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## Liturgy and the Moral Life

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If you attend the performance of most Christian liturgies, you will find the assembled reading and listening to the scriptural depiction of various events that compose the core Christian narrative. If you attend the performance of a liturgy of the Eastern Christian churches, however, you will discover that the assembled do not simply read or listen to the scriptural presentation of the events that compose the core Christian narrative; they also reenact many of these events by imitating them. During the services of Holy Week, for example, the assembled will read and listen to what the Gospels say about the events surrounding Jesus's death. Then, at various points, they reenact some of these events, such as Jesus's washing of the disciples' feet and his burial. At these points, the readers and listeners become performers.

The question that I would like to pursue in this chapter is why this is so. Why would the scripts of the ancient liturgies direct those assembled for the liturgy, not merely to read and listen to the scriptural presentation of various events that compose the core narrative, but also to perform actions that imitate them? In raising this question, I am not interested in identifying causal or historical explanations of why the activity of reenactment figures so prominently in the ancient liturgies, as interesting as such explanations might be. Instead, I am asking what the activity of liturgical reenactment is *for*, what its contribution to the moral and religious life is supposed to be.

The answer that I am going to offer assumes that there is no single contribution that liturgical reenactment is supposed to make to the moral and religious life: there are probably multiple ways in which reenactment is supposed to contribute to the realization of various ethical and religious ideals. Still, I suggest that we can helpfully speak of the dominant ends or goals of liturgical reenactment, and that among these dominant ends is that of contributing to the construction of a narrative identity of the participants.

By an agent's narrative identity, I have in mind a sequence of events which has that agent as a subject, to which he or she might refer if he or she were accurately to tell a story of his or her life. Suppose, for example, I were to ask you a series of questions, such as who are you, what made you who you are, and what do you value most in your life? You might answer by telling me that you are the one whose love of music led to years studying the cello and whose dedication to the instrument required sacrificing a promising dancing career. Your having such properties as *being a lover of music* would be part of your narrative identity, since it would form part of a storylike sequence of events, which has you as a subject, to which you might refer were you to tell a story of your life. (I do not assume that there must be only one such story you could offer in response to my questions, or that it would have to fall into some specific genre or have any specific content. Such a story simply needs to be responsive to the types of questions I just mentioned.)

In focusing my discussion on the topic of narrative identity, I realize that I am joining a much larger conversation about the role of narrative in the moral life. The contribution I hope to make to this discussion is not, however, to advance another descriptive claim about the ways in which certain activities are likely to contribute to the development of one's narrative identity. So, for example, I am not going to develop a variant of the thesis that Plato railed against—namely, that imaginatively identifying with a character in some work of art, such as a drama, increases the likelihood that one becomes like that character, thereby undermining self-control. Instead, the view I defend is thoroughly normative. I am interested in the normative commitments that agents undertake when engaging in liturgical reenactment and how these commitments might contribute to the construction of a narrative identity of a particular sort.

My topic in this chapter is a large one, so I should call attention to several respects in which my discussion will be selective. Although the activity of liturgical reenactment is prominent in the ancient liturgies, I am going to focus on, not these liturgies in general, but only those of the Eastern Christian churches, as these strike me as a particularly rich resource to explore given our topic. Moreover, my eye will be on, not the totality of the Eastern liturgies, but on the Lenten liturgies in particular, as it is in these services, which are deeply penitential, that the activity of liturgical reenactment figures most prominently. For ease of reference, I will often refer to "the" script of the liturgy, but when I do so, it is the scripts or performance plans of these liturgies that I typically have in mind. Finally, liturgical reenactment comes in different varieties. As will soon be evident, I focus on, not reenactment in all its forms, but those cases in which the performance of speech acts plays a fundamental role. The performance of these acts, I'll claim, plays an important role in the formation and sustenance of traits of character important to the moral and religious life.

Illuminating the way in which participating in the liturgy can contribute to the formation and sustenance of an agent's narrative identity requires some stage-setting. I dedicate the first section of the chapter to this stage-setting and then draw upon this work in the second and third sections to directly address our topic.

### 1. Liturgical Immersion

The vespers service of Holy Tuesday begins with a reading from the Gospel of Matthew that presents the story of the woman who the tradition often identifies as a prostitute, Mary of Bethany.<sup>1</sup> According to the scriptural narrative, in the middle of a dinner party, Mary anoints Jesus with "very precious ointment," pouring the oil on Jesus's head and wiping his feet with her tears and hair (Matt. 26:7; Luke 7:37–38; John 12:3). In the services that follow on Holy Wednesday, the hymnody embellishes Mary's story by putting words in her mouth, at one point having her address Jesus with this request: "Behold me sunk in sin, filled with despair . . . yet not rejected by your love. Grant me, Lord, remission of my sins and save me . . . O merciful Lord who loves human kind, deliver me from the filth of my works."<sup>2</sup> At a different point, the hymnody shifts from the perspective of Mary to that of the assembled, having them sing words attributed to Mary: "Like the Harlot I fall down before you, Christ my God, seeking to receive forgiveness; and instead of ointment I offer you the tears of my heart. Take pity on me, Saviour, as you had on her, and grant me the remission of my sins. For I cry like her to you: Deliver me from the filth of my deeds."<sup>3</sup> What then occurs in the service is that the people file forward to venerate the icon of Christ, kissing it in the way that Mary is said to have kissed Jesus himself on the occasion of the dinner party. Immediately after venerating the icon, each is anointed with oil by the priest.

