2010

Between the Way to the Cross and Emmaus: Deconstructing Identity in the 325 CE Council of Nicaea and "The Shack"

Trevar Simmons
Gardner-Webb University

BETWEEN THE WAY TO THE CROSS AND EMMAUS: DECONSTRUCTING
IDENTITY IN THE 325 CE COUNCIL OF NICAEA AND *THE SHACK*

by

Trevar Jay Simmons

A Thesis submitted to the faculty of
Gardner-Webb University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of English

Boiling Springs, N.C.

2010

Approved by:

_____ Advisor

_____ Reader

_____ Reader

Table of Contents

Introducing a Haunting God: Between the Cross and Emmaus

"We tell ourselves stories in order to live" (Didion 11)

Christians tell their stories in relation to their understanding of God; these stories are theologies, theistic worldviews. As these stories differ, as different Christian sects "recall, at least in rough outline, the point[s] from which they [take] their departure" from other sects, their stories create us/them binaries (Halbwachs 85). Under the umbrella of "Christian," these binaries become forms of the orthodox/heretic dichotomy.

Within these polemic identities, Christians look dimly, as if in a mirror, at themselves and the Christian others, faced with issues of doctrinal diversity. Given the diversity of Christian belief and expression, how can we live with each other? How can we act, believe, and worship together in the shadow of the divisive permutations of the orthodox/heretic binary?[1] These questions cannot be answered for every asker, but this text will address these questions from a philosophical and theological position and read cultural texts of the past and present. Ultimately, the orthodox/heretic binary deconstructs, because identity deconstructs. Although this deconstruction yields no "right" belief that applies to all peoples, at all times, and concerns all matters of existence—no true orthodoxy—it allows a peek at the kingdom of God, a place where people crucify their identities in the *imitatio Christi* and become a communion of saints who attempt to carry the *imago Dei*.

---

[1] On this need to act, Derrida says, "reflection upon the Latin noun 'religion' will no longer be held for an academic exercise, a philological embellishment or an etymological luxury: in short, for an alibi destined to suspend judgement [sic] or decision, at best for another *epoché*" ("Faith and Knowledge" 64).

Entering the Conversation: A Literature Review of Deconstruction and Theology

Deconstruction has met mixed reviews in Christian circles, which places this text in a controversial setting amidst and between the discourses of Christian theology and deconstruction. Ronald Michener describes deconstruction as an attempt "to put the discipline of philosophy in its rightful place—simply one of many disciplines, not the ultimate guardian of all" (47). Deconstruction dethrones philosophy in secular areas and dethrones theology in religious circles. Philosophies and theologies are ways to "organize the shifting phantasmagoria" of stories we experience—our worldviews (Didion 11). Deconstruction recognizes the impotence of "those narratives which hold a legitimizing function," whereas micronarratives can still carry truth (Michener 53).

Many theologians see deconstruction resulting in nihilism, despondent meaninglessness, and nonsensicalness (cf. Erickson 55-56, 170; Griffin 30 McGrath 74-75; Michener 71; Peters 20). However, even some of these thinkers do not completely dismiss deconstruction. Although Michener does not approve of deconstruction, he advocates appropriating it, explaining, "by 'appropriation' I mean borrowing and applying those elements from deconstructionist thought that are pertinent to our theological concerns, while withholding our assent from those elements which are not" (197). James K. A. Smith follows a similar method in his book, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*. For Smith and Michener, deconstruction benefits theology as a tool they use selectively.

Further down the spectrum of thought, theologians like Kevin Hart adopt and promote a postmodern theology steeped in deconstruction, or a deconstruction steeped in theology, depending on your interpretation. Hart uses the tool of deconstruction, but not

just when convenient. For Hart, deconstruction cannot touch negative theology and its accompanying mysticism. Hart goes so far as to say "negative theology is a form of deconstruction" (186).

Charles Winquist and Mark C. Taylor represent still another theological reaction to deconstruction. For them, deconstruction is still a tool, but they neither place nor see limits on where the tool can be used. Winquist sees theology as a view that cannot really encounter the world and all that is in it—theology cannot rightly be a worldview. However, Winquist still aims at theology and worldview: "The project [of constructing a theology] has no closure. […] Theological constructions need the deconstruction that pulls them back toward the economics of force" (79). Because theology cannot account for all of existence and every occurrence, deconstruction continually considers the parts of existence hidden in the darkness. Deconstruction in theology yields a theology where "theology oscillates between constructive and deconstructive possibilities" (103).

Following a different path, Mark C. Taylor sees Winquist's oscillation, but cannot see theology oscillating only within itself. Although Winquist rightfully embraces deconstruction, he still softens the blow when it comes to the theological enterprise. Taylor does not; he calls his work *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*—not exactly theology, not exactly not-theology (10). Perhaps Taylor's work is closer to saying "~~theology~~," which is theology *sous rature*, or theology under erasure. Derrida borrowed this practice from Heidegger in searching for a way to express how inappropriately a word conveys meaning, but how necessary it is for communication, even if it misses the mark (Powell 47). Taylor integrates deconstruction with traditionally Christian images and highly influence this paper and its vocabulary with his compelling interpretations of

the interweaving network of theology and deconstruction (for simplicity, I only use *sous rature* to emphasize the insufficiency of language).

Taylor argues for the deconstruction of God, self, history, and the book. In deconstructing, these things have given birth to something new. God dies, history ends, the self disappears, and the book undergoes closure" (Taylor 7-8). As a result of this deconstruction an "a/theological network" rises (Taylor 8). This network embraces God as writing, as "the interplay of signs" in which there is no transcendental signified, but rather an endless creation of meaning and play (105-6). In place of the self, is the trace— a person who is so interrelated to everyone else that the person includes a trace of the individual and traces of everyone and everything else (138; 140-1).

History ends, because history never began. Without a beginning, there can be no end (155). Indeed, without selves, history cannot be told. History is a construction, not reality (68). What exists is erring—wandering, being wrong, sinning, and more wandering (72-73). Without history, the book could never have been opened or written by an Author-God for a people. Instead of a book, Taylor advocates for the text, "an endless process of multiplication, pluralization, and dispersal" (180), echoing the words of Derrida: "There is nothing outside the text" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 163).

John D. Caputo takes yet another route that influences my understanding of deconstruction and theology. Caputo does not see deconstruction necessitating any sort of atheism, perhaps saying so in the face of Taylor's proposal ("Prayers and Tears" 4). Instead, Caputo says: "In the view I am advancing here, deconstruction is treated as the hermeneutics of the *kingdom* of God, as an interpretive style that helps get at the

prophetic spirit of Jesus" ("WWJD?" 26, original emphasis). Like Winquist, Caputo understands deconstruction helps check if a view reflects reality ("WWJD?" 27).

Surely deconstruction cannot avoid the topic of God, but neither can it make a ruling. Instead of necessarily saying whether or not God exists, deconstruction will tear down ideas and attributes of God, which serves as the reality check, what Caputo describes as justice. Caputo's idea of justice follows Derrida's and this emphasis on justice is where Caputo mainly differs with Winquist and Taylor.

In an interview with Caputo, Derrida describes justice as "what gives us the impulse, the drive, or the movement to improve the law, that is, to deconstruct the law. Without a call for justice we would not have any interest in deconstructing the law. That is why I said that the condition of possibility of deconstruction is a call for justice" ("Deconstruction in a Nutshell" 16). Justice *sous rature* is the reality behind the words "justice," "law," "God," "self," "history," "book," and "theology," just as ~~God~~ is the possible reality behind the words "God" and "YHWH." Justice and God need these words not only for deconstruction, but for any sort of existence: "Justice in itself is an unconditional demand, but of itself, it has no flesh and bones, no force, no teeth" (Caputo, "WWJD?" 63). We need language and therefore deconstruction in order to reach towards understanding. Without language, there is no communication and no thought. Without deconstruction, there is no continuation of thought towards truth and reality—towards God.

Entering the Conversation: This Piece

This thesis reaches towards God with Caputo's understanding of justice and Taylor's understanding of identity as a trace. With these understandings, I approach the questions asked earlier of how to live and act with each other amidst difference. First, this text examines the creation of Christian identity in chapter one. This chapter reflects on a Bible burning by Christians to illustrate the deconstructing process of identification, especially as presented in Jacques Derrida's *Monolingualism of the Other* and popular Christian author Brian McLaren's *A Generous Orthodoxy*. Although rooted in some good intentions and confidence, the binary sloshes about in a power struggle, not in "correctness" or love. This power struggle for identity is alive and dangerous, evinced in the Bible burning. This struggle is also ancient and modern, as will be seen in the 325 CE Council of Nicaea and theological battles over William Paul Young's *The Shack*.

