

THE RETURN OF THE BODY IN EUCHARISTIC PRACTICE:
PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE DISRUPTION OF RITUAL
SPIRITUALITY THROUGH THEATER FOR HEALING BROKEN-HEARTEDNESS

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Introduction

This paper will make several moves in order to begin a rewriting of eucharistic hermeneutics. The rewriting, however, will be more than simply a new approach to eucharistic theology; it will, if successful, disrupt both the theology and the ritual practice of the eucharist. The term “eucharist” is here used to denote the ritual that denominations designate differently as, for example, Holy Communion, Lord’s Supper, Holy Mass, Sacrament of the Altar, etc. – the (usually) Sunday ritual of sharing bread and wine.

Post-traumatic stress theory (PTST) as read by Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*,¹ is not only a clinical or psychoanalytical category but as that which is able to read (interpret) history. PTST moves beyond the realm of psychoanalysis and reveals a way in which we can approach meaning in history. This move implies the disruption of representational forms of remembering (or reference) just as there is a blurring of the distinction between knowing the (traumatic) event and the way in which that event is repeated or ritualized. The traumatic event escapes the accessible realm of memory and intelligibility. The repetition of the traumatic event is then not a conscious remembering but the “return” of the event continually experienced as if for the first time. “Event” as a “force of return” will be developed as the body continually irrupting within eucharistic practice.

I. Trauma theory: survival and return

Cathy Caruth’s groundbreaking study on trauma and the possibility of reading history comprises several interwoven chapters. The focus of this reflection, however, will be primarily on Caruth’s Chapters 3 and 5: “Traumatic Departures: Survival and History in Freud” and “Traumatic Awakenings.” I will argue that Caruth’s own reading of Freud (and Lacan) and the implications she draws for trauma theory, literature, history and the possibility of reference highlight a displacement continually operative in trauma, in theory, in history. Though largely unnamed, I believe that this displacement is inscribed in Caruth’s text as a force that breaks open exclusive theoretization. This force is not transcendental in its power; it is not a philosophical principle or eternal theological truth (like *grace*). On the contrary, it is best summarized by a question that Caruth uses to disrupt the discussion of trauma theory, the question situated between life and death: what does it mean to survive? This question continually disrupts the

¹ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). And for the purposes of this study, the pages 57ff will be of particular interest. Hereinafter cited as *Unclaimed*.

scene between thought and living. It interprets a certain understanding of “force of a return” that is already operative in Freud’s *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) that Caruth is reading.

Jenseits des Lustprinzips is asking the question whether history could be understood as the history of a trauma:² the notion that history itself bears the mark of a traumatic event, an event that Freud traces in *Der Mann Moses und die momtheistische Religion*³ to the invented murder of Moses. Caruth expands on this historicized notion of trauma to ask what it implies for individuals and communities. It is in this application that she proposes that history is the question of survival.

What Freud encounters in traumatic neurosis is not the reaction to any horrible event but, rather, the peculiar and perplexing experience of survival. If the dreams and flashbacks of the traumatized thus engage Freud’s interest, it is because they bear witness to a survival that exceeds the very claims and consciousness of the one who endures it. At the heart of Freud’s rethinking of history in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, I would thus propose, is the urgent and unsettling question: *What does it mean to survive?*⁴

The traumatic event is embedded, though not fully accessible, in the surprise or shock of survival.

The question of survival has particular characteristics. It is the translation of an indirect awareness of the traumatic event. What is surprising, Caruth points out, is the indirectness involved. “If a life threat to the body and the survival of this threat are experienced as the direct infliction and the healing of a wound, trauma is suffered in the psyche precisely, it would seem, because it is *not* directly available to experience.”⁵ The return of the traumatizing event, the force of a return, is not available to consciousness as sensation or knowledge but is repeated precisely because it is not available, because it is only experienced indirectly. The force of a return questions consciousness and the place of consciousness in time and space, in context.⁶ It implies both a return (of the traumatic experience if only indirectly) and a departure, the displacement of consciousness.

