"If It Be Your Will":
Making Promises with Derrida, Ricoeur and Chauvet

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ABSTRACT: Through a critical engagement with the work of Derrida, Ricoeur and Chauvet, the paper defines the Christian vow or promise as an ever-new performance of the self in favour of the 'other'. The notion of the asymmetry of one's relationship with the other is explored in terms of a 'call' in the face of another, any other, which is experienced as more originary that one's own sense of self. This call has a particularly apocalyptic or eschatological dimension to it. It unsettles and destabilises the Christian self in the same movement as it produces and makes that self real. The call effects a radical destabalization of the self such that the self may only come to be by making room for the other who is Christ. The paper concludes that eucharistic worship, as a constant re/membering of the Christian's death and resurrection in Christ, is a primary or exemplary instance of the vow so defined.

> *If it be your will*
> *That a voice be true*
> *From this broken hill*
> *I will sing to you*
> *From this broken hill*
> *All your praises they shall ring*
> *If it be your will*
> *To let me sing.*
>
> **Leonard Cohen**[1]

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I should like to explore the meaning of making vows or promises, particularly as this relates to the Christian experience of worship. Along the way I shall be making three claims. First, that vows or promises are performances of the self in favour of another. Second, that in the West at least, vows or promises inscribe a fundamentally Jewish or Christian sense of the real. Finally, that the weekly gathering of Christians to perform the Scriptures and celebrate the sacrament is essentially promissory in structure and effect, and may therefore be described as an exemplary experience of the vow so defined. I shall substantiate my claims by engaging a number of contemporary French thinkers. Chief amongst these are two philosophers, Jacques Derrida and Paul Ricoeur, and a theologian, Louis-Marie Chauvet. Derrida has written about a 'performative self' which is always already 'promised' and 'responsible,' and about Western religion as an 'exemplary' instance of the performative as such. Paul Ricoeur organises his philosophy around the thought of 'oneself as another' and locates that self in a sense of conviction/decision which he calls 'attestation' or 'testimony'. Chauvet writes about Christian worship as a symbolic performance of the 'body of Christ,' that is, a body constituted as a self only through the trial of suffering and death out of love for the other. Placed together in this way, 'intertextually,'

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[1] From the song "If It Be Your Will" on *Various Positions* (Columbia Records), 1984.

as Kristeva might say, the resonances between the three will help me to inaugurate some new thoughts concerning the vow.

CLAIM 1: VOWS OR PROMISES ARE PERFORMANCES OF THE SELF IN FAVOUR OF ANOTHER

1.1 The Performative

Let us begin, then, by examining the nature of 'performance' or 'the performative'. The phrase, as first coined by J.L. Austin, denotes a statement which, despite appearances to the contrary, is not about truth or falsity in a descriptive or constative sense, but rather, as an utterance, performs the very action is seems to represent.[2] For Austin, vows or promises are performatives in this sense. They should not be taken as 'outward and visible signs' of internal mental or spiritual actions, but rather as words which *are themselves* the accomplishment of a bond.[3] So that when I say, in a wedding ceremony, "I take this man as my lawful wedded husband," it is the *words themselves* which accomplish or affect the marriage. Austin did not wish to imply by this that promissory words have a power in and of themselves, apart from the context in which they are uttered. On the contrary, performatives are said to be 'conventional acts' in the sense that they imply and refer to 'the total situation in which the utterance is issued—the total speech-act'.[4] It is essential for my purpose that we understand what Austin meant by this.

In the early chapters of *How To Do Things With Words,* Austin argues that in order for performatives to be 'successful,' the speaker or speakers need to both 'intend' and 'actually conduct themselves' in a manner 'appropriate' to the context in which they are speaking.[5] So, to invoke our marriage example again, the words "I take this man to be my lawful wedded husband" would not *successfully* perform a marriage unless they were spoken within the context of a conventional wedding ceremony with witnesses, an authorized celebrant, the lawful paperwork etc. The participants would also have to mean what they say when they say it. For these reasons, Austin distinguishes between 'happy' and 'unhappy' performatives i.e. performatives which are successful because of right intention and procedural fidelity, and those which are not. A good example of the 'unhappy' performative would be a promise made in the context of a piece of theatre, where both the promiser and the promisee are playing roles which begin and end with the play itself.[6]

Performatives, then, are statements which ultimately entail, imply, or presuppose what may only be described as 'other performatives' in a total contextual situation, a total 'speech-act' in which even apparently constative utterances are made to function in a performative manner.[7] By this move, Austin ultimately breaks down the distinction between performative and constative utterances, opting in the later parts of his book for a new taxonomy of language which sees *all* language as performative in some way or another. All language, he says, whether it is uttered in the explicitly performative 'first person indicative active' or not, is essentially action-oriented, making explicit the '*force* or meaning' in an utterance, 'how it

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[2] John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 4-6
[3] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* , p 10
[4] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* , pp 18, 52
[5] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* pp 8, 15
[6] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* p 22
[7] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* , pp. 47-49, 52

is to be taken'.[8] From there he divides language into three kinds of performative action: the locutionary (doing something *as* saying something), the illocutionary (doing something *in* or *by* saying something), and perlocution (saying something in order to *produce effects* in other people).[9] Finally, then, there is a recognition that every statement, even those which appear to be about some kind of pre-existing truth or falsity, are themselves also ways of establishing or *accomplishing* that truth or falsity. In that sense, truth is utterly dependent on a sense of the context in which that truth is being discussed.[10] While constative statements might be more locutionary in character, and explicit performatives more illocutionary, each is made possible by the other in a total speech context which is, itself, ultimately performative.[11]

Of course, there are a number of well-rehearsed objections to this theory of the performative utterance, many of them anticipated by Austin himself. Derrida points to a contradiction in Austin's determination of context as a criteria for 'happy' performance. The requirement of a 'conscious presence of the intention of the speaking subject in the totality of his speech act' implies that the speaking subject is able to *master the meaning* of his or her performance in its specifically determined context. No residue of meaning may overflow or transgress that sense of context.[12] The conventions that authorize are therefore made coextensive with, and transparent to, the intention of the speaking subject. Derrida is right to say that such a situation represents not the reality of the ordinary speech-situation, but rather a philosophical reduction which is imposed upon that situation by Austin.[13] One may note the way in which Austin rules 'out of play' a whole variety of 'infelicities' which nevertheless, he admits, inhere in '*all*' conventional acts![14] He recognises, at one point, that it is often extremely difficult to determine how far a particular procedure or convention extends. 'Can a dog or a penguin be baptised?' he asks.[15] While acknowledging that innovations in conventional understanding are a potential problem for contextual delimitation, Austin chooses to rule such innovations 'out of play'.[16] Surely there is an implicit recognition, here, that performatives are not finally subject to the rule of either convention or intention? Derrida believes so. Indeed, he argues that it is *what Austin excludes* that makes the performative work as performative. Paradoxically, 'a successful performative is necessarily an "impure" performative'. What makes the performative possible is its citational doubling [*doublure*], its dissociation from itself in 'the pure singularity of the event'.[17] What does Derrida mean to say by this?