The sequence of liturgical actions just described is interesting on several levels. Notice, first, that some of the actions performed by the assembled are ones in which they reenact elements of the embellished scriptural narrative by both imitating and repeating actions attributed to Mary, such as her cry to be delivered from her misdeeds. Other liturgical actions, such as when the people venerate the icon of Jesus, imitate Mary's actions but do not repeat them. Instead, they reenact these actions by employing props, in this case an icon of Jesus, to perform actions that are supposed to represent Mary's action of kissing Jesus. It is clear, moreover, that the priest's action of anointing the

people is supposed to connect with Mary's own anointing of Jesus, although it is not exactly clear how. One interpretation is that the rite is a commemoration of her action, a fulfillment of Jesus's words that what she had done "will be told in memory of her" (Matt. 26). The "telling" in this case would not simply be an oral or a written presentation of her story, but also a dramatic and creative extension of it, in which the priest anoints the people as she anointed Jesus.<sup>4</sup> Mary is only one of a cast of characters whose actions are reenacted in the context of the liturgy. On the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, for example, the people listen to the Gospel story of the Publican and the Pharisee and sing: "In our prayer let us fall down before God, with tears and fervent cries of sorrow, emulating the Publican in the humility which lifted him on high . . . Let us utter the words of the Publican in the holy temple 'God be merciful!'"<sup>5</sup> Likewise, on the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, the people listen to the story of the Prodigal, and sing, "With the words of the Prodigal I cry aloud: I have sinned, O Father; like him, receive me now in your embrace and reject me not . . . Accept me in repentance and make me as one of your hired servants."<sup>6</sup> In both cases, by performing speech acts of certain sorts, the people reenact parts of the Gospel story by imitating and repeating actions attributed to its characters.

I call the figures of the Publican and the Pharisee "characters" advisedly, as neither is presented in the scriptures as being an actual historical figure. Each is instead a fictional character that Jesus employs in his parables. An interesting feature of these last examples of liturgical reenactment, then, is that when the people imitate and repeat the words of the Publican and the Prodigal, they are engaging with, not a historical narrative, but a fictional one. The case of Mary of Bethany is somewhat different, since she is not presented in the scriptures as a character in a parable. Still, it is worth stressing that when the assembled imitate and repeat Mary's words, they repeat, not Mary's actual words (the scriptures do not present her as saying anything when she anoints Jesus), but those attributed to her by the church's hymnody in its effort to embellish the scriptural narrative. In all the cases we've considered, then, liturgical reenactment involves reenacting either the actions of fictional characters or act types attributed to non-fictional characters that (for all we reasonably believe) they did not perform.

Let me, for ease of reference, call actions of both these sorts *fictional actions*. Given our topic, a natural question to raise is how we should understand the

<sup>1</sup>The identification is contentious. For a discussion, see Stump (2010), chapter twelve, 12.

<sup>2</sup>*The Lenten Tridion* (Mary and Ware 2002, 539, 537). I have modernized the English used in the translation. In what follows, I will refer to this work as *LT*.

<sup>3</sup>*LT*, 695–96.

<sup>4</sup>Another interpretation suggested by the liturgical script is that the act of being anointed answers a call issued by Mary of Bethany: "The Harlot washed your pure and precious feet with her tears, and she urges all to approach you and receive the remission of their sins. Unto me also grant her faith, O Saviour that I may cry to you: Before I perish utterly, save me, O Lord" (*LT*, 375).

<sup>5</sup>*LT*, 107, 108.

<sup>6</sup>*LT*, 116, 118.

activity of reenacting fictive actions. Are the reenactments themselves best viewed as a species of make-believe behavior in which the people pretend to be Mary of Bethany, the Publican, or the Prodigal? Or are they better described as cases in which the participants pretend to be present in their own person at, say, the event (whether real or fictional) in which Mary anoints and kisses Jesus or when the Prodigal returns home to his father?

There are powerful trends in both philosophy and theology that would recommend that we view liturgical reenactments of both sorts as dramatic performances and, hence, behavior in which we engage in make-believe.<sup>7</sup> According to these views, when the assembled engage in liturgical reenactment, they should be understood to pretend that they are characters in the scriptural narrative or to be present in their own person at the events depicted by the narrative, much in the way that you or I might pretend to be Mary if we were to stage a dramatic reenactment of the Gospel of Matthew.

