

The Apotheosis of Our Shame: On Ephraim Radner's Rendering of the Christic Figure

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The End of the Church: A Pneumatology of Christian Division in the West. By Ephraim Radner. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998. 365 pp. \$37.50 (paper).

Spirit and Nature: The Saint-Médard Miracles in 18th-Century Jansenism. By Ephraim Radner. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2002. 432 pp. \$65.00 (paper).

Hope among the Fragments: The Broken Church and the Engagement of Scripture. By Ephraim Radner. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2004. 240 pp. \$24.99 (paper).

The Fate of Communion: The Agony of Anglicanism and the Future of a Global Church. By Ephraim Radner and Philip Turner. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006. 320 pp. \$29.50 (paper).

A Brutal Unity: The Spiritual Politics of the Christian Church. By Ephraim Radner. Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2012. 482 pp. \$49.95 (cloth).

Time and the Word: Figural Reading of the Christian Scriptures. By Ephraim Radner. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing, 2016. 334 pp. \$50.00 (cloth).

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The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions that appear to be both neutral and independent, to criticize and attack them in such a manner that the political violence that has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked.

Michel Foucault¹

The more you suffer, the more it shows you really care, right? Yeah.

The Offspring²

One of the many ironies of contemporary Anglican theology is that—Sarah Coakley’s evocation of the Annales School notwithstanding—it is Ephraim Radner whose project tracks closest to the ethos of Michel Foucault’s. This irony is not simply in the obvious—that Radner is vigorous in defending the transhistorical, figural significance of “sexuality” and a gender binary, while Foucault’s intent was to demolish them. But it is in the fact that Radner’s project accepts so much of Foucault’s gambit, only to put it to such different work. Both display a fascination with arcane and transgressive historical incidents, which they summon to disturb established intellectual conventions; both have a keen, and often unsettling, awareness of power’s entanglement in truth; motifs of violence, especially sadomasochism and self-immolation, recur across their work; and genealogical, structuralist, and historicist methods are at the foundation of their most critical theoretical arguments.³

Radner is a conservative in every proper (that is, nonpejorative) sense of that term. And like every conservative worthy of the name, his conservatism is erudite, idiosyncratic, and defies established academic (and ecclesial) conventions. In other words, there is something of the radical in him. Radner’s detractors and admirers ought to ponder this fact with some care. Too often Radner is assessed and categorized according to how well one can place his opinions, say on ecclesiastical polity or same-sex matrimony, relative to established

¹ Michel Foucault, *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate: On Human Nature* (New York: The New Press, 2006), 41.

² The Offspring, “Self-Esteem,” *Smash* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Epitaph, 1994).

³ One might also point to Michel de Certeau as an example, who was likewise inspired by Foucault. As I will point out later, a major reason for Radner’s adoption of figural reading is to work out the alternative to the historicist metaphysics that is still presupposed by the contemporary revival of precritical biblical hermeneutics.

conventions. But it is rare that his opinions, even when they follow convention, have a conventional rationale. They are always an iteration of some aspect of his theological vision, which is a project that has been unfolding for two decades now, and which involves the complex interweaving of ecclesiology, church politics (church unity, in particular), pneumatology, historiography, providence, theodicy, and the hermeneutics of the Christic figure. None of these different elements can be easily separated from one another, but figural hermeneutics is the cornerstone of the project. Radner's publication of *Time and the Word: Figural Reading of the Christian Scriptures* this year marks an important moment in that project, because it gives us Radner's most sustained and direct statement of what he understands figural reading to be, and why he insists it is the shibboleth—perhaps another *figural* irony—that he and his allies argue that it is, especially for the Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church.

Even those, like myself, who recognize why reviving figural reading is important for the contemporary church, and who have read with care the arguments on behalf of its pivotal role in recent Anglican controversies, have come away, more often than not, thinking that *figure* and *figural reading* are red herrings, at best, or MacGuffins, at worst. They hardly seem to present a viable or even coherent alternative to the conventions of historical-critical hermeneutics, and not the project that Hans Frei pursued with such diligence. Indeed, rather than a bold, positive theological project, figural reading appears to be blustering, revanchist apology for Foucault's "Renaissance episteme."⁴ Happily, *Time and the Word* clarifies a lot about what Radner understands to be the stakes, especially the theological and metaphysical stakes, and why they are so high. I can best present what I take to be the book's significance for this conversation by setting it in relation to Radner's previous treatments of the subject.

