

We Cannot Live By Bread Alone:  
The Meaning of Religion to Secular People

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According to Stephen Sykes, the Christian theologian has a responsibility to exercise “power in the church, a power which resides in his or her ...power to communicate. ...[A] theologian must communicate to other than fellow theologians, and that...is one of the few justifications for occupying valuable time and money in the production and reading of works of scholarship.”<sup>1</sup> Hence the title for this contribution, “We Cannot Live By Bread Alone: The Meaning of Religion for Secular People.” Here indeed is a critical issue in modern theology—who are we as religious, specifically Christian, people, and how do we go about teaching and retelling the news about Christ risen to those who do not define themselves by our categories?

To get at the matter, I will begin with what is, perhaps, an improbable source. I turn to psychology, specifically to Donald W. Winnicott (1896-1971). Winnicott, a British psychoanalyst, postulated the notion that the early months of infancy establish the psychic well-being not only of the nascent child, but also of the adolescent and adult.<sup>2</sup> Of crucial importance is the maternal relationship, which determines the development of the infant’s sense of self. In order to create a positive self for the baby, the mother is to be attentive to all of its needs. In so doing, the baby has “an experience of omnipotence,” and learns “that the mother intervenes as needed to

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity: Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Note D.W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development*, The International Psycho-Analytical Library, 64 (London: Hogarth Press, 1965), esp. “Ego Integration in Child Development” (56-63) and “Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self,” (140-152).

transform life for the well-being of the baby.”<sup>3</sup> This parenting theory is now known as “Attachment Parenting.” As just some of its advantages, it claims to foster the baby’s healthy independence, the ability to give and receive intimacy, and a strong sense of self. The relationship between the parent and the child is thus characterized by mutuality – mutual trust, giving, and connection.

Winnicott has observed that some mothers, in contrast, parent so that they are always in charge, determining when the baby gets held, fed, and, otherwise tended to. Consequently, the infants learn to anticipate the expectations of the mother and to shape their identity to please the mother and to conform to her wants. This method is contemporarily called “authoritarian parenting,” and when consistently used, forges in the child a “false self”, directed toward the perceived demands and needs of the mother, at the expense of the child’s “true self.” As a false self:

...the infant gets seduced into a compliance, and a compliant False Self reacts to environmental demands and the infant seems to accept them. Through this False Self the infant builds up a false set of relationships, and by means of introjections even attains a show of being real, so that the child may grow to be just like mother, nurse, aunt, brother, or whoever at the time dominates the scene.<sup>4</sup>

Walter Brueggemann claims that Winnicott’s insights about parenting can be borrowed by theologians and church people and applied to analyze the relationship between worshippers and God. He writes, “I propose that if God is experienced in doxology as always unqualifiedly good, fixed, sovereign, in charge, never acting, never impinged upon, it leads to worshippers who are docile, passive, and who

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<sup>3</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Israel’s Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 114. On this and the following pages, Brueggemann establishes the relationship between Winnicott’s theories and that of the relationship between worshippers and God. It is from here that I developed the thesis for this paper.

<sup>4</sup> Winnicott, “Ego Distortion,” 146.

finally act in bad faith to please God, whatever they may in fact feel.”<sup>5</sup> The “faithful,” so to speak, simply “go through the motions” in their relationship with God in order to guarantee little trouble, to maintain a predictable and untaxed relationship, and to present merely a pretense of authenticity in their faith allegiance to God’s claims. They have developed, to use Winnicott’s terminology, a “false self.”

I believe that Brueggemann not only has described the state of artificial faith amongst artificial Christians, but also the perception that the secular world has of Christian believers. This is to say, secularists see Christian faith as artificial. Christians are pictured as those who, without reflection, comply to a given set of laws and rules which, as a primary benefit, assures salvation. Paul Churchland, a prominent US scientist and a chief opponent of Christianity, characterizes this prevailing secular view of people of faith when he writes:

The common picture of the Moral Agent [namely someone who desires to act morally] as one who has acquiesced in a set of explicit rules imposed from the outside—from God, perhaps, or from Society—is dubious in the extreme. A relentless commitment to a handful of explicit rules does not make one a morally successful or a morally insightful person. The price of virtue is a good deal higher, and the path thereto is a good deal longer. It is much more accurate to see the moral person as one who has acquired a complex set of subtle and enviable skills: perceptual, cognitive, and behavioral.<sup>6</sup>

This is not only a clear indictment of artificial faith, but, from a very different quarter, serves to illustrate Winnicott’s theory of the artificial self—note Churchland’s description of the person of faith as “acquiescent,” implying mere passivity, docility, and rote compliance to an established order.