Presented with the identification in the Bible burning, chapter one firmly places Christians within the deconstructing us/them structure of orthodox/heretic and addresses the issues of how to live with this deconstructing binary inside and outside of Christian communities: the communion of saints and justice. Observing deconstruction and moving beyond the binary, oppressive alterity dissipates and the sects that were once polemically separated can come together, beginning to reach towards the impossible: correct belief and the kingdom of God. Only together can communities attempt right beliefs, for they need to consider the experience of the Other and result in a mutual benefit of all sides. Only together and in deconstruction can theology have a proper future.

History is consulted to see this deconstruction at a distance. Chapter two investigates the 325 CE Council of Nicaea, prototype for the orthodox/heretic binary of

Christian identification. The binary deconstructs in the mytho-historical data of the council, in the events of and surrounding the council. This deconstruction includes the creed produced at the council, specifically around the use of the word "anathema."

Chapter 3 will proceed on a similar path as chapter 2, but looking at *The Shack*. Since the novel became a bestseller, it has been the subject of much argument and name-calling, especially the names orthodoxy and heresy. After seeing deconstruction in the name-calling, the play of special/normal will be examined.

Chapter 4 grasps towards what theology and deconstruction are opening. With orthodoxy/heresy continually deconstructing, the binary points towards the play of theory/practice. When people stop obsessing about the boundaries of identity, they are free to engage in identification with each other, amiably working to develop the self in regards to theory and practice. Both "us" and "them" crucify their identities only to arise as something similar, but other—a resurrected, hauntological trace continually on the way to the cross and the resurrected presence/absence of the ghostlike Jesus on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35).[2]

The "them" of us/them are no longer heretics or pagans, but rather siblings and friends. Together, we are motivated towards theology, deconstruction, and God—love, justice, and peace amidst the aporia of thinking and acting. We can choose theory and action, or neither theory nor action—we can choose to go beyond the tension of the two to the opening up of another possibility: the kingdom of God descending onto the city of humanity and the city of humanity ascending into the kingdom of God.

---

[2] A Derridaean neologism, "hauntological" connotes the *différance* and play between presence and absence, Hauntology is not concerned with existence, but rather with the inescapable need to acknowledge a thing ("Specters" 35, 177n1, 177n2, translator's note). On the concept of the self as a trace, see Mark C. Taylor 13, 34-51.

Chapter 1: Crucifying Identity

"Where books are burned, in the end people will be burned" (Heine, qtd. in "Library").

"Where the mountains kiss the sky," a small group of Christians gathered to eat "fried chicken and all the sides," and burn books. However, due to state laws and rain, the book burning turned into a book tearing ("Canton, NC"; Grizzard, "Book Burning 2009," respectively). These Christians are from a self-proclaimed "independent, fundamental Baptist church" and they placed some unexpected items on their list for burning. At the top of list, Pastor Grizzard wrote on his website: "We are burning Satan's bibles like the NIV, RSV, NKJV, TLB, NASB, ESV, NEW, NRSV, ASV, NWT, Good News for Modern Man, The Evidence Bible, The Message Bible, The Green Bible, and ect. These are *perversions of God's Word* the *King James Bible* [sic]" ("Book Burning 2009").

Beliefs are the issue for the people at this church. Grizzard cites Ronald Reagan and others who praised the beauty of the King James' Version of the Bible, thinking the Bible deserves the "high" language of 1611 in order to be read and heard in English. The issue is not just beauty, however. Grizzard repeatedly throws the word "perversion" and quotes a myriad of persons who claim the KJV is an inspired version of the Bible for English speakers ("Preversions"; "King James Version 1611"). Speaking for his church, Grizzard approves of some earlier English translations of the Bible as well, translations based on the *textus receptus*, and the *textus receptus* itself ("Book Burning 2009).

Translation has little to do with the contents of the Bible, though. Grizzard is not basing his beliefs about the KJV in the Bible, since the Bible says absolutely nothing about textual criticism, which manuscripts are the most reliable, or who is the most authorized to translate from those manuscripts. Grizzard and other "KJV Only"

Christians are concerned with their belief in the preservation and perversion of God's words ("King James Version 1611"). Their beliefs are grounded completely in faith, not the Bible, which I am not judging as a poor position necessarily.

Rather, we see the congregation's beliefs for what they are: faith. And we see this church in Canton is a canton: set aside from much of the world and many Christians for political purposes, for purposes of delineation, for purposes of defining doctrine along the line of correct and incorrect, or orthodoxy and heresy, to use proper theological terms. Their doctrines are portrayed with a particular cant on who is and who is not right, canting away from anyone who says anything with which they do not agree by burning—or tearing, rather—the works of those who disagree with their orthodoxy.

Through their polemic beliefs, this Amazing Grace Baptist Church creates a rigid identity on which to rest their beliefs. They base the beliefs on the idea of orthodoxy, although they might not describe themselves in this way. These sorts of sects can start in various communities, Christian or not, and many of them start small like the church in Canton. Christians especially often create sectarian communities for evolving differences, whether the differences are positive situations where separatists break off for what "we believe" or negative situations where a group is exiled, excommunicated, or excluded for what "they believe." In either separation, the communities created find the identities steeped in a deconstructing, us/them alterity.

Identity naturally grows upon us/them alterities; for Christians, it stems especially from the orthodox/heretic binary. Christians build upon their identities with language, like all identities. Pastor Grizzard appends language like "Independent King James Bible Believing [sic]" onto the word "church" (*Amazing Grace Baptist Church*). By using the

word "independent," the church separates itself from any denominational community of

Baptist churches, the word "Baptist" connoting Protestant and practicing immersion

baptism of adults, not infants. The church continues to identify itself as different from

others when it touts "King James Bible Believing," which, grammatically, could connote

either using the King James Version and believing in the Bible or believing in the King

James Version of the Bible. Either way, the group sets itself as "not them" with its

bricolage of amendments on the word "church"

With all this Christian jargon, these identifiers approach meaningless. Many

Christians use the phrase "Bible Believing" without believing the same things about the

Bible. And although "independent," the church is still a community that believes it is part

of a larger community, evinced in the many links and people to whom the refer on their

website. In reaching for precision, they find as much ambiguity as the word "Christian"

and the word "human," for "an identity is never given, received, or attained; only the

interminable and indefinitely phantasmatic [sic] process of identification endures"

(Derrida, *Monolingualism* 28). Before one can even say "Christian," one must say "I" in

some language. Before one can say "I," one must experience "I." Before one can

experience "I," one must have the sense of "I," which is an identity and identity is a

construct of language. The "I" has no originary event and identity becomes lost in

différance, leaving humans only with the process of identification (Derrida,

Monolingualism 29).

Members of *Amazing Grace Baptist Church* can associate themselves with each

other, independently a community within a community and Baptists different from, but

similar to other Baptists; however, in using words to demonstrate difference, they

emphasize their similarities. As they say "independent," they attempt to repress their dependence. Yet, they reflect their dependence when they rely on the concepts those words mean to them and other dis-like them. By saying "I am," one attempts to repress other "I am" possibilities with an implicit "I am not" (Derrida, *Monolingualism* 31).

This repression comes from the language one inherits, but not just language in the sense of French, English, or German, but rather Christian religious language in any dialect. To be Christian is to be an inheritor of Christian religious language, inheriting knowledge that independent Baptists are a communities without denominational community, but also communities resisting community, simultaneously "I am" and "I am not." They accept the repression, accept the "imposing and legitimating appellations" of Christian identity by saying "I am …" (Derrida, *Monolingualism* 39).

1.1. Christian Identity as Orthodoxy/Heresy and the Deconstruction Thereof

Within and behind these Christian appellations, stands the powerful orthodox/heretic binary stemming back towards and past the 325 CE Council of Nicaea and as recent and popular as the din surrounding William Paul Young's *The Shack*: "The word *orthodoxy* […] is often one of the prime weapons of exclusion, conjuring inquisitions and throwing around damning labels like *heretic* and *infidel*" (McLaren 279). McLaren disguises the binary and Grizzard highlights it as he oppresses through destroying the words of the theological Other, pushing them to the disapproved side of the binary. Others oppress through avenues of power in first naming and then separating, creating sects by withdrawing and excluding.

When Grizzard, the Council of Nicaea, Young, and Young's critics use the orthodoxy/heresy language, they use a language "whose essence is always colonial,

which tends, repressively and irrepressibly, to reduce language to the One, that is, to the

hegemony of the homogenous," to completely snuff out the heretic, to remove the

us/them binary by getting rid of "them" (Derrida, *Monolingualsm* 39-40). At the Council

of Nicaea, power was exerted through excommunication and by empowering leaders who

supported the ideals of orthodoxy in doctrine. Surrounding *The Shack*, Young touts

himself as orthodox, while critics like Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist

Theological Seminary, and former counsel member to President Nixon and current

popular Christian author, Chuck Colson, think the whole book is heretical rubbish.

In the suppressing and oppressing surrounding Amazing Grace Baptist Church,

Nicaea, *The Shack*, and other identification events, the orthodox become un-orthodox.