1.2 The Performative as 'Peverformative'

Derrida's engagement with the 'performative' is at the heart of all he has written. In the 1966 essay 'Signature Event Context,' which I have been citing, Derrida built a theory of performance around the idea of the 'iterable' [from the Sanscrit, *itar*, or 'other'], that sense in

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[8] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, p 73
[9] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, pp 99-101
[10] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, pp 143, 146
[11] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, p 146
[12] Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, *Limited Inc.*, ed. Gerald Graf, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p 14. Austin defines an 'infelicity' as either a '*misinvocation* or *misexecution*' of procedural rules stemming from the conventional setting in which a performative utterance takes place (*How To Do Things with Words*, p 17).
[13] Derrida, "Signature Event Context," p 17
[14] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, pp 18, 19
[15] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, p 31
[16] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, pp 29-31
[17] Derrida, "Signature Event Context," p 17

which language is said to repeat itself by also differing from itself. In order for language to be language, in order for language to actually communicate, it must retain that capacity in the absence of either its supposed 'author' (speaker) or its 'reader' (hearer). At the scene of writing, an author presumes that his or her text will be readable by absent readers, whether that absence be a consequence of time or space. Similarly, in the scene of reading, a reader presumes that a text is readable apart from the presence of an authorial intention. This means that writing, or the possibility of meaningful communication in general, is predicated not upon the presence of meaning, but upon its absence:

> For a writing to be writing it must continue to "act" and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, be it because of a temporary absence, because he is dead, or, more generally, because he has not employed his absolutely actual or present intention or attention, the plenitude of his desire to say what he means, in order to sustain what seems to be written "in his name".

In this sense, the situation of the writer or signer is exactly the same as that of the addressee or reader. In either case, there is a '*drift*' [*dérive*] in writing which takes it away from human intention and consciousness as the 'ultimate authority'. There is a double movement here, inscribed and represented in the notion of iterability. On the one hand, language must be repeatable in order to communicate. On the other hand, that very repetition is made possible only by the movement of 'absolute différance' (both difference and deferral) which ruptures the totalising genealogy of ontological presence.[18] The implications of these findings go well beyond a simple analysis of communication in language:

> Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written (in the current sense of this opposition), in a small unit or a large unit, can be *cited,* put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable. This does not imply that the mark is valid outside of a context, but on the contrary that there are only concepts without any centre or absolute anchorage.[19]

Iterability means that contexts and intentions can no longer be seen as stable horizons by which the meaning of performatives are fixed. Iterability implies that performatives are really 'peverformatives'—malformed performanatives[20]—creations of meaning that constantly escape such controls by virtue of the movement of *différance*, classically defined in *Of Grammatology* as that which 'produces what it forbids, makes possible the very thing that it makes impossible.'[21] In this perspective, the stabilization of meaning in vows would appear to be at issue as well, and this because of the interrupting movement within the promising intention of something which is 'other,' something that is 'alter-ego'.[22] On the one hand, a promise could not be a promise without being repeatable, as an event, in another context. On the other hand, such repeatability is necessarily at odds with itself, giving place to a difference that Derrida likens to the work of a parasite. A parasite (promise) depends on the hospitality of its host (a self). It 'takes place' in a space the host provides (if unintentionally), but it never entirely *takes* the place of the host. Thus, a promise can only 'take place' as an event whose meaning is never entirely completed, or whose meaning could always be something other than

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[18] Derrida, "Signature Event Context," p 8
[19] Derrida, "Signature Event Context," p 12
[20] Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p 136
[21] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, corrected ed. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), p 143
[22] Jacques Derrida, "Limited Inc a B C," trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, *Limited Inc.*, ed. Gerald Graf, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p 76

it is.[23] It implicates the self in ways that the self does not intend, and cannot ultimately control. It is to this sense of otherness at the heart of the vowing self that I now turn.

1.3 The Self in Favour of the Other

In his own critique of speech-acts, Paul Ricoeur emphasises that the performative effect of language would not be possible apart from the action of human selves. The performative requires that for every speech-act there is a self or agent who gives that speech its force. This is particularly clear in the context of illocutionary speech, where the force of utterance implies that the words "I affirm" might be placed at the beginning of every such statement, making the involvement of a self explicit. But there is a second implication as well. The words "I affirm that . . ." would be completely unnecessary were there not another person to whom the words are being addressed. This means that illocutionary speech is also *interlocutionary*.[24] Performative speech may therefore be described as an essentially 'bi-polar phenomenon: it assumes, simultaneously, an "I" that speaks and a "you" to whom the former addresses itself.' Here "I affirm that" equals "I declare to *you* that" and "I promise that" equals "I promise *you* that". The axiom Ricoeur draws from this analysis will prove decisive for our thesis: 'every advance made in the direction of the selfhood of the speaker of the agent has as its counterpart a comparable advance in the otherness of the partner'. [25]

But who and what is this self that speaks? And who or what is the other that is addressed? These questions are unanswerable, says Ricoeur, unless one first recognises, with Heidegger, that a self is always already embedded in *temporality* and therefore in a kind of *historical narrative* which orients itself toward the future.[26] The problematics of the self would then be oriented towards the question of how it is that personal identity may be established and maintained through time.[27] Here Ricoeur proposes what he calls a 'narrative' theory of the self, gathered around the polar concepts of *character* and the *keeping of one's word*. Let us examine each of these in turn, noting the ways in which the self and the other are mutually implicated.

Character designates 'a set of distinctive marks which permit the reidentification of a human individual as being the same'.[28] It is formed through a continual and ongoing negotiation between sedimentation and innovation in bodily praxis, but more significantly between relationship to the other and the internalisation of such relations. In the context of my thesis, I wish to emphasise the second of these processes, because here the constitution of the self is predicated upon a fundamental recognition of values, norms, ideals, even heroes, in the 'other' by which the self comes to identify itself with a proper name. Despite the inevitable appropriations and projections involved in such a process at the psychological level, Ricoeur notes that a certain kind of un-erasable loyalty and fidelity is implied, such that what others say about the self becomes an indispensable source of *stability* in character.[29] Why am I a self that perseveres through time? Because others recognise me as such, and because I identify myself in stable characters beyond myself.

