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Gifts from the World: Bringing Dumitru Staniloae in Conversation with some Prominent Themes in Majority World Theologies

By

Robert A. Simpson

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Edinburgh

2022
Signed Declaration:

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented is entirely my own.

Robert A. Simpson

........ Date: 13/08/2022
Abstract

This thesis engages the theological topic of the “gift” and “gift-giving” that has become popular within Euro-American theological discourse. While the academic discourse is traced back to an anthropological work that highlights the nature of gifts outside the West, the theological conversation remains mostly isolated to Western assumptions, concerns, and questions. I argue that this lacuna in the conversation can be partially attributed to the term “contextual theology.” The term contextual theology is commonplace within contemporary Christian theology. The term possesses both a methodological and a descriptive value, meaning contextual theology is both a way of doing theology and also a way to describe the nature of all theologies as being products of their respective historio-cultural locations. In the twenty-first century, it is not always clear what is different about contextual theology other than it is often used to distinguish theologies developed outside the “Western tradition” (Euro-American). This thesis then argues that the term contextual theology, while at first useful, has now unintentionally assisted in siloing theologies developed in the Majority World from theologies developed in the West. To alleviate this gap, this thesis attempts to undertake a theological experiment at pursuing an intercontextual theology that seeks to treat all theologies explored as equal dialogue partners. To do this, it identifies a gift theology that is both absent from the wider discourse and provides the grounds for theological construction as found in Romanian Orthodox theologian Dumitru Staniloae’s “World as a Gift.” The thesis then explores Staniloae’s World as a Gift and argues that it can be supplemented by placing it in dialogue with various Majority World theologies from a wide variety of geographical contexts due to these theologies’s foci on the particular gifts found within creation due to their deep concerns that arise from particular geographic contexts. These particular gifts of matter, space, and time operate as the three themes around which the dialogue of this thesis takes place. In engaging in this exercise this thesis is able to engage four overarching transcontextual themes: 1) a relatively strong emphasis on human responsibility; 2) the interdependency of all creation; 3) the primacy of the past and present; 4) the lack of a stark division between the spiritual and material. Hence, this thesis moves in the direction
of an intercontextual theology that offers the beginnings of a future “global theology” of the World as a Gift. Finally, by leveraging these themes found through dialogue, this thesis attempts to broadly apply these findings to the author's context of North America.
This thesis is a work of Christian theology that engages conversations around the topics of “gift” and “gift-giving” that have become popular in North Atlantic academic theology. The ideas of gift and gift giving have become useful to explore the relationship that exists between God and humanity. This has led to the need to clarify what a gift is and how this informs humanity’s relationship with God. For instance, is a gift something that is given with no strings attached (unilateral), or, is a gift something that comes with an obligation to give back (reciprocal)? In theological terms: Do God’s gifts come with an obligation to give back to God? If so, how does humanity give back to God? These questions have been explored by a number of Euro-American theologians but there is a lack of engagement from and with theologians that exist outside the Western tradition. Thus, this thesis hopes to offer the beginnings of a theology of the gift from a global perspective.

To do this, this thesis attempts a “theological experiment” where it builds upon Romanian Orthodox Dumitru Staniloae’s gift theology by bringing him in dialogue with multiple non-Western theologians around the topics of matter, space, and time. By engaging in this exercise this thesis is able to identify four overarching themes that transcend context: 1) a strong emphasis on human responsibility; 2) the interdependence of all of creation; 3) the primacy of the past and the present; 4) the lack of a division between the spiritual and material. Finally, by leveraging these themes found through the dialogue that takes place this thesis attempts to apply them broadly to the author’s own context of North America.
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"Let everything happen to you / Beauty and terror / Just keep going / No feeling is final."

This quote from German Poet Rainer Maria Rilke in many ways captures the experience of my journey here in Edinburgh. The last four years have been anything but normal. There is a certain ring of irony here as this quote has nothing to do with the actual writing experience, but rather, everything else that happened in my life while writing. Perhaps it was providence or perhaps it was coincidental but writing a dissertation about gifts and thanksgiving was exactly what I needed to be writing on during such a difficult season in my life. I learned to periodically rise above life’s beauties and tragedies and see that life truly is a gift and accepting that gift means accepting all of life in both its beauty and terror. Without the support and friendship of all those listed below (and many more whom I could not fit on this list) I could have never finished this degree program.

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All of you are gifts I don’t deserve.
Chapter 1: The “Gift” in Contemporary Theological Discourse

Introduction

In 2003, the New York Times published an article entitled, “Love & Money; When Parental Gifts Come with Strings Attached.” Ellyn Spragins explored the (un)intended consequences of parents who give gifts to children expecting something in return.¹ She writes, “While gifts that inspire obligation are practically an art form in Japan, gift-giving in this country is supposed to be an unfettered act of generosity.”² This short article written during the holiday season suggests the subtle, yet important difference between “American” concepts of gift-giving and Japanese concepts of gift-giving. The fundamental difference is that gifts in Japan are intended to “inspire obligation” and require reciprocity, whereas in much of America an ideal gift is typically portrayed as an act of “unfettered generosity.” As an American, these differences became most apparent to me during an ethnographic study of diasporic South Korean Christians living in Edinburgh, Scotland for my master’s dissertation. The themes of “reciprocity” and “obligation” appeared repeatedly throughout my study. This was in stark contradistinction to my understandings of gift and gift-giving as I had always generally assumed a gift should be given unilaterally with “no strings attached.” Given the close relationship that exists between ideas of gift and gift-giving and several theological topics, it should prompt us to wonder in what ways cultural understandings of gifts and gift-giving may have come to influence theological assumptions and vice versa. As we will see, I am hardly the first person to make such an observation.

² Ibid.
Conversations surrounding the gift have attracted a lot of interdisciplinary attention in recent years. In a brief analysis of these various fields I hope to show the following: (1) Reciprocity is integral to gift-giving in many contexts; (2) The theme of reciprocity is coupled with and reemphasized within the contemporary theological discourse often through various forms of theologies of participation; (3) While the academic discourse is usually traced back to social-scientific work which highlights the nature of gifts outside the Western world, the theological conversation tends to remain isolated to Western concerns and questions. This thesis will challenge some of these Western assumptions by engaging with voices outside of the Western discourse by offering the beginnings of a revised theology of Dumitru Staniloae’s World as a Gift through intercontextual dialogue.3 But before it does, in the following sections I will primarily focus on how the gift is being utilized within contemporary theology and argue that a chief concern among theologians who employ the gift are seeking to reemphasize human participation and agency, reciprocity in the divine-human relationship in opposition to what they believe to be mechanistic, unilateral, individualistic, and anthropocentric soteriologies. The main aim of this chapter is to provide the necessary background to the relatively recent gift theologies in order to frame our conversation moving forward.

**An Interdisciplinary Gift**

In this section, I will observe how the categories of gift and gift-exchange have been used in social scientific, philosophical, and theological literature as well as highlighting the differences that exist.

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3 In the next chapter I will explore more fully the idea of intercontextual dialogue. For now, it will suffice to say that I imagine intercontextual theology to be placing multiple theologies from widely different geographical contexts in dialogue with one another in an attempt to trace out the general themes that exist between them.
depending on the cultural context. It should be clarified that it is not the aim of this chapter to provide a complete overview of the history of gift-giving within these fields.

Why has the gift been such a popular topic of late? As Alan D. Schrift argues that the gift has become “one of the primary focal points at which contemporary disciplinary and interdisciplinary discourses intersect.”\(^4\) Schrift concludes that these discussions show that the question of the gift is primarily political in nature. The current political climate lends itself to understanding others and resources as being more reciprocal and counteracting the “very notion of a property possessing individual empowered to demand full and unimpeded authority to control all that he or she owns.”\(^5\) The questions surrounding the gift are often concerned with the issues of justice, ethics, and interpersonal relationships. But the question we need to ask as well is: Why are so many theologians interested in notions of reciprocity and participation?

**Social-Scientific Conceptions of Gift-Exchange**

Unsurprisingly, there is hardly a unanimous opinion as to what a gift is, and this can change drastically depending on the context in which it is being used. There is a large amount of social scientific literature that focuses on the themes of gifts and gift-giving and what these phenomena are. The most notable work in this area is Marcel Mauss’ *The Gift*, published in 1925.\(^6\) Mauss found that societies lacking monetary exchange utilized the giving of gifts instead and that gifts were integral to every part of these societies. Mauss argues that in many societies, gifts never come without obligations. Gift-giving relationships consist of three obligations: (1) the obligation to give; (2) the obligation to receive; (3) and the obligation to repay.\(^7\) This is in stark contrast to the

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\(^5\) Ibid., 19.
\(^7\) Ibid., 11.
“Western” idea of the pure gift, or a gift given without an expectation of a return. The difference arises that in some societies there is no separation between “gift” and “commodity.” Jonathan Parry is correct in his argument that:

Gift-exchange — in which persons and things, interest and disinterest are merged — has been fractured, leaving gifts opposed to exchange, persons opposed to things and interest to disinterest. The ideology of a disinterested gift emerges in parallel with an ideology of a purely interested exchange. Mauss’ real purpose here is not to suggest that there is no such thing as a pure gift in any society, but rather to show that for many the issue simply cannot arise since they do not make the kinds of distinction that we make. So while Mauss is generally represented as telling us how in fact the gift is never free, what I think he is really telling us is how we have acquired a theory that it should be.8

Parry’s analysis here is correct: Mauss is not arguing, as Derrida will, that a pure gift does not exist in the realm of human giving. He is providing a genealogy of how many Western societies have come to hold to the altruistic idea of a pure gift. However, what is not explained is why many East Asian contexts, which currently do possess a monetary economy, have largely continued to operate with an obligatory gift-system in which reciprocity is required, and why more “Western” societies do not. Parry claims that Christianity is the primary factor in this difference. Parry argues that in order to develop this idea of a “pure gift” one needs a religion that looks for deliverance from “this profane world of suffering. The unreciprocated gift becomes a liberation from bondage to it, a denial of the profane self, an atonement for sin, and hence a means to salvation.”9 He goes on to conclude that it was “no accident” that the separation of the gift from commodity took place where Christianity was the dominant religion.10 Fenella Cannell challenges Parry’s caricature of Christianity and also unveils

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9 Ibid., 468.
10 Ibid.
the hidden bias within anthropology toward “heterodox Christianities.” She uses Mormonism as an example of a Christianity that does not posit a “radical separation between body and spirit, between this life and the life to come, or between spirituality and kinship.”

Parry’s caricature of an ascetic Christianity that completely disvalues the material world is at best a surface reading of what many forms of Christianity actually teach about the material world.

What is evident is that Mauss’ threefold understanding of gift-giving is paralleled in many cultures today. Harumi Befu understands Japanese giving to be centered around the idea of *giri* (duty). She writes: “Since gift-giving is an act of *giri*, and since *giri* requires reciprocation, a gift naturally calls for a return gift. The moral obligation to give, to receive, and to return gifts is as much a part of traditional Japan as it is of the archaic societies with which Marcel Mauss concerned himself in his famous essay on the gift.”

In China, the basis of gift-exchange is found in the six Confucian values: *renqing* (appropriate emotion); *li* (social courtesy); *mianzi* (respect); *lian* (dignity); *bao* (reciprocity); *guanxi* (relationship building). Through analyzing the exchange of wine in China, Ye Yang and Angel Paladino conclude that, “The considerations on *guanxi* (relationship), *mianzi* (saving face), and reciprocity are reflected in everyday exchange and consumption behavior, particularly in driving attitudes and intentions to give gifts.”

*Bao* is the key moral principle that should be followed and by following this it is understood to increase the strength of social relationships.

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similarities to this also in South Korea. The practice of Korean ancestral veneration has played an integral role in the reciprocal gift-giving culture in South Korea. For example, the word for “gift” in Korean is Sun Mool, which originally meant “foods on an altar.” These foods are to be shared with members of the community and promote social unity. Because of the shared cultural and religious traditions, the gift-giving practices in China, Japan, and South Korea are very similar. At the heart of gift-giving in these countries is the obligation to reciprocate, and each system has its origins in cultural and religious beliefs.

The obligation to reciprocate is not limited to East Asia. David P. Mann shows how miscommunications occurred in the past between Western missionaries and the Dowayo peoples in Cameroon because these peoples understood gifts to be reciprocal while the Western missionaries did not. The Dowayo people were hesitant to accept the gifts due to these gifts being seen as “interested,” meaning, “what are they trying to get out of me…?” This perception of a reciprocal relationship is not confined to human relationships, but also a person’s relationship with God. Mann observes that “Gift exchanges cement relationships. It is to a person’s advantage to share with others…this continual sharing throughout the society creates a sort of social safety net for times of difficulty.”

Examples of this can be found in the work of Naomi Haynes and Simon Coleman on Pentecostalism, charismatic Christianity, and gospels of prosperity. Naomi Haynes conducted her research on gift-giving behaviors in Korea and America, and her work includes a comparison of how these behaviors differ in collectivist vs. individualistic cultures. Simon Coleman has written extensively on the globalization of charismatic Christianity and the spread of gospels of prosperity.

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18 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 51.
21 For Simon Coleman’s work on charismatic Christianity see Simon Coleman, The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Simon
ethnographic study in the Zambian Copperbelt. Gift-giving among peoples in the Copperbelt is seen as a core component of a well-functioning social life. It is through interdependent networks of exchange that Pentecostals give gifts to solidify social ties.22 At the top of this network is the Divine where through contributions “believers ‘indebt’ God to them’ in a ‘reciprocal relationship’ thereby ‘compelling’ God to do more than what He wanted to do for them.”23 Here we see that reciprocal gift-exchange is not restricted to human relationships. This kind of gift-giving relationship with God can also be found in Simon Coleman’s *The Charismatic Gift*, where Swedish Pentecostals understand that with, “seed faith, the return is regarded as coming from the divine realm. The gift is in ideological terms both ‘free’ and ‘interested’: an obligation to provide a material response falls not on fellow humans but God.”24 This understanding is not confined to the context of Sweden but also extends itself to many other Pentecostal and prosperity theologies. Furthermore, it is not unique to contemporary contexts but finds resonance in more ancient contexts of Scripture as well.

The notion that a reciprocal gift-giving relationship with God can be found in the Torah’s instruction on giving gifts. In many ways, John Barclay argues, the Jews were different from the surrounding society in that they rejected reciprocity in gift-giving on a horizontal level (interhuman exchange). But this does not imply they believed in a “pure gift.” For example, Barclay argues that the Old Testament emphasizes giving gifts to the poor without the expectation of a return from the poor, but that God himself would reward them back in blessing. He writes:

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The Jewish ideology is undergirded not by the ethos of a “pure,” unreciprocated gift, but by an emphasis on the certainty of reciprocation from God. Jews were perhaps more likely than non-Jews to give to beggars, not because they did not care about a return, but because they had a strong ideological grounds for expecting one – not of course from the beggar, but from God.\textsuperscript{25}

In this scenario, the return is not expected from other humans, but that the good works done would be repaid by God. Peter Leithart echoes this claim with his idea of the infinite circle of Christianity whereby one can give without any kind of anxiety due to God being the one of infinite resources:

The New Testament, following the Torah, does include a certain kind of circularity. With Jesus and Paul, the line of the unrequited gift, and the branching line of grateful dissemination, is circumscribed by a circle with an infinite diameter. Gifts flow on and on, but the generous, cheerful giver can hope for a return.

The circle is infinite because God is the source of every gift, even gifts mediated through human beings. Thanks is due, but it is due to the ultimate Giver, the Father. Human givers give, but recipients owe thanks and grateful service not to the giver but to God. The circle is infinite also because the promised return does not necessarily happen in time; it may be requited at the final judgment.\textsuperscript{26}

The burden of reciprocation is then shifted from one’s peers to the Divine. In this framework, all gifts are given with an expectation of a return but it is a delayed and hopeful expectation that God will reward one for one’s good works in the afterlife or Final Judgment. I use these brief two Scriptural examples in order to show that reciprocity in giving is not confined to recent non-Western cultural contexts but can be argued to exist in some form in past contexts as well.\textsuperscript{27} It may be that in

\textsuperscript{26} Peter Leithart, \textit{Gratitude: An Intellectual History} (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 7.
\textsuperscript{27} We could also look to the number of passages that speak to the notion of eschatological rewards that do not always fit neatly with Western ideas of altruism. I am thinking here of some passages like: Colossians 3:23-24, Hebrews 11:6, Matthew 6:1-34, Revelation 22:12, 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; Exodus 32:28-29; Isaiah 40:10; Philippians 3:12-14. Each of these passages speak of God rewarding humans for good works and seeking after God.
some sense the contexts of Africa and East Asia that we have broadly discussed are closer to the understandings of gift and gift-giving as found in the New Testament than the modern construction of an ideologically “free gift.” This is not to suggest that the gift-giving systems of the Greco-Roman world are identical to that of those contemporary systems used as examples above. But what is apparent is that reciprocity is central to how many of these various systems function and are quite different from the modern Western ideal of altruistic gift-giving. Even if one is expected to give to their neighbor who cannot repay, the expectation still exists that God will bear the responsibility of the return, even if this is relegated to the eschaton. Reciprocity is still present in this paradigm and is quite different from the idea of pure altruism. These two brief examples display how intertwined the relationship between gift and gift-giving and theological beliefs can be.

Returning to ideas of giving among Pentecostals and charismatics displays for us how the cultural understandings of gifts and their functions translate into the spiritual lives of believers. Or, in the case of the Swedish Pentecostals, how despite the culture this form of giving is preoccupied with a focus on the divine return, whether in the present or future eschaton. Unfortunately, this reciprocal gift-exchange between God and the believer is often overlooked in favor of analyzing prosperity gospels as being mere products of Western globalization.

There is little doubt that globalization has played a significant role in the analysis of Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity, but this myopic view tends to distort the realities that these forms of Christianity promote a gift-exchange relationship with God that resonates with cultural presuppositions. The reduction of prosperity gospels to “avatars” of globalization has also been influential in theological

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28 This is explored at length in John Barclay’s work *Paul and the Gift*, which will be engaged with later.
discussions where prosperity theology is not analyzed on its own terms. On closer look, many of these theologies of prosperity seem to be concerned with the material dimension of salvation and an emphasis on the present, both of which are culturally embedded ideas in many faith communities. The difference between the “infinite circle” described by Leithart and the type of Pentecostal giving surveyed here, is that the Pentecostal gift-giving relationship with God stresses a return from God not only in the future but in the present. As we will see in Chapter 4, this may be due to a more “realized” eschatology where the Christian’s life is one marked by ongoing giving and receiving from God in tangible and existential ways, often manifesting itself materially in one’s present life.

What is apparent from the above examples is that the altruistic gift-system appears to be the outlier. This was exactly the point Marcel Mauss was trying to make. What we see in many parts of the world is an understanding that gifts operate around the principle of reciprocity. The expectation of a return is latent within the gift. Similar to the Jewish conception of gifts argued by Barclay above there is a strong theological theme on rewards in the afterlife within the Christian tradition. In medieval Catholicism the,

...practice of donations, already questionable, became increasingly commercialized after the twelfth century, as gifts to monasteries became more and more calculated and contractual. Specific numbers and types of prayers and rites were specified when donations were made. The monks performed religious services for pay...During the last centuries of the medieval period, the church began to apply the

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principles of the new monetary economy to the supernatural system of salvation. What were once
conceived as “gift exchanges” were increasingly viewed as purchases….

Due to what would eventually become the abuse of these religious rites would come a strong
reaction from many within the Church, especially the Reformers, against this kind of “monetary
economy” that functioned within the Church. But even within early Protestantism the notion of
rewards given in the afterlife was fully reconcilable with the emphasis on unconditional grace and
justification:

For the majority of Protestant writers who addressed the issue, belief in degrees of reward in heaven thus
did not conflict with the Protestant insight of justification freely attained by the merits of Christ, since
rewards resulted naturally or automatically from good works, which were part of the elect’s
sanctification.

While the gift-giving relationship between God and the believer is understood differently, reciprocity
still exists within this exchange. The elect’s good works do not go without reward but can be
expected in the next life. However, it is almost impossible to calculate such a reward or speculate on
this further. Natalie Zemon Davis in her influential book The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France argues
that Calvin and other Protestant Reformers break with the tradition of a reciprocal relationship with
God. There was a strong desire, according to Davis, to completely deconstruct any Catholic

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32 Leithart, Gratitude, 96.
33 Emma Disley, “Degrees of Glory: Protestant Doctrine and the Concept of Rewards Hereafter,” The Journal of
Theological Studies 42, no. 1 (1991): 77–105. See also Charles Raith, After Merit: John Calvin’s Theology of Works and Rewards
34 It is interesting to contrast this with many pentecostal and charismatic theologies that have a more realized
eschatology. For examples of realized eschatologies from the Majority World see, Alexander Chow, “Eschatology and
World Christianity,” Studies in World Christianity 22, no. 3 (November 1, 2016): 201-215.
understandings of reciprocal gift relations or obligations “in terms of gratuitousness.” As stated above, the reformed theologians tended to relegate any kind of rewards to the afterlife. For example, Reformed Neo-Calvinist theologian Hermann Bavinck speaks of the Christian’s obligation to live a holy life because of God’s compassion for them, and even goes on to emphasize that in the afterlife, “God will reward everyone according to one’s works.” This shows us that while Reformed theologians move away from any kind of calculation involving works and salvation, there is still an understanding that an obligation is placed upon believers that comes with the gift of salvation, and that a proper response will be met with further rewards in heaven. I make this point specifically because it is often the case in these discussions that Reformed theology is typically accused of fostering a kind of unilateralism within Christian theology and denigrates any real kind of human response to God.

This section reveals that gift-giving systems that operate around the principles of reciprocity and obligation are commonplace and further reveal that the “pure gift” is a modern Western idea. Furthermore, we can also see how tightly intertwined cultural ideas of gift-giving are with religious systems and theology. While reciprocity and obligation are almost always present, the principles manifest themselves in divergent ways. For example, in the case of the Swedish or Zambian Copperbelt Pentecostals, there is an understanding that one’s gift-giving relationship with God manifests itself in the present life. In other words, a gift given to God expects a return in this life. Whereas in the case of Bavinck, rewards for a successful response to the gift of salvation are to be expected in the next life, which is also paralleled by Barclay’s interpretation of the Torah’s ideas surrounding eschatological reward. While there are many variations between these different conceptions of gift-exchange, there is an understanding that the human subject exists in a kind of

36 Ibid., 114.
gift-exchange with God and that this exchange operates around the principles of reciprocity and obligation. Furthermore, we have seen how gift categories are a common way to explore humanity’s relationship with God. One could argue they are a fundamental way of speaking about creation’s relationship with God. This prompts several interesting questions. Can we give back to a God who lacks nothing? Does God give gifts in a particular, measurable way? What are the obligations attached to God’s gifts? How does humanity give back to God? And is this repayable? Are God’s rewards given in the present life? Or, are God’s rewards to be given in the afterlife? Before approaching some of these questions, we will see how the gift has been understood and utilized within the field of phenomenology.

**Other Than Being: Phenomenological Interpretations of the Gift**

The other major area of the discussion is within phenomenological discourse about the gift. I will be focusing here on Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion who have both incorporated the gift extensively in their work. Before speaking on Derrida, it is helpful to briefly consider philosopher Immanuel Kant. Kant whose deontological moral system and categorical imperative provide a strong ideal that legitimizes the “gift with no strings attached,” for “The moral imperative always requires only one thing: moral behavior, without excuse.” For Kant, one should do good for good’s sake alone, and not for any kind of reward or recompense. He writes in his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* that,

> The moral worth of the action thus lies not in the effect to be expected from it; thus also not in any principle of action which needs to get its motive from this expected effect. For all these effects could be

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brought about through other causes, and for them the will of a rational being is therefore not needed; but in its the highest and unconditional good can nevertheless be encountered.\textsuperscript{40}

We can see how this could strongly support an ideology of the “pure gift.” Any gift given with an expectation of reciprocation or “pay-back” is one given with impure motives for the giver is giving not for the sake of the moral good, but for the “expected effect.” As we will see, Derrida has a parallel definition of what a true gift is.

Derrida argues that Mauss is not speaking about a gift at all, for anything that requires reciprocity is by definition not a gift. Derrida defines a gift as having “no reciprocity, return exchange, countergift, or debt. If the other \textit{gives me back} or \textit{owes} me or has to give me back what I give him or her, there will not have been a gift, whether this restitution is immediate or whether it is programmed by a complex calculation of a long-term deferral or differance.”\textsuperscript{41} As we can see, this is the complete opposite of the definition of the gift as supplied by the cultural contexts explored above. Derrida argues that the gift is by definition that without obligation, reciprocity, or any kind of calculation. This looks very similar to the Kantian moral imperative. He believes that anything given within finite time gets caught within Mauss’ threefold typology of giving, and thus giving a gift is impossible.\textsuperscript{42} Again, this is in stark contradiction to what we found in our survey above where reciprocity and obligation are essential attributes of the gift in other cultures. Arguably, Derrida is working within more recent ideas that separate “freedom and obligation, interest and disinterest.”\textsuperscript{43}

What Derrida does acknowledge, however, is that within this finite life one cannot escape


\textsuperscript{42} Derrida, \textit{Given Time}, 24.

\textsuperscript{43} Barclay, \textit{Paul and the Gift}, 63.
reciprocity. Even if a gift is given altruistically, let us say, for example, a donation to a children’s charity where nothing material can be given back in return to the giver, the giver may still be given the satisfaction that they have done something morally correct. This is still in a sense a “return.” What we can glean from Derrida is that reciprocity is simply inescapable even if the ideal is the “pure gift,” because the giver has received something back, possibly in the form of positive emotions, which can never be achieved. However, Derrida seems to be operating under the assumption that the ideal gift, by its very nature, is something that must be given altruistically. Yet, as we have seen in other contexts this separation of commodity and gift is not so neatly separated. I am not making an argument that Derrida was directly influenced by Kant. I am simply making an observation that similarities exist between Derrida’s reflections on the gift and Kant’s moral imperative. However, I do wonder if Derrida has fallen prey to Kantian assumptions regarding what makes a moral action “pure.”

In a different direction, Jean-Luc Marion attempts to utilize the gift to speak about the Divine without invoking the metaphysics of Being. He reconceptualizes the gift to be a “saturated phenomena.” That is, the gift contains more phenomena than what appears to the observer.\textsuperscript{44} This is opposed to “normal” phenomena that “give” themselves to the observer in manageable ways. John D. Caputo helpfully summarizes Marion’s intention:

\begin{quote}
With everything other than God, Marion contends, we always mean or intend more than is actually given to us, and our experience is always forced to play catch-up with our intention. But with God, more is given to us than we can ever mean or say, so that words and concepts are always at a loss to express what has been given…God gives himself in a way that exceeds our reach or our grasp…\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 194-195.
\end{flushright}
Marion’s gift becomes then a form of apophatic theology to speak about the Divine. With the Divine, there is always something that escapes our language and experience. We simply “can’t put our finger on it.” Marion’s recent publication, *Givenness & Revelation* brings this understanding of pure givenness and through it, Marion develops a distinctly Trinitarian understanding of revelation through givenness. It is the “privilege of the phenomenon of revelation, which allows it to show itself in itself and through itself in an unmatched way, would depend on its other privileged feature: giving itself in an unmatched way. In fact, biblical revelation puts into operation the privilege of a givenness that surpasses every expectation, every prediction, and, finally, every reception.” Marion believes gift and givenness to be a univocal concept regarding the Divine. There is a risk here that Marion falls prey to the exact kind of “idolatry” he seeks to avoid. As David Bentley Hart states:

> Marion fails to make John of Damascus’s distinction: that God is infinitely distant from all things…As a result, Marion nearly falls prey to that paradox whereby the most radical kind of transcendence becomes in fact a radical kind of immanence: by seeming to place God at an objective differential distance; God is somewhere else. This ultimately has the consequence of reducing God to a being after all, set over against the totality of beings, for he and the world must be embraced then within a neutral distance…

Hart argues that Marion falls prey to a univocal view of God which is not successfully able to balance God’s immanence and transcendence. He later contends that the only proper solution to this is through analogy. Whatever the case may be, Marion is able to tactfully use the category of

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47 Ibid.
48 David Bentley Hart, *Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 238. Hart goes on to argue that ultimately understanding God purely on the basis of negation also leads to God only being “the world’s highest principle rather than its transcendent source and end” (243). He goes on to argue that it is only through analogy that one can speak of and understand God.
49 We will see later how the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of the essence/energies distinction is an attempt to balance both God’s immanence and transcendence.
50 Ibid., 243.
the gift. Existence itself is already *given*, thus, we are automatically placed within the conversation and its usefulness in speaking about existence, our relationship to the Divine, and others.

The phenomenological discussion explores the various ways the gift can be reconfigured to speak about reality. What began as a sociological discussion gives way to a phenomenological hinge point whereby talk of the divine is reintroduced into phenomenology. Derrida reminds us that we are entrapped in inescapable webs of reciprocity, and this reciprocity undergirds many of the gift-exchange paradigms that exist in most societies. Derrida also provides a cautionary tale to be careful of bringing assumptions as to what a gift is or can be. Marion displays the usefulness of the gift in speaking about humanity’s relationship to the Divine, specifically in regards to the idea that everything is already given, and in the same way humans cannot escape the web of reciprocity due to the “givenness” of its existence. These two brief examples also show that overlapping questions are being asked regardless of academic discipline. What is a gift? Are there obligations attached to a gift? What are they? What does a gift communicate? Can one reciprocate a gift? How? In the next section, we will see that many of these trajectories are taken up by theologians.

**The Gift and Recent Theological Discourse**

As Andrew Davison notes, the “theme of ‘gift’ has become an important one in Christian theology.” From a Christian theological viewpoint, the language of gift and gift-giving can be

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52 To be sure, I do not want to collapse all of these gift-systems as being reciprocal vs. unilateral. A variety of different systems exist with different customs and religion-cultural beliefs that undergird them. However, what I intend to show is that the theme of reciprocity and obligation is prominent within many of these systems, and that the Western “pure gift” paradigm is the outlier.

53 Andrew Davison, *Participation in God: A Study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 30. For a recent evaluation of gift theologies that offer both reciprocal accounts as well as unilateral
considered all-encompassing as the totality of life can be conceived of as a gift. John Milbank states, “Gift is a kind of transcendental category in relation to all the *topoi* of theology, in a similar fashion to ‘word.’ Creation and grace are gifts, Incarnation is the supreme gift; the Fall, evil and violence are the refusal of gift, atonement is the renewed and hyperbolic gifts of forgiveness…”54 The theme of the gift within Christian theology can be traced to the New Testament writers. The close connection between gift and grace is the most obvious example. However, the theme of gift has been used to speak about many theological topics ranging from participation, salvation, theologies of economy, creation, and trinitarian theology. Recent theologies that utilize gift language often stress reciprocity to varying degrees. Once again, many of the same questions asked above are pursued in theological discourse. In the following sections I will first analyze Kathryn Tanner and John Milbank’s theologies of gift and gift-giving. Afterwards I will briefly look at how both J. Todd Billings and Julie Canlis think of Calvin’s theology in light of the theme of participation. Then I will turn to some larger movements such as the Mannermaa School and the New Perspective on Paul.

Kathryn Tanner has explored ways of understanding gifts, gift-giving, grace and how these concepts can assist us in conceptualizing new ways of economy that are in contradistinction to the reigning capitalist forms of economy that dominate the global landscape. She writes:

What if God simply gives us what we need in an utterly gracious way? And expects us to organize our lives with one another accordingly? The categories of gift and grace, then, might contrast sharply with both Locke’s and a capitalist logic of property, and suggest the possibility of an interesting new one.55

accounts of the gift such as Philip Ziegler’s apocalyptic theology see, Alexander Massmann, “Neither Demon Nor Angel: Theology and Empirical Studies on Reciprocity,” *Modern Theology* 37, no. 2 (April, 2021): 434-457.


Tanner’s primary concern is retaining God’s giving as both free and gracious. Tanner defines a gift as being “offered freely” and should not be caught up in any kind of “tit-for-tat.” A gift given should be “offered for nothing, without compensation, apart from any consideration of a return being made for it. Giving is completely disinterested, without self-concern, solely for the well-being or pleasure of others.” Tanner dismisses modeling an economy of grace on human systems of gift-exchange as they are too “competitive” and are often marred by hierarchical relations. Tanner rejects both the language of “pure giving” and “reciprocal giving” due to the implicit understanding that God exists on the same relational plane as human beings. She instead opts for the phrase “unconditional giving.” Unconditional giving is a gift given that “is not conditional upon our reception or proper response in that God’s giving still streams forth in the same fulsome way even when it meets the brick wall of sin.” Tanner’s understanding of God’s unconditional giving argued primarily on the basis of: (1) God’s abundance; (2) The inability for humans to make an adequate return for God’s giving. There is no need to make a “return” to God because God already has everything and lacks nothing. Furthermore, human beings cannot possibly make an adequate return to God for what he has given, especially because our existence is given by God. Humanity does not exist on a continuum with God, and thus using primarily gift-language to speak about God in a gift-giving relationship could be seen as inappropriate. Tanner does admit that we can give back to God in our “little ways” and that God would gladly receive them, but God does not need or require this

56 Ibid., 57.
57 Ibid., 57.
59 Tanner, Economy of Grace, 63.
60 Ibid., 65.
61 Ibid., 67-68.
return. God “expects” a return, but does not require or obligate the receiver to make one. This return is becoming “givers” like God and sharing divine benefit with all. But there are no conditions in this paradigm. She goes on to explain how this kind of giving should be imitated by humans on the “horizontal” plane. Tanner rejects the language of “pure gift” and “pure giving,” yet, her ideas around “unconditional giving” still sound quite similar to the “pure gift” i.e. a gift with no strings attached. It is difficult to see how her idea of the unconditional gift is really that different from the pure gift. Tanner also seems to implicitly affirm a kind of reciprocity in her insistence that God does expect a return from human persons and is glad to receive them. But it is unclear how God can expect a return without placing some sort of obligation on the receiver. Does not the expectation of a return imply that there is an obligation implicit in the giving of the gift? It seems to me that expectation is not all that different from obligation. That in a sense, our return to God could be conceived of as freely giving to our neighbors, and perhaps this is exactly Tanner’s point.

If Tanner rejects the usage of Maussian and anthropological discussions of the gift when analyzing God’s giving, then John Milbank holds that these ideas can be rehabilitated, or are even *praeparatio evangelica*, to speak of God’s giving to humanity. For Milbank, “purified gift-exchange” is defined as the human ability to dynamically respond to the Divine Gift through the incarnation and engage in Trinitarian gift-exchange. One of Milbank’s ultimate goals is to place the gift back within ontological categories and offer a socialistic alternative to global capitalism as well as reacting against modern secularism. He posits a strong participatory framework whereby humans engage in dynamic response to the Divine Gift. Milbank accuses “pure gift” thinking of being “one theological strand in thinking about *agape* which has sought to be over-rigorous in a self-defeating fashion.”

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62 We will see that Dumitru Staniloae understands that humans do have the ability to “give back” to God in a uniquely human way.
64 Ibid., 132.
Milbank, reciprocity is an inescapable condition within gift-giving relationships. Similar to Derrida, there is no way to escape the obligation within these relationships. Purified gift-exchange is a “circle of delayed, but appropriately human, response to the ultimate divine Gift.”\(^{65}\) Milbank’s trinitarian logic undergirds this purified gift-exchange. The life of the Trinity is one that is characterized by “asymmetrical reciprocity.” Similar to Tanner, this is to be imitated by humanity.\(^{66}\) We are created by God, and thus have already received a gift from God, and have no choice but to participate in the divine-human exchange. Through Christ, we participate in the eternal Trinitarian gift-exchange.\(^{67}\)

Because of creation’s condition of being created creatures have received the gift of being already. Creatures are engaged in this gift-exchange relationship with God whether they acknowledge it or not.\(^{68}\) It is important to note Milbank’s larger agenda is fighting against what he believes to be the modern secular “flattening” of the world along with others in the Radical Orthodoxy cohort. Milbank sees participation in God as a way to combat the view of a detranscendent world that characterizes so much of modernity.

Milbank’s project utilizes the idea of the gift and gift-giving as a way to formulate his theology of participation. As we will see later on with Dumitru Staniloae, Milbank understands that to articulate God as the Giver of all gifts, including concepts such as time and matter, is in a sense to

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\(^{65}\) Ibid., 154.

\(^{66}\) We should also remember that for Milbank and Tanner divine agency does not exist in a zero-sum game. As Rowan Williams summarizes: “…it is not possible to ‘locate’ God as an agent among others within the finite order, since that would imply an interdependence of limited agencies…” Rowan Williams, *Christ: The Heart of Creation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 221.

\(^{67}\) Stephen Webb is an example of one who attempts to strike a middle road between Tanner’s “excess” and Milbank’s “exchange” by constructing an unrestricted Trinitarian model of giving. The Triune God is the model of a generous, reciprocal relationship. The giving between each member of the Trinity, which is a real exchange, is so abundant that it overflows to humanity in a dynamic, creative process that necessitates human participation in the exchange and abundance of God in Stephen H. Webb, *The Gifting God: A Trinitarian Ethics of Excess* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 176.

\(^{68}\) A similar understanding exists in the Confucian concept of filial piety. One is indebted to one’s parents even beyond death because they brought the child life. By virtue of being born, one is indebted to their parents. See, Chang-Won Park, *Cultural Blending in Korean Death Rites: New Interpretive Approaches* (London; New York: Continuum, 2010), 35.
subjectify these elements of creation which apparently assists in restoring their meaning and ability to point beyond themselves.

Following Sarah Coakley’s evaluation of these two theologians, there is a desire by both to speak about participation in the Triune God and the world that is “ontologically disposed to reflect the glory of God…true cooperation and ‘participation’ in this Gift would seemingly inexorably produce a changed world, economically and politically.”

This is an idea we will pick up on in the next chapter. This emphasis on human agency affirms that political and economic systems can change and it is part of the Christian responsibility to work towards just systems. While Tanner deemphasizes reciprocity in this exchange due to her understanding of non-competitive relations, she still retains the language of participation and sees a benefit in speaking about participation utilizing gift-language. Milbank on the other hand adopts the understanding of reciprocity unreservedly. One could object to this embrace by pointing to the negative consequences that can often manifest themselves in gift-systems that emphasize obligation and reciprocity. But both Tanner and Milbank emphasize reciprocity to varying degrees. In Milbank it is definitely much more at the forefront. While for Tanner it is imperative that God’s gift always and absolutely remains absolutely free. However, both of them would argue that human persons should imitate the unconditional giving of God and become givers themselves, and in this way are making a sort of “return” to God. The “return gift” to God is something I would like to highlight as we will return to

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this idea later on. If one grants that there is some way in which we can offer up a “return” to God, the following question becomes what exactly? Or, how? As noted earlier, the theme of participation has become popular in contemporary theology. As it will be shown, there are a plurality of ways conceiving of this notion of participation that are not always continuous with the traditional Eastern Orthodox doctrine of *theosis*, or deification.\(^7^1\) It is worth asking potential reasons why “participatory soteriologies” have become so fashionable of late. Simeon Zahl has recently argued that this popularity is in part due to two perceptual reasons: 1) theologies of participation are understood to be superior at “integrating soteriology with experience; 2) Protestant theologies of justification are “ineffective at integrating soteriology with experience.”\(^7^2\) Zahl defends traditional Protestant theologies of justification against these charges, and shows that theologies of participation do not necessarily result in a better integration of soteriology with experience. Whether or not Zahl is correct in his assessment, the fact remains that there is a trend away from more traditional Protestant soteriologies. We will see in the following chapters that many of the Majority World theologians I analyze also turn away from more traditional Protestant soteriologies as well. For now, I would like to turn to two examples of rereading both John Calvin and Martin Luther in an attempt to find elements of reciprocity and human agency in light of the turn to participation.

**Guilty as Charged? The Gift and John Calvin**

With all the talk of reciprocity in the Divine-human relationship, John Calvin come under heavy criticism due to the perceived “unilateral” nature of his theology. J. Todd Billings defends against

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\(^7^1\) It is important to note the distinct nuances between these various forms of union or *theosis*. Many of them vary widely. Within a large stream of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, humanity participates in God’s *energies* not his *essence*. A distinction is made, and yet there is considerable debate if the distinction is nominal or real. The point being that there are many ways to articulate a Christian doctrine of participation that vary metaphysically. This will be explored further in Chapter 3.

surface readings of Calvin that allow no room for reciprocity in Calvin’s theology. He is defending Calvin primarily against Milbank and the Radical Orthodoxy school for whom Calvin has become somewhat of a punching bag and an example of unilateralism that allows no room for human agency or reciprocity. He writes:

Contemporary critics of Calvin usually have a hidden ledger in mind: ‘participation’ is rightly articulated by Thomas; or ‘deification’ is definitively stated in late Byzantine theologies; or ‘reciprocity’ is properly understood by Marcel Mauss or by other Gift theorists. In general, there is imposition of external criteria upon Calvin’s theology, and Calvin is found to fall short of the standard at hand.\(^{73}\)

Billings argues that just because Calvin does not fit neatly into Scotist, Palamite, or Thomist ideas of participation does not mean that Calvin’s theological anthropology denigrates human agency or participation. On the contrary, Calvin “offers his own appropriation of the biblical and patristic theme of participation, strongly emphasizing a Johannine theology of ‘indwelling’ along with a Pauline soteriology of sin and forgiveness. He exhibits a concern for the unity of divinity and humanity in creation and redemption, while not losing sight of the negative consequences of such an insight (‘without me you can do nothing’).”\(^{74}\) Billings concludes that the dualisms inherent in using gift-language to express Calvin’s thought are “simply not adequate.”\(^{75}\) He instead opts for classic understandings of participation in the Sacraments and in Christ.

Julie Canlis expounds on this even further by utilizing Calvin’s doctrine of ascension which she argues possesses a strong participatory element as long as it is grounded in participation in


\(^{75}\) Ibid., 190.
Christ. She helpfully points out that for Aquinas participation is based on “substantialist ontology” and that for Calvin it is based on “election.” According to Canlis’ interpretation of Calvin, humanity participates in Christ’s ascent. He is the “ladder.” She writes: “Ascent is thus characterized not so much by privatized obedience rather, it is our participation in Jesus’ ‘return’ to the Father. Calvin’s greatest contribution here is his insistence that the Christian life (ascent) is not merely a response to Christ’s descent. Grace includes our response.” Canlis is careful to say that this participation is not substantial. It is the Holy Spirit who enables humanity to participate in and through Christ that allows for participation in “the very life of God.”

While these two authors do not explicitly adopt the category of the gift, they both are an example of theologians attempting to rehabilitate readings of Calvin that emphasize participation, especially Canlis in her interpretation of Calvin’s doctrine of ascension. There is a desire here to retrieve a sense of human agency and active participation in the ongoing dynamic work of the Triune God in Calvin’s theology. Billings’ defense of Calvin is an important reminder of the potential reductive dangers in using the gift as both a constructive tool and hermeneutic. Indeed, “The concept of ‘gift’, which tends toward the two options of being ‘unilateral’ or ‘bilateral’, ‘passively’ or ‘actively’ received, is simply not adequate to express the biblical and theological complexity of Calvin’s thought.” These are both somewhat reactionary attempts to defend Calvin against those who charge him with being too unilateral. There is also an attempt to reread Luther as offering a kind of theology of participation to which we now turn.

77 Ibid., 44.
78 Ibid., 252.
79 Ibid., 144-145.
A Lutheran Version of theosis: The Finnish School

Finding its origins in the ecumenical discussions between Lutherans and Eastern Orthodox, the Finnish School of Luther has attempted to reinterpret Martin Luther’s theology in light of the doctrine of theosis. It seeks to respond to the domination of the German Liberal Protestant tradition’s readings of Luther. For Mannermaa, Christ really is present in faith. By “really is present” I mean that Mannermaa believes God to be ontologically present in the Christian believer. It is not just his gifts that are present but Christ is both favor and gift simultaneously. Because God really gives himself to the believer, the believer is able to participate in God’s life.\(^{81}\) Mannermaa continually repeated that justification is not just an imputation of righteousness, but rather it is a participation in God’s righteousness through faith. We are first and foremost given God himself and subsequently all his gifts of righteousness, joy, peace, and love. Mannermaa summarizes this well: “Thus, in addition to being ‘favor’ (forgiveness), Christ is also ‘gift.’ In other words, the presence of Christ means that the believer participates in the ‘divine nature.’ And when participating in God’s essence, the Christian also becomes a partaker of the properties of this essence.”\(^{82}\) The indwelling presence of Christ transforms the believer. I have to agree with Kärkkäinen that the way the terms union, theosis, and “real-ontic” are being utilized are not altogether clear.\(^{83}\) The most notable issue is the understanding that the human believer participates in God’s essence which comes very close to collapsing the distinction between Creator and creature. Eastern Orthodox tradition largely maintains the distinction between God’s essence and energies, where the believer participates in

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God’s energies, but never his essence. Furthermore, it is also unclear how Luther’s strong doctrine of sin fits within this overall paradigm as the ontology of the Christian East is quite different from that of Martin Luther’s theology.

Regardless of some of the concerns regarding the Mannermaa School, it is one strong example of the contemporary trend toward theosis and theologies of participation. The theological formulations also center around using gift language to articulate this version of theosis. One example is Risto Saarinen, who argues that the “receiver-oriented’ view of post-Augustinian theology” over-dominates the discussion.” He argues that we need to analyze this discussion from the Giver’s perspective, and he develops a theology of the gift that he utilizes in his construction of an ecumenical theology of giving. Bo Holm takes a different approach, and believes that Luther is more “unilateralist than Milbank, but from another perspective he is even more “exchangist” than Milbank.” Milbank’s purified gift-exchange operates around the two principles of non-identical repetition and delayed return. Holm argues that justification “shatters” any kind of calculation in the exchange. For Holm, Luther’s theology is one of “divine plentitude” instead of “human deficiency.” He argues that “real gifts exist only as exchanges.” He writes:

84 I will explore this idea in the next chapter. For a summary of the neo-Palamite doctrine of the divine energies see, David Bradshaw, “The concept of the Divine Energies,” Philosophy & Theology 18, no. 1 (2006): 93-120.
85 Kärkkäinen, “Salvation as Justification and Theosis,” 79.
88 Holm, “Justification and Reciprocity,” 100.
89 Ibid., 114.
The exchange is the gift, and the Gospel is paradoxical but “realized reciprocity.” The paradox lies in the fact that the Gospel’s contents tell us what is not equivalent in the absolute sense — God and man, righteousness and sin, life and death — and what is not symmetrical — God can give, humans cannot. Humans, therefore, are not part of reciprocal communication, but are elevated to equivalence, due to participation, due to love; and to reciprocity due to God’s self-giving.\(^90\)

Holm argues that God is the only one that can fully give as he is the one that can give himself fully. If a human being tried to give himself fully, it would result in death, and death cannot restrict God. This does not mean that humans are only receivers. On the contrary, the giving of God transforms humans into givers because they participate in the exchange, that is the “being of God himself.”\(^91\)

Here we see the utilization of the gift to explore the relationship between participation and justification. Many of the debates swirling around the Finnish school are tied directly to the Lutheran doctrine of justification and the nature of said justification. In this case, it seems that there is a desire to recover a sense of human agency within the Divine-human relationship without falling into a version of Pelagianism. This is part of the reason the Finnish School turns to a version of \textit{thesis} because of its ability to “avoid many classical controversies of Western theology.”\(^92\)

\textbf{Circular Grace? The New Perspective on Paul}

Closely related to the reinterpretation of Luther is the New Perspective on Paul movement (NPP). While this label may not be exactly helpful (as the group is quite varied in their interpretations), scholars such as N.T. Wright, James Dunn, E.P. Sanders, and John Barclay are all attempting to reread Paul in light of his cultural context and consciously trying to avoid eisegeting Protestant

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\item \(^90\) Ibid.
\item \(^91\) Ibid., 116.
\item \(^92\) Saarinen, \textit{God and the Gift}, 4.
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theology into Paul’s letters (Luther usually is identified as the main culprit). The discussion surrounding gifts and gift-giving has arguably been revitalized by John Barclay’s *Paul and the Gift*. While Barclay covers the previous discussions surrounding gifts and gift-giving, he asks the question: If the gift was understood to be reciprocal in Paul’s context, then what does that mean for Paul’s understanding of grace? He goes on to develop six perfections of grace that have historically been emphasized in theologies of grace: (1) superabundance; (2) singularity; (3) priority; (4) incongruity; (5) efficacy; (6) non-circularity. He argues that because of Paul’s context Paul “simultaneously emphasizes the incongruity of grace and the expectation that those who are ‘under grace’ (and wholly refashioned by it) will be reoriented in the ‘obedience of faith.’ What has seemed in the modern world a paradoxical phenomenon — that a ‘free’ gift can also be obliging — is entirely comprehensible in ancient terms.” Furthermore, this grace is given without worth to the recipient. Grace, Barclay argues, is for Paul primarily incongruous but this does not imply its singularity or its non-circularity. Barclay makes the case that:

One does not have to find ‘timeless principles’ by extracting general truths from particular historical debates: Paul himself saw the general relevance of a theology of grace that reconfigured the map of reality…In fact, one might be struck by the similarities of Paul’s missional context and the social context of many churches today. Not only in pioneer mission, but even (in fact, especially) in a pluralist or secularizing context, churches now find themselves needing to rediscover their social, political and cultural identity… This new missional context makes Paul’s theology of grace relevant not only in the re-

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94 Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 70-75.
95 Ibid., 563.
96 Ibid., 569.
contextualized forms in which it has become familiar (as an individualized theology of ‘amazing grace’),
but also in its original dynamic accompanying the creation of innovative, counter-cultural communities of
faith. 97

I quote Barclay at length here to show that the discourse surrounding gifts and gift-giving would do well to include discussions occurring within the field of World Christianity. As Barclay points out, the “individualized theology of grace” is a contextual phenomenon and one that has dominated the theological landscape. According to Barclay’s interpretation of Paul, the assumption that grace is a gift given altruistically is incorrect. Instead, it is entirely understandable that a gift can be given freely and incongruously but still operate around the principle of reciprocity.98

Matthew Bates has taken some of Barclay’s observations and incorporated them into the notion of “salvation by allegiance alone” in order to emphasize the need for an obligated response to God.99 Bates attempts to construct a new theology of grace that centers around the allegiance to Christ. For him, the word “faith” has become almost meaningless in today’s context and does not sufficiently emphasize the need for Christians to live for Christ.100 He incorporates Barclay’s findings on the obligation of a return without violating grace as being a “free gift.” He writes: “Grace is a multifaceted concept, but construing pistis as allegiance does not violate Paul’s understanding of grace. Quite the opposite: for Paul, acceptance of the Christ gift demands embodied allegiance

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97 Ibid., 573.
100 It is questionable if the word “allegiance” is any better than faith as it too is subject to a whole host of meanings, and might actually undermine the priority of the gift given by God.
(obedience) as an obligatory return. Meanwhile, Scripture is clear that we will be judged, at least in part, on the basis of our works.101 Echoing Barclay, the free gift of salvation brings with it an obligation to live in “allegiance” to Christ. This allegiance is externalized in obedience and at judgment “God ‘will pay back’ … in relation to works.”102 This is similar to the same sentiment echoed earlier in regards to God’s repayment of the human response to God’s gift.

