". . . AND FOLLOWED HIM ON THE WAY" (MK 10:52): IDENTITY, DIFFERENCE, AND THE PLAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

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Ut unum sint, Ut plures sint

I want to speak about identity and difference, and try to answer what at first glance might be considered a naive question: in Christianity, how can we have both at once?

The catalyst for our theme is, of course, the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council's *Decree on Ecumenism*, *Unitatis Redintegratio*.[1] Its opening chapter goes right to the heart of the matter by invoking Jesus' prayer to the Father in the Fourth Gospel's last discourse: "that they may all be one, even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us" (John 17:21). The decree calls for "the restoration of unity among all Christians," and judges divisions among the followers of Christ to be a "scandal" that makes it appear "as if Christ himself were divided" (UR 1). To overcome these divisions, the model of unity offered is that of *communio,* which "finds its highest model and source in the unity of the persons of the Trinity." The signs of this "fellowship in unity" would be the confession of one faith, the celebration of divine worship in common, and the preservation of "the harmony of God's family" (UR 2).

Coming to the decree as a fundamental and systematic theologian, I view it differently than my colleagues in ecclesiology or ecumenism. My focus is not on the decree's diagnosis of the ecclesial situation, nor on its prognoses—crucial topics, but also ground that has been well-plowed by the experts. Rather, for me the decree reflects a more general conundrum that inhabits the heart of Christianity and the church, namely the fraught relationship between unity and diversity. That relationship appears to some as an exercise of the Holy Spirit's freedom; to others it signals the loss of Catholic identity and a capitulation to relativism. I confess that I look for the contradictions that jostle each other for attention, all the little paradoxes that subtly undermine what we are told is the decree's usual meaning and perhaps give us another productive approach to the overall meanings of Christian life, the *communio* of those who live it, and the *fides quaerens intellectum* that explores and promotes it.

The decree manifests a crucial dialectic that is emblematic of Christian life, namely, the "unity" proclaimed by the decree as the Christian ideal is closely shadowed by "difference" that cannot be suppressed but is seen as necessary and even an occasion for admiration. Let me give you three examples. First, along with

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[1] Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis Redintegratio)*, trans. Edward Yarnold, in Norman Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils,* 2 vols. (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 2:908–20, Latin and English on facing pages [hereafter UR cited by article]). Another translation is available online: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html (accessed on June 16, 2014). I cite the translation in the Tanner edition.

the opening chapter's emphasis on the Spirit's action of bringing the faithful "into intimate union with Christ so that he is the principle of the church's unity" (UR 2, citing Ephesians and Galatians), there is immediate acknowledgment of difference, both in Christ's sending of twelve different apostles on mission (and whose preaching, we are later told, was received "with differences of form and manner . . . explained variously in different places, owing to diversities of character and condition of life" [UR 14]) and in the Spirit's role in "the distribution of graces and offices . . . enriching the church of Jesus Christ with different functions" (UR 2). Thus the Holy Spirit's actions engender both identity and difference. Another example is where the *Decree* points to the "rifts" (*scissurae*) existing in the church that are deemed "obstacles" to communion. Yet in the midst of these separations we are admonished to recognize that all the baptized "have a right to be called Christians," that "significant elements and endowments" which give life to the church (such as the written word of God and the life of grace) "can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church," and that "the separated churches and communities as such . . . have by no means been deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation" (UR 3). The third instance is the most blatant example, and I quote it in full:

> All in the church must preserve unity in essentials. But let all, according to the gifts they have received, maintain a proper freedom in their various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in their different liturgical rites, and even in their theological elaborations of revealed truth. In all things let charity prevail. If they are true to this course of action, they will be giving even better expression to the authentic catholicity and apostolicity of the church (UR 4).

All three examples underline the fact that the pursuit of authentic Christian unity cannot shake off unity's necessary "other"—diversity, difference, even fragmentation. *Ut unum sint* always includes *ut plures sint,* especially since the model for *communio* is the Trinity (UR 2). Cardinal Walter Kasper, who has worked long and hard in the service of Christian unity, puts it this way: "Unity in the sense of full *communio* does not mean uniformity but unity in diversity and diversity in unity. Within the one church there is a legitimate multiplicity of mentalities, customs, rites, canonical orders, theologies and spiritualities."[2] Even amidst the single-minded pursuit of Catholic identity, then, difference reveals itself and must be welcomed, not simply accommodated. How are these obviously existing circumstances to be explained?

There have been countless ecclesiological and ecumenical explorations of how unity and diversity can be thought together. But I want to pursue at a deeper level what Kasper has termed the problem of "pluriformity" and its limits.[3] This analysis is

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[2] Walter Kasper, "The Decree on Ecumenism—Read Anew After Forty Years," in John Paul II et al., *Searching for Christian Unity* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2007), 18–35, at 30. Also online: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/card-kasper-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20041111_kasper-ecumenism_en.html (accessed on June 23, 2014).