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<sup>5</sup> Brueggemann, *Israel’s Praise*, 114.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Churchland, *The Engine of Reason, the Seat of the Soul: A Philosophical Journey into the Brain* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 287.

But does this vision of the secular world provide a viable alternative to that which it perceives to be Christianity's? To answer this question, I turn again to another category in parenting theory. In addition to the two polarities proposed by Winnicott, namely "attachment parenting" and "authoritarian parenting," there exists yet another form of parenting, called alternatively "permissive parenting," or "laissez-faire parenting." This form of parenting allows the child to determine the direction of development. Here the parents provide few, if any, consistent discipline. They see their parental role as more friend than parent. Under this model, the children become either self-confident (even arrogant) or insecure and apprehensive. Either way, the children have little respect for established rules and authority. After extensive evaluations of children and the parenting styles of their guardians, Diana Baumrind, a leading psychologist in this field, determined that, "Parents of the least socially responsible and independent children were themselves noncontrolling [and] nondemanding..."<sup>7</sup> The dearth of parental structure at home leaves the children adrift in society and creates in them disdain for any conventional mores.

I submit that our society, not coincidentally often dubbed a "Permissive Society," ascribes to a philosophy of "permissive parenting." It too sets few limits—sexual, expressive, or otherwise. Although there are, indeed, behavioral legal limits, generally speaking, citizens accept general relativism. Robert L. Simon labels such tolerance as "Absolutophobia," the fear of an ultimate claim.<sup>8</sup> Tolerance is the gospel of the day. Said more eloquently by Hans-Georg Gadamer, this deep-seated

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<sup>7</sup> For a fine analysis of parenting styles and their effects on children and society, see Diana Baumrind, "Parental Disciplinary Patterns and Social Competence in Children" *Youth and Society* 9:3 (March 1978), 239-276. Here 253.

<sup>8</sup> Robert L. Simon, "The Paralysis of Absolutophobia," in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 43(42) (June 27, 1997), B6.

reluctance to censure anything is rooted in the Enlightenment and its fascination with and espousal of a “prejudice against prejudice.”<sup>9</sup> This situation is exacerbated in contemporary life, says sociologist Hans Mol, because:

In pluralistic societies [such as ours], the actual competition between a large variety of foci of identity has created dilemmas of commitment. ...Lack of commitment, lack of identity, meaninglessness, anomie and alienation are all very much related symptoms of society in which definitions of reality are no longer taken for granted because competition has relativized each and all of them.<sup>10</sup>

This is, I maintain, society’s direct parallel to permissive parenting, which avoids discipline, finds little use for ultimate claims, and relativizes all actions according to either whim or situation.

Ironically, the underpinnings for this laissez-faire societal development come from a fairly rigid framework. According to Robert Webber, the Enlightenment paradigm, upon which much of modernity was built, bases itself on three convictions. “Foundationalism” claims that there are societal principles which are beyond question, and which provide the fundamental building blocks of the social order. “Structuralism” asserts that every society needs ‘texts’ which provide sense and stability, and which can be uniformly interpreted by reason. Last, the “societal metanarrative” offers the community’s consistent string of meaning and purpose.<sup>11</sup>

It is the latter which particularly interests Webber, and us. He writes of it that:

Secularists have a grand metanarrative that moves from the origin of creation out of chance to the culmination of creation in some kind of golden age. And the means by which this goal will be accomplished, they argue, is through autonomous individualism, using the tool of

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<sup>9</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1989), 272.

<sup>10</sup> Hans Mol, *Identity and the Sacred: A Sketch for a New Social-Scientific Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976), 12.

<sup>11</sup> Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 19.

reason to interpret the text of science to determine the meaning and the future of the world.<sup>12</sup>

This individualism, coupled with a dependence primarily on science to provide necessary sense to life, leads people to disregard, and even disdain, an authoritative, communally addressed, and supposedly subjective word to the world.