When identity forms lines of orthodoxy/heresy, it necessarily turns from knowing oneself

to oppression and becomes a matter of perspective and power, not a matter of correct

belief. Orthodoxy is defined by those in power in a community or sect, not necessarily

those who are right.

Christian historian Walter Bauer exposes the issues of perspective and power in

his *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*. He argues that orthodoxy and heresy

developed from each other in different locations. In some locations, what eventually

became orthodoxy and heresy existed nearly harmoniously until leadership moved from

cooperative councils to single authorities and rigid hierarchies including bishops, popes,

and emperors. Whether the majority or minority view, the person who obtains leadership

moved from an I/them to an us/them by incorporating his followers into his idea of

right/wrong belief, eventually naming heretical what were the dominant and original

beliefs of some geographic locations.

When singularity was not achieved in the community, suppression and oppression moved towards exile, the orthodoxy established by the authority "either obliges others to adapt themselves to its dominant representations, or it systematically ignores them […] relegat[ing] them to an inferior rank" (Halbwachs" 92). When the oppressed are exiled, the heretics go out of the community and sometimes establish their beliefs as orthodox in their new home. When orthodoxy equates to dominant, it moves away from its etymological root of "right belief" to being an issue of perspective, to being "what we believe."

Chesterton exemplifies this derision of the meaning of orthodoxy when he talks about his opinions of Rudyard Kipling and George Bernard Shaw: "I am concerned with him [Kipling] as a Heretic—that is to say, a man whose view of things has the hardihood to differ from mine. [...] I am concerned with him [Shaw] as a Heretic—that is to say, a man whose philosophy is quite solid, quite coherent, and quite wrong," and again, "It may be true that the thing in Mr. Shaw most interesting to me, is the fact that Mr. Shaw is wrong. But it is equally true that the thing in Mr. Shaw most interesting to himself is the fact that Mr. Shaw is right" (15, 290, respectively).

Orthodoxy/heresy is a deconstructing matter of perspective and power, whether it (re)appears amidst pre-Nicene Christian and proto-Christian communities or communities defining themselves in a post-Nicene, postmodern world amidst didactic novels and cantons. After the Council of Nicaea, some of the "heretics" were later restored into community for the same reason they were excommunicated: politics, not belief. In 325 CE, the orthodox rooted their perspective of orthodoxy/heresy in belief and usefulness for the church and empire. Today, the perspective is much the same. Christians like Albert

Mohler and Chuck Colson have a livelihood supported by people who metaphorically buy what they say and literally buy what they produce. Mohler and Colson believe they are right, just like the fourth-century Alexander and Constantine did. But just like Alexander and Constantine, Mohler and Colson have a following to lead and keep. Although Young exhibits more fidelity to his theological others, he inherits their language and tries to reverse the binary, playing the power game with them like Athanasius did at Nicaea.

The us/them binaries deconstruct precisely because of the changing definition based on perspective and power. Although these binaries stand in front of struggles for power and identity, beyond them, in fields of deconstruction, lies a possible community where every theological other gives and receives blessings, mutual blessings. When embodying their deconstruction, especially the deconstruction of identity, the individual becomes a trace in "The absence of a stable model of identification for an *ego*" (Derrida, "Monolingualism" 60, original emphasis; cf. Taylor, especially chapter 2 and 6). The "I" might use descriptive words like "orthodox" and "heretic," but not to stereotype or homogenize the whole person, but rather to evoke similarities between traces of the connotations of each of those identities.

These evocations never stop at identifiers, but always continue to explain until the identifiers approach an abundance of meaning and, as a consequence, meaninglessness.[3] "Independent King James Bible Believing" says a lot about Amazing Grace Baptist Church, but deconstructs, as aforementioned. Pastor Grizzard recognizes this

---

[3] See Derrida, "Monolingualism" 60 for the references to stereotyping and homogenizing. See also page 66 on the utility of the identification process, what Derrida calls an "idiom [that] *makes things happens*" (his emphasis). I owe the connection of abundant meaning with meaninglessness to Bosch (511).

deconstruction as he sees the necessity to have a page of their website dedicated to

continuing the process of identification. Their "What We Believe" page shows how

identity is more than identifiers, it is a never-ending process of identification. Grizzard's

epithet for the church again deconstructs as he cannot simply call the church

"Independent King James Bible Believing" or juxtapose its positions to that of heretics,

he must continue identifying (cf. Grizzard, "Heretics to Avoid").

   In continuing the process of identification, the community or person attempting to

construct an identity becomes a trace of the words spoken. As Grizzard updates his

website, he meets contention from those who do not understand his identity the way he

does. In response to this gaze, he writes more words. As the words "orthodox" and

"heretic" may be tossed about between Grizzard and his contenders, the division between

the words is rent in two like the curtain of the temple in the passion narratives. This

splitting leaves only a trace of both in the confluence of both, forcing the "I" to move on

and search for more ways to experience identification, more ways to remember the self

and the self's community that are more than one or the other and more than an attempt at

a mythical golden mean.

   For Grizzard, that means another book burning, joining with another church,

despite their "independent" status ("Book Burning 2010"). The 2010 book burning will

be similar to the 2009 event, but even in its attempt at continuity and tradition, it makes

new statements that supersede the old ones, making a different identity than the previous

year's. And the process will continue, perhaps with a 2011 burning of books, an effigy of

a past identities in an attempt at keeping a consistent, orthodox identity. These continued

efforts in identification become anamneses that are not only memory and hauntology, but

also actively and religiously reflecting and remembering the Eucharistic anamnesis of the suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ in the continual death and rebirth of identity in its deconstruction, of the *différance* of identification ("Anamnesis").[4]

However, without recognizing this deconstruction, the Amazing Grace Baptist Church will continually try to retain the orthodoxy/heresy line. It is not until the church recognizes and embraces the deconstruction of identity that they can step towards and beyond the goal of orthodoxy: right belief and rightness in general, including belief and action.[5] "Right belief" must justly represent the one and the other, must be "an anamnesis of the entirely other," must be Eucharist (Derrida, "Monolingualism" 60). Without a true communion of saints, or communion period, without including the experience and memory of the Other, of all others, and of the entirely other, then orthodoxy falls subject to a "hole in [the] gospel," to borrow a phrase from journalist James Pedrick. When orthodoxy represses the memory and experience of the other—the heretic—the orthodox miss out on the opportunity to be "right," whether that group is led by Grizzard, the *homoousios* group at Nicaea, Young, or Mohler. One group can reach for correctness only when in relationship and partnership with the Other, only when "shar[ing] the treasures of their heritages" at a common table (McLaren 233; cf. Ps. 23:5),[6] only when they forsake their "safe" memory by throwing away orthodoxy for the sake of getting closer to orthodoxy, by losing themselves in order to find themselves, and by sharing the

---

[4] Cf. Maurice Halbwachs' *On Collective Memory*. See especially chapter 6 on the religious collective memory, which forms communal identity, especially in doctrine, but also in practice.

[5] In a similar vein, McLaren says "right thinking […] recedes, happily, farther beyond our grasp the more we pursue it" (336).

[6] My colleague David Michaux brought my attention to the connection Psalm 23 with communing with the Other at the table and, based on the end of the Psalm, in the future kingdom.

bread of the Eucharist with everyone, even the dogs who beg at the table (Matt. 10:39; 16:25; 15:21-28).

Without identity, the self becomes a "trace" in a truly Christian or, rather, Jesus-like way (Taylor 34-51). Identity and "the self [are] nailed to [the] cross," on either side of Jesus the Christ, again creating a Eucharistic anamnesis (Taylor 50). Here we find a religious death of the author, resulting in a hauntological existence of Christ, self, and identity—an existence between the way of the cross and the way to Emmaus. The deconstruction of orthodoxy/heresy needs the deconstruction of identity and the deconstruction of self, which is the very *imitatio* and *imago Dei*.

In this way, the "us" needs the "them" in order to be "us" and vice versa. Without "them," the "us" cannot reach its potential, whatever it might deem its purposes. If the "us" wants to evangelize the world, it needs a "them" to evangelize, a them to resist evangelization in order to stay "them" so the "us" can still be the "us." If the "us" wants to eliminate poverty, it needs an impoverished "them" to assist. If the "us" wants to have "correct belief," then it needs to consider all experience, even the experience of the heretical "them" (McGrath 121; Selmanovic; cf. Erickson 23). Re-communion beyond the us/them binary is essential for continuation, for finding the future possibilities to which deconstruction opens us, for living and acting together in a cosmopolitan setting where our responsibility to each other is infinite (Derrida, "Specters" xv; "Cosmopolitanism" 16-17; Critchley and Kearney x; cf. Faith House Manhattan). It is only in this community of communities where we can listen to the voice of the Other instead of silencing it. The us/them binary of Christianity—orthodox/heretic—needs deconstruction in order for Christianity to continue faithfully.