[3] See Kasper's address to the Conference of the Society for Ecumenical Studies (17 May 2003, St. Alban's Abbey, Hertfordshire, England), "*May They All Be One? But how?* A Vision of Christian Unity for the Next Generation," http://sfes.faithweb.com/0305kasper.pdf (accessed on June 16, 2014).

especially necessary in our contemporary context, whether one calls it late modern, postmodern, post-secular, or post-postmodern. Today, aspirations to unity are often considered hegemonic, and "difference" is the default hermeneutic of everyday life. For example, Terry Eagleton notes how the term "culture" has shifted since the 1960s, from its nineteenth-century meaning of high human ideals that grounded a unifying consensus and resolved political strife. It now refers to different and even agonistic national, sexual, ethnic, and regional identities—"culture" now as "difference," and "part of the very lexicon of political conflict itself."[4] Ever since Martin Heidegger's post-metaphysical arguments for "the ontological difference" (not a concept, but the *process of differentiation itself* that allows us to tell the difference between Being and beings, a "third" that escapes metaphysics' binary thinking) and Jacques Derrida's ode to *différance* (the "play" that makes discourse possible but can never say its own name),[5] the originary character of "difference" has been considered so self-evident by philosophical, social, and cultural theories that it needs no justification. Arguments for any primordial unity or oneness have been dismissed as Platonic fantasies and considered suspect, even dangerously coercive. Jean-François Lyotard states this in a particularly memorable way at the conclusion of *The Postmodern Condition,* where he links what he calls "the transcendental illusion" with terror: "We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one. . . . Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name."[6] The current cultural default in favor of difference renders any argument in favor of Christian unity, and any attempt to see it in a mutual relationship with difference, more difficult to make. It demands a more fundamental analysis than an ecumenical hermeneutics can give. And so the question remains: in Christianity, how can we have both unity and diversity, identity and difference together?

The New Testament Clue: Performance

Scripture provides resources for the first half of the solution that I want to give, and a performance hermeneutic provides the second half.

The New Testament supplies an important warrant by offering what one might consider an exquisite balance between unity and diversity. First, to use James Dunn's formulation, there is "a fairly clear and consistent unifying strand . . . [that] provided the *integrating centre* for the diverse expressions of Christianity,"[7] namely, Jesus

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[4] Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture,* Blackwell Manifestos (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 38.

[5] See Martin Heidegger, "The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics," *Identity and Difference,* trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 42–76, at 65; Jacques Derrida, "Differance" [*Différance*], *Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 3–27, at 11. See also my article, "Prolegomena to a Catholic Theology of God Between Heidegger and Postmodernity," *The Heythrop Journal* 40 (1999): 319–39, esp. 321–22.

[6] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), 81–82.

[7] James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity,* 3rd ed. (London: SCM, 2006), 403 (here and elsewhere, the emphases are Dunn's).

himself and "*the affirmation of the identity of the man Jesus with the risen Lord*, the conviction that the heavenly reality known in kerygma and scripture, in community, worship and religious experience generally is one and the same Jesus of whom the Jesus-tradition speaks."[8] That affirmation was not read back into the Jesus-tradition from later insights, but rather "was rooted in Jesus' own understanding of his relationship with God, with his disciples and with God's kingdom."[9] In other words, to use Edward Schillebeeckx's pithy formulation, "We must see him like this, because this is the way he is."[10] This christological unity is at the foundation of the unifying roles played by Easter faith and the experience of God's sending of the Spirit throughout all early Christian communities.[11]

But at the same time this unifying conviction was lived out in different situations and expressed in diverse formulations. Most obviously, there are four canonical Gospels and many others besides, not one, each with a particular narrative frame and a distinctive Jesus-portrait. Paul, for his part, identifies God's Son, "descended from David according to the flesh" (Rom 1:3) and "handed over for our transgressions" (Rom 4:25), with the risen Lord who "was raised for our justification" (Rom 4:25). Mark's language is different; his Gospel of the Son of God (1:1) also tells of the suffering Son of Man. Acts contains the very different exhortations to belief in Jesus by Peter in Jerusalem and Paul in the Areopagus (2:14–40; 17:22–31). The author of John's Gospel "presents the earthly Jesus *already* in terms of his exalted glory."[12] And diversity extends far beyond language patterns into practices. As Dunn notes, "*there was no single normative form of Christianity in the first century*" but varied types, "each of which viewed others as too extreme in one respect or other—too conservatively Jewish or too influenced by antinomian or gnostic thought and practice, too enthusiastic or tending towards too much institutionalization."[13] The metaphor that James Robinson and Helmut Koester employed in the 1970s to explain the relationships among early Christian writings—"trajectories"—is helpful here, and can be combined with Walter Kasper's characterization of the Easter event as the "initial ignition" of Christianity, in order to describe its dynamic development in various directions of communities of believers (and not just the literary after-effects).[14] Certain trajectories had the power to shoot out from this origin and become dominant (e.g., Pauline ecclesial organization, Johannine high christology), while others lost effectiveness for failing to express adequately the essence of Jesus' identity and soteriological significance (e.g., the communities behind Q or the Gospel of Thomas).

Now, none of this ongoing development would happen without *the active reception of Jesus' person, praxis, and message.* In Christianity, this active reception takes the form of embodied, historically situated, temporally extended *performance*;

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[8] Ibid., 245.

[9] Ibid., 403.

[10] Edward Schillebeeckx, *Interim Report on the Books "Jesus" and "Christ",* trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 11.

[11] Dunn, *Unity and Diversity,* 437–42.

[12] Ibid., 245.

[13] Ibid., 407.

[14] James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ,* new ed., [trans. V. Green] (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 112.

that performance is called "discipleship"—following Jesus, living a Jesus-like life. "Christian identity," William Spohn remarks, "comes from identifying with the person, cause, and community of Jesus Christ, which are inseparable. Disciples are committed to the person of the master and those whom he is concerned about; his cause is the reconciliation and healing reality of the reign of God."[15] And so alongside Dunn's integrating christological center we must consider this other unifying element, the performative one that includes the possibilities of its own diversity.