I do not wish to broach any empirical claims about what it is that the assembled are doing or take themselves to be doing when engaging in liturgical reenactment. I do want to claim, however, that like any script or score, the liturgical script calls forth responses of certain types from participants in the liturgy. Among the responses *not* ordinarily called forth by the liturgical script, I want also to claim, is that of engaging in make-believe behavior. If I am right about this, the response called forth when the assembled venerate the icon of Christ is not that of pretending to be Mary of Bethany (or to be present in one's own person in Mary's circumstances). Similarly, the response called forth when the assembled imitate and repeat the behavior of the Prodigal is not that of pretending to be the Prodigal (or to be present in one's own person in the Prodigal's circumstances). In the next section, I offer an argument for this assessment. For now I wish to emphasize two points.

The first is that engaging with narratives—whether they be fictional or not—ordinarily requires imaginative activity on the part of those who attempt to understand or interpret them. Among other things, when we try to understand a narrative, we must fill in its gaps, project possible explanations for what occurs, or creatively interpret its happenings in the light of relevant background knowledge, and so on. But we should not, I believe, equate imaginative activity with pretense; to imaginatively extrapolate from a narrative needn't be to engage in any sort of make-believe behavior. The second point is that from the fact that important parts of a narrative are presented as and recognized to be fictional, we cannot infer that imaginatively engaging with that narrative is itself a matter of engaging in make-believe. When one finds oneself imaginatively engaged by a story—even to the point of being swept away by it—one needn't be engaging in any sort of pretense or game of make-believe. There is

such a thing as imaginative engagement with fictional narratives that is not pretense.

Let us suppose for present purposes that the assessment just offered is correct: when the script directs the assembled to reenact the behavior of the Publican or the Prodigal by imitating or repeating it, it ordinarily calls forth not the activity of pretending to be the Publican or the Prodigal (or pretending to be present in one's own person in their circumstances) but of imaginatively engaging with the stories that involve these characters. How, though, should we understand the sort of imaginative engagement that the liturgical script calls forth if it is not a species of make-believe?

The issue calls for a discussion unto itself but let me briefly gesture at what I believe is the correct answer.<sup>8</sup> There are, in principle, untold ways in which one could approach a work, such as a novel, that presents a narrative; one could approach it for the purpose of uncovering the author's religious views, political allegiances, sexual preferences, or the like. Here, however, is a way to approach such a work with which we are familiar and on which many other approaches are parasitic: one imaginatively immerses oneself in the narrative presented by the work.

Think of the activity of immersing oneself in a narrative work (that is, a work that presents a narrative) as having two primary components: first, it involves attending to the content of the narrative of the work (what it is communicating) and the properties of that content (such as how its various elements hang together) in such a way that, in engaging with the work, one prioritizes attending to this content. This means that, while immersing oneself in a narrative work is compatible with attending to features of the presentation of its narrative, such as the author's word choice or use of certain grammatical constructions, doing so is for the purpose of better attending to the content of the narrative itself. So, when reading, for example, one can momentarily marvel at the use of a striking metaphor, asking oneself why the author would use it in this context. But the point in doing so is better to engage with the content of the work in which the metaphor is being used.

Immersing oneself in a narrative work involves more, however, than simply attending to its content in such a way that one screens off or fails to prioritize certain features of its presentation, such as the author's word choice. It is also to take up a certain kind of vantage point with regard to the narrative presented by the work. Explicating the phenomenon of taking up a vantage point is not easy, but the basic idea is that when immersing oneself in a narrative work, one imaginatively enters its narrative by situating oneself within it.<sup>9</sup> In taking up such a vantage point, then, one does not take up the stance

<sup>7</sup> I have developed the view in considerably more detail in Cuneo (2014a).

<sup>8</sup> Harris (2000) offers some interesting empirical data that supports this way of thinking about immersion.

<sup>9</sup> See Walton (1990) and the references in Wolfenstorf (1990), for example.

of a dispassionate observer or critic. Rather, one attends to its content in such a way that its characters and events loom large in one's consciousness and one becomes emotionally engaged to some significant degree with these characters and events. Still, in so immersing oneself in the narrative of the work, one does not take oneself to be a character in the work (or be present in one's own person at the events described in the work). Characters in a work do not, after all, attend to the ways in which the work of which they are a part is presented.<sup>10</sup>

The positive proposal I wish to make is that the liturgical script ordinarily calls forth behavior similar to that in which we engage when we immerse ourselves in a literary work. When the script of the service of Holy Wednesday for example, calls for the assembled to imitate and repeat the speech acts attributed to and the behavior of Mary of Bethany, they are to immerse themselves in Mary's story. Or, to state the phenomenon from the opposite angle, when the script directs the assembled to imitate and repeat the speech acts attributed to and behavior of Mary, it calls forth the activity of allowing the assembled to be absorbed by Mary's story, engaging with its content and allowing her character and actions to loom large in their consciousness and emotional life when they reenact her behavior.