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[23] Derrida, "Limited Inc a B C," , p 90
[24] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p 43
[25] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* , pp 43, 44
[26] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* , p 113.
[27] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* , p 117, 118
[28] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* , p 119
[29] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* , pp 121, 122

Character is of course a narrative concept. In narrative, according to Ricoeur, personal identity is not identical with character, but is constructed in the relationship between character and *plot*. Narrative identity therefore has a distinctively *event* nature. It is performed as a 'discordant concordance,' in which heterogeneous elements are synthesized into the unitary whole that is narrative itself. 'The paradox of emplotment,' says Ricoeur, 'is that it inverts the effect of contingency, in the sense of that which could have happened differently or might not have happened at all, by incorporating it in some way into the effect of necessity or probability exerted by the configuring act'.[30] In the context of narrative strategy, identity is established by a transference of the event-nature of the unfolding plot onto individual characters, such that characters become, themselves, correlative versions of the larger story. Indeed, the event-forces cut both ways in this situation, because character produces plot as much as plot produces character.[31] There is a dialectical notion of freedom here, in the Kantian rather than the Hegelian sense. While the self is constituted by the force of a larger history in which is simply arrives, or it 'thrown,' it also possesses a performative power of initiative, whereby it can reinscribe what it receives in genuinely original ways.[32] In the language of narrative, such a self might be called a 'character' or a 'narrator,' or perhaps even a 'co-author'.[33] But there is another implied in this taxonomy, an 'other' who is not simply another person, another character, but also the force of the 'story' in which the self finds itself. But what 'is' this story, and who is its author? These are important questions indeed! Unfortunately I shall have to delay that discussion for now and turn, instead, to that other source of narrative identity, the *keeping of one's word*.

With *the keeping of one's word*, we discover that there is yet another 'other' at the heart of the self, this time in the form of an ethical obligation. According to Ricoeur, the question 'who is the self?" may only be answered in the singularity of an "I" who 'has the obligation to safeguard the institution of language and to respond to the trust that the other places in my faithfulness'.[34] This statement carries further that emerging sense I have from Ricoeur in which the 'real' or narrative self is a *unique event* in the negotiation between the 'same' (character) and the 'other' (plot, author, theme, other characters). From the side of the other, Ricoeur develops a theory of *self-constancy* as the ethical fulfilment or completion of narrative. Citing Benjamin, he notes the way in which narratives facilitate exchanges of experience that are inevitably assessed in terms of praise or blame, approval or disapproval. Even where specific values are transformed through the course of a narrative, one may never escape the fact of valuation. Even with history, that mode of narrative that seeks to be the least polemical with regard to values, the historian cannot help but be drawn into the evaluating universes which he or she is investigating. So much so that 'At least in the mode of imagination and sympathy the historian brings back to life ways of evaluating which continue to belong to our deepest humanity,' and this is the case even where historical research reveals only monsters and victims. In this last instance, the relation of debt to the past is transformed into 'the duty never to forget'.[35]

Valuation in narrative therefore inscribes an originary sense of the other who 'calls' the self to account, in the Lévinasian sense. Here there is both an 'other' who counts on me, who calls out "Where are you? I need you!" and a 'me' who becomes accountable, who answers "Here I

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[30] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p 142
[31] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, pp 143, 144
[32] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p 147
[33] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, pp 159, 160
[34] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p 124
[35] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p 164

am!". Lévinas' term 'responsibility' unites these two senses. Here, says Ricoeur, there is a constancy that cannot be reduced to a perpetuation of the same.[36] In the "Here I Am" the self responds to the call of the other with a sense of resolute decision, not as a repression of the awareness that things may be otherwise (in the midst of a story, things may *always* be otherwise), but rather with that sense that "sure, I could do things differently, but here is where I stand".[37] This is the moment of *promising,* of *attestation*, of *testimony*, the moment at which the self is posited or performed *as a self*. Now, let us be clear about what this means. *Attestation* is not, in Ricoeur, the adding of another to the self after that self has been established in some kind of monadic unity. Rather, the self is *always already* that tension between the other and the same that he calls responsibility. In phenomenological terms, the self is constituted in a threefold experience of *passivity*: a passivity towards one's body, a passivity towards someone or something other than oneself, but also the passivity experienced in self-relation that Heidegger called *Gewissen* or 'conscience'.[38] I should like to conclude my discussion of Ricoeur with a brief reflection on the way in which each of these categories might shed light upon the vow.

The body, says Ricoeur, has a two-fold adherence: to the world of things and to the self.[39] This means that the body represents the other *in* the self, a self that may not be posited apart from the resistance which the body offers in the form of *suffering*. Suffering, says Ricoeur, is not simply physical pain, though it is that too. It is also the experience of aporias in the narrative of one's life, 'the incapacity to tell a story, the refusal to account, the insistence of the untellable'. As I noted earlier, the power to tell a story is also an experience of the power to *act*, to posit the self as a narrative event unfolding through time. Ricoeur cites Husserl, who noted that the body even appears to precede the distinction between the voluntary and the involuntary. Thus, the experience of suffering might be understood as the moment when embodied *existence* appears to resist the power to tell a particular story *about* that existence.[40] Still, there is an implicit recognition in this account that another story may be told, a story about 'evil'. Most of the 'evil' in the world, says Ricoeur, is inflicted by humans on other humans, and thus the experience of pain in one's own body, and the experience of another's power over me, coincide to the point of becoming virtually 'indistinguishable'.[41] One might conclude, then, that while suffering offers a serious resistance to the ambition to tell a *particular* story, it does not appear to prohibit the possibility of telling stories altogether. Having suffered, one must tell one's story *differently* or *otherwise*. Vows, as performances of the self, would therefore require that the experience of suffering, and even of the resistance of suffering to certain kinds of performance, be taken seriously. This, I think, is precisely what Christian vows do most excellently, with their two-fold insistence on the *undergoing* of suffering and the *resistance* before evil.