1.2. Re-communion through Engaging a Deconstructed Identity

Living with this deconstruction involves embracing the Other and cooperating with them—a re-communion not of "saints," but rather of all humanity at communion and personal tables (if not also at the marriage supper of the lamb), as exemplarily seen in Faith House Manhattan, a community of persons with and without faith who live, grow, and serve together.

Faith House Manhattan attempts to deconstruct the difference between any us/them by re-communing religious and nonreligious persons who once worried more about rightness and wrongness than each other. Indeed, when schisms form, both the "us" and the "them" believe they are right; "the most basic motivation behind every heresy and schism," and the orthodox too, "is the conviction on the part of the heretics and schismatics that they are right and their opponents wrong" (Lee x).[7] Sects and movements form from the difficulties and conflicts involved in having different beliefs. These factions must crucify their identity in order to once again achieve fellowship, be that identity as part of the Amazing Grace Baptist Church, a Nicene, an Arian, a supporter of *The Shack*, or, simply, "Christian."

With their identities crucified, the communion of saints can re-commune with themselves and with the Other. Us/them binaries will not be forced upon anyone, no "in-group which w[ill] banish others to an out-group." But rather, there will be a "*come-on-in group*, one that s[eeks] and welcome[s] everyone" (McLaren 279, original emphasis). Of course, not everyone will want to "come on in," despite the invitation. But when the Other chooses to remain an other, the "come-on-in" invitation must not be revoked. The

---

[7] Cf. Robert Roth, who rightly says, "heresy always intends to be on the side of God" (117).

offer must stand, even when unheeded and if need be, we can follow the example of Jesus who, "If people rejected his acceptance, he did not retaliate against them, but submitted himself to humiliation, mistreatment, even crucifixion by them" (McLaren 279).

1.3. The Kingdom: Justice, Orthodoxy/Heresy, Voiced/Voiceless and Belief/Action

If re-communion is going to be a "come-on-in group," then it becomes a justice issue deconstructing further binaries. As orthodoxy/heresy deconstructs, one sees how the orthodox and heretic of any time not only repress each other in their various ways, but also the poor and uneducated (depending on the sect). Issues of orthodoxy and heresy are luxuries many cannot afford when their lives depend on being uneducated and/or laborers. The identification arguments occur in the ranks of the empowered of most sects, those who have a voice and work at silencing the voices of others.

In earliest Christianity, arguments of belief happened at the wealthy and academic level. Concerning the rural, uneducated, often "poor" peoples in the first three centuries C.E.—*am ha-aretz*, literally, "the people of the land"—Jones says, "Usually they accepted Roman or barbarian with equal apathy" to their acceptance of any "orthodox" or "heretical" Christian (29).[8] *Am ha-aretz* often lacked the luxury of study and/or argument of belief. They would receive the law out of tradition and often do as told, at least, to a practical point.

It is impossible ever to truly know how and what *am ha-aretz* did and thought, since they have passed away with their voices repressed by circumstance and people,

---

[8] "Poor" likely means something vastly different from what it did in the first three centuries C.E. Today we define poverty by how much money one has and makes, whereas many of *am ha-aretz* may have only seldom acquired or used any sort of money, instead they were "economically self-sufficient," living entirely of the land and through trade in the rural area (Horsley 75, 66-87, 103).

leaving them unheard by most of the future. People living in hard-to-reach areas like mountains were about as likely to be influenced by orthodoxy and heresy as they were the Roman empire (Horsley 16).[9] The voices of orthodoxy could barely traverse the gap between them and the voices of *am ha-aretz*.

Even Emperor Constantine saw this gap when he wrote a letter to Alexander and Arius; he asked them, concerning their theological squabble, "For how very few are there able either accurately to comprehend, or adequately to explain subjects so sublime and abstruse in their nature? Or, granting that one were fully competent for this, how many people will he convince (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 2:69)?" In the same vein, how was Arius to convince the farmer to ponder the budding doctrine of the trinity as the farmer worries about the weather, the fields, the animals, his sick child, his pregnant wife, and his elderly parents instead? Did Alexander ever take time to convince the women in central Alexandria of *homoousios*, let alone the women *ha-aretz*? What of the slaves?

Similarly, poverty and education are an issue surrounding the battle on *The Shack*. Christian authorities constantly sell their interpretations of the Bible and theology in a language easier and more pleasing to read to a certain demographic of readers. The leaders of denominations and popular para-church organizations send their opinions out on the internet, radio, or pamphlets either directly to the public or to the pastors who then re-package the opinion for the new *am ha-eretz*: the parishioner. These authorities are threatened when an easy-to-read, cheap, bestselling novel enters the scene, distilling a

---

[9] Although Horsley speaks specifically of Galilee in his work, his connection between "political geography" and "topography" is true outside of Galilee, too. There are still mountain and jungle villages whose inhabitants live ignorant of much modern technology and politics, depending on how hard their village is to reach.

different theology and another interpretation of the Bible for those who can understand

modern stories more than the Bible.

As this new perspective and oppression influences the deconstruction of

orthodoxy/heresy, it brings to light more binaries. It is not only the orthodox and heretical

sects who need to cooperate, but also the rich and poor, the heard and unheard, the voiced

and voiceless of both groups. And still today this binary cries for deconstruction not

simply in the intellectual space of doctrine, but also in the area of action and everyday

life.[10]

Orthodoxy/heresy only becomes an issue when power struggles arise and

disagreements turn into disputes. Disagreements are novelties, whereas disputes aim to

win and overcome the opponent who is an other. Different and contrasting beliefs can

and do amiably exist *vis-à-vis*. Disputes occur in problems of existential identity and in

struggles for power. Chesterton rightly maintains "truths turn into dogmas the instant

they are disputed" (306).

Therefore, the orthodoxy/heresy binary is inherently an issue of voice. Neither

sect wants the other sect(s) to be heard. The extremists of all sects want everyone to think

like they do, because they think they are correct and they want others to hold "correct

belief." Because these sects believe they hold the truth, they do not want to listen

honestly to the voices of others, since they must be wrong.[11] The voice of the Other is

---

[10] Although much is said about the belief/action binary (under various names), Yoder
calls it "a doctrinal error. The biblical word does not distinguish what you ought to think
and what you ought to do, or if it does so, it is in order to accentuate that the two must be
related closely" (390). Although not ideal, the binary is real. Most of us live it, however
unfortunate.
[11] Brian McLaren promotes a group he thinks transcends these two options, what he calls
a "generous orthodoxy," taking the term from Hans Frei (McLaren 14-15). However,

desired only to be silenced and melded into the hegemonic voice. The voice of the Other

is to speak in only one language, a language that is not their own (cf. Derrida,

"Monolingualism" 1). With this obsession for orthodoxy and silencing the Other, belief is

hailed above action.[12] It is often more important to read the King James' Version of the

Bible and believe it is *the* inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God than to read and

understand the words inside of it.

But not all people in sects are preoccupied with doctrine. Many are quite focused

on love and social justice, on lifting up the Other and deconstructing binaries, whether or

not they realize the deconstruction they incarnate. These people are not exceptions to the

previous descriptions, but rather deconstructors, although they may resist that language.

They are the ones who listen to the voices of the voiceless and refuse to prefer doctrine at

the expense of action. They deconstruct these binaries in their lives, often struggling, like

Derrida, with the *Monolingualism of the Other*—that language they have inherited and

speak, but which is not their own, that language of binaries, of orthodox/heretic,

voiced/voiceless, and belief/action—like Faith House Manhattan. Similarly, many aim to

deconstruct these binaries, but are merely trying to flip them or replace the orthodox

doctrine with another orthodoxy (for example, Smith).

McLaren must end up promoting either no orthodoxy or another orthodoxy, however
movable the boundaries. If his generous orthodoxy is truly broad and without set limits,
then his generous orthodoxy is no orthodoxy at all, it is simply a community of people
with beliefs, which is what I advocate. McLaren's terminology attracts a certain audience
that might not otherwise reject orthodoxy and its limitations, making *A Generous
Orthodoxy* a practical title, albeit an errant one that ends up being no orthodoxy at all.
[12] It is not heresies the orthodox are trying to silence, but rather the heretics, to silence
them and force them to conform. Conversely, those labeled heretic are often trying to
silence the orthodox as well (Zito 125).

1.4. The Binaries in Time: An Overview of the Power of Interactions

These binaries span the years from Christianity's gradual emergence from Israelite religion to today. As Christianity changes, the orthodoxy/heresy binary changes with it. The orthodoxies of today are not the orthodoxies of yesteryears; ancient creeds have been supplemented, altered, and discounted by different statements of beliefs from the official, denominational publications and systematic theology text books to the organized and unorganized thoughts of the blogosphere. Similarities persist, but changes are inevitable.

Likewise, the heresies of today are not the same heresies in earliest Christianity, despite similarities. Things change, things stay the same, but similarities and continuity are not lords and ladies over flux (cf. Foucault 21-22). Despite changing, orthodoxy and heresy conflict where people fight against each other to establish their identity and to honor and protect their God, all of which can be protected when you are in power. Power is not always sought for power's sake, but rather to promote correct belief and good identity, although, money and control have always been alluring. The players in Nicaea and *The Shack* all think they are right and want others to have correct beliefs.