## II. Identification

I started our discussion by raising the question of why the scripts of the ancient liturgies go beyond directing the assembled simply to read and listen to segments of the core Christian narrative to also reenact some of the events it depicts. In my initial attempt to address this question, I assumed that it would be helpful to get a clearer sense of what liturgical reenactment is, the character of the sort of activity that is called forth when the liturgical script directs the assembled to do such things as imitate and repeat the actions of Mary of Bethany or Jesus. The question on which we need to make progress is the contribution that liturgical reenactment so understood is supposed to make to the moral and religious life. Let me take a few more steps in toward that goal by saying something more about the phenomenon of reading narrative works canvassing what some philosophers have said about the ways in which reading literature is supposed to contribute to the moral life and the formation of character.

In the introduction to her collection of essays *Love's Knowledge*, Martha Nussbaum points out that moral philosophers have virtually ignored the role

of literature in the moral life.<sup>11</sup> Nussbaum contends that this oversight is not trivial, for literature—and Nussbaum has in mind the novel in particular—is especially well-suited to contribute to the expansion and refinement of moral understanding. What literature does, Nussbaum suggests, is present us with rich descriptions of characters, their traits, and their often complicated predicaments, allowing us to emotionally engage them and thereby expand our powers of moral judgment, refine our abilities of ethical discernment, deepen our ethical understanding, and have access to alien points of view. In this regard, Nussbaum contends, these works are importantly different from those of philosophy. In a treatment of the virtues, a philosopher such as Aristotle or Aquinas might offer an accurate analysis of a particular virtue. But given its abstract nature, such an analysis could (for most of us) gain only limited traction in the moral life; we would gain very little appreciation for its lived character. By contrast, “showing” a virtue by means of a narrative that displays its dynamics over time—so Nussbaum maintains—offers us a much better sense of what the virtue is and how we might recognize it. In this way, the sorts of narratives regularly presented in literature make a unique and important contribution to the moral life; they often accomplish what works from other genres—and, indeed, ordinary life—cannot.

When all goes well, immersing oneself in liturgical action might expand and refine our powers of moral understanding in much the same way that engaging with literature does, at least if philosophers such as Nussbaum are right. But it would not do so because those segments of the liturgical script concerned with liturgical reenactment present us with rich and detailed descriptions of characters and their predicaments. The reason is that although these segments of the liturgical script engage with the scriptural narrative, they do so largely by re-presenting and embellishing portions of this narrative. More exactly, these segments of the script are largely a selective and stylized appropriation of this narrative that presupposes an intimate familiarity with it. When, for example, the script for the services of Holy Friday imaginatively weaves together the stories of Joseph of Arimathea and Mary Theotokos, presenting these stories from the first-person perspective of the characters, it does not follow them through an extended period of time, offering rich and detailed descriptions of these characters and the predicaments they face. Rather, it offers snapshots of their lives, creatively blending and embellishing their stories by, among other things, highlighting some of their important characteristics, such as their courage in conditions that appear to them hopeless.<sup>12</sup> But if the contribution that liturgical reenactment makes to the moral and religious life is not that

<sup>10</sup> Cuneo (2014a) expands upon these points, noting that immersion typically requires moving back and forth between attending to the content of a work and ways in which that work is presented.

<sup>11</sup> Nussbaum (1992); Carroll (2001, part 4; 2010, parts 4 and 5) also have some of the best discussions of the topic of which I'm aware.

<sup>12</sup> Eric Auerbach's (2003) classic work *Mimesis* contrasts Greek narrative and biblical narrative on precisely this point: biblical narratives don't fill in the background in the way that Greek narratives do.

of imparting moral understanding by the presentation of rich and nuanced narratives, how should we understand it?

The answer, I believe, lies in what I will call the self-reflexive character of the liturgical script. As the passages I have quoted from the liturgical script will have already indicated, the liturgy has the striking feature of casting much of its hymnody in the first-person. This technique is employed in three different though compatible ways.

In some places, the technique is employed to recast stories, which in their scriptural presentation are themselves not narrated from the first-person perspective, into hymns that are narrated from the first-person perspective of their characters, such as when the hymnody presents elements of the Genesis story from the perspective of Adam:

The Lord my Creator took me as dust from the earth and formed me into a living creature, breathing into me the breath of life and giving me a soul. . . . Honour me. . . making me a companion of the angels. . . . In my wretchedness I have cast off the robe woven by God. . . . and I am clothed now in fig leaves and in garments of skin.<sup>13</sup>

Elsewhere, the script presents hymnody from the perspective of Jesus, the so-called second Adam:

I who am rich in Godhead have come to minister to Adam who is grown poor. I who fashioned him have of mine own will put on his form. I . . . have come to lay down my life as a ransom for him.<sup>14</sup>

