The Language of Formation in Official Church of England Documents

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Over the last fifty years the word "formation" has been increasingly employed in the context of training for ordination, yet it has rarely been defined. This article traces its first tentative appearance in the de Bunsen report, Theological Colleges for Tomorrow *(1968), to its abundant usage in the Hind report,* Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church *(2003), and the documentation concerning "Common Awards in Theology, Ministry and Mission" (2014) in order to discern its meaning according to official Church of England documents.*[1]

By way of background, training for ordination in the Church of England in the 1960s consisted of attending a residential theological college (seminary) for two or three years (depending on age and whether or not the candidate already had a Bachelor's degree). From 1970 mature candidates could train on a course for three years instead. This involved attending weekly evening classes and six or seven residential weekends and a residential week each year. From 1980 some dioceses ran Ordained Local Ministry (OLM) schemes. Most of

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[1] Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry (ACCM), *Theological Colleges for Tomorrow: Being a Report of a Working Party appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, to consider the problems of the Theological Colleges of the Church of England* (London: Church Information Office, 1968); Archbishops' Council, *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church: The Structure and Funding of Ordination Training*, GS 1496 (London: Church House Publishing, 2003); "Common Awards in Theology, Ministry and Mission," https://www.churchofengland.org/clergy-office-holders/ministry/ministerial-education-and-development/common-awards-in-theology,-ministry-and-mission.aspx.

the training took place in the candidate's home parish in order to prepare the ordinand for the task of being a priest in that particular place. Following ordination all candidates served a three or four year curacy in a parish under the supervision of a training incumbent (like an apprenticeship).

Formation as Integration

The de Bunsen report referred to theological colleges providing "professional training" like medical schools train doctors, or colleges of education train teachers.[2] Clergy needed to be equipped for a threefold ministry of word, sacraments, and pastoral care, hence the suggestion of a threefold analysis of what a theological college must provide: adequate education in theology; "community formation," which is described as "the deepening of a man's prayer and commitment and self-knowledge in a way that is integrated with his growing grasp of theology"; and an adequate foundation of practical and "professional" training.[3]

The emphasis on the integration of spiritual life, self-knowledge, and theological knowledge recurs in the official documentation and becomes increasingly important in any discussion of formation for ministry. It was already evident in *The Purpose and Scope of Clergy Training* (1949): "The best Theological College is one in which the Chapel, the lecture-room and the common-room are all working together to make a fellowship of Christian life both natural and supernatural, the power of which shall remain in the memory of the ordinand and as a pattern and an inspiration for his future work in a congregation."[4]

As well as integration within the life of an individual ordinand, the de Bunsen report recognized the need for greater integration between the theological college and the post-ordination stage of training during the curacy. The report noted that "the concept of theology as a subject first to be treated as an abstract enquiry and 'learned,' and then at a second stage to be 'applied' or followed by 'practical courses' is being replaced by an approach in which there is

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[2] ACCM, *Theological Colleges for Tomorrow*, 1.
[3] ACCM, *Theological Colleges for Tomorrow*, 2–3.
[4] Central Advisory Council of Training for the Ministry, *The Purpose and Scope of Clergy Training: An Outline of Current Practice* (London: Press and Publications Board of the Church Assembly for the CACTM, 1949), 37.

an overlap and integration at every stage between the 'theoretical' and the 'practical.'"[5]

Doing Theology Today (1969) concerned itself with "theological proficiency," "theological confidence," and "theological thinking."[6] Once again the concept of integration was emphasized: integration between academic study of theology and spiritual life, on the one hand, and contextual awareness and practical experience, on the other. "The study of theology only becomes an effective component of the training of the priest when it comes into a living relationship with the inner life." For this to happen, the report declared, theology must engage not only with the priest's faith, worship, and prayer, but also with an understanding of the constantly changing world.[7] "We are concerned that theological education as a whole should be characterised by a careful integration of rigorous theological study with planned practical experience."[8]

In 1974, *Patterns of Ministry* aimed to bring together the main lines of thinking about ministry in the Church of England from the reports of the preceding seven years. Its author, Hugh Melinsky, equated theological education with "priestly formation" which, he wrote, is "to borrow a phrase from our Roman Catholic brethren."[9] There is no indication as to whether he considered the terminology "theological education" and "priestly formation" to be synonymous. Melinsky also raised the challenge of integration in a report published the following year in which he referred to "ordination training" as having three parts: the rigorous discipline of understanding the Christian revelation in the Bible and the main features of its subsequent history; the equally rigorous understanding of the society in which the ordinand is to practice ministry; and the equally difficult discipline of understanding how these two realms of study penetrate and affect each other.[10]

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[5] ACCM, *Theological Colleges for Tomorrow*, 28.

[6] Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry, *Doing Theology Today: The Second Report of the Theological Education Committee of the Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry* (London: Church Information Office, 1969), 1.

[7] ACCM, *Doing Theology Today*, 7.

[8] ACCM, *Doing Theology Today*, 22.

[9] M. A. Hugh Melinsky, *Patterns of Ministry: A Discussion Paper,* GS 202 (London: Church Information Office, 1974), 24.

[10] M. A. Hugh Melinsky, *The Ministry of the People of God*, ACCM Occasional Paper No. 3, July 1975 (London: Church House Publishing, 1975), 12.

Formation in the Spiritual Life

Peter Baelz was Chair of the Committee for Theological Education (CTE) and involved in many of the reports published in the 1980s. In an introductory talk to a conference on spirituality in ordination training, Baelz considered the spiritual life as a response to the gracious giving of God. In doing so he richly employed the language of formation:

> A powerful image to hand in this context is that of transfiguration, or metamorphosis. The same word is used in the story of Our Lord's transfiguration on the mountain and in St Paul's exhortation to the Christians at Rome that they be not conformed to the pattern of this world but be transformed, or transfigured, by the renewing of heart and mind so as to learn what is the perfect will of God. Thus at the basis of the Christian spiritual life is a transfiguration both of the world and of the believer. The world is now no longer seen as a self-sufficient and self-contained entity of its own, apart from God, but as the creation of God himself. God is the centre of the world. And the believer no longer sees himself as the centre of his own world, but finds a new centre for himself and for all else, namely, God in Christ. He becomes ex-centred from himself, and in-centred on God. Thus the beginnings of the spiritual life are to be found in the new way of seeing, a new vision, a new faith. It is this vision that engages heart and mind and calls forth a living and a loving response of trust and obedience.[11]

In the same collection of papers, David Wheaton wrote that if the aim of ministerial education is to train Christians who will spread the light of the knowledge of Christ in the modern world (alluding to 2 Corinthians 4), then they must be people who are being daily transformed, people who are "forming Jesus Christ in the depths of their hearts."[12]

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[11] Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry, *Spirituality in Ordination Training: Papers Prepared for a Conference held in Birmingham 1980*, ACCM Occasional Paper No. 9, January 1981 (London: ACCM, 1981), 9.

[12] ACCM, *Spirituality in Ordination Training*, 69.

Formation through Inhabiting Theology

In *An Integrating Theology* (1983) Baelz reported that the CTE had discussed at some length how to develop an approach to theological education in the Church of England which "would hold together in a creative relationship the formation of a person's own ministerial vocation and character, the acquisition of an appropriate and serviceable knowledge of the living Christian tradition, and an understanding of the forces operating in contemporary culture both at the individual and at the social level."[13] Later on in the report Baelz expressed his dissatisfaction with the perceived dichotomy between the critical and detached study of theology in the university and the subjective faith perspective of the theological college. He insisted that in the theological college the student's approach should still be critical and detached but also self-involving and engaged. The ordinand "must learn to inhabit" the theology being studied. According to Baelz, this is the difference between a critical understanding and awareness which is an end in itself, and a critical awareness and understanding which is the servant of Christian discipleship and ministry.[14]

Experience and Authority (1984) reported discussions about the relationship between theological concepts and the educational ideologies which underlay patterns of theological education. It reiterated the belief that the context in which learning takes place is often of as much importance as the curriculum which takes place within that context and that the context may significantly affect the outcome of that learning.[15] *Experience and Authority* referred to Bernstein's typology of educational activity, which made a distinction between a "collection code" and an "integrated code." According to Bernstein, "any collection code involves a hierarchical organization of knowledge," with strong boundaries between subject areas, so that "the ultimate mystery of the subject is revealed very late in the educational life" and only to those who are socialized into it. This perspective views learning as acquiring the tradition. In contrast, an integrated code blurs the boundaries between subjects and requires "teachers of different subjects to enter into social relationships with each other" which "arise out of a shared,

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[13]   Peter Baelz, *An Integrating Theology,* ACCM Occasional Paper No. 15 (London: ACCM, 1983), 3.

[14]   Baelz, *An Integrating Theology*, 8.

[15]   Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry, *Experience and Authority,* ACCM Occasional Paper No. 19 (London: ACCM, 1984), 12.

co-operative educational task." This perspective views learning as reflecting together on experience.[16] Rather than agreeing with this distinction between collection and integrated codes, *Experience and Authority* prefers the language of "doing theology" and argues that "the knowledge to be acquired in theological education can never be simplified into what is a wholly intellectual matter or what is wholly emotional; it involves the whole person in such a way that his or her identity is at stake, and it rarely involves that person in isolation."[17]

Formation through Reflection on Experience

In 1985 the Church of England published two significant reports. The controversial *Faith in the City* was convinced that the training offered to clergy was not only inadequate but often inappropriate for those who would minister in Urban Priority Areas (UPAs).[18] The report called for the promotion of Local Non-Stipendiary Ministers (LNSMs) in UPAs. It suggested that a suitable program of training for LNSMs would be based on fieldwork, involving project work and placements in UPAs. Such training would include some residential weekend work on themes emerging from the project work and place-ments. It would use modern adult education skills, and the primary concern of the training would be to develop theological reflection. What mattered, according to the report, was whether clergy "have developed habits of reflection and social awareness such that they can draw creatively on their resources of theology and spirituality in the face of new realities and engage in a dialogue with those of other faiths or none."[19]

A Strategy for the Church's Ministry, known as the Tiller report, similarly placed an emphasis in ordination training on the development of an integrated theology using Bible study, history, and the behavioral sciences, with reflection on previous experience. The basis of this integrated training would be "the relationship between

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[16] Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control: Theological Studies towards a Sociology of Language* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 85–115.