The argument about performance that I want to lay out here is a relatively simple one. In making it, I follow two of Hans-Georg Gadamer's cardinal rules about hermeneutical understanding. First, the moment of *understanding* is the moment of *interpretation* is the moment of *application*.[16] Understanding and interpretation are ontological; they pertain to the actualization of the interpreter's temporally-situated possibilities-for-being. The truth of any text, work of art, or musical work—and, for our purposes, the values of the Kingdom of God preached and lived by Jesus—can only be grasped when applied to the interpreter's own lived experience and possibilities, when there is a fusion of the horizon of the historically-situated catalyst with the horizon of the historically-situated interpreter. A fusion of horizons does not erase the temporal distance between them, the "pastness" of the past; rather, the temporal distance remains and is productive. It reveals both difference and continuity, allowing the interpreter to see where the past's presence in the present has shaped to some degree the pre-judgments, interests, and questions of the interpreter.[17] The second rule is that any tradition is a "history of effects" (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) and that all understanding is a consciousness effected by history.[18] To be part of a tradition means that one is, so to speak, standing in a stream with its origins far upstream. What constitutes the stream and flows past one's ankles—that is, what influences the interpreter's pursuit of understanding—is all the material that had originally entered upstream in time. One can accept, reject, or vary that material, but one is *always already* formed and influenced by it. Thus a double hermeneutic ensues: not only is it necessary to interpret works against the background of their own historical horizon of expectations, but the interpreter has her/his own horizon of expectations against which she/he needs to be interpreted as well.[19]

Discipleship is the Christian applicative moment—embodied, tradition-situated and temporally-saturated. There is no understanding of how God's salvation is revealed to us in Christ without the applicative moment of living a Jesus-like life and imagining one's possibilities in light of the values of the Kingdom of God. The New

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[15] William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 164.

[16] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 307–41, esp. 308.

[17] Ibid., 306: "The horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. *Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves*" [emphasis original].

[18] Ibid., 341–79.

[19] On the "double hermeneutic" and its inevitability in theology, see Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 291–92. This can be extended *mutatis mutandis* to all understanding.

Testament expresses it in many ways: following Jesus, imitating Jesus, living in Christ, remaining in Jesus, being members of the body of Christ, following the example of Jesus, and so forth.[20] Let me focus on one of these, a paradigmatic case from the gospel of Mark, the author who thematizes discipleship to the utmost. Along with Jesus' journey to Jerusalem as the suffering messiah, the entire second half of the gospel foregrounds authentic discipleship, seeing it pointed squarely in the direction of the cross. The episode where the blind Bartimaeus is healed (10:46–52) leaves us in no doubt about this. Mark's redaction of this miracle story into a discipleship story acts as a corrective to the completely inadequate and even pernicious understanding of discipleship articulated by James and John in the previous pericope (10:35–45). Let's call them and the other members of the Twelve the "capital D" disciples, whom we would expect to know precisely what discipleship involves. James and John, however, equate discipleship with eschatological power and control. In the Bartimaeus pericope this definition is swept aside and the true nature of discipleship is again revealed. Mark's narrative quickly eliminates the "capital D" disciples as well as the vacillating crowd, leaving only Jesus and Bartimaeus. The question-answer ping-pong effect of their concluding dialogue (10:51–52) directly equates "faith" with "sight," with spiritual insight. It is with both physical sight and spiritual insight, then, that Bartimaeus, at the close of the episode, "followed him on the way" (*êkolouthei autô en tê hodô* [10:52], the most important words in the pericope, placed at the very end for full rhetorical effect)—the way that leads to Jerusalem, to suffering, to the cross, and to resurrection. Authentic discipleship for Mark and his community, then, is embodied in Bartimaeus and in his faith that following in the steps of Jesus, who earlier defined his mission in terms of service rather than power (10:42–45), is the way to experience God's saving presence. The key in Mark is praxis, living a Jesus-like life, and the responsibility of the Gospel's audience as faithful disciples is to spread the good news of salvation.[21] The diversity of forms used by the New Testament books to express particular ways of "following" share this fundamental insight. "Christ also suffered for you," says the First Letter of Peter, "leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps" (2:21). Or we can apply Rowan Williams' more contemporary idiom: "Christianity is a contact before it is a message . . . If the risen Jesus is not an idea or an image but a living person, we meet him in the persons he has touched, the persons who, whatever

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[20] For variants of expression, see Fernando F. Segovia, ed., *Discipleship in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 1–5; Joel B. Green, et al., eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels,* 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), s.v. "Disciples and Discipleship" (M. J. Wilkins), 202–12; Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise,* 164–65.