I reference Barclay and Bates as examples of New Testament scholars who are both attempting to construct theologies of grace that take into account not only the social context of the NT, but also emphasize the obligatory nature of grace that requires a response from the receiver, i.e., the human believer. Barclay does a good job at highlighting how contextual ideas of grace are and how bound together they are with our concepts of gifts and gift-giving. Once again, we can also see that more “traditional” Protestant soteriologies are suspect here.

What is interesting is that many of these debates around the gift center around the nature of the relationship between works and grace. We can confidently say that most agree that God is always conceived of as being the first Giver. God is the one who in every way initiates this relationship with creation. Not only that, but God continuously keeps giving. “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”103 But the key differences lie in the question: Does the “gift” (whether it is salvation, creation, etc.) come with obligations? If so, what are they?

**The Gift & Western Theological Discourse**

We have seen the theological discourse around the gift range from phenomenology, participation, justification, and theologies of economy. In the quest for a “re-enchanted” cosmos, John Milbank

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101 Ibid., 127.
102 Ibid., 108.
103 James 1:17 NRSV.
and some other Radical Orthodox theologians are attempting to look to “premodern” sources in an attempt to push against the deficiencies they find in modern secularism. They believe that the unilateralism that is characterized by a lack of synergy results in a voluntaristic worldview that places a stark dichotomy between Divine and human action as existing on the same metaphysical plane. What is often left is only the “passive obedience” of the human, or in gift language, the receiver.\textsuperscript{104} It could be argued that among many Western theologians a recognition exists that the “pure gift” might be a more secular idea than a Christian one and that this “unilateral heroism” of the pure gift “is self-enclosed.”\textsuperscript{105} As Charles Taylor states:

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But is this the ultimate measure of excellence? If we think of ethical virtue as the realization of lone individuals, this may seem to be the case. But suppose the highest good consists in communion, mutual giving and receiving, as in the paradigm of the eschatological banquet. The heroism of gratuitous giving has no place for reciprocity. If you return anything to me, then my gift was not totally gratuitous; and besides, in the extreme case, I disappear with my gift and no communion between us is possible.\textsuperscript{106}
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If giving without any expectation of a return is the ultimate virtue, then Christianity, whose primary symbol is the Cross (the ultimate form of self-sacrifice), is not as virtuous as the modern secular existentialist who seeks to do good in the face of an ultimately meaningless universe, for “living for others, even more in dying for them, is bereft even of the hope of return, which the martyr still has, in the restored life of the Resurrection. It is the absolute heroism.”\textsuperscript{107} By “pure gift” standards, the atheistic existentialist martyr who does good for others without any hope of a return in the form of

\textsuperscript{104} Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider, “Introduction: Transfiguring the World through the Word,” in \textit{Encounter between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World through the Word}, eds. Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 6.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 702.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
an afterlife is more virtuous than the Christian who follows God in hopes of eternal life in the promised resurrection. But, as Taylor asks: “…is this the ultimate measure of excellence?” What if instead “the highest good consists in communion, mutual giving and receiving, as in the paradigm of the eschatological banquet.” Regardless of one’s take on modern secularism, there remains a real trend among many Western theologians and “gift-theologians” to reintroduce a strong element of participation and human agency in the Divine-human, relationship especially through versions of theosis.

From another angle, the reinterpretation of John Calvin, as well as the Mannermaa school and NPP, are all attempting to reevaluate traditional Protestant doctrines of grace and salvation by emphasizing the participatory and reciprocal elements of the gift in different ways. There is a real emphasis on the obligation placed upon the recipient to offer some sort of response, or return to God, however inadequate that may be. While approaching this from different perspectives, they both see the value in utilizing the category of the gift to assist in their reformulations that utilize some theology of participation, although this varies in its manifestations and reassourecements. Again, there exists here a desire to reemphasize the human person’s place in the Divine-human relationship.

These re-readings from various groups indicate a desire to reevaluate the nature of the relationship between grace and works, and if grace should carry obligations with it. Many of these

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108 However, there are some theologians who would dispel with an afterlife as traditionally conceived. See David W. Congdon, *The God Who Saves: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2016), 273. He states: “The truth of the resurrection is not an egotistical hope in my personal heavenly reward or the infinite extension of my life. Instead following Paul, it is the hope that ‘God may be all in all.’”
110 Ibid.
111 Dietrich Bonhoeffer explores questions surrounding the obligation grace places on the believer in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, vol. 4, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003). We could also look at Anselm of Canterbury’s doctrine of atonement also raises the question of the reciprocal gift’s worth compared to the gift already given, and the duration of the gift-exchange.
reinterpretations are anthropocentric, that is, the focus is on the human’s relationship with God. The previous lack of emphasis on reciprocity has contributed to an objectification of not only the human receiver in the Divine-human relationship, but also of other aspects of reality which has had negative consequences. One only has to think of the dominant issues surrounding the twenty-first century: hyper-individualism, ecological disaster, migration, inequality, and religious plurality. I would argue that many of these issues can be tied with the reduction or immanentization of non-human creation in much of Western discourse that divorces spiritual subjectivity from material objectivity. Perhaps a different paradigm is needed and one that is less influenced by modernity.

Curiously, with all the renewed attention paid to the “gift,” Eastern Orthodoxy, theosis, and participation, Romanian theologian Dumitru Staniloae’s idea of the World as Gift is absent from these discussions even though it utilizes gift-language to speak about deification. Staniloae understands the world to be a gift from God, and it is through the world that we are drawn up into an ongoing dialogue with God that involves continuous giving, receiving, and giving back to God. This is cosmological in scope and does not leave out any aspect of creation. However, as I will argue, Staniloae’s theology of the gift can be pressed further and more detail can be given than what Staniloae originally intended.

I believe that this is where the Majority World theologians I have chosen offer a productive direction in regards to this as many gift theologies speak of offering up a “return gift” to God without entering into much detail as to what this return gift actually is. However, before explaining how I intend to explore this further, we should now turn to Majority World theologies of the gift.

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112 For an overview of many of these modern problems from a missional perspective see David Bosch, Transforming Mission (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011): 357-370.
114 Charles Miller, The Gift of the World (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 74. More will be said on this in Chapter 3.
The Gift and Majority World Theologies

While the prosperity theologies mentioned at the beginning of this review have a form of gift-giving theology, there has been little theological reflection on the conversation outside the Western discourse. Although little research has been done in this area, there is some recognition that it could be fruitful for theological interests. Daniel Arthur Rober identifies two important issues that the category of the gift could assist in grappling with religious pluralism and theologies of inculturation. He writes:

How can Christians recognize the way in which God’s grace permeates cultures that are not, like that of Europe, historically Christian, while being true to its core creedal affirmations? Once again, recognition is central to these discussions, and understanding them in terms of recognizing the gift may help to provide a new way forward…and should be further explored…\footnote{Daniel A. Rober, Recognizing the Gift: Toward a Renewed Theology of Nature and Grace (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 227.}

By including different definitions of what gifts and gift-giving are from different cultural contexts, the conversation could shift in a variety of ways. There are two examples of this I would like to explore. The first is Jackson Wu, who has recently presented a paper on Chinese reciprocity and gift-giving in theology, and its possible benefits for avenues of exploration.\footnote{Jackson Wu, “Reciprocity, Collectivism, and the Chinese Church,’’ (paper presented at Patronage Symposium, Beirut, 2018), 1-21. http://wp.production.patheos.com/blogs/sites/576/2018/10/Reciprocity-Collectivism-and-the-Chinese-Church-Presentation-Patronage-Symposium-2018-Jackson-Wu.pdf. His other notable work is: Jackson Wu, Saving God’s Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2012).} Wu surveys the cultural foundations for Chinese gift-giving and contrasts them with Western ideas. He then looks at the implications of a more reciprocal idea of grace and concludes that the Chinese emphasis on the reciprocity of gifts could help recover the “circular” aspect of grace. He writes, “Chinese use gift-giving to sustain and strengthen relationships. The bond (or renqing) between people creates the
obligation or ‘ought to’ that Westerners mistake as contra-grace. However, from a Chinese Christian perspective, the following is true: if my ‘ought to’ is also my ‘want to’, then it is grace.”

This paper displays the trajectory Wu is taking. He sees the importance of incorporating Chinese gift-giving as a resource in developing a theology of grace that emphasizes reciprocity, and that reciprocity can serve as a helpful corrective to what may be an over-emphasis on unilateralism in theologies of grace.

Another example would be theologian Agnes M. Brazal’s recent discourse on the Filipino concept of *utang na loob*. Here, Brazal briefly engages the conversation around gift as evidenced by her engagement with Derrida and Marion. Building upon the work of Edmundo Pacifico Guzman, Brazal explains that *Utang na loob* literally means the “debt of the inner self” or the “debt of reciprocity.” Creation is God’s gift and by this definition a kind of extension of Godself. This implies a certain panentheism (which we will see is a common theme among the theologians analyzed later). This means that all of creation is a “sacrament of the divine.” Brazal concludes that, “It is thus possible to reciprocate a gift without undermining the notion of gift. Jesus did not give his life to others to get a reward, but the resurrection’s reward is a participation in that divine giving.” Brazal takes an interesting turn and applies this theology of gift-giving to pragmatic problems in the Philippines such as the need for self-care among Philippine overseas contract workers. She explains how *utang na loob* can become either a virtue or a vice depending upon how it is applied. She argues that neoliberal capitalism is a system “of vice that breeds poverty and climate changes.”

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117 Wu, “Reciprocity, Collectivism, and the Chinese Church,” 19.
120 De Mesa, “Contextual Theology,” 127.
121 Ibid., 130.
122 Ibid., 141-143.
change, which are forces that push people to migrate. The lack of debt of human solidarity (utang na loob) is built within this social structure." Both Wu and Brazal emphasize the important point that reciprocity does not negate a gift being a gift. While they both stress the importance of reciprocity, Wu and Brazal place an emphasis on different “gifts” so to speak. Wu’s analysis rests on the gift of grace, while Brazal emphasizes the gift of creation.

If reciprocity in gift-giving is such a dominant theme in many Majority World contexts, then why has so little attention been given to reciprocity, gift-giving, and grace from these gift theologians? In the following chapters, we will discover that the theme of reciprocity abounds in unique ways and that by including these voices, valuable contributions to this discussion can be made. One example of this is that many of the Majority World theologians analyzed in the upcoming chapters often “subjectify” aspects of creation that are often objectified by Western thinkers. In other words, there is less of an anthropocentric focus. To harken back to Risto Saarinen, giving a gift often requires that the receiver possesses some sense of agency and is able to respond in some way. He writes, “One semantic feature of the verb “to give” is that both the giver and receiver are normally supposed to be persons or at least living beings.” He goes onto explain that if someone gives a gift to their dog, there is a sense that the human giver has “personified” their pet. In Chapter 5, this personification of nonhuman creation will be most pronounced. By thinking in terms of gift-language, we will be able to explore further the relationships humanity has with nonhuman creation.

**Evaluation**

The use of gift-language is widespread and as we have seen has proven to be a useful tool in the construction of theologies of creation, participation, and salvation. As alluded to earlier, we have

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123 Ibid., 137.
seen two primary approaches when it comes to gift-theology: (1) among more traditional Protestant authors, such as the Mannermaa school or Barclay’s *Paul and the Gift*, the emphasis tends to focus on the soteriological.\(^{125}\) That is, an attempt to discover (or rediscover) how salvation, justification, and sanctification can be conceived of when understanding (gift) in a more reciprocal fashion; (2) the Radical Orthodox cohort, along with Staniloae (as we will see), focus on the gift of creation, where the accent lies on humanity’s relationship with creation and God. This does not absolve the soteriological element, but encompasses it. However, it tends to operate with the assumption that the ultimate *telos* for humanity is the union of creation with God. It is also more expansive in its focus. For example, merely existing as a human person places one in this gift-exchange with God whether they are aware of it or not. Both approaches identify participation and the agency of humanity (the receivers) as core components for understanding one’s relationship with God. In both, God always takes the initiative and priority in the giving of the gift. And just because this gift comes with obligations does not absolve its character as a gift.

The approaches are also different in that those that are more focused on the gift of salvation are often operating within the traditional divisions of “nature” and “grace,” the “spiritual” and “material.” Whereas in more creation-centered approaches, these divisions are downplayed significantly. As we will see, many of the Majority World theologies engaged in this project lean much more towards a creation-centered approach, rather than a concern with God’s gift of salvation towards a fallen humanity. However, gift theology is not without its critics.

As we have seen, there are many potential pitfalls of primarily using gift-categories when analyzing theologians. First, there is the danger of reductionism when utilizing such language. J. Todd Billings in his analysis of Calvin and gift-theologians makes a compelling point that, “The

\(^{125}\) This is not to suggest a stark separation between creation and soteriology. My point is to stress that depending on where the emphasis lies changes in the trajectory of gift theologies.
concept of ‘gift’, which tends toward the two options of being ‘unilateral’ or ‘bilateral’, ‘passively’ or ‘actively’ received, is simply not adequate to express the biblical and theological complexity of Calvin’s thought.”

There are a number of ways that gift language can project a “specific standard” on certain theologians, and certain nuances that are not able to be grasped using some of the binaries that can result from using such language. Sarah Coakley echoes this criticism. She questions the utilization of the gift as a primary category over and above language such as faith, grace, trinity, and sanctification. Coakley goes on to critique the vagueness with which the term “participation” is often used in this discourse, especially referring to Milbank and Tanner. Zahl also notes the vagueness surrounding the term participation. It is important moving forward that an awareness of this tendency of reductionism be kept in mind when analyzing theologians through the categories of gift, exchange, reciprocity, and unilateralism. Furthermore, it is important to provide a definition as to what “participation” means.

Another potential pitfall is that with many “theologies of the gift” that come from Radical Orthodoxy is that there can be such a strong theology of creation that it diminishes the effects of the Fall and sin. James K.A. Smith, writing from a Reformed perspective, wonders if:

The ambiguity in RO might be an indication that what is lacking is a radical understanding of the fall. I have some suspicions that of late, Milbank — under the rubric of universalism — is rehabilitating a quasi-natural theology. This would stem from the fact that, even if he recognizes the noetic effects of sin (it is

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126 Billings, Calvin, Participation, and the Gift, 190.
127 Coakley, “Why Gift?,” 229. Coakley also goes onto critique the lack of analysis regarding the importance of gender, gift, and the “sexual subtext” that is “inextricably entrwined” in the discussion.
not clear that he does), for him, grace seems to be universally shed abroad in such a way that these effects are undone for all humanity (BR, 106).\textsuperscript{128}

Furthermore, many gift-theologies can be fairly anthropocentric in focus. This is not to say that their focus is exclusively on the relationship between God and humanity — quite the contrary, the cosmos and all of creation is \textit{frequently} emphasized in these theologies. However, as has been discussed above, the \textit{detail} of how particular aspects of creation participate in God tends to be lacking and is often relegated under the umbrella terms “cosmos” or “creation,” with only humanity’s participation being thoroughly explored and analyzed. But even humanity’s participation can sometimes be obscured, or at least focuses primarily on metaphysical statements regarding how humanity participates in God.

\textbf{Why Gift?}

Hopefully, this chapter has illustrated the usefulness of gift-categories in theological construction. To answer Coakley’s critique of gift-language in theological discourse over other terms such as grace and faith is that the gift almost acts as an elevated category because in a sense everything is a gift. It can act as a useful paradigm to speak about the relationship between Creator and creation alongside more traditional theological language because ultimately the relationship can, and has often been, construed as a gift-giving relationship. To quote Milbank again:

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\textit{To quote Milbank again:}
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\begin{itemize}
\item James K.A. Smith, \textit{Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-secular Theology} (Grand Rapids, MI, 2004), 165. RO here is referring to Radical Orthodoxy.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{128}
“Gift is a kind of transcendental category in relation to all the topoi of theology, in a similar fashion to ‘word.’ Creation and grace are gifts; Incarnation is the supreme gift; the Fall, evil and violence are the refusal of gift; atonement is the renewed and hyperbolic gift that is forgiveness…”¹²⁹

Furthermore, the reciprocal gift-giving relationship can emphasize a relational dynamic rather than a transactional one. This gives a place to reciprocity and restores both agency and dignity to both the giver and the receivers, as within the cyclical exchange the receiver then becomes the giver, and the giver the receiver. This is unlike the modern “pure gift” unilateralism that statically encases both the giver and receiver into specific roles where the giver only gives and the receiver only receives. In this paradigm, the receiver becomes objectified in a sense whereby the only agency it possesses is to be acted upon by the giver. As we have seen, many theologians are reacting against this paradigm by constructing a reciprocal relationship of gift-exchange between both God and creation. However, I am curious to see in what ways this reciprocal relationship is posited between humanity and other aspects of creation found in the theologies I have chosen to dialogue with. For example, our relationship to the Earth is anything but unilateral, and yet the history of many modern civilizations displays a relationship that posits humanity as simply statically receiving the gifts from the Earth. Staniloae would describe this as a history of “taking” and now we find ourselves in a precarious situation ecologically. Perhaps a different paradigm could help posit a gift-relationship that exists between Earth and humanity that is reciprocal? For example, Native American Randy Woodley writes:

Everything in creation plays a part in the others’ existence and well-being. One of the most basic examples of this kind of reciprocity is how the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide between plants and animals

¹²⁹ Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, ix.
keeps us all living...we naturally understanding that all things created need each other in order to live in harmony.\textsuperscript{130}

This parallels the concept of \textit{utang na loob} explored above in that by virtue of being creatures we exist in debt and in solidarity with all other created things and to God. This is just one avenue for exploration where we can explore just \textit{how} human beings and the Earth participate in this relationship with God and with one another. And through the utilization of gift-language we may find potential resources for theological construction.

As mentioned earlier, this is a relational paradigm. We have seen how in the modern West the gift has been bifurcated from the economy because of the dominance of transaction and commodity that exists. A large reason why the “pure gift” seems so obvious to many is that we live in a world of transactions, and so gifts should \textit{not} be transactional, but only given out of pure altruistic motives. To receive anything back for a gift, just seems to be engaging in a transaction, thus losing the special worth or intentions behind the gift.

Finally, as mentioned toward the beginning of the chapter, the gift is located at the intersection of many different disciplines. As this chapter has shown, it has been utilized in sociology, anthropology, philosophy, theology, political science, and economics. Thus, it has the potential for interdisciplinary engagement which is important given that the field of World Christianity is heavily interdisciplinary as well. It could prove to be a useful way to analyze larger themes present among Majority World theologies.

Conclusion: Looking Forward

In this first chapter, I have attempted to frame the conversation around the gift in order to show how we might enter and contribute to this conversation. As observed, there is very little theological reflection from Majority World theologians on the topic of gift and gift-giving. Furthermore, there is very little to no engagement from Western theologies of the gift with Majority World theologies. How then can we work towards a more “global” theology of the gift?

Looking forward, this project is split into two parts. Part I (Chapters 1-3) sets the stage for the dialogue that takes place in Part II (Chapters 4-8). In this chapter, I analyzed many of the recent debates and origins surrounding theologies of gift and gift-giving. In it, I showed how the gift conversation in Western theology is representative of the strong trend towards theologies of participation in reaction against a perceived mechanistic, unilateral, individualistic, and anthropocentric soteriologies, and that “gift theology” offers different ways to creatively articulate alternatives to this. The choice of the gift also has underlying constructive and hermeneutical purposes. The “gift” operates as a universal category. To be clear, I do not mean universal in the sense that the definition of the gift is homogenous, quite the opposite. But almost every culture possesses some kind of gift economy or cultural understanding of gifts and gift-giving. What is interesting for our purposes is that many of the concepts of gift-giving emphasize *reciprocity* which implies some sort of interconnectivity. As we have seen, many gift-theologies are attractive because they emphasize and explore the dynamic relational aspects of one’s relationship with God and creation. The gift also possesses hermeneutical value. By viewing theologies through the lens of gift and gift-giving, one can tease out different characteristics within different theologies.

In order to work towards a more “global” theology of the gift I need a methodology that might allow me to overcome the gap in conversation that exists between Western theologies and Majority World theologies. In Chapter 2, I will interrogate the term “contextual theology” and propose that a solution to this gap is through the “global perspectives model” offered by Stephen B. Bevans which includes the concept of intercontextual theology. Intercontextual theology seeks to
place multiple theologies from widely different geographical contexts in dialogue with one another in an attempt to trace out the general themes that exist between them. It is not focused so much on the contexts of these theologies but is an attempt to “zoom out” in order to discover what overarching trends exist despite their contexts as well as the potential relevance these theologies might have beyond their own contexts.

I also need to choose a primary interlocutor who can anchor the conversation by providing both a theoretical framework and the basis for constructive work as I do not want to start from the “ground up” so to speak. This leads into Chapter 3 where I explore the most important aspects of Romanian Orthodox theologian Dumitru Staniloae’s theology as related to his concept of the World as a Gift. The reason for Staniloae is twofold. First, Staniloae is a natural entry point into the conversations surrounding the gift, as not only is he noticeably absent from the larger discourse, but he also provides a developed gift theology from which to work within. Second, Staniloae’s theology operates around the Eastern Orthodox understanding of theosis. Dialogue between Eastern Orthodox theologies and Majority World theologies are not commonplace. But as we will discover, there are many convergences between the theologies chosen in this thesis and the theology of Dumitru Staniloae despite substantial contextual, denominational, and theological differences which may speak to a larger need for Majority World theologies to engage in more dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox tradition. And, as I will argue, there may even be signs that there exists an implicit theology of participation being articulated in many of the Majority World theologies engaged in this project. The primary research question of this thesis moving forward is: *What resources do Majority World theologies offer in a revised understanding of Staniloae’s “World as a Gift?”*

To avoid lapsing into a survey or a purely comparative project, I have decided to organize my thesis around three transcontextual themes for my dialogue partners to engage with: matter,
space, and time. To clarify, these three themes should not be interpreted along the lines of "scientific discourse" nor are they to be associated with transcendental philosophies. These themes are operating as very broad conceptual categories within which each conversation will take place. For example, Chapter 5 is centered around the theme of "space." "Space" can have a whole host of meanings, but for our purposes we are speaking about lands, oceans, and the natural world. In each chapter, I place two Majority World theologians in dialogue with each other and Staniloae centered around the given theme. Organizing these conversations by theme allows me to identify the larger trends that exist between them that transcend context and allows for the generation of theological materials to be used to supplement and work towards a revised theology of the "World as a Gift." This is done in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Each of these chapters is focused on a different particular relationship humanity possesses.

Chapter 4 is centered on the theme of "matter." In particular, this chapter analyzes how Staniloae understands the relationship between the material and the spiritual and the effect this has on his understanding of the human body. I then engage South Korean Pentecostal Pastor David Yonggi Cho’s theology of blessing as well as his theological anthropology. I also engage with Brazilian Catholic Ivone Gebara’s understanding of materiality and particularity, as well as her theology of the body.

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131 To clarify, the term “transcontextual” is a working concept. By “transcontextual” I simply mean to say that certain categories such as the “land” or the “human body,” while not definitionally homogenous, do have significance that exists beyond the particularities of a given context. The term “intercontextual,” while closely related, is seeking to emphasize the inter-dialogue that needs to take place between various contextual theologies. Thus, an “intercontextual theology” is one that places multiple contextual theologies in dialogue with one another despite contextual differences. This discussion will continue in Chapter 2.

132 One might object that these categories reinforce the dominance of the North Atlantic worldview by situating the conversation around these three themes. But as we will see, these themes are already prominent in many Majority World theologies. For example, in A Native American Theology the authors are attempting to reimagine and explore a Native American Christian theology of “space” and “time.” Or we can also point to John Mbiti’s exploration into African understandings using the category of “time.” However, these themes should not be seen as hard “categories” but act almost as conceptual centerpieces around which dialogue is to take place.
Chapter 5 is centered on the theme of “space.” This chapter in particular is focused on both humanity’s place in the natural world as well as humanity’s relationship with non-human creation. I analyze Staniloae’s understanding of the natural priesthood of humanity as well as his understanding of the natural world. I then engage with Cherokee theologian Randy Woodley and his understanding of humanity’s place and relationship with the natural world. I also engage with Polynesian theologian Winston Halapua and his understanding of humanity’s relationship with the natural world as well as the Earth’s oceans.

Chapter 6 is centered on the theme of “time.” In this chapter, I analyze the importance of the ancestors and the past. I analyze Staniloae’s understanding of the afterlife as well as his understanding of the importance of the past for theological reflection. I then engage with Kenyan theologian John S. Mbiti and his African eschatology. From there, I dialogue with Singaporean theologian Simon Chan and his reflections on the venerational practices of the Japanese Indigenous Church Movements (JICM).

Finally, in Chapter 7 I hope to apply some of these findings generally to my own context of America in order to show the usefulness of intercontextual dialogue and how its findings can be applied to some of the problems facing twenty-first century America that result from the excesses of the pure gift paradigm.

There are some important clarifications to be noted from the outset. The first is that it is important that I locate myself within this discussion as a North American Protestant interlocutor. My background as an American non-denominational Protestant somewhat predisposes me toward approaching theology with an ecumenical eye. Furthermore, this project is not intended to be a comprehensive one, but rather it hopes to see if it is possible to generate theological materials for construction from intercontextual dialogue. While this thesis engages with Dumitru Staniloae, David Yonggi Cho, Ivone Gebara, Randy Woodley, Winston Halapua, John S. Mbiti, and Simon Chan, it is not primarily interested in their theologies for their own sake. This does not mean that this thesis is
not attempting to portray their theologies accurately. But rather its primary intention is a constructive one that hopes to show that intercontextual engagement is both possible and fruitful. In many ways, this thesis hopes to go beyond Staniloae’s original conception of the “World as a Gift” through dialogue with different Majority World theologies. This thesis is not intending to set forth a fully-fledged methodology, nor is it offering a complete revised theology of the “World as a Gift,” but it is hoping to point towards the beginnings of both.

In summary, this thesis should be seen as an attempt at intercontextual theology of the gift that pushes towards mutual construction and generates something novel by identifying larger trends and utilizing them despite contextual differences. If one marker for “contextual theology” is doing theology intentionally aware of context and placing it at the forefront, then this thesis is an attempt to do theology by placing the “global context” at the forefront. To paraphrase Bevans, it is trying to do theology as if the rest of the world existed.¹³³

**Chapter 2: An Intercontextual Theological Experiment**

*Introduction*

The late Andrew Walls poses a question for the twenty-first century Church in his article, “The Ephesian Moment: At a Crossroads in Christian History.” He explains that the “Ephesian question at the Ephesian moment is whether or not the church in all its diversity will demonstrate its unity by the interactive participation of all its culture-specific segments, the interactive participation that is to be expected in a functioning body. Will the body of Christ be realized or fractured in this new Ephesian moment? Realization will have both theological and economic consequences.”¹³⁴ This

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question is asked to the global Church that now finds its centers of gravity in multiple locations across the world. While Christianity has grown dramatically in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and Oceania it has declined in the North Atlantic countries. Naturally, this has resulted in a plethora of theological activity outside the Western world. The number of publications written by theologians from the “Global South” is ever-growing and shows no sign of slowing down. This shift in gravity became most apparent with the rise of various liberation theologies arising in the 1960’s-1980’s. Latin American liberation theology, Black liberation theology, Dalit theology, and minjung theology explicitly challenged normative assumptions around what theology was, how it should be conducted, and who it was for. These theologies were met with mixed reactions. Needless to say, the discipline of theology has not been the same since. These liberation theologies in their various manifestations have come to be placed under the umbrella of the sub-discipline known as “contextual theology.”

But what makes these theologies “contextual?” What is “contextual theology,” and how does it differ from “theology?” In the following sections, I will analyze some of the recent definitions surrounding contextual theology and note some of the ambiguities that exist regarding the term. I will also argue that Stephen Bevans’ “global perspective model” is the next step for contextual theology as well as interrogate some studies that could be placed within this model to see what can

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135 Dana L. Robert reports that 70.8 percent of the Christian population was European at the beginning of the twentieth century, and that now that percentage has dissipated to a mere 28 percent. See Dana L. Robert, “Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1945,” International Bulletin of Missionary Research 24, no. 2 (April 2000): 50. A more recent article based upon the findings of the third edition of the World Christian Encyclopedia (2019) reports that, “By 2020 fully two-thirds of all Christians were in the Global South, with only one-third in the Global North. By 2050 we anticipate that 77 percent of all Christians will live in the Global South.” See Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, “World Christianity and Mission 2020: Ongoing Shift to the Global South,” International Bulletin of Missionary Research 44, no. 1 (2020): 10.

136 For an extensive treatment of the different kinds of contextual liberation theologies see Angie Pears, Doing Contextual Theology (London: Routledge, 2010).

137 In this chapter I will use the term “contextual theology” for conceptual purposes. However, in the following chapters I will instead opt for “Majority World theologies” when referring to Christian theologies that are developed outside of Europe and North America as well as including the indigenous groups that exist within the North Atlantic countries. To be clear, I am not assuming these theologies to be homogenous.
be gleaned from them methodologically. Finally, I will lay out the plans for my “theological experiment.”

**What is Contextual Theology? Terminological Difficulties**

While the term contextual theology can be found everywhere within contemporary theology, it is slightly enigmatic. In their recently edited volume, Sigurd Bergmann and Mika Vahakangas have rightly observed, “A clear definition of contextual theology is still lacking, while at the same time we can find several operational clarifications.”\(^{138}\) What are these operational clarifications? Bergmann and Vähäkangas identify a few markers without adopting a clear definition of contextual theology. They opt toward Angie Pears’ definition of contextual theology as theology that “explicitly” places the contextual nature of theology at the forefront of the theological process.\(^ {139}\) According to Bergmann and Vähäkangas, some of the markers to identify contextual theology are an emphasis on lived theology or praxis; interdisciplinary, interreligious, as well as placing a high emphasis on theological construction.

Stephen B. Bevans whose text *Models of Contextual Theology*,\(^ {140}\) which is considered a classic in the field, argues that contextual theology operates in a dialogical fashion between both the experiences of the past (Scripture, tradition) as well as the experiences of the present which he defines as, “the context in which the Christians of a concrete time and place find themselves.”\(^ {141}\) Through this “mutually critical dialogue” with both the past and the present is not a new phenomenon but has always been a deeply “Christian” one. From what we can gather thus far, contextual theology is reacting against theologies that assume themselves to be universally

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\(^{139}\) Angie Pears, *Doing Contextual Theology*, 1.


applicable. One of the key contributions of contextual theology then is it has awakened the contemporary theological enterprise to its own cultural and historical situatedness by placing context at the center of theological reflection. While theology has traditionally understood its limitedness in terms of God-talk, it has not always understood itself to be limited in its applicability and relevance to other cultures.

It is here that we need to make an important clarification. There are two senses in which the term “contextual theology” is typically utilized. Contextual theology is used in both a descriptive sense and a methodological sense. The descriptive sense in which it is used is to claim that all theology is a situated enterprise being done in a specific historical and cultural location. The immediate implication of this notion is that theologies are not just limited in their speech about God, but that they are also limited in their immediate applicability and relevance to other contexts.

The methodological sense is used to convey the idea that a contextual theologian, aware of the limitedness of theology, is explicitly placing context at the center of their theological reflection. Contextual theologies are typically split between two models: the “indigenous model” and the “socio-economic model.” Or, to put it another way, they are split between the “search for identity” and the “search for economic change.” While this distinction is controversial, the liberation theologies mentioned above are examples of the search for socio-economic change. In regards to the indigenous model, one can think of Kwame Bediako’s *Theology and Identity* where a part of his task is exploring the potential continuities that exist between African indigenous religions and early Christian tradition. One can see how important context is for both of these models. At the center of each are distinct contextual questions such as: “How do we make sense of our culture’s

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142 Bergmann and Vähäkangas, “Contextual Theology,” 2.
143 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 431.
religious history in light of the Christian faith?” And, “What are the underlying systemic causes that have created this unjust situation we find ourselves in?” However, the distinction between the search for identity and the search for socio-economic change is not always helpful as the search for identity and the search for socio-economic change are often coupled together. For instance, Bediako’s theology is primarily focused on identity but could also be considered “liberative.”

In another recent publication, Victor Ezigbo distinguishes between what he terms the explanatory genre of contextual theology and the constitutive genre. Ezigbo nuances this statement further and declares that what is distinctive about contextual theology is the recognition that context is “one of the essential and indispensable sources of Christian theology.” For Ezigbo, it is important that context performs a different function than that of Scripture and Church tradition. Ezigbo argues that contextual theology is not simply making “existing theologies relevant to a new theological issue” (as in the explanatory sense) but rather, it is allowing the present-day Christian community to act as an essential theological source that should contribute both to the form and content of Christian theology in ways that are different from other sources such as Scripture, tradition, and reason.

According to Ezigbo, a successful contextual theologian will be able to navigate between both “armchair” and “fieldwork” theological inquiry. Ezigbo appears to be communicating that what is distinctive about contextual theology is that it situates itself intentionally

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146 For a critical evaluation of Bediako’s relationship with liberation theology see Tim Hartman, Kwame Bediako: African Theology for a World Christianity (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2022), 154-158.


148 Ezigbo, The Art of Contextual Theology, 11. Ezigbo is arguing that the explanatory genre of contextual theology sometimes takes other sources of Christian theology such as Scripture, tradition, and reason and elevates them over and above the context of the Christian community. What this results in is a “dressing up” of the theologies generated from the sources above in a local language.
toward grassroots Christian theologies which should determine the form and direction theological reflection should go. This privileges work that utilizes ethnographic sources that are then placed alongside the “traditional” sources of Scripture, reason, and Church tradition.\(^{149}\)

However, it is still difficult to understand what is *distinctive* about contextual theology within contemporary theology. Certainly in the past “universalizing theologies” existed. But is that still the case today?\(^{150}\) From what we can gather from these more recent reflections on the methodological sense of the term is that contextual theologians understand themselves to be placing context in the foreground to varying degrees as an integral and non-negotiable source for theological reflection. But it is not always clear where the descriptive sense of the term begins and where the methodological sense ends. One could make the argument that there exists a thin line between those who place context in the foreground and those who do not place as much of an emphasis on the context explicitly. How exactly is this to be measured? For example, is Karl Barth a “contextual theologian” in the methodological sense in his direct reaction to Nazi Germany and the *Deutsche Christen*\(^{2}\)? Or, could Yale theologian Kathryn Tanner be considered a contextual theologian? Tanner’s recent work responds directly to the dominance of finance-driven capitalism and its implications for both the Church and larger society.\(^{152}\) These are brief examples, but the point is that

\(^{149}\) An example of this kind of theological reflection can be found in Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004).

\(^{150}\) Robert Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997), 2. Schreiter defines a universalizing theology as, “A universalizing theology is a theology that intentionally or unintentionally extends “the results of their own reflections beyond their own contexts to other settings, usually without an awareness of the rootedness of their theologies within their own contexts” (2).

\(^{151}\) Timothy Gorringe, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Gorringe argues that Barth was indeed a contextual theologian because he sought to respond directly to the events of his day (16). Gorringe also notes Barth’s insistence that “different contexts required different theologies” (287). Furthermore, in 1968 Barth contributed to the *South East Asian Journal of Theology* and “urged them to respond to the burning problems of their own context, their own ruling-ideologies and ‘realities’, responsibly and concretely, not as Western or Barthian theologians but as joyful *South Asian Christians*” (287). We could also cite Rudolph Bultmann here as engaging in a type of contextual methodology as argued by David W. Congdon, *The Mission of Demythologizing: Rudolf Bultmann’s Dialectical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015).

\(^{152}\) Kathryn Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019). Tanner speaks to the contextual nature of theology in Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*
if we apply the definition of contextual theology as provided above to both of these theologians, it is
difficult to see what makes their methodologies any less contextual than the aforementioned
liberation theologies unless we limit the term to mean theologies which explicitly use ethnographic
sources. It appears that the term contextual theology is too fluid and imprecise to be able to
successfully distinguish it methodologically from “theology.” Thus, we are faced with an interesting
question: What is being referred to when we are speaking of “contextual theology?” Justo L.
González may provide some illumination toward this question:

The new theology, being done by those who are aware of their traditional voicelessness, is acutely aware
of the manner in which the dominant is confused with the universal. North Atlantic male theology is
taken to be basic, normative, universal theology, to which then women, other minorities, and people from
younger churches may add their footnotes. What is said in Manila is very relevant for the Philippines.
What is said in Tubingen, Oxford, or Yale is relevant for the entire church. White theologians do general
theology; black theologians do black theology. Male theologians do general theology; female theologians
do theology determined by their sex.153

Gonzalez published Mañana in 1990 and it arguably remains relevant today. In his recent book, Tim
Hartman explains the reception of theologian Kwame Bediako: “For many Western theologians,
Bediako is considered to be an African theologian who wrote African theology. Perhaps non-Africans
might want to read Bediako’s writings, but — this line of thinking continues — those writings
would not have any immediate claim on non-African readers, though non-Africans may try to

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appropriate some insights for their own purposes.” He goes on to argue that Bediako’s work has been “marginalized” because his contextual theology has been relegated to his particular context “without reflection on the implications of his claims for other contexts.” This is an important point. Hartman correctly identifies that one of the main issues latent within contextual theology is that it is by definition confined by context. In speaking to the “power question” of who decides the criterion by which to judge contextual theologies, Kirsteen Kim states:

This problem is compounded because the logic of contextual theologies is often that theology in one context cannot be challenged by outsiders to that context. Because Asian theologians, for example, are trying to do theology in a specifically Asian way and with respect to Asian realities, it is inappropriate to assess them with respect to criteria derived from a different context, and such moves, especially by proponents of a ‘classical’ theologies, are strongly resisted.

She goes on to state that because of the internal logic of contextual theology, these theologies “may find it difficult to lay themselves open to critique.” Bevans makes a similar observation stating, “As I have taken to saying somewhat ironically, the problem with contextual theologies is that they are contextual.” There is truth to Bevans’ somewhat ironic statement. It is almost as if the definition of contextual theology unintentionally reinforces or encourages its isolation to its own context. There exists an implicit understanding that because contextual theology so emphasizes context, that it is only relevant and applicable to said context. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen advocates for the usefulness of the term. He argues that while the terms contextual, global, and intercultural

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155 Ibid., 51.
157 Ibid.
theology served an important purpose in awakening Christian theology “from the slumber of Euro-American hegemony,” that time is now over and the task largely achieved. Continuing to use these terms risks unintentionally perpetuating the idea that some theologies are “contextually driven” and others are “neutral.” Kärkkäinen also alludes to the “gap” that exists between Western theology and contextual theology. His solution is for “academia in the Global North to invite ‘contextual’ views as equal dialogue partners,” while also imploring “contextual theologians” to “stop undermining and eschewing tradition as if, for example, the main sources of oppression in Christian community is traditional ways of addressing God or speaking of Christ’s suffering.” While Hartman does not advocate for the dissolution of the term, he does advocate a similar desire to Kärkkäinen. He pleasfully encourages others to also engage in comparative studies between Western and non-Western Christian theologies. He also hopes that “the stark distinction between Western and non-Western theologies will disappear. I hope that deeply contextual theologies flourish around the globe and thoughtful engagements arise across boundaries.” Both Kärkkäinen and Hartman are not advocating for some kind of monolithic global theology that rules over all, but are instead pushing for the recognition that all theologies are contextual, and because all theologies are contextual they should be treated with equal importance. Their analysis also reveals that the term contextual theology actually might be now helping to reinforce the very thing it sought to correct: Euro-American normativity within the theological discourse. Hartman and Kärkkäinen also expose the gap that exists between “Western theology” and “contextual theology.” What is their solution to this gap? Some form of methodology that involves intercontextual engagement through mutually critical dialogue.

160 Ibid.
161 Hartman, Barth and Bediako, 193.
All theology is contextual theology

The dictum, “There is no such thing as ‘theology’; there is only contextual theology” is an oft repeated statement in discussions surrounding contextual theology.¹⁶² As we have seen, however, while that statement is de jure true, it is not yet de facto true. As I have argued above, “Western theology” remains largely normative. Furthermore, the lack of terminological clarity as to what is distinctive about contextual theology leads us to the potential possibility that what is “contextual” about “contextual theology” is it is theology that is done largely by those who operate or choose to operate outside of the “normative” tradition. I believe that this gap has been unintentionally created from both sides. As we will see in this study, too often Majority World theologians dismiss the Western tradition by virtue of it being deemed too “dualistic.” In the chapters that follow, we will observe that many sweeping generalizations are aimed at the Western theological tradition, which upon further investigation, sometimes prove to be inaccurate. No doubt suspicion here is warranted due to the issues surrounding the history of Western intellectual imperialism and colonialism. This has naturally led many theologians outside the West to do theology on their own terms with their own methodologies and expectations (and we are better for it!) But this has had the unintentional effect of creating various theological silos whereby contextual theologies remain bound by their own contexts. Contemporary contextual theology faces three main problems. The first is that contextual theologies are often siloed off from each other. As I will explain below, it is not often that contextual theologies from completely different contexts are brought into dialogue with one another. The second problem facing contextual theology is one that I have already been alluding to: contextual theologies are sometimes siloed off from activity taking place in contemporary Western theological conversations, to which I would argue they have much to contribute. Thirdly, there is also a sense in which “context” needs to be understood to be a fluid and not a static term. Not only

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¹⁶² Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, 3.
do we occupy our particular contexts, but in the contemporary world, we also occupy a larger “global” context. One only needs to think of the internet or migration to see that “context” is a fluid and always shifting reality. In fact, the recognition of the contextual nature of theology should “level the playing field” whereby all theologies can be treated as equals. That is why in this next section I hope to explore Bevans’ explanation of the “global perspective model” as I believe it to be a potential way forward in moving beyond this impasse.

A Potential Way Forward: The Global Perspective Model

In postulating about the potential future of contextual theology, Bevans contends that there is a need to do theology with a “global context” in mind. This is not meant to be a universalizing or totalizing theology. In Robert Schreiter’s *The New Catholicity*, Schreiter prophetically explains that, “Theology must find ways of embracing both the global and the local if it’s to be a faithful and credible voice for belief.”

Schreiter believes that theology must possess the “ability to speak beyond its own context” and have an “openness to hear voices from beyond its own boundaries.” Since this was written, we have seen that the theological landscape has dramatically shifted in the twenty-first century. Theological activity within the academy is acutely aware of the contextual nature of all theology and is rarely done with the explicit idea of total or universal relevance in mind. The fact that there are now thousands of contextual theologies that are “always changing and there are always new ones being articulated,” confirms that theology is well on the way to fulfilling its local function. Yet, the global function is still lacking. Bevans offers a way forward in what he terms the “Global Perspective model.” This “global theology” is one that is a “step beyond contextual theology”

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164 Ibid., 4.
and is a theology in “global, not local context.” Bevans explains that the first step in doing a “global theology” is placing “these contextual theologies in dialogue with one another,” and that this is done with an acknowledgment that this global theology is also occasional, incomplete, limited, and always provisional. Bevans helpfully illustrates what doing a “global theology” might look like:

Theology today should not be done by steeping oneself in only one tradition — whether it be Nigerian, Malaysian, Brazilian, or Roman. Theology today needs to be done in a dialogue with one’s own contextual perspective and the broad and deep tradition of the Christian church, and in a dialogue as well with the results of this interaction and the perspectives of Christians from every part of our world.

Bevans highlights the need for theology to be done by bringing a diverse set of voices into critical dialogue with one another as well as in dialogue with the Christian tradition. This is often done either through a comparative study or survey. He ponders the potentialities of what a “real mutually critical intercontextual dialogue between contextual theologies that have more or fewer affinities with one another” might look like. He writes, “What might be the results of a mutually critical dialogue between themes in Filipino theology and the same themes in Indonesian theology?...I think these are intriguing questions, and their answers may indeed hold out a future for theologizing from the perspective of world Christianity.”

Bernard Dinkelaker observes:

The term intercontextual signifies that the issue of the gospel, culture and language is more than a matter of contextualism, even more so as ‘contextual theology’ in ‘Western’ theology is still generally understood to

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166 Ibid., 80-81.
167 Bevans, Essays in Contextual Theology, 78.
168 Bevans, Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective, 4.
169 Bevans, Essays in Contextual Theology, 179.
be of concern primarily to theologies in the “Two-Thirds World”, notwithstanding the fact that claims of a universal theology in Europe and North America are no more uncontested.\textsuperscript{170}

Here Dinkelaker sees the need for intercontextual theologies due to the understanding that theologies are not only contextual but that there exists a universal element. This need for intercontextual engagement has been recognized by several theologians and many attempts at engaging in a global theology have been undertaken.

**Previous Approaches to a Global Theology**

A number of studies have been written that could be placed within the global perspective model. For instance, one only has to look at recent theological textbooks or edited volumes to see that theological education would now be considered incomplete without at least giving reference to theologies being developed globally.\textsuperscript{171} In this next section, I will explore a few different attempts that could be placed within the global perspective model.

The first example is Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison’s *Jesus in Global Contexts* as well as Volker Kuster’s *The Many Faces of Jesus Christ*.\textsuperscript{172} The authors set out to survey a variety of contextual christological articulations from Latin America, Asia, Africa, as well as feminist and black

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\textsuperscript{170} Bernhard Dinkelaker, *How is Jesus Christ Lord?: Reading Kwame Bediako from a Postcolonial and Intercontextual Perspective* (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang Edition, 2017), 20. Dinkelaker goes on to cite Christopher Duraisingh who echoes these concerns in speaking about theologies of mission. He writes: “I believe that relatively little or no serious work has been done toward an intercontextual theology of mission. Mission theologies hitherto have been monocultural and monologic. Therefore, I submit that intercontextual relations that take identities, differences and plurality serious can be explored as one of the new paradigms in mission today.” Christopher Duraisingh, “Mission Towards Reconciled and Inter-Contextual Communities” *International Review of Mission* 91, (2002): 484.


christologies from North America. Each chapter surveys different theologies from each particular region. Their final chapter seeks to “set these contexts in conversation with each other.” In the concluding chapter, Pope-Levison and Levison draw out overarching themes that transcend context. For example, they identify one theme to be Jesus’ death as a historical conflict where many of the theologies they surveyed place a high emphasis on Jesus’ death as one resulting primarily from Jesus’ antagonistic stance towards the “powerful elite of his day.” Furthermore, they are also able to identify shared sources and methods of the theologies surveyed above.

Küster’s *The Many Faces of Jesus Christ* takes a similar approach to that of Pope-Levison and Levison in that he organizes his study context by context, exploring different models and christological formulations. Küster explains that the subject of christology will allow him to anchor his discussion in order to “detect the commonalities, divergences and opportunities for ecumenical learning in the connections between themes in contextual theologies.” This will allow him to go beyond both “social and cultural boundaries.” Within each context, Küster identifies different theologians surveying their respective theologies grouped by geographical region. Importantly, he identifies that there exists a fluidity between traditional denominational lines (Catholic and Protestant), and notes that the “Orthodox hardly take any part in these discussions.” He also makes the observation that Paul rarely appears in these contextual discussions and that the doctrine of justification “occurs only rarely.” I note this last point to illustrate the potential strength that the multi-contextual survey offers. By taking a more general approach, Küster is able to identify the larger trends that exist beyond contextual particularities. Indeed, this is the biggest strength of both

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174 Ibid., 169.
176 Ibid., 194.
177 Ibid., 184. This will be important for us later.
178 Ibid., 196.
the approaches noted above. By surveying multiple theologians from different contexts larger thematic trends and dissonances can be identified. However, while both of these studies should be commended for their breadth, each suffers from geographic isolation. While many of the thematic trends mined from the surveys are noted, the specific theologians themselves are not brought into direct dialogue with one another. A comparative approach is adopted, where similarities and differences can be noted. But the resources generated are not then brought to construction to offer something new based upon these findings. This is a problem that presents itself repeatedly.