Call the technique employed in this and other passages *narrative recasting*. If the point of these particular examples of narrative recasting were simply a matter of getting the assembled to pretend to be Adam or Jesus, their function would be more or less transparent. What better way to pretend that one is Adam or Jesus than to take up his perspective? I have claimed, however, that we ought not to understand the liturgical script to call for the assembled to pretend that they are characters, such as Adam and Jesus. If I am right about this, when the script directs the assembled to sing hymns from Mary or Jesus's perspective, something else is going on. That something else, I would say, consists in the assembled *playing the roles* of Adam and Jesus—where playing the roles of these characters consists not in pretending to be them but (in part) taking up their perspectives by speaking in their voices.<sup>15</sup>

In other places, the liturgical script directs the assembled not to recite stories narrated from the first-person perspective of the characters, but to quote

and appropriate passages from these stories, employing them to perform speech acts that express the first-person perspective of those assembled:

[L]et us emulate the groaning of the Publican and, speaking to God with warm tears, let us cry out: "O you who loves humankind, we have sinned. In your compassion and pity, be merciful and save."<sup>16</sup>

Like the Thief I cry to you "Remember me"; like Peter I weep bitterly; like the Publican I call out "Forgive me, Saviour"; like the Harlot I shed tears. Like the woman of Canaan I cry to you, "Have mercy on me, Son of David." Like the woman with an issue of blood, I touch the hem of your garment. I weep as Martha and Mary wept for Lazarus.<sup>17</sup>

Call this activity that the liturgical script calls forth *indexical appropriation*. In the cases before us, indexical appropriation consists in embedding various speech acts, such as requests that incorporate first-person pronouns ("Remember me" and "Forgive me, Saviour"), in other speech acts, such as assertions ("Like the Thief I cry to you") that also incorporate first-person pronouns. Unlike the examples of narrative recasting offered above, indexical appropriation consists not in playing the role of a character but allowing biblical persona to function as models—these models often functioning as ideals whose characteristics we try to approximate in our own behavior.

Finally, in other places, the liturgical script employs the first-person pronouns in what is perhaps an even more unusual way. Under this use, the pronoun functions not so much as a marker of who is doing the addressing as an indicator of who is the *object* of address. When the pronoun is used in this way, the liturgical script is self-referential in the sense that, when an individual conforms to it in the context of liturgical performance, she is the object of her own address. What is more, these uses of the first-person pronouns often figure in a certain type of construction in which the speaker refers to him- or herself comparatively, as being like or identical with one or another character, such as when the assembled compare themselves to the Prodigal Son:

I am become the Prodigal Son, and having wasted my riches I perish now from hunger. Beneath your protection I seek refuge, O loving Father: accept me as you have accepted him. Make me a sharer at your table, that I may cry to you: Before I perish utterly, save me, O Lord.

I am the prodigal: conceived in sin, I dare not look up to the height of heaven. But trusting in your love for human kind, I cry: God be merciful to me and save me.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *LT*, 168.

<sup>14</sup> *LT*, 513.

<sup>15</sup> It is not easy to specify exactly what it is for an agent to play a role. I say more about the matter in Cuneo (2014a).

<sup>16</sup> *LT*, 108.

<sup>17</sup> *LT*, 245, 263.

<sup>18</sup> *LT*, 375, 668.

Call this use of the singular first-person pronoun *comparative self-address*. Unlike narrative recasting, comparative self-address is not (in the paradigm case) a matter of playing a role. And unlike indexical appropriation, it is not (in the paradigm case) allowing a character to function as a model. Rather, I would say it consists in treating a figure function as a *type*, of which the assembled declare that they are examples. In the passages just quoted, for example, the Prodigal Son functions in just this way.

The overarching question we are pursuing concerns the contribution that liturgical reenactment is supposed to make to the moral and religious life. An important clue to understanding that contribution, I have suggested, is the liturgical script's use of the first-person pronouns. Let me now move beyond noting the various uses to which the script puts these pronouns and hazard a general suggestion as to what their functions might be in the context of liturgical performance. Having offered this suggestion, I will qualify it in some important respects.

Imagine that you and I are very different people: you are a thief, and I am not. Or somewhat differently, suppose that you are a collaborator with an oppressive foreign power that is occupying our country, and I am not. Between you and me there is likely to be considerable psychological distance. That is given our different stations, it is likely that you and I have rather different histories, temperaments, values, commitments, and the like. Suppose, though, it is important for me to understand you better, say, because we find ourselves invested in a joint project whose success matters to both of us. In order to understand you better, I could engage in at least two activities.