[21] Mark's critique of the misunderstandings of the Twelve has been a staple of Markan scholarship since Theodore J. Weeden's *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971). For a convincing reading of Mark's rhetorical ability to invest his audiences with the responsibility of discipleship, see Paul Danove, "The Narrative Rhetoric of Mark's Ambiguous Characterization of the Disciples," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 70 (1998): 21–38.

their individual failings and fears, have been equipped to take responsibility for his tangible presence in the world."[22]

Discipleship shares with Dunn's integrating christological center the same dialectic of unity-and-diversity. In both instances we are confronted with an identity marker as well as the reality of multiple authentic ecclesial variations; the obvious historical variability and even improvisation do not leave identity behind but in fact are the only ways identity can be experienced. What kind of an explanatory scheme or metaphor can we use to explain how this happens? How do we present this unifying truth of Christian ecclesial life that is not some pure essence or a Kantian *Ding an sich* but that can only be experienced in the midst of shifting historical incarnations? Already in the 1980s Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argued for the advantages of treating the biblical witness as an historical prototype allowing variation rather than as an invariant archetype to be applied strictly and ahistorically in differing cultural settings. She recognized that one needs to account for the differing historical manifestations of Christian liberative praxis revealed by historical-critical and social-cultural studies of the Bible and its world.[23] In my view, though, her insightful suggestion suffers from the same inadequacy that metaphors of "framework," "foundation," and even Dunn's "center" have; they are grounded in either a literary understanding or a visual or mechanical metaphor and thus are too static. They work against what the Tübingen philosopher Manfred Frank has called "the unforseeability of interpretation" that arises from the encounter between a guiding structural form and personal freedom. The result of this encounter is a particular "style" that is determined by neither form nor subjectivity alone, and could never be coerced or rigidly codified in a system of rules or discourse.[24] If anything, the diversity of historical responses to the risen Lord demand an explanation that allows more flexibility, more flow, more temporally-saturated elements. It must be one that counts difference not as a problem to be solved but as a necessary precondition for any understanding whatsoever of Jesus, his praxis, his preaching, and his death and resurrection.

Ut musica Christianitas: A Performance Hermeneutic

Here is my suggestion: Christianity is like music. There is a close analogy between the musical work and musical performance and a deeper understanding of the truth of Christian identity as it develops in history.[25] A *performance hermeneutic* is the most adequate way to discern the truth and the underlying logic of the Christian tradition, which is an ensemble of practices, beliefs, and reflections. Christianity is

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[22] Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 92–93.

[23] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Women-Church: The Hermeneutical Center of Feminist Biblical Interpretation," in *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 1–22, esp. 9–15.

[24] Manfred Frank, "Toward a Philosophy of Style," trans. Richard E. Palmer, *Common Knowledge 1* (1992): 54–77, at 54–55, 76.

[25] This section borrows some material from my article "*Ut Musica Christianitas:* Christian Tradition as a History of Performances," in *The Shaping of Tradition: Context and Normativity,* ed. Colby Dickinson, Lieven Boeve, and Terrence Merrigan (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 91–99.

like music because (a) following its own incarnational logic and the New Testament's logic of discipleship, it needs to be performed/interpreted in space and time in order for its intended salvific truth to be fulfilled, and (b) each performance carries with it the history that has preceded it. The comparison works because the "intentional object" that is the musical work is already both a multi-layered *interpretation* of a previously sedimented tradition and an *improvisation* within a historically-constituted genre, both of which require duration over time.[26] The intended truth of the musical work occurs in its authentic fulfillment only when realized in particular and therefore varied performances in space and time. Right here is the identity-difference dialectic. Any written score is an historically-situated schematic identity (either more or less detailed) that needs to be filled in and concretized by uniquely varied moments of performance.[27] Experiencing the truth of the Christian tradition is a similar process: as a three-dimensional temporal truth it unites a past (that is always already interpretive) with future possibilities, all at the moment of their incipient realization in the always different present. The key here is *temporality.* In its various guises and various construals of reality, the Christian tradition brings its past—i.e., its origins, the lived experiences of discipleship that effectively and affectively respond to those origins, and the effects of those effects—into a relationship with an ever-changing present by means of temporally-projected participative acts. With one's performative interpretation of the elements of that tradition—performance in the present—one discloses the past's future possibilities to be discerned, actualized, made effective, and savored.

How might we illustrate this thesis and the principle of variation that, as we have seen, is clearly built into the New Testament witness? Let me offer an example of Western music that has the principles of variation and dialectic built into it as well, Johann Sebastian Bach's *Goldberg Variations,* BWV 988 (Bach's title was *Keyboard Exercise: Aria mit verschiedenen Veränderungen*).[28]

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[26] For "improvisation" in this context, see Bruce Ellis Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Benson, "The Improvisation of Hermeneutics: Jazz Lessons for Interpreters," in *Hermeneutics at the Crossroads,* ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, James A. K. Smith, and Bruce Ellis Benson (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 193–210. For the difference between the "intentional" and "real" existence of musical works, see Roman Ingarden, *Ontology of the Work of Art,* trans. Raymond Meyer and John T. Goldthwait (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1989), 27–46, 90–94.

[27] Performances are never identical, even when performers aim for rote repetition ("just like the recording"). They are varied by many factors, such as the acoustic character of the space, the mood of the performers and the audience, the physical state of instruments and voices, etc.