Robert Jenson sees the notion of a societal metanarrative as no longer valid, however. He argues that although society longs for such communal cohesiveness, hope for it is all but destroyed in the postmodern world. Jenson poignantly describes this world as “a world that has no story and so cannot entertain promises.”<sup>13</sup> In contrast, he says, the Christian world does have a story. Says Jenson, “The story the Bible tells is asserted to be the story of a God with His creatures; that is, it is both assumed and explicitly asserted that there is a true story about the universe because there is a universal novelist/historian.”<sup>14</sup>

However, it is precisely the universality of this story that the Enlightenment explicitly set out to destroy. This mindset could not abide the “...notion that a faith claim in the biblical text could possibly continue to be authoritative for a particularistic community of interpretation”<sup>15</sup> The quest to win freedom from the “tyranny of the Christian myth” was based on a misguided notion that the Christian Church and its message fettered the human spirit and mind, thereby hindering human progress and, by extension, self-salvation. Unfortunately, all too often, when the Christian unifying story was waylaid by empirical investigation, the Church and its message, which sought to be respected on the terms of the world, capitulated. It

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<sup>12</sup> Webber, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Robert W. Jenson, “How the World Lost Its Story,” *First Things* 36 (October 1993), Section One.

<sup>14</sup> Jenson, “How the World Lost Its Story,” Section Three.

thereby acquiesced either to cultural relativism or its message became anachronistic and archaic. Either way, its distinct, prophetic story was in danger of being lost.

The abandonment of a common story, a common metanarrative, leads inevitably to societal despair. In the face of conflicting or relativized stories, society has no promise to be offered and trusted. We, as members of society, like children of permissive parents, trust excessively in ourselves, if we trust at all, and create our own self-serving story because no other is available.

Brueggemann acknowledges this despair, and finds that it manifests itself in several forms. The first form of pain exists in our broken relationships, coupled with:

the pain of lives of quiet desperation, of having achieved all the promises of our society and discovering failure and emptiness, of having become the false self required by idolatry, of having been docile, conformist, and passive for so long that one is either immobilized or one is a raging volcano without knowing where to dump the lava.

The depth of these hurts leads inevitably to violence which takes manifest form in a violence not only against those nearest to us, but in public policy. Ultimately, "After so much guilt and denial, we do not believe in an alternative future."<sup>16</sup>

This is indeed a cause for despair. It is also, however, an opportunity for a new beginning, for an attempt at "world building" in the most challenging and discouraging of circumstances. It will be a counter-cultural pursuit, as most noble pursuits are, requiring that society recognize the newly articulated counter-world as "authoritative, accepted as a given without a doubt or reservation, and without any entertainment of a plausible alternative." This is counter-cultural indeed,

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<sup>15</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 13-14.

<sup>16</sup> Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise*, 134.

demanding not just an external acceptance of the new reality, but rather a personalization of the newly established truth. With not a little hope mixed with an awareness of the stakes, Brueggemann says “When this reality is accepted as objectively true and personally mine, it becomes a norm (*nomos*) by which all else is tested.”<sup>17</sup>

A fine theory, if idealistic. So how indeed shall this be accomplished? Brueggemann looks to the Israelites, finding in their world a world much like ours. He believes that in the presence of all the other rival claims of their day, they made their case through a pattern of testimony, dispute, and advocacy. In his description of this pattern, Brueggemann writes:

The role of testimony is to advocate a rendering of truth and a version of reality that are urged over against other renderings and versions. The witnesses for Yahweh in the Old Testament advocate a truth and a reality in which Yahweh stands as the leading and preeminent character. Within Israel’s advocacy of a Yahweh-dominated truth and a Yahweh-governed reality, subordinated disputes occur even among Israelite witnesses. But taken all together these witnesses, different as they are, advocate a Yahweh-version of reality that is strongly in conflict with other versions of reality, and other renderings of truth that have been shaped without reference to Yahweh and that determinedly propose a reality and truth that is Yahweh-free.<sup>18</sup>

This is no small task, and must be undertaken with great care and intentionality. It is worthy of another conversation to expand on his claim that uniformity of witness is not a precondition to this vision. It is enough here to note that Brueggemann believes that it has been done and can be done again.

Not carelessly, however. As he maintains, “...our postmodern situation, which refuses to acknowledge a settled essence behind our pluralistic claims, must make a

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<sup>17</sup> Brueggemann, *Israel’s Praise*, 13-14.