This desire for something new to be generated together is recognized by Victor Ezigbo. In his essay “Imagining Mutual Christian Theological Identity: From Apologia to Dialogic Theologizing,” Ezigbo hopes to develop a dialogical method whose goal is to bring “contextual theologies in dialogic communication tailored toward developing ‘theological materials,’ some of which can be used to construct Christian theological identity.”¹⁷⁹ In short, Ezigbo’s main concern seems to be to bring these different contextual theologies in dialogue with one another to create “something new” together.¹⁸⁰ Ezigbo carefully develops four principles that should govern this dialogue: 1) fragmentary-mentality principle; 2) the more presence of contextual theologies principle; 3) the other-referential principle; 4) the global issue principle.¹⁸¹ Each of these principles is an attempt to balance the particular with the universal, as well as an understanding that every theologian comes to the theological task limited and in need of dialogue. Ezigbo then brings Indian theologian Peniel Rajkumar in dialogue with Latin American theologian Gustavo Gutierrez and is successfully able to draw out shared thematic resonances between these two theologies that can be used towards the construction of shared theological identity. Ezigbo should be commended for taking this next step.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 466.
¹⁸¹ Ibid., 457.
in bringing two theologians from vastly different contexts in dialogue with one another. However, Ezigbo chooses two theologians who both operate as liberation theologians who share many of the same concerns. But what would happen if two theologians were brought into conversation with one another that had very little in common theologically as well as contextually?

As mentioned earlier, Tim Hartman has also responded to the call to take this need for mutual dialogue seriously. In *Theology After Colonization: Bediako, Barth, and the Future of Theological Reflection*, Hartman utilizes a comparative approach and places two theologians with very “little affinity” with one another in dialogue. Placing Kwame Bediako and Karl Barth in dialogue with one another, Hartman believes that it can “generate significant theological engagement that transcends cultural and geographic boundaries.”182 Hartman concludes that through such dialogue a global theology can be achieved:

> If such deep listening and learning can occur, such that the Western agenda can be interrogated and laid aside and the anti-Western rhetoric of some postcolonial theology can be suspended, there exists the possibility of true dialogue within World Christianity. Indeed, the goal would be dialogue, not a monolithic, global theology.183

Hartman’s project demonstrates the importance of intercontextual dialogue. In grappling with the problems of pluralism, globalization, secularization, Hartman is able to dialogue with Barth and Bediako for solutions to these problems. But because of the mutually critical dialogue that takes place between them, many of these “cultural blinders” are able to be exposed and worked through. However, Hartman’s approach does not go broad enough to draw out transcontextual themes that exist between multiple contexts.

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182 Tim Hartman, *Theology after Colonization*, 32.
183 Ibid., 196.
Perhaps the most ambitious of these attempts is Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen’s five-volume series entitled “A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World.” This five-volume systematics builds off of his earlier works which survey various topics such as Christology or Ecclesiology from a global perspective. Kärkkäinen’s “transversal” approach not only seeks to dialogue with contextual theologies but other religions as well as the latest developments in science and religion. It is truly “global” in every sense of the word. A notable aspect of this series is that Kärkkäinen takes a different approach to the two explored above. Whereas previous attempts situate contextual theologies by geography, Kärkkäinen inserts them at the table alongside other interlocutors as equal contributors. For example, in the first volume entitled Creation and Humanity, Kärkkäinen cites both J.Y. Lee and Leonardo Boff alongside the likes of Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure when discussing ecological pneumatology. This is just one small example of Kärkkäinen’s larger methodology here. He does not isolate these theologians according to geographic context, but rather he simply invites their insights alongside others. Kärkkäinen does a good job at treating all of his dialogue partners as equals. Kärkkäinen’s five-volume series is perhaps the closest to what we can properly describe as being an “intercontextual” work. However, one does wonder if the sheer breadth of the work diminishes the significance of particular contextual theologies and if a different project can be undertaken that limits itself to contextual theologies. The contextual theologians’ voices tend to get somewhat muted in this massive project. However, this series does overcome the issue of geographic isolation as well as the lack of a constructive element that is missing in many of the global perspective projects seen above.

184 Here I am referring to works such as Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, The Trinity: Global Perspectives (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007); Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002). The second edition of some of these works take a more comparative approach and seriously revises these conversations.

What can we glean from these previous approaches? The first is engaging with multiple contextual theologies from diverse geographic backgrounds so that, like Küster, Pope-Levison and Levison, we are able to draw out overarching themes that exist between these theologies that transcend context. Following Kärkkäinen, we also do not want to isolate these contextual theologies geographically. Unlike Kärkkäinen, we do not want to go so broad that the contextual theologies are more muted in the discussion. To be sure, this will be a difficult balance to strike. Furthermore, we want to engage in a dialogical approach that results in the generation of theological materials that can be used toward the construction of something novel as seen in Ezigbo and Hartman. Thus, it is my hope to engage in a kind of theological experimentation that takes cues from the projects analyzed above.

**A Theological Experiment in Intercontextual Theology**

In the previous sections I have argued that two primary problems face the sub-discipline of contextual theology today: 1) Contextual theologies are sometimes isolated from other contextual theologies; 2) Contextual theologies are sometimes isolated from Western theological conversations. I have argued that Bevans’ global perspective model (which includes the idea of intercontextual dialogue) offers a way forward because it desires to place theology within a global contextual frame that sees all theologies possessing equal importance. But we have also seen that many of the approaches which adopt this perspective often find it difficult to strike a balance between the particular and the universal. A wider, universal approach is often too broad, while a case study approach can often reinforce geographic isolation. It is my hope to offer a step forward by conducting a intercontextual theological experiment that seeks to address the problems noted above, as well as leverage it to assist me in developing the beginnings of a revised theology of Staniloae’s World as a Gift.
Chapter 3: Dumitru Staniloae and the World as a Gift

Chapter 1 displayed the benefit and potential of utilizing gift categories in the construction of theologies of participation. In this chapter, I will survey Staniloae’s life and background in order to properly understand his theological idea of the World as a Gift that I hope to supplement with my findings in Chapters 4-6. To do this, we will primarily be analyzing Staniloae’s understandings of the divine energies as well as the *logoi* which are integral to his conception of the World as a Gift. I will then argue that Staniloae, much like many other “gift theologians,” does not go into much detail concerning particular gifts from God, but rather operates on a “macro” level in speaking about the World as a Gift as a whole. This shift in perspective from the Gift (universal) to the gifts (particular) offers much in regards to theological exploration. It is the particular gifts of matter, space, and time that will serve as the thematic centerpieces for our intercontextual dialogue and sets the stage for the second part of this thesis where I will place Staniloae in dialogue with various Majority World interlocutors.

*Introduction to Dumitru Staniloae*

“Bridge-builder,” “pan-Orthodox,” and “ecumenical theologian” are just some of the ways to describe Romanian theologian Dumitru Staniloae.186 Andrew Louth has gone as far to say that Staniloae, “is not marginal, he is not even simply a bridge between East and West, or between Russian and Greek Orthodoxy: he is at the centre of what many would regard as the liveliest and most original movement in modern Orthodox thought.”187 He has been ranked by some among the 20th century’s greatest theologians, with some saying he compares to Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and

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Karl Rahner.\textsuperscript{188} His influence was far reaching extending to both Jurgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg.\textsuperscript{189} And yet, he has hardly received the recognition he deserves outside Eastern Orthodox circles. He has certainly not enjoyed the notoriety of the Russian school composed of names such as Vladimir Lossky, Georges Florovsky, and Sergei Bulgakov. It has been estimated that he is quoted three and a half times less than Zizoulas and four times less than Lossky,\textsuperscript{190} despite having published a vast amount which includes 210 theological articles, a three-volume Dogmatics, multiple translations, and a plethora of articles written for popular consumption.\textsuperscript{191} Unfortunately, much of his work has not yet been translated into English which partially explains the lack of engagement. However, more and more of his work has been translated, especially his Dogmatics. Staniloae has been described as one who stands at a crossroads between the “East and the West.”\textsuperscript{192} His “thought plunges western readers into a different world and into a style of thinking which may surprise and even dumbfound them.”\textsuperscript{193} The idea that Staniloae stands as a “bridge” is a fitting metaphor for this project as his concept of the World as a Gift is also providing a bridge through which intercontextual dialogue can take place. As we will see in the following chapters, strong continuities exist between Staniloae and some of the thematic trends uncovered through this theological experiment. The themes that run through Staniloae’s theology are reciprocity,

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\textsuperscript{188} Charles Miller, \textit{The Gift of the World}, 74.
\textsuperscript{191} It is also worth noting that Staniloae’s Dogmatics are three volumes in the original Romanian. Andrew Louth, “Review Essay,” 258.
\textsuperscript{192} Kallistos Ware, “Forward,” x.
\end{flushright}
cooperation, dynamism, and personalism which all find resonance in some of the Majority World theologies we will dialogue with in this thesis.194

**Biography**

Dumitru Staniloae was born in Transylvania in 1903, in a rural setting surrounded by nature. His family was very involved in church life, and from a very early age, Staniloae desired to be a priest. Staniloae was the youngest child of five, and also had a twin sister. He began his theological studies at Cernauti Seminary in Northern Bukovina from 1922 to 1927.195 His early theological training left him unsatisfied due to the lack of innovation and German rationalism which dominated his training.196 Staniloae then abandoned theological study for literature until Metropolitan Balan encouraged him to return to theology. He then went on to study in Athens, Munich, Berlin, and Paris while engaging with the patristic tradition, Kant, Hegel, and most importantly Gregory Palamas.197 He began teaching at Sibiu Theological Academy from 1929 to 1946. During those years he married his wife Maria and was ordained as a priest in the Orthodox Church.198 In 1938 he would publish his study on Gregory Palamas and would also come to engage with Maximus the Confessor. As Miller states, “Those years at Sibiu signified Fr. Staniloae’s final rejection of scholastic categories of thought.”199 The post-war period would begin Stalin’s totalitarianism and would bring increasing difficulties to the Church. Ronald G. Robertson writes, “Without exaggeration it can be said that he single-handedly transformed the orientation of Romanian Orthodox theological thinking in the

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194 It should be said from the outset that this is not a comprehensive study of Staniloae’s theology. It is meant to be an exploration into his concept of the World as a Gift and an adoption as well as expansion of it. Thus, my focus will be limited to the aspects of his theology I find relevant to the World as a Gift.


197 Ibid., 14.

198 Ibid., 15.

199 Ibid., 17.
post-war period. His work is characterized by a return to the patristic sources, an emphasis on the close relationship between theology and spirituality…”

Staniloae moved to Bucharest to teach theology and was eventually imprisoned from 1958-1962. His daughter writes about this period: “He remained firm in his convictions, never for a moment losing his hope in God. He passed through that hell with a luminous smile on his lips, and with confidence that God gives us hardships to purify us so that we might obtain the future life, a reality that presupposes effort and a powerful will.” Staniloae would return to teaching in 1963 until retiring in 1973. His retirement was anything but quiet. Staniloae would finish translating the Philokalia from Greek into Romanian. He would eventually publish his Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, a landmark achievement for Orthodox theology that responds to the “urgent challenges posed to all Christians, indeed to all men and women living in modern industrialized society.”

Orthodox Spirituality: Aseiticism and Mysticism would follow quickly after in 1981, along with Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy. Both he and his wife Maria would pass away in 1993.

However, for all Staniloae’s success, one seriously troubling aspect of his life and thought centers around his tenure as the editor of the Telegafial Roman (The Romanian Telegraph) from 1934-1945. The Telegafial Roman was deeply antisemitic, and Staniloae was no exception. As Gabriel Andreescu notes, “From 1934 on, once Dumitru Staniloae became editor-in-chief, no more positive texts on Jews were published.” This is somewhat surprising given Staniloae’s reputation as being a “theologian of love.”

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It is worth noting a small anecdote described by Staniloae’s daughter regarding a rabbi who was Staniloae’s cellmate for a time while in prison (1958-1962). She writes, “For a while they put a rabbi with him in his cell. ‘I have never met anyone before who prayed so hard. He was direct and obstinate,’ father recounted. He was very impressed. ‘It was a true struggle with an angel, like in the Old Testament. Rarely have I seen such powerful convictions, such a fervent faith. It was extraordinary!’ This certainly does not erase Staniloae’s antisemitic agenda from the Romanian Telegraph, but it does beg the question if Staniloae’s convictions changed later in his life regarding the Jewish community. What is odd is the omittance in many English publications concerning Staniloae’s antisemitism. We could perhaps attribute this to the lack of English translations of the Romanian Telegraph during the years Staniloae spent as editor of the publication.

Due to Staniloae’s work only recently being translated, he has gone largely unrecognized in Western discourse. However, he is beginning to slowly enter into recognition. In a world gripped by ecological breakdown, cynicism, and dealing with the many unintended implications of modernity, Staniloae’s theology is appealing to many. Staniloae reaches back into the past and dialogues with many of the Church Fathers and the patristic tradition. He engages seriously with them, synthesizes with them, and ultimately reformulates their best insights for the contemporary age.

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206 While I find Staniloae’s deep association with antisemitism and anti-Judaism very troubling, it should be noted that this project is only attempting to adopt Staniloae’s World as a Gift as a starting point and go beyond it in an attempt to create something new. In other words, this project is not concerned with Staniloae’s theology for its own sake, but rather is seeking to utilize it as a starting point.

The Eastern Orthodox “Large Arch”

Staniloae is recognized for returning to the patristic tradition to assist him in addressing modern challenges. Typical of many Eastern Orthodox theologians, he regularly engages Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers, Cyril of Alexandria, John of Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor, Gregory Palamas, Symeon the Theologian, and many others. As Emil Bartos explains, “Staniloae’s theological thinking struggles to keep in balance the unequaled spirit of the Fathers and the present-day challenge in the field of Orthodox theology.” The two most important influences for this study are Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas. It is important to note from the outset that deification is absolutely central to Staniloae, as well as Palamas and Maximus. Even though deification has received renewed interest among Western theologians today, there is still some confusion as to what is exactly meant by this term. I think Andrew Louth clears this up well:

One way of putting this is to think in terms of an arch stretching from creation to deification, representing what is and remains God’s intention: the creation of the cosmos that, through humankind, is destined to share in the divine life, to be deified. Progress along this arch has been frustrated by humankind, in Adam, failing to work with God’s purposes, leading to the Fall, which needs to be put right by redemption. There is, then, what one might think of as a lesser arch, leading from the Fall to redemption, the purpose of which is to restore the function of the greater arch, from creation to deification. The loss of the notion of deification leads to a lack of awareness of the greater arch from creation to deification, and thereby to concentration of the lower arch, from Fall to redemption; it is, I think, not unfair to suggest that such a concentration on the lesser arch at the expense of the great arch has been characteristic of much Western theology. The consequences are evident: a loss of the sense of the cosmic dimension of theology, a

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tendency to see the created order as little more than a background for the great drama of redemption,

with the result that the Incarnation is seen simply as a means of redemption…

I quote this passage at length from the outset to help clear up any confusion around the concept of
deification in Eastern Orthodoxy due to the large amount of recent “Western” interest in the topic.
Some would argue that the rejection of theosis has “created a gulf in the relationship between the
Creator and the creation which ultimately degenerated into the rejection of the Divine in favor of
the material.”

However, as we have seen, many Western theologians have taken a renewed interest
in theologies of participation and this “larger arch” of God’s purpose for humanity. Staniloae makes
similar observations:

Western Christianity has often had the tendency to refer salvation to man as separate from nature. Eastern
Christianity, on the other hand, has never conceived them separately from one another, although lately the
West too has generally abandoned the conception of man’s salvation as something separate from nature,
and the school of Bultmann, which does accept this separation, is now rather an isolated phenomena.

It is important to understand from the outset that Staniloae conceives of salvation and deification on
a cosmic scale, where no aspect of creation is untouched. The spiritual and material enjoy no
division. Instead of a materialized world, Staniloae posits a kind of Christian materialism. This
Christian materialism understands that the material world is spiritually infused and one cannot be
divided from the other. That “instead of wishing to suppress matter which has revolted against the
spirit through the effect of sin, gives it the place the Creator assigned to it.”

Staniloae also

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211 Alexander Chow, Chinese Public Theology, 145.
develops his theology along these lines. He even writes of the “close interconnection between biological and spiritual” where “one realm influences the other both in the decline and in the restoration of man.”

Here we can see some “detail” being explored by Staniloae on just how the biological world of creation participates spiritually in the process of deification, or participation in God. In Chapter 1, I criticized the tendency among many gift theologies to relegate various human and nonhuman relationships under the umbrella term “cosmic” and do not explore them in much detail. As we will see, Staniloae begins this process by exploring humanity’s relationship to the natural world, and I believe this is a starting point that can be pushed even further with the help of Majority World theologians who I believe do explore these relationships in unique ways. Before exploring this point further, it is important we look at the metaphysical presuppositions of Staniloae’s metaphor of the World as Gift. Both the *logoi* and the essence/energies distinction provide the basis for Staniloae’s metaphor of the “World as Gift.” These two concepts operate in the background of this metaphor and are integral in understanding Staniloae’s theology. To do this, I will explore both of Staniloae’s two greatest influences: Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas. For Maximus, we will explore his understanding of the *logoi* which Staniloae is building upon. Furthermore, I will also survey Gregory Palamas’ conceptualization of the essence/energies distinction which Staniloae holds to quite closely and is a way to hold to balance God’s immanence and transcendence.

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Maximus the Confessor and the logoi

One of the most important dialogue partners for Staniloae is Maximus the Confessor (580-662). Calinic Berger states that, “Staniloae turned to St. Maximus’ thought decisively, therefore, for a coherent Christological vision of the world, expressed at times with technical doctrinal precision, which could thereby act as a framework to incorporate and evaluate contemporary theological insights and give guidance for social concerns.”

The doctrine of the logoi also provides the basis for Staniloae’s “Christian materialism” which will be discussed in Chapter Four. In this section, we will focus on the cosmic scope of his theology achieved through his doctrine of the logoi. First, we will briefly explore an outline of his theology.

Maximus the Confessor was a monk who was integral in the rejection of Monothelitism, Monoergism, and Origenism. He was particularly influenced by the Cappadocians and Pseudo-Dionysius. He lived a difficult life in which he was exiled and rendered unable to speak or write after having his tongue and right hand cut off. His work was not systematic, with the most notable being the Ambigua (Book of Difficulties).

The single purpose of God is to “unite the world to Himself.” This is the axiom of Maximus’ theology. In reaction to Origen’s “system of immobility” where “diversity and movement” are a result of the Fall, Maximus argues that movement is integral to creation because all creation is moving toward God.

God grants humanity both his image and likeness. Alexander Chow states it

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216 It should be noted that Tollefsen notes that Maximus could be considered to have a doctrine of the essence/energies distinction that is very close to Gregory Palamas’ doctrine. He refers to the ousia of God and the “things around God.” For an in depth exploration of Maximus’ theology see, Torstein Tollefsen, The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 139. However, in this section I want to focus on the logoi in Maximus and save the essence/energies distinction for the section on Gregory Palamas.
concisely: “In his image, God imparts on humans the essence of their existence. In his likeness, God shares with humanity the goals of their existence.” The *telos* of all creation is to be united with God. This has been hindered by the sin of humanity. Thus, the large arc (deification) is disrupted by sin, resulting in the need for redemption (the small arc). What results from the Fall is a division of the human will. Humanity possesses a natural will that seeks participation, cooperation, and communion with God through which it is free. The gnomic will is humanity’s potential to revolt against its own nature which leads to self-destruction and nothingness. Human sin has also resulted in a degeneration of the “likeness” of God. The movement of humanity is not toward God, but away from Him. It is a movement that results in creation collapsing back into the nothingness from which it was created.

Maximus provides Staniloae with a christocentric cosmos whereby everything points back to the Logos from which it was created. However, because human nature is united with the hypostasis of the Logos in Christ, humanity is liberated from sin because in Christ “there could never be any contradiction between natural will and gnomic will.” Lars Thunberg highlights three different facets of Christ’s work: (1) the sacrificial; (2) the ascetic; (3) the gnostic.

In the Incarnation, the Logos descends to humanity and identifies with the suffering of human beings. It is the “condescending philanthropy” that liberates humanity from its own egoism and restores humanity to a state of reciprocity. Christ also resisted the Devil and temptation in his ascetic practices of

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219 Chow, *Chinese Public Theology*, 131.
221 Ian A. McFarland states: “Given the fall, of course, it is very much the case that the incarnation also reverses the declension of created being back to the nothingness from which it came by reestablishing it on a renewed basis: no longer secured merely extrinsically by God’s gift of finite being, the existence of creatures is now sustained by God from within, anchored in God’s own life, rendered through the flesh of Christ inseparable from the creatures life.” McFarland, *Word Made Flesh*, 75. It is also important to note that this “nothingness” is not a “something.”
222 Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 38.
224 Ibid., 67.
rejecting money, fame, and food. He also practiced charity toward those who hate him. Finally, through divine grace humanity can contemplate God and possess knowledge of Him through the logoi.

The logoi are embodied in created things and give the material world a transcendent dimension. A logos exists for every created thing: nature, animals, plants, stars, etc. Christ expresses himself in all of creation: “The Logos-Christ not only expresses Himself in His logos for the human species and His logoi of human persons, He expresses Himself in the logoi of every created nature, of animals, insects, plants, minerals, etc., as well.” The logoi ultimately point back to the Logos. It is here where we see the “Christocentric cosmos” of Maximus the Confessor. There is no aspect of created reality that does not contain the logoi. For Maximus:

The Logos is embodied in the world by certain logoi that come from Him. These logoi of beings are a kind of divine Ideas which, taken together, constitute the divine plan for the created cosmos. On the basis of this plan, as it is actualized in a world consisting of intelligible and sensible beings, the foundation is laid for a cosmic conversion to God. The logoi belong to the Logos and this Logos/logoi conception is, then, the backbone of Maximus’ world-view.

This understanding of the world is also affirmed and utilized by Staniloae. Berger maintains that Staniloaetains Maximus’ ontological tie between the Logos and the logoi which “pre-exist in an eternal, undifferentiated, and unchanging unity in God the Logos” that does not discard simple unity but becomes “differentiated and dynamic in the act of creation.” For Staniloae: “the logoi of things possess ontological and existential (that is, personal) dimensions simultaneously.” This implies that

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224 Tollefsen, The Christocentric Cosmos, 228.
225 Ibid., 2.
226 Ibid., 398-399.
227 Ibid., 398.
reality is personal because all of reality is made up of the logoi. This subjectification of the world means that all things are ultimately involved in an exchange with its Creator. Through the concept of the logoi Staniloae subjectifies and personifies creation which assists in positing a gift-relationship with creation. The “logoi foster personal dialogue, ultimately conveying God’s love to us and stimulating our love for God.” Staniloae writes that:

The divine logoi which radiate from the world fill it with light and with a transparency, which give an infinite perspective to our understanding. Anything, object or happening, by its inexhaustible meaning, by its never fully explained purpose in the whole universe, must constantly set us to thinking and carry our reason beyond this object.

All creation, according to Staniloae, is imbued with infinite meaning. The logoi add a subjective element to what would otherwise be considered “opaque” objects that can only be measured in their utility. Staniloae argues that by viewing the world opaquely, a person only sees things as being “one sided” and can lead to a kind of slavery because creation is reduced to satisfying humanity’s bodily passions. Thus, a person becomes a slave to their desires. This way of viewing the world sees no meaning beyond the material and any meaning at all is imbued only by the human mind. Staniloae writes:

The deeper, more spiritual logoi of things are covered; only their materialistic side and fleshly utility are still seen… They say that the beauty of young girls is a tempting form produced by nature in the service of the multiplication of the species. The material attributes of things make a wall which prevents seeing anything beyond them. The world becomes exclusively material and utilitarian, or usable exclusively for the flesh.

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229 Ibid., 400.
231 Ibid., 148-149.
The tree of knowledge of good and evil becomes, pure and simple, pleasant to look at and delicious to eat.\footnote{Ibid., 210.}

For some living in the 21st century, objects are typically thought of as nothing more than things to be consumed. Their value lies in being able to satisfy one’s desires. But through the doctrine of the logoi Staniloae is able to maintain that there is something more to things than just their material attributes. The logoi enable Staniloae to see all things in the world as possessing both meaning and significance. The personal and existential dimensions of the logoi add a subjective element to the “world of objects.” We will see in the following chapters that the Majority World theologians chosen in this exercise also add a subjective element to what would typically be considered “opaque” objects with no real meaning beyond their utility, or their use to satisfy human desires. As Alexander Chow states, “The divine logoi exist in all of creation — not limited to humanity — and have a spiritual dimension because the entirety of creation is penetrated by God’s energies.”\footnote{Chow, Chinese Public Theology, 142. Emphasis my own.} Because the doctrine of the logoi extends to all of creation, we can see how Staniloae can argue that all created things are ultimately caught up in a gift-exchange with God. Indeed, Staniloae even goes as far to say that “the entire cosmos — through each human subject — may come to have a share in the quality of being subject, which is to say, the prospect of the human person experiencing the entire cosmos in its reason and sensibility.”\footnote{Dumitru Staniloae, The Experience of God, trans. Ioan Ionita & Robert Barringer, vol. 2 (Brookline, Mass: Holy Cross, 2000), 55.} Staniloae’s doctrine of the logoi is intimately intertwined with Gregory Palamas’ doctrine of the energies of God. It is to that which we now turn.
Gregory Palamas and the Palamite Distinction

The other highly influential figure on Staniloae’s thought is Gregory Palamas (1296-1359). Having published his dissertation on Palamas, Staniloae borrows heavily from Palamas’ essence/energies distinction which is foundational for his doctrine of deification and his epistemology.

St. Gregory Palamas was a monk who lived at the Holy Mountain of Mount Athos. He was involved in the spiritual practice of hesychasm which is a kind of prayer that seeks to experience the uncreated divine light of God. This practice came under fierce opposition from Barlaam, a monk from the “West” who accused the hesychasts of heresy. Palamas would go on to defend himself against these accusations, and his theology would be confirmed at the councils of Constantinople in 1341, 1347, and 1351. John Meyendorff summarizes this debate well:

Nevertheless there were at stake principles already heralding the advent of the modern world in the dispute between Barlaam and Palamas, and, very often, it was those principles which divided the supporters of Palamas from his adversaries. The humanists, in fact, started from the assumption of a sort of autonomy for human reason, and its independence in relation to a God whom they conceived as some impenetrable and inaccessible Essence. The union of God and man, realized once for all in the person of Christ, and divine action, effective and real, among humanity regenerated by baptism, played no decisive part in their thought. Whereas the hesychasts were defending a conception of activity outside the sphere of God’s action. The idea of a complete ‘collaboration’ between these two activities was indeed the special message of Palamism. The Orthodox Church, by approving the Palamite doctrine in 1351 and recognizing Gregory Palamas as one of the Fathers, has solemnly condemned the secularism of modern times, opposing thereto a humanity ideal which is essentially Christian.235

235 Meyendorff, A Study of Gregory Palamas, 27.
Palamas has been integral for much of the theological development in the Eastern Church. It is no mistake then that Staniloae is highly indebted to him. While Staniloae was in Berlin he appreciated Karl Barth’s emphasis on the transcendence of God. But found that Barth over-emphasized God’s transcendence at the expense of God’s immanence in the world. Staniloae instead found in the doctrine of the distinction between essence and energy “a way of speaking about God’s real involvement with humankind and the world without compromising his essential unknowability.”

The Palamite doctrine of the essence and energies distinction was born out of controversy and has remained so to this day. Palamas believes that the essence of God is part of the hypostases of the Trinity, but is transcendent and cannot be known. This is a way of apophatically preserving the transcendence and mystery of God, and preventing him from being “boxed in” by human thoughts about him. It is also impossible for creation to participate in God’s essence. Because humanity cannot be deified or participate in God’s essence, it logically follows that humans participate somehow in God. Palamas identifies this as participation in God’s energies. The energies of God are God’s activities in the world that consist of “the economy of salvation, including his attributes, his will and his ‘uncreated light’ — the very light that permeated from Christ’s transfigured body (Matthew 13:43) that can be received by every Christian.” It should be noted that for Palamas the activities of God differ from the essence, “but is not separated from it.” There is considerable debate around whether this distinction is real or nominal. The spectrum ranges from the distinction in Palamas to being real in the fullest sense (Lossky), to being a “minor

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237 There is significant debate of late around the issue of whether this is a “real” distinction or a “formal” one. This will be explored later.
real distinction” (Grumel), and to being purely nominal (Hart). However, as A.N. Williams helpfully points out, this spectrum itself can be confusing because many supporters of the “real” distinction often speak in vague terms as though undermining their own position. The spectrum ranges from the distinction in Palamas to be real in the fullest sense (Lossky), to being a purely nominal distinction (Hart). However as A.N. Williams helpfully points out, this spectrum itself can be confusing because many supporters of the “real” distinction often speak in vague terms as though undermining their own position. For Palamas, it is impossible that an essence can be without energies. While the energies are uncreated, they are not completely identical with the essence of God. The energies are God’s “single, eternal, creative Act.” They are unified and some are contingent, necessary, temporal, eternal, realities, activities, operations, and attributes of God. These are all acts of self-manifestation. This distinction allows Palamas to say that: “God can do otherwise without being otherwise,” as opposed to Aquinas who encounters the contradiction of divine simplicity and divine freedom. I think Bradshaw summarizes the differences between “East” and “West” well: “The East has no concept of God. It views God not as an essence to be grasped intellectually, but as a personal reality to be known through His acts, and above all by oneself sharing in those acts.” Furthermore, this would explain the emphasis on cooperation and synergy as found in Staniloae and is integral to his concept of the “return gift” to God. We will explore this later on.

One reason why the Palamite distinction is seen to be integral to the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of theosis is that to participate in God’s essence would blur the distinction between Creator

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242 Rowan Williams concludes that Palamas’ doctrine results in two eternal realities: (1) God in se (God as he is in himself); (2) God as participated in by creatures. Williams believes this to be an obvious affront to the doctrine of divine simplicity and does not see any way to unify them in Rowan Williams, “The Philosophical Structures of Palamism,” Eastern Churches Review 9 (1977): 27-44. David Bradshaw argues that Williams’ problems with the essence/energies distinction likely stems from his Latin heritage where anything that is not the divine essence is not God in Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 228-229.

243 Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West, 238.

244 Ibid., 271.

245 Ibid., 275.
and creature. As McFarland states, “while creatures cannot share in the divine nature (since if they were to do so, they would, by definition, become divine), they can participate in the divine energies without ceasing to be creatures.”

Thus, one can only participate in God’s energies. Contrary to what many critics believe, this does not “render the persons unknowable.”

The primary objection is that the doctrine of the essence-energies distinction compromises divine simplicity and the distinction between creature and Creator. Kallistos Ware attributes this controversy to a difference in genre. According to Ware, the Greek Fathers are not attempting to expound a rational theology much like the West, but rather holding to tradition of expanding upon their own experiences with the Divine and Holy Scripture.

However, it seems that many of these interpretations see the energies as separate from the essence of God when this is not the case. The essence can never be separated from the energies. The energies are enhypostatic. They do not have a hypostasis of their own, nor are they subsistent or personal in themselves but only in their inseparability from the Father, Son, and Spirit.

As Butner concludes: “Simply put, there is no essence apart from the energies, and thus the energies relate both to what God is in se and pro nobis. Consequently, when the deified know God in energy, they know God as God in se and pro nobis.” The purpose here is not to settle this debate, but rather to show what Staniloae’s position is and why.

As stated before, in reaction to Karl Barth’s dialectical theology, Staniloae would praise the emphasis on the transcendence of God but felt that Barth removed the immanence of God in the world. While studying Barth’s Commentary on the Romans, he found a solution in the essence/energies

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250 Ibid., 57.
251 Ibid., 43.
distinction of Palamas. For Staniloae, it was the best way to preserve God’s transcendence and freedom while at the same time maintaining his immanence and personal involvement among his creatures. Unsurprisingly, Staniloae believes this distinction to be a real distinction. As I argued above, it is an unavoidable conclusion to make from the doctrine of deification. Staniloae writes:

> Deification is the passing of man from created things to the uncreated, to the level of divine energies. Man partakes of these, not of the divine essence. So it is understood how man assimilates more and more of the divine energies, without this assimilation ever ending, since he will never assimilate their source itself.

Another helpful way of understanding this is to look at Staniloae the apophatic element within his theological anthropology. We can know a person by their energies — that is, by their acts, what they say and do in the world. But we cannot know a person in their totality, in their essence. There is a sense in which we can know, engage, and participate in another, but we cannot know them in their totality. Staniloae describes this as “the human subject is also apophatic and is not exhausted by its acts, for its acts (or its energies) are not one with its essence, as is true in the case of objects.” This is “supremely true for God, for not only does He transcend all things as Source of them all, but is also above all the powers He manifests or wishes to manifest.” This protects God from being domesticated by humanity and allows for humanity to participate in the Triune God without participating in the essence of God, of which His transcendence is protected. This distinction allows God to be both immanent and transcendent. As Staniloae states:

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252 Bartos, *Deification*, 62-64.
253 Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 373.
255 Ibid.
It is an infinite world, of infinite steps and reliefs of the spiritual life. This doesn’t mean that being in it we won’t be in God, for God is everywhere where the medium of His energies are. But nevertheless, we won’t be united with His essence. We will be, however, ever closer to it, in the measure in which we become greater in spirit in order to be the subjects of ever increasing divine energies.\footnote{Staniloae, \textit{Orthodox Spirituality}, 373.}

It should also be noted that for Staniloae the \textit{logoi} are distinct from the divine energies. Often, they can be confused for being synonymous when that is not the case. There is an important distinction to make here: the \textit{logoi} are divine energies that are manifested in the physical world. The uncreated energies can be mediated through physical things, while also able to be mediated without them.\footnote{Ibid., 237.}

As we have seen, Staniloae synthesizes both the Maximean and Palamite understanding of a christocentric cosmos where God’s energies and the divine \textit{logoi} permeate all of creation giving it a personal, dynamic and transcendent character. These two ideas allow for a reciprocity to exist between both humanity and non-human aspects of creation. Staniloae’s understanding of the world also gives all created things a subjective element whereby reciprocal relations can exist and ultimately point beyond to humanity’s relationship with God. Both the divine \textit{logoi} and divine energies undergird Staniloae’s concept of the World as a Gift. One will notice a kind of “weak” panentheism at work here.\footnote{Kallistos Ware, “God Immanent yet Transcendent: The Divine Energies according to Saint Gregory Palamas,” in \textit{In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God’s Presence in a Scientific World}, eds. Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacocke (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 166. This will become especially important later on as we will see many of the Majority World theologies dialogued with in this project also affirm panentheism to varying degrees.}

\textit{Knowing and Unknowing: Staniloae’s Epistemology}

Before moving on to the World as a Gift, we should first briefly explore Staniloae’s epistemology. This is important because as we have seen, creation is a window through which one comes to know
a personal God. The divine energies enable one to comprehend the *logoi* in creation. As we have seen, according to Staniloae, all of creation is inherently rational and can be known by human persons. The goal of this *gnosis* is “always ‘person’ (interpersonal communion), and the means of attaining this goal is always found through ‘nature.’”\(^{259}\)

Staniloae distinguishes between three different types of knowledge of God: (1) cataphatic; (2) negative; (3) apophatic knowledge.\(^{260}\) Cataphatic knowledge, or positive knowledge of God, is the ability to recognize and discern the *logoi* that exist within the created order. These are affirmative statements that can be made about God. This is to be balanced with negative knowledge of God. It is following the tradition of saying “what God is not” rather than what God is. However, both negative and positive statements about God are realized to be lacking, and a balanced approach to both leads us to see the limitless divine mystery that stands before us. This then leads to the apophatic approach, of which Staniloae splits into three stages: (1) apophaticism of cataphatic and negative theology; (2) apophaticism after pure prayer; (3) apophaticism of the vision of the divine light.\(^{261}\) The first stage is that point in time where one realizes that neither positive nor negative statements about God is sufficient. That perceiving God through the world is seeing God through “a mirror dimly.”\(^{262}\) This then draws a person into the activity of pure prayer, where then the person is “drawn out” beyond all concepts, positive or negative, and is there in silence until (3) the divine light illuminates and consumes the person. Note the stress placed upon the existential element here.

The goal of knowledge of God is always to experience and know God personally. God is not just an object to be grasped only intellectually, whether through apophatic or cataphatic methodologies. God is personal and can be known through his energies, through his “attributes in motion.” And

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\(^{259}\) Berger, “Gnoseology,” 519.

\(^{260}\) Bartos, *Deification*, 33. It should be noted that “negative” and “apophatic” knowledge of God are often equated.

\(^{261}\) Ibid., 33.

\(^{262}\) 1 Corinthians 13:12 NRSV
one of these energies is the incomprehensible divine light which is the ultimate knowledge of God in which one is drawn infinitely toward the horizon with no end in eternal boundless joy.

The World as a Gift

We have covered many of the different aspects of Staniloae’s theology including some of the metaphysical assumptions that undergird his thought. It is key to recall that deification has always been the telos of creation regardless of the Fall. As Emil Bartos echoes, “deification is seen as the reason and purpose of creation, the world and man stay in an interdependence and reciprocity…”263 Thus, the narrative of redemption is, as we looked at earlier, a smaller arch in the story of communion with God that restores creation to the larger arch of the narrative. Deification is the central axiom in Staniloae’s thought and all of his theology revolves around it. Staniloae, like many of the theologians we surveyed in Chapter 1, utilizes gift categories to communicate this. The “World as a Gift” becomes a central theme in his theological formulations, and reciprocity operates as the central motif within this framework. Bartos identifies three core relationships within Staniloae’s thought: God-creation, world-humanity, and humanity-God. Each of these core relationships possesses its own gift exchange relationship where reciprocity is fundamental to these relationships functioning properly. Staniloae utilizes the formula Amo, ergo sum, “I love, therefore I am.”264 Love is at the center of Staniloae’s relational ontology, and love requires reciprocity to fulfill it where “the person who loves is also affected by the love or by refusal of the other.”265 This point is at the center of Staniloae’s gift theology. The ultimate purpose of the World as a Gift is that one

263 Bartos, Deification, 11.
265 Ibid., 72, 77.
sees beyond the gift to the Giver and is drawn to the Giver in love through the complete dialogue of the gift.

**The Gift's Purpose: To Point to the Giver**

It is through the gift of the world (*lumea ca dar* in the original Romanian) that there is a “mutual movement of two persons toward one another.”\(^{266}\) What does Staniloae mean by the “world?” According to Ivana Noble, Staniloae defines the world to be, “both cosmic nature and humanity. According to him, it is impossible to separate the two. Both are designed for divine glory. But each can contribute something specific, something unique that, to use Staniloae’s Aristotelian vocabulary, belongs to their essence as a potentiality that can be actualized.”\(^{267}\) The gift of the world is not just a gift to be given. It is something to be acknowledged, received, and reciprocated. The purpose of the gift of the world is to draw all of creation to Godself. Staniloae writes:

> In essence, through the gift of the world God desires to make himself known to man in love. Therefore, man must rise above the gifts he has received to God who gave them. The gift, understood as a sign of the love of one person for another, is by its very nature destined to be transcended in favor of the one who has given it. In a way, the gift is the thing which the person who has *given* it renounces out of love for the person to whom he gives it.\(^{268}\)

The gift of the world is given by God so that creation, more specifically, humanity, may look beyond the gift to see that it has been given by a Person. Humanity is placed within this gift-exchange with God. But this requires that humanity acknowledges the World as a Gift, and is then obligated to give

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\(^{267}\) Noble, “Doctrine of Creation,” 192.

back to God. Not only is the world a gift given so that the Giver might be known, but also serves a pedagogical purpose:

The world is a teacher to lead us to Christ. Of course it can also be the road to hell. It is the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the tree of testing. If we look at its beauty in order to praise its Creator, we are saved; if we think that its fruit is pure and simply something to eat, we are lost. Salvation isn't obtained in isolation, but in a cosmic frame.269

The world has a pedagogical role in the deification of humanity. It is important to notice the role of potentiality in Staniloae’s thought. The world has the potential to lead us to the Giver, or lead us away. Humanity has the potential to recognize the Giver and the gift or ignore it. This reflects the underlying role of synergism in Staniloae’s thought, hence why reciprocity is so foundational to his gift theology. By recognizing the World as a Gift of God, one is then able to receive the gift and give back to God. However, as Staniloae recognizes, much of human history can be characterized by humanity seeing the world as nothing more than something to be used, or “taken.” The idea of “taking” implies an absence of reciprocity. Humanity has the choice to receive or take the world. Regardless, humanity is caught up in a gift-exchange with God whether it accepts or rejects the World as a Gift from God.

One will notice we are speaking on a cosmic, or “macro level” here. Humanity has been summoned to “use the world freely as a gift of God so as to make response through it to the love God has given every human being, and through the world, to extend this dialogue of love to his fellow human beings.”270 This gift:

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269 Staniloae, Orthodox Spirituality, 205.
...takes on a central role in the knowledge of God. Since the ultimate goal of all forms of knowledge is a personal reality, and the various forms of nature are the means of this knowledge, no aspect of reality is without its role in the divine-human dialogue.\textsuperscript{271}

This means that for Staniloae ultimately everything can be conceived of as a gift from God. There is no part of reality that cannot have a role in the journey towards knowledge of God. These “smaller gifts” from God are filled with infinite meaning that cannot ever be completely explored and are ultimately given with the goal of drawing us closer into communion with God. The various gifts given to humanity are to be received, acknowledged, and then reciprocated back to God in an unending gift exchange. One does wonder if Staniloae is over-optimistic on this point. Where exactly does evil, suffering, and tragedy fit in here? Surely, Staniloae is aware of the evil and destruction that results from the taking of these gifts for selfish purposes. This point will be explored further in Chapter 4. It is these “smaller gifts” that will serve as our themes in the following chapters around which our dialogue partners will be situated. If humanity is willing to receive the gift of the world from God, then how exactly does humanity “give back” to God?

\textit{Reciprocating the Gift}

In Chapter 1 we observed that a key point of Kathryn Tanner’s argument was how can humanity possibly reciprocate to a God who lacks nothing? For Staniloae, it is by receiving the things “given us by God” which can become “our own gift to God by the fact that in the return of these things to God we are now free. We transform things into gifts of our own through the act of our freedom and through the love we thus show to God.”\textsuperscript{272} Here we can observe two complementary ways Staniloae understands giving back to God. The first being that properly acknowledging and receiving gifts

\textsuperscript{271} Berger, “Gnoseology,” 303.
\textsuperscript{272} Staniloae, \textit{The Experience of God}, vol. 2, 23.
from God implies that we understand these things and their character as gifts. By receiving these
gifts we recognize that they are contingent and that they are not ultimate realities. In a Maximean
vein, Staniloae writes that human beings are able to “create the world” with God.273 For Staniloae,
matter can be transformed, and through human work an “imprint” of the human resides in the
gift.274 Bordeianu explains this well:

"Furthermore, we need to use the elements of creation as gifts among us, after we make them more
beautiful through our work, and this, too, is an exercise in our natural priesthood. Staniloae considered
that through scientific discoveries, humankind organizes the forces of nature in conformity with their logoi
for the benefit of society. We reveal the beauty of creation through arts and literature.”275

When humanity fulfills its natural priesthood it is then able to grow spiritually and learn how to give
to others.276 Humanity cannot exist without nature, and we are “bound to it reciprocally.”277 By
reciprocating the gift(s), humanity is able to co-create the world with God and lead it to its telos:
union with God. Berger points out that, “Staniloae writes that man’s goal is to humanize the world.
What this means concretely is that the world does not remain as an object or end in and of itself, but
is incorporated into the divine-human dialogue, for example, as ‘gift.’”278 What the “gift” partially
does is subjectify the world by seeing all things as ultimately caught up in the divine-human gift-
exchange. The world is a gift through which we come to know the Giver. To not participate in this
mutual exchange with God, humanity objectifies creation, and only sees the gift as an end in itself
with no need for reciprocation.

274 This will be further analyzed in Chapter 4.
275 Bordeianu, Dumitru Staniloae an Ecumenical Ecclesiology, 149.
276 The notion of “natural priesthood” will be explored further in Chapter Five.
Rejecting and Taking the Gift

There is another paradigm humanity can live by: the paradigm of “taking.” To refuse the gift from God is to objectify the world so that the gift is not recognized as a gift, but rather as an end in itself. Staniloae uses the example of simple fruit to emphasize this point:

> The deeper, more spiritual logoi of things are covered; only their materialistic side and fleshly utility are still seen. For example, the beauty of an apple, the sweetness of a grape, are no longer seen as having the purpose of making us realize that the creative energies of beauty and of sweetness come from God; we should still have this knowledge even when there will no longer be apples and grapes; we see them pure and simple, for awakening and satisfying a bodily appetite. The material attributes of things make a wall which prevents seeing anything beyond them. The world becomes exclusively material and utilitarian, or usable exclusively for the flesh. The tree of knowledge of good and evil becomes, pure and simple, pleasant to look at and delicious to eat.279

To see things only as objects to be used or consumed is, in Staniloae’s view, a fallen paradigm. Within Staniloae’s theology, simple things such as fruit, possess transcendence because all of creation is drenched in the energies of God. They should be correctly recognized as gifts from God, pointing beyond themselves to their Creator, and thus drawing us closer to communion with God.

Staniloae sees this objectification of the world as a direct symptom of the Fall. It is important to note the central place reciprocity has in this paradigm. To reciprocate is to cooperate with God and grow closer in communion with him. To not reciprocate is to fall into sin. According to Noble, Staniloae sees the modern Kantian understanding of the world as deemphasizing the need for reciprocity, and instead promoting an individual unilateralism:

Staniloae criticized a Kantian understanding of people and nature as ‘ends in themselves.’ Against it he stated that we were created as something out of nothing, with a beginning and an end, and a responsibility to the Creator, responsibility in terms of a requirement of response to God’s gifts by returning the gift to God with our ‘own valuable stamp on the gifts received and thereby …making of them human gifts as well…’ Staniloae finds here the lack of reciprocity, vital for his faith in creation out of love realized in the mutual exchange of gifts.280

By looking at the gifts of matter, space, and time we can explore the ways we are reciprocally bound to these realities. These are not just things in themselves but are gifts from a gracious Giver. We can see space as only a geographic distance that needs to be overcome; time as a consumable that needs to be properly managed towards only productivity; matter as only an end in itself with no transcendent purpose beyond consumerism. Or, we can instead follow Staniloae’s lead and see these things as gifts that point beyond themselves to their Giver, which involves giving back to God with our own human “imprint” on them. As we will come to see, Staniloae and the Majority World theologians chosen for this project each understand matter, space, and time as realities that point beyond themselves and come with responsibilities and obligations.

The Complete Dialogue of the Gift

All of these elements explored above are parts of the “complete dialogue of the gift.” When Staniloae speaks of the complete dialogue of the gift what he means is that for this dialogue to be complete it must include three elements: 1) giving; 2) receiving; 3) giving back. God gives humanity the gift of the world. Ideally, humanity recognizes the World as a Gift from God, receives it, and then offers it back to God in return. The complete dialogue of the gift operates around the core

themes of responsibility, reciprocity, cooperation, participation, contingency, and potentiality. As we saw, this gift of the world is contingent in two ways. The first is that God did not need to create the world. The second is that human persons have a choice to receive the gift and give back, or to take the gift for oneself, perceiving it as the ultimate reality, and thus refusing to cooperate with God and offer nothing in return.

**Staniloae and Gift Theology**

We observed in Chapter 1 how many theologians have utilized the gift to articulate their versions of humanity’s relationship with God where “gift” and “reciprocity” do not contradict one another. We can think of John Barclay’s reinterpretation of the Apostle Paul’s ideas of grace and how this affects our understanding of salvation and the obligation of the human believer to reciprocate. Not surprisingly, Staniloae’s gift theology leans heavily on a creation-centered understanding of the gift as opposed to individual soteriological concerns. Grace, for Staniloae, is not necessarily something “given” from the outside. Grace is one of the divine *energeia*. It is uncreated as opposed to some of the Western Protestant and Catholic conceptions of created grace. This difference should remind of us the “large arch” of deification that was discussed earlier. Thus, the focus changes from the dynamics of the salvation of the individual, to the union of all of creation with God. The gift conversation could benefit by exploring not only the macro-scale theology of the gift but also a theology of the *gifts*. The questions then shift to: How does all of creation participate in this gift-exchange with God? What are the gift-exchange relationships that exist between humanity and other parts of creation? If everything is a gift from God, should these smaller, particular gifts be explored?

As Staniloae writes, “Life is a gift from God. Everything that the human person eats and drinks and the pleasure he takes ‘in all his toil’ are gifts from God (Eccl. 3:13).”

In the following chapters we

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will explore these gifts from God in dialogue with Staniloae and different Majority World theologians.

We have seen that for Staniloae world is the primary way God interacts with us personally through the divine energies and *logoi* which permeate the world. These two doctrines attach a personal character to these non-human aspects of creation which, if thoroughly explored, point us to different and deeper understandings of our reciprocal relationship with God. We do not just belong in a reciprocal relationship with God, but rather we live in an intertwined web of reciprocal relationships with all aspects of creation, human and non-human. I believe Staniloae provides an overarching framework from which to work within and explore various ways in which humanity participates in gift-exchange with the world and how these exchanges operate reciprocally. But I believe that this can be pushed further and expanded upon with insights gleaned from Majority World theologians who also strongly emphasize the theme of reciprocity within their respective theologies as well.