In turning to the otherness of other people, I note, again, the confrontation—at once admiring and critical—that Ricoeur makes with Emmanuel Lévinas. Levinas had argued, in *Totality and Infinity,* that the injunction from the Other takes place in a space which is inherently asymmetrical. The Other is the teaching master who the "I" is powerless to objectify. The "I" and the "Other" cannot, therefore, be correlated within a pre-existing framework or ideological

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[36] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p 165
[37] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, pp 167, 168
[38] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p 318
[39] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p 319
[40] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p 320. A similar perspective is developed in Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985)
[41] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p 320

system. The Other is above and beyond correlation because he or she is from infinity.[42]
Ricoeur interprets this talk of 'asymmetry' and 'relation without relation' as hyperbolic, and
therefore overstated. 'The Other absolves itself from relation in the same movement by which
the Infinite draws free from totality'. Ricoeur argues that Levinas found this move necessary
only because he had *already* identified the Platonic category of the 'same' with the 'self' in an
equally hyperbolic way. Here the ego is locked up in itself, absolutely incapable of the
Other.[43] Ironically, the later writings correct this disingenuousness, according to Ricoeur, not
by a withdrawal from hyperbole, but by the use of an even more radical hyperbole. In
Otherwise Than Being, Lévinas wrote of the Other not as a master teacher but as an offender or
persecutor in need of pardon, and that such a thing might only be affected by the willingness of
the "I" to substitute itself for the Other. Here it is an 'expiation,' or substitution, which makes
the relation between alterity and identity possible. Thus, Levinas can speak of a 'gestation' of
the other in the same whereby I am bound in relation to the other before I am bound to even
my own body. [44] In this Ricoeur discerns a welcome shift in Levinas' conception of the self.
Here the Self is no longer the Same, but its contrary, Substitution, a reflexive self in which the
otherness of the Other is always already present, not as a suspect representation, but as the
'trace' of infinity. This implies, of course, a self which possesses a capacity for the Other, a
native openness to address and discovery, from the very beginning.[45] In this perspective, the
vow or performance of self, would become the 'mode of truth' by which the self bears witness
to the other-in-the-self. Far from positing the self as some kind of Cartesian foundation, the
vow becomes the evidence that an eternal return of the Same is simply not possible.

The closest proximity of the other in the self is what Ricoeur calls, after Heidegger, *Gewissen,*
or conscience. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger has spoken of conscience as the awakening of a
self that could be distinguished from the 'they'. The awakening happens when a 'call' [*Ruf*] or
'summons' [*Anruf*] is heard.[46] There are two agencies here, and there is a dissymmetry in
favour of the agency that calls. Lest we hear these words in a moralistic sense, or press them
into the service of a dialectic between 'good' conscience and 'bad' conscience, Ricoeur
reminds us that the call in Heidegger actually 'says' nothing, indeed, the caller is none other
than Dasein itself! Yet, the call is experienced as from somewhere else, "*from beyond me and
over me*" [*aus mir und doch über mich*],[47] reminding Dasein of its thrownness, and therefore of
its debt to all that is more primordial than itself. While this doctrine of being guilty, or
indebted, certainly calls for action on the part of Dasein, Heidegger, it seems, refrained from
speculating on precisely what that action ought to be.[48] While Heidegger's theory has the
advantage of being free of moralism, it has the disadvantage of promulgating a

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[42] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), p 216

[43] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* , p 337. The passage Ricoeur has in mind is from *Time and the Other*, where Lévinas speaks about the ego as insomnia: a wakefulness in which there is not yet anything that could be called conscious agency or intention, a moment between simple being and personal willing or knowing: 'One is detached from any object, any content, and yet there is presence'. At this moment, the sheer fact of presence is oppressive because one is 'held by being, held to be'. Wakefulness, insomnia, is utterly anonymous because there is not yet subjective agency: 'I am, one might say, the object rather than the subject of anonymous thought' [Emmanuel Lévinas, *Time and the Other (and Additional Essays)*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), pp 65, 66]

[44] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise Than Being or, Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, 1998 ed. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981), pp 15, 84, 76.

[45] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* , pp 339, 340

[46] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein Und Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp 248-255

[47] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* , p 348

[48] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* , 350

'demoralization' of human behaviour.   For that reason, Ricoeur explores, instead, a model of conscience that joins '*injunction*' and '*attestation*'.   Here 'Listening to the voice of conscience would signify being-enjoined by the Other.   In this way, the rightful place of the notion of *debt* would be acknowledged, a notion too hastily ontologized by Heidegger at the expense of the ethical dimension of indebtedness'.[49]   But how does one retain the ethical injunction inscribed in responsibility, without becoming moralistic at the same time?

Derrida, for his part, opts for a 'mystical'[50] kind of responsibility, a duty 'beyond' either debt *or* duty as they are ordinarily understood: 'In order to fulfil my duty towards God [Derrida's name for the other who calls, *any* other], I must not act *out of duty*, by means of that form of generality that can always be mediated and communicated and that is called duty. The absolute duty that binds me to God himself, in faith, must function beyond and against any duty I have'. This absolute duty appears to operate, in Derrida, as a gift or sacrifice that is beyond 'both debt and duty, beyond duty as a form of debt'.[51]   In an extraordinary meditation upon the story of the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22.1-19) , Derrida claims that the duty 'beyond' duty is nothing other than the necessity of choosing, like Abraham, between many goods, many 'others' for whom I am originarily responsible*: to be prepared to choose between the other and the other, to give to one the gift of death, and to another life.* Paradoxically, the willingness to accomplish this 'absolute duty' also absolves us of every ordinary debt and releases us from every moral duty. And all this *without our knowing why.* Derrida makes Abraham a 'witness' of these things, but as a necessarily silent witness who must keep the 'secret' of the absolute because is can never be understood, even by the one witnessing.[52] 'Such, in fact, is the paradoxical condition of every decision: it cannot be deduced from a form of knowledge of which it would simply be the effect, conclusion, or explication. It structurally breaches knowledge and is thus destined to nonmanifestation; a decision is, in the end, secret. It remains secret in the very instant of its performance'.[53] Citing Kierkegaard, who said that if he were to speak of the duty to God he would need to speak in tongues, Derrida claims that the witness to absolute duty is at the essence of that performative he calls, alternatively, 'testimony' or 'faith'.[54] Here that vow is a performative decision which testifies to both the possibility of moral life and the impossibility of a total ethical code. This squares quite nicely, I think, with Ricoeur's citation from Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption,* where he finds in the *Song of Songs* a form of commandment that is not yet a law, in the pleading of the lover to his beloved: "love me".[55] The moment of conviction and of attestation appeals to the power of this singular pleading in conscience, even as it is unable to stabilize some kind of moral code in response.

1.4 A Question: are Derrida and Ricoeur compatible on the theory of a responsible self?

I am creating my discourse on the vow by weaving together the thought of Ricoeur and Derrida. But is this really possible?   From a Derridean point of view, does not Ricoeur, with his positing of a 'narrative self' which negotiates the difference between the other and the same, simply repeat the Hegelian dialectic of thesis and anti-thesis which resolves itself into a

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[49] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* , p 351

[50] Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority," *Cardozo Law Review* 11 (1990): 919-1045.