<sup>18</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, xvi-xvii.

major and intentional investment in the practice of rhetoric, for the shape of reality finally depends on the power of speech.”<sup>19</sup> As people of the Word, it is speech that conveys our story, and characterizes our mission.

Jenson would agree with Brueggemann’s comparison of our present-day situation with that of the Israelites. However, he nuances this claim by noting that the early Church’s mission:

was directed to persons who *already* understood themselves as inhabitants of a narratable world...But this is precisely what the postmodern church cannot presume. What then? The obvious answer is that if the Church does not *find* her hearers antecedently inhabiting a narratable world, then the church must herself *be* that world.<sup>20</sup>

That, unsurprisingly, involves teaching, *catechesis*. As Jenson in another work notes, “Catechesis was born as the instruction needed to bring people from their normal religious communities to an abnormal one.”<sup>21</sup>

Here, then, the Bible text from which the title for this contribution comes, dovetails nicely with my assertion that the Church in the postmodern era must teach a clear and assertive faith in the midst of the cacophony of other cultural claims. It is not a coincidence that the phrase, “One does not live by bread alone,” is found in two places of Scripture, both dealing with temptation. Matthew 4:2-4 and Luke 4:3-4 tell of Jesus’ response to the devil’s temptation to turn stones into bread. Jesus declared that one does not live by bread alone, a clear rebuttal of the dishonest attempt to abate Jesus’ hunger after having fasted for forty days and forty nights.

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<sup>19</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 71.

<sup>20</sup> Jenson, *How the World Lost Its Story*, Part Four.

<sup>21</sup> Jenson, “Catechesis for Our Time,” *Marks of the Body of Christ* eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 140.

But Jesus here quotes from Scripture, Deuteronomy 8:3, to be exact. This portion of Deuteronomy is a passage from one of Moses' addresses to Israel, an address which, according to Bernhard Anderson, "...is made all the more forceful and relevant because it actually reflects Israel's temptations to compromise its faith with Canaanite culture, from the earliest days of the Conquest to the recent heyday of paganism under Manasseh."<sup>22</sup> Moses speaks here to a community able to recall the Exodus and its perils, and yet which stood on the verge of a new land filled with promises. He insists that the covenant between God and Israel was not made in the dusty past, but rather is renewed every day. This covenant is grounded on God's love for God's tiny band of chosen people, a choice which demonstrates undeserved grace, and effects responsibility and sacrifice. As such, the Israelites are to reject synergistic temptations such as intermarriage or cultural adaptations of their religious traditions.<sup>23</sup> It is in this framework that Moses asserts that one does not live by bread alone, referring to the manna, the "miserable food," which God provided on their journey. This explicit reference implies that one is not upheld by mere "human preferences but by anything and everything that the Lord alone decrees."<sup>24</sup>

This claim has been lost by the Church. It must be reasserted. This story of God's love and guidance to God's creatures, God's sustaining of creation, and God's redemption of the world, which is the Church's metanarrative, is also the world's. It is clear that the world does not hear it as such, if it hears it at all. It is clear that the

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<sup>22</sup> Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall [Simon and Schuster], 1986 [1957]), 377.

<sup>23</sup> Anderson, 380-383.

<sup>24</sup> S. Dean McBride, Jr., "Deuteronomy," *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version* ed. Wayne A. Meeks, (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 282.

secular world prefers to compose its own story, because it finds the story of the biblical God obscure and irrelevant. But, as Jenson claims:

Neither you nor I nor all of us together can so shape the world that it can make narrative sense; if God does not invent the world's story, then it has none, then the world has no narrative that is its own. If there is no God, or indeed, if there is some other God than the God of the Bible, there is no narratable world.

Moreover, if there is not the biblical God, then realistic narrative is not a plausible means for our human self-understanding. Human consciousness is too obscure a mystery to itself for us to script our own lives.<sup>25</sup>

"Scripting our own lives," however, is precisely what the secular world likes to do. And not just the secular world, but much to Moses' chagrin, it is the habit of the faithful as well. Jenson notes elsewhere that the distinguishing factor between our day and that of the early church is that not only the world does not know the story, but neither does the church.<sup>26</sup> The story has been lost, or at best muted by the other cultural tales.

So what is one to make of all of this? My title asks, "what is the meaning of religion to the secular world?" My brief survey indicates that religion has no meaning to the secular world, or that it has but one individually-determined meaning amongst a plethora of equally valid meanings, of equally valid stories, if you will.