Radner made a direct connection between ecclesiology, pneumatology, providence, and figural reading in his dissertation on the miracles that occurred among the Jansenists at Saint-Médard. This book was revised and published in 2002 as *Spirit and Nature: The Saint-Médard Miracles in 18th-Century Jansenism*. Though *The End of the Church: A Pneumatology of Christian Division in the West* (1998) was published first, *Spirit and Nature* is the cornerstone of Radner's

⁴ See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 17–42.

vision. Remarkable for its ambition, *Spirit and Nature* is prima facie a history of the St. Médard miracles and ecstasies, but, at the same time, it is an oblique, constructive pneumatology, which identifies the Spirit as the act of divine self-effacement that renders the figure of Christ in history. This act of self-effacement is the negation through which Christ's figure is determined, and it is an act that we participate in, through our own acts of charity, asceticism, and exegesis, which in themselves render Christ apprehensible in our lives. Mainline Christians often invoke the Spirit's stimulation of so-called prophetic activism and doctrinal innovation for changing church teaching and practice on same-sex matrimony or communion before baptism; but for Radner, this is illusory because the Spirit only *appears* at all—think Derrida's *différance* or Lacan's *objet a*—as this distinctive pattern of dis-appearing, or, as Barth might put it, the veiling that unveils Jesus Christ. Radner discovers in the Jansenists a way of identifying this pattern of abnegation, and its ostensive denotation of Christ, with the reality of the reception of God's grace and historical providence. The appearance of the figure of Christ shows events or persons and their actions to be the types.

Radner established two important motifs in this work. The first was the transcendental significance of Christian unity. Jansenists epitomize Radner's emphasis on "staying put" within a divided church because they refused to cooperate in any way with church division, neither separating themselves from other Christians nor accepting Rome's condemnation of them in 1713. They stayed put and refused to leave, allowing their lives, under condemnation and even persecution, to render Christ's figure. The second was the way that Radner laid the groundwork here for a figural reading that is not just a hermeneutical practice, but a method of transcendental phenomenology, a metaphysical doctrine, and a distinctive Christian practice. scripture, history, ecclesiology, and even the Christian herself can be reduced, much like Husserl's "ego," to the figure of Christ. It is important to underscore, as well, that this understanding of *figure* as receiving its determination from negation has roots in Descartes, Spinoza, and the Port-Royal *Logic* (and Antoine Arnauld, specifically).⁵ The latter

⁵ I am referring to Spinoza's claim in Letter 50 to Jargis Jellis, that "determinatio negatio est." See Baruch Spinoza, *The Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Cambridge, Mass.: Hackett, 1995), 259–260. *Figure* here does not refer to figural reading, but to the specific determination of matter, but Spinoza's metaphysical assumptions are integral to his distinction of meaning from reference in biblical hermeneutics. On this

is especially worth noting for its association with Jansensism, but its subject-object construction of propositions and its representationalist paradigm are issues I will return to below.

Radner then worked out this pneumatology of negative determination in relation to the divided church in *The End of the Church*. This book is radical. Take, for example, this query: "To those who refuse to accept the management of division (or incoherence) as a pneumatic vocation, one might also wonder, in surveying theologically the condition of the churches' division today, whether, in fact, the Holy Spirit is *absent*" (p. 26). He, then, concludes, "We must confess, in short, that the 'absence of the Paraclete' from within the Church ought to be constitutive of historical pneumatology (our understanding of the Holy Spirit's life in time) and that Christian division and scriptural obscurity are themselves pneumatic realities of the historical present" (p. 27). The biblical figure for this pneumatically abandoned church is Israel's division into Northern and Southern Kingdoms, caused by Israel's infidelity and resulting in God's judgment and exile.⁶ Such abandonment is still consistent with the Spirit's work, which is always self-immolating for the sake of rendering Christ, and it is the only form by which to inhabit the true church in our condition because, in suffering our ecclesial dereliction, we still exhibit the figure of Christ's passion (Mark 15:34). As Radner put it, "This is the Church's negative visage; but it is inescapably the Church's. Positively, we would say that this ecclesial constitution by the Spirit is ordered toward the manifestation of Christ, figurally in the form of his Passion, anagogically only in the disclosure of his Resurrection" (p. 44).