[17] ACCM, *Experience and Authority*, 34.

[18] Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas (ACCUPA), *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation* (London: Church House Publishing, 1985), 119.

[19] ACCUPA, *Faith in the City,* 112, 116–117, 119.

prayer, belief and action in the mission of the Church."[20] Although these reports were not produced by those responsible for ordination training, they mention "developing habits of reflection," which is a key notion in formation: thus these reports illustrate the continuing movement towards the concept of the reflective practitioner.

Also published in 1985, *Patterns of Ministerial Training* researched "the relative merits of the various patterns and styles of training presently used in theological colleges and courses and their suitability for ministry as presently exercised in the Church of England."[21] It included comments on the part that community or residence has to play in "spiritual formation" and "the formation of character." By 1985 the increase in the ratio of married to single students had had a major impact on the pattern of residence and communal life at all colleges, but the report observed that the traditional pattern of college community life was most closely preserved by the Anglo-Catholic colleges that placed a very high value on "the part the community plays in spiritual formation and in the preparation of candidates for parish ministry."[22] This report used a questionnaire survey of clergy to seek their opinions regarding the balance between the various subjects included in their training. More than half of the respondents indicated that too little time had been given in their training to teaching, prayer, counseling, spirituality, and preaching.[23] These opinions were common to candidates who trained residentially and on courses. This demonstrates that although community life plays a part in spiritual formation, it does not necessarily lead to it. Another finding was that the residential weekends and week of a course, although of relatively short duration, may be very intensive and "formative experiences."[24] In the conclusion of the report the strengths of full-time residential training were described in terms of "the time and space it provides, not only for formal study but for helping candidates living and worshipping together in a community to grow and be formed as ministers of the church."[25]

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[20] John Tiller, *A Strategy for the Church's Ministry* (London: Church Information Office, 1985), 147.

[21] Mark Hodge, *Patterns of Ministerial Training in the Theological Colleges and Courses* (London: ACCM, 1985), 1.

[22] Hodge, *Patterns of Ministerial Training*, 11–12.

[23] Hodge, *Patterns of Ministerial Training*, 33.

[24] Hodge, *Patterns of Ministerial Training*, 66.

[25] Hodge, *Patterns of Ministerial Training*, 91.

ACCM 22: Formation in Wisdom and Habit of Life

It was in 1987 that the word "formation" came to prominence in official Church of England documentation, with the publications of *Education for the Church's Ministry* (ACCM Occasional Paper No. 22) and a speech by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, entitled *Theological Education Today*.[26] The report acknowledged that "even if colleges or courses are at times encouraged to be concerned with the personal formation of their students, the need to satisfy 'ACCM requirements' may lead to preoccupation with academic to the exclusion of other central concerns."[27]

According to ACCM 22, the task of the ordained minister is to focus the ministry of the whole church by "recognizing, coordinating and distributing the ministry of others," therefore "training should be such as to produce interdependent ministry." Interdependent ministry, or "interanimative" ministry, calls for people "who have begun to be conformed in their nature to this ministry and task."[28] This requires the development of personal qualities, and theological education will need to be conceived as a lifelong process of personal development. The report expected the ordinand to seek "to be conformed to the very form of God's being for mankind in the world, intellectually, spiritually and practically, and into the discipline of thought and life which is implicit in this."[29] It does not clarify what is meant by the phrase "to be conformed to the very form of God's being," which may simply signify becoming more like Christ. For Andrew Mayes, it evokes Philippians 2:6–8, "the form required by God's *kenosis*."[30] According to ACCM 22, this conformation is to be achieved through seeking to grow in wisdom and godliness, therefore theological education should "seek to form the ordinand in this wisdom and habit of life as a 'virtue'

[26]   Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry, *Theological Education Today: A Speech by the Archbishop of Canterbury,* ACCM Occasional Paper No. 25 (London: Church House Publishing, 1987).

[27]   Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry, *Education for the Church's Ministry: The Report of the Working Party on Assessment*, ACCM Occasional Paper No. 22 (London: ACCM, 1987), 18.

[28]   ACCM, *Education for the Church's Ministry*, 33.

[29]   ACCM, *Education for the Church's Ministry*, 37.

[30]   Andrew D. Mayes, *Spirituality in Ministerial Formation: The Dynamic of Prayer in Learning* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), 48.

bestowed by the grace of God, both for itself and for its representation in the Church and in the world."[31]

The understanding of theological training as a *habitus* or wisdom for living, rather than a theoretical knowledge divided into subdisciplines, builds on the insights of Edward Farley. Farley understood the ancient concept of *habitus* as "a cognitive disposition and orientation of the soul, a knowledge of God and what God reveals." He argued that from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries "*theologia* is a state and disposition of the soul which has the character of knowledge." Theology was seen as "a *practical*, not theoretical, habit having the primary character of wisdom." The biblical concept of wisdom is neither a purely theoretical intellectual understanding, nor a purely practical applied knowledge as in skills; it is rather a way of life oriented towards God (for example, Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 9:10), and modelled upon Christ (1 Corinthians 1:22–24, 30). According to Farley, such wisdom may be a gracious gift from God (connected with faith, prayer, virtues, and yearning for God), but it may also be enhanced through human study (especially of the scriptures and their interpretation) and argument.[32] As David Heywood observed, both Farley and ACCM 22 "came down firmly in favour of theology as spectacles for interpreting the world rather than simply 'knowledge about.'"[33]

Gary Wilton noted that ACCM 22 used similar language to David Kelsey's description of the "Athens" rather than the "Berlin" paradigm. The "Athens" paradigm is rooted in the culture of ancient Greece, where *paideia* "meant a process of 'culturing' the soul, schooling as 'character formation.'"[34] Within this paradigm, theological education is understood as "a movement from source to personal appropriation of the source, from revealed wisdom to the appropriation of revealed wisdom in a way that is identity forming and personally transforming."[35] The "Berlin" paradigm derives from the establishment of a faculty of theology within the University of Berlin in 1810. It stresses the interconnected importance of two quite different

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[31] ACCM, *Education for the Church's Ministry*, 37–38.
[32] Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 35–36.
[33] David Heywood, "Learning How to Learn," *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 6.2 (2009): 171.
[34] David H. Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing, 1993), 6.
[35] Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin*, 19–20.

enterprises: orderly, disciplined critical research, and "professional" education for ministry.[36] Within this paradigm theological education is understood as "a movement from data to theory to application of theory to practice."[37] Wilton argued that ACCM 22 expounded a consistent view of ministerial education according to the "Athens" paradigm, which was "focussed on personal formation including notions of wisdom, virtue, habit and discipline. Study is deep and intelligent, yet subservient to the greater truth. It is undertaken in a reflective and meditative environment. Community-life is a key element of this paradigm and is actively shared by staff and students alike."[38]

Mark Chapman observed that the report takes the approach that "all parts of the educational programme are to be seen in relation to, or 'relativised' by, the central aim of theological education; and no one part should be seen as the heart of the process."[39] The same emphasis on integration in formation was reiterated in the Archbishop of Canterbury's speech *Theological Education Today*. He said that "ministerial training, if it is to be successful, must attempt to integrate the intellectual, spiritual, moral and practical in a way that is appropriate for the different types of people who offer themselves for the Church's ministry." Asserting that theological colleges and courses should provide both the environment and the means by which ordinands receive "the necessary *formation* for the ministry to which they feel themselves called," Runcie also reiterated that formation is a lifelong process but that the foundations needed to be laid prior to ordination.[40]

Formation through Conversation

In *Theology in Practice,* a report published the year after ACCM 22, Rowan Williams (at that time chairman of the CTE) called the

[36] Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin*, 12.
[37] Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin*, 22.
[38] Gary Wilton, "From ACCM 22 to Hind via Athens and Berlin: A Critical Analysis of Key Documents Shaping Contemporary Church of England Theological Education with Reference to the Work of David Kelsey," *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 4.1 (2007): 41.
[39] ACCM, *Education for the Church's Ministry,* quoted in Mark D. Chapman, "Living the Truth: Cuddesdon in the History of Theological Education," in *Ambassadors of Christ: Commemorating 150 Years of Theological Education in Cuddesdon 1854–2004,* ed. Mark D. Chapman (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 15.
[40] ACCM, *Theological Education Today*, 9.

church "to look to a model of theological formation that allows some productive 'conversation' between different frames of reference and accounts of experience, traditional and contemporary, 'interior' and practical, so as to help nurture an integral personal vision, a discipline of informed reflection—'wisdom' rather than skill alone."[41]

This language is reminiscent of that employed by Baelz and builds on his contribution to the work of the CTE. The encouragement of a "conversation" between theology and experience presages current models of mixed-mode and contextual training. The language of vision, view, and perspective becomes more common following ACCM 22. Theological reflection and the cultivation of wisdom become the stated goals of theological education for ministry. But above all, "ministerial formation is concerned with the development of the student as a whole person so that theology, spiritual development and self-expression can be integrated."[42]

Formation through Corporate Life

Residence—An Education was published in 1990. Residence was considered to be crucial to training for ordination because it encouraged certain characteristics regarded as "essential for ministerial, spiritual, and personal formation."[43] With regard to personal formation, a course principal wrote, "It is vital that in ministerial formation students live together for residential periods where they are vulnerable to one another's continued gaze and enquiry both during and after the formal education sessions."[44] The report pointed out that it is not only during the period of residence but also in the processes involved in entering and leaving it that "we have an educational instrument for the formation of the minister."[45]

It is spiritual formation that is claimed to be most influenced by residential training through the integration of the prayer of the church, the ordinands' understanding of their part in that as public

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[41] Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry, *Theology in Practice: The Proposals of the ACCM Working Party on Urban Studies Centres,* ACCM Occasional Paper No. 29 (London: ACCM, 1988), 5.

[42] ACCM, *Theology in Practice*, 37.

[43] Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry, *Residence—An Education,* ACCM Occasional Paper No. 38 (London: ACCM, 1990), 12.