The “force” of the return (contained within the shock of survival) of the traumatic experience is due to its inaccessibility. The traumatic event itself, or as Derrida states, the singularity of event,⁷ cannot be known. Because we cannot know the event in its entirety, because the event takes us “by surprise,” in an unexpected manner, the surprise is continually repeated as a question of survival. “The breach in the mind – the conscious awareness of the threat to life – is not caused by a pure quantity of stimulus, Freud suggests, but by ‘fright,’ the

² Ibid., 60.

³ Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke XVI* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, Verlag, Fünfte Auflage 1950), 101-246.

⁴ Caruth, 60.

⁵ Ibid., 61.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Paris: Galilee, 1990), 31-32. Hereinafter cited as *SEC*. The English translation is found in Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, trans. Alan Bass and Samuel Weber (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988). Hereinafter cited as *SEC-English*.

lack of preparedness to take in a stimulus that comes too quickly. It is not simply, that is, the literal threatening of bodily life, but the fact that the threat is recognized as such by the mind *one moment too late*.⁸

The traumatic event was not recognized in its happening. In other words, the traumatic event disrupts the subject and its context by breaking the spatial, temporal, the sensory conception. “The shock of the mind’s relation to the threat of death is thus not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the *missing* of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced in time, it has not yet been fully known.”⁹ The event is experienced as “traumatic” only later when the subject realizes that it has survived. Because the threat to life (the traumatic event) is missed, that is, cannot be captured, it is experienced as something that continually returns, something that is iterated. Freud suggests that this iteration of the enigma of survival is the death drive. Caruth writes:

As a paradigm for the human experience that governs history, then, traumatic disorder is indeed the apparent struggle to die. The postulation of a drive to death, which Freud ultimately introduces in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, would seem only to recognize the reality of the destructive force that the violence of history imposes on the human psyche, the formation of history as the endless repetition of previous violence.¹⁰

The approximation of death and life within trauma theory blurs the distinction commonly drawn between these two realities. The traumatic event itself – or more specifically, the missing of that event – the traumatic event that could have meant death returns as the enigma of survival. Life is then the enigma of having survived death. Although Caruth follows Freud in understanding the return as the return of previous violence, her own writing of that return as the enigma of survival points towards a displacement of repeated violence. Repeated violence itself does not define history or humankind or the human community. The “force of return” is not encapsulated in repeated violence but rather in the question of survival.

Though the notion of survival points towards the irruption of death within every context, it is also an awakening to responsibility: death continually irrupts not as a negative force but as a voice demanding a responsibility of every human being, of every community. The missed traumatic event and its return as a question (as the enigma of survival) form a movement out of a given context. The context is permeable or non-saturated; the subject is called out by the irruption of the other (as death missed and as dead voice calling). The other, this fact of alterity does not permit a systematization or a theorizing of life/death but continually iterates the unexpected, the ungraspable, the unmanageable of every (traumatic) event.

At the beginning of the chapter on Freud’s *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, Caruth asserts (and then insists throughout the remainder of the book) that the notion of trauma does not eliminate the possibility of reference in history. It is a rethinking of reference and history¹¹ that brings “event” back into theory, into writing, and I want to add, into ritual. This “return” of event into

⁸ Caruth, 62.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 63.

¹¹ Ibid., 11.

theory is not the return of a perceptually confirmed and cognitively verified fact. History – or event – arises in our understanding where “*immediate understanding* may not.”¹² Immediate understanding (knowing defined as immediate perception of the “here and now”) is displaced. There is “something” in experience, in event that cannot be grasped by understanding but which arises and asserts itself. We could perhaps say that history is “known” by something within it that *makes itself known* – something over which we have no control. This “something” is like a force that continually returns to haunt the field of simplistic historical vision, breaking in to disrupt meaning though not negating the possibility of meaning/reference.

What is repeated is not the previous violence but the inaccessibility of every event. Caruth develops this last form of displacement more fully in the concluding chapters, particularly in her reading of Lacan’s reading of Freud. Caruth’s work to reconnect poststructuralist literary theory and history, the attempt to introduce the complexity of event into theory is best described, I believe, as a “gathering in” – that which is inaccessible in event is brought into theory not through a newly discovered representation of the inaccessible but through a continual repetitive action that displaces the subject always outwards. What is repeated or ritualized is precisely an awakening from violence, a resurrection; it is “the experience of waking into consciousness.”¹³ It is a waking to the enigma of survival, to the discovery of the inaccessible or absent in every situation (and every theory) and to the impossible possibility of translation. What is repeated – that which is gathered in – is actually the possibility even the call to disseminate or scatter hegemonic theory, myth, system. Ritual, as witness to this displacement, pushes towards a dissemination and calls then upon the profoundest responsibility.