[51] Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p 63

[52] Derrida, *The Gift of Death* , pp 72, 73

[53] Derrida, *The Gift of Death* , p 77

[54] Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," trans. Samuel Weber, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar, (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), p 98

[55] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* , p 351

synthesis? Does he not, therefore, simply repeat the delusory march of metaphysical self-presence through history, thus failing to seriously address that history's aporias? I would say no. On the contrary, like Derrida, Ricoeur suspects that history and the self and everything are ultimately resistant to such monadic topologies. This may be seen in what he says about the self in postmodern literature or science fiction, where the classical features of character are all but erased in favour of some kind of stream of consciousness. The effect of such writing is to erase a sense of the self as the same through time (character) in favour of a self which is far more contingent and far less accomplished.[56] Ricoeur notes that while these literatures are less 'realist,' in the sense that a self cannot really be a self apart from the permanence inscribed through characterisation, they nevertheless expose our thinking to the question of what the 'existential conditions' might be which make the performance of a self possible in ontological terms. Here he speculates that what might be revealed here as 'inviolable' is a radical difference between the self as a singularity and the self as the same through time, even on the level of coporeality.[57] This is a significant statement, because it shows that Ricoeur, no less than Lévinas or Derrida, is cautious about any attempt to dissolve the thought of self into either narrative *or* metaphysics, if these are conceived as totalities. That is why he ultimately rejects the suggestion of Alistair MacIntyre in *After Virtue,* that a life must be grasped as a singular totality if it is to be experienced as successful or complete. Real life is messy, says Ricoeur. The capacity of a self to master his or her own story in the fashion of a Cartesian cogito is virtually impossible on several fronts. First, the memory of origins are hazy at best. Second, one may never experience and assimilate one's own death. Third, many of the key elements of one's life properly belong to other's stories, such that it is almost impossible to distinguish what is mine from what is another's. Finally, the self can tell a number or different stories about itself at the same time, and each of these may contradict and fracture the others at multiple points.[58] Why, then, a *narrative* theory? Doesn't the very idea suggest totalising intention? Well no! Of all the models of the real available to us, the category of narrative would seem most open-ended. Ricoeur's argument here is, I think, undeniable. Narrative does not, and cannot, totalise the real. Rather, it creates a habitable, but always provisional, space in which life may actually be lived. It helps us to organise our experiences and thoughts retrospectively, thus creating patterns of expectation for the future without fixing these in place. In doing this, narrative does not set one individual's monologue over and against others, but forms a discourse in which there are many protagonists and projects, sometimes competing, sometimes agreeing, but always emeshed.[59] Is this really all that *crucially* different from the Derridean belief that all of us are always already inside a field of meaning which he calls 'ritual'? Even the one who studies the ritual, he says, is 'playing a role' which the ritual allows for, so that the boundary between the critic and the actor is both 'uncertain' and 'permeable'.[60] Perhaps the only significant difference between these two great thinkers is simply one of emphasis: that Derrida is more interested in the instability of performance, while Ricoeur is more interested in its stability.

CLAIM 2: VOWS OR PROMISES INSCRIBE A FUNDAMENTALLY JEWISH OR CHRISTIAN SENSE OF THE REAL.

The great etymologist of European languages, Emile Benveniste, testifies to the profound affinity in European thought between the ideas of religion, responsibility, and the vow. In

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[56] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* , pp 148-150

[57] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* , p 151

[58] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* , pp 160, 161

[59] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* , p 162

[60] Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, trans. Ian McLeod (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p 3

each he locates a deep sense of paradoxical duality. The Latin *sacer* can mean both 'consecrated to a god' and 'affected with an eradicable pollution'.[61] In time, the two concepts attracted two different words. *Sacer* was reserved for a sense of 'implicit sacredness,' while a related word, *sanctus* was used to denote 'explicit sacredness,' or that which is set aside by human beings as sacred.[62] Similarly, the Greek term *hierós* has to do with an original sacredness in holy things which were believed to be charged with divine presence, while *hósios* was reserved for objects which has more to do with human law and activity, even if that sphere was set apart by the gods.[63] The Latin *religio* itself has an ambivalent history. Cicero and his followers trace it from *legere*, to gather or collect, but Tertullian and his disciples preferred *ligare*, to bind. Buried in the first meaning is the idea of *scruple*, a sense in which there is re-collection, a starting again after careful consideration. The second tradition is more confident, designating a positive *bond* or *obligation* between human beings and God.[64] The bond idea comes up again in the Greek *spondē* or 'responsibility,' which originally meant to give a personal pledge on someone else's behalf. In the Latin *respondeo* there is a drift into the sense of a pledge or bond which responds to another's bond, while the the Gothic *swaran* took on the explicit meaning of a vow.[65] But it is the Greek term *eúkhesthai* that interests us most for the investigation at hand. In Beneveniste's opinion, the word combines a dual notion: to pray and to make a vow. It gathers together that sense in which a pledge is offered and addressed to the divine, in the expectation that the divine will respond with blessing or a favour.[66]

Derrida recently revisited exactly this etymology in attempting a definition of religion for our contemporary age. Religion today, he says, is a universalising phenomenon that is deeply associated with the Latin language and culture, particularly as these are played out in their Anglo-American manifestation. This 'hyper-imperialist appropriation,' provocatively named '*Globalatinization*,' has, he says, been going on for centuries, but is now absolutely dominant, even as it begins to 'run out of breath' [*essoufflée*]. Interestingly, Derrida avoids the temptation to speak about the more plastic end of this phenomenon ('McDonaldisation,' 'Disneyisation' etc.), noting only that international law and the global political rhetoric are dominated by the Latin sense of religion in general, and Christianity in particular. And what is the essential structure of this religious language and culture? Answer: *sacramentality*, an alliance and 'promise' to testify to a future truth which has itself been promised, and, indeed, has already arrived in the testimony itself. 'The promise promises *itself*, it is *already* promised, that is the sworn faith, the given word, and hence the response'.[67] This is to speak, as Derrida often does, of an essentially 'messianic' or 'apocalyptic' structure to Western thinking. Following Lévinas, Derrida locates in language a sense of promise and expectation which issues, ultimately, in an inbreaking of hyperbolic justice in the face of an 'other'. This inbreaking 'inscribes itself in advance in the promise, in the act of faith or in the appeal to faith that inhabits every act of language and every address to the other'.[68] If Derrida is right, and I wager that he is, then every vow or promise made in a European language is always already inscribed with a fundamentally Jewish or Christian sense of the real. This means, further, that the 'performative' as such—which I have already described as a positing of self

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[61] Emile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, trans. Elizabeth Palmer (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), p 451
[62] Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society* , p 455
[63] Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society* , p 461
[64] Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society* , pp 517-522
[65] Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society* , pp 474, 475
[66] Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society* , pp 489-496
[67] Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," pp 66, 67
[68] Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," pp 56, 57

in favour of the other—must be seen as an idea indigenous to the Judaeo-Christian tradition. I would like to take a moment or two to explore this thesis.

