrum. The *Mal'akh Adonay* appears

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[138] The agonizing process of unveiling remains partial until Moses' fifth evasion, when he miserably begs, "Send someone else" (4:13). Since all his previous objections had been met by God, there was no other reason for this refusal but his own nothingness before a mission so beyond human capability. The assurances of God have not penetrated his fear. This is the essence of Moses' unflattering self-portrait.

to Moses *mittokh haseneh* [from the midst of the bush] in verse 2, while in verse 4, it is *'Elohim* himself who speaks *mittokh haseneh.* In other words, both persons, God and this *Angel of the LORD*, are located by the identical descriptor. This is just one example of that interchangeability, mystifying to some, in which there is an Old Testament agent who is somehow both God himself and a Messenger of God at the same time.[139]

Strong corroboration for the view that this "Angel of the LORD" is to identified with the Son of God himself, the preincarnate Christ, comes through Jesus' conspicuous repetitions of the phrase, *egō eimi* [I am], in the Gospels (see below).[140] It is somewhat surprising that Kierkegaard seems to have overlooked recognizing Christ in this mysterious Old Testament personage, since it was "one of the Luther's major means for educing the Christian content of the Old Testament as a full partner with the New, in fact as well as name" (Hummel, 1979, p. 402).

In this theophany, Christ appears *"as* a flame of fire"[141] meaning that the flame actually *is* the Angel of the LORD himself, not a miracle he performs external to himself. It seems an especially appropriate appearance given that fire has qualities such as immateriality, mystery, warmth, light, beauty, attraction, and yes, danger. Although other possibilities exist, the most intriguing interpretation of the theophany notices that the thorn bush can somehow remain an

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[139] Incidentally, another of these seven narratives is the *Akedah* [the Binding] that consumed Kierkegaard in his classic, *Fear and Trembling.*

[140] The grammar itself is mind-bending in his solemn expression, "Before Abraham was, *I Am*" (Jn 8:58). He was equally explicit in identifying himself with the Burning Bush theophany when he was placed under solemn oath and was asked upon pain of death whether he was "the Christ, the Son of God." He answered, *"I Am"* (Mk 14:62). Though modernist scholars may miss this point or dismiss it, the people who shared a semiotic web with Jesus in his day caught his meaning exactly. In John 8, they demonstrated their offense by trying to stone him. In Mark 14, how the words sounded to ancient Jewish ears is apparent in the tearing of the priestly robes amid shouts of "Blasphemy!" Besides the evidence in the Gospels, there is fittingness to this title as applied to the Christ, since *Mal'akh* need not refer to a created angel. Instead, the Hebrew root behind *mal'akh* carries the more basic meaning of a solemnly commissioned messenger. The expression resonates with the title of *Mashiakh* [Messiah], the Anointed One, and in another way, with the New Testament designation of Christ as the *Logos* [Word] of God. This *Sent One* would become the embodiment and incarnation of all that God through all eternity wanted to say to his world.

[141] The Hebrew grammar (Gesenius, Kautzsch & Cowley, 2006) supports this view (p. 379). The word *as* translates a single letter preposition in Hebrew. The construction is known as the "*bet* of essence."

intact thorn bush while a fire is, literally, "in the midst of it" (rather than that the bush is in the midst of the fire). The distinction is fascinating, asking the reader to visualize an unquenchable flame deep within the unharmed branches. This is suggestive of the incarnation of Christ. Thus Moses' narrative points beyond itself to an even greater impossibility to come, namely, that his full and actual humanity should somehow remain what it is while concealing the very "fullness of the Godhead in bodily form" (Col 1:19). In Jesus, Divinity burns but does not consume.

As is typical, the narrator leaves the reader space to puzzle it out, making no comment of his own. We are all Moses in the face of it. This is an additional key to understanding Sinai as an indirect communication. As Kierkegaard would insist we notice, Moses cannot know what to make of the messenger, this paradox, this fire within the thorn bush. The *Flame of Yah* no more issues with plain communicative directness than would the incarnate Christ 1400 years later. Every word he says issues from a bewildering contradiction. Inwardness is a sweater catching on this nail, common sense unraveling—what to make of Jesus Christ? As a point I feel compelled to return to again and again, the argument for the presence of indirect communication in the Old Testament is most convincing when one considers the propositional forms divine communication might have taken instead. There is nothing obvious about a theophanic Burning Bush.

4.4.5 **"The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."** Before taking up the divine utterance, "I Am who I Am," that enigmatic expression is set within a fascinating discourse-dominated episode, such as is typical of the genre. An additional *Leitwort* is of particular interest, Yahweh's identification seven times in early Exodus (four times in eighteen verses), that he is *"the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob"* (2:24, 3:6, 15, 16, 4:5, 6:3, 8).[142] Preeminent philosopher of

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[142] There is an element of subjectivity in ascribing significance to repetition of this kind where it might simply reflect more generally on the ancient rhetorical style that was, for course, situated far closer to orality then we are in our day. However, in a context that includes the Lord's self-naming, and given the meaning Christ found in the expression (see below), my instinct is that this repetition matters.

communication, Martin Buber, recognizes an impactful indirect communication inherent in the purposeful repetition of Hebrew words and phrases:

> If one imagines the entire text deployed before him, one can sense waves moving back and forth between the words. The measured repetition that matches the inner rhythm of the text, or rather, that wells up from it, *is one of the most powerful means for conveying meaning without expressing it* [emphasis added]. (Translated in Alter, 2011a, p. 117)

The ineffability of divine love acting in time—one could speak of it for days and yet feel as if everything has been left out—is yet captured alive in the dozens of stories that are evoked by the mention of "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." The narrative camera pulls back to take in the wide-angle view, the shared but forgotten history that broadly encompassed the exchanges at the Burning Bush. This is radically condensed speech. "I am the God of your fathers" is like the looming stranger who kneels down to whisper to a child, "I knew your Dad," and so to become no longer quite such a stranger. A bit of uncertainty is reduced at each echo of "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," something like the dynamic of "shared networks" out of Berger's Uncertainty Reduction Theory. "Moses, we know the same people, you and I. You may not know me, but your fathers did. They trusted me, and I never let them down."[143]

This could only come as a revelation to Moses along with all the other ways the Angel of the Lord was able to compactly communicate his radical solidarity with Israel, the divine mind

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[143] Not only did Jesus evidence how the Burning Bush was vividly present in his thoughts (Sloan, 2012), but he even brought to this text a remarkable indirect reading. He read in the simple expression, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" an explicit divine promise not of some vague afterlife, but of an actual, physical resurrection of the dead. Precisely this was at issue when he chose to quote this verse, explaining that God is "not the God of the dead but of the living" (Mk 12: 26-27). That is, he will be revealed, in the end, not as the God of dusty bones, or even as the God of disembodied spirits. He is the God of this very Abraham, this very Isaac, and this very Jacob, actual living men, and the very ones we know as they are mediated to us through the ancient narrative. Christ's manner of lifting out such a deeply veiled meaning from the Hebrew text, a promise of resurrection that is not at all expressed on its narrative surface, lends eloquent credibility to my thesis: Jesus recognized a sermon of indirect communication in a single phrase of the Torah.

filled with the suffering of his people. The literal expression, *"seeing, I have seen* the misery of my people" (3:7), in which two forms of the same Hebrew root are paired together, is emphatic: no aspect of their long and painful experience had escaped his notice. When God refers to the Hebrew slaves as *"my* people" (3:7), a single Hebrew consonant has made the difference. He did not say *'am*, but *'ammi*. The suffixed letter, *yod*, is, in fact, that very "jot" or "least stroke of a pen" than Jesus once said would never pass away, even if all of heaven and earth did (Mt 5:18). Here were moments of brilliant grace fading quickly in the evanescence of the spoken word— once it passes by there is nowhere to look for it (Ong, 1982, p. 32). It is a kindness that the oral moment is mediated by the technology of writing to live again in our distant overhearing.

Even as the medium of communication at the Burning Bush is so intensely defamiliarizing, there is a familiar ring to the communication style for the mind prepared to meet Christ there. If I may, this *Malʾakh* [commissioned one] sounds rather like Jesus. When he is not answering questions with questions,[144] he is instead choosing to answer the question Moses *should* have asked instead of the one he did. For example, the Lord does not speak directly to Moses' pleading, "Who am I that I should go to pharaoh…?" His *non sequitur* is simply, "I will be with you" (3:11-12). Throughout the discourse, the right question is never, who is Moses, but rather, who is this God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? What is his name? "The [Old Testament] question always echoes and the answer either dispels or perpetuates our sense of mystery, incongruity, discontinuity" (Sternberg, 1987, p. 241). In the present example, the question perpetuates a sense of things that can only ever be known in part.

Layers of meaning open up with our identifying of Christ as this "God of Abraham,

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[144] Yahweh answers Moses with a litany of four rhetorical questions of his own: "Who gave a man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" (4:11).

Isaac, and Jacob." His expression, "I have come down to rescue them" (3:8)[145] especially resonates in the Christian consciousness. The Christological reading of this text carries an understanding that the time stream does not end with this great act of redemption, this exodus out of Egyptian bondage. Instead, when deliverance arrives as promised, it becomes itself a new promise of a costlier redemption yet to come. When the *Sent One* ultimately enters the human story, it will be all the way down and all the way in.

I do not hesitate to admit that there are elements to some of the preceding arguments that make no appeal to dogmatic certainty. Not only can decent people disagree, but deniability happens to be essential to the communication form in question.[146] To see what I have at the Burning Bush is, in a deliberately loaded word, subjective. *Seeing always is*. It is, in fact, an inherent aspect of indirect communication that receivers are left to do what they will with truths of towering significance in awareness that other "passers-by" will indeed pass by, recognizing no such significance at all. It is the prerogative of all to refuse to acknowledge the hidden hand that moves in their own lives and the relentless attention and wounded affection of which they are the object. It is all the more likely that most will do just that within the creep of the secular social imaginary in which the visit to the mountain is increasingly scarce. It is this that keeps the gospel itself from becoming an ideology propped up in the usual ways: merely human reason,

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[145] Incidentally, this anthropomorphism does not reveal a primitive God-concept on the part of the narrator, but reflects divine accommodation to the limits of human comprehension. To substitute other more meta-physical language would not thereby escape metaphor; it would only succeed at being less compelling. In an earlier example, Yahweh *"remembered"* his covenant" (2:24). It does not mean that God can forget things, but describes the human perception of his sudden dramatic intervening. If a father shows up unexpectedly to fulfill a promise made long ago to his young daughter, she girl might exclaim, "You remembered!" The implication would be: "I *thought* you had forgotten, but now I know better."

[146] What Good (1981) explains about irony applies to indirect communication in general: "Is not a source of irony's attraction and repellence alike that it may plausibly be taken literally, invites us to take it literally, makes a certain sense when taken literally? Yet a nagging doubt hints a meaning hidden behind the mask" (1981, p. 22). To hear the elusive unsaid or not to—this is fodder for the conversation the best and must subtle texts manage to provoke.

eloquence, or authority. It is to remain "the breeze blowing by."[147] It is kept alive by the power

that rests on the apparent weakness of the message and on the actual weakness of messengers

who share in the confessed nothingness of Moses. The masks of *Deus Obsconditus* himself—a

created universe, an ancient narrative, a man, a cross—will appear to most as nothing but empty

hiding places. Yet, I am not only convinced, but I share the sentiment of Flannery O'Connor

(1969).

> There is an unlimited God and one who has revealed himself specifically….It is one who
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> confounds senses and the sensibilities, one known early as a stumbling block. There is no
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> way to gloss over this specification or to make it more acceptable to modern thought.
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> This God is the object of ultimate concern, *and he has a name* [emphasis added]. (p. 161)

It is this name to which I now turn.

4.5 The Hiddenness of God and Divine Indirect Communication

Theologians have long been both captivated and frustrated by the concept of divine

hiddenness. The central argument of this chapter will now relate the profound indirectness in the

divine utterance, "I Am who I Am," to that paradox by which God intentionally conceals himself

in order to be revealed. First, it is necessary to ground this doctrine where it is most explicitly

introduced in the Old Testament Book of Isaiah. Next, I will briefly review the theological

literature in which the hiddenness of God is typically problematized before I return to a positive

theology of divine hiddenness that characterizes Kierkegaard's position.

4.5.1 Deus Obsconditus. Although the concept of the hidden God has been with

humanity for centuries, much has changed regarding what people make of it. When the prophet

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[147] According to Kallenberg, "The rejectability of the gospel is ironically what prevents it from becoming mere propaganda. Consequently, the Good News cannot be fully understood as good news unless the gospel is offered in noncoercive ways" (cited in Penner, 2013, p. 135).

Isaiah first exclaimed in the 8th Century BCE, *'achehn 'attah 'el mistatter* [Surely, you are a God who hides himself] (Isa 45:15), it was, in context, an expression of acute wonder, humility, and praise. In other words, it was anything but a complaint. After all, Isaiah's full expression was, "You are a God who hides himself, the God of Israel, *one who saves!"* The prophet was contemplating the fact that God intended to redeem Israel from its captivity, which he would accomplish by raising up Cyrus of Persia to topple Babylon from its place of prominence on the world stage. Thus, "You are a God who hides" was an Alleluia, a revelation birthed in a desperate time, acknowledging that the hidden hand of God pulls on hidden strings behind the seemingly random movements of history. He does so in ways no mortal mind can comprehend and for the good of the people he inexplicably loves.[148]

Humanity, the crown of God's creation, became humanity ruined when the first of our race illegitimately reached for the glory of God in Eden, desiring to be like him. In Adam, in his very body, all humanity is included—this is the jarring biblical view (1Co 15:22). God then hid his glory in an extraordinary kindness for a race which, in its Fallen condition, could not survive his unveiled presence. In Luther and Kierkegaard's conception of divine hiddenness, different in kind from the hollow modern complaint, he conceals himself as an act of unspeakable grace thereby accommodating himself to human finitude. He masks his glory, his very self, *where only faith can find him*. In this view, it is in most tender mercy that God condescends, willing to

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[148] While the hiddenness of God is a lively topic for modern theologians, it is often framed negatively as a question of theodicy (e.g., Dumsday, 2015): how can such a God, if he exists, be justified for failing to reveal himself more openly. As Rea (2011) puts it, "God…is supposed to be the sort of being who would show up once in a while" (p. 268). Humanity is apparently plagued by divine hiddenness as a nagging "epistemological problem" (Oakes, 2008). "Divine hiddenness is not the answer the atheist wants: it fails to meet him on his own epistemological grounds" (Murphy, 2014, p. 5). One resolution in the literature is that God hides in order to preserve human free will. This solution only complicates matters (Trakakis, 2007) but is at least valid for maintaining that faith in God, if it results from coercion, is not yet faith (Murray, 1993, p. 37). Under the influence of Kierkegaard, some scholars do not blame God for hiding, but blame humanity for its willful resistance to the sort of evidence for his existence that God provides (McCreary, 2009).

appear as less than he is, even making himself capable of being denied outright. His loving

impulse is to self-limit, to open for humanity a space, rather than to destroy. It is his passion to

be found and seen to his God-sized heart, with an otherwise unthinkable fullness and intimacy.

What we have in Christ is far better than what we think we want in our demand that he "show

up" on our epistemological terms. Divine hiddenness is a corollary of divine love.

The implications are far-reaching. For Kierkegaard (1846/1992) subjective knowledge of

God is supremely available by the self-authenticating Word and Spirit, and this subjectivity, in

turn, makes it possible "to see God everywhere" (pp. 246-247).[149] Once you know someone is

hiding he is no longer completely hidden" (Abicht, 2011, p. 117). Luther, too, lived in a "world

full of God" (Dehart, 2014), frequently noting the ways God comes "under the appearance of

opposites" (Kolb, 2010), never more than in the suffering of Christ—strength in weakness,

victory in defeat, life in death. Indeed, the agony of a gruesome crucifixion is the last thing in the

world that could be mistaken for the glory of God, that is until faith resolves the paradox—"yes

this, precisely this, is glory." Kierkegaard was quick to frame divine hiddenness as God's

necessary indirectness, agreeing with Luther that its vital purpose is to leave room for Christ to

be an object of faith (Kierkegaard, 1848/1991, p. 137; Luther, 1957a). Most significant for my

purposes, the accent on God's coming "under an appearance of opposites" has Old Testament

antecedents, such as the "still small voice" that called to Elijah when the Lord was not in the

whirlwind, earthquake, or fire (1Ki 19:11-13). Likewise, the Old Testament believers enjoyed a

status as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6) that was never how they appeared to

sight. This was an aspect of the cruciform life to which they were called.

To return to our "ground zero" of Old Testament indirect communication: just as God

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[149] According to Martin Buber: we experience God as absent because we wrongly construe him as an object of speculation, persistently failing to think of him in explicitly I-Thou terms (Bracken, 2006, p. 170).

paradoxically conceals himself in order to be revealed, his "I Am who I Am" at the Burning

Bush presents a matching paradox. I will demonstrate that this form of communication is an

apparent refusal to answer Moses' question, "Who are you?" The words *I Am who I Am* first

strikes our ears the way "I'll get there when I get there" does (as a husband may say to a wife

who asks when he'll be home). There is a relational message there, but no content…or so it

would seem. Yet *I Am who I Am* is, at the same time, a divine self-revelation of inexhaustible

meaning and unfathomable depth. It reveals as it conceals. "The failure to signify becomes itself

a sign" (Warner, 1990, p. 13). All that met Moses senses as he looked toward the East, all that

his reason weighed, and all that argued against the long walk to Egypt, these were the illusion—

the "trained incapacity" (Burke, 1984, p. 93)—to be pierced by the sound of God speaking his

own name.

4.5.2 **"I Am who I Am."** In keeping with the value of Childs and his Canonical

Criticism, scholarship has already taken up the issue of the plenitude of meanings "I Am who I

Am" has accumulated across time. Vanhoozer (2010) includes a lengthy discussion of that

interpretive history (pp. 40-44): the semantic density of the expression was further complicated

as it migrated from the Hebrew to the Greek-speaking world. There *I Am* intersected with age-

old philosophical questions about being and non-being.[150] The verb tenses in the two languages

in question do not perfectly coincide: the Greek language did not have a ready equivalent for the

nuances of this Hebrew verb form. (The Hebrew *imperfect* connotes, quite significantly for the

present case, an ongoing action rather than specifying past, present, or future).

However, the density of meaning in the phrase, "I Am who I Am" does not end with

etymology. The subsequent sayings and doings that are ascribed to the God called, *I Am*, or

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[150] The Septuagint has, *ego eimi ho Ōn,* which translates, *"I am the one who is,"* or, *"I am Being itself."*

Yahweh [He is][151] are drawn into this mysterious name like light into some impenetrable black

hole. See, for example, the meanings that are ever after married to the name of God once he

called it out to Moses—"Yahweh, Yahweh"—in his cleft in the rock: "The LORD, the LORD,

the compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in love…" (Ex 34: 6-7). Plato's worries in his

Phaedrus were unfounded, namely, his fear that the technology of writing would result in sterile,

inhuman documents that would say their one thing incessantly, idiotically, over and over. Here is

a different kind of text. This name for God is a different kind of name.[152]

    4.5.3 Idem per idem. The premise of this argument is that recognizing the subtle

indirectness of God's response to Moses, "I Am who I Am," requires identifying a figure of

speech that occurs throughout the Bible. An *idem per idem* is defined as the declining on the part

of a speaker to say any more than has already been said, either because the willingness or the

ability is lacking. For example, *I Am who I Am* matches the syntactical structure of Pontius

Pilate's, "I have written what I have written" (Jn 19:22), whereby he refused to speak any further

about the placard he had placed over the crucified Christ. Similarly, Queen Esther commented

about her dangerous mission in appearing before the king of Persia, "If I perish, I perish" (Est

4:16). While biblical scholars have long recognized the utterance of God, "I Am who I Am," as

idem per idem (Driver, 1911), they have tended to see in the intentionally ambiguous answer

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    [151] The more common divine name, *Yahweh,* corresponds by etymology to 'e*hyeh* [I Am], the difference being that the subject is in the third, not the first person. However, by a more technical argument, the actual etymology of *Yahweh* might be *He Causes* rather than *He is* (Hummel, 1979, p. 71; Bekkum, 2006, p. 7), bringing to mind the "Uncaused Cause" of an important argument for the necessity of God. The divine name then becomes the indirect answer to the question, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" *I Am who I Am* finds God alone to be the sufficient reason for all things; his own existence can only be explained by reference to himself.

    [152] An excursus on every known interpretation of *I Am* is not necessary. However, the strongest connotations are: timelessness and unchangeableness, sublime independence and absolute self-existence. Because of the expression 'e*hyeh 'ittakh* [I am *with you*](3:14), faith can supply the words *with you* at every hearing of I *Am,* so that the name itself has the illocutionary force of a promise. This promise, in turn, depends on the mystery of divine omnipresence: God does not merely fill the universe with his presence, but this "I" is the essence of the divine being, fully present in every place—the universe is in him, who is in the tiniest seed. The sentence *I Am who I Am* is a "veritable event in thinking" (LaCocque, Ricoeur & Pellauer, 2003, p. 331).

only a "closure device" and a means merely to "terminate debate" (Lundborn, 1978, p 194).

When Moses asked, "Who are you?" the reply, "I Am who I Am," is certainly not the information-less tautology it may first appear to be. To be sure, a strong relational message is included. It is not unkind, but it does discourage Moses from inquiring any further into the name of God.[153] More importantly, I suggest that *I Am who I Am* is a communication of that ineffable divine inwardness. It floats atop an ocean of meaning, none of which can be comprehended, much less adequately expressed.[154] If we perceive by the *idem per idem* a refusal to answer Moses' question directly, what is refused is any settling on a one-dimensional meaning that would flatten the infinite roundness of God. Instead, *I Am who I Am* is intended to do just what it has done: it has kept hearers across the centuries open to his eternality, his changelessness, and to the sublime independence of the One who nevertheless "saw their misery and came down to save." In his study on the relationship between biblical narrative and biblical naming, Sonnet (2010) recognizes the "positive import of God's elusiveness," characterizing the figure of speech with "suspense, curiosity, and surprise" (pp. 333-334). It is not an end to dialogue with humanity but initiates the unfolding and perpetual mediation of a quite wonderful story. It pays the ultimate compliment to our noetic nature, extending the invitation to ponder him who is Verb, not noun, and who, as the ground of all being, is Being itself.

Linguistically speaking, the very simplest of human sentences, *I Am*, strains with the weight of glory. No closure is possible to the heavenward "Who are you?" Every answer is unfinished, the hopeless, happy task of eternity. Until then, it is a name that reads human minds

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[153] In fact, after speaking the words *I Am who I Am*, the LORD does get to speak for nine full verses without interruption by Moses, suggesting that the usual illocutionary force of the *idem per idem* remains.

[154] Another theology-laden example lends support to my view. "I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Ex 33:19, quoted in Ro 9:15) is God's indirect answer to the centuries old theological puzzle, *"Cur alii prae alii?"*—"Why are some saved and not others?" This non-answer, although colored with grace, eloquently communicates that this matter is not ours to know. It is locked up within the hidden mind of God, inaccessible to human inquiry, and beyond all human thought.

and answers to the restless, relentless questioning that hides at the bottom of the immortal, immaterial self. "Is anyone there? Are you really all that the old stories say you are, the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Are you with us? Are you with me?" *I Am.*

In summary, *I Am* is an answer of sublime, relational indirectness, even as the questions to which it corresponds are hidden in human inwardness, never to find sufficient words. It is self-evident that this indirectness can only be a matter of highest earnestness for the one who believes that God, in Christ, really communicated himself this way. The reason for God to say no more than he has said with *I Am who I Am* is a quite wonderful paradox. He is *Pel'i* (Jdg 13:18)—his name is *Unnamable.*[155] Limitation involved with this most holy communication exists not in himself but in finite human minds to whom he would reveal his inwardness when the medium is words. He himself is not, however, limited to words. Metaphorically speaking, there is a mountain higher than Sinai, at which this chapter will ultimately arrive.

4.6 Performative Utterance as a Communication of Capability.

As I continued to test the premises of Kierkegaard's indirect communication against the particularities of Old Testament historical prose, I cast my net from the mountain of God into the chapters that immediately follow the Burning Bush episode. There I happened upon examples of indirect communication in a quite surprising array. I have settled upon four that especially transcend a transmission model of communication according to which we receive information and test truth claims in a quite straightforward way: we simply reason out whether the communication we have received corresponds with independent reality as we know it on rational

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[155] Judges 13 offers interesting support to the preceding analysis. The word *Pel'i* is often translated, "Wonderful." However, in another account featuring the *Angel of the LORD*, the father of Samson asked the preincarnate Christ, "What is your name?" He answered, "Why do you ask my name? It is *Pel'i."* This supports a meaning of "Ineffable" (Murray, 1964; Hertog, 2002), confirming that the name of God transcends human speech and understanding. We cannot escape paradox or the limits to what can be communicated directly; by Word and Spirit, and not otherwise, we find Christ in a "knowing that surpasses knowledge" (Eph 3:19).

grounds. This paradigm comes nowhere near to exhausting the extravagant power of language in the mouth of a creative God. The four examples to represent episodes in which *a new state of affairs* is created by the exchange itself. A new situation opens up, one that had no prior existence and which was and is unavailable for testing in any conventional way. It is intensely relational, can only be realized subjectively, and involves the communication of new qualities in the lives of those who trust the reality with which the Word of God presents them, and who find themselves stepping inside. Above all, there is nothing that Christ ever teaches for which he, the Teacher, is not perpetually indispensable. This is divine performative utterance.

Additionally, each of the following four examples holds special fascination because some central aspect of Kierkegaard's usual handling of indirect communication is turned on its head. 1) A curious form of overhearing occurs when Moses is given a message of grace to carry to others that is preeminently meant for himself, to speak to his own private fears; in Kierkegaard's terms, it is a teaching in which he must personally exist. 2) A close examination into how the resistance of Moses functions rhetorically will illuminate a new sort of resistance to which God himself yields; this offers a vital insight into the edification of Moses as mediator. 3) We encounter the power of transportation to a narrated future in a way that indirectly accomplishes an installation of hope. 4) The narration of distant past events can reach brilliantly beyond itself to involve future audiences in its communication of identity.

Before taking up these arguments, it is necessary briefly to affirm a simple truth without which my argument cannot proceed: at least since the Enlightenment there has been an erosion of the claim to know God through God. Religious scholarship has often confined itself to a tenuous historical reconstruction of the history of religion. It need not be so. The Lord of the

Bible is a communicative God.[156] This is what makes genuine theology possible.

4.6.1 **A God who speaks.** In the contemporary milieu of linguistic pessimism that perpetually argues for the instability of words, the theological task can yet retain a deeply rooted optimism. The ability to know God is grounded in the desire of God to make himself known, and this through humble means. As Vanhoozer (2010) explains, "Scripture depicts divine agency largely in communicative terms" (p. 356). God literally performs speech acts (Thompson, 2006, p. 213), and in the ancient Hebrew imaginary, it is his speaking that makes things happen, even as the divine Word underlies reality itself in the biblical view. The constant repetition in the Old Testament, "thus sayeth the LORD," culminates in Jesus who is the divine "begetting of a Word that communicates all the Author is" (p. 356).

All of this marks a dramatically important ontological and epistemological assumption, namely, the willingness and ability of the *God Who Is* to speak into the sphere of human history. With this essential commitment, I will draw on Austin's Speech Act Theory which he articulated most thoroughly in *How To Do Things with Words* (1975).

4.6.2 **Divine performative utterance.** The concept of performative utterance requires some elaboration. As mentioned, the term means that there is a special kind of utterance that *creates a new state of affairs*.[157] Patrick (1999) applies this idea to the biblical text as the linchpin to a rhetorical approach to the Bible. The biblical God draws people into transformative

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[156] As elementary as it sounds, it marks a critical divide in biblical scholarship. "The bifurcation between biblical studies and theology has often meant that methods are regularly applied to the Old Testament with the assumption built in that God can neither act nor speak" (Bartholomew, 2012, pp. 13-14).

[157] One example is the sentence, "I now pronounce you man and wife," although performative utterances do not usually come so clearly marked. Discourse analysis distinguishes between the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary force of utterance—what words mean, what they aim to do, and what is their actual affect in the rhetorical situation. Even the pronouncement of marriage can be to no effect if it were spoken over random strangers. Certain conditions must be met for performative utterance to succeed, since this communication form is always a transaction, no less so in the form of written text. Testing the truth of performative utterance means trusting the authority of the speaker. There is no other way.

discourse. He does it through the singing, imaging, and narrating that is the Old Testament

reality construction. He does it, for example, by the gift of a new name, as when the "heal-

grabber" *Ya'aqov* [Jacob] becomes *Yisra'el* [Israel], the one who "wrestles with God" (Gn

32:28). This brings to the receiver a new reality—"so *this* is who I am"— just as all of God's

covenantal commitments give relationship with him its defining quality. In fact, I argue that the

apostle was alluding to a performative utterance (not in so many words, of course) in his game-

changing commentary on the Old Testament: "For no matter how many promises God has made,

they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him, the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God"

(2Co 1:20). It is a transactional grace, but what a transaction! He says, "I have redeemed you in

Christ," we answer, "Yes, you have."

This means a changed situation, the truth of which can only be meaningfully plumbed in

the lived experience of those who believe him. Those who refuse communication in this form

have nothing to test, rationally or otherwise. They have no business commenting on the beam.

All this belongs to the *how* of receiving divine address.

> What is said and hence to be known, comes into existence in the act of saying and
>
> receiving….Its truth cannot be known apart from the correlative response of the
>
> recipient….It is this type of discourse that makes the speaker essential to what is
>
> communicated. It is this type of discourse that makes sin and redemption the heart and
>
> soul of the biblical story. (Patrick, 1999, p. 216)[158]

Hampson (2001) identifies the gospel itself as a performative (p. 47). Translation: when

God calls you his child, the one he has fully and eternally reconciled to himself, he means to turn

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[158] Patrick does not explicitly weave indirect communication into his discussion of performatives, but comes closest to doing so when he writes, "The accounts of these performatives usually break the proscenium arch; the reader is brought into the performative transaction depicted in the text" (p. 205)

upside down your entire experience of life in this world, making realizable an otherwise unimaginable self and an otherwise unimaginable orientation to the steady stream of reality that confronts you moment by moment. To *know* this way of being-in-the-world requires the view from inside. The deep, subjective truth of the Old Testament is only available in an existential way, in the gaze of faith "along the beam." For those who are not willing, the verdict is written in advance, "Be every hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving" (Isa 6:9). To those who enter in faith the symbolic universe that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is infinitely qualified to name, there comes a set of capabilities: that of courage, of the resort to grace, of identity, and of hope.

4.6.2.1 "The LORD was concerned"—the capability of courage. After the luminous depths of the divine utterance at the Burning Bush, the way the narrative moves forward is deceptively straightforward. However, this part of the story, which I affirm again is Moses' own remembrance, spoken in his own voice, becomes as important a case study of edification as we have in the Old Testament. In the section of analysis after this one, we will visit the pinnacle moment when the Moses fully comes into his own as a mediator between God and his people, and as an unambiguous Old Testament type of Christ. However, that did not happen overnight.

The dialogue at the Burning Bush ends with extraordinary abruptness. Essentially, *I Am* says to Moses, "Don't forget your staff" (4:17), and just like that, it is over. In the close reading of biblical dialogue, abrupt endings to conversations and conspicuous silences after a character has spoken can bring remarkable subtlety to characterizations and fascinating complications of plot. In this case, there is considerable narrative tension in the fact that Moses does not accept his mission, or signal in any way that he has entered with gladness or trust into the transaction of the divine performative utterance, or that he takes any joy in the promise of redemption.

To be sure, readers are treated to the sight of Moses doing as he is told, however, his frantic "Send someone else!" (4:13) still hangs in the air.[159] In his leave-taking from the family of Jethro (always a culturally complex moment) he is *Johannes de Silentio*, so to speak, saying nothing about the real reason for his departure. When he first stands before his Hebrew kinsmen, he hides behind his brother Aaron who speaks for him just as Yahweh offered (an arrangement that will not last long). What Moses learns in this overhearing is that he has been wrong in every way. The message that he carried obligingly from Yahweh and whispered into the ear of Aaron—*"I Am* with you"—had made no apparent impact on Moses himself, but now he watches the elders of Israel spontaneously fall to the ground at the very sound of it (4:31). Unlike Moses, they needed only a direct communication, having none of the resistance he had ascribed to them. The moment is self-evidently burned into the memory of Moses, this crumbling of the elders of Israel, so that it survives in his Torah. It is as if, though vicariously, the power in the promise and self-naming of God finally began to dawn on him. If he wondered how he could have missed it before, he need not have. As always, it is the struggle that educates.

The communication issues here are timeless, and they all attach to the matter of Christian testimony. Witnesses, to use the term again, have a deceptively straightforward assignment. Like Moses, they carry within them a message meant for others, a treasure in the jar of themselves. They are merely to repeat it faithfully and unaltered. Professional ministers may intellectually assent to the fact that their own weakness is a prerequisite so that a power other than their own may rest on what they do, yet their functional commitment may be to their own native ability as

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[159] The grammar of his expression is fractured (literally): "Aha, LORD, send by a hand of you will send." This may be an example of *iconicity.* Usually words, as symbols, are arbitrary, having no resemblance to what they signify. However, there are ways in which words can begin to simulate their meanings, for example, "I waited for you a *long, long, long* time" (Leff & Sachs, 1990). Iconicity may occur in a brokenness of speech that imitates frantic urgency. At any rate, Moses' last utterance at the Burning Bush is a memorable one.

communicators, even as this was the whole worry of Moses (3:11; 4:10). They can become consumed by the question of how to get this message about the grace of God across—classic transmission model thinking—understanding little about what it would mean to live in the thought themselves. Depression comes with territory. Then it happens. Like Moses, they speak the words out of their own conflicted and half-hearted appropriation, doing as they have been told, only to stand by and watch those very words work poignantly and powerfully in the lives of those to whom they speak. Anyone who has experienced it would call it a quite humbling edification. These are the "so what?" issues as Moses takes leave of Midian.

This opening example of performative utterance begins in an original observation having to do with the "extraordinary prominence of verbatim repetition in the Bible" (Alter, 2001a, p. 111). Biblical close reading must be exquisitely tuned to reiterations of text that seem at first glance to be mere duplications. The repetition may come with easily overlooked differences that bring indirect commentary, foreshadowing, thematic assertion, and subtle misdirection. These constitute a favorite sort of argument for premier Old Testament literary critics such as Robert Alter and Shimon Bar-Erfrat. However, I know of no example of such scholars staking an argument on the conspicuous *absence* of such a repetition where one might have been expected. I argue that the Moses narrative carries such a clue that the things Yahweh told Moses to say as a direct communication to Israel were meant primarily to speak to his own heart with the power of indirectness. My evidence is the proverbial "dog that didn't bark."

The entire dialogue between Moses and the LORD at the Burning Bush is framed according to the resistance Moses claims to anticipate on the part of his Israelite brothers: they would see his unworthiness (3:11); they would demand to know God's name (3:13); they would not believe him (4:1); and he lacked all capability for persuading them (4:10). If any of this were

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true, and if the elders of Israel were the true site of struggle, my instinct is that Moses would allow his readers to overhear the all-important moment of delivery, if not in full, then at least in part. In fact, he would probably include some additional tantalizing information that had been held back until the retelling.[160] Instead, the narration of Moses first speaking to the elders of Israel is conspicuously compact. "And Aaron told them everything the LORD has said to Moses" (4:30). That's it. All the prominence is given to Moses' reception of the message by such a bare reportage of its delivery. It is not only the amount of space devoted to each episode but also the vividness of the writer's expression that reveals his "true subject" (Burke, 1984, p. 233).

By this reading of the Burning Bush discourse, Yahweh may be understood to be taking part in a gentle fiction, as if the urgent questions actually *do* belong to the elders of Israel. Remarkably, he is like the wise counselor who plays along when some distraught young man says, "I have this friend and he's in trouble…" by answering, "So tell me about this friend of yours." It is a strategy in which both parties collaborate, and the person who needs help may even suspect that the helper knows the truth. It is enough that *he does not know that he knows that he knows*. It is an intriguing way for some fragile, necessary interpersonal space to open up within the face-to-face. It is astonishing that God should take part in communication under this guise, divine kindness reaching for the weakness in the man. This much is beyond dispute: the resistance in the account of Moses was all his own, and *'Elohim yada'* [God knew]. Accordingly, the promises of Yahweh on the Mountain of God were an indirect communication.[161]

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[160] This is the typical strategy, and the trained reader learns to listen especially close where other readers tune out. In Ruth 3:17, Boaz told Ruth to take some barley back to her mother-in-law. When she does, the narrator makes a significant addition to what he reported earlier: Ruth says to Naomi: "He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, '*Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.*'" The delay of that critical information plays with a major motif in the book of Ruth (as I explain in chapter 5).

[161] I note other episodes in which a lack of repetition is conspicuous. The Lord's most personal ownership of Israel comes when he gives Moses a message to deliver to pharaoh (literally), "My son, my firstborn is Israel, and I told you, 'Let my son go'" (Ex 4:23). In the showdown to come between Pharaoh and Yahweh, this sentence dramatically ups the ante. Yet, amid all the repetitions painstakingly recorded between

Dabber 'al-lev [speak to the heart] is the Hebraism that expresses the communication of deepest comfort (cf. Isa 40:1). Christian psychologists Crabb and Allender (1984) define the essence of encouragement as the act of speaking to the fear that another person hides inside (p. 80). Contrary to their approach, however, it is apparent in the exchanges between the LORD and Moses that biblical encouragement does not unmask the other person, exposing him or her in their shame. It comes far more indirectly than that, and to this, it owes its power.[162]

As to indirect *intra*personal communication, it constitutes that "quite curious form of overhearing." Biblical prose requires that readers fill in some gaps regarding Moses' long stumble toward Egypt. Moses carries in inwardness and across a trackless wilderness the message he himself most needed to appropriate. The anxious Moses must have turned it over and over in his mind, poking its surface, peeling it back. There is ultimacy in it and it has everything to do with him. Yet, it is not addressed to him, so that it is not his to tamper with or do with it as he pleases. He is still a long way from Kierkegaard's "victory of love," that is, from overcoming himself in that spectator-less arena for the sake of those who need him. Be that as it may, Moses offers solid biblical affirmation of one of Kierkegaard's major concerns, namely that Christian teachers "exist in what they teach" to live out the true nature of their calling. Whatever Kierkegaard meant by the expression, the application before us now is about grace. It is the edifying call for gospel servants *to treat themselves to the very gospel they extend to others*.

Those who best speak best the message of reconciliation to the abandoned and healing to

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Moses and Pharaoh, we never hear this particular piece—"my son, my firstborn is Israel"—delivered to pharaoh. I argue that it is a similar sort of high impact indirect communication meant to speak first to the heart of the messenger. It was Moses not Pharaoh who would benefit from understanding the true level of Yahweh's investment in the redemption of his people. It is a striking way to emphasize a truth, that is, by the very failure to repeat it. Incidentally, that same sentence is thick with theology. It calls up the two histories that converge in the Bible, that of Israel and that of Christ, the true *prototokos* [firstborn] of God (Rev 1:5).

[162] This brief treatment of a biblical concept of encouragement brings into consideration how the interpersonal communication of grace may best come indirectly in such a way that exploits every advantage of the dynamics of overhearing, and other strategies for the gentle managing of interpersonal space.

the broken do so in transparent solidarity—"Come, let us be two sinners with our hands held out." Their whole joy is to bring students into a relationship with this particular truth more than any other, and to do so even as they bring students into relationship with themselves so that the comprehension of grace may own a special vitality of existence within that human connection. Maieutic religious teachers live for this hidden curriculum. Christian indirect communicators also understand that the truth of Christ, this ultimate subject matter, transcends them—"who is equal to such a task?" (2Co 2:16). After all, what God is ultimately always teaching is how to be in a relationship with him, and their own spiritual poverty is indispensable to this task.

All depends on the reduplication of teachers who live relentlessly in the thought of their forgiveness, their imaginations captivated by it in the deep involvement of the heart, not the intellect alone. Like Jacob wrestling with the *Malʾakh Adonay,* they hang onto it for dear life precisely because they need to, not letting go "until it blesses them" (Gn 32:26). They know no other way than to comfort others with the very comfort they have received from God (2Co 1:3-5), becoming ever more deeply absorbed in the gospel, to exist in it until it crashes every inward stronghold. Moses at the Burning Bush stands for every Good News herald whose first task is *double reflection.* Even as speaking of death in the abstract must always give way to talk that is about "*my* death," so the Christian truth-teller can know nothing of redemption in the abstract. For him, for her, there is only "*my* redemption." The Word of divine solidarity they bring to others is meant first for them. They can hardly survive their calling without it.

4.6.2.2 "Remember Abraham"—the capability of resorting to grace. There is a rest of the story when it comes to the Moses' five evasions at the Burning Bush, and this one absolutely "heals from behind." The fascinating matter of the edification of Moses culminates 28 chapters after the blunt dismissal at the Burning Bush. Throughout the intervening chapters, Moses can

still be heard opposing Yahweh. In fact, he still resists him in the episode to which we turn now in chapter 32. In truth, however, everything has changed.

The nation of Israel is on the verge of annihilation in the hands of an angry God; a golden statue is still cooling not far from the rubble of two tablets of stone. This is the story readers think they are in for: another distressing story of that strange, fierce, intolerably jealous Old Testament God. Moses had been summoned onto the mountain of God to receive the "Ten Words." Down below, Aaron appeases the demands of a restless people with an alternative object of worship, the golden calf that, significantly, was not hidden but plain as day: "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from Egypt" (32:4). What follows is no doubt a troubling narrative for modern sensibilities, but at last the patience of Yahweh had reached its end, and he told Moses, "Now leave me alone[163]…that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation" (Exodus 32:10). The Lord presented himself to Moses in a terrible contradiction, the promising God bent on destroying his "firstborn son." It brings the possibility of offense out of which faith may yet leap and spring. It is at this moment that the story changes into a story of another kind. It comes with the resort to grace in the form of a cry from Moses, like one newly born. "Remember Abraham…" (32:13).

To comprehend this moment, more must be said about the resistance of Moses at the Burning Bush and how it functions rhetorically. Certainly, it humanizes the great Lawgiver for the generations who read the Torah, but it accomplishes more than that. As we have seen, the account remains thick with the tension created by his resistance to *I Am*, and how long this continues in the narration unresolved is a key to how the account maintains suspense even for

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[163] This expression in Hebrew is difficult to adequately characterize. The verb has a special suffix that indicates the so-called "long imperative." The nuance of the form is that it calls for action towards or on behalf of the speaker, and the verb comes with a prepositional phrase *li* [for me]. Thus, it seems to imply that it is up to Moses to decide whether or not to comply, and that Yahweh waits on his decision.

those who know the outcome. Moses provokes readers' introspection and the heightened self-relation that indirect communication always aims for. They not only intuit the truths embedded within the story but what is most important, they feel within themselves the difficulty. Moses, as narrator, is calling himself into question for the sake of his hearers, the teacher willing to join his students in the resistance that comes naturally to them all against that reality that breaks in from the outside. To his own humiliation, he signals that he understands. The stubborn resistance of Moses brilliantly prepares the moment in Exodus 32 to which we now return.

"Now stand aside, Moses." What happens next is, indeed, what Kierkegaard would call the resort to grace, in the "pain of knowing that every moment before it has been wasted" (1848/1991, p. 200). It is a resort to the barely translatable *khesed*—"tender mercy" and "faithful love" are hardly adequate—because, in all his pleading, Moses makes no claim on behalf of the people or, for that matter, on his own behalf. Instead, his is the audacity of holding the words of God up to God. "You made a promise!"

> Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to whom you swore by your own
> self: "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give
> your descendants all this land I promised them…their inheritance forever." (32:13)

Moses is still opposing Yahweh, but this time with a more stubborn, even wordier resistance (cf. also vs 11-13), he has seized upon his name, this "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." I argue that this pleased God down to his hidden heart; it was the very response on the part of Moses that the divine communication was designed to evoke.[164] In that "Remember

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[164] Kierkegaard (1843/1943) writes eloquently about the experience of longtime saints in prayer. They "conquer by being conquered." This episode is all the more remarkable in that God is the one who relents as if defeated by his own promise. This attitude of faith is, once again, reminiscent of Jacob wrestling with God at Peniel (Gn 32:22-32): incredibly, the *Mal'akh Adonay* [Angel of the LORD] cries, "Let me go!" and is answered with, "Not until you bless me." A mirroring New Testament story involves the Syro-Phoenecian woman whom Jesus referred to as a Gentile dog. She knew him better than that and saw through the mask.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," the mediator was Socratically born. It is this that made Moses

Moses. It is a telling example of Kierkegaard's concept of communication because this resort to

grace was nowhere suggested by the Lord's communication to Moses, in fact, much the opposite

as God showed the terrifying face of an enemy. In this dramatic encounter, his centuries-old

promises were the object of communication that are alive in this moment *only by revelation*.

To be clear, the fact of those promises were no doubt the information Moses had already

possessed, but *the capability of making this appeal* as brought on by crisis, this was new.[165] For

Climacus, "the essential in this knowledge is the appropriation itself" (Kierkegaard, 1846/1992,

p. 79). This is both the essential secret and the essential form of truth in its fullest bloom. This is

the whole meaning of Kierkegaard's often misunderstood axiom "truth is subjectivity."

"Remember Abraham" is the symbol of Moses' own edification. Interestingly, Moses not only

mentioned the pregnant *Leitwort* ("Abraham, Isaac and Jacob") that sounded seven times from

the vicinity of the Burning Bush, but the crisis also agitated up a fragment of cultural memory. In

his panic before the Angel of the LORD, here is the account to which Moses made his appeal:

> [God] took Abraham outside and said to him, "Look at the sky and count the stars—if
>
> indeed you can count them." Then he said to him [this repetition, *vayy'omer Adonay,*
>
> indicates a pregnant pause in the divine utterance during which Abraham stared into the
>
> jeweled expanse before the words continued], "So shall your offspring be." (Gn 15:5)
>
> When Moses cried out to the Lord, "You swore by your own self: 'I will make your

His joy in her could hardly be contained (Mk 7:25-30). Divine indirect communication frequently evokes things in the subject that are not present in the words themselves of the particular moment.

[165] This is indeed a capability, not of sanctified living, but at the essence of justifying faith. Hong (1972) turns Kierkegaard into a sort of pseudonym of her own, and characterizes the reception of grace as an ultimate existential task: "The essential task for the individual in the forgiveness of sins is to make it valid in time. It is the new creation. When the pastor says, 'I declare unto you the gracious forgiveness of all your sin,' he does not mean forgiveness some time, he means forgiveness now" (p. 76). Forgiveness as a theory, in turn, scarcely translates into the capability of forgiveness, when theology, at last, becomes life.

descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky" (32:13), it highlights a special feature of divine performative utterance. When Moses makes the appeal, "You swore *by yourself*"—with the dramatic sound of *bakh* in Hebrew—it emphasizes quite irresistibly that the divine utterance is grounded in nothing but itself.[166]

To return to the matter of divine performative utterance, this revelation is not of a mere assertive character, and it does not compete with truth achieved by unaided reason or ordinary rational testing. Instead, it stretches the limits of persuasion, since no human being has the capacity to pass judgment on such knowledge that makes no appeal to human reason or tangible evidence. "Biblical narratives of revelation communicate a knowledge of God that cannot be known by philosophical reason because they construct what is to be known in the transaction of speaking and the commensurate response of human recipients" (Patrick, 1999, p.16) This is precisely what makes of the "remember Abraham!" moment a true Kierkegaardian leap. There is no natural transition on a path of human calculation. As a revelation, it constitutes a new reality that collides with every other, and into which one can only be born, indeed, born of God.[167]

When it comes to the indirect communication of truth, a wealth of theology moves within the compact expression *zekhor le'Avraham* [remember Abraham]. The relationship between the Mosaic Covenant—"obey these commandments fully and I will bless you"—and the Abrahamic

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[166] The New Testament writer to the Hebrews notes this, namely, that "when God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself" (6:13). Although it is confounding in terms of epistemology, from the divine perspective, there is nothing more convincing Yahweh could plausibly offer than the sound of him putting himself under oath.

[167] If it seems I make too much of this moment in my tracing of Moses' edification, it turns out to be decisive in respect to his coming into his own as the mediator between God and Israel. His solidarity with his fellow Hebrews reaches its rhetorical heights at the end of this same episode. Moses pressed God to know that all was restored between him and Israel, going so far as to pray, "But, now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written" (32:32). Evidence mounts in the Torah that Moses is a type of Christ-Mediator, the one who stands between people and God representing each to the other. He not only had unprecedented face-to-face access to God, but was urgently willing to offer his life for a backsliding people. This argument for Moses as a type culminates in his farewell sermon in which he unveils his most significant Messianic prophecy, "The LORD your God will raise up for you *a prophet like me from among your brothers* [emphasis added]; you must listen to him" (Dt 18:15).

Covenant that preceded it—"you will be my people and I will be your God"—is never expressed more eloquently in the Hebrew Old Testament. The latter covenant that centered in the Ten Commandments was in shambles before Moses could even get the stones down the mountain. Remarkably, at the very inception of the legal transaction forged at Mount Sinai there lives this shining moment, the resort on the part of the Lawgiver himself to that earlier unilateral, unconditional, no-strings-attached covenant of grace. "Remember Abraham…" is the Hebrew version of falling upon Christ and it was the divine intention all along.

It is the struggle that educates. Kierkegaard (1848/1991) explains, "The consciousness of sin takes us to Christ as he is. To want to enter by any other road is high treason against Christianity" (p. 155). God is everywhere present but nowhere grasped except the place where he has bared his heart. For Kierkegaard, the height of capability is to realize that one is nothing before God. Yet this is higher still: to flee the hidden God—God as we cannot know him or comprehend him or survive him—and run to Christ, the promise of grace.

4.6.2.3 "Someday your children will ask"—the capability of hope. Another brief example comes a few chapters later in the book of Exodus. We have seen that biblical close reading pays close attention to the narrative manipulation of space and time as an indirect feature of ancient storytelling (to be played with by storytellers of all times). This ideal can reveal further moments of poignancy. It comes into play, for example, when Moses had just relayed to the elders of Israel that, unless they have the blood of the Passover lamb smeared on their door posts, "the destroyer" would enter their homes to strike them down (12:23). Then, in this darkest of moments, he begins to instruct them that there would come a day when their children would sit beside them at the Passover Seder and innocently ask, "What does this ceremony mean?" (12:26), and he instructs them in what to answer. It is a fine piece of "abductive reasoning." He

steals the elders away to a far off time and place when that night of terrified waiting would be a distant memory warmly recalled. It is artfully indirect, this narrative transportation to a moment when fathers would tenderly recall for their dears ones the day of their redemption. Where is the communication of capability? Notice everything. Upon being instructed in that warm familial litany for the distant happy day, the elders responded quite unexpectedly as they had only once before. They bowed with their faces to the ground (12:27). Though the circumstance was unchanged, all that frightened was imaginatively shut out by means of a narrated future. This served for the capability of hope and it affected them deeply. Indeed, it edified.

Note, however, that this charming example and those that precede it all focus on the functioning of performative utterance *within the narrated world*. They concern what the indirect communication meant for Moses and for those in Israel who believed him and attached themselves to him. One more cluster of examples concerns the subtle ways the narrative horizon expands to include readers of the story spread across time.

4.6.2.4 "We were in Egypt"—the capability of identity. Key moments in connection with the Old Testament salvation event concern the ingenious ways the modern overhearing audience is drawn within the frame and is thereby guided toward a certain view of life and mode of living.[168] However, as Patrick (1999) explains, "Exegetes have usually ignored the question of the transaction the text seeks to engender with its audience. *It is not on the surface of the text* [emphasis added]" (p. 32). Even when scholars recognize the dynamic of performative utterance in the Old Testament, they usual treat it as historicized rhetoric or rhetoric confined to the

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[168] This set of examples owes much to Patrick and his intriguing book, *The Rhetoric of Revelation in the Hebrew Bible* (1999). He includes in his analysis some useful insights about the reasons biblical narratives achieve their full rhetorical efficacy as they convince an audience that they are the revelation of God. Austin (1975) took it as self-evident that "a performative utterance will…be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on a stage" (p. 22). The assumed reality of Old Testament historical prose means to prevent a modern audience from adopting the posture of distance without participation.

narrated world. When the text meets the modern reader it comes as descriptive discourse, nothing more. The mode of truth is that of mere correspondence: the reader may either assent to its facticity or not, but is not otherwise personally implicated. This myopic view excludes any lively interest in promoting inwardness and subjectivity in present day believers by means of the ancient revelation. I argue, instead, that much more is going on for those ideal readers who, in the solitude of the reading sanctuary, discover themselves as fulfillments of prophecy embedded in the biblical story. It is their very reverence and stubborn joy that makes the old promises come true in the quiet space where they sit and read. Those who belong to Christ are the true spiritual Israel (Ro 9:8). They are the stars in Abraham's sky and the sand at his feet (cf. Gn 22:17).

The proscenium arch is especially penetrated in the redemption story of Exodus. The Angel of the Lord said this after calling himself *I Am*. "This is my name forever,[169] the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation" (3:15). The character of God endures with his name, and here is the promise that both will be known to the end of time. He would see to it. The fusion of the horizons of modern reader and ancient writer becomes more overt in the Song of Moses, the Song of the Sea (15:1-18) Its preservation is for future audiences to blend their voices with the Israel of the narrated world, to cross over into their time and take their part in worship of the hidden God who is mediated by the story. For Kierkegaard, whenever the church is really the Church, it will meet this world in a collision. About the enemies of the "city of God" in this world Moses sang a timeless song:

By the power of your arm

they will be as still as a stone—

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[169] The Hebrew word, *'olam* [forever], carries the etymology of hiddenness. The future audience this sentence envisions is concealed to all but the eyes of God. (This is not to assume that biblical speakers have this in mind whenever they use the word; that is not what makes etymology interesting or important.)

until your people pass by, Lord,

    until the people you bought pass by. (Ex 15:16)

The strange dynamics of quasi-memory are enhanced when the narrative is also a song, with music as the vehicle to deliver it to the deepest inward places, and as a mechanism for the sort of absorption that crowds out every other thought. Although Fisher (1989) was speaking about stories, how much more are songs *about* stories "enactments of the whole mind *in concert with itself* [emphasis added]"(p. 68). Still, the reaching of the Exodus text to distant selves beyond its place and time becomes most intense in connection with the Christological centerpiece of the book of Exodus, the celebration of the *Pesach,* the Jewish Passover.

The command, "Commemorate this day" (13:3) is important for a number of reasons. The people were told precisely how to narrate the redemption night to future generations, and close reading attends to the pronouns: "On that day tell your son, 'I do this because of what the LORD did *for me* when *I* came out of Egypt'" (13:3). Later: "In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought *us* out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery'" (3:14). Forty years later, in his farewell sermon, Moses would still frame the commemoration of the exodus in these terms: "In the future, when your son asks you…" Since his audience that day included almost none of the people who had experienced the exodus, he can only be enjoining faithful Israel in all times to say, "*W*e were slaves of pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought *us* out with a mighty hand" (Dt 6:20).

Indwelling these simple pronouns is a communication for the capability of successive generations to find in the celebration of the Jewish Seder a changeless core of identity and to be constituted as a unique and particular people in every age, strangers in this world. The community of faith has not infrequently staked its life on the story, expressed in the courage

under threat of extinction to celebrate the *Seder*. All the more poignant in the occasion of crisis is when the head of the home hides the piece of matzah bread, lights the candles, pretends to be Elijah knocking on the door, and looks into the eyes of his children. "We were in Egypt."

Brueggemann (2001) touches on the latent power in the biblical text when it is afforded an enduring life in the believing community. He often articulates that the many performances of the Old Testament text in study, prayer, and worship replicate the original transformative interaction. This is the perpetual realization of the text's inward truth that Von Rad (2001) advocated with his concept of *Nacherzahlen*—the Retelling. The risk of losing some gem of truth in the story is overcome by a keeping in touch with the story—our story—whole and complete, in every subsequent day. As we have seen, the inception of the Passover came with the understanding that the event was to take on a liturgical life of its own (12:45, 13:3, et al.).[170]

There is no need to draw here all the lines of Christian typology that run between the Passover lamb and the sacrifice of Jesus made strange and fresh: the perfect male lamb, its unbroken bones, the branch of the hyssop for spreading blood on the doorframes, and the way death was held out. Good minds have pondered "the *thisness* of that and the *thatness* of this" when it comes to this Lamb who is Lord. My interest is to relish the mode of communication that is involved. Taste and smell are the senses of remembering. The oral world is inside us while the visual plays out before us. Touch is always a thing close up, never remote. It is all there in the Hebrew *Pesach*. A young, perfect lamb lives in the family yard for two weeks. Its presence becomes familiar. Little hands have petted it, little eyes watch its blood change colors on the door frame, and little ears hear the softness it brings into grown-up voices. Later, given the sharp

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[170] This is something like the central idea in Kierkegaard's book, *Repetition* (1843/1983): the *Seder* would bear perpetual reiteration by which believers neither forget the past nor postpone what they have learned about their Redeemer for some future time. Instead, they continually enact both in the present. In this case, the idea is corporately and communally applied.

injunction that the animal is to be cooked, not boiled (12:9), it is fully recognizable when set upon the table. The seasoned lamb's warmth, simultaneously bitter and sweet, is in your belly as substance for the journey, the Going Out from the world you know and into another far better. As a mode of communicating Christ, this lamb is astonishing.

It is perhaps unanswerable how well the first partakers of the Passover could have articulated its Christological significance. All that it points to along the beam, the fullness of the portrait it paints, likely evaded Israel's consciousness in part up to the day a certain Rabbi *Yeshua* passed the bread and wine around at the *Pesach* [Passover]. The thing in every age has been to trust such revelation as God has provided for that age, and so to keep their eyes on this lamb, small and of no account. Their lament had ascended to God (2:23) like the upward cry of young Lucy in Lewis' *Voyage of the Dawntreader* (1952/2005): *"If you ever loved us..."* and it was enough. It is "the primal scream that permits the beginning of history" (Brueggemann, 2001, p. 11), and the brokenness in which hope loves to be born. It would save them in every way a human being can be saved.

In summary, "I Am who I Am" is the ultimate divine performative utterance that has informed all these successive examples of the communication of capability. Its inward truth is, in fact, only knowable by Moses as he stakes his life on it with each trembling step toward Egypt, and as he dares to repeat the seeming absurdity of what he has seen and heard. The religious subject must "taste and see that the LORD is good" (Ps 34:8), that is, to no longer know only *that* it is true on someone else's authority, but to know *how* it is true and to own it as one's own. It is no good rationalizing or preserving one's dignity. Is it not in the intellectual exercise but in acting as one who believes would act, and in speaking as a fool, that the soul is thrown upon God, unable to go on unless he perpetually "shows up." Those who refuse the promise of *I Am*

can know nothing of its veiled depths. The *what* of the message is available to them in a borrowed and speculative sense, but never the *how* of a life lived differently because of it. Yahweh is no thought experiment, nor is he data to be filed for some later usefulness. He is now. The problem of God requires the immortal self to find out in existence that *He is who is.*

4.7 The "Infinite Qualitative Difference": Findings and Discussion.

I have found the enigmatic utterance, *I Am who I Am*, to be an indirect revelation of the ineffable inwardness of the hidden God that is especially suited for the inwardness of faith. It speaks relationally and ambiguously, just as any *idem per idem* does, yet faith loves to sound the oceanic depths beneath the apparent simplicity on the verbal surface of the name of God. "Deep calls to deep" (Ps 42:7). I demonstrated a permeation of literary indirectness in the texts leading up to the Burning Bush, bringing to the surface the subtleties of meaning that honor the noetic capacity of readers in every age. Next, I traced examples of divine performative utterance as an indirect communication form in which a new kind of knowledge comes into existence through the communication itself, and to which faith gives inward substance. It involves the kind of "information" that has a pulse. It lives and breathes and only makes sense in relationship with the One who reveals it. It is not only a knowing; it brings a knowing *how*. To fall on Christ is its beginning and end. This captivating display of indirect communication in Exodus promotes a new variety of inward qualities in the lives of its recipients: faith and hope, courage and identity.

Ultimately, I argue that when any redemptive word or act appears within Old Testament revelation (for example, when death passed by the blood-streaked doors of Israel), it has a necessary, inner, organic connection to the timeless work of Christ as its true ground. This understanding goes to the essence of an interpretive principle I asserted earlier: a hermeneutic of trust reads the Hebrew Scripture as "the best text it can be" (Dworkin, 1985). This is the core

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premise illuminating a text that is redemptive, Christ-saturated, and true. Reno (2004) applies the axiom of "showing not telling" to a faithful engagement with the Old Testament: "To see Christ as the recapitulation of Old Testament detail is more important than a statement that he does so recapitulate" (p. 403).

A revelation on a mountaintop—it is the ultimate biblical type-scene.[171] In both the Burning Bush and in the crucifixion of Christ, a dramatic discourse meets the reader in a profound moment of overhearing. The *Wholly Other* draws near in a mystifying paradox and an appearance of opposites, the fire of divinity pulsing deep within the limbs. For God to win the hearts and minds of his people, to open up a way for them to relate to him that is closer and more intimate than otherwise imaginable, it would require this "supreme disguise" (Becker, 1982, p. 18), this emptying, that is Jesus on his cross. The truth was not thereby domesticated, as a certain Roman centurion would attest out of his own new capability of awe. "Surely, he was the Son of God!" (Mt 27:54). The glory of God was never more deeply hidden and never on more breathtaking display for those with eyes to see.

The relevance of linking Sinai and Calvary, these two highest elevations in the Judeo-Christian landscape, is the way the sky opens up in a fresh understanding of the "infinite, radical, qualitative difference" that Kierkegaard measured between humanity and God. This phenomenon has deep roots in the Old Testament and is specially mediated by the Burning Bush narrative. What precisely is "the difference"? Podmore (2011) began his exploration where most others do, considering that the abyss is essentially sin. This understanding remains a critical feature of the call for the church to repent on her knees over a merely intellectual engagement with Christ, and

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[171] The Hebrew word for mountain, or *har,* is an additional *Leitwort* worth mentioning in this regard. The word occurs at the beginning of Exodus 3 and at the end of Exodus 4 (cf., 3:1 & 4:27), but not in between. Thus it serves as an *inclusio* to mark off the literary unity (a matter of interest in biblical literary criticism).

over a consciousness of her own piety grown larger than the consciousness of the grace she has received. Confrontation with the disturbing reality of one's own personal depravity is the cost of the exhilarating truth that hides behind it. That note of grace in the Old Testament has roots deeper still than those of judgment, and the awareness of sin must be held in a perpetual, urgent dialectic with God's radical redemption or risk a hopelessness too bleak to contemplate.