It is this call to responsibility that, I believe, is latent throughout Caruth’s text. All of the displacements operative within her text point towards a displacement of the self or context by the other. This “other” is often unwritten or appearing in disguise. For example, in the concluding chapter, in the father’s dream of his dead child calling him to wake up (“Father, don’t you see I’m burning?”¹⁴), the other takes the form of a child. But what is to distinguish this child in a dream from the beggar who knocks at the door of the church, while Holy Communion is being celebrated, and asks for bread? We relegate the beggar into a world of dreams (or ideals: “love the neighbor”) where we have no responsibility. Caruth brings the dream back to irrupt within reality. The other displaces us – our selves, our world, our theories – and calls us.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 64.

¹⁴ “A father had been watching beside his child’s sick-bed for days and night on end. After the child had died, he went into the next room to lie down, but left the door open so that he could see from his bedroom into the room in which his child’s body was laid out, with tall candles standing round it. An old man had been engaged to keep watch over it, and sat beside the body murmuring prayers. After a few hours sleep, the father had a dream that his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: ‘Father, don’t you see I’m burning?’ He woke up, noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried into it and found that the old watchman had dropped off to sleep and that the wrappings and of one of the arms of his beloved child’s dead body had been burned by a lighted candle that had fallen on them.” Sigmund Freud, *The Standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 5:232. Cited also in Caruth, *Unclaimed*, 92.

But the “other” is already deeply embedded in Caruth’s first question: what does it mean to survive? This question implies a responsibility. The surprise of survival is not simply escaping the threat to life, to one’s personal life. This question is the not only posed by victims, for example, of the Holocaust but it is posed by their children and grandchildren: why am I here? It is the question of a parent confronted by a severely handicapped child, by a child in whom death is continually present: what does it mean to live? The question begs responsibility. It is a question every community and nation should ask themselves when confronted by death, that is, by starvation, illness, injustice, torture, war, terror, poverty: what does it mean to live in luxury? It is the biblical question posed within a place of death: the dead rich man calling upon Lazarus to bring him comfort (Luke 16). It is the voice of one executed: “Do this in remembrance of me” calling us not to ritual imitation but to discipleship.

II. Freud and the turn to ritual

What we have here engaged, through the writing of Cathy Caruth in particular, is a displacement of the meaning of repetition. Following Derrida, we distinguish repetition from iterability.¹⁵ Repetition is understood as that which closes the event in on itself and creates the illusion that we have captured the event. Iterability however “repeats” the rupture in any event. The utterance or possibility of intervention constitutes the event as iterable, that is, opens the door to an iterability that does not dilute or compromise the singularity of event. I will continue to use this distinction and expand it throughout the rest of the paper as we consider Freud’s use of the word *Annahme* and, in particular, the child’s game that displaces the traumatic dreams within the text of *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*. What is particularly intriguing for this study is Freud’s turn to a child’s game, to a repeated game, to an enacted ritual.

Freud approaches the question of iterability through a child’s game – the game of *Fort und Da*. He had observed, in the house where he was staying, a little boy throws out his toy in order to retrieve it. When he threw the toy away from him, he exclaimed, “o-o-o-o” and when he pulled it back, “a-a-a-a!” As it turns out, this little boy was his grandson and both Freud and his daughter (the boy’s mother) interpreted the exclamations as signifying the words *Fort* and *Da*. What Freud later understands is that the child is enacting the departure of his mother, who would be gone for long hours of the day, but also, in a strange way, the child was also repeating the final departure of his mother (who died).