*Staniloae and Majority World Theologies*

So then, why bring a Romanian Orthodox theologian in dialogue with Majority World theologies? Staniloae’s paradigm of reciprocal gift-exchange between God and creation posits a strong participatory theology of creation. The use of gift-language is especially helpful here, as the theme of interrelated reciprocity is heavily emphasized in Staniloae’s paradigm of gift-exchange between God-creation. Creatures receive the gift of the world from God and all the gifts that makeup creation. Each moment of a person’s existence is an opportunity to interact with the Triune God through his gift of creation. Non-human elements of creation are given a personal and dynamic character where through them reciprocal relationships are established and also through them is always an opportunity to encounter God. We see a very similar view of the world that exists within many
Majority World theologies where non-human aspects of creation are offered a more prominent place in this participation.

Staniloae was also an ecumenical thinker, even if he sometimes caricatured “Western” theology, however, this is probably due to being silenced and isolated under a communist regime. As this project is working from an ecumenical viewpoint, Staniloae is a fitting candidate: “In this concept of open sobornicity, every theological system is welcome as offering some valid insight, although the weaknesses of each must be criticized. Through openness to the insights of other systems, one’s understanding is enriched, and a more symphonic understanding of the whole is attained.”282 A symphonic understanding of the whole is what we are trying to achieve here. Speaking in the language of gifts, Staniloae writes: “Each nation, he once wrote to a friend ‘possesses its unique gifts.’”283 It is fairly clear that his own theology is open to dialogue and insights from other traditions. By bringing Staniloae in dialogue with many thinkers from around the world, a mutual exchange of “gifts” can occur whereby we gain deeper clarity around many of these topics. Toma believes him to be not only a “bridge” between the East and West but also someone who provides solutions to many of the existential questions facing the modern secular culture.284 In a way, Staniloae symbolically represents what we are trying to accomplish here: a mutual exchange of “theological gifts” from diverse contexts and backgrounds.

Looking Forward: The Gifts of Matter, Space, and Time

As we have seen, Staniloae presents us with a strong theology of participation communicated through his theology of the gift of the world. There is also the personalization of many aspects of non-human creation which we have seen in Staniloae’s doctrine of the logoi and divine energies.

283 Miller, Gift of the World, 7.
284 Toma, “Father Dumitru Staniloae and his Contribution to Theology,” 14.
Within the Majority World theologies engaged within this project, we will see that there might exist a kind of implicit theology of participation as well as an elevated status given to non-human creation due to many of the parallels that exist between Staniloae and these different theologies. Furthermore, another key element of continuity between both the Majority World theologians chosen for this project and Staniloae is a rejection of dualism. The physical and spiritual worlds can be distinguished for conceptual purposes but exist in an inseparable relationship that is porous and not closed off. The material world directly effects the spiritual world and vice versa.  

For this project three themes have been identified around which our dialogue will take place: (1) matter; (2) space; (3) time. As Daniel Neeser states, for Staniloae creation “means means solidarity, bond between the creatures and between these creatures and the cosmos. Cosmic nature is not only a condition of human existence but also the scene of solidarity, where the creative or destructive dialogue between human beings takes place.” Matter, space, and time are to be seen as gifts. We have seen how the gifts of the world presents human creatures with a choice to receive or take the gifts. Through the lens of gift-exchange, I hope to tease out reciprocal relationships that intertwine all of creation.

**Matter:**

Staniloae’s theology knows no separation between the spiritual and material. They are both intertwined and cannot be torn apart. Salvation is both a spiritual and material process. A reciprocal relationship exists between the two where the material affects the spiritual and vice versa. This is a

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285 There are other possible avenues of theological exploration here. Note the German Romantics who attempted to react against the “major aspects of the Cartesian legacy: its mechanical conception of nature, its dualism between mind and body…the young romantics also questioned some of the fundamental assumptions behind Enlightenment rationalism…” (2). See, Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 31-32. Here we have a “Western” example of a rejection of “Cartesian dualism.” Many of our Majority World theologians dialogued with in this project repeatedly reject the “dualisms” they find to be present in many Western theologies.

view of the world that elevates the material and does not disvalue it, nor does it reduce all of reality to it. It could be argued by divorcing the spiritual from the material that characterizes so much of the 21st century, has allowed anything to be commodified. The material has been devalued and stripped of any transcendence. A strong theme in both pastor David Yonggi Cho and theologian Ivone Gebara’s theologies is the lack of dualism. We are also reminded of our brief look at Pentecostal/charismatic Christians that see no separation between a spiritual/material salvation in Chapter 1. Thus, for many Christians, it is natural to think that by giving money to the Church, God is going to reciprocate and may even reciprocate in material terms. Salvation has both material and spiritual consequences for the everyday practical needs of believers. Furthermore, many Liberation theologians recognize this as well. For many, salvation is material in that it brings liberation to the oppressed and marginalized of society. Miroslav Volf has also recognized this, “Liberation and pentecostal theologies share the basic soteriology insight into the materiality of salvation, but they are sharply divided in their concrete application of that insight: Pentecostals apply it to supernatural healings and ‘blessings,’ while liberation theologians apply it to socioeconomic liberations.”

Undergirding both of these groups is an understanding that salvation has real implications for the present life.

What we find in both Staniloae and many Majority World theologies is an understanding of salvation that is all-embracing, where no aspect of reality is left untouched by God’s desire to bring all of creation in union with himself. Not only that, but the gift of salvation possesses both material and spiritual consequences. There is no division between the two as they are bound up in a reciprocal relationship with one another.

**Space:**

We have seen how for Staniloae, the World is the arena whereby we come to know God and experience Him. Staniloae recognized the need for stewardship over Creation in light of the ecological crisis that we are now experiencing. Much of Staniloae’s theology exists within the paradigm of *I-Thou-Nature*. Ivana Noble highlights that for Staniloae, “the human being cannot exist apart from his relationship with nature. The three together make an inseparable whole: I-Thou-Nature. … The human being can experience God both in himself and in relation to nature.”

We exist in a reciprocal relationship with the World, and in taking care of the world we allow the world to “lead us to Christ.” Theologians like Randy Woodley and Winston Halapua, also emphasize our relationship with the world and our responsibility to take care of it along with our reciprocal relationship with it. Woodley goes as far as to claim that the principle that guides the universe is reciprocity. And that our refusal to live in reciprocal relations with the Earth is the reason why we are in our current ecological turmoil. Josiah Baker states it well:

…Native Christians demonstrate that both the present and future lives of Christians are equally placed within creation and that they are to live as a portion thereof. As they are placed on the earth, they are to maintain proper relations with all of creation — human and non-human — as they live in the Kingdom of God. As they live within creation, they are to strive for present harmony as response to God’s reconciling of all places in Christ.

The key here is an understanding of balance and harmony that must exist between humans and the natural world. These “proper relations” revolve around the principle of reciprocity.

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289 Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 205.
Staniloae’s theology understands time as the interval for humanity to respond and receive God’s gifts. Too much of the “Western” conception of time is centered around something to be used wisely and spent correctly. Whereas for Staniloae, “time is not this sometimes monotonous, sometimes menacing sequence of days and hours; it is the scene where human love for God grows and where the divine love for humanity is manifested. Because God loves and accepts the creatures as they are, He loves and accepts the time in which they live.”

A core theme in both John Mbiti and Simon Chan’s theologies is that of the ancestors. The ancestors are often conceived of as being personal, subjective representations of the past. Ancestors give one their cultural heritage, identity, and origins. In speaking about the African conception of time, John Mbiti writes, “Time as a succession or simultaneity of events ‘moves’ not forward but backwards. People look more to the ‘past’ orientation of their being than to anything that might yet come into human history.”

Because of this, we are obligated to ‘give back’ to our ancestors by remembering and honoring them. Staniloae echoes this inclination in his understanding of those who have died:

They cannot erase them from their memory or from their prayer list, but only move them from the ranks of the living to the ranks of the departed. In this responsibility toward them is reflected in the will of God, who wants to keep them connected; and through this relationship He wants to pour His love upon those who departed in the faith, through the love of living for them.

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293 This is not to say that the ancestors are purely symbolic. As we will see in Chapter 6, the ancestors are seen as very real entities that exist and affect daily life.
The theme of reciprocity is central here. In a culture that is increasingly becoming disconnected from the past and fixated on the technological future, this kind of reciprocity oriented toward the past can provide helpful reminders that the past is integral to our human identity, both individually and communally. For Mbiti, Chan, and Staniloae, death does not end one’s reciprocal relationship with someone.

**Conclusion**

The World as a Gift as conceived by Dumitru Staniloae involves all of creation, human as well as non-human, as a gift given from God. Everyone is automatically placed within this gift-exchange with God. I do not want to be seen here as saying that Staniloae is positing some sort of continuum between God and creatures in the realms of causality or being. It is actually because they do not exist on the same plane that God and creatures can both give, receive, and reciprocate gifts. If we were to understand God and humanity in competitive relations, then of course one could not possibly “give back” to God. The human would remain passive and receptive. Gift-language acts as a paradigm to speak about one’s relationship with God and others.

Furthermore, everything is a gift and can be seen as a gift or dismissed. Staniloae posits a view of creation as being infinitely meaningful as seen in the *logoi* and drenched in transcendence by God’s energies. The world is the stage whereby one can come to know God or reject him. The gifts of creation can either be used as means for communion, for which they were originally intended, or they can be taken and rejected and used for selfish purposes which assist in the destruction of the world. Time, space, and matter are all gifts from God which are intended to promote communion. In the following chapters, we will be looking closer at the ways Staniloae understands space, time, and matter to be gifts from God, along with how theologians chosen for this project understand time, space, and matter which all operate around the principle of reciprocity. Staniloae writes:
And, in part, the human person also creates the world. He can freely bring into act some or other of the potentialities of the world, and because God assists man toward this end, God himself remains in a relationship of freedom to the world and in a relationship of free collaboration with the human person. Within the world, the freedom of the human person thus comes to meet the freedom of god. This meeting occurs not in confrontation, but in collaboration…

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Chapter 4: The Gift of Matter - Sacraments, Bodies, and Prosperity

Introduction: A Disney Interlude - Soul

Released in late 2020, Pixar’s movie *Soul* tackles all sorts of questions about the meaning of life through the lens of middle school jazz teacher Joe Gardner. Just when Gardner is about to catch his big break and fulfill his lifelong dream of being a jazz musician, he is unexpectedly killed in an accident. The film follows his soul to the afterlife where he accidentally ends up in the “Great Before,” a place where souls are given personalities and find their “spark” that drives their future lives on Earth. Gardner meets Soul 22 who has been unable to go to Earth because this soul has a very negative view of life on Earth. In a mix-up, Soul 22 ends up in Gardner’s body by accident. But it is precisely the experience of living in Gardner’s body that Soul 22 finds the meaning of life. Soul 22 could not previously understand what the purpose of life was. It is through an embodied sensory experience that Soul 22 comes to see the fullness of what life can be, especially in its most mundane experiences. While not a perfect analogy, the point of this example is to highlight the importance of material bodily existence and the outright rejection of any kind of dualism as one of the primary themes of the chapter.

In this chapter, I will first explore the way that the material dimension of experience is understood by Staniloae by looking in particular at his understanding of both the human body and his emphasis on the material nature of the Holy Mysteries of the Church. From there, I will explore South Korean pastor/evangelist David Yonggi Cho’s “Full Gospel” and his theology of prosperity and healing as it relates to the body. Finally, I will analyze Latin American Ivone Gebara’s ecofeminist theology and her revised anthropology of embodiment. What we will see is that the relationship of the material and spiritual understood by these thinkers directly affect how they understand salvation to be an all-encompassing reality that begins in the present life and that this
view of salvation is an attempt to offer pragmatic solutions to the evils experienced throughout one’s life.

**Staniloae’s Christian Materialism**

Matter occupies an integral place in Staniloae’s theology. For him, the material and spiritual are intimately connected and are only separated for conceptual purposes. As we have seen, the doctrine of the *logoi* provides the metaphysical groundwork for Staniloae to understand the material world as the avenue through which God reveals himself. As Berger rightly notes of Staniloae’s view of the material: “Orthodox gnoseology and spirituality are not only integrally connected to the material dimension of reality, but totally inseparable from it. Our actions and relationship with things affect our spiritual development…”297 As embodied creatures, human actions have spiritual consequences and vice versa. In Staniloae’s theology, the material and spiritual are one integrated whole.

In the same vein, there are certain trends present among many theologians from other parts of the world that echo Staniloae’s emphasis on the intertwinement of the spiritual and material. Speaking broadly, many liberation and charismatic theologies are both deeply concerned with the questions surrounding the nature of salvation and its effects on the material, mundane aspects of everyday life. Instead of a salvation that remains perpetually “in the future,” many liberation and charismatic theologies seek to understand how salvation comes to the “present.” How does salvation affect living human bodies now? How does salvation come to human society now? Miroslav Volf has observed that concerning salvation, “Pentecostals apply it to supernatural healings and ‘blessings,’ while liberation theologians apply it to socioeconomic liberations.”298 By placing Cho,

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Gebara, and Staniloae in dialogue with one another we will find that the nature of the gifts within
the dialogue of “gift-exchange” are both material and spiritual.

Before proceeding further we will need to briefly explore two important concepts that
undergird Staniloae’s conception of material reality. First, as we have already discussed, is Staniloae’s
understanding of the *logoi* of creation. Second is Staniloae’s understanding of matter as being
inherently “malleable” and “contingent.” With these two concepts explored, we will then look in
particular at how this affects his understanding of the human body, as well as the physical
characteristics of the Holy Mysteries as two concrete examples of how important the material
dimension of reality is for Staniloae’s theology.

As repeatedly stated, Staniloae refuses to incorporate dualistic notions of the world in his
theology. There is no place for pitting the body versus spirit, supernatural versus natural. As we have
seen in the previous chapter, nature is itself infused and animated by the spiritual dimensions of
reality. There can be no separation. Staniloae states that “Christianity doesn’t save man from a
certain part of his nature, but it saves him as a whole.” This and that in the resurrection “transfigured
matter still remains matter.” This Christian materialism understands that the natural world is the
window to the supernatural. This window can be opaque or transparent depending upon the
spiritual development of the subject. The physical and spiritual dimensions of reality are intertwined
with one another.

Staniloae’s Christian materialism affirms that created matter is in fact “good.” Matter is
integral to both the development and salvation of all creation. Furthermore, Staniloae understands
matter to be both flexible and contingent. The *telos* of matter is to become fully “spiritualized” so
that it becomes a medium through which the divine energies can be apprehended. This means that

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299 Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 86.
300 Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. 6, 154.
in matter’s fulfillment the “world will be so bathed in spirituality that instead of spirit being visible through matter, matter will be visible through the spirit…” This positive evaluation of matter also prompts Staniloae to see science as a necessary dialogue partner with theology. Staniloae writes that “There is a close interconnection between the biological and spiritual; one realm influences the other both in the decline and the restoration of man. Here a vast field of research is possible on the details of interdependence between the biological and spiritual.” This interconnection displays Staniloae’s understanding that the material/physical/natural world is the medium chosen by God for knowledge and communion with Himself. Humans are not simply insulated Cartesian minds that interact with other minds divorced from physicality. Humans are embodied, physio-spiritual creatures who exist and move in a world where every moment has the potential to move toward or away from communion with God and others.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Staniloae’s doctrine of the logoi gives everything in creation a certain personal, existential, and dynamic character. Kevin Berger helpfully summarizes this idea:

The sections of the logoi and uncreated energies demonstrated that even non-subjective nature is inseparable from person, and plays an indispensable role in bringing about interpersonal communion. Because the person does not exclude nature and nature does not exclude person, on any level, all reality plays a role in the divine-human dialogue. All things ultimately serve the goal of interpersonal communion.

Berger’s point helpfully illustrates why Staniloae chooses to use gift-exchange as a way of speaking about our relationship with both God and the world. All of reality is involved in the gift-exchange

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301 Ibid., 152.
302 Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 81.
between God and his creatures. All of reality is intended to facilitate communion between God and humanity and it is in this way that all of reality is personal and relational. This view of reality implies that even non-human creation cannot be neatly segregated into the realm of “objects” to be used only for consumption and utilitarian purposes. Creation is ultimately a sacramental reality for Staniloae. In Staniloae’s theology, “there is no profane. All creation is spiritual, or even mystical.”

As we will see, matter possesses both an epistemological and relational function for Staniloae.

**The Transparency of Matter**

As stated, *potential* is a keyword in understanding Staniloae’s theology. A gift given necessitates that both the giver and receiver recognize the gift as being a gift. If the gift-exchange functions properly, the gift given strengthens interpersonal communion. The gift becomes “transparent” in a sense because a gift given is not given for the sake of the gift alone, it is given so that love may increase between subjects. Matter functions in a very similar way for Staniloae. Matter has the potential to be a medium for communion with God and others. Or, it has the potential to be the very thing that cuts off one from communion with God and others. When something material becomes more “transparent” it is more open to interpersonal communion. On the other hand, when something becomes more “opaque” it becomes closed off to interpersonal communion. When something material becomes more “opaque” it becomes closed off to interpersonal communion. The ultimate goal of matter is to become fully transparent so that through matter God makes himself known fully and available to the human subject for interpersonal communion. A human person can see the gift given by God and be directed towards the Giver in love, or the human person can see the gift only for its “material attributes” and nothing more. As we will see, this is also the case in human relationships as well as the relationship with the non-human natural world.

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304 Bordeianu, *Dumitru Staniloae an Ecumenical Ecclesiology*, 156.
305 Berger, “Gnoseology,” 84.
For Staniloae, matter can either be the means for communion or the means for “egotistic satisfaction.”\textsuperscript{306} Sin and the passions of the human person are what propel humans to see matter in this way. However, through discipline, human persons can “train themselves” to see all things as gifts that ultimately point beyond themselves toward the Giver. We might remember from the previous chapter Staniloae’s example of the apple to communicate this point. The apple can be seen as a “sign of divine goodness and beauty” or it can be seen as only something to “stimulate my appetite.”\textsuperscript{307} This is not just an act of self-control or ascesis for Staniloae. The human’s entire perception of the world must change. One must seek to see the “entire majesty of the world” and to find in it the “transparent world which itself becomes a mirror of God and a ladder to Him.”\textsuperscript{308}

This implies matter’s epistemological value. One comes to know God precisely through the material world. As Berger observes, “God communicates to each person specifically through the things of the world.”\textsuperscript{309} In a reciprocal fashion, the gift of matter is both a gift and a task. Humanity has been given a unique responsibility to assist in transforming the world and leading it towards fuller spiritual transparency. Due to both the contingency and malleability of matter it possesses the infinite potential and “unceasing fertility.”\textsuperscript{310} God has given human beings the task to transform the world into a spiritual reality where each person uniquely brings their contributions to the transformation of the world.\textsuperscript{311} As we will continue to see, a strong theme in Staniloae is the obligation and responsibility the gift(s) of the world place upon the human being. Staniloae continually emphasizes the collaboration that must take place between humanity and God to

\textsuperscript{306} Staniloae, \textit{Orthodox Spirituality}, 214.
\textsuperscript{307} Ibid., 214.
\textsuperscript{308} Ibid., 149.
\textsuperscript{310} Staniloae, \textit{The Experience of God}, vol. 2, 3.
\textsuperscript{311} Ibid., 80.
transform the world.\textsuperscript{312} Being unique, every human person can offer a distinctive contribution to this transformation of all things. Generally speaking, we can think about liberation theology’s hope of bringing about social change that results in a more just society. Staniloae’s theology might lend itself to this kind of social change in seeing all things as being contingent and malleable.\textsuperscript{313} More will be said on this later.

To transform the world, the human person must also become transformed. The embodied human person is the primary way through which the “creator Spirit” works in the world.\textsuperscript{314} The human body operates in Staniloae’s thought as the site of deification. With Staniloae’s broader understanding of material reality in place, we can now turn to how Staniloae understands the human body, as well as the importance of the materiality of the sacraments.

\textit{Agent of Transformation: The Human Body}

For Staniloae, the human body is a “great mystery.” A full “human life is the bodily life, which gives a specific complexity to human existence and makes the human person capable of beautifying his spiritual life in the richness and harmony of the visible forms.”\textsuperscript{315} However, the human body does not exist in isolation but is directly connected to the entire cosmos. Staniloae’s anthropocosmic vision of creation places the human person at the center of all of creation.\textsuperscript{316} It is precisely because

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{312} We will see in Chapter 5 how this understanding directly relates to the natural world.
\item \textsuperscript{313} Staniloae writes that “Christ leads history as a whole toward the Kingdom of God through social progress and the reform of its institutions. That is why Christians are obligated to this progress and these reforms, which play a part in drawing history closer to the Kingdom of God.” Dumitru Staniloae, \textit{The Experience of God}, trans. Ioan Ionita & Robert Barringer, vol. 4, (Brookline, Mass: Holy Cross, 2012), 133.
\item \textsuperscript{314} Staniloae, \textit{The Experience of God}, vol. 2, 5-6.
\item \textsuperscript{315} Staniloae, \textit{The Experience of God}, vol. 6, 119.
\item \textsuperscript{316} I am borrowing this term from Confucian scholar Tu Wei-ming who understands much of Chinese thought as anthropocosmic. See Tu Wei-ming, \textit{Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness} (New York: SUNY Press, 1989). Wei-ming writes, “Through reciprocity, humanity becomes interfused with the cosmic transformation and thus, as a co-creator, forms a trinity with Heaven and Earth. Humanity, in this perspective, stands as the filial son and daughter of the cosmos” (106). Here, Wei-ming understands the quest of Confucian self-cultivation as being bound up with the cosmos.
\end{itemize}
of Christ’s Incarnation and Resurrection, that the whole of human nature is able to achieve deification.\(^{317}\) In the Son’s Incarnation, God justifies the “creation of matter.”\(^{318}\) Through the power of Christ’s resurrected body there is a “total personalization of the cosmos in Christ and in human beings; for there is an ontological continuity between the matter of the body and the matter of the cosmos.”\(^{319}\) It is through each human person that the cosmos can “share in the quality of being subject.”\(^{320}\) The reason why humans are placed at the center of creation is that they are the link that joins God to the whole of nature and transforms an impersonal reality into a personal reality.\(^{321}\)

Staniloae believes that it is for the human person that the natural world exists because it is in the human person that the world finds and fulfills its meaning due to the human person’s endowment with the consciousness of herself and the world.\(^{322}\) It is through humanity that nature’s potential is actualized. This means that human beings can transform nature and lift it to a place where God can be known through it. Or, it can entice the human person and leave itself in the dark where the human becomes enslaved to the natural world and all the beauty it offers.

Through the human body and the work done by it, the cosmos is to be transformed. Staniloae goes as far as to explain that the “entire world senses the fact that it is inserted within the spirit through the medium of the human body. It is only through the body, by human work, that the human person can transform nature.”\(^{323}\) The human person is free, conscious, and rational and because of this can leave a human “imprint” on the world.\(^{324}\) We observed in the previous chapter

\(^{317}\) Bartos, *Deification*, 186. Bartos writes, “It is important to mention that, to a certain extent, Staniloae’s concept of salvation is physical. For him, the incarnation achieved a deification of human nature, spiritual and physical” and that “by becoming man, Christ entered into ontological relationship with all men” (186-187).

\(^{318}\) Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. 6, 119.


\(^{321}\) Ibid., 112.

\(^{322}\) Ibid., 19, 51. We will see that Gebara has a similar idea that parallels Staniloae on this point.

\(^{323}\) Ibid., 51.

\(^{324}\) Ibid.
that this is very important in answering the question of a human person’s ability to “give back” to God. Due to the potential of matter, human persons creatively “imprint” something of themselves onto a “gift” that makes it unique and new, and offer it back to God in a complete exchange of the gift.\textsuperscript{325}

At the center of Staniloae’s vision of creation is humanity who is ontologically connected to the cosmos and possesses the power to transform the cosmos and propel creation towards its fulfillment. The human body then becomes the site of deification, not just for the individual but for the entirety of creation. But how does Staniloae understand the human body’s relation to the spiritual dimensions of a person?

Staniloae believes the soul permeates the physical body and yet it transcends its materiality.\textsuperscript{326} A particular example of this would be Staniloae’s explanation of the unity of the human subject in its experiences of pain and pleasure. It is through the “sensibility of matter” that the senses of the body experience pain or pleasure and this echoes in the human spirit which is then “experienced by spirit and body in common.”\textsuperscript{327} The body and the spirit are both so intertwined that this relationship transcends the “plane” of the sciences.\textsuperscript{328} Thus we cannot reduce the body to being something purely material without the spiritual element attached to it. It is through the body that the freedom of the human spirit is able to be “exerted upon the world” and can be brought into communion with God. Staniloae argues that without the body, the human spirit would be unable to change the material world.\textsuperscript{329}

The human body is also neither purely subject nor object. He writes, “The human body is not matter only, nor is it rationality that has been molded into material form as object. It is matter

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\item \textsuperscript{325} This will be explored later on.
\item \textsuperscript{326} Ibid., 65.
\item \textsuperscript{327} Ibid., 52.
\item \textsuperscript{328} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{329} Ibid., 53.
\end{itemize}
that has been given the character of being subject, and as subject it participates in the spirit.”330 The body cannot be thought of as simply being a material object that acts as the mediator between the human spirit and the material world.331 The unity of the body and the spirit means that the action of a human person results in the spirit working upon the body and the body participating in the work of the spirit in reciprocal fashion.332 It is “every gesture” of the body that has direct consequences on the spirit and vice versa.333 These formations are so intimate that even after death the soul “has the roots of the body deepened within itself during the course of life on earth.”334

It is through Christ’s body that the cosmos has been restored to its capability of being united to God. Because of the Incarnation, reality at every level is personal and capable of furthering communion. One particular way Christ’s body works on human bodies is through the mysteries, or, the sacraments. Through Staniloae’s doctrine of the sacraments, we can see an example of how he sees the interplay between the body and the spirit.

**Staniloae and the Holy Mysteries of the Church**

To be clear from the outset: I am not venturing into a detailed analysis of Staniloae’s sacramental theology. That would be far too great a task for this chapter. I am instead focusing on the importance of the sacraments for Staniloae and their impact on the human person to show how both the material and spiritual are deeply intertwined in Staniloae’s view of reality. Staniloae understands the mysteries of the Church to have their basis in God’s workings through the medium of matter and it is from Christ “that in each of the sacraments, the power of God extends over all

330 Ibid.
331 Ibid., 53.
332 Ibid., 55.
334 Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. 2, 77. As we will see in Chapter 6, these formations can dramatically affect one’s experience of the afterlife.
human beings through gestures and material elements." Staniloae believes the sacraments to be the material means through which Christ deifies the human person. He writes:

> The sacraments take into account the bond between soul and body and the fact that the soul is open to God, for in Christ this openness of humanity toward God has reached its highest level. Through His activity Christ comes into contact with our bodies, and these contacts grow deeper and deeper within our souls. Through His body, which is full of power, Christ Himself is at work on our bodies, but through His body there is to us not only the purity of His human sensibility but also the clear sensibility of His own soul and the power of the Godhead inherent in Him.

As we will see, Staniloae understands the sacraments to always consist of two bodies interacting with one another. A priest, acting as a representative of Christ, comes into contact with the Christian who receives sanctification through the material. God has chosen that the material be the means to sanctify human creatures affirming the link between matter and the “power of God.” The Incarnation affirms that God became human so that he can gather not just souls but bodies. He does not use some “other mode detached from the world of matter” to sanctify human beings. It is precisely through matter that Christ’s power fills the world. On this point, Staniloae criticizes Protestantism as seeing matter as only having symbolic value and failing to see the ontological connections that exist between the divine Word, Christ’s human body, and the human body. He argues that this has led to a “total separation between the activity of God in the soul and the matter

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336 Ibid., 11.
338 Ibid., 11-12.
339 Ibid., 12. Staniloae notes how some Protestant theologians are calling for a return to the worldview of the “primitive Christians” who believed nature to be the primary medium through which Christ interacts with humanity. As we will see in Chapter Five, there are a number of theologians from around the world who share this sentiment.
used as the medium of this activity, hence its elimination of the sacraments.”

I highlight this criticism to show how important it is for Staniloae to uphold the deep connection between spirit and matter. To divorce one from the other in any way is simply impossible and is a distortion of how God operates in the world. It is primarily through the materiality of the “constitutive elements” of the sacraments that Christ sanctifies the Christian.

In the next section, I am going to analyze the seven Holy Mysteries according to Staniloae. I am looking in particular at the importance of the physical characteristics of the sacraments as well as their impact on the human person.

**Baptism: Water**

The section of Staniloae’s Dogmatics entitled “The Unity between Water and the Holy Spirit as Womb of the New Man,” is where Staniloae makes a connection between the re-creation of humanity with the primordial waters used by God in the Genesis narrative. The primordial water is not a material element but is instead “created by God and possesses potentially in itself the reasons and potencies of all the defined beings — images of the reasons of the Logos…” He also describes this water as being “undefined energy.” It is through the Spirit that this energy begins to take on more “defined forms” — one of which being water. Staniloae believes this to represent a “reservoir from which all bodies are born, are nourished, and maintain their mobility.”

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340 Ibid., 13. As mentioned before, Staniloae’s critiques of Protestantism are often guilty of over-generalizations and specific examples are not usually provided. While generally speaking Protestantism has reduced the number of sacraments, many strands of Protestant sacramental theology would affirm that the sacraments are not merely symbolic. For one example see, Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, Vol. 4, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006). See pages 565-587 on Bavinck’s understanding of the Eucharist. Also see pages 517-521 on his understanding of baptism.

341 Ibid., 23.

342 Ibid., 28.

343 Ibid.

344 Ibid.
this mobility, things become rigid and immobile, leading to death. The Fall of humanity has lead to this death, and human persons are born in the flesh bearing the “imprint” of subsequent generations on their bodies.  

It is necessary for human persons to be rebirthed through the Holy Spirit. This rebirth is accomplished in the Spirit through the act of “baptism, the liquid reservoir of the universe.” Once again, Staniloae links both humanity’s creation and re-creation as an event with cosmic implications:

Man is thus reborn as much from Spirit as from cosmic matter, inasmuch as the water represents this matter in a liquid state, as a reservoir and womb for every form of organized existence. Baptism has a cosmic significance. It means that matter itself, brought back to the condition of spiritual mobility, becomes a milieu for the creator Spirit, who is free and ever new in all His acts.

Here Staniloae powerfully links the primordial Creation account with the act of baptism. It is not just through the Spirit a human is reborn but also from “cosmic matter.” Here Staniloae makes materiality integral to what it means to be human. In the same way, God used the water to give shape and form to the Universe, so too does God use water to achieve the rebirth of the cosmos. The water of baptism foreshadows the eschatological reality to come where water’s full transparency will be made apparent. Furthermore, water is not just the “primary foundation of life on the plane of creation,” but it is also the primary means of cleansing. This cleansing washes away the original sin and enables the restoration of the imago Dei by the enhypostatic imprinting image of Christ onto the person. Typical of Staniloae, he emphasizes that baptism is both a gift and a duty. The baptized

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345 Ibid., 29.
346 Ibid.
347 Ibid., 31.
348 Ibid., 40.
349 Ibid., 32.
are responsible to “keep safe” and developing the gift of baptism, or else one risks spiritual corruption.

It is through baptism that “water has now been made spiritual for the sake of human rebirth and the reestablishment of humanity’s relationship with God.”\textsuperscript{350} It is through the water that the Son was able to “be immersed in human nature, and through that nature, in water, so that we, by immersing ourselves in water, can be immersed in His divine life, in His Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{351} The sacrament of baptism is not purely a symbolic gesture for Staniloae. He links the waters of baptism with the primordial waters God uses to create. The water used in baptism is both a representation of the spiritual fluidity of matter as well as an example of a material element becoming fully spiritualized.

\textit{Christmation: Oil}

Christmation is directly tied to baptism. The visible act of the anointing with the chrism is an act that lasts much longer in the newly baptized person than the water of baptism. The oil “penetrates” the body and its persisting effects are an indication that the new birth is being assimilated. When the Christian actualizes this new life through effort aided by the Spirit, the “chrism is absorbed within the body, and the body grows pliable and loses its rigidity, it allows itself to be penetrated. By God, and man and Spirit become a single font of the fragrance of new life...”\textsuperscript{352} Once again we have here the imagery of the need for mobility and flexibility, for movement means life. The oil provides the lubrication for this mobility and seals the baptism. It is through this act of chrismation that the Christian is penetrated by the Holy Spirit and “imprints Himself upon these physical members and

\textsuperscript{350} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{351} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{352} Ibid., 66.
organs, and on the spiritual powers on which they are founded..." Staniloae speaks on the significance of the chrism being anointed on the entire body, but especially the bodily senses. It is precisely through the senses that a person engages with the world, it is in the world a person comes to engage with God.

It is through the ears that the Spirit opens up the ability to hear deep spiritual meanings. It is through the nose one is able to resist evil smells. The chest is where one becomes pure of heart. And finally, the hands and the feet are anointed so that the Christian may be ready to spread goodness at a moment’s notice. Staniloae argues that it is precisely through this anointing that affirms the Church’s historical affirmation of the human body. Because it is precisely through the human body that a person’s “life as a whole is enriched and oriented either toward good or toward evil, and it is through the body that the Holy Spirit is communicated to him, for the body is pierced by sensations, and it is through this sensibility that the soul and the mind are able to open themselves up and give themselves to God.”

It can be difficult to tell when Staniloae is speaking metaphorically about the chrism. However, taking into account his larger understanding of the material and spiritual, one can assume that the oil itself possesses actual ontological significance when used to anoint the newly baptized. For instance, when he speaks of the chrism being absorbed by the body making it more “pliable.” The point is that the material element of the sacrament (oil) has direct spiritual implications as well as effects on the body.

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353 Ibid., 69.
354 Ibid., 68.
355 Ibid., 68-69.
356 Ibid., 70-71.
357 Ibid., 71.
The most obvious example of the importance of the materiality of the sacraments is the Eucharist. This section could be an entire chapter, but due to space I will be briefly looking at a few key aspects of Staniloae’s Eucharistic theology.

For Staniloae, it is through the body and blood of Christ that a person is united with Christ. In the act of consuming Christ’s body and blood the elements “communicate their own quality to our body and blood” so that our body and blood become bearers of the entire work of Christ.358 Through the Eucharist, the “divine qualities, imprinting themselves upon our own body and blood and uniting their divine activities and sensibility with the activities and sensibility of our body and blood.”359 Indeed, this is a deifying activity whereby Christ’s body and blood work directly on our body and blood. Staniloae believes the Church to be Christ’s extended body, bearing his body and blood through the Eucharist. Christ’s fully realized body is spiritualized, extends in some sense to our bodies, and will be completed in the resurrection. The full transparency of our bodies is not confined to our bodies. As stated earlier, our bodies are directly intertwined with the cosmos. Thus, Staniloae writes:

Moreover, this same power extends gradually from the body of Christ into our bodies too, because its destiny is to extend itself completely at the resurrection not only over our bodies but also over the entire material world, and in this way it will render all the rational principles of creation transparent, or make all of creation wholly spiritual.360

It is through spiritualized bodies that the cosmos will become spiritualized. Human bodies are the site of deification. There is no humanity without the world, and no world without humanity. The

358 Ibid., 79.
359 Ibid., 80.
360 Ibid.
two are both intertwined with one another, and the actions of one affect the other. The world and humanity exist in an intertwined, interdependent, reciprocal relationship. And it is primarily through humanity that God seeks to deify the world. By taking part in the Eucharist, a Christian’s body becomes further spiritualized if the person actualizes the qualities given in the Eucharist. The Eucharist communicates Christ’s body and blood to the Christian and gives the person the potential to actualize these qualities in the world. However, it is the responsibility of the person to do so.

**Repentance: Hand of the Priest**

In the act of repentance, Staniloae discusses the importance of both the hand and the stole of the priest. In the moment of absolution, Staniloae describes how the priest lays his hand and stole on the head of the Christian. It is through the “body and the liturgical vestment of the priest, the grace of Christ comes upon the penitent just as once it flowed through the body and the garments of the Lord to those who sought His help with faith. Ultimately, grace comes upon the recipient’s being as much as through the hand of the priest as it does through the material elements present in the other mysteries.” Again, we see how important the material is for Staniloae. Interestingly, Staniloae notes that “there is no further material element” other than the hand and stole of the priest. However, Staniloae, in looking for where the material acts as a conduit for the spiritual writes:

> Nevertheless--given the exceptional spiritual interpenetration that occurs between spiritual father and the penitent in this mystery, an interpenetration where Christ Himself is present in the course of the penitent’s confession and the priest’s counsels to him--it may be possible to say that this intimate encounter itself constitutes the 'matter' through which the Holy Spirit is at work in this sacrament...  

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361 Ibid., 91.
362 Ibid., 131.
363 Ibid., 132.
In some way, because of the intimate physical encounter of the penitent and the Priest, this close emotional connection could be thought of as the “material” element in this case. Staniloae is not content to ever isolate the spiritual from the material. The two are always intertwined.

**Ordination: The Priest**

Staniloae understands Christ to be the Priest of creation. Christ offers “creation to God; and of the renewed gathering together in God of all human beings, who had lost they primordial unity and had been scattered abroad.”\(^{364}\) It is through the hypostatic union Christ reopens the door to deification. The Word of God has redeemed the entirety of human nature and offers this redemption to all of humanity. Because Christ is no longer seen physically, this requires human persons to distribute his gifts. He accomplishes this through the priesthood. It is through the priesthood that Christ “works visibly through His own hand, His hand is active through the hand of those through whom His invisible priesthood is extended into the visible plane.”\(^{365}\) In other words, it is through human bodies that Christ works and distributes his gifts to the Church. Staniloae writes: “The human body is important not only when the mysteries are received through it but also when they are celebrated, because the Spirit, coming forth from the body of Christ, is active through the human body.”\(^{366}\) Human bodies are the locus of how and where God works. Staniloae’s understanding of the priesthood could be seen as an example of how he understands humanity’s role in the cosmos.\(^{367}\)

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\(^{364}\) Ibid., 138.
\(^{365}\) Ibid., 140.
\(^{366}\) Ibid.
\(^{367}\) For more on Staniloae’s understanding of “natural priesthood,” See Bordeianu, *Dumitru Staniloae an Ecumenical Ecclesiology*, 149-159. The concept of natural priesthood will also be covered in Chapter 5.
Marriage: Bodily Union

Unsurprisingly given Staniloae’s historical and cultural context he understands marriage traditionally. He defines it as being a “natural, lifelong bond between a man and a woman” and that these two together are completed. Staniloae speaks of the complementary bodily distinctions between men and women as signifiers of a spiritual “reciprocal complementarity.” Staniloae goes on to speak about the different ways this reciprocal complementarity is manifested in the marriage union.

For our purposes what is most important about Staniloae’s understanding of marriage is the role of the body within marriage. Staniloae cautions those who would seek marriage to seek the “desires of the flesh” and to understand it as both a bodily and spiritual relationship. Various acts of “bodily love” are raised to a higher plane as being accompanied by an increase in both “spirituality” and “familiarity.” Staniloae condemns sexual intercourse outside of marriage because the physical act of sex does not coincide with the spiritual union that occurs in marriage. It can also result in the reduction of the other person into an object to be consumed for sensual pleasure. It is only within marriage that a complete bonding of the bodies and souls of two persons can occur. It is precisely through the bodily union that is used as a “means of promoting their spiritual union.” Again, we see how the spiritual and the physical are inseparable within Staniloae’s thought. The physical act of sex bolsters and helps promote the spiritual union of the marriage. Furthermore, the condemnation of sex outside marriage is based mainly on the need for the proper spiritual union to be in place for the bodily union to achieve its purpose of furthering the transparent communion between the two spouses. Without the spiritual union of marriage, the risk is the objectification of

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369 Ibid., 171.
370 Ibid., 175.
371 Ibid., 180.
372 Ibid., 180-181.
373 Ibid., 181.
374 Ibid., 179.
the other instead of subjectification. One could fall into the trap of seeing another person as an object to be used for one’s own selfish desires. This should be understood within the backdrop of Staniloae’s larger theology. As we have covered, objectification for Staniloae is a way of seeing something as opaque and only to be consumed. And this ultimately enslaves a person to an object.

**Holy Unction: Healing of the Body and Soul**

Staniloae’s doctrine of divine healing best exemplifies his understanding of the intertwinement of the material and spiritual. He describes the mystery of divine healing as the “mystery of the body *par excellence.*” Staniloae explains the different ways in which unconfessed sin can lead to the sickness of the body. Or, how external influences from the “invisible forces of evil” can lead to sickness or disease. The body and soul are so intertwined that it is almost impossible to determine what the origin of the sickness is. He also explains the different ways divine healing may manifest itself — sometimes it is through direct bodily healing which strengthens the soul, or through the healing of the soul that strengthens the body. For Staniloae, there is no possible way to separate the soul and body from one another. He writes:

> As long as a man lives, there is no possible way of separating body and soul, and hence there can be no separation either between the working of grace in the body and its working in the soul. The very healing of the body is felt by the sick person as a grace given to him as an integral human person. The body is full of the energies of the soul; through it the soul work, and without it the soul cannot work. Hence grace does not work upon the body without also working upon the soul, but as it works upon the soul -- strengthening it, purifying it of sin, and thus calming its conscience -- these works in turn have a fortifying

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375 Ibid., 194.
376 Ibid., 196.
377 Ibid., 194.
effect upon the body too, making it an instrument of the soul's activity on behalf of the good and a source of strength for the soul.378

Such a close relationship between the body and the soul may sound odd to modern ears. The idea that the anointment of consecrated oil actually has the effect of moving, cleansing, and sanctifying the body against “invisible forces of evil” is not something many contemporary people dwell on.379 However, we do well to remember that divine healing has always been an integral aspect of the Christian faith. As we will see, it is a central component of the rapidly growing Pentecostal/charismatic movements across the globe. Divine healing exemplifies how a sickness of the soul can lead to sickness of the body and vice versa. There is an intentional ambiguity here in Staniloae’s analysis of divine healing. Unlike some teachings on divine healing found in today’s charismatic movements, Staniloae refuses to provide a theological formula for divine healing. This refusal is based on the fact that he understands the body and soul to be so inseparable that it is impossible to identify what the origin of the sickness may be. One cannot easily determine exactly what is causing the infirmity as there are invisible and visible external forces as well as internal forces that could be the cause.380

The emphasis Staniloae places on the human body point us to an important point: The doctrine of deification is not just the soul’s ascent toward God. It is the entirety of the human person — body and soul — toward God. The telos of the body is that the body will be completely spiritualized and transparent towards all things.381 In the eschaton, the body will not be tossed aside or considered less important. It is because Jesus has “assumed a body and keeps it for all eternity” that the body is fully affirmed and upheld. Because our bodies are connected to the rest of the

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378 Ibid., 195.
379 Ibid., 196.
380 Ibid.
381 Ibid., 147.
cosmos, so too is the material justified and affirmed. The entirety of the material world awaits the
day when it will become fully transparent and able to fully manifest the glory of God. One could
fairly charge Staniloae with an overly optimistic ontology. Staniloae does devote room in his
theology to the role of sin, evil, and the enslavement of humanity after the Fall. But given what
Christ has accomplished, Staniloae sees the infinite potential of humanity. This is why in my opinion
Staniloae’s theology is intentionally optimistic. Humanity has the ability, and matter has the
potential, to be transformed in such a way that it can increase communion and display the glory of
God. But Staniloae is always insistent that humanity must choose to work with God. Unfortunately,
as Staniloae was aware himself, humanity has too often chosen to see the material world as an end to
itself, and only as something to consume and exploit. What is important for us is to see that within
Staniloae’s paradigm, matter has the potential to be transformed by human bodies and that the
salvation that Christ offers affects the whole of the human person.

The Material in Liberation and Charismatic Theologies

As eluded to earlier, a dominant theme that will become more apparent is that many of the Majority
World theologies dialogued with in this project reject a dualistic view of reality and of the human
person. Generally speaking, liberation theologians and charismatic, or “prosperity” preachers, are
primarily concerned with questions surrounding the role of the body and the material consequences
of salvation in the present life. Like Volf, Veli-Metil Kärkkäinen has noted these similarities between
Pentecostal and Minjung theology, “Despite the foundational differences between Pentecostal and
liberationist Minjung tactics, there are also surprising common intuitions, particularly the idea of a
holistic salvation which not only relates to life-to-come but also to this current life in its spiritual,
mental, physical, and economic dimensions." This is further echoed by Sebastian Kim who notes that in the aftermath of the Korean War, both progressive and conservative reactions to the postwar context are “not mutually exclusive.” He observes that, “While progressive Christians anchored their action on justice and the prophetic traditions, conservative Christians were basing their action of the gospel of peace and prosperity.” Both the liberation and prosperity approaches are seeking to emphasize two points: 1) salvation encompasses the whole of life; 2) salvation has real, pragmatic effects in the present world and is not solely hope for future eschatological fulfillment. As we will see, both David Yonggi Cho and Ivone Gebara emphasize these two points in their own distinct ways, but the underlying instincts overlap in interesting directions.

Before proceeding, it would be wise to briefly discuss the worldwide phenomena of the Pentecostal movement. What exactly is Pentecostalism? And what are its origins? Both of these questions have garnered considerable debate among scholars. For our purposes, we will adopt Allan H. Anderson’s definition of the movement as “ecstatic forms of Christianity defined in terms of special gifts given by the Holy Spirit.” Pentecostalism is anything but a fringe movement. As Anderson notes:

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384 The origins the Pentecostal movement have been traditionally attributed to Azuza Street, Los Angeles. However, this has been challenged by a number of scholars who criticize this as being an overly Western-centric narrative. For an overview of the possible origins of Pentecostalism see, Cecil M. Robeck Jr., “The Origins of Modern Pentecostalism: Some Historiographical Issues,” in The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism, eds. Cecil Roebuck and Amos Yong (Cambridge, U.K., Cambridge University Press, 2014), 13-30. See also Brian Stanley, Christianity in the Twentieth Century (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 289-312.
Whatever our opinion or personal experience of Pentecostalism, it is a movement of such magnitude that Christianity itself has been irrevocably changed. The mushrooming growth of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches and the ‘Pentecostalization’ of older, both Protestant and Catholic Churches — especially in the Majority World — is a fact of our time.  

Due to the wide variety of Pentecostalism and charismatic churches, we will focus on one figure in particular: David Yonggi Cho. Cho’s Yoido Church in Seoul is the largest congregation that exists in South Korea.

David Yonggi Cho and a Theology of Blessing

Before proceeding, we must briefly explore the context in which Cho’s theology developed in order to understand him properly and not simply dismiss him as being a proponent of a “prosperity gospel” that only seeks the fulfillment of material wishes. As Anderson observes, Cho has been working in the “Korean context of poverty, Japanese occupation, and the Korean War.” Anderson warns readers not to frame Cho’s theology of blessing through the eyes of Western material wealth, but through the eyes of the poor. We must also consider the multi-religious context of South Korea and its impact on the reception of Christianity. The religious systems of Confucianism, shamanism, Daoism, and Buddhism all influence the Korean worldview to one degree or another. The relationship between these different religions is porous, but there is a strong element of continuity.

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between Korean Christianity and Korea’s religious heritage. Chung Soon Lee goes as far as to say that “Shamanism determined the mind, nature, and religious ground of Korean people before receiving Christianity.” The strong emphasis placed upon the “fulfillment of material wishes” within Shamanism means that there is no part of life that is untouched. Thus, when Cho’s theology invokes 3 John 1:2, “Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in health; I know that it is well with your soul,” one can understand why such a message has resonated so strongly for many South Korean people. We would do well to also note the importance of Cho’s mother-in-law Joshil Choi, for the growth and establishment of Yoido Full Gospel Church. She not only supported Cho throughout his ministry but also established the prayer mountain of Osan-ri which became renowned for the number of people claiming to experience healings.

David Yonggi Cho was not an academic theologian, but an evangelist and pastor. However, I believe that his theology of the Full Gospel/threefold blessing is representative of larger trends present in the wide and complex movement of Pentecostal/charismatic churches. As Wonsuk Ma has concluded, “Cho has never been considered to be a theologian, but more an evangelist and pastor,” but, “he has created a powerful theological tradition that has already impacted many churches and Christian leaders in the last four decades, and this seems to be only the beginning.”

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392 Ibid., 111.

Like Jurgen Moltmann and many others, I will be taking Cho “seriously as a Christian theologian and shall enter into his ‘Full Gospel Theology.’”

Cho’s Full Gospel can be broken down into two categories: 1) the fivefold gospel; 2) the threefold blessing. Both of these are central to his writings and ministry. The fivefold gospel consists of: 1) the gospel of salvation; 2) the gospel of the Holy Spirit; 3) the gospel of divine healing; 4) the gospel of blessing; 5) the gospel of Jesus Christ’s second coming. The threefold blessing consists of: spiritual blessing, physical blessing, and blessing of circumstances. As we can already see, Cho’s core message attends to every facet of human life.

In the next section, I am going to explore Cho’s tripartite understanding of the human person as this will be key to understanding his gospel of divine healing and the gospel of blessing and prosperity.