So it would be, if not for the resort to Christ who is the reason to believe that the anchor still holds behind the veil to the Most Holy Place. "It is finished" (Jn 19:30) is the final divine verdict. "He has risen, just as he said" (Mt 28:6) is the ultimate edifying Word. Podmore (2011) concludes that for Kierkegaard, the full revelation of the "infinite, qualitative difference" between God and humanity is indeed expressed in that transcendent grace.[172] The "difference" is love. "Father, forgive them…"—who is capable of such a thing? This is a man acting in the full character of *I Am.* Awareness of sin and Savior grow side by side in the religious self, but ultimately, the great *mysterium tremendum* of the abyss is the way this one dies for the world.

Narrative recreates events. This re-experiencing is all-in-all to this communication form (Craddock, 2002, p. 199). In transformative interaction with the biblical stories, in the telling and retelling, we bind them to forehead and chest, to mind and imagination. We wake up in the same world of bleeding lamb and parting sea, and it is a revelation. These real memories of Moses and Aaron, and of Mary and John, at last come to feel like memories of our own. The capability is in the mediating words, not us, a humbling beauty that still takes some of us to our knees.

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[172] Podmore allows that "it cannot be denied that one must first enter into the darkness in Kierkegaard's writing before one can discover the light of forgiveness that shines through them" (pp. xi-xii).

Chapter 5 "Warmed by Contact": Indirect Communication in Hebrew Short Story

> Do not urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where
> you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people; your God will be my God. Where
> you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May God deal with me, be it ever so
> severely, if anything but death separates you and me. (Ru 1:16-17)

The book of Ruth is a highly stylized, poetically crafted, historical account that has been performed for centuries in the Jewish harvest festival known as Pentecost or *Shavuot* [the Feast of Weeks]. The Church of the ages has long been "warmed by contact" with this exquisite short story. I borrow the phrase *warmed by contact* from literary theory (Bate, 2002, p. 234) for its extraordinary significance in terms of the communication of capability in the Old Testament. The influence of the theology implicit in Hebrew narrative does not come by academically trained analysis. When truth is made entangling through story and aesthetically beautiful by a full exploiting of literary charm, the captive heart is welcomed more deeply into the human race and the community of God. That is, the indirect communication of theology by divinely inspired literary means is uniquely powerful to lead the soul out of itself and into a fuller human response to the *khesed* [faithfulness] of God as the central motif of the book of Ruth.

The book of Ruth is revealed as indirect communication by recognizing that Kierkegaard offered an account of indirect communication that does not emphasize the maieutic. Kierkegaard did not express himself in any single unwavering definition of indirect communication. Instead, he evidences here and there a "second account of the distinction between direct and indirect communication" (Aumann, 2008, p. 7) based on the rhetorical style of the communicator and

whether or not certain literary devices are being employed. Aumann considers Kierkegaard's

main "artful devices" to be: 1) pseudonymity, 2) "showing not telling," and 3) deception (p. 42).

All of these offer interesting comparisons between the book of Ruth and Kierkegaard's

strategies.[173] As the main issue for this study, I will argue that the second artful rhetorical device,

"showing not telling," applies globally to the ancient narrative style. Additionally, we will see

that the maieutic method of communication, although not emphasized, is by no means missing

from this second account of indirect communication.

5.1 Chapter Preview

To preview this chapter: on the basis of the book of Ruth, I advance two arguments. 1)

Old Testament narrative is remarkably disciplined as a theological "showing not telling." This

argument begins with linguistic features that are unique to the structure of the Hebrew language,

but it broadens to the fact that writers of biblical narrative only rarely convey the meaning

readers are meant to take away. The particularity of their truth is hardly ever generalized,

abstracted, or distilled into propositions. It is purely a "showing." 2) *The veiling of theological*

truth in literary beauty is a vital component of the communication of capability in the Old

Testament. The *what* of the story of Ruth is that God is faithful and delights to see the same in

those who say they know him. As important as that is, it is also familiar and unsurprising

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[173] The anonymity of the writer of Ruth has consequences analogous to Kierkegaard's *pseudonymity*: it invites speculation about the point of view of a writer with no biography. We cannot lean on the writer's identity to help us come to terms with the ambiguities of the narrative (which I will discuss). As to *deception*, I have argued that biblical narrators do not deceive their readers; this does not mean they are straightforward. Instead, they delight in holding information back in a suspenseful delay. The result can even be humorous. In chapter two, Naomi breathlessly asks Ruth where she has been gleaning that she brought back so much grain. The answer will revive all the hopes of Naomi, and Ruth could simply have said, "Boaz." Instead, Ruth responds with an unnecessarily long sentence (literally): "The name of the man whom I worked with him today is Boaz" (2:19). The delay is torturous but delightful. Later, I will expand on the fact that the very last word in the Hebrew text of Ruth reveals what the book has been about from the start. The rhetorical effect is the same as Kierkegaard's willingness to "deceive into the truth" if only in the way readers suddenly come into contact with the true character of the story, but only after it has fully invaded their imagination.

information offered up in a single prosaic sentence. A person may spar with such a proposition intellectually or offer an easy assent. Neither posture necessarily brings involvement, consequence, or cost. The sentence is true, yet it is somehow, so to speak, *not true enough*.

Most compelling about the book of Ruth is the *how*. How does Ruth offer her truth? How does this literary gem spend its influence in the inwardness of the reader at the existential crossroad where stands a displaced young widow? On the one hand is Moab, the life she knows and a calculation that makes perfect sense. On the other is the vast uncertainty that is Israel and a long path toward a God called *He Is*.[174] Of course, for Kierkegaard, it is the walking that matters. As we will see, the path is all Christ.

5.2 A Literature Review of Ruth Scholarship

First, I will review the scholarly literature to establish some preliminaries about the book of Ruth: the arch of the story, the question of its genre and its intertextuality, clues in the literature to its literary indirectness, and scholarly attempts to establish the book's purpose. In this chapter, I will draw on centuries of literary criticism, including insights drawn from thinkers as far back as Aristotle and continuing on up through T.S. Eliot and C.S. Lewis.

5.2.1 **The story of Ruth.** Although the title *Ruth* appears at the top of all of the most ancient manuscripts, the narrative has less to do with Ruth and more to do with her mother-in-law, Naomi. Ruth is a remarkable character for reasons that will be explored in this chapter. However, in the culminating act, she plays no role except to have a baby and then promptly disappears from the narrative. Instead, the arch of the story can be best described as the *emptying and filling again* of the widow Naomi.[175] Her bereavement in a foreign land at the death of her

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[174] As I discussed earlier, *"He is"* reflects the etymology for the Lord's special covenant name, *Yahweh*. I mention it here to anticipate an unprecedented use of this name in the book of Ruth.

[175] Reader are kept in touch with the central motif throughout the narrative, for example, when Boaz measures out six scoops of barley for Ruth at their secret betrothal and tells her to take all of it back to Naomi.

husband and both of her sons (with the loss of every prospect for human thriving) is relieved in

the end by the surprise of an unlikely baby set on her lap. With the child's arrival, Naomi's place

in Israel is restored. To be sure, it all happens through the resourceful and noble actions of a

foreigner named Ruth, as well as a family relation named Boaz.

    5.2.2 **The genre of Ruth.** Genre criticism can trace its roots to Renaissance critic John

Dryden (1631-1700) and his recognition that each genre communicates meaning within its own

conventions. The Book of Ruth offers a richly textured example. I am persuaded by Wilch

(2006) that this narrative represents a special genre we might call *historiographical short story*

(p. 8), meaning that the account is historically reliable, yet it is written in a stylized way.[176] That

identification of genre depends on such observations as the fact that the characters in the book of

Ruth are not *transformed* in the unfolding of the drama (as happens in a novella) so much as they

are *revealed* by it. This "characteriological coherence" (Fisher, 1989, p. 47) is a point of contact

with Aristotle on a feature of narrative that lends special verisimilitude and persuasive power: we

are persuaded by characters that *act in character.* Again, the neoclassic literary critics such as

Dryden are in agreement (1668/2002, p. 117), anticipating the narrative paradigm by centuries.

    There is an additional genre marker to the book of Ruth that deserves mention. The first

Hebrew word in the book is *vayhi* [and it happened]. (This will recall for some readers the

phrase, "and it came to pass," of archaic English translations.) On the one hand, we can compare

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This emptying and filling again of the old widow comprise the "unity of act" affirmed by centuries of literary criticism. Here is a single story told exceptionally well through scenes of mounting tension and release.

[176] Kierkegaard preferred to use fictional characters to personify religious subjectivity. Real individuals were not good exemplars for him because subjectivity cannot be displayed, and because the truly repentant do not want spectators. He worried that using real people as examples would prompt admiration and delay, not emulation. I argue that a genre of stylized historical writing can accomplish more by the license it takes, not to invent or deceive, but to artfully surface the theological truth of actual lives. Media studies reveal that identifying with characters is a strong component in our wishing to be like them. Admiration need not interfere with emulation—the desire to be like another person is a key to a communication of capability. The deserving and winning of admiration is an authentic way to bring a new quality into the life of another.

this word to "Once upon a time," or better, to "The kingdom of heaven is like…" from the parables of Jesus, to talk about the lowering of listener defenses by the ritualized words of narrative introduction. The mind of the listener relaxes to take in some third person account, from some other time and place, not anticipating all that stories can lay on mind and heart for some distant sleepless night. To be clear, however, *vayhi* [and it happened] is also important as a genre marker for historical prose; the phrase is to be taken literally. Absent other genre markings to the contrary, this formula constitutes a transparent truth claim and introduces virtually all of the historical books of the Old Testament. Together these occurrences indicate that we are in possession of a connected theological history from the creation of the world through Israel's return from captivity in Babylon.

From the identification of genre, we are able to weigh in on several contested issues involving the interpretation of Ruth. For example, in a historiographical short story, characters reveal their nature by their first contributions to the dialogue. This device well exemplifies indirect biblical characterization. Witness Boaz, whose true character emerges as he accepts the mantle of kinsman-redeemer. His first words are to call out the greeting, "The LORD be with you," to the laborers in his field (Ru 2:4), and his steady, unselfconscious piety will not disappoint as his story unfolds. This theory of *first words* gains most of its traction through the "Where you go, I will go" speech of Ruth at the crossroads (Ru 1:16-17). We know everything we need to know about her by the time her first utterance has ended (as I will discuss). Scholars have difficulty deciding whether Naomi is essentially a bitter old woman or, much the opposite, a woman of deep faith (Collins, 1993). Therefore, it is noteworthy that "Call me '*Mara* [bitter]'" (1:20) are not her first words. Instead, as Naomi steps on the stage, she first opens her mouth to speak words of release and blessing to her widowed daughters-in-law, "May the LORD show

you kindness" (1:8). That is the essence of Naomi within the crucible or her hard life as the unfolding of the story will reveal her, and that simple utterance drips with theological significance. It was radical in its day (as we will see). Genre always matters. In this case, we are to understand that we have met the essence of these characters in these initial moments of overhearing.

5.2.3 **Intertextuality and the book of Ruth.** Scholars have fastened on the way this narrative interrogates and lends inwardness to those around it, a concept referred to as intertextuality or "texts in dialogue with texts" (Wolde, 1997). The order of Old Testament books varies between the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) and the Greek Septuagint (LXX). Someone reading the LXX (or an English translation) from cover to cover would arrive at the book of Ruth with the disgusting odor of the last pages in the book of Judges still hanging about. The historical prose there concludes with the most sordid accounts in all the Scriptures and it happens to center around the very same Judean village as concerns the book of Ruth. This adjacent narrative results in a more hopeful sense of place to associate with a town called Bethlehem.

A reader of the MT who is moving sequentially through the *Tanak* encounters an *'eshet khayil* [virtuous woman] at the end of Solomon's proverbs (Pr 31:10-31), and is next treated to a story about just such a woman in the character of Ruth, called by the identical Hebrew expression (Ru 3:11).[177] Such readers could hardly stop at the end of Ruth's four charming chapters without continuing into the Song of Songs, the haunting Hebrew love song that invites contemplation (in a poetic mood) of the love between Christ and his Church. By the ideals of canonical criticism, the harmony of the Old Testament is well attested by the book of Ruth's

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[177] A related term is applied to Boaz, as (literally) a "mighty man of valor" [*'ish gibbor khayil*] (Ru 2:1) and this particular expression had previously referred almost exclusively to warriors. This is a fascinating clue that the narrative offers to us in Boaz a radically altered vision of what it means to be a "real man."

fascinating conversation with the books that surround it in the canon. There is much that evades

the reader who does not have a mature grasp of the whole.[178]

T.S. Eliot asserted that all good literature modifies the entire body of literary art that

preceded it, each contribution opening a new highway to what art can become (1917/2002, p.

482). Consequently, the intertextuality of the book of Ruth extends to books that are further

removed from it in the canon. The narrative includes many echoes with the account of the

patriarchs, and this brings considerable tension to the story.[179] Narrative tension addresses

something other than a knowledge problem in the lives of readers: it functions to disturb and to

require them to think for themselves. Of special interest to the Christian reader is the

intertextuality between the Old Testament book of Ruth and the New Testament writings that

focus on Christ, the ultimate *Go'el* [Redeemer], that is, if we recognize a prophetic element to

the book that allows it to meaningfully interact with the literature of a future day. Under divine

inspiration, the book of Ruth communicates what it means to be redeemed in a way that

transcends the mundane circumstances of the original story.[180]

5.2.4 **Clues about indirect communication in the Ruth literature.** Scholarly interest in

the book of Ruth has never explicitly connected its rhetorical features with indirect

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[178] Other scholars interested in intertextuality have noted linguistic resonances between this story of King David's ancestors and those about King David's marriages (Berger, 2009). What lends much of the startling beauty to the book of Ruth is the fact that we encounter such remarkably faithful people against the dismal backdrop of the book of Judges "when everyone did as they saw fit" (Jdg 17:6, 21:25).

[179] Ruth 1 is conspicuously peppered with the Hebrew word, *shuv* [return] as concerns Naomi's decision to go back to Israel. This same word is the common expression for repentance in biblical Hebrew. This complicates our assessment of their leaving Israel because of a famine—Was the family punished there? Was Naomi's coming home a repentant return to God?—and the allusions to the positive example of the patriarchs complicates it further still. This anticipates a major argument of this chapter: we are *shown* their actions and the consequences of their actions, but we are never *told* what to make of the ambiguities that go unresolved.

[180] The Book of Ruth is the lone story to put a human face on complex family law within the Mosaic covenant (Baylis, 2004). Its application to Naomi's situation is complicated by the foreignness of Ruth, an identity the narrator holds conspicuously before the reader. Only people acting in the *spirit* of the law, versus the *letter*, would have recognized any obligation toward her. The underlying issue is Naomi having a true place in Israel by regaining possession of her dead husband's plot of ancestral land. *Naomi needs a redeemer.*

communication. However, attention has been given to specific literary strategies that fit easily underneath Kierkegaard's umbrella. Hyman (1983) has analyzed the function of the *sixteen questions* in the dialogues of Ruth, with a special emphasis on those that go unanswered. Fewell and Gunn (1988) focus on five moments of heavy silence in the narrative. Decker (2010) has focused on the irony and puns that pepper the book of Ruth. Lastly, the ambiguity of the book of Ruth continues to engage scholars.[181] Especially interesting is the *linguistic* ambiguity in the way Naomi addresses Ruth with gendered language that slips from female to male as if she's addressing a man. This inconsistency could demonstrate an unremarkable feature of the Hebrew language (which is quite flexible in this regard). However, it might indicate the ambivalence of Naomi for having this Moabitess daughter-in-law instead of the sons she grieves (Davis, 2013). The unexpected grammar is then a plot-thickening device that brings a note of tension only to be relieved in the celebration of Ruth (and her gender) in the final act.

Incidentally, Ruth scholarship has also been busy at the task of excavating the *what* of the narrative, as in, "Here is what the book teaches."[182] However, none of the academic treatments of the theology of the book of Ruth are as compelling as the story itself. "The suggestion of a thing may be more convincing than a detailed portrayal of it" (Berlin, 1983, p. 136).

5.2.5 Setting and Purpose. Much scholarly debate has attended the book of Ruth in terms of authorship, date of writing, and the circumstances that occasioned it. A plausible construction is that the book of Ruth is an apologetic for King David's reign (Goswell, 2014). The story reads like an episode of the famous radio program created by Paul Harvey in which the

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[181] Readers may struggle between a pious and cynical reading of the characters' motives (Koosed, 2011) or what to make of the marriage connotations of Ruth's "clinging" [*davaq*] to Naomi (Callaham, 2012).

[182] These values include faithfulness (Phanon, 2010; Halton, 2012), human dignity (Juliana & Claassens, 2012), communal solidarity (Guyette, 2013), and cultural assimilation (Southwood, 2014). I am not convinced by the feminist claim that only a female author could display the level of sensitivity one finds in the book of Ruth (Bauckman, 1997).

host narrated the surprising lives of famous people without revealing their identity until the last sentence of the story. Naomi's story ends with a stylized genealogy that is specially crafted to list Boaz in the privileged seventh position. In the even more privileged and final tenth position, and as the very last word of the book (in Hebrew), we read, *David.*[183] This has been royal David's story from the start, answering for the missing birth narratives of Israel's greatest king. Where does a David come from? Of what sort of people is he? The Book of Ruth is the answer. If this delightful story is the very stuff of King David, then it is also the stuff of great David's greater son. Clements (2014) attaches great significance, in terms of the book's grander purposes, of the presence of the name of Ruth in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel.[184]

In connection with such neglected matters as Israel's obligation to be a light to the world, to reach out beyond Israel's borders with the Word of God, and to open up a space of hospitality to the widow and the foreigner, the book of Ruth is an inspired Word. Significantly, that Word does not come as a lecture on biblical ethics. It is a story, a shimmering but true "once upon a time" set in Israel's worst days. The stirring Hebrew concept of *shalom*—"the way things are supposed to be" (Plantinga, 1996)—is made to get up and dance, not only in the feast of *Shavuot* but in the Christian imagination as well.

There is one thing more to be said about the purposes of the book of Ruth. At the structural center of the narrative is the hopeful surprise of Naomi. Upon hearing that the field Ruth had "chanced upon" (to glean behind the harvesters) was the one belonging to Boaz, she

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[183] This is a fruit of genre criticism. The New Testament itself begins in Matthew 1 with a stylized genealogy (in 3 parts with 14 names in each) that speaks indirectly to the interconnectivity of the two Testaments. It is a densely packed introduction to Jesus by the litany of narratives that only someone conversant with the Old Testament can unpack from the sequence of names.

[184] Included in any talk of the book's purpose must be the soft human face it gives to the abstract concept of *khesed* [covenant faithfulness] (Campbell, 1990). That theme could argue for a date of composition to coincide with King Josiah's reforms, or some time when calls for reform were falling on deaf ears, such as in Jeremiah's day. Either way, the dating of Ruth's authorship would fall to within two decades of 600 BCE.

burst out, *"That man is our kinsman redeemer"* (2:20). This follows the well-documented ancient Hebrew style, lost on the modern reader, of placing the unifying theme of a piece of literary art at the precise center. (We will encounter several revealing examples of literary centering in the pages to follow.) Naomi has a *go'el* [redeemer], which is very nearly the book's middle word. The purpose of the office of the *go'el* was to see to it that when individuals lost their land or their freedom or if they had been harmed, their nearest brother, one of their own flesh and blood, was to step up at any cost and make it right (cf. Lev 25).

According to its literary center of gravity, the Book of Ruth is revealed to be, before it is anything else, *a redemption story.* All hope was lost until the appearance of a redeemer, and we overhear Ruth's poignant plea at his feet in the dead of night, "Cover me." To one who knows the yearning for Christ, it will all sound vaguely familiar. The purpose of the book of Ruth, like the highest purpose of literary art, is to embed truth of the highest kind in the interest of that other way of knowing how things really are. There is a love written into the center of all things.

5.3 Hebrew narrative as "showing not telling."

An athlete wrote to his former coach in distance running. The letter chronicled all the things the young man had never been able to understand about his coach: the level of investment of time and of himself in such a mediocre runner, the grace and patience toward such an immature young man, and so on. The letter ended, "…and coach, today I met Jesus Christ, and *I figured you out."* This is anecdotal, but it is too telling to omit. Aumann (2008) writes:

> When I show a student an ethical principle (e.g., by exemplifying it in my life) but refrain
> from didactically spelling it out, I establish the same kind of maieutic relationship
> Lessing [one of Kierkegaard's influences] does. The principle I want to communicate
> resides implicitly in my actions. Thus, I provide the student with some amount of

assistance….Nevertheless, because I do not state the principle explicitly, the student must

go through part of the discovery process for herself in order to acquire knowledge of the

principle. (p. 54)

The relevance of my anecdote is that it suggests an indirect communication of the

capability of understanding Christ, not merely an ethical principle. "Figuring him out" exploits

the psychological "stickiness" that attaches both to the things a person has had to struggle over

time to understand as well as to narrative communication in general according to the power of

episodic (versus eidetic) memory. This "showing but not telling" exemplifies what is true

throughout Old Testament historical prose: "In the Old Testament narratives the theological truth

is communicated in the chronological development of the events of the story; the reader does not

just understand the truth—he experiences it" (Alter, 2011a, p. 39). In the best stories, readers

find themselves "in the middle of a world apparently without comment" (O'Connor, 1970, p.

74). It is an indirectness that is worked deeply into the very structure of the Hebrew language.

5.3.1 **The inherent indirectness of the Hebrew language.** When Hebrew prose is

translated from that source language into some target language, one of its defining features is

obscured unless the transition is extremely literal (and easily recognizable as a translation).

Hebrew narrative is *paratactic*, meaning that it tends to string together narrative elements using

only the conjunction *and*, a single letter prefix in the original language. The opening scenes of

Ruth would translate (literally), *"And* it happened in the days of the judges…*and* a famine was in

the land…*and* a man went from Bethlehem…*and* they were there…" and so on. For a translation

that doesn't smack of "translation-ese," most occurrences of the word *and* needs to be swapped

out for connectives that supply some sort of subordination of one clause to another using words

such as *so*, *since*, *but*, or *when*. A smooth translation, then, cannot avoid being interpretive as it

adds editorial commentary at this most elemental grammatical level about the relationship of one clause with the next. Thus in translated biblical prose, one thing happens *because of* the other, or *in spite of* the other, and so on, as a set of narrative sinews missing in the original language.

My argument is that, linguistically speaking, biblical Hebrew is structured to take a straight reportage of "showing but not telling" to the highest level. However, if it seems that the biblical narrator is confined by the syntax from offering any commentary at all, that would be a miscalculation. The biblical narrator is the epicenter of literary indirect communication.

5.3.2 The Hebrew narrator. The narrator of the book of Ruth would have Aristotle's approval for stating little of his truth directly.[185] Our storyteller only intrudes two times to mention God in his own voice, first, as the one who relieved the famine, and later, as the one who blessed Ruth with her pregnancy. Upon reflection, these two occurrences are related, and they come in the first and last chapters of the book as examples of the intricate symmetry of the story, as I will discuss below. These brief exceptions prove the rule: the reticence of the narrator to barge in on the scene only conceals his significance. The narrative study of Scripture reveals much about the way the biblical spellbinders communicate their spiritual point of view.

In *Narrative Art in the Bible*, Shimon Bar-Erfrat (1984) elucidates the critical role of the narrator in Old Testament historical prose. He explains that the relation between the narrator and narrative is not like that between painter and painting or composer and musical composition. It is distinguished by the fact that the narrator is, quite simply, "inside the narrative" (p. 13), that is, the narrative voice is part of the work itself. It is the narrator who brings the events before us and addresses us. "We see and hear only through the narrator's eyes and ears" (p. 13). It is this

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[185] Aristotle (335 BCE/2002) complains of the narrator who calls too much attention to himself, "appearing on the scene throughout," and he concludes that "the poet should speak as little as possible in his own person, for it is not this that makes him an imitator" (p. 33).

narrator who mediates the entire reality of the narrated world, its shape depending in every way on the narrator's standpoint, his horizon becoming more and more *unconsciously* shared by the reader. While the narrator is the most important structural component of the story, he is the one character most likely to go unnoticed, and along with him, his deep influence. Bar-Erfrat's contention is that the great potential of a narrative to influence an audience rests with the narrator, leading to the "absorption of his or her implicit values and attitudes" (p. 14). He argues that that the reader identifies less with the characters of the narrative than with the narrator, and that the religious narrator's point of view is the feature of the genre that serves most strongly to impart "its outlook on life, people, good and evil, God and divine activity in the world" (14).

> Whereas the Prophetic and Wisdom literature express their views directly,[186] openly urging that they be accepted, the narrative operates *in an oblique and unobtrusive way* [emphasis added], and in this respect narrative modes in general, and the technique of the narrative viewpoint in particular, fulfill a decisive role" (p. 14)

In other words, the narrator's voice exemplifies the essence of theological indirectness for the way readers fall under the gentlest sway of a persona they scarcely acknowledge.

Biblical narrators seem to describe their characters in matter-of-factly, but they are not indifferent to them (Bar-Erfrat, 1984, p. 45). The teller of Ruth and Boaz's story clearly loves his *'eshet* and *'ish khayil* [woman and man of virtue] for the way they relate themselves to the ideals of covenant faithfulness. Consequently, we love them, too. As strong and as round as these characters are, so that our eyes are riveted on them, on their actions, and on the scenes that play out so vividly in front of us, the narrator's admiring voice is inside us. In unconscious identification with him, we come close enough to his inwardness to be "warmed by contact."

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[186] I will complicate this part of Bar-Erfrat's premise in both Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. The communication within prophetic and wisdom literature turns out to be quite indirect, albeit in different ways.

What Erfrat does not mention is that the Hebrew language itself has another characteristic feature that enhances these effects. In Chapter 4 I articulated how the Hebrew word, *hinneh* [behold!], has the rhetorical function of drawing the reader into the perception of the biblical character, as we saw in Moses before the Burning Bush. However, the word can also occur as part of the narration. The narrator in the book of Ruth only uses this convention when God's hidden hand of providence is moving behind the scenes. When Ruth happened upon the field that belonged to Boaz, the redeemer of whom she had been completely unaware, the writer interjects that just then, *"Hinneh* [look!], Boaz was coming from town…" (2:4).The same happens when the nearer kinsman with whom Boaz needs to negotiate just happened to pass by (4:1). *Hinneh!* Reader and narrator join in that sense of "immediate witnessing," becoming two tourists with their heads moved close together to gain the same angle of sight through the trees. The word seems designed for erasing the edges of the movie screen and, according to whatever posture readers have been maintaining toward the drama, to pull them the rest of the way inside.

5.3.3 **The indirect theology of the book of Ruth.** How is the theology of Ruth enfolded into the artful narrative as a "showing not telling?" Without repeating all that I have said about the indirectness of literature and story, I will discuss three brief examples that have a particularly Kierkegaardian feel to them. 1) In the place where the text most forcefully points to the hidden hand of divine providence, it is the reader who supplies the truth in an incredulous inward response to the narrator who slyly seems not to notice. 2) The theology of the book of Ruth is not labeled as such. It has been written into the dialogue of the story's characters and embodied in their actions so that readers may encounter truth within the dynamic of distance and participation that characterizes the ideal reception of Old Testament narrative. Remarkably, the book of Ruth can be shown to deal, through the gentleness of indirect communication, with precisely the same

illusion as the one Kierkegaard saw in the Danish state church. 3) The story has two dramatic

foils which, coincidentally, can represent Kierkegaard's aesthetical and ethical spheres of

existence; their ways of being in the world are seen for what they are in contrast with Ruth and

Boaz (Lee, 1988) standing close by and putting skin and bones to the truly religious. These are

the ways the story sneaks "good reasons" (Fisher, 1989) for faithful living past readers' defenses.

5.3.3.1 The unsaid in the said. A charming example of theology coming to the reader

through an indirect communication happens when Ruth randomly enters a field to glean and it

turns out to be the field of Boaz, Naomi's kinsman. The whole plot and the awakened hope of

Naomi hinge entirely on this seeming coincidence, and the narrator characterizes it with the

phrase, *vayyiqer miqreha* [and her chance chanced upon] the field of Boaz (2:3). The expression

involves a side-by-side repetition of the Hebrew root, *qarah* [to happen upon], and thus forms an

example of the figure of speech known as *farrago* (as heard in such melodic expressions as

willy-nilly or wishy washy). *Vayyiqer miqreha* seems to be coined by the writer in an ironic

literary wink. A more emphatic way to exclaim, "What an amazing stroke of dumb luck!" could

hardly be constructed. When this Scripture is performed in the Jewish festival of Pentecost, the

audience considers then dismisses the naïve reading of the expression, and faith joins faith in a

communal smile—as if such things just happen! In this way, all attention turns toward the *unsaid*

in the said. It is the reader who supplies what the narrator has conspicuously avoided putting it

into words. The hidden hand of a good God is moving behind the scenes.

In classic indirectness, this heartening piece of theology was not articulated by the writer.

Instead, it was agitated up from the store of truth in the community's living memory, and if it is

the reader who has supplied the truth of the matter, then it is the reader who owns it. The episode

informs the guiding axiom of narrative analysis as mentioned earlier: "There are a thousand ways

to tell any story." A writer makes choices: what to leave in, what to leave out, where the narrative spotlight happens to linger, and at what angle it shines. That this particular story is told in this particular way, like Ruth wandering into Boaz's field, has not been left to chance.

5.3.3.2 Theology experienced and overheard. The deep truths of the book of Ruth come through urgent dialogue and narrative action. The narrator has written all the theology into the mouths of the players and embodied it in their movements. One example can pass for many: it is a decisive moment within the Old Testament canon that Naomi should bless a foreigner, Ruth, with the words (literally), "May *Yahweh* do with you *faithful love"* (1:8). In other words, Naomi used the special name of the covenant God of Israel, as well as the special word, *khesed*, which is God's unique *covenantal* love. Both words connote the intimate relationship Israel enjoyed with God, sealed with divine promise and enacted in a shared history. It appears that within the taken-for-grantedness of Naomi there lived a truth that eluded the nation, a matter of supreme existential importance for the truly religious: although Israel was God's chosen people, the firstborn of his mysterious election, he was never theirs alone. He was never theirs by right.

This is a truth that echoed from the original calling of the patriarchs (e.g., Gn 26:4) and it would reverberate on down through the Hebrew poets and prophets (e.g., Isa 49:6), yet it rarely appeared in the lived-out piety of Israel. For most, the thought that God could become the refuge and peace of the Ninevites or the Edomites was speculative information, nothing more. Petulant Jonah personifies the active Jewish resistance to such an idea. When Naomi spoke as she did to these foreign women, it calls into question a sentiment that would harden into Israel's most persistent corporate self-delusion, namely, that the chosen nation somehow *deserved* her election because of something God saw in this people. On an individual level, the illusion was that being of the right ethnicity meant having a guaranteed place in the heart of God. It is remarkable how

similar this illusion is to the one Kierkegaard saw in his beloved Denmark.[187] "Children of God? What else would we be? Aren't we Israelites?" It would take a Jesus to confront it directly and head-on, "And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham" (Mt 3:9).

For those who were not predisposed to take this particular truth up into their lives, Naomi's conversation with her daughters-in-law is among the most crucial moments in the book of Ruth. A hidden theology comes delicately, poignantly, and indirectly. As we have seen, such moments pass quickly within the movement of the narrative. Its story form accomplishes the suspension of judgment—who is in a mood to contradict the bereaved and broken Naomi? Readers are prepared to savor the drama of her but are not guarded against what the narrator has smuggled in, a point that might otherwise deeply offend. To those who would think to disagree with Naomi's radical ideal, there is no one with whom to spar. No one is talking to them at all. It is a chance overhearing as a grieving widow says good-bye to two non-Israelite girls she happens to love (1:8). "May my God be for you, a Moabitess, everything that he is for me, a Jew."

This is an unambiguous point of contact with Kierkegaard's ideals. "Showing but not telling" is the firm commitment of Old Testament narration. It extends through long, uninterrupted portions of its story. When each main character in the book of Ruth prays on behalf of another and later seizes the moment to be the answer to that prayer,[188] there is no editorial comment to break the trance. When a foreign woman is embraced by a Jewish community as one "better than seven sons" (4:15), the narrator holds back his *hinneh* [behold!].

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[187] Kierkegaard (1846/1992) imagines a man who worries over his claim to be a Christian. His wife consoles him, "How can you not be a Christian? You are Danish aren't you? Doesn't the geography book say that the predominant religion in Denmark is Lutheran-Christian? You aren't a Jew, are you, or a Mohammedan? What else would you be then?" (p. 50)

[188] Naomi prays that Ruth might find a resting place in a home of her own, Ruth prays that the LORD will let nothing move her from Naomi's side, Boaz prays that Ruth will find shelter under the God of Israel's wings, and so on. All embody a selfless piety that is left to the reader to infer.

The Book of Ruth shows what it looks like and how it sounds when the people who know God, not just *about* God, begin to carry the whiff of divine *khesed* [faithfulness] in this very real world.[189] The deep slice of theology in that word is not taught didactically, but by what William Hazlitt (1778-1830) described as the power of absorption in something or someone outside of ourselves (cited in Bate, 2002, p. 266). It is "a showing but not telling." It is an absorption.

5.3.3.3 Existence spheres in the book of Ruth. What Kierkegaard did for religious purposes through his pseudonyms is unprecedented. He invented characters positioned outside of Christendom who could express alternative ways of being-in-the-world. They present multiple versions for the self to be a self, they make the case for their point of view, and Kierkegaard lets them struggle in his texts with how to respond to the truly Christian out of varying degrees of understanding. That being said, the similarities between what the writer of the book of Ruth accomplishes with two secondary characters and what Kierkegaard was after is uncanny. It happens in connection with Ruth in the opening chapter and with Boaz in the closing chapter.

While Ruth and Boaz each make their own sort of "leap of grace," acting beyond the bounds of common sense, each has someone standing nearby who has the identical opportunity. (This is that egalitarian note that we have marked in Kierkegaard.) The writer offers no comment about the altogether reasonable choices they make. He only causes them stand in front of the camera beside their religious counterparts and then lets them fade out of the scene. They pass out of narrative significance and leave the stage to those who lend human dignity and warmth to the will God has for his people. Both have names that are pregnant with significance, just as

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[189] Because the genre is historiographical short story, the plain goodness of these real life characters gives the lie to the assertion of Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) that only fiction can teach us, reasoning that history only teaches wrongly (1595/2002, p. 81).

Kierkegaard's pseudonyms do.[190] In fact, Orpah and "Mr. So-n-So" come remarkably close to

representing, in turn, what Kierkegaard termed the aesthetic and ethical spheres of existence.

In chapter one, we meet the foil for Ruth in a sister-in-law named "Orpah." Her name has

an unmistakable connotation in Hebrew. An *'oreph* is the back of a person's neck, and *'Orpah* is

simply a feminized version of that Hebrew noun. In the English idiom, people who shamelessly

flee may "turn their tail and run"; in the Hebrew idiom, they turn the backs of their necks. For all

the sentimentality of watching Orpah weep right along with Ruth and Naomi, a Jewish reader

would not forget her name or what it means. What persuades Orpah to return to Moab is Naomi's

repeated insistence that there will be no foreseeable prospects for finding love in Israel or the

security that comes with it. Orpah doesn't say so herself, but Naomi comments to Ruth after

Orpah has left, "Your sister-in-law is going back to her people *and to her gods* [emphasis

added]*"* (1:15). (These gods would be Chemosh and Baal-peor, among other local deities, so that

Orpah's return to Moab is a return to human sacrifice and sexual perversion.)

As an aesthetic, Orpah shows no interest in life's large questions. She weighs her

prospects for a pleasant and comfortable life with no mention of ultimate issues or even ethical

ones. This argument from silence may not seem fair. However, Orpah is the foil to Ruth who

manages to convey in only a few lines, through the compressed speech of Hebrew poetry, that

her mind is filled with matters of life and death, human loyalty, and self-sacrifice, and above all,

the God of Israel and the hope of finding a place among his people. I will dissect her poem

below, but suffice it to say that her "leap" would endear her to Kierkegaard. By that I mean her

utter resoluteness in a matter of such extreme uncertainty as that which lay along the path she

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[190] E.g., Kierkegaard's works ascribed to *Climacus* and *Anti-Climacus* concern the ability or non-ability of the soul to "climb" to God. The writer of *Fear and Trembling* is named *Johannes de Silentio*, suggesting that Abraham had no one he could speak to about God's command that he sacrifice his beloved son. (This idea is clearly and movingly expressed in Luther's sermons on Genesis which Kierkegaard avidly read.)

was choosing. Whatever persuaded Ruth to do such a thing, clearly rational argument played no role in it. In fact, every sensible thought pulled the opposite direction. Ruth is plainly absurd, or so it can only seem from the aesthetic point of view. In truth, she is transcendent. In stark contrast, Orpah makes perfect human sense and passes out of the story.

In chapter four we meet the foil for Boaz, a nearer kinsman who would have first dibs on redeeming Naomi's property for her. Thus we meet again a secondary character given precisely the same opportunity as a main character, in this case, to redeem the displaced and impoverished family. We can comfortably associate this foil with Kierkegaard's *ethical* sphere of existence. This nearer redeemer must weigh his ethical responsibility toward Naomi and toward the will of God. This was his calculation: how to "do the right thing" and at the same time profit from his actions and be admired by the Bethlehem crowd? When he makes the choice not to take the deep truth of covenant faithfulness up into his life, he earns special treatment from the narrator who injects his point of view with characteristic indirectness. Again, it concerns the man's name.

The nearer kinsman-redeemer is referred to by the narrator as *peloni 'almoni* [a certain someone]. It is another farrago created just for this story, it would seem, although we don't have the sort of access to the linguistic habitat that would allow us to be sure. Since the story will end with a communal prayer that the child Obed might become famous (4:11) (literally, "may they call [his] name in Israel") it is a significant narrative choice that "Mr. So-and-So" goes forever anonymous, having found no truth for which to "live and die." Just as when Moses carefully names the faithful Hebrew midwives of Exodus chapter two, but leaves the pharaoh anonymous, the narrator of the book of Ruth has found a way of saying, without saying it, that the story lies with Boaz, not with the other man. His character, by the negation for readers of any sympathetic

identification, is another example of Sidney's "inspired consideration of what a man ought to me" (1595/2002, p. 75). The writer's discipline for "showing but not telling" is uncompromised.

The Book of Ruth is a parade example of those special portions of Scripture that manage to take on a life of their own within the community of faith spread across time. Not only have Jewish people performed the drama of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz for centuries at that their outdoor harvest festivals,[191] as has been mentioned, but at one such Pentecost festival, in particular, the New Testament community came into the very capability that was incubated in the book of Ruth. A space of Christ-warmed hospitality opened up for the Gentile in the very family of the Jew (cf. Ac 2) and the barriers of language, culture, and tradition just fell away. The second argument of this chapter takes up the observation that what we find in the book of Ruth is not only all showing (versus telling), but it is an especially beautiful display.

5.4 Literary Beauty as Key to the Old Testament's Communication of Capability.

Biblical exegetes, given their primary concern with the cognitive content of biblical texts, have largely ignored the "beauty of holiness" (Wendland, 2014) that is a vital aspect of the Bible's communicative power and another way the Spirit draws the soul to the things of God.[192] The matter of capability remains on center stage. To become caught up in such round and

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[191] These texts have not sat lifeless in some ancient drawer. The book of Ruth is a splendid example of what we may call *theological entertainment.* Scholars of entertainment education articulate the powerful influence of performed art, and all the key elements are present in the book of Ruth. Here is narrative *transportation* to the atmosphere of another time and place: a high plains crossroad, a barley heap at night, an ancient city gate. Here is *parasocial relationship* in the way we experience Naomi as a someone in our own lives. Here is *identification* with irresistible characters: who would not want to be just like Ruth, a real woman, or Boaz, a real man? Here is theology come to life and truth with a particular human face, achingly beautiful and affecting. It is all indirect communication. The influence does not come in propositional form, nor can its meaning fully live or be itself apart from the medium of a really good story.

[192] Here Kierkegaard would offer his concern that aesthetic appreciation of Scripture can allow the reader to escape being personally implicated by finding ways to enjoy the artistry (Patrick, 1999, p. xviii). "It is Christian truth that is observing me" (not the other way around), "since it is from God and God is in it" (Kierkegaard, 1848/1991, p. 234). He depicts an artist's portrayal of the crucifixion, and all the interest of the viewer goes to "whether it is a masterpiece, whether the play of colors is right, and the shadows, whether blood looks like that." Lost is the "actual suffering of the Holy One" (1848/1991, p. 255-256).

pleasing characters offering up their costly faithfulness is to become faithful ourselves, or at least to *want* to be. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis, in the net of a satisfying narrative and its subsequent events—this happened, then this, then this…—things are caught alive that are not subsequent— what grace is, or faith, or hope. Through story, we *are let in*. This has been a dominant concern among the literary critics spread across the centuries, namely, the dynamic relationship between truth and art as they meet in a potential to lend an aesthetic quality to life itself.

5.4.1 **Truth, art, and beauty in the corpus of literary criticism.** Kierkegaard's "second account" of indirect communication can bring him into conversation with centuries of literary criticism. For Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), art comes into its highest purposes wherever the heart has "*fed* upon the *truth*, as insects on a leaf, until it is tinged with its food, and shows the color…in every minutest fibre" (cited in Bate, 2002, p. 6). According to Hazlitt, art alone can bring a "sympathetic grasp," over against an intellectual assent, of what is real and true (1818/2002, p. 266). The book of Ruth exemplifies Sidney's contention that the purpose of literary artistry is to give "concrete body to the general truths it is disclosing, which we can otherwise admit are true but not *feel them vividly* [emphasis added]" (1595/2002, p. 73). It is not only art in general but beauty in particular, that matters according to a strong consensus among the giants of literary criticism. Coleridge explains that beauty renders truth "*realizable* to the total mind" (p. 330). Sidney admires those artists who best "hide truth in pleasant things" in order to "move men to *take the goodness in hand* [emphasis added]" (1595/2002, p. 84). Literary beauty plays strongly in that equation of art delivering capability home to the human heart.

What makes literature beautiful? Two qualities emerge from an ancient literary debate, and by either measure, the book of Ruth succeeds as a literary achievement. Horace (65-8 B.C.) ascribed beauty to the total harmony and unified composition of a piece, complaining that the

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finely sculpted toenails of a statue were a wasted effort if the work as a whole lacked proportion. Longinus (1st Century B.C.) would gladly concede that point, but would argue that a work of art can have both composition as well as moments of astonishing sublimity and emotional transport—he referred to Moses' *yehi 'or* [let there be light] as the "echo of a great soul" (1st Century/2002, p. 61). What is more, Longinus maintained that what actually brings us back to a piece, again and again, is the minute crafting of those particular "beauties" found within, and those exquisite or exquisitely painful moments of "sublimity flashing forth like thunderbolts" (1st Century AD/2002, p. 58). Arnold (1822-1888) called them "touchstones," those isolated literary moments achieved by a full exploitation of the mysterious power of words (cited in Bate, 2002, p. 401). The idea echoes in C.S. Lewis' memory of his teacher "Smewgy," who once quoted Milton and added, "That line made me happy for a week" (1955, p. 107). The point for this study is that the content of Ruth—the "what does it teach" question—is enhanced in every way by both aspect of literary beauty: the total harmony and the moments of "sublimity flashing forth."

5.4.2 **The exquisite beauty of Ruth**. This essay has already mentioned the intricate symmetry that reveals the book of Ruth to be a harmonious literary composition, not some shifting oral narrative.[193] To add one more example to those already mentioned, in the first act Naomi is poignantly bereft of *yeladehah* [her two boys]. It is striking that her two sons, grown and married would be described with this Hebrew word, but the word from the first chapter echoes in the last when a *yeled* [boy] redeemer is placed in her lap. Horace should be more than satisfied. However, the book of Ruth has Longinus' "beauties" as well. If, according to I.A. Armstrong Richards (1893-1979), "To be or not to be" manages to still surprise in spite of the

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[193] The opening and closing chapters each have dramatic literary foils and unique mentions of God's provident action; also, the inestimable value of Ruth that goes blatantly unnoticed in the first act is celebrated in the last act. This literary symmetry has caught the attention of other scholars (Bertman, 1965; Grant, 1991, Wilch, 2006). Hummel argues for the integrity of the book of Ruth on this basis (1979, p. 509f).

reader's long familiarity (1929/2002, p. 529), how much more, *"Where you go, I will go…"*

Ruth's speech to Naomi at the crossroads between Moab and Israel stands bright among the most compelling acts of human loyalty and commitment in all of literature. In particular, her words exemplify that beauty of minute crafting, consisting of a literary device called *chiasmus* that was dear to the heart of all the great Hebrew poets. The term *chiasm* refers to the Greek letter, *chi,* which is shaped like the English letter X. If you wrote on one line, "The heavens / declare / the glory of God," and on the next line, "The work of his hands / proclaim / the skies" (the word order in the Hebrew of Ps 19:1), you would see the crossing lines if you connect the semantic correspondences. Chiasm can be more involved than this, such as in Ruth's speech.[194] The structure of Ruth's speech can be diagrammed like this (in paraphrase):

A1 Do not try to change my mind.

     B1 I will not leave you in life.

          C1 Your people are my people.

          C2 Your God is my God.

     B2 I will not leave you in death.

A2 I swear it.

By recognizing the chiasm, the reader can spot how the middle element matters most. The centerpiece in Ruth's speech (and her defining first utterance in the story) consists in the embracing of Naomi's very identity and God by Ruth. The ethical beauty of her commitment finds expression in the fact that Naomi's God is the true reason Ruth follows her back to Israel. Humanly speaking, Ruth has no prospects in Israel, as Naomi bluntly asserts (1:11-13). Ruth has

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[194] "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people; your God will be my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me" (1:16-17).

seen the crushing tragedy that has struck Naomi in spite of her belief in God. The reader is awed

by the faith of the foreigner Ruth who wants Naomi's God only because he is God and not for

what he can do for her. As Kierkegaard would say, the religious subject takes God *a tout prix* [at

any price] (1846/1992, p. 200). Faith itself is defamiliarized in the way Ruth "clings" [*davaq*] to

Naomi and her promising God the way a wife clings to her man. When Moses first commanded

the children of Israel, newly freed from their captivity in Egypt to be kind to foreigners, the

reason he offered was (literally), "You *know the soul* of the sojourner" (Ex 23:9). That is, the

people of Israel knew a thing or two about living in a place that was not home, having done so in

Egypt for 400 years. Later generations would not possess this knowledge except by Burkean

identification with the "soul of Ruth," sharing in her human stuff out there at the crossroads.[195]

The attentive reader is next shocked by the deafening silence of Naomi in response to

what Ruth has done. (Earlier we noted the importance of paying attention to biblical utterances

that receive no response.) It is an arresting narrative choice, this wordless communication in

which "silence shouts its message" (Waltke, 2007, p. 122). Blinded by grief, the old widow will

enter Bethlehem after a ten-year absence and complain to all who whisper, "Is this Naomi!?" that

she comes home empty. Naomi complains that she has nothing, as Ruth stands immediately

beside her, a young Moabitess who is plainly not nothing. The reader waits in tension for the

weight of Ruth's sacrifice to be recognized *by someone within the story*, and this heightens the

poignancy of her act. Thus the reader has been opened up to a perception that a character in the

story has not, an artful rhetorical device for stirring the subjectivity of the reader.

It is Boaz who sees Ruth for who she is in the next chapter. When he shows unrestrained

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[195] As we've seen, Burke would complicate my discussion about Naomi as the central character of the narrative. Rather than attending only to the amount of space the writer happens to give to Naomi's part in the story, or the number or lines she speak, he would have us note the vividness and brilliance that attach to Ruth in her brief shining moments. Ruth may yet be the narrator's "true subject" (Burke, 1984, p. 233).

kindness to the poor outsider who happened into his field, her falling to the ground (2:10) is the reader's glimpse into the level of risk, vulnerability, and loss she has endured. It is a further education into *"the soul of the sojourner."* When asked the reason for his kindness, Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before" (2:11). Finally, someone sees her! The reader experiences release and catharsis (more on that below), as Boaz continues, "May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, *under whose wings* you have come to take refuge" (2:12). The relationship between these two is an aesthetic achievement. In fact, not a word ever passes between Boaz and Ruth that would not fit Fisher's special use of the term *charisma* as that which exists "when there is a communicative transaction in which one person perceives the other as loving and honoring the best in them" (Fisher, 1989, p. 17). This expresses well the social reality they construct. Their characteristic way of relating to each other is an aspect of the "good reason" they provide for living faithfully.

The writer of the book of Ruth would have pleased the sensitivities of Aristotle who ascribed the highest genius to the writer who creates an original metaphor. The word *kanaf* [wing] that Boaz used to express the security he hoped Ruth might come to know under the shelter of God is the same word Ruth uses for the corner of Boaz' blanket. In the high suspense at the threshing floor at night, when Boaz will discover the woman lying at his feet, she will simply say, "Spread your *kanaf* over me" (3:9). It means, "Let your blanket be the wing of Yahweh to me." In other words, "Marry me, Boaz, and be the answer to the way you prayed for me." When the reader "gets it," subjectivity delights in the lovely association.

The writer of these scenes is capable of a curiously ambiguous beauty. Scholars puzzle

over the moment after the betrothal when Boaz doles out for Ruth, according to the Hebrew text, simply "six barleys" (3:16).[196] The performance at Pentecost can only have the character of Boaz emptying his scoop six times into the shawl of Ruth. The stage would fall silent except for the slow rhythmic whisper of the metal in the grain—one, two, three, four, five, six—by the light of the couple's smile. What can it mean? Earlier, Naomi had told Ruth to go back home to Moab in order to find a "resting place" in a new home and family (1:9). Deep in the Jewish consciousness, *what comes after six is rest* (Gen 2:2-3). Ruth has found her rest and her home. When Ruth returns to Naomi, she reports Boaz's insistence that she must not go "emptily" (3:17). The narrator keeps the reader engaged with his true theme, the emptying and filling again of Naomi. We watched the terrible emptying in chapter one. The filling of Naomi has begun.

A reader might react to the Ruth dialogues, "Who talks like that?" Nobody does. It was one of the burdens of Reynolds that the unnaturalness of artistic imitation is no criticism. Art is not for that reason ineffective. When Fantine sings her grief in the musical, "Les Mis," no one complains through the lump in their throat that this is not what real people do. *If* any license has been taken with the raw material of the actual discourse between Ruth and Boaz, it reflects the way "art achieves its exquisite suggestiveness of the otherwise veiled essence of the thing itself" (Reynolds 1786/2002, p. 239). If their talk did not proceed in the precise words that are recorded for us (these and no others), the actual moment was no less lovely, nor have we been deceived. The poetry only shows us what was there all along though veiled, a gorgeous theological beauty against the backdrop of the grotesque in the gross spiritual darkness of the times.

5.4.3 **The training of the heart.** As Richards revived the psychological study of art, he insisted on the weakness of purely intellectual belief. This revived an ancient acknowledgment

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[196] The unit of measurement (seahs or omers) is not specified the way the earlier amount had been.

that the Greek *gnosis* [knowledge] is not the same as *praxis* [practical living]. No one has since articulated the psychological process by which art is transformative better than Aristotle already did in the 4th century B.C. His *Rhetoric* has had a dominant influence across the centuries, but less known is his *Poetics* and the contribution it makes for understanding how literary art can contribute to spiritual formation.[197] It concerns a process Aristotle termed *psychogogia* [the leading out of soul]. This idea recognizes art as molder and developer of human character, and it corresponds well with the Reformation understanding of what is wrong with human nature in the first place. The predicament of human sin is nothing other than the "soul curved inward."

Aristotle's conception, taken up with enthusiasm by later critics (e.g., Sidney and Hazlitt) is that drama works its wholesome influence in human character through *katharsis* [cleansing], the purgation of the twin emotions of fear (in response to evil in the world) and pity (the ability to sympathize with others). Fisher termed the dynamic "cathartic participation" (1989, p. 7) and extended its application from drama to story in all its forms. These feelings, once drawn out, are carried along through the narrative movement to their resolution, thus lifting the soul to a mutual and harmonious serenity outside of itself. The morbid and egoistic element of human feeling is shed as the psyche is caught up in sympathetic identification with the poetic characters and is extended outward and away from self-centered absorption. The result is an "enlarging of the soul" as it "rises into universality" (Bate, p. 17). Feeling is joined to insight and a vivid awareness of "the essential import of human action" (p. 17) and these combine in the capability of responding vitally and sympathetically to truth. So the theory goes. Aristotle's "total man" is the one who has experienced this "leading out of soul" through the transformative power of art.

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[197] Incidentally, Luther was a violent critic of Aristotle, and even more, of Thomas Aquinas through whom Aristotle gained massive influence in Christendom. However, the two works of Aristotle mentioned here are exceptions. Luther affirmed them whole-heartedly.

All the more through inspired biblical artistry, according to the Spirit of Christ's indwelling, we need not be C.S. Lewis' "men without chests" (1947/1974), only capable of responding to life with intellectual detachment. We would know a full-chested, emotional, imaginative, and compassionate response to the human drama and to those with whom we share the stage. What Karl Jung (1928) intuited about myth is far better said about the latent power of inspired Hebrew narrative: its sorrows are felt "not as my sorrow, but as the sorrow of the world, not a personal isolating pain, but a pain without bitterness that unites all humanity" (p. 297).

The Book of Ruth has this purgation and not only in the moment when Boaz rewards Ruth's sacrifice. Narrative tension is continually stirred and relieved through the course of the four acts, never more than in Ruth's midnight proposal.[198] Boaz tenderly consents to marry her and the reader experiences *katharsis* for perhaps twenty seconds of narrating time, but wait! There is another more closely related kinsman.[199] When the nearer kinsman says to Boaz, "You redeem for I cannot do it" (4:16), in the bouncing of the child redeemer on Naomi's lap— because *Deus Obsconditus* is faithful—and many other moments of sweet release within the sacred story, readers are consumed and absorbed, for a time, in someone other than themselves. They feel the pities and fears of someone else as their own. This quality existed first in the writer, and later in the reader, but it was not communicated directly. It is not that sort of thing.

Kierkegaard's concern for communicating capability brings the *how* of reading Scripture in touch with the instinct for recognizing the beauty that is there. The idea surfaces across the long history of literary criticism that an immediate and visceral response to art is not lightly to be

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[198] Boaz might simply refuse Ruth, but what is far worse, he can take advantage of her, publically shame her, and/or he can withdraw all the protection and support on which her life has come to depend.

[199] An example of this tension concerns a verse for which a literal translation is incomprehensible: "And she came and she stood from then the morning until now this her sitting the house a little" (Ru 2:11). I see it as another example of *iconicity*. The young woman has probably suffered abuse, making the servant nervous when Boaz's inquires after her. Boaz does not dignify the servant with an answer. Seeing frantic urgency in the brokenness of speech is more interesting than assuming that the Hebrew text is faulty.

dismissed. A person of sufficient quality and sensitivity is able to acknowledge the power of a piece "though it is not in his power to give the reason" (Reynolds, 1786/2002, p. 237). Hazlitt distilled this insight into a concept of imagination as that human faculty which transforms the accumulated experience of an entire life into a "readiness of response" (1818/2002, p. 267). By this, he means the ability to respond with instinctive immediacy, and to decide from gut-feeling, not analysis, that a given work of literary art is among the greatest the world has seen and is worthy of the home it furnishes for itself in the inwardness of the reader.

The Christian Church, the body of Christ in the world, has made just such a judgment about that lovely gem of the Old Testament Scripture that is the book of Ruth. This chapter is an attempt to catch up to that strongly felt understanding in the slower, more intentional cognitive way. Although the left-brained process of analysis is fragmentary and slow, it can add its own kind of support to what we already knew on better grounds: there is to this narrative a veiled but matchless literary beauty, fitting clothing for the theological beauty within.

5.5 "I figured you out": Findings and Discussion

C.S. Lewis wrote movingly about the poverty of the life lived without literature. It is a self-imposed solitary confinement in the closet of one's own narrow experience. It is reading alone that "heals the wound" (1967, p. 140). Books were to him like the stars in the sky of the Greek poems offering a multitude of other ways for observing life in this world. "I see with myriad eyes, but it I still I who see…I transcend myself, and am never more myself when I do" (p. 141). Elsewhere he expanded on the theme: "to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as with our own...*we demand windows"* (2002, p. 51). This eloquent grasp of what reading means in the life of the individual becomes transcendent when elevated in a biblical context, especially in view of all that appears at the far

end of Old Testament beam. It is a matter of decisive important to this dissertation to recognize that the Old Testament points to something beyond itself, better, *Someone.*

5.5.1 **Christological typology in the book of Ruth.** There have been several Christian literary critics who gave full expression in their work to a theological point of view, from Sidney to Coleridge to T.S. Eliot. Only such writers could be expected to acknowledge that under the divine inspiration of Scripture, explicit Christian theology can be embedded in a piece of literature in a way that surpasses the understanding of the writers themselves (cf. 1Pe 1:11-12). The theology of the book of Ruth is at its most sublime when it comes to the possibility that several characters in this classical biblical redemption story may have a Spirit-intended correspondence with Christ and that aspects of their stories are relived in his Church centuries later.[200] If Boaz is just such a noble type of Christ, our Brother, and our Redeemer, then Ruth becomes a type of his bride, the Church, in her most heart-pounding moment, pleading to Boaz, "Cover me."

The most compelling type of Christ in the book of Ruth is the child Obed. Hebrew names capture essences, and *'Oved* is a Messianic title meaning *Servant* (Isa 42:1). The story ends with a chorus of women singing that it is this unlikely birth, this Bethlehem-born ancestor of Christ, who by his coming brought new life to his whole human family. They refer to this child when they ask God to make his name "famous in Israel." The distant echoes of this redemption story over a millennium later could only have been written into the story by the Narrator God himself.

5.5.2 **The implications of Ruth for the Old Testament's communication.** Reading

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[200] Identifying Christian typology requires care. Rather than seeing allusions to Jesus with every occurrence of "wood" or "red" in the Old Testament, identifying types begins with recognizing a *redemptive function* in the textual details that resonate through close reading in the later unveiling of Christ. When it comes to Ruth, it is beyond dispute that the office of redeemer and the institution of marriage are types that are confirmed in the New Testament (Cf., Eph 1 & 5). It is no leap to consider Ruth and Boaz to be as well.

Ruth as an indirect communication of Christ marks a night-and-day difference in terms of the effect on the reader. Virtually every commentary on the book reads it as a direct communication, meaning that *the narrative merely points to itself.* The book is thus read for the information and ethical instruction it provides. Ruth and Boat respond to the need of their neighbor as to the very call of God. Male readers are exhorted to be more like him, and female ones more like her, and if they try, really try, perhaps they will become capable of their essential goodness. Unfortunately, the examples of Ruth and Boaz are such that attempts at a rigid, mechanical emulation will tend to be crushing. There is a narrow way of edification and capability, but it is not nearly so direct.

"The Scriptures testify about me" (Jn 5:39) said the Lord Christ, and the Spirit must work his own sort of instinct for reading the Old Testament as a *John the Baptist*. In other words, the meaning within story after story, image after image is this: *"I am not the one. I only point to him."* As an indirect communication of Christ, the Old Testament is not a series of disconnected stories to be approached for *information.* Instead, it is unveiled as a single grand narrative to be read for *formation* out of a longing to be drawn more deeply into the view that opens up. Read with proper indirectness, the meaning of Boaz rushes suddenly forward: *"Hinneh!* [look!] There is a Redeemer, closer than a brother, one who shares you flesh and blood. I am not he. I only point to him." Let the reader "figure him out" and the beam disappears.

To take our leave of Bethlehem, the book of Ruth is that proverbial elephant that blind men felt with their hands. The giants of literary criticism have contributed their point of view. Aristotle showed us its trunk, Sidney its tail, Reynolds its flanks, and, yes, Longinus, the toenails. *Warmed by contact* with this marvelous text, we step back from cognitive analysis and the scattered insights and open our eyes to take in the exquisite whole. As such, the book of Ruth exemplifies the "showing not telling" that marks all Old Testament narrative, including dramatic

foils that mirror Kierkegaard's existence spheres, and a confrontation with the same illusion in Israel that Kierkegaard would confront in Denmark. We have experienced the indirect influence of a gifted narrator who makes us stand in his shoes, narrative transportation—the places we go when we think we are reading a book—and memorable characters through whom readers can experience wholesome and cathartic absorption in someone other than themselves. The beauty was not *in* the ancient story, it only came *through* it, and it is the beauty of Christ himself.

For those who are moved by Ruth to join her at the existential crossroads, capability sparks awake in a passing moment of C.S. Lewis' *Sensucht*, the stabbing joy that is longing. The soul is somehow a larger place when this mood is felt "not as my joy, but the joy of the world" (Lewis, 1969, p. 297). All beauty reminds. All that is breathtaking asks, "What do I remind you *of?"* It is "the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited" (Lewis, 2001, p. 45). Ultimately, the communication of capability through the literary sublime and its divine purpose of leading the soul out of itself are realized as I look to the woman on the other side of the bed and remember another crossroad and another promise made in the hearing of faithful Yahweh. *"Where you go, I will go…."*

Chapter 6 "Equipment for Living": Indirect Communication in Hebrew Poetry

A voice says, "Cry out."

And I said, "What shall I cry?"

"All people are like grass,

and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field…

The grass withers and the flowers fall,

but the word of our God endures forever." (Isa 40:6, 8)

I have explored a range of theories having to do with the manner in which symbols act upon inward subjectivity, and I have discovered a special fondness for those ideas that become transcendent the Word of God is brought to bear on them. Our favorite writers on literature and rhetoric sometimes said more than they knew: we "encounter a Thou" in the sacred text, experience a "fusion of horizons" with that of the biblical world, and find in the inspired literature a power for "healing the wound" of symbolic poverty. When Kenneth Burke described poetry as that which furnishes "equipment for living" (1974, p. 61), he offered another thought package from the world of secular scholarship that especially glistens when baptized in the river of revelation. In this chapter on the Old Testament psalmists and prophets, I will demonstrate the link between Hebrew poetry, construed as "equipment for living," and Kierkegaard's passion for capability, that is, for translating into existence what one has been given to understand.

What Burke does *not* mean by his expression is captured in a line by Kenneth Koch: "People say yes everyone is dying / But here read this happy book about the subject" (cited in Robbins, 2015, para. 6). Burke had no time for pretty talk or sentimental uplift. He believed in an

actual and costlier redemption. As to the pain of living, no one gets a pass. For Burke, poetry found its purpose in something urgent and muscular. It is "a ritualistic way of arming us to confront perplexities and risks…..It would *protect* us" (1974, p. 61). He saw a power in poetry for achieving the fortifying of the self for "one's campaign of living" (1974, p. 104).

A recent study (Katsion, 2013) paves the way for bringing Burke's "equipment for living" into a spiritual frame as it takes up the question of the widespread popularity and cultural influence of John Newton's "Amazing Grace." The song can usher in that rare moment when God is still met in the public square. Of special interest is how a song that confesses the nothingness of the self, and how that self owes everything to redemptive grace, has somehow managed to endear itself to a secular audience. I move this conversation onto biblical grounds. "The LORD is my shepherd" (Ps 23:1) still carves out space in the secular consciousness—if only at deathbeds and gravesides—in a culture that remains for a time "Christ-haunted." I have selected so familiar a text in the hopes that through close reading it might "never be the same." I accomplish this, in part, by taking up the jarring clash of moods between this poem and one adjacent to it, the "I will lack nothing" of Psalm 23 set against the "My God, my God, why…" of Psalm 22. Something quite powerful is communicated indirectly in that quite palpable tension.