We should not imagine all of Christianity's history was "red in tooth and claw"— or, perhaps, read in tooth and claw, superimposing a zeal for power upon those in the past with whom a scholar disagrees (Tennyson 56.15). In the earliest movements, some Jesus-sects of Jewish, Gentile, or mixed composition could coexist with little trouble. The book of Acts depicts an issue that may have been quelled when Paul came to Jerusalem and defused some misunderstandings, allowing both communities in question—the Jesus-sect

in Antioch and that in Jerusalem—to coexist (although Peter still had difficulty accepting the different groups [Acts 15; Galatians 2:11-14]).

Even as many Jesus-sects evolved into Christianity, the disputes were not ubiquitous, as some imagine. Randal Rauser tells a hypothetical tale of a "fierce public debate between orthodox Christianity and Arianism [which] so consumed the general public that people would jump into theological debates at the slightest provocation" (10). Although Rauser argues that the general milieu was engaged in the debate, a "public debate" can reflect a debate done in public and a debate done for the public, since the bishops thought they were doing a public service. Gregory of Nyssa claimed this debate was so important and prevalent that a person asking for change would receive a discussion about begotten vs. not begotten (qtd. in Rauser 10-11). Although Rauser quotes Gregory to further his view, the quote reflects instead how the needs of the poor were left unmet for the sake of a public debate. Instead of feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, the bishops gave them doctrines and arguments.

These two fanciful accounts reflect not simply an orthodox way, but rather a privileged recount of the past, where the others are not just those who became orthodox or heretical, but all the poor upon whom the church stood. While obsessing over right and wrong beliefs, people forgot about the right actions called for by Jesus in places like Matthew 25:36-40. The very privileged status of these disputes again reflect how incomplete orthodoxy and heresy are—making them both deficient theologies as they ignore not only the experience of the other part of the binary and that of the poor and uneducated, but also the very imperatives of the Jesus whom both groups claim to follow.

As education has become more available, orthodoxy and heresy has taken a different shape. Some people—orthodox and heretic—saw the divide between the educated clergy and uneducated poor. For one, Jerome translated the Bible into Latin, what was the common language in his time. But his translation soon rose to an elevated status where, again, only the educated could reach it. Martin Luther is another (in)famous man to place the Bible in the hand of the people. Of course, the Bible was still only accessibly by those who could read, even if it was in the common language. Even in the USA today we have those who refuse to read any other translation but the Authorized King James Version of the Bible, which is written in a seventeenth-century, British English few US American (or even British) persons understand today.[13]

But those who only accept the KJV are but one sect defining orthodoxy and heresy while struggling for power. And fortunately, not all in these sects are hungry for power, a hunger occurring at the top tier of education and power, a hunger that sometimes ends in quite scary acts, including the Halloween book burning in Canton, NC (Grizzard, "Book Burning 2009").[14] Indeed, we cannot even paint every person within a movement as struggling for power. Intentions are as polyvalent as orthodox movements.

Intentions and movements have grown with time and access to education and power. Without nobility and hereditary succession, power can be held by anyone who makes it into the right circles, which can be anyone, as many rags-to-riches stories have

---

[13] I have only noted a few, popular milestones in those who have tried to bridge the gap between the Church and the Academy by translating the Bible. Other translations occurred and other persons made great strides to include the poor and uneducated in constructing their personal theology, although sometimes at the expense of the rich and educated.

[14] Are these actions not more scary than the unknown coming from forgoing identity for identification and leaving the hope of a planned eschaton for an openness to the future?

shown. With a plethora of sects, we see more orthodox movements than we see heretical movements. In the earliest Christianity, the orthodox gained and retained power by pointing out heretical movements. Orthodoxy has often been defined by pushing off from heresies, by saying what orthodoxy is not, which is still true today. However, since the separation of church and state in many countries allows for many different sects to have equal or similar power, we see a multitude of powerful orthodoxies, quite unlike what we saw in the first five centuries C.E.

With so many orthodoxies, some Christians are wont to identify themselves as heretics before an orthodox person has the chance. Today, seminary students and professors proudly tout the epithet "heretic" or claim a "special place in hell." Even G. K. Chesterton recognized this phenomena, saying, "The word 'heresy' not only means no longer being wrong; it practically means being clear-headed and courageous. The word 'orthodoxy' not only no longer means being right; it practically means being wrong" (4). This positive view of heresy is a sort of new orthodoxy, a play for power through interpellation or hailing the subject, where one first accepts the name-calling of the other and then uses that same pejorative name as a positive identifier (Bressler 199). Sometimes the oppressed uses these names as a source of power, using the power of interpellation for themselves (Bressler 256).[15] The binary flips from orthodoxy/heresy to heresy/orthodoxy. Things change and they stay the same: the orthodox and the heretics are still both fighting for power and still from an ivory tower.

---

[15] When Bressler talks about this power shift in interpellation, he specifically references the use of the word "queer" in queer theory. Teresa de Lauretis coined the term to take the oppressive power out of the word "queer," making it acceptable instead of condemnable (Bressler 256).

Of course, we have only a background of the deconstructing orthodoxy/heresy binary in ancient and modern times with its relations to voiced/voiceless and belief/action. It does not fit every situation, as noted, and is mythical, in the sense that is not reality for all situations, but rather informative for all situations. With this background in place, we can move on to examine the deconstruction of orthodoxy/heresy in the two examples of the stories of reaction to the 325 C.E. Council of Nicaea and the stories of reaction to William Paul Young's fictional novel, *The Shack*.

Chapter 2: Nicaea

When we watch the deconstruction of orthodoxy/heresy in the deconstructing of the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, we observe the deconstruction of a myth. The council has reached mythical status in Christianity, as the interpretation of the event is as important as what actually happened. The event has transcended itself to become a symbol of Christian theology (cf. Ayres 86; Wand 21), even though the event was one step in part of a larger process of defining Western orthodoxy. The myth portrays the council as the defining moment of ecumenical orthodoxy and the Nicene Creed as a ubiquitous authority immediately after the council. However, orthodoxy was not created *ex nihilo* at the council. In fact, much of the council's significance was not established until the 451 CE Council of Chalcedon, when the creed we call "Nicene" was penned, capturing the spirit of Nicaea, not the letter.[16]

By writing what Caputo calls a "microhistory" (WWJD? 106), we see interpretations other than the traditional one, ones of how struggles for identity, power, and truth-seeking established a Nicene "orthodoxy" in a very un-Jesus-like and, therefore, ungodly and unorthodox manner. The methods are an unorthodox wedding of church and state while the doctrines reflect an always already deconstructing concept of orthodoxy/heresy, of theology. The play of binaries and interpretations in the Nicene event, deconstruction becomes evident in orthodoxy/heresy in the Nicene Creed (451 CE) with the creed established at Nicaea (325 CE).

---

[16] Although penned at Chalcedon, the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon attribute the creed to the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE (Wilhelm).

2.1. The Council of Nicaea (Re)told

Before the council, a (theological) conflict arose in Africa between bishop Alexander of Alexandria and one of his priests/presbyters, Arius. Some describe this problem and the ensuing controversy as one of christology, but Ayres rightly depicts the issue as one of how "the term 'God' could be deployed. […] In discussions of the relations between the Son and the Father, or between creation and generation, arguments about the 'grammar' for talking about God were also under way" (14). How we talk about God says a lot about what we believe concerning God, although Constantine thought the matter was a "very insignificant one," at least until the council was convened (cf. Stiver 6; Eusebius, "Life of Constantine" 2:69).

If, like Alexander and the Gospel of John, we say Christ was God's word and wisdom, then Christ "must always have been with the Father" (Ayres 16). On the other hand, Arius cannot talk about anything as "always" existing other than God. If only God is ultimate and eternal, then Christ must have been created and, therefore, is inferior to God.[17] Both men wanted to protect their "high" christologies and theologies, Alexander focused on Christ's godliness, whereas Arius singled in on God's holiness. Both were protecting the same orthodoxy about God's greatness, Alexander by envisioning a duality amidst God's unity, whereas Arius saw God's uniqueness, separate even from the divine child of God.

This conflict arose at a time when church government was increasing in its expression of hierarchy (Todd 197-97). With hierarchy on the rise, theology was becoming not only the interest of the bishop, but also the responsibility of the bishop,

---

[17] More theology was at stake here, but this simplified description is more than enough for our purposes. For more details of the theology at stake, see Ayres 15-84.

although presbyters and other lower clergy were still accustomed to some theological

freedom. When theological disagreements occurred, the myriad of leaders were leaning

towards disputes and argument, a prime opportunity for a bishop to exercise more

authority based on how much power he presumed (and perhaps how confident he was in

his beliefs). Alexander was most likely concerned about theology, but more was at stake

than just theology. Alexander's position and authority was at stake, since his opponents

were as political and polemical as he. A growing wealth was also at stake during the

fourth century, since the church started owning land in the third century (Todd 197).