I might attempt, in the first place, to close the psychological distance between us by taking up your point of view on some matter on which I find your views puzzling or alien. Or, somewhat differently, I might attempt to identify with you, locating points of similarity between you and me, where these points of similarity could be the basis for mutual enjoyed recognition, lasting social bonds, or unified action, such as when we realize that we share a deep interest in jazz and make plans to perform some of our favorite pieces with one another.<sup>19</sup> A moment's reflection reveals that these activities are not identical. I could close the psychological distance between you and me to some significant degree by appreciating how you see things without identifying with you in any appreciable sense, since your ways of seeing the world might still seem too alien. Similarly, I could identify with you without having to close any appreciable psychological distance between us, since there might be none to speak of.

I take it that closing the psychological distance between oneself and another is often for the purpose of identifying with that other person. At any rate, in

what follows I shall understand it to have that function and will speak simply of the activity of identifying with another—where identifying with another is understood typically to incorporate the activities of both closing the psychological distance between and identifying (in the sense specified) with that person.

The proposal I want to develop is that the liturgical script's use of narrative recasting, indexical appropriation, and comparative self-address is to facilitate the identification with the array of characters presented in the liturgical script. To appreciate the point, begin by observing that the liturgical text presents us with an array of characters that many of us are likely to find deeply alien in important respects: criminals (the Thief), collaborators with oppressive foreign powers (the Publican), betrayers (Peter), wastrels (the Prodigal), prostitutes (Mary of Bethany), the hysterical (the woman of Canaan), and the impure/sick (the woman with an issue of blood). Notably, however, the script directs the assembled not to distance themselves from these characters because they are vivid examples of the unsavory and the unclean but to imitate and repeat their actions and words to the point of identifying with them, sometimes in the strongest of terms, such as when it directs the assembled to assert such things as "I am the Prodigal."

That identification is in fact the activity called forth by the liturgical script is, I think, especially evident in the cases of comparative self-address that we considered. But it is also evident in the cases of indexical appropriation that we canvassed, such as this passage:

Like the Thief I cry to you "Remember me"; like Peter I weep bitterly; like the Publican I call out "Forgive me, Saviour"; like the Harlot I shed tears. Like the woman of Canaan I cry to you, "Have mercy on me, Son of David." Like the woman with an issue of blood, I touch the hem of your garment. I weep as Martha and Mary wept for Lazarus.<sup>20</sup>

This passage helps us to see the self-constituting character of liturgical reenactment: in performing the speech acts of requesting forgiveness and mercy by using the words of the Publican and the woman of Canaan, the assembled do not simply express a desire to emulate these characters; they also *bring it about* that in performing these speech acts a range of similarities now hold between them and these characters—these similarities being of such a kind that they can contribute to the project of identifying with these characters. To the question, in what way are you like the Publican? it could fairly be responded by the assembled: I am like the Publican in imitating and following his example to the point of even using his words. Imitation, in this case, begets identification.

<sup>19</sup> A third activity would be to imagine what it would be like for me to be in your position.

<sup>20</sup> *LT*, 245, 263.

The liturgical activity of identifying with the range of characters presented in the liturgy is intriguing if only because traditional religious traditions are often intent on carving out and ratifying strict social roles for their adherents. In many such traditions, men are allowed to perform certain actions, but women are not. The ritually clean are permitted to participate in certain rites, but the ritually unclean are not. In the passages that we have considered, exactly the opposite dynamic appears to be at work: the script invites men to identify with characters who are women; women, with characters who are men; the innocent, with characters who are criminals; the faithful, with characters who are betrayers; the responsible, with characters who are wastrels; the healthy, with characters who are chronically sick; the stoical, with characters who weep; the emotionally stable, with characters who are emotionally unstable, and so forth.

The intended effect seems (at least in part) to be twofold. On one level it is to destabilize the self to some degree, inviting participants in the liturgy to expand their own self-conceptions in ways that, for many, are hardly going to seem like second nature. One could, in fact, look at the activity of identifying with the cast of characters presented in the liturgy as an exercise of autonomy of a certain kind in which agents revise certain self-understandings of themselves or call into question roles into which they have been scripted. On another level, however, the script seems intent on unifying the self-conceptions of the participants around certain ethical and religious ideals that these characters share, such as their willingness to repent of their failures and their readiness to acknowledge that they do not have it all together. In this regard, participating in liturgical reenactment of this sort has a pronounced leveling effect: whoever you might be, and whatever your station—so the script seems to say—there is considerable common ground between you, me, and these characters whose actions and behaviors we imitate and repeat. Interestingly, unlike the basis of the sort of friendship that Aristotle lauded, the common ground does not so much consist in acknowledging shared virtues or accomplishments as deep and regrettable flaws, ways in which we are fragile and fail.

Let me now add a qualification to these points about identification, which I mentioned in passing a few paragraphs back. To this juncture, I have been speaking in general terms about the function of the liturgical script's use of the first-person pronouns, suggesting that they are employed to invite the assembled to identify with these various biblical persona. But speaking in such general terms risks distortion, since terms such as "I" and "we" are indexicals and as such, do not have a unique content that determines their reference. All else being equal, when used by me, the term "I" refers to me; when used by you, the term refers to you. Indexicals, then, have what are commonly called *characters*, which are, roughly, rules or functions, from contexts—such as my uttering the term "I" on some occasion—to contents—in this, case me. The character of the

first-person indexical, then, will determine on any given occasion of use who it picks out or refers to.