I will also highlight texts that are off the beaten path. The biblical polemic against idolatry in Isaiah 40-48 is dense with prophetic irony, but it would seem on the face of it to have little power to disrupt the thinking of a modern audience. Twenty-first-century sophisticates would seem to be safe outside its line of fire. Therein hides its influence. My final poetic text, Isaiah 40, opens the same literary unit in which the polemic is found but is among the sweetest moments in the entire Old Testament canon. Experiencing it as such requires a certain surrender to abduction into a biblical world bent on self-destruction.

6.1 Chapter Preview

To preview this chapter: first, I offer two arguments that reveal the functioning of indirect communication in the book of Psalms so that the worship life of ancient Israel has its proper place in this study. Psalm 22 and 23 encompass the full range of agony and serene devotion in the poetic genre. Next, to represent the Hebrew prophets, I offer two arguments that issue from the book of Isaiah. Isaiah is the ancient writer who took Hebrew poetry to its literary heights and most fully exploited the genre's latent rhetorical power.

Here are those four arguments: *1) The Hebrew poetry of the ancient psalms represents an intensely subjective form of overhearing.* Readers encounter words addressed not to themselves but to God, and they experience them in an inward merging of their own subjectivity with the passionate inwardness of the psalmists. *2) Hebrew songs are able to penetrate the inwardness of a subject while he or she is not yet aware that it is Christ who sings and prays them; the recognition of his voice then brings the truly religious forward with Kierkegaardian suddenness.* The effect is to bring worshipers into closer contact with a diverse range of capabilities—to pray and to sing, to suffer and to hope—as they coalesce into a single capability, that of joining and living in mystic union with Christ, the true "I" of the Psalms. *3) Irony in the poetry of the Old Testament prophets constitutes an essentially indirect form of maieutic truth telling that is able to differentiate an audience and smuggle in a new awareness for both ancient and modern hearers.* Prophetic irony can be bitter and scathing in one context and genuinely humorous in another, anticipating by millennia what Kierkegaard intended by combining "earnestness" with "jest." *4) The poetry of the Old Testament prophets is globally ironic in a still more subversive way through the communication of truth that comes grounded only in itself.* My analysis will feature *Restoration Prophecy* as is found in even the fiercest of the prophets. The *direct* reading

of these prophecies confines their power for edification to a distant past or to a future not yet begun. The *indirect* reading reveals meaning having to do with audiences of every generation.

Why poetry? In the end, I will draw these arguments together within the frame of "equipment of living." Before I commence with them, I will take up two preliminary matters: the current state of the scholarship of Hebrew poetry and an understanding of the features of the genre that make it especially suited for things that are caught, not taught. Biblical poetry "is not just a set of techniques for saying impressively what could be said otherwise. Rather, it is a particular way of imagining the world" (Alter, 2011b, p. 189). When the meaning of the prophets and psalmists is found, it is not to be drained off and used as a substitute for their poetry. The poem *is* the meaning because it is an experience, not an abstraction (O'Connor, 1970, p. 75).

6.2 A Literature Review on Hebrew Poetry in the Prophets and Psalms

Scholarly criticism of Old Testament poetry is a story of its own, set within the larger scope of historical criticism that I traced earlier. The study of biblical poetry also experienced a turn toward literary and rhetorical approaches in recent decades that has not involved any large-scale debunking of earlier critical approaches. The conversation simply moved on, consisting mostly in debates about the best way to account for the dynamics of Hebrew parallelism (cf., Hruschovski, Kugel, Scholvsky, et al.), which has been recognized as the most remarkable feature of Hebrew poetry for over two hundred years.[201]

In *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (2011b), Robert Alter can again be credited with unveiling the startling degree of artistry and sophistication on the part of the ancient writers. Once we catch

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[201] Hebrew parallelism is that poetic form which most readily translates into poetry that is still recognizable as such in a new language: the translator does not need to artificially force rhyme onto the translation. Semantic parallelism is a sort of *rhyming of thought*. However, the stiches in a poetic line tend to simultaneously echo in other ways, for example, syntactically or in internal phonicity. The translator of Hebrew poetry is painfully aware that there is more literary crafting in the source language than any target language can fully bear, and is constantly confronted by choices about which poetic features to bring over in translation. Note, for example, the sound of the very first line of the psalter: *'ashre ha'ish 'asher lo' halakh.*

a glimpse of what he sees in David, Solomon, or Isaiah, it is impossible to *un*-see it:

> The lines of biblical poetry are informed by an often fierce and mesmerizing energy of
> assertion that sweeps from one part of the line to its parallel member ….There is subtlety
> as well as insistence in these seeming repetitions: utterances develop and change,
> miniature stories unfold…and always more is going on than one initially realizes. (p. xi)

What is new in Alter amidst the "satisfying complexity and sheer excitement of biblical poetry" (p. xi) is this recognition of the *vertical* features of these poems (in contrast to the horizontal movements of semantic parallelism), that is, the way "miniature stories unfold." This narrative element is very significant in terms of framing Hebrew poetry as an indirect communication because we mark, once again, the clean break its writers made from the ancient Epic form. It is also significant that this same break was the move that took the narrator off the stage and buried him to a depth of unnoticability within the text (as I have discussed).

When Hebrew poetry deals with Israel's history (e.g., Ps 78, 105, and 106), there is "no narrative *realization* of the events invoked; their intelligibility depends on the audience's detailed knowledge of the events" (Alter, 2011b, p. 29-30). The poems lack the exposition of independent narratives but are a form of literary play involving information already secure in cultural memory. Kierkegaard springs to mind with his concern for "the intimate realization of the significance of what was already known" (Craddock, 2002, p. 77). The Hebrew poet's recasting of familiar historical prose into evocative images and patterns contributes much to my thesis. Whatever need they were addressing in their community and in ours, it has little to do with supplying information where it was lacking—"yes, you know your history, but do you *know* it?"

Alter observes that there is always more going on in biblical poetry than one initially realizes. Unfortunately, this means that there is always more to occupy the scholar's intellect.

The theological spin-off is conspicuously absent in most biblical literary criticism, and rare is the scholar who gives evidence to being personally implicated by the object of study.[202] It is time to ask in a serious way what it means, theologically speaking, that there is poetry in the Bible?

If the *how* of Hebrew poetry concerns its literary and rhetorical conventions, and the *what* is the theological pay dirt beneath, the *why* of biblical poetry involves the marriage between the two. We encounter in this genre a "particular genius for effecting the direct, immediate involvement of the audience in a kind of *emotional dialogue with both its form and content* [emphasis added]" (Lichtenstein, 1984, p. 121). The cure to the complaint of West and Beldman lies in taking the beauty *with* the veil, its artistry in the service of its meaning. "Here is what the psalm teaches"—this can be communicated directly. To cry or to smile, to whisper "I am sorry" to an empty room or to get off the couch—these are the things that cannot. This is the *why* of biblical poetry. The features of the genre conspire to heighten the maieutic communication style that we perceived throughout Old Testament historical prose.

6.2.1 Identifying Hebrew poetry. When it comes to the scholarly exploration of biblical poetry, considerable attention must be given to how we recognize that we are in its presence in the first place. The Hebrew copyists did not make poetry recognizable by any special formatting of the text. A page of Hebrew poetry *looks* like a page of prose. At the same time, the theory that Hebrew poetry and prose exist on a continuum has proved entirely unsatisfying (Alter, 2011b, p. 2). A given text is one or the other, not both. Whereas biblical prophets can bounce comfortably between narrative and poetry, and given that poetic lines can intrude in the very midst of prose

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[202] West (1992) complained over twenty years ago that in "intense pursuit of the medium of Hebrew poetry we have lost the poetry's theological message" (p. 424). By some accounts, little has changed: "It seems rare to find scholars going beyond the aesthetics, technique, or analysis of Old Testament poetry to ask the more fundamental questions about its significance" (Beldman, 2012, p. 86).

narration,[203] how are we to decide? The main issue, as noted, is that form has a different relationship to content according to the choice of genre. This may be best perceived when poetry and prose meet suddenly in the biblical text. Jeremiah chapter 20 furnishes a revealing example.

Upon release from a night in the stocks, the prophet immediately waves a rhetorical fist in the face of Pashhur, his nemesis, and offers him a new name, *Magur-missaviv* [terror all around]: "For this is what the LORD says, I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends…" (20:4). Pashhur is speechless, and the reader concludes that this Jeremiah is a man of steel. However, the text then switches abruptly from prose to poetry as Jeremiah expresses his anguish in twelve tear-stained verses. Multiple moods collide. "O Lord, you deceived me…his word is in my heart like a fire…the LORD is with me like a warrior…Sing to the LORD!...Why did I ever come out of the womb?" (20:7-18). As Mother Theresa once prayed, "What are you doing, my God, to one so small?" (2007, p. 187). Through the juxtaposition of poetry and prose, the reader is afforded an outer and inward view of the very same episode, deeply complicating the reader's identification and involvement. The example well demonstrates the choice involved for the writer who reaches for the proper *how* to best communicate some burning *what*.

Beldam (2012) outlines the identifying features of the poetic genre according to parallelism,[204] terseness,[205] figures of speech,[206] and verbal patterning[207] (pp. 86-95). For my part, I will reorganize the features of Old Testament poetry according to their relevance for

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[203] Think, for example, of the moment when Adam first meets and names his wife: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gn 2:23).

[204] Its broadest (much debated) categories are: synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic parallelism.

[205] Hebrew poetry can be identified by a reduction in the occurrence of three particles: the *'et* marker (preceding a definite direct object), the definite article *ha-*, and the relative clause indicator *'asher.*

[206] These include: synecdoche ("let the bones you have crushed rejoice"), merism ("the LORD will watch over your coming and going"), personification ("the trees clap their hands"), hyperbole ("one thing I have asked of the LORD"), litotes ("be not far from me"), and apostrophe ("shudder in horror, oh heavens").

[207] In *acrostic* patterns, each verse or strophe begins with a subsequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet. We saw *chiastic* patterning in Chapter 5. The scholarship on rhythm in Hebrew poetry is inconclusive apart from a hunch that something is going on among the cantillation marks and steady beats of Hebrew poetry.

indirect communication. Hebrew poetry is a heightened form of maieutic communication in comparison to prose; each of the following categories involves a similar argument.

6.2.2 A heightened exploitation of language. A profound scholarly investigation of language still draws scholars into its orbit, and it is no good to dismiss it as mere words about words. The experience of life, others, and God is saturated by language (p. 9). Fisher (1989) comments revealingly on the fact that symbols mediate reality in a way that gets at the essence of the human condition: "Language is not just one of man's possessions in the world, but on it depends the fact that man has a world at all" (p. 94).[208] It always matters how reality is storied, languaged, and pre-cognitively imagined, and in this, the awareness of our need for biblical revelation is only heightened. Humans do not tend to experience the world directly (or nakedly like the animals), but are always shoving words in between what is "out there" and what is "in here." Poetry occupies the space between with special vibrancy. Consequently, it is *biblical* poetry that by its semantic density brings "a consciousness of the linguistic medium of religious experience" (Alter, 2011b, p. 170). Penner (2013) is persuasive in seeing hermeneutics, not epistemology, as the church's "fundamental intellectual activity" (p. 71) because of the centrality of verbal revelation, not reason, to the life of the Christian community.

In poetry, the true power and giftedness of language come alive in terms of the reality of God and the relationship he extends to the world. To have *him* at all depends on the symbolic revelation that enters both self and community from the outside. The Word of God is his means for giving himself. Clearly, if words are the stuff of our life together and of inwardness alike, his are the ones that matter. To know this by immersion in Psalm 23 or Isaiah 40 is the best cure for

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[208] The phenomenologists assert that human experience, as we know it, is only possible because of language. It is "the house of being; in its home man dwells" (Heidegger, 1947/1977). This can be affirmed in a dialect with a full affirmation of objective reality and the meaning of vast spaces known only to God.

skepticism about whether language works. This kind does, and we will see it issue in a diverse array of capabilities—to confess, to hope, to sing, to endure—that come wrapped up in the warm reality of the praying, prophesied Christ. Apart from him, they do not make much sense.

After parallelism, the saturation of images is what most distinguishes biblical poetry from biblical prose. Poetic images particularly exploit the unbounded power of words to make symbolically present what is not otherwise available to the moment. The verbal pictures of Hebrew poetry sanctify the imagination as a completing power—the intellect limps without it—and serves for the healing of modernity's rift between mind and heart. They shape mental images for the mysteries of God that otherwise evade all human grasping. I reiterate the maieutic quality of biblical images and how the learner understands more deeply the meaning he or she has completed, such as the lively *tertium* of biblical metaphor. When familiar things are drawn into the sphere of a new perception—the one thing seen in the light of the other—we are getting at essences. The object of biblical learning is not to speculate but to learn truly to live off its inexhaustible supply of images as off an unmerited inheritance.

6.2.3 A heightened hermeneutical distance. The concerns of this chapter serve to enhance awareness of the hermeneutical distance between the ancient writers and the modern audience. When can we feel confident that we have properly detected irony, that we are laughing in the right places, or that we have genuinely caught the mood? These difficulties are not for the wringing of hands, but rather they invite solemn and heightened effort. In fact, the very recognition of the hermeneutical distance involved contributes to our admiration for the power of these texts to speak in contexts quite foreign and far removed from their original setting. They close the gap on their own steam, and 3000 years are as nothing at all. Literary devices that tend not to penetrate the curtain of non-Hebrew cultures will play a major role in this chapter.

To move forward an earlier discussion of Hebrew parallelism, this is the feature of Old

Testament poetry that most commends a methodology of close reading, but the modern reader

needs to learn how. The longest running debate about Hebrew poetry concerns the existence of

synonymous parallelism: is it ever the case that the second stich in a poetic line means to say the

same thing as the first stich but in different words? [209] So it seems to the linguistic pragmatist

based on normal human talk. I lean toward Alter, a linguistic purist, in recognizing that "literary

expression abhors complete parallelism, just as language resists true synonymity, always

introducing *small wedges of difference* between closely akin terms…and the perception of

disharmony in a harmonious context" (Alter, 2001b, p. 10). The genius of the Hebrew poetic

form hides in these semantic modifications. They are constantly at play and combine with all that

I have argued about Old Testament poetry, especially the foreignness of the well from which

Hebrew images are drawn, and the way this enhances their potential for making truth strange.

All these features (and more) constitute the strange language of the kingdom of God, and

the Psalms are the invitation to join in and become acculturated into its peculiar customs and

syntax (Brock, 2007). This represents freedom from the tastes and prejudices of our time. I will

elaborate next on the bearing all of this has on the emotional contagion of Old Testament poetry.

6.2.4 A heightened epidemiological influence. Earlier I used Old Testament examples

to develop a key assertion of Kierkegaard: the mood which any aspect of revelation evokes in the

religious subject is decisive for how that individual is relating to its teaching existentially. The

propensity for speculating about Christian theology in a mood of detachment represented to him

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[209] Consider the verse, "Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered" (Ps 32:1). By the device known as elision (or gapping), the reader supplies the idea, "blessed" to the second stich where it is not repeated. This syntax demonstrates that two halves of a poetic line may address the same *res* [subject matter], which can yield significant theological insight. However, this insight is not lost by acknowledging that while the subject matter is the same, the second stich brings something new.

a particularly distressing "error in modulation." As marked earlier, Kierkegaard understood the way the Psalms can create a sort of emotional contagion for the spread of genuine Christian pathos (Engelke, 2010c, p. 144). Images and songs have the same covert ability that story does to "sneak past those watchful dragons" where sterile reason or fussy religion stand guard.

The "impulse for intensification" bears repeating as the most compelling theory to date about the horizontal movements of Hebrew parallelism. Physical darkness in this first stich is likely to become inner darkness in the second, bowing low becomes licking the dust, a son becomes a tender only child, and so on. Action turns extreme. Abstract becomes concrete. Images sharpen. *Feelings get stronger.* Indirect communication is inherent in this stereophonic style: we are always seeing a thing twice and with an amplification of meaning and imagination that is self-involving. Parallelism involves perpetual pulses and waves to draw the reader— better, the worshiper—little by little into the space the poet occupies where pathos hangs thick in the air. Breathing this air is the key to a wholistic understanding of the deep poetry of God.

In this chapter, I will complicate these assertions by noting that Hebrew poetry is not only characterized by its emotional *content* but even more, by its emotional *movements.* These have a great deal to do with the communication of capability in the Psalms and are not limited to what happens horizontally in the individual lines. Crushing despair at the top of the poem—"How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?"—resolves in serene devotion at the bottom—"But I trust in your unfailing love" (Ps 13:1, 6). Such poetry especially smiles on the reader who slips into the stream. This is that other way of knowing, this entering into theological reality as it is mediated through empathy and identification with the ancient writers. Additionally, close reading attends to the conversation between psalms in proximity to one another within the canon. This subject informs the first two major arguments of this chapter, to which we now turn.

6.3 The Unique Subjective Overhearing of the Hebrew Psalms

Before unveiling the fruits of a close reading of Psalm 23, there is some ground to cover that applies generally to the whole psalter (as opposed to the prophets) as an indirect communication. I have only mentioned in passing the single most entangling feature of the psalmody. Brown (2002) expresses what no careful reader of the Psalms can fail to have noticed:

> The poetry oscillates between anguish and joy, righteous protest and personal confession. Rife with the pathos of praise and the ethos of agony, the book of Psalms captures better than any other corpus of Scripture the "bi-polar" life of faith. (p. 2)

It could seem at first glance that Hebrew poetry confronts the Old Testament scholar with absolute contradiction. Psalm 23 has a quite deliberate "anti-Psalm" that is Lamentations 3:1-6 (Van Hecke, 2002). These poems pick a fight from the start. Compare "he leads me beside quiet waters" (Ps 23:2) with "he has driven me away" (La 3:2). On it goes, point for point, David versus Jeremiah, until at last "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Ps 23:6) meets "he has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead" (La 3:6). It is a quite dreadful antiphonal. How is one religious subject to relate to both of these texts?

The problem dissolves in an understanding that, in both cases, "there will be days like that." How the world looks, even to the eyes of faith, is a moving target. The array of moods in the Psalms corresponds with the inward religious drama as it is set in a world of breathtaking beauty and heartbreaking sorrow. "We would be hard-pressed to find a single human experience of a dimension of public or private life that biblical poets did not touch upon" (Beldman, 2012, pp. 94-95). Brueggemann (2007) describes a common pattern: the poet is securely oriented… then painfully disoriented…then surprisingly reoriented (p.2).[210] It is natural enough for

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[210] Psalm 73 provides an example to stand for many: "Surely God is good to Israel" (v 1)…"all day long I have been plagued" (v 14)…"but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (v26).

worshipers to identify with the middle piece, the disturbing dislocation of the self in a world that makes no sense, but the writer would draw them on currents of feeling toward that place of resolution. The psalmists incarnate their communication and offer up their very selves as a service to all. *"I was there once, but now I am here. I have lived some life for you."*

A rhetographic exegesis[211] of Psalm 23 (Asumang, 2010) notices the transportation of the reader to six new rhetorical places in the course of six verses. Each of these spatial locations— from green pastures to darkened valley to the table of the king—comes in hues colored in by previous occurrences in the canon. This allows for the psalm's compact but formidable communicative power. There is about each of those rhetorical spaces the whiff of the familiar. Those acculturated to the biblical world will feel at each bend in the path that they have been there before. So it is with the spiritual states that spin and clash in the Psalms. Of each, we recognize that we have been here before and will almost certainly be here again.

Henri Nouwen (2009, p. 33) wrote of entering deeply into the world and praying to God *from there*. This is the ideal that most dramatically sets the Psalms apart from other Old Testament Scriptures. Not only are we provided with the very words that construct and maintain a relationship with God (so that Carey's *ritual model* of communication joins the list of ideas that are biblically transcended), but these words especially provide orientation to God for every spiritual circumstance. Whether exalting the LORD or pounding on his chest, the religious self of the psalmist is always squarely facing in the direction of Yahweh, always dealing intensely with him. Whatever the particular place and whatever the particular moment, they speak to God "from

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[211] This is a technique for close reading according to the following insight: "A speaker or writer composes, intentionally or unintentionally, a context of communication through…signs that conjure visual images in the mind which, in turn, evoke familiar contexts that provide meaning for a hearer or reader"(Asumang, 2010, p. 3). Aristotle himself understood that in order to persuade hearers, they "must be made to see things" (4th Century BCE/2004, 3.11).

there." The modern reader peeks over the shoulder of God, as it were, and eavesdrops on the passionate subjectivity of the poets addressing themselves to him. They mediate the capability of saying to God whatever the soul most needs to say to him, things written at the bottom.

In the Psalms, as overheard communication, the modern audience is not the object of its rhetorical influence in any overt way. Just as in Augustine's *Confessions* (400/2005), many psalms are addressed entirely to God but along the way the poet coyly acknowledges to God that readers exist. Like parents who speak up for the benefit of the child hiding on the stairs, the psalmists give evidence that they do, of course, mean for their poetry to be overheard. Psalm 23 accomplishes this effect in a subtle way by beginning in the third person so that David speaks *about* the LORD, not *to* him. Thus it begins in ambiguity about who is being addressed. As the psalm progresses, it exemplifies the quality of aloneness with God by switching to the second person and by exploiting the intimacy of the first-person singular pronoun, "*Your* rod and *your* staff, they comfort *me. You* prepare a table *for me*" (v. 4-5). In these verses, no one else exists, just David and David's Lord. The overhearing audience is vaguely acknowledged again in the end with the return to the third person. It is a fascinating poetic effect.

As we have seen, overhearing represents a sort of literary hospitality for the less-than-convinced learner or for one flirting with despair.[212] This is that Kierkegaard-styled gentleness, the great care that has been taken not to establish a power relationship between the reader and the writer as a human agent. For example, it will never occur to the reader of Psalm 102 (the loud groaning of a man who is wasting away) that the writer is being spiritually authoritative; if anything, the reader is in the position above, looking down in pity. The purpose can only be that

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[212] Kierkegaard, of course, writes frequently about despair. By etymology, the Danish word he used suggests that his true subject was a sort of "mega-doubt." That is, he was not thinking of *tvivl* [doubt] but *fortvivlelse* [despair] that is the self not wanting to be itself before God.

the honesty of writers such as this, even if encountered in the motions of liturgy, comes to belong increasingly to the religious subject, and become more and more available for life. This is appropriation, the thing that cannot be communicated directly.[213]

"As the deer pants for water, so my soul pants for you, my God" (Ps 42:1). It is important to acknowledge that a power to wound also lurks in expressions such as this. If he happened to notice it, Kierkegaard would have admired the way the psalmists confront the modern hearer with "what it means to be a Christian." The psalms speak in the very language of the religious sphere of existence. Much of its poetry expresses how we would feel if we were better people than we are, and how the edified soul, fully oriented to God, would express itself quite spontaneously. Therefore, as I join in the inspired songs in the obligations of corporate worship, I can sometimes not resist the heightened self-relation, the "I-I" in which I wonder if, indeed, I mean what I am saying. Do I "lack nothing?" Do I "fear no evil?" Do I "pant?" Could this passion, this ache of the psalmists be what it means to know God and not merely know about God? What are the illusions this self holds of itself that can no longer withstand this revelation?

How does overhearing function in the psalter? This is the critical matter, namely, the way the "I" of the psalm asserts itself and presses in on the inwardness of the modern person at prayer (Wenham, 2009). "The LORD is *my* shepherd," says writer and reader together. Subjectivities merge in a moment of overhearing unlike any other. "To stand alone—with the help of another" (Kierkegaard, 1967, 1:650) names the transaction between the Hebrew poet and the hearer. In fact, the book of Psalms presents a dynamic in which a communicator may in a sense disappear.

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[213] It can happen in the moment of brokenness or crisis that a person comes to mean the words of the psalms to a degree and depth they could not have imagined. It is a moment of discovery of both God and self. The great surprise is that the inspired words express the very thing the soul needed most to release. "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire beside you" (Ps 73:25). The religious self "conquers by being conquered"(Kierkegaard, 1844/1945, p. 239) as it sings and prays the Word of God back to God.

By the mystery in which the Spirit reveals Christ "in the inmost place" (Ps 51:5), he moves, as I have said, "in, with, and under" normal psychological processes, in this case, those that belong to the reading experience itself. Poulet maintains that when one reads *any* text, personal identity is set aside and the text constitutes a new subjectivity within oneself (cited in Alcorn & Bracher, 1985, p. 342).

> If reading removes the subject-object division that constitutes all perception, it follows that the reader will be "occupied" by the thoughts of the author, and these in their turn will cause the drawing of new "boundaries"…so that the virtual background (the real "me") will take on a different form. (Iser, 1972, p. 298-299)[214]

Relationship with God is saturated in language so that this merging of subjectivities as mediated by the biblical text calls up several ideals of Kierkegaard: the immersion in existing and subjectivity, the building up of a self before God, the actualization of truth in one's life, and the capability of addressing God that is learned in the act of addressing oneself fully to God. This is the medium of actuality and "the transition is pathos-filled" (Kierkegaard, 1967, 1:284). It is "something deeper than a cognitive adjustment" (Tietjen, 2013, p. 51). The reader is "occupied." In all this, the function of poetry as "equipment for living" is realized when the self learns *how best to talk to itself* in the "I-I" of self-relation—"Why so downcast, O my soul?" (Ps 42:5).

The capabilities communicated through the psalter, from the soul's complaint to its doxology, all find coherence in that capability of living in orientation to God regardless of external circumstance or the spiritual weather inside. In singing the Psalms, the religious self not only gets to imagine an alternate version for the self to be a self, but the alternative comes

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[214] My drawing on such investigators into reader response is a concession that there are ideas within their approaches that are not without their fascination. In this quote, clearly the "author is not dead" and the meaning that operates on the inwardness of the reader properly resides in the text.

complete with a language and a manner of speaking all its own. This is edification: to look at this self, the only one I have ever known, and to see, in Christ, a cup spilling over (Ps 23:5). It also represents the low-hanging fruit of symbolic interactionism: it matters what you call things.

Yet this edification need not be a self-conscious one. The self-relation is not the end. In the capability of singing to God with full-throated abandon, and in passing but real moments of remembering the one it loves, the self does not think on itself at all. To be made small in the presence of God and to lose oneself in him—it is for this and for us that the psalmists poeticized their relationship with him. "I have lived some life for you."

6.3.1 The enhanced communicative effects of song. The Psalms are meant to be sung in all their major and minor keys. When it comes to the *how* of revelation, we not only ask, "Why poetry?" but also, "Why song?" The Psalms are the most compact site for Augustine's maxim, "the New Testament is in the Old concealed," and are properly thought of as a "Bible within the Bible." That this "Bible" is set to music enhances our sense of the power that attaches to form.

True religion is simultaneously concerned for both the soul of the individual and the soul of the community, and both are in view here. The disunity of mind that is the common human experience results in disharmony in the community. Both are resolved, at least potentially, in the act of singing the Word of God (Brock, 2007). When the Scriptures are set to the finest musical settings and instrumentations, the singer gains respite from the fragmentation of the self that comes by the cacophony of the modern mediated experience. The intrusion of a thousand thoughts is disrupted for a time. We find one mind within ourselves, and learn to rest within the quiet of a single thought. *"He restores my soul"* (Ps 23:3). This is the influence of song.

I am most eager to exploit the power of indirect communication for the communication of grace to the individual person who knows all the facts but none of the joy, and to reach for that

inward sorrow in the other that the peace of Christ has somehow failed to touch. It was not a spoken recitation that David envisioned when wrote: "He leads me beside quiet waters" (Ps 23:2); it was a song. As such, it can easily be learned *by heart*—interesting expression!—and so to live ever more electrically in the consciousness. The "I" of the poet wants to dissolve again into the "I" of the broken, and music is the solvent. In the Lutheran view, music is esteemed as the highest gift of God next to theology itself. As noted, it enjoys a privileged path to the imagination and is a vehicle for the singing of wholesome truth into our very bodies and lives.

"To stand alone—with the help of another." There is a communal aspect to singing the Word of God in both its disturbing and exhilarating truths, and this is another key to the way the psalter functions for conveying its capabilities. Even the desperation of "My God, my God, why?" (Ps 22:1) becomes something else as a shared experience. It is a journey best taken together, this movement from secure orientation, through the "valley of the shadow of death" (Ps 23:4), and out the other side. The uniqueness of each inspired song creates a "sharable idiosyncrasy" (Robbins, 2015, para.20). Text and tune are married together in a way that accounts for both the "stickiness" of a particular Psalm and the communal fusion among those who well know and love it.[215] Even more, there is healing in the intersubjectivity between the "I" and the "we" that can play in the grammar of poetry: "Now *I* know that the LORD saves his anointed…*we* trust in the name of the LORD!" (Ps 20:6-7). The "I-I" is not the end. Instead, the weary soloist learns to love the art of harmony, the gift the self can never give to itself.

These communal harmonies vibrate with the familiar benediction of Christ: "Where two or three come together in my name, *there am I in the midst of them* [emphasis added]" (Mt 18:20). What I argued about Old Testament prose is equally true of its poetry: for the self to be

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[215] It is unfortunate that few Christian communities experience the psalmody set to music.

built up by the Psalms, the act of addressing God can be no fiction. The Christ must be perceived as the real person he is, a receiving vessel for the song and one who is both capable of absorbing it and ever willing to be moved by it. "Oh, a sigh is enough" (Kierkegaard, 1848/1991, p. 22).[216]

Burke (1969b) defines mystery as that which "arises at that point where different kinds of beings are in communication. In mystery there must be strangeness; but the estranged must also be thought of as in some ways capable of communion" (p. 115). This mystery is writ large in humankind's reaching for the God who always reaches first. There is grace in that mystery when the eternal meets mortality in the sudden epiphany of King David: "The LORD is my shepherd."

6.3.2 A close reading of Psalm 23. My purpose here is to move from what is generally true about Hebrew poetry as a vessel for indirect communication to a set of gleanings from one poem in particular. Naturally, Psalm 23 has been the subject of exhaustive literary analysis that I need only briefly survey. The occasion for the psalm's composition is ambiguous. However, by analogy to other psalms in which dire circumstances have David reaching for his stylus, it seems likely that this poem, too, expresses his resolve to trust in a time of anguish (VanGemeren, 2008, p. 252). At very least, for Psalm 23 to be "the best Psalm it can be," we cannot assume that it is the musings of a man at leisure in the sunlit meadow that the poem evokes.

Critics commonly deal with the literary structure of Psalm 23, noting the double *inclusio* that brackets the literary unit (e.g., Foley, 1988).[217] This psalm illustrates the role of numbers in Hebrew poetry: it begins and ends with exactly twenty-six words, with the theme expressed in three words at the poem's exact center (more on that in a moment). These are sacred numbers

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[216] If I were writing a treatise on prayer, the emphasis would be on what it means that we pray "in Jesus' name." Cathartic or psychological effects would not enter in. It is critical to note that my way of speaking about prayer in this entire chapter always involves praying the Word of God, and to this belongs every power of edification, not the effort of prayer itself.

[217] Phonicity is an aspect of this literary device: Psalm 23 is not only bracketed by the repetition of the divine name, but also by the combination of consonants in 'e*khsar* [I lack] and '*orekh* [length].

(Labuschagne, 2009).[218] Most of the attention by scholars has gone to solving the apparent incompatibility of the metaphors that dominate the two halves of the psalm. The movement from shepherd imagery to images at a banquet table becomes natural once it is recognized that Israel's kings were often cast as shepherds. Psalm 23 offers Yahweh himself as that king who is both shepherd and host (Foley, 1988; Gillingham, 2002). Incidentally, my "best text" reading takes issue with critics who discard the superscription: "A psalm by David" (e.g., Foley, 1988, p. 364). Superscriptions appear in the most ancient Hebrew manuscripts of the Psalms in existence. Many meanings begin to unfold by simply permitting David to be the writer, as we will see.

6.3.2.1 "For you are with me." I have already made much of the Hebrew literary device of *narrative* centering, for example, the exclamation, "That man is our kinsman-redeemer" at the apex of the book of Ruth. An example of *poetic* centering involved the passionate subjectivity of Ruth in her vow of faithfulness to Naomi. *Ki 'attah 'immadi* [for you are with me] (23:4) is an equally rich occurrence of this device perched on the high literary peak of Psalm 23.[219] The expression captures the essence of the gospel, and in the manner of poetic centering, its meaning runs down both sides of the slope and spreads like milk and honey over the images before and after. The true theme of the Psalm speaks uniquely into each of the locations to which the writer whisks us away: from pasture to stream to trail to death valley to table, and at last, to ultimate home. The reason impelling every line is, in the mind of David, *"because you are with me."*

Even before arriving at the very home of God (23:6), the psalm's guiding thought has already impressed a sense of timelessness on the reader in a fascinating and indirect way. All

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[218] Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is assigned a number, beginning with *alef* as the number one. The numbers assigned to the four consonants in the name, *Yahweh*, add up to 26. This is his number. This has nothing to do with Jewish mysticism, or the *Kabbala*, but simply demonstrates minute poetic crafting.

[219] Identifying the occurrence of this literary convention can be subjective. An especially convincing proof it exists occurs in Psalm 11. At the center of a poem about worldly chaos we meet the phrase, *Adonay behekhal* [the LORD is in his temple] (11:4).

literary texts are of course serial, unrolling in time like the scrolls on which they were once

written, yet the psalmists have their ways for dissolving the sense of temporal movement (Alter,

2010b, p. 147). For example, they use repetition to cause the reader's mind to "shuttle back and

forth along the text continuum" (p. 147). The verbal artwork of the short lyric psalm is especially

potent for "offering to the mind's eye a single panorama of elements held nicely together" and

"the complex realization of one moment of perception" (p. 147). This insight originates in Psalm

1, but it applies beautifully to Psalm 23 where time stops in the awareness that Christ is near.

I do not dispense with the question, "What does this psalm teach?" [220] However, my

study answers to another curiosity, namely, how the unnoticed features of the text move and play

on the mind. This is the *how* of biblical poetry as an indirect communication. I argue that the

unconscious impression of timelessness contributes to the enduring poignancy of Psalm 23 as a

quality people may feel deeply but are unable to explain. This speaks to the reason Psalm 23 has

come to be so strongly associated with funerals and gravesides.[221] Indeed, the grave of a dear one

is the place it becomes the "best psalm it can be." These are the edifying words to which

generations have learned to cling in the darkest night of soul: *"because you are with me."*

6.3.2.2 "The LORD is my shepherd." The authorship of David is a component of

meaning that is unavailable to the hermeneutic of suspicion. I refer again to the letter *yod* that is

the first person possessive pronoun, as in *Adonay Ro'i* [The LORD is *my* shepherd] (23:1).The

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[220] Psalm 23 affirms that Israel's religion knew an afterlife. I take this truth to be everywhere assumed in the Old Testament. Psalm 23 ends in David's confidence that he will dwell in the house of Yahweh for *'orekh yamim* [length/stretching of days] (v. 6). While this could seem to refer to his time on earth, other contexts show that the expression can be an idiom for eternity as an *endless* "stretching of days" (e.g., Ps 93:5). Psalm 23:6 exemplifies the impulse to intensification in Hebrew parallelism. "All the days of my life" (stich A) moves to the endless succession of days in heaven (stich B). Thus "miniature stories unfold": being pursued by divine goodness in life, the soul arrives at last in the home of God. The chase is over.

[221] This association is not an obvious one; Psalm 23 may not refer to death at all. The meaning, "death-shadow" (23:4), takes *tsalmavet* to be a rare compound noun. It may refer instead to impenetrable gloom or "deepest darkness," since it occurs elsewhere in contrast with common nouns for "morning" and "light" (e.g., Am 5:8 & Jer 13:16), or in parallel with the word for darkness [*khoshet*] (e.g., Job 3:5 & Jer 34:22).

dominant impulse in ancient Israel was to speak corporately of "our God" rather than "my God" (VanGemeren, 2008, p. 243). This is true of Israel's one-sentence creed, the *shema* [hear!]: "Here, O Israel, the LORD *our* God, the LORD is one" (Dt 6:4). Kierkegaard would have appreciated the individuating expression of David's piety, this self that did not lose itself in the crowd. He was one to notice moments of aloneness with God wherever they occurred.[222]

What the authorship of David contributes to the interpretation of Psalm 23 involves the way he mediates in poetry his own personal experience, having labored as a young man in the flocks of his father, Jesse. He knew a thing or two about sheep and what is involved with caring for them—the competence, selflessness, and personal cost—such as are beautifully expounded in, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (Keller, 2008). My point is to isolate the moment of David's sudden epiphany, "The LORD is *my* shepherd." In other words, "Everything I ever was to my sheep, this, just this, he is to me." The religious subject takes the truth up *into* life that is only made available *through* a life, the truth that comes by revelation interacting with the actuality of lived experience. This is the grace-tinted example to balance the harder moment between David and his prophet. As the negative image of Nathan's "You are the man," the "LORD is *my* shepherd" is the moment when objectivity became subjectivity.[223] The maieutic effect is for the reader to search out the same dynamic in the particularities of their own experiences and callings.

    6.3.2.3 "He leads me beside quiet waters." A piece of wisdom among the wise is that the

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[222] For example, in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, the Pharisee is obsessed with how he compares to the wretch in the back, while the tax collector is oblivious to any human presence, no matter how loud. He "stood at a distance" (Lk 18:13) and addressed himself to an audience of one.

[223] This happens elsewhere in the Bible. A Roman Centurion appealed to Jesus on behalf of a servant who was suffering. It was his own position of authority over men that helped him to appropriate the transcendent authority of Christ (Mt 8:5-8). Any Dad who has ever looked down upon a sleeping child, lost in the thought—"Would I not gladly tear off my right arm for her?"—could reach for the wall to steady himself when the next thought breaks through, "God is *my* Father." Everything he is to her and everything she is to him become that vital point of intersection where theology meets life. Together both fill the "cup" that God himself has poured, until a bit of the stuff runs over the rim (23:5).

material conditions in which people find themselves has less to the do with the quality of their lives than do the metaphors by which they live. Here I make the connection between Psalm 23 and all that I have argued about the emotive and maieutic qualities of biblical images so that I may take the matter a major step further. Without exception, new images are introduced in every poetic line of Psalm 23: a shepherd, a valley, a dinner, a cup, and so on. These combine in a lovely and encompassing semiotic web. These metaphors, together with all those like them in the broad sweep of biblical poetry, support a pattern of living and give rise to a culture of their own as an alternative for a world that lives poorly without them. Each image of Psalm 23 takes its place within a long line of recurrences in the cannon, exploiting the strength that Old Testament pictures gain in their successive echoes across a stream of changing contexts. For example, we will meet the LORD as *shepherd* throughout the prophets (e.g., Isa 40, Jer 17, Eze 34, et al.) and still later when Christ in flesh inhabits this beloved image (e.g., Jn 10, 1Pe 5, Heb 13, Rev 7).

Many of the images of Psalm 23 fall into a category that Osborn (1967) terms "archetypal metaphors." He highlighted metaphors that not only transcend cultural lines but are equally "immune to changes wrought by time" (p. 115). These metaphors are especially grounded in prominent and universal features of human experience. Whereas light and day (23:6) relate to the fundamental struggle for survival and development, "darkness reduces people to a helpless state, without control and vulnerable to the world's dangers and blind to its rewards" (p. 116). In addition to the "deep darkness" of Psalms 23 (v. 4), the word *ge'* [valley] also deserves mention. Human cultures across time are united in a consensus about the connotations of "vertical scale images" (p. 115) whereby desirable objects are projected above the hearer and undesirable objects below. I could offer similar observations about wanting, greenness, still water, death, restoration, tracks, tables, cups, and homes. Who does not know about such things within a rich

tapestry of personal associations? Osborn asserts that archetypal metaphors "activate basic motivational energies within [an] audience, and if successful, turn such energies into powerful currents that run in favor of the speaker's truth" (p. 115). This analysis enhances my explanation of the timeless quality, universal appeal, and enduring rhetorical power of Psalm 23.[224]

Through it all, the psalmists can represent the same essential indirectness that exemplifies the biblical narrators. The biblical poet, too, has a gift for painting scenes in front of the eyes of readers while his voice joins them in their inwardness. That voice is part of the work, mediating biblical reality in a way that tends to go unnoticed. Alter (2011b) captures one of its elements:

> There is no nature poetry in Psalms, because there is in the psalmist's view no
> independent realm of nature, but there is creation poetry…evocations of the natural world
> as the embodiment of the Creator's ordering power and quickening presence. (p. 146)

This speaks to the counter-intuitive advantage words have over raw reality itself. Words allow us to perceive the sinews of meaning, the size and scope, the insides and the backs of things. In David's evocative treatment of green pastures, quiet waters, and deep valleys there resides what is not information so much as an entire point of view and a standpoint inwardly realized.

6.3.2.4 "Even though I walk." For a further observation about the way Hebrew poetry amplifies many features of Hebrew narrative, we return to the matter of ambiguity. As an instructor in biblical Hebrew, I can attest to the liveliness and heightened interest of classroom discussions that happen precisely because teacher and students have together encountered some difficulty in the Hebrew text. It happens more frequently in poetry than in prose, and it often concerns places where the poem permits itself to be read in different ways.

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[224] Admittedly, the images of Psalm 23 have this potency to varying degrees, depending on the culture with which they interact. The images of the "shepherd," his "staff and rod," and "anointing" could be archetypal to some audiences. For ours, they lean instead toward defamiliarization, what Carey described as "wrenching phenomenon from background to foreground" so as to cause us to notice them (1989 p. 19).

A revealing example has to do with the infamous *ki*. The range of translation for this very common and remarkably flexible Hebrew word include: *since*, *that*, *if*, *when*, *surely*, *although*, *so that*, and much more. This word can also set up an oath formula or introduce direct discourse. In connection with Psalm 23:4, we meet a range of possibilities:

"Even *when* I walk through the valley…"

"Even *if* I walk through the valley…"

"Even *though* I walk through the valley…"

Is David contemplating the inevitability of death as the shadow under which he will pass some day? Is he weighing some other dark existential threat that exists only as a possibility? Is he describing the space in which he sits and writes this song? I offer a soft argument on the basis of the "best text" theory: "Even *though* I walk…" seems to me to lend the fiercest beauty to the Psalm. It best expresses that quality of entering the "center of the world and praying to God from there," because David is then revealing that there is a grace by which it is possible to speak the words, "I will fear no evil" (v. 4), in the extremity of ultimate things.

It is this that best displays the "I" of the edified self who sings in Psalm 23, that most passionate "I" which seeks to merge with the subjectivity of the hearer and bring about its surrender to the current of pathos and prayer. This is that unique version of overhearing which the book of Psalms represents. This modern reader leans his poor half-heartedness on things a man under inspiration once addressed to God. I strangely overhear myself—"The LORD is my shepherd, I will not lack"—and am grateful for this most costly capability, having done nothing to earn or deserve it. Such as I am and after all these years, I still mean it.

6.4 Christ Praying the Psalms: "A Healing From Behind"

Here I will argue not only that it is Christ himself who walks through the Psalms and

rustles the leaves of Hebrew imagery and parallelism, but that he himself is often that poetic "I" stealing into the subjectivity of the worshiper who joins the song. As the hermeneutical key that unlocks the genre itself, this argument takes the exploration of indirect communication in the Old Testament a major step forward. It is Christ who leads the movement from secure orientation with God to painful disorientation to surprising reorientation. It is Christ who is calling, "I have lived some life for you." It is Christ who has "entered the center of the world to pray to God from there." And it is Christ who "heals from behind" at the very spot where the Psalms are capable of their deepest wounding, as we will see. This happens according to a dynamic Kierkegaard would certainly appreciate: hearers find out what an entangling piece of literature has actually been about, but only *after* it has made a home for itself in their consciousness.

The tension among particular psalms, even adjacent ones in the psalter, becomes extraordinarily significant within the Christological view of the Psalms. There is meaning to be worked out in the interplay of polarities (Alter, 2011b, p. 156). Singing in the strains of Psalm 22 has its edifying role to play, and it is not to sing lullabies to the shallow aesthetic.

> I have sometimes thought sometimes that even Levinas (and ever more Buber), in their articulation of the human "I" before the divine "Thou," have been too restrained, too deferential, and too polite….The Psalms, in their boldness and passion, are out beyond our conventional liturgical and devotional practices. (Brueggemann, 2007, p. 1)

For all the dark night of soul that finds jagged expression in Psalm 22, it resolves, as so many do, in a deepened faith and the catharsis of adoration that comes in the morning. Speaking of the audacity of the Hebrew poets, Brueggemann (2007) continues: "When we catch up with it here and there, now and then, the transaction itself in its transformative force is nothing less than resurrection, the gift of new life that the God praised and summoned intends us to have" (p. 1).

This means that Psalm 23 is well-served, deepened in fact, by the shriek of confusion and pain that precedes it. Hummel (1979) discusses the way Psalm 22 helps to "depaganize the piece" (p. 435), that is, it prevents the modernist reading of Psalm 23 that takes it as an expression of the indomitable human spirit. Such a sanitizing of the realities of life in a world such as this would be an offense to all who suffer.[225] David's eyes were not squeezed shut to the death-shadow, nor is there false bravado in the meal he takes in the presence of the enemy. However, what does the most to seal the potency of the Psalms for aiding in soul-survival is meeting Christ there.

6.4.1 The Christological interpretation of Psalms. The Christological content of the Psalms was affirmed by Christ himself in the way he drew freely from them, for example, in the verse that has been central to my thesis: "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter hidden things, things from of old" (Ps 78:2). It was later recognized by the New Testament church within the first months of Christian church history, as witnessed in the preaching of Peter in Jerusalem: "Jesus is the 'Stone the builders rejected'" (Ps 118:22, quoted in Ac 4:24-30). In the same chapter, his fellow Christians identified Christ as that "Anointed One" against whom the "nations raged" (Ps 2:1-2). In fact, it is in connection with Psalm 2 that the literary device known as *inclusio* adds support to the Christological reading of the entire psalter.

An identical word *'ashre* [blessed] introduces the opening line of Psalm 1 and the closing line of Psalm 2. This signals that the introduction of the book of Psalms is not Psalm 1 by itself, but Psalm 1 and 2 taken together (Brug, 2004, p. 113). The central concern of Psalm 1 is how a human being is blessed in relation to the *Word* of God, and this is enfolded into the central concern of Psalm 2, how a human being is blessed in relation to the *Son* of God. To "delight in the teaching of the LORD" (1:2) and to "take refuge in the [Son]" (2:12) are as two sides of a

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[225] It is sobering to consider that Satan, for the purposes of tempting Christ, used the words of a "happy Psalm" (91: 11-12) ripped out of their proper context (quoted in Mt 4:6).

single golden coin. How interesting that the word which would conquer two colossal maladies—wanting the biblical text without Christ and *vice versa*—should be this little *'ashre* [blessed]. Indeed, the expression, "kiss the Son" (2:12), is the invitation to know the "face-to-faceness" of contemporaneity with Christ as mediated by the Psalms as a whole.

"Properly to pray the psalms is to pray them in Jesus' name, because the voice in the Psalter is Christ's own voice" (Reardon, 2000, p. xvii). This weighty claim, as I say, takes the present study a significant step forward and has wide-ranging support. The idea extends at least as far back as Augustine who turned to the Psalms in search of the mystery of Christ "who prays for us, prays in us, and is prayed to by us" (421/2002, p. 220). The very act of reaching for a psalm with this measure of expectancy is a capability all its own. Bonhoeffer did the most to contextualize this understanding in the practices of an underground worshiping community in the extremities of World War II and Nazi Germany. "The Psalter is the vicarious prayer of Christ for his Church. Now that Christ is with the Father, the new humanity of Christ, the Body of Christ on earth, continues to pray his prayer to the end of time" (1954, p. 46). The point is not that the Psalms are partitioned off from full ownership by believers. The words can be ours precisely because they were his first. Jesus is the reason we know that we do not pray them in vain.

> The Christian church confesses that Christ is the only one who can or who has plumbed the depths of the primal suffering of which these psalms ultimately speak, but whose experience of it was also undeserved and hence of vicarious and redemptive significance for those who join themselves to Him. Only He can fully pray these psalms in all their fullness, and only in covenant with Him can the faithful, Old Testament as well as New, pray them validly. (Hummel, 1979, p. 431)

Hummel's argument is not only that certain psalms are explicitly quoted in the New Testament

as providing access to the very thoughts of Christ, as is clear, but that this is "illustrative of what happens in the entire genre" (p. 431).[226]

Psalm 22 comes in its own sort of *incognito*: it meets us as an altogether human lament. Only faith, informed by the New Testament, can rise to the thought that "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (22:1) is the profound mystery of *God contending with God*. This faith emerges out of the possibility of offense that is Kierkegaard's *Ultimate Paradox*. However, the same paradox has a particular cast in the Old Testament: how can the kingly Shepherd of Psalm 23 and the abandoned Servant of Psalm 22—"I am a worm and not a man"—be reconciled in the same Lord Christ? Jesus self-consciously identified himself with both these psalms (Jn 10; Mt 27:46), and these poems coincide with two perplexing streams of Messianic prophecy. The long Old Testament wait was for a King who would sit on David's throne forever (2Sa 7) and for the Lamb that would not open its mouth in the slaughter (Isa 53). The point is that Old Testament faith, just like that of the New, meant confronting a contradiction that reason could not solve.

This paradox may have occasioned the dying question John the Baptist sent to Christ: "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Lk 7:20).[227] Although John would die soon, even then Jesus' whole impulse was not to answer directly, but instead to pull Isaiah in between by a thinly veiled allusion, and let the Baptist and his messengers work it out—"Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight…" (Lk 7:22, cf. Is 42). Jesus' final word to his friend on this side of eternity was: "Blessed is the one

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[226] I would complicate the suggestion that the psalms are without exception to be interpreted this way. The book of Hebrews quotes Psalms that are found to be *about* Christ. Similarly, it is not necessary to force every Psalm or Psalm verse into this hermeneutic, such as the psalms of confession. That said, the close reading of Psalm 22 to follow represents an example of Scripture that fully demands to be read in just this way.

[227] John had proclaimed about his cousin, "The ax is already at the root of the trees…his winnowing fork is in his hand" (Lk 3:9, 17). So it was. Yet it would not be surprising if Jesus was not what John expected as he languished in Herod's prison. There is some ambiguity in the account for readers to resolve.

who does not stumble [is not offended] because of me" (Lk 7:23).[228] Throughout *Practice in Christianity* (1848/1991), Kierkegaard accented the lowliness of Jesus as central to the offense:

> Is [Christ] not in glory now? Yes, of course, this the Christian believes. But it was in the condition of abasement that he spoke those words, ["Come to me…"]; he did not speak them in glory….one cannot become a believer except by coming to him in his state of abasement, to him, the sign of offense and the object of faith. (p. 25)

The New Testament fixes the humiliation of Christ in the minds of believers by means of those particular psalms that especially make them want to look away, especially Psalm 22. In the piercing of hands and feet (22:16) and bones pulled out of joint (22:14), the unrecognizability of God reaches its unfathomable extreme, and it is this that reveals him to his heart. "And I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself" (Jn 12:32).

The New Testament really does something to the Old. The steady stream of apostolic allusions is a transforming touch, infusing the Old Testament with an inexhaustible supply of new things to say in view of Christ, the Psalms' true Singer. He fills the sky like a sun rising late on the Old Testament world. It is positively Kierkegaardian: the Old Testament is commonly read out of a firmly fixed ethical sphere of existence—"thou shalt not" and "an eye for an eye"— but in the Christological reading, the truly religious is suddenly brought forward. Similar to Hummel, Bonhoeffer found support for this hermeneutic in connection with a select group of Psalms that challenge the reader to "let stand what is incomprehensible" (p. 45). He explains:

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[228] There is another intriguing possibility as to the meaning of this story. Perhaps it was not John who was in danger of being scandalized by Jesus. If may have been a most gentle indirect communication on the Baptist's part, a way of transferring the allegiance of his last remaining disciples to Jesus. If so, Jesus poignantly played along. His answer to the question, "Are you the one?" is characteristically indirect: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight…the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor" (Lk 7:22). Like Moses on his walk to Egypt, the disciples would experience this communication in that unique overhearing as they carried the answer back to John: they were liaisons bearing urgent words addressed to someone else, but meant entirely for them.

A psalm that we cannot utter as a prayer, that makes us falter and horrifies us, is a hint to us that Someone else is praying, not we. The one who is here protesting his innocence, who is invoking God's judgment, who has come to such infinite depths of suffering, is none other than Jesus Christ himself. (p. 45)

This is nowhere more true than in a close, attentive reading of Psalm 22. Our voices become awkward and then fall away entirely. At a certain point in the accumulation of details, we discover that we can no longer pray along. Someone else is praying.

6.4.2 A close reading of Psalm 22. The literature on Psalm 22 includes attempts to describe its desperate claims of innocence and heart-wrenching appeals as a special rhetoric of prayer aimed at moving the heart of God (Charney, 2013).[229] If studied rhetorical practice could be found to underpin this psalm, it would open up new avenues of study, especially in the form of comparisons between Jerusalem and Athens having to do with the art of striving for public influence (Charney, 2010). However, I am not convinced that Psalm 22 describes "a ceremony in which the speaker explicitly fulfills his vows in public" (p. 260). This seems to me rather tone-deaf. Worse, it severely diminishes the mystery at play in Psalm 22.

Recent studies of Psalm 22 have surveyed the history of its interpretation. The dominant rabbinic view attempted to connect this poem with the dire circumstances of Esther in Persia, but a minority clung to a messianic reading (Tkacz, 2008). Also, the cry of Christ from the cross in

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[229] In terms of bringing ancient Hebrew and Greek rhetoric into conversation, I grant that Psalm 22 blends Aristotle's artistic proofs in a most dramatic fashion. *Logos* persuasion is evident in the appeal to Yahweh's long history of rushing to the side of his people in distress (22:45). *Ethos* persuasion is not limited to the way the speaker in Psalm 22 appeals to the personal history he has shared with Yahweh (22:9-10); the very nature of his address gives evidence of an unshakable devotion in the midst of searing pain. *Pathos* persuasion is self-evident as the writer appeals to the highest of motivations, the glory of God and the ultimate good of humankind (22:27-31), in a poem that drips with rawest feeling. However, none of this is owing to any studied deliberation of rhetorical effects, but rather to the sheer extremity of the situation and to the character of the man in question. He reaches for every possible means for moving the heart of God, and he does not need an Aristotle to show him how.

which he quoted Psalm 22:1 has drawn scholarly attention (e.g., Carey, 2009; Shipp, 2011), and I

will build on that fact that Jesus prayed the words of this psalm in the very act of being crucified.

The structure of Psalm 22 is much discussed in the literature. I favor VanGemeren (2008,

p. 235-236) for noting the clear structural divisions as marked by the emphatic use of pronouns:

"my God" and "yet you" (22:1, 3), "but I" and "yet you" (22:6, 9), and so on. These units come

together in a complex symmetrical structure. When ample evidence for the craftedness of the

psalm rises to the surface, it is no longer possible to argue that the trusting resolution in the final

portion of Psalm 22 might have been a separate psalm that was later stitched together with this

one. [230] It is all a piece of one cloth and recognizing this frees us to contemplate the remarkable

ending of the psalm as a feature of the "best psalm it can be."[231]

In view of all the other startling details of the psalm to follow, it is not a pious fiction to

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[230] My argument that Psalm 22 is an intact literary unit is supported in a quite technical way. An important word of transition between the cry for rescue and the call to praise happens *within a poetic line* at the surprising word *'anitani* [you answered me] in verse 22. This means that Psalm 22 cannot be divided into two poems without severing an individual verse of Hebrew parallelism in two.

[231]In the scholarly conversation on Psalm 22, most of the curiosity concerns a spine-tingling moment: "they have pierced my hands and my feet" (22:16). The fact that this text was composed centuries before crucifixion was invented is not in dispute. However, this translation has long been problematized by critical scholars of the Old Testament who write under such titles as "Psalm 22:17b: more guessing" (Strawn, 2000), and "Circling around the problem again" (Swenson, 2004). The standard claim has been that it is the Septuagint (LXX), the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, that supports the translation, "pierced," and that it is only a bias on the part of Christian translators of the Old Testament that they conveniently follow the LXX to support a reading that points so unavoidably to Christ. As to the witness of the Hebrew Masoretic Text,[231] the Leningrad Codex (950 AD) reads, *ka'ari* [like a lion], not *ka'ru* [they pierced]. The difference comes down to a single Hebrew letter (*yod* instead of *vav*). Of course, "Evil men have encircled me, *like a lion* my hands and feet" is not a reading without its own difficulty. This could be the reason that there are, in fact, some Hebrew texts from before and after the printing press that support "they have pierced my hands and feet." This issue needed to be raised but is easily dispensed with. The publication of articles that challenge the traditional translation ended abruptly in 2005 when a scrap of the Hebrew text was found at Nachal Hever dating from 50-68 AD which has the reading, "they pierced" (Hopkins, 2005). Gren (2005) asserts that accepting this witness to the original text has become "virtually inescapable" (p. 297), and critical scholars, for their part, have moved on. Evidently, it was Jewish copyists whose bias was showing. "Like a lion" is the unsupportable reading. It dates to a time long after Christ had quite inconveniently (for some) fulfilled this detail of the prophecy, and it contradicts not only the far more ancient Hebrew reading, but also the LXX (composed by Jewish believers, no less, more than two centuries before the time of Christ). To be clear, it is the piercing of *hands and feet* that is so striking in Psalm 22:16 (or verse 17 in the Hebrew manuscripts). However, there are other messianic prophecies that speak of his piercing (Isa 53:5; Zec 12:10). (Incidentally, the same verb can also be used of digging, but verses in which it refers to the piercing of ears establishes that "piercing" is well within the semantic range of the verb.)

suggest that we possess in Psalm 22 a "fifth Gospel account of the crucifixion of Christ" (Gren, 2005, p. 286). In fact, David expresses the passion and inward agony of Christ in a way that the later Gospel writers scrupulously avoided for their own rhetorical purposes (notably to maintain an ironic yet beautiful kingly motif for the noble Christ). The young Jesus surely read David and understood his future: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth…" (Jn 12:32).

6.4.2.1 "To the tune of 'Doe of the Morning.'" There is a surprising irony in King David's musical notations to his two most brutal and startling Messianic psalms. The superscriptions of many psalms mention the names of the tunes by which they were to be sung. It would seem that only the sweetest or most contemplative of melodies could go by such titles as "Doe of the Morning" (Ps 22) or "Tune of the Lillies" (Ps 69).[232] By the names of these melodies alone, it is difficult to imagine them married to such raw texts as, "I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat" (22:17) or "I am the song of drunkards…scorn has broken my heart (69:12, 22). David, of course, was a talented musician and one especially skilled at soothing the troubled heart, like that of King Saul. It would be fascinating to know how Psalm 22 actually sounded off the lyre of David. Although we do not, the superscriptions to the Psalms are among those scattered textual moments in the Old Testament canon that bring nondiscursive symbols into consideration (like the colors and shapes of the temple design). Tunes are felt as qualities not easily turned into words.

Music, as rhetoric, leans strongly toward indirection because when messages "are couched in music…listeners do not ordinarily anticipate persuasion and, as a result, [may not be] aware of its complete implications" (Irvine & Kirkpatrick, 1972, p. 273). This is especially true of the psalms when the objects of persuasion are the ones singing messages addressed to others,

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[232] Christian musician, Michael Card (2000) is to be credited with making this observation, although he seems not to know what to make of it besides: "I think it adds to the emotional impact" (p. 24).

rather than listening to words address to themselves. The study of music as rhetoric examines how lyrics and music work together to combine conceptual and emotional content (Sellnow, 2010, p. 116). This scholarship leans heavily on Susanne Langer (1953). It was she who first tuned in to patterns of intensity (or disorientation) and release (or resolution) for the way they can create an *illusion of life*. That term is suggestive of the way song simulates *virtual time* (through music) and *virtual experience* (through text). Most interesting in connection with the superscription of Psalm 22, "Doe of the Morning," is the dynamic of *incongruity* (a technical term for Langer) when the message and the music contradict each other. This creates a third meaning, the ineffable kind, which presses in through a deep, perhaps subconscious ambiguity.

It is difficult to imagine singing about drinking vinegar or suffering a slow suffocation to a pleasing melodic line, or for that matter, to construct a single melody that could be comfortably married to the full range of moods represented in the poem. It is an indirect communication, at very least, in the arousal of subjectivity by the very strangeness of the clash of tune and text, with the worshiper mirroring in inwardness some of the disorientation that disturbs the surface of the words. Later, when the text catches up to the tune, so to speak, in the resolution at the end of Psalm 22, it may be that the heart of the worshiper was being prepared for it all along.

6.4.2.2 "My God, my God, why…?" The quoting of the opening line of Psalm 22 by Christ in his crucifixion is tantamount to referring in shorthand to the entire psalm, just as the phrase, "Onward Christian soldiers" brings the entire hymn to mind (Shipp, 2011, p. 58). That the entire psalm (not verse 1 alone) is an unveiling of the subjectivity of the crucified Lord is further evidenced by the word from the cross "It is finished" (Jn 19:30) that echoes the final verse of Psalm 22, *'asah* [he has done] (v. 31). Buth (2013) argues that when Jesus substituted an Aramaic verb, *sabakhtani* [you have forsaken me], for the Hebrew *'azavtani* (from the same

semantic domain), the utterance manages to be even more sorrowful because of the connotation of divorce and utter personal rejection that inheres in the Aramaic verb (p. 420).

To ascribe such depths of alienation to the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, affords an unprecedented glimpse into the very deepest shadow of mystery within Christian orthodoxy. *Perichoresis* refers to the mutual loving permeation of the Persons of the one true God in one another as was undisturbed through timeless eternity. The contorted face of Christ represents the apparent breaking of the eternal circle of the unspeakably blessed divine Community.[233] (It was a breaking in experience not in fact. God remained God.) This *lamah* [why?] was not a recitation on Jesus' part. In view of David's original literary scream, it cannot be that Christ quoted Psalm 22:1 without the question issuing from the very tortured inwardness which the word prophesied.[234] The Father had forsaken the Son, and the Son, having surrendered the exercise of omniscience, allowed himself to fully experience his abandonment in bewildering confusion and the temptation to utter timeless despair. He had the power to call twelve legions of angels to his aid, yet he possessed a power more unthinkable still. It was the power *not to*.