[28] For the critical edition and facsimile pages, see Johann Sebastian Bach, *Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke* [NBA], Serie V, Band 2: *Zweiter Teil der Klavierübung/Vierter Teil der Klavierübung* [Goldberg Variations]/*Vierzehn Kanons,* ed. Walter Emery and Christoph Wolff, BA 5048–01 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1977). I rely on the following analyses: Ralph Kirkpatrick, preface to Johann Sebastian Bach, *The "Goldberg" Variations,* ed. Ralph Kirkpatrick (New York; G. Schirmer, 1938), vii–xxviii; David Schulenberg, *The Keyboard Music of J. S. Bach,* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 369–88; Peter Williams, *Bach: The Goldberg Variations,* Cambridge Music Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Musical examples are taken from Johann Sebastian Bach, *Goldberg Variationen: Aria mit verschiedenen Veraenderungen, Clavicimbal mit 2 Manualen, BWV 988 & Verschiedene*

Example 1.   J. S. Bach, *Goldberg Variations,* BWV 988
Title page of original print (Nuremberg: Balthasar Schmid, c. 1741/42)
[http://imslp.org/wiki/Special:ImagefromIndex/74598]

Most know that the piece consists of an keyboard "aria" in the guise of a tender sarabande, thirty variations of thirty-two bars each (16+16, with each half repeated), and then a repeat (*da capo*) of the aria at the end. But the movements that follow the aria are not thirty variations on the aria's melody, but rather *thirty different melodies* built on the aria's fundamental bass line:

Canones über die ersteren acht Fundamental-Noten der Arie, BWV 1087, nach J. S. Bach's Exempler des Erstdrucks, ed. Martin Straeten (2010), available at http://imslp.org/wiki/Special:ImagefromIndex/240148 (reproduced in accordance with Creative Commons Attribution—ShareAlike 3.0 license).

Example 2. J. S. Bach, *Goldberg Variations,* BWV 988: Extracted bass line [David Schulenberg, *The Keyboard Music of J. S. Bach,* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 377]

A bass line like this, beginning with a descending tetrachord, has a long history stretching back to the seventeenth century and even earlier. The bass line itself is melodious; its first eight notes, in fact, echo the first line of Luther's Christmas hymn tune "Vom Himmel hoch, da komm' ich her" (a melody with which Bach seems to have been preoccupied in his last years). He probes this 32-bar harmonic sequence for every possibility it offers and creates a veritable cornucopia, "thirty distinct essays exploring the language and genres of music as its composer understood them."[29] There is, for example, the boisterous two-part invention that opens the set (here and elsewhere, the first eight fundamental notes of the bass line are circled).[30]

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29. P. Williams, 35.

30. Reference recording: J. S. Bach, *Goldberg Variations, BWV 988; Toccatas, BWV 912–915,* Bob van Asperen, harpsichord (Virgin Veritas 50999 6 93198 2, 2 CDs). An equally fine recording, also steeped in the style of the period, is Pierre Hantaï's second recording of the work (Mirare 9945). Both players take most of the repeats. (Many listeners associate the *Goldbergs* with Glenn Gould's famous piano recordings of the work. I'm not a fan.)

Example 3. J. S. Bach, *Goldberg Variations,* BWV 988: Variation 1, mm. 1–8

There is a two-part canon built on the bass line, the first of nine canons (every third variation except the last):

Example 4. J. S. Bach, *Goldberg Variations,* BWV 988: Variation 3 (Canon at the unison), mm. 1–6

There is a fugue that is both rigorous and playful:

Example 5. J. S. Bach, *Goldberg Variations,* BWV 988: Variation 10 (Fughetta), mm. 1−16

Variation 16 at the mid-way point is a stunning French overture:

Example 6. J. S. Bach, *Goldberg Variations,* BWV 988: Variation 16 (*Ouverture*), mm. 1–8

There is a heart-breaking *lamento* in the minor key:

Example 7. J. S. Bach, *Goldberg Variations,* BWV 988: Variation 25, mm. 1–8

And the next-to-last variation is a virtuoso *tour de force:*

Example 8. J. S. Bach, *Goldberg Variations,* BWV 988: Variation 29, mm. 1–16

Thus, thirty *different* melodies built on the same foundational bass line. Bach was so intoxicated with its possibilities that, on a blank page of his personal copy of the print, he composed fourteen more canons on the first eight notes.[31] Even more remarkable is the fact that the bass line never appears in its hypothetical original form, but only as altered with passing notes, chromatic inflections, and embellishments. Any "pure" form of the bass, as shown above, has to be extracted from the thirty-one examples. It is in the nature of the fundamental bass and its implied harmonies to be always in the background, guiding the unfolding logic of the piece while allowing freedom in the creation of the upper melodies. But the bass line is also easily discernible, even viscerally felt, since "the harmonic rhythm is consistent throughout the work" and the fundamental notes of the bass are most often on the downbeats.[32]

The point here is not a lesson in music theory. Rather, I want to focus on the unity-diversity dialectic and temporality. If musical performance in general, as I have argued, is the most adequate metaphor for explaining the lived application of Christian truth, the *Goldberg Variations* are an excellent analogue to our specific topic, the unity and diversity of Christianity, its christological claims, and its exhortations to discipleship. This analogy is so because like any musical work, it plays out *in time*; it needs actualization in time to reveal its identity and meaning.[33] In the *Goldbergs,* the harmonic sequencing unfolding in time determines the fundamental flow of the composition of the variation but does not predict what the completed form of the variation will be. Bach's teeming creative imagination—his ability to take the germ of a musical idea and explore it from every angle, exhausting its possibilities while at the same time getting it to transcend its original limitations— is always guided by the underlying harmonic framework but is not scripted by it. Almost anything goes, *as long as it adheres to the rule of the harmonic sequencing of the bass line*. The almost wild diversity of genres attests to this. The canon, the overture, the *lamento,* and the virtuoso showpiece have nothing in common but the harmonic logic of the bass line that structures them and takes time to unfold through a series of dissonances and consonances, tensions and releases, to a satisfying close or cadence. The resulting work is an exemplar of the "unforseeability of interpretation."