The game intrigues Freud because it apparently contradicts the pleasure principle. Freud asks, “Wie stimmt es also zum Lustprinzip, dass es dieses ihm peinliche Erlebnis als Spiel wiederholt?”¹⁶ Though Freud proceeds to explain the repetitive nature of the child’s game as in some way working out the pleasure principle (by making an unpleasant association – a departure – pleasant), he remains perplexed and goes back and forth himself on whether this example implies something beyond the pleasure principle. The perplexing character of the child’s ritual and that, which finally brings Freud to positing the death drive as something “beyond” the pleasure principle, is the repeated nature of the “fort” on its own. The child repeats the departure

¹⁵ “Il faut qu’elle soit répétable – itérable – en l’absence absolue du destinataire” *SEC*, 27.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 13. “How then does his repetition of this distressing experience as a game fit in with the pleasure principle?” Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), 15. Hereinafter cited as *BPP*.

without the pleasurable return. It is a repetition of a departure, the repetition of death or the attempt to enact a death, to bring a death, departure, a displacement into the realm of life.

This gathering in of death, this breaking in of death through the repetition of the *fort* and its curious relation to the *da* play out in several ways throughout Freud's text. Already in the first chapter of *Jenseits*, Freud raises questions as to both the smooth functioning of the *Lustprinzip* and the too easy explanations that can be given. He begins the first paragraph with a description of what happens in psychological theory and presents a "*Darstellung*" (representation). Freud opens up for discussion a metapsychological picture or representation. In the next paragraph, he immediately retracts this by stating that with the presentation (*Aufstellung*) of the *Lustprinzip*, he has no interest in seeing how close he can come to a philosophical system. "Priority and originality are not among the aims that psychoanalytic work sets itself..."¹⁷ Any theoretical speculation is always grounded in the facts of daily observation. He warns that we are dealing with "*das dunkelste und unzugänglichste Gebiet des Seelenlebens*"¹⁸ and, if we cannot help contact with it, we need the most flexible, *lockerste Annahme* (the least rigid hypothesis).¹⁹

Two observations need to be made. First, as already stated, Freud is beginning to play the game of "*fort und da*" through his own hesitancy in writing: proposing theory, retracting his ambitions, restating the need for theory but now as an extremely flexible approach – an *Annahme*. This is further underlined in Chapter 2 after the introduction of the child's game. An "obvious" interpretation is given to the game.²⁰ But this interpretation is also questioned because "the first act, that of departure, was staged as a game in itself and far more frequently than the episode in its entirety, with its pleasurable ending."²¹ The game does not apparently fit the theory. Freud then states that "[n]o certain decision can be reached from the analysis of a single case like this."²² He then proceeds to explain and deconstruct different ways in which this playful repetition could be interpreted. The *Kinderspiel*, the "*fort und da*,"²³ can be interpreted as reproducing the mother's departure in order to reproduce the pleasurable return; repeating the experience the child was able to turn something passive into something active – but this would be simply a means of control, of exercising an instinct for mastery; indirectly venting anger at the mother by throwing objects or simply trying to transpose oneself into the adult world – which only suggests that repetition is a derivative form of imitation.

Despite this long list of possible (and seductive) interpretations, despite giving the reader satisfactory answers to the questions surrounding this curious child's game, despite bringing everything back, pulling the toy back and explaining with joy, "*Da!*", Freud throws us back out again with a strong exclamatory, "*Fort!*" Freud remains unsatisfied because the theories we use to approach such cases all presume the dominance of the pleasure principle. These theories do

¹⁷ Freud, *BPP*, 4.

¹⁸ Freud, *Jenseits*, 4.

¹⁹ Freud, *BPP*, 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 14. Though it must be noted that the English "obvious" is much stronger than the German "*nahe*."

²¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Freud, *Jenseits*, 11-12.

not “witness” (*zeugen*) to the effect (or operation) that other tendencies might have, tendencies that are beyond the pleasure principle, tendencies that are more originary and independent.²⁴