This one "entered the center of the world and prayed to God from there." It was a willing act of love, free of any coercion to spoil the stunning perfection of his sacrifice. This willingness lends all its poignancy to the "Why?" and is mysteriously expressed in other messianic Psalms. The pre-incarnate Christ prayed, "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me....Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to

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[233] The circle was broken, so to speak, to let humanity in. "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world" (Jn 17:24). Overhearing rises to a new power of signification when the Son speaks to the Father *and the subject matter is you.*

[234] Only hours before his crucifixion, Jesus said to his disciples, "You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me" (Jn 16:32), and a little later, he gave words to the mystery of *perochoresis*, saying to his Father, "I am in you and you are in me" (Jn 17:21). Nothing could have prepared him for the cross, but who can speak of such things?

do your will, O God" (Ps 40:6-8 quoted in Heb 10:5-7 in reference to Christ). In the end, the Father's whole heart went out to the Son—and this, just this, is the gospel—he forever prizes the act as only he can prize it.[235] It is this that lights up the truly religious sphere of existence (Kierkegaard's "Religion B"). To every condemning power—devil, world and our own weak flesh—faith answers, "This is the act *I* prize as only the broken can, and in it I hide myself."

The understanding that it is Christ we hear making the resort to God in Psalm 22 transforms it into a communication of the capability of suffering. The Old Testament prophets and poets were capable of pouring out the most bitter of complaints against the LORD, and they do so at a pitch that may alarm pious believers. In their rawest moments, they were, indeed, not polite or deferential. Psalm 22 provides the most extreme example in, "My God, my God, why have your forsaken me?" This is not permission to vent at God the radical evil in the human heart in some moment of pain. However, words that could express rank hatred and unbelief in the mouth of another represent on the lips of the crucified Christ a deeper sort of trust than the world has seen. The dilemma in the soul of Christ comes precisely because he *knows* who his Father is and says so—"enthroned as the Holy One; the praise of Israel" (22:3)—and he *knows* that his love is infinite, his wisdom perfect, and his power absolute. This knowing is the very reason and fuel for the "fervent cries and tears" (Heb 5:7) of that "precious self" (22:20).[236]

The capability of suffering comes into the life of the Christian who knows that same confusion, the kind that comes because of, not in spite of, the deep experiential knowledge of the way God loves. With this understanding, the religious self needs no longer paper over whatever

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[235] So remarked Jesus: "The reason the Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own" (Jn 10:17-18).

[236] Jesus refers to himself with the unusual word, *yekhidati* [my only one] (22:20). The translation is difficult, but possibilities include: "my precious life" or "my only soul." He refers to his waning life as a unique and unreplaceable possession.

is going on inside or fix the mess on its own before daring to step into the presence of God. The soul who knows him best is the one who understands best that "he can handle me." The primal shout of Israel that we noted in Exodus 2:23 is validated by the way Christ echoed the same word *za'ak* [he cried] in Psalm 22:6. In Christ, God knows what life is like, and in this most painful of psalms hides the permission, should anyone need it, to enter the sanctuary and, as I say, beat on his chest a while. Where is God when it hurts? It means the world to hear in Psalm 22:1 none other than the voice of God the Son.

6.4.2.3 "I am a worm and not a man." There is an accumulation of data in Psalm 22 that quickly grows into the awareness that "Someone else is praying." I need not duplicate the analysis of other scholars on all of the prophetic intricacies which point to Christ's crucifixion, but will give a brief accounting of them in order to offer a few results of my own close reading.

Psalm 22 includes the content of the mocking Jesus endured: "He trusts in the LORD;[237] let the LORD rescue him…since he delights in him" (22:8). The expression, "a band of evil men" (22:16), is ironic by virtue of the religious connotation of *'edat mere'im* [congregation of evil ones] that would fit Kierkegaard's "monstrous crowd" all too well. The speaker is surrounded and put on public display as gruesome entertainment (22:12, 13 & 16). The parallels to Christ's crucifixion continue in: the bones pulled out of joint (22:14); extreme dehydration (22:14, 15) (cf. also Ps 69:21 where vinegar is offered for his thirst); and the gambling over his clothing (22:18). The counting of his bones (22:17) further suggests the public nakedness (or nearly so) of the sufferer. And, yes, "they have pierced my hands and my feet" (22:17b).

As mentioned, the details come together in a portrait of perfect suffering. The appeal

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[237] This is a rich expression to which we will return below: *gol 'el Adonay* [he rolled to the LORD]. The crowd taunts Jesus as one who surrendered his every concern for himself to his Father like rolling some great boulder off of himself and onto the shoulders of God. The "congregation" around the cross is scandalized that this devotion, if it were genuine, could bring the suffering one to such a place.

Jesus makes to his own innocence, as is explicit in many psalms, comes in this case as part of an enthymeme: God did not fail to rescue Israel in her distress: so *how can he abandon this faithful Son?* (This last part is left to the hearer to supply.) This transparent claim contributes to the sense that believers cannot pray this psalm in their own name, but only in his. For them, the path of this psalm runs through the mystery of that life that "is hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3).

As to the more subtle connotations, the expression of profound dehumanization Christ experienced—"I am a worm and not a man"—is enhanced in many ways. Metaphors of water and wax (22:14) express formlessness to capture the inner feeling of the anguished (VanGemeren, 2008, p. 243). His bones, heart, and tongue all fail him (22:14-15). He can no longer function as a human being. The Son of God came incognito as a man and nothing more, but in the extremity of crucifixion, he knew himself to be hardly even that. Yet Christ responds with a most poignant appeal to his own humanity by poeticizing God as his midwife: "Yet you brought me out of the womb….From birth I was cast upon you." The word *rekhem* [womb] (22:10) comes from the semantic root that conjures the deep compassion (or "womb-feeling") that this sufferer knows can only be found in his Father. There was nowhere else to look for it.[238]

In Psalm 22's resolution, Christ stands shoulder-to-shoulder with his whole redeemed family in the world, and tilts his head back to addresses God also "from there": "In the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises" (Ps 22:22; quoted in Heb 2:12 in reference to Christ). Just as I observed in Exodus 3, Psalm 22 reaches in the end for its timeless audience in the power of divine performative utterance: "Future generations will be told about the Lord.

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[238] There are other connotations that could be missed in the foreignness of the text and genre. A modern audience does not easily relate to "My strength is dried up like a potsherd" (22:15); potsherds were not only worthless, but a broken pot, like a broken man, can scarcely be put back together (VanGemeren, 2008, p. 243). For another example, dogs (22:16) were not "man's best friend" in ancient Jerusalem. If they were not seen roaming the garbage dumps, they were licking the blood or biting the flesh of those killed or otherwise unable to fend them off. In Psalm 22, the dogs may be literal, or else, like the "strong bulls of Bashan" (22:12), they are figures for the crowd that contributed all it could to the misery of Christ.

They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—for he has done it" (22:31).

Wherever people dare to believe that these ancient predictions come true in them…they do.

The "surprising reorientation" that marks Psalms 22:22-31 is an especially high doxology. The suffering Servant anticipates a day when he will worship the Father as one drumming up praise in the center of the redeemed throng (22:22). He calls on them to enter into his joy (22:23). The reason he offers for joy is that his own abandonment was only for a time (22:24), and he envisions the same fullness for people who will erupt in praise to God from all the ends of the earth and to the end of time (22:27-31). A *merism* comes just before the end of the psalm: "all the rich will feast…all who go down to the dust will kneel" (22:29. This is a common Hebraism in which the writer mentions the two extremes of a spectrum (e.g., "both young and old"), and the enthymeme is that what is said about those two groups must apply to everyone in between. The rich will learn what richness means, and those who "cannot keep themselves alive" (22:30) will no longer need to because of what is literally the Psalm's final word: *'Asah*—"It is finished!" To bring the close reading of Psalm 22 to a close, verse 31 has another example of the edifying impact of a single Hebrew letter. It is another example of the way hindsight can recognize that the theology of the apostles was there all along in the Psalms.

6.4.2.4 "Proclaim his righteousness." The word *tsidqato* [his righteousness] ends with the letter *vav* as its pronominal suffix. The promise is that future generations "will proclaim *his* righteousness to a people yet unborn" (22:31). This provokes again the awareness that the believer possesses no righteousness of his or her own, and that the only righteousness God could ever accept and embrace to himself is that of his Son.

The death or life of the Christian is not determined by his own resources; rather he finds

both only in the Word that comes to him from the outside, in God's Word to him. The

Reformers expressed it this way: Our righteousness is an "alien righteousness," a

righteousness that comes from outside of us (*extra nos*). (Bonhoeffer, 1954, p. 23)

The phrase "*his* righteousness" in the final poetic line of Psalm 22 will be reshaped into the name

of the Messiah himself, *Adonai tsidkenu* [the LORD *our* righteousness] (Jer 23:6). This will

become the name of the city of God as well (Jer 33:16). The reason the sinner can stand before

God is God. "It is an honor to owe everything to Christ."

This explains the assertion that the Christ who prays in the psalms prays *vicariously,* that

is, for us and in our stead. This is that healing from behind at the site of psalmists' most potent

wounding. Who is able to credibly shout their own innocence to the sky? Who is capable of

seeking after God with such holy and passionate ardor, even from a bed (or cross) of pain? That

Psalm 22 is Jesus praying both *for us* and *in our place* is the healing at that place of bitter

honesty. It is the difference between straining to match the character of the Righteous One who

speaks in the psalms and being found *in him* by childlike trust and dependency. This is the width

of the "broad ugly ditch" between a direct and indirect reading of Psalm 22.

6.4.3 "I have lived some life for you." The identification of Christ as the "I" of Psalm 22

brings forward the truly religious with all the suddenness Kierkegaard could only have marveled

at. "I am not capable of all this," says the religious self that immerses in the poem, every illusion

undone. *"I Am,"* says this "someone else who prays," so that the self may yet will to be itself and

"rest transparently in the power that made it." This is the very definition of Christian spiritual

wholeness against the possibility of despair, and we met it earlier as a theme of the entire psalter,

"Blessed are all who take refuge in [the Son]" (Ps 2:12).

For the Hebrews, it is a condition known as *shalom* [peace]. They cherished an obscure

prophecy that *Sar Shalom* would one day appear, the very "Prince of Everything-the-way-it's-

supposed-to-be."[239] The life that is really life is simply to die in identification with Christ in his vicarious dying as Psalm 22 brings it so heartbreakingly close. The thing is to concur with the judgment of God, and to let the self come to the awful conclusion about itself, "This death is my death," and so to be crucified with him and included in him in his rising. Psalm 22 brings that near as well. We set out to account for the power of the Psalms and have stumbled upon a divinely inspired version of *psychogogia.* It is the leading of the soul, not only out of itself but even more, into Christ. It comes in the catharsis and release that is humble repentance and faith.

The great illusion of Christendom is that the meaning and purpose of theology is our living for God, when in reality, it is Christ's living for us. In him, we can dare to be sinners, that is, to give up the pretense that we are any of us, of ourselves, capable or qualified to talk to God in the full manner of the Hebrew psalms. The capabilities that the psalms communicate have to do with living in Christ and being included in him by faith. We would proclaim *his* righteousness, never our own, to such people as share our moment on the stage. The capability of the book of Psalms is that of living in perpetual orientation to God as he has revealed himself in his Son, and this out of every situation, sunlit or shadowed. Yancey (2001) records the moving story of a mathematician named Shcharansky learning to survive in the Soviet Gulag. When guards took away his tattered copy of the Hebrew psalter, he laid down in the snow refusing to move until they returned it. It is no wonder. "Equipment for living" indeed.

In the psalms, we gain unprecedented access to the innermost thought of Christ, and it comes through that genre that most ingeniously compels its audience to think along. We are

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[239] In the verse I allude to (Isaiah 9:6), a great mystery is concealed in a simple substitution of verbs. According to the prophecy, the Prince of Peace would be "*born* for us" [*yullad*-lanu] and a son would be "*given* to us"—*nittan-lanu*. In one sense, the Messiah is *born* just as any human child comes into existence. Yet, in another sense, he is *not* born (as if here were existing for the first time), but *given*. The Ultimate Paradox is, indeed, not confined to the New Testament for one who knows how to look for it.

given room to think our own thoughts, too, and to add our own faltering harmonies to his exquisite song. We learn to open our own mouths, to suffer, to endure, to hope such as we are because there is a better Pray-er who has already "lived some life for us." It is that warm reality of Christ that we enter in humble faith and—this is edification—we pray to God "from there."

6.4.4 The ultimate overhearing. Before transitioning from the poetry of psalms to that of the prophets, it is worth reiterating that all of the communication analyzed above has met us in a space of overhearing. The "best text" exploration of the Hebrew psalms has brought us to the very heights of that dynamic. We have been eavesdropping on the most sacred of conversations, those things that have passed between God the Father and God the Son in the very act of redeeming the world. It includes, "My God, my God, why…?" However, this was not the end.

Consider that other word of Christ from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). This is not addressed to the soldier holding the hammer. He is flatly ignored. Nor is it addressed to the sort of world that would crucify its truest and best. It is a matter between the Father and the Son, and somehow from that very thing issues its extraordinary power to stun and to hush those who listen in from the outside. They have nothing whatsoever to contribute and are not consulted. In this "*Father, forgive*" rests a quiet power to dispel every illusion humanity holds about itself and every illusion it holds about God. Indeed, if the whole world—angry, dying, terrified and in the dark—could only hide itself in a particular cemetery, with Kierkegaard nearby, a finger to his lips, what it would overhear next is better still by far. The Gardener, forceful and tender, turned that woman around with a word. "He said, 'Mary'" (Jn 20:16). It is a power to wound and a power to heal, an indirect communication.[240]

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[240] "My God, my God…" is, in fact, not the only psalm verse Jesus quoted from the cross. "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46) draws on Psalm 31:5. He "rolls to the Lord," just as the crowd had said. The capability or "equipment for dying," so to speak, was not for Christ alone. When Stephen, the first

6.5 Irony and Humor in the Hebrew Prophets.

The transition to the new argument that is before us now is so abrupt that it may as well come from Kierkegaard himself:

> It is indirect communication to place jest and earnestness together in such a way that the composite is a dialectical knot….If anyone wants to have anything to do with this kind of communication, he will have to untie the knot himself. (1848/1991, p. 133)

Just as when an audience is held spellbound by the narratives of Moses or soothed by the music of the psalms, people who are being amused do not know that they are being persuaded. The content of the message does not seem to be a serious matter even for the one communicating it, but this is a miscalculation. The use of humor in religious communication does not mean that earnestness is lacking. It can mean that the communicator's commitment to the maieutic is quite serious indeed when the infinite weightiness of the subject matter is veiled behind an ironic wink. By blending ultimate issues with humor or jest, Kierkegaard was extending his strategies for pushing his readers away: no one ought to take Christianity seriously just because he did.

Consensus, scholarly or otherwise, about what constitutes ironic communication is elusive. However, at the bottom, it involves a dialectical relationship between the *said* and *unsaid* that creates a third meaning. This deeply nuanced third meaning is more a thing to be savored for those who enter the charged rhetorical space of the writer or communicator than it is to be explained to those who cannot see it for themselves. Irony always speaks to an implied audience (whether it exists or not) that would naively run with the first available meaning. Thus irony individuates in the same way that humor does in general (Hummel, 1979, p. 124): how each person stands in relation to the truth is revealed under the rhetorical spotlight by their

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Christian martyr, cried out under the stones, "Lord Jesus, *receive my spirit"* (Ac 7:59) we can only surmise that the capability came to him through yet another divinely arranged overhearing.

joining (or not) in the communal laugh or the knowing glance. A space of understanding opens up between those who do and those who do not. At the same time, irony is able to create community better than direct communication by means of the conspiratorial bond among those on the inside, the ones who have seen through the verbal surface. They participate in the intricate intellectual dance with the speaker and share in the communion of sight.

Irony is a "graceful stinging" (Anolli, Ciceri, and Infantino, 2002, p. 76). However, when it comes to this form of truth-telling, the wound can run deep. There is much to be repudiated in any given life, and irony of the Old Testament variety, much like that of Kierkegaard, especially targets the false ultimates by which people live their lives. Old Testament irony is the ancient iconoclasm against false images of every kind. It is a criticism rooted in the perception of the distance between pretense and reality—between the outer display and the inward truth—and mocks those who think they are something when they are not.[241] As we will see, it often comes in exaggerated form in order to make cultural distortions apparent for what they are (O'Connor, 1970, p. 33). It lays bare a false or uninspired religiosity and offers the spiritual dissonance that these lack, an awaking from their socially respectable slumber.

6.5.1 Stable irony versus the "absolute infinite negation." The presence of irony in the Old Testament has been well-established in biblical scholarship for decades. If irony is itself a tantalizing strategy for indirect communication, I can appeal to such scholarly tomes as *Irony in the Old Testament* (Good, 1981) and *Irony and Meaning in the Bible* (Sharp, 2009) in total as support for my thesis. However, I draw cautiously from that research. What happens to the

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[241] Good (1981) traces the word irony to its roots in the *eiron* of Greek comedy, the person we might call the "ironic man." The *eiron* shrewdly poses as less than he is and has for a foil the *alazon*, the pompous fool. This background invites reflection on the deep theological irony, so to speak, in the first coming of Christ. I refer to the unrecognizability of God in human flesh. His humble appearance as someone infinitely less than he is (cf. Php 2:8) would mean the ultimate revealing of the proud in their conceit (Lk 2:35).

familiar voice of the inspired Old Testament at the hands of scholars specializing in irony is eerily similar to the treatment Kierkegaard himself receives. The vitality of the Christian content in Kierkegaard's authorship can be siphoned away by ascribing irony to his work in its entirety, and by obscuring his true voice in a supposed "radical undecidability" (Tietjen, 2013, p. 138). We have noted this already. To be clear, however, Kierkegaard himself knew the game well.

Irony, as an "absolute infinite negation," was a weapon Kierkegaard wielded against the prevailing philosophies of his day, and he understood that Socratic irony would dissolve all truth if it were allowed to. Universal irony can undermine everything with its endless cycles of negation, and the universe offers no point of undefeatable resistance against the total undermining of meaning for those who love the abyss. In fact, the entire project of Sharp (2009) is to insinuate that the Old Testament may be *globally* ironic and in this way she subverts its entire received meaning and alienates its familiar voice. She admits (without irony) that "universes hang in the balance" (p. 6) when it comes to the identification of irony in Scripture. Some arrive with her at a complete destabilization the Hebrew text. In the "best text" view, the biblical text means everything it has ever meant, but scholars of this persuasion would burn every bridge behind them. This is the dark side of scholarly close reading: a great text may, in a quite tragic sense, "never be the same."[242]

For all the richness and layers of the prophets' irony, "absolute infinite negation" is never their way. They are no more endless debunkers than Kierkegaard was. Wayne Booth wrote the book on the present subject, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1974), and for him, the identification of irony

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[242] As a professional hazard, biblical scholars often succumb to a weakness for finding the ironic reading always to be the more interesting one, and they drive ever deeper into the woods of that hermeneutic of suspicion. Naturally, readers play the fool if they miss a note of irony where the ancient writers intended it, reading with grim seriousness what may have amused the writers themselves. However, there are errors in both directions. There remains a place for the naivety of faith that is willing to play the fool for Jesus' sake.

in written texts requires the discipline of knowing where to stop. Sandy and Geise (1995) can be appreciated for insisting that a biblical text should not be understood as ironic without some compelling reason to pick up the reverse train of thought (p. 79). In other words, to label a text as ironic obligates the critic to a disciplined close reading of the actual *said* of the text.

It is critical that I distil here the way I understand irony for the purpose of the analysis to follow: in a clean break from the "infinite negation" of universal irony, I will treat the irony of the Old Testament as *stable irony*. In other words, I will concern myself with irony that is a controlled element and one which assumes a definite religious position, just as Kierkegaard did (Tietjen, 2013, p. 8). The fundamental characteristic of stable irony is the perception of incongruity. Of course, the same is true of humor according to an understanding that goes at least as far back as Aristotle. For this reason, my analysis will not make a fine distinction between irony and humor as I consider the relentless exploiting of incongruity in the prophet Isaiah's polemic against idolatry. Leaning on Good (1981), I assert that biblical irony comes into its own as a communication of capability. It was a strategy for leading God's ancient people into a bone-deep understanding of what it would mean to *live* in covenant relationship with him (p. 241). Incidentally, Friedman (2000) agrees that Isaiah's polemic counts as both irony and humor, arguing that Isaiah's communication is thus quite humanizing, rather than religiously aloof.[243] There is more that must be said on this subject in preparation for the close reading to come.

6.5.2 The presence of humor in divine revelation. "The total absence of humor in the Bible is one of the most singular things in all literature," so said the English philosopher, Alfred

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[243] Friedman (2002) contributes to the debate about whether there is humor in the Old Testament by noting a subjective element of the question: seeing the full range of Old Testament humor requires an appreciation of humor in its darker forms. The book of Esther lampoons Israel's Persian captors. At the feast of Purim, Jewish children whoop in laughter as they munch on their "Haman cookies," even though the story resolves in a mass hanging. Geybels (2011) connects this brand of humor to the struggle of a minority community to survive (p. 18). This certainly fits the context of the book of Esther.

North Whitehead (cited in Konner, 2007, p. 113). Humor has been seen by some as a form altogether too undignified for God (the inventor of laughter, no less). Others argue that it would be surprising, indeed, if a book that so reliably attends to the full range of human experience left humor out of the mix, especially given the incongruity worked so deeply into the fabric of human experience (Rogness, 2012; Biddle, 2013). "Christianity is not at all closer to heavy-mindedness [*Tungsind*] than to light-mindedness" (Kierkegaard, 1848/1991, p. 154). As to that subjective element in the perception of biblical humor, it is here to stay, evading especially those who fail to open themselves up to the atmosphere of the Hebrew Scriptures (Lindvall, 2003).[244]

I sense high biblical comedy when the statue of the false god Dagan tumbles over in the presence of the Ark of the Covenant, its arms, legs, and head all falling clean off (1Sa 5:4-5). As that account plays out, most English translations are too polite to reveal that the images which the Philistines were forced to fashion out of gold were in the shape of their *tekhorim* [hemorrhoids]. This is funny stuff, but you would not know it from the word *tumors* in most Bibles. "How would you film it?" is the question that reveals the comedic element in the text.

There are plenty of other examples of Hebrew texts that rise to a comedic level that can scarcely be denied.[245] The writers in Hebrew (and occasionally the cognate language of

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[244] At the same time, identifying biblical humor is always tentative. The modern reader has not been enculturated into the ancient world to know in every case what societal norms are being turned on their heads. All of the difficulties of cross-cultural interpretation are heightened when it comes to knowing (especially in literature) when a communication is meant to be funny. This is because of "a lack of familiarity with the imaginative universe in which their acts are signs" (Geertz, 1973, p. 30). Laughing in the wrong places involves responding to incongruity that is purely a result of the hermeneutical distance, a classic example being the descriptions of idealized female beauty in the Song of Songs—"your belly is a heap of wheat" (7:2, ESV). Biddle (2013) offers an excellent study in *A Time to Laugh: Humor in the Bible*. He discusses the physical or autonomous character of comedy, the involuntary and ecstatic aspects of laughter, and the intrusive and subversive power of humor. It comes in from the outside. It wounds from behind. This is where our primary interest lies.

[245] A person might read Judges 3, for example, to a Christian youth group; once they realize it is permissible to laugh, they will. My personal candidate for "funniest thing in the Bible" involves the rivalry between Haman and Mordecai in the book of Esther. In the context of chapter 6, verse 12 still makes me laugh out loud, but I won't explain the joke. Ironies multiply as we imagine a modern Bible Study group discussing this account in sober and earnest tones.

Aramaic) could positively relish pointing out the incongruities to which members of their audience were blind or had an active interest in denying, using humor to smuggle in quite subversive messages.[246] For their part, the Hebrew prophets turned to poetry as the genre that allowed them to pepper their messages with a full variety of wordplay and paronomasias (or puns), which are mostly lost in translation.[247] As to historical prose, the narrative surrounding the birth of Isaac is especially notable for displaying the full breadth of the reasons people laugh. These range from the joyless laughter of Sarah in the offense of her reason before the divinely absurd (Gn 18:12-15), to the belly-laugh of faith at the sheer incongruity of a child born in her 90th year. Abraham named the boy *Yitzkhak* [Laughter] and Sarah blessed the name with shaking shoulders. It is another example of performative utterance as communication that not only *points* to things beyond itself, as the best stories do, but also *reaches* for a distant audience to draw it into that "new state of affairs": "God has brought me laughter, and *all who hear about this will laugh with me* [emphasis added] (Gn 21:6). This is the segue to a final preliminary matter. It is critical to articulate the special indirectness of irony and humor—note again that I am not sharply distinguishing the two—and to link that with elements of a theology of incongruity.

6.5.3 Biblical humor as an indirect communication. A biblical theology of humor begins in an ontology of the human being as *animal ridens* [the creature who laughs], or as *homo ludens,* [man the player].[248] This ontology is rooted, in turn, in the deep incongruities of human existence. Not only is the image of God marvelously incongruous with the human clay upon which it is stamped, but fallen human nature knows incongruities of another kind, those that

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[246] When it works, humor is a most sophisticated strategy for navigating sensitive communication, beginning in the "oasis of momentary disengagement" (Kierkegaard, cited in Brothers, 2014, p. 74) that allows room for hears to step back and breathe.

[247] "Tell it not in Gath" (Mic 1:10) involves a pun in which the word *Gath* sounds like the Hebrew for "tell." Thus begins a compact series of ten similar puns based on the proper names of towns and cities.

[248] Fisher (1989) affirms this designation and credits it to the Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga (p. 12).

would make the soul laugh so as not to cry. There comes to every self the nagging sense that it does not fit in the same world as death and was perhaps made for another. Humor is ever poised to break out among we "animated dirtballs" (Biddle, 2013, p. 134), yet finding what is funny in the human condition is not a contradiction to human dignity. As G.K. Chesterton observed, "Every man is important if he loses his life; and every man is funny if he loses his hat and has to run after it" (cited in Gansky, 2014, p. 289). Finally, incongruous perspectives mingle especially in the divided Christian heart—the grave and weighty business of getting our due and a wholesome spirit that needs only to become strong enough to laugh it down.

When the irony of the Hebrew poets is aimed at the serious illusions of the idolatrous human self, they prefer to perform a most non-intrusive surgery. Their purposes are, from start to last, redemptive. Their poetry is "equipment for living" the ironic life, a life lived with the false bottoms knocked out and the illusions of self-importance shattered, and the sooner the better. As we have seen, Kierkegaard understood the self as a self-relation, or an "I-I." This explains much about his penchant for jest since humor involves the "ability to distance one's self from one's self [that is] essential to human self-understanding" (Murphy, 2009, p. 226). According to Booth (1974), irony means rescue from relativity (p. 172) and to true irony belongs a freedom that issues in joy and blessing (p. 252). Freedom is the self laughing at itself for carrying the weight of a world that will dangle in space whether one carries it or not. In the Christian sense, growing in the kingdom of God means coming into deeper congruity with the way things are in the universe that Christ himself holds together (Biddle, 2013). This movement toward freedom by means of an ironic laugh is pure Kierkegaard.

What makes humor so definitively indirect, whether it comes through the Word of God or otherwise, is the dynamic according to which the truth that makes a thing funny cannot be

spoken directly. To explain the joke is to kill what it was meant to communicate, *which is the laugh itself*. The laugh is subjectivity. The laugh is the appropriation of whatever truth was smuggled in, the sign that he or she "gets it." The phenomenon among communicators of "like known by like" is at its most palpable where one person leans on another, both crying with laughter, struggling for breath. This illustrates the communal aspects of indirect communication when the "essential secret" becomes a secret shared.

Gentle, self-deprecating humor is the price of admission to the pleasantness of Christian oneness. However, a fragile sense of self hides behind the deadliest illusions (self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, and self-importance) all couched within the deadly seriousness with which the self takes itself. No message can arouse more opposition in the face of such formidable armor than a direct communication, "You are ridiculous," even when softened by a smile and, "Of course, so am I." However, if the one can get the other to laugh, how the bubble would burst.[249] Humor "forges a horizon of understanding" (Murphy, 2009, p. 226), and biblical humor does so especially where the surface meaning of the text and the ego are both punctured. The humor of the prophets, even at its most biting, is an extension of the freedom of a wholesome perspective. We enter the space of laughter and are surprised to find that we can tolerate the incongruities of existence in the paradox of a weighty and glorious jest.

6.5.4 A close reading of Isaiah's idolatry polemic.

To whom, then, will you compare God?

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[249] This is a theme across the works of C.S. Lewis, as illustrated in the scene in *The Great Divorce*, (1964) in which a man's former wife, in pure self-mortified mirth, tries to push her laughter through the defenses of her former husband who assumes the ridiculous posturing of a huge but wounded ego. Lewis' narrator explains: "I don't know that I ever saw anything more terrible than [that] struggle…against joy. For he had almost been overcome. Somewhere…there must have been gleams of humor and reason in him. For one moment, while she looked at him in her love and mirth, he saw the absurdity of the Tragedian" (p. 129). (Someone who didn't know better might guess that Kierkegaard, not Lewis, had written that novel, with the overhearing in fear and trembling of spiritual conversation, the seeming invincibility of human illusion, and the image in which people gradually become solid—or edified—by such truth as manages to break through.)

What image will you compare him to?

As for an idol, a craftsman casts it,

and a goldsmith overlays it with gold.

He looks for a skilled craftsman

To set up an idol that will not topple. (Isaiah 40:18, 20)

These verses set up a theme which Isaiah will elaborate fully ten times in the major literary unit that consists of Isaiah chapters 40-48. These nine chapters are unified around the promise of Israel's deliverance from bondage in Babylon, and in that context, the illusion of idolatry is an intriguing motif.[250] As I alluded earlier, this polemic meets the modern reader in a particularly safe overhearing. Its target, the worship of wood and stone, seems quite distant, indeed, from the foibles and false ultimates of the modern reader who may not find the following examples to be funny, per say. After all, these are not our incongruities…or are they?

As a key to the detection of irony, an informed reader may sense something unreliable about Isaiah's communication. The problem is that, technically speaking, paganism made a distinction between the physical image and the numen or divinity itself (Hummel, 1979, p. 219). If idolaters actually knew that the idols they created were not gods themselves, is Isaiah's ridicule even fair? Did he fail to understand paganism? After all, he is in no position to ridicule the transcendent or to lampoon passionate devotion on the part of those who believe. His target can hardly be the way faith clings to mystery against all the evidence that daily assaults the senses. What, then, is the incongruity at the center of Isaiah's relentless truth-telling? If he is not constructing a rational apologetic for Yahweh or an evidence-based argument against idol

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[250] All that I have discussed previously about the artistry of Hebrew poetry is exemplified at the hands of its highest master. Isaiah's poetry is highly decorated with chiastic patterning and soundplay, for example, the Hebrew expression for choosing a piece of wood that will not rot is: *lo' yirkav yivkhar.*

practices, then what, precisely, is the force of his argument? After attending to the themes that Isaiah unfolds in connection with his subject matter, I will argue on the basis of a simple cluster analysis that Isaiah's approach is a thoroughly indirect communication, combining infinite earnestness with a quite wonderful and liberating jest.

6.5.4.1 "Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?" In announcing the idol polemic in 40:19-20, the punchline, so to speak, is the observation that closes the vignette: "[The idolater] looks for a skilled craftsman to set up *an idol that will not topple*." In the chapter immediately following, Isaiah's next iteration of the subject ends on the same comedic note (41:6-7).[251] After depicting the idol artisans encouraging one another in their work, Isaiah closes the scene with the craftsman actually nailing the idol down so that it won't fall over. In this and the examples to follow, the sense of incongruity is deepened by Isaiah's skillful use of enthymeme.

Without using that term, Burke affirms the special influence of maieutic communication in poetry. When an audience supplies what has been carefully left unspoken by the poet, it is "creatively participating…[and is] exalted because it has a feel of collaborating in the assertion" (1969b, p. 58). Fisher (1989) makes note of the same rhetorical dynamic: when some small piece of an argument is suppressed, it becomes an invitation to the audience to complete the logic, thereby "contributing to its own persuasion" (p. 28). The present example (of the many I could comment on) is quite subtle. Even though the physical idol is not, strictly speaking, the same entity as the numen, the very least thing an object of ultimate trust might be expected to do is to keep its representation from falling over. This much Isaiah does not say. It is not his way to kill

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[251] These verses nicely exemplify the impulse to intensification in Hebrew parallelism. In the first stich, the artisans simply "encourage" each other. The following lines become increasingly vivid and concrete: the one who smooths with the hammer spurs on the one who strikes the anvil, saying about the welding, "It is good," and so on. A study by Clines (1987) examined this very portion of Isaiah to advance a small nuance into the study of parallelism, arguing that *increasing precision* is the key to the form.

the "joke," nor is he the one to whom the confession must be made. His maieutic calls on the dim awareness that must exist somewhere within the pagan artisan as he reaches for another nail. The idolatrous self must admit to itself that it does not think much of its object of ultimate reliance. This is not innocent ignorance; the nature of illusion is to deny what one knows. If this is, in fact, humor, it is of the Seinfeld-esque observational variety. It is Isaiah spotting the row of nails in the base of an idol: "What's *that* all about?"

Similarly, when Isaiah first introduced his idol polemic (40:19), he merely said, "As for an idol, a craftsman casts it…" and left it to his audience to intuit what is absurd about a god that people make instead of *vice versa*. Later iterations elaborate the bald fact (41:6-7; 44:12-17), emphasizing not only the attention to detail on the part of the artisans but even more their grim fanaticism: "The blacksmith…gets hungry and loses his strength; he drinks no water and grows faint" (44:12). The incongruity reaches its heights when the craftsman splits a block of wood. With half, he makes a fire and says, "Ah, I am warm," and with the other half he makes his god and says, "Save me; you are my god" (44:16-17). The prophet Jeremiah conspires in the joke and always turn to the poetic genre to do so, for example, "They say to wood, 'You are my father,' and to stone, 'You gave me birth'" (Jer 2:27). Once again, these things are only funny when you once visualize them. To imaging filming, it is to realize the scene fits better in the genre of Monty Python than some earnest Christian production. The solemnity in these things is a swelling bubble ready for bursting, but reason will not do it. Far better is a single explosive guffaw.

Isaiah exploits another set of absurdities in the sheer impotence of the false gods. As before, Isaiah does not paint this portrait all at once but circles back, again and again, to add new brushstrokes to what he sketched in chapter 40. After an idol, upon request, is unable to reveal

either what has happened in the past or what is yet to come, the smirking prophet pleads for it to do *anything* at all, whether good or bad (41:22-23). After several satirical chapters, he isolates quite compactly the reason and occasion for indirect communication. Of the idolater he comments, "A deluded heart misleads him" (44:20), and with the expression, "No one stops to think" (44:19), he names the modest objective of his communication form. Only stop and think.

One theme Isaiah riffs on quite frequently involves the literal senselessness of the idols that he saw mirrored in the spiritual senselessness of the idolaters. In chapter 6, Isaiah had constructed a chiasm to portray this fatal quality in Israel. The verbal patterning involves the sequence of nouns: heart, ears, eyes / eyes, ears, heart.

Make the *heart* of this people calloused;

> make their *ears* dull

> and close their *eyes*.

Otherwise they might see with their *eyes*,

> Hear with their *ears*,

> Understand with their *hearts*,

And turn and be healed. (Isa 6:9-10)

These are the Scriptures that provided the springboard for my entire thesis. Jesus drew from them in Matthew 13 to explain the indirect communication style to which he turned in the form of his parables. As I argued earlier and at length, people who are described (literally) as "seeing, they do not see" require something more than a further accumulation of information.

In the chapters we are considering now, Isaiah repeats the charge, "Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see" (42:18). Although Isaiah never completes the logic for his audience, he begins to address the idolaters as if they have come to resemble the idols themselves. There were

becoming that which they loved. Isaiah writes, "For I knew how stubborn you were; the sinews of your neck were iron, your forehead was bronze" (48:4). In an especially skillful example of poetic ambiguity, it eventually becomes impossible to determine from context whether Isaiah is speaking about the idols or the idolaters when he writes, "Their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see" (44:18). The enthymeme, the ironic truth-telling, is that he could be speaking just as well about the one as the other. This is that "graceful stinging" in the non-functioning eyes and ears of the idols (not to mention their feet) as Israel's comic "mini-me." The humor is analogous to that of the best impressionists. We laugh because the resemblance is uncanny.

The feet of the idol are for show. "[The idolaters] lift it to their shoulders and carry it; they set it up in its place, and there it stands. From that spot it cannot move" (46:7). If the incongruities above seem more ironic than humorous, the note of the plainly comic returns in the brilliant vignette that opens chapter 46. Not only do idols need to be cared for, like a sick aunt, so that they don't fall over, but the act of carrying them positively breaks the pagan back.

Bel bows down,

Nebo stoops low…

They stoop down together,

unable to rescue the burden. (46:1-2)

Once again, to visualize it, or even to go so far as to ask how a person would film the scene, can do much for realizing the incongruity. This one comes after five lampooning chapters have played out at the expense of the idolaters and the empty nothings they fashion with sweaty intensity and uncalculated cost. After all that, we are given to observe these images in profile, seeming to bow in worship of Yahweh. Look closer and you smell the perspiration and hear the exaggerated groans of those who can no longer bear the burden of their lie. Throughout his

treatment, Isaiah has cast these people as themselves incapable of detecting the irony of their circumstances—"no one stops to think"—and this in itself is a devastating rhetorical blow.

Isaiah has not indulged himself in some entertaining diversion to distract from the religious gravitas of the piece. He has turned to pure jest as a means for realizing his spiritual vision—"If I can just get you to laugh!" These backbreakers are, after all, their ultimacies. Just then Yahweh breaks in, as he does frequently in Isaiah 40-48 with the characteristic beauty of Isaiah's sublime rhetoric. These are the clashing colors he adds to the vivid polemic. I can imagine no truer Kierkegaardian collision of divine earnestness with prophetic jest, and it happens throughout this literary unit (as we will see).

Listen to me, O house of Jacob…

> you whom I have upheld since you were conceived,

> and have carried since your birth.

Even to your old age and gray hairs

> I am he who will sustain you.

I have made you and I will carry you;

> I will sustain you and I will rescue you. (Isa 46:3-4)

6.5.4.2 "To whom will you compare me?" When radical skeptic David Hume (1711-1776) tells an irreverent joke about the real presence of Christ in the celebration of Holy Communion,[252] he begins by saying that the doctrine is "so absurd that it eludes the force of all argument" (1757/2007, p. 67). Christians understand well the unreasonableness of their faith as it looks from the outside. This is why the force of Hume's rhetoric cannot be that of reason but

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[252] A priest inadvertently lays a coin on the tongue of a communicant. When the coin would not dissolve, the man cried to the priest, "I wish you had not committed some mistake: I wish you had not given me God the Father: He is so hard and tough there is no swallowing him" (p. 67).

ridicule. The damage would be done not in some sudden realization on the part of the pious of what the doctrine of Real Presence actually claims, but rather if they found the promise of Christ to be a fitting object of humor. In this, they would cross the sacred line. "If I can just get you to laugh." Humor reveals how a person exists in relation to truth even if they continue to assent to it intellectually.

Like the "absolute infinite negation" of irony when the tool has fallen into the wrong hands, humor loses its inward joy when there is nothing left in the world that is so precious and so sacred as to exist outside of its realm. God, as revealed in Christ, is never the object of biblical humor. Never. "For in faith man knows that he can take only God with ultimate seriousness. All else is susceptible to the ironic vision" (Good, 1981, p. 245-246).

All of this yields a powerful insight in the positive example (compared to Hume's joke) of Isaiah's idol polemic. As a reason-based apologetic, it would fail. The pagan idolaters knew what they were doing in the manufacture of idols. They knew what they meant by it and what they did not. Their illusion called for that deeper incongruity of earnestness and jest. It is signaled by three repetitions of the rhetorical question within the idol polemic: to whom can Yahweh be compared? (Isaiah 40:18, 25; 46:5). A simple cluster analysis reveals Isaiah's true subject. Here is the key: throughout his polemic, he never once targets the incongruities involved in idol worship without couching those verses with elaborations on this ultimate theme: "Who is like the LORD?" He does so in three motifs (as follows). Each is an epiphany.

The attention the idol manufacturers must pay so that their creations do not fall off their stands (40:20) is set in its first iteration against the backdrop of the first motif: the *cosmic dimensions* of the works of Yahweh. Before him, "the nations are a drop in the bucket" (40:17), and the very stars appear in the sky at night because "he summons each by name" (40:26). When

Isaiah adds the bit about the nails in the next chapter (41:7), he introduces it in terms of the LORD as the one "calling forth the generations from the beginning," and as the one who was "with the first of them and with the last" (41:4). That God alone has the *capability of revelation* is the second motif. Isaiah asserted this before the vignette involving the half-block of wood (44:8), and again immediately before the image of the false gods bending low: "Who foretold [their futility] long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the LORD?" (45:21). This motif of revelation then flows immediately into the third and greatest motif: the heart of revelation is an *astonishing redemption:* "And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. Turn to me and be saved" (45:21-22). When we first noticed the nails in the idol's base, Isaiah directed our attention to Yahweh's choosing of Abraham "from the farthest corners of the earth" (41:8). Immediately after the image of the half-block of wood, it echoes again: "I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you" (44:22). *Who is like the Lord?*

There is no aspect to Isaiah's idolatry polemic that is not similarly framed with elegant poetic lines dedicated to these motifs, each bringing that incongruity of a higher and deeper kind. The prophetic ironic vision was a perception of human life as it was currently being lived and of how it might be lived instead: "New things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you" (42:9). Idolatry was a "failure of the imagination." Their gods were too small.

In Chapter 4 I made much about the hiddenness of God as a theological underpinning for the indirect communication of divinely inspired truth. It is worth noting that the crucial verse that announces *Deus Obsconditus* brings this as an additional motif to Isaiah's idol polemic:

Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel. All the makers of

idols will be put to shame and disgraced; they will go off into disgrace together. But

Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation; you will never be put to shame or disgrace to ages everlasting. (Isa 45:15-17)

Biblical *shame* finds a technical definition here as the experience of a religious subject who is found out as having placed ultimate trust in the wrong object. Is it significant that the particular shame that attaches to pagan idolaters is linked to the way they were resisting the hiddenness of God, degrading themselves with gods their eyes could see and their hands could touch.[253] Illusion is spiritual bondage of a kind that is willfully self-imposed. This reveals the fittingness of the idol polemic within the broader literary unit (Isa 40-48) which concerns the restoration of God's people. Isaiah's ultimate purpose was not to shame.

6.5.4.3 Irony as liberation. The purpose of all the Hebrew prophets was to extend the freedom of the wholesome divine perspective. Upon reflection, the reader might realize that the *information* about ancient idolatry that Isaiah has delivered to our day could have been packed into a single paragraph of unambiguous prose, and not a very long one. What Isaiah means to communicate to subjectivity is the *scent of the ridiculous* that hangs about all the scrambling of people to shape their own destiny and all their scrounging about for something upon which to ground a life (under the care of Yahweh himself, no less). After the indictment, "Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?" (44:20) (which captures well the irony of self-deception), Isaiah warmed to his true theme. The truth held back until this moment is that every human offense is somehow swept away "like the morning mist" (44:22). Earnestness and jest continue to kiss in the rhetorical flourish that was birthed in that single thought:

Burst into song, you mountains,

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[253] The shame Isaiah provokes is the kind that would hang about Judah until the disaster of the Fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Captivity. Only this crisis could cure their demand for gods they could fashion in their own pale image and manipulate at will. Pagan idolatry would never again creep into the homes of the Hebrews, although with the religion of the Pharisees, an even worse illusion would take its place.

you forest and all you trees,

For the LORD has redeemed Jacob,

he displays his glory in Israel. (44:23)

Texts create their own contexts. I argue that the idol polemic is ultimately neither biting nor grim. I argue that the nails, the half-block of wood, and the statues tipping over manage to be funny because of this underlying mood of celebration. The atmosphere is here thickened by the literary device known as *apostrophe* in which the speaker addresses himself to inanimate things. What he has to say is apparently best overheard, so Isaiah turns from his audience to say something *about* them to the mountains, forests, and trees, calling on them for a witness. "Sing…Shout…Burst." If Isaiah himself is not shouting, it is a performative contradiction. Wherever Old Testament irony appears, it signals that liberating faith is somewhere nearby.

> The world does not comprehend its ridiculousness, and hence faith can be ironic about
>
> unbelief. But faith's irony about unbelief points to the world's true splendor, that the
>
> world is the sphere of redemption. The irony of faith is finally its radical sense of
>
> redemption, its freedom in God. For faith, God alone is sacred, and all else is dispensable.
>
> Yet God is free to redeem even the dispensable. (Good, 1981, pp. 246-247)

When a man enters a room soaking wet, pauses for people to notice him, and then announces to the room, "It's raining," this is not the communication of information but something else. It is with just this sort of irony that I can cheerfully say to those close to me that I am "continually in the wrong before God" (Kierkegaard, 1847/1993), p. 243). I am not offering information they don't already know well, but something else: "Dear ones, we can be sinners." This is the freedom and full bloom of Christian irony. The sham is ended in the presence of

Christ, best dismissed with a smiling "good-bye." We can shatter stifling perfectionism with the wholesome laughter of faith, that is if sin is really "swept away like a morning mist."

6.5.5 Overhearing prophetic humor. The modern audience will not tend to feel implicated by the incongruities on the surface of Isaiah's idol polemic. Where the pure funniness of Isaiah's depictions may fail to survive the hermeneutical distances it has to travel—it's time for me to admit as much—something else still arrives in our day intact, something archetypal, paradigmatic, and universal. This goes directly to the question, "Why poetry?" Alter (2011b) specifically ascribes to the effects of poetic language the way biblical messages are lifted to "a second power of signification" (p. 182). In this he considers the way statements addressed to a concrete historical situation gain "an archetypal horizon" (p. 182). Although Alter had a different Old Testament context in mind, his explanation fits Isaiah's polemic hand in glove:

> If one considers, as the metaphors of the poem require one to consider, how God has treated them as beloved sons…flagrant violation of God's commands becomes a paradigmatic instance of treachery, of man's daunting capacity for self-destructive perverseness. In this fashion, a set of messages framed for a particular audience of the eighth century B.C.E. is not just the transcription of a historical document but continues to speak age after age, inviting members of otherwise very different societies to read themselves into the text. (p. 182-183)

Pagan idolatry is a very potent "paradigmatic case." Isaiah's polemic still sounds from the ancient text and still casts idolatry as the great joke each of us needs to see for ourselves. The context of grace that Isaiah constructs in his dialectic of earnestness and jest provides the security for the proper laugh at their own expense. If humor "dislocates the familiar…and makes people assume a contemplative attitude toward the world" (Geybels & Herck, 2011, p. 2), the

idol polemic goes a crucial step further: it defamiliarizes the very self of the modern reader.

Who, then, is this, hammering in the nails at the base of his god? Who is this whose back is bent in sustaining all that he trusts to sustain him? Who is this frantically crafting identity and purpose out of such raw material as a fawning student, a new book, or a shiny Ph.D.? "Is not this thing I hold in my hand a lie?" In Isaiah 40-48, the self can meet itself as a vaguely familiar stranger. Where have I seen this before, this addiction to self-rescue and this attachment to things that promise too much, to gods bent on breaking the heart of its worshipper, and to a thousand things infinitely smaller than Christ? Who is this so seemingly incapable of letting a bit of irony into the "I-I" of self-relation? I feel like I know him.

"If I can just get you to laugh." GK Chesterton (1908/1984) spent a bit of his brilliance in describing a man who suffers from the delusion of solipsism: he has arrived at that insane place by "a combination between logical completeness and spiritual contraction" (p. 16). Since it was reason that brought him there, all wound up in a tight suffocating circle, no amount of further reasoning can set him free. I argue in a similar way about the universal illusion that Isaiah has in his sights in the texts we have been considering. A colossal self-importance—even my gods depend on me—has brought the idolater to self-degradation, and it goes to the essence of indirect communication to enter the joyless striving of the ethical sphere with something else entirely. In this case, humor is that window that lets in the fresh air and opens out onto a larger point of view: "There is a God, and you are not him. If you knew yourself at all, you would take this as Good News indeed." The matter of caring for the self has not been left to the self.

Fear not, for I have redeemed you;

I have summoned you by name; you are mine…

When you walk through the fire,

> You will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

For I am the Lord, your God,

> The Holy One of Israel, your Savior. (43:1-3)

As to the Christological import of Isaiah's idol polemic, and based on the recurring motifs of revelation and redemption, I argue that the overarching rhetorical function of his irony is to clear the stage of ultimacy for one who alone is worthy. Here is the "information" my analysis has withheld until now. God the Father breaks into the polemic with a startling suddenness. He has something to say about his Son: "Here is my Servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight (42:1). Then he speaks directly to the Messiah, his Anointed:

I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness;

> I will take hold of your hand.

I will keep you and will make you

> to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles,

to open eyes that are blind,

> to free captives from prison

> and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. (42:6-7)

The language is that of the Jewish year of Jubilee, and it is this that Jesus read in the synagogue in his hometown. He rolled up the scroll, paused, and said, "Today…" (Lk 4:21). The obsession of Kierkegaard with what it means to be a Christian is here serenely balanced by what it means to have a faithful God. It is a lesson learned best in the context of a life that has known the kicking out of countless human props and has seen through the illusion of many a misplaced reliance. In the same literary unit we have been considering, Jesus appears more than once as a mysterious divine personage standing in the iconoclastic rubble:

He tends his flock like a shepherd:

> he gathers the lambs in his arms
>
> and carries them close to his heart. (40:11)

It has all been for him, this ironic "clearing of the stage." This is the Lord Christ who steps up to the floodlights of Old Testament prophecy and is immediately recognizable even to those who are uninitiated in the genre. This introduces a heretofore unmentioned feature of indirect communication. A final major argument about the indirect communication of Hebrew poetry is revealed in the aching beauty of Isaiah chapter 40.

6.6 Indirect Communication and the Prophetic Perspective.

As Pannenberg (1968) discussed the self-revelation of God in history as an indirect communication, he offered an important distinction about indirect versus direct communication.

> Direct communication transmits content without a break from the sender to the receiver. In indirect communication, the path is broken: the content first reveals its actual meaning by being considered from another perspective. Indirect communication is on a higher level: it always has direct communication as its basis, but takes this into a new perspective. (p. 14)

How does it happen that the religious subject should come to draw a sacred text "into a new perspective" so as to see new meanings that had not been apparent before? One answer is the passing of time. In the phenomenon of Messianic prophecy, we meet texts that had a vital thing to say to their first audience, yet new meanings are filled in through multiple fulfilments occurring over intervals measured in centuries. Every time the promise comes true in some surprising new way, the text is found to have had more to say than could have been realized before. The path is broken. In Isaiah 40, that new point of view on an old communication was

occasioned by a national emergency that only a true prophet could have seen coming.

6.6.1 A new perspective through crisis. The setting of Isaiah Book II[254] is especially

instructive for our purposes. However, this depends on a "best text," face-value reading as

follows: Isaiah wrote at a time of gross spiritual complacency much like that of Kierkegaard's

Denmark. By a prophetic revelation, Isaiah wrote about a disaster on the distant horizon, a

devastating captivity at the hands of Babylon such that no one else could have perceived.

(According to internal evidence, the composition of the book of Isaiah dates to a full century

before Babylon's meteoric rise.) Isaiah Book II is consumed by the exquisite comforts he was

given to speak into that far off despair, a message that would be meaningful to most only when

disaster fell. It could only have met its *first* audience, complacent and smug, in a profound

ambiguity and a strange discordant note. What in the world to make of Isaiah? It is easy to

imagine scoffing crowds by day, perhaps a "Jerusalem laugh" like that of later Copenhagen, and

a sparse handful of wide-eyed disciples gathering around Isaiah at night.

Perhaps the program of Kierkegaard in publishing in two incongruous streams had a

vague precedent after all. In Book I, Isaiah had prophesied relentlessly concerning the much

nearer judgment of God on the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which was coming through the

agency of brutal Assyria. This threat of judgment would arrive soon enough all the way down to

Jerusalem's door.[255] However, Isaiah also composed these other strange sermons, his own sort of

Edifying Discourses. These messages breathed with the deepest consolation for a sorrow that

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[254] My face-value reading of the book of Isaiah would scandalize the rationalist critic as it recognizes it as the work of a single author, even as Christ ascribed verses selected throughout the work to Isaiah. Chapters 40-66 are properly thought of as *Isaiah Book II* according to a major division in content at 40:1.

[255] Although I am emphasizing grace in the Old Testament prophets, the judgments of Isaiah retain their vital importance. They become part of our history, "of a piece with the judgment on our imperiousness, but also at one with the judgment visited for us all upon the One on Calvary" (Hummel, 1979, p. 33). In other words, every divine judgment and every divine absolution of the Bible, whether Old or New Testament, has an inward connection to Christ as the one in whom it is all realized there at the center of history.

only penetrated the smallest remnant of his own day, those who *already* grieved over Israel because of her true spiritual condition. Isaiah had, like Christ himself, "a different conception of what misery is" (Kierkegaard, 1848/1991, p. 61). Ring a bell?[256]

In Chapter 7, I will discuss the Christological meaning of the Tabernacle rituals and furnishings that would be replicated in the temple of Solomon. For now, suffice it to say that praying toward the Most Holy Place was the Old Testament equivalent of praying in Jesus' name. The faith of Israel was meant to look "along the beam" of the sacrificial blood that turned the Kidron River red in order to know something of the cost of their redemption and draw near to the heart of God. For this reason, when Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C., the devastation cannot be overstated. By the agency of Babylon, Yahweh had wiped his own worship center off the face of the earth. The event would be recorded in all its painful detail on four separate Old Testament occasions as no other moment of Jewish history.[257] Somewhere along the far-off shores of the Euphrates, the captives of the First Deportation (before Jerusalem fell) still prayed toward the West. Their complacency was already shattered by the long walk and subsequent daily realities of their exile. Yet they thought to themselves, "There is still hope. For as long as that temple stands, we will be a people…" Then came the news.

Jerusalem had fallen. The walls of the city called "The LORD is our Righteousness" (Jer 33:16) had been pulled down. Black smoke billowed out between the pillars of Boaz and Jabin, and all her secrets were piled up on Babylonian oxcarts, naked to the open air. The lampstand,

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[256] To take the Isaiah-Kierkegaard parallels an important step further, Isaiah is a thoroughly dialectical communicator. He exemplifies the theological art of the Hebrew prophets in general: when they speak their judgments, it is *as if there were no gospel*. Then, when they speak their grace, it as if there were *no longer any law*, for it is has been nailed to a cross (Becker, 1982, p. 141).

[257] The crushing of Christ is the New Testament event that corresponds to the demolishing of the temple so permeated with Christological meaning, and would likewise require four tellings. "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up again in three days" (Jn 2:19)—this part of Scripture is as rich with typology as any I have discussed already.

the curtain, the mercy seat—all were changed. The beauty was not in the artifacts themselves, nor was it in their concealment. Beauty was the objects *together with* their concealment. The Hebrews, newly captive, looked on them in horror. "So it's over then. So it's really done."

This is the atmosphere of Isaiah Book II, and this transportation is altogether necessary for the modern reader to grasp the haunting beauty not of things but of words: *Nakhamu nakhamu 'ammi* [Comfort, comfort my people] (40:1). Note again the personal pronoun, *"my* people." You could search the word all day and not discover what was in it for him to say it, and it is for the imagination to reach for what the words meant for every Jew in King Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon—"my people." This is Pannenberg's "broken path." It is the crisis itself that created the "new perspective" he attributed to the functioning of indirect communication. This is the charged rhetorical space in which new meanings would be unveiled in Isaiah Book II.

6.6.2 Analysis of Isaiah chapter 40. Yet another example of literary centering has deep significance for an indirect reading of Isaiah Book II. It is easily demonstrated by literary analysis that Isaiah 40-66 is composed of three units of equal length: the restoration of the people of God (chapters 40-48), the ministry of the Servant of God (chapters 49-57), and the everlasting kingdom of God (chapters 58-66). Each of these three units, in turn, consists of three parts, and *the middle of the middle* happens to be Isaiah chapter 53. This is the central theme and hermeneutical key of Isaiah Book II:

He was pierced for our transgressions,

he was crushed for our iniquities;

the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,

and by his wounds we are healed. (Isa 53:5)

In the composition of Isaiah Book II, at the precise center between the great promise of

'Arukhah [Restoration] and the great eternal hope—"I am making all things new"—there is the

Lamb led to the slaughter. "As a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth

(53:7). The suffering Messiah splatters his scarlet stain across the entirety of Isaiah's "Book of

Comforts." The interpretation of Old Testament prophecy is likely to be mired in controversy

until its last feature is fulfilled, but I argue on the basis of this poetic centering that the

communication in Isaiah Book II is a thorough-going Christological permeation. Its ultimate

truth is known and fulfilled in religious inwardness for all who know Christ, regardless of when

they live in time: "The glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it"

(40:5). To establish this, I will articulate a particular view of Old Testament prophecy.

6.6.2.1 A Christological view of restoration prophecy. Virtually every Old Testament

prophetic book, no matter how shrill with judgment it might be, contains its startling

juxtapositions of restoration promise.[258] To interpret these prophecies, a range of possible

fulfillments are available according to several successive historic moments. First, there is the

restoration that is the literal return of the people of Judah from the Babylonian Captivity at the

decree of Cyrus in 539 BCE. Historically speaking, such a return was an unprecedented event.

However, as incredible as it was, it did not live up to the full beauty and depth of the prophetic

images of restoration. It was a *partial* fulfillment. Once that great Homecoming became a reality,

it became itself a type and promise of a greater one yet to come.

The additional fulfillments of Old Testament Restoration prophecy are inseparably bound

up in Christ. His first Coming becomes the second and far more momentous event which an

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[258] I am making a distinction between Restoration prophet and another subset of massively important prophecy. Direct (or rectilinear) prophecies of Christ do not have multiple fulfillments, but speak exclusively to Christ's incarnation (e.g., Isa 9:6-7), as well as his life, death, burial, and resurrection (e.g., Isa 53:1-11).

interpreter can explore for prophetic fulfillments. For a third possibility, restoration prophecies often give a tangible display to the inward realities that come with knowing Christ as realized in the church of entire New Testament age. These new spiritual riches come wrapped in concrete images of timeless resonance for the people of God: their peace is a lion lying down with a lamb and a sword beaten into a plow; their joy is wine running down the hills; their righteousness rolls like a river. There is one final locus of fulfillments of the ancient prophetic vision, and that is the ultimate restoration when the earth as we know it passes away and the heavens are rolled up like a scroll (Rev 6:14). There is a note of indirect communication even in the fact that the ultimate purpose of Old Testament revelation was kept back until the very end of the canon when the later prophets arrived speaking their language of ultimate renewal.

> When you humble yourself before God—my God, great is my sin—the heavens open and God, as the prophets say, looks down through his window to say: just a little while…just a little while…this sickness is not unto death…not, it is unto life so that you should see the glory of God. (Kierkegaard, 2008, p. 263)

There will always remain those prophetic details whose meanings are not exhausted by the return from Babylon, the first coming of Christ, or the inward experience of the Christian with Christ. We live in our own "Not Yet" as we look for that timeless eternity that begins when a new Jerusalem descends from the sky.[259] The Hebrew prophets all saw this, too.

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[259] One analogy for the prophetic perspective (with relevance to indirect communication) is that the prophet gazes toward the distant mountains and is unable to see the spaces between the several ranges that take up his view. In the poetic mood, he sees the Restoration of Israel from Babylon, he spies the Shepherd walking among the returnees, he sees the spiritual riches of Christ, and a vision opens up of an eternal and abounding blessedness. For the prophet, these often blend together on the prophetic horizon, and this is part and parcel to the way Old Testament prophecy speaks to every audience that is included in Christ no matter where they live among the "mountains." Old Testament prophecy can, in turn, be a rich and complex mural in which colors from the entire palette of fulfillments swirl together on the artist's wall and can only tentatively be isolated from one another in interpretation. All of this is to continue to follow New Testament cues: there are many examples of the apostles recognizing spiritual, non-literalistic fulfillments of biblical prophecy, and they always do so in reference to Christ (cf., Ac 15:16, Ro 2:28-29; 9:6-8, Php 3:13, Heb 12:22, et al.).

This view articulates a perspective on Old Testament prophecy in which Christ is all-in-all. If Restoration prophecies are fulfilled in a variety of ways that blend together across the history-long story of Christ, then it has comforts to speak into every generation. A spiritual reading of Messianic prophecy is egalitarian in a sense that Kierkegaard would appreciate since no believing reader is left out of its promises, not even by the accident of their birth in time. To read prophecy as a *direct* communication invites an intellectual exercise consumed with arguing the discrete futuristic meaning of each prophetic detail with an eye to the evening news. It is as if Old Testament prophecies were irrelevancies that sat dumbly on a shelf until this final hour. To read prophecy as *indirect* is to step back, take in the portrait as a whole, and know the rapturous beauty of the eternal Christ acting in time. "Behold, I am making everything new" (Rev 21:5).

The Hebrew prophets are thus found to bring readers spread across time into *contemporaneity with Christ* as mediated through these prophecies, just as much as through the four Gospels. Although Hummel's tome of Old Testament isagogics never mentions Kierkegaard, he comes quite close to Kierkegaard's language in referring to the "contemporizing function" (1979, p. 443) of Old Testament prophecy, that is, the way every past fulfillment is historically actualized for the believer who recognizes Christ as the soul of biblical prophecy. Hummel ascribes this to the elevated style of the poetic genre (p. 443). Alter (2011b) agrees that in Hebrew poetry we "glimpse for a moment a new reality" (p.197), and I affirm that Christ himself is the dominant figure absorbing every motif into himself. In Isaiah chapter 40, for example, we are given to understand that the people *of every age* are grass and their splendor a fading flower (40:6). Yet the miraculous way of the penitent opens up *in every age* as well, in valleys lifted up and mountains brought low so that a smooth highway impossibly appears (40:4). *In every day of waiting,* a Shepherd can be seen among the refugees streaming down the

rise toward home, and there are lambs in his arms (40:11). Stars appear *in every man's sky*, still hearing their names called out in the accents of the divine (40:26). Hope is a wind pushing *all* toward home, and young men, who once stumbled, suddenly mount up on wings like eagles (40:31). It is just this way for the religious self that is growing in the capability of engaging the Hebrew prophets.

To summarize the point: indirect communication is communication that reveals new meanings when viewed in religious inwardness through new perspectives. In the case of Restoration Prophecy, I refer to the new perspectives that history provides: the return of the captives from Babylon, the day of Christ, the Church age, and eternal beatific vision. Isaiah has a new thing to say in each of these contexts and an always more expansive benediction, yet he continues to mean everything he has ever meant. All of this is vital to an indirect, spiritual reading of Messianic prophecy whereby the poetic imagery has everything to do with here, with now, and with me, here on my piece of that broken rhetorical path.

Isaiah himself expresses his sympathy with what I have conceived as the temporally egalitarian reading. In fact, as I hinted earlier, he could not have been more explicit: "The glory of the LORD will be revealed, *and all mankind together will see it* [emphasis added]" (40:5). Isaiah left us a poem of unsearchable depths that has occasioned a mountain of scholarship devoted to figuring him, and one thing is crystal clear: only in Christ is the veil taken away.