[44] ACCM, *Residence—An Education,* 7.

[45] ACCM, *Residence—An Education*, 6.

representatives of the church, and the individual's prayer life.[46] The working party that produced the report concluded that "residence and community in ministerial training are not ends in themselves," but are intended "to equip men and women for the ordained ministry of the Church." When the main purpose and goals of training are "clearly identified" and "carefully sought by prayer, activity and reflection," then residential training "should nurture right attitudes and inculcate correct habits."[47]

As the Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry (ACCM) became the Advisory Board for Ministry (ABM), two reports were published as interim evaluations of the college and course responses to ACCM 22: *Ordination and the Church's Ministry* (1991) and *Integration and Assessment* (1992). The first report evaluated responses to the question: "What ordained ministry does the Church of England require?" In doing so it recognized that the church and its clergy are part of the culture, but asserted that "they *interpret* the culture in a different way, against a different horizon."[48]

Ordination and the Church's Ministry considered it essential "to underline the degree to which growth in holiness is achieved partly through corporate formation in prayer and liturgy, and not just through the individual's prayer and meditation." It reiterated immersion in both corporate and individual prayer as being consistent with forming ministers to exercise corporate and not individualistic ministry because "the Church of England has historically understood that the common prayer and sacraments of the Church . . . are a fundamental way in which the Church as the Body of Christ is formed."[49]

Integration and Assessment provided an interim evaluation of the college and course responses to two other ACCM 22 questions: "What is the shape of the educational programme best suited for equipping people to exercise this ministry?" and "What are the appropriate means of assessing suitability for the exercise of this ministry?" With respect to the first question, the report states that "this educational programme includes not only a curriculum of courses of study or syllabus, but also the structured elements of training in skills, the

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[46]   ACCM, *Residence—An Education*, 30.
[47]   ACCM, *Residence—An Education*, 2, 53.
[48]   Advisory Board of Ministry, *Ordination and the Church's Ministry: An Interim Evaluation of College and Course Responses to ACCM Paper No. 22*, ABM Ministry Paper No. 1 (London: ABM, 1991), 11.
[49]   ABM, *Ordination and the Church's Ministry*, 38–39.

application and relating of practice and theology, pastoral formation, personal and spiritual development and formation." According to the report, theological training was to be seen in terms of the all-round development of the person, therefore "links need to be made between growth in knowledge, understanding, prayer and holiness, ministerial skills, personal development and ministerial formation." There was an emphasis on integrating knowing, doing, and being. Knowledge was defined as including both theory and empirical data, and experience as including both an intellectual grasp of theory and the practical experience which theories attempt to illuminate.[50]

Mayes asserted that in *Integration and Assessment* "the Church of England took significant steps forward in its understanding of ministerial formation." However, he seems to have missed both the various examples cited above of the use of formational language, and the historical development of increasing emphasis on integration as an essential component of formation. Mayes wrote that "the language of integration entails a fitting together of different parts of the jigsaw; a making of connections between prayer, theology and ministry."[51] The different pieces of a jigsaw interlock but sit alongside one another, whereas integration, as it is understood in the discourse of formation in theological education, is more like a multidimensional dynamic interplay.

Ministerial Formation

A booklet aimed at informing candidates about the different training opportunities within the Church of England in 1992 revealed that only a few of the institutions employed the word "formation" in their self-descriptions. The Aston Training Scheme proclaimed that it embodied "the conviction that a high level of self-awareness, group and personal skills informed by the habits of spiritual discipline and theological exploration, are pre-requisites in ministerial formation."[52] Cranmer Hall claimed that "a tutorial system ensures the personal profiling of each student's course, including their spiritual, academic

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[50]   Advisory Board of Ministry, *Integration and Assessment: The Report of an ABM Working Party on Educational Practice,* ABM Ministry Paper No. 3 (London: ABM, 1992), 7, 14, 19.

[51]   Mayes, *Spirituality in Ministerial Formation*, 50.

[52]   Advisory Board of Ministry, *Theological Training in the Church of England* (London: ABM, 1992), 14.

and practical ministerial formation."[53] Ripon College, Cuddesdon stated that the work of the college fell into four principal areas, "reflecting the need for spiritual formation, theological education, pastoral practice and ministerial skills."[54] And the East Anglian Ministerial Training Course offered "a three-year course of 'ministerial formation,' enabling the student to acquire theological knowledge and pastoral skills and to continue his or her personal development."[55] Thus, "ministerial formation" was used by three of these institutions as an overarching term, and "spiritual formation" as one element of training by the fourth.

Formation as Induction into a Tradition

Hugh Melinsky, Chief Secretary of ACCM for five years before becoming the Principal of the Northern Ordination Course, wrote *The Shape of the Ministry* in 1992. In that publication he acknowledged difficulty in finding the right terminology for discussing adult Christian education (or training, or development, or formation).[56] Melinsky noted that "training" normally presupposed a clear-cut end product, which is not the case with ordained ministers. He then suggested the broader term "education," "a process concerned with the discovery of truth and with the development of the truthful enquirer," but realized that this lacked the vocational element. He observed that Roman Catholics preferred the term "formation" for the development of both clergy and laity since "this term puts emphasis on the involvement of the whole person," but some saw it as "too suggestive of brain-washing." Melinsky concluded that "the key process for ministers is induction into a tradition, and in so far as this has a testable result, the term 'training' is still useful."[57]

This seems to be how the word "formation" was understood in official Church of England reports published in the early 1990s. A report on the criteria for selection for ministry asserted that the training for which candidates were being selected required not merely intellectual ability but also "preparedness to enter a process of personal formation for an inter-dependent ministry concerned with serving the

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[53] ABM, *Theological Training*, 18.
[54] ABM, *Theological Training*, 25.
[55] ABM, *Theological Training*, 38.
[56] M. A. Hugh Melinsky, *The Shape of the Ministry* (Norwich: The Canterbury Press, 1992), 143.
[57] Melinsky, *Shape of the Ministry*, 249.

mission of God in the world."[58] A subsequent report on recruitment included frequent use of the word "formation" both in its findings and its recommendations. It concluded that "above all young people can be **formed**, both in training and by the communities which they serve. It is communities and parishes which form priests–particularly 'first career' priests–and they need to have the confidence to be able to do so."[59]

Mission and Ministry: Formation as Preparation for Ministry

Ten years on from ACCM 22, *Mission and Ministry* reviewed progress in the provision of education and formation for ordained ministry. The report repeatedly employed the phrase "theological education and formation," indicating either that the two nouns "education" and "formation" are not synonymous and therefore both elements are required, or that they have become collocated to describe the whole. A further linguistic question is whether the adjective "theological" applies to "education" alone or to both nouns. I suspect the former is the case, because the phrase "theological formation" does not occur in the report. This implies that "theological education" and "formation" are thought to be two separate elements of training, a conclusion borne out by the concern expressed in the report on reading responses from colleges and courses to ACCM 22. Those responses demonstrated that there was still a disproportionate emphasis on academic assessment with a failure to assess the practical and formational aspects of training.[60]

Mission and Ministry reiterated that "what is required is a means of forming in ordinands the wisdom and habit of life by which to identify the situations by which the Church is formed and to which it must address itself." The church of the day was perceived as needing in its ordained ministers "not so much bodies of knowledge but patterns of life and thought to adapt them to their contexts." The emphasis in training should be on "formation as suitable persons" for ordained

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[58] Advisory Board of Ministry, *The Report of a Working Party on Criteria for Selection for Ministry in the Church of England,* ABM Policy Paper No. 3A (London: Central Board of Finance of the Church of England, 1993), 34.

[59] Advisory Board of Ministry, *Recovering Confidence: The Call to Ordained Ministry in a Changing World,* ABM Ministry Paper No. 13 (London: Central Board of Finance of the Church of England, 1996), 22.

[60] Ministry Division, *Mission and Ministry: The Churches' Validation Framework for Theological Education* (London: Church House Publishing, 1999), 13.

ministry, not simply on gaining "discrete areas of skill or knowledge." There should be a synthesis of knowing, being, and doing, and in order to encourage this, penultimate and final reports on ordinands should "in an integrated way comment on the academic, practical and formational aspects of training."[61]

A comment about the staffing requirements of institutions in *Mission and Ministry* reveals that ministerial formation was understood as "deepening the life of faith in the candidate," with the role of the public, ordained minister specifically in mind.[62] A contemporary report on LNSMs noted that there were two primary contexts of parish and peer group within which some aspects of ministerial formation were undertaken.[63] Concern was expressed that in those schemes where there was a particular bias towards the parish context of the training, there tended to be "difficulties in achieving priestly formation," and in those schemes where a large proportion of the training was in the LNSM peer group, there were "deficiencies in the development of the local team."[64] The phrase "priestly formation" in this context is used to distinguish between those who are training for ordained ministry and those who are training for lay ministry on the same course.

The Hind Report: Formation for Ministry

A working party set up by the Archbishops' Council, with Bishop John Hind as its chair, produced an interim report entitled *The Structure and Funding of Ordination Training* in February 2002. Its task was to undertake a fundamental review of ordination training. It sought "to review the ministerial training needs of the Church as a whole with a particular attention to the theological education, ministerial formation and training of the clergy."[65] The report recognized that "the term 'formation' has come to mean either the whole process

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[61] Ministry Division, *Mission and Ministry*, 25, 37, 41, 47.

[62] Ministry Division, *Mission and Ministry*, 83.

[63] Advisory Board of Ministry, *Stranger in the Wings: A Report on Local Non-Stipendiary Ministry* (London: Church House Publishing, 1999), 79.

[64] ABM, *Stranger in the Wings*, 79.

[65] Archbishops' Council, *The Structure and Funding of Ordination Training: The Interim Report of a Working Party Set Up by the Archbishops' Council* (London: Ministry Division of the Archbishops' Council, 2002), 1.

or that part of it which refers to personal, liturgical and spiritual development in preparation for the distinctive role of the ordained."[66]

The final published version of the report, entitled *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church* and known as the Hind report, stated that "in this report we have normally used the term 'ministerial education,' encompassing the formational, educational and training aspects of preparation for ordination ministry, though we also use the shorthand 'training.'"[67] The terms "ministerial training," "ministerial formation," and "ministerial education" were used regularly in both versions of the report and appear to have been used interchangeably.