And Radner is unafraid to bite the bullet. Referring to Augustine's arguments against the Donatists, Radner declares that, within division, the church's apostolic and sacramental ministry, while valid, remains inefficacious: "Until unity is reestablished, the character of any sacrament is emptied of any practical divine effect, and turns into an instrument of increased defilement and alienation" (p. 189). He later states, "The divided Church is still Christ's Body; and it is a Body for which the life of God is given and given with the promise of indelibility. But as a divided Church, it is a dead body, no less Christ's and

distinction between meaning and reference, see Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980), 42–46.

⁶ See Radner, *The End of the Church*, 35–39.

no less taken up by a living God, but dead for all that. Of this body, the divided ministry is but an aspect” (p. 195).

One cannot doubt the urgency or sincerity with which Radner exposes the reality of church division and its consequences. But, one is left wondering how seriously he expects us to take his declaration that the taste of the Eucharist is (ought be?) gall and vinegar, divine judgment against us, through which the figure of Christ continues to be rendered even by our divisions (pp. 199–275). For example, if we were to follow the same logic for the sacramentality of matrimony, then same-sex marriage would equally be a rendering not just of the figure of Christ, but explicitly of Christ’s nuptial fidelity to the church. But this is not the case for Radner. We can only make sense of this discrepancy in one of two ways. Either these prophetic declarations are not at all about the fidelity of the church’s sacramental practice, but about shocking us with a salacious dalliance with apostasy or a lurid conjuring of the specter of heresy; or, the structure of Radner’s prophetic utterance—both the audacity of casting one’s speech in that mold and its content—is perverse, in the precise Lacanian sense. And in this respect, we are once again in proximity to Jansenism (and Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, too), where the convergence of holiness with fastidious suffering and self-immolation at Saint-Médard also re-doubled as garish, sexualized acts of brutality, cruelty, and violence.⁷

In the essays that appeared between *Spirit and Nature* and *A Brutal Unity: The Spiritual Politics of the Christian Church* (2012), Radner works out the implications of his theology of the Christic figure in direct response to the ecclesial politics and controversies of the Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church. His essays in *Hope among the Fragments* (2004) and *The Fate of Communion* (edited with Philip Turner, 2006) elaborate on this pneumatology of negative determination by bringing it into direct conversation with the issues of ecclesial polity, biblical interpretation, and human sexuality that have been most contentious in the Anglican Communion. Of special note here is Radner’s use of the figural method to show how the distinctiveness of the nuptial union between Christ and the church relates to the sacramentality of matrimony.

In *A Brutal Unity*, Radner ends every chapter of this work with a figural mediation that reiterates the complex, interweaving claims

⁷ See Brian E. Strayer, *Suffering Saints: Jansenists and Convulsionaries in France, 1640–1799* (Eastborne, U.K.: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 257–265.

he is making while further developing its repeated motifs. It is quite an extraordinary and innovative work in that regard, the most mature expression of the vision he began to set out in *Spirit and Nature* and *The End of the Church*. Though his authorial voice is in some ways more irenic and measured in this work, it is unclear whether this is a sign that Radner intends *A Brutal Unity* to mitigate some of the more radical claims he made in *The End of the Church*, especially those regarding sacramental efficacy. What is clear is that by the writing of *A Brutal Unity*, which is a political theology of liberalism, an ecclesiological remonstrance denying Christian violence, and a doctrine of providence, Radner is prepared to raise the stakes on his assessment of the political implications of Christian division. Rather than the figure of Israel's two kingdoms, Radner points to the primordial murder, Cain and Abel. In a chapter titled "Division Is Murder," Radner first connects church divisions to the separation of Christianity from Judaism, and then, linking that separation to original act of fraternal violence, unfolds a relentless portrait of the violence of Christian history, including everything from medieval pogroms to complicity in Rwandan genocide, even the Shoah itself. The figure for our divisions is Cain's murder of Abel, which, once more, has its antitype (fulfillment) in the rendering of the figure of Christ's passion.