The second observation is related to this departure and return. We see another example of “*fort und da*” surfacing in the word *Annahme*. This word is preemptively translated by “hypothesis” in English. (A strange parallel is to be read here between Freud and Luther. The disruptive characteristic of their writing is tamed through translation into English, tamed by science in the one case, tamed by the “church” in the other.) The Standard Edition of Freud’s work translates, “This is the most obscure and inaccessible region of the mind, and, since we cannot avoid contact with it, the least rigid hypothesis, it seems to me, will be the best.”²⁵ We are led to believe that, if we are to have contact with this “obscure” (or unclear, unintelligible) region, it must be through the least rigid hypothesis, a flexible theory. But Freud’s text suggests something very different. Read it again, “Es ist das dunkelste und unzugänglichste Gebiet des Seelenlebens, und wenn wir unmöglich vermeiden können, es zu berühren, so wird die lockerste Annahme darüber, meine ich, die beste sein.”²⁶ The region is described first of all in terms of light, specifically, a lack of light. It is a dark region, in fact, the darkest and most inaccessible region. Freud avoids a pairing of obscurity and understanding as if understanding were able to pierce into that dark region and formalize it, as if darkness could put order into the chaos. The approach to this region, any contact with this dark and inaccessible region happens – in the writing at least – through the word *Annahme*, that is, through adoption (literally, of a child), taking in, gathering and accepting.

The obscure region is not clarified through theory but rather theory itself adopts the obscurity. In order to reach beyond the pleasure principle to those “*ursprünglicher*” and “*unabhängig*” tendencies, theory itself needs to gather in the obscure, adopt the inaccessible. Obscurity, in other words, is brought here (*da*) although there is no indication that this darkness will be understood or mastered. In fact, we can argue the contrary: this adopted obscurity, this *Annahme* of the most inaccessible region, displaces theory. As such, theory does not even accomplish the act of adoption rather the darkest, inaccessible regions assert themselves upon theory and displace it. They continually break open theory. Put in terms of the perplexing child’s game: the “*da*” moment in the game is in some ways already a “*fort*.” And isn’t *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* itself the writing of a disruption, a continual game of displacement, of the pleasure principle?

If the *Annahme* were an explanation of the dark and inaccessible, it would again be a game of mastery. The *Annahme* of darkest and most inaccessible regions, those regions that are never fully captured or conceptualized, is an iteration of this obscurity, this enigma of survival, this absence. In the word *Annahme* Freud holds both the departure and the return in a curious juxtaposition. **The *Annahme* embodies ritual and ritual is marked by the iteration of an obscurity, an absence, the enigma of survival.**

²⁴ Freud, *BPP*, 17. All possible explanations, “are of no use for *our* purposes since they presuppose the existence and dominance of the pleasure principle; they give no evidence of the operation of tendencies *beyond* the pleasure principle, that is, of tendencies more primitive than it and independent of it.”

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶ Freud, *Jenseits*, 4.

Psychoanalytical theory is itself presented as an *Annahme*, that is, as a taking in, or taking upon itself, *adopting* the dark and inaccessible reality of the mind. If theory “refers” to history or context, it is to what is not known in the event, to what is absent in everything. The *Annahme* is a gathering in of the inaccessible, can we say, as the adoption of a child, maybe even a dead child. It is like a continual return of that unexpected call of that child but that return sends it always *fort* once again; it passes on the call. As such the “passing on” is an iteration of something that cannot be captured, the impossibility of a pure repetition or mastery of event.

Written within Freud’s text, in the actual “*fort und da*” of the text, is a resistance to theory, to that which can be simply repeated and therefore a rewriting of ritual. This resistance comes to expression in the very word for theory itself, *Annahme* or hypothesis. But if simple repetition of the event (whatever the event) is resisted then how do we remember? Freud draws a surprising distinction between repetition and remembering. The patient “is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past.”²⁷ Repetition, or what I have called, iteration, is not the memory of something past but a displaced reliving of what was latent, inaccessible, absent in the event; that which cannot be known in the event displaces facile remembering; that which confronts us in the event, in experience, is not an object that can be remembered or mastered (or theorized). The event is only accessible through an *Annahme* as a continual question of survival. The question calls upon iteration: iteration that which cannot be remembered. Context itself then, as always historical, is broken open or, as Derrida suggests, “never absolutely determinable.”²⁸ It is not self-contained but knows the irruption, the return, of a force.