Left there, the paper would be somewhat depressing. But as Christians, we are people of a hopeful story. This story continues to be told, and continues to be told in worship. It is here, in worship, that the story and the catechesis can best be, must be, expressed. Gordon Lathrop, liturgical theologian, says that:

We seem to have forgotten the idea long ago praised by de Tocqueville as characteristic of American culture and useful in all democracies, that

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<sup>25</sup> Jenson, *How the World Lost Its Story*, Section Three.

<sup>26</sup> Jenson, "Catechesis for our Time," 142.

volunteer gatherings of diverse people in local communities can enact a shared vision that has public and communal meaning combating the deleterious effects of individualism.<sup>27</sup>

Individualism, expressed in a permissive society where what is good for you is O.K. with me, diminishes the need for and responsiveness to a communal story. But worship brings together alienated individuals and leads them to hear the story together, the metanarrative of the church. As Jenson says, "When we teach would-be believers how to worship, we teach them to know God."<sup>28</sup>

This is a critical claim in the whirlwind of the world in which the people know many gods. And it exactly the reason why Sykes maintains that "The activity of worship sharpens the contrast" between the claims of the church and the secular world.<sup>29</sup> The radical flavor, meaning and implication of worship has been ceded to the banality of culture, all the more reason to be all the more adamant and clear about our identity. As Jenson says, "'Going to church' must be a journey to the place where we will behold our destiny, where we will see what is to come of us."<sup>30</sup>

What is to come of us, of course, is known in the person of Jesus Christ. Worship provides an opportunity for *anamnesis*, remembering, recollecting, "the deeds of Jesus set in the context of God."<sup>31</sup> It is what American poet Wendell Berry calls the Judeo-Christian's "pattern of reminding."<sup>32</sup> This reminding of the specifics of God's interaction with creation must take place, for if it does not, "Doxology which robs Israel of its concrete memory yields a god who does not do anything and who is

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<sup>27</sup> Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Jenson, "Catechesis for our Time," 145.

<sup>29</sup> Sykes, 274.

<sup>30</sup> Jenson, "How the World Lost Its Story," Section Six.

<sup>31</sup> Sykes, 265.

<sup>32</sup> Wendell Berry, "The Responsibility of the Poet," *What Are People For?* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 91.

therefore an idol,"<sup>33</sup> or, in other words, a not-good-enough mother. Israel and the Church are in danger of developing a false self.

The ritual which is worship, then, is the venue for the perpetuation of the story, giving new and seasoned believers their true identity in a world which does not provide one, and does not care if it has one. Worship provides a chance to feed our "hunger to move beyond self, to return our energy and worth to the One from whom it has been granted. In our return to that One, we find our deepest joy. That is, what it means to 'glorify God and enjoy God forever.'"<sup>34</sup>

I assert that it is in worship that Christians receive their meaning, and from this experience and their participation in it, they can therefore better articulate that meaning to the secular world. Although, says Brueggemann, "...the world may think [that religious faith] is subjective self-deception...the assembly which credits the speech and action knows that the reality of God is not a reality unless it is visibly done in, with, and by the community."<sup>35</sup>

But what is this reality? It is an event, not something that happened, but something that happens. According to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, "one might add that when something happens, the situation changes. An event, then, may be said to be a change from one state of affairs to another."<sup>36</sup> This event is known in Christian circle shorthand as "the Christ event," and is the primal and primary story to be related through worship.

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<sup>33</sup> Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise*, 105.

<sup>34</sup> Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise*, 1.

<sup>35</sup> Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise*, 10.

The Christian claim is that something did indeed happen, and that our situation has radically changed. This is precisely why what is preached is labeled good *news*. According to Richard A. Norris, this claim of newness demonstrates the barrenness of secular claims. “No doubt,” he says, “that explains why good ideas and high ideals, however edifying or enlightening, do not, in and of themselves, qualify as good news; it is at least in part because they do not actually occur, except, to be sure, notionally.”<sup>37</sup> These good ideas, which come in the guise of promises from self-help books, or astrology, or nature, or individualistic self-gratification, are ultimately hollow and empty promises of a promise, the results of which cannot be delivered.