Hent de Vries believes that Derrida's entire project might be just characterised as a 'being *on the way* (an *unterwegs* of sorts), not to language (*Sprache*), not to the essence of language, and not to writing, let alone to a science of writing, but rather, to "God" (*á dieu*) or to what comes to substitute for this name for the totally other, yet another totally other (an incommensurable, totally other "totally other")'.[69] This is borne out, I think, in Derrida's writings on what is called 'negative theology'. In *On the Name,* Derrida defines negative theology as a language that casts suspicion on the very essence and possibility of language. As a language of *kenōsis*—a language which constantly empties itself of final or definitive meaning, even as it produces an infinite number of meanings through iterability—negative theology is also 'the most exacting, the most intractable experience of the "essence" of language: a discourse on language, a "monologue" . . . in which language and tongue speak for themselves'.[70] Negative theology 'launches or carries negativity as the principle of auto-destruction in the heart of every thesis,' and yet, paradoxically, 'nothing is more faithful than this hyperbole to the original ontotheological injunction'.[71] This talk of 'faithfulness' implies a promise and an injunction which is always already there, in the language, before the self even has a chance to constitute itself:

> I will speak of a promise, then, but also within the promise. The experience of negative theology perhaps holds *to* a promise, that of the other, which I must keep because it commits me to speak where negativity ought to absolutely rarefy discourse . . . Why can't I avoid speaking, unless it is because a promise has committed me even before I begin the briefest speech? If I therefore speak of the promise, I will not be able to keep any metalinguistics distance in regard to it. Discourse on the promise is already a promise: *in* the promise. I will thus not speak of this or that promise, but of that which, as necessary as it is impossible, inscribes us by its trace in language—before language. From the moment I open my mouth, I have already promised; or rather, and sooner, the promise has seized the *I* which promises to speak to the other, to say something, at the extreme limit to affirm or confirm by speech at least this: that it is necessary to be silent; and to be silent concerning that about which one cannot speak . . . This promise is older than I am.[72]

Here, in negative theology, Derrida locates the source, or exemplary instance (he can't decide which)[73] of that doubling or splitting of allegiance to self and other which I called the 'vow'. On the one hand, negative theology is tied to a faithful repetition of traditional Christian texts. On the other hand, there is an attempt to slough off this sedimentation in response to a call and gift (of Christ?) which seems to come from some 'place' beyond what the tradition inscribes.[74] In this way, the faithful performance inherent in a vow seems tied to a kind of *un*faithfulness. As noted in my discussion of otherness, the vow necessarily performs the sacrifice of the other for the sake of another other: this as responsibility, an act and a decision in response to the injunction which comes from "God" as the wholly other who is also 'any other'. The *á dieu*, of course, is both a movement towards and a movement away from God, and at the same time.[75] It is a renouncing of God as idol for the sake of loving a God beyond

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[69] Hent de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), p 26

[70] Derrida, *On the Name* , pp 48-54

[71] Derrida, *On the Name* , pp 67, 68

[72] Jacques Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," trans. Ken Frieden, *Language of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Wolfgang Iser, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p 14

[73] Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," , pp 61, 62; Derrida, *On the Name* , p 75

[74] Derrida, *On the Name* , pp 71, 72

[75] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p xv .

being, an 'other' whose proper name is no more than a trace of a trace, in the tradition of Eckhart's *gelâzenheit*.[76] According to Derrida, the performative is always a participation in this double movement of affirmation and denial, which means, for our purposes, that *the vow* is the example, par excellence, of the 'becoming theological of all discourse'.[77]

CLAIM 3: CHRISTIAN WORSHIP IS AN EXEMPLARY PERFORMANCE OF THE VOW SO DESCRIBED

Until now, Christian theology has exhibited a distinct indifference to the vow as I have described it. Most of the works written about vows have concentrated on either occasional rites (ordination, vows to become members of canonical religious congregations) or else upon the social or psychological implications of making such vows. As far as I am aware, no work has yet explored the possibility that the ordinary Sunday liturgy of the church, with or without a particular baptismal rite, might be considered a 'performance of the self in favour of the other' in the way that I have described it. The works that come closest to our purpose, not surprisingly, are those that engage the French phenomenological tradition in a redefinition of liturgical action. Amongst these, the most important are works by Jean-Luc Marion, David Power, Kenan Osborne, and Louis-Marie Chauvet.[78] For the purposes of this article, I shall confine myself to a conversation with Chauvet, beginning with an outline of his theological method, and concluding with a appropriation of his thinking for my thesis concerning the vow.

3.1 Symbolic analysis as a post-metaphysical method in Sacramental Theology

Chauvet's book *Symbol and Sacrament* presents a theory of sacramental action which listens, attentively, to the thought of the performative. In a statement reminiscent of Derrida's comments on ritual, Chauvet says that 'It is impossible to really comprehend anything without recognizing oneself as always-already involved in what one is trying to comprehend; this is the clearest description we can give of the method of our project.'[79] Out of this conviction, Chauvet proposes what he calls a 'symbolic' account of liturgy over against the more dominant 'metaphysical' approach inherited from Aquinas. A symbolic account, he says, while never entirely escaping its metaphysical determinations, may nevertheless stand as a constant reminder that such determinations are in operation. As such, the symbolic represents a being 'on the way' towards an escape from metaphysical thinking.[80] The way is opened because symbolic analysis is aware of the way in which human subjectivity is constituted *in* and *by* language, as opposed to having or being a series of pre-linguistic properties which are simply expressed *through* language. For the metaphysical mind, language is purely instrumental in that it becomes the means of communication between two separate realities:

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[76] Derrida, *On the Name* , p 74
[77] Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," p 6
[78] Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), David Noel Power, *Sacraments: The Language of God's Giving* (New York: Crossroad/ Herder & Herder, 1999), Kenan B. Osborne, *The Christian Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist* (Paulist Press, 1998), Kenan B. Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World: A Theology for the Third Millenium* (New York/Mahweh, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1995)
[79] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* , p 2
[80] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* , pp 8, 9, 46

being in general (as object) and the individual human consciousness (as subject).[81] Symbolic analysis, on the other hand, conceives of reality as linguistic through and through, erasing the gap between subject and object through the specifically *illocutionary* practise of 'reinserting' human subjectivity into the 'language-game' of which it is always already part.[82] This means that the project of human subjectivity must be conceived as an *event* much like language itself. Chauvet is very close to Ricoeur and Derrida here, conceiving of interlocutionary language as that which both precedes and exceeds us, thus structuring our thinking absolutely. As event, human subjectivity therefore possesses (as self-present knowledge) no final meaning apart from that accomplished in its performance.[83]