The Full Person

In his book The Fourth Dimension Cho explores the relationship of the body, soul, and spirit. Cho believes that “Man is made in the image of God in that he is a trinity: body, soul, and spirit.” Cho writes that there are eight facets of the body according to Scripture: 1) the body houses both the soul and spirit; 2) the body can be affected by what it sees; 3) the body can be made alive by the Holy Spirit (divine health); 4) it is the temple of the Holy Spirit; 5) proper care of the body should be maintained; 6) the body is affected by spoken words; 7) the body is the chief symbol of the Church;
8) the body will be transfigured in the resurrection. Each of these aspects of the body Cho lists displays the interplay that he believes exists between the body, soul, and spirit. Cho understands the relationship between the soul and the body to be so intimate that “in our vital functions that often it is difficult to differentiate between the two.” Cho has a hierarchical understanding of the body and the soul as the soul “controls our will and desires and has a strong influence over the body.” As Frank D. Macchia notes, Cho’s understanding of the relationship between the body, soul, and spirit are not dualisms but should be understood as dimensions: “He does not assume a separation and conflict between body and spirit in the attainment of the Spirit of God. In fact, his language is dimensional and not dualistic. Though he holds to various levels of reality (body, soul, spirit, Holy Spirit), he qualifies these by noting that the “higher includes and directs the lower.” Thus, for Cho, this hierarchical understanding of the human person is as follows: Holy Spirit, spirit, soul, and then the body. For Cho, there is a direct interplay here between the various dimensions of the human person. Cho goes on to explain how the soul is comprised of the mind, emotions, desires, intellect, and taste. It is not exactly clear what Cho believes the spirit to be other than the part of the human person that died when sin entered the world and that the spirit can be made alive through the Holy Spirit who draws humans into a “new dimension.” It is the part of the human that is “made alive by Christ” so that communion can be achieved between a person and the Creator.

In all of this, Cho declares that there must be a balance between these different aspects of the human person. He writes:

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398 Ibid., 191-192.
399 Ibid., 192.
400 Ibid.
Our bodies are important. We are commanded not to neglect them. The Christian should therefore be concerned about his health by eating properly, exercising and adopting proper habits. What is often the case is that people have a tendency to overemphasize one aspect of their nature above the others. A man who is more intellectually oriented should not feel that his body is unimportant. A spiritual person should not neglect his intellectual or physical condition. In all things there must be a balance.403

Cho’s emphasis on the body is vital for understanding his Full Gospel. The body has just as much importance for Cho as the other facets of the human person. This is why divine healing and blessing are given prominent places in Cho’s theology. What is interesting are the many parallels between this view of the body and Staniloae’s understanding of the body and soul. In both, we see an emphasis on the physical dimension of a person having a spiritual impact and vice versa. Cho is also careful to stress the need for balance. As Cho notes, people are often tempted to develop one part of their nature at the expense of the other. This stress on balance displays Cho’s holistic understanding of the human person. It is the whole person being saved.

**The Full Gospel**

Before venturing into Cho’s theology of blessing and healing we must frame these conversations in two ways: 1) Cho’s rejection of pain and suffering as trials to be embraced, as often is communicated in large swaths of Christianity; 2) The contextual nature of his theology. Cho’s ministry and theology seek to affirm the belief that suffering is not the will of God: “The first idea we should correct is the theory that poverty, pain, trial and tribulation are the ingredients of Christian virtue. Nowhere in the Bible is it written that meager meals and poor living conditions are pleasing to God.”404

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403 Ibid., 196.
pain, and suffering are direct results of sin.\textsuperscript{405} Cho’s theology is best framed by theodicy. Sam-hwan Kim has correctly observed that:

The fundamental assertion of Cho’s TFB has to do with well-being. As stated in 3 John 2, the TFB seeks the well-being of the spirit which also leads to the well-being of the physical body and of general circumstances (in all things). Well-being implies wellness, and this wellness is the practical aspect of the good. Good without wellness is meaningless. God who is good also provides wellness. On the other hand, when circumstances go wrong, it means they are going \textit{bad}, and this is the practical aspect of evil. As the good of God does not include even the possibility of evil, God cannot be the source of things going wrong, bad or evil.”\textsuperscript{406}

In other words, Cho’s theology of blessing shifts the problem of evil from being an abstract one to a pragmatic one. We can view Cho’s theology of blessing as an attempt to address the problem of evil pragmatically instead of metaphysically. The question then is not solely focused on \textit{where} evil comes from. But rather \textit{how much} pain and suffering are Christians expected to accept and bear for themselves and their neighbors.

Most Christian theologians affirm that suffering is not the will of God, but often the expectations that are given for life are one’s that involve an acceptance of pain and suffering. Has this acceptance gone too far?\textsuperscript{407} One of the axioms of Cho’s theology is the rejection of the notion that suffering or pain is the will of God and are simply to be endured. Furthermore, Cho does not desire to \textit{wait} for everything to be made right in a future eschaton. While Cho retains an

\textsuperscript{407}This question is taken up by Karen Kilby among others. See Karen Kilby, “Negative Theology and Meaningless Suffering,” \textit{Modern Theology} 36:1 (2020): 92-104.
eschatological hope in his theology, he does believe that God’s promises of peace and prosperity apply to the Christian in the present life. Cho writes, "...for the God I had learned about at the seminary seemed to be merely the God of the future. I could not find the God of the present to show Him to people who were living in such desolation and poverty."\(^{408}\)

This brings me to my second point: the contextual nature of Cho’s theology which I would like to reemphasize. Cho’s theology must be seen in light of the post-Korean War circumstances in South Korea. Anderson captures this points well:

In this situation, the gospel had to be contextualized to meet the starkly desperate needs of the Korean people. Cho preached a message of hope, that these slum-dwellers could receive spiritual blessings but also physical and situational blessings from God if they came to Jesus Christ and lived by the word of God. Cho’s message of salvation in body and spirit gave comfort to people who were poor and suffering. His teaching on healing was closely related to the poverty and sickness rampant at that time. His teachings on blessings and prosperity were his theological counteraction to the ravages of the Korean War. For Cho, the message of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit was a present contextual message that gave hope to a suffering and destitute community. Most of his members in these early years were extremely poor.\(^{409}\)

Salvation, then, is not just a message for hope in a future life in heaven. Cho sees salvation as a gift that touches every aspect of the present human life whether that be physical, spiritual, or circumstantial. Salvation takes on a pragmatic hue where it is not only concerned with the spiritual condition of the human person but is also concerned with the material life one lives now. It is a solution to the problem of evil by directly addressing the pain and suffering people experience on a


daily basis. This is not unlike Staniloae, who also sees salvation as having an actual, tangible effect on the human person in this present life. This emphasis on salvation in the present then helps us to understand Cho’s theology of blessing.

The Gospel of Blessing

Cho’s teachings on prosperity and blessing immediately evoke the image of “Word of Faith” movements or other versions of Westernized “prosperity gospels.” While prosperity and blessing are central components of Cho’s theology, he needs to be distinguished from these movements that teach “the overly-simplistic belief that merely articulating a desire would put God into the position of having to supply whatever wish the individual expressed.” Cho is more nuanced than this. Cho repeatedly emphasizes the need for “proper motivation.” And that proper motivation is to position “God first in your life, and place your primary desires on the building up of His Kingdom.” There is an implicit understanding that if God blesses one with material abundance, this abundance is used unselfishly and for giving to others. Cho also does not advocate for the belief that one’s salvation entails that life will be in any sense easy. In Chapter 8 of Solving Life’s Problems he speaks of life’s “perplexities.” These include the perplexities of: weakness, rejection, persecution, and hardship. In Chapter 10 he speaks of life’s difficulties and is firm in his belief that one can overcome life’s hardships by trusting in the Lord. Thus, there is a recognition that negative things will inevitably happen in one’s life. But these are not things that should be embraced but rejected and solutions to life’s perplexities should be sought out.

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411 Cho, Solving Life’s Problems, 32-33.
As referenced earlier, Cho believes we must reject the idea that “poverty, pain, trial, and tribulation are the ingredients of Christian virtue.” Furthermore, Cho believes that Christians must reject the idea that the material world is only for the “devil.” Both the Incarnation and the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ affirm this. Cho argues that Christians must stop thinking that “spiritual blessings” are all that is needed, but Christ’s victory includes material blessings as well. He carefully distinguishes between “prosperity” and “greed.” Greed sees material possessions as ends in themselves. Whereas prosperity is “an attribute of God.” Meaning that God desires to see his people live prosperously in all areas of life. Indeed, Cho argues that “God first created the material world and gave it to man as a gift.” Thus, salvation includes this material present life and it is up to Christians to exercise the responsibility that they have to lay hold of this reality to advance the Kingdom of God.

Again we see another connection point to Staniloae who also affirms that the Incarnation and Resurrection affirm the material as God’s gift. Implicit in Cho’s distinction between prosperity and greed is an affirmation that all good things are gifts from God and that they are not ends in themselves. This is reminiscent of Staniloae’s division of “taking” and “receiving.” Cho’s understanding of greed aligns with Staniloae’s notion of taking. Proper reception of God’s gifts, or the gift of prosperity, is recognition that material prosperity and well-being is not an end in itself, but rather is to be used in service to others. Furthermore, both affirm that the material world is good when it is properly understood to be a gift from God.

This brings us to Cho’s understanding of tithing. Cho has various ways of describing this as the “universal law of giving and receiving,” or as “the law of investment.” He defines tithing as

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413 Ibid.
414 Ibid., 54-55.
“God’s promise of prosperity to His people. And this prosperity is not limited to the material realm. God will also bless you with the prosperity of joy, peace, health, and harmony in your home.”

When explaining tithing Cho uses numerous examples from Scripture, especially the Old Testament. Cho takes seriously passages that display God’s willingness to meet the material needs of people. A brief example would be Malachi 3:10 that Cho cites in support of his understanding of tithing. The way Cho describes tithing can be disconcerting for many. However, Cho does grapple with passages in Scripture that can make one uncomfortable due to the seemingly transactional nature of God’s relationship with his people. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this way of conceiving of this relationship between God and the individual is reminiscent of how South Korean gift-giving operates around the principle of reciprocity.

Reciprocity is fundamental to Cho’s theology of tithing. He argues that “In the natural world the principle of giving and receiving is prevalent.” It is in “the natural realm there must be both receiving and giving. Anything that refuses to give will become useless and dead.” Cho uses the examples of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as all examples of biblical figures that properly tithed, and because of this were given material wealth and abundance.

In a striking passage, Cho uses the example of countries in Asia and Africa as examples of nations that have rejected the Gospel and failed to share material blessings. And have not experienced the same level of prosperity as several Western civilizations. As problematic as this statement may be, it does give insight into how Cho believes there to be an almost causal

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417 “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,’ says the LORD Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.” Malachi 3:10 (NRSV)
418 We can we think here of the book of Job which criticizes of this kind of formulaic account of God’s relationship with his people.
420 Ibid., 36.
421 Ibid., 39.
relationship between giving and receiving in one’s relationship with God in a way that comes too close to a neat system of cause and effect. The obvious question is: Does Cho believe that material success and prosperity have a direct correlation to spiritual health and vice versa? The answer appears to be yes and no. Set within the backdrop of what was discussed earlier, Cho is fully aware that life is full of complex difficulties and perplexities, and he attests to that through personal anecdotes quite frequently. He also does not believe God’s love is conditional.\textsuperscript{422} But formulaic statements like these do seem to imply some sort of system of cause and effect that is so problematic among those that preach “prosperity.”

\textit{The Gospel of Healing}

Cho argues that the “Christian faith and healing are inseparable. Actually, healing is a central part of the gospel of the redeeming grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{423} In Cho’s doctrine of divine healing, we see another example of how important the material and the present are for Cho. Cho believes that it is God’s desire for all to live in good health. Sickness and death are direct results of the Fall.\textsuperscript{424} Cho argues that the origins of sickness are tripartite: the devil, sin, and the curse of the Fall. These three work in conjunction together. Cho writes: “The devil entices man to sin against God, and sin brings the curse of God.”\textsuperscript{425} This is why Cho suggests that it is only through the spiritual treatment given prior to physical treatment can complete healing occur.\textsuperscript{426} Cho describes sickness as being an “organic state.” It is a “succession of effects” that ultimately result in death. He even states that “The devil is the one behind the sickness and provides the destructive energy of the sickness…” Consequently, if the devil departs from the sickness, the germs will decompose and

\textsuperscript{422} Ibid., 136.
\textsuperscript{425} Ibid., 116.
\textsuperscript{426} Ibid., 117.
disappear.427 Once again, we see how the spiritual and the physical are intertwined in Cho’s thought. According to Cho, the spiritual forces of evil have the power to actually enhance one’s sickness and make it worse.

For Cho, the believer has a responsibility to accept healing as a gift from God. He writes, “Like an other blessing, healing comes to those who yearn for it. God cannot give gifts to people who are indifferent or who are not sure if they should accept the gifts. Those who want to be delivered from the power of sickness should have a strong desire for perfect health. They should yearn for it.”428 There is an obligation placed on the believer to properly desire healing and to recognize it as a gift from God that God desires to give. God is unable to “fully heal you unless you become a sacrifice unto Him.”429 Furthermore, the sick believer must both repent from one’s sin and forgive those who have sinned against the believer. Cho also believes that one must have faith given by an encounter with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. A faith that God really can heal their infirmities. And finally, Cho argues that one must not sin again or give any opportunity to the Enemy to return to one’s life.430 Again, Cho could be accused of charting too close to a formulaic account of how one is healed that does not always produce the results expected. This could implicitly lead a Christian who is not healed to place the blame on oneself as the primary weight of responsibility appears to lie with the one who is sick.

Concerns aside, Cho’s theology of blessing is one representation of a Christian thinker attempting to meet the needs of his context. Cho’s context of post-War South Korea pushed him to reject any notion that God desires for people to suffer. Instead, Cho offers a kind of theology of hope. This is not primarily a theology of a future hope (although Cho does espouse this), but also a

427 Ibid., 118.
428 Ibid., 144.
429 Cho, Solving Life’s Problems, 88.
hope for the present. Salvation comes to the present. As we have seen, Cho’s theology of blessing is intimately tied to his anthropology and soteriology. Human persons are both spiritual and material creatures, and thus need to have their material and spiritual needs met. This means that salvation for Cho is a salvation that attends to all aspects of life. One interesting contribution to Cho is his insistence that God cares about the finite needs of everyday people which is unsurprising given Cho’s role as a pastor and evangelist. We should also note some of the surprising similarities that exist between both Cho and Staniloae given their denominational differences. Both affirm that the material world is good, while simultaneously affirming its ability to lead people astray by seeing material things as ends in themselves. By rejecting any kind of dualism, Cho and Staniloae are able to affirm that salvation involves the entirety of the human person. Furthermore, the lack of dualism leads to the understanding that the human body is affected by and affects the spiritual dimension of the human person and vice versa. While Staniloae does not give much attention to the particular present circumstances in the same way Cho does, he could affirm alongside Cho, that every good thing one possesses is ultimately a gift from God and that these gifts are to be used in service for others.

**Ivone Gebara’s Ecofeminist Theology**

Ivone Gebara (born 1944) is a Brazilian Catholic nun who is primarily known for her ecofeminist theology. She was previously silenced by the Vatican for her controversial views on abortion, which prompted the Vatican to look more closely at her wider theology. She was then sent back to seminary to be “re-educated.” In this section, I will sketch some of the broader contours of Gebara’s thought before exploring her theological anthropology.

Gebara’s thought seeks to reimagine the Christian tradition outside the normative male-centered discourse. She believes that this first and foremost requires her to exorcise from Christian
thought the dualistic principle that there exists a world of “sensible things” and a “World of
ideas.” She writes,

Idealism, like dualism to which it is closely linked, is always tempting to us. The world of our dreams and
projections is always beautiful, harmonious, perfect. The real world in which we live, with its constant
conflicts, its apparent or real contradictions, seems to weigh us down. Our desire changes the world; very
often we live wrapped up in the world we desire or project, and we forget to look at reality in its beauty
and ugliness, its cleanliness or filth. What most interests us is the "other world," the "other me," the
"other reality." People discuss ideas, enter into endless controversies, but are incapable of seeing, of
sensing, of detecting the challenge represented in the presence of the "man with the withered hand," or
the "woman suffering a hemorrhage" in the middle of the crowd.

This quote reveals one of Gebara’s main concerns: meeting the needs of suffering peoples. For
Gebara, it is the idealism that she believes characterizes so much of the Christian tradition, that
operates like opium of the masses and has led to the fragmentation of human reality which
reinforces patriarchal systems that seek to divide rather than unify. This idealism is a “denial of
human reality as it appears to us.” She instead opts for a realistic approach, meaning that when we
speak of transcendence we cannot do so outside the realm of human experience. It is precisely in
our “relativity within history, in our limits and frailty” that we experience transcendence within our
human bodies. In a quasi-Feuerbachian fashion, this means that all human discourse about God is
just that — human discourse. By wholeheartedly embracing human limits, Gebara’s theology
remains perpetually open to revision, as well as avoiding the construction of any totalizing system.

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432 Ibid., 19.
433 Ibid.
434 Ibid.
that can perpetuate injustice such as the traditional model of God, which Gebara believes characterizes God as “an all-powerful Lord, king over all persons and living things…as omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent.” Gebara is seeking to move away from the idea that God is just one being over and against other beings. We can see Gebara attempting to maneuver away from any kind of hierarchical and anthropocentric notions of God and creation. The traditional view of God comes under attack repeatedly in Gebara’s theology. By traditional, she means a theology that “sees God as a person with a will, a purpose, a plan for salvation, and a historical project.” And that this “divine personality” was made in the “image and likeness” of human personality. Essentially, Gebara is arguing that in many ways our anthropocentrism has led us to make God into our own image, or more specifically creating a God who will assist in securing human hierarchies. However, she is willing to affirm God is a person in an analogous way, but denies that God’s being is person. She writes,

> To speak of relatedness as the mysterious reality of God is, in the final analysis, to affirm that God is not a pure essence existing in itself; rather, God is relationship…To speak of God is to speak of that which is beyond us. To speak of God is to affirm the ‘something’ that we are and that goes beyond us, based on human experience and moving beyond it.

There is a kind of apophaticism that is at work here. Gebara is attempting to escape what she sees as the domestication of God for the use of political and religious agendas. While Gebara admits that speaking about God this way is both “somewhat imprecise” and “abstract,” one does wonder if

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436 Ibid., 113.
437 Ibid.
438 Ibid., 104-105.
439 Gebara speaks about God as a “mystery” repeatedly. She writes that the word mystery is “essential” for “anyone who does theology.” Ibid., 133.
describing God this way actually escapes the potential for it to be used for a nefarious political or religious agendas as well. In fact, this is exactly the case. She writes,

But what is really important is to understand the historical consequences of our imprecise discourse on God, of our ‘models of God.’ This is the case because models are not neutral. They betoken a stance, an action in the face of the various problems that arise in our world. God as all-powerful Lord, king over all persons and living things, God as omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, or even God as the avenger of the poor and restorer of justice—all are images or models that imply concrete historical behaviors.440

This is another example of Gebara’s pragmatic approach. She sees a direct link between theology and “concrete historical behaviors.” Her point here is that the traditional view of God has resulted in the patriarchal society we now inhabit. Thus, following Sallie McFague, Gebara commits herself to a panentheistic perspective on God’s relationship to the world where “God is in all and all is in God” while at the same time stressing God’s transcendence as being absolutely superior and different.441

Gebara’s theology seems to begin from the concrete historical behaviors she desires. For her the “ecofeminist model” that is “expressed in relatedness is undoubtedly just one more model: It suggests a certain kind of religious sociopolitical action that will be somewhat different from the actions that flow from other models.”442 While Gebara’s approach “levels the playing field,” it does beg the question if in Gebara’s attempt to dismantle the “traditional God” she inadvertently subverts her own project. She invokes Sallie McFague to argue that the standard for these models of God do not need to be evaluated according to whether or not they are actually describing “God’s being,” but rather if they are in accordance with “postmodern science, and interpretation of Christian faith, our

440 Ibid.
441 Ibid., 122.
442 Ibid., 133.
own embodied experience, and the well-being of our planet and all its life forms.”

Practical outcome is the most important for Gebara. However, Gebara’s approach is too dependent on the assumption that many of our contemporary ills are a result of the more traditional Christian theological tradition, in this case, the “classical” view of God. It is uncertain if Gebara’s theology will necessarily fare any better than the “classical” theologies. But perhaps that is precisely what Gebara desires: a theology that is always open to revision and attempts to resist all impulses to be wielded towards the domination of others whether that be human or non-human.

As we also have seen, Gebara prefers to speak of God as relationship based upon her assertion that relatedness is the foundational reality for all existence. For Gebara, everything is interconnected and interdependent. Gebara defines relatedness as “experience” as both a condition and a value. When speaking of experience, Gebara is careful to emphasize that this experience takes place within the “confines” of our bodies that exist in a specific historical location. She describes the importance of dealing with the “concrete realities” that have to do with our bodies and that these “specific ills and pains” need salvation.

**The Human Body and the Sacred Body**

Embodied experience is at the heart of Gebara’s theological project. As we saw earlier, Gebara accuses the “Western Christian tradition” of perpetuating “dualism that not only regards the dyad God and humanity as opposites but does the same to the dyads spirit and matter, man and woman, and good and evil. Throughout the course of our history, dualism has engendered a thousand and one antitheses.” It is not a surprise then that in attempting to overcome the “dualisms” of spirit

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444 Ibid., 103.
445 Ibid., 182.
versus matter and mind versus body, Gebara affirms the deep unity of the human being who is inseparably both a material and spiritual creature. She writes,

Opposition between spirit and matter, common to Greek thought, has been a centuries-long legacy in the development of Christian theology. Its imprint is still visible today, and even when we think we have been freed from dualism, we are still somehow caught up in its snares which are often subtle and tenuous…The ancient split between spirit and matter still runs in our cultures blood and through our own veins, even when we they to claim something else.

Again, I do wonder if Gebara places too much emphasis on the dualism that she sees everywhere within Western Christian theology. For instance, Staniloae might be said to embody the Eastern tradition which is often characterized as being quite friendly to “Greek thought” to which Gebara is so allergic. Yet, as we have seen, his theology offers a holistic cosmological vision of the world that echoes much of what Gebara hopes to emphasize — namely a unified interdependent vision of the world that is dynamic and continually evolving.

For Gebara, the material and spiritual should be understood within the limits of our materiality. Gebara understands the human person to be an embodied creature that is simultaneously subject and object and is “in some sense the thinking dimension of the universe.”

She goes on:

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447 Bingemer and Gebara, *Mary Mother of God, Mother of the Poor*, 18-19.
448 Ibid.
449 See Mark McInroy, “How Deification Became Eastern: German Idealism, Liberal Protestantism, and the Modern Misconstruction of the Doctrine,” *Modern Theology* 37 (2021): 934-958. McInroy traces the massive influence German Idealism has had on the perception of the doctrine of deification. I am using this as one example of the influence the “Hellenization Thesis” has had. As we will see with our other interlocutors throughout this project, this thesis is often assumed. There is the oft-repeated accusation that “Western Christianity” was somehow coopted by Greek metaphysical assumptions. Dualism is often the primary example used to explain this point.
450 Bingemer and Gebara, *Mary Mother of God, Mother of the Poor*, 18-19.
To reflect on the meaning of the human person is to accept the challenge of becoming creators of ourselves and of the entire living world, and to be capable of overcoming the growing isolation imposed on us by economic liberalism and the transnational capitalist system.\textsuperscript{452}

This is reminiscent of Staniloae’s understanding of human work and vocation. He writes:

The spiritual and physical order of the created world develop together, by a mutual influence which holds for the whole universe. Thus, each person is responsible for the development of the whole of the physical and spiritual universe. Our smallest gesture makes the world vibrate and changes its state.\textsuperscript{453}

In both Staniloae and Gebara we see how humanity, as the “thinking dimension” of the cosmos, is tasked with cooperating with God that results in humanity being “co-creators.” Nothing is fixed, but all things are in a kind of processual moving forward (or have the potential to be). But also notice the emphasis here on human responsibility. It is up to humans \textit{to do something}. Humanity can transform the world for good or for ill. Furthermore, this work is both material and spiritual simultaneously. And it is within human bodies that this work is to be done.

The body is for Gebara a “unique site of suffering and joy.” But the human body also is the site where both injustice and oppression are experienced. Gebara writes that human bodies “are affected, not just by unemployment and economic hardship, but also by the harmful effects the system of industrial exploitation imposes on them.”\textsuperscript{454} This industrial exploitation determines the value of certain bodies over others. It “allows the exploitation of the bodies of the poor and demands respect for the bodies of the rich.”\textsuperscript{455} Gebara identifies a woman’s body as a unique site of conflict and exploitation. In reference to prostitution, Gebara writes: “The female body is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{452} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{453} Staniloae, \textit{Orthodox Spirituality}, 42.
\item \textsuperscript{454} Gebara, \textit{Longing for Running Water}, vi.
\item \textsuperscript{455} Ivone Gebara, \textit{Out of the Depths: Women’s Experience of Evil and Salvation}, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press), 36.
\end{itemize}
merchandise with a short shelf life, refurbished when the stock runs out. It obeys the laws of the market with its own logic, a logic of consumerism and of excluding and oppressing some to the benefit of others.\textsuperscript{456} She goes on to argue that maids who work in family homes also experience the objectification of their bodies as only possessing value in the ability to serve others.\textsuperscript{457}

What the woman’s body reveals is not only the objectification of women, but the objectification of the natural world, as Gebara would argue, women are often understood to be symbolically closely related to nonhuman nature. And both are subject to being defined by their utility to men.\textsuperscript{458} Again, Gebara believes the dualisms of Western civilization have created false dichotomies between the natural world and human beings which have led to the exploitation and oppression of both the natural world and those that suffer under patriarchal systems.

In an attempt to overcome these dualisms which she describes as running straight through our “culture's blood,”\textsuperscript{459} Gebara constructs a vision of the world that is characterized by interdependence and interrelatedness through an understanding of the “collective body.” The Sacred Body is a vision of the world that sees the “universe as our body, the earth as our body, the variety of human groups as our body — a body that is in evolution, in creative ecstasy…Everything is our body…”\textsuperscript{460} To be clear - Gebara does not wish to diminish differences. This Sacred Body should be primarily understood as being multiple and diverse expressions of the same Body. This might sound like quite an odd idea, but it does hearken back Paul's language in 1 Corinthians where Paul speaks

\textsuperscript{456} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{457} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{458} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{459} Bingemer and Gebara, \textit{Mary Mother of God, Mother of the Poor}, 18.
of Christians as being the body of Christ in much of the same way. Gebara is simply expanding this concept outside the bounds of the Church and extends it to all of creation.

The “body” is a key resource for Gebara’s theology. It allows her to emphasize the interrelatedness of all things and emphasize the collective. To hurt another’s body is to hurt one’s own body. To hurt the Earth is to hurt one’s own body as well. This interdependence also goes beyond the living and extends itself to the past. Gebara writes:

I am I, but at the same time I am thousands of lives and circumstances that have gone before me to weave and prepare for my personal life. I am myself, but I am also the countless lives that went before me. I am my ancestors, with their personal histories; their voices and traditions run through my veins. I am I, but my being goes beyond my own individuality, beyond the personal story limited by the years of my own life.461

As we can see, the interdependence of all things and materiality are both central to Gebara’s theology. She characterizes human persons as material creatures embedded in a material universe which is precisely where transcendence is to be located. In the following chapters, the interdependence of all things — living and dead — becomes very apparent.

This is a liberating vision Gebara offers. It is a call to action to struggle for the “dignity of all persons’ lives today.”462 For Gebara, all lives are interconnected, including nonhuman lives. To struggle for the dignity of all persons is to also struggle for the dignity of the natural world. However, Gebara’s theology can be somewhat utilitarian due to its intense focus on concrete, lived situations from out of which Gebara conducts her theological investigations. As identified, her argument tends to hinge too much upon the idea that Western Christianity, by in large, is one giant

462 Ibid., 161-162.
blunder of dualisms that has led the world down a path of consumerism, ecological destruction, sexism, and racism. However, it is difficult to say that Staniloae’s theology is filled with dualisms due to an over-reliance on Greek philosophy. Oddly enough, many of Gebara’s criticisms of “Western Latin” theology are also echoed by Staniloae. Furthermore, it is also difficult to see how his more “traditional” view of God necessarily leads to such oppressive systems.

**Theological Considerations: Embodiment, Theodicy, Anthropodicy**

This chapter has covered a lot of ground. Throughout it we have touched upon various theological loci such as: soteriology, Christian anthropology, and the question of evil. In this chapter, we have primarily focused on the various ways that Staniloae, Cho, and Gebara understand material reality. For each of these thinkers, the material holds an integral place for their theologies. Staniloae’s sacramental view of reality sees all of the created order as being the medium through which God draws people into communion with Godself, the natural world, and others. We also saw the supreme importance Staniloae places on material reality in his understanding of the Holy Mysteries. Because Cho does not divorce the material from the spiritual, salvation takes on a pragmatic hue. Cho is emphatic that salvation must include the basic material needs of people in the present. And that God actually cares about people’s material needs and circumstances. Cho presents us with a salvation that is not only “on the horizon” but is in some sense already here. Gebara embraces the limitations of humanity and sees no possible way to speak of salvation outside of material reality because this is the very reality we inhabit. This is why she speaks so concretely and pragmatically about evil(s) and salvation(s). Bringing these theologies together, we can see that salvation is needed for individuals, communities, political and social systems, and the natural world. But what is most

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463 We could also mention the doctrine of creation and ecology here as well. This discussion will be saved for Chapter Five.
interesting about both Cho and Gebara’s theologies is that salvation does not remain in the abstract but is brought to bear on the particularities of daily life.

Soteriology is largely predicated on what one is being saved from. And for Gebara and Cho in particular, the question of theodicy is at the forefront. The primary theological question being asked here is not: “From where does evil come from?” Rather: “How do we fight against evil now?” There is a tension that exists in the negotiation between how much salvation can be experienced between now and the eschaton. Or, what kind of salvation is this? Is it purely a promise that things will someday get better? Or, is there some way in which salvation can “come to this house” today? Furthermore, Staniloae, Cho, and Gebara emphasize the need for human responsibility. This shifts the question of theodicy to a question of anthropodicy. Instead of placing the blame on God for evil in the world, the blame should instead rest on humanity. As we have seen and will see more in the following chapter, humanity is tasked with co-creating the world.

Eschewing any metaphysical concept of evil, Gebara takes a phenomenological approach and prefers to speak of the many evils experienced in everyday life. For Gebara, deliverance from evil takes place in the here and now. She writes, “This step involves taking another view of the theology of salvation, to see there a redemption in the here and now, a redemption that takes flesh now, even if for the moment this salvation is contained within the limits of our body, our heart, and our daily routine.” Notice that Gebara mentions both the body and one’s daily routine. There is no part of life that is not touched by this salvation.

A similar thematic thread exists in Cho’s theology. As quoted earlier, Cho is not looking for the God of the future taught in seminary. Rather, he is concerned with the Living God of the present and how God meets the needs in the daily lives of his congregants. Cho stresses that God

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464 Luke 19:9: “Then Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.’” (NRSV)
465 Gebara, Out of the Depths, 123.
does not desire suffering or pain, and “trials” of this kind are not to be embraced. This seems like a basic, fundamental theological idea. However, as Karen Kilby has noted recently, theologians may have unwittingly gone from accepting “limitation and the inescapability of some suffering in the order of things, to its embrace.”\textsuperscript{466} This leads her to restate the basic idea that, “suffering and loss are not part of God, or grounded in God’s Being, or desired by God.”\textsuperscript{467} This is an excellent lens through which to understand Cho’s theology. Cho’s theology is not simply built around acquiring more material possessions or achieving success as ends in themselves. Rather, what undergirds Cho’s theology is the fundamental rejection of the idea that suffering and loss are desired by God in any way. This is reminiscent of the “God for us” of Karl Barth, but it is an understanding of “God for us” in every aspect of our lives. There are notable questions of discernment here, and this is why I critique Cho for overly formulaic accounts of blessing. This is where Staniloae’s theology of purifying the passions could potentially compliment Cho’s theology of blessing.

Many have accused Cho of an over-realized eschatology. But it is hard to make this charge when much of modern theology may be accused of possessing an under-realized eschatology. Generally speaking, modern theology tends to posit a salvation that is always coming but never arrives. The emphasis on a present salvation is not entirely unrelated to Staniloae. While deification is understood to be an eternal process, deification begins in this present life and continues into eternity, but human persons can actually progress along this path starting now. Staniloae’s emphasis on cooperation with God means that humanity actually possesses the ability to transform the world

\textsuperscript{467} Ibid., 172. For a fuller treatment of Kilby’s engagement with theodicy see, Karen Kilby, \textit{God, Evil and the Limits of Theology} (London: T&T Clark, 2020). See also, Linn Tonstad, \textit{God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality and the Transformation of Finitude} (New York: Routledge, 2016), 166. In a similar vein, Linn Tonstad argues that Sarah Coakley’s deployment of kenosis results in a characterization creation’s dependence on God as submission and vulnerability. These criticisms prompt theologians to distinguish between what is the result of sin and what is simply human finitude.
in the present and offer it back up as a gift to God. While God is ultimately the one who will achieve this transformation, human work and labor are integral to this process.

Given that materiality occupies such an important place for each of these thinkers, it is no surprise that the human body occupies a place of central importance. For Cho and Gebara in particular, the emphasis on embodiment is a particular attempt to address the lived sufferings and evils people experience daily. Gebara writes of the concrete realities that affect and take place within the body such as specific ills and pains, particularly experienced by the female body. For her, this requires specific solutions that bring salvation and healing.\(^{468}\) It is human bodies that have suffered injustice under oppressive systems. It is human bodies that suffer various ills and pains that require healing. And it is through human bodies that other human bodies can be liberated and healed. Through the healing of human bodies comes the healing and liberation of the natural world as well. Both Staniloae and Gebara see bodies as sites of transformation and healing, not just of individuals, but of the entire cosmos in which all things are interconnected. Staniloae does not see deification taking place in isolation. Rather, it is connected to the entirety of the world around it as we can never isolate the human person from nature. Through human imagination, labor, and effort, the world can be transformed through the human body. Matter has the potential to become “transparent” and human persons have the ability to actualize this transparency. The transformation of individuals can lead to the transformation of all things. The human body is both the site of deification and liberation.

From a different angle, Cho is focused in particular on the individual human body and God’s desire to bring healing to both the body and circumstances in one’s life. This is why healing occupies such an integral place in Cho’s theology. He believes that “God made us new in Christ and made us a royal priesthood. Consequently, if our spirits, souls and bodies prosper, it naturally follows that

everything will go well. This is the order and the law of creation." For Cho, the human body is the site of prosperity. If the human person is healed physically and spiritually, then it follows that well-being will be achieved and that prosperity should be sought after.

Regardless of the many differences that exist among these thinkers, what we can ascertain is that salvation comes to human bodies in the present life. It is a salvation that affects every aspect of human existence which includes material needs, wants, and deliverance from everyday evils.

**The Gift of Matter**

How can we reflect on these things through the lens of gift and gift-giving? How does the gift of matter fit within the “complete dialogue of the gift?” It is here that I will take things gleaned from the dialogue above and attempt to reflect theologically on the gift of matter.

As we have seen in dialogue with these authors, the material world is affirmed as a good gift given to us by God. To be clear: God is always the initiator in all exchanges. We can rightfully agree with the book of James that “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above…” The material world is the primary medium through which God reveals Godself and engages with humanity.

In the second stage of the complete dialogue of the gift we have the need for the gifts given by God to be recognized as such. Human persons must come to realize that any material abundance or material things come from God. These material gifts possess the potential to be used for communion (transparent) or used for selfishness (opaque). Indeed, this is where anthropodicy comes in as we explored above. Humans can take God’s gifts and use them only for themselves, not realizing the sense of indebtedness that comes with the gifts given. With these good gifts from God

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470 This is not meant to be a comprehensive theology of the gift of matter. Instead it is meant to be a starting point from which further and more developed theological reflection can take place. Furthermore, it displays the potential of an intercontextual method. It is here that I am thinking of many of the main points explored above and trying to synthesize them into a “novel” theological reflection that takes the concerns of each theologian seriously.
471 James 1:17 (NRSV).
comes an obligation, or a responsibility to our neighbors. For instance, take Jesus’ teaching in Luke 14:12-14:

He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.\footnote{Luke 14:12-14 (NRSV).}

This brief example from the Gospel of Luke helpfully illuminates for us that one of our potential “return gifts” to God involves giving to the poor and the needy. In this way we are taking the gifts we have received and “transforming them” by then giving them away which displays that not only do we understand that the things given to us are gifts (and undeserved), but that we seek to use the material world to increase communion between subjects. By sacrificing our personal possessions we can expect a blessing from God perhaps here in the present life, or at the resurrection of the righteous.

In a similar vein, we can think of our embodiment as a gift. The human body is the site of transformation. It is in and through the human body that God brings about the liberation of the world. Human persons have the unique ability to transform the world in an infinite number of ways. This means then, that unjust social structures that exist now can indeed be changed and transformed. Human persons can work toward the transfiguration of unjust social structures and work towards the liberation of those suffering under those structures. By doing this, it is just another particular way in which humans are able to offer up a gift back to God. Not only should our gift to God be meeting the basic needs of particular individuals, but our body politic should also be one
that is characterized by meeting the basic needs and protecting the poorest and vulnerable in our societies and sees human prosperity as the ideal for all.

In the following chapters, we will move on to exploring humanity’s relationship with the natural world, where all of creation, both human and nonhuman are involved in a continuous gift-exchange (Chapter Five). And finally, I look at how this gift-exchange also extends itself not only to all living things but also extends to the dead. As we have seen, this gift-exchange with God is both material and spiritual with no division. The gifts we receive are material. And the gifts we give back are material ones.
Chapter 5: The Gift of Space - Lands, Oceans, and Nonhuman Creation

*Introduction: A Disney Interlude - Moana*

Based loosely on Polynesian mythology, Disney’s *Moana* illustrates the reciprocal relationship that exists between humanity and non-human creation. In the movie, the ocean is given subjective characteristics and acts as one of the main characters in the story. The central conflict of the movie stems from the demigod Maui, who steals the “heart of creation” from the goddess of life (Te Fiti) so that humans may have the power to create. Maui loses the heart of creation, which results in the “blight” that is destroying the ocean and nearby islands. The ocean chooses Moana to restore the heart of creation to its rightful place and continually aids her throughout the movie to accomplish this task. I use this example only to foreshadow and assist to illustrate some of the thematic elements of this chapter. In this chapter, we will explore humanity’s relationship to the natural world, which makes up the space in which we move, live, and have our being. We will find that for both Staniloae and the Majority World theologians selected for this chapter, the interdependence of all creation is a central aspect to each interlocutor. To start this chapter, I will analyze Staniloae’s understanding of space as well as more specifically how he understands the interdependent relationship between humanity and non-human creation. Subsequently, I will look at the recent works of theologian Randy Woodley as well as Winston Halapua. What we will discover is that reciprocity again operates as a central principle in understanding humanity’s relationship to the rest of creation.

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473 This chapter is primarily focused on the “Earth.” However, I am using the “natural world” in a “cosmic” sense that is not limited to this planet.
Dumitru Staniloae: Space as a Gift

In Staniloae’s theology, both the concepts of time and space are understood to be means of deification and are closely intertwined. By “means of deification” I mean to say that both time and space are used by God to deify the human creature and draw humanity closer into communion with Godself. As noted, they can both be conceived of as gifts from God in Staniloae’s framework. Space is “the form of the relation between God — the supra spatial and infinite one — and finite persons, the form which makes possible their movement between one another, and thereby also towards God, for God cannot be found apart from communion with other persons.” Space is meant to be filled with subjects in communion. In this section, I will first explore Staniloae’s understanding of space as one of the means of communion and deification. I will then look at the space humans occupy — the Earth and how Staniloae understands humanity’s relationship with the natural world.

Staniloae understands God’s relationship to space to be supraspatial. This means that there is no reference point or place where God “is” as he is above all things. Paradoxically, God is also “in all things” because “all things have their existence through him.” Neeser helpfully observes that for Staniloae, “Space participates in the infinity of God not of itself but because the creatures who live in it can be the visible image of the Trinity, and thus in a certain sense become present to the whole of space or are even above it.” It is in this sense that material creatures who occupy space become representations of the Triune God through space and time in their communion with others. Staniloae primarily understands space to be the primary place of communion. It is the “place of encounter and interpersonal relation, the medium of reciprocal revelation; it fulfills its purpose completely when it is transfigured and overwhelmed by interpersonal communion.”

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474 Bartos, Deification, 110. For Staniloae’s concept of time see Chapter 6.
476 Ibid.
has the potential for interpersonal communion, it is also the distance between one subject and another. It is because of space that humanity possesses the choice to “either withdrawal from the gaze of the other or to draw near to him.”

Again, as we saw in the previous chapter, human cooperation is central for Staniloae. Space is a gift that can be used either for good or ill within Staniloae’s theological framework. Space can be received as a gift to be used for further communion and interior interpersonal relations, or it can be used to increase the distance between one and the other in a non-cooperative way.

Staniloae quotes St. Symeon the New Theologian who writes, “…when no one loves you, you do not feel anything except space, the tedium in space devours you.” The feeling of space is amplified when one is isolated and alone. Love is the primary vehicle through which space is overcome.

Staniloae uses the example of the absence of a familiar person. In the person’s absence, the “space seems somehow to have been amputated by that absence. He is even present in his absence.”

Staniloae understands the space between God and creation is overcome in Christ who is the “unifying link” of the world. He characterizes the Incarnation as a kenotic act in space. Because of Christ, humanity is the center point through which all aspects of creation converge, “…man is the point where the parts of the world and of space are linked together.” Humans can accept this gift, or can keep God at a distance. In the eschaton, this space will be “overwhelmed” with the glory of

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479 Ibid., 173.
480 Ibid., 176.
481 See Nicolae Turcan, “Theo-Phenomenology, 70.
483 Ibid., 180.
484 Ibid., 181. Staniloae is careful to maintain that in the Incarnation, the Word does not cease to be omnipresent, but rather that in Christ God comes to the “closest possible proximity” and has “made himself accessible and able to be grasped as God in the highest degree.”
485 Ibid., 179. Staniloae places human creatures as the center of creation. More will be said on this below.
486 Ibid., 182-183.
God. Staniloae writes: “In eternity, there will no longer be a variety of distances, but God will be close and intimate to everyone in the same way, in every place and time, so that there will no longer be distinction, properly speaking, between here and there, between now and then.” Union with God means that all intervals of time and space will be overwhelmed.

Space in Staniloae’s thought operates in both positive and negative fashion. The positive aspect of space is where interpersonal communion can exist, and individuality can be maintained. Negatively, space can create distance, which needs to be overwhelmed for full communion. The creatures who occupy space are granted agency. The choice is to overcome the distance created by space through love and communion, or to withdraw into oneself, furthering the distance that exists between subjects. In gift language, space is a gift given to creatures by God. In accepting this gift and returning it (the return is reciprocal relations that overwhelm space), subjects draw closer to one another. By selfishly “taking” the gift of space, one uses that space to keep others at bay. Space becomes “mine” and is used as an instrument to ward off communion and instead retreat further into one’s own space where the distance between subjects increases.

The ultimate goal of space is union with God. It is where individual subjects are able to commune and grow in love toward one another by overcoming the space that separates them while retaining their individuality. The world is the space where creatures live, move, and have their being.

**The Earth and the Natural World**

As we have covered in both Chapters 3 and 4, the world, which includes the Earth, is the means through which God desires to unite us with himself. Because of this, the “world is a system of materialized reasons or inner principles which human reason gradually gathers within itself through

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Ibid., 178.
the collaboration of its various subjects.” These “materialized reasons” grant the material world an infinite capacity to draw creatures closer in communion with God if humans cooperate.

Ivana Noble rightly states that for Staniloae, “the human being cannot exist apart from his relationship with nature. The three together make an inseparable whole: I-Thou-Nature…The human being can experience God both in himself and in relation to nature.” Staniloae is adamant that we cannot bracket nature to the side when speaking of our relationship with God. We always experience God in and through the world. The natural “must come into all our relationships, it is a gift to us and we are bound to it reciprocally. We cannot become God’s partners without nature.”

While salvation and deification are primarily directed toward humanity (the macrocosm of all creation), this can never be a humanity that is spoken of as abstracted from nature (which Staniloae accuses some strands of Western Christianity of doing). What Staniloae means in characterizing humanity as the macrocosm is: “Man has the capacity to unite all things among themselves and also with God, because within his thought all things meet and through his will he can achieve a unity in himself, a harmony with all others and with God. Hence man can be called ‘the great world’ (macrocosm) because he is able to contain and master all things spiritually.” Doru Costache helpfully distinguishes between the Maximean concept of humanity as the “microcosm” from Staniloae’s idea of the macrocosm. He contends that Staniloae shared Maximus’ view that while the world was created with the human person “in view” that the “anthropic conditioning could not be

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488 Ibid.
490 Ibid., 194.
reduced to the creation of the universe for humankind.\footnote{Doru Costache, “A Theology of the World: Dumitru Staniloae, the Traditional Worldview, and Contemporary Cosmology” in Orthodox Christianity and Modern Science: Tensions, Ambiguities, Potential, eds. Vasilios N. Makrides and Gayle Wolosechak (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2019): 220.} This means that for Staniloae while the universe is centered around humanity, and it is humanity’s task and privilege to push the entire cosmos forward in evolution.\footnote{Ibid.} Furthermore, for Maximus the “human impact” on the cosmos could only be understood properly at the eschaton. While for Staniloae, this “human mark” could be perceived in the present. It also reveals two things about Staniloae’s theology that have been briefly mentioned before. The first is that Staniloae understands the cosmos to be “open” in a sense. While the ultimate telos for creation is union with God, the universe is incomplete and requires humanity to cooperate with God to bring about this union. This brings us to our second point which is the stress on cooperation, or synergism, that Staniloae repeatedly emphasizes. We have seen how the gift relationship requires cooperation between God and humanity.

Thus, humanity must always be thought of as ontologically connected to nature. The two exist in an interdependent relationship with one another and cannot be separated.\footnote{Staniloae, The Experience of God, vol. 2, 1.} While Staniloae does make a distinction between natural and supernatural it is only for conceptual reasons. He writes that the “Human being cannot be conceived apart from cosmic nature. This can mean that nature, too, does not fulfill its purpose apart from human being or through a human being who works against nature.”\footnote{Ibid., 1-2.} Again, nature is understood here to be a gift through which humanity works towards communion with God. It can be recognized as a gift with the obligations attached to it and fulfill its purpose by promoting communion with God. Alternatively, it can be seen as a “given,” as an object to be used and exploited for one’s selfish ends. When seen as a gift, it “proves itself a means through which man grows spiritually and brings his good intentions toward himself and his
fellow men to bear fruit;” or, when taken humanity “sterilizes, poisons, and abuses nature on a monstrous scale, he hampers his own spiritual growth and that of others.” To summarize, in Staniloae’s understanding of space, nature can be the means to increased communion, which overcomes the distance between subjects, or it can be taken and used to increase the space that exists between creatures, thereby hampering the spiritual progress of others. Staniloae understands humanity’s spiritual growth to be directly linked to the natural world. To poison or pollute the natural world directly “hampers” humanity’s spiritual growth and vice versa.