In today’s postmodern world, Christian worship is critical to narrate the story which can shape the world in a transformative way. The story is heard and imbibed by the worshipers, so that they can be the means of this transformation. Lathrop juxtaposes a tradition in Native American worship which claims that the shaman becomes a “hole through which the power could come” with Christian worship. In Christian worship, says he, “it is the assembly itself, encountering Christ in word and sacrament that becomes a hole in the fabric of things, through which life-giving power flows into the world.”<sup>38</sup>

My claim that Christian worship is essential for determining the meaning of religion to the secular person should be now clear. But more specifically, I claim that Christian worship without the Eucharist does not suffice. It is in the Eucharist, in the weekly, regular administration of the Lord’s Supper, that the people of Christ will

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<sup>36</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1999 [1983]), 15.

<sup>37</sup> Richard A. Norris, Jr., “The Eucharist in the Church,” *Marks of the Body of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 87.

<sup>38</sup> Lathrop, 212.

reclaim and retain their identity, by hearing their story, and then narrating it to the world, proclaiming its authority, its universality, and its good newsiness. As Jenson says:

For the ancient church, the walls of the place of Eucharist, whether these were the walls of a basement or of Hagia Sophia or of an imaginary circle in the desert, enclosed a world. And the great drama of the Eucharist was the narrative life of that world. Nor was this a fictive world, for its drama is precisely the “real” presence of all reality’s true author, elsewhere denied. The classical liturgical action of the church was not about anything else at all; it was itself the reality about which truth could be told.

In the postmodern world, if a congregation or churchly agency wants to be “relevant,” here is the first step; it must recover the classic liturgy of the church, in all its dramatic density, sensual actuality, and brutal realism, and make this the one exclusive center of its life.<sup>39</sup>

The partaking of the bread and the wine necessitates a hearing of the promise and a response of thanksgiving. And when one hears the promise and speaks words of thanks to God, one not only hears but participates in the ongoing retelling of the story. Sykes is clear on this point, that “The self-sacrifice of Christ proclaimed anew at each Eucharist makes an uncompromisingly absolutist demand.”<sup>40</sup> Today’s world shirks this sort of demand, making it all the more important to be expressed. The absolutist demand overcomes individualistic claims, insisting that the disparate voices of the secular world come together to worship the author of the world’s narrative.

I began by saying that I am convinced that the secular world sees the Christian world as irrelevant, as out of touch with modern advances, and, implicitly, with the variety of other equally legitimate stories. If we as Christians are indeed the idolatrous people which Brueggemann, with the assistance of Winnicott, describes, there is

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<sup>39</sup> Jenson, “How the World Lost Its Story,” Section Four.

reason for the secular critique. But it need not be so. Brueggemann claims that Christians may make use of four ways to make the Christian story relevant, and in the meantime bring God's world of life to the existing world of death. He believes 1) that Christians must pronounce the spiritual dimension of life, a dimension unpopular due to the emphasis on materialism in today's world. He maintains 2) that Christians are to articulate the global implications of the gospel message, a message which crosses human-made borders and boundaries. He insists 3) that we are to attend to the poor and oppressed of our nations, speaking on behalf of those who have small voices. And he believes 4) that Christians are to sound a note of hope in a world either deaf to hear it, or who are attuned to other, deathly, voices.

Again, we turn to Robert Jenson, who says that such a purpose, always grounded in the message of Christ and God's interaction in the world, a purpose heard and tasted through worship, is precisely the Church's mission to the world. Although the church is indeed to listen, its primary job is to speak, says he. "Those who have not the stomach for this should seek some other society in which to be religious. Besides, what the world has to say is always pretty much the same old thing. The whole point of the gospel is that it is a *new* thing."<sup>41</sup>

The gospel *is* a new thing, event that it is. And now it needs to be proclaimed to a *new world*, a postmodern world, a world which has no guiding presence, and fools itself into thinking that this is as it should be. With a renewed commitment for lively, dramatic, narrative and even apocalyptic worship, worship that revolves around the weekly proclamation of the word and celebration of the meal, the

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<sup>40</sup> Sykes, 274.

Christian community can have its authentic self restored. Refreshed, it can enter into the secular world as narrators of a story which has universal meaning.

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<sup>41</sup> Jenson, *Story and Promise: A Brief Theology of the Gospel About Jesus* (Ramsey, NJ: Sigler Press, 1989 [1973]), 177.