With this turn to politics (Radner includes an unexpected defense of political liberalism as a tragic hedge against the violence unleashed by Christian divisions), and its link with providence (which has been a constant theme for Radner), the metaphysical dimension of Radner's method of transcendental phenomenology begins to become a distinctive feature. That is, Radner begins to draw the figural relationships between Christology, ecclesiology, pneumatology, and providence in a way that presents their capacity as identifications of reality and truth, and not only as theological concepts. And it is this metaphysical dimension, in which the whole of reality renders the figure of Christ, that is the subject of *Time and the Word*. We are now in a position to better evaluate the significance of its contribution to the discussion that Radner began twenty years ago.

Time and the Word belongs to a body of work committed to the revival of figural (or typological) reading of scripture. These works emerged from both the postliberal ethos (among mostly Protestants) and Ressourcement ethos (among mostly Roman Catholics). Some of the names associated with this revival are Christopher Seitz, R. R. Reno, Matthew Levering, John David Dawson, and Richard B. Hays.

Lewis Ayres's work on Nicea should also be placed within its orbit. The origins of the revival can be traced back to Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946), as well as Leonhard Goppelt's *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (1966). But Henri de Lubac's *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture* really revived interest in it in Catholic theology, while Hans Frei's *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* identified (drawing on Auerbach) figural reading as the decisive element that modern biblical hermeneutics lost when the historical-critical method developed. Frei noted that the practice was the backbone of Luther's and Calvin's Reformation doctrine of scripture. In many ways, *A Brutal Unity* seems inspired by the project Frei was working on when he died, which sought to revive figural reading—in the mode primarily of Calvin, Edwards, Barth, and Julian Hartt—for use in modern political theology and the doctrine of providence. But Radner mentions Frei in *Time and the Word* only in passing, in his introduction, stressing instead the influence of Brevard Childs on Radner. He notes the importance of a graduate seminar he took with Childs at Yale for shaping his thoughts on biblical figure, especially their reading of Andrew Louth's *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology*.

Radner draws on all these influences together in *Time and the Word* to give us the first thoroughgoing theoretical treatment of the theology of the biblical figure. Radner is very clear that he understands his theology of the Christic figure to be *metaphysical*, but this should not be understood in either a foundational sense or grounded in generalized human experience. Radner's claim is that a metaphysics of figural reading does not require either a narrative of modern decline or a restoration of premodern metaphysics, even Neoplatonism in particular (though he expresses partiality for Platonism). He devotes chapter 4 to showing that even Ockham was still able to deploy a figural reading of scripture, and so a metaphysics of the Christic figure may be compatible with a variety of different philosophical outlooks, including modern ones. He understands the transcendental nature of the Christic figure to include the absolute priority of God as the creator of time,⁸ which relativizes “our temporal framework's experiential contours . . . through the dissolution of that framework's priority” (p. 82). This is a

⁸ One might think of the kind of reversal that occurs within Marion's phenomenological reduction of Being to *givenness*.

point made in opposition to all historicism, which is the primary target of the work—and really has been the implicit target of the revival of figural reading from the start. Radner notes that, although the revival of precritical hermeneutical methods has allowed for the bracketing of the dominance of the historical-critical method, the working metaphysics, even of antifoundationalist postliberals, has remained historicism (p. 81). What the Christic figure gives us, Radner argues, is the revelation of the transcendental truth that precedes, conditions, and determines all of time and our experience of it. Scripture makes known God's will because it is the "instantiation of the mysterious timeless-temporal reality of God, in relation to creatures," and "straddles the threshold of God's asymmetrical time and creaturely time" (p. 100). Radner can thus state, against much of the traction many want to gain from the idea of tradition, that scripture is a transcendental reality that "does not 'develop' . . . [but] orders all experienced developments"; it supplies the "pattern of recognizability by which all things exist" (p. 102). This allows Radner to "remove the term 'figure' from purely rhetorical or logical categorization, and locate it within a metaphysical context of objective reference," because all of reality is included in a literal way within the purview of scripture (p. 103 n18).