Staniloae is careful to point out that nature’s status as a gift from God comes with obligations and responsibilities. Nature is a “malleable, contingent reality” that is “equated to the measure of the creative human imagination.” Humanity is given the ability to transform nature creatively. It is humanity’s task to “spiritualize” nature, or sanctify it. Radu Bordeianu summarizes what Staniloae means by this:

How do we sanctify creation? By fully realizing the sanctity of creation, not in the pantheistic sense that creation is holy, but that God is transparent through and present in it, as its Creator and purpose…our relationship with creation is a two-way street: on the one hand, our salvation depends on the world, and creation is the environment of our spiritual growth; In this sense the world is already a sacrament. On the other hand, the vocation of humankind is to turn the universe fully into a sacrament…

As Bordeianu points out, the deification of humanity depends upon the world, and the world depends on humanity. A reciprocal relationship exists whereby the world provides the space where creatures can grow in communion with one another and with God. The world is the means by

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497 Ibid., 3.
498 Ibid., 4
499 Radu Bordeianu, Dumitru Staniloae: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology, 150.
which we come to see and know God. By neglecting our responsibilities towards the world, we diminish the ability for both ourselves and others to know God. This brings us to the theme of a natural priesthood that is prominent within Staniloae’s theology. As discussed, humanity’s place in the cosmos is not one of entitlement but of responsibility. The task set before humanity is to act as priests of creation and assist God in spiritualizing creation and bringing all things into communion with him.\textsuperscript{500} The act of spiritualizing creation could be thought of as humanity’s “return gift” to God. It is our “work.” Staniloae writes that by “returning to God the gifts of nature transformed through the ascesis of our work and through the imprinting of the cross upon them, we sanctify them and remove the character they have of being an easy source of pleasures; thus we sanctify ourselves.”\textsuperscript{501} The work of transforming nature simultaneously sanctifies nature and the human. Staniloae goes as far to say that it is the “duty” of humanity to grasp and understand creation’s reasons. As always with Staniloae, there is a need for genuine cooperation between both God and humanity: “The world is created as a field where, through the world, man’s free work can meet God’s free work with a view to the ultimate and total encounter that will come between them.”\textsuperscript{502} By working with God, humanity can leave a distinctive imprint on the “malleable” and “flexible” reality of creation. This extends to the human person having “his own part in creating himself; he is not created by God only. And, in part, the human person also creates the world.”\textsuperscript{503} Once again, both the openness and dynamism of Staniloae’s theology are evident here. The world and humanity are not finished projects but are

\textsuperscript{503} Staniloae, \textit{The Experience of God}, vol. 2, 44.
placed in an ongoing transformative process.\textsuperscript{504} With this transforming power, humanity can offer the gift of the world back to God. When one returns creation’s gifts back to God, the gifts are “stamped” with human work, and “their value is enhanced.”\textsuperscript{505} By doing this they become “human gifts” that are offered back up to God and he gladly receives them.\textsuperscript{506} The human responsibility toward nature given by God appears today to use resources sparingly and not to disfigure nature through pollution. This responsibility protects us from the passions and from seeking any infinite satisfaction in the world.\textsuperscript{507} Nevertheless, with this degree of openness comes the risk of humanity taking the gifts. Staniloae believes that God never coerces or forces humanity to follow him. Every person has a choice. When humans do not recognize these things as gifts given from the Ultimate Subject and instead see them as “objects” to be taken, things can go horribly wrong. The power given to human persons to transform nature can be used for evil purposes as well. If we think back to Staniloae’s understanding of humanity as a macrocosm, we can only imagine what kind of destructive force a human person can become. Unfortunately, humanity has tended to “take” from nature and the tendency has always been there to see nature as a reality in itself, disconnected from us, and its only use is to satisfy our desires. Staniloae uses the tree of knowledge as an example of what this “taking” looks like. The tree becomes an end in itself and is only “pleasant to look at and delicious to eat.”\textsuperscript{508} A “taking” mentality is one where the supernatural is divorced from the natural, where the natural world is treated only as an object to be used.\textsuperscript{509}

It is not hard to see the ecological implications Staniloae’s theology possesses. Staniloae writing in the latter half of the twentieth century already has a strong awareness of the damage

\textsuperscript{504} Staniloae, \textit{Theology and the Church}, 114.
\textsuperscript{505} Staniloae, \textit{The Experience of God}, vol. 2, 24.
\textsuperscript{506} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{507} Ibid., 6-7.
\textsuperscript{509} Staniloae, \textit{The Experience of God}, vol. 2, 181.
humanity was doing to the environment and the need to remind us of our deep and inextricable connection to it. Bordeianu concurs:

…the belief that our salvation is related to the environment makes us more responsible toward creation. It is not only and interdiction against abusing nature, to satisfy our self, utilitarian, consumerist, and fallen passions, but it is also a positive call to mold the world in conformity with God’s eternal intentions, or the logoi.\textsuperscript{510}

Indeed, for Staniloae true cooperation can exist between both God and humanity. God has given humanity the gift of the world, the space in which humans exist. Humanity can either work with God or refuse to.\textsuperscript{511} Working with God means recognizing creation as a gift from God and the responsibilities that come with this gift. Humans are indebted both to God and the natural world. Humans are tasked with spiritualizing all of creation so that they can offer up the world back to God. Furthermore, the environment provides the space for humans to live and flourish along with everything creatures need to survive. The various “gifts” of nature are given with the expectation that humanity will take care of the created order so that it can continue giving the multitude of gifts the natural world provides us with every day.

\textit{An Anthropocosmic Theology}

Staniloae primarily understands space to be a gift whose primary goal is to promote communion among personal subjects. We have also seen that Staniloae understands the natural world to be intimately connected to humanity. There is no way to speak about humanity disconnected or

\textsuperscript{510} Bordeianu, \textit{Dumitru Staniloae an Ecumenical Ecclesiology}, 159.
abstracted from nature. The natural world and humanity exist in an interdependent, reciprocal relationship that must be maintained for humanity to experience communion with God. To tarnish our relationship with the natural world possesses disastrous consequences, not only for one’s physical well-being, but for one’s spiritual progress. Staniloae believes humanity to be the macrocosm of the cosmos where all aspects of creation intersect.\textsuperscript{512} He also develops a concept of the “natural priesthood” of all human persons which elicits an obligation placed upon humanity to take care of nature and not abuse it. Exercising this responsibility leads humans into deeper communion with God and others. However, this responsibility can be abdicated by human beings and the ability human beings have to transform nature can be used for ill purposes.

One way to characterize Staniloae’s understanding of the relationship between humanity and the natural world is “anthropocosmic.” Meaning, humanity is integral and central in the created order and able to participate in the ongoing creation of the cosmos.\textsuperscript{513} As we have seen, Staniloae believes human beings are central in creatively working with God to transform the gift of creation. Some would accuse Staniloae of anthropocentrism here, but just because human beings occupy a central place within the cosmic order, even as the pinnacle of creation, does not disqualify the responsibility humanity possesses toward the natural order. Costache would defend Staniloae against accusations of anthropocentrism due it the theocentric understanding of the \textit{telos} of creation and the understanding of the cosmos as “a task and function, not a privilege.”\textsuperscript{514} Too often a false binary is created where one is either egalitarian or hierarchical in more ecologically inclined theologies.\textsuperscript{515} Staniloae repeatedly emphasizes that care of nature is our responsibility, our task, and our duty.

\textsuperscript{512} Staniloae, \textit{The Experience of God}, vol. 1, 179.
\textsuperscript{513} Tu Wei-ming, \textit{Centrality and Commonality}, 78.
\textsuperscript{514} Costache, “A Theology of the World,” 220.
\textsuperscript{515} See George E. Tinker, \textit{American Indian Liberation: A Theology of Sovereignty} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 73. Tinker explains that understanding creation in cyclical terms is important to be rid of any notions of hierarchy and it promotes “genuine egalitarianness.” We will come to see this view reflected below in other theologies as well.
Because nature and the world take care of us in so many ways, it is our job to take care of it. In doing so, God intends to use humanity to make transparent all of material creation.

It is easy within this framework then to posit a gift-relationship between nature and humanity. Both exist in a reciprocal relationship that cannot be separated. Humanity exists within nature and is dependent upon it for its success. Our salvation is intimately intertwined with the natural world. As we have noted, the I-Thou-Nature paradigm creates two gift-relationships: one between humanity and God; and between humanity and the natural world. God has given humanity the world in hopes that human beings will take care of it and offer it back to God as a return gift. The natural world gifts humanity with space to exists in. This reciprocal relationship is used by God to draw all of creation to himself. Staniloae repeatedly emphasizes our care of the natural world by ensuring its growth. In doing so, we offer our gift of provision back to nature, and in doing so nature further declares the glory of God until it is fully transparent with God’s energies.

Staniloae’s theology gives a prominent place to the natural world. However, while Staniloae possesses a robust theology of creation, he does not typically speak of the particular relationships we have with different aspects of creation. When Staniloae is speaking of the gift of the “world,” he is doing so on a macro-level, i.e. the cosmos and all that is within it. This is also the case with many other gift theologies as eluded to in Chapter 1. What we will see below is that many Majority World theologies speak of these particular relationships quite often and reflect on them theologically. The relationships humanity has with particular lands, oceans, or animals are reflected upon and used to further our understanding of our connection to the natural world. In the theologies dialogued with below, we will see that many of these theologians are successfully doing what Staniloae prescribes, namely, contemplating the potential “materialized reasons or inner principles” of the different facets of the world and how humanity can live in right relations with them.


**Gifts from the Natural World**

Staniloae emphasizes that space is an integral tool in the process of deification where space is to be filled with subjects in communion, and that humanity is never to be abstracted from the natural world. Many Majority World theologies echo these themes. The theme of space occupies a large place within the theological literature where space often takes priority over time (in contradistinction to the “Western” tendency to place time over space). Many of these theologies are attempting to think primarily in spatial terms. Terms like peace, balance, and equilibrium are common words used repeatedly in these eco-focused theologies. The Kingdom of God is characterized by these terms and usually are attached to a given locality in the present. For instance, issues surrounding the land are particularly prominent in Native American and Palestinian theologies, which have often led to “displaced theologies” where a community is cut off from its geographic location thereby creating dissonances in identity. Not only is the land important, but theologies of the oceans also find prominence in many Oceanic theologies. As we will discover, many of these theologians posit dynamic, interconnected, and reciprocal relationships that exist between the natural world and humanity that parallel much of what Staniloae says on a cosmic level. More often than not, various aspects of nature are personified and given subjective characteristics in these theologies. As stated, these relationships are often thought of in more particular terms. To clarify, many posit specific relationships that humanity may have with a particular geographic location, ocean, or even rocks. George E. Tinker, a Native American theologian states:

> It may be necessary at this late date for a healthy Christian creation theology to look to indigenous peoples around the world who are more firmly and self-consciously rooted in a creation-related self-
understanding. Christian theology and Christian life may now have to learn from American Indian, tribal
African, Pacific Island, tribal Asian and other indigenous peoples.516

Many of the theologies surveyed below reflect theologically on different features of their given environments. In doing so, unique perspectives are reached that are helpful in understanding how God both reveals himself and operates in creation. In the following sections, I will explore and dialogue with both Randy Woodley and Winston Halapua’s respective theologies and draw out some of the key thematic elements that exist between Staniloae, Woodley, and Halapua. Much like the previous chapter, I will end with a short theological reflection using the resources provided by the dialogue.

**Randy Woodley: The Harmony Way**

Randy Woodley is a Cherokee theologian whose theology attempts to creatively reflect upon and utilize the Native American indigenous tradition in the creation of a Native American theology. Much of his theology is based upon his concept of the “Harmony Way,” which is the “common values” that exist “within many First Nations’ worldviews that were derived from his doctoral work.517 Woodley directly compares the Harmony Way to the ancient Semitic idea of Shalom. He writes:

> Shalom, like Harmony Way, is made up of numerous notions and values, with the whole being much greater than the sum of its parts. Both are meant to be a way of living life in concrete ways that include more than all the terms found within the construct. They both set forth practical steps included within a vision for living. They both require specific action when the harmony or shalom is broken. They both

have justice, restoration, and continuous right living as their goal. And, perhaps most importantly, they both originate as the right path for living, being viewed as a gift from the Creator.518

Here we see something that is common among the theologies that we have engaged thus far: an understanding that there exists revelatory value in indigenous traditions. Notice that Woodley places an emphasis on the holism of his indigenous tradition as well as the pragmatic value found therein. For Woodley, much of the Euro-western worldview is “broken” and “fragmented.”519 This is a point that Woodley repeatedly states. He often contrasts the “indigenous view” with the euro-Western worldview.520 In fact, Woodley even goes as far to say that the “Harmony Way” of living may be the “Creator’s original instruction for the way in which all societies should be ordered, and for how all life on this planet should be lived,” based upon his experience with other indigenous traditions such as “Zulu, Inca, Maasai, Sami, Maori, Inuit, Australian Aboriginal, and Hawaiian peoples.”521 Woodley characterizes shalom as being “communal, holistic, and tangible.”522 There is a strong pragmatic element here as one should not just think about shalom but actually do shalom. This is also a key point that Woodley repeats. One of his main criticisms of the modern Euro-American religious reality is that due to dualistic thinking, it divorces belief and action. What does enacting shalom actually look like? Woodley explains that, “Living out shalom means taking into account all of creation in reciprocal relationships and learning from creation as object lessons for understanding

518 Ibid., xv.
519 Ibid., xv.
520 In Shalom and the Community of Creation, Woodley provides a series of charts on pages 107-109 that directly compares the Native American and Modern Euro-American worldviews. For example, these charts show the Native American religious reality as being fully integrated (beliefs and actions), whereas the Euro-American reality is more fragmented (right beliefs do not correspond to right actions).
522 Woodley, Shalom, 21.
God’s shalom provision.” But shalom is not confined to humanity. It is extended to all animals and other aspects of nonhuman creation. This is why Woodley suggests moving from the language of “Kingdom of God” to “community of creation.” He reasons that “community” denotes the cosmic scope of God’s redemption plan for creation. Woodley’s theology can be described as leaning heavily on a strong doctrine of creation that seeks to retrieve a kind of cosmically oriented understanding of salvation.

**Creation Centered Theology: Holism over Dualism**

Woodley argues that Jesus ultimately held a “creation-centered” worldview and that, “To Jesus, all of creation was alive.” Woodley suggests that the Harmony Way is much less anthropocentric than the traditional Euro-western worldview. Furthermore, all creation is sacred, and should not be divided up into different categories such as inanimate versus animate, spiritual versus secular, natural versus supernatural. This should remind us of the previous chapter, where we found that for Staniloae, Gebara, and Cho these divisions also should be removed. Woodley argues that the dualisms that exist in modern Euro-western categories (another element of continuity) have led to a view of the world in which humanity is placed at the “top” or the “center” and the natural world only exists for human utilitarian purposes. Woodley defines dualism as being “a way of perceiving reality within a framework of two opposing rudiments such as spirit and flesh, mind and body, mind and matter, or good and evil.” This dualism can be traced from “Plato and Aristotle” to “Descartes and Francis Bacon.” For theology, this Greek dualism has prompted Western

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523 Ibid., 36.  
524 Ibid., 39-40.  
525 Ibid., 47.  
526 Ibid., 48.  
527 Ibid., 50-51.  
528 Ibid., 101.  
529 Ibid., 104.
theologians “to extrinsically categorize and dissect concepts, and define objects by their attributes and separate them accordingly,” which has been the “dominating influence in Western doctrinal development.” Woodley argues that these dualisms are everywhere within Western culture and society and naturally the Christian tradition is also guilty of perpetuating the categorization of reality. He believes that this these dualisms have also led to Western Christians ignoring their ecological responsibilities, stressing orthodoxy over orthopraxis, and has assisted the colonialist enterprise. Woodley stresses that the primary problem with the dualistic framework is that it effectively divorces “being” and “doing.” That there is a fundamental disconnect between “what one believes” and “what one does.”

In contrast, Woodley argues that the indigenous, or holistic worldview, is one in which all of creation, or the material world, is considered to be good and that salvation itself is a reality that “implies the restoration of our whole selves to God and the whole of creation, including our social and physical selves.” We can see here that Woodley’s lack of dualism leads him to understand humanity to be intertwined with the natural world. Much like Staniloae, there is no way to abstract humanity from nature. Humanity’s salvation is bound up with the world’s. This allows him to place value on all created things and also leads to a less anthropocentric view of reality. For him, the problem with much of the Euro-western worldview is it sees nature as something “external” to humanity. Woodley writes:

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531 Ibid., 102.
532 Ibid., 102-103.
533 Ibid., 106.
534 Ibid., 102.
Modern, Euro-western, hierarchical worldviews set humanity up, over and above the rest of creation. In such a view it makes no sense to become intimate with creation…To the Euro-western mind nature is to be feared, conquered, killed, or utilized for its material value; it is never to be viewed as intimately related to us or sacred…The western view of creation has proven to be pitifully anthropocentric and utilitarian. Christianity has simply followed suit.535

We would do well to notice how closely this parallels Gebara’s and Staniloae’s criticisms of the “Western worldview.” There appears to be a pervasive understanding that the “West” is fragmented by dualism, ultimately attributable to Greek metaphysics.536

This emphasis on holism leads Woodley to a more de-anthropocentric view of creation. Woodley suggests that we would do well to remember that creation was not primarily created only for humanity, but that God takes enjoyment in other beings of creation as well.537 While Woodley desires to move away from anthropocentrism, he does believe that humanity possesses an “important place” in creation as both a “protector” and “restorer” of the created world.538 Woodley even extends Jesus’ act of redemption to not only humanity but to all of creation. Whereas many would place primary importance on Jesus’ humanity as the focal point of the Incarnation, Woodley places the primary importance on the material component of the Incarnation (these two are bound up together). This allows him to understand salvation as being completely all-encompassing. This prompts us to remember the previous chapter where both Cho and Gebara are also advocating for an all-encompassing salvation that sees humanity’s salvation as being bound up with the world.

535 Ibid., 52-53.
536 Interestingly, Woodley admits that there exists “Similarities to indigenous ways of thinking can be found in some strands of pre-Enlightenment European theology, especially in Eastern Orthodoxy” (104).
537 Ibid., 53.
538 Ibid., 54.
Naturally what undergirds Woodley’s theology is the principle of reciprocity which he understands to be the fundamental to all of life.

**Reciprocity: The General Principle of the Universe**

As we have seen already, Woodley emphasizes both interrelatedness and reciprocity as foundational principles. Woodley writes, “Reciprocity is the natural law of the universe. For humans to maintain harmony, we must reflect the reciprocity in the created order. There is a fluidity between understanding reciprocity between human beings and reciprocity of all other parts of creation.”\(^{539}\) By not emulating this reciprocity, this creates “disharmony.” Woodley rejects a traditional understanding of “human depravity” and opts for the notion of “disequilibrium.” In this view, sin is not necessarily “inherited” or “permanent.” And alleviating sin requires practical steps toward “restoring harmonious relationships in all of creation, rather than simply obtaining human forgiveness.”\(^{540}\) This disharmony can also cause disease and illness. Woodley uses the example of what Native Americans do in the case of illness. He explains that a “medicine person” will go to the home of the sick person in order to retrieve a “fuller picture” of one’s life. He writes that the “medicine person asks not only about the symptoms but also about dreams, feelings, and strains in relationships that have occurred lately in that person’s life.”\(^{541}\) Here we see another example of the holism Woodley is describing. Much like David Yonggi Cho in our previous chapter, disease is not confined to a purely physical problem, but it is the symptom of a deeper disharmony in one’s life.

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\(^{539}\) Ibid., 66.  
\(^{540}\) Ibid., 69.  
\(^{541}\) Ibid., 91.
**The Emphasis of Space over Time**

Woodley believes that the West tends to place more value on *time* rather than *space.* He argues that an emphasis on space, or place, lends itself more toward a “creation-based spirituality.” He explains that in modern America, time appears to be “event oriented.” It is also commodified to a certain extent. He gives an example of the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving, both are holidays that are celebrated irrespective of geographical location. He labels this kind of event as being a “pseudo-place from which they draw their identity.” He contrasts this with Native Americans who are bound to a **real place.** Referencing Vine Deloria Jr., Woodley explains that “place-oriented peoples” directly connect their truth to their specific context. Whereas time-oriented peoples abstract their truth which lends itself to the universal application regardless of location. It is partly because of this orientation that the land “can be stolen.” In contrast, “Indian time” is “regulated by place, relationship, and the experience of now, not by a clock.” Woodley then connects this idea to the importance of the past for Native Americans. He writes, “Among North American Native peoples, our past is forever in the present, especially when it comes to place.” The past is directly connected to this idea of place.

The emphasis on place is extremely important and is not without scriptural support. Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann’s explores the topics of “land” and “place” in his book *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith.* It is here that I would like to briefly...
dialogue with Brueggemann as his work is frequently cited in theologies of the land. Brueggemann utilizes gift-language to speak about the land as a “gift,” which also suits our purposes here.

According to Brueggemann, modern industrial society is largely disconnected from the land. What Brueggemann labels “conventional Christianity” largely neglects to speak of the land and only speaks of Yahweh. In contrast, secular humanism only speaks of the land and never of Yahweh.\textsuperscript{548} In the Old Testament narratives, the land is closely associated with identity and cannot be separated from it.\textsuperscript{549} Because of this disconnect, many have come to experience an “agony of rootlessness” in the modern world.\textsuperscript{550}

Brueggemann argues that the land of Israel is to be understood as a gift from Yahweh. He characterizes this as a “pure gift” of “radical grace” that binds the nation of Israel to the giver of the gift. What Brueggemann means by “pure gift” here is a gift given with God’s priority. This gift does not disqualify the receivers’ obligations regarding the gift. Because it is a gift, the land “is not just an object to be taken and occupied.”\textsuperscript{551} The land continuously gives to the people through the resources of shelter, food, and water.\textsuperscript{552} The gift of the land is given with the expectations of obligation, responsibility, and reciprocity. The land is not only a gift but it is also a task. The land “must be managed. Even land given must be taken care of. Those who possess it must take responsibility for it…It must be managed, ordered, and administered. It must be used well, first in order not to lose it, second in order to enhance it.”\textsuperscript{553} Furthermore, the land is a place of remembrance. It is the place where the receivers of the land remember the Giver of the land. Brueggemann identifies the central temptation for Israel is that it will forget the Giver of the land and “settle for how it is and imagine

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{548} Ibid., 52.
\bibitem{549} Ibid., 46-47.
\bibitem{550} Ibid., xiii.
\bibitem{551} Ibid., 48.
\bibitem{552} Ibid., 49.
\bibitem{553} Ibid., 71.
\end{thebibliography}
not only that it was always so but that it will always be so." Israel must always remember itself as living in a gifted existence, and must do so to remain in communion with the giver of the land. Brueggemann uses the sabbath as an example of how this remembering is to take place. The Sabbath serves as a reminder that the land’s purpose is not limited to human needs and that the land possesses its own rights “over against us and even its own existence.” Not recognizing the land as a gift means viewing the land as purely an object to be used and cultivated at its expense. To grasp or take the land is to view the land only for productivity and consumption. Brueggemann implores us to remember that:

...the land is not only gift from God, transcendent Promiser. It is also land in history, land not usurped or simply mastered, but a land with its own history. Therefore this people does not own the land but also belongs to the land. In that way, we are warned about presuming upon it, upon controlling it in scientific and rational ways, so that its own claim, indeed its own voice, is not heard or disregarded.

Brueggemann sees the land not only as a gift but in some ways possessing rights and agency over and against humanity. Brueggemann argues that certain forms of Christianity may need a corrective in focusing less on the “transcendent Promiser” and more on the responsibility for the gift of the land. To focus solely on the Giver is to forget the gift itself and the embodied existence of living in the land. Remembering the land and Yahweh must maintain a kind of equilibrium. Brueggemann concludes with the expectation of the eschatological land that is coming. Yahweh promises a land where “there is no anxiety, no sorrow (John 16:20). There is only trust in the promise of a land of rest and joy. But surely such a gift is a scandal.”

554 Ibid., 54.
555 Ibid., 63-64.
556 Ibid., 192.
557 Ibid.
558 Ibid., 196.
Brueggemann’s exploration of the importance of the land and place and its deep connection to the peoples who live there finds strong resonance to the concerns of Woodley and other Native American theologians. The land is important because it houses both the living and the dead as well as nonhuman creation. It has a “voice” of its own and is foundational for the identity of the peoples living there. To take away the land or the peoples of the land is highly destructive and leads to the notion of “displaced peoples.”559 One example of this potential destruction comes from theologian Yohanna Katancho. Katancho believes the geography of Palestine possesses a “theological message.” In the Kairos Document (which Katancho greatly utilizes) it states:

We believe our land has a cosmic mission. In this comprehensiveness, the meaning of promises, of the land, of the election, of the people of God open up to include all of humanity, starting from all the peoples in this land. In the light of the teachings of the Holy Bible, the promise of the land has never been a political program, but rather a prelude to a holistic salvation of the cosmos.560

Katanacho wants to emphasize that the Kairos Document reminds us that God is concerned not only with human beings but with all of creation.561 The stones cry out and share with humanity salvation history. The land is intimately connected with its “masters.” When there is injustice in the land, it suffers, but when the “inhabitants are godly, it flourishes and overflows with blessings.”562 He characterizes the land as being a “fifth gospel” whose “paragraphs are mountains, valleys, seas,

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559 For reflections on displaced peoples see, Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan, Christianitys in Migration: The Global Perspective (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). Marthinus L. Daneel echoes the close relationship between people and the land states, “…the people, the animals, the plants, the entire earth-community — unborn, living, dead…Invasion of the land by foreigners and destruction of its resources for human gain or ‘progress’ make the people living there rootless serfs and aliens. Through internal and external displacement, they lose touch with the dwelling places of their ancestors, hence with their own cultures and histories.” See Marthinus L. Daneel, Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 107.

561 Ibid., Footnote 19, page 54.
562 Ibid., 32.
and plains. Its lines and words are holy sites, ancient walls, caves, seas, and plains." Katanacho constructs a christological understanding of the land whereby Christ is the ultimate owner of the land in his fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises. Therefore, both Jews and Palestinians are gifts from God and both belong to the land.

For Katanacho, the land, its natural features, and holy sites possess revelatory power. It is intimately intertwined with the people who inhabit it as well. The land suffers when injustice reigns supreme. It has a specific history and is the place of those who have come before it. By being displaced, the community suffers and so does the land. Katanacho believes Christ to be the ultimate owner of the land, and all lands. The people of this land represent the cosmic and holistic nature of God’s salvation plan for the entirety of creation. As we can see, Katanacho’s understanding of the land also emphasizes the interconnectedness that Woodley speaks of. Both are also coming from a perspective of a “displaced peoples” who have been cut off from the land to which they are bound. What is most interesting is when we think back to the previous chapter and Cho’s understanding of disease and the human body. The way that human persons act in the land has a correlation to whether or not the land “suffers,” much in the same way that Cho argues that disease in the human body can be attributed to sinfulness and nefarious spiritual forces. The land is directly intertwined with the peoples that live in the land. It is a reminder that we are not disembodied minds that happen to occupy a specific geographic space. But rather the land shapes the people and the people shape the land. In many ways this is what Ivone Gebara’s concept of the “Sacred Body” is also attempting to communicate. Furthermore, the land also is connected to the dead and the people’s past. Part of what roots the people to a specific place is it is the place of their ancestors.

563 Ibid., 56.
564 Ibid., 40.
Much of Woodley’s *Harmony Way* is in reaction to the deficiencies he sees within Euro-western theology. For him, much of Euro-western theology is broken and fragmented due to the dualisms it has inherited from its Greco-Roman heritage. He attempts to construct a theology that is inherently holistic by primarily affirming the interdependent relationships that exist in all of creation. We also saw the importance of place for Woodley. The land is not just a geographic place. The land contains the history of the peoples that have lived there for generations. The people do “not own the land” but also belong “to the land.”\(^{565}\) This understanding of place and the land is often given more attention than to another place: the oceans. As we will see, Winston Halapua’s theology of the ocean finds many resonances with theologies of the land and he will emphasize many of the same points as Woodley.

**Winston Halapua and Theomoana**

Often overlooked, but garnering increasing attention, is the development of *theomoana* theology, which has been important in understanding the relationship humanity possesses with the oceans of the Earth. Cecilie Rubow and Cliff Bird summarize Oceanic theology as, “Contextual theology in Oceania draws on the traditional natural-cultural worldviews and practices, which include notions of interconnectedness, belonging, sharing and reciprocity, respect, and the sacredness of the land-sea-air domain.”\(^{566}\) Notably, Oceanic theology is primarily spatial in its understandings.\(^{567}\) In this section we will be focusing on retired Anglican Bishop Winston Halapua and his small but powerful book, *Waves of God’s Embrace: Sacred Perspectives from the Ocean*.

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\(^{565}\) *Brueggemann, The Land*, 192.


Halapua explains that *theomoana* means “God the Ocean.” The word *moana* “is used to express the world-encompassing, interconnecting nature of God” as well as the God whose “being is ever life-giving, dynamic and embracing.” It is gender-neutral. Halapua believes that *theomoana* offers “gifts to theological thinking.” *Theomoana* expresses the relational aspect of the theological enterprise, and that thinking about God also forces us to think about our relationship to one another and all of creation. Halapua believes that the five oceans provide a deep metaphor for how the Body of Christ should function. Each ocean is diverse and different but each ocean “finds its completion in others.” Reminiscent of Gebara and Woodley, Halapua argues that *theomoana* “intentionally departs from a dualistic approach to theology which is trapped in Gnosticism and Platonic philosophical underpinnings. Such a unjust legacy undermines the glory of God in creation and in culture.” As we have seen before, this charge of dualism is commonplace among our dialogue partners. Unsurprisingly, there is a deep ecological element to *theomoana*. Halapua argues that *theomoana* first and foremost sees God’s creation as a gift to be respected and taken care of rather than abused. Finally, *theomoana* understands the deep interconnectedness of all creation. Halapua writes:

> From the oceans we are freely gifted oxygen, climate, food and interconnectedness. Most of the living species find home within waters of the ocean. *Theomoana* speaks of many and diverse gifts in creation. As one ocean flows into another, so *theomoana* speaks of God’s love, which flows freely and unconditionally, gifting life without ceasing. *Theomoana* puts forward a way of life that is a response to immense and unconditional gifting.

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569 Ibid., 93.
570 Ibid.
571 Ibid., 94.
572 Ibid., 95.
Here Halapua uses gift language to convey his point that humanity and the rest of creation is bound together in a web of reciprocity. We do well to notice that Halapua stresses that *theomoana* offers “a way of life.” In other words, *theomoana* can offer us a way of creatively thinking about how humanity can offer up a return to the “immense and unconditional gifting” of God.

**Moana: A ‘Deep’ Metaphor for Interconnection**

Halapua understands himself to be writing from an oceanic perspective rather than the “landlocked” perspective of much of modern theology. By writing from an oceanic perspective he is able to “write with a deep oceanic sense of interconnectedness with creation, with others and with the mystery of God who calls into being all things.” This interconnectedness is “triune” connecting the ocean, sky, and islands. Halapua begins by describing *moana* as not some “vast empty space” but as the place where one experiences “the presence of gods” and the “spirits of the ancestors.” Halapua believes that the word *moana* is an apt metaphor for his theology and believes it to be able to “reclaim relationships as a gift of creation to be nourished and celebrated.” He explains that *moana* can assist in helping the modern world understand: 1) interconnectedness; 2) the deep mystery of life; 3) diversity; 4) generosity and reciprocity; 5) the need for silence. As we will see in the next chapter, the interconnectedness emphasized by most of our dialogue partners almost always extends to not only the living but the dead. Halapua explains the word *fonua*, which is the Tongan word for “land” and “womb.” He references Celine Hoiore to elucidate the significance of this as one would traditionally bury or throw the umbilical cord into the sea to display the rootedness of a person to their “specific place.” This is reminiscent of the importance of the geographic places explored...

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573 Ibid., 3.  
574 Ibid.  
575 Ibid., 5.  
576 Ibid.  
577 Ibid., 10.  
578 Ibid., 6-7.
above in Woodley and Katanacho. He goes on to creatively reflect on each ocean and explains how each of the oceans depend upon one another and also vary widely. He writes:

Each of the oceans has distinct and fascinating features and yet wonderfully and importantly there is interconnectedness between the diverse dynamics and life of the oceans…Each ocean has its own distinct dynamics and features, not in isolation or competition, but in flowing waves and currents in partnership with other oceans. The waves and currents are instrumental in distributing the various gifts of the five diverse oceans within each of them and beyond ocean boundaries. They also enable the interaction with the sun, the atmosphere and the land.579

This is key for Halapua, as the land, the oceans, and the sky are all deeply interconnected to one another, and so is humanity. Halapua sees that the oceans operate in a relationship of boundless giving and receiving. This theme of gifts and gift-giving displayed above is utilized throughout Halapua’s theology.580

Polopolo: Gift and gift-giving

Before proceeding onto the theme of gifts in Halapua’s theology we must first briefly examine the Polynesian concept of manava.581 Halapua explains that the word manava can be understood as “life and that which nurtures life,” and within the Tongan translation of the Bible, the “breath of God” described in the Genesis narrative is manava. Halapua concludes that through this word we can understand how we are “deeply connected to God, to other human beings and to nature in all its

579 Ibid., 24.
580 Winston Halapua, “Celebrating the Gift of Water,” Anglican Theological Review, 100, no. 1 (2018): 7-12. He writes, “For us, science is God’s gift and theology is God’s gift. We need one another. Economy is God’s gift and other philosophies are God’s gift. The planet and all of creation are God’s gift” (8).
581 Halapua, Waves, 33.
It seems that for Staniloae, Woodley, and Halapua, one cannot bracket off the human from the natural world. They are deeply interconnected and intertwined.

The Tongan word for gift is *polopolo*. Its roots are found in the ancestral tradition of the Oceanic peoples. The core idea of *polopolo* is that the “best” is always offered due to the idea that everything is already given. It is in a sense a “response of grace for grace.” Halapua expounds on this idea:

Our understanding of *polopolo* is connected to our roots and a deep appreciation, conscious or unconscious, that our life and all things around us are gifts. This understanding helps us recognize our responsibility as custodians of the legacy of the past for the sake of the future. To live shaped by the world view of *polopolo* is to live out of abundant generosity.

Here Halapua explains to us that (1) *everything is a gift*; (2) the need for recognition of these gifts; (3) our responsibilities that come with gifts. Furthermore, at every step, Halapua emphasizes the past’s weight upon the present for the future which will be the focus of the next chapter. Halapua goes on to describe the various ways the island nation of Tuvalu is suffering from the abuse of the “gifts of creation” resulting in multiple serious ecological problems. He uses this example as a warning for the rest of the world, that the continued abuse of creation’s gifts possesses “huge consequences — the ocean is robbed of its potential to give life.” From one angle, we can view this in relation to Staniloae’s concept of “taking” the gifts of creation. Halapua gives us a concrete, real example of what this “taking” and “abuse” of the gifts looks like through the example of the island of Tuvalu.

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582 Ibid.
583 Ibid., 34-35.
584 Ibid., 35.
585 Ibid.
586 Ibid., 39.
**Space for Talanoa**

Halapua then details the connection of both space (outer space) and the ocean and how both represent space that “allows both being and becoming.” He then describes the need for “providing space” for diverse dialogue. *Talanoa* is an “Oceanic gift and contribution to the whole quest for more listening and dialogue.” Halapua explains that *Talanoa* is an open, receptive, respectful space that values a diversity of stories and opinions. One of its key characteristics is that *Talanoa* “honors the past, brings the past to the present and enables change in moving to the future.” Halapua goes on to describe the four gifts of *talanoa* as being: 1) space; 2) justice; 3) listening; 4) dialogue. *Talanoa* provides an inclusive space for all. It listens to diverse stories and “no one story has more space and value than any others.” It encourages respectful and intentional listening. And finally, it promotes open dialogue.

“Diversity” and “interconnectedness” could be the two central themes that exist within Halapua’s theology. Like Woodley, Halapua utilizes both his indigenous tradition as well as the experience of the natural world as key sources for reflection in the construction of his *theomoana*. Rubow and Bird note this trend in wider Oceanic theology. They observe that “Amongst contemporary theologians in Oceania, it could be argued therefore that land, sea, and sky are unwritten textual sources that contain ‘readability characteristics’ like written text, which come to the fore as the impacts of the effects of climate change increase.” Halapua is also intensely pragmatic. Throughout his book, he repeatedly refers to concrete problems that are happening within his context of Oceania and potential ways forward toward solving these issues. This appears to be

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587 Ibid., 52.
588 Ibid., 54.
589 Ibid., 58.
590 Ibid., 64.
591 Ibid., 62-64.
592 Rubow and Bird, “Eco-theological Responses to Climate Change in Oceania,” 164.
another reoccurring theme within this project: the identification of present sufferings and evils that need to be worked toward solving. In this case, these problems are ecological and require ecological action. We also see the perceived threat of dualism that Halapua seeks to overcome. The rejection of dualism appears to be one way that Majority World theologies tend to demarcate themselves from Western theology. As we have seen, Woodley believes indigenous worldviews to be more holistic than their Western counterparts. But as we questioned in the previous chapter: Is this really accurate? Is Western Christianity actually beholden to dualism?

In many ways, Halapua’s theology is an exercise in *polopolo*. Halapua sees *theomoana* to be a gift itself given to the rest of the theological community, offering unique insights and contributions to the theological enterprise as a whole. Halapua does not seek to hoard this theology but instead give it to the world. He writes:

> The very construction of the word *theomoana* speaks of God’s care to the whole of creation. It is a theological and ecological approach that challenges the human, arrogant tendency to treat the planet earth and its life with disrespect. *Theomoana* advocates a humility that honors the creation as God’s gift. This is of vital importance at this time when abuse of the gifts of planet earth has been so great that there is now threatening global disaster in the form of climate change.\(^{593}\)

Halapua is hoping to offer up his theology of *theomoana* as an alternative way of seeing the world in hopes that it may assist in alleviating the destruction of the Earth’s oceans. It is an alternative to a “taking” mentality and instead seeks to think of our relationship to the natural world as being one centered on reciprocity respect.

\(^{593}\) Ibid., 36.
Theological Considerations: Panentheism, Revelation, and the Interrelatedness of all things

The Immanent God

The first major theme we can draw on is that of the immanent God. In prioritizing space over time, these theologies tend to emphasize both “God’s presence and immanence.” The question then is not so much when is the Kingdom of God coming, but where is the Kingdom? The Kingdom is usually located to include the natural world where cosmic harmony and equilibrium is of primary concern. Josiah Baker explains that if one were to ask a Native traditionalist to describe their faith, “she would depict a map of locations” in contradistinction to a Christian who would begin to tell a story of past events. Thus, it is the space in which we live, move, and have our being, which is of the primary concern for these theologies. This immediately places concern away from “past” and “future” time and places us in the present.

The questions being asked are what is God doing now, where is God to be found now, and how do I participate in what God is doing in the present? More often than not, the natural world serves as a primary resource for theological reflection in theologies of space. God is present and active in all things. We see this in Katanacho, Halapua, and Woodley’s respective theologies (as

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596 Ibid., 236. Baker notes how this spatial thinking is manifested in four areas: 1) the Kingdom of God; 2) Cosmic Harmony; 3) Liberation Theology; 4) Eschatology. Creation is often seen as closely identified with the Kingdom of God. Many rituals are seen to be restoring peace and harmony to creation in the present space. This also manifests itself in liberation theologies which are concerned with justice for the space in which we live. Finally, the eschaton is not seen as a purely temporal event but it is a “placed” event that will ultimately effect every aspect of the created order and is most relevant for the present time. As stated in Kidwell, Noely and Tinker, *Native American Theology*: “Native time is oriented to the repetition of events…The importance of cycles in nature is paramount in Indian communities” (13).
597 A more cyclical understanding of time also may have an effect on this kind of thinking. What has happened will happen again and again as it is within the natural world. Thus, there is less concern with the future as the future is collapsed into the past as something that has already happened and will happen again and again.
598 We can also think of Leonardo Boff’s statement that, “The human being is that one capable of hearing the thundering of galaxies and supernovas, as well as picking up the song of the bird in the forest, or the soft breathing of a newborn child, and rising up to the *Spiritus Creator*…Everything is or can be sacramental” in Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the*
well as Gebara and Cho). Halapua repeatedly utilizes the ocean as a way of thinking not only about God but of humanity. The diversity of the oceans, the deep mystery, the waves, all contribute to an understanding that God is near and the natural world is the primary medium through which one can experience God’s presence.

But this is not entirely foreign to Staniloae either. While Staniloae always maintains God’s transcendence through the the essence/energies distinction, he is also able to radically affirm God’s immanence in God’s energies. And as we have seen in Staniloae’s theology, the world itself is the medium through which God reveals Godself to us and all things contain the _logoi_. There definitely exists a _sensus divinitas_ in both Halapua and Woodley. Tinker believes that the “particular gift of Native American peoples (and of other indigenous peoples) is an immediate awareness and experience of the sacredness and interdependence of all creation.”

Perhaps it is the _sensus divinitas_ of many of our dialogue partners that remind the Post-Enlightenment Western world of an immanent God in the world, where the vision of the world is not one of a closed off machine able to function on its own but as absolutely filled with God’s presence.

As we saw with Gebara in the previous chapter, a panentheistic understanding of God’s relationship to the world appears to be the preferred one here even if it is not always explicitly affirmed. Staniloae’s understanding of the essence/energies distinction can also be understood to be a form of panentheism as well. While metaphysically it is not always explained how God relates to the world in these theologies, it is most definitely a common thread that God is understood to be

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George E. Tinker, “Integrity of Creation,” 528.

See McFarland, _The Word Made Flesh: A Theology of the Incarnation_, 80. He writes: “Because a God who creates from nothing sustains every creature in existence in every aspect of its existence at every moment of its existence, God is always already maximally present everywhere in creation, since in God’s absence nothing created could exist at all.”

In _Mariana_, Justo L. González takes a more classically theistic approach and understands God to be Wholly Other than Creation, see pages 118-119.
intimately present within all of creation, and that the natural world is essential to experiencing and knowing God.

**Natural Revelation**

Due to this stress on God’s immanence, it is unsurprising to find that nature is one of the primary ways God reveals Godself. As we have seen with both Halapua and Woodley, there is a strong revelatory value attached to both their respective indigenous traditions as well as the experience of the natural world itself. Halapua regularly draws upon various Oceanic traditions in his theological reflections. He finds substantial revelatory value in the indigenous traditions. We can think back to Woodley’s terms such as “God’s blueprint” and the “primal vision” used to describe this. Woodley describes the Native American “Harmony Way” as being the “Creator’s original instruction for the way in which all societies should be ordered, and for how all life on this planet should be lived.”

There exists this idea that all cultures and societies have had access to this “blueprint” from the beginning and therefore are useful for theological reflection. There also exists an implicit concern that by bracketing off the effectiveness of natural revelation, this can be used to ultimately bracket off indigenous cultures, and what is ultimately left is only “Western” theology.

These ideas are not completely foreign to Staniloae. As observed above, Staniloae possesses a strong theology of natural revelation through his utilization of the *logoi*. Furthermore, Staniloae’s understanding of the “natural priesthood” of all humans parallels the idea of a “Harmony Way” or “primal vision.” All three of our dialogue partners possess a strong notion of natural revelation and the ability for humanity to grasp and interpret natural revelation. This does beg the question if these

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602 This kind of thinking has become highly suspect among some portions of Protestantism. The most well known being Karl Barth’s rejection of natural theology. While I disagree with Barth in his insistence that human beings cannot perceive natural revelation, I do think Barth’s warnings should always be present in the background when discussing natural revelation.

theologians are overly optimistic in their assumptions regarding the human ability to interpret God’s natural revelation. Integral to Staniloae’s hamartiology is the need for humans to purge themselves of the various “passions” in order to properly perceive the logoi of creation. One does wonder if a similar hamartiology needs to be developed among Majority World theologians that involves a strong theology of discernment.

**The Interconnectedness of All Creation**

As Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker explain, “The American Indian notion of reciprocity is fundamental to all human participation in the world-balancing and maintaining harmony. Reciprocity involves first of all an understanding that the cosmos is sacred and alive.” All of creation is interdependent and connected. As we have seen with Woodley and Halapua, as well as Gebara, the idea that all things are interconnected and exist in reciprocal relationships is integral to each of their respective theologies. Staniloae can also be seen to affirm an interconnectedness of all things as seen through his understanding of *I-Thou-Nature*. Humanity’s deification is directly bound up with the world’s spiritualization and vice versa. This brings us to an important point: the interconnectedness of all of creation means that humanity’s salvation is bound up with the world’s salvation. For Staniloae as well as for the theologies engaged with in this project, there is a real sense that there is no salvation of humanity without the world, and there is no salvation of the world without humanity.

This interconnectedness enables these theologies to enlarge the role nonhuman creation plays. Woodley outright rejects the designation of “inanimate” as being a “Euro-western” concept.

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605 This is echoed in theologian Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator’s book *Religion and Faith in Africa: Confessions of An Animist* he describes one of the core themes within “African religion” is the idea that “the human person and the cosmos have a vital connection and that both influence and depend on each other.” See, Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa: Confessions of An Animist* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 110.
and is a result of the Euro-western divorce from the natural world.\textsuperscript{606} The nonhuman is often personified and given subjective characteristics such as the ability to communicate with humanity. Nonhuman creation is treated with dignity and respect and there exists a recognition that all facets of creation are bound up with one another. This is most personified in both Woodley and Halapua’s insistence that the land or the oceans can teach humanity something. For Halapua specifically, the oceans teach us about our interconnectedness and the need for us to give and share with one another. This shifts the perspective from seeing nonhuman creation as possessing an element of subjectivity rather than objects allows for a real reciprocity to exist in these relationships. It then makes more sense to speak of a “gift-giving” relationship with nonhuman creation. The emphasis on interconnectedness extends itself to the dead which will be covered in the next chapter.

Through the doctrine of the \textit{logoi}, Staniloae also is able to grant a kind of subjectivity to all things as every moment becomes a moment of divine-human dialogue. As Berger repeatedly stresses, for Staniloae, “No aspect of reality is without its role in the divine-human dialogue. The goal is always person, the means, nature.”\textsuperscript{607} Thus, our relationship with nature is always an opportunity for a subjective encounter with God.

\textit{Cosmic Christianity: The Place of Humanity}

This chapter has observed that the question of humanity’s place within the created order is reevaluated. Woodley and Halapua both opt for a less anthropocentric view of humanity’s place in creation while still retaining a kind of special place for humankind (as does Gebara). Staniloae places humanity at the center of creation in a mediatorial role. Because he understands humanity’s deification as bound up with the world’s, he naturally possesses a less anthropocentric view of

\textsuperscript{606} Woodley, \textit{Shalom}, 48. He writes, “Jesus, like so many in his day, was comfortable in a constant conversation with natural creation. He was not estranged from creation in the way most of us in the western world are today” (48).

\textsuperscript{607} Berger, “Toward a Theological Gnoseology,” 532.
creation while simultaneously affirming the uniqueness and importance of humanity. All three of them do not necessarily denigrate humanity’s unique role in the wider cosmos, but rather they elevate the natural world to a higher place within the created order. It appears that they do not elevate humanity over and above the natural world. They instead see humanity’s unique place in creation primarily as occupying a role of responsibility toward the rest of creation. Both are seen to be bound up with one another and dependent on each other. This elevation of the status of the natural world is not hard to see given the attachment of subjective characteristics to nonhuman creation. Nonhuman creation is to be seen as possessing a dignity and integrity in its own right. As we have seen, often familial terms are used to promote a more egalitarian relationship between humanity and nonhuman creation. Instead of a view of the created order where humanity exists at the apex and is over and above all of creation, there is a sense of cosmic community that is defined by mutuality and reciprocity. When the members of the cosmic community are working together, both balance and harmony are achieved. Here we have an elevation of nonhuman creation and a humbling of humanity. The notion of service and responsibility undergird these theologies as well. It is not a service necessarily “from above” in a hierarchical sense, but it is service from a place of mutual interdependence. As Woodley writes:

The idea that all people and things are related to each other includes all of humanity. The idea opens us to the possibility of once again becoming the family we already are. By realizing the connectedness of humankind to all animal life, we become aware of new possibilities for learning and maintaining a concern

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608 Leonardo Boff states: “Now we are returning to the vast planetary and cosmic community. We are fascinated by the green forest, we pause before the majesty of the mountains, we are awed by the star-filled sky, and we admire the vitality of the animals” Boff, Cry of the Earth, 40.
for the preservation of all living things. A worldview based on reciprocity and familial relatedness also has
tremendous ecological implications.69

Family, cosmic community, reciprocity, and interdependence all serve to further the egalitarian
nature of our relationship with the created order. Humans serve creation not from a place of
superiority but because it is indebted to the rest of creation, just as in some respects creation is
indebted to humanity in certain ways. Cyclically, gift-exchange occurs among all creatures who, as a
cosmic family, provide for one another and depend on one another. While not all eco-oriented
theologies adopt this egalitarian understanding (instead opting for a more classical stewardship
approach), the key takeaways are: (1) A reemphasis on the value and integrity of nonhuman creation;
(2) Humanity’s responsibility regarding nonhuman creation; (3) An understanding that every aspect
of the cosmos participates in salvation. We can affirm that the three theologies dialogued with in this
chapter possess a version of cosmic salvation.

The Gift of Space

It is here that I will conclude with placing the above insights while reflecting on the gift of space.
Speaking abstractly, we can understand the gift of space as directly related to the gift of matter. If
the gift of matter in one sense constitutes the “makeup” of the gift, then following Staniloae, the gift
of space is the distance between the two subjects participating in the gift exchange. Without space,
or distance, individuals would be collapsed into each other. But space allows for communion to exist
while individuality can be maintained. As we have seen repeatedly, the gift of space can be used for
good or for ill. It can be used to increase the distance between subjects, or it can be used to draw
subjects closer in communion with one another. In this chapter in particular, we examined

69Woodley, Shalom, 81.
humanity’s relationship with the natural world as well as its place in the cosmos. In dialogue with Staniloae, Woodley, Halapua, and others, we can see that the entirety of the natural world is involved and is integral for God’s plan of redemption. Salvation cannot be bracketed off from the natural order, and human salvation and nonhuman salvation are interdependent. By correctly recognizing all of the natural world as a gift we can then see our responsibilities toward the natural world. Much like how Woodley argues that Native American peoples are “placed-oriented,” we can think of humanity at large in this way as well. Humanity is directly tied to a “place” and that “place” is planet Earth.

Staniloae speaks of the “natural priesthood,” meaning that humanity is tasked with stewarding and spiritualizing all of creation. In parallel fashion, both Tinker and Halapua show how it is we can enact this responsibility. To take care of the lands and oceans is to participate in communion with God as well as with nonhuman creation. Furthermore, it reminds us that nonhuman creation is not only a gift to humanity from God, but it offers gifts itself. For example, rivers and streams give us water to drink. In return, humans do well to protect these rivers and streams. Too often, we have adopted an attitude of simply “taking” from them and treating these places as though their only value is satisfying human need. In this paradigm, we can theorize that a “return gift” to God, as well as to the natural world, is one that cultivates the environment around us and attempts to find the best ways to live in harmony and peace with the natural world where both human flourishing and nonhuman flourishing are possible.