Annahme – the writing of theory – in Freud is at the same time the continual disruption of theory (rather than conclusive systematization) and the engagement of an iterated move. It is the disruption caused by child’s ritual of sending forth, of playing the departure, of adopting the dark and inaccessible region. The *Annahme*, this adoption of (by) a child, as both theory and disruption of theory opens the field to that question Cathy Caruth posed: what does it mean to survive? The question of survival is, I believe, also operative in communal ritual and particularly in the Christian liturgy. Could we say that the dark and inaccessible region – the execution of God on the cross – returns and haunts Christian liturgy as the question: how could someone die for me? How could God die? And, in even greater surprise, the enigma of survival is posited: how could we survive the murder of God? This surprise itself displaces both the theorizing and the ritualizing of God’s death as simply sacrificial act.

In both Freud and Caruth, theory itself is disrupted (and displaced) by the call of the other. The call of the other – the fact of alterity – finds expression in both their writing through a reference to ritual – to the iterability of something not totally grasped or known. In Freud, the reference is explicitly to a child’s ritual; in Caruth, the reference is to the iterability of a theological notion (the sense of chosenness of the Jewish people) and perhaps also to that subconscious human ritual of dreaming. To our surprise, we will now discover that this same move to ritual – to a liturgical form or language – is found in Luther, a move that profoundly

²⁷ Freud, *BPP*, “Er [der Kranke] ist vielmehr genötigt, das Verdrängte als gegenwärtiges Erlebnis zu *wiederholen*, anstatt es, wie der Arzt es lieber sähe, als ein Stück der Vergangenheit zu *erinnern*.” Freud, *Jenseits*, 16.

²⁸ Derrida, *SEC*, 20.

rewrites our understanding of liturgy and, in particular, begins the rewriting of an eucharistic hermeneutic.

IV. Writing the return as liturgical event

The enigma of survival is an iteration of that which is inaccessible (even perhaps absent) in event and that returns. This iteration is not just experienced by the individual (in the form of a specific traumatic experience) but communally: a people are defined by this force of return as in the case of the Jews and the sense of chosenness.²⁹ In both cases (individual and communal – or, could we say, the clinical and interpretative?) the fact of iteration breaks ritualization open because it points towards that which has not been comprehended in history. Ritual – and, for our example, the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper – is not a form of *representation or mastery* but is the continual opening up to the inaccessible that returns as a force, as something uncontrollable. The turn to ritual is necessitated, according to Freud’s and Caruth’s reading of trauma theory, precisely because the “event” (in this case the Christ event) cannot be represented, cannot be “logo-fied” in theory. The turn to ritual in order to express this force of a return also reconfigures our relation to “meaning” – meaning is not something we can know but a body that confronts, that continually imposes itself or asserts itself as a force and that disseminates both subject and context.

Luther is constrained to find a language for this force of a return. He too is obliged to find words that will displace representational knowledge in favor of a theology of the cross. He is forced to find words for the Christ event. And Luther turns in his struggle to the place where the struggle was most intensely experienced: in the liturgy. Luther can only find liturgical language to translate this force of a return. The Christ event returns as a force that confronts every subject in every context through a disruption of subject and context. The confrontation is not itself a new presence forcing its entry upon the scene but a continual disruption of the scenes we create.

Luther turns to the liturgy because it is through ritual that he understands the demise of all systems. The liturgy can embody the Christ event as traumatic event from which we awaken always one moment too late: why did I survive? What does it mean that God died and I didn’t? Luther reacted against the relegation of the radical singularity of the event (the meal-sharing tradition) by 16th century Catholic sacramental practice. This practice, still current today in different form, in all denominations, places an event at center stage – the Last Supper (for example, Luke 22) – and establishes this event as knowable – or commemorating – origin. By placing a theological emphasis on knowable origin, the eucharistic celebration becomes “law” (ritual as rote repetition) rather than that which displaces law/ritual. In the worst-case scenario, the eucharist becomes a law dictating our ritual remembering and repetition as if through ritual remembering we had ever-renewed access to the mystical or divine foundation (the Last Supper) and to some special communication of grace. In this scenario, only the (usually male) presider regulates access to the event and the meaning of the event is controlled through faithful observance and imitation of the law (of the knowable event). This is not what Luther proposed.

Luther’s proposal is most clearly witnessed in his vehemently polemical writing against Zwingli: *That These Words of Christ, ‘This is my Body,’ etc., Still Stand Firm Against the*

²⁹ Caruth, 71.