I call attention to this point about the nature of indexicals because it is important to see that in its ample use of first-person pronouns, the liturgical script allows for a great deal of flexibility concerning what is said or accomplished by the participants' use of these pronouns. Depending on who you are and what stage of your life that you are in, your uttering sentences in a liturgical context that repeat those attributed to the Thief or the Prodigal Son might mean something very different or play very different cognitive roles from my uttering those same sentences in the same context. Given your history, uttering the sentence "I am the Prodigal" might function as an invitation to search for similarities that might not be obvious or to close the psychological distance between you and the Prodigal so that you can better understand and reconcile with those who are like him in obvious respects. In contrast, given my history, uttering that same sentence might function to acknowledge a past that I would rather forget but that is important for me to come to terms with.

I would add to this that the activity of identifying with characters in the context of liturgical performance can be fraught with moral risk, as it can be an occasion to distort one's self-conception or trigger tendencies that are on the whole harmful to oneself, such as engaging in self-abasing behavior when what is needed most is assurance of one's worth. We have, then, another reason to think of the liturgical script as calling forth certain types of responses, not from all participants, but from only those who stand to make progress in the moral and religious life by immersing themselves in the activity of liturgical reenactment. It goes without saying that whether one is such a person might require reflection and good judgment.

To this point, I have been developing the thought that, like engaging with literature, liturgical reenactment can make important contributions to the moral and religious life, helping us to realize certain ethical and religious ideals in the activity of identifying with the array of characters presented in the liturgical script. Recall, though, that my claim at the outset of the chapter was stronger than this, for I said that a dominant aim of liturgical reenactment is to contribute to the construction of a narrative identity. And, it could rightly be observed that identifying with someone in some respect is not perforce to construct a narrative identity. I could, for example, discover that you and I have a shared love of jazz, and we might identify with one another because of this. But when it comes to telling a story of my life, this similarity may not be important enough to figure in my story. It is not part of my narrative identity.

That noted, it strikes me that attention to the cases of comparative self-address that we've considered, such as when the assembled assert "I am the Prodigal," strongly suggests that the liturgical script is calling forth more than simply identifying with characters such as the Prodigal. It is telling, after all, that in the passages that I have quoted, the identification is complete—the

claim is not that I am like the Prodigal in some respect or other but that I *am* the Prodigal. I am the one who has thrown away his birthright and squandered the gifts given to him. As such, the identification appears to be of such a kind and importance that it is an answer to the question, “who are you?” which is exactly the sort of question that the telling of one’s story is supposed to address. In fact, I think we should be open to the possibility that what the liturgical script is calling forth when it directs an agent to reenact the Prodigal’s actions and engage in comparative self-address is for that agent to narrate or construct his or her own story in the context of the liturgy. If that is right, the activity of liturgical reenactment can be itself a kind of storytelling, a telling of one’s own narrative. That is, such an activity can consist in articulating who one is or aspires to become, which would be another striking example of the self-constituting character of the liturgical action, since engaging in such an activity one would, in a certain range of cases, bring it about that one’s narrative identity has a particular contour, which it shares with the Prodigal’s. I would add that the telling of one’s story in the context of the liturgy need not be *de novo*. For many, it will be a retelling of one’s story that perhaps amends, augments, or corrects a narrative that one is prone to tell in other contexts. At any rate, if these suggestions are along the right lines, we can identify yet another way in which narrative functions in the context of the liturgy: when people assemble for the liturgy, they not only read and listen to narratives but are also called to construct them while engaging in the liturgy.

### III. Commitment

The overarching question that I have been pursuing is the contribution that liturgical reenactment is supposed to make to the moral and religious life. The clue to answering this question, I’ve suggested, lies in the self-reflexive character of the liturgical script, as it is this feature of the script that helps us to locate the sorts of activities the script calls forth. Prominent among the activities called forth by the script, I have claimed, is that of identifying with characters in the core Christian narrative, where this identification should be understood as contributing to the construction of a narrative identity.

I have, however, stopped short of broaching any empirical claims to the effect that liturgical reenactment is likely to contribute to the construction of a narrative identity. For my proposal is unapologetically normative: the construction of a narrative identity is among the activities that the script calls forth. I want now to suggest that the answer to our overarching question is normative in another distinct sense.