And so Alexander, Arius, and others met, resulting in Arius' informal

excommunication (he was formerly excommunicated at the council of Nicaea). Arius

traveled East into Palestine, where he found bishops and fellow presbyters who accepted

him and approved of his views.[18] We should not be too quick to assimilate the views of

Arius and these other Eastern bishops, though (Grant 3). It seems safe to assume Arius'

views of God and Christ were at least tolerated, if not similar to those in the East, but we

should not assume Arius either made disciples or found people who all believed the same

thing he did. Just because people accepted Arius does not mean they can be identified as

"Arian" (Ayres 2). Those Arius-friendly bishops could simply be more inclusive than

Alexander. Or they were working the power board. Hierarchy was not just establishing

itself in the bishopric, but also within the Church as a whole, as evinced in the later

canons issued at Nicaea, some of which elevated the status of various bishoprics. These

Eastern bishops had an opportunity to promote internal conflict within the Alexandrian

---

[18] And even before Arius left, "the disputants at Alexandria sent emissaries to the bishops
of several provinces, who accordingly ranged themselves as partisans on either side, and
shared in the same spirit of discord" (Eusebius, "Life of Constantine" 2:62).

church, causing other areas to look at Alexandrians with less esteem (cf. Eusebius, "Life

of Constantine" 2:71).

As the conflict heightened, the Eastern emperor Licinius prohibited the bishops

from meeting, as "Such hostilities [within the church] threatened the peace and unity of

Licinius's empire" (Grant 3).[19] Soon after, Constantine became emperor of the East and

West, moving from his capitol in the West to Licinius' former capitol (although we

cannot determine what part churches played in this shift in emperial power). Constantine

also wanted to resolve the increasing conflict within the Eastern church. He sent money,

but "money could not buy unity" (Grant 2).[20] Like Licinius, Constantine did not approve

of the bishops meeting, at least, not on their own. Constantine sent his "church advisor,"

the Spanish Ossius of Cordoba, with a letter to Alexander and Arius, telling them to

"refrain from further discussions."[21]

At least, Arius and Alexander were to refrain from such debates, although conflict

heightened (Eusebius, "Life of Constantine" 2:73). However, Ossius used his privileged

status to continue discussions, discussions excluding Arius; he met with some bishops in

Antioch and there agreed to excommunicate the growing sect associated with Arius at a

future council in which Constantine involved himself, the 325 CE Council of Nicaea

(Grant 4). The Council of Nicaea was mostly decided before it ever met and the winner

was the bishop already in power. Nicaea, "named from '*Victory*,'" proves an apt name, as

---

[19] For the narrative of this event, I borrow mostly from the history contained in Grant, 1-3, which I found verified in other sources.

[20] Grant writes Constantine sent money "to support the more-reliable clerics," but does not name who those were and why they were more reliable than others.

[21] Grant 3; Eusebius, "Life of Constantine" 2:71. Grant identifies the letter bearer as Ossius, whereas Eusebius leaves the man unnamed (Eusebius, "Life of Constantine" 2:63, 73).

the emperor, Ossius, and Alexander were each victorious in their own way before the council even convened (Eusebius, "Life of Constantine" 3:6). Orthodoxy and heresy were pre-identified with people and their beliefs.

Then the theological battle ensued with a few hundred bishops, almost entirely from the East, the emperor's advisor Ossius, and the emperor himself (Ayres 19; Payne n. pag.; Chadwick 175; Wand 9; cf. Eusebius, "Life of Constantine" 3:6). During the meeting, a few bishops presented the creeds they would recite at baptisms, creeds which were "the summary of the teaching given by each bishop to the catechumens," which amounted to what we can call each bishop's orthodoxy (Wand 10; Grant 7). At this time, the church was not a singularity with a dominant orthodoxy or identity. That culture was still in the making at this time.

Given this plurality of belief and expression, one cannot look at Nicaea and think anyone determined to settle any theological matter once and for all. The issue was as much about a few specific believers and authority as it was about identity, doctrine, or any catholic statement of belief. Ayres notes only two documented precedents for using a creed to define what is and is not "correct belief." The first was in Antioch against Paul of Samosata in 268 CE and the pre-council meeting in Antioch a few months before Nicaea. These instances were used as much against individuals as they were against any "heresy," and, "until the beginning of the fifth century[, …] local creeds continued to be used in catechesis" (Ayres 85-86). Ayres cites no evidence of these creeds impacting the community outside of their generation. Grant concludes, "neither in politics nor in religion are there any final settlements" (12). The bishops likely went into the matter at

Nicaea expecting a settling of power and politics dressed up as religion, unlike the traditional view of a battle of orthodoxy and heresy.

Eusebius of Nicomedia was the first bishop to present his creed. He had been close to Licinius in geography and politics; he also approved of Arius. In fact, he once wrote to Alexander, asking him to restore fellowship with Arius (Grant 3). His creed was quickly dismissed (Grant 6). Soon after, Eusebius of Caesarea "presented what he called the traditional faith of his church at Caesarea" (Grant 7). Although the Caesarean Eusebius was also fond of Arius, his creed was much more readily accepted, perhaps because it was steeped in Johannine and Pauline language. Although acceptable, the creed still had not reached the polemic level needed to oust Arius sympathizers.[22]

Constantine intervened, recommending the term "homoousios" (same substance or essence) be introduced into the creed, a term "already agreed upon by Ossius and Alexander."[23] The creed was also accepted by all but two bishops who refused to sign the creed, both from Africa. Afterwards, the council went on to write a set of anathemas to limit the creed's interpretations. Two more bishops would not sign the anathemas, one being Eusebius of Nicomedia. Given all those who sympathized with Arius, it is hard to imagine why only two bishops did not sign the anathemas. Since language is often plurivocal, the creeds and anathemas may have remained ambiguous enough for some

---

[22] Following Ayres, I avoid the term "Arian" to describe contemporaries of Arius who do not want him excommunicated. "It is virtually impossible to identify a school of thought dependent on Arius' specific theology, and certainly impossible to show that even a bare majority of Arians had any extensive knowledge of Arius' writing. Arius was part of a wider theological trajectory; many of his ideas were opposed by others in this trajectory: he neither originated the trajectory nor uniquely exemplified it" (2).

[23] Grant, 7; Eusebius, "Letter" 4. "*Homoousios*" implies that God the Holy Parent and Jesus the Son consist of the same essence. For more on usage and meaning of "*homoousios*" see discussions in Grant, 7-8 and Ayres 92-98.

bishops to agree with the creed. Still, questions remain as to whether those who signed and did not sign did so for reasons of theology or politics.[24] Orthodoxy is hard to determine when language, interpretation, and livelihood are involved (cf. Stiver 12).

The four non-signing bishops and Arius were formally excommunicated and an us/them identity was formed. The remaining bishops were left in their seats of power, some perhaps stretching an interpretation of the creed so as to retain a sense of integrity.[25] However, the excommunications left the identity lines between orthodoxy/heresy or victor/loser a bit hazy since most of the excommunicants, including the infamous Arius, were "readmitted" within three years after the council; "almost all the bishops everywhere became aware that the decisions of Nicaea were now a dead letter" (Grant 11). Church Historian David Wright claims few people really cared for the results of Nicaea, but never "openly dared to attack his [their emperor, Constantine's] beloved Council" (168-69). Because the emperor was involved, certain theologies were tolerated instead of held by some. As hierarchy within the church rose, the same situation would arise when any church authority was involved.

The council continued meeting for the next few months, discussing when to celebrate Easter and penning various "canons or disciplinary decrees" on various issues. The emperor also took some time to speak on "the importance of harmony in church and state," perhaps with a hint of "or else" as Constantine had just supervised a few excommunications (Grant, 9; for information on the canons, see Wand, 15-20). In effect, Constantine was associating "us" with power and "them" with suppression and silence.

---

[24] See Grant, 7-8; Ayres, 91, 98; Wand, 11-12; Payne n. pag.; Chadwick, 175. Ayres reproduces the creed and one anathema on page 19; cf. Eusebius, "Letter" 4-5.
[25] Ayres says some bishops maintained a sense of subordinationism within the Nicene creed (91).

2.2. Theological Implications as Nicaea Deconstructs

Nicaea and a form of its creed are important to many Christians today, but we cannot assume it always was.[26] Ayres describes the Western empire as having a "patch[y]" knowledge of the council, and that knowledge does not imply anything regarding the creed; "In a context when councils were not expected to produce precise statements of belief, there is no reason to think that Nicaea would be remembered for its creed in the years which immediately followed" (Ayres 87). And why should many people have known about Nicaea if it was not a champion of ecumenism? If the council was not about determining what was and was not "orthodox" for all, then it was likely about establishing a certain unity within the church's leadership in a certain area—about order within the emerging hierarchy. Since the bishops could not maintain a peaceful fellowship as they were, the emperor decided to oust some members of the larger community by circumscribing that specific community within theological limits.