The incarnation is the decisive element for Radner in his formulation of the metaphysics of the Christic figure, because what we encounter in the incarnation is a synecdoche, a "figure wherein the part stands for the whole, or where the whole is represented in some part which it comprehends" (p. 189). The whole of the world itself can, because of the incarnation, be understood as a glorious expression of God only "insofar as the Incarnate One, Jesus Christ, is present as the one speaking and receiving his word in us" (p. 192). On this basis, Radner declares that Christian language is always synecdochic because it is, in the wake of the incarnation of God, always a "representation" of God, "an embodiment of the glory of the embodied Word who is Jesus" (p. 190). And it is just here that we see the reiteration of the negative determination that characterized Radner's pneumatological rendering of the Christic figure in a kind of incarnational apophaticism, in which the whole of reality is displaced by the particularity of Jesus, yet in such a way that the whole is thereby given its determination precisely in its displacement by the particular, and vice versa.

My principal observation is that the form of this synecdochic relation between the universal and the particular is the exact mirror of

Spinoza's configuration of the relation of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, which Schleiermacher elaborated upon in his *Dialectic*. As Schleiermacher puts it in his 1822 lectures on the *Dialectic*, "World = unity with the inclusion of all contrasts," while "God = unity with the exclusion of all contrasts."⁹ Schleiermacher sees Christ, as the Redeemer, as the synecdoche of this relation, as the arche-type (*Urbild*—one might say *figure*) in whom the finite and infinite hold together, the particular in whom the universal is realized, and humanity joined to God.

There are two reasons the figural reading of scripture is important for Frei. The first is its ability, in his opinion, to obviate the need to understand the text's meaning as what mediates its relation to history. Classical figural reading worked because it did not recognize a distinction between the narrative and history, and any modern recovery of it will have to account for that distinction. The reasons Frei gave for disliking allegory were the same as those given by Auerbach: it left the literal sense behind altogether and did not take history seriously. David Dawson has shown, in considerable detail, how in the hands of its most skilled practitioners, like Origen, we can see how allegory always begins with the literal sense and always returns to history.¹⁰ Radner makes his agreement with Dawson explicit, on each of these points, and further concurs with those who insist that a clear distinction cannot be made between figural reading and allegory.

Now the trouble here is that, as valid as these points are against Auerbach, they do not account for Frei's own distinctive theological, indeed christological, preoccupations, which are situated at the intersection of Spinoza, Schleiermacher, and Tübingen idealism (namely, F. C. Baur and D. F. Strauss). As Frei made clear in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, Spinoza laid the cornerstone of modern biblical hermeneutics because he separated the meaning of the text from its

⁹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Dialektik, aus Schleiermachers Handschriftlichem Nachlasse herausgegeben von Ludwig Jonas. Friedrich Schleiermachers sämtliche Werke* III, 4, 2 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1839), 433. This translation is taken from Thandeka, *The Embodied Self: Friedrich Schleiermacher's Solution to Kant's Problem of the Empirical Self* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), 114.

¹⁰ See the discussions of Frei and Auerbach in David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2001). The persistence of what Frei calls a "meaning-structure" in Dawson's reading is apparent from his essay on Origen, "Allegorical Reading and the Embodiment of the Soul in Origen" in Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones, ed., *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric, and Community* (London: Routledge, 1998), 26–44.

reference to history. The narrative was a mere representation, a myth, of its more general meaning, which the text both presupposes and expresses. In this configuration, the relationship between the text and its meaning was negatively determined, since as a finite iteration of this universal meaning, the biblical text gives determinate form to the universal meaning, while the apprehension of that meaning requires the negation of that particular occasion. When Frei objects that allegory does not take the literal sense or history seriously, he means that it shares this representational or mythic “meaning structure,” and that figural reading—or at least that version of it that he is interested in and believes to be salutary—does not. Furthermore, Frei’s objection to this overarching meaning structure can be sustained even if one can show that a sophisticated allegorical reader like Origen begins with the literal sense and always returns to history.¹¹ Figural reading is not allegory or myth because it is not a representation of consciousness, but a narrative pattern with an objective, public integrity that is proper to itself. There is no overarching meaning structure, only the communication of the significant relation of one particular (person or event) to another. Jesus, as the figural fulfillment, does not “absorb” or represent the meaning of the type and antitype; rather, as the figural fulfillment, he is the single, unsubstitutable point of reference for the historical meaning of every single creature—whether a single dove, a sacrificial lamb, a blade of grass, or a Syrian child. The universal meaning of history cannot be spoken or known apart from this relation of particular to particular. And this way of understanding the relation of type to antitype is thus dialogical rather than negatively determined.