6.6.2.2 A deeper sort of prophetic irony. Penner (2013) has authored a masterful treatment of the performative contradiction of reason-obsessed Christian apologetic in *The End of Apologetics*. Along the way, and informed by Kierkegaard, he contributes much to an understanding of an all-encompassing sort of prophetic irony. If irony can be understood as a means for dragging into perception some deep societal incongruity, Old Testament prophecy is

ironic in a global sense. Naming it as such invigorates rather than undermines its meaning.

The frequently intoned, "This is the what the LORD says…" of the prophets is "deceptively straightforward" (Penner, 2013, p. 93). The irony in this phrase, both where it is stated and in the way it is everywhere assumed in the prophets, consists in the claim to speak the truth for which God alone provides the grounding. This offers a radical protest against every social convention for how communicators establish their truth. The prophetic speech act exploits the usual rules of discourse in a way that throws into sharp relief the failure of any unaided human endeavor to capture things as they are. It issues from an understanding that total mastery of absolute truth belongs to God alone, to be revealed in the times and manners that please him.

The Old Testament prophets, knowing themselves to be the recipients of divine revelation, do not waste time arguing about whether their messages are rationally justified, nor do they ground authority in their own eloquence or adequacy to speak for Yahweh. These sacred texts lose their character for the *un*-ironically direct religious communicator who attempts to supply a reason-based underpinning for Old Testament prophetic discourse (where it never occurred to the prophets to do so) in order to make it plausible by the standards of modernity. As for those who resist divine revelation in the arrogance of fallen human reason, they are, in the prophetic point of view, simply rebelling against the Word of God. There is nothing to argue about. *I Am who I Am* reveals the ultimately ironic name, and when it comes to his Truth, *it is what it is*. Isaiah chapter 40 provides an extraordinary example of this feature of prophetic utterance and contributes additional insights for the communication of religious truth.

6.6.2.3 The grounding of belief in Isaiah chapter 40.

All men are like grass,

and all their glory[260] is like the flowers of the field.

The grass withers and the flowers fall,

because the breath of the LORD blows on them. (40:6-7)

Kol habbasar khatsir [all flesh is grass] names humanity's defining quality. Isaiah was a man of exceptional optimism in spite of the times in which he lived. Here he establishes in no uncertain terms that his hope is not grounded in the character of humanity, much less the people of Israel. When it comes to them, Isaiah was a realist through and through. The next expression, then, sets the transitory nature of all human powers in starkest contrast. The perishable is revealed for what it is in the light of the imperishable: "The word of our God stands forever" (40:6-8). In this, Isaiah is most emphatic about the distinction on which prophetic irony depends:

Why do you say, O Jacob,

And complain, O Israel,

"My way is hidden from the LORD;

My cause is disregarded by my God?"

Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,

The Creator of the ends of the earth. (40:27-28)

The people had judged their situation by experience and intuition and arrived at a reasonable conclusion. Isaiah contradicts all this in the prophetic style of pure, un-bolstered assertion—"do you somehow not know?" This fulfills the reason for Hebrew poetry, as he

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[260] This is an extraordinary use of the word that has come up in this study several times already. *Khesed* usually translates as "faithful love" or "lovingkindness," but here it must refer to the gracefulness of an outward appearance, which fits the metaphor of beautiful but fading flowers. At any rate, it is not humanity at its worst that cannot withstand the breath of the LORD, but humanity at its best.

forcefully reminds them of the revelation they had heard before but somehow had not heard.

Within the poem there is a significant repetition of, "To whom will you compare me?" In its first occurrence, this rhetorical question introduced the idol polemic of the entire literary unit (40:18), as discussed earlier. The next occurrence (40:25) runs in the opposite direction, becoming the invitation to look to heavens and wonder who created them.

He brings out the starry host one by one,

and calls them each by name. (40:26)

The stars matter. It is a key to the interpretation of Hebrew poetry that later poetic elements are allowed to comment on earlier ones.[261] However, it can only happen as the reader marries the biblical text in order to more and more "comes to terms" with the writer's full pallet of connotations and associations. The rhetorical force of the stars includes not only divinity's unimaginable power but his impenetrable wisdom as well—"his understanding no one can fathom" (40:28). Further elaboration on this theme comes later: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (55:9). Here again is Osborn's favorite archetypal metaphor, the kind that transcends time and culture. In this case, the "thisness of that" is the sheer vertical scale of difference when divine and human knowing are set side by side. The education consists of the head tilting back.

Isaiah's inspired logic is always a rhetorical loop not quite closed. When next he gives words to the human calculation that humanity has been abandoned by God, he pleads incredulously, "Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God" (40:28). The

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[261] All the most important poetic devices require this: from poetic centering (in which the theme of fully half of a literary unit is delayed), to chiastic patterning (in which later elements rhyme with earlier ones in concentric circles of thought), to the repetition of Hebrew semantic roots (that exploit their full range of meaning), to the type-scenes that recur (with subtle variations that contribute to a mosaic of intertextuality).

enthymeme is best expressed rhetorically as well: "God, your God, has said *this* to you, and your own grassy heart says *that*. Why do you believe you?"

The ironic form is implicit throughout. "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of our God stands forever" (40:8). Luther commented on this verse:

> Where this Word [of God] takes possession of the heart by true faith, it makes the heart as firm, sure, and certain as it is itself, unmoved, stubborn, hard…in proud confidence laughing to scorn all that spells doubt and fear, ire and wrath, for it knows that the Word of God cannot lie. (1543/1972, p. 272)

The voice of God not only grounds itself, but, in Isaiah chapter 40, it grounds the believer as well in an unassailable position. Because the surety of God does not stand or fall on a prop of human reason, neither is it vulnerable to it. Most importantly, this largely unrecognized form of irony is (like that of the idol polemic) a *stable irony*. Rather than exploit the uncertainty of all things, it issues from the ultimate religiously fixed position. "This is what the LORD says…" It invites an epistemology that is both premodern and new, all for the sake of a joyful, conspiratorial community of belief.

6.6.3 A Christian apologetic based on the hiddenness of God. For Kierkegaard, if every apologetic proof were to succeed, this could only bring the religious subject closer still to the absolute scandal of the debased Christ hanging on his cross, the man who claimed he was God. In that moment there is only the Word of God—"Take this. This is for you." Issues of secondary concern to the religious self, such as the historical success of the Christian institution, matter to the Christian, but in the same way that the history of a marriage matters to a husband or wife, that is, only in light of the current love (Kierkegaard, 1846/1992, p. 54).[262]

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[262] "The faith that justifies…is no mere historical knowledge, but the firm acceptance of God's offer promising forgiveness of sins and justification. To avoid that impression that it is merely knowledge, we hold

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock" (Rev 3:20). Kierkegaard's authorship was dedicated to bringing those who were already acquainted with the historical facts of Christianity to also know something of this contemporaneity, and so to experience that fear and trembling by which the door to Christianity swings open. Its reality comes to the religious self apart from a hopeful glance in the direction of all the apologetic "geniuses" who want to assure the rest of us that they have it all worked out. They would have us become confident in them and not in Christ, which is another thing entirely. There is, however, a form of Christian apologetics that is sympathetic to Kierkegaard's viewpoint, that is deeply informed by a theology of the hiddenness of God, and which finds full confirmation in Isaiah chapter 40. Kierkegaard notwithstanding, we need not jettison C.S. Lewis, G.K. Chesterton, or any of the finest of Christian apologetic thinkers. We do, however, need to keep them in their place.

The key to the apologetic I am advancing is that it maintains a crucial distinction between those aspects of Christian theology that are subject to empirical investigation and those which fully transcend empiricism (Thompson, 2013).[263] As we have seen, the doctrine of *Deus Obsconditus* is always concerned with the "masks of God." It is not beyond sanctified human reason to investigate these divine hiding places as they exist in the form of: the wonders of the created universe, the wake of Christ and the big fact of the church in history, or even the experiences of the Christian life. These are the masks of God; they are not transparencies. The majestic Deity lives in unapproachable light, and it is for our sakes that he is always mediated, and that his communication with humankind is indirect. Here is the question before which

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that to have faith means to want and to accept the promised offer of forgiveness of sins and justification" (From the *Lutheran Confessions*, Tappert, 1959. P. 114).

[263] I am indebted to this superb, unpublished Master's thesis. I find the idea to be both sympathetic with Kierkegaard and yet also somewhat of a corrective. What is original in my treatment is the way Thompsons' distinctions are validated (and extended) by a close reading of Isaiah chapter 40.

empiricism stands mute: *what is in the heart of this God toward poor sinners on the basis of Christ?* For this, there is only revelation. "Proclaim to her…that her sin has been paid for" (40:2).

By observing the distinction between what is available for rational investigation and what is not, a Christian apologetic informed by the hiddenness of God is not afraid to bring people into contact with the masks of God. They are to encounter them psychologically and are free to reason about them to their own satisfaction (Thompson, 2013). However, as Kierkegaard would insist with every fiber, an apologetic that is not a "Judas' kiss" retains clarity about *what it means to be a Christian*. Knowing *that* remains the sole province of a Spirit-given enlightenment. Only faith can know anything about it as it dares to gaze upward out of the swamp of human wretchedness and radical evil, and as it clings for dear life to the external Word. Kierkegaard is right. To add a buttress of human eloquence, authority, or proof *to this* is to diminish it.

To demonstrate this in Isaiah chapter 40 will not depend upon an exhaustive close reading. Rather, I offer a catalog of all that is subject to rational questions and empirical investigation, and I note the significance of finding all of them in a single chapter of Hebrew poetry. To begin with, Malcolm Muggeridge famously declared about human depravity that it is "the most empirically verifiable reality" (cited in Zacharias, 1998, p. 111). This reality Isaiah asserts in chapter 40 in his "all flesh is grass" soliloquy, then in the gross human folly, he exposes in the form of all its idolatries, and again in the bone-weariness of the human condition—"even young men stumble and fall" (Isa 40:30). In Isaiah 40, Isaiah hardly lets more than a few verses pass without returning to something every human heart can verify in its own experience.

Isaiah nods more than once toward investigable *historical experience*, calling to mind

countless peoples that have come and gone at the divine will—"surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales" (40:15). He similarly exposes the opposition to Christ by human princes and rulers, as is well known to history. They are like chaff next to the counsels of Yahweh (40:23-24). As to the wonders of the *physical universe*, I have also already discussed the impulse of the prophet to point his readers to the stars to once consider their mute testimony (40:26). The shepherd imagery of this chapter (40:11) with which Christ self-consciously identified (John 10) brings into view the entire phenomenon of *Messianic prophecy*, as discussed earlier, which is a fitting object of the fullest exercise of reason and scholarly inquiry. The empiricist is well capable of setting verses of Isaiah side by side with verses of John to wonder, "What are the chances?" This is not yet faith.

In addition, it is altogether appropriate for communication scholars to become interested in every aspect of the *Christian experience* from conversion to the grave, whether in the socio-psychological or phenomenological tradition of communication research. Isaiah provides multiple themes for a Christian phenomenology: *repentance* is poeticized in the mountains that fall and the valleys that rise in order to convey the miracle that is the genuinely contrite heart; inexhaustible *gratitude* is hyperbolized in the inadequacy of all the forests of Lebanon for building a worthy altar fire (40:16); Christian *hope* is a sprouting of wings like eagles (40:31), and, of course, Christian *comfort* is the chapter's entire theme (40:1-3), as we have seen.

To these categories (matters that are subject to the investigations of reason), I add the fact of the *Christian Church*. She exists, and her vocation has always been "to go up on a high mountain" (40:9) or to otherwise seek the highest piece of rhetorical ground that can be found, and to shout to what valleys there still are, "Here is your God!" (40:9). As to the immense

formidable unity of her testimony across the ages, this, too, is a matter of scholarly investigation and a fitting conversation piece when a believer and religious skeptic sit down together.

It is a powerful distinction: what is empirical and what is not, and it mirrors the classical Lutheran distinction between the two kingdoms of God, the one in his left hand and the one in his right (referring to the exercise, in turn, of his sovereignty and his grace). There is an additional contribution Isaiah 40 can make to Thompson's thesis. What it comes to the "masks of God," recognizing them as such changes how the religious self relates itself not only to God but also to these things he hides within. To recognize his hidden hand moving behind the history of powerful men means that we do not trust ourselves to them—"all flesh is grass." To see people living the "good life" in its various worldly alternatives, and to catch some glimmer of the image of God there is not to envy them—"all their glory is like the flowers of the field." As the pre-moderns all knew, the fallen universe is still a meaningful one in spite of the crack across the sky—"look to the stars; who created all these?" And "why do you say, O Jacob, my way is hidden from God?"—this is the self learning how best to talk to itself.

The essence of the "Isaiah Apologetic" is that the God of all grace has not left himself without signposts. He has not gone out of his way to remove every good reason for the heart to turn in his direction with its urgent questions. He has, however, arranged a unique place for the truth of Christ behind the sacred partition of divine revelation. All of this is apiece with Kierkegaard's project, namely, to allow the Bible to speak on its own terms and in its premodern dialect—"the word of our God stands forever" (40:8). For the prophets, this was a truth for which one may literally "live and die" "The world was not worthy of them" (cf. Heb 11: 32-38).

"Comfort, comfort my people," is the thought that is meant to fill the whole mind of the Lord's representatives in every place and station. His will is for them to be good news in their

own person, and so to bring good news as they hold out his Christ to the world. God has not given many separate gifts to the world, as if peace were one, hope another, and love another still. "Here is my Servant" (Isa 42:1)—this is God's one gift to humanity, and in this one gift is every other gift concealed.

6.7 "Speak to the Heart of Jerusalem": Findings and Discussion.

Dabberu 'al-lev Yerushalim [speak tenderly to Jerusalem] is literally, *"Speak to the heart..."* (40:2). I introduced this Hebraism in chapter 4 where I associated it with a dynamic of biblical encouragement that can be most impactful when it is least direct. Its occurrence in the introduction of Isaiah Book II indicates that this dynamic characterizes the entire literary unit. It has special relevance for my broader study as well. What does it mean? To begin with, it must be noted that when the Hebrew writers meant to speak exclusively about emotion, they turned to the word *kilyot* [kidneys] not the word for heart.[264] To be sure, the emotions are by no means insignificant to the Hebrew writers in terms of religious devotion. The prophet Jeremiah chided the people that their honoring of Yahweh was always on their lips but ever far from (literally) their kidneys (Jer 12:2)—a quite Kierkegaardian thing to say.

In contrast, the *lev* [heart] is the Hebrew metaphor of choice when the *entire inner life* of the individual is in view. *Lev* refers to all that pulses within, that is, to every aspect of inwardness. Although intellect, emotion, and will can be distinguished semantically, in reality, they together comprise the organs of the soul in which the image of God may be found, and as the seat of all human capabilities, they can never be fully extracted from one another. Smith (2009) exposes the flaw in Christian worldview thinking in that it reduces the ontology of the believer to intellect alone, failing to grasp that a person can *think* in a Christian way, yet have all

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[264] In butchering an animal, the kidneys are the very last and innermost organ to be uncovered.

its fond desiring directed toward the world and its alternative versions of human thriving.

The Hebrew poets knew better. They addressed themselves to the entire inward *lev* [heart], and in the beauty of the Psalms and the humor of the Prophets—in the embodied ecstasy of worship and in the full-hearted laugh—the religious self can properly order its loves. After the writer describes nearly losing his very self in envy of the arrogant, he addresses his Lord:

Whom have I in heaven but you?

And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

My flesh and my heart may fail,

but God is the strength of my heart

and my portion forever. (Ps73:2-3, 25-26)

As Isaiah 40:1-2 characterizes the entire communication to follow, "speak to the heart" ascribes a power to its poetic lines for especially penetrating the inwardness of its audience. Alter (2011b) comments: "The poem represents, or creates, an experience quite different in kind from that of the prose paraphrase" (p. 203). Fisher (1989) believed that the cognitive significance of poetry "lies in its capacity to *manifest* knowledge, truth or reality" (p. 13), which suggests the completing power inherent in theological imagination (referred to earlier) and a deeper and more experiential way of knowing. To feel truth, to vibrate with it, to step inside it—these are capabilities that the Spirit has specially gifted to the world through the poetry he inspired. It is a further kindness for those who wish to *live* truth but can never do so on their own.

Alter (2011b) asserted that poetry is especially suited to bring a timeless quality to religious expression. If we were to imagine how God would talk, poetry would be our best guess as "our best human model of intricately rich communication, not only solemn, weighty, and forceful but also densely woven with complex internal connections, meaning, and implications"

(p. 176). If I may say it this way, Hebrew poetry *sounds like God.* These features of the genre, according to the insight of Brueggemann (2001), allow the modern reader to reactivate symbols and images out of our historic past. The poets turned toward the special language of metaphor in such a way that their expressions can be meaningfully touched upon at many points by diverse people (p. 45). On this issue, too, Alter (2011b) is in total sympathy: Old Testament poetry "generated powers of signification that pressed beyond the immediate occasion….History was turned into a theatre of timeless hopes and fears" (p. 204). "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem." I argue not only that the *lev* [heart] refers to the totality of human inwardness, but also that in the indirect, spiritual reading of the prophets for which I have argued, *we are Jerusalem.*

6.7.1 Equipment for living. "Equipment for living" is an apt description for Hebrew poetry understood as a communication of capability. When Burke articulated the reason for poetry in general, he turned to explicitly militaristic language: "Surely, the most highly…sophisticated work of art, arising in complex civilizations, could be considered as designed to organize and command the army of one's thoughts and images" (1973, p. 298). So much for sentimental uplift. I argue that the Hebrew prophets and psalmists disguised the most serious of purposes even when their artistry was at its loveliest or most ironic. In this same vein, Burke was speaking about the value of poetry for the one who discovers "allies for the war" in those who experience it with them. This attaches to a poem's sharable idiosyncrasy of form. Kierkegaard did not experience a religious context that would allow him much to celebrate the communal aspects of religion, the mutual fascination with Christ, or what Buechner termed the essential "us-ness" of faith. Yet the Old Testament Psalms and the Prophets are designed for the most palpable communion of one human being with another when the other is just as sad or just as glad, and inwardness is blessed to know that it is so. The tune begins, and the other knows the

words and clearly loves them, or catches the inside joke of faith, or shares in a knowing, ironic glance that pierces human isolation.

6.7.2 The capability of living in Christ. Christ himself is the object of the communication of the Hebrew Prophets and Psalms, though not overtly displayed on the verbal surface of their poetry. He is the centerpiece of this special genre and in him cohere all the various capabilities I have found communicated there. In terms of indirect communication, I have demonstrated the unique *overhearing* of the Psalmists' subjectivity that occurs in the inwardness of the reader. The "I" of the poet would become the "I" of the religious subject through the ministrations of the Spirit. When the passion of the psalmists most wounds the sensitive conscious by their full-throated expressions of what it means to be a Christian—this perfect suffering, this transparent innocence, this exquisite praise—it is precisely there that the poems *heal from behind* in recognition that it is first Christ who prays. This understanding beckons the religious self to wrap its weakness around his perfect vicarious sufficiency.

As to the prophets, they relied on that combination of "earnestness and jest" to accomplish their rhetorical purposes. In fact, the prominence of ironic humor in the prophets in the face of human incongruity argues for the indispensability of indirect communication for communicating what otherwise cannot be communicated, that is, the wholesome laughter of faith that clears the stage for whom it belongs. The religious subject "cannot glimpse the true king until the fantasy is shown to be a fragile and perishable deception" (Brueggemann, 2001, p. 46).

The prophets are particularly useful for demonstrating how certain forms of communication only reveal their meaning when viewed *from a new perspective*, and this becomes a useful new way of talking about the multiple fulfillments of Messianic prophecy. This understanding allows the prophets to have edifying things to say to every audience through time,

including their immediate one. A deeper sort of irony is extended to the believer by the prophets' refusal to ground their messages in anything but divine revelation. It is not merely hope, but hope *in the LORD* that "soars on wings like eagles" (Isa 40:31). For the religious self, "ungrounded" equals "free" (Good, 1981, p. 244) and this is simply and self-evidently because God is.

 "The LORD will renew their strength" (Isa 40:31). Every believer will gain that new perspective on words like these as comes in the moment of dying, when the truly religious rushes forward in suddenness and urgency, and what we will see in the words then will be a country of our own. No other understanding of capability can be drawn from the Hebrew prophets than that it comes from God alone. This is an aspect of prophetic taken-for-grantedness:

> The diligent reader will discover that its real subject is not man, his devotion, inspiration, or experience, but God as He still creates, elects, redeems, sanctifies, reigns, reveals, judges….Its insistent poetry and doxology is a salutary reminder that its horizons must extend far, far beyond what the saints below can ever grasp. (Hummel, 1979, p. 448)

Sometimes only a poem will do. Christ himself is the subject and satisfaction of the Hebrew Psalms. Christ himself is the object and obsession of the Hebrew Prophets. Hebrew poetry, as a communication of capability, is the fortification of the self as happens exclusively by its being drawn more deeply *into him.* Capability is the orientation of the religious self *to him* wherever it may be in the flow of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation in this world. Capability is that self learning to sing and to laugh, to mourn and to hope, *only for him.*

Chapter 7 "The Beauty Deeper In": Indirect Communication in Hebrew Sub-Genres

> In the past God spoke…through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. (Heb 1:1-3)

With this chapter our map (indirect communication) leads deeper in the wild Old Testament woods. There are even places where our vehicle (close reading) will be temporarily abandoned. That is to say, I will explore indirect communication mostly at the higher level of meaning represented by *genre* as the place where form and content meet.[265] I will remain in contact with the explicit wordings of the sacred text, but the accent will be on *reading in context.*

The texts I have selected represent genres ranging from the general weirdness of Old Testament apocalyptic (through a curiously Kierkegaard-like prophet who was mocked as an eccentric and ignored as little more than a "riddler") to the thinly veiled eroticism of a Hebrew love song (and in *The Holy Bible* no less). In the book of Ecclesiastes, the human obsession for sense-making will be disrupted by the world's wisest man crying, "Everything is meaningless." In the book of Proverbs, wisdom is personified; she walks the streets in search of anyone who will follow. In the cultic portions of the book of Exodus, we will pass beneath the canvas skin of the Tabernacle noting symbols, colors, textures, shapes, and smells. When it comes to Jesus, there is always more going on in these genres than first meets the eye. The Beauty is deeper in.

It can be a disorienting experience to traverse the Old Testament terrain, given the borders there are to cross. The same canon that includes a funeral dirge sung over fallen

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[265] Genres may be defined as "form-and-content models" (Sandy & Giese, 1995, p. 30). However, they are not codified in rules but are best understood as "family resemblances" (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 32).

Jerusalem also features a romping satire in which the name of God is never mentioned. In fact, Lamentations and Esther actually share a backyard fence in the Hebrew text.[266] Indeed, while the Bible is thought of as a single book, naturally enough, the word by which it is named comes from the Latin, *ta biblia* [the little books]. The Old Testament represents an unprecedented, never to be repeated diversity that is in paradox with its own deep harmony; its "disregard for unity is quite as impressive as its exhibition of it" (Frye, 1982, p. xvi.). In the pages to follow, Christ will emerge yet again as the unifying principle, the light that flickers on in this celebration of the full and beautiful strangeness of the Old Testament. He is "the shock of revelation."

7.1 Indirect Communication in Other Genres

In this chapter, I will develop major arguments from the most provocative Old Testament genres. Before I preview those, however, there are some otherwise unrepresented genres that deserve a cursory treatment here. It will not require close reading to articulate the ways these literary forms, otherwise neglected in this study, each adds their weight to my thesis.

7.1.1 Mosaic law. First, there is much more to the ceremonial system of ancient Israel than the Passover motifs (which I discussed at length) and the rituals of the Tabernacle (to follow). Christological significance pervades the whole sacrificial system, the priesthood, the theology of the land and of inheritance, the many colorful festivals, and traveling feasts, as well as the countless imperatives and prohibitions that especially breathe with Good News (such as the Year of Jubilee and the laws of Sabbath rest). Countless scholars have already pulled back

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[266] Lamentations demonstrates poetic centering in the ravishing beauty of chapter 3 sung from the ashes. As "the crucifixion of God's adopted Son, Israel" (Hummel, 1979, p. 524), this lament furnishes the ideal locus of study for the Old Testament theology of the cross. The book of Esther provides another vista on the narrative absence and immanent presence of *Deus Obsconditus* (cf. 4:14)—"No theologoumenon breaks the spell of the story" (House, 1992, p. 32). This text exemplifies biblical humor and theological entertainment.

the veil to the exquisite portrait of Christ in Old Testament ceremonial law.[267] It becomes a simple matter to marshal this entire mountain of scholarship as a celebration of my thesis.

From the Legal Code of the Israelite theocracy, we could isolate texts which could seem at first blush to be the pinnacle of biblical directness: *"Thou shalt not..."* As unambiguous information, the fact that it is wrong to steal is available on the verbal surface of the Decalogue [the Ten Words]. "He told us, so we know." However, to receive the injunctions and prohibitions of the moral law as if they are *merely* direct would be to casually assume that it must be possible to keep them in some satisfactory way—"Surely, he would not tell us to do something that he knows we cannot do." The fact that these divine utterances, properly understood, press down upon the subject in a quite impossible standard of perfection signals that something else is going on in the communication from Sinai. The apostle names that something quite plainly: "Through the law we become conscious of sin" (Ro 3:20). As a direct communication, God means by his commandments exactly as he says. At the same time, the utterance *does something.* It breathes in a capability of repentance on which every other capability depends.

According to Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" (Mt 5-7), fulfilling the "Ten Words" means doing so inwardly (in that land where lust is the same as adultery and hatred is murder) and doing so because the subject wills it, having no heart to do otherwise. This is obedience. Like a butler whose incompetence is unrecognized until he is actually told to do something, until a man once gets off his chair as the will of God bids him, he does not know himself in earnestness or doubly reflect in the category of sinner. Sinai was a pyrotechnic assault on human illusion, but Christ is hidden in that *Shekinah* cloud, and the contrite heart is the one he will never despise.

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[267] This research is guided in many respects by the New Testament letter to the Hebrews, and it carries on in the strength of that illuminating verse in the letter to the Colossians: "These [rules and festivals] are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (Col 2:17).

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle offers an exhaustive treatment of the capabilities which are—*and are not!*—communicated in the moral law. The law kills but can never make alive. The law guides, but the reason to follow and the capability of doing so must come from another place. These texts advance our understanding of the dialectic of Law and Gospel as informed by Kierkegaard's special genius for making distinctions. Nothing would benefit Christian communicators more than if they grow up into a crystal clear understanding of all that *only the grace of God* can accomplish in human inwardness. As to Old Testament indirect communication, Sinai is very much in play in its role of breaking the soil of the human heart.

7.1.2 The history of Israel's kings. This study has also neglected the six historical books that run from 1 Samuel through 2 Chronicles. I have dipped into this history (e.g., Nathan's parable, other moments from David's life, the fall of Jerusalem, etc.), but there remain boundless uncharted waters. The two books of Samuel and the two books of Kings chronicle a seismic event in Israel, the end of the theocracy and the beginning of the days when kings took up their reigns. I offer the following as the low-hanging fruit of literary analysis.

The story of the kings of Israel does not open with or even contain the birth narrative and early childhood of Saul (the tragic false start for the monarchy). It does not even do so on behalf of David the kingly archetype. Remarkably, this history opens with the lengthy birth narrative and early childhood of the prophet Samuel. This signals rhetorically that the narrative spotlight is not on the halls of power, but rather, on the one we first meet as a young boy, now sleeping on the floor of the temple where he keeps the lanterns lit, now wide-eyed and breathless at the voice in the night. "Speak Lord, your servant is listening" (1Sa 3:9)—this theme resounds in every narrative within the meta-narrative of Israel's ever vacillating royalty. The *shalom* [peace] of Israel would always depend, not on her kings, but on the Word that issued from the mouths of

the prophets. That is where the story is. The provocations of Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha have much more than this to offer for understanding indirect communication by literary means.[268]

7.1.3 The curious genre of action prophecy. The later writing prophets did not always work in poetry. Their prose sections frequently include a special genre of *action prophecies* ranging from the mundane to the painful to the bizarre: Jeremiah smashes a jar, Ezekiel is forbidden to mourn his dead wife, or he is told to lie on his side for over a year—what to make of such things? Instead of a "showing but not telling," the strategy is often a "showing *first* and a telling *later*." This includes occasions when the people urgently asked to know the meaning— "Won't you tell us what these things have to do with us? Why are you acting like this?" (Eze 24:19). At that moment, the indirectness of the form had its desired effect. The medium is the message, and in the case of action prophecy, it is the person of the prophets themselves existing in their own prophetic messages. All of this meets us in that space of overhearing to which we are now quite accustomed. Incidentally, the same is true of the prophetic oracles where the fact of our late overhearing is emphasized when a series of nations are explicitly addressed by name. We are obviously not Edom, Ephraim, or Egypt, so what harm could it do to listen in?

7.1.4 The genre of disputation. The overheard dialogue of the Old Testament is a form that is fully exploited for indirect communication in the book of Job by means of the special sub-genre of *disputation*.[269] The theological argument among Job's friends affords important

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[268] As to all those Hebrew monarchs, both the good and the bad, each has his own John the Baptist quality, that is, his own way of communicating to the reader, "There is a king on whom your life depends, but I am not him. I only point to him." I offer this on the strength of Yahweh's promise to David, "When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from you own body….Your thrown will be established forever" (2Sa 7:12, 16). The history of the kings is re-storied in 1 & 2 Chronicles, but the warts of Hebrew kingship are discretely passed by. Jewish royalty is idealized in a way that especially surfaces the typology to be realized in that "truer and better David."

[269] Patrick and Scult (1990) offer an extended treatment of the book of Job that exemplifies the "best text" theory of interpretation (pp. 81-102). Their work could easily translate into an introduction on indirect communication in this genre. They do not assign ultimate undecidability to the meaning of Job, but they mark well the force with which it compels readers to seek out the reorientation and equilibrium of other Scriptures.

comparisons with the cacophony of voices in Kierkegaard's pseudonyms. After all, in the book of Job, readers find themselves compelled to arbitrate among conflicting voices that are as entangling as any persona Kierkegaard ever invented. Job's "comforters" speak much that is theologically sound, but each does so from a larger point of view that is decidedly a trap.

The comparison with Kierkegaard is instructive. After some 600 pages in one of his most important works, Kierkegaard has his pseudonym, Climacus, not only call the entire piece "superfluous" but adds that "it is to be understood in such a way that it is revoked" (1846/1992, pp. 618-619). This does not mean that there is no truth in all those pages, but that all the responsibility falls to his readers to sort it out. Why are we not told this earlier? Readers are compelled to stake a position and to join the mental dialogue. Then, because of the ending, it becomes like a movie you have to watch all over again, knowing what you now know.

Something similar happens in the book of Job. Only in the final chapter of the book (fully 35 chapters after the disputation began) is the reader explicitly told not to accept the theology that the three friends had spouted. Yahweh confronts them: "You have not spoken the truth about me" (42:7). Job is the one who is vindicated in the end even though he cursed the day he was born; also vindicated is his posture of suffering—"though he slay me, yet I will hope in him" (Job 13:15). These are, so to speak, the Spirit's "signed works" amid the milieu, and they include the epitome of New Testament revelation that is "in the Old concealed":

I know that my redeemer [*goel*] lives,

and that in the end he will stand on the earth.

And after my skin has been destroyed,

yet in my flesh I will see God;

I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another.

How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19:23-27)

The communication of capabilities here includes a crucial one for our day: it involves readers in the hard work of discerning the one true Voice in this world amid an endless sea of words.

7.1.5 Hebrew fables and additional parables. The Old Testament also sets the sub-genre of dialogue within a short list of Hebrew fables, with trees that talk to vines and eagles that soar off to plant seeds in distant lands (Jdg 9:7-15; Eze 17:1-8). Most interesting about the two fables in Ezekiel 17 is that the first one has an interpretation (a judgment on Judah's king) which is offered in the text immediately after the fable. That makes the missing explanation of the second fable quite conspicuous, and the unexplained fable is clearly Messianic: "I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar…birds of every kind will find shelter in the shade of its branches" (Eze 17:22-23). The communication of restoration retains its full indirectness.

This is in addition to the presence of several parables in the Old Testament like the one that opened this dissertation. Isaiah chapter 5 is especially potent. After the parable paints the scene, the loving attention and care a vineyard owner lavished on his vineyard, we learn that he returned to it one day to bear the insult of its putrid, uneatable grapes. Then comes the line, "Israel is the vineyard" (Isa 5:7) that is reminiscent of Nathan's, "You are the man!" It is a two-minute story wrapped around an image, a powerful way to communicate indeed.

The indirectness of parables and fables will be obvious to the reader by now. They carefully maintain the receptive frame that allows the speaker to enter more deeply into communication with the reader. Ultimately, I can say that if there is an Old Testament genre that cannot easily find its place under the indirect communication umbrella, I am not aware of it.

7.2 Chapter Preview

A profound defamiliarization of Christ runs through the genres we now consider. He will

meet us, for example, as the Master Craftsman, the Lover, and as the Temple Curtain torn in two. Here are the arguments to which five additional genres give rise. *1) Old Testament Ritual: the indirect communication of Christ is mediated in priestly ritual and in the features of the space in which it occurred.* This analysis will attend especially to the furnishings of the Tabernacle. 2*) Old Testament apocalyptic: the prophets were inspired to commit to writing the often bizarre visions they received; these typically did not provide any new knowledge, but rather pressed hearers toward a more edifying relationship with the information they already possessed.* It will prove significant that these visions usually accompanied times of national existential crisis. 3*) Proverbial Wisdom: in the single most satisfying discovery of this entire effort, I will argue that Christ is given a startling new name in Proverbs chapter 8. His name is Capability.* This is the beating heart of Old Testament wisdom and here it is revealed that every conceivable religious or ethical capability is met in Christ. 4*) Wisdom Literature: the ambiguity of the book of Ecclesiastes in which highest optimism collides with deepest pessimism is profoundly self-involving.* As an indirect communication, it disrupts the comfortable thinking of people within the aesthetic or ethical spheres of existence and provokes a conversation beyond the borders of the book. 5) *Love Poetry: within a single text, the Song of Songs, culminate all of the dominant features of indirect communication that I have featured in this study*. This final piece of analysis will bring new dimensions to the title of this dissertation: *the Beauty with the Veil.*

7.3 The Dwelling of God": Indirect Communication in Old Testament Ritual

> Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the
> tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon
> it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. (Exo 40:34-35)

As to the manner in which the Old Testament communicates its messages, we have asked

the question, theologically speaking, "Why poetry?" and "Why story?" To these, we now add, "Why ritual?" Carey (1975) articulated a view of communication that uses religious ritual as an analogy for the way communication names and creates social units, binds people together in stable relationships, and serves to repair, maintain, and transform social reality consisting in that web of human connections. When it achieves these purposes, communication is a shared aesthetic achievement and does not lose touch with its linguistic cousin, "community."

> A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information, but the representation of shared beliefs. If the archetypal case of communication under a transmission view is the extension of messages across geography for the purpose of control, the archetypal case under a ritual view is the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality. (p. 15).

Although many scholars do not acknowledge the debt this theory owes to religious transcendence, Carey explains that it "has never completely escaped its metaphoric root" (1979, p. 15). The enacted patterns and repetitions of everyday communication, as well as the social spaces in which they best occur, form of a picture that is not unlike what happens between the believer and God, and between believer and believer, in the liturgical dynamic of the literal sanctuary. Therefore, the ritual model of communication is instructive as we turn now to the *actual* ritual of ancient Israel. There we find yet another indirect communication in which grace is revealed as the true nature of the Old Testament's numinous beauty and enduring influence.

In Exodus chapter 25-30 we encounter the inauguration of a new kind of relationship between God and Israel through ritualized communication. It comes in the form of fully six chapters devoted to the construction of the Tabernacle and the design of the garments worn by

the priests who served there. In classic Old Testament repetition, after these six chapters of instructions, we are treated later on to six chapters in which the instructions are carried out.[270] In addition to prescribing the daily rituals of keeping the lamps lit, the incense burning, and the table of showbread stacked with fresh matzah bread, the exhaustive detail in these twelve chapters is designed to support the highest ritual of the entire ceremonial system of Israel.

Once every year, on *Yom Kippur* [Day of Atonement] the high priest would enter the Most Holy Place to sprinkle the blood on the Ark of the Covenant.[271] He entered with fear and trembling, having bells attached to the fringes of his robe so that people outside could hear if he was still alive and moving, and he had a rope around his waist so that they could drag him out if he was not. Significantly, for everyone but this priestly "go between," the ceremony was hidden from sight. Everyone else in the Hebrew world was simply to know and imagine all that took place behind the veil in the heart of the sacred tent, as in the hidden heart of God. They were asked to believe that what happened inside did somehow create and sustain, repair and transform their relationship with the Lord of Glory himself.

7.3.1 The ritually mediated presence of God. At the site of the Burning Bush I explored how, by means of the vividly narrated memories of others, people can gain a non-propositional awareness of things they have not experienced themselves. It is especially significant that when *q-memories* are received as the conscious experience of another conscious person *as a person*, people may "experience to an attenuated degree *what it is like to be in the presence*" of someone they have not otherwise met (Rea, 2009, p. 23). Something is gained of the presence of this

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[270] Sometimes the repetition of the Old Testament may serve the rhetorical function of signaling, quite simply, "this matters." Old Testament Hebrew scores extremely high on measures that test languages for redundancy according to how often a reader is able to successfully predict the next word in a written text. (Naturally, this linguistic feature supports the oral reception of the Word.)

[271] The full description of *Yom Kippur* furnishes another example of literary centering by the position it occupies at the structural center of the Torah, suggesting that this celebration may be the point of it all. Presumably, this is what we would hear from Moses if he were only allowed one thing to say.

someone that propositional descriptions cannot transmit as the memories of someone else can come to feel like memories of our own. I am not alone in believing that this dynamic applies to Old Testament Scripture and is further heightened when its stories are *ritually* remembered and reduplicated. Childs (1962) concurs: "When Israel observes the Sabbath in order to remember the events of her redemption, she is participating again in the Exodus event. Memory functions as an actualization [*Vergegenwärtigung*] of the decisive event in her tradition" (p. 53).

The idea of commemoration-as-actualization recognizes in sacred ritual the ability to mediate the presence of the events it recalls. There is new knowledge to be gained when the doctrinal content of Christendom—the *didache* [the Teaching]—moves from the lecture hall to the sanctuary. The inspired narrative gains a new quality when it is enacted within a sacred space, embodied in physical motions, and elevated by a full sensory experience that includes colors, textures, tastes, and smells. However, a familiar caveat is in order:

As with Biblical narratives, a certain amount of "seeing as" will be required for the divine presence to be mediated at all. For example, if the function of (some) liturgical acts is indeed to commemorate…one will have to see the liturgy as a vehicle for putting us in touch with historical events in which God himself was an actor. (Rea, 2009, p. 28)

If it is true that ritual can be a way to make present for religious subjectivity the things that are commemorated, then this is certainly an insight into the commemorating ritual in the Old Testament as an indirect communication. As to who or what those rituals mediated, it is not difficult to demonstrate that the Jewish Tabernacle and everything associated with it constitute an unprecedented concentration of Christological typology. These rituals are the blowing of the divine Breath into a new sort of community gathered around glistening and burning, wafting and billowing symbols of redemption. Indeed, in the instructions he gave to Moses for the

construction of the Tabernacle, Yahweh made a promise: *"I will meet you there"* (25:22).

7.3.2 "The Dwelling Place" as commemoration. Although the commemorative aspect of the Tabernacle may not explain every feature of its design, the actualizing of Israel's past into the present of the worshiper is expressed in many ways. Three distinct areas of the Tabernacle complex correspond to three distinct sections on Mount Sinai. In this way, its very architecture mediates the seminal event, the inauguration of the Mosaic covenant through which a unique people of God first came to be. To explain: the Tabernacle's courtyard is a place for the people of Israel to gather; it coincides with the barricaded space at the foot of the mountain. The Holy Place permitted entrance to the Levitical priests, even as the elders of the people of Israel were once invited to fellowship with Yahweh at a spot partway up the mountain (24:9-11) (and these "heads of families" were the priests of Israel before that task was awarded to the tribe of Levi). Finally, only the High Priest of Israel was ever welcomed into the Most Holy Place, just as Moses met with God alone on the heights of Sinai. In fact, when the tabernacle construction and the preparation of the priestly garments were completed, the book of Exodus concludes in a high and heartening Old Testament moment. The *Shekinah* cloud,[272] the symbol of the Glory of the Lord, filled the place so that no one else could enter, even as the same bright cloud hid the peaks of Sinai when the covenant was first forged with Israel. Yahweh had moved in.

Commemoration is signaled in the Tabernacle by the presence of a jar of manna, the budding staff of Aaron, and the two stone tablets of the Law, all of which were deposited in the Ark of the Covenant. What is more, at the Burning Bush, when Moses was instructed to take off his sandals, it was the first mention in the Bible of a physical space being holy because of the special presence of Yahweh. Scholars have noticed that the descriptions of the priestly garments

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[272] This word does not occur in the Old Testament, but only in other Jewish writings. However, it is semantically related to the word *Mishkhan* [the Dwelling], one of the terms used for the Tabernacle.

fail to mention any footwear, suggesting that priests only entered the Tabernacle with bare feet as on holy ground. This is a further subtle repetition of Sinai and of the "infinite qualitative difference" Moses encountered there. There is no question that the tabernacle existed as a most vital symbol of Hebrew remembering. Israel had a past from which to draw perpetual edification.

7.3.3 The Christological interpretation of the tabernacle. All these aspects of the Tabernacle's design and furnishings blend with others that are seen, by their forward-reaching typology, to anticipate more than commemorate. Deep associations with Christ are affirmed in the Letter to the Hebrews with examples that include: the veil, the entering of the Mediator into the Most Holy Place, the atonement cover, and so on, not to mention the fact that the entire sacrificial system communicates the cost of redemption as a thing measured in blood. However, *Hamishkan* [the Dwelling Place], was not much to look at from the outside, even as Messiah "had no beauty that we should be attracted to him" (Isa 53:2). The main structure had a covering of ram skin that had been, quite dramatically, dyed red. However, over this was laid a hide of sea cows as a skin that maintained its organic appearance. The Tabernacle is always to be imagined as it reposes, veils flapping in the breeze, in the center of the twelve tribes of Israel camped three on each side and as far as the eye can see—Now the dwelling of God is with men (cf. Rev 21:3).

All the beauty was hidden deep within the veils. Gold dominates the precious metals that glisten in the candlelight, but there are silver and bronze as well.[273] The fabrics are linen-white and blue, purple and scarlet, all hung with ringlets of gold, and suffused with symbols such as the angels woven into the curtains and the pomegranates on the vestments of the priests who passed through them. The cups of the lamps on the Menorah are in the shapes of flowers. The mode of

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[273] Some consider gold to be the symbol of God, silver the symbol of Messiah, and bronze the symbol of God's people, with further meanings to be drawn from the ways these mingle together. If we receive them more basically as non-discursive symbols, the quality they evoke, together with the onyx, rubies, and other precious stones, is simply the transcendence of this sanctuary above ordinary human existence.

communication is suggestiveness. I argue that some of it may simply be art for the sake of art,

and beauty for the sake of beauty such as makes the soul "nostalgic for God." Yet, few will ever

lay eyes on it. Practically speaking, the extravagance is unnecessary, which is rather the point.

Like the container of priceless nard that a broken woman once poured over the feet and hair of

Christ (while some bitterly complained that it was a waste) there is a time to break the jar. The

Tabernacle was not only called the Dwelling Place. It was also commonly called the name *Ohel*

Mo'ed [Tent of Meeting], which we do well to defamiliarize. Call it the *Canvass of Encounter*.

Every last feature is an indirect communication and it seems best to narrate the Tabernacle, so to

speak, as a progression of increasing inwardness. The following is the guided Christological tour.

Approaching the Tent at its main entrance, you must pass by the Altar of Sacrifice and

the Golden Basin. They are themselves an education: you do not just waltz right up, but must

take the way into God's presence that he himself has provided. It is not available without the cost

of sacrifice or a washing in pure water. As you pass through the first curtain, on your left is the

Minorat zahav tahor [the Lampstand of pure gold], even as Christ is the Light of the World. On

your right is the *Shulkhan,* [the Table] with the twelve loaves of the *Lekhem Panim* [the Bread of

the Presence] stacked upon it, even as Christ is the Bread of Life.[274] Facing you, against the

curtain on the far side of this rectangular room, is *Mizbeakh miqtar ketoret* [the Altar of Incense],

and the fragrance from there is the prayers of the saints that are a pleasing aroma to God through

Christ (Rev 5:8). That is the atmosphere of this place. All these furnishings are overlaid in pure

gold to communicate the worth to the soul of this Sweetness, Sustenance, and Light. The

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[274] This *showbread* has puzzled people for centuries going back to the Jewish commentator Maimonides (1135-1204). We are not told that it was to be unleavened bread, and leaven need not signify sin (as it sometimes does), but can connote sumptuousness instead. The fact that there were *twelve* loaves is easy to associate with the tribes of Israel and Jesus' disciples (twelve being the number of the Church). Taking a meal with someone was an intimate expression of fellowship. In the Holy Place, the bread would then stand for fellowship between believers and God as the elders of Israel experienced it on Sinai. Associating Christ, the Bread from heaven, with the loaves of *matzah* only deepens these other associations.

Parokhet [the Curtain] that hangs behind it is Christ's own body that would be torn apart to let you in (Heb 10:20). There is an anchor for the soul that passes through this veil and runs into the Most Holy Place where it finds a firm hold (Heb 6:19). Yet the Beauty is deeper in.

In the cube that is the perfect three-dimensional space of the *Qodesh Haqodashim* [the Holy of Holies], there is a wooden chest overlaid with gold. In it is the Law of Moses, the holy will of God. Inscribed there in stone is everything that accuses, everything that condemns, and every reason you do not belong in that place. However, thank God for God, a slab of gold covers the chest. It is the *Kaporeth* [the Atonement Cover], or in the Greek New Testament, the *hilasterion*. This covering, too, is Christ (Ro 3:25). It is upon this slab of gold, under the spread wings of the golden *Hakeruvim* [cherubs], that the high priest sprinkles the blood of the ram on *Yom Kippur* [Day of Atonement]. These are the "copies of the heavenly things" (Heb 9:23) where Christ still enters the heavenly Tabernacle, the presence of God the Father, with his people fixed to his chest like the stones on the priestly ephod. He is there to pray for them all on the basis of who he is and what he has done (cf. Exo 28:21).[275]

Commemoration-as-actualization meets in Christ as he disrupted the rituals at the second temple (in which the designs and furnishings of the Tabernacle were repeated) and redirected them to himself. At the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, a priest poured water drawn from the Pool of Siloam out of the golden pitcher and onto the temple porch as he recited a line from Isaiah.[276] It was to ritually remember God's provision of water in the wilderness, but suddenly a voice was heard from the edge of the crowd, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me" (Jn 7:37).

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[275] Validation of the unbounded Christological meaning of the Tabernacle comes in the prologue to John's Gospel. John 1:1-18, though composed in Greek, is a carefully constructed chiasm according to the continuing influence of the Hebrew convention. Recognizing it as such reveals the height of John's thought and his center. It is this that the aging apostle who once leaned on the chest of Christ infuses with highest mystery and holy astonishment, (literally), "The Word became flesh *and tented among us"* (Jn 1:14).

[276] "Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isa 12:3).

A similar incident seems to have occurred on the first day of the same holy feast when a single candle replaced the Law in the Ark of the Covenant to commemorate the Law of Moses as a glorious light. On this day, the same voice rang out, "I am the Light of the world" (Jn 8:12). [277]

7.3.4 "I will meet you there." The instructions to Moses in Exodus 25 began in all straightforwardness, "Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them" (v.8), but a world opens up at this spot. The redemptive rituals point "along the beam" to what reality is like in its deepest sense. If it is possible at the time of Christ for an old man named Simeon to have "waited for the Consolation of Israel" his entire life (Lk 2:25), and then to recognize the object of his hope in the arms of Mary, then we can certainly imagine a faithful Israel within Israel fixated on the Messianic promise in every Old Testament day.[278]

This knowledge at the heart of biblical consciousness was certainly associated with the Tabernacle by some from the very beginning. For them it was information beyond price that was deepened and actualized in the motions of Levitical worship. Perhaps for others the connections evaded their conscious awareness for days or years at a time, as the deepest influences often do. That would not cancel the redemptive significance in the lightening of conscience on *Yom Kippur* as the high priest disappeared beyond the veil, or in watching the *Hasa'ir* [scapegoat] driven into the wilderness with all the people's sins laid symbolically on its back. They clung in faith to such promises as they had the grace to understand. To remove your sandals because the very ground is holy, to be sprinkled in clean water so as to pass through the outer curtain, to light the lamps and stack the bread, to breathe in the incense, and to know without needing to see it

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[277] This is a reconstruction that depends only on concluding that the scandalous story of the adulterous women (Jn 7:53-8:11) comes out of order in John's Gospel, as seems likely from the evidence.

[278] After all, there is a red thread of promise that begins in the words to Adam and Eve about the woman's Seed who would crush Satan's head (Gn 3:15). That thread runs through Abraham—"through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed (Gn 26:4)"—and is repeated to each of the patriarchs. It then unfolds like a rose through centuries of history and prophecy. In indirect communication, the true content is there by revelation, and this is Christ in the Old Testament promise.

what was behind the innermost veil—every last act was an immersed participation in Christ.

7.3.5 Practicing the presence of God. I began my discussion of Moses' Tabernacle by discussing a ritual view of communication that suggests, by analogy, the power of actual ritual to create, repair, and transform bonds of relationship and community. It is significant that the relationship forged through ritual at the construction of the Tabernacle happened entirely at God's initiative. In fact, *relationship repair through ritual* is central to what happened there, in the enactments of redemption and vicarious atonement against the troubling awareness of radical human evil. In terms of transcending direct propositional communication, Rea (2009) is quick to add that the extent to which liturgical acts can do so "depends upon the (trainable) sensibilities that one brings to the experience" (p. 29). In other words, all of this involves a new capability, namely, "to practice the presence of God."[279] Coakley (2008) is in essential agreement:

> What is distinctive to liturgical "knowing"…is the way that bodily movement, sensual acuity, affective longing, and noetic or intellectual response, are intricately entwined and mutually implicated in what is occurring, and are being *trained over time to intensify and deepen their capacity for response* [emphasis added] to the risen Christ. (p. 15)

The capability of experiencing God in this way requires cultivation in order to participate in the special maieutic of ritual. However, this does not cancel the paradox: we must rely on God to rely on God. There is a moment of recognition that overcomes the deniability that attends to the hiddenness of God and the indirect communication of Christ, and it is ever his to give.

 I take all this to mean that Old Testament ritual has important implications for the New Testament sacramentalism that supersedes it. The practice of actualizing commemoration

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[279] This phrase is borrowed from Brother Lawrence (1691/1985), the results of whose great spiritual experiment were, indeed, that living daily in conscious awareness of the mediated presence of God is an art and a capacity that is much to be desired.

remains and is, I believe, still with us. Baptism is described quite dramatically in just this way: "We were therefore buried with Christ by baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:4). Baptism is not a picture. It does something. So also the celebration of the Lord's Supper is performed, as Jesus said, "in remembrance of me," (Lk 22:19), and as the apostle added, in order to "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1Co 11:26). The apostle described the Supper as a *koinonia* [participation] in the very body and blood of Christ made present in this mysterious way (1Co 10:16). I take the tangible elements—the water, bread, and wine—to be a unique and special sort of "visual Word" to be received in faith along with the inspired words that first accompanied their institution, even as the Tabernacle invited personal trust in all that it represented in its day.[280] Many have found special application of the ritual communication of capability in times of deep anguish, when the hiddenness of God is experienced as a loss.

> Suffering human beings longing for the presence of God can go to the Scriptures and the liturgy and find it—in small and mediated ways to be sure, but nevertheless in ways that provide them with the resources to see themselves not as lost and abandoned by God but rather as living daily in the presence of a loving but silent God. (Rea, 2009, p. 30)

7.3.6 Christ, the Dwelling of God. Although my argument parts company with many

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[280] The sacraments are, of course, vulnerable to abuse in the complacency that substitutes external ritual for deep involvement in relationship with God, or that does not combine the sacraments with faith in the promises the Scriptures have attached to them (e.g., 1Pe 3:21, Mt 26:28, et al.). Still, a false dichotomy pits external practice against inward devotion. There is a genuine piety that knows itself to be edified in the sacraments, and the Old Testament affirms this possibility in rituals that breathe with Christological significance. The liturgy I affirm is a saturation of the Scriptures out of which it is constructed, creating a timeless bond with Christians who have for centuries sung such texts as, "Create in me a clean heart of God" (Ps 51:10), or, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace" (Lk 2:29). This worship form always includes the moment of counter-formation that is the confession and absolution, and it participates by that light in an annual rehearsal—an actualizing commemoration—of the life of Christ. Among the faithful, hatred of sin is love for Christ and this confession is an act of highest devotion. It happens within this transcendent worship style designed to draw believers out of themselves and into him, and to locate the dislocated in liturgical time.

within evangelical Christianity, and with Kierkegaard as well, this study furnishes me with a new way to talk about what the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion can mean to one form of Christian piety.[281] Their inherent promises bring nothing other than *the non-propositional awareness of what it is like to be loved by God*. To recall with the apostles that I am baptized into the death of Christ and raised with him, to partake of a meal in which he is present with the very body that was given and the very blood that was spilled, and so to proclaim his death until he comes, these indeed make present to faith the decisive events of the past. The capability is to linger there. I understand every step toward unravelling the mystery through reason to be a step away from Christ.

In all this, I connect to a growing body of Christian scholarship, notably Smith (2009; 2013) and Webber (1999) that affirms a new apologetic that would give to the thick liturgical atmosphere of a worshiping community the role traditional apologetics has given to rational argumentation. Instead of explanations and proofs, this apologetic welcomes the outsider into the Most Holy Place that is the spoken and visible Word in order to make living within this charged symbolic universe something that can be, in the Spirit and in the fullest theological sense, imagined.

The cultic system of Old Testament Israel that was inaugurated at the Tabernacle of Moses and continued in the Temple of Solomon was a Janus with one face turned toward past remembrance and the other toward a future hope. When Christ appeared in history, the scandal consisted of the call to the people of God to transfer every allegiance they had to pillars and stones to the place where Jesus sat breaking every seal on the sacred scrolls, and to seek out the *Kavod Adonay* [the Glory of the LORD] from then on, in his gentle face. Rather than prescribing

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[281] Kierkegaard's *Discourses on the Communion on Friday* (1848-1851/2011) endorse this view with characteristic eloquence.

any of the Old Testament observances on New Testament believers, I merely find the divine

communication by such means to be instructive. No one committed to disembodied worldview

thinking or a reductionist understanding of the human person would ever have thought of such

things. They represent a wholistic formation of a peculiar people.

The motions of transcendent theological embodiment extend an influence on a bottom up,

precognitive level.[282] Like the incense in the Holy Place, and the altar in front of the veil, it is

especially the New Testament sacramental rituals that mediate a worshipful remembering and an

actualizing of what we love, according to our own best version of ourselves (cf. 2Co 5:17).[283]

They furnish a vision of the life that is best to live: in, by, and for Christ, the Dwelling of God.

7.4 "A Revealer of Mysteries": Indirect Communication in Hebrew Apocalyptic

In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by

the Kebar River, the heavens opened and I saw visions of God….I looked, and I saw a

windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and

surrounded by brilliant light. (Eze 1:1,4)

So begins the wild ride that is Hebrew apocalyptic literature: intersecting wheels covered

in eyes, living creatures with four wings and four faces, a valley of bones re-assembling

themselves, and so it goes. Ezekiel chapter one is not only the opening of the book that goes by

that name, but its composition "ushered in the age of the idiom itself with all its supernaturalist,

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[282] All my life I have physically stood up when the words of Christ are read from the four Gospels. Only much later have I taken to "crossing myself" in self-benediction as an "I-I" reminder of who and whose I am over against the forgetfulness of my Christian life. The liturgies I have known since infancy, the ones I grew to watch my father perform, are the motions that bodily imprint a sacred social imaginary. I grew to love bowing my head beneath his "Aaronic Blessing" (Nu 6:24-26)—"the LORD bless you and keep you…"— although I did not understand it until his hands could no longer rise. It was the constant of my life.

[283] Smith (2009) would describe it as a counter-formational vision of human thriving that does not leave it to lectures on Christian worldview to stem the pedagogies of worldly desire. By this he means the embodied secular "liturgies" of media and mall, sports arena and academia against which philosophical abstractions are no match.

eschatological accents" (Hummel, 1979, p. 267). By the time of the composition of the New Testament book of Revelation, an apocalyptic "vocabulary" had been well-established. Although the uninitiated are likely to be bewildered by biblical apocalyptic, the difficulty recedes for those who become conversant in the special language of Old Testament imagery.

It was not the intention of the writers working in this form, or the Spirit who inspired them, to be opaque to those who hungered for a Word from God in the world's darkest days. Even at its most mysterious, unmistakable themes of divine control and the triumph of ultimate good over radical evil still manage to break through. The inspired writer of apocalyptic literature takes the old promise in his hands—"I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jer 29:11)—and he plugs them into some unseen socket in the wall. The thing comes alive. It is the marriage of unambiguous promise with visionary pyrotechnic display that sets apocalyptic apart as an indirect communication.

7.4.1 Apocalyptic literature as an indirect communication. The Old Testament apocalyptic literature furnishes an example of one of my main contentions: Old Testament-style indirect communication is not only a strategy for disturbing the complacent. Since this genre tends to appear in times of crisis, its audience is often already in the grips of fear and trembling, already displeased with the evil all around, and already earnestly thirsting for God. The writers of biblical apocalyptic had other reasons for eschewing a direct, propositional form of communication. When Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and others issue their siren call to hope and perseverance, it comes under a veil as thick as any in the Old Testament.[284] This confirms a broadened application of indirect communication to include the mediation of healing and grace.

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[284] The word *apocalyptic* [a revealing] comes out of the Greek translation of the book of Daniel. In Daniel's Aramaic, God is the *Gale Razayya'* [Revealer of Mysteries] (2:29). Incidentally, scholars often puzzle over the occasional switch from Hebrew to Aramaic that occurs in Daniel and a few other places. The likely

It would add further luster to my argument to side with scholars who believe that the names under which apocalyptic was written, such as Daniel and Ezekiel, were actually pseudonyms (of the likes of Kierkegaard's Climacus or Johannes de Silentio). That notion is overruled by a "best text," genre-sensitive reading. Daniel and Ezekiel are presented in a most straightforward way as quite round historical figures. As I alluded to earlier, Ezekiel is not without his similarities with Kierkegaard as one who communicated in a way that could be dismissed as though not serious: "Then I said, 'Ah, Sovereign LORD! They are saying of me, 'Isn't he just telling riddles?'" (20:49).[285] I need not reiterate all the reasons it matters that the prophet is as real to us as God was to him. Any other view is fatal to the influence of these texts.

Biblical apocalyptic is a study in literary transportation. Readers are "take away from all this" and set down in an otherworldly place, a place where truths glow in the spiritual dark. All the stops of theological imagination are pulled out. In fact, Apocalyptic is the closest thing to visual media that a written text can construct: it is full of colors, graphics, and soundscapes within a surprising "universe of literary artistry" (Sandy & Giese, 1995, p. 178). Its appeal is visceral more than intellectual. Although written in prose, apocalyptic is best read as one reads a poem. The bold images of a new heavens and a new earth, for example, are to be inhabited, not dissected, nor need every detail be pressed into service. The visual collages offer a mood of transcendence—just this is the object of its communication—and it is one designed to steadily draw the heart away from the here and now. Apocalyptic fully exploits the captivating power of enigma. It demands effort of its readers, and the effort is rewarded when they begin to see their

explanation is that while Daniel intended his apocalyptic for the edification of his Jewish audience, he took pains to make sure the captor nation could overhear him in the *lingua franca* of the Babylonian empire.

[285] We meet here again a most significant word in terms of this study. As we have seen, in normal usage the Hebrew *mashal* may be anything from a parable to a pithy saying to speech that is intentionally puzzling. The translation of the plural word *meshallim* as "riddles" is appropriate in Ezekiel 20.

own circumstances as God sees them. The subjectivity that apocalyptic would communicate is that of hope and courage by means of the dawning of a most refreshing eternal perspective, the perspective of God. In this way, the genre itself is a "maker of meaning" (Devitt, 1993, p. 580), and one that does the most to supply a theme that is otherwise underrepresented in this study.

The special capability of Hebrew apocalyptic is that of learning to live *sub specie aeternitatis* [under the aspect of eternity]. The truth to be taken up into life, in this case, is of the particularly everlasting kind, invulnerable to the present reality.

As it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"—the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. (1C 2:9-10)

This luminous genre speaks uniquely to the paradox by which the divine is both transcendent and immanent, infinitely beyond yet present all the way down and all the way in this world. It rushes to our side with its unspoken call to "fix our eyes on what is unseen" because "what is unseen is eternal" (2Co 4:18). For people who are in trouble for his sake and who survive by learning how to "live by faith and not by sight" (2Co 5:7), Hebrew apocalyptic is not content to tell. It shows.[286] Given the context of crisis, it is worth reiterating that the ongoing significance of these texts grows out of the meaning they had in the original setting in which they first spoke their capability of hope and spoke it well. Failure to so root these Scriptures has turned the apocalyptic literature in both Old and New Testament into a "homeless child" (Sandy

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[286] It is not necessary to repeat all that has been said about Restoration Prophecy. Suffice it to say that promises of renewal can also take apocalyptic form and have the same range of fulfillment as other typical prophecies. An example is Ezekiel's vision of a valley of bones which come back to life as the *Ruakh* [Breath /Spirit] of Yahweh blows on them (Eze 37:1-14). The image can take in with equal felicity the revival of the hopes of the captives (cf. 37:11), the spiritual restoration of new life in Christ (cf. Jn 5:24-27), and a final physical resurrection of all who have died in Christ (cf. 1Th 4:16).

& Giese, 1995, p. 187) wandering the hermeneutic back alleys vulnerable to every manner of abuse.[287] The solution is to recognize that Old Testament apocalyptic has a soul.

According to the final biblical apocalyptic, the Revelation of John, it is the very "spirit of prophecy" (Rev 19:10) to draw all possible attention to Christ. It comes into its own when the religious self is lead outside of itself and bound up with him. Christ is that "Son of Man" (Da 7:13) and the "figure like that of a man" (Eze 1:26; 8:2) who steps here and there into the wild literary landscape unannounced like some Aslan, good but not tame. He is the *Revealer of Mysteries*. He is the *Glory of God.* (cf. Heb 1:3). *Kavod* [Glory] is a Leitwort that occurs twenty-one times in Ezekiel. Through Christ, the eschatological victory is always already-not-yet. It both waits to be realized and is existentially present to every audience. "Atonement and incarnation, salvation and new creation, form the warp and woof of the biblical fabric" (Hummel, 1979, p. 266) and these are meaningful in every age. Faith is the timeless overcoming.