All of the created order exists in an interdependent and reciprocal relationship. It is here that a constant giving-receiving-returning takes place. But as we will see in the next chapter, this interdependent gift exchange is not limited to only the living, but also extends to the dead.
Chapter 6: The Gift of Time - Saints, Ancestors, and the Past

Introduction: A Disney Interlude - Coco

In 2017 Pixar released the film *Coco* which tracks a young boy’s journey to the realm of the dead during the Mexican holiday *Dia de la Muertos* (the day of the dead). In the movie, Coco must assist Hector in taking his photo back to the realm of the living so that he could be remembered by a family member. It is explained in the film that if no one alive remembers you, one dies a “final death” and disappears. The film thematically centers around memory and remembering those who have died, as well as the continued connection the living have with the dead. This film is a beautiful example of what this chapter seeks to describe: those who are presently alive and their relationship with the past and the deceased. As we will see, Staniloae, John Mbiti, and Simon Chan place a high premium on our relationship with the past and those who have died. In many ways, we can imagine that the past “gifts” us with our present, and in return, we are obligated to remember the past and those who have gone before us. Like the previous chapters, I will explore more generally what Staniloae states about time as an abstract concept before looking at both his doctrine of the communion of the saints and his understanding of Church tradition as a dialogue with the past. After this, I will look at the ideas of time along with theological reflections on the ancestors in both John Mbiti and Simon Chan’s theology. We will find that the interdependence of all things spoken about in the previous chapters does not confine itself to the living, but extends itself to the dead.

Dumitru Staniloae and Time

Much like space, time for Staniloae is one of the “means” of deification. This means that for Staniloae, time is one of the realities God uses to deify creation. Staniloae writes, “God creates the world and time, and he remains in connection with the world through his will for the sake of dialogue with conscious beings whom he wishes to lead into full communion with himself. To this end the world was made so that humans could make use of it in their growth into communion with
Berger describes Staniloae’s concept of time as, “Our response to God’s love introduces time. More specifically, time is the distance between the self-offering in love of the one ‘I’ to another. Time represents spiritual distance between created persons and God, between the offer of God’s love and His expectant waiting for a response.” We can understand this to mean that if there was no freedom given to the creature and it was already in communion with God, no interval would be needed. But because God respects the creature’s freedom, the interval is created (time). As stated in the previous chapter, both space and time are closely interrelated in Staniloae’s thought. If space is the *distance* between God and creatures, then time could be considered the *duration* that exists between God and creatures.

Staniloae bases his conception of time in the life of the Trinity. Within the life of the Trinity, Staniloae believes there to be a kind of motion between the members of the Godhead. Staniloae writes: “Eternity is life and life is motion: not an identical motion, however, going around in a circle…But it is a motion above all motion. Karl Barth has rightly said: ‘the pure *immobile* is — death. If, then, the pure *immobile* is god, death is god.” This motion is perechoresic in nature. Thus, within the life of the Trinity there exists “perfect communion between inexhaustible subjects and in the reciprocal interiority of their infinity.” God is or has “true eternity” due to his being “perfect communion of supreme persons beyond all limitations.” This is the basis of time. Time is not something to be juxtaposed against eternity, nor is it a “falling away” from eternity unfolding into

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613 For more on Staniloae’s use of *perechoresis* see, Danut Manastireanu, “The Place of Trinitarian Perichoresis in the Dogmatic Theology of Fr Dumitru Staniloae,” *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 10, no. 2 (2019): 149-168. Manastireanu argues that while Staniloae rarely utilizes the term, it is implied through different vocabulary such as “intersubjectivity.”
615 Ibid., 153.
Eternity is to primarily be seen as a “dialogue of eternal perfect love between subjects who are perfectly interior one to the other.” Eternity then acts as time’s foundation as it is both “before” and “after” time. Eternity is something “other” than time. It is only with this understanding of eternity could a world be created to actually “participate in his eternity.” It is in this perfect dialogue of love between the members of the Godhead that loving relationships with temporal beings are able to exist. This is the ultimate telos of the created world: for the temporal to participate in eternity. This is where Staniloae introduces the Maximean understanding of motion toward God instead of the Origenist conception of movement “away” from God resulting from the Fall. Movement is a “positive necessity” of creation to move toward God where rest in God’s eternity is found. We should remember that Staniloae believes the ultimate goal of all of creation has always and will always be communion with God. The Fall of humanity did not change this ultimate purpose. And it is precisely through movement that creatures can overcome the duration that exists between them and God.

**Time and Deification: Stretching out toward the Future**

Motion towards God is also produced through human work. As we have seen throughout this thesis, Staniloae believes that one can move toward God or further away from God based upon one’s willingness to cooperate with God. Staniloae stresses that, “Man’s love is only a response to this offer and it could not occur if this offer did not exist — an offer which is simultaneously a power given to man to respond to God.” The offer of salvation is both the grace and power of God to enable creatures to effectively respond to God. Staniloae argues that, “eternity is thus as

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616 Ibid.
617 Ibid.
618 Ibid., 154.
620 Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. 1, 156.
much as in time as it is above time,” and God awaits creatures to use the “ladder of time” that has been given by eternity to either ascend toward eternity or away from it into self-isolation. Staniloae writes:

> For God, time means the duration of the expectant waiting between his knocking on the door and our act of opening it. He does not force his entrance into the hearts of men. Time in this sense implies both the freedom and the respect accorded by God to conscious creatures. Union with God in love cannot come about without the free response of man to the offer of his love. But God, expectantly waiting, experiences time without forgetting or stepping outside his own eternity, while we, when we do not hear his voice, experience a time that has no consciousness of eternity.

Here, Staniloae understands time to be rooted in the free choice of God to respect the freedom of his creatures, and in doing this he waits for them patiently. Time is the interval where creatures are freely able to move toward eternity or away from it. Citing Maximus, Staniloae believes time is not to be related to creatures externally, but time actually functions as a “condition” of the “creatures ascent.” Through God’s energies God is able to engage with temporal creatures without compromising his transcendence. It is through these energies that “God experiences together with us the expectant waiting (and hence time) on the plane of his energies and of his relations with us.”

Time also carries with it change. Staniloae believes that we are perpetually stretching out towards the future. To stop moving in the interval of time is to die. Staniloae describes this interval

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621 Ibid., 157-158.
622 Ibid., 160.
623 Ibid., 157.
624 Ibid., 163.
625 Ibid., 159.
as being marked by the Cross of Christ that is “situated within each moment.”\textsuperscript{626} It is by Christ’s work that he helps creatures transcend the interval of time that “separates us from full communion with God.”\textsuperscript{627}

Ultimately, time ends in what Staniloae terms “two eternities.” Time ends either in “the eternity of perfect communion” which is characterized by a “movement that transcends all motion,” or an “eternity of solipsism there is the impossibility of any movement and hence of any freedom.”\textsuperscript{628} Staniloae summarizes his view of time as thus:

Eternity is in solidarity with time without being confused with it. Eternity is the origin of time and its prospect; it is the force moving time forward towards itself. At the end, eternity will overwhelm time and confer upon it its own quality. Then time will no longer exist (cf. Rev 10.6), for we will possess nothing but love.\textsuperscript{629}

Eternity is thus both “before” and “after” time. Time is the interval of duration that exists as a means of deification. This means that it is the period a creature has to either cooperate with a patient God and move toward an eternity of perfect communion, or towards one of self-isolation. This “double mobility” reserves the utmost respect God has for creaturely freedom. What we will see is this mobility not only extends to those who are alive in the present but also includes those who have died.

\textsuperscript{626} Ibid., 163.
\textsuperscript{627} Ibid., 169.
\textsuperscript{628} Ibid., 164.
\textsuperscript{629} Ibid., 171.
Staniloae and the Past

Staniloae’s understanding of time places a heavy emphasis on the present as stretched out towards the future, where time reaches its apex. As we have observed, time and space can act as means of deification, where one can accept God’s perpetual invitation for communion with Him, or, one can choose an eternity of self-isolation. While there is a heavy focus on the future in Staniloae, the past also occupies a very important role in Staniloae’s theology. In this next section, we will look at two particular ways Staniloae reflects on the past: 1) the communion of saints; 2) dialogue with the past for theological reflection.

Sanctorum Communio and the Afterlife

It is important from the outset to note that for Staniloae there exists a certain kind of “fluidity” of the soul’s state after death. This fluidity exists because “freedom preserves its role because love preserves its role.” Staniloae believes that there is a possibility that “those in paradise can help those on earth and those in hell; many souls in hell can be liberated through the prayers of the saints and of those on earth…” Staniloae goes on to say that the state of one’s soul is not completely fixed by individual judgment at death. It is not until the “universal judgment” that one’s eternal destiny is fixed. Staniloae appears to be saying that even those who have died in some sense remain in the interval of time until the Final Judgment where ones destiny becomes final. Staniloae juxtaposes this with the “juridical-objectified” and “motionless fixity” of the way “Western” theology characterizes the state of souls. He believes that Orthodoxy provides a “personal, spiritual, and dynamic-communal relationship between God and man, and thus between those on earth and all who have departed this life.” These statements also affirm the preceding chapters in that

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630 Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. 6, 83.
631 Ibid.
632 Ibid.
633 Ibid.
Staniloae’s understanding of the human person is one who is at every moment able to move toward or away from God and others. Death does end this capability for movement until the Final Judgement. Furthermore, Staniloae believes that death does not end one’s relationship with the living and vice versa. Communication still exists between the “living” and “departed” through prayer and “one’s action on behalf of another.”\textsuperscript{634} This will become a strong point of connection later on when we see how both Mbiti and Chan also emphasize similar ideas as they also affirm both an intermediate state where movement toward or away from God is possible.

The “departed believers,” as Staniloae calls them, go on to contemplate God after death and enter into a deeper union, greater likeness, and an “advanced deification.”\textsuperscript{635} Once again, those who have departed do not exist in a “static” state, but rather are continually “partaking of these energies…but they will never come to fully comprehend them or grow tired of the Godhead, nor will they be bored by experiencing the Godhead in a monotonous way.”\textsuperscript{636} We can see here Staniloae’s usage of the Palamite distinction to imagine an eternal life that is characterized by one drawing ever closer to God forever because of the infinite nature of God’s energies. The saints direct their attention toward the living and desire to assist those that still remain on Earth. Even though they have died, the saints still play a role in the lives of the living:

But the love of the righteous among themselves must also be directed toward those on earth, with whom they are to a certain degree recapitulated together in Christ, that is, together awash in his love. And love toward those who need help consists in helping them. As a result the saints help those on earth to overcome their difficulties, and they especially help them in their need for salvation.\textsuperscript{637}

\textsuperscript{634} Ibid., 96.
\textsuperscript{635} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{636} Ibid., 85.
\textsuperscript{637} Ibid., 86.
Staniloae believes that it is the duty of Christians to both venerate the saints and ask them for their assistance and prayers. This veneration of the saints is ultimately directed at Christ who was the means of their sainthood.\textsuperscript{638} Staniloae writes, “We honor them in order to praise Christ, whose work has proved its efficacy through its fruitfulness in them; we honor them by honoring the criterion according to which are supposed to act.”\textsuperscript{639} Staniloae accuses Protestantism, in its rejection of veneration, of dismissing Christ’s ability to actually effect change in a human person while they are alive on Earth. He writes: “By refusing to honor the saints, the Protestant world manifests a total disbelief that the human person is able to make Christ’s work fruitful and visible, a disbelief that it is everyone’s duty to cooperate with Christ so that His work may bear fruit in them.”\textsuperscript{640} It seems that Staniloae sees Protestant theological anthropology as possessing a “low” view of the capability of the human person. He goes on to say that Protestantism paints a picture of God acting on human persons as “objects,” unable to respond to cooperate, and that “the total devaluation of the human person, as God’s creature, does not reflect upon God as well.”\textsuperscript{641} This displays Staniloae’s optimism that the human person can cooperate with God. The choice is always there, whether in this life or even the next. However, one’s choices in the present life can harden a person to respond to calls for communion. As we have seen previously, every choice for Staniloae can harden or soften the human person toward God and others.

Staniloae cautions his readers to see that there exists an ambiguity about who among the dead pray for the living, or if they need our prayers.\textsuperscript{642} As the living, we must adopt an agnostic stance toward who among the dead who need our prayers, and who among the dead is praying for us. Staniloae goes on to speak of the various gradations of hell and paradise. The lowest regions of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[638] Ibid., 86-87.
\item[639] Ibid., 88.
\item[640] Ibid., 88.
\item[641] Ibid., 88-89.
\item[642] Ibid., 93.
\end{footnotes}
hell are where the “worst sinners are” and the highest regions of paradise where the saints exist.643 Undergirding Staniloae’s understanding of these gradations, and the ability for movement out of hell, is that the decisions made in the present life have eternal consequences. In speaking on the Universal Judgment, Staniloae writes:

Thus the last judgment will also be a supreme revelation of the divine plan of history, of the contribution that human persons brought to its realization or obstruction. This will show that the human person also had a responsibility for creation’s unfolding after him in time, not only for his immediate neighbors. Each person’s good or bad example had repercussions upon the whole world. But this will show that each person also had an obligation to be directly engaged, according to his potential, in the world’s historical life; he was obliged to sustain, for example, the saving faith or the ideas of justice and of brotherhood among human beings.644

Here we can see on display Staniloae’s strong understanding of human freedom and responsibility which has been repeatedly noted throughout this project. We should remember that every decision and every moment is a dialogue with God. What is more, these moments have eternal implications. For instance, in one case Staniloae describes those who have gone to hell “not completely lacking faith in Christ, or not hostile to Him” as well as “did not commit acts that damaged the life and salvation of others” can, with the assistance of the living, “reenter communion.”645 Staniloae stresses the need for prayer. By praying for another, Staniloae sees this as exercising responsibility for the

643 Ibid., 94.
644 Ibid., 190.
645 Ibid., 94. Staniloae lists the sins that damage life and salvation as being: homicide, abortion, sex outside marriage, depriving others of basic needs, examples, encouragement, teaching, and violent force. Staniloae does say that one can repent of these sins before death in order to establish communion with Christ.
other and in doing so may even open them up for communion. This act should not cease because someone has died. Indeed, Staniloae writes:

The believers continue to also feel responsible for their brethren who have departed this life. They experience their dialogical relationship with them too. They cannot erase them from their memory or from their prayer list, but only move them from the ranks of the living to the ranks of the departed. In this responsibility toward them is reflected the will of God, who wants to keep them connected; and through this relationship He wants to pour His love upon those who departed in the faith, through the love of the living for them.

Staniloae believes we are obligated not to forget the dead just because they have died. Staniloae affirms that God desires to save all of humanity and this is why he refuses “to forget the dead and also causes the living to not forget them.” Death does not cut off the departed from having a relationship with the living. For Staniloae, there exists the possibility of communion between the dead and the living through prayer and supplication. He argues that when one prays to God to “remember the deceased,” God takes into consideration both our and the deceased’s response so that “His concern may become most effective.” Again, cooperation between subjects is absolutely vital here. It is not only through prayers but through good works that we assist those who have departed. The deceased benefit from our good works because when we “ask others to remember them and when we perform works of mercy on their behalf, they themselves in a way ask for God’s remembrance through us and press us to perform these works.” In some way, the deceased

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646 Ibid., 95.
647 Ibid., 98.
648 Ibid., 99. However, while Staniloae does affirm God’s desire for all to be saved he simultaneously affirms that not all will be, in fact, saved due to human freedom. Those that freely choose to insulate themselves from communion will find that they have an “incapacity for dialogue” (191).
649 Ibid., 100.
650 Ibid., 101.
participate through the living in their good works. There is a reciprocal exchange where the living, in
doing a “good work” on behalf of another draws in others to the remembrance of the departed who
is also beckoning and assisting in these good works to begin with. We will come to see below that
the Japanese Indigenous Church Movements (JICM) analyzed by Simon Chan have similar views in
their practice of the evangelization of the dead. As stated earlier, it is not only we who remember the
dead, but God remembers them:

God’s remembrance has the power to keep spiritually alive unto the ages of ages those who respond to
this remembrance. We do not have this power because as the moment of their separation from us
becomes more distant, so does their remembrance weaken in us, as does our power to keep them in a
relationship with us and therefore alive. In addition to this, after two or three generations no one
remembers most of the deceased. Only for and through God do they always remain present and therefore
alive, because for God there is no past. 651

Fortunately, God is the one who remembers those who have died and keeps them alive in his
memory. As we will see with both Mbiti and Chan, their respective indigenous traditions place a
high emphasis on the memory of the living toward the dead. One common thread is the belief that
once all those who knew the deceased have died, then this person dies a type of “final death” as the
movie Coco eloquently illustrates. The memory of the living community is of vital importance.
Indeed, it is still important in Staniloae’s theology, but God’s memory is ultimately what keeps them
alive. In a certain sense the past can be understood to be collapsed into the present in this way.
Because God remembers those who have passed on, they are here, alive in the present united to us
by our union with Christ displayed in the partaking of the sacraments. As discussed in the previous
chapter, one prominent thematic thread was the interconnectedness of all things. The deceased are

651 Ibid.

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also included in this interconnected web. Within this framework, the dead need the living, and the living need the dead. The living are indebted to the deceased because the deceased provide us with our present. The deceased need to living to remember them. Death does not remove a person from the reciprocal relationships that undergird all of creation. For Staniloae, the deceased depend upon the living for remembrance through prayer and good works. While the living depend upon the dead for their origins and assistance in carrying out good works and ultimately moving forward in their journey of deification. There is another form of dialogue with the past that I believe is important to highlight, and that is the dialogue with the past in terms of the nature of theological reflection.

**Dumitru Staniloae’s Theological Dialogue with the Past: The Neo-Patristic Synthesis**

In regards to the theological enterprise, theology must be in continual dialogue with those who have come before us. As Staniloae writes, “Here we see the importance of the teachings of past generations, of dialogue between human beings, of the experiences on which these are based, and of the reflections made by each individual.” Church tradition naturally occupies a central place in Staniloae’s theological methodology. As noted in Chapter 3, his theology has been characterized as being a “Neo-patristic synthesis” due to his continual dialogue with theologians such as Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Maximus the Confessor, Gregory Palamas, and others. But Staniloae is also in dialogue with many from the Western tradition as well. As Bartos observes, Staniloae promoted a return to the patristic sources as the way to engage in theological reflection rather than relying on the later commentators and manuals of theology. He rarely commentates on any doctrine without

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652 As I will detail below, one of the most fascinating themes found within this project is the way in which most of our dialogue partners are attempting to “do theology” by remaining in conversation with their respective indigenous traditions.
654 For more on his key dialogue partners see, Louth, “The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Staniloae,” 57.
655 Some notable dialogue partners are Karl Rahner, Karl Barth, John Calvin, and Hans Urs Von Balthasar.
656 Bartos, *Deification*, 5.
reference to the Church Fathers.\textsuperscript{657} What is more, he does not find himself concerned with modern thought as a source for theology unless it was to helpfully illuminate “patristic insight.”\textsuperscript{658}

Staniloae argues that theology must abide by three principles: (1) adherence to the revelation of Jesus Christ as witnessed in Scripture and tradition; (2) the responsibility to the present; (3) an openness toward the future eschaton which carries with it a responsibility to point toward the “faithful.”\textsuperscript{659} Staniloae charges theologies that do not do this as useless and damaging to the Church. He goes on to explore what happens when these criteria are unbalanced or not held together.

We have seen Staniloae’s regard for the past and church tradition, however “a literal repetition of the words and formulae of the past” is unsatisfactory. It shows “a lack of responsibility show for the richness of revelation expressed in holy scripture and in apostolic and patristic tradition.”\textsuperscript{660} To not adapt and to not grapple seriously with the questions that result from the lived experiences of those in the present is damaging to theology. Staniloae believes that the Church “assimilates into her teaching only what has in fact its own relevance for every period. That is why it is a good thing when, from the thought of each age, theology retains what is permanently valuable.”\textsuperscript{661}

However, what is even worse is a theology that is so focused on being “relevant” to the present age it completely abandons the tradition of the Church and the revelation of Jesus Christ. He cites both Rudolph Bultmann and the “death of God” theologians as examples of this.

Staniloae also believes there lies a danger in a myopic view of the eschatological future. To only focus on the future is to abandon responsibility towards the present age. He charges some

\textsuperscript{658} Louth, “The Orthodox Dogmatic Theology of Dumitru Staniloae,” 65.
\textsuperscript{659} Staniloae, \textit{The Experience of God}, vol. 1, 89.
\textsuperscript{660} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{661} Ibid.
forms of Protestantism with this. What is a balanced theology? It is ultimately a theology that is apostolic. This means that theology is “faithful to the past, but not enclosed in the past; it is faithful to the contemporary world but its vision goes beyond the present situation of mankind today.” It is because of the infinite content of revelation that insights from the past can be enriched. He writes:

> The continuous journey under this same sun, that nevertheless goes on increasing in brilliance, is the tradition of the Church, while the authentic light of the sun — which accumulates as a dowry and as a permanent good interpreted by theological insight— becomes the teaching of the Church. This light from which theology grows and which in turn theology makes grow by interpreting it in the ever more brilliant light of revelation, enriches the tradition of the Church…”

Staniloae attempts to strike a balance in his theology of adhering to but not being stuck in the past, engaging with the present, and being openly disposed toward the future. The past provides for the Church of the present insights and resources that can assist in the present problems that plague contemporary theology. The past can provide gifts to the present by seeing how the Church has responded to similar problems in the past, and by engaging with the experiences of the saints that preceded us. As Agachi states of Staniloae, “we have to be able to discover which are the problems and new challenges of the present, while we can look in the past in order to find out whether the Church has faced something similar, to reflect on the differences and similarities between the past and the present and then proceed with the solution.”

Thinking through this within the context of Staniloae’s understanding of the afterlife explored above, we can see that by faithfully dialoguing with the past within theological reflection is a way of keeping the past alive. In this way, the multitude of voices that have departed remain alive.

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662 Ibid., 91.
663 Ibid., 92.
and invite us to engage with them in order to “enrich” Church tradition. The past is not statically locked away, but is “alive” and engages with the living in attempts to grapple with the problems facing the Global Church today. Interestingly though, we can also frame some of our dialogue partners within this project in this manner. In many ways, their continual engagement and dialogue with their indigenous pasts is a way of keeping these past traditions alive as well. We should ask the question: What place do indigenous traditions have in the realm of theological reflection? Do they benefit or hinder theological inquiry? These questions will be reflected on below.

As we have seen, Staniloae understands time’s origins and ends are grounded in and by eternity. Time is experienced in the present as duration and is the movement of creatures who occupy space toward or away from God. This interval of time also includes the deceased. Just because someone has died does not yet render them outside the interval of time as those who have died still await the Universal Judgment. Thus, this allows Staniloae to affirm that movement toward God is still possible for those who have died and find themselves in one of the regions of hell and continual purification for those who find themselves in paradise.

Most important for our purposes, Staniloae understands that death does not cut off an individual from the living. A relationship between those who have died and those who are alive remains intact, and while it may be hindered in certain respects, it is not over. This ongoing relationship places an obligation on the living to pray for the deceased and also to ask for their assistance in living out the remainder of one’s life. The deceased rely upon the living to remember them and also depend upon the prayers of those still alive. In the case of theological reflection, the present must always be in dialogue with the past, but not circumscribed by it.

The Past Always Present: John S. Mbiti and Simon Chan

As discussed in Chapter 5, we saw that for Woodley and some others the category of space tends to take primacy over that of time. Speaking generally, time tends to be oriented around events in contradistinction to a view of temporality that is viewed as “a line extending equally into past and
future, marked off in units of hours, days, years, and centuries” and that time is moving forward to the future.\textsuperscript{665} Furthermore, the past looms large over many Majority World theologies as the problem of negotiating between one’s Christian faith and indigenous background is of primary importance. Questions surrounding the theological significance of one’s indigenous past, coupled with the individual eternal destiny of one’s ancestors, all occupy an important place in the theological literature.

There are many theologies that place a high importance on the past. In speaking about the Akamba understanding of time, John S. Mbiti states that time is, “simply a composition of events that have occurred, those which are taking place now and those which will immediately occur.”\textsuperscript{666} Mbiti argues that this understanding of time is one that is more two-dimensional (past, dynamic present) rather than the three-dimensional time (past, present, future).\textsuperscript{667} Woodley echoes these sentiments when he states that, “Indian time is regulated by place, relationship and the experience of the now, not by a clock.”\textsuperscript{668} For many Native Americans, the “past is forever in the present,” specifically in a sacred place.\textsuperscript{669} It is in these “sacred places” that the distinction between past and present is broken down.\textsuperscript{670} Directly connected with the past is the difficult question of the ancestral tradition that is prevalent among many indigenous peoples. As Wilbert R. Shenk identifies, “Asian
and African theologians recognize that Christian identity will remain confused so long as the relationship to the ancestors is not clarified.” Indeed, the controversial questions surrounding the ancestors have attracted a lot of theological inquiry and debate. In these next sections, we will primarily be concerned with these two issues and see how John Mbiti and Simon Chan have navigated them.

New Testament Eschatology and Africa: John S. Mbiti

The question of the place of the ancestors is one of the central theological problems in Africa. This is not merely an academic interest, but rather one that is experienced at the grassroots. A real existential issue for many African Christians is the apparent conflict between the ancestral cult and Christian teaching. Questions such as: “Can we no longer honor our ancestors? “Are we forever cut off from our forebears? “Why should we as African Christians be forbidden to show respect to our progenitors by pouring out an oblation to them?” “Does God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ forbid us to maintain our traditional relationships with the ancestors as our forefathers have done?” According to Allan H. Anderson for many members of indigenous churches, ancestral beliefs are still intact. Too quickly, ancestral veneration was assumed to be a demonic and Satanic product, one that involves worship of the dead. This condemnation of the ancestral cult has often resulted in a kind of religious schizophrenia among many African Christians who then exist with

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672 Missionary influence here cannot be understated. As Andrew Walls notes, “missionary Christianity was largely disabled from giving clear guidelines on the matter of the ancestors, since there was no precise equivalent in Western experience either of the ancestors or of the family and kinship systems to which the ancestors belonged.” Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* 127.
“dual religious minds.” When looked at more closely, the ancestors are not understood to be “dead,” but they are “still around and are part of the families and that community. They understand full what is going on, share in the preoccupation and projects of the living members, and are intimately interested in what is going on.” This is an important point. The ancestors are those who have died and are understood to remain in an “unbroken relationship” with those who are still alive.

Theologians have typically approached this problem from multiple angles. These typically take the form of christological, ecclesiological, or pneumatological approaches. Christological models typically take the positive, or compatible attributes traditionally assigned to the ancestors and relate them analogically to Jesus Christ. A similar approach is attempted from a pneumatological starting point as found in Caleb Oladipo’s conception of the Holy Spirit as “Grand Ancestor.”

Ecclesiological models take a different route and connect the ancestral tradition to the Christian doctrine of sanctorum communio. Each of these approaches are attempting to find parallels that exist between the functions of the ancestors and Christian doctrines. The primary problem underlying the sanctorum communio approach is that it must find a way to incorporate or provide the potential to incorporate those who have died without professing explicit belief in Christ while they were living.

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679 See Charles Nyamiti, Christ as our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1984). Nyamiti even goes on to extend this ancestral relationship into his doctrine of the Trinity, see pgs. 74-75. He also goes onto situate it into the communion of saints pg. 149. See also, Benezet Bujo, African Theology in its Social Context (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992). Bujo gives Jesus the title of Proto-Ancestor. For grassroots christologies see Stinton, Jesus of Africa.
As we will see both Mbiti and Chan navigate this particular issue with sensitivity, and both posit the idea of an intermediate state between one’s death and the Final Judgement.

One of the most influential, albeit controversial, book is John S. Mbiti’s *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*, where Mbiti dialogically engages with New Testament eschatology and African indigenous religions. The most controversial aspect is John Mbiti’s characterization of the African conception of time as being “two dimensional.”

Mbiti focuses specifically on the Akamba peoples in this book but believes that these conclusions can be extended to most African peoples. His main goal is to see “to what extent can we find theological meaning in the traditional religious life of African peoples.” Mbiti argues that the “linear three-dimensional concept of Time” found in most Western theologies is not necessarily the only New Testament point of view of time. By “three dimensional” Mbiti means a view of time as moving forward and is thought of in terms of the past, present, and future. Mbiti explains that for the Akamba, time is primarily concerned with events — those that have occurred, those which are taking place in the present, followed by those which will occur in the near future. The far-future has no meaning and belongs to the reality of “no-Time.” Mbiti understands this concept of time as having two dimensions: 1) a long past; 2) the dynamic present. He argues that the future, as we typically conceive of it, is “virtually non existent” in the African worldview. He writes:

> The future is virtually absent because events which lie in the future have not been realized and cannot, therefore, constitute Time which otherwise must be experienced. Time as a separate reality does not

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684 Ibid., 2.
685 Ibid., 182.
686 Ibid., 24.
‘move’; only events come and go, often in a rhythmic succession. It is, therefore, what has taken place or will shortly occur that matters much more than what is yet to be.\textsuperscript{687}

Time in this framework is made up of concrete events. The focus is not on what \textit{could} happen, but instead on what has actually happened or is happening. This removes time from the realm of abstraction and grounds it in actual events. Events do not “move forward” but “move backwards.” Rhythmically, each event comes and goes. There is not necessarily a “goal” of history that exists in the far future, but rather history is oriented around the past. For the Akamba, history, “points to the roots of their existence, such as the origin of the world, the creation of man, the formation of their customs and traditions, and the coming into being of their ‘whole’ structure of society.”\textsuperscript{688} Thus, the universe does not have an ending, but rather cyclically continues on and on.

Mbiti distinguishes between two types of time — the \textit{tene} (past) period of time and the \textit{mituki} (present) period of time. The \textit{tene} period is where “all phenomena sink.” It is the “centre of gravity in the Akamba conception of History: people’s thinking and understanding of the world are oriented towards this finality.”\textsuperscript{689} Mbiti uses the example of a person’s lifespan. As they age, they are not moving forward into the future, but rather they are slipping from the \textit{mituki} period of time into the \textit{tene} period. Another way of conceptualizing this (if I am correct in my interpretation), is instead of thinking of time as being a train moving forward toward its final destination, time is instead characterized as a gravitational vortex that pulls everything towards it. Much of the criticism towards Mbiti’s accuracy on this point I think is overblown and misses the point. Mbiti’s task is primarily a theological one where he seeks to find connection points between the New Testament and his own ethnography. For our purposes, we are only concerned with the theology that Mbiti develops.

\textsuperscript{687} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{688} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{689} Ibid., 28.
It is within this context that Mbiti places the ancestors. The ancestors, or the living-dead, are “real people” living in a land just like their own. The ancestral realm is an intermediate realm that exists between God and humanity. It is a “complete copy” of the physical world in many respects and a continuation of life here in the physical world. Mbiti notes that the spirit world of the Akamba lacks a direct relationship between God and man and God and the departed. To die is to be united with one’s family and to the community of “those who are gradually being forgotten.” As time passes, the living-dead are eventually forgotten and lose any individuality and thus “deprived of the totality of being.” This is an extremely important point for later on when Mbiti explains his own views on the afterlife and the de-individualization of the person into the corporate identity of the Body of Christ. Mbiti terms this phenomenon to be “deteriology” because there is no future goal other than the eventual disintegration of the person into the deep past where they are forgotten. Once the last person who remembers them dies, they die “relative to human beings, but survives in spirit form, in the state of collective immortality.” This is one reason why ancestral veneration is important. By remembering the ancestors, the living bring them into mituki time. Mbiti writes:

By remembering the departed, his relatives retain him in their mituki period, in what may be called ‘personal immorality’ since he is remembered personally and by name, and is addressed as such during the act of pouring out libation and giving of food — which constitute acts of ‘remembrance’, fellowship and renewal of relationship between the living and the living-dead.

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690 Ibid., 10. Included here are also the Ainu who are ancestors that have died long ago and are no longer remembered by name.
691 Ibid., 133.
692 Ibid., 139.
693 Ibid.
694 Ibid.
695 Ibid., 50.
696 Ibid.
The living and the living-dead exist in a reciprocal relationship with one another. In remembering the dead, the living bring them into the present period of time where they remain “alive” so to speak. In the act of remembrance, often through food-drink rituals, the living-dead are alive in the community. We should note here the special concern for equilibrium that exists. An odd tension exists within the Akamban perceptions of the living-dead and the *Aimu*. Mbiti argues that equilibrium needs to be established where the ancestors are not too close or too far away. If the ancestors are too close or too far away, they can cause misfortune, such as possession. Food-drink offerings are necessary for maintaining this equilibrium between the two worlds. In return, the ancestors have the ability to bless the community.

Mbiti compares these understandings of the food-drink rituals with the celebration of the sacraments (baptism and communion). He writes, “The Sacraments form the nexus between the physical and spiritual worlds, and through the concrete and material realities, eschatological realities become evident and available in the temporal and physical realms.” In speaking about the eschatological significance of the Eucharist, Mbiti argues that time itself is both “eclipsed and intensified.” In baptism one dies their first death at baptism. He argues that the physical properties of the sacraments — water, bread, and wine — are key for the Akamba peoples as they perceive the world is more “concrete” rather than “abstract.” And by engaging in the sacraments one is transported from the physical realm to the spiritual realm. Mbiti also believes that the sacraments preview the “ultimate ‘sacramentalization’ of the entire cosmos.” Furthermore, humanity’s redemption is one that is both material and spiritual, and that it “will be completed only
in relation to the whole cosmos.”702 Here again we have another version of cosmic Christianity that we have seen repeatedly throughout this thesis. Humanity’s salvation is seen as being directly connected to the rest of the cosmos as observed in Staniloae, Gebara, Woodley, and Halapua’s theologies.703 Mbiti even frames humanity’s salvation as a “miniature rehearsal” of the coming redemption of the cosmos that is similar to Staniloae’s conception of humanity as the macrocosm of the universe.704 But this sharing of a meal is also a way that Christians “declare our corporate existence in the Body of Christ, which includes both the departed and surviving saints.”705 Here Mbiti provides the sacramental foundation for his understanding of the communion of saints.

Another way Mbiti connects the African ancestral tradition with the New Testament is through *Sanctorum Communio*. He argues that the early Church concern for the dead (through the use of Christian diptychs) gives us strong grounds to connect the Akamban spirit world with the Christian tradition of the communion of the saints.706 However, Mbiti believes that the African tradition could actually lead to a revival of the doctrine, which for all intents and purposes, is “lost” in much of contemporary Christianity.707 However, the doctrine of the communion of saints, as Mbiti recognizes, is directed toward Christians. What does Mbiti believe about those ancestors who have died as non-Christians? This is where Mbiti’s conception of the corporate immortality from earlier is most important. Mbiti contends that a corporate resurrection assumes a corporate death. He writes, “So the human race and the cosmos die on Good Friday and rise again on Easter Sunday…They participate corporately in the whole ‘Christ-event’, for they are His Body. What has

702 Ibid.
703 Ibid. Mbiti notes in footnote 1 that, “cosmic redemption has not been given the attention it deserves, at least in western theology, though it is celebrated in the liturgical life of the Orthodox Churches” (107). What is interesting is again we see a passing reference to Eastern Orthodoxy without any kind of substantial engagement with the tradition, even though it parallels and compliments so many of the concerns of the theologies we have been dialoguing with.
704 Ibid.
705 Ibid., 154.
706 Ibid., 155.
707 Ibid., 184.
happened to the Head of that Body must inevitably happen empirically and eschatologically to its members as well."708 Through baptism, the individual person “dies” and becomes joined corporately to the Body of Christ.

This is where Mbiti makes an interesting move. Later on, he argues that “there is no explicit scriptural warrant to support a materialistic view of the Resurrection body. All that we are positive about is that it will be ‘spiritual’ and not ‘physical’, heavenly and not of dust.”709 A physical body would represent a demarkation from other individuals thus promoting a more individualistic view of the resurrection that Mbiti desires to reject. Mbiti finds it difficult to “believe that this individuality will persist beyond the final Resurrection and the Parousia.”710 He goes on to affirm that individuals will decide to give up their individuality and enter into “corporate oneness.”711 As we have seen, this is quite different from our other dialogue partners who want to retain and emphasize the material aspects of the Resurrection. It is unclear if Mbiti sees a total “sacramentalization” of the cosmos as discarding with material reality, or being overwhelmed by it and fulfilling its purpose as being a receptacle of spiritual reality like Staniloae. Mbiti does explain that “if there is still a physical realm after the final Resurrection, the saints will not be barred from participating in that physicalness even if essentially they will be in the irreversible mode of spiritualness.”712 Thus, it seems for Mbiti he does not land dogmatically on one side or the other. He concludes that the “details of what happens beyond the historical plane of human existence are neither for you nor for me to dogmatize about.”713

708 Ibid., 166.
709 Ibid., 172.
710 Ibid., 176.
711 Ibid.
712 Ibid., 174.
713 Ibid., 180.
Mbiti also reflects on the idea of the intermediate state as the Parousia has yet to take place. He explains that there is “almost certainly a spiritual transformation (or ‘improvement’), a process of ‘perfecting the souls before the Parousia.’” He bases most of this on 1 Peter 3:19 and Hebrews 11:39 and argues that what would be the point of these passages if changes could not occur in the intermediate period? Mbiti also contends that death does not create a “complete severing of mutual interest” between the living and the dead. And that it is likely that the “departed saints show active interest in the welfare of the Church on earth, and, in ways unknown to us continue to contribute to the extension of the Kingdom of God in the entire creation?” This view of intercession is brief, but very similar to Staniloae’s views on praying for the dead and the dead interceding on our behalf. It further grounds the idea that the living and the dead still remain connected and concerned for one another.

Finally, Mbiti considers the possibility that some will reject God and what their fate will be. He appears to advocate for a kind of universalism, in which the punishments of hell serve as a purification process where at some point the soul is ultimately willing to come to God and “participate fully in the corporate life of the ‘many-in-one’.” This stance of Mbiti is unsurprising given the extreme weight he gives to the corporate nature of the resurrection to the point of absolving individual identities and rejecting a materialistic view of the resurrection body. While Mbiti does reject this materialistic view of the Resurrection, he repeatedly affirms humanity’s salvation is bound up with the entire cosmos. However, we would do well to mention Mbiti’s evolution regarding his soteriology. As Ngong argues, Mbiti’s soteriology shifts from a theocentric

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714 Ibid., 175.
715 Ibid., 155.
716 Ibid., 180.
perspective towards an anthropocentric perspective. Ngong believes that “Mbiti moves from understanding the material realm in a theocentric manner to an immanent and anthropocentric one. The ultimate no longer appears to be God but material well being.”

Blake Burleson writes that Mbiti’s soteriology should be seen as “a positive participation in the recreation of the cosmos.” Mbiti writes that, “Therefore, this Jesus who is so human, and at the same time Savior, is able to enter into all human situations which call for salvation. Thus, African peoples find salvation to be meaningful in areas far beyond the limitations of evangelical theology which has more or less confined that term to the question of sin.” This is reminiscent of Chapter 4 where both Cho and Gebara also place a high emphasis on the salvation from the evils that plague peoples in this life. Salvation is then focused on meeting the material needs of people.

Mbiti’s eschatology is also intensely christocentric. He offers a christological solution to the problem of the “deep past.” He places Christ as victor over the deep past, which threatens all of humanity. It is precisely in Christ’s resurrection that the person is rescued from deep time as Christ stands in front of it:

Thus, the Resurrection ensures that the individual is not deprived of his being by being worn out, washed away, dragged off, drained of being by the force of Time’s backward dimension. It is only the resurrection of those in Christ which protects them from the subtracting effects of the tene period which, as we saw

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and as we all experience, drags the individual towards oblivion and obliteration, and robs him of his being.

Now the Resurrection puts a halt to this process and reverses the whole momentum of Time. 721

Mbiti sees the past as threatening to consume and disintegrate everything into nonbeing. In the resurrection, Christ stands in front of the tene period of time and transforms it. This changes our understanding of time as not a type of commodity but rather views time christocentrically as Christ being the “ground and boundary of human existence.” 722 He collapses both the past and future into the present through Christ’s Resurrection. He characterizes the Resurrection as the “presentization of Time dimensions — a bringing together into the present of both the past and the future.” 723 We could argue that for Mbiti, Christ’s resurrection makes him the victor over time and its degrading effects.

William P. Russel explains the significance of Mbiti’s view of time for Western Christians. 724 He argues that Western Christians should be more concerned with those who have departed. Furthermore, there is a need not only to think about this individually, but also to think about our relationships to “other people’s dead, and therefore to the whole of history.” 725 He finally asks: “How do we, as twenty-first century Christians in the West, situate ourselves? If Christ is the Lord of History, who are we in relation to previous generations?” 726

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725 Ibid., 98.
726 Ibid.
**The East Asian Family and the Ancestors**

The centrality of the family undergirds the ancestral cult in East Asia. As Simon Chan notes, "For the family in East Asia, family solidarity is experienced not just with those present but with those who are dead. So significant is this concern that failure to address it adequately is a main reason why Christianity has not had a strong appeal among the masses in Confucian societies."\(^727\) Similar to the questions asked by African Christians, many East Asian Christians are asking the questions, "if they did not know Jesus while on earth, can they still become Christians? Can the living bring the gospel to the dead? If so, how?"\(^728\) Before proceeding, I would like to give a brief outline of the importance of the family in these cultures.

The Confucian concept of filial piety is central to understanding ancestral veneration in this context. Filial piety is one of the means in what Confucianism hopes to achieve, namely, "how a man can become a genuine man by fulfilling his inherent nature."\(^729\) Both Confucius and Mencius believe that a life that is determined by filial piety is the key to becoming a more humane person.\(^730\) It is the “core Confucian virtue which denotes respect and obedience that children should show their parents. It demands not only that one serve the parents while they are alive, but also that one pay respect to them after they have died."\(^731\) Filial piety is the basis for all relationships, and subsequently all of society. It can be considered a virtue that requires cultivation through external acts of goodwill and ritual engagement.

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\(^727\) Simon Chan, *Grassroots Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (Downers Grove, IL: 2014), 190.
\(^728\) Ibid., 189.
\(^730\) Ibid., 36.
In describing acts of filial piety, Ch’oe understands the ritual basis to be “rewarding the origin and repaying parent’s favors.” Filial piety can be expressed by preserving one’s body, serving and respecting one’s parents and elders, and following the introductions and wisdom of one’s elders to contribute to the larger society. All of these acts of expression are to be carried on even with the death of one’s elders. These acts of ancestral veneration can take place in the form of funerals and memorial rights. For example, in South Korea, many Koreans travel to family grave sites where they offer food to their ancestors and bow down before their graves. This act of offering is done not only to show respect for one’s ancestral spirits but also in hopes to receive a blessing from them. What is evident is that filial piety is the basis for ancestral veneration in much of East Asia. Death does not break the bonds between family members and the living participate in an ongoing relationship with the dead. Serving one’s parents after they have died is the ultimate “culmination of filial piety.” However, the ancestral tradition’s relationship to Christianity has been anything but amicable, especially among Protestant denominations.

_Simon Chan and Sanctorum Communio_

Similar to Mbiti, Simon Chan believes that one of the best ways to reconcile ancestral veneration in East Asia with Christianity is to ground it in a strong ecclesiology, specifically one that has a robust view of the communion of the saints. Much like our other two interlocutors in this chapter, Chan’s approach is also dependent on an understanding of the “intermediate” state and the ability for

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732 Ch’oe, “Ancestor Worship: From the Perspective of Confucianism and Catholicism,” 36.
733 Ibid.
734 Ibid.
735 Oak, _The Making of Korean Christianity_, 193. Similar ceremonies are held in China and Japan. In China the Qingming Festival and the Zhong Yuan Festival are important days reserved for remembering the deceased. In Japan one could also note the Obon festival.
737 Ch’oe, “Ancestor Worship: From the Perspective of Confucianism and Catholicism,” 37.
“continuing transformation” even after death. It is also worth noting that throughout Chan praises both the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox understandings. He states from the outset that he feels free to draw from both Catholic and Orthodox sources as “they offer a broader and more solid basis for contextual theologies compared with what goes on in much of mainline Protestantism and evangelicalism today.” Chan defines the intermediate state as the time between a person’s death and final judgment. It is within this interval of time that one can be continued to be transformed by “the Spirit of God from one state of existence to another” and will continue until the final resurrection. Chan notes that the ancestral traditions in both Africa and Asia act as a preparation for an understanding of the communion of the saints. Here, both Mbiti and Chan display the belief (much like Halapua and Woodley) that indigenous traditions possess some revelatory value. And both find connection points between their respective indigenous traditions with Christian doctrine (more will be said on this later). Chan finds Protestant responses to this to be quite limiting in the refusal to acknowledge continuing transformation post mortem as well as it does not offer a pragmatic dimension of the communion of the saints. It is here that Chan turns to both the German Catholic-Lutheran dialogue as well as a case study of the Japanese Indigenous Church Movements (JICM).

Chan argues that there must exist a sacramental foundation for the communion of the saints. Mbiti also establishes a sacramental foundation on this point as well. It is through baptism and the Eucharist that enables one to enter into the communion. Chan uses the example of JICM’s contextualized version of Christian ancestral rites that seek the “evangelizing of and communion

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738 Chan, Grassroots, 189.
739 Ibid., 8.
740 This case study was conducted by Mark R. Mullins and can been found in Chapter 7 of Mark R. Mullins, Christianity Made in Japan: A Study of Indigenous Movements (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998). Mullins concludes that these indigenous Christian movements extend the possibility of salvation to the spirit world. He also makes the claim that these indigenous movements might contribute to the “re-enchantment of the world” that was lost after the Protestant Reformation (155).
with the dead.” He cites an example of a “mass” that is performed for the dead, where the living receives the Eucharist in place of the dead. By understanding those who have died as still existing in a “flux” state between now and the resurrection, this establishes the ongoing relationships that exist between the departed and the living. Furthermore, it strengthens the notion of interdependence. It also enables the possibility of post-mortem salvation. As Chan writes:

Through the church on earth, deceased ancestors who did not hear the gospel in life are given the opportunity to hear it, but continuing growth to a fuller knowledge of God is also needed for the perfecting of communion with the triune God. This communion is possible because of Christ the ancestor-priest whom we honor and through whom both the dead in Christ are also honored and those not yet in Christ are prayed for by their descendants on earth.

Here Chan establishes the possibility of expanding the scope of salvation to the realm of the dead. He anticipates the rejection of this view of an intermediate state as being incompatible with Scriptural references that suggest salvation can only be attained in this present life. Like Mbiti, he references Christ’s descent into Hades (1 Peter 3:19-20) as evidence that Christ’s work extends to the dead and allows for the possibility that they may come to know Christ post-mortem. Much like Mbiti, Chan’s approach is very christocentric as it finds its basis in the Resurrection as well as a strong understanding of the Body of Christ.

Chan concludes with an understanding of the cosmic consummation of all of the created order in the end. Chan writes: “God’s ultimate intention in creating is to enter into communion with humanity and through humanity, with the whole created order. This cosmic communion, this

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741 Chan, *Grassroots*, 192.
742 Ibid., 196.
743 Ibid.
meeting of God and all his creatures, is primarily expressed in worship and achieved in worship.\textsuperscript{744} Chan believes that this “eternal liturgical celebration” is where all things — “angelic, human and nonhuman — find their own unique voices; it is where they actualize their distinct hypostases.”\textsuperscript{745} Chan successfully highlights the compatibility that exists between the ancestors and the communion of the saints. As noted, the key points here are an understanding that death does not denote the final destinations of the deceased, but that in the intermediate state a degree of fluidity still exists in one’s acceptance of the Christian gospel. Furthermore, there is an understanding of a real, ongoing relationship between the living and the dead. A reciprocal relationship still exists even after death. The living and the dead both can have an effect on one another.

The question of the ancestors place within Christianity is one that is echoed across a wide variety of cultural contexts and has historically been a contentious issue. As we have seen there are two primary issues at play here: 1) the compatibility of the ancestral cult with Christianity; 2) the status of one’s ancestors post-mortem. Both Mbiti and Chan affirm that there exist connections between the ancestral tradition and Christianity. The basis for this is a strong belief in natural revelation, and the ability for humanity to discern natural revelation. The status of one’s ancestors post-mortem is also of primary concern. Another point of convergence is both are utilizing ethnographies that analyze grassroots movements in both East Asia and Africa to reflect on theologically. In this way they are both attending to the “on the ground” questions of local churches. Furthermore, both do not dismiss the Western and Orthodox Christian traditions, but instead, wholeheartedly embrace and dialogue with them as evidenced by their appropriation of the \textit{sanctorum communio} and both argue that in fact, indigenous traditions could lead to a revival of the doctrine itself due to the keen existential concern both these contexts have towards the reality of one’s

\textsuperscript{744} Ibid., 200.  
\textsuperscript{745} Ibid., 201.
ancestors. What both of these analyses reveal is the successful dialogue that can take place when one uses both a non-Christian indigenous tradition in conversation with the Christian tradition. More will be said on these points in the following section. What is apparent is that the ancestral tradition is not fading away, but is rather a real question contemporary theology needs to further engage with.

**Theological Considerations: Sanctorum Communio, Eschatology, and Ancient Knowledge**

As we have seen, the question surrounding the fate of those who have died is a key concern here. Staniloae, Mbiti, and Chan all affirm an understanding of an “intermediate state” that exists between the time when one dies and Final Judgment. Furthermore, each one of them affirms (in their own ways) the possibility that souls have the potential to move closer or further away from God during this time. But each one of them is open to the possibility of post-mortem salvation as well as continued post-mortem purification. Staniloae is the most rigid of the three. Staniloae with one hand will affirm the possibility of the movement of souls toward or away from God in the intermediate state, while at the same time affirming that while God desires all to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4-6), this “all” is restricted to “only those who responded — at least to some small degree — to God’s appeal while they were alive.”