Both reports noted that in the case of theological colleges, formation for ministry was offered "through the opportunities afforded by full-time study, the worship and communal life of the college and an extensive range of placements."[68] The Hind report added that the college environment offered formation within a particular church tradition.[69] In the regional courses "formation or development for ministry" was facilitated by "the community of prayer and learning, especially during the residential elements (weekends and Summer or Easter schools), in conjunction with the candidate's continuing experience of work or home and his or her own parish and placements."[70] The Hind report added that the course offered formation within a community that included a wide range of church traditions and that "the distinctive characteristic of this pattern of formation is the *movement between gathered and dispersed modes of the intentional community of formation*."[71] According to both reports, Ordained Local Ministry schemes emphasized "two primary locations for the formation of candidates": the home parish and the educational program, which utilized the learning and worshipping community of staff, ordinands, and others and included placements and practical training.[72] The Hind report added that "the distinctive characteristic

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[66] Archbishops' Council, *Structure and Funding of Ordination Training*, 2–3.

[67] Archbishops' Council, *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church*, 3.

[68] Archbishops' Council, *Structure and Funding of Ordination Training*, 5; Archbishops' Council, *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church*, 4, 7.

[69] Archbishops' Council, *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church*, 119.

[70] Archbishops' Council, *Structure and Funding of Ordination Training*, 5; Archbishops' Council, *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church*, 7.

[71] Archbishops' Council, *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church*, 120.

[72] Archbishops' Council, *Structure and Funding of Ordination Training*, 6; Archbishops' Council, *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church*, 8.

of this pattern of formation is attention to the growth of collaborative ministry in a local context, combined with the movement between the life of home, work, community and parish and the intentional community of formation."[73] The language of "communities of formation" is introduced in the Hind report, which declared, "Our reflections on formation indicate that we believe that is vital [*sic*] for training to take place in community."[74]

Mayes argued that *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church* "marks a major shift in Anglican thinking towards making formation the key paradigm of theological education."[75] Although the language of formation is more prevalent, this does not represent a significant development in thinking. In two additional paragraphs under a new subheading "Theological Education and Formation," the report acknowledged that some people prefer the term "formation" rather than either "education" or "training" for ministry:

> This has the advantage of implying a process that shapes the whole person, has resonances with ideas of growth and change and fits in well with theology as a spiritual discipline. A further advantage of the use of the term "formation" is that it encourages the concept of lifelong growth and learning. It is central to the thinking of this working party that the purpose of the early stages of ministerial education should not be to provide the knowledge and skills which will be necessary throughout ministry, but to establish the patterns of learning, piety and competence which will sustain an appetite for continued growth.[76]

The second additional paragraph in the Hind report continued:

> It is important not to see formation merely as a process of moulding. Formation for ministry, like Christian formation as a whole, must take its tone from Paul's expression in Galatians 4:19 where he describes himself as being "in travail until Christ be formed in you." It is rather a matter of being

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[73] Archbishops' Council, *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church*, 121.
[74] Archbishops' Council, *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church*, 123.
[75] Mayes, *Spirituality in Ministerial Formation*, 51.
[76] Archbishops' Council, *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church*, 29.

conformed to the pattern of Christ and his ministry. As such it is a creative process initiated and sustained by God and is inseparable from the call to sacrifice and the cross that are implied in Christ's call to "Follow me." . . . It is also important not to understand formation as being concerned solely with questions of spirituality and discipleship which is then added as a third element alongside "education" (= academic study) and training (= learning skills for ministry). Rather "formation" should be seen as the overarching concept that integrates the person, understanding and competence.[77]

The Hind report acknowledged that personal development may be a necessary part of ministerial formation, but that it is not the goal in itself. It then explained that the term "formation" was at best a convenient shorthand. "It alludes to elements of *transformation*, the Spirit of God at work in fallible human beings, *forming* Christ in them. At the same time, candidates put themselves at the service of the Church, and participate in a process of being *conformed* to the public role." That public role is conceived as including prayer, "acting as a spokesperson on behalf of and to the Church," continued growth in theological and ministerial learning, and "leadership of the Christian community."[78]

Jeremy Worthen, then Principal of the South East Institute for Theological Education, criticized the Hind report for having only a relatively brief section on the concept of formation and for not giving a clear explication of exactly what is involved in conformity to the public role. He inferred from the context that this is about professional formation.[79] On the other hand, Paul Overend, then on the staff of the Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme, believed that the term "formation" was "adopted as a metaphor of education" by the Hind report and understood "in terms of reflective discipleship within an evolving tradition."[80] The Hind report itself asserted that there is no one model of formation: "Ministerial formation is a dynamic and continuing process that draws on a range of contexts, in which

[77] Archbishops' Council, *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church*, 29.
[78] Archbishops' Council, *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church*, 38.
[79] Jeremy Worthen, "A Model of Ministerial Formation," in *The Making of Ministry*, ed. Angela Shier-Jones (Peterborough: Epworth, 2008), 42.
[80] Paul Overend, "Education or Formation?: The Issue of Personhood in Learning for Ministry," *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 4.2 (2007): 141.

the candidate moves between gathered and dispersed settings of the Church's life, and, under supervision, is helped to grow towards the role of the ordained, defined in terms of service, holiness, vocation and mission."[81]

The interim report argued that the consistent approach since ACCM 22 had sought the creative integration of knowledge and understanding, spiritual and ministerial formation, and skills (in reflective practice) in educational programs "so that education for the Church's ministry is consistently oriented to forming and developing habits of godly wisdom."[82] Whereas the interim report used the same three headings for its "draft benchmarking statement for deployable clergy,"[83] the Hind report used the headings "Being—growing in faith, discipleship, prayer and vocation"; "Knowing and understanding"; and "Doing—developing skills in and for ministry."[84] In this instance, it seems that the interim report was more in line with the historical development of the concept of formation in official Church of England documentation than its successor.

Shaping the Future: Forming Communities of Practice

The 2006 report *Shaping the Future* understood theology as *habitus*—laying stress not on the acquisition of knowledge or skills, but on the development of people of faith within communities that shape Christian living. It reaffirmed the vision that "character (being/ spirituality/vocation) is being transformed in Christ through engagement with self, others, Scripture and the Christian tradition (doing/ skills/practice) for the sake of deep knowledge (metanoia/practical wisdom)."[85] The report claimed that an emphasis on the formation of *habitus* in Christian communities took seriously the historical and corporate nature of the church. It also laid the emphasis in theological study upon nurturing human beings who know God to be the ground and source of their being, and are confident and fluent enough in scripture and Christian tradition as lived reality that they can be open to those whose experience is different. Thus, the report declared,

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[81]   Archbishops' Council, *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church*, 39.

[82]   Archbishops' Council, *Structure and Funding of Ordination Training*, 41.

[83]   Archbishops' Council, *Structure and Funding of Ordination Training*, 42–44.

[84]   Archbishops' Council, *Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church*, 58–59.

[85]   Ministry Division, *Shaping the Future: New Patterns of Training for Lay and Ordained Ministry* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006), 60.

they will be able to help the people of God bear witness to the riches God offers in Jesus Christ.[86]

Common Awards: Formation as Transformation into the Likeness of Christ

The online documentation around the introduction of Common Awards in 2014 illustrates the ever-increasing profile of formation in official Church of England documentation. The *Preface to the Common Awards in Theology, Ministry and Mission*, written for staff, students, and interested individuals, explains that Common Awards adhere to an understanding of Christian education as "akin to the classical Greek conception of education—*paideia.*" It then states: "Formation relates to the transformation of learners into the likeness of Christ and into ways of being, knowing and doing that inhabit the kingdom of God and reflect the God-given callings for which learners are being prepared. It involves the cultivation of virtues, spiritual disciplines, self-mastery and self-awareness, but, above all, seeing the knowledge, love and worship of God as the only and ultimate goal of learning from which all other learning flows."[87]

Thus it brings together many of the elements mentioned in previous documents and firmly places the perspective of the Church of England on ministerial education in Kelsey's "Athens" rather than "Berlin" paradigm. This marks a return to a pre-Enlightenment approach to theology. Furthermore, there is a noticeable absence of any mention of the need for critical thought in the process of formation.

The *Preface* recognizes that growth in inhabited wisdom requires engagement with "the other," with the Christian community, with self, and with God. Participating institutions, therefore, are to "reflect the Trinitarian community of the Godhead" in relationships of self-giving love between staff and students. They are to encourage students to be inspired when they encounter difference, seeing such experiences "as prompts to become better listeners to the Spirit and to the 'other.'"[88]

The *Preface* states that "the development of a theological *habitus* for participating in God's mission in the world is at the heart of the

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[86] Ministry Division, *Shaping the Future*, 60–61.
[87] *Preface to the Common Awards in Theology, Ministry and Mission,* 2; https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1578047/preface to the common awards.pdf.
[88] *Preface to the Common Awards,* 3.

content of the Common Awards."[89] It emphasizes the importance of the integration of everything for this to happen and, as an illustration, it includes a quotation from Kathleen A. Cahalan, "When theological educators strive to make integration a goal, a process, and a strategy [. . .], we are essentially seeking to form and educate a person with integrity."[90]

The Common Awards also seek to address the difficult issue of how to assess formation. The *Preface* recognizes that such learning often takes place within the "hidden curriculum" of relating to tutors, supervisors, and peers, participating in community life, and practicing personal disciplines of study and prayer, as well as in "reflexive engagement with the world." It asserts that formation may be "*measured* through assessment," but acknowledges that it is more likely to be "*discerned* within a relational and mentoring approach to teaching and learning."[91]

Formation according to the Church of England

From its first appearance, it has taken nearly fifty years for "formation" to come to the fore in official Church of England documentation regarding training for ordination. Whereas Andrew Mayes described this historical journey as "the evolution of a paradigm," it seems more appropriate to describe it as the rediscovery of an earlier understanding of theology as inhabited wisdom, with the word "formation" indicating the process of integration by which that happens. According to the official documents, formation for ordained ministry is fostered through a deepening spiritual life, inhabiting theology, reflection on experience, conversation, experience of corporate life, and induction into a tradition. Together these elements serve to establish the patterns of learning, piety, and competence necessary for sustaining ministers in the public role to which they are called. The church recognizes that ultimately formation is the work of the Holy Spirit forming the likeness of Christ within the individual.