But, how did the emperor decide who to support, exactly? Did he follow whatever his advisor Ossius believed. Were his selections carefully based on who was and was not a supporter of Licinius. Could Constantine have followed a "theological" majority present at the council or within the larger empire? Did Constantine have a sincere interest and opinion in the matter? Were Arius sympathizers truly "heretical" compared to the gospel writers, Jesus, Paul, and the other apostles, and Constantine knew it? Did God persuade Constantine?

Based on the excommunications, it seems the majority who attended the council won the day, although the majority at the council does not necessarily equal the majority

---

[26] The Nicene Creed recited today was produced at the Council of Constantinople in 381 (Wright 174).

of Christians; neither can we conflate either of these majorities with any idea orthodoxy, because orthodoxy took longer to develop. Even the Nicene creed took a good 15 years until it found its way into other texts (Ayres 100). And how steep was the majority's theological slant in comparison to their personal biases and political leanings and fears? Were they really trying to champion correct belief or were they trying to defeat their opponents, opponents who were theologically different from them and causing a disruption in the bishop's power? If so, over a thousand years of Christians have defined orthodoxy not as "right belief," but rather, "'what *we* think,' as opposed to 'what *they* think'" (McLaren 32, original emphasis). If so, orthodoxy is more concerned with identity than correctness.

When Wand narrates the event, he believes those involved are "struggl[ing] to define and maintain truth," but, regardless of the purpose, Wand rightly notes it is at this council "that the refinements of human character can be most clearly perceived. […] and there is often to be seen the drama of a fight for life or at any rate for a place in the sun," a perpetual anamnesis of identity, of ipseity, or selfhood (1-2). Whereas tradition looks at the council and sees the hand of God promoting, protecting, perpetuating, or perfecting what became known as orthodoxy, a different look can see, instead, a human squabble obsessively worried about the valid concerns of who is right and who is in power in the church, in the state, and in the local communities. This latter observation is reachable regardless of human intentions, since authorial intention does not have the last word.

This new interpretation draws up theological implications. Whereas a traditional view suggests God ordained Nicaea in order to champion orthodoxy against heresy, this interpretation could portray God as ambivalent towards orthodoxy. Or it could imply God

was upholding orthodoxy while the men at Nicaea strived to become more than "names connected with a series of events or with a list of dates," so they could "come alive as they are seen wrestling in a public debate for what they hold most dear" (Wand 2).

Theological or anthropological, the idea of orthodoxy and heresy cannot be responsibly maintained at the Council of Nicaea. If one desires orthodoxy/heresy to be delineated by God, one finds ambiguity as to God's involvement in Nicaea. If one thinks orthodoxy/heresy is defined by people, then the binary becomes nothing more than an oppressive power no better than the evils of the crusades. In this latter case, orthodoxy is removed from orthodoxy, becoming something it never claimed to be: simple power.

Orthodoxy/heresy does not originate and become defined at Nicaea. Rather, it deconstructs, becoming moot. Instead of believing the original myth of Nicaea or the possible interplay of power, Nicaea draws the interpreter to search for God, doctrine, faith, justice, and an exemplar of faith and action beyond Nicaea—neither beginning nor ending in the council, but still including it and still interpreting it. Identity is crucified as orthodoxy/heresy is abandoned for a community tracing Christ (the *imitatio Christi*) and searching for the *imago Dei*.

2.3. The Creed of Nicaea and the Nicene Creed

The creed established at the Council of Nicaea reflects the deconstruction of the event and the interplay of orthodoxy/heresy at the event deconstruct. The creed established during the council is as follows:

> We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible
> and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten of the
> Father, that is, of the substance [*ek tek ousias*] of the Father, God of God,

light of light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of the same

substance with the Father [*homoousion to patri*], through whom all things

were made both in heaven and on earth; who for us men and our salvation

descended, was incarnate, and was made man, suffered and rose again the

third day, ascended into heaven and cometh to judge the living and the

dead. And in the Holy Ghost. Those who say: There was a time when He

was not, and He was not before He was begotten; and that He was made

out of nothing [*ek ouk onton*]; or who maintain that He is of another

hypostasis or another substance [than the Father], or that the Son of God is

created, or mutable, or subject to change, [them] the Catholic Church

anathematizes. (Leclercq)

According to the traditional myth, the creed defines orthodoxy. In defining

orthodoxy, the creed not only sets forth what "we believe," but also what "those" others

believe. Orthodoxy is not simply defined as what it is, but as what it is not—and with

vehemence. It could be enough to declare what "we believe," as the Nicene Creed later

does, since creeds naturally set up an us/them binary. But the creed of Nicaea condemns

heretics, making them marginal through "we believe" and then accursed through

anathematization.[27] "They" are doubly identified and doubly remembered—"an

anamnesis of the entirely other" (Derrida, "Monolingualism" 60). The creed creates a

common Eucharist in its very attempt to separate communion—in making an us/them, it

misspeaks and deconstructs.

---

[27] Every council from "Nicaea to that of the Vatican" have used the word anathema to
decry what they determine heresies (Gignac).

The word anathema is a loan word transliterated from Greek. Current ecclesiastic usage denotes a formal curse. Whereas excommunication removes a person from fellowship with Christians, anathema declares a person cut off from God. Joseph Gignac notices this distinction between the two curses beginning in the sixth century. However, the Nicene usage should not be confused *de facto* with the current ecclesiastic distinction. Instead, biblical uses provide a more reasonable window into the use of anathema, although still not ending the story on what *anathema* could mean during the council.

Etymologically, an anathema connotes setting something up. Biblically, it is used to translate the Hebrew *cherem*, where things—human and otherwise—were dedicated to God through destruction. In the New Testament, the word adds the nuance of an oath. In Acts 23, some Jews want to kill Paul and refuse to eat or drink until Paul is dead. The text uses the verbal form of anathema: "they anathematized themselves" (Acts 23:13). In verse 14, the Jews reportedly anathematize themselves an anathema, using both the verbal and noun forms of the word. Although connoting a personal oath ("curse" in some translations, particularly the KJV), this usage still carries the memory of *cherem*, for if their goal is not met, they will be destroyed and be with their God.

The remaining five uses of this word in the Greek manuscripts suggest a similarity with *cherem* without the oath or curse connotation (Rom. 9:3; 1 Cor. 12:3; 16:22; Gal. 1:8, 9). 1 Corinthians 12:3 says no person can call Jesus anathema (*anathema Iesoun*) while having the Spirit of God. In this usage, the word is not necessarily negative. On the one hand, Jesus was killed and dedicated to God, but on the other hand, he was also resurrected. Jesus was anathema, but lives again and is no longer in a state of

destruction. Anathema is not pejorative, but simply not applicable to Jesus, based on a belief in his resurrection.

In Romans, Paul wishes to be anathema for the sake of his people. This usage does not necessarily mean Paul wishes to feel the full wrath of God in place of his brothers or sisters. Neither is Paul definitely wishing to be transported to a sort of hell. Paul could be wishing for a sacrificial death in the vein of Jesus' death. Paul might want to be embody Christ, to die and be resurrected, just not a resurrection exactly like Jesus'. Again the word proves to be not necessarily negative, since Paul asks for something good for his people. Although something negative might happen to Paul immediately if he becomes anathema, he would not necessarily be accursed forever.

The remaining usages are used in the way the creeds use them, first by stating a belief and then pronouncing anathema upon those who believe or do not believe it. Although these usages could connote the current understanding of separation from God, it is a jump to superimpose today's meaning on the earlier usages. According to the word's relation to *cherem*, the creedal use of the word can also carry this connotation. The creedal anathemas ask for the ideological others—the heretics—to become holy through their dedication to God in death.

If the heretics become holy through this dedication of sacred destruction, then the orthodox are no longer the preferred in the creed's binary, for "to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). The Nicene creed creates an equality of us/them—the heretics gain in becoming anathematized and the orthodox have Christ in life. Both results are holy, both eventually end with a re-communion at a common table. The creed loses its balance between orthodoxy/heresy as the binary flips, turning into play as neither orthodoxy nor

heresy becomes preferred. The orthodox live for Christ and the heretics gain, too,

becoming holy and set up for God. Because of anathema, the creed loses its sense of us

against them, preferring both and, therefore, preferring neither. Anathema yields

"anamnesis of the entirely other"—God—where the council that produce it remains

ambivalent to that entirely other (Derrida, "Monolingualism" 60).

Chapter 3: William Paul Young's *The Shack*

Deconstruction occurs in other events concerning the orthodoxy/heresy binary, deconstruction of text and deconstruction of myth. Although myths are being constructed differently today, they are still created. The myth of Nicaea hid truth and abused power. Similar myths are being constructed about William Paul Young's novel, *The Shack*, like the one about to be told. Some call it heretical rubbish, others call it an orthodox gift from God. As the binary deconstructs, it reveals a deconstructing text.