Fanatics.³⁰ As the Reformation was taking root in the lives of people, in certain practices of prayers and religious culture, one of the strongest objections to Luther's liturgical theology came not from the Roman church but from more radical reformers. Zwingli condemned what he called Luther's slavery to the older Roman sacramental system: Christ was not really present in the bread and the wine of the eucharist but the bread and the wine were merely symbols or representations of Christ. Luther saw a great danger in this position (which he labeled "fanatic"): when the body of Christ is merely representation or memorial, it becomes a disembodied body, a dis-membered body.

Luther's insistence on the literality of the words "this is my body" is the insistence on a reality that cannot be captured or contained by the senses or reason. These words do not have a hidden (metaphysical) meaning nor do they simply "signify," that is, stand as a memorial sign of what it is to be a Christian (against Zwingli). These words, "this is my body," confront the believer and for the one who tries to cover them up or conceal them by explaining them away, they stick like an "everlasting splinter" to the flesh.³¹

The argument Luther pursues in this fiery treatise is twofold. First, there is the simple meaning of the words. The reader, interpreter, translator, is not to seek different meanings to words that are clearly stated. "For anyone who ventures to interpret words in the Scriptures any other way than what they say, is under obligation to prove this contention out of the text of the very same passage or by an article of faith."³² In other words, we are obliged, so Luther argues, to take the words "This is my body" literally when referring to the bread. We are not to interpret "is" as "represents" and "body" as "sign of the body."³³ The reader (the interpreter and finally the participant) is confronted by the literality of the words.

Now, here stands the text, stating clearly and lucidly that Christ gives his body to eat when he distributes the bread. On this we take our stand, and we also believe and teach that in the Supper we eat and take to ourselves Christ's body truly and physically. But how this takes place or how he is in the bread, we do not know and are not meant to know. God's Word we should believe without setting bounds or measure to it. The bread we see with our eyes, but we hear with our ears that Christ's body is present.³⁴

³⁰ Martin Luther, *That These Words of Christ, 'This is my Body,' etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics*, Luther Works (LW) 37:99ff and Weimar Ausgabe(WA) 23:64ff.

³¹ LW 37:29. "Denn ich thar auch wol darauff schweren, das dieser spruch Christi (das ist mein leib) ynn yhrem hertzen stickt, wie ein ewiger stefft, des sie nirgend mugen los warden." WA 23:88, 8-10.

³² LW 37:32. "Denn wer sich vnter steht, die wort ynn der schrifft anders zu deuten denn sie lauten, der ist schuldig dasselbige aus dem text desselbigen orts, odder durch einen artickel des glaubens zu beweisen." WA 23:92, 25-28.

³³ LW 37:32.

³⁴ WA 23:87, 28-35. "Da stehet nü der spruch vnd lautet klar vnd helle, das Christus seinen leib gibt zu essen, da er das brod reicht, Darauff stehen, glauben vnd leren wir auch das man ym abendmal warhafftig vnd leiblich Christus leib isset vnd zu sich nymbt, Wie aber das zu gehe, odder wie er ym brod sey, wissen wir nicht, sollens auch nicht wissen. Gotts wort sollen wir glauben vnd yhm nicht weise noch mas setzen, Brod sehen wir mit den äugen Aber wir horen mit den oren das der leib da sey." LW37:28-29.

Our senses are disrupted by this bread and wine which is Christ's body. The senses of seeing and hearing are in an irreconcilable tension. Our body is confronted physically by this Other body.

The "fanatics" (as Luther called Zwingli and those who insisted on a symbolic interpretation of the words) wanted "to eliminate the words 'This is my body' and say: 'Christ took bread, gave thanks, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, 'Take, eat, do this in remembrance of me.'"³⁵ The fanatics wanted to eliminate the confrontation, the tension, that the words "This is my body" introduced into the human quest for knowledge and faith in God.