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[89]   *Preface to the Common Awards,* 4.

[90]   *Preface to the Common Awards,* 5, quoting Kathleen Cahalan, "Introducing Ministry and Fostering Integration: Teaching the Bookends of the Master of Divinity Program," in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry,* ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 115.

[91]   *Preface to the Common Awards,* 6.

Re-ordering Desires: A Trinitarian Lens on Eating Disorders

Jillian Jackson*

This paper uses the doctrine of the Trinity to demonstrate the unique role God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can play in the healing of eating disorders and explores how a trinitarian framework may be brought alongside healthcare services to aid in recovery. Drawing on the theological work of Sarah Coakley, the paper considers various trinitarian models and practices that can redirect our minds, hearts, and imaginations to a new participation in the trinitarian God. This essay seeks to show that it is also possible to challenge the idolatrous thought patterns of an eating disorder by redirecting the mind to participation in life through the lens of the life-giving Trinity.

Among us are shrivelled women
>who in despair do not eat,
>who in powerlessness weep downcast,
>whose lips tremble, and
>who barely dare ask otherwise.

We in our compassion and sensitivity
>stand alongside those shrivelled women,
>who in despair do not eat,
>who in powerlessness weep downcast,
>whose lips tremble, and
>who barely dare ask otherwise.

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Down deep in all candour we ourselves
    are among those shrivelled women;
    we also in despair do not eat,
    we also in powerlessness weep downcast
    we also have lips that tremble, and
       we also barely dare to ask otherwise.
They wait . . .
We wait alongside them . . .
We wait.
And you … sometimes . . . speak shalom and the world
is made new.
    This day in our despairing hope,
    grant that we, along with all the shrivelled women,
    may—before sundown—eat and praise and
    depart in peace.
For now, we wait. Amen.[1]

Eating disorders[2] are complex conditions that arise from a combination of long-standing behavioral, biological, emotional, psychological, interpersonal, and social factors, including low self-worth, feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness, anxiety, anger, loneliness, troubled personal relationships, difficulty expressing emotions, and physical or social abuse.[3] Tragically, up to one-third of adults with eating disorders have experienced physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.

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[1] Walter Brueggemann, "Our Despairing Hope: On reading 1 Samuel 1:9–28 / February 8, 2001," in *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth: Prayers of Walter Brueggemann* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2003), 42.

[2] The term "eating disorder" includes the categories of Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, and Eating Disorder NOS. For simplicity, in this paper the terms "eating disorder" and "anorexia" will be used interchangeably and refer to a broad spectrum of pathological eating behaviors. See Carrie Gottlieb, "Disordered Eating or Eating Disorder: What's the Difference?" *Psychology Today* (February 23, 2014); www.psychologytoday.com/blog/contemporary-psychoanalysis-in-action/201402/disordered-eating-or-eating-disorder-what-s-the.

[3] See "Factors That May Contribute to Eating Disorders," National Eating Disorders Association, www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/factors-may-contribute-eating-disorders; "Eating Disorder Types and Symptoms," National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, www.anad.org/get-information/about-eating-disorders/eating-disorder-types-and-symptoms/; and *The Human Face of Mental Health and Mental Illness in Canada 2006,* www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/human-humain06/pdf/human_face_e.pdf, especially chapter 7, "Eating Disorders."

Over time, compensatory behaviors, such as restriction and binge eating and purging, eventually become a burden and create personal and social loss, as well as physical injury. Sufferers become isolated, helpless, and hopeless, as friends and family distance themselves, unable to help or understand. Their performance in activities, work, school, and social situations becomes impaired, and hospitalizations are sometimes necessary. They become physically and psychologically exhausted from battling disordered thoughts and ritualistic behaviors, and often lack feelings of belonging. Over time they may well have acquired a capacity to enact lethal self-injury. Anorexia has the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric disorder, with death rates estimated as high as 17 percent. It was previously thought that the majority of anorexia-related deaths were a result of physical complications secondary to the disorder; however, recent research reveals that most anorexia-related deaths are due to suicide.[4]

The journey to healing is long, hard, traumatic, and expensive. Relapse after initial treatment is common and stable weight does not equate with psychological stability. After weight has been regained, sufferers continue to live absorbed by fears of becoming fat, devoting incredible energy to organizing their lives around food and exercise. Even while engaged in multiple levels of supportive care, patients average at least seven years to simply reach a stage of management.

A widespread yet false assumption about people suffering from eating disorders is that they have caused their own demise through self-absorption with the aesthetics of weight, shape, food rituals, beauty, and appearance. They are stigmatized as having a self-absorbed ego and told the issue would be easily resolved if they just ate like everyone else. The public's lack of compassion and misunderstanding of the disease misses the complexity of the disorder and the associated suffering from behaviors that serve as a source of life in a sea of misery and provide meaning to an otherwise meaningless life.

It can be argued that "eating disorders in general, and anorexia in particular, are actually distorted pictures of the behaviors and obsessions that characterize our culture,"[5] reflecting a loss of meaning and soul that we all suffer from in some shape and form. In a world

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[4] Pamela K. Keel, David J. Dorer, Kamryn T. Eddy, Debra Franko, Dana L. Charatan, and David B. Herzog, "Predictors of Mortality in Eating Disorders," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 60.2 (2003): 179–183.

[5] Pamela Fickenscher, "From Catherine to Katniss: Disordered Eating, Resistance, and the Eucharist," *Word & World* 33.4 (Fall 2013): 361.

where poverty is so prevalent, what does it say about our cultural and ethical values that the diet industry is worth $61 billion and the fitness industry $40 billion?[6] How might the church challenge the ideal of a perfect physical body by acknowledging its own brokenness and imperfection in embodying Christ? Rather than being ignored as a marginalized population, the broken bodies of the eating disordered need support to heal from corporate sin. The church needs to bring to consciousness the things that make God weep and ask, How are we being called to be the prophetic voice of Christ against the Western cultural view that bodies are marketable entities? A church that engages a pastoral application of trinitarian theology can offer a healing pathway for eating disordered individuals who feel starved of meaning, powerless to make change, angry, voiceless, and deeply unhappy.

Trinity and the Reordering of Desires

It would be naive to entertain the hope that an intellectual concept of Being would offer an individual a cure for such a pernicious disease. However, if faith in the Trinity is more than an idea, and rather "involves a personal process . . . [of] 'appropriation' or 'inwardness'" of a Christian relationship to a trinitarian God,[7] it can come alongside healthcare services and offer an alternative pattern of being which informs the journey of recovery. I am suggesting that the doctrine of the Trinity can provide an alternative frame of reference that challenges the authority of the eating disorder.

In Sarah Coakley's work on the Trinity, she offers the proposal of reimagining desire for God through contemplation, specifically contemplation through a trinitarian lens. For Coakley, the Trinity points to something "*beyond* literalism and ideology to something both richly symbolic and at the same time apophatic in its imaginative dimensions."[8] Coakley's *théologie totale* suggests that the aesthetic realm and the powerful arena of fantasy and imagination add creatively to our theological reflection. As eating disorders are embedded in the

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6   Fickenscher, "From Catherine to Katniss."

7   William C. Placher, *The Triune God: An Essay in Postliberal Theology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 26.

8   Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 260.

realm of aesthetics, it may be possible for the doctrine of the Trinity to offer a powerful tool of reimagination for eating disorder sufferers.

Coakley presents a historical and artistic analysis of the iconographic expressions of the Trinity.[9] She demonstrates that the Trinity, as it is experienced, struggles to be adequately captured artistically. This suggests that in the physical realm a trinitarian God defies being contained in a fixed image. In contrast, an eating disordered lens is fixated. The fixation is upon one idolized, static image of thinness. By reflecting on the Trinity via contemplation and imagination, the Trinity presents a powerful tool of reimagination for eating disorder sufferers because it challenges the foundation the eating disorder is built upon, this fixated image of self. If our memory and imagination give us access to God's memory and imagination for us, then attending to this imaginative practice has the capacity to draw us and God closer in relationship.[10] If God as Trinity refuses to be contained in one image, so also should our own fabricated image refuse to be contained by and limited to a single image. To engage a conversation between the Trinity and an eating disorder is to entertain the idea that our physical body, formed in the image of a trinitarian God, can also have multiple expressions.

Breaking and Renewing Covenants

Most, if not all, people with eating disorders can recall a significant time, even an exact day, when they made a covenant with the disease. Precursors for the disease may have been present for years prior, but a psychological breaking point is reached when engagement with their own ideal image of the body becomes an all-or-nothing endeavor of pathological thinking along the lines of, "I will never be fat again," or "I will only weigh less than one hundred pounds," or "I will not eat white carbohydrates," or "There must be 'x' amount of distance between my thighs." A false covenant with an associated image of thinness becomes so binding the person is willing to adhere to its perceived safety, regardless of health risks, in order to manage the emotional turmoil in his or her life, the true source of the disorder.

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[9] See "Seeing God: Trinitarian Thought through Iconography," chapter 5 in Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self,* 190–265.

[10] Michael Welker, "Relation: Human and Divine," in *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 165.

Once a covenant with the disease is made, the person's physical image becomes an idol of worship and imposes severe structures on eating behaviors.

Sarah Coakley's work offers a remedy to the false covenant. Reflecting on trinitarian art, her goal was to find in the art forms a means toward the purgation of (often unconscious) idolatry, and then redirect our minds, hearts, and imaginations toward a new participation in the trinitarian God. It is my goal in this essay to show that it is also possible to challenge the idolatrous thought patterns of an eating disorder by redirecting the mind to participation in life through the lens of the life-giving Trinity.