The New Testament's christological claim and its call to discipleship have the same function as the *Goldbergs'* bass line: they provide the unifying background shaping impetus to the varied lived experiences of Christian life throughout the centuries. The truth of Christian life can be expressed with three elements: doxology, soteriology, and liberative praxis. Timothy Radcliffe concisely summarizes the first by identifying what he calls "the point of Christianity": "If Christianity is true, then it

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[31] Fourteen Canons, BWV 1087. Bach envisioned even more possibilities: in the bottom right corner, he wrote "Et c." For the critical edition, NBA V/2, see above, n. 28. See also Christoph Wolff, "The Handexemplar of the Goldberg Variations," *Bach: Essays on His Life and Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 162–77.

[32] Schulenberg, *Keyboard Music of J. S. Bach,* 378.

[33] Even non-tonal pieces follow this prescription. In John Cage's famous *4'33″,* the pianist, with minimum gestures, sits silently at the instrument for precisely that length of time and thereby "reveals" the ambient sounds around us as music. The subtly shifting (and mesmerizing) percussive and melodic effects of Steve Reich's four-movement *Drumming* need around a hour an a half to unfold.

does not have a point other than to point to God who is the point of everything."[34] Walter Kasper unites doxology's praise of the triune God with Christianity's salvific intent: "According to the Lord's farewell prayer true life consists precisely in knowing and glorifying God. For its own sake therefore soteriology must pass over into doxology. For amid all the vicissitudes and instability of history man's salvation consists in having communion with the God who through all eternity *is* love."[35] This continual incarnational impetus is never isolatable "as is" but only available in particular embodiments. We experience the love of God through the incarnated grace of Christ offered to us in living a Jesus-like life in light of the Paschal Mystery. That grace perdures in us and in the world through the power of the Spirit who offers us fellowship, a participation in that divine love (2 Cor 13:13). Discipleship-as-application is thus a necessity, as Jesus tells the lawyer at the close of the Good Samaritan pericope: "go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). The sole reason for the Christian tradition is to incarnate this participation, and it does so by a series of provocations and receptions: a history of effects. The Christian life is therefore best viewed as the embodied performance of discipleship over time, built on the fundamental logic of the Incarnation and its sacramentalizing of particularity, and applied in diverse historical and cultural contexts and as an ensemble of practices, beliefs, and reflections. The tradition never loses sight of its origins in the practices of Jesus of Nazareth and his followers, and indeed presents them through the means of effective performative receptions that occur further "downstream." This means that Christianity is always more than "what would Jesus do?" since every present receptive performance responds to all of its pasts, whether overtly or covertly. At the same time, the performers of the tradition also can never ignore the current context in which discipleship is being lived and where the truth of the salvific tradition is being applied.

What is crucial here is the aspect of *temporality*. That is why music and the interpretation of the musical work present the most adequate analogy for understanding the Christian tradition, because only musical performance conveys the combination of unity, variety, and duration that helps explain the authentic diversity of Christian praxis and its ecclesial expressions. The musical work is temporally saturated in two ways: always historically situated, coming out of a particular epoch and interacting with that epoch's genres; but also inherently an *arrangement of time*—it takes time to perform its unique configuration and sequencing of tonal and rhythmic events.[36] We could use words like "concretized," "articulated," "embodied," and "incarnated" to express the historical particularity of Christian lives and to make the necessary connection between those lives and divine revelation's incarnated particularity that is central to Christian belief.[37] But those valid descriptions bypass

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[34] Timothy Radcliffe, *What is the Point of Being a Christian?* (London/New York: Burns and Oates, 2005), 1.

[35] Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ,* new ed., [trans. Matthew J. O'Connell] (London/New York: Continuum, 2012), 315.

[36] This holds true for any musical work, from chant to "Happy Birthday" to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony to Daft Punk's "Get Lucky."

[37] "Incarnated particularity" is fundamental to all Christian faith claims. See Anthony J. Godzieba, Lieven Boeve, and Michele Saracino, "Resurrection—Interruption—Transformation: Incarnation as Hermeneutical Strategy," *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 777–815.

any acknowledgment that embodied discipleship is constituted and developed individually and communally only over real time. The *ecclêsia* is simultaneously its past, the appropriation of this past through performances in the present, and its eschatological liberative praxis. The ensemble of temporally-saturated practices and reflections that constitute the tradition as a history of effects guided by the Spirit unfolds and accumulates receptions in time and over time. The synthesis we make of these practices and reflections—seeing them as an "ensemble"—can be experienced only from particular points in the temporal horizon. Of necessity it is a limited synthesis, much like our experience of any piece of music: we grasp its identity without being able to synthesize all of its performances. So by its very nature the church's incarnational logic and its exhortation to follow Jesus "on the way" are expressed in the dialectic of unity and diversity: *ut unum sint, ut plures sint.* Difference and its counterpart temporality are not problems to be solved and dismissed, but rather the necessary ways we have access to the plenteous grace of the life of Christ and the Paschal Mystery that confirms our share in it.

The Eclipse of Time and Narrative

Our analysis, though, has omitted one thing: the disturbing eclipse of time and narrative in contemporary culture. The temporal duration necessary for discipleship's implications to unfold and be discerned is becoming literally inconceivable. Christian life is already positioned by a cultural sense and by economic and technological factors that threaten to overwhelm our narrative imaginations.