The fanatics attempt to keep God "locked up in a closet."³⁶ They do not believe that God is present in the outward Word, that is, they do not believe that God could in some sense *return* in the outward celebration of the Word. The sense of "presence" here needs to be read in light of this confrontation the words create. God is not present in a fully accessible conscious form but in the bread that has these words ("This is my body") *added* to them. This addition, of course, is not the accident of Aristotelian metaphysics – as something that is simply added to the essence, the accident of a substance. The traditional Catholic approach to the eucharistic celebration (integrating the ritual into an ecclesial hierarchy that controls the dispensation of the sacrament and theologizes this sacrament as "sacrifice") falls into the same trap as that of the radical reform approach: both incorporate the sacrament into structures of representation. The use of representation or symbolism perpetuates the illusion of a control that blocks out (or at least attempts to block out) the possibility of a singular utterance or return. Whereas Luther is attempting to lift up that which is inaccessible in the event – that which confronts the participant. Through the bread with the Word added to it, the Holy Spirit is given with all its gifts.³⁷

The literality of the word – This is my body – confronts us again with the non-saturable context, with the break, the rupture in context exposing the subject to the force of a return, of an addition. Something in event and context remains inaccessible and this something inaccessible "confronts," that is, it precludes systematization, theorizing, and sends the "subject," so to speak, out the door. The inaccessible in event, this rupture in context and irruption of a force, this possibility of an addition is, for Luther, best witnessed in an iterated event of the eucharist. Here, in this liturgical celebration, Word and body cannot be understood separately. The body is comprehended in the Word and is in fact necessary "in order that our faith may be correct and consistent with the Word, because the two, Word and body, are not to be separated."³⁸

Here, in the eucharistic celebration, iteration as continually failed remembering allows the body to return. Liturgical iteration does not establish a new line of communication with the divine or insure a participation in the heritage of the new covenant. Liturgical celebration, and particularly the eucharistic celebration, confront us with this failure of meaning – with the failure

³⁵ WA 23:245, 35-246, 5 and LW 37:126.

³⁶ WA 23:262, 33-35 and LW 37:137.

³⁷ Luther writes, through the outward (or literal) Word, "the Holy Spirit is given with all [the Holy Spirit's] gifts.

³⁸ LW 37:140. "Nu stehen da Gotts wort, die ynn sich begreissen vnd fassen den leib Christi, das er dasey, Drum wie das wort vnd der glaube not ist, so ist auch der leib ym wort verfasst vns not, auff das vnser glaube recht sey vnd mit dem wort sich reyme weil die beide, wort vnd leib nicht zu scheiden sind." WA 23:266, 22-26.

of the self, the individual to define meaning. Rather, a body returns or confronts the self in this eucharistic celebration – a body that cannot be controlled or captured. The ritual gathers in the darkest regions, the violence of an execution and in this *Annahme* it confronts the participant with the dissemination of event, context and subject in the world. This *Annahme* points towards responsibility.

Luther writes: “The one faith says: This is Christ’s body. The other: This body is mine. Do not come forward without this faith.”³⁹ “This body is mine” – the believer is conformed to Christ’s broken, disseminated body. The believer is conformed to the suffering, needy, indigent body of the neighbor.

The sacraments, and particularly the eucharist, make us aware of the other in his or her need. They point us to the other who, by their appearance in our midst, somehow, points out the failure of our often insular and hermetically sealed rituals. The eucharist makes us not only attentive but responsible for the cry of the other. It is the waking up, one moment too late. It is the voice of a dead, yet living body, calling out: Do this in remembrance of me.

“Nevertheless, God says: “I do not choose to come to you in My majesty and in the company of angels but in the guise of a poor beggar asking for bread.” You may ask: “How do you know this?” Christ replies: “I have revealed to you in My Word what form I would assume and to whom you should give. You do not ascend into heaven, where I am seated at the right hand of My heavenly Father, to give Me something; no, I come down to you in humility. **I place flesh and blood before your door** with the plea: Give Me a drink! Instead, you want to erect a convent for Me.”⁴⁰

God is experienced in the confrontation of the Word inseparable from the body. The cross “returns” liturgically and iterates an utterance of faith that pushes the participant out the door to be confronted by the body in the world, to find the broken body of Christ in the world, in the cry of the “other.”

³⁹ Irving L. Sandberg, trans., *The 1529 Holy Week and Easter Sermons of Dr. Martin Luther* (Saint Louis, MI: Concordia Academic Press, 1999), 69.

⁴⁰ LW 22:519-520, Commentary on John 4:9.