7.4.2 To better love what we already know: Ezekiel chapter 1. As an indirect communication, the apocalyptic genre *interacts with knowledge that its audience already possesses.* Its reason for existence was to "speak to the heart" of people whose lives had been turned upside down, and for whom familiar truths can feel unreal, overwhelmed by the present circumstance. An insight I drew earlier from Teitjen (2013) gains special force in view of crisis:

 Most religious people lack a decisive religious "impression," the weighty realization of

 religious truth in the "present," in the midst of a life right now. Religiousness is sought

 for another day's use; in the meantime, they have their lives in other categories. (p. 12)

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[287] For example, it is common to read the way a particular prophetic symbol of famine or war is tied by a religious writer to specific events that happen to dominate current media. It is a kind of "chronological snobbery" that wants to claim that our day and ours alone is that special day the Seers recorded. What is far more likely is that these same prophetic images apply to *every* famine and *every* war as a recurring cry to the people of God in *every* age, "lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Lk 21:28).

When the bottom drops out, this simply will not do.

Ezekiel's opening apocalyptic takes such truths as divine omniscience and omnipresence and activates them in the inwardness of the audience through electrified language and an attention-arresting defamiliarization. Apocalyptic is cryptic and other-worldly, but for these very reasons it may consume the mind and quiet the heart, peeling the eyes of the self off itself. In this case, the literary transportation is to the very throne room of God:

> Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like an expanse, sparkling like ice, and awesome….Above the expanse was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him…When I saw it I fell face down. (Eze 1:22, 26-28)

This is that bigger picture, cosmically so, which Ezekiel opens up. Even as I articulate its meaning, namely, that "God is in control"—dare I say it?—I feel the triviality of the easy cliché compared to the grandeur of Ezekiel chapter one. No one falls face down before a cliché. It is the narrating of the vision, visceral and unforgettable, that mediates the presence of Christ and allows the reader to perceive the glory within every true thing that can be said about him.[288]

The apocalyptic genre invites comparison to media studies where it has been discovered, for example, that mass media gathers its power by means of the talk it creates in its audience. As people asked each other what the visions of Ezekiel could possibly mean, it is likely that remote

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[288] This happens in spite of the way Ezekiel clearly struggles to describe it. He can only tell us what "it was like" (1:5, 13, 24, 26, 27) in sight or sound so that readers not only imagine what he depicts, but they are compelled to heighten everything by their own imagination wherever Ezekiel signals that words have failed.

truths were Socratically reborn one after another in the urgent conversations of the faithful remnant: "It means he is with us. It means he has not abandoned us or forgotten his promise. It means he is near." In such times, the speaking of Sunday School truths to one another is never cliché. It is a capability, inwardly deepened in the special credibility that crises supplies, and in the costliness that pain attaches to the words. Like the best of theologically informed art, these scenes not only mediate truth, but they create the hushed response—"I recognize that"—in the religious subject who newly understands his or her own most prized possession of truth. All this the text would mediate in our day as well. They would revive our love for the knowledge we have long had already and which we, too, could stand to love more dearly.

7.4.3 Glory comes home. The Restoration Prophecy of Ezekiel features the literary blueprints for a new temple in a new Jerusalem, having fantastic dimensions and described in exhaustive detail (Eze 40-47). In the end, the Glory, which is Christ, moves in and the final two words of the book are *Adonay sham* [the LORD (is) there]. Read these chapters directly, and you expect that on some future day we will offer animal sacrifices in order "to make atonement" all over again (Eze 45:17) (while the writer of the letter to the Hebrews spins in his grave). Read it indirectly and everything is Christ, and we are his temple of living stones (cf. 1Pe 2:5, Eph 2:20; 1Co 3:16). If eight chapters devoted to temple design seem as if the Spirit has gone to an awful lot of trouble to communicate *that*, then we do not understand biblical indirect communication. Those temple blueprints, that scene of the Glory moving in—none of this is straightforward information. This is "hope and a future" and that future is all Christ. Ezekiel's temple is a place for running to—"blessed are all who take refuge in him" (Ps 2:12)—and the running itself is what the prophet communicates. The divine handwriting on the walls reads: I love you. I have redeemed you. *I will make you my home* (cf. Jn 14:23). It is already-not-yet.

In the chaotic times and frantic thoughts in which we now live, my own religious self has lately been conditioned at every hearing of one Christian saying to another, "God is in control," to mentally travel to Ezekiel chapter one. Imagination gets caught up in the atmosphere there, in the blue expanse that looks like ice, and the sound is "like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty" (Eze 1:24). Above it sits one like a Son of Man, and I am edified.[289]

7.5 "Skill in Living": Indirect Communication in Hebrew Proverbial Wisdom

> Let love and faithfulness never leave you;
>
>> bind them around your neck,
>>
>> write them on the tablet of your heart.
>
> Then you will win favor and a good name
>
>> in the sight of God and man.
>
> Trust in the LORD with all your heart
>
>> and lean not on your own understanding. (Pr 3:3-5)

The pithy sayings of ethical wisdom that characterize the Old Testament book of Proverbs might seem to be a quite direct communication form. The verses above illustrate that the text is peppered with imperatives and prohibitions, as well as the pronouns "you" and "your," as mark the second person form of address. There is some quite direct literary eye contact, so it would seem, between writer and reader. However, as we have seen so often before, there is risk in too direct a reading of yet another literary form.

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[289] The book of Ezekiel includes an example of the *implicit information* in many biblical texts that add a sort of artificial maieutic for later readers. (For example, the original audience of the books of Judges or the two books of Samuel would have had no trouble understanding that the expression, "from Dan to Beersheba," refers to the whole land of Israel from North to South.) In the case of Ezekiel, the *Kavod Adonay* [Glory of the LORD] is described in chapters 8-11 as moving from the Most Holy Place, to the temple threshold, to the air above it, to the East Gate, and to the Mount of Olives. It is clear to anyone that Yahweh was moving out of his temple so that it might fall as it must. The implicit information is the fact that he was moving in the direction of the captives in Babylon, to find a new and favorite place to live in the hearts of the broken-hearted.

One function of proverbial wisdom is to distil in one place the ethical principles that operate with some predictability within a moral universe, and more importantly, to center those ideals, not in mere punishment and reward, but in a trusting relationship with God. A modern reader could be forgiven for misreading this genre as having the illocutionary force of a promise: "Live this way and all will turn out as you hope it will." However, this reading ignores the corrective within the book itself in the form of its appeal to "trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (3:5).[290] By the same misreading, the book of Ecclesiastes then becomes a radical critique of so simplistic a view of the world as one finds in the book of Proverbs, and one book has been pitted against another within the canon.

The indirect reading of the book of Proverbs views Old Testament proverbial and non-proverbial wisdom in a deep and involving dialectic. Proverbs points out the path of true wisdom which it grounds brilliantly in Christ (as we will see), and the book of Ecclesiastes sets limits on our ability to make sense of life *on any other terms*. To maintain this distinction, it is crucial to recognize the genuinely indirect features of the proverbs of Solomon. They come in a poetic form (with all the indirectness that attaches to imagery and parallelism) but this is only the beginning. The book of Proverbs is not so easy or obvious as it may first appear.

7.5.1 The indirectness of proverbial wisdom. To begin with, it is a mistaken impression when readers perceive themselves to be directly addressed in this form. Instead, in the first seven chapters alone, Solomon addresses himself to *Beni* [my son] *nineteen times*. This places readers squarely in Kierkegaard's cemetery, so to speak. We overhear a warm but insistent communication from an older man to a boy he hopes will not lose his way. The overhearing of

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[290] Proverbs 3:5 enjoins readers (literally) not to "support themselves" on their own ability to discern the good and bad in life. About such things as sunshine or rain one must not say too much. The trust in God for which Solomon appeals is the no-matter-what kind.

religious earnestness in a familial frame is, indeed, the rhetorical structure of the book. The way

the book of Proverbs is framed is important for another reason. A closer look at its opening

verses leads us to fully expect that this genre will combine direct and indirect communication.

Proverbs thus makes a significant contribution to this study, causing us to recognize that both

ends of the maieutic continuum can meet in a single Hebrew text.[291] Let me explain.

The book of Proverbs opens with an unprecedented series of infinitive phrases that

express the purpose of all that follows. Indirect communicators absolutely *do not* begin by

declaring the objectives of their communication, but there is more here than meets the eye.

Among these phrases we read, on the one hand, that the instructions in this book are "for giving

prudence to the simple" (1:4). The word *simple* comes from the Hebrew word *peti* from the root

that signifies openness. We can expect the genre of proverbial wisdom to include some direct

communication of ethical wisdom to meet the needs of people who are naïve or unformed, and

thus, *open* to influence. On the other hand, the genre has additional purposes in helping people to

"understand proverbs and parables, the saying and riddles of the wise" (1:6).[292] In other words, a

prominent purpose of the book of Proverbs is to help readers understand a full range of

communication from the plainest to the most maieutic.

The elusive indirect communication of this genre includes sites of deliberate ambiguity.

There are proverbs that directly and quite intentionally contradict one another, as is evidenced by

adjacent proverbs. One verse intones, "Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in

his own eyes" (26:5), while the preceding verse advises, "*Do not* answer a fool according to his

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[291] No one is suggesting that the brilliant excesses of Kierkegaard either can or should be emulated in the modern Church. It is the blending of communication that is direct and indirect, guided preeminently by the forms in the biblical text itself, that can keep her communication vivid, challenging, and alive.

[292] Two of the vocables are rare and difficult. *Melitsa* and *khidah* give rise to such translations as *satire* or *ridiculing humor*, and communication that comes in the form of *enigma* or *puzzle*. Where the English translation has "riddles of the wise," the Septuagint renders the word in question *skoteinon logon* [dark speech].

folly, or you will be like him yourself" (26:4).This is clearly not a direct communication of information, nor can its content be applied in any mechanical way to real world ill-defined problems. Instead, it is a maieutic communication *par excellence*, one of the countless sites of dialectic tension in Proverbs where wisdom consists in untying yet another sort of biblical knot.

7.5.2 The theme of the book of Proverbs. When Solomon[293] announces the theme of the entire book: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (1:7), it is the epitome of poetically compacted speech. There are a mere four words in this half-line of Hebrew poetry where the English have ten. One is the covenant name of the LORD that we met at the Burning Bush—we never did see to the bottom of it. Another is the word for *wisdom* that will have looming significance over this entire dissertation (as we will see). First, however, there are important exegetical questions connected to the two remaining words, *beginning* and *fear*.

Re'shit [beginning] often designates something as *chief* or *highest*. According to that meaning, the fear of the LORD is understood to be the highest pinnacle among the many achievements of human reason. However, the word just as often refers to a *beginning* or *initiation* instead, and a parallel expression (Pr 9:10) solidly supports that reading here in Proverbs 1:7. This is a far more expansive claim: there is *no wisdom at all* if it does not have the fear of the LORD as its origin and ground. The theme verse of the book of Proverbs, then, is the unabashed assertion that people do not know anything, no matter how wise they may be by other standards if they do not know this fear. God's sort of wisdom has no competitor. It stands in opposition to and is the frustration of, any other sort of knowing.

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[293] I accept the designations about authorship that occur at the beginning and throughout the book of Proverbs. (This is one Old Testament book, along with the book of Psalms, to which we can confidently ascribe more than one author). Solomon was a man of unprecedented wisdom, as detailed in 1 Kings 4:34-39. Upon being asked by the LORD to name anything he desired, he asked for a *lev shomea'* [a heart that hears], that is, an inward capability for *hearing the difference* between good and evil, wisdom and foolishness.

As for the word *yare'* [fear], it includes all the normal associations English speakers have with the word *fear*, but the word in Hebrew has a much more expansive semantic range. This is signaled in a psalm verse that reads (literally), "For with you is forgiveness, therefore *you are feared*" (Ps 130:4). There it is demonstrated that *yare'* extends to another sort of trembling that is different in kind from that of anxiety or dread. The word can signify a profound and reverent awe before the mystery of divine condescending love. In other words, this "fear of the LORD" is the sinner's experience of the "infinite qualitative difference" between themselves and God, and it can be occasioned by his holiness, his grace, or both at one time. It is in this very dialectic of fear that true wisdom is born in the inwardness of the religious self. The path of wisdom, the only kind there is, runs between the two mountains of Sinai and Golgotha.

7.5.3 Hebrews versus Greek wisdom. It is critical to be specific about what the writer of Proverbs means by the word *wisdom*. Many synonyms pile up in the prologue of the book, and each one signifies a nuanced capability.[294] However, the most important *Leitwort* in the book of Proverbs is the word *kokhmah* [wisdom]. This word for wisdom refers to having knowledge *as well as the ability to apply it*. The person in possession of *kokhmah* knows how to do things. I argue this based on the occurrence of the word in connection with the craftsmen who constructed the Tabernacle and all its furnishings (Ex 35:31). They received instructions of such a kind that room was left room for artistic imagination in order to realize the vision. These were people who knew how to do things with fabric, metal, and wood. In the book of Proverbs, *kokhmah* extends to *skill in living itself*, and this is the most prominent word for wisdom in all of Old Testament

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[294] *Bin* is the root associated with *understanding* (or discerning difference) that we have met already. *Musar* concerns the willingness to learn and take *correction* from those who are wiser. *Mishpat* means *justice* understood as the application of wisdom to the needy and vulnerable in society. There are synonyms that connote the ability to perceive the likely consequences of one's actions, and others that involve having the restraint or common sense to act accordingly. Like the dozens of words Eskimoes are said to have for *snow*, there are still more Hebrew words related to the many capabilities of wisdom. They are the antonyms to the word *folly* (with its own family of synonyms), referring to *moral* stupidity not deficient intelligence.

wisdom literature, both proverbial and otherwise. To distinguish this word from all of its many synonyms, one could do no better than to translate the word *kokhmah* as *capability.*

The comparison between the ancient Greek and Hebrew conception of wisdom has special relevance. On the one hand, there is the pondering of the mysteries of the cosmos with Plato and his ideal forms. On the other hand, there is the ability to discern the awful and wonderful power of words. These two paradigms are different in kind. Consider the knowledge of the Ph.D. in rocket science whose life is a proverbial disaster for lack of self-control—his problem is not that he is stupid—versus the pious grandmother who starts her day with the Word of God on her lap—she knows how to do things. To avoid ruin by the sparkle of wine, to seek out many counselors, to have the grace to listen in quietness—this is the old Hebrew wisdom. It brings to mind the saying about the philosopher who can tell you everything there is to know about the universe except how to get through an ordinary day. It also brings to mind all the sensitivities of Kierkegaard in terms of both philosophy and ethics.

I discussed earlier the acronym, SPUNCA, that Aumann (2008) uses to capture Kierkegaard's views on philosophy (p. 238*): Sophisticated Philosophical Understandings is of No Christianly Value.* He saw that philosophy contributed nothing to Christian orthodoxy and that merging the two could only result in the complete emptying of the latter. To take the matter forward, speculative philosophy, under the veneer of hijacked Christian language, made no demands upon its audience. There was no way for people to relate to it *except* intellectually. In other words, there was nothing in this form of wisdom that could be actualized, say, in the act of loving your wife well or in nurturing the courage of a cheerful disposition. Kierkegaard's famous and famously misunderstood axiom, "truth is subjectivity," does not even apply to this kind of

truth.[295] The point is that the ethical wisdom of the ancient Hebrew model is of such a kind that it ushers in the possibility that people would hold themselves in a wrong relationship to it.

The beginning of *un*wisdom, so to speak, is to take the Old Testament wisdom literature as a communication of information and not of capability. Kierkegaard (1967, p. 272) illustrated this in a great jest in which a sergeant tries to instruct a recruit that he is not to speak during drill. To the growing frustration of the sergeant, the recruit answers over and over that he fully understands what he is being told. What he does not do, however, is stop talking. The more he affirms his cognitive grasp of the message, as if it were a transmission of data, the more he reveals a failure of capability (and of the communication that was meant to instill it).

In just this way, there is no guarantee that the study of ethics (as it concerns the accumulated treasures of wisdom about how it is best to live) will make a person better. To understand Kierkegaard's frustration with Danish Christendom, you must imagine a great crowd of untruth relating to Christianity itself in the way of the stupid recruit, a vast and dull congregation that perpetually confirmed this posture—revelation as information—in one another. What the book of Proverbs does about it this problem is quite remarkable indeed.

7.5.4 Christ, the Wisdom of God. Proverbs chapter 8 presents one of the most interesting exegetical and interpretive questions of the entire Old Testament. It is a text that has a long history of its own, especially in the significant role it played in the early Christological

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[295] The relativity of those who speak comfortably about things that are "true for me" but may not be "true for you" would have been incomprehensible to Kierkegaard. If a person were to say in total hypocrisy, "Jesus is Lord," is he telling the truth? Yes and no. What is objectively true has come in a form that was never intended for it when it is embodied in a person who relates to it so falsely. There is a dreadful untruth in the communication episode. One of Kierkegaard's parables features a madman who tries to convince people that he is sane by repeating something true over and over again. His ranting, "the earth is round, the earth is round," convinced them of just the opposite. Kierkegaard is cleverly illustrating the fact that whether or not a person says things that are true is not the end of our concern for truth or for that person. "Truth is subjectivity" means that how a person stands in relation to truth is of decisive importance for that person. Christian truths are not like shiny coins that have the same value no matter whose pocket they are in. Speaking objectively, of course, they do—the gospel is the gospel. Speaking subjectively, they do not.

controversies of the 4th Century AD.[296] This is the question: were the church fathers correct when they saw Christ in this portion of the Old Testament, or could the word *kokhmah* in Proverbs 8 simply be a personification of *wisdom* as a divine attribute? The latter would be well within the bounds of Hebrew Poetry. In fact, *folly* is personified in the very next chapter. What is more, the Hebrew word for wisdom is a feminine noun. It stands to reason that a father instructing his impressionable son would want to cast God's wisdom as a woman issuing an attractive siren call:

Does not wisdom call out?

Does not understanding raise her voice?

"To you, O men, I call out;

I raise my voice to all mankind." (8:1, 4)

For the first 21 verses of Proverbs 8, there is nothing to disrupt this natural reading. Even as a personification of wisdom, the verses provide much to ponder over against one's own lived-out foolishness. "I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me" (8:17). However, the language begins to reach higher at a quite identifiable moment when this *wisdom* announces:

The LORD brought me forth

as the first of his works before his deeds of old;

I was appointed from eternity,

from the beginning, before the world began. (8:22-23)

Someone reading Proverbs 8 all along as a personification of a divine attribute may cling

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[296] In the Arian controversy over the nature and person of Christ, people on the sides of both Arias and Athanasius assumed that Proverbs 8 was speaking about Christ. In the end, Proverbs 8 contributed to the wordings and affirmations of the Nicene Creed, describing the Son of God as: "begotten of the Father before all worlds...begotten not made...through whom all things were made." As for a text that "means everything it has meant," Proverbs 8 has accumulated massive significance.

to that interpretation through the entirety of verses 22-31 (where I will resume close reading in

earnest). However, others are likely to experience dissonance with that reading at various points

along the way. One crux occurs in verse 30 where *kokhmah* [wisdom] speaks of God and recalls

being "the craftsman *at his side*" (8:30). In other words, some sort of distinction is being

introduced between two persons, both of whom are credited with the creation of the universe.

This problematizes understanding this wisdom as nothing but an attribute of God, although this

is not insurmountable (evidenced by fine scholars who continue to read the text in just this way).

I have restrained my analysis of Proverbs 8:22-31 where the exegesis is rather technical

(much of which I will relegate to footnotes for those with special interest). Yet, the pay dirt is

flecked with gold.[297] The following is the case for the reading by which Christ himself is the

voice of Capability that calls in Proverbs chapter 8.[298] (Incidentally, it is useful to note that the

feminine noun for *wisdom* and all the feminine pronouns that accompany it have dropped drop

out in the switch to the first person singular at verse 12 and continuing throughout the verses we

now consider.) What can we say for sure about this *Kokhmah* on the basis of a close reading?

Kokhmah [Wisdom] was already the possession of God before any creative act occurred

(8:22), that is, "from the beginning, before the world began" (8:23). Using a verb with strong

Messianic associations, God "appointed" this *Kokhmah* in timeless eternity.[299] Rather than that

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[297] I have had help in digging it up by others who have arrived at the same Christological reading (Childs, 1979/2011, p. 383; Hummel, 1979, pp. 399-403; Steinman, 2009, pp. 206-218).

[298] This interpretation revives that of the most prominent pre-Nicene fathers, especially Justin Martyr (100-165 AD), Irenaeus (2nd century), and Origen (185-254 AD). Dionysius of Alexandria (died 265 AD) was one of the few to wrestle with the problematic Greek translation of Proverbs 8:22. The Septuagint translates the Hebrew word *kanan*i (a key but disputed word) into the Greek word, *ektisen* [he created].To have wisdom declare itself to be *created* by God would either be fatal to the Christological reading of Proverbs 8, or worse, would support the Arian view of who Christ is. He could not be the *hypostasis* [exact representation] of God's being (Heb 1:3). Suffice it to say that the translation, "he created me," can be completely ruled out based on usages of the verb *kanah* in the Old Testament, especially in this very book of Proverbs. There it can unambiguously refer to someone *possessing* someone or something. It is safe to take as the meaning of the expression in Proverbs 8 that this Wisdom was God's special belonging from all eternity.

[299] The word *nasakh* occurs elsewhere only in Psalm 2 where God addresses his Son whom he (perhaps) *installs* on Mt. Zion. However, the word occurs in parallel with *Meshiko* [Anointed One] (Ps 2:6) and

wisdom was ever created, he was "given birth" (8:24, 25) before anything else existed in an eternal moment of timeless begetting.[300] Here the poem soars to things of uncommon beauty—oceans, mountains, horizons, and clouds (8:24-29)—evoking an imagination both scientific and theological. It is the cosmic dance of things unthinkably distant and large, the mysterious binding of all things (8:29-30), and the joy that pulses at the center of all there is (8:30-31). Wisdom declares, *sham 'ani* [there (was) I] before any of this came to be. In fact, he is the *'etzlo 'amon* [master craftsman beside him] who laid the foundations of the earth (8:29-30).[301]

The final expression has an aura of mystery about it such as may best be felt in the strangeness of a wooden translation. In the end, this *Kokhmah* exalts (literally) "I was delights day-day, playing before him in all time, in the world, his earth" (8:30). The connotation is pure joy. The grammar in connection with the word *delights* involves the *abstract plural*, just as in the expression, "his *compassions* never fail" (La 3:22). The plurality itself brings concreteness to the abstraction of the noun: the reader is invited to imagine the countless manifestations in reality of the quality it describes. Proverbs 8:30-31 captures the pure delight of every divine creative act when "angels rejoiced while the morning stars sang together" (Job 38:7). This evokes not only

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thus may actually hold the same verbal idea as *Meshiakh* [Messiah]. The occurrence of *nasakh* in Proverbs 8:23 would then have even stronger Messianic implications than otherwise.

[300] Deepest mystery surrounds the verb *kholalti* which is sometimes translated as "I was brought forth." This is where Proverbs 8 contributed to the language of the Nicene Creed. The ancient theologians hammered out a careful language for describing the relationship of God the Father and God the Son, describing the latter as "begotten not made." If Proverbs 8:23 & 24 refers to Christ, it is high Christology. The relationship of the First and Second Persons of the Trinity is revealed in human speech as a timeless begetting. This is their eternal relationship, rather than that "was a time when he [the Son] was not." This is the reading of *kholalti*—"before the hills, *I was brought forth*"—that reveals its total harmony with the apostolic language, as I will describe shortly.

[301] I commented earlier on the significance of the word *beside* which creates some sort of distinction between the speaker and God, whom I am taking (with many scholars) to be two persons of the Trinity. The word translated "master craftsman" is a rare and difficult form, but the Hebrew root is that of the familiar word *Amen*. You might say, Christ was the "Amen-er" sustaining, confirming, and participating in all the Creator was doing. The translators of the Greek Septuagint rendered the expression so that the divine wisdom *binds all things together,* which is quite evocative in this context as well. Proverbs 8 doesn't only mention things unthinkably large, but also refers cryptically to "the dust particles of the world" (8:26).

the meaningfulness of the world God made, expressed in the flight of an insect and the curve of the wave (taken for granted in the pre-Modern world), but even more, the ecstasy of creation.

At the end of this exalted poetry, the wonder of creation becomes the mystery of grace. The final line of the literary unit turns abruptly to a note of revelation which nothing that has come before would lead a reader to anticipate. This *Kokhmah*, this "Christ, the Wisdom of God" (1Co 1:24) takes special joy and pleasure in all human beings (literally): "all my delights are in the sons of humankind" (8:31). Suddenly, after this crescendo, the language tames back down to the themes with which it began: "Now then, my sons, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways" (8:32). In fact, chapter 9 returns to the third person, which in turn brings back the feminine noun for wisdom and its accompanying feminine pronouns.

What has most persuaded many believing scholars that Christ is the Wisdom that sings in Proverbs 8 is the similarity of the language this text has with many Scriptures that are incontrovertibly speaking about him. In the book of Acts, the apostles reveal that Psalm 16 was nothing other than a hymn that Christ himself sings, and it includes the edifying line, "As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious *ones in whom is all my delight* [emphasis added]" (vs. 3). This is all the more significant in context where it is an aspect of resurrection prophecy: "You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay" (Ps 16:10). The highest joy of the risen Christ is the people he has redeemed.

The similarity of language and thought extends also to the New Testament epistles. There we meet "Christ…the *Wisdom* of God" (1Co 1:24). Christ has been "*appointed* heir of all things" as the one "through whom [God] made the universe" (Heb 1:2) and who is "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Heb 1:3). Preeminently, in the letter to the Colossians, Christ is the *prototokos* [firstborn] over all creation, (not to mention that he is also the firstborn from the

dead) (1:15,18). Furthermore, "all things were created by him" (v. 16) who is "before all things and in him all things hold together" (v. 17). Neither are the Gospels left out. John refers to Christ as the divine and immanent *Logos*, a term he borrowed from the Greeks for whom it meant the wisdom of *world-reason* or the *divine logic* in all creation (Hummel, 1979, p. 402).

What is most striking of all is the way these New Testament resonances of Christ as the very Wisdom of God often allow the language of creation to give way to the language of the cross, the wisdom that is higher still. The wisdom of God is the apparent foolishness of Christ crucified and the ultimate *skandalon* [offense] to human reason (1 Corinthians 1:23), even as the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. In Colossians 1 where Christ is the "firstborn of God," and where the language about the person of Christ Creator soars as high as any place in Scripture, what follows is this: "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth of things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (v. 19-20). It is all apiece of the continual pouring of meanings of the New Testament writers into the Old Testament vessel, in particular, the urgent invitation of *Kokhmah*, "Who finds me, finds life" (Pr 8:35).

7.5.5 His name is Capability I have argued above that the word *capability* is a most appropriate translation for *kokhmah*, the theme word in Proverbs, to distinguish it among all its synonyms. Next, I argued at some length that Christ's very name in Proverbs 8, accordingly, is *Capability*. The implications this has for the book of Proverbs, for the larger genre of Old Testament wisdom literature, and for indirect communication can hardly be overstated. In view of the preceding analysis, Proverbs 8 supplies compelling support for my thesis. In tension with the express purposes of the book that are laid out in its prologue—and in classic indirectness— there is a far higher purpose to the book of Proverbs that its writers did not announce in advance.

The purpose of the book of Proverbs, as an indirect communication, is to transcend the ethical sphere of existence in the truly religious. In the biblical view, the knowledge of right and wrong does not require special revelation because it is innate in humanity; it is available through human conscience and through contemplation of the orderly majesty of the universe. It is subject to the investigation of human reason and conscience. There is a reason that the proverbs of Solomon, where they repeat information that is already available, do so in poetic images and form and (now and then) with deliberate ambiguity. These strategies involve the subject in double reflection on what such things mean in existence. They turn objectivity into subjectivity.

However, the book of Proverbs does more than communicate ethical information. It communicates Christ and gives him his intriguing new title as Capability itself. It is in him that every capability that can be thought of congeals and holds together. Whoever does not know him, does not know anything, better, *how to do anything*. Proverbs 8, as the touchstone of Hebrew proverbial wisdom, changes how the religious self relates itself to the entire ethical content of the Hebrew Old Testament. It does so by drawing the religious self into a relationship of faith with Christ the Wisdom of God, because only in him and in this trembling and joyful fear can the capabilities of real and ultimate wisdom begin to find realization in the religious subject. So far so good. However, what it requires is that we stand back and watch, first in horror and then in something else entirely, the way the entire ethical sphere of existence falls apart.

7.5.6 The proper understanding of biblical righteousness. The word *tsedakah* [righteousness] is the *Leitwort* in the book of Proverbs by which the question about how to properly relate oneself to the ethical requirements of Christianity quickly becomes a crisis. To understand this, it is necessary to elaborate further on how a direct reading of Old Testament proverbial wisdom necessarily fails. A naive reading of vast portions of the book of Proverbs

would have it match up quite miserably with what passes for religion in the street. These Scriptures could seem at first glance to commend a view of religion as a sort of vaguely sanctified common sense about right and wrong. Worse, it could be misread as affirming an instinctual works-righteousness: do good things and God is obligated to reward you. (This time, it is Kierkegaard who spins in his grave.) Such a reading not only ignores the poetic vignette in chapter 8, but it also conveniently steps around the ultimacies that are everywhere present among the proverbs as a crucial feature of the genre. These examples are drawn from a single chapter:

> The eyes of the LORD are everywhere
>
>> Keeping watch on the wicked and the good. (15:3)
>
> The LORD detests the way of the wicked
>
>> But he loves those who pursue righteousness. (15:9)
>
> Death and Destruction lie open before the LORD—
>
>> how much more the hearts of men! (15:11)
>
> The path of life leads upward for the wise
>
>> To keep him from going down to the grave. (15:24)
>
> The LORD is far from the wicked
>
>> But he hears the prayer of the righteous. (15:29)

The ethical requirements which the book of Proverbs lays on the religious subject are not such a casual matter after all. The attributes of God, his omnipresent and omniscient holiness, are brought fully to bear in an examination of the quality of every human life. Solomon spiritualized the law much as Christ did when he equated lust with adultery and hatred with murder: the heart (inwardness itself) is laid perpetually open before Yahweh. What is more, the words *death* (15:11) and *grave* (15:24) in the verses above translate the same Hebrew word, *she'ol*, presenting

it as one of two ultimate destinations.[302] Individual proverbs relentlessly accumulate to offer

abundant life and blessing to the one who is righteous and to threaten consequences in this world

and the next for the one who is not. For anyone to claim these rewards or to exonerate

themselves from these punishments, they would have to be under a monstrous illusion, indeed.

"If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O LORD, who could stand?" (Ps 130:3).

> Wisdom's own axiology would highlight primarily the vertical, existential aspect of man
>
> before God, always under God's searchlight (cf. Ps. 139). Every day is judgment day.
>
> Man is always at the crossroads. His situation is always poised between life and
>
> death…every choice and activity of his, even the most trivial, is fraught with ultimate
>
> consequences. Each thrusts ultimately in one direct or the other; *sub specie aeternitatis*.
>
> (Hummel, 1979, p. 398)

"Every day is judgment day." I am taking pains to describe the unique power to wound

that is present throughout the book of Proverbs, aimed as they are at the practical manifestations

of human character in an actual lived existence. However, as Solomon himself says, "Wounds

from a friend can be trusted" (Pr 27:6). The insistent question that is Socratically born in the

inwardness of the sensitive conscience is absolutely intended by the writers of biblical wisdom

literature*: who is righteous?* This occasions the resort to grace that names the collapse of the

ethical sphere of existence. The Book of Proverbs holds up a mirror to bring the religious self to

that mortifying consciousness of sin so that every illusion may dissolve in the cry for mercy.

The New Testament understanding indeed draws powerful steam from this Hebrew

literature, namely, that there is no righteousness available to the religious self except that foreign

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[302] Only a scholar committed to the assumptions of higher criticism can read eternal consequences out of this word, as becomes clear by simply scanning its range of uses in the Old Testament. *She'ol* is most often a poetized descriptor of Grave and Death in capital letters, so to speak. That is, it is more than a poetic heightening of temporal death.

righteousness which is the person of Christ himself. The need to bring Old Testament texts into conversation with one another is nowhere more urgent than here. This is from Isaiah:

I delight greatly in the LORD;

My soul rejoices in my God.

For he has clothed me with garments of salvation [*bigde yesha'*]

And arrayed me in a robe of righteousness [*me'il tsedakah*]. (Isa 61:10)

This is the covering of exquisite beauty that adorns the very lives of believers by faith (and under which, in a delightful image from Luther, they must perpetually pull their toes). First, however, they most know that they are naked. All self-satisfaction under the bright surgical light of the Proverbs is pure illusion. Only faith can bear its lines in stubborn joy and confidence.

Since the "righteousness" or "wickedness" is no longer simply a matter of personal merit and deserts, but of whether or not in the light of God's promises and covenant, one has been found guilty or innocence before the heavenly court, the believer can and does always appeal to a vicarious righteousness to contravene what otherwise is a sure "law of condemnation." Here, the ultimate unity of the concepts of "wisdom" and "righteousness" enable us to bring the entire matter within the forensic rubric of "justification by faith." (Hummel, 1979, p. 399)

In a dynamic we have seen before, indirect communication is inherent when the proverbs heal at the very places where they do their most grievous wounding. "Bleed on me again, Lord Christ" is the cry of the religious subject. The pursuit of *tsedakah* [righteousness] (15:9) can no longer refer to the moral striving to be found worthy under "God's searchlight." That project failed before it began. The pursuit of righteousness becomes, instead, the passion for the self to be found only in him. "Whoever finds me finds life"(8:35) is the promise faith cheerfully claims.

This is not the religion of the street: "I will be good enough. I must be good enough."

> Wisdom's accent on ultimacies will be a major part of the argumentation that such a
> theology was…implicit throughout mainline Old Testament thought, and often surfaced
> also in a more explicit way….In one sense, the full nature of that ultimacy could not be
> revealed until the ultimate act itself, the resurrection of our Lord. As always, the faithful
> exegete will be careful to distinguish the degrees of explicitness in revelation of that
> ultimacy (i.e., he will not "read in" alien meanings), but the greater danger is that he will
> fail to "read out" of these texts their full Christological import. (Hummel, 1979, p. 399)

What does it mean to be wise? In sharpest contrast to all that unaided human reason can know, there is all that filled the mind of Christ in his contagious shout to the sky:

> At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father,
> Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and
> learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were
> pleased to do. (Lk 10:21)

The revelation to which Jesus refers is the reality of his divine nature, though veiled in human flesh. Although the smart ones missed him, the children found him out, and it made him glad.

7.5.7 A taste of Christ delighting. Proverbs chapter 8 casts its wild, mentally unhinging creativity over the entire genre of pithy ethical sayings. That most mysterious of Hebrew poems is all Christ in a revelry of remembering the very creation of the world—*sham 'ani* [I was there]. He laughed in the playground of the whole earth, but the height of his happiness was in the people he redeemed (cf. 8:30-31).

This is the achievement of the book of Proverbs. It combines pithy ethical sayings about the life that is worth living with this breathtaking, cosmic vision of the universe as it whirls in the

heart of Christ. It is instructive to consider what the one has to do with the other. It brings to

mind C.S. Lewis' theory of *universal value*. It is not mere taste or shifting sentiment when a

parent delights in a child, for example, but rather the act and the pleasure of it is in harmony with

the universe as it really is (1947/1974). The same is true of every other embodiment of ethical

wisdom that is affirmed in Old Testament wisdom literature: they are linked uniquely and

inseparably to the universe-sized dimensions of Proverbs 8, and to reality as it really is. This is

ethical wisdom's relationship to the joy that is Christ. It is no wonder that proverbial wisdom is

framed in relational terms, the father delighting in his tender son. Both sides of *yare'* [fear] are

stirred as Christ offers a taste of his own delight to all who cling to him in brokenness and faith.

There is one final critical note to this argument. What I have articulated throughout this

section about the biblical way of life is the polar opposite of the antinomianism against which

Kierkegaard railed in his day. That is the theological view in which the liberating ethic of

Christianity is canceled and every "cost of discipleship" is radically undermined. The Book of

Proverbs has not somehow fallen out of the canon. Instead it still affirms that the God who cares

for his people also cares about how they live.

"Come to me, all you who are weary…" (Mt 11:28) is the call of Christ to those who are

exhausted under the weight of legalistic self-righteousness, and it is not a call to joyless striving,

but to a relationship characterized by spiritual, inward rest. The prerequisite for the obedience of

faith is a full heart. Until one knows this freedom from every curse and coercion of the law, and

apart from the relationship of the redeemed with the Redeemer, it is impossible for the religious

self to properly read the book of Proverbs, or to ask in the right way what God would have a

person do.[303] Before grace comes in, the religious subject can only use the law to justify itself or

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[303] It is a Reformation axiom: "What the law requires is the end of the law."

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to distinguish itself from others, and to insult the gift that God makes of himself. When, instead, the word *righteousness* comes into its own in the book of Proverbs as a word of highest comfort and relief, and the soul knows its first taste of Christ delighting, its instructions are transformed, not expunged. Although the genre is misread as a series of promises for the self-righteous to claim as a hedge against pain and suffering, what remains is an intoxicating vision of the life upon which the universe inwardly shines, even when pain and struggle remain for a brief time.

Struggle we will and it has little to do with how smart we are. The existential mess, the ugly reality, is more humiliating than that. The Book of Proverbs spins a vast web of capabilities, but the "fear of the LORD" is where skill in living begins. In this way, our knowing "how to do things" begins with the capability of repentance and it culminates in our being drawn more deeply into the grace of Christ who is the Wisdom of God. It expresses itself in a desire to teach others and to exist in what we say. In this genre we meet a style of religious pedagogy informed by the Hebrew *mashal* [proverb]: one thing is always set beside another in artful indirectness. Preeminently, it is Christ we would set beside any other way of being-in-the-world.

7.6 "Chasing After the Wind": Indirect Communication in Wisdom Literature

> I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. (Ecc 1:12-14)

Out of the entire Old Testament, the book of Ecclesiastes or Qohelet[304] best exemplifies the strategy in which the communicator "gives by taking away" (Kierkegaard, 1846/1992, p. 275). In Kierkegaard's analogy, just as a person's mouth can become so stuffed with food that no

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[304] The title, Ecclesiastes, creates confusion with the non-canonical literature titled, *Ecclesiasticus.* I will often refer to the books as *Qohelet* [the Preacher] based on the verb *qahal* [gather an assembly].

nourishment is possible, an excess of unappropriated knowledge can impede true edification. In this view, it is better to know a little and to begin to express that little in existence, than to use encyclopedic biblical knowledge, as Kierkegaard put it, "to construct a world in which I did not live." Qohelet would communicate what could seem to be a modest capability: to fear God and to enjoy life for what it is because nothing else makes much sense. Both the vertical and the existential are present in this message, which can be captured quite concisely. *Be here now.*[305]

7.6.1 Giving by taking away. This idea emanates from Kierkegaard's robust understanding of the true quality of the human receiver. The self is no blank slate of ignorance waiting to be written full. The better analogy for human inwardness is of a leather palimpsest on which much has already been written so that its skin needs to be scraped clean before anything new can be inscribed there. In truth, most people stubbornly cling to what they think they know and to the illusion of having life all figured out. Ironically, those who imagine themselves to be religious are especially prone to settle down comfortably in this world, supposing that they already possess Solomon-like answers to all that life will ever ask. What is worse, they can be prone to that seldom acknowledged problem of over-communication when some shattered soul shrieks, "Why?"

Earlier I argued for an indirect reading of the book of Proverbs that takes seriously the way its accusing ethic chases the sensitive reader back to Christ in whom every capability is found, that is, in the Wisdom, the Righteousness, and the Joy of God. Old Testament proverbial wisdom may nevertheless be misread as the altogether conventional wisdom of "doing good so that good things happen." This point of view can easily fossilize into a system of pharisaical self-righteousness and domesticated self-sufficiency. In other words, a naïve reading of the book of

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[305] A friend, Dr. Kenneth Cherney, contributed this insight (to much slapping of foreheads) at a conference I attended in April, 2014.

Proverbs could contribute to a false, comforting narrative about life in this world to be defended at all cost. People in the ethical sphere must preserve that narrative as if survival itself is at stake: personal obedience will stem disaster, and every human pursuit is within the grasp of those who sufficiently commit themselves. In the ethical sphere of existence, the religious life is turned into "a branch of self-interest" (Hummel, 1979, p. 534). Not if Qohelet can help it.

The Preacher is a pitiless surgeon working in the tools of both poetry and prose. Christendom has not been especially tolerant of ambiguity, but can be characterized instead by a willingness to speak into the silence of God, and to paste a meaning wrestled out of his hidden mind onto every particular happening in this world. "The Christian compulsion to moisten the world with meaning raises the anxiety in people that they may have missed a spot, left a dry patch of senselessness that puts their whole project of salvation at risk" (Robbins, 2007. p. 212). We would walk by our own lights. The Preacher is a corrective not unlike Kierkegaard.

"Meaningless, meaningless!"

Says the teacher.

"Utterly Meaningless!

Everything is meaningless." (Ecc 1:2)

The Preacher has taken stock of his world and all that he has witnessed between the two horizons of birth and death. He has looked unblinkingly at the enigmas of life and all the flat contradictions to conventional wisdom that are regularly seen "under the sun" (Ecc 1:*3 et passim*). This expression (occurring 27 times in Qohelet) is extraordinarily significant, referring to how things appear to human sight and unaided reason.[306] He simply cannot work out all the

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[306] This helps to resolve how such a book gained acceptance in the canon. For example, it seems theologically problematic that the same fate is said to come to people and animals alike when they die (3:19). However, that every living thing returns to the dust from which it was made is precisely how things appear "under the sun," and a biblical book that acknowledges this is of inestimable worth. Later, in the haunting

things life has shown to him. To try is "a chasing after the wind" (1:14 *et passim*).[307] This image

poetically captures the mad and futile pursuit of pleasure, advancement, wealth, or sense-making

on human terms. A full array of human capabilities are examined then discarded in a such a way

as to chase readers back to a better knowledge, that of their own nothingness and frailty.

Ultimately, it is the inevitability of death that casts its shroud of futility on the totality of all

human striving to make sense of the world as it really is. It will all come to nothing. This book is

the anti-*shalom*, that is, it concerns the way everything is *supposed* to be, but clearly is not. One

apparent fate befalls the righteous and wicked, the wise and the fool alike. Whatever can it all

mean? The Preacher is unwilling to varnish reality with half-truths or chirpy fables. The only

alternative is to confront an existential darkness for which only the light of revelation, the light

of Christ, will do. This is the whole key to the Christological reading of the book.

The "taking away" in Qohelet is quite violent, a sort of literary shock treatment offered

up to cancel the easy pieties, teach reason its limits, and to set down a border guard down for the

hidden mind of God. However, it is crucial to detect the kindness of the Preacher in so pitiless a

demolition. It is a severe mercy that seeks to strip away a view of life that can only set the soul

up for a horrifying disillusionment and an unyielding despair. After all, life happens. When the

illusion crashes, it crashes hard. Qohelet would strip the comfortable mask off the universe, and

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poem about aging, revelation picks up where phenomenology leaves off: "the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it" (12:7).

[307] The word *khevel* refers to a vapor, mist, or mere puff of breath. Translations such as "meaningless," "vanity," or even "absurd" might seem to be what would have attracted Kierkegaard, but the book occupied a quite positive place in his thought. He saw in it the capability of making distinctions between, for example, what belongs to this world and what belongs to eternity, or between what one can and cannot understand. Further, the Preacher demolishes the aesthetic and ethical spheres of existence: he affixes the assessment of "meaningless" equally to the pursuit of pleasure (2:1-11) as to toil of work (2:17-26), *apart from God*. This last phrase matters. "Meaningless" does not attach to every way of being-in-the-world, but to every point of view except the true religious sphere of existence, that is, the fear of God (12:13-14). The key for both Kierkegaard and the Preacher is to refuse to replace faith with reason or trust with empiricism. What is more, the "house of mourning" (7:2, 4) brings to the religious self a necessary dissatisfaction with the vain hopes of this world, pointing the way toward a hope that is in God alone. This is not meaningless.

for such an agenda, propositions simply will not do. It requires an indirect communication.

7.6.2 Deliberate ambiguity as an indirect communication. The Qohelet literature is unanimous in recognizing the deep ambiguities of the book. Its most compelling feature is the frequent alternation of viewpoint "from what seems like rank agnosticism to very traditional, orthodox sounding assertions—and back again" (Hummel, 1979, p. 530). The ambiguity of Qohelet is evidenced by the diversity of scholarly readings it has occasioned, including those that diametrically oppose each other (Ingram, 2006). In fact, the book is fundamentally ambiguous *by design*. The undeniable polarity of Qohelet, the great clash of the pessimistic and optimistic point of view, is the most important characteristic of the book. This is its real genius, its capability for taking hold of a self, robbing its sleep, and refusing to leave it alone.

Consider all that coexists within the boundaries of this one book. There is the altogether charming: "Two are better than one…a cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (4:9, 12), the undeniably profound: "[God] has set eternity in the hearts of men" (3:11) and the genuinely nostalgic: "[There is] a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance" (3:4). Indeed, God has "made everything beautiful in its time" (3:11). *At the same time*, the Preacher cannot hold back the knowledge of where all the striving of his life and all the clutching at beauty will inevitably lead. He confesses, "My heart began to despair" (2:20). He has "seen the burden God has laid on men" (3:10). He stares squarely into the face of death as the common destiny of all. It reaches backward to constitute "the evil in everything under the sun" (9:3).

This is not the linear resolution and re-orientation of the harder Psalms which begin in agony but end in praise. Qohelet is far more circular, tying a much tighter dialectical knot. "Everything is meaningless" remains the refrain until the final conclusion (12:8). In the end, everything that has come before in the book, the breathless wonder—"Stand in awe of God"

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(5:7)—and the edge of despair—"I hated life" (2:17)—are cryptically ascribed to "one Shepherd" (12:11).[308] The final word then enjoins readers in the dialectal imperative: "Fear God"[309] (12:13). The two polarities of mood cannot avoid clashing even within the individual sentences of the book: "Enjoy life…all your meaningless days" (9:9). These are the barely tolerable tensions of Qohelet that compel readers into a subjective engagement with the text, creating the inquisitive state that consciously puzzles over its paradoxes, and seeks out the truth that resolves them. The reader intuits that somehow everything is at stake.

I argue that the truth toward which the Preacher chases his readers is that which exists beyond the borders of the genre's own communication. This is indirect communication, namely, the fact that it concerns knowledge that is gained on other grounds than itself. At this Qohelet is remarkably successful. Rather than shrug their shoulders in despair of unraveling the ambiguity, laymen and scholars alike can hardly resist taking up the task of completing the work. In the end, all are forced to admit that the reality of God does not dispel the mystery of existence, but only heightens it. The ambiguity of Qohelet is a vital rhetorical strategy for capturing readers and helping them engage with the ambiguity of life itself such as is mirrored in the text (p. 37).

> There are undoubtedly patterns and structures in Ecclesiastes, which tempt the reader to seek the one overall pattern that explains how the book is put together. So also life under the sun: here too there are patterns and structures that tease people into trying to find the solution that explains it all, to search for "grand narratives." (Ingram, 2006, pp. 64-65)

So far so good. However, I part company with Ingram's assumption that Qohelet is like life itself in being characterized by a *permanent* indeterminacy of meaning. Presuppositions are

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[308] It is quite fascinating to consider that in the next major section of this chapter we will meet a similar lone, enigmatic note in the Song of Songs in which Christ is suddenly brought forward.

[309] Earlier I demonstrated that *yare'* [fear] is a much fuller concept than its translation in English lets on. Biblical *fear* can be occasioned by forgiveness as well as judgment (Ps 130:4).

powerful things, and ascribing ultimate indeterminacy of meaning to Qohelet—and life—is a function of what the reader brings to the table. Old Testament non-proverbial wisdom is a reflective wisdom (as opposed to the didactic wisdom of Proverbs). However, it is more than merely a negative space for readers to make out whatever sense they will. It is true enough that modernity has been overly confident in its ability to plumb the depth of reality. However, a more realistic and humble approach to the world need not give in to the excesses of Postmodernity; it can open instead the door to special revelation provided by God through the incarnation of Christ, the Wisdom of God. He is the only possible resolution to humanity's failure to find meaning on its own in an incomprehensible world.

This is an either/or. The chasing after the wind either settles permanently in the soul or gives way to the chasing after him. In promising to remember forever the person who merely holds out "a cup of cold water to one of these little ones" (Mt 10:42), Jesus offers the antidote to the futility of life. "Your life is meaningful in this, *that it means something to me."* This is the only possible resolution to the Qohelet conundrum, and the "best text" this book can be is the one that, by the Spirit of God, has this as its purpose from the start.

Qohelet is not an easy book. It is not meant to be. It does not resolve all of its own tensions, and this is rather the point. The reader is not permitted to stand back and mildly assess how well *someone else* has done at the task that confronts every human being in aloneness with God. Instead, the alternating viewpoints on the part of the Preacher, and the way he burns the bridges of thought behind him hint at a profound change in his soul struggling for birth. The reader witnesses the struggle and the overwhelming transparency that attends it, and cannot *not* ask of what this change consists.

Ultimately, the reader must draw to Christ for relief, and in doing so, discovers a key

insight of Kierkegaard, namely, that the spiritual dissonance that is nurtured within the pages of the Old Testament are the necessary cure to spiritual slumber. Finding the "best Qohelet" means receiving the gift in the clashing of its points of view and accepting its paradoxes as meaningful in themselves. These put the reader on the path that breaks out of Solomon's woods and ends in a clearing called Christ, the revealed *Kokhmah* [wisdom] of God. Solomon[310] does not write the way he does because he enjoys it. Truth itself is paradoxical, even as the holiness and grace of God meet, each at full strength, in the cross of Christ, the foolishness of God. Thus, the genre to which Solomon turned was the only way to say what he, under divine inspiration, needed to say.

It is a partial light that meets us in Qohelet. It is not the only book in the Bible. In the New Testament apocalyptic, the maddening opaqueness that is all of human history—who can make any sense of it?—is captured in the image of a scroll and in the weeping of John over the fact that no one could open it to see inside. "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain," he writes, and all the life of heaven sings to Jesus, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelations 5:6,9). Solomon takes away, but as the Jesus said about his own coming in flesh, "One greater than Solomon is here" (Lk 11:31).

7.6.3 The perspicuity of the Old Testament. Having confronted in this cursory way the site of profoundest polarity in the Old Testament, it is important to avoid a misconception.

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[310] The writers of Qohelet self-identifies as a "son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1). We need not insist that Solomon is the writer based on this descriptor, since the Hebrew word for "son" is flexible, but I would challenge the critical assumptions that would dismiss the possibility out of hand. The argument *against* Solomon's authorship is linguistic; such arguments tend to be circular. The argument *for* Solomon's authorship simply notices how well the book from some son of David fits with what we know of him: he experienced wealth, power, learning, and pleasure at a grand scale and to his own spiritual ruin. There is something quite attractive in the possibility that we possess three works from the ancient king: Songs as the poem of his youthful vigor, Proverbs as his middle-aged reflections, and Qohelet as a hopeful sign of his repentance. (For that matter, Solomon is a candidate for naming the author of the book of Ruth as well.)The Preacher may as well have been Solomon, and I refer to him that way for convenience.

Recognizing deliberate ambiguity where it exists in the Hebrew text complicates, but by no means erases, the perspicuity the canon as a whole claims for itself—"Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Ps 119:105). The Bible is a clear book, not an easy book. Recognizing biblical ambiguity does not put biblical meaning up for grabs in the sort of "sweet obscurity" that Kierkegaard deplored. Qohelet is not an invitation to get lost in the intellectual exercise of endless interpretation, or to avoid responsibility in the shrug of the shoulders—"After all, who can really say?" The perspicuity of Scripture does not cancel the difficulties of truths that are hard won in life, nor the dialectical tensions in the text such as fit the nature of the truth it communicates. The perspicuity of Scripture does not eliminate the possibility that one book in the canon can have the purpose of raising profound questions that can only be answered in other places within the deep cohesion of Christological doxology that makes up the canon as a whole.

Biblical interpretation safely thrives under the umbrella, "Let Scripture interpret Scripture." In particular, the axiom, "Let the clear passages interpret those that are obscure," goes back to Augustine (397/1987, p. 133) and has served for the avoidance of a great deal of hermeneutical mischief. I propose a companion principle: let the obscure passages of the Scriptures add meaning and dimension to those that are clear. Indeed, let the religious subject strive to know that blessed simplicity on the far side of biblical complexity. Qohelet is the most important site of struggle between the artful ambiguity and the perspicuity of the Old Testament, both of which I affirm in uncertain terms, and as daunting as this text can be, there still emerges a quite clear set of capabilities that the Preacher communicates with his brilliant indirectness.

7.6.4 Qohelet and the communication of capability. To make room for the gospel to be appropriated in quiet stillness, Qohelet instructs his readers in a capability of tolerance for ambiguity in a world such as this. Christ is the Answer, but he does not give all the answers. He

is the *Deus Obsconditus* of the Hebrews, not the inscrutable Fate of the Greeks. That is, he can be trusted. One must only know his heart. The old dogmaticians did not theologize in a vacuum, but spoke instead of the *habitus practicus*, or the "practical habit of the theologian." This is the art of turning theology into life. The Preacher informs this view when he argues against the possibility of any theological system that is so air-tight as to lock out all mystery. Theology that is worthy of the name will always require humility and trust in the face of contrary human experience and perception. One could do worse than walk in the shoes of the Preacher, willing to see what he sees to find the gift in all that confuses, and to learn this highest art.

> My heart is not proud, O LORD,
>
>> my eyes are not haughty;
>
> I do not concern myself with matters
>
>> or things too wonderful for me.
>
> But I have stilled and quieted my soul…
>
>> like a weaned child is my soul within me. (Ps 131:1-2)

Perhaps the capability Qohelet returns to most often is that of the simple existential presentness that the religious subject nurtures in the face of things too big to wrap its mind around. This is the most transparent meaning of *"Be here now."* "Light is sweet, and it pleases the eye to see the sun. However many years a man may live, let him enjoy them all" (11:8). The Preacher is not being ironic in his frequent calls to engage with "gladness of heart" (5:20) the things that occupy us here, and to enjoy the beauty of life, though fleeting. "This is the gift of God" (5:19) is the seldom understood *carpe diem* hidden in this neglected Old Testament text.

Cynicism is *in*capability. Qohelet's winding path ends up in the responsibility that is characterized and shaped by the fear of God, and thus, in spite of all the Preacher has seen of this

world, his is a call not toward but away from cynicism. In a quite lovely and liberating irony, we may learn to say about cynicism, "This, too is meaningless." Instead, the call of the Preacher is to "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth" (12:1), and after the brilliant poetic images of aging—"the stars grow dark…and those looking through the windows grow dim"—he concludes, "Remember him—before the silver cord is severed" (12:6). This hints at the capability of a second childhood of faith, [311] a remembering at the far side of life's forgetfulness. The call of Christ is "Remember me," not, "Figure me out." "In the Bible, where [the consciousness of life's brevity] is set against the consciousness of God's eternality, it becomes the occasion for a new kind of inwardness" (Alter, 2011b, p. 156).

In the end, Qohelet reaches as far beyond itself as any text in the Hebrew cannon. The resurrection of Christ lifts our eyes above the horizon of this world beyond which Solomon strained to see. To be sure, the book of Ecclesiastes does not hold out any unambiguous portrait of Christ. What it does do, however, it is not lightly to be dismissed. It makes the world intolerable without him. *It makes Christ necessary.* This is what the Preacher has to give for all that he relentlessly takes away. This taking away is the great salvific shaking "so that what cannot be shaken may remain" (Heb 12:27). In this way, it communicates with supreme indirectness the ineffable meaningfulness of Christ. It cannot be put into words, but blessed are those who try.

> My Lord, I find that nothing else will do,
>
> But follow where thou goest, set at thy feet,
>
> And where I have thee not, still run to meet.

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[311] For Kierkegaard, faith is "what as I child I did easily and naturally" compared to adulthood when "being clever is more commended than believing" (1844/1945, p. 74). It is this clever savvy that the diminishment of old age may strip away "when the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well" (Ecc 12:6).

Roses are scentless, hopeless are the morns,

Rest is but weakness, laughter crackling thorns,

If thou, the Truth, do not make them the true:

Thou art my life, O Christ, and nothing else will do. (MacDonald, 1880/2008, p. 20)

7.7 "The Beauty with the Veil": Indirect Communication in Hebrew Love Poetry.

I delight to sit in [my lover's] shade,

> and his fruit is sweet to my taste….

His left arm is under my head,

> and his right arm embraces me. (SS 2:3, 6)

The Song of Songs[312] [hereafter "Songs" or "the Song"] represents the densest concentration of indirect communication in the Old Testament. Its form is poetry (with all the indirectness that attends that genre), but it also has narrative movement (with the maieutic quality that attends to story) to a degree no other poem in the Bible has. Songs leaves its readers alone in the space of the most intimate overhearing in the Scriptures in the whisperings of lovers enthralled in passion. However, what distinguishes Songs as an indirect communication *par excellence* is its entangling ambiguity. If Qohelet is the Old Testament text that most contends with itself, Songs is the one that battles any interpreter who dares to come near to it.

The Song is a puzzle on its surface level of meaning, quite apart from any higher spiritual interpretation. Unlike the speculative help most English Bibles provide, the Hebrew text of Songs is pure spoken dialogue. It has neither stage directions nor even labels as to who is speaking or when the speaker changes. The only available clues for sorting out the multiple

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[312] In grammatical terms, the title in Hebrew, *Shir hashirim*, [the song of songs] is a construct chain that is the equivalent of a Hebrew superlative. It could be rendered, "the most excellent song." Ecclesiastes is the only other Old Testament book with such a title in the original, *Hevel hevalim* [vanity of vanities].

voices in the Song are grammatical markings for gender and number on the Hebrew verbs and pronouns of the text. In fact, there are not only male and female speakers but choruses that break in as well, suggesting to many that Songs is a play. This brings into consideration the full dynamic of *distance* and *participation* by analogy to the theatrical stage (as I have discussed).

Some scholars argue against reading Songs as a drama, reasoning that a play could hardly have made its way into the inspired Scriptures (Hummel, 1979, p. 500). However, drama or not, the subject matter of Songs would itself seem to take us into uncharted canonical territory—*Dodi li va'ani lo* [My lover is mine and I am his] (SS 2:16). To decide instead that the Song is only a story, not a play, does nothing to alleviate the challenge of constructing what is actually happening as the narrative unfolds. The task involves the critic in myriad decisions which stubbornly resist consensus among those who try. The problem runs so deep that some scholars prefer to think that Songs is simply a collection of undifferentiated wedding songs. Songs permits itself to be read in non-linear ways as well: trying to discern its story may be complicated by the presence of dream sequences, or its intent may be to capture the cyclical moods of love rather than the arch of one particular love story.

Things do not get easier when it comes to the search for a higher spiritual meaning for Songs such that would justify its presence in the canon. What in the world to make of the Song? No other book of the Bible confronts its readers with so daunting a puzzle. Is it allegory? Is it literal? Is it both at once or some new category entirely? Readers cannot enter without making a prior decision about its interpretation at the macro level, but as they make their way through the text, nagging clues are likely to accumulate that they have come in by the wrong door.

"Something is going on here that counts" (Sayers, 2004, p. 162), but what? Could it represent the most astonishing defamiliarization of the entire Hebrew Scriptures so that we meet

Christ and the Church as strangers? Is this poem a phenomenology of what it is like to be drawn into that relationship? Was its composition, under the Spirit's inspiration, an act of exploration and discovery into the most intimate inward dimensions of *shalom*? Wherever we may come down on these questions, there is power in asking them that is not diminished even for those who throw their hands up at the apparent undecidability of the Song.[313] Even for them, it is an enigmatic, self-involving, "Yes, but what if?"

It will not require an exhaustive or definitive treatment of Songs for me to draw it into my thesis. I will begin the task by describing the characteristics of the book and by tracing the history of the Songs hermeneutic. This, again, is a nod to Brevard Childs' interest in what a given text has meant in the believing community across time. I will stake a position within that range of meanings by bringing to light the moment of highest theology in that is usually lost in English translations and is under-considered by most scholars. Ultimately, I will reveal how the *Song of Solomon*[314] has been the inspiration for this dissertation's title, *The Beauty with the Veil*.

7.7.1 Literary features and surface meanings of Songs. The most prominent feature of Songs is the way it exemplifies the role of the *sustained cluster of metaphor* in Old Testament poetry. It is here that its indirectness begins. Clines (1980) describes this aspect of the Song:

> Country (with its flocks, vineyards, sun, flowers, hills, fields and villages) and court (with
>
> its king, chambers, curtains, maidens, jewels, couches, perfumes, banquets, streets and

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[313] I am not allowing that the meaning of Songs is left up for grabs. Among conservative scholars there is a core agreement that Christ is deeply present in the Songs. I will articulate my own argument about the meaning of Songs in due time. However, it can hardly be questioned that working out a definitive interpretation requires an extended argument, and no scholarly consensus is likely any time soon.

[314] This traditional view supports the "best Songs" it can be. However, as I argued in the case of *Qohelet*, what I most object to is the impulse of many critics to exclude the very possibility of Solomon as author. The Hebrew text is ambiguous: the prepositional letter, *lamed* in 1:1 could either indicate that the poem is *by* Solomon or dedicated *to* him. Hummel (1979) notes the Song's favorable mention of the city of Tirzah as would seem unlikely in a poem written after the Disruption of 922. B.C (p. 495). Songs must have been composed sometime after Israel had its first king, but before the nation was divided in two by Solomon's two sons. It seems odd to dismiss out of hand that the Song is a poetic transportation to Solomon's court.

squares) function as a brilliant but transparent metaphoric system for the disjunction of the lovers that is always striving towards union. The imagery is everywhere sensuous, with fragrances, breezes, natural beauty, delights of food and wine; and the emotional language is highly pitched, with ravishments of heart, lovesickness, desperate longing, exultation, and its images of animal energy (gazelle, stag, goats, raven, doves, fawns Again, the imagery of enclosed gardens, walls, doors, or absence and presence, of losing and finding, pervades the poem with the tension of sexual desire, frustration, and fulfillment. It is not the explicit reference to breasts and kissing that creates the erotic quality of this poem, but the consistent play of metaphor. (p. 125-126)

The language is rarely direct. Instead, it leaves "many things unspoken but nonetheless present" (Murphy, 1979, p. 104).[315] The sexual act is never communicated explicitly in Songs. The lovers "browse among the lilies" (2:16) as behind a curtain, or else the literary camera discretely settles on the apple trees (2:3), and leave it to readers' imagination when she coos, "he has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love" (2:4). In fact, apart from a few scattered moments, the single-minded passion of Songs has more to do with *Sensucht* than gratification. The poem is taken up for long stretches by the stabbing joy that is desire.