Coakley explores the meaning of *desire* and argues that our primal desire is for union with God. A desire for God is physical, erotic, and intense by nature. She suggests that if this desire for God is misguided in its seeking it results in a fallen world of sin and disorder. Gerald May refers to this as a "displacement of spiritual longing."[11] The physical, erotic intensity of desire Coakley describes is likewise felt in the often intense physical desire to be thin. The parallel of physical desires here suggests there is a spiritual element required for healing from an eating disorder. It is not that the physical behaviors are sinful, but that the longing for wholeness, meaning, and a sense of godliness has unfortunately been displaced by a physical desire to be thin, which leads to spiritual as well as physical emptiness.

The spiritual work for those struggling with an eating disorder is gradually undoing the original covenant made with the disease, while also relearning the primal covenant God made with all of creation that affirms the creation as good. Contemplating the Trinity helps us to delve into the way God has revealed God's Self to us, and to consider how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit challenge our values, challenge the way we live and the meanings we fabricate to make sense of our world, and inevitably challenge our culturally created rules of living. Coakley refers to this contemplation as the "discipline of *particular* graced bodily practices which, over the long haul, afford certain distinctive ways of knowing."[12] Contemplating the iconography of the Trinity through the lens of an eating disorder during the journey of recovery influences how someone experiences herself (or himself)

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[11] Gerald G. May, *Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 92.

[12] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 19.

physically and becomes a tool for redirecting the mind to a memory of a God forgotten.

Confronting a False Covenant with an Economic Trinitarian Lens

I take seriously Karen Kilby's caution against viewing social theories of the Trinity as society's latest ideals of how human beings should live in community simply projected on to God.[13] My intention is not to extract from the Trinity a formula for better living that eating disordered patients need to follow. Rather, I suggest that a person living with an eating disorder and seeking a healing path through Christian faith may find that an economic trinitarian lens is able to challenge the false covenant. An eating disordered mind is plagued with constant chatter about what to do in order to keep eating rituals in check. Sufferers can be so engaged in this inner dialogue that they cannot calm their minds to be present to tasks or conversations at hand. The Trinity offers an alternative set of values that the sufferer uses to talk back to the mind chatter and gain power over the eating disorder's authoritarian dialogue.

I hasten to caution that not all terms and models used to explore the Trinity are helpful in an eating disorder context. For instance, in her recent book *Blessed Are the Consumers*, Sallie McFague introduces a model of the Trinity based on *kenosis*.[14] This model addresses well the problem of ecology; however, her language of restraint, sacrifice, and death as necessary for new life is a dangerous remedy in the context of an eating disorder. Sacrifice especially is a dangerous model for someone with the ability to sacrifice his or her own well-being as a precarious substitute for real control (termed the "Control Paradox").[15] Women in particular are often socialized to take care of others, and too often this training teaches women to take care of others' needs before their own. Eating disordered individuals manage a massive pool of unexpressed, overwhelming emotions following years

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[13] Karen Kilby, "Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity," *New Blackfriars* 81.957 (November 2000): 441.

[14] Sallie McFague, "'It's Not About You': Kenosis as a Way to Live," chapter 6 in *Blessed Are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2013), 141–170.

[15] Catrina Brown, *The Control Paradox: Understanding and Working with Anorexia and Bulimia,* National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC), http://nedic.ca/sites/default/files/control-paradox-understanding-and-working-anorexia-and-bulimia.pdf.

of suppressed needs and feelings by seeking to take control in two ways: by taking care of others while sacrificing themselves, and by self-abasement in order to make the physical sacrifices needed to lose weight. These two behaviors are the tools used by anorexics to become unwell. Self-diminishment is used to manage unexpressed emotions so the sufferer does not need to feel overwhelming emotions. Therefore, a sacrificial trinitarian model reinforces the foundation of behaviors that feed the disease.

In contrast to McFague's proposal for *kenosis* and the Trinity, I am emphasizing the image of an abundant God who no longer requires sacrifice. The trinitarian relations are those of a God who loves in freedom and lives in communion, who continually gives from an un-emptying font of life.[16] This is also *kenosis,* but the difference is there is never an "empty," only more love. The hope, over time, is that the person with an eating disorder will embrace the capacity to receive life again as a grace that wills only to create more life. The God of an abundant Trinity acts via the Word made flesh, the eternal Son, intrinsic to God's very being. Through the Word God gathers to God's Self all created being and the life-giving Holy Spirit animates it with its own powers and freedoms dependent on the movement between Father and Son, bestowing itself within all created life.[17] Working with this model of the Trinity, individuals struggling with an eating disorder are drawn ever closer to the fullness of what God intended them to be, drawing them toward the fullness of life lived with the Divine.

To see a woman or man physically suffering from anorexia nervosa is shocking, but people with eating disorders do not always show their emptiness physically; rather, they practice incessant eating rituals in order to remain emotionally empty. Their unspoken aim is to have an empty soul, not just an empty stomach. The caregivers' instinct is to want to feed them, but long-term healing is not a quick-fix meal: it requires spiritual healing. In the Trinity, God is trying to communicate the goodness of God's own life outward to consume what is not of God; it is the overflow of life or the effulgent radiance of something supremely bright because the Father is continually receiving what the

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[16] Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 66.

[17] John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 7.

Son and Spirit are returning.[18] This is trinitarian nutrition for the eating disordered soul who, when healed, can absorb God's love and allow it to overflow from a wholeness that never depletes.

Let us turn now to consider the unique role each source of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—plays in the healing of an eating disorder. Following this discussion, the Trinity as a community will also be added to demonstrate the pastoral application of the Trinity for eating disorder sufferers.

The Father

> *For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear,*
> *but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry,*
> *"Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit*
> *that we are children of God.* (Romans 8:15–16)

In 1991, a new book appeared on the market called *Father Hunger*, written by psychologist Margo Maine. In her review of Maine's book, Susan Campbell observed that while studying girls with eating disorders, Maine had noticed that the research literature rarely considered "the role fathers play in the upbringing of the walking skeletons" whom she was treating: "When the girls painstakingly pieced together how they went from being chubby, happy infants to emaciated shadows trying to starve themselves, they rarely mentioned Dad. Or, if they mentioned Dad, he wasn't a distant ogre. Instead, he was inept at connecting with his daughter."[19] In her book Maine sought to address the oversight of "father hunger"—the emptiness experienced by women whose fathers were physically or emotionally absent, unable to connect with their daughters. Maine believes this absence creates a void that leads to unrealistic body image, yo-yo dieting, food fears, and disordered eating patterns. The term "father hunger" is now part of the psychology lexicon.

Where the need for an intimate relationship with a father has not been met, the divine fatherhood of the Trinity can play a significant pastoral role for an eating disorder sufferer. In relationship to a divine Father, as a replacement for the father she did not have, the

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18   Tanner, *Economy of Grace*, 66.
19   Susan Campbell, "Fathers' Roles Often Overlooked in Girls' Eating Disorders," *Hartford Courant,* December 17, 1991, http://articles.courant.com/1991-12-17/features/0000208176_1_bulimia-association-american-anorexia-father-hunger.

sufferer contemplates the Father in relationship to the Son. The reestablishment of trust between daughter and father takes place in the setting of a divine image. Ultimately, "although God as our transcendent Creator is indeed a kind of parent, God is far more intimate with us than human parents ever could be, even closer than a pregnant woman is to her unborn child. God's love pervades us, flows through every molecule, vibrates every particle of our being."[20] This is the God of Jesus when he says, "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30). The Father's love of the Son in the Trinity is more constant than human parental love can ever be and in this environment the daughter learns to trust again the constancy of relationship. It is through contemplating the Father's love for Jesus that she comes to know "the love that God has for us," for "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God" (1 John 4:16).

Likewise, the sufferer can contemplate the divine Father in relationship to the Holy Spirit. In this relationship the divine Father makes space for the "other" child, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, understood in this way, is not simply the love created by the Father's love for the Son (and vice versa) but a mode of being of its very own, suggesting God's love stretches to include more than one. The love of God the Father is not selfish love but love that freely overflows to be available for more than one. Divine love is not love turned inward, but as Kallistos Ware explains, quoting Richard of St. Victor: "Shared love is properly said to exist when a third person is loved by two persons harmoniously and in community, and the affection of the two persons is infused into one affection by the flame of love for a third."[21] The Father of the Trinity is able to be present to the Holy Spirit just as he is to the Son. The intra-trinitarian *kenosis,* then, is not so much emptying, but rather a continual mutual self-giving and reception in God's freedom to give God's life.[22] Once again, as eating disordered individuals engage with God the Father in this model of the Trinity, they find themselves in a relationship of love, filling the gap of what was lacking in an absent father.

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[20]   May, *Addiction and Grace*, 122.
[21]   Kallistos Ware, "The Holy Trinity: Model for Personhood-in-Relation," in Polkinghorne, *The Trinity and an Entangled World*, 122. Ware is here quoting Richard of St. Victor, *On the Trinity* 3.14.
[22]   Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Sophia, Apophasis, and Communion: The Trinity in Contemporary Orthodox Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 244.

The Creator Father, the source of infinite tenderness and joy, dazzles us with unspeakable presence and reminds the person with an eating disorder of the primal love of a Creator that transcends the love of any father. The work of the sufferers is owning their worthiness to receive the love of God the Father. A gradual opening up to regard themselves through the eyes of what "father" ought to be in relationship occurs and they move toward giving themselves the right to expect that need in all relationships. Notably the pastoral work is not to damn the limitations of their own fathers, but to acknowledge the essential need of connecting with a father figure as a loving presence who freely wills to be in a relationship of mutual love. Healing acknowledges and enters into the grieving loss of a limited parent and embraces the father of trinitarian faith in order to move beyond being stuck in long-term grief.

To repress the trinitarian vision of divine fatherhood, as some feminists urge, is to deny individuals with eating disorders an effective image through which to relate to God. As an alternative to removing male language from the Trinity, Coakley argues that when the term "Father" is used "appropriately" *(proprie)* of God in the sense of the true inner-trinitarian relations described above, it can offer an assault on patriarchal authority. "As Freud above all knew so well," says Coakley, "'to kill the Father is to remain with and reaffirm the rule of the Father'; so there has to be another way out other than enforced repression" and complete removal of male language.[23] This is not to say that the Trinity cannot be referred to in feminine terms, but rather that it is the relationship among all three members which ultimately offers an interpretive meaning for our lives. Coakley asks, "'Can a feminist call God Father', then? One might more truly insist that she, above all, *must*; for it lies with her alone to do the kneeling work that ultimately slays patriarchy at its roots."[24] Those who suffer from eating disorders do the kneeling work needed to slay their wounded pasts and create a new future for themselves. This requires the absent father be replaced by a passion for a healing relationship to God as Father. The work of the church is to provide guidance to this God, as Father, and to promote contemplative practices and supportive spiritual counseling to guide the journey which ultimately brings us all to our knees in worship and praise.