The cases of reenactment in which I’ve been interested involve the performance of speech acts of various sorts in which one appropriates the words of characters presented to us in the liturgical script. Fundamental to the performance of

any speech act, however, is that the speaker commits himself to the world being a certain way. In asserting, I commit myself to the world being thus and so (and to my believing it to be thus and so). In promising, I commit myself to acting in a certain way (and believing that I can act that way). In commanding, I commit myself to having the authority to direct your actions in certain ways (and believing myself to have such authority). In my view, it is the normative alteration that occurs upon committing oneself in these ways that accounts for (at least in part) why it is that certain sentence utterances count as speech acts such as asserting, promising, and commanding. Speech, under this approach, necessarily involves normative transformation of such a kind that a speaker acquires rights, responsibilities, and obligations vis-à-vis her audience, and vice versa.<sup>21</sup>

Taking account of the ways in which speech is normative allows us to more adequately address questions that I raised earlier in this discussion. One question—the question that I raised at the very outset—is why the scripts of the ancient liturgies go beyond directing the assembled to read and listen to the presentation of events that compose the core Christian narrative to reenacting them. The answer is that in reading or listening to a narrative, one does not thereby commit oneself to anything. But when the assembled engage in reenactment of the sort called forth by the liturgical script, they perform speech acts of various sorts that commit them to being certain ways, such as being like (or aspiring to be like) the Thief, the Publican, or the Prodigal.

A second, closely related question is how liturgical reenactment might make a distinctive contribution to the moral life, different from reading narrative works such as novels. The answer is that while reading a novel can be morally transformative, it is not an activity that as such calls forth the activity of committing oneself to anything. Liturgical reenactment of the sort called forth by the liturgical script is different since it belongs to the essence of this activity that the assembled commit themselves to ethical and religious ideals of various sorts, including being like characters such as Mary of Bethany. Of course we have excellent empirical evidence that in a large range of cases these ethical ideals do not “take.” But when they do not, the failure is of a distinct kind: it is a failure to live up to standards that have not been imposed on one by another but to which an agent has committed herself in the context of liturgical action.<sup>22</sup> If this is so, and liturgical reenactment is as I have described it, then such reenactment is doubly normative: it is an activity not only called forth

<sup>21</sup>Cuneo (2014b) defends this position. This view, which I call the *normative theory of speech*, takes its inspiration from Alston (2000); Brandom (1998); Searle (1969); and Wolterstorff (1995).

<sup>22</sup>In the Divine Liturgy, immediately before partaking of eucharist, the assembled pray: “May the communion of your holy mysteries be neither to my judgment nor my condemnation, O Lord, but to the healing of soul and body.” One way to understand this prayer is that it expresses the desire that the partaking of eucharist not be out of step with ideals to which one has otherwise committed oneself in the context of the liturgy in such a way that partaking of the eucharist proves to be an exercise of self-condemnation, a failure to live up to these ideals to which one has committed oneself.

by the liturgical script but also one in which the assembled commit themselves to various moral and religious ideals, including being like (or aspiring to be like) the characters presented in the liturgical script.

Having noted the ways in which liturgical reenactment is normatively transformative, we are now better situated to address yet another issue that I left hanging. The issue is why we should understand liturgical reenactment to be a species of not make-believe behavior but immersion in which one imaginatively enters into the narrative presented by the liturgical script. We are better situated to address this question because it should be evident that when one engages in pretense of a sort in which one pretends to be a character, one does not thereby commit oneself to the world or oneself being a certain way. To illustrate, suppose I were to pretend to be Mary of Bethany, repeating the words attributed to her in the liturgical script: "Behold me sunk in sin, filled with despair . . . yet not rejected by your love. Grant me, Lord, remission of my sins and save me . . . O merciful Lord who loves human kind, deliver me from the filth of my works." Were I to repeat Mary's words in the context of the liturgy while pretending to be her I would not thereby have committed myself to being sunk in sin, filled with despair; or anything of the sort. Neither would I have requested anything of Jesus. I would have merely acted the part of Mary of Bethany much in the way that I would if I were acting a part in a theatrical presentation of the book of Matthew. If I am right to suggest that the heart of liturgical reenactment consists in *committing* oneself to being certain ways, however, then I believe that we have decisive reason to reject an account of liturgical reenactment according to which it consists in make-believe behavior. For if it did, then liturgical reenactment could not be normatively transformative—at least in the ways with which we have been concerned. Its aim would not be to transform the self by way of committing oneself to certain ethical and religious ideals.

There is one remaining observation that deserves to be voiced, and that is the communal nature of liturgical reenactment. For, although I have not emphasized the point, liturgical reenactment is an activity that is performed not in isolation but in the context of a community dedicated to the realization of certain moral and religious ideals. When all goes well, one is aware that the liturgical script calls one's fellow participants to commit themselves to the very ideals to which it calls you to commit yourself. Moreover, your fellow participants are aware that the script calls you to commit yourself to the ideals to which it calls them to commit themselves. Mutual recognition, then, is yet another dimension of liturgical reenactment and it deserves to be the subject of further reflection. It is a topic of sufficient richness, however, that exploring its role will have to await another occasion.<sup>23</sup>

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