But the second point concerns Frei’s real reason for contesting these hermeneutical assumptions, which was to avoid the christological conclusions they entailed. If the separation of biblical meaning and reference creates the problem of how to mediate them, then what Schleiermacher sought was to show that true humanity, understood as human life lived in perfect union with God, was realized in the single human being, Jesus of Nazareth. He was the one occasion in history that was identical with God. But the problem, as F. C. Baur and D. F. Strauss argued in their different ways, was that it is impossible to provide a logical or historical rationale for identifying a single individual with the ideal Christ. Wherever that identification is made, as it is in

¹¹ See Frei, *Eclipse*, 29.

Schleiermacher, the conclusion can be shown to be foregone, presupposed. Some truth of humanity in general, or our self-consciousness, is grasped because of a particular occasion, but we mistakenly identify that truth with the particular occasion through which we recognized it—and Feuerbach, Marx, and Freud would make much of this, of course.

Left unaddressed, Radner's way of conceiving the metaphysics of the Christic figure remains tied to this basic problem. For Radner, the purpose of figural reading is to move beyond the theological and ecclesiological limits of a biblical hermeneutics grounded in historical-criticism and its historicist metaphysics. The aim is to affirm that the biblical figure precedes and determines all of history, and is not itself determined by it. All of time, all of history, even our blasphemy and infidelity renders the figure of Christ. In this regard, Radner resolutely refuses Schleiermacher's approach, which is to demonstrate that the historical reconstruction of Jesus corresponds in full to the ideal Christ. Radner instead insists on the full correspondence between the biblical text and the ideal Christ, or Christic figure. It is true that this obviates the need to mediate history and the text, but the problem of the reflective relation between the finite particular and the infinite universal remains. That is, Radner conceives of the Christic figure as a turning of this problem on its head, thus eliminating the need for any such mediation. But this is sleight of hand, because the one issue that Frei appealed to figural reading to overcome, the reduction of Christ to a generalization of human self-consciousness, is the one issue that Radner ignores.

The form of history is always necessarily walking the path of the self-effacement of the cross, and it is only in the particular perspective of adorative self-effacement that this form of history is both *known* and rendered. But this does not evade Strauss; it inverts and repeats him. Christ is not for Radner the generalization of the whole of human history, but rather all of human history is the generalization of Christ, the Christic figure. Since he gives us no account of how Christ's universal significance is not reducible to a generalization of self-consciousness, Radner's Christic figure is, then, identical (at least in function) to the archetypal Christ of Tübingen School liberalism. And this filiation is important because it means that, in practical consequence, Radner's otherwise stunning project is, in its metaphysical architecture, indistinguishable from the constructivist or revisionist methods of his opponents, and his real achievement may lie in this

very fact: that he outplays them. Perhaps the only way of distinguishing them is, to draw on a distinction Radner makes in more than one location, by one's conscious intention—faithful, adorative, and uniform or rebellious, blasphemous, and diverse. What matters here, however, is in the end, within the metaphysics of Radner's Christic figure, grace and providence are just the theological names for necessity and fate.¹² The Spirit only "appears" in the self-effacement that makes Christ's figure appear, and, then, is made not only *thinkable* but *knowable* in itself by the necessary negative movement that gives the Christic figure historical determination. What matters here is one's perspective on the situation. What alone remains consistent is the priority of subjective consciousness, or an implicit metaphysics of idealism. If the Spirit discloses nothing new in history, but only represents Christ to the world in the repetition of his movement to the cross, then this is scripture's truth and history's meaning. As Frei wrote of H. Richard Niebuhr, "Faith was attachment to the slayer and life-giver for its own sake, with no return favors asked. . . . It was the transforming enablement to call 'God' what had appeared to be fate."¹³ This was a comment on Niebuhr's affinity for Spinoza.

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Radner's vision is as bold and uncompromising as it is idiosyncratic. Those of us who find Radner's conclusions dubious on issues from the efficacy of the church's sacraments to the sanctity of matrimony among same-sex couples, ought not to dismiss him summarily. He has witnessed firsthand the horrors of Rwandan genocide, and the hypocrisy and even criminality of Christians and clergy there. His theological vision is shaped in an extraordinary way by the obligation to think through the implications of that reality, and to demand that a church as self-satisfied as the Episcopal Church reckon with its complicity, with honesty about the violence it wages in any number of ways.