We need to be cognizant of Staniloae’s agnostic approach to those who have died, and this is why we remember them through both prayer, good works, and the sacraments. Mbiti is a little more flexible than Staniloae in his insistence that even a “second death,’ pain, mourning, and the like, cannot therefore be absolute realities. They are doomed to complete annihilation and obliteration, by the Resurrection life brought about by Jesus Christ.” This is rooted in his strong emphasis on the corporate dimension of salvation. For Mbiti, what God has done for one human person counts for all of humanity. He also speaks of the idea that “continuing

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transformation” can still take place referencing both Hebrews 11:39 and 1 Peter 3:19. Chan argues that the harrowing of hades means that Christ’s salvation is extended to all of those who seek it, and that if one is in hell they are there of their own freedom, not because the offer has been rescinded. However, like Staniloae, Chan affirms that after the Final Judgment one’s decision is ultimately final. What undergirds the logical possibility of an intermediate state for all three is a soteriological understanding that salvation is processual. Death does not end the work or scope of salvation. Human freedom is also important here. A human person always has the choice to cooperate with God and God is always patiently awaiting a response. But here we also see the notion that the interconnection of all of creation is not stopped at physical death. Reciprocity abounds with the dead and the living.

We have also seen that the doctrine of sanctorum communio is also used in all three theologies as well. All three also employ the doctrine to provide the basis for the ongoing relationship between the living and the dead. We can say that Chan diverges the most from his own denominational background being a part of the Assemblies of God denomination. It is important to also state that our three theologians are agnostic in terms of the state of one’s soul after death, which is why continued intercessory prayer and action on their behalf is affirmed. Staniloae seems to offer the most reflection on the notion that the dead need the living’s intercession as well as the living needing the dead’s intercession while Mbiti seems to only gesture towards it in brief passages. In fact, out of the three, Mbiti seems to be the least concerned with the dead’s role in the lives of the living other than the acknowledgment that they most likely do care about the Kingdom of God and that the living should continue to pray for the dead.\footnote{Ibid., 155.} This is probably due to Mbiti’s strong corporate understanding of the resurrection which results in his hopeful universalism. Whereas
Chan is willing to go so far as to say that the JICM practices of evangelization of the dead are not so “far-fetched” and actually appear to be “basically sound.”

These points reveal to us again the “cosmic” scope of salvation that has appeared so prominently within this thesis. The dead are included in the “cosmos.” But while there is a strong emphasis on the past, there is also a heavy concern with how the past is brought to bear on the present. As we have seen before in both Chapters 4 and 5, the emphasis on working out one’s salvation in the present is paramount. These theologies seek to understand how to properly orient themselves towards those who have died and what responsibilities exist as Christians on behalf of the dead.

The final thematic trend I wish to identify here is that of “ancient theology.” Obviously, Christian theology possesses a long rich tradition of continual dialogue with the past through both avenues of Church tradition and Scripture. As we have seen in multiple theologies (if not all) in this thesis, there exists another form of dialogue: dialogue with indigenous traditions. Both Mbiti and Chan dialogue with both Church tradition and indigenous tradition within their theologies. Perhaps it is the conscious incorporation of indigenous traditions that might be one defining aspect of “Majority World theologies.” Underlying this methodological move is a strong understanding of natural revelation that exists (as we saw in Chapter 5), as well as the human ability (a high theological anthropology) to actually discern where God’s revelation exists within these traditions. It has to be admitted that a dialogue with an indigenous tradition is an element that modern Western Christianity has been lost, or at the very least, underemphasized. Is there a need for Western Christianity to dialogue with its indigenous past? Is it even possible?

750 Ibid., 62. Chan speaks of *prima theologa* which he explains is the continuity that exists between both “primal religions” and Christianity. He cites many of the early church fathers as supporting this idea.
Another element in this conversation worth noting is the suspicion of the Western Christian tradition that we have seen in many of the theologies dialogued with in this project. As we have seen, many accuse the Western Christian tradition to be dualistic. The Western Christian tradition is seen to be beholden by various dualisms that result from a “Greco-Roman” or “platonic” heritage. Simon Chan even remarks on this briefly:

It is not unusual for discussions on Asian contextual theology to begin with a distinction between Eastern and Western ways of thinking. The Western way, we are told, is abstract, rationalistic and dualistic both metaphysically (for example, spiritual-material, God-creation) and epistemologically (subject-object) while the Eastern way is concrete, holistic and nonrealistic; Western thought presents issues in either/or terms while Eastern thought encompasses both/and; Western thought is linear while Eastern thought is non-linear; and so on.751

Chan notes a trend that can also be confirmed by some of the theologies in this thesis. For theologians like Woodley, Mbiti, Halapua, and Gebara, this binary is used to differentiate their theologies from normative Western hegemony. But as Chan notes, what is “sometimes called the Western way of thinking should more accurately be called Cartesian and Enlightenment thought, which does not exclusively define Western epistemology and philosophy.”752

However, I think we do well to remember that we cannot simply discard Western Church tradition so easily. As Kärkkäinen states, “‘contextual’ theologians” should “stop undermining and eschewing tradition as if, for example, the main source of oppression in Christian community is traditional ways of addressing God or speaking of Christ’s suffering.”753 Kärkkäinen argues that a truly “global” theology will be one that is inclusive and engaged “in a (self-)critical and constructive

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751 Ibid., 9.
752 Ibid.
mutual dialogue between tradition and contemporary challenges and promises is there hope for a
more balanced, robust, and vigorous theology.”\textsuperscript{754}

\textit{The Gift of Time: Gifts from the Past to the Present for the Future}

It has been observed throughout this thesis that for both Staniloae and the Majority World
theologies dialogued with that the interdependence of all creation is a primary and central theme
among these theologies. All of creation is seen to be interdependent and reliant upon reciprocal
relationships. Therefore, all of creation is being redeemed by God. In this chapter, we have come to
remember that creation also includes those who have come before us, those who have departed. The
past is just as much a part of redemption as the present and future. Our present time is directly
dependent upon the past, and the past is kept alive by the memory of the living. One way we can
imagine “giving” to the past is by remembering and honoring those who have died. In retaining their
memories we keep them “alive” to the present.\textsuperscript{755} As Bediako reminds us:

\begin{quote}
The past is important, not simply because without it the present generation would not exist, nor the
institutions and customs of the community have their present meaning. The past is important also because
it is properly the realm of the community ancestors whose goodwill and protection are crucial for the
continuation of the generation of the living.\textsuperscript{756}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{754} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{755} We would do well to also remember those who have been victims of atrocities as well as the perpetrators of said
atrocities. For a theological reflection on this theme see Miroslav Volf, \textit{The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a
\textsuperscript{756} Bediako, \textit{Theology and Identity}, 326.
Chapter 7: Towards a Revised Theology of the Gift(s)

Introduction

Before concluding, I want to both ressumarize and also attempt to show the beginnings of what a revised theology of the gift(s) might look like by utilizing my findings from Chapters 4-6 and broadly applying them to some problems facing my own context of North America. To be clear from the outset, I do not consider this a fully-fledged theology of the gift, but rather the beginning of one.

Writing in 1991, David Bosch contends that the West “finds itself in the midst of a crisis of gigantic proportions.” He goes on to say that the “modern gods of the West — science, technology, and industrialization — have lost their magic.”\(^757\) He then explains that the fallout from the 20th century has resulted in the increasing gap between the rich and the poor as well as the coming of a cosmic ecological disaster has led us to see that the Enlightenment promise of progress is a “false god.”\(^758\) One of the questions undergirding this thesis was: “Is contextual relevance possible beyond contextual particularities?” By utilizing the insights gleaned from this intercontextual dialogue, I hope to explore some potential ways that this theology of the gift(s) can speak to my own context as a North American Protestant. At the end of Chapters 4-6 I have gestured towards ways the gifts of matter, space, and time could be generically constructed. This thesis is hoping to offer a different vision of the world where “giving back” to God is in part based upon how we live in proper relation to others, nonhuman creation, and the deceased based upon our dialogue with Cho, Gebara, Woodley, Halapua, Mbiti, Chan, and Staniloae. If the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed to us anything, it is that the interdependence of all of creation as explored in this thesis has become much more apparent.\(^759\) As we have seen, whether we like it or not, all relationships revolve around the

\(^757\) Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 372.
\(^758\) Ibid.
\(^759\) Pope Francis, “Encyclical Letter Fratelli tutti of the Holy Father Francis on Fraternity and Social Relationship,” 3 October 2020, nos. 7 and 8: http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-
principle of reciprocity. With what has been given, humanity possesses a responsibility to properly
give back to each of these aspects of creation and in doing so they simultaneously give back to God.
If we place the issues of consumerism, ecological destruction, and unrestrained technological
advancements within the context of gift-giving, we can see that these problems might partially stem
from a view of the world, not as a gift, but as a given. If we think back to Staniloae, one of his main
concerns is that the gift does not exist for itself, but ultimately exists to point beyond itself to its
Giver. This is what I mean by seeing the world as a “given.” Another way to say this is that the
much of the world as seen to be an object where nothing points beyond itself. This has resulted in a
taking mentality where instead of operating around the principle of reciprocity, we simply take the
gifts given to us. Consumerism sees matter as only made up of objects to be consumed. This
mentality has extended itself to the natural world where it is seen as a realm only to be dissected,
conquered, and dominated for human ends. We can also see this in the industrialization of time
which sees only “progress” and “efficiency” as the only virtues worth cultivating as reflected in
unrestrained technological advancements. A revised theology of the gift(s) hopes to garner a vision
of reality that is quite different, and one that is centered around reciprocity.

A Brief Retread

Before proceeding further, it would be helpful to briefly retrace some of the main points I have
made throughout this thesis as we have covered a lot of ground. As I identified in Chapter 1, many
gift theologies seem to be concerned with emphasizing both human participation and agency in the
divine-human relationship. This is in opposition to what these theologians believe to be too much of

francesco20201003enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html. Pope Francis notes that despite all of our “hyper-connectivity” the
inability for different countries to work together made responding to the pandemic all the more difficult.
an emphasis on a unilateral “pure gift” that relegates humanity to the role of a passive object.

Michael Dauphinais helpfully illustrates the concerns associated with the unilateral gift:

The modern deformation of gift as unilateral and nonreciprocal creates a social dynamic and theological universe in which actual gifts are tarnished by participation in reciprocity and exchange. Consider how the giver’s separation from the recipient would impact Christian theology: God gives a gift that could never be returned; God’s gift would not establish communion; God’s gift would remain a transcendental or eschatological ideal that equally condemns and forgives all human actions and efforts. In this extreme consideration, God’s gift is never properly received. In fact, one might ask whether such a gift is ever truly given.760

We saw in Chapter 3 that Staniloae’s “World as a Gift” counteracts the unilateral and nonreciprocal gift by positing a vision of the world that operates around reciprocity and participation. But this thesis has attempted to argue that Staniloae’s original conception of the World as a Gift can be revised and supplemented in relationship to Majority World thinkers by exploring the smaller gifts that make up the World as a Gift. While Staniloae does affirm that everything is a gift from God, he rarely explores these smaller gifts in any detail.761 Throughout Chapters 4-6 we explored various smaller gifts by engaging the themes of matter, space, and time. I placed Staniloae in dialogue with various Majority World theologians in an attempt to draw out some of the broader themes that exist between them despite context and denominational background. Chapters 4-6 revealed to us four overarching themes: 1) a relatively strong emphasis on human responsibility; 2) the interdependence of all creation; 3) the primacy of the past and present; 4) the lack of a stark division between the spiritual and material.

First, we can see the strong emphasis that our dialogue partners place on human responsibility. Staniloae’s theology of the gift operates under the assumption of synergism. His continual call for humanity to cooperate with God and humanity’s free choice in doing so displays his belief that humanity possesses a responsibility to transform the world and offer it back up as a gift to God. One of the primary ways he communicates this is through his understanding of humanity’s natural priesthood to act as caretakers of the natural world. For Cho and Gebara we could see this emphasis on human responsibility in the way that they frame the problem of evil. In my analysis, I argued that the problem of evil shifts from theodicy toward anthropodyicy. It is primarily human neglect for the basic needs of their neighbors that has led to much of the evil and suffering experienced in the world. Thus, it is the responsibility of humanity to seek to bring healing on both individual and systemic levels. In engagement with Halapua and Woodley, we could see this same sentiment in how we are responsible for the natural world and need to bring healing to our lands, oceans, and nonhuman neighbors. In dialoguing with Mbiti and Chan we explored the various ways we are obligated to remember and honor our past ancestors. Human responsibility and agency is found throughout this project. A revised theology of the World as a Gift will not only emphasize obligation, reciprocity, and responsibility but will explore what these responsibilities are and to whom we are obligated to “give back to.”

Second, the interdependence of all of creation is another theme found in dialogue with our various interlocutors. Staniloae’s dictum of I-Thou-Nature seeks to convey the point that humanity is bound up with the natural world and the natural world is bound up with humanity. While not explicitly explored in Chapter 4, Cho’s “Full Gospel” and his holistic understanding of the salvation of the human person can also be extended to the natural world. In a blog entry, Shane Clifton posted a transcription of a sermon Cho gave in 2005 where he states,

We have a responsibility for nature. When Jesus died on the cross, he redeemed nature, too. Because natures curse was brought upon the fall of Adam, Jesus’ precious blood effects the salvation of nature. We
have to pray for nature…We have to stop destroying nature. We have to bless and pray to revive
nature…For people to live, nature has to live.762

This is unsurprising as we have seen how Cho’s soteriology attempts to encompass every facet of
the human life. Gebara also repeatedly emphasizes interdependence in her concept of the “Sacred
Body” where she constructs a vision of the universe as all being a part of the same body where
everything is intertwined. Halapua and Woodley also see everything as interconnected. But this
interdependence does not confine itself to the living, but can also be seen in our relationships with
the dead as our dialogue with both Mbiti and Chan revealed. Furthermore, all of these theologies
posit a cosmic understanding of salvation. Thus, a revised theology of the World as a Gift will
emphasize the interdependence of all of creation and the intertwinement of humanity and the
natural world’s salvation.

Third, the primacy of the past and present is pronounced. While Staniloae’s theology is very
much oriented towards the future, there still exists a strong emphasis on both the past and present.
His emphasis on human responsibility immediately places us in the present as well as his stress on
the importance of human “work.” In terms of the past, Staniloae possesses a strong doctrine of the
communion of the saints as well as his theological method is reliant upon dialogue with Church
tradition as exemplified in his Neo-patristic synthesis. Cho and Gebara are also very much
concerned with what salvation means for people in the present. Waiting for the “God of the future”
is not enough for both Cho and Gebara. Cho’s theology of blessing displays how much salvation
comes to people in their everyday circumstances. While Gebara’s ecofeminist theology seeks to

identify particular evils that require particular salvations. In both Halapua and Woodley’s theologies we can see how natural revelation occupies a central place as both are looking to the past in order to dialogue with their respective indigenous traditions. But the present also occupies an important place in the call for ecological responsibility and the need for humanity to cultivate a harmonious relationship with the natural world. Mbiti and Chan also look to their respective indigenous traditions for inspiration in the construction of their theologies. But of supreme importance for both Mbiti and Chan is that the past becomes present when we dutifully remember it as seen in their reflections on the communion of the saints and the ancestral traditions. Thus, a revised theology of the World as a Gift will not only be oriented towards the future, but will be deeply concerned with the past and the present with an awareness that all creation is intertwined.

Fourth, there exists a lack of a stark division between the material and spiritual. The lack of a division between the spiritual and material is found throughout Staniloae’s theology whether that’s through his understanding of the world as essentially a sacrament, or through his understanding of the human body both in this present life and in the future resurrection of the dead. Cho’s Full Gospel and his dimensional understanding of the human person also downplays the distinction between the material and spiritual facets of reality. Through her phenomenological approach, Gebara outright rejects the dualisms she believes run through Western thought. Woodley and Halapua also reject “Western dualism.” Both Mbiti and Chan’s reflections on the ancestors reveal to us a fluidity that exists between the material and spiritual worlds as seen by the impact the living can have on the ancestors and vice versa.

The themes gathered from our various dialogues enable us to see both how they can be situated within the World as a Gift while at the same time adding unique and particular understandings to the World as a Gift as originally conceived of by Staniloae specifically by exploring the particular gifts that make up the World as a Gift. Now that we have seen some ways that Staniloae’s theology of the gift can be complimented, I would like to take some of the insights
gained and apply them broadly to some problems facing 21st century America as a nondenominational Protestant Christian.

**A Complete Dialogue of the Gifts**

As a reminder, the original complete dialogue of the gift as formulated by Staniloae involves three parts: (1) giving; (2) receiving; (3) giving back. Ideally, humanity recognizes the world as being a gift from God, receives it, and offers it back up to God in an act of reciprocity. In this thesis, I have focused on the particular gifts that make up the gift of the world. Thus, we will follow Staniloae’s original idea but parse it out in reference to the particular gifts of matter, space, and time. Hence the notion of a “complete dialogue of the gifts.” Each gift requires proper recognition of its character as a gift. This also requires that each gift is understood to be given by God (the Giver). Once these gifts are properly recognized as gifts, they can be received as such. However, unlike the free gift paradigm, the gifts given are understood to be laden with obligations and responsibilities. As we have seen, this does not nullify their character as gifts as in the modern Western understanding of gifts being unilateral. The gifts received are then offered up in return. By participating in this gift exchange, humanity understands these gifts as not ultimate realities, but are instead the very things that lead humanity back to God. However, humanity can take these gifts for themselves, often perceiving them to be ultimate realities, and refusing to cooperate with God in this gift-exchange God has initiated and offers up nothing in return. Instead of matter, space, and time being seen as gifts, they are often seen as realities to be hoarded, controlled and dominated as exemplified in the problems of consumerism, ecological decline, and uninhibited technological advancement. These issues stem from material, spatial, and temporal excesses that exist within Western societies, or more specifically, my own context of America. Undergirding these excesses is an implicit paradigm of the “free gift” or the “pure gift” which operates around the principle of unilateralism rather than reciprocity. A pure gift expects nothing in return, nor understands obligations to be placed upon the receiver. In these next sections, I hope to utilize the insights gained from Chapters 4-6 in a first step
to show how we can creatively imagine a revised theology of the gift(s) to potentially speak to these problems.

**A Complete Dialogue of the Gift of Matter**

1) *Taking the Gift of Matter: Consumerism*

   In his book, *Being Consumed*, William T. Cavanaugh writes that, “Consumerism is an important subject for theology because it is a spiritual disposition, a way of looking at the world around us that is deeply formative.” He quickly dismisses the notion that consumerism is simply all about greed. He instead argues that consumerism primarily operates around the principles of detachment and desire. Furthermore, consumerism has the ability to turn anything into a commodity. He writes, “In a consumer society, detachment occurs in both selling and buying, and *anything* can be sold: healthcare, space, human blood, names (*Tostitos Fiesta Bowl*), adoption rights, water, genetic codes, the rights to emit pollutants into the air, the use of one’s own forehead.” Eve Pool explains that the “core vulnerability that consumerism finds easy to exploit is human anxiety.” Ultimately, consumerism sees the world as made up of material objects that promise the individual satisfaction beyond what they can give. If we think about this in gift terms we can see how this operates in a unilateral fashion. Consumerism sees material reality as made up of potential commodities to be consumed. One way to frame it is consumerism detaches the gifts from the Giver and simply sees all things as “given” and ready to be used. In this case there are no obligations placed upon the receiver (consumer). The material objects exists solely to (falsely) satisfy the desires of the receiver (consumer). Furthermore, excessive consumerism can lead to the commodification of *anything*. If we think back to our discussions surrounding the human body, we have seen how the

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764 Ibid.
human body has been commodified in the consumer culture of America. In thinking alongside Gebara, we can see the example of how the female body has been commodified. She writes:

Some women only have value as objects…Women objects have difficulty in regarding themselves as autonomous, as subjects who can guide their destiny even while taking note of what is not under their control…Girls are not worth anything in themselves, only as merchandise for men.\textsuperscript{766}

I use this example only to show how uninhibited consumerism has become. Excessive consumerism sees the world only made up of objects including other human persons. Thus, it encourages a taking mentality that only operates unilaterally rather than reciprocally.

2) Identifying the Gifts Given and Received

If we think of the material as a gift, we can then see that material objects do not only exist to be consumed. In thinking alongside Cho and Staniloae, we have seen that all material things can be seen to be gifts or blessings given to us by God. By properly recognizing all material things as gifts from God we can affirm that these material things are not primarily ours. This creates a certain detachment from material possessions and presents the opportunity for these possessions to be shared. Furthermore, we are material creatures with material bodies. In many ways these bodies are both a blessing and a curse. They are a curse in that they are limited and frail and require food, water, shelter, medical care, to name a few. In understanding our bodies as gifts, we understand the need to take care of our bodies and know that God desires people to live in health and prosperity. If God desires that for our own bodies, how much more does this prompt us to see and perceive the needs of the most vulnerable bodies in our society. Many do not have their basic needs met.

3) Giving Back

\textsuperscript{766} Gebara, Out of the Depths, 34.
How might we return the gift of matter? We identified in Chapter 4 that one of the most pressing issues facing both Cho and Gebara was the obligations that come with the gift of matter to work toward meeting the needs of the most vulnerable in society. We specifically saw this in both of their concerns for addressing the particular lived needs of the people around them. For Cho, this was through his idea that God desires to bring salvation to all peoples which does not preclude material blessings as “we must lay aside the thinking that spiritual blessings and heaven are all we need, and that material blessings are out of place for us. The salvation which Jesus wrought for us has the same power in the material world as the spiritual world.”\(^\text{767}\) As we saw in Cho’s theology these material blessings given to us by God are to be used in service of others. For Gebara, she not only desires to bring salvation to the particular evils that are experienced by individuals, but also identifies the systemic pressures that create these needs in the first place. Perhaps one way we could creatively imagine “giving back” the gift of matter is directing one’s gaze towards our neighbors in need. A return gift is one where we work to identify and transform unjust social structures that perpetuate circumstances that enable a world where the basic needs of so many go unmet. Furthermore, we can also on an individual level seek to share any material abundance we have been given and seek to meet the basic material needs of those most vulnerable in our societies.\(^\text{768}\)

A complete dialogue of the gift of matter perceives the material world to be a gift from God as opposed to consumerism which sees the material world as only made up of objects to be bought, sold, and used. The gift of matter places upon humanity the responsibility and obligation to use the gifts of the material world to meet the needs of the most vulnerable peoples in the present life, and


\(^{768}\) Luke 14:13-14: “But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (NRSV) 2 Corinthians 9:6-7: “The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (NRSV).
to also work towards the transformation of any unjust social systems that fail to meet the basic needs of the most vulnerable. In meeting these needs and offering salvation to this particular evils, we offer up a return gift to God.

**A Complete Dialogue of the Gift of Space**

1) *Taking the Gift of Space: Ecological Disaster*

The uninhibited consumerism referenced above has also led to ecological decline. In Hawaii, Kamilo Beach has now “become littered with colorful manmade debris, 90 percent of it plastic.” Sherri A. Mason, writing for the *American Scientist* reports that the Great Lakes are filled with microplastics and through a study conducted in 2014, found that Lake Superior’s surface “has an average of more than 30,000 particles per square kilometer, or 2.5 billion particles in total.” These microplastics are now found everywhere — from our drinking water we drink to the fish we eat to the air we breathe. These examples are just the tip of the melting iceberg in regards to how humanity has contributed to ecological decline. Our actions have also effected the animal world. As Heather Eaton notes, “In many Euro-Western contexts, people are awakening to animals and issues of hunting, farming, food sources, animal testing and research, companion animals, shelters, and zoos…what is deeply troubling about this is that from a larger perspective, animals are severely threatened and in a catastrophic decline.” With these brief examples we can see that these problems can be partially attributed to a view of humanity’s relationship with the natural world as a unilateral one. It sees the lands, oceans, and animals as made up of gifts to be given only in service

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to humanity without any responsibilities or obligations attached to these gifts. Humanity continually
takes and takes from the natural world without properly giving back to it. As observed in Woodley
in Chapter 5, this creates a disequilibrium in the natural world. He writes, “Mutuality and natural
reciprocity are appreciated by the understanding that all of creation operates according to this
principle. Another way to say this is that in all of life there is a harmonious existence and an
existence of chaos. Harmony is the action that restores the balance and subsumes the chaos.” In
other words, when the natural world suffers, humanity suffers.

2) Identifying the Gifts Given and Received

In thinking alongside Staniloae, Woodley, and Halapua we have seen how all of the natural
world can be perceived to us as a gift from God. The animals, lands, rivers, oceans, and sky in which
we move and have our being are all gifts from God given to humanity. Staniloae sees all of creation
as intertwined and humanity is bound to the natural world. Woodley understands the land as the
space to which a community is bound. In this case, the land is where the community of creation
resides. The land provides the resources humans need to survive and flourish. In a similar vein,
Halapua sees the oceans as an example of boundless giving. It is “Because of the water of the
oceans, life on earth exists as we know it. We can say that the oceans were a primary means of
gifting life on earth.” As stated at the end of Chapter 5, humanity is directly tied to a space and
that space is planet Earth. Earth is the space to which humanity is bound. And with the gift of the
Earth comes obligations and responsibilities.

3) Giving Back

How might we give back the gift of space? In Chapter 5 we saw how Staniloae, Woodley,
and Halapua understand humanity to be bound together with the natural world. Staniloae speaks of

the “natural priesthood” given to all of humanity. It is the responsibility of humanity to “use
resources sparingly and not disfigure nature through pollution.” He even warns that “man must
not produce, among these *logoi*, and impossibility of coexistence (by pollution, by the exhaustion of
energy, etc.)” Staniloae understands that it is humanity’s duty as natural priests to not destroy the
natural world. Woodley argues that we must imitate the reciprocity that the natural world displays
and understand that what affects one of us affects all of us. Thus, living in harmony with creation
requires us to enact *shalom*. It requires us to see the term “neighbor” extended to all of nonhuman
creation. We can imagine that a “return gift” to both nonhuman creation and God might look like
directing our gaze towards the current plight of the natural world. This might require us to become
more ecologically conscious and find ways to work towards the preservation and flourishing of
nonhuman creation.

A complete dialogue of the gift of space understands the natural world to be intimately
intertwined with humanity. The gift of space places upon humanity the responsibility and obligation
to cultivate and protect the natural world in the present life. In protecting the natural world we are
“giving back” to God.

**A Complete Dialogue of the Gift of Time**

1) *Taking the Gift of Time: Uninhibited Technological Advancement*

America is home to the largest tech companies in the world: Google, Facebook (Meta),
Apple, and many others. Today, it would be hard to argue against the notion that our lives are
dominated by technology. Writing in the latter half of the 20th century, French thinker Jacques Ellul
argued that “Technique has penetrated the deepest recesses of the human being.” If Jacques Ellul

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775 Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 43.
woke up in the contemporary world he would believe he had woken up in some sort of nightmare. I reference Ellul here because of his frighteningly accurate predictions about the role of technology within society. For Ellul, technology has seven concrete characteristics: (1) rationality; (2) artificiality; (3) automatism of technical choice; (4) self-augmentation; (5) monism; (6) self-augmentation; (7) autonomy. While not needing to dive into each of the nuances of these points, the point Ellul is attempting to make is that the technological society is one that is completely ruled by an obsessive need for efficiency as well as possessing no accountability. Helena M. Jerónimo, José Luís Garcia, and Carl Mitcham argue that that Ellul’s predictions in the 20th century have largely come true. They provide the following examples:

…with regard to artificiality, technology increasingly dominates organic life through the increasing ‘technification’ of biology and associated commercializations. A wide variety of synthesized organic substances are used today in a multiplicity of industrial applications, including the sensitive areas of food and health. With regard to self-augmentation and monism, there is the field of ‘anthropotechnics’...

For Ellul, “technology, much more than capital, is the core element of modern civilization, and we have to recognize today that not only has technology acquired much greater power to shape and condition humanity, but that it has also merged with capital in an intensely dynamic fusion.” And how exactly does this relate to the gift of time? Or, more specifically, the gift of the past? Technique, much like consumerism, operates primarily around the promise of a better future. It revolves around the virtues of efficiency, production, and performance. Thus, it is quickly becoming apparent that

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779 Ibid.
780 Ibid., 5.

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modern technologies are being developed at such a rapid pace, humanity does not have time to properly reflect on the potential consequences of the technologies being produced and the potential disastrous consequences it has for humanity and the rest of creation as a whole. We need only to look at the 20th century and the race for the atomic bomb as one such example. But today, there are many technologies being developed that could pose not only an existential threat to humanity but also erase the definition of what it means to be human. By myopically focusing on the promises of the technological future as well as valuing efficiency, production, and performance, we might be liable to forget the past. And in forgetting the past and those who have come before us, we effectively take from them. The past has no place in a culture dominated by productivity and efficiency.

2) Identifying the Gifts Given and Received

In Chapter 6, we observed how for Staniloae, Mbiti, and Chan the past can be thought of as a gift. The past “gives” us our present. In dialogue with these three, we have seen how the dead might continue gifting us with their prayers and supplications. For example, Staniloae understands the saints to be continually praying for us on our behalf. The past can also be seen to be given to us by God in that we can possibly perceive the work that God has done through our predecessors.

3) Giving Back

How might we imagine “giving back” to the past? To put it simply we can give back to the past by not forgetting it. The importance of memory and remembering are central to giving back to the past. In thinking alongside Staniloae, Mbiti, and Cho we can remember the past by remaining in constant awareness and dialogue with it. Staniloae is in constant dialogue with Church tradition, while Mbiti and Cho are in dialogue with both Church tradition and indigenous traditions. Furthermore, we saw how Staniloae reminds us that death does not end one’s relationship with

781 I am thinking here of artificial intelligence as well as issues surrounding transhumanism.

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someone and that we have a responsibility to pray for them as they might be offering prayers up for us. By remembering them we bring them into the present. Those who have died do not remain locked away in the past but are brought into the present when we continue our relationship with them. This is echoed in both Mbiti and Cho’s reflections on the ancestral tradition in both Africa and East Asia. Because of what our ancestors have done for us, we are required to remember them. An example of this might be the JICM’s evangelization and communion with the dead where a living person receives the Eucharist on behalf of the dead.

A complete dialogue of the gift of time understands that time understands the living’s debt towards the dead. The past has given the present its reality. And in return, the living remember those who have departed and in doing so they keep the past alive. In remembering and honoring the dead we are simultaneously offering up a gift to God.

In these sections, I have identified three issues facing American society today: 1) consumerism; 2) ecological decline; 3) uninhibited technological advancements. I then proceeded to frame these issues within the complete dialogue of the gift, or in this case, the complete dialogue of the gifts. I have argued that these three problems are a result of seeing material things, the environment, and time as only gifts given and received but do not see the need for any return. These excesses within American society result from a lack of reciprocity. I then explored the ways my dialogue partners offered potential solutions to not only perceiving the world differently, but the various ways one might reciprocally “give back.” Throughout each of these theoretical thought experiments we can see that humanity exists in both a gift-exchange with God (the Ultimate Giver) as well as with one another, nonhuman creation, and the dead. We could maybe add to Staniloae’s dictum of I-Thou-Nature to include the dead in order to affirm the interconnectedness of all things both living and dead. What we can see is that by properly engaging in these relationships reciprocally, we are simultaneously offering a return gift up to God. It is our labor and our work that transforms the world which is our return gift. I believe Staniloae would describe this as
“spiritualizing” creation and making it more transparent so that we further increase communion among creation as well as with God. Finally, the last point I want to make is that our return gifts to God do not go without a reward. But that God promises to repay us for our gifts offered up to him.

**Human Labor and Eschatological Rewards**

In Chapter 7 of *Theology and the Church*, Staniloae explores the obligations Christians have from the perspective of Orthodox soteriology. Throughout this chapter Staniloae reflects on the different responsibilities Christians have towards the world. He repeatedly emphasizes the “work” Christians have to do in the world. And with this work offered up to God will come a return from God in heaven.\(^{782}\) I have touched on this notion of eschatological rewards in Chapter 1 of this thesis and how even within Protestantism, which desires to downplay any notion of work righteousness, understands these rewards to be fully compatible with the doctrine of justification. There are many passages in Scripture that are set against the notion that one should only do “good works” with an attitude of pure altruism. Nathan Eubank specifically explores this theme in Matthew 6:1-21 where Jesus speaks of the rewards the Father will give to those who do good works “in secret.”\(^ {783}\) For example in Matthew 6:17-18: “But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”\(^ {784}\) Eubank places this passage within the context of Second Temple Judaism and also contrasts Matthew’s understandings of reward with both Mark and Luke.\(^ {785}\) He notes that “Modern scholars have sometimes treated these passages in Matthew as a theological

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\(^{782}\) Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, 208.


\(^{784}\) Matthew 6:17-18 (NRSV).

\(^{785}\) Eubank argues that Matthew’s account seeks to relegate rewards from God to the eschaton whereas Mark and Luke offer the possibility of these rewards being offered in the present life.
embarrassment.’ 786 He concludes that, “The evangelist speaks of rewards ‘with your Father in the heavens’ because he assumes that righteous deeds earn treasure in heaven that is kept until the coming judgment, when all will be repaid for their actions.” 787 If we were to think about this in relation to the gifts explored above, we can see how our return gifts to God are not given in vain, or with pure altruism, but are given with the expectation that God will “give back” for the gifts we have offered him.

I have spoken throughout this thesis of “giving back” to God through living in right relationships with our human neighbors, the natural world, and the departed. Here we might take a cue from Karl Rahner’s understanding of the unity of the love of God and the love of neighbor. He writes, “…the categorized explicit love of neighbour is the primary act of the love of God.” 788 As I have repeatedly stated, by “giving back” to the natural world, other humans, and the dead, we are simultaneously “giving back” to God. Except in our case, we have seen how through dialogue with our Majority World neighbors, we were able to expand the definition of “neighbor” to also include the natural world and the dead. Are we giving back to God in a way that God literally receives something he does not possess? Staniloae would argue that our “human imprint” left by our transformation of material reality does in a sense offer something unique up to God. However, given Staniloae’s convictions regarding the unchanging, unknowable essence of God, we can conclude that when we are speaking of “giving back” we are primarily focused on the act of love involved in giving a gift. I believe that Rahner’s union of the love of God and neighbor provides us with some clarity on this point. Along with praise, adoration, and thanksgiving, our acts of love towards our neighbours can act as our return gifts to God.

786 Eubank, “Storing up Treasure,” 92.
787 Ibid., 91.
In this chapter, we have seen how in dialoguing with Majority World theologies, we can discover particular ways we might work towards offering a return gift to God and that many of the excesses in American society are partially due to a underemphasized need for reciprocity. At the beginning of this thesis I made the observation that many theologies of participation have been developed and utilize the categories of gift and gift-giving to do so. Often, these gift theologies revolve around metaphysical concerns. But what we can see in this thesis is a theology of participation that can be developed which does not primarily revolve around metaphysics, but embodied action in the world. It is participation in the most literal sense of the term. There is much less a focus here on how salvation is achieved, but more so how salvation is to be lived. Each of the gifts explored above are focused on the present repercussions of receiving these gifts from God. And each of these gifts come with responsibilities and obligations. We can give back to God and each other by sharing material blessings with the least of these. We can give back to God and the Earth by preserving the natural world. We can give back to God and the past by living in an ongoing relationship with those who have died. Each of these increases communion in the world. This emphasis on reciprocity encourages one to live out their salvation in the present life. The thrust of this thesis has been finding a way to live reciprocally in the world. The Christian life should strive to work towards strengthening the communion with all creation, not out of a pure altruism, but out of the hope that one’s striving is not done in vain. Our “good works” towards others are our return gift to God. And we can have confidence that God will repay these gifts offered to him. As Staniloae writes:

Justice, equality, brotherhood and lasting peace cannot be realized if we have no interest in the material universe. The material universe, like mankind itself, is destined for transfiguration through the power of the risen body of Christ…We must demonstrate increasingly in practice the meaning of material goods as gifts, as the means of mutual exchange between men…Only if all men are united can they transform the world and respond to the call to treat the world as a gift, as the means of mutual exchange. When we
share in the material goods of the universe we must be conscious that we are moving in the sphere of Christ, and that it is by making use of these material things as gifts for the benefit of one another that we progress in our union with Christ and with our neighbor.789

In the end, these are but a few brief considerations as to how a revised theology of the gifts could speak broadly to these problems facing 21st century America. I believe that a “global” theology of the gift can be summed up in “love your neighbor as yourself.” But in this case the term neighbor is expanded to mean not only our fellow human beings but all of creation.

789 Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, 212.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis has sought to engage theologies of the “gift” from a global perspective by bringing theologians from various contexts into dialogue with Romanian Eastern Orthodox theologian Dumitru Staniloae through his idea of the “World as a Gift.” The World as a Gift not only served as a natural entry point into the gift conversation, but also provided the theoretical basis from which I could attempt to work towards theological construction. This thesis has sought to answer the main question: What resources do Majority World theologies offer in a revised understanding of the ‘World as a Gift?’ The aim of this thesis was to show how Staniloae’s theology of the World as a Gift could be rethought through a theoretical experiment of intercontextual theology. By placing Staniloae in dialogue with David Yonggi Cho, Ivone Gebara, Randy Woodley, Winston Halapua, John S. Mbiti, and Simon Chan, I was able to identify broad thematic trends between them that are not confined by context. Furthermore, many of these theologies offered a more praxis-oriented approach in their theologies due to their intense concern with speaking to their own cultural contexts which supplemented Staniloae’s original idea of the “World as a Gift.” In fact, it was by exploring these “local theologies” that we discovered how Staniloae’s World as a Gift, which operates on a cosmic scale, could be rethought and applied to more particular gifts of creation. Or, in other words, we explored the particularities that make up the World as a Gift.

Part I of this thesis (Chapters 1-3) attempted to set the stage for this theoretical exercise. In Chapter 1, I observed that many gift theologies are attempting to develop and retrieve theologies of participation as well as rearticulate traditional Protestant soteriologies in hopes to better emphasize notions of participation, reciprocity, and human agency. I also observed that there appeared to be a lack of engagement from many Euro-American gift theologies with Majority World theologies on the topic of gift and gift-giving despite the fact that in many of these contexts reciprocity is a primary feature of the gift. This prompted me to find a way to alleviate the gap in
order to work towards the construction of a revised theology of the gift that included the insights of Majority World theologies.

In Chapter 2, I argue that the gap found in the gift conversation revealed a larger problem that exists within the global theological discourse. There still exists a gap between non-Western, or contextual theology, and Western theology. The underlying idea being that “contextual theologies” are a unique and different type of theology, while “theology” is still implicitly understood to mean “North Atlantic” theology. A second problem I identified was that there have been very few attempts at placing different contextual theologies in conversation with one another. Taking a cue from Stephen Bevans’ “global perspective model” I sought to design an exercise in intercontextual theology where I would simply treat all theologies explored as equal dialogue partners. This required me to pick a theology of the gift as a basis to work from and within. Thus I chose Staniloae’s World as a Gift as it proved to be a useful starting place by providing the theoretical framework and basis from which to work. This then meant that this thesis could take a first step at offering a “theology of the gift” that included both an Eastern Orthodox perspective as well as providing the opportunity for non-western theologies to supplement that framework ultimately resulting in a revised understanding of the World as a Gift. In discussing Staniloae’s framework in detail in Chapter 3, I argued that his approach primarily works on a cosmic scale. The World in its entirety is a gift from God given to humanity with the obligation placed upon humanity to offer the world back up to God in reciprocal fashion. But within this paradigm there exists “smaller gifts” that needed further exploration. The Majority World theologies placed in dialogue with Staniloae were able to supplement his framework by providing more detail as to what these particularities of the gift were, as well as providing more pragmatic elements to the World as a Gift. In other words, Staniloae’s paradigm primarily focuses on humanity’s gift-giving relationship with God, while the Majority World theologies chosen were able to provide more detail as to how humanity’s gift-giving relationships operated in regards to both the natural world and intrahuman relationships.
Part II of this thesis (Chapters 4-7) was where I placed Staniloae in dialogue with different theologies centered around a given theme. These themes were matter, space, and time. Chapters 4-6 started with, somewhat ironically, a “Disney Interlude” that partially displayed the main point of each chapter. *Soul* captured the importance of integrating the material and the spiritual in order to live a full human life. *Moana* displayed humanity’s interconnectedness to the natural world as well as highlighting a view of the natural world as possessing its own agency. *Coco* illustrated the indebtedness of the present to the past and the importance of ongoing engagement with our ancestors. I structured each chapter to dialogically engage with Staniloae and two other chosen interlocutors. From these three chapters, four overarching themes emerged: 1) a strong emphasis on human responsibility; 2) the interdependency of all creation; 3) the primacy of the past and present; 4) the lack of a stark divide between the spiritual and material. While these themes are largely confined to this projects chosen dialogue partners, I suspect that this would also apply to many Majority World theologies with their own nuances and differences.

At the end of Chapters 4-6, I placed my findings within the framework of the complete dialogue of the gift in order to creatively imagine different ways of conceiving of the gift given, the gift received, and the return gift. What we discovered was that successful reciprocity to God is in part based on how we live in proper relation to others, nonhuman creation, and the dead. Humanity exists in an interdependent web with these other aspects of creation. Each relationship is centered around reciprocity. We are indebted to each other. We are indebted to the natural world. And we are indebted to the past. With each of these gifts given, humanity possesses a responsibility to properly give back to each of these aspects of creation and in doing so they are giving back to God.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I sought to take these findings from Chapters 4-6 and apply them broadly to my own context of 21st century America. I identified three general problems that were related to the gifts of matter, space, and time: 1) consumerism; 2) ecological disaster; 3) uninhibited technological advancements. As I argued, each of these problems stems from a taking mentality. In
other words, each of these problems does not correctly recognize material things, the natural world, and the past as gifts but simply sees them as givens. I then worked towards ways a revised theology of the World as a Gift could assist in alleviating these issues by framing them within the complete dialogue of the gift. What we found was that Staniloae’s original conception of the World as a Gift could be supplemented and revised by exploring the “smaller gifts” of matter, space, and time as seen above. But we were also able to see that these insights extended beyond their contexts and were able to speak to my own context as an American Christian.

A Hope for Talanoa: The Potential for Intercontextual Theology

The hope for this thesis can be summed up in Winston Halapua’s call for Talanoa to be a future metaphor for the theological enterprise. He writes, “To engage in Talanoa is to value different stories, different voices, and different contexts as gifts.”790 Considering the central theme of this dissertation has been primarily concerned with gifts this quote is most fitting. In a kind of “meta-commentary” that is what this project has attempted to do: to see all theologies as gifts worthy of dialogue, reception, gratitude, and reciprocity. While this thesis is not advocating for a fully-fledged methodology, it does hope that it showed the potential for intercontextual engagement.

What was to be gained from attempting intercontextual theology? The first is the ability to place different Majority World theologies in conversation with one another which often does not happen in the “encyclopedic approach” or the “case study approach. For example, Ivone Gebara is a Catholic Latin American ecofeminist theologian from Brazil and David Yonggi Cho was a Pentecostal megachurch pastor from South Korea. These are two very different theologies from very different contexts. Yet by placing both of them in dialogue with one another as well as with Staniloae, it revealed parallel concerns and themes even though they diverge widely in their

790 Halapua, Waves, 56.
respective theologies. Furthermore, by having multiple dialogue partners and drawing out the themes that exist, there is in a sense a “new” context that is then reflected upon. In other words, there is a shift from local or the particular contexts, to a more global context. This is not to suggest that this theology is global in the sense of universalizing or totalizing. It is at the end of the day the start of another “contextual theology” that is limited and provisional. But it is a theology that is made up of many of the insights and concerns from widely different parts of the globe.

Furthermore, I was also able to test Staniloae’s theology within the particularities of different contexts, while simultaneously testing the particularities of these different contexts against the more “general” or “universal” nature of Staniloae’s theology. In other words, I sought to test the general with the particular and the particular with the general. What resulted is that through mutual exchange, it became apparent that Staniloae and different Majority World theologies complimented each other quite well despite the number of differences between them. This might speak to the need for more Majority World theologies to engage in dialogue with Eastern Orthodox theology.

By attempting intercontextual theology, I was also able to move towards the beginnings of a revised version of the World as a Gift that moves beyond Staniloae’s original formulation that is complimented by many of the insights gleaned within this project. It has attempted to offer a gift theology that takes seriously the “giftedness” of everything by looking at particular gifts and utilizing gift language as a way of exploring how humans relate to the gifts of matter, space, and time. Thus, it hopes to push the gift conversation from a general or universal direction, to a more particular direction. This thesis also shows many of the parallel concerns that exist between the theologies chosen for this project and “gift theologies.” One of which is a desire to move away from the perceived threats imposed by Western modern secularism. For example, we observed how Randy Woodley and Ivone Gebara are suspicious of the “Western worldview” and both characterize it as

701 The differences I am referring to here are primarily denominational as well as metaphysical.
being fractured by innumerable dualisms that have naturally come to influence Euro-American theology. As Steven Shakespeare notes, “Modernity reduces everything to one level, draining the world of real worth…We value the world by seeing it related to God as its giver. Without that relationship, the world is just so much stuff, to be pushed around and exploited as we see fit.”

Both are seeking to offer a vision of the world that is “changed” and one that is not “flattened” by modernity as both tend to appeal to “premodern” sources. The difference being is that while many “gift theologians” are returning to premodern Christian theologians, many Majority World theologies are returning to their respective indigenous traditions. There is a lot of potential here for further mutual dialogue and mutual correction.

Prospects and Limitations in Gifts from the World

There is also the potential for further intercontextual engagement centered around a variety of different themes. For example, I could have theoretically chosen the theme of “Spirits” which could have explored the different understandings of the spirit world and spiritual warfare that are prevalent in many Majority World theologies. Furthermore, a different combination of interlocutors would most likely result in different theological trends being unearthed that might be similar or different to the trends identified in this project. It would be interesting to compare this project to a similar project that attempts intercontextual dialogue.

However, there are also a number of limitations with this approach. There is a difficult balancing act involved in trying to plot a path in between an encyclopedic approach and a case study approach. It can be at times difficult to balance the number of conversation partners involved.

There is also the issue of the multitude of languages involved. This project has intentionally limited itself to primarily English sources, but there are theologies produced around the world that have yet to be translated into multiple languages. A monolingual approach, while advantageous in keeping the breadth of the material manageable in a broad project such as this, has its downfalls. For example, while Staniloae’s major works have been translated into English, there are still a number of his works which have yet to be translated from the original Romanian. As theorized in Chapter 3, maybe this is why Staniloae’s involvement in the Telegraful Roman often goes unmentioned in many English sources. This is just one small example of how limiting oneself to English sources can be problematic and limiting.

The linguistic problems associated with this approach are very real. However, perhaps this is exactly why this approach is needed. It does reveal one of the main difficulties facing the global theological discourse. While this project limits itself to English sources, it by no means prescribes a monolingual approach. This thesis is attempting to lay the groundwork for further “intercontextual experiments” that might choose to utilize a plurality of languages in their approach. In fact, this project might encourage the need for future theologians to not only be well-versed in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, and German, but also perhaps Yoruba, Maori, and Chinese.

Earlier, I explained the four overarching trends that were present in Chapters 4-6. However, there are also a number of other theological trends that were also unearthed. For instance, one of the most apparent trends is that among the Majority World theologies I analyzed, there is a desire to move away or overcome a perceived static, dualistic, individualistic, future-oriented view of salvation towards a processual, integrated, cosmic, present-oriented view of salvation. More generally we could say that the soteriological trends unearthed in this thesis point to a shift in focus from how salvation is achieved (i.e. the ordo salutis) to how salvation is enacted, or, lived out. These trends are one possible explanation as to why many of the theologies engaged paralleled so much of Staniloae’s theology. Undergirding Staniloae’s theology is the concept of theosis, and theosis presents a view of
salvation that is very much in line with those concerns. In an article asking “What Have Lutherans Learned from Orthodox,” Kärkkäinen concludes that “the fear of ‘works righteousness’ of much of Protestantism, certainly including Lutheranism, has to be challenged and corrected by the ‘synergistic’ (Eastern Orthodox) and ‘cooperation’ (Roman Catholic) understanding of (‘prevenient’) grace, while at the same time (in agreement with the whole of the Christian tradition) all forms of Pelagianism need to be resisted.”

I think this point hits on an important point and elucidates much of what we have seen throughout this project. Many of our interlocutors are not so concerned with “works righteousness.” Their primary concern is how can one give back to God, i.e. how one lives out their salvation as seen in the intense concern with meeting the needs of the poor, healing nature, and living in right relations with the deceased.

This also leads me to my next point: many of these theologies engaged are creation centric, as is Staniloae’s theology. For example, many of the theologies engaged with develop strong notions of natural revelation. As we discovered in Chapters 5-6, the use of indigenous traditions as sources of theological reflection reveals not only a strong doctrine of natural revelation but also a positive theological anthropology that also assumes that the revelatory content within these traditions can be properly discerned. This is also where I would contend that many of these Majority World theologies have an underdeveloped understanding of personal and individual sin. Sin is often reframed in its systemic and corporate dimensions, or rethought of in different categories such as “unbalance” and “disharmony.”

“For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making

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peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it” (Ephesians 2:14-16, NRSV). As the quote from Andrew Walls pointed out from the beginning of this thesis, the Global Church faces a question: Will the Church display its unity “by the interactive participation of all its culture-specific segments…?” Or, will it continually fragment? At no other time in Christian history has there been the opportunity for such global engagement. This thesis is offered as a gift and has aimed to serve the global theological dialogue.

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