Recent cultural studies have shown that the accelerated pace of contemporary life leads paradoxically to its "de-temporalization." We complain about "having no time" to get things done, despite the promise of digital technologies to help us control the constant onslaught of fragmentary waves of information. But, as media theorist Douglas Rushkoff notes, it is a false hope: "For not only have our devices outpaced us, they don't even reflect a here and now that may constitute any legitimate sort of present tense. They are reports from the periphery, of things that happened moments ago."[38] Postmodern culture, he says, is characterized by "narrative collapse," due to the loss of optimism about the future and brought on by overwhelming events like 9/11 and the implosion of the economy. That collapse is mirrored in the "presentist" popular culture that shapes much of our everyday experience: goal-directed narrative arcs once used by television dramas and sitcoms have been replaced by shows "characterized by frozenness in time, as well as by the utter lack of traditional narrative goals."[39] Without a *telos,* the search for meaning looks to drama generated by disconnected spectacles of attention-grabbing behavior, such as reality TV's stock-in-trade of humiliation and personal tragedy.[40] The loss of narrative is also

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[38] Douglas Rushkoff, *Present Shock: when Everything Happens Now* (New York: Current/Penguin, 2013), 74.

[39] Ibid., 31.

[40] Ibid., 37: "Without the traditional narrative arc at their disposal, producers of reality TV must generate pathos directly, in the moment . . . What images and ideas can stop the channel surfer in his tracks?"

mirrored in contemporary politics, with its hair-on-fire chaotic decision-making and inability to reach or even construct long-term goals.[41]

The social theorist Hartmut Rosa has coined a phrase for the cause of such "now-ism": social acceleration. Such acceleration, he says, has three elements: technical acceleration ("the intentional . . . acceleration of goal-directed processes"), acceleration of social change (where past experiences no longer meet present expectations, causing the present as a time-span of stability to "contract"), and acceleration of the pace of life (where we experience the contraction of the present as "the scarcity of time resources" and the anxious compulsion to "keep up").[42] The way we conceive of both individual and social life thereby changes: "life is no longer planned along a line that stretches from the past into the future" but rather is governed by short-term decisions in response to an overwhelming number of "unforeseeable contingencies" and the needs and desires of the moment. The result, Rosa argues, is an "incapacity to engage in long-term commitments," which in turn leads to "a paradoxical backlash in which the experience of frantic change and 'temporalized time' give way to the perception of 'frozen time' without (a meaningful) past and future and consequently of depressing inertia."[43] Rosa argues that this "de-temporalization of time" affects not only individual identities; social identities and political decisions are also pervaded by directionless inertia masquerading as frantic change, resulting in the "disappearance of politics."[44] We are left with an apparent unsolvable dilemma: social acceleration reveals a range of human possibilities that is wider than ever, but our abilities to survey these possibilities and decide among them remains as truncated as before. We are overwhelmed and can't keep up. The result is ominous; the pace of everything around us ("increasingly contingent and revisable") accelerates, while our own "loss of direction, priorities, and narratable 'progress'" causes us to decelerate into inertia.[45]

This is the contemporary situation in which Christian discipleship is embedded, at least where consumer capitalism and its technologies prevail. Various forms of contemporary Catholic dogmatism—or, better put, attempts to reduce Catholic identity to a single identity-marker or a "brand"—are capitulations to this inertia, even while claiming to resist the social changes that provoke it. In other words, attempts to "trademark" Catholicism as "settled doctrine" or an ethereal metaphysical realm, or to reduce it to strictly literal readings of Vatican II texts or the *Catechism,*

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[41] Ibid., 47: "Policy, as such, is no longer measured against a larger plan or narrative; it is simply a response to changing circumstances on the ground, or on the tube . . . What used to be called statecraft devolves into a constant struggle with crisis management. Leaders cannot get on top of issues, much less ahead of them, as they instead seek merely to respond to the emerging chaos in a way that makes them look authoritative."

[42] Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity,* trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 71–80, at 71 (goal-directed), 76 (contraction of the present), 79 (scarcity); Rosa, "Social Acceleration: Ethical and Political Consequences of a Desynchronized High-Speed Society," *Constellations* 10/1 (2003): 3–33, at 6–10.

[43] Rosa, "Social Acceleration," 19–20; see also 25: "The inability to control social change has brought an overwhelming sense of directionless change in an 'iron cage' that itself has become fundamentally inert."

[44] Ibid., 20–22.

[45] Ibid., 27. See also *Social Acceleration,* 80–93.

or to conflate it with Catholic social thought or inflexible liturgical law are anxiety-prone reactions to the accelerated speed of social change and overwhelming difference. They are also ways of minimizing the lived performance of discipleship and the basic need for these applicative moments to play out over time in order to clarify their meaning. By understanding unity unilaterally, dogmatist reactions function similarly to Neoscholasticism in its attempt to counteract modernity. As Francis Schüssler Fiorenza has demonstrated, Neoscholasticism relied on modern rationalist means of certainty and thus implicated itself in the very modernity which it tried to condemn.[46] Dogmatist construals of Catholic identity are implicated in a similar way in postmodern inertia when they conflate a temporally contingent synthesis with the "essence" of Catholicism and go on to claim that synthesis as perennial or absolute. In doing so, the temporally unfolding "harmonic logic" of doxology, soteriology, liberative praxis, and discipleship—the identity-difference dialectic of the New Testament and the ongoing Christian tradition—is betrayed.