¹² See the discussion of "Christomonism" in Hans Frei, "Analogy and the Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth," in Mike Higton, ed., *Hans W. Frei: Unpublished Pieces; Transcripts from the Yale Divinity School Archive* (website), <http://divinity-adhoc.library.yale.edu/HansFreiTranscripts/Freitrancripts/Frei01-Analogy.pdf>.

¹³ Hans Frei, "History, Salvation-History, and Typology," in Hans Frei, *Reading Faithfully*, vol. 1, *Writings from the Archives: Theology and Hermeneutics*, ed. Mike Higton and Mark Alan Bowald (Cambridge, U.K.: James Clarke & Co., 2017), 160.

Anglican theology prides itself on its theologian-poets. From Taylor to Herbert to Andrews, from Sayers to Charles Williams to Rowan Williams—*Time and the Word* makes clear that Radner belongs in this list. Many may object. More than one commentator has remarked on Radner's abstruse arguments. He announces an intention to make an argument, only then to pile up obscure references, which he says prove the conclusion, though it's never clear how. Radner presents as savant, not poet (though he has published a book of poetry, *The World in the Shadow of God*, subtitled *A Christian Natural Theology*). But any good or fair reading of him should recognize that his kaleidoscopic associations, esoteric allusions, and often unexpected subversions of theological conventions are the marks of poetic affiliation. I might even be tempted to compare him to Thomas Pynchon were he less severe or gave even a hint of ironic humor. We misread Radner when we fail to recognize this poetic dimension of Radner's theology of figuration. And to misread Radner, I think, is to misunderstand the present condition of theology and the place the poetic ought to play in it. I do not mean by this that I think Radner's answers are right—quite the contrary, in fact. But even where I think Radner is wrong, if we have read him well and critically, then he will have prompted us to ask the questions that can lead us beyond our mystification.

And it is here, on the point of mystification, where the comparison to Foucault can be instructive in a new way. The question is not whether Radner is a radical. I believe it is clear that he is. The question is just what kind of radical he is. And this is why I left out of my epigram the reason that Foucault gave for why our political task is to unmask the violence of self-proclaimed neutral institutions: that is, "so we can fight against them." Radner is radical, but there is, despite his *agon* with the Episcopal Church liberals, not any sense at all of this fight. It is true that his early work imagines a day when church unity will be restored and the sacraments will be efficacious once more, and we can see Radner the radical here, who gives us a hint of revolt, but only in the sense of Camus's Sisyphus. Even in that early work, and certainly by *Spirit and Nature*, there is an equally strong impulse to refuse, even amid all the anxiety and even disgust that the church's divisions and violence evoke, to acknowledge any gap between the reality of what the church is and the ideal of what it ought to be. That is, the right response to division is not to fight it, but to expose the lies we tell ourselves to justify our division, and then to stay put and suffer

the consequences of division, because it is in our suffering that the figure of Christ is rendered. We expose Christian violence, not in order to fight it or rebel against it, but to suffer it and thereby conform our lives to the figure of Christ. I come away from reading Radner with the disconcerting sense that when he exposes the aporias of our divisions and violence it is not salutary, that it nurtures division and gives succor to violence. Indeed, at the very moment that the figure reveals, it conceals, confounds, mystifies.

I think this is the upshot of Radner's metaphysical inflection of figuration: he is relentless in revealing our illusions of innocence, so that he can force them to submit to the law of the cross, of self-immolation, in which the split between the reality of what the church is and what it ought to be disappears. As Corey Robin has pointed out in the sphere of politics, this is a familiar strategy, one associated with a distinctive kind of revolt, a certain kind of radical.¹⁴ It is a strategy that is far more dynamic and attuned to our condition than its opponents are often capable of even seeing, much less admitting. It is a strategy that borrows from its rebellious opponents, except for this one thing—not for the sake of stoking desire, not for the inauguration of the fight, not for the imagination of hope, not for the realization of the new, but as novel occasions for reproducing what we know about the present. This is what figural reading is, as Radner conceives it. It appears as a dynamic, lucid, even poetic revelation of the shameful secret of our divisions, of our violence. But, at least in this mode, figural reading is that cunning ruse through which we preserve our divisions in amber, and project our violence into eternity—the apotheosis of our shame.

¹⁴ See Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2013).