But how does this 'symbolic' approach work itself out as a specifically *theological* method? Chauvet claims that theologians are witnesses to a language of relationship in which they know themselves to be already held. They are *themselves* this language already, specifically as that language is instituted in the Scriptures, teaching, and liturgy of the Church. Thus, the question "who is God?" can never be answered apart from the question "who is speaking of God?" This is to understand the task of theology as thoroughly hermemeutical in Ricoeur's sense: not the retrieval of some kind of 'original meaning', but the negotiation of new meanings and new practices in an ever-creative repetition of the tradition to which theology is heir.[84] That presumes, of course, that the tradition has to be read and interpreted, it has to be engaged seriously in all its historical materiality and eventfulness. Why? Because, as Derrida says, both phonemes and graphemes are already given us in our cultural inheritance. They are the material stumbling-blocks against the metaphysical ambition for an ahistorically conceived presence-to-self of total meaning. 'Language *resists* in the same way that *matter* resists'.[85] It is in this sense that Chauvet can say that the key theologal symbol of grace, the pure and unconditional gift of the possibility of life and freedom, is given us in the tradition as a reality that cannot be 'stocked and stored', or otherwise 'objectified' in any way. In the final analysis, while grace may be given in the tradition, it cannot be finally understood by the mind which seeks to totalise that tradition according to some kind of system or economy. Yet (and here is the paradox of Christian faith), grace as a force of resistance has the effect, not of totalising meaning from the side of God, but rather opening a space for human selves to be *agents* in free and innovative action. Chauvet calls this phenomenon the 'gratuitousness' of grace.[86] Innovations in meaning occur, then, because of the movement of ineffable grace in the language of the tradition to which theology is heir. In theological parlance, it is grace as a redoubling of Derridean *differánce* that gives rise to the possibility of interpretive innovation. To interpret, theologically, is take *responsibility*, to posit a self in favour of the other through an engagement with the tradition.[87] Thus, neither the living self nor the Christian tradition may speak independently of each other. The tradition, or 'story' in Ricoeur's terms, constantly refigures itself in the performance of new Christian selves, while that self comes to be what it is by an interpretive engagement with the many 'others' embodied in that same story.

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[81] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, pp 32, 33
[82] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, p 42
[83] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, pp 87, 88, 99
[84] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, pp 65-69
[85] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, p 141
[86] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 108
[87] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 145. It is important to underline here that while grace, for Chauvet, is only 'comprehensible' within an anthropo-linguistic framework, this should not be taken to imply that there is no extra-linguistic *origin* for grace. Rather, the anthropo-linguistic structure is said to be constituted, by grace, from '*outside of us (extra nos), in Christ*' (p 140).

3.2 Christian selves as embodied versions of the Paschal mystery

An important corollary of this last point, and one that Chauvet emphasises many times over, has to do with the place of the body in theological thinking. Following Merleau-Ponty in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Chauvet says that the body is a 'speaking body' which communicates in the double-tongue of oneself and another. This because the body is at once my own, and part of the embodied, material, world in general. I noted this already in Ricoeur. But Chauvet introduces a related insight from the thought of Dubarle: that the body is therefore an 'ach-symbol' of the whole symbolic order. Everything is conjoined and negotiated in the liminal space of the body: 'no word escapes the necessity of laborious inscription in a body, a history, a language, a system of signs, a discursive network. Such in the law. The law of mediation. The law of the body'.[88] In theological perspective, this means that the tradition should be seen as a 'body' of symbols, the corporeal nature of the *humanum* as such, forming a kind of *palimpsest* on which, and by which, the sacred comes to be. '*The anthropological is the place for every possible theological*' says Chauvet.

Now, if Chauvet is right, and I believe he is, then this would call for a veritable revolution in the way the various branches of theology have been pictured. No longer would 'fundamental' theology be primary, or 'sacramental' theology simply a 'pastoral' application of 'systematic' theology. Rather, sacramental theology, as a reflection upon the ways in which the faith is lived and practiced in the body, would articulate the fundamental 'dimension' that operates throughout the whole thematics of theology, from beginning to end.[89] In this perspective, the specifically sacramental liturgies of the church would constitute the primary symbolic expression and performance of all that the faith has to say, because here the faith *happens*, is an event, in the bodily speech of gestures, postures, spoken and sung words, colours, smells and silences. In the liturgy, according to Chauvet, one may discern the presence and activity of three different *kinds* of body: (1) the *social* body of the church, that set of relations which exists synchronically amongst the people who gather; (2) the *traditional* body of the church, with its diachronically received history of word and deed; (3) the *cosmic* body of the church—in water, bread and wine, wax, light and ashes, textiles and colours etc.— which is received from the earth and imbued with a particular significance. The sacraments are thus made of 'significant materiality'. The meaning of faith may only be experienced and performed *as* bodily, *by* the bodily, and *within* a body which is the church. Thus, according to Chauvet, there is no room within Christian faith for a gnosticism that aims for knowledge apart from the otherness of 'mediation' in history and materiality:

> In their significant materiality, the sacraments thus constitute an *unavoidable stumbling block* which forms a barrier to every imaginary claim to a direct connection, individual and interior, with Christ or to a Gnostic-lie illuminist contact with him. They represent the indefeasible mediations, beginning with the Church, outside of which there is no possible Christian faith. They tell us that the faith has a body, that it adheres to a body. More than that, they tell us that to *become a believer is to learn to consent, without resentment, to the corporality of faith.*'[90]

Lest it be said that his thought of the body represents a collapsing of theology into philosophy or anthropology, let it be underlined that Chauvet's starting point on this matter, as on every matter, is the New Testament witness. 'To theologically affirm sacramental grace is to affirm, in faith, that the risen Christ continues to take flesh in the world and in history and that

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[88] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* , p 151
[89] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* , pp 159, 160
[90] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* , pp 152, 153

God continues to come into human corporality'.[91] Here Chauvet confirms that the paschal mystery of Christ—the total event of his incarnation, life, crucifixion and resurrection—is for him both the primary sacrament and the pre-eminent criterion for theological discourse as such.[92] What Chauvet reads in this event is the following: that God chooses not to be God apart from the materiality of human beings in their social, historical and cosmic dimensions; that it is in the very nature of God to become human. Indeed, following Moltmann in *The Crucified God* and Jüngel in *God as the Mystery of the World,*[93] Chauvet also insists that God is nowhere more divine than in the humanity of the Christ. There we see a Trinitarian God who is revealed as Love in the very withdrawal of God from God in the death of the Son, which is also an identification by God with the human existential. Here God cannot be God except by a distancing which is also a proximity.[94] In sacramental terms, this would mean that the ordinary liturgies of baptism and of the Eucharist stand as an ever-new performances of the Christ-event in Christian selves who act from the power of the Spirit. Here the Christ event is both given and taken to the worshipping self as the 'other' who also constitutes that self as itself.