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[23] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 326.
[24] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 327.

The Son

This is my body. (Mark 14:22)

> *Those who want to ascend advantageously to the love and
> knowledge of God should abandon the human metaphysical
> rules concerning knowledge of the divinity and apply themselves
> first to the humanity of Christ. For it is exceedingly godless
> temerity where God has humiliated Himself in order
> to become recognizable, to seek for oneself another way.*[25]

A dualistic relationship between the soul and the body has troubled Christianity since Paul's negative attitude toward sexual bodies (Rom. 1:27). The rigorous self-abnegation and self-discipline of extreme fasting has a history in the aesthetic practices of the desert fathers. Admittedly a form of this soul–body split is present in eating disordered persons. Self-abnegation and self-discipline are also the "tools of the trade" of the self-made slender body.[26] However, Jesus, the Word made flesh as a member of the Trinity, reveals a God that loves embodiment. The created body of God in Jesus the Son is held as equal in value to God the Creator and the creating Holy Spirit. Augustine and Paul may have imagined that "no one hates himself," that "we would prefer good for our souls and bodies, rather than harm."[27] But this is not true for someone with an eating disorder who wants nothing more than to be rid of the physical self. The disgust of the body maintains disciplined eating patterns in order to escape the disgust. However, in contrast, the Trinity denies escaping to a spiritual realm as being God's will, and claims that physical creation is of God.

To contemplate the historical human acts of Jesus as acts of an embodied God challenges the eating disorder. To disregard the body is to disregard Jesus. To deny the body is to deny that God said "yes" in Jesus. It is the physicality of the Trinity that refuses to intersect with an eating disorder. Jesus' work in the world, done in relationship with God the Father and revealed through the Holy Spirit, allows us to participate in the life of the Trinity through the living flesh of our

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[25] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Hebrews* (on Hebrews 1:2), quoted in Placher, *The Triune God*, 45.

[26] Debra A. Reagan, "Reclaiming the Body for Faith," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 67.1 (2013): 43.

[27] Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 67.

own inescapable form. In the Incarnation, God freely and lovingly assumes human life and claims it is "good."

One of the more recent developments in the treatment of people with eating disorders is somatic psychotherapy. This therapy helps clients attune their nervous system to sensations and emotions that they have suppressed in order to manage trauma. It encourages them to be fully present to their physical body by recognizing and naming the sensations in the here-and-now.[28] Somatic therapy is associated with the spiritual practice of mindfulness. It is necessary for eating disorder sufferers to relearn how to embody their frame and feel their edges without any associated self-hatred. A trinitarian faith can support somatic therapy because it invites believers to enter courageously into a loving and conscious relationship to the body, just as the body of Christ was lovingly raised up in resurrection.

As already mentioned, Sarah Coakley's solution for overcoming spiritual displacement is contemplation, which in her words requires the "willingness to endure a form of naked dispossession before God; the willingness to surrender control (not to any human power, but solely to God's power); the willingness to accept the arid vacancy of a simple waiting on God in prayer."[29] If we assume this solution is best experienced in a seated prayer practice, it represents a challenge for those who find embodying their frame uncomfortable and sometimes even frightening. When our eyes are closed, contemplation enters more directly into our physical bodies; our physical edges become more distinct and sensations are heightened. For someone with an eating disorder, embodying the whole of life contemplatively, that is prayerfully, avoids the possible distress of feeling the body's uncomfortable edges in a seated prayer practice. Embodying a contemplative life is to intersect Jesus' way of being in the world with our own within the contexts of our relationships, our career choices, and even our eating choices. It is to respond to the call of the Son to journey on his path.

Recovering from an eating disorder involves the discovery of a new mission for life correlating with the primal covenant made with a compassionate God. It is an invitational mission. The Trinity speaks

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[28]   Ron Manley and Carrie DeJong, "A Therapeutic Approach to Working with Trauma and Dysregulation: The Example of Eating Disorders and Substance Use Disorders," *Insights into Clinical Counselling* (December 2014): 27–29, 31, 33; http://bc-counsellors.org/app/uploads/2016/02/IICC-December2014-web.pdf.

[29]   Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 19.

to a unification of the will of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, aligned to one purpose of love for the other. Based on what we know of Jesus' life work, it was not out of sacrifice that he acted but out of love for the Father—a love so nourished that it became available for neighbor and the world. What we know of Jesus through scripture can be brought into creating a new life purpose rather than a life absorbed by a displaced desire to be thin. The commitment to creating life anew in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a vocation in contemplation; it is a life fully lived in contemplation. Caregivers focus on helping eating disorder sufferers rediscover lost passions that are life-giving. With new experiences the eating disorder sufferers grow to trust they have a purpose that contributes to the greater whole. Eventually they find meaning for life outside of the eating disorder. Like each member of the Trinity, they discover they are uniquely gifted and are invited to participate in life using those unique gifts rather than physically and emotionally disappearing.

Helping clients attach to a higher purpose that transcends unhealthy cultural values holds them in good stead when the struggles to return to old patterns of living resurface.[30] In God's trinitarian life, the Father makes space for the creation of something other (*koinonia*). Eating disorder sufferers also make space for something other, by finding new things to include in their lives. The caregiver gently invites them to new goals, new activities, new patterns of behavior to liberate these individuals from the blinkered vision they have formed of themselves. To quote Paul, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). In this contemplative therapeutic work individuals move from brokenness into a new vision in Christ revealed in the Trinity. The Trinity in this sense brings God's life into their own.

The Trinity then becomes a model for living, not in the sense of self-sacrifice but of continually creating the self out of love, for the sake of the love that has already been given. The call to that vocation rivals the call to an eating disorder in never being a task completed to fulfillment. There is no bottom to an eating disorder—that is, no size is ever small enough, no weight ever light enough—and becoming thin becomes a relentless task needing an equally bottomless task to rival its power. The Christian life is an incomplete pattern of being

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[30] May, *Addiction and Grace*, 149.

asking for ongoing choices to be made out of the need to transcend our small self and connect with the God of our divinely perfected self.

The God who is revealed in Jesus Christ is a God who elects, and God has elected humanity.[31] In choosing to work to recover, eating disorder sufferers live into being elected by God and re-entering their bodies, entertaining the idea that these bodies are, by God's judgment, deemed to be good.

Holy Spirit

> *No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.* (1 Cor. 12:3)

God as Holy Spirit is the enabler, transformer, and sustainer. The Holy Spirit is present as its own member of the Trinity whose role, while not independent from Father and Son, is unique to itself. It is present because of the love between the Father and Son but it is not limited to being the product of that love. Rather, the Holy Spirit participates in the love as Father and Son make space for the Spirit to inspire the love between them to burn.

The Holy Spirit is life-giving and yet it is also unpredictable and uncontrollable. The unpredictability of the Holy Spirit is potentially terrifying for those with an eating disorder because through eating disorder behaviors they are seeking to gain control over the perceived chaos of emotions and relationships. Out of a fear of change, eating disorder sufferers become trapped in the perceived safety of ritualistic behaviors and routines. Entrapment represents security but also identity. The Holy Spirit threatens that unhealthy foundation and participates in the recovery process not as if by magic, but by enabling sufferers to emerge from insecurity, fear, and paralysis, and to find they can release control and find resilience in the spirit of life again.[32]

God as Holy Spirit is the work of grace. Medical science informs us that brain plasticity enables humans to create new neural pathways in order to change behaviors. But what initiates the desire to change those pathways and what maintains the changes when they are in their infancy remains unclear. The pernicious nature of eating disorders

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[31] Eberhard Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 86–88.

[32] Michael Welker, *God the Spirit,* trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 1994), 87.

and the length of time it takes to recover from the disease tells us that change for someone with an eating disorder is complex and not simply a matter of will. The will of the eating disorder sufferer is limited and most patients have little desire to be well and lose the security of achieving weight loss and all the safety that goal entails. The eating disorder takes on a persona all of its own.

The work of child psychiatrist John Bowlby has encouraged a growing interest in the area of attachment theory which has significance for understanding eating disorders. For an eating disorder sufferer, often significant relationships to people they love have been deeply scarred, usually in the earlier stages of development or at key developmental times, and certainly during the course of the disorder.[33] The attachment between the three persons of the Trinity suggests that attachments are important theologically, that they ought to be considered precious, valued, and protected. The recovery process for eating disorder clients involves learning how healthy attachments work. In a clinical setting, the attachment between therapist and client, for instance, is often experienced as grace. It is grace given to someone isolated by the shame associated with eating disorder behaviors. This shame and the insecurity of the client requires fluidity between two people, as the client learns how to engage in a relationship based on trust. In this process the client learns how to accommodate change, learns how to feel emotions, learns how to be vulnerable to speak her or his truth and not have the relationship dissolve. And most importantly, the client learns how to receive again.