The Play of Discipleship

If there is to be any critique of contemporary culture by Catholic theology (I refuse to use the term "culture war"), the issue is not liberal-vs.-conservative, pre-Vatican-II-vs.-post-Vatican-II, traditionalist-vs.-progressive. The real point is to critique the eclipse of time and narrative that affects our experience of discipleship, and the temptation to de-temporalize Christian faith in reaction to what the theologian David Ford has called the "multiple overwhelmings" of the present.[47] If Christianity is indeed like music, then here we need to recall the quasi-temporal structure of the musical work as an intentional object; it contains elements that succeed each other in a determined order and are qualitatively modified by some or all of the preceding and following elements. The Christian tradition as a *Wirkungsgeschichte,* a history of diverse effects and receptions, functions in a similar way. Now, I don't want to be misunderstood. To express the fundamental truths of the Christian life as "ecclesial benchmarks" that memorialize the insights the church has gained over a period of time (the creeds, for example) is a valid and necessary exercise deeply embedded in our Christian history. But to express the fundamental truths of Christianity simply as a set of infinitely-repeatable identity markers or propositions is an attempt to take an immovable stand within the temporal flow of applications and articulate a complete synthesis of temporally-situated practices and reflections. The gospel injunction to "go and do likewise" always renders such stasis inadequate.

A performance hermeneutic is the most adequate way to explain the variegated play of discipleship that grounds the authentic application of the values of the Kingdom of God. For example, John Noonan's *A Church That Can and Cannot Change* can be read as an itinerary of performative moral applications of insights gained from discipleship.[48] The 1999 *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of*

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[46] F. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology,* 263.

[47] David Ford, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 7–11.

[48] John T. Noonan, Jr., *A Church That Can and Cannot Change: The Development of Catholic Moral Teaching* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005). In speaking of John Henry Newman as the "inventor" of the idea of the development of Christian

Justification agreed upon by both Catholics and Lutherans is an instance where dissonant theological anthropologies (i.e., diverse performances of the meaning of the Paschal Mystery) could be brought into harmony after almost six centuries of divergent applications of the notions of faith and grace.[49] And the ongoing reaction to Cardinal Walter Kasper's address at the 2014 Extraordinary Consistory on the Family, regarding the readmission of divorced and remarried Catholics to the Eucharist, has revealed severely different understandings of Jesus' teaching on marriage and the history of exceptions to Jesus' prohibition of divorce, including differences between Western and Eastern Church practices.[50] These divergent applications all claim to be rooted in Jesus' teaching, and the ongoing discernment of the link between broken married relationships and the reception of the Eucharist, a discernment that needs to delve deeply into Jesus' overall practice and its continued reception among ecclesial communities, will need time to come to fruition.

To explain why and how difference always shadows unity, as both the New Testament and the *Decree on Ecumenism* acknowledge, a *performance hermeneutic* is needed, a way of articulating the active imitation of Christ and all of its receptions. We thereby can recognize how God's saving grace is revealed in manifold variations over time and why the central Christian performances of the truths of the tradition which disclose God's rich mercy and the ongoing life of the Spirit—liturgical ritual, sacraments as experiences of the "excess of grace," contemplation leading to action, moral choices leading to actualized participation in divine life—are the fundamental starting points for thinking theologically about the richness, diversity, and temporally-saturated character of the Christian tradition and its relation to the world.[51] Discerning the salvific truth of Christian life occurs not merely from the force of rational argument, but also from the lived experiences of Christians

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doctrine, Noonan says, "An Anglican arguing his way into the Catholic Church, Newman saw that the anomalies and novelties of his new spiritual home were the marks of vigor, of maturity, of being alive" (3).

[49] *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church* (31 October 1999), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/ rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html (accessed on June 17, 2014).

[50] Cardinal Kasper's address is published as *The Gospel of the Family,* trans. William Madges (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014). For a sample of the harsh criticism leveled at Kasper's suggestions, see Sandro Magister, "On Communion for the Remarried, a Letter from Bangladesh," http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1350792?eng=y (accessed on June 17, 2014); "For the Record: Full Translation of Cardinal Caffarra's Interview—On the Indissolubility of Marriage, 'Compromise is unworthy of the Lord,'" http://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2014/03/for-record-full-translation-of-cardinal.html (accessed on June 17, 2014).

[51] See Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life,* trans. William Madges (New York: Paulist, 2014), 131: "The message of divine mercy is not a theory that is alien to praxis and world realities, nor does it stop at the level of sentimental expressions of pity. Jesus teaches us to be merciful like God (Luke 6:36) . . . This motif of *imitatio Dei,* the imitation of God and his actions in Jesus Christ, is foundational for the Bible. Therefore, the message of divine mercy has consequences for the life of every Christian, for the pastoral praxis of the church, and for the contributions that Christians should render to the humane, just, and merciful structuring of civil society."

attempting to follow Jesus, and the unscripted harmonies of grace underpinning those experiences. This is why Christian *performance,* the *play* of discipleship, must be at the heart of any discussion of ecclesial life and the effects of the church in the world. We must be the journeying Bartimaeus, and we cannot leave the active grace of God in Christ to be swept up in any sort of anxious and reactive inertia. In our common attempts to live the values of the Kingdom of God, temporality and difference are positive values; they give us access to the unfolding unifying harmonic rhythm of the Paschal Mystery and the gift of the Spirit that together guide our attempts to live a Jesus-like life. The rest is noise.