3.3 Baptism as the Performance of a Vow in favour of the Christic Other

Saint Paul wrote in *The Letter to the Galatians*:

> Through the law I died to the law in order to live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if justice could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing! (2.19-21).

This passage of Scripture is a key source for my thesis in this article. Here the "I" of the apostolic self is not only decentered, but actually killed off and resurrected otherwise, in an asymmetrical encounter with the historical pasch of Christ: a history which, in point of fact, is only available to the apostle in the form of a *sacramental and liturgical tradition*. This is made clear by Paul's subsequent reminder that the Galatians were made children of God by being 'baptized into Christ,' thereby becoming 'heirs according to the promise' (3.27, 29). One may speak here of a Christian self which is performed through a ritual identification with the life, death, and resurrection of Christ in the sacramental liturgy of baptism. One may also say that such a self is performed in the displacement of the self by an 'other' self, a Christic self met in the liturgy, which operates according to the logic of a horizon which Paul refers to simply as 'the promise'. This 'promise' is that delivered to Abraham: blessing and a share in the Abrahamic covenant to all who place their 'faith' in that promise (see 3.6-9, 17-18). Derrida could almost have been exegeting these verses when he described the promise as the inbreaking of a messianic justice which 'inscribes itself in advance in the promise, in the act of faith or in the appeal to faith that inhabits every act of language and every address to the other.'[95]

[91] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* , p 490
[92] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* , p 477
[93] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. John Bowden and R.A. Wilson (London: SCM, 1974), Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981).
[94] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* , pp 493, 494
[95] Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," , p 56

In this Pauline context, the performance of the Christian self in baptismal faith is indeed an inbreaking of the 'other,' who comes from the future to problematise the present through an engagement with the past. Expressed otherwise, when Christ comes to the self in baptism as a new self, an-other self, everything which may have been stabilized as 'law' for that self up until 'now' is suddenly called into question with regard to its ultimate justice. Suddenly the self finds that the world has turned and relationships have to be broken and remade according to a newly revealed ethical criteria. Of course, even with the 'arrival' of justice, justice does not arrive. If the messianic, for Christians, is personified in Christ, then the promissory structure of the liturgy reminds them that the Church lives in the time between the coming of Christ and an other coming of Christ. The breaking and remaking of the self in baptism is therefore revealed as the structure of the Christian life as such: the baptismal undergoing or suffering of the failure of the law in favour of an-other who is always already arriving as grace within the aporias of the law as it stands. In this perspective, the baptismal vow represents a radical repositioning towards the Christic 'other' which happens, like the death and resurrection of Christ, only once.

3.4 Eucharist: the making of the body of Christ

The Eucharist, however, is that act of the church that is repeated over and over again. Its purpose is to remind both God and the human self of the covenant they entered into at baptism, and to maintain the partners in their conversion to one another. Chauvet understand the specific eucharistic rite to be a radical intensification of what the liturgy as a whole is trying to do: to transform the self of the worshipper into a new corporeal form of the crucified and risen body of Christ. Here he draws upon the Lukan story of the road to Emmaus (Luke 24). This story, like many others in Luke's writings, is about the way in which Christian identity is formed: through a letting go of the need to understand God, and an acceptance of the missional movement of God through the embodiment of Christ in the liturgy. The people met upon the road live in the time of the Church, the time when Jesus of Nazareth is no longer visible. They long to touch, to see, to understand a Jesus who is no longer available to such presentation. 'However, the *Absent One* is present in his "sacrament" which is the Church: the Church rereading the Scriptures with him in mind, the Church repeating his gestures in memory of him, the Church living the sharing between brothers and sisters in his name. It is in these forms of witness by the Church that Jesus takes on a body and allows himself to be encountered'.[96] Thus, the story speaks of a stranger who encounters them with a Scriptural word which functions to deconstruct their understanding of how God works. The word is symbolic of Christ himself, because the word preached is essentially about Christ. It is Christ witnessing to himself in the memory of the Church. The Scriptural body of Christ then becomes flesh in the breaking of the bread, recalling the moment at the last supper when Jesus said 'This is my body, given for you' (Luke 22.19). At this moment, the disciples recognise the stranger, but he vanishes so that their eyes open only on an absence which witnesses to the presence they have imbibed as bread. The implication is clear: Christ is embodied *as* the mission of the Church, *through* its sacramental liturgy of story and meal.[97] Again, there is a double movement here. On the one hand, faith requires that we 'renounce our ambition to capture Christ in our ideological nets or in the ruses of our desire'.[98] In the liturgy of the church, says Chauvet, there can be no reducing of faith to a system of religious knowledge by which the otherness of God may be negated or changed into an available object

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[96] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, p 163
[97] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, pp 168-171
[98] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 173

or a dead body.[99] By this, the self as propagation of its same self is displaced by the other.
On the other hand, the encounter with such an elusive God, a God who is other, is predicated
upon the specifically liturgical repetition of an all too human performance of the self in Jesus
of Nazareth. Put like that, it becomes clear that the double-nature of the performative self in
liturgy has its theological foundation in a Trinitarian Christology of the 'two natures,'
reconciled but not synthesised through the mission of the Spirit. That is why the Eucharistic
liturgy, and the selves it forms, might be described as 'iconic' in the same sense in which
Christ is iconic (Colossians 1.15). An icon is neither an idol of the divine nor the 'thing
itself'. Rather, it symbolizes the divine by bringing human art or making together with divine
inspiration such that the divine resonates in the icon without in any sense becoming the icon
itself. Thus, the *Letter to the Philippians* can speak of a God who hollows the divine essence
out in the human Christ (2.7) and yet comes into his most splendid divinity by the same
movement. Here there is a paradoxical becoming of the Godhood of God through a kenotic
procession in the human other. God who becomes God through not being God. Is this not
how it is with the liturgical self as well? Here the self becomes its most Christic self by
losing (loosing) its own centre, by allowing itself to be hollowed out by the absent presence of
the other who is God, neighbour, conscience, materiality. The self becomes itself by
responding to the call of the other for love, by becoming itself the broken Love which God
already is.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The song of Leonard Cohen captures the paradox of this self well. A self that is able to be
'true,' to be a true voice which also speaks or sings the truth, is only that which is also able to
submit to the will of another absolutely. The reference to 'this broken hill' as the place of
such performance surely recognises the same as a repetition of the gesture of Christ, who was
broken on the hill of Golgotha: 'This is my body, broken for you. Do this to remember me'.
The song he sings is therefore both a vow and a liturgy, it is the vow as liturgy. In addressing
his speech to the other he asks only for the power to repeat that address, and so constitute his
own capacity to be, to speak, to sing. The power of the self to be is here predicated only upon
the basis of another power, the power of another who lets be.

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[99] Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* , p 174