The Holy Spirit plays a helpful role in the dynamic movement of attachment to another person beyond empirical reality. The health of the client–therapist relationship is essential for eating disorder recovery. As in the Trinity, it is as if the relationship creates a third person: client, therapist, and the client–therapist relationship. The path of faith and the path of recovery involve an inner testimony of trust to walk without knowing where one's feet might fall. It is a graceful journey of being in relationship, where the client can safely experiment with new ways of being. "The inner testimony of the Spirit results not in a purely intellectual realization of the truth of which it

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[33] Judy Scheel, "Linking Early Attachments to Eating Disorders Later On," *Psychology Today* (November 1, 2011): www.psychologytoday.com/blog/when-food-is-family/201111/linking-early-attachments-eating-disorders-later.

persuades believers," writes William Placher, "but more in a heartfelt sense that, 'Yes, this makes sense: I can trust this; I can live my life this way.'"[34]

Community of Love

> *It is in the Eucharist that the Holy Spirit constitutes the community literally as the Body of Christ; Christ becomes the one and the many, the one in whom the many are united through Christ to each other and to God the Father in relations of freedom and love.*[35]

The eucharist lends itself to speaking about the Trinity as a single relationship of One. A recent change in eating disorder treatment has been the move away from focusing on self-esteem issues, once believed to significantly contribute to the disease, toward focusing on self-compassion, through the work of psychologist Kristin Neff. People with eating disorders consider themselves profoundly different from people without the disorder. It is a pathology of thinking that they do not need what other people need. The development of that common mindset is complex and unique to each individual's narrative. In order for the eating disorder to hold power it must convince sufferers that they are not worthy of needing what other people need, so that over time clients develop the ability to ignore their own pain and physical nourishment. It is to completely numb out the self. But with self-compassion, the goal is to give ourselves the same kindness and care we would give a good friend.[36] Compassion requires that we see the shared human condition, the common imperfections of humanity, rather than the differences. Self-compassion denies the belief that everyone else is perfect and we are flawed by comparison, and rather confirms that we are all imperfect beings and our separate self is actually part of a larger imperfect commonality.

Likewise, the trinitarian relationship of three consists in the unbreakable unity and equality among the members, who are

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[34]   Placher, *The Triune God*, 93.
[35]   Papanikolaou, "Sophia, Apophasis, and Communion," in Phan, *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, 252–253.
[36]   Kristin D. Neff, "The Science of Self-Compassion," in *Wisdom and Compassion in Psychotherapy: Deepening Mindfulness in Clinical Practice,* ed. Christopher K. Germer and Ronald D. Siegel (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 79–92. See also Dr. Neff's website, http://self-compassion.org.

individually unique yet cannot be uniquely identified without the other.[37] What the Son receives from the Father is no greater in need than what the Son gives back to the Father. The Holy Spirit does not have a separate job description to the Son but simply effects what Jesus did. Therefore, there is no setting of one apart from the other. Individualism is absolutely inconceivable in their case. The three are differentiated but dependent on each other. To the eating disorder sufferer this argues that having needs is part of God's world, that receiving from another is part of God's way of being, and that deserving equally in a non-hierarchical order is inherent to the very nature of God. It invites eating disorder clients to see a new world order for themselves of which they are a part. Self-compassion is affirmed through the Trinity. Entering the mystery of the one God in three persons points to a way of being which precludes individualism and separation (or self-sufficiency and self-existence) as a criterion for multiplicity.[38]

When the Trinity does speak to eating disordered sufferers, it often speaks loudest at the eucharist, the feast of love celebrated by the body of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is true that the meal at the heart of Christian practice consists of anorexic portions of food.[39] But the eucharist has never been solely about physical nourishment, and so it can actually provide a safe environment for someone with an eating disorder. The ritual of the eucharist becomes the testing ground for different ways of being with one another.[40] On reflection, the eucharist "reminds us that no food is ever eaten 'individually'";[41] it welcomes everyone to the table, and it is, as in the Trinity, distributed equally with no room for diminishment of one person's intake compared to another's. It is a defiant act that disrupts the eating disorders' usual calculations of costs, calories, and appearance.[42] Sharing in the eucharist proclaims life as sacred, as the Holy Spirit acts as the *anamnesis* of the love of the Son for the Father and

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[37] John D. Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution," in *Trinitarian Theology Today,* ed. Christoph Schwöbel (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 48–49.

[38] Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity," in Schwöbel, *Trinitarian Theology Today,* 49.

[39] Fickenscher, "From Catherine to Katniss," 359.

[40] Fickenscher, "From Catherine to Katniss," 365.

[41] Fickenscher, "From Catherine to Katniss," 365.

[42] Fickenscher, "From Catherine to Katniss," 364.

the receipt of created life which moves from the Father to the Son in the resurrection.

Partaking in the eucharist is a prophetic resistance to excluding oneself from participating in life. The economic Trinity is experienced at the meal collectively as participants gather as Christ's body across time and space, as one body. It is a practice geared toward healing the broken body of Jesus. This trinitarian practice "calls us to be with Christ and one another in transformed ways, ways that might have the power to even change the next meal we eat."[43]

Conclusion

Eating disorders fill a gap when security, trust, and love are missing. Within a cultural context that values lean bodies as the ideal and where thinness offers a promise for adoration and self-worth, eating disorders thrive. Media, cultural language, and explicit values about physical bodies reinforce the false covenant that being thin will provide the missing security, trust, and love. A primal desire for God, the true source of security, trust, and love, is misplaced and falls prey to a covenant with an idolatrous image of bodily perfection. Tragically, an eating disorder fails to give the life it promises, and the desired security, trust, and love are not found while a life is destroyed.

Contemplation of the Trinity offers an alternative, a faithful hope that acts to counter the despair of the false covenant promised by an eating disorder. The Trinity welcomes participation when life is practiced as a way of being, rather than as an intellectual problem to solve, and thus results in a life more fully lived. Sarah Coakley's work on the multiplicity of trinitarian images breaks down the rigid ideal of one perfect form for God and challenges the foundation of eating disorder thought patterns. Entering vocational contemplation by allowing each member of the Trinity and the trinitarian relationship itself to reorder desires provides the opportunity for a new road map of life to emerge. Reattachment is made to the one true trinitarian God through exploring the divine Father and the embodied Son, and developing relationships infused with the Holy Spirit's presence. Eventually the false covenant of an eating disorder is seen for what it is.

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[43] Fickenscher, "From Catherine to Katniss," 366.

In a post-Christian, secular age, trinitarian language is too often dismissed as outdated or too complicated rather than seen as a powerful pastoral tool that can speak truth to power, as it has been demonstrated to be in the recovery from an eating disorder. The increasing number of people who are actively starving themselves, despairing of meaning and hope, is a modern cultural crisis. The church needs to bring the language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in its liturgy alongside therapeutic medical interventions, reconfiguring a truthful reality based on the image of a trinitarian God for shriveled sufferers of eating disorders who need to be spiritually nourished in order to be spiritually and physically healed.

Symposium:
Barbara Brown Taylor

Introductory Comments

Lauren F. Winner*

There are many good reasons to attend to the work of Barbara Brown Taylor. One is instrumentalist: in short, if we could understand exactly what it is that makes Taylor so popular and so beloved, we could go some distance toward understanding the current American religious landscape. Taylor is read by all kinds of people, but two of her large constituencies are mainline church people, and those people for whom the mainline church is the church they identify with but don't attend. If we can understand why she is read by the people who read her, we would understand something important about the non-ecclesial desire for the gospel that seems to be present in a certain stratum of the American readership.

An even better reason to attend to Taylor's work is that she pays attention to her words. Her attention to language is, in the landscape of contemporary Christianity, almost unparalleled. This attentiveness is important at the level of craft: she is, simply put, a dazzlingly good prose-stylist, and her care for words is evident in all of her work, from sermons she wrote twenty-five years ago to the essay she wrote last week.

There is, nonetheless, a shift in how she is attentive to words, or, more precisely, in the words to which she attends. For many years—decades, even—Taylor wrote for mainline Protestants about the importance of using the tried-and-true terms of Christian speech, as she tried to ease us out of our skittish allergy to words like *sin* and

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incarnation. For example, in a 2002 essay on preaching Easter in the *Journal for Preachers*, Taylor wrote about preachers who try to preach Easter without ever "using the word, since 'salvation' has become one of the more problematic words in the Christian vocabulary." During Easter, Taylor suggested, "it does seem possible for preachers—and all who care about the mystery of the word made flesh—to spend some time contemplating both the rich scriptural heritage and the fullness of reality contained in the word 'salvation.' What did it mean before Jesus was ever born? What did he think it meant, and what did it come to mean after he died? What kinds of experience does the word name? Beyond what salvation *means*, how does it *feel*? How would you explain it to a seven-year-old child?"[1] She seems to want us to think about what the word is and how best to use it, and she wants us to do this by contemplating mystery: there is something instructive for all of us in the seven-year-old child question. To explain salvation to a second grader would require both radical simplification and also the clarification of something essential.

But then a shift happened, in Taylor's own Christian life and also in her writing—a shift away from advocacy for old Christian words. She notes this shift in her two most recent books, *An Altar in the World* and *Learning to Walk in the Dark*. In the first she tells of being asked to come give a talk at a church in Alabama. Her host asked her simply to "come tell us what is saving your life now." Taylor describes feeling a kind of awed relief at this question, "as if he had swept his arm across a dusty table and brushed all the formal china to the ground. I did not have to try to say correct things that were true for everyone. I did not have to use theological language that conformed to the historical teachings of the church. All I had to do was figure out what my life depended on."[2] And then in *Learning to Walk in the Dark*—which is, in its way, deeply Christian apophaticism—Taylor says that once upon a time she had a lot of reliable ideas about God, enough ideas to fill a cedar chest, but "the big chest I used to keep them in is something smaller than a shoebox now."[3] Taylor writes that the first thing to go for her was her certainty about the language of

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[1] Barbara Brown Taylor, "Easter Preaching and the Lost Language of Salvation," *Journal for Preachers* 25.3 (Easter 2002): 18–25.

[2] Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), xvii.

[3] Barbara Brown Taylor, *Learning to Walk in the Dark* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 138.

faith—the very words she had taught us for so many years how to say, *sin* and *salvation* and *prayer*, now held less for her. Her apophaticism begins exactly with a "keen awareness of the limits of all language about God."[4]

By way of introduction to this troika of papers considering Taylor's work, I would invite us to notice that Taylor's reconsideration of Christian speech is precisely that—a reconsideration of Christian speech. I have suggested that Taylor is read by people for whom the mainline church is the church they don't attend; in a parallel way, for Taylor speech has not tidily or even wholly evaporated. Rather, to the extent that she no longer uses tried-and-true Christian language, that language remains the language she doesn't use. The shape of what she does not say anymore remains formative of what she now says. That is what makes her, not a self-help writer, but rather a twenty-first-century John of the Cross or Meister Eckhart.

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[4] Taylor, *Learning to Walk in the Dark,* 13.