The main linguistic argument *against* taking Solomon as the author of Songs is a consensus among some scholars that the poem carries a subtle Galilean, not Judean dialect. However, the backwater accent of Songs could be a loving accommodation on the part of the king to the bride he woos. She is, after all, a "Shulamite" from the Galilean town of Shunem. The

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[315] Although the reader is treated to mutual, head-to-toe descriptions of male and female beauty, these lines are not in themselves titillating. If readers find them so, it is they who are revealed, not the quality of the text. Rather, the physical beauty of the lovers comes discretely veiled in imagery such that jars us awake to the particularity of its cultural setting. In fact, as I alluded earlier, it is here that the modern reader is most likely to laugh in the wrong places—"your nose is like the tower of Lebanon" (7:4).

argument *for* Solomon as author attaches to the fittingness of its setting, and if the argument

prevails, it has much to contribute to finding the "best Songs." Indeed, the narrative abduction

steals the reader away to the kingly court of Israel. The way the man pursues the woman from

there to the fields of labor where the sun has darkened her skin even invites reflection on

Kierkegaard's most famous parable about Christ, the king who must empty himself of his

majesty if ever to know a love that is true. The woman in Songs is embarrassed by her skin, and

in the course of the poem, she never knows herself as anything but unworthy. She is beautiful

because he finds her so, and he runs to meet her where she is and to speak in the accents she best

understands. How like the Son of God! It cannot be far from our minds that Solomon, as a king

of Israel, occupies an office that can be safely identified as a Christological type, and this

demonstrates how the very possibility of his authorship contributes to our meditation on the

text.[316] However, it is best not to arrive there prematurely.

Whatever meaning we work out for the supremely maieutic book of Songs, its surface

meaning involves the romantic love between a husband and a wife.[317] This should be implicit in

the overall reading, not run around in a rush to allegory. The poetic surface is too vivid for that.

It has too much verisimilitude. Simply put, this *is* what romance is like: the uniqueness for the

lover of a particular love, the way nothing else exists for the two of them, even the element of

teasing, and the complaints about the ways true love is difficult (Hummel, 1979, p. 502). The

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[316] Incidentally, since the bride of Songs is called a "Shulamite," she shares a semantic link with Solomon. The Hebrew root which they have in common is familiar because of the word *shalom* meaning peaceful, whole, or perfect. Perhaps we should refer to this Shulamite as "Mrs. Solomon."

[317] Even a vague commitment to a harmonious reading of the Bible or the "canonical consciousness" involved with its composition would protect the Songs from any association with "free love"; it was never read that way until the 1960s (Hummel, 1979, p. 501-502). The Songs' long association with weddings argues against its approving of extramarital sex. In Kierkegaardian terms, the aesthetic cannot signify the religious. Much less can sin be the sign of Christ—the Christological reading is excluded if the poem is read in such a way. One interpretation that allows for the marriage of the lovers has them married before the Song even begins, so that the poem describes their passion to find each other again amid circumstances that have parted them. Another possibility assign portions of the poem to the lovers wishing for and daydreaming of one another.

reader meets and first identifies with these lovers *as lovers*, breathes in the romantic atmosphere, and shares in the human stuff. This can scarcely be denied. The question is whether Songs is a phenomenology of romantic love, and yet at the same time the veil of something More.[318]

Not only is the human aspect of the Songs too vivid to ignore, it is also too important. If the sweep of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures is all-encompassing, and if it would baptize every aspect of human life, the absence of any positive treatment of the sexual relationship would be conspicuous.[319] "One does not need to be Freudian to recognize that little is done in life without some reference to sexuality, and most of life's ultimate questions cannot be posed without consideration of its origin and transcendental significance" (Hummel, 1979, p. 492). That being the case, Songs lends itself as a corrective to any view that Christian orthodoxy is, at bottom, prudish or puritanical, and as such, an unfit topic for the sanctuary and an unseemly interest for the religious self. According to Kierkegaard, this comes close to naming the dread of the ethical on the part of the aesthetic when the issue of marriage swings into view: to give up the aesthetic sphere of existence seems to mean taking the leap away from passion or the full-throated enjoyment of anything, especially sex. The aesthetic knows nothing of love that is both deeper and more routine, like a stream of water that is always different and always the same, and now and then catching the shimmer of the moon (Peters, 1997). The "best Song" the Songs can be is the one that has gotten over the difficulty of rendering morality in aesthetic terms.[320]

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[318] Misgivings about the seeming secularity, if not eroticism, of Songs has attended the book as far back as the 1st Century A.D. When the Council at Jamnia fielded questions about the canonicity of various contested Old Testament books, there were complaints that some of the lyrics of Songs were being sung in the taverns. This attests not only to the sharable idiosyncrasy of its form, but also to the reading which has seemed the most natural to the most people. In the Songs, a man and a woman are desperately in love.

[319] It is not the case that only the Song can fill this gap. This from the book of Proverbs: "May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love" (5:18-19).

[320] Chesterton (1908/1994) took up the same corrective in observing that a man who complains that he can only marry one woman might as well complain that he can only be born once or that the Garden of Eden has only one gate (p. 58). The didactic uses of the Song—"here's what it teaches"—do not begin to

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The Song does not merely exist as a didactic communication of what we ought to think about physical intimacy. After all, the unique genre in question here is not a lecture. It is a song to be savored and appreciated. The capability that would let itself in by the back door is that of responding properly to sex, which Christian theology uniquely sanctifies behind the plush velvet cords of a covenantal promise. Songs brilliantly elaborates on the exuberant ecstasy of Adam at his first glimpse of Eve—"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gn 2:23). Even as we turn now to strive to find the right language for the Christological significance of Songs, it will depend in every way on this hermeneutical starting point, that is, to recognize that it is a transparent celebration of the "essential rightness of the man-woman relationship" (Hummel, 1979, p. 503). The interpretation hinges on receiving the epidemiological influence, the proper catching of the mood. When we look "along the beam" of Songs, this will be its shaft of light.

7.7.2 A brief history of the interpretation of Songs. The Songs, no less than Qohelet, has sparked a lively conversation as far back in history as is available to scholarly sight. When the Songs was contested at Jamnia, as was mentioned earlier, its chief defender was the super-orthodox Rabbi Akibah. His comments included the following: "The world itself is not worth the day on which this book was given to Israel, for all the Writings are holy, but the Song of songs is the Holy of Holies" (quoted in Carr, 2003, p. 4). Songs is one of the *Megillot* [Scrolls], that is, one of the five sacred texts that became associated early on with the major Jewish festivals. Not only was Songs regularly read in connection with the Jewish Passover, but its use in the early Christian Church was so important and so prominent that Carr (2003) refers to it as "their fifth

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exhaust its value for the wholistic life of faith: "Certainly, it may be *used* in protest against distorting and limiting views of human sexuality. But when it is no longer time for protest or battle or the restoring of balances, the Song comes into its own again not as some 'useful' artifact but as an invitation to delight in the mysterious reality of joyful physical love" (Clines, 1980, p. 126).

gospel" (p. 4).[321] Beginning most notably with the church father, Origen (184-253), and extending well beyond the Reformation, there is no question but that the allegorical approach "held virtually unchallenged sway" (Hummel, 1979, p. 497).[322]

Both conservative and liberal interpreters moved away from the allegorical approach to Songs since about 1800, but rejecting that hermeneutic was much easier than agreeing on an alternative (Hummel, 1979, p. 499). As mentioned, interpretations that played with Songs as drama or as a straightforward story only embroiled those who tried in endless quibbling over how to work out the details. Are there two or three main characters in Songs? Where is the conflict that drama requires? More recently, contemporary marriage customs in various cultures have been enlisted to shed light on the interpretation of the Song, suggesting that it is actually a collection of separate wedding poems that celebrate the beauty and affection of any bride and groom. Any link between modern practice and the meaning of an ancient poem is questionable.[323] Finally, recent Songs scholarship has found its way to the far end of the spectrum opposite allegory. By this hypothesis, the meaning of Songs is confined to the ordinary human love described on its poetic surface. In this view, Songs simply exists to affirm the monogamous. If it reminds the reader of God's passionate pursuit of a lost humanity, this is a reader response that has jumped the rails of the text's intended meaning.

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[321] There are more Latin manuscripts of the Song than any other Biblical book and more medieval sermons on the Song than all other books of the Bible besides Psalm and John (Carr, 2003, p. 4).

[322] The spiritual-allegorical approach admits some variety. Some have read the Songs as the allegorized history of Yahweh's dealings with Israel from the Exodus to the Return from captivity, or as a history of the church climaxing in the Reformation. Its popularity at times rode the wave of Mariolatry, holding special appeal for cloistered "brides of Christ." The problem with a strictly allegorical interpretation involves the obsession that inevitably comes with it of pressing every detail of the Song so that it represents something other than what it is. The result is generally incoherent, exhibiting no intrinsic connection between the particularities of the text and the meanings assigned to them. To adapt a bit of Kierkegaard, allegory has succumbed to excesses on the part of hermeneutical "geniuses" pontificating to the rest—"this means this and that means that." Allegory deserves its bad name with the sheer arbitrariness of its interpretations.

[323] Studies in comparative religion have given rise to the suggestion I cannot entertain, that of a cult-mythological interpretation by which Songs describes the love of the gods. The idea is that myths were made palatable to Israel by injecting references to Solomon, later to be allegorized in the ways described above.

Ultimately, all of these interpretations of Songs have, to one degree or another, bogged down in an either/or—it is *either* a spiritual allegory *or* it is nothing more than what it plainly appears to be. I argue an interpretation of Songs that overcomes these semantics by celebrating the mystery of the Songs as a marvelously provocative both/and.

7.7.3 An indirect view into Songs.[324] To leave the interpretation at the level of human love alone would be a step away, not toward, the "best Songs" this book can be. So direct a reading of the Song would turn it into a protest within the canon against the notion that Christ is the hermeneutical key to the entirety of the Old Testament. In fact, Songs would argue against the canonical approach at a more basic level even that that, asserting itself as the text within the corpus of inspired Scripture that lacks even an implied vertical dimension. As to tracing that dimension, the uniqueness of Songs creates a certain semantic difficulty, especially when it comes to categorizing it as biblical typology. This terminology could imply that the Songs must poeticize one of Solomon's actual romantic relationships which then becomes the type of Christ. Nothing we know of Solomon suggests that he enjoyed the sort of "marriage" (among his hundreds) that can be appropriately thought of in these terms. At very least, "it's complicated." There is another way, even if the terminology fails.[325]

The "marriage" of Yahweh and Israel is the image that fuels the most provocative rhetoric of the prophets. The inward organic connection between these two ideas, true marriage and true religion, is especially striking in the frequent construing of Israel's idolatry in terms of adultery. Most shocking of all is when Yahweh, speaking through the prophet Hosea, agonizes in

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[324] I do not claim that my view of the Songs is original. My position, like the historical sketch above, owes much to the Old Testament isogogical work of Horace Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh* (1979) and, to a lesser degree, to the massive commentary on Songs by Christopher Mitchel (2003). What is unique in my treatment is the framing of this view in terms of indirect communication.

[325] Incidentally, I am not willing to violate the Reformation principle of *unus sensus literalis* [the one literal sense]. With Hummel (1979, p. 504), I accent the unity in the various levels of meaning. They come together in a single, richly layered theological meaning.

a voice that any jilted lover (or abandoned parent) would recognize: "What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears" (6:4) and later, "How can I give you up?" (11:8). It is a most mysterious condescension of the sublimely independent *I Am.*

This is the interpretive key to the Song: these arresting moments create in the Old Testament *an unmistakable climate*. For biblically literate readers, marriage is in the background of all their thoughts about God, and God is in the background of all their thoughts about marriage. The unique Hebrew giftedness for blending human intimacy and intimacy with God in the Judeo-Christian thought-world is what sets the stage for this transcendent Hebrew love song.

It is important to note that positive examples of marriage imagery mirror the negative ones in the canon. Bible lovers have long contemplated the ineffability of grace—the "thisness of that and the thatness of this"—when it comes to seeing the God-relationship in the light of human marriage, such as through the altogether stunning revelation: "As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:5b). The prophet Isaiah even refers to Yahweh as *Dodi*. "I will sing a song for the one I love…*my loved one* had a vineyard" (5:1). The English translation obscures the fact that this is the same word that is translated "my lover" throughout the Songs. In typical fashion, the Old Testament prepares the world for the ultimate unveiling of the human-divine relationship in the full light of Christ:

> Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.…For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am

talking about Christ and the church. (Eph 5:25-27, 31-32)

"I am talking about Christ and the church." This biblical climate lends naturalness to the "along the beam" reading of Songs. This reading does not diminish the "essential rightness of the man-woman relationship" but *depends on it* and therefore it wraps the idealized passion of the marriage relationship in a full doxology of holy pleasure and enjoyment. It does so in such a way that marriage becomes, of all human symbols, the one worthiest of inviting *contemplation*—a key expression—of the love between Christ and the redeemed. The accent here is on marriage as a divine institution that God himself has baptized in transcendent meaning.[326] We arrive at this both/and interpretation of Songs: Christian marriage, like the relationship of the lovers in Songs, is just as it appears to be, *and* it points beyond itself.

This interpretation leans by analogy on a longstanding hermeneutic of biblical parable: it is not necessary or advisable to enlist every detail of the text in a one-to-one correspondence with some known theological detail about Christ or his Church. At the same time, there is nothing to forbid the reader from reveling in the luminous particularities of the text. To draw from a single chapter of the Song (SS 4), he or she is free to trace the biblical associations of the color scarlet, or to reminisce about the many gardens and fountains of Old Testament type-scenes. These are the invitation to think on Christ in the poetic mood, and to let every thought end in him.

The exquisite poetic detail in the Songs attaches to that sweetest version of all human loves, and that human love is, in turn, "both an echo of divine love and a transparency of another order of perfect love" (Hummel, 1979, p. 505). All of nature will share in the redemption at the end of the age; no less does marriage. Songs describes that bliss with the highest poetic artistry,

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[326] When Hummel refers to this interpretation as the "sacramental" meaning of Songs (1979, p. 504-505), it will be problematic to some readers. Though a Lutheran himself, he does not mean that the rite of marriage is a sacrament according to the usual Lutheran use of the term.

and it does so with a view to love's transfiguration in the new creation when the new Jerusalem

descends from heaven like a beaming bride walking down the aisle. Christ is revealed as the love

behind all loves. Faith has never wanted any other.[327]

The presence of Christ in the Song, like his presence in Christian inwardness, is there

only by revelation along with everything else that comes from the Spirit and is either spiritually

discerned or not at all (cf. 1Co 2:14). Anyone can hear the song of a couple in love and,

according to their own lived experience, smile and sing along. It is by the grace of God that some

see them and smile their inward smile in aloneness with Christ. The Song, like marriage itself, is

a John the Baptist. "There is a Longing, an Affection, and a Consummation. There is one is

worthy of your highest passion and devotion, but I am not the one. I only point to him."

7.7.4 "The flame of Yah": the theology of Songs.

Place me like a seal over your heart,

> like a seal on your arm;

For love is as strong as death,

> its jealousy unyielding as the grave.

It burns like blazing fire,

> *like a mighty flame.* (SS 8:6-7)

The translation, "like a mighty flame," for the Hebrew word, *shalhevetyah*, is singularly

unfortunate. When commentators declare that Songs has no reference to God, they seem to

deliberately fail to account for this remarkable word. It ends with the suffix, *yah*, which is

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[327] Given that C.S. Lewis was not commenting on Songs or its interpretation when he wrote the following, its fittingness is uncanny: "When we see the face of God we shall know that we have always known it. He has been party to, has made, sustained and moved moment by moment within, all our earthly experiences of innocent love. All that was true love in them was, even on earth, far more His than ours, and ours only because His. In heaven there will be no anguish and no duty of turning away from our earthly Beloveds, because we shall have turned already; form the portraits to the Original, from the rivulets to the Fountain, from the creatures He made lovable to Love Himself" (1960 p. 190-191).

undoubtedly an apocopation for *Yahweh*. The literal translation of the word is, "the flame of

Yah." It must be remembered that this particular name for God is the one that most connotes his

covenant bond of faithfulness to his people. Yahweh is his married name, if you will. In fact,

compound nouns in ancient Hebrew are nearly always proper nouns (or poeticized names). This

means that a capitalized "Flame of *Yah"* is a defensible translation.[328]

Unearthing the expression, "the Flame of *Yah*," provides an unmistakable vertical

element to the interpretation I have articulated. The religious is suddenly brought forward.

Mitchel (2003) agrees that it is "the single most significant phrase in the Song….the apex of the

book's theological highlight" (p. 1188). It should come as no surprise by now that this most

revealing word has been held back to very near the end of the poem to lend its inward holiness,

but only after the reader is fully taken in by the beauty of the work. If the Song is as

Christologically rich as I have argued, then this verse marks the moment when Christian

imagination is explicitly invited to soar to that one higher love that is "as strong as

death…unyielding as the grave…rivers cannot wash it away" (8:6-7). The most intense and

consuming love any man or woman has known in life becomes the only one capable of

furnishing the sign.[329] Here is a theology that sings, and what it sings is that the very God who

has appeared in the midst of flames in countless places in the Scriptures is the sole source of this

love.[330] A human being cannot light it within himself; it is the action of God. It is the "flame of

Yah." In fact, the Hebrew pronouns have not let us down. In the poetic line that introduces this

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[328] Where does the bland translation, "like a mighty flame" come from? There is a theory among exegetes that the other name of God in Hebrew, *'Elohim*, can appear in the text as a sort of Hebrew superlative. For example, the expression "the mountains of God" would be in translation "the highest mountains." By extension, this conjecture (that lacks incontrovertible examples) is then applied to the suffix *Yah,* as if the word merely refers to a "fierce fire." As a result, no reference to God appears in the translation.
[329] In the book of Hosea, the love of a parent for a child blends with this image and completes it.
[330] Mitchell (2003) offers further support of this view: "The imagery of 'Love' as fire, finds its fulfillment in Christ's atonement and the gift of the Holy Spirit" (p. 1220).

highest moment in Songs, "Place me like a seal over your heart" (8:6), the suffix translated as "your" is masculine, confirming that the bride is speaking of the fiery love of the Groom, not *vice versa*. The passion to which this points is Christ, and as Kierkegaard saw so clearly, it is to him that every initiative in the divine and human love story is ascribed.

> You have loved us first, O God, alas! We speak of it in terms of history as if You loved us first but a single time, rather than that without ceasing You have loved us first many times and every day and our whole life through. (Cited in Lefevre, 1963, p. 14)

7.7.5 Defamiliarization in the Song. Defamiliarization has been the discovery of the best Christian writers. "The best relation to our spiritual home is to be near enough to love it. But the next best is to be far enough away not to hate it" (Chesterton, 1925/1993, p. 11). In context, Chesterton is transitioning from an analogy in which a person who lives on the grave of a giant is too close to it to recognize its dimensions and shape—there is a certain distance required to see it for what it is—to a companion analogy that is even more useful. Christian orthodoxy meets a secular audience that has its patterns of resistance firmly ensconced. Chesterton wonders how the Christian message might create an altogether new response if it were dressed up and made strange in Chinese trappings—Chinese images, accents, and atmosphere—with the essence unchanged (p. 11). C.S. Lewis would certainly chime in with his bit about giving the message a form that might it allow it to "sneak past those watchful dragons." My dissertation simply swaps Hebrew for Chinese, and in Songs, defamiliarization is on a quite enthralling display.

Reading Songs is like opening the gift I once received, a treasure of old love letters between my mother and father from the days following World War II. The pleasure of their love is veiled in hints, for example, a cryptic P.S. from the bride that reads, "By the way, I liked it." In one letter my mother wrote with some embarrassment about how she found it easiest to

communicate intimate feelings through the mail. In his face-saving reply, my father wrote, "It is the same for me, Darling. Next time you are here, we will sit across from each other in the sitting room with pen and paper in hand, and write the loveliest things to one another." My parents were mediated to me in those letters. I met them there as strangers and knew them for the first time. So it is with Christ in this most intimate overhearing. "How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful!...There is no flaw in you" (SS 4:1,7). She answers, *Dodi li va'ani lo* [My lover is mine and I am his]. If a love song of thinly veiled eroticism can surrender its images for the Lord Christ alone with the Church, his Bride, then the strategy of defamiliarization for the communication of Christian truth has found its divine endorsement.

7.7.6 The capability of passion. The Song brings its poetry into conversation with Kierkegaard's idea of passion as central to the ontology of the human self. A Christological reading of Songs weighs in on the debate between the Romantic versus the Enlightenment view of human ontology—are we essentially rational or essentially passionate beings? Kierkegaard staked his life on the latter and Solomon is on his side. After all, what is the life of the mind if it does not marry all clarity of thought with some sort of gusto? To be sure, there is passion in the *human* dimension of Solomon's love song. The Christological reading validates the notion of passion in the religious sphere into which human love is drawn through the mediation of the Hebrew poem. In Kierkegaard's terms, the religious self, unlike the aesthetic, actually has a self to give, and in Christ, there is not only the model but the impulse and the power for the self to give itself to life and to the world outright. After all, this is what Jesus did with his freedom. Passion then concerns the entirety of human existence. Christ is to be known by the daily grace he brings, but also in the call to imitation, to joyful improvisation, and to a passionate imagination suited for receiving one's life new each moment.

Earlier I quoted a New Testament text in which human passion is transcended in the angels who "long to look into these things" (1Pe 1:12). However, the translators of the Greek text have opted for tame propriety. The words literally translate, "even angels *lust*…" Though they enjoy sinless perfection, they yearn in their very being to enter more deeply into this knowledge. They seem to envy the edification that is available to mere men and which consists in knowing Christ by the vehicle of the humble Bible we each hold in our hands. This is passion, that Christ becomes the Truth for which we may live and die. This view of faith is reminiscent of the old wedding vow: "With my body I thee worship." Where the "error in modulation" has been so overcome, the self does not have itself to thank. This fire is the Flame of Yah.

The implications are far-reaching, extending to the quiet reading space where the Song lies open on a woman's lap. Should she bracket the poem's significance for her life in the intellectual puzzle it presents? Or is the Hebrew text more self-involving than that? Is there a necessary breathlessness and sleeplessness to the life of faith? Does she give in to a passionate concern for what the words mean for how life may be lived? More than knowledge alone, the Songs means to communicate this pathos-filled appropriation. As such, it is unequivocally an indirect communication. It is not the sort of a thing one person can give directly to another.

7.7.7 The Beauty with the Veil. As I've described throughout this study (p. 10 *et passim*), the meaning of this dissertation's title, "The Beauty with the Veil," is that Christ is revealed in the stunning diversity of biblical forms, and that we have come to appreciate the literary *how* that serves the Christological *what* so superbly well for the edification of the Christian soul. However, there is more here than meets the eye as we contemplate how form and content meet in the Song. Just as earlier we found an interesting comparison between Hebrew and Greek wisdom, here there are discoveries to be made in setting the ancient Greek ideals of

beauty or eroticism beside the old Hebrew alternative. Hummel (1979) comments on the Israelite

sensitivities that were "properly shocked and outraged" (p. 495) by celebration of nudity among

the Greeks. In a brilliant article by Peters (1997), the writer explores this contrast further.

> Largely forgotten today are two contradictory old wisdoms: the mania of beauty and the
>
> discipline of principled looking away....No tradition knew a discipline on the wandering
>
> eye like the Jewish. In contrast to the Greek, which tends to see the beautiful other
>
> immediately "in the flesh," the Hebrew tradition constantly sees beauty as an image,
>
> something mediated and re-presented. (p. 11)

There is more than meets the eye in the Hebrew way of mediating beauty in words alone,

rather than unveiling it in a visual imitation. The Hebrew impulse has deep affinity with the

hiddenness of God as its theological ground. The ultimate Beauty of the divine is hidden behind

the mask of the divine Word. So, also does the beautiful copy under heaven, sanctified creaturely

love, come discretely veiled in the Song.[331]

Peters (1997) uncovers the problem which the Hebrew alternative overcomes, and it is a

compelling, overlooked reason for Judaism's fussy iconoclasm: "The most subject-like of all

objects is an image of a subject" (p. 9). In other words, the Greek nude *seems like a someone*

with which the viewer (or voyeur) engages, but of course, nobody is home. It has no subjectivity.

Greek erotic art shared no inner history with the ones who gazed at it, but only drew people away

from the unportrayable, unreproducible beauty of a real man and real woman. Their love is

enacted in time, etched in laugh wrinkles, and recalled in knowing glances. Worse yet, when the

statue purports to be an image of the divine, what the worshipers project onto it is sheer

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[331] The Hebrew poets did reflect with some passion on divine Beauty, for example, begging only to gaze upon it every day of their lives (Ps 27:4). Moses dared to ask that this same Beauty (using the identical word *no'am*) would rest upon us all (Ps 90:17).

blasphemy. God has made no promise to meet with humanity there. The Hebrew smashing of idols is the loud protest against that confusion of subject and object in order to preserve instead the ideal of treating "subjects as subjects and objects as objects" (Peters, 1997, p. 12).

The Greek nude is beautiful in its way, but in another way, it is not. It is not beautiful under the lascivious male gaze of the one how falls in love with a dead thing twenty times in a single day. If true beauty is to be communicated, unveiled nakedness is never the biblical way. Instead, it is the poetry, the Song, that has what the statue lacks in inwardness and inner history. Of course, of itself, it is mere words on the page, but the subjectivity of the Lover beats within it and is communicated through it. True beauty is the mediated kind. It is the glory together with its covering, or the "Beauty with the Veil." The splendor of God is now, and for a little while longer, an indirect and mediated splendor. It remains, for a time, behind its mask.

The marble nude is fit for smashing for the way it both offers and denies sexual satisfaction. The Beauty in its poetic veil in the Song best awakens that visceral *Sensucht*, the passion of belief, and the joy that is longing and desire. It does not expose beauty in the way of the Greeks but veils it in exquisite suggestiveness. It does not frustrate, but only whispers, "not yet." The final consummation is as inevitable as the promise of God. Beauty will step out from behind every curtain in this world: the sunsets and the foxes, the history of the Church and the songs and sacraments of Christ, the heaven-sent moments of rapture, and everything that ever made us cry. We will be face to face.

As I have argued from the beginning, the "Beauty with the Veil" captures an ideal for reading the Old Testament. It means embracing the Christ who comes to us there in the way he has chosen to come. It means not despising, with the immature Augustine, the humility of the literary form. When the Apostle wrote about the veil that covers people's hearts whenever Moses

is read, he meant that in the recognition of Christ a veil falls away within religious inwardness, even as the hiddenness of God remains for a while. The Word of God, in all its genres, is the veil that remains. We walk up with fear and trembling, press our faces against the fabric, and know in inwardness the "I-Thou" as mediated by the Word in all its mesmerizing forms. Relationship with God in Christ, this Flame of Yah, comes as a gift, and the task of sanctification is then to fill it with an unportrayable, unreproducible inner history of grace acting in time.

These are the things that attracted me to Peter' article and inspired me to borrow his image. The hiddenness of the Christian is like the hiddenness of God. Songs overcomes "the problem of other minds" and communicates the essential secret of Christian earnestness by means of the ineffability of marital joy. The Hebrew way exploits the powerful human dynamic in which "like is known by like." Beauty is calling:

> Embrace the ones I have given you, a husband or a wife, a parent or child. I am close.
> They are my mask. I am seeing to it that you are loved. Love them with the heart I have
> given you, with the fire I have set, and know something of me. I am along the beam.

7.8 "Many Times and Various Ways": Findings and Discussion.

If the Hebrew text is a literary John the Baptist, then it is also the "Best Man" at the wedding of Christ and his Church. Jesus spoke this way of his best friend, the actual John the Baptizer. The language in which Christ spoke of John and which John spoke of himself is reminiscent of the role of the ancient *soshben.* This refers to the rabbinic custom in which the best friend of the groom would escort the bride to the bridal chamber and stand watch outside until the groom arrived (Card, 1995, pp. 46-48). When John's disciples expected him to be jealous because the crowds were turning from him to Jesus (John 3:26), he replied: "The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and

is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice" (Jn 3:29). At this moment, according to rabbinic law, the one who occupies the role of the *soshben* has only one more task. It is to "go away rejoicing" (Card, 1995, p. 48). This is John and his graceful disappearing: "That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less" (Jn 3:29-30). This completes our gallery of images for communicating indirectly all that the Old Testament means.

To personify it for a moment, the Old Testament does not mind its place outside the tent or resist its second-class status in comparison to the New Testament. The place it is meant to occupy in Christian existence was changed the moment that the one whose shadow it appears in person from around the corner. However, the Christian life, like Christian marriage, has a history it loves to remember, beginning when the Beloved got down on one knee. That is the Old Testament. Although the Hebrew text is a culmination of myriad human voices, and in spite of the storminess of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, the Old Testament conceals a single divine Voice offering the unthinkable proposal—"Will you marry me?"

When Christ arrived in the flesh, the ancient prophetic Scriptures were on hand to perform the introduction of Bridegroom and Bride as the mirror of John the Baptist fulfilling his calling. In deepest spiritual mystery, the Word of Christ is a kiss on the lips of the Church, his bride. What is more, Christian communicators are themselves an indirect communication occupying the space between Christ and the other, like the masks of God. They play their part best when they know their place. They speak the Word of Christ to another—"there's someone it's time you met"—then leave them alone. They go away rejoicing.

Chapter 8 Findings and Discussion

For we did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the coming of our

Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty....And we have the

word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to

a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your

hearts….For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as

they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2Pe 1:16, 19, 21)

Throughout this final chapter, a single over-arching contribution—one loud, unifying "so

what?"—will be implicit on every page. What every result and finding have in common is that

each demonstrates the remarkable explanatory power of that "constellation of ideas" that is

indirect communication when applied to the foundational texts of Western Civilization. Although

Kierkegaard's strategies have yet to be tamed into a testable theory of communication, their

ability to describe and explain the Old Testament text in rhetorical terms can have few rivals

within the broad scope of communication scholarship.[332] What Kierkegaard feared has come

true, namely, that he has fallen into the hands of professors, but I dare to hope he would be

pleased by what has been Socratically born in these pages.

I have surveyed the Old Testament as a communication and what I have learned is that

the more I concentrate on the ways in which thought has been woven into literary patterns that

move and persuade in all their sublime literary indirectness, the better I am able to think the

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[332] One implication of this study is the boundless potential for discovery in bringing communication theory of all kinds (not only rhetorical theories) into contact with great literature (not only the biblical text).

thoughts of the writers after them. The trail of their every thought empties out into Christ. The divine Voice within the myriad human voices of the Old Testament could have chosen modes of expression that are more direct by far. He did not. He chose to tell us stories and sing us songs. Receiving "the Beauty with the veil" means that our passion for the *what* of biblical revelation is only deepened as we open ourselves up to the *how* of the Spirit's communication. The Old Testament presents its truth as a thing to be experienced. Being transported by that story, getting lost in that song, identifying with fellow travelers, catching their pathos like a disease—these are just a few of the ways biblical theology comes dressed up differently than all the propositions that can be formulated about it. Lord, why not be more direct with you people? In the end, the answer has to do with the uniqueness of the task of communicating Christ to human inwardness and subjectivity. He is the Old Testament "pearl of great price" hidden in the Hebrew field.

8.1 Chapter Preview.

In this chapter, I will distil the meaning of all the preceding analysis into five sections of Findings & Discussion. The first three relate directly to the three contributions I projected for this study in Chapter 2, although they will come in reverse order*: 1) I will credit Kierkegaard's contribution to this study in a way that commends him as a guide for similar explorations.* His strategies occasion a new way of speaking about the Old Testament and its power for cultivating the inwardness and edification of the modern reader. *2) I will articulate the full range of Christological possibility in the Old Testament when it is viewed through the lens of indirect communication.* I hope to extend the conversation beyond Old Testament semantics in order to communicate my "theory of the case" to a broader audience. *3) I will draw from the full breadth of my study in order to articulate how the Old Testament enhances Kierkegaard's program.* His constellation of ideas has been demonstrated by the biblical text to apply to the communication

of the grace of God. This by no means cancels the power of indirect communication for disturbing the complacent but resolves that effect in the "healing from behind" that I have demonstrated to be the Old Testament's larger purpose.

Beyond those three contributions, my findings lead in two additional directions. This study has followed an interdisciplinary approach, blending the interests of such disparate fields as communication theory, literary and rhetorical criticism, Old Testament scholarship, and Christian theology. The fourth section of this chapter will champion that value as I draw out some inter-disciplinary implications at two scholarly intersections. A fifth section will reaffirm that if the presence of indirect communication in the Old Testament has been validated in this study, these strategies have something new to bring to Christendom's most vital communicative tasks.

After discussing the limitations of this study, a final section will draw out an especially exciting avenue for future research. Where the road leads from here has mostly to do with the promise I see in a companion study of indirect communication in the New Testament. To show and not merely tell this, I will conclude this dissertation much as I began. I will bracket this study with a story in which Jesus both displayed and transcended the communication strategies of Nathan before King David—"Simon, I have something to say to you" (Lk 7:40).

8.2 "New Knowledge": A Kierkegaardian Language for Old Testament Study.

At the outset, I expressed my eagerness that one result of this study should be that scholars with Christian concerns might warm up to Kierkegaard. I mean to follow his example in his most strenuous assertion, namely, that he had nothing new to bring to Christian theological understanding. For my part, I bring nothing new to the meaning of the Old Testament. The central insight guiding this dissertation is as old as St. Augustine: "the New Testament is in the

Old concealed; the Old Testament is in the New revealed." Instead of offering theological

innovation, I have hung my hat on the scholarly value that Brummett (2010) connects with the

methodology of close reading. "To speak in new terms about a great text constitutes new

knowledge" (p. 35). This has been Kierkegaard's contribution to the preceding analysis. He has

supplied the terminology to speak in a new way about the biblical text, and from this emerge new

ways to interrogate its inspired writers.

    8.2.1 A fresh vocabulary for Old Testament scholarship. This study has combined a

methodology of close reading with the ideal of reading a great text as the "best text it can be." A

posture of unwavering respect, not only for the inspiration of the biblical text, but also for its

sophistication, artistry, and brilliant intentionality has proven invaluable for surfacing its inward

harmony. Through effort and discipline, the ideal reader grows in the ability, not to read Christ

into the text, but to read him *out* of it, and does so with a steadily mounting fascination and joy.

The text first resists then surrenders to the best efforts of the persistent reader. This is the Old

Testament's achievement. Learning properly to read the inspired text is a capability to be gained,

not surprisingly, by reading the inspired text.[333]

    The point is that Kierkegaard's strategies for indirect communication have advanced this

appreciation for the Old Testament genius, giving it some new and proper names. The way of

Old Testament narrative is a *showing, not a telling*. The way of Old Testament poetry is that of

intense *defamiliarization*. The character of the Hebrew text is *maieutic* in a way that

accommodates the noetic nature of the human subject. Its prose and poetry alike invite readers to

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[333] Making sense of a particular text within the canon means intuiting the place it occupies within the careful boundaries of the revealed truth of the Bible as a whole, and doing so according to the saturation of Christological meaning that the Bible affirms for itself. This is sometimes referred to as "the analogy of faith."

complete, and so to own, the meanings intended by the writers.[334] "Speaking in new terms"

about the Old Testament extends to the heightened awareness Kierkegaard brings when it comes

to the audience that responds to the Old Testament as a communication. It is not new theological

content that he offers, but rather a new sort of *attention* paid to the receiver.

We have seen that ancient Israel was susceptible to the same illusion that clouded the

Danish state church of Kierkegaard's day, and in spite of all his fierceness, ultimately his focus

on the audience has to do with how best to love it. For the sake of communicating Christ,

Kierkegaard would have us attend to what a particular audience already knows or does not, and

how it is relating itself to what it knows. The vocabulary for describing and explaining the Old

Testament's enduring influence can now include: *repetition*, *reduplication*, *double reflection*,

and so on. Above all, the concept of *capability* has found a permanent place in all my thoughts

about the Hebrew Scriptures. Together these constitute a new way of unpacking the New

Testament thought, namely, that the Scriptures are "useful for…training in righteousness" (2Ti

3:16). Wisdom calls in the streets, "Whoever finds me finds life" (Pr 8:35). Not information.

Life. To once become acquainted with the ideals of Kierkegaard is to spot them on virtually

every Old Testament street corner, like the Dane himself walking the streets of Copenhagen.

Experience suggests that none of this represents a new conversation. It is the revival of a very old

one, and one which untold numbers of Christians are eager to have if they can only find the

words: what the grace of God in Christ, revealed in his holy Word, has to do with right here and

right now. Kierkegaard is useful for the quality of the talk his language and vocabulary prepares.

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[334] To be clear, I have constantly affirmed that meaning resides in the text itself, not in the subjective reader response, or some place in between. This view protects the integrity of the message and its existence prior to and apart from me as a listener (Craddock, 2002, p. 57). Maieutic communication only makes sense according to a structuralist view of language and a correspondence view of truth, or truth that has objective validity of its own outside of human subjectivity. Similarly, indirect communication only makes sense if the communicator is clear and intentional about the "live and die" truth he or she intends to communicate.

8.2.2 A fresh set of questions. Kierkegaard has contributed to the best questions literary criticism has learned to ask of the Old Testament: if there are a thousand ways to tell any story, why tell it this way? If there are a thousand ways to express any truth, then why poetry, why proverb, why ritual, why vision? Kierkegaard lends himself to a vivid engagement with the question about the *form* of the Old Testament as a communication, impressing upon his students the counter-intuitive notion that the *how* matters every bit as much as the *what* that it is designed to serve. The question, "What does this Great Text do to me?" is every bit as compelling as "What does it teach?" if truth is to be known and experienced and not merely speculated about.

The *how* of the Scriptures is a most vital point of contact with the *how* of living in that very Christ to whom Moses, David, Solomon, and Isaiah all bent their knees, and in the largeness of the universe, they mediate for their readers. To say what they most wanted to say, in the only way they could say it, I have concluded that the Old Testament writers arrived under inspiration at rhetorical strategies that have a remarkable affinity to those of Kierkegaard. In other words, he did not invent them. To understand him, for all he got wrong, is to see a man so gripped by the *what*, that is, by Christ the object of faith, that he became consumed by the *how*, that is, how to give expression to this truth so that others might be gripped as well. The instinct and the capability came to him from the outside. The Bible was always open on his bed stand. He lived within its thought and experienced it as an absorption in an idea that would not leave him alone.

8.3 "Never the Same": A Range of Christological Meaning in the Old Testament.

I have tried in the course of this study to move beyond telling to showing the composite portrait of Christ in the Hebrew Scriptures. The hope is that having once actually seen Christ so active and alive in his Old Testament trappings, there may be a sort of *Gestalt* shift for the religious subject. As a result of a sudden change of perception at some tipping point in the

accumulation of biblical data, readers will no longer be able to *un*see him there. As to the *how* of reading the Scriptures, Kierkegaard's provocative call is for the reader to be crucified to every impulse toward detachment, speculation, and abstraction. The ideal is to inhabit the biblical world body and soul, to be willing to be personally implicated and called into question, not to lick the Old Testament wounds but submit to them, to surrender to the "disease" of the text, its mood, and to do it all in the posture of overhearing that fits (as I have demonstrated) with the rhetorical structure of every biblical genre. Even more, as a result of that wounding, committed readers gain the capacity to meet the Old Testament with a heightened expectation that there is a sun that also rises there "with healing in his wings" (Mal 4:2). There is a place where the lonely "I" can rest transparently in its own ultimate "Thou."

8.3.1 Beyond semantics. My fear is that scholarly jargon does not communicate the meaning and value of the Old Testament very well to people who are unacquainted with the terminology or who have not tracked the scholarly conversation from where it began. The questions biblical scholars love to ask do not necessarily engage a general audience, which is the one that matters. Is it safe, for example, to draw lines of *Christological typology* from Eve who was created out of the opened side of Adam to the Church that exists through the wounded side of Christ, the second Adam? What about the catching of the ram's horns in the thicket on Mount Moriah—*Adonay Yireh* [Yahweh sees to it]—at the near-sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham (Gen 22:13-14)? Does this foreshadow the crown of thorns worn by our Lord? To say unequivocally that it does not, and then offer no further comment, is to turn hearers away from the moment empty and to forbid the glance "along the beam." To say unequivocally that it does, well, where will the mischief end? We need other ways of speaking about these things.[335]

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[335]Is the boy Samuel (cf. 1Sa 1-3) a type of the boy Jesus? For many sensitive Old Testament readers, this question is a speech-act that belongs to the university more than the sanctuary. It can only seem to be

In the end, this study has more to do with how to convey the exquisite beauty of the Hebrew Scriptures to those outside the academy. To do so I have often stepped away from abstraction toward metaphor to communicate a poetic ontology of the Old Testament. Its beautiful diversity resolves in *One Grand Story* that "rings true and hangs together" in Christ. The Old Testament promise has all the pathos of a *Marriage Proposal* and all the poetry of a *Wedding Song*. Its gallery of images is a *Holy of Holies* and the *Shadow of the Things to Come.*

Here I will distil in one place the full range of Old Testament Christological possibility according to the four images that have become most illuminating for me, and which I expect will be the most useful for communicating to others the capability of holding the Book to one's chest like a prize. 1) We listen to the Old Testament as to a *John the Baptist;* 2) we learn to gaze *Along the Beam* of the sacred text; 3) we take off our shoes before the *Burning Bush* of revelation; and 4) we hold in trembling hands the *Bible Jesus Read*.

8.3.2 The Old Testament as John the Baptist. I have turned to this imagery more than once in the preceding study. Here I will credit the writer who inspired it. The appeal for a mature grasp of the literary components of the Bible is a seldom acknowledged contribution of Martin Luther and a fruit of the Protestant Reformation: "I see that there has never been a great revelation of the Word of God unless he has first prepared the way by the rise and prosperity of languages and letters, as though they were John the Baptists" (cited in Clines, 1992, p. 25).

Strictly speaking, Luther is referring to a rise in appreciation for literature, even for words themselves, as a necessary precursor for the revival of biblical theology where it has waned.

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foisting academic categories upon the text that are foreign to it, and may even obscure the reality of Christ who is there and cause people to miss out on a more "right-brain" poetic sort of engagement with the words. Articulating precisely how Christ is served by this or that Old Testament text becomes a matter best left to "geniuses." If all of the Scriptures testify about Jesus *one way or another*, this must certainly be true of Samuel (and Adam and Eve and the ram, as well). One way or another, they exist to draw us deeper into Christ.

However, I do not think I bring anything foreign to his sentiment by applying his image to the literary forms within the Bible itself, for this is certainly the point of contact he had in mind. The power of the John the Baptist imagery is that it signals that the literary forms do not exist for their own sake. The critic who approaches the Bible merely to enjoy the "beauty of holiness" in its artistry or to celebrate its long over-looked sophistication has not yet been to the Jordan. They have missed the point. Like John the Baptist, the forms exist to point beyond themselves. "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). As this verse indicates, the cross was the Baptizer's whole theology, and the same is true of the Old Testament.

It is the theology of the cross that wakes up at the opening shriek of Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why?" As it is with Christ, that God does his best things in the midst of weakness, suffering, and apparent defeat, so it with the people he has drawn to himself. Like Israel in Egypt, like Jerusalem in ruins, like Solomon in his meaninglessness, like Ruth with her face to the ground, he makes his people nothing—*Kol habbasar khatsir* [all flesh is grass]—then he loves the nothing he has made, indeed, loves it into something. There are possibilities that begin when human capability ends. I have articulated the ways *this* theology (not just any theology) is experienced in absorption with the biblical story, caught in the pathos of the biblical poem, known in identification with the biblical writers, enacted in biblical ritual, and sung into our very bodies in biblical song. When Songs, the books of Ruth, or Proverbs have succeeded at what each has labored hard to communicate, the fortified religious self knows in inwardness that "it is an honor to owe everything to Christ." One thing is required for finding this ground of ultimate edification and the only safe place to be: we learn to approach the Old Testament *indirectly.*

Taking the Old Testament as a *direct* communication can prove devastating to its meaning and intention as my study has shown. If the book of Songs *merely points to itself and*

nothing more, then human sexuality becomes what it all too likely to become, a gross idolatry and a promise that life's highest satisfaction lies with it and not the one who gave it. If the book of Proverbs *merely points to itself*, then the one who despairs over its ideal of righteousness and the one who embraces the illusion of having achieved it are both condemned together. If the book of Ruth *merely points to itself*, then Boaz is calling, "Be like me." Like Moses and Elijah, Jeremiah and Esther, he holds out his model of covenant faithfulness and it is warm and heartening, that is, until the religious self once tries and is undone.

"I am not the one. I only point to him." This is the John the Baptist reading of the Hebrew Scriptures. The *how* of engaging them is the increasing capability of recognizing that much more is going on there than is first apparent. That something more is Christ, a truer and better Solomon, a truer and better Wisdom, a truer and better Redeemer…and nothing else will do.

8.3.3 "Along the beam" of the Hebrew Scriptures. I have already reviewed the image of the shaft of light in C.S. Lewis' toolshed, the one he can either look *at* or look *along*, and to quite different effects. In fact, what is most striking is how different the two experiences are. One moment, it is all floating motes of dust that disappear as they drift out of the beam. The next moment you are blinded by the light and squinting at the things it lights up from its unthinkable distance away, simply because you stepped inside it and bothered to look up. The point is not that looking *at* the beam of the Old Testament is without importance or validity. Far from it. Linguistic, literary, and rhetorical analysis, and the temporary scholarly distance they require, comprise just such a contemplation. For my part, I have analyzed chiastic structures, paid minute attention to literary centering, perused my Hebrew grammars and lexicons, and much more.

These modes of discovery are only a means to an end. The point is not to privilege them so as to miss the look *along* the beam, which would be a shame.

The prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with

the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of

Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the

glories that would follow. (1Pe 1:11-12)

C.S. Lewis' imagery of the toolshed fits well with the spectrum of Christological meaning that I

am summarizing in this section. While *looking at the beam* captures well the close reading that I

have done, next I will make a distinction between *stepping into the beam* and *looking along it*.

Stepping into the beam has meant explicitly rejecting the notion that all the truth is

available in a posture of scholarly distance. It involves trusting in the divine performative

utterance—*'ehyeh 'ittakh* [I will be with you]—in order to know its reality. It means catching the

mood of the text, like the great joke the ancient idolaters must learn to tell on themselves as if

succumbing to a disease, and receiving into one's own subjectivity the "I" of the psalmists as the

"I" of Christ. Stepping into the beam involves acknowledging the saving one who is mediated by

the immersed participation in its story and song, and inhabiting the world of ancient Israel

through its whole long trajectory: the forming of people, the provision of a home and a king. It is

to know their captivity in our time, within a "not yet" this is not unlike theirs, and to scan another

horizon than the one that meets our eyes. Above all, the religious self steps into the beam when it

is implicated by the righteousness of the Proverbs or the passionate subjectivity of the prophets

which it does not find within itself but can only imagine. It can only leap among the footsteps of

Boaz that are too far apart for walking in, to say nothing of the footsteps of Christ.

Looking along the beam means seeing something in the slab of gold splattered in blood

which one person cannot give directly to another, or hearing this something struggling to be born

in the cry of Moses—"Remember Abraham"—or feeling this warm inward something in the

Flame of Yah. "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us" (Lk 24:32). When the condemning face of Yahweh just changes, and all is *Nakhamu, nakhamu 'ammi* [Comfort, comfort my people], it is possible to forget that it is all centuries-old scratchings on leather parchment. Indeed, the purpose of the beam is to disappear. *Deus Obsconditus* becomes *Deus Revalatus* in Christ, and to gaze upward in the Old Testament shaft of light is to be alone with him, and yet not, because "like is known by like."

8.3.4 The Old Testament as a Burning Bush. The point in referring to the whole Old Testament as a "Burning Bush" is not to allegorize off the literal theophany on Mount Sinai. I have made much of the dynamics by which the rhetorical force of the Hebrew Scriptures grows exponentially through a face-value, "best text" reading. However, I take this license because no better image exists to communicate to the popular mind still hungering for transcendence that the Old Testament is a shimmering revelation. *It is a Burning Bush.*

My purpose here is to summarize the range of Christological meaning in the Old Testament under this pregnant image. It includes the true and unequivocal types of Christ in the Old Testament—Jonah's three days in the great fish, the water at Rephidim, and so on—as well as the entire historical sweep of Israel's story that resolves in Christ as the lone and true Israel "reduced to one." We have met Jesus as the one we overhear praying in the Psalms, as the one for whom prophetic irony clears the stage, and as the source and end of every love that is truly love. As I have demonstrated exegetically, the pre-incarnate Christ appears as an actor at many places in Old Testament historical prose under the title, *Mal'akh Adonay* [the Angel of the LORD]. Not only was Christ the flame that spoke from the Burning Bush in a stunning foreshadowing of the incarnation, but it was he who stayed the hand of Abraham at the *Akedah*, who wrestled with Jacob at Bethel, who comforted Hagar, strengthened Elijah, and so on.

We saw that Messianic prophecy flows in two seemingly irreconcilable streams—the Suffering Servant and the Conquering King—that would one day meet in Christ, the Ultimate Paradox. We surveyed the mountain range of Restoration Prophecy with all its individual peaks that stand for the release of the captives, the day of Christ, the spiritual riches of knowing him, seeing him face to face in the final falling of the veil, or all of these at once. The prophets communicate this redemption through relatable images drawn from life: wine and honey, lambs and lions, pruning hooks and plowshares. All the colors of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms culminate in a thrilling portrait of Jesus Christ. The bush burns but does not burn up.

Moses saw something on the mountain that flashed in the night and drew him closer in and higher up. It was curiosity more than anything else, a spontaneous impulse to climb. It is just this way with the Old Testament. A book on a table with coffee rings on its cover does nothing to overwhelm. Yet there is a fire within the leaves. Just as at the literal Burning Bush somewhere in the range of Horeb, the Old Testament fire is Christ himself. He is the Flame of Yah.

8.3.5 The Old Testament as the Bible Jesus read. The Hebrew Scriptures have an additional benediction to offer. As for ushering Christendom into a deeper love for them, I offer the image of a young *Yeshua* sitting cross-legged and spellbound in the temple courts when the scrolls were unrolled (Lk 2:41-51). There is a mysterious double meaning in the simple idea that Jesus *found himself* in the Old Testament. One can only speak with a "stammering and stuttering" of the subjectivity of Christ, particularly about how the human soul of Jesus grew in self-awareness and self-identity. To live an actual human life, he did not exploit the prerogative that was his divine omniscience. This leads us to a wondering contemplation about a first century Hebrew boy immersed in a culture of bloody sacrifice and prophetic images. One day, for example, he encountered in a 700-year old text a Messiah born in Bethlehem, one "whose origins

are from of old" (Mic 5:2). He was only a listening child, and Lord, the things he heard:

> I was there when he set the heavens in place....In you and in your seed will all the
>
> nations of the earth be blessed....I heard their cry and I have come down... Make an
>
> atonement cover of pure gold.... That man is our Redeemer....My God, my God, why?....
>
> Nor will his Holy One see decay....I saw one like a Son of Man coming with the clouds
>
> of heaven.... My Lover is mine and I am his....

As a Hebrew might say, "hearing, he heard." There is no question that Jesus found

himself in the pages of the Old Testament as the key to its meaning.[336] This reality occupied the

entire walk to Emmaus where "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to [the

disciples] what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Lk 24:27). The sleepy town

came up all too soon, and as the sun had set on Emmaus he feigned his good-bye to his friends—

one can think about that all day. It is ours to linger in the unselfconscious earnestness of their

discipleship. "Stay the night and tell us more. Whoever you are, please stay."[337] The point is that

a Kierkegaardian passion to experience contemporaneity with Christ, true God and true man,

must ever overcome the scandal of these thoughts, and must lead ever deeper into the Hebrew

Scriptures, now that we are given to imagine God with bent knees and elbows, hungrily reading

and inwardly digesting the scrolls, cracking and worn, because he knew himself there and was

edified. Recognizing the Old Testament as the Bible Jesus read opens up still another sort of

indirect access to the magnificent mind of Christ.

Speaking in human terms of Christ our brother, still available to use in its pages are the

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[336] Even those four hundred intertestamental years when people would "stagger from sea to sea" (Am 8:12) for lack of a Word must serve some divine rhetorical function, the quiet shouting a message until an infant shattered the silence in Bethlehem.

[337] Only three days earlier, Christ had done something quite irreversible to the *hallel* [praise] psalms (Ps 113-118), line by line, simply by singing them in the Upper Room in his final Passover with his friends.

very thoughts that ran through his human soul and which now may run freely through ours. These are the images, stories, and songs that perfectly ordered his loves, the prayers he still prays, and the biblical image of human thriving that he realized in our place for the sake of our own realization. In an office crammed with a thousand books, the thought that there is one of them that my Lord loved too, and loved better, very nearly takes the breath away. There his inwardness is close enough to touch and to feel its heartbeat. In the sea of human words, there are some that he especially prized, that he sang in the annual ascent to Jerusalem, that he held onto for dear life at this final Passover Seder. I do not discover the Old Testament words until I love them for Jesus' sake like the light of my own Upper Room.

8.4 "Healing from Behind": the Indirect Communication of the Grace of God.

First among the major contributions I set out to accomplish with this dissertation was to demonstrate how the ancient Hebrew text can complicate and extend the strategies of Kierkegaard and bring them fully to bear on the task of communicating the grace of God. I began to feel in my bones that seismic shift of meaning that occurs wherever Christ as the key is fitted into the hermeneutical lock. It happened at Sinai, Rephidim, and the shores of the Kebar in Babylon. It happened in the psalms, proverbs, and prophecies. The severity of the text, where it is most offensive to modern sensibilities, always gave way to something else in the light of Christ, a "healing from behind."

Not once did the texts I have interrogated turn mute at the question of capability that is essential for framing the Old Testament as an indirect communication. What Kierkegaard took to be the paradoxical height of capability, the religious self discovering its nothingness without Christ, has only led to capabilities that reach higher still. These are the capabilities that have to do with the undeserved and unconditional love of God: to fly to Christ-like Moses in the crisis of

the golden calf; to be drawn more deeply into Christ as we lean on the prayers he prayed first and in our stead; and to exist in this grace as we hold it out to one another. This is the edification that is the ultimate purpose of the Hebrew text which justifies the assertion that it does not merely contain but that it *is* as indirect communication. The idea did not come to me as a dream in the night. It merely gathers up the apostolic sense that a myopic obsession with Christ, by the indwelling Spirit, breaks the seals of the entire Hebrew Old Testament.

Kierkegaard applied indirect communication to the malady of his day primarily to disturb people and to replace their complacent illusions with a bit of fear and trembling. The purpose was preparation. He did so in order that the gospel might then be communicated directly and unequivocally. This is an over-simplification, of course, but a useful one. In noticing the ways the inspired Hebrew texts extend the use of communicative indirectness to healing purposes, by no means do I deny what Kierkegaard saw or what he did about it. A convenient confusion between what it means to have the truth versus being had by it did not fade with his generation. The things that pass for faith—sentimentality, Christian eloquence, external uprightness—do much to enhance the illusion that consists in one's own best display. The point is that although I have emphasized the grace of God as it lives and breathes in the Old Testament, this does not mean that it is safe to minimize the Old Testament's brutal honesty, or its power to beat the life out of the vain human ego. The fear and trembling to which I have often referred are the knowledge of the self that it carries within all that it would take to ruin its own salvation (cf. Heb 6:4-6).

The simple truth is that the "dead bodies" of the Old Testament matter. Flannery O'Connor commented about the need for the grotesque to appear in her stories if they were to offer anything more than sentimental "uplift," and the Old Testament, too, makes radical human

evil something recognizable, first on the page and then in the bathroom mirror. The Old Testament is and remains, fundamentally, a redemption story, but one that is meaningless to the person who recognizes no cause for anything so extreme as the ripping and writhing of Psalm 22. There is a hunger for redemption that wakes up in the grit and gore of that poem, and in the shame of the golden calf, and in the pain of the lover who cannot find her other. When it does, as I say, only Christ will do. The wounding is part of the healing. It has always been this way.

We have noted the transition-less juxtaposition of judgment and grace that characterizes the prophetic literature. The whole Old Testament falls open with the realization that these two themes are resolved utterly and only in the crucifixion of Christ. Without this knowledge, the Bible remains a deep, dark, and inscrutable book. Here collide the two sides of the "infinite qualitative difference" between humanity and God, divine holiness and divine love. Both are true to a staggering degree, and the way they together operate on the religious subject goes to the essence of biblical rhetoric. It is in holding both themes together, each at its fullest intensity, that I am changed, drawn ever deeper into the cross and into the daily dying and rising with Christ. It is the end of the "trained incapacity" that illusion represents (Burke, 1984, p. 93) and of every need to pretend. We are each more train wreck and more posterchild of grace than we can know.

In the end, the contribution this study offers for enhancing the possibilities of Christian communication consists of the call simply to attend to the full menu of rhetorical strategies displayed in the Old Testament. This relates to the entire continuum of direct versus indirect communication. On one end is the immediacy of Nathan to David, "The LORD has taken away your sin," and on the other the edgy parable that prepared the moment. That full repertoire of communication choices comprises the capability of the Old Testament, this relentless tearing at the veil between the sinner and God.

8.5 "Into the Moats": Interdisciplinary Implications.

The metaphor in which academic disciplines are construed as heavily fortified castles belongs to Brenda Dervin (2006). She offers her firsthand account of a time when scholars representing a wide diversity of fields first began to gather in a common ideal of investigating communication as "the central phenomenon, not a phenomenon on the periphery" (p. 20). The endeavor was marked by generosity, hospitality, and a shared value in which every player had something to offer. Initially, differences about how it is most appropriate to study communication were not as important as the exciting potential in the cross-pollination of formerly independent academic pursuits. However, those methodological differences ran deep, and the implosion among scholars at so basic a level of disagreement was all but inevitable.

The result was that academic disciplines became "socially inscribed and buttressed edifices that empower but also constrain the very idea of scholarship as activity" (Dervin, 2006, p. 19). Most scholars remain safely inside their own discourse communities. To extend the metaphor, Dervin writes, "The moats are wide, protecting as they do the common agreements which define academic discourse communities" (p. 19). She describes how treacherous those waters can be. It is self-evident that the messy field of communication scholarship is not well served when academics speak only to themselves within the confines of their own specialized jargon. Further, it is clear that the most interesting research gaps are more and more likely to be found in the wide open spaces between narrow disciplinary concerns.

What Dervin describes as the current state of communication scholarship is not unique to that field. Boda (2012) has recently traced the fact that Old Testament study has not been immune to the increasing specialization in the academic world. He offers a similar prescription: "What is needed today are daring attempts to move outside these disciplinary walls and write and

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reflect on Old Testament theology within…the broader contemporary context (ethics, pastoral theology, worldview studies, political theology, etc.)" (p. 152). Like Dervin, Boda articulates for his discipline the ideals on which his prescription depends and the benefits that can ensue:

> Such an approach demands hospitality, a willingness to dialogue in community across the theological disciplines and life experiences, but also courage to venture outside one's expertise. In this way, then, Old Testament exegetical and biblical theology has potential to impact the church's preaching and worship as well as the church's reflection on creational activities ranging from politics to education to law. (p. 153)

It is no stretch to add *communication* to his short list of the church's "creational activities" that can be enriched by the crashing of disciplinary boundaries and by the impulse to communicate scholarly findings in a way that is accessible to a broad audience. This is what I have tried to do on the strength of the Old Testament provocation.

For my part, I have discovered that the likes of Søren Kierkegaard and Brevard Childs, Kenneth Burke and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Walter Fisher and Robert Alter have a great deal to talk about, and am personally richer for it. For its most inevitable cross-disciplinary nexus, this dissertation brought Kierkegaard scholarship into conversation with literary criticism within the overarching concern for the *how* of the ancient Hebrew Scriptures as a communication of theological truth. This is the integration between disciplines that has been on the front stage throughout this study. However, there are two other important ways in which parallel avenues of inquiry have been tentatively drawn into a common line: 1) what the Hebrew Old Testament brings to the study of rhetoric; and 2) how theology contributes to communication theory.

8.5.1 An interdisciplinary approach to rhetoric and the Old Testament. The Hebrew

Old Testament stands as Israel's massive contribution to all of Western society and culture.[338] In the all-encompassing diversity of human concerns that can trace their roots in the Old Testament, is it possible that rhetoric is excluded? Zulick (1992) noted with chagrin that the Old Testament "remains somewhat removed from the center of critical inquiry in rhetoric and communications theory today" (p. 125). That gap began later to be filled at the initiative of George Kennedy (1998), but the door on which he pushed mostly opens up onto comparative studies of rhetorical practices in ancient cultures. What, then, is the Old Testament's contribution to a modern, robust rhetorical understanding? This study introduces indirect communication as the key to that question, affirming it as the hidden gem of the Torah and the entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures. As a set of rhetorical strategies that I have shown to pervade the entire Old Testament revelation, indirect communication has been overlooked, misunderstood, undervalued, and neglected as Western rhetoric took another course.[339] My analysis includes a comparison with Aristotle's rhetoric simply because we are here considering rhetorical matters at their ancient roots.

This puts the communication of Christ on a narrow rhetorical ridge between the two alternatives. [340] When it comes to this dialectic between communicative directness (and its

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[338] The revealed truth of the New Testament that is concealed in the Old begins in its concept of divinity: there is one God who exists in a Trinity of persons according to which timeless Love is revealed to be his very nature and essence. Although humanity's debt to the Hebrew Scriptures is seldom acknowledged, its imprint still remains for a time on every of aspect of society's worldview, symbolic universe, and social imaginary. This extends to: morality, justice, family, language, literature, art, science, human relations, human community, human purpose, and much more. Embedded in its pages are ideals ranging from the inestimable value of the individual (especially the child) to the proper place of reason in pursuit of ultimate truth.

[339] The competing visions of communication as persuasive instrumentality and communication as dialogic possibility have long existed in a paradoxical relationship. "If I command you to be communicative, I have, indeed, become persuasive. If you dare to listen, you have become dialogic" (Dervin, 2006, p. 22). Both ideals will continue to serve Christendom well. However, the dialectic tension between them is an invaluable corrective to the extremes at either end, and from the biblical soil grows a quiet critique of both paradigms.

[340] The critique of Aristotle's famous exploiting of "every possible means of persuasion" involves the possibility that coercion can be enacted as a sort of violence against the face of the other within so muscular a view of rhetoric. If I cudgel other people to bend their mind to my will, I may not only diminish them in my eyes, but in their own as well. If the point is to reduce every threat to my beliefs and self-perceptions by transforming others into my likeness, then it is for just such an audience that I must strive toward Kierkegaard's "victory of love," and win on behalf of others the battle with myself. At the other end of the

inherent limitations) and dialogue (the ultimate communication panacea), there is a rhetorical middle way, a road less traveled. It is to commit unreservedly to that truth for which one may "live and die," and yet to thoughtfully empty the communication of all coercion, and to trust not to human eloquence or humanly derived authority. Though they may thunder and cajole, this is the rhetorical way of the Hebrew writers *when it comes to the indirect communication of Christ*. What power there is must reside within the *nuda verba* [the naked Word] itself.

The gospel comes in an essential message of mystery and grace that gives itself to neither ideology nor the clever wishy-washiness of "whatever is true for you." Nor are we left without signposts for finding our way out onto the narrow ridge between. Kierkegaard impresses upon Christendom that its communication of grace needs more intentionally to take its cues from the God who hides in order to be revealed, the God who communicates indirectly in order to sneak past human defenses, puncture human illusions, arouse subjectivity, and leave each man and woman alone at the Burning Bush of revelation. We stand in awe of what only God can do in the soul of another human being. We speak Christ to a sister or brother, then "shyly withdraw" to leave the two of them alone to sort things out.

How much one person can do for another in terms of Christian edification was a major concern for Kierkegaard. "To stand alone with another's help" (1967, 1:650) is the way he described the relationship of a student to a Christian teacher, with Socratic midwifery as a companion analogy. Only God can give birth to his truth in the inwardness of another. The Apostle Paul turns the image upside-down when he wrote to Christians who were losing their

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rhetorical continuum, the feminist ideal of *invitational rhetoric* is subject to considerable criticism regarding its theoretical coherence. Communicators are encouraged to act without authenticity, as if they do not privilege their own truth when, of course, they do. For all the vaunting of dialogue, it is not necessarily a form of love free from the exercise of merely human power. Entering the rhetorical fray with the immediacy of encounter (armed with good eye contact) may not be all it's cracked up to be. The direct communicative assault may be counter-productive in the face of illusion and deeply self-protective resistance to the truth.

way. He addressed them as "my dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19) Evidently, a wholesome understanding on the part of the communicator that only God can reveal Christ to other human beings by Word and sacrament coexists with the willingness to suffer on their behalf. This is the middle way.

8.5.1.1 *Beyond Aristotle.* Just as this study occasioned a contrast, first, between the old Hebrew and the old Greek ideals of wisdom, and later, of romantic love, there is a similar divide in rhetorical understanding. There is an important distinction to be made in the fact that Aristotle dedicated his exploration of rhetoric to occasions when an audience *knew it was being persuaded.* This is an indication of just how direct is the communication that is informed by *The Rhetoric* (4th century BCE/2004). Of course, this distinction in which an audience knows that it is being persuaded is *sometimes* true of biblical rhetoric as it met its original hearers (not as much for us modern over-hearers). Those who first listened to Moses' farewell sermons certainly were not left guessing about his true purposes in addressing them as he did. However, even the book of Deuteronomy demonstrates the predominance of narrative rationality in Moses' rhetorical style, and the book only affirms by its presence in the canon the strategy of combining direct communication with "showing not telling," and for blending straightforwardness with the artfully maieutic. The larger picture of Old Testament-style rhetoric includes the many genres in which the audience may *not* realize that it is being persuaded: the singing of the Psalms, laughing with the jesting prophets, participation in the Passover rituals or the theatre of Ruth and Esther, the *un*-persuasion, so to speak—the giving by taking away—of Qohelet, and so on.

The point is that Aristotle's system did not account for the dynamics whereby the direct assault on an audience's illusions can be counter-productive. We can further describe and explain

the Old Testament's many modes of indirect communication according to the limitations of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, not only when these strategies fail, but, even more, when they succeed.

8.5.1.2 *The limitations of logos, ethos, and pathos.* Only a Christian rhetor of the highest integrity will be unwilling to "succeed" according to the time-tested ideals of rhetoric as it reaches for "every available means of persuasion." First of all, an audience may assent to the *Logos* persuasion of the professional Christian communicator while a certain falseness remains that has nothing to do with the accuracy of the thought. There can be falseness instead in the motivation of the hearer to hide in abstract speculation or to be content with a superficial grasp of the reasons the speaker provided (as if it is enough that the speaker seems to know what he or she is talking about). Until I can explain the grounds of my truth in my own fresh expression, my capability of living that truth is crippled because it is only partially mine. When others succeed in impressing me with the words they string together, it is not necessarily the help I need.

Ethos persuasion, too, can succeed too much. An audience may be so persuaded about the trustworthiness of the speaker that all personal responsibility for the truth is abdicated to his or her authority. Witness the crisis when a Christian leader experiences a moral failure; it is as if orthodoxy itself has collapsed. Missing is what Kierkegaard understood well: "In eternity you will look in vain for the crowd. You will listen in vain to find where the noise and the gathering is, so that you can run to it" (cited in Moore, 2002, p. xxviii). Christian rhetors must nurture their suspicion toward all who prefer to hear them talk, and only them, over any other teacher.

Lastly, an audience may mistake the strong emotion of *Pathos* persuasion that swirls within the self for a sign of some sort of deeply penetrating change. The more skillful the rhetor, and the more emotion in the room, the more listeners may assume that becoming caught up in all of that is all the rhetorical situation is asking of them. Further, Kierkegaard's worries over the

"error of modulation" need not involve the absence of any feeling, but instead, the falseness

consists in having the *wrong* feeling accompany a given truth. For example, hearers experience

moral indignation when, if they were honest at all, they would be burning with shame.

Classic rhetorical strategies involve relying on information the audience already has. The

power of the enthymeme and the ideograph consists in allowing the audience to take part in their

own persuasion by unconsciously supplying what has not been put into words. Indirect

communication deeply shares this concern for what knowledge the audience already possesses.

Its unique contribution consists in its attempt, rather than merely to call up that knowledge in

order to bolster an argument, but instead, to bring significant change to how the audience relates

itself to what it already knows. "Yes, you know this word, that song, this story. Yes, you know

your responsibility, your forgiveness, your Lord. But do you *know* them?"

On the strength of a deepened understanding of human nature and the many forms of

human falseness, Kierkegaard grabs communicators by the throat once they, too, have learned to

take these issues seriously. Too many rhetors may be satisfied at getting a rise out of an audience

when great harm has occurred in connection with the worst delusions of all: self-righteousness,

self-sufficiency, self-importance, and self-satisfaction. These are the walls against which direct

communication bangs its head, and this style of rhetoric still dominates, not only high school

forensics but also most graduate level courses in homiletics as well.[341] Indeed, what to do about a

superficial grasp of reasons on the part of an audience, the way it is prone to surrender

responsibility (and all the more, the more gifted the rhetor), the error of modulation, or every

other way the objects of persuasion hide their true selves to keep them safe and unaffected?

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[341] Brothers (2014) notes a change in regard to Aristotle's long influence on homiletics. He credits this growing trend to Craddock and notes that the ideal of combining distance with participation is a rhetorical advance in its own right (p. 48).

8.5.1.3 *The unique rhetoric of communicating Christ.* This study concerns rhetoric in its ultimate form, the rhetorical actions of God the Father that center in his one consuming thought, namely, Christ his Son. Biblical rhetoric involves communicating truth that is dialectical to its core: the holy judgment of God and his inconceivable impulse to redeem meet in the cross of Christ. This central truth, this ultimate reality, works itself out in many inwardly connected paradoxes: the Christian has a double sense of self as a desperate sinner and a holy child of God; faith is passive in its salvation and alive with activity in its connection with Christ; it costs nothing and it costs everything to belong to him; the heart rests and strives, sorrows and rejoices, and so on. It seems that Christian Socratic midwifery always gives birth to twins, and either twin will die without the other. This introduces a rhetorical paradox. An audience that clings to only one side of the dialectic, for example, that it costs nothing to belong to Christ, is holding to a most sacred truth and a terrible distortion at the same time. This means that, in general terms, the Christian rhetor always has two things to say. However, practically speaking, the Christian rhetor must assess each audience to know which of its "two things" to shout the loudest, that is, which truth holds the most provocation and surprise because of the contemporary neglect.

For truth so paradoxical as the Christian message, being in possession of only one side of the dialectic, especially the softer side, makes it likely that the religious self is relating to what it knows as information. What it lacks is earnestness. Confronting such an audience with the neglected truth is designed to deepen their inwardness and double reflection in regard to the portion of total truth that is already familiar and well-rehearsed. The tension among truths is the essential piece, and it is this that can only come as an indirect communication because, but its nature, it is a subjective knowledge. It is not the sort of thing one person can give to another—"I told him, so he knows." Ultimately, it is the dialectic of these lively twins—Law and Gospel, sin

and grace—that is the true genius of the Old Testament where the two are forever colliding.

I am not *I Am* to you. (Hos 1:9, my translation)

I have loved you with an everlasting love. (Jer 31:1)

These kiss each other in Christ. They resolve in no other way. For Christian communicators, the task is to shape their own rhetoric according to that overarching and revelatory dialect and to do so within a commitment to understand their particular audience and how it relates itself to what it knows.[342] The best rhetorical thinkers, from those who deal in the art of persuasion to those who care about the art of dialogue, can serve the Christian rhetor so long as every thought is taken captive to Christ, the wisdom and power of God.

8.5.2 An interdisciplinary approach to communication theory and theology. A second major implication having to do with the interdisciplinary ideal concerns how happily and well the ideas from communication scholarship and theology have played together in the Old Testament meadows. I have repeatedly observed the ways in which the best ideas of communication theory become transcendent in connection with revelation in general and its Christological significance in particular. Preeminently, the ways in which the Hebrew Scriptures inwardly "ring true" and "hang together" in Christ furnished the parade example of the way all things communicative tend to light up at the touch of biblical theology.

The heuristic marriage of communication and theology involved Austin's theory of performative utterance when brought together with an essential aspect of the ontology of the divine, namely, that the God who exists is communicative. As an aspect of the middle rhetorical

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[342] Out of Augustine's productive ambivalence toward rhetoric emerge many ideals about rhetoric that fit with the special challenges of Christian persuasion. His themes in *Concerning Christian Doctrine* (397/1987) include the rhetor's need to experience the crucifixion of self to this world and of the world to the self, the test of all rhetoric in whether it leads the soul deeper into Christ; and the promise that the gifts of the rhetor, no matter how modest, will be multiplied like the fish and loaves of Galilee when surrendered to him.

way that I described earlier, divine performative utterance exploits the power of language to create a new state of affairs, one that must be believed to be seen or to know its influence in life, and this applies to the entire Old Testament promise. There is more.

Whereas Kierkegaard articulates the ultimate aloneness of the religious self (since the subjective realization of religious truth can only happen in private inwardness), Burke opens a hopeful window. His powerful notion of identification—the sharing of human stuff as echoes in the ancient ideal that "like is known by like"—begins with an awareness of human alienation, much as Old Testament theology begins in a sense of sin. Ultimate rescue arrives in a biblical theology of *koinonia* [fellowship], the *having-in-common* that is so eloquently portrayed in Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* (1939/1954a). To adapt the thought of Peters (1999), it is not communication but Christ himself who is our ultimate compensation for the fact that we can never be each other.

These insights culminate in a transcendent view of social penetration and social perception in which Christ is strong in the word of a brother or sister (because his words are more than symbols), and the religious self gathers data from him and not from the flawed other. "We regard no one from a worldly point of view; though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer" (2Co 5:16). This means learning to treat another human being according to the decisive way God has already treated them in Christ. It is an avenue toward transcending Fisher's ideal of *charisma* (1989, p. 17) in which communicators think the best of one another.

The literary theory of the "best text" has integrated well with Fisher's idea of narrative rationality in the interest of making available to readers all that the inspired text can be. Harm is done once readers become convinced by modern bias that a literary achievement as sophisticated and entangling as the Old Testament is actually quite primitive and crude. This can only do

violence to the way the religious self relates itself to the text. As to my theory of the case, the key to the Old Testament is Christ. All the thickness of my descriptions of the Hebrew Scriptures belongs to him. He is the "beauty of holiness" hidden beneath the literary beauty and the reason we return to the ancient Hebrew well. The "best text" argument for the Christological reading of the Old Testament is cumulative. I believe that it is overwhelming. In the end, the ancient Hebrew-styled communication of such mountaintops as the hiddenness of God and the theology of the cross is less about abstraction and more about what it is like to live on them.

There have been many other concepts drawn from both theology and communication that have influenced this study. The former contributed a quite nuanced view of reason, an understanding of the mediation of grace through humble means, of Christological typology, restoration prophesy, and much more. The latter brought in such constructs as uncertainty reduction and Burke's "equipment for living," the ideals of entertainment education, rhetorical constructs (e.g., archetypal metaphor and enthymeme), and much more. Theology and communication theory found many happy couplings, such as the power of both ritual and narrative to mediate the presence of the ultimate Person and the most sacred of histories. In view of all this, it is no surprise that Craddock (2002) noted a small but growing interdisciplinary movement among biblical scholars who have become interested in communication as a primary concern and a necessary dimension of biblical study. "Before the world, inner and outer, of the hearer, most biblical scholars stand, drawn and challenged by the unexplored territory" (p. 63). In view of this, Craddock commends Kierkegaard as an unparalleled explorer of that world. I hope my study does as well. To borrow and adapt something Brenda Dervin said, this study has been guided by an ideal in which communication *in and through Christ* is "the central phenomenon, not a phenomenon on the periphery" (2006, p. 20).

I hope that I have demonstrated the boundless potential of integrating communication and theology and I offer this as an additional theoretical implication of my study. Kierkegaard deserves a place at the table of communication scholarship. All the best theologians do.[343] My contention through these few examples is that the explanatory power of Kierkegaard's ideas, when applied to the Old Testament, can be extended through a broad array of communication theories. What I further hope is quite new and refreshing about my approach is the very notion of studying human communication in all of its facets on the basis of the greatest literature in the world. Robert Atkinson (1988) has advocated for a growing database of life stories to be gathered not only for the transformative effects the process of life review can have for its participants, but even more for the usefulness of all the accumulated narratives for research across a wide array of academic disciplines: sociology, psychology, linguistics, rhetoric, and so on. I mention this as an analogy. I hope that my study provides a model for communication research by virtue of the fact that we are in possession of the inspired and true redemption story of God and his interactions with fallen humanity.

8.6 "To Live and Die": Implications for the Church's Communicative Tasks.

In the quiet of my private study, I rediscovered the Old Testament's latent power for restoring the shock of Christian revelation and for occasioning a fresh hearing of the Gospel. I

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[343] A few specific examples will suffice to argue that there is much more work to be done by anyone minded to answer the call for biblical scholars to care about communication theory. Judee Burgoon can be enlisted to offer her two cents about the nonverbal expectancy violations in the book of Esther. Haman stumbles onto a couch, a king holds out a scepter, and on such things as these the fate of a nation turns. There's more than a hint of Dervin's Sensemaking Theory in the stories set within stories in the Old Testament, for example, we overhear Joseph re-narrating his life experience from a perspective of faith as he addresses his brothers' betrayal, "You meant to harm me but God meant it for good" (Gn 50:20). The same story beautifully illustrates Balance Theory as Fisher (1989, pp. 88-89) explains it: a person searches for and adapts the story that restores equilibrium—"God never left me"—and consubstantiality—"I am your brother, Joseph!" For a third example to stand for dozens more, if reading the Old Testament today is analogous to a cross-cultural exchange, cultural theories of communication such as face saving and face negotiation become relevant. The Old Testament books of Daniel and Esther come immediately to mind, because they provide intense, hypersensitive dialogues that stand as aesthetic achievements at places of cultural collision.

have argued that the lively presence of indirect communication in the Old Testament becomes a strong validation for exploring its strategies for expressly Christian purposes. In this section, I distilled some of the implications my study can have for communicating Christ into a double irony: a culture that thinks it knows what the gospel is and a church that still hungers for grace. First, however, any thought of implementing Kierkegaard's strategies confronts Christian communicators with pivotal questions about those who receive their message: 1) what do people know or think they know about themselves and about the God who is revealed in Christ; and 2) how do they relate themselves to what they know? Kierkegaard embodies an ideal found among the old German dogmaticians. He was first of all a *Menschenkenner* [a people knower].[344]

8.6.1 Assessing the audience outside the walls of Christendom. Indirect communication operates on what an audience already knows but does not properly appropriate. Therefore, its strategies do not enter the discussion of how best to communicate Christian truth when an audience is naively ignorant of it. However, in the case of contemporary culture, the question of how much Christian information people have is complicated. Few would disagree that secular culture remains "Christ-haunted" (O'Connor, 1970, p. 44) and that bits and pieces of Jesus, so to speak, still appear here and there in the milieu of mediated culture. The oversupply of digital information that characterizes our times certainly includes Christian orthodoxy. Truths to die for are readily available at the click of a mouse but are a still small voice amid the maelstrom. To immerse in popular culture or the halls of higher education is to become aware of growing numbers of people who are not in possession of the *what* of Christianity in anything but the most distorted cultural memory. The most elementary presentation of Christ and the plan of

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[344] Christian scholarship is an act of love when it spends its energy investigating the way symbols act on people, and on an ever deepening understanding of the audience in its desperate need for Christ.

salvation would come as news to an increasing segment of the American population.[345]

Christian apologist, Timothy Keller draws a revealing image from the Gospel record. A man named Nathaniel uttered an easy dismissal of Christ—"Nazareth? Can anything good come from there?" (Jn 1:46)—and this echoes in a pervasive, patterned cultural response to Christendom. "Can anything good come from there!?" The secularists on the street carry an expectation about the church that precisely nothing of value exists behind its doors. Speaking culturally, psychologically, and above all, theologically (cf. Ro 8:7), they are not inclined to change their minds. There are no blank slates.

These conditions create at least one point of contact with the challenge Kierkegaard confronted: people will see the direct Christian communicator coming and arm their defenses. Craddock (1973) comments that when threatened, the hearer does not listen, think or ponder because every faculty is "lined up along the barricades in anxious defense" (p.81).The frontal attack is easily resisted. Christian theology is castigated as "hate speech" and media portrayals demonize Christians as intolerant bigots who embody what is wrong with the world. Given this stereotype, the Christian witness is wise to come in with something other than dogmatism or superiority. That *something else* will be the subject of the discussion of the Church's communicative tasks to follow below, but it begins in creative communication forms drawn from Scripture and qualities of humility and winsomeness learned from Christ. The witness must yield

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[345] One might conclude that our spiritual climate has little in common with Kierkegaard's and that in such times Christ can only be communicated directly. However, the issue is complicated by a gross cultural illusion: people *think* they know what Christianity is. The Christian message meets large portions of contemporary society not as the fresh hearing of something new and unconsidered, but as one option among many for trying to make life make sense, and one assumed to have been debunked long ago (everybody says so). In the extreme view, Jesus represents an ethnic mythology that strangely persists among the ignorant with nothing whatsoever to commend it. People can be inoculated by the dead virus of a false sense of Christianity against any breaking through of the vitality of the Christian message. The Jesus they imagine stands in the way of the Jesus who is.

the rhetorical position above in honor of Christ who once left heaven itself behind. The ideal of "giving by taking away" applies to a distorted view of what it means to be a Christian.

In the cultural milieu in which Christian information is everywhere blended with misinformation, and with virulent forms of hatred toward Christ coming more and more out of the closet, so to speak, the prescription is a combination of direct and indirect communication forms. Christian directness is absolutely essential. It will include an unapologetic presentation of the full offense of the cross as the key to a theology which, love it or hate it, is not dull. The Old Testament need not be eschewed because of the way atheists wield it against the Christian Church. The holy thunders and wild promises of Yahweh that always seem to say too much— these exist as a provocation at the center of this culture's site of struggle. There is a God and we are not him. Combined with direct communication, indirectness can take a form in which the witness joins the skeptic in his or her doubts, a Kierkegaardian insight that echoes in Chesterton.

> In dealing with the arrogant asserter of doubt, it is not the right method to tell him to stop doubting. It is rather the right method to tell him to go on doubting, to doubt a little more, to doubt every day newer and wilder things in the universe, until at last, by some strange enlightenment, he may begin to doubt himself. (1925/1992, pp. xii-xiii)

The objective is then to bring the religious suddenly forward and promote a simple awareness, not only of what it means to be a Christian but also what it means *not* to be. People must come face to face with what they have dismissed and the meaninglessness of what they have embraced instead (for example, through an immersion in the book of Ecclesiastes). Kierkegaard was right. What is needed is a new moment of fear and trembling, of *Anfechtung* [struggle], and with it, the hunger for redemption.

All this is preparation. The beating heart of the witness lies elsewhere. What makes Christian joy complete is rather to speak the Word of God into the ache and to "shyly withdraw." Ultimately, Christian indirectness will mean striving with all energy to arrive with better stories—*"That man is our redeemer!"*—to disturb and displace the ones this culture tells itself and so to heal from the behind the modern audience of which we have become most eager students. We have noticed with Kierkegaard's help that the back door is not so tightly locked.

Webber (1999) traces many striking similarities between the current cultural milieu and the one that confronted primitive Christianity. His prescription for the church is a return to eroded Christian ideals such as mystery, beauty, and symbol in a liturgical, Word-centered, sacramental community. That is, he appealed for a retreat from argument, proofs, intellectualism, and individualism. He might just as well have called for there to be a more indirect cast to the church's entire representation of Christ to the world.

8.6.2 Assessing the audience within the walls of the contemporary church. The questions only deepen when it comes to assessing the contemporary church. Is the task of communicating Christ within Christendom all about confronting complacency or is it about bringing grace to an exhausted disciple? That is, is the battle today more like Kierkegaard's or Luther's? Based on the popular Christianity on display thoughout Christian bookstores and radio stations, I suspect that it would come as news to a great mass of churchgoing Christians that the Gospel of the unconditional love of God is *for them*, and that they need it as desperately as they did before they were ever saved. Something has gotten lost amid the steady diet of preaching about the moral striving of the Christian life. Some succumb to the illusion of "believing their own press." Many walk away. Prostitutes and sinners once puddled around Christ. Having no illusions about themselves, they were closest to the kingdom of God. Where are they now? What

must be restored is some awareness that the very center and focus of Christianity is that *Christ lives for us,* the illusion being that the center of Christianity is *our living for God.*

This can hardly be pressed upon Christendom directly. Tell them, "The focus of the Christian life is Christ living for us," and they are likely to smile and agree and continue to live under the stultifying burdens of a pharisaical religiosity. This is because they will not know what can possibly be meant by it, so convinced are they that already fully grasp the elemental matter of what it means to be a Christian. I have come to a view of Kierkegaard that for all his emphasis of the *how* of the Christian existence, his actual purpose is as indirect as it is profound.

> It is only in the encounter with the God-Incarnate…that one recognizes that the whole project of striving to actualize the idea has been an exercise in self-justification, and therefore a failure to rely upon God. In Christ it is revealed that one has to rely on God even to be able to rely on God. (Polk, 2010, p.136)

At some point, I must confess that I do not, in fact, know Kierkegaard's *how* and that I cannot live in the way he describes, and on this hinge, the great door opens inward. The ethical sphere has crumbled. You and I indeed cannot, but there is One who did. You hear him whisper out of the offense of his apparent lowliness, "Come to me, you weary and burdened," and, "You will do all this and more." Reason stammers, "but you are impossible." It is the opposite of coercion when he says again, "Come." The Dane impresses upon his readers that in the realm of the religious, within this truer version of human thriving, God-relatedness is a gift. It is an honor to everything to Christ. This is the exquisite Kierkegaardian dialectic. Those who are broken will understand it fully as the Spirit opens up the world to them. Uncounted Christians living in the ethical sphere and still waiting for some Nathan to say, "You!" will be best served by an indirect communication to bring an awareness of their own hollow core and to whom it belongs.

The reader can now appreciate the special challenge of how to communicate Christian subjectivity both within and outside of Christendom. How, indeed, to communicate to someone living in the aesthetic sphere that *this* is the life that is really life, this ever-deepening dependence on Christ in an ever deepening awareness of need? How to communicate with the great mass of Christendom that the obsession with themselves (self-improvement under a Christian veneer) is the very thing that blocks their way? Nothing requires more gentle handling than an illusion, and this provides a useful key to the church's multi-faceted communication task.

8.6.3 "A student among students": implications for Christian pedagogy.[346] In the course of this study, I have discovered a convergence of interests among the best scholars of education, the best writers on the subject of Kierkegaard, and that steady voice that sounds within the Hebrew Old Testament. These come together in a similarity of concerns for what it means for one person to assist in the edification of another. Vanhoozer (2010) describes how, for their part, the biblical writers do not mean to affect the human intellect alone:

> The triune God speaking in Scripture wants to produce not only cognitive, but volitional and affective effects, and achieves such through the various kinds of communicative acts that make up the Bible: poetry, song, parable, apocalyptic, story, and argument. The divine rhetorician speaks not merely to inform, much less to entertain, but to elicit a response. The overall aim is *training in righteousness* and *equipping for good works*…the capacity to participate rightly in what God is doing in Christ through the Spirit. (p. 479)

As to Vanhoozer's construal of God as "the divine rhetorician," I offer that the Thou in the Hebrew text is the "divine Teacher" as well so that we might meaningfully ask: How, then,

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[346] Ultimately what I advocate in this section is for Christian scholars to do for such tasks as Christian pedagogy, what Craddock has already done for preaching (2001; 2002) in work extended by Brothers (2014) and what Penner has done for Christian apologetics (2013).

does this Teacher teach? Even this a showing rather than a telling, but we can begin to draw some tentative conclusions. Any of my readers who are familiar with pedagogical scholars ranging from Paolo Freire to Jane Vella will recognize the high degree to which the Old Testament mode of edification anticipates the best of educational theory.

As for his students, the Old Testament Teacher is never content to leave them in their self-deception, or in a superficial grasp of the knowledge he offers. Instead, he compels them to question their conventional wisdom and complacent assertions, and how well they actually live the simplest things they know (cf. Ecclesiastes and Proverbs). He fully exploits such "teachable moments" as occasioned by crisis and cataclysmic change (cf. Ezekiel at the Kebar River and Moses at the Burning Bush). His students learn best when they do not realize they are learning, such as when captivated by a lively story, embodying a timeless ritual, or getting lost in a lyric that sticks in their heads (cf. Esther, Leviticus, and Songs). Their unconscious edification may consist in the ability to respond viscerally to the beauty of holiness, to laugh at their own expense, or to pray themselves unknowingly into the very mind of Christ (cf. Ruth, Isaiah, and the Psalms). In all these ways, he stirs them to new understandings of old and blessed truths in passionate self-involvement. The Teacher who hides himself within the Old Testament is committed to the maieutic and the need for his students to form their own connections in the midst of ambiguity, to discover what might just as well have been missed, to be confronted by beautiful questions, to believe in order to see, and to be left alone with the disturbing, exhilarating Word. In the Hebrew idiom, this Teacher always and only "speaks to their hearts," that is, their *lev*, which I have demonstrated to refer in the old Hebraism to the full range of human inwardness in intellect, emotion, and will.[347] By no means does he withhold from his

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[347] As we have seen, high among the capabilities the Old Testament would communicate is that of attending to this divine voice in negotiating the disorienting cacophony of a fractured society, as well as

pupils the unambiguous word and blessed theological facts, but offers them freely to those who have been taught to hunger for them—"I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jer 31:3).

As to those frail human beings who dare to teach for him and in his name, they understand that the way students relate to the truths they teach is bound up in the way students relate to them as a someone in their lives, so that they must think with fear and trembling about how well they have taken truth up into their own lives. They are called to exist in what they teach and on failing that, to make the resort to his grace and continue their own education in the art of falling. In performing the essentially Christian, shot through as it is with repentance, they also show more than tell. They die to the desire to impress their students in a moment students will recognize.[348] They offer their teaching as a form of friendship, an invitation, and an art. The soul is the canvas, and indirect communication is the brush. They are willing to call themselves into question for the sake of those they teach, to communicate in the accents of solidarity with them, wanting nothing more than to be a student among students. They do not see their fellow travelers as receptacles in which to pour the knowledge that inflates their own egos. Their students, as existing religious subjects, are living the same task as their teachers are. Their teachers are not interested in creating in their pupils a debilitating dependence upon themselves.[349] They join their students in the journey of the lifelong learning of Christ (which does not mean learning how to be a book). They are willing to appear as less than they are, that he might appear as all that he is. They do not fear being revealed as beginners themselves. They do not overpower, yet their

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practicing the quiet of inwardness in spite of the surrounding technological society that would turn us into objects and would have us all conform to the logic of the system.

[348] This reflects the ideals of Jane Vella (2002).

[349] There is in this some of Paulo Freire who challenges a banking model of education that views the teaching task as making deposits in students on whom educators project ignorance. He fears that this does nothing to develop in students any critical consciousness of their own (1970/2007, p. 80). His ideas are controversial, but it can hardly be questioned that any Christian educator who stands in front of Christian students would be well served by understanding that they also "know things."

teaching of Christ resonates with a marvelous unsaid: "You know, I would die for this." This is the hidden curriculum. It requires the humility and restraint of teaching with your mouth shut.

Ultimately, the Old Testament model of edification is not content with the classical definition of education in which the teacher guides students from the "known to the unknown." This ideal conceals an assumption that every problem is a knowledge problem. Education becomes a panacea in the failure to comprehend that an educated sinner is a stumbling sinner still. Taking students from the known to the unknown is not canceled as a pedagogical ideal. It is enhanced by a new ideal that would see students move from *the unassimilated to the assimilated* with respect to our life together in Christ and the world of deceptively straightforward Sunday School truths. Embracing this ideal would constitute an advance in Christian pedagogical understanding, and it is a crucial point of contact between the present study of indirect communication in the Old Testament and the fundamental task of the Church, a teacher by birth.

8.6.4 "Making it personal": implications for communicating face-to-face. There are difficult social spaces that complicate the task of an unscripted, interpersonal communication of Christ. Among the highest of communication challenges is that of speaking his name through the veil of a complex interpersonal history or in a context fraught with emotional vulnerabilities. The task is ripe for the wisdom of indirect communication. In addition to that is the broader task of communication that is aimed at promoting true community within a culture of hyper-sensitivity and deep fracture. The Christian church has a stewardship of the fading ideals in which people encounter one another face-to-face with the art of talk that is deepened in undiminished nonverbal richness. They spend in the community what cannot be offered remotely: the gift of touch that recovers the lost memory of skin and the gift of presentness together in time.

8.6.4.1 Interpersonal indirect communication. The Old Testament texts that I have

considered have included interpersonal communication between human characters. These

exchanges ranged from the confrontational to the poignant, that is, from the "you are the man" of

Nathan before David, to the "spread over me your wing" in the special charisma between Ruth

and Boaz. The sublime indirectness when the kinsman-redeemer scoops six measures of barley

into the shawl of Ruth—"now rest, my darling"—is enough to confirm that grace is an element

of all that can be communicated best when it is most artfully veiled. These literary moments have

created a scholarly space for considering interpersonal indirect communication. Although it

might not seem obvious, Brueggemann (2009) concurs: "Attention to the interpersonal dynamics

practiced in ancient Israel is worth the effort, for the sense of healthy humanness imagined there

is a response to a glaring deficit in our contemporary world" (p. xiv).

This study has touched on the ways in which interpersonal freedom and space are created

or maintained, and how they function interpersonally. I have argued that conditions that simulate

overhearing can exist in face-to-face encounters. This impulse provides balance to the much-

vaunted concept of immediacy (which has its own role to play). In an otherwise commendable

effort to articulate communication theory in Christian terms, Muehloff and Lewis (2010) express

the facile assumption that in the deepest Christian sense, communication must be direct:

"Communication forgiveness strategies must involve the forgiver *directly* [author's emphasis]

addressing the offense with the offender" (p. 120).[350] Although it may be counterintuitive,

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[350] I absolutely affirm the truth of this assertion for every context in which the receiver is ripe for
direct communication. Christian absolution—"In the name of Christ, I forgive you"—is indeed the most
immediate form the Gospel can take (cf. Jn 20:23), and the broken sinner will often need nothing less.
However, the reality is that people are able to communication, "I'm sorry" or "I forgive you" as the
illocutionary force within a wide variety of indirect communication behaviors, such as through touch or self-
effacing humor. There is a recognized gap in the interpersonal communication literature having to do with
message construction for speaking to the feelings of others. The need is for theory that "links the features of
emotionally supportive messages with the outcomes they produce" (Berger, 2005, p. 432). This comes out of
a growing awareness that emotions are not merely psychological phenomena, but that they are socially

powerful moments of interpersonal communication can occur when words of encouragement are

spoken indirectly to the fear someone hides inside. A greater interpersonal edification is often

possible through speaking to those conditions indirectly, like "a breeze blowing by."[351]

Lastly, the need for Christian communicators to exist in what they communicate has an

application to interpersonal communication. It is always an indirect communication because to

speak the Word of Christ to another is always to occupy the space in between (cf. 2Co 5:20). The

task is to conform the communicative act with the reality which is Jesus himself. On this matter,

Bonhoeffer deserves the final word on how direct and indirect communication combine

according to the need of the other in the interpersonal task:

> [Spiritual love] will not seek to move others by all too personal, direct influence, by
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> impure interference in the life of another….It will rather meet the other person with the
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> clear Word of God and be ready to leave him alone with this word for a long time,
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> willing to release him again in order that Christ may deal with him. (1939/1954a, p. 26)

8.6.4.2 Indirect communication in the cultivation of Christian community. This study

of indirect communication in the Old Testament has encountered numerous examples in which

communication forms have a subtle influence on the phenomenon we call community.[352] When

people of the Old Testament community of the faithful held in common the *what* of their

religious life, having the same heart and the same understanding, the *how* of the Hebrew

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defined and constructed. As we have seen, for Kierkegaard, emotions are caught like diseases, and that when it comes to helping another to know truth as it demands to be known, feelings matter.

[351] One example that can stand for a hundred: shall I expose my father, fast diminishing with age, by saying, "You are feeling useless," and then speak theology directly at his embarrassed face? Or might it be better to ask him to teach me, while he still can, what he has learned about Christ in the 84 years he has followed him? Shall I take a rhetorical position above and speak my wisdom to such a man, or might I call up all the wisdom he has from a rhetorical position below? The answer should be obvious.

[352] A caricature of Kierkegaard persists that he cared little for community. It was a false so-called community he opposed, not a true one that meets in a common confession of the nothingness of the self apart from Christ. In fact, Vevere (2014) sees in Kierkegaard a poignant reaching for others that is nurtured through the art of solitude and immersion in the truly religious.

revelation had its role to play. We noted the differentiating and communal effects of biblical irony and humor in which these truth-telling forms of communication reveal how each person stands in relation to the theological content. Similar ties are either forged or severed with each divine performative utterance—"Surely, I am with you"—as some enter together the new state of affairs that God holds out to them and become the people of promise, while others leave alone with themselves. The subjectivity of the psalms becomes a collective intersubjectivity when the "I" and the "we" of these songs play together. This captures the dialect in which the religious subject is alone with God, and yet in another way, not alone at all. Community in the realm of faith is a reality that can only be properly captured in the indirectness of poetry and image.

How good and pleasant it is

when brothers live together in unity!
It is like precious oil poured on the head,

running down on the beard…. (Ps 133:1-2)

This raises an additional point of contact between Kierkegaard and the Old Testament in the Hebrew concept of the *she'erit* [remnant]. It was revealed that a small family of the faithful would always have to learn how not to lose itself within the complacent external community. Kierkegaard always reached rhetorically for *the Church within the church* just as the ancient prophets reached for that remnant, and this remains the reality for Christian communicators today. They always know, in Jesus' images, that there are weeds among the wheat and bad fish in the same net as the good. John's apocalyptic further enlivens this familiar truth—we have seen that this is what apocalyptic literature is for—in an image in which a tenth of the very city of God collapses on the day of judgment (Rev 11:13). This double audience is another reason for learning how to speak both directly and indirectly in the dialectic of law and gospel.

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Where my study has detected a relationship between certain forms of communication and the cultivation of community in the Old Testament context, it brings to mind the ways communication theory is probing similar issues. My analysis of the communal repetition of the Passover ritual looked at the way the heads of the families would perpetually treat the Exodus as a personal recollection—"We were in Egypt"—and how this served to enfold generations in the communal performative utterance. This offers transcendent insight into Bormann's symbolic convergence theory according to which the lively recalling and interpreting of events which are no longer present create group consciousness and group cohesiveness when the rhetorical vision is inwardly shared. Similarly, this study has lingered especially in Old Testament narratives, poems, rites, and other communally shared symbols. These combine in what Geertz would think of as a "web of significance" (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). This well describes the Old Testament's internal harmony as it is bound up altogether in Christ. Pacanowsky and Geertz (1988) collaborate on the task of making sense of institutional cultures as can include that of the visible church. Old Testament Israel, as it was organized and held together by a web of symbols, stories, and rituals, has provided a significant case study.

These are the points of contact that approve of the merging of such scattered voices as the theologians and theorists of group communication I have mentioned. The communication of communal capabilities is another area of inquiry in which I have demonstrated that the deepest insights about human existence are available for mining from the greatest literature of the world, namely, the Hebrew Old Testament. As always, what is concealed in the Old Testament is revealed in the New: "Where two or three come together in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20). This is community.

8.6.5 "Theological imagination": implications for cultural engagement. There are two

additional communicative tasks for which this study is relevant. By loosely linking together theologically informed art and Christian apologetics, I am signaling a new posture toward both. Artistic expression is no less important than apologetics and deserves more far more attention than it usually receives as the church considers its task in engaging both the surrounding culture and the culture of the church itself. Apologetics, understood as meeting the world at its most challenging sites of struggle against Christian truth, can no longer be conceived as an intellectual exercise alone, but as a wholistic task that involves the entire life of the witness and deserves the full exercise of every resource of sanctified imagination. It is the creativity and the rootedness in life that these twin tasks of apologetics and art have deeply in common. As I observed in connection with Christian pedagogy, there is a similarity of concern between those who would, in Jesus' name, take up these communicative tasks and the intentionality I have detected in the *how* of the Old Testament. The writers of the Old Testament and a new generation of Christian artists and apologists appear, at least here and there, to be after the same thing. I refer to their long preoccupation with how to live and not only with what there is to know.

The Old Testament everywhere melds artistic crafting with unblinking honesty about life's questions. Its brand of art is not tame but is rather a startling accusatory finger in the chest of the modern self. It knows how to do this directly, but that is not its only way. More often than not it provokes the self to call itself into question from within. More importantly, it answers the very angst it creates and does so with that radically ungrounded "thus sayeth the Lord" that culminates in moments of transcendent expression where only a poem will do. *Nakhamoo nakhamoo 'ammi* [Comfort, comfort my people]. In the face of well-practiced worldly resistance and perpetual human questions, the Old Testament reasons by its own internal logic of divine grace and mystery against the backdrop of human Fallenness. It relentlessly and ultimately points

the tortured self away from itself, but not to more and better arguments, inert information, or systematized abstractions. Everything is Christ.

8.6.5.1 Indirect communication and art. At an art exhibit I once attended, one piece had gathered a cluster of people around it in a whispered, but intense conversation. In the midst of works dedicated to every imaginable theme was this painting of a lamb that was slain. It was not an easy thing to look at, this crushed dead animal, this disturbing still life. The blood that flowed from its neck had pooled into an abstract shape that was, the longer one looked at it, suggestive of the oceans and continents of the whole world. I heard the sudden sharp inhale of the woman beside me and the wordless sigh. "I recognize that." There is no new information in that portrait, and it can mean nothing to the person who has no knowledge of the Lamb of God. Instead, it brings a heightened awareness and a new imaginative way of knowing, to allow what is familiar to occupy an altogether new and different sort of place in the inwardness of the observer, and to make it freshly available for life. The thing is not merely to know but to love what one knows. This is edification. Notice further, that if the point of art were to excavate the message of each piece and to translate the visual into didactic sentences, once that were accomplished, the viewer would walk away. There would be no reason to return.

So it goes with the literary artistry of the Old Testament. I have discussed "the beauty of holiness" in the book of Ruth as an aspect of its theological meaning and persuasive power and as a reason we return to the story and surrender again to its skillful abduction. Faithfulness *is* beautiful. I have read Ezekiel chapter one as a translation of the familiar doctrinal assertions of Israel (having to do with their identity as a people, the qualities of their God, and the nature of his promises) into a wildly imaginative portrait; it was all for the sake of a threatened people in a time of existential crisis. I have found Book of Songs to resist every available hermeneutical

category, preferring to argue that it sings the rightness of the married relationship and then, in utmost subtlety, it lights the "flame of Yah." Marriage is thus baptized in mystery. This invites the one who overhears to contemplate the love of Christ in the delicate poetic mood as conjured by the intimacy of the lovers. It reveals the otherwise veiled essence of things and persuades people, when an argument may not, to take the good in hand.

This artistry has none of the obviousness and directness of tepid Christian art and sentimental uplift as is in oversupply in our times, art that leaves little to talk about beyond, "Isn't this nice." It is, in Burke's expression, "equipment for living." like weaponry for the war that is not of flesh and blood. This Old Testament-style artistry is drawn from life and offered to life, immersed in transcendence, and, as I have suggested, it offers over against the current cultural pollution an alternative gallery of images and stories that express a radically distinctive way of imagining and being in the world. Their influence both invades and evades consciousness. Such is the Word of God.

Although it is counter-intuitive, in modernity it is possible to know too much, such as when in the staggering wealth of what it knows it imagines itself to be wise. With a bitterness it cannot justify, it staggers about in a hunger to know the mystery of redemption for which it yearns but cannot tolerate. Into this milieu, the church is called to sing its songs and paint its pictures. As Crouch (2013) describes in *Culture Making*, she can do better than merely critique or condemn, consume or copy culture. She must create. Although culture is always perceived as a saturation, and Christendom is known for hymns and liturgies, there is room for more. This is a call for art of every genre to take its inspiration from the artistry of the Word. There is room for artists who faint for the glory of God and have no heart to draw the spotlight onto themselves.[353]

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[353] There is also room to challenge the continuing creep of an entertainment mindset throughout Christendom. The impact of this inexorable trend is likely to be complicated. On the positive side, it is true

8.6.5.2 Indirect communication and Christian apologetics. In *The End of Apologetics* (2013), Myron Penner has already begun the task of articulating what Kierkegaard has to do with answering the world's questions, both honest and cynical, about Christianity, and it has to do with how to fill with appropriate inwardness and clothe in outward credibility the "Hear I stand" of modern Christian witness. Penner has begun the task of lighting up on the basis of Kierkegaard a new and more other-centered Christian apologetic. The goal is to replace the modernist mode that defends the faith by waging intellectual war with a humble passion to express the truth in an integrated life. The *how* of this better witness is a poetics of Christian witness in which form and content meet in an essential harmony, and people are responded to as people not as objects, in an I-thou relation and not an I-it.[354]

In this section, then, I need only review what my study contributes to Penner's good beginning.[355] I believe the way the Old Testament beckons away from "secular apologetics" to be quite significant. That phrase captures the sort of Christian answer that is embarrassed to appeal to a higher transcendent ground of biblical revelation but seeks to justify Christian truth (as if it were needed) exclusively in imminent human reason. My study has offered validation for

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that messages of influence can be smuggled into an audience that thinks it is merely being amused. At the same time, there can be chilling consequences for the church lurking within the familiar axiom that "the medium is the message." When the trappings of entertainment are welcomed into the sanctuary, the forms constitute a loud message of their own about what it means to be a Christian. The medium can commit every sort of violence to the message. One does not serve the fine wine that is the theology of the cross in a Styrofoam cup. "If anyone would come after me, let him take up his cross and follow" (Lk 9:23)—for such content the only suitable medium may be a cruciform life in which all reliance is on the external Word of God.

[354] The utterance, "Jesus is Lord," can have a variety of illocutionary forces (what the speaker is meaning to do by the speech act), depending on the person who speaks it: to demonstrate superiority, to stifle response, to shame, to edify, to win, to woo (Vanhoozer, 2002, p. 172). A receiver can respond psychologically to the speech act to the detriment of ever contending with the force of the words themselves and what they would do to the most persistent of human illusions over against the reality of Christ. This is a compelling argument for paying attention to the *how* of communication in regard to Christian witness so as not to unnecessarily arouse the patterned resistance in the other.

[355] It is not necessary to reiterate my discussion of the basis for a new apologetic that is grounded in the hiddenness of God. This is the new way forward that Thompson (2013) has opened up in an idea I saw extended in Isaiah 40 in a distinction between what is empirical and what is not in terms of Christian truth.

a set of ideas that pull in very different directions than the old, modernity-informed, reason-obsessed apologetics. It confirms the shift in thinking from that of wanting to provide a rational warrant for belief, as if the task of the church were fundamentally epistemological, to explicating the life of faith on the basis of its sacred texts. The Old Testament offers its alternative story, a better one, and its Spirit-wrought narrative rationality, with the result that the hermeneutics of that story as it continues in the New Testament is the church's fundamental intellectual activity. As to the vital communicative task, it is both as simple and as challenging as this: witnesses must engage listeners with the Word of God, the grand metanarrative of God speaking his Christ into this Fallen place, so that they can picture in a precognitive way the world as it really is; and by their lives they are to demonstrate that it is possible to live in this world. What resounds most loudly in the Old Testament is that Christian revelation is true not because it can be proven from a position outside of it to the satisfaction of natural human thinking, but because it is the Word of God. "All flesh is grass…but the word of the LORD stands forever" (Isa 40:8).

One major contribution of the Old Testament to this purpose is the way it prepares the religious self, intoning the deadly seriousness of "you are the man," and squeezing out the necessary, "Lord, have mercy." This is the transformative crux in the face of the most dreadful illusions of self-sufficiency, self-importance, and self-righteousness, and the Old Testament contributes much where it spends its forceful rhetoric on piercing these strongholds with Nathan-like indirectness. Its writers look unblinking at the realities of radical evil in this world. This is the greatly neglected truth of our times, and without it, the Gospel becomes something other than what it is a curious, tame, and unnecessary thing. The consciousness of sin that these texts mean to open up in the subjectivity of their audience marks the way of the penitent that is the only path to the grace of God in Christ.

In their own Old Testament trappings, Moses and David, Jeremiah and Ezekiel all embody the more difficult task of showing the world a way of life that is structured by the crucified and risen Christ and a reality shaped by cross and resurrection. The thing is still and always to offer up a life that cannot be understood apart from Jesus who holds it together. As Lewis (1970) affirmed, such a task throws faithful witnesses onto Christ to cling to him even when reason turns against them, and this is a good place to be:

> No doctrine of the faith can seem to me so spectral, so unreal as the one that I have just successfully defended in a public debate. For a moment, you see, it has seemed to rest on oneself. As a result, when you go away from that debate, it seems no stronger than that weak pillar. We apologists can be saved only be falling back continually from the web of our arguments into the reality—from Christian apologetics into Christ himself (p. 103).

When C.S. Lewis described the risk of Christian apologetics to the faith of the apologist in these vivid terms, he certainly had reason-based, not revelation-based apologetics in mind.[356] Whatever the communicative task, a sort of falling is always part of it. I have demonstrated that the Christ-obsessed Old Testament revelation is a very good place to land.

8.7 Limitations of the Study

I have already confessed to the limitation involved with tracing a set of communication strategies across the sheer massiveness of the Old Testament canon. This project has been not unlike spending a single day at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art. I confess that as a tour guide, I tend to linger at my favorite exhibits while pointing down a dozen other hallways,

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[356] Lewis (2007) validates an indirect approach to apologetics in another way as well. He once wrote a letter to the editor of "Christianity Today" to signal an end to his own project of directly communicating Christ: "I wish your project heartily well but can't write you articles. My thought and talent (such as they are) now flow in different, though I think not less Christian, channels, and I do not think I am at all likely to write more directly theological pieces. The last work of that sort which I attempted had to be abandoned. If I am now good for anything it is for catching the reader unawares—thro' fiction and symbol. I have done what I could in the way of frontal attacks, but I now feel quite sure those days are over" (2007, p. 651)

mumbling, "Another day, perhaps." There is just too much.

There are countless more Hebrew *stories* to be told where still more features of indirect communication align. There is Saul, the young and future king, made to traipse around the countryside in search of his father's straying donkeys, and it is all, apparently, to cause him to know himself as the one "to whom is all the desire of Israel turned" (1Sa 9:20). Could not the prophet Samuel simply knock on Saul's door and tell him as much? Apparently not. There are still more Old Testament *poems* to haunt the dreams of the modern overhearing audience: "Brace yourself like a man, Job, I will question you and you will answer me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the heavens and the earth?" (Job 38:3-4). There are still more Old Testament *types* laden with Christological import, for example, the bronze serpent Moses lifted up on a pole so that those bitten by snakes could merely turn their heads and live (Nu 21). Countless *images* remain untapped, such as when Yahweh declares that anyone who touches the one he loves has dared to poke their finger into the *'ishon* [little man] of his eye (Ps 17:8). Let the reader pause and work that one out. The ineffable "thisness of that and the thatness of this" is a heartening and self-involving indirect communication. When it comes to indirect communication in the Old Testament, I have only offered a sampling of all that is there.[357]

Further, my commitments to a theologically conservative brand of Lutheranism will strike some as idiosyncratic. I can only reiterate the fittingness of those commitments to the subject matter, that is, both to Kierkegaard himself with his theological dialectic, and to the Old

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[357] There are limitations of another kind to this study. I have brought many commitments to this undertaking, having concluded in advance (and having argued as strenuously as I know how) that Christ is the *res* [subject matter] of the Old Testament. Only by knowing the *what* could the exploration of the *how*, the communication processes of this inspired literature, proceed in a meaningful way. This fact is so central to my work that I if were shown to be wrong at this foundational level, it would be fatal to this study. Nothing of value would survive. I am content to have it be so. This situation is not unlike the way scholars of Kierkegaard, if they have little time for what he had to say about Christ, can only find themselves sifting through the rubble of his life's work for anything that is not ultimately incoherent or ironically self-defeating. It hangs together with the Ultimate Paradox, the God-Man Jesus Christ, or not at all.

Testament as the theological ground of his ideas, coming to him as they did through the deeply Hebraic Martin Luther. The hiddenness of God, the rhetorical dialectic of Law and Gospel, the theology of the cross, the Means of Grace, salvation by Grace Alone, through Faith Alone— these are only the most important of the distinctions that have ultimate coherence for me, and in which the strategies and theological underpinnings of indirect communication come together, if only for me, in a seamless unity. Ultimately, it is this coherence that I argue. This means that I have to be content with the argument I have advanced in spite of the way I may have limited my audience. "Here I stand, I can do no other"—this is the Lutheran manner of speaking. See a man captivated by the cross, and take in the point of view that looks out from there as from no other. This is the truth that edifies me. It can edify you as well.

8.8 A Proposal for Future Research

A study of indirect communication by means of the *New* Testament is likely to have far more implications for the modern Church than the Old because for us, as for the apostles, the Grand Miracle of the Incarnation has already happened. For this reason, our communicative tasks are the same in kind as theirs. We live, as they did, in the great *anno Domini*. At the same time, the Hebrew text stands by to lend its aid. "The strangeness of the Old Testament can make us realize how strange, too, is the New Testament, when correctly understood, to our time and to our natural way of thinking" (Anderson, B. W., 1963, p. 249).

Kierkegaard's fascinating interactions with the New Testament would be a fitting starting point for the study I am proposing, and the result is likely to be a further appreciation of his deep personal appropriation of the gospel. In his *Edifying Discourses*, Kierkegaard spent his gift of expounding for dozens of pages at a time on a single pregnant phrase drawn most often from the New Testament, for example, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (1844/1945) or, "Love

shall cover a multitude of sins" (1843/1943). When he commented on the glance that passed between Peter and Jesus in the midst of Jesus trial (where most Christian writers assume the look to have been a withering rebuke), Kierkegaard had a different impulse, seeing only one thing in the face of Christ: "Peter is Peter, and I love him" (1847/1995, p. 170).

The same research gap remains in connection with the New Testament as the one I have worked to fill with the Old. Kierkegaard used and played with these texts for his own purposes rather than that he explicitly grounded his strategies there or offered any final accounting for them. Having set the stage with all the foregoing analysis into how Christ was communicated by those who waited and dreamed of *Sar Shalom* [the Prince of Peace], the study I propose is the most important one. What of Peter and Paul? What of Stephen? What of John?

> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our
>
> eyes, which we looked at our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the
>
> Word of life....We write this to make our joy complete. (1Jn 1:1,4)

The three distinct genres of the New Testament (History, Epistles, and Apocalyptic) each have their own potential to advance a scholarly understanding of indirect communication.

8.8.1 Indirect communication in the four Gospels and the book of Acts. I have discussed how a change is likely to be discovered in indirect communication in the Scriptures that were written after the "shadow of the things that were to come" was chased away by the full sunlight of Christ in the flesh. To be clear, the mystery of *divine* indirect communication only deepened at the stirring in Mary's womb. After all, the terminology of Christ as the "Sign of Contradiction" is drawn from the account of the baby Jesus in the arms of old Simeon.

At the same time, all that has been said about the limits of direct communication and the reasons for gentle indirectness continue to apply in the New Testament discourse. The Pharisees

who contended with Christ had codified in their rule-making the same corporate illusion and false security that we found in the Old Testament community. A false brand of religiosity is certainly the target of Christ's provocative miracle (the only one that did harm) of cursing the fig tree. The same thing is narratively embodied in the older son of Jesus' most famous parable, occasioned as it was by the muttering of Pharisees, "This man welcomes sinners…" (Lk 15:2).

Speaking of the Prodigal Son—better, the Waiting Father—it should become every bit the touchstone of the research I am proposing that Nathan's parable has been for this study. It is undoubtedly both the greatest and most scandalous parable ever told. The communicative dimensions of the story include the conspicuous absence of dialogue on the part of the father. He speaks not a word in reply to the prepared speech of the lost boy, but overwhelms him in an overhearing of grace: "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him…" (Lk 15:22).

"This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see…" (Mt 13:13). This verse and all the Old Testament allusions that came with it proved to be extraordinarily significant to my study. What Christ reveals about his own communication may be found to apply, *mutatis mutandi*, to forms that extend beyond his parables to his other modes of discourse. When Jesus was at his most blunt—"One of you will betray me" (Mt 26:21)—a profound and penetrating indirectness still pokes the surface of the words. The question mark after the phrase of the disciples, "Surely, not I?" (26:22) is undoubtedly one of the single most interesting punctuations in the Greek New Testament text from a Kierkegaardian perspective. However, where the study I propose might be most edifying has to do with the deepest mysteries of overheard communication in the moments that passed between the Father and the Son, such as in the upper room and from the cross itself. Although I have wondered in writing at some examples along the way, as to their full significance, I have barely pushed the door ajar.

To the discourses of Christ in the Gospels, I add the book of the Acts of the Apostles to round out the New Testament historical genre. Peter saw a vision of animals let down from the sky in a sheet (Ac 10:9f). This is not direct communication, and neither is Paul's preaching to the pagan on Mars Hill, "Men of Athens, I see that in every way you are very religious" (Ac 17:22). I suspect the ideal of combining indirect communication with an unambiguous proclamation of Christ would be validated by the book of Acts. It should be self-evident that, taken together, these five narrative-driven books provide far more material than the Old Testament ever could for considering the indirect interpersonal communication of grace and indirect communication in fledgling and fragile Christian community. That fact alone justifies the proposed study.

8.8.2 Indirect communication in the New Testament epistles. The New Testament includes a series of twenty-one letters addressed to Christian audiences, all infused with the authority of the very eye-witnesses of Christ. They are a saturation of Christian teaching and Christian counsel to groups and individuals; strong propositional content lies on the surface of the text. Their importance for the companion study I propose begins in the fact that they constitute the New Testament genre that represents the greatest departure from all that the Old Testament writers make available for communication research. At the same time, the proposed study would provide a corrective where the biblical text is most likely to be mistaken for direct communication. The reader forgets that the apostle is talking over some matter with the Christians of Philippi or Colossae. What is more, readers forget that what is epistle is also a story at the same time. Missing the story, readers cannot imagine their way in.

> *There was once a man who languished in prison and his dear ones, Lydia especially, could not get help to him, or not nearly as much as they wanted to. Somehow he got his hands on the things he needed in order to write to them, and to tell them, "Oh, my*

friends, I have a secret. I have learned how to live with a lot, and I know how to live with

nothing. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me...."

An epistle is a story in disguise. Fisher would no doubt agree. God is speaking to me in his way,

and that way is his provision of overhearing and an indirectness that by no means diminishes the

power of what he has chosen to reveal.

The epistles can further our understanding of the ways an additional range of spiritual

illusions complicate Christian communication. Ancient Gnosticism comes to mind, as does

Solomon—"There is nothing new under the sun" (Ecc 1:9). We meet an expanded range of the

reasons for resistance as the New Testament writers shape their communication, for example, to

the Galatian Christians fast losing their grip on Christ. New Testament correspondence offers

direct and indirect communication in an assortment of blends—the letter to Philemon displays

this ideal in an interpersonal exchange and the Letter to the Hebrews concerns a community.[358]

The communication of the primitive Church that is on display in the New Testament

epistles is not only essentially and explicitly Christian communication, but it is more

theologically indirect than first appears. This component of the study I propose may be the most

likely to result in findings that are the most accessible for readers who want to think deeply about

the communication of Christ in this present church culture and in a secular age that is coming to

resemble the 1st Century a little more all the time (Webber, 1999).

8.8.3 Indirect communication in the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation is the

lone New Testament, Church Age apocalyptic. What I detected in the book of Ezekiel, I affirm

more strenuously about the visions of the exiled apostle John on Patmos: apocalyptic gives a

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[358] All this communication has all taken place in the same body of Christ of which modern Christians are a continuation. Lively, round, and all too real Christian relationships are mediated through inspired text as through Christ himself.

wild, new, and defamiliarizing cast to information that is already familiar to the audience (that is, if they were conversant with Old Testament symbols as well as the discourses of Christ).[359] Its purpose is to bring subjectivity into a closer contract with essential Christian truth where appropriation is most desperately needed, such as on the wrong end of a sword. To meet their need as the canon closed, there came one final "showing not telling."

There is a rider on white horse advancing undaunted amidst the chaos, winning his trophies still. His name is the Word of God. His robe is dipped in blood. These comforts open up suddenly to the Christian of any time who observes this present world in fear and trembling. Jesus still walks among the lampstands that are the churches, and her pastors are still the stars in his hand (Rev 1:12-16). At any moment, a new Jerusalem descends from the sky like a bride. There is no sun there because Christ is her only light.

This proposal recalls an ideal I suggested earlier: not only do we let the clear passages of Scripture interpret the difficult ones, we let those that are most provocative add dimension and depth to those that are clear. We were told that the Word of God is a powerful thing. In the book of Revelation, we see it. There is a sword that slides out of the mouth of Christ. Indeed.

8.9 "I Will Open My Mouth in Parables": A Concluding Vignette.

I close this dissertation just as it began, with a biblical parable which, when it was first told, compelled a subject to make a judgment before understanding that the act would be self-implicating. When it comes to both the Old Testament parable with which this study began and the New Testament parable with which it closes, there is resistance in the room and a well-fortified illusion, rather than any predisposition to hear and understand. However, there is more

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[359] It seems unavoidable to this writer that reading the book of Revelation as an indirect communication of truths already revealed in Scripture supports an *amillenialist* interpretation, and one that is quite elegant in its cohesiveness and simplicity. This reading only requires that strict attention be paid to the role that symbolism can be shown to play in this genre according to internal evidence in the biblical text.

to the story when Christ chose to communicate this way, and grace is more explicit as well.

> Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the
> Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in
> that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster
> jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet
> with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on
> them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man
> were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—
> That she is a sinner." Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell
> me, teacher," he said. (Lk 7:36-40)

The woman's communication is, of course, thoroughly indirect. She is Kierkegaard's "silent teacher" who comes without authority and in a minimal reliance on words. The way her tears act on the inwardness of the sensitive reader has to do with the questions they uniquely provoke: What does she see that I don't see? She does not say. She only washes the Savior's feet with her tears, and breaks her jar, like her own heart, and lets everything pour out.

As for Simon, his grumble is irony itself. The *alazon* [pompous fool] passes verdict on the *eiron* [one who is more than he appears]: the prophet is kind because he is ignorant. A little later Jesus will say, "Do you see this woman?" signaling that when he speaks the following, Simon is unaware that the brief parable concerns both the woman and himself.

> "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii,
> and the other fifty. Neither had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of
> both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who
> had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged directly," Jesus said. (Lk 7:41-43)

While the woman tears herself open, the Pharisee "supposes." You can hear the distancing on the part of Simon, the non-commitment. He got the answer right, as Jesus said, but the mood is all wrong. He provides the parade example of what Kierkegaard meant by having objectivity when all subjectivity is lacking. The man who thinks, postulates, and conjectures is caught in the error of modulation. It is a severe kindness that Christ does not leave him there.

> Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon. "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." (Lk 7: 44-47)

The nonverbal expectancy violation on the part of Christ is not to be missed. It lends poignancy and heightens our awareness of the layers of indirectness that are at play. To imagine how you would film the scene from Luke's minimal stage directions is to make a discovery. Jesus words are addressed, not to the woman, but to Simon. She overhears them. Yet we are told Jesus has deliberately turned in order to face her directly. In a most arresting image, he has locked his eyes with hers, yet speaks *about* her: "I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven." He opens his mouth in parables and utters things hidden from the creation of the world.

As direct as Jesus eventually was with Simon—"I came into your house, you did not give me any water for my feet…"—he left it to the Pharisee to complete the meaning in an important way. He chose not to put the most damning questions into words the way he might have: "How large is your debt, Simon? Do you think you know?" In the end, Jesus spoke his grace to the

woman in the ultimate directness of immediacy and absolution like they were the only two people in the world—"this is between me and you."

Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Lk 7:48-50)

It is no surprise how scandalous this was for the overhearing audience there in the room with them. Yet, for the reader, the indirectness on the part of the Gospel writer continues. Like the parable Nathan told to King David, in God's economy this one also meets the reader as a story inside a story and all of it mediated by an ancient text.

Literary analysts, especially those who give attention to the Bible, are good for noticing the way stories end. In the Gospel account, the woman is graciously dismissed. We are not told a single word she spoke, or for that matter, any further provocations on the part of Jesus toward the offended crowd. Most importantly, we are not told what Simon said or thought about the episode. As Kierkegaard would say, the writer Luke "shyly withdraws" and insists we join him, ushering us so suddenly out of the room. "Leave Simon alone now. He has much to think about." So also do we. How much then, do we owe? Do we think we know? And if it were to be canceled, erased, suddenly expunged, what then? This body, this outward shell around an essential inward secret is not unlike a jar. How then to break it? Where shall I pour?

This story captures what the entire Bible is at its essence. It is a communication caught in a cemetery, a breeze blowing by. It is Christ speaking words that are ostensibly addressed to others, but taking pains that they are loud enough for the ends of the earth to overhear. It was to Moses, not to us, that he said, "I Am who I Am," and to an ancient prophet, "Comfort my people," and to the back of God himself, "My God, my God, why?" It was to a dying criminal,

not to us, that he said "Today you will be with me in Paradise," and to a dead child, "Little girl, get up." To a woman who had lost the world he said, "Mary." He was not speaking to us, and yet he was, lovingly, deliberately, and absolutely. Every word is personal, an assault on illusion, and every meaning is completed in the capability of loving one another deeply and from the heart for Jesus' sake. It is an indirect communication, and its presence in the Bible is astonishing.

Kierkegaard's strategies, his way of speaking about communication, characterize in one way or another the entirety of God's revelation of Christ his Son in this world. This is that history-long dissemination, the casting of divine utterance to the wind like a sower flinging seeds all around. It is an extravagance of wasteful grace. He spends it without regard to the merits of whoever might receive them, even as the sun shines on the evil and on the good.

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