Reactions to *The Shack* engage a wide variety of perspectives. The Amazing Grace Baptist Church of Canton, NC calls it one of "Satan's popular books written by heretics" and is said to have ripped up a copy of it on Halloween night 2009 (Grizzard, "Book Burning 2009"; Young, "Conversation"). These strong words starkly contrast with the author's own interpretation; Young says, "You'd have to be an idiot to think it isn't a God thing [that the book has been so successful and influential beyond authorial intention]" (Young, "Keynote Speech").[28] These two statements embody two quite opposite approaches to the book, both engaging in a struggle for power and both likely motivated by a passion for God and what they think is true and right; although Young and Grizzard pursue different things, their approaches are similar and correlate with a multitude of others. Both statements represent polarities in the "microhistory" surrounding *The Shack*'s reception.

---

[28] During Young's speech he said his intentions were completely limited to what his kids would read. Any reading beyond that audience was beyond any authorial intention.

3.1. The Shack*: A Place for Satan's Heretics*

Since we all read with our own eyes, Christians read books as Christians, which means something different for each Christian (cf. Bressler, 76-80). Some Christians read little other than the Bible whereas others read everything but the Bible, and, of course, a large variety of Christians exist between and beyond those two categories.

The Shack is a special sort of book for Christians because it consistently includes explicit allusions to Christian theology and the Bible, it is theologically didactic. Sometimes the book reads more as a theology text book than a novel, whereas other times it reads more like a novel than theology. Albert Mohler says it "includes some very clear theology […] making some very clear theological claims," and classifies it as "religious fiction" (Cf. Olson 13; Rauser 159; LifeWay, "Book Briefing"). Although genres are fluid categories, "religious fiction" rightly captures the way Christians approach the book: as something they will interact with in the ambiguous realm of theology. Christians can interact in theology with any book, but more Christians more easily engage theologically with books self-proclaimed to be in the theological discourse, like *The Shack*. Their horizons of expectation are primed for theology as they approach the book.

When they get into the book, their expectations are not disappointed. The novel is a story about a man named Mack who went camping one day with his son and two daughters. While camping, his son nearly dies while canoeing with the oldest daughter. Mack plays the hero, saving his son and leaving his youngest behind at the campsite. Real tragedy soon overtakes the scene as Mack cannot find his youngest daughter Missy when he returns to the campsite, because she was kidnapped by a serial killer known for the terrible things he does to little girls.

After this incident, but prior to the tragic account in the novel, Mack gets a strange letter in the mailbox. The letter bears no stamp and is addressed simply to Mack and signed "Papa," an epithet Mack's wife Nan affectionately calls God. The note asks Mack to meet Papa at "the shack," which Mack can only assumes means the place where the police found Missy's bloody dress in the woods of the mountains (16).

Mack decides to go to the shack and sees reality transform. As winter changes to summer in an instant, so does the shack turn from dilapidated to homey. Inside this shack, Mack finds three people who all claim to be God: a large black woman who goes by the name Papa, a Middle Eastern Jesus, and an Asian woman named Sarayu. The four interact and the novel works at teaching Mack about God as the trinity, about God's love, about theodicy or the problem of evil, and about forgiveness, both of God and humanity.

When Christians read this story, they do not know the story, but they enter the story prepared to read it against their sources of theology. Since authors play an authoritative role in many peoples' lives, Christians and other people often engage a book with a little more humility than they would a person preaching on the street corner. Hence, Christian leaders across the world fear *The Shack* because they disagree with it.

A new weapon is used in this modern battle: media and technology. Fewer fourth-century persons were actively involved in Nicaea because they had less access to doctrine and doctrinal foundations such as scripture and other literature. With literacy abounding, more Christians can be and are involved in doctrinal debates in various ways. *The Shack* is more readable than a theology textbook, so more people are likely to pick it up. And anyone who has any thoughts on *The Shack* can post audio and video sermons, radio clips, and blogs on the internet.

The media is like a dirty arms-dealer who sells its weapons without moral obligation to any one army. Whereas *The Shack* advertises its own website in the book itself, as a sort of preface and afterword (4, 249, 253-54), the bookstore of the Southern Baptist Convention, LifeWay Christian Stores (LCS), has created a program called "Read With Discernment." For some books, authors, movements, and organizations—products not "consistent with historical evangelical theology" (LifeWay "Discernment")—LCS hands out paper warnings to their customers, or, for online shoppers, includes a small link on the product's description page.

The Shack received such a label to combat the novel's readability and popularity. In this way, those in power strengthen their influence on the common people by influencing what people read and how they read it.[29] Before readers even start *The Shack*, they will likely read the "Book Briefing," which tells the to be wary and "read with extra discernment" concerning the book's statements on the Trinity, salvation, and sin. The battle for interpellation gains new weapons and enlists new soldiers as time progresses.

---

[29] LCS's website proclaims it is "a division of […] the Southern Baptist Convention." Since the "Read With Discernment" program started in 2008, LCS has stopped selling some books and authors online. When I first started my research into this program on 14 April 2009, the LCS website carried discernment warnings for *The Shack*, the emerging church movement, and popular Christian authors Rob Bell, Donald Miller, Brian McLaren, but did not sell anything by those authors on their website, which is true to this day (with the exception of a forthcoming listing for a book co-authored by Brian McLaren, *The Justice Project*, a book without a discernment warning). As of 1 Dec 2009, the website only carries the discernment warning for *The Shack*. However, an employee of an LCS store handed me the aforementioned "Read With Discernment" warnings and said the employees hand out the warnings when customers buy the books.

3.1.1. The Academy v. Wm. Paul Young

These explicitly harsh critiques are found all over the internet by Joe and Jane Christian, popular bloggers, and even more popular Christian leaders. President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Albert Mohler scathed the book in April 2008 on his radio program during an episode earning "an encore presentation" in May of the same year. He said, "I find the book deeply troubling," apparently because it "includes undiluted heresy." During the program, Mohler summarizes the book and then contrasts a few parts of the book with doctrines of which he is "especially fond," to use Young's language (*The Shack* 155). Mohler finds discord between his interpretation of *The Shack* and his interpretation of theology and the Bible; because of these, he says, "the book's clever, it's … it's just not orthodox, it's just not biblical Christianity." This cleverness makes the book dangerous in his eyes. Not only does the book have the authority of an author, but it uses a cunning rhetoric to express a theology other than his own. So he labels it heretical and throws in as many jabs as he can in about thirty minutes.

Mohler tries to diffuse what he sees as "a complete destruction of the understanding in the Scripture of the Christian trinity," something he suspects a Christian will only support and endorse if they are amiss of theology, ignorant of the contents of the book, or congruent with Young and "the effect of the book, [which] is, indeed, deeply subversive of the Christian faith." Young would agree, although his work is less "destruction" and more deconstruction, whether or not he would use that word. During a keynote speech Gardner-Webb University, Young said he "fully intended" to attack the idea of a hierarchy in the trinity, an idea Mohler fully supports. How apt for Mohler to continually use the word "deeply" during his program as Young believes he is providing

a "thick description" of what Mohler calls "the reality of what happened in the Bible."[30]

Mohler thinks his interpretations of "reality" and the Bible are correct, but Young sees

himself as expanding that view, finding a contradiction between Mohler's doctrine and

reality, and, indeed, intentionally subverting and "opening it [theology] to its own

future," its future being a new conception of God and the trinity (Caputo, "WWJD?" 106;

cf. Bressler 364).

Neither Mohler nor Young can rise victor. Mohler's terms "orthodox" and

"biblical Christianity" are similarly claimed by Young, who said "the orthodoxy in the

book" came from the early church and the Bible. When Mohler says "deeply subversive,"

Young's interpretation shouts, "Yes! Exactly!" in a truly deconstructive fashion. The two

may not engage in direct dialogue, but they are struggling for power like the fourth-

century bishops. Mohler sits in a place of power, earning his living from a fame

associated with the academy, a place some feel Young accuses as an ignoble institution

(Young, *The Shack* 65-66, 91, 198; cf. Challies 6, 9).

In a *USA Today* on-line review, Cathy Grossman claims fans of the novel "read

Young's message as saying you can just discover Jesus' love inside yourself, turn your

life over to him […]. No need to put in time in the pews or know theology," a point

Norman Geisler and Bill Roach say "is clear: […] forget your seminary training."

Grossman sees *The Shack* and Young accusing Mohler and other theologians and pastors

of claiming to be the way to Jesus and Jesus the way to God, of not preaching, "The veil

---

[30] Again, my words, not Young's. A "thick description" is used "to describe the
seemingly insignificant but abundant details present in any cultural practice. By focusing
on these details, cultural poetics critics believe they can reveal the inherent contradictory
forces at work within a culture" (Bressler 364).

of the temple has been rent," but rather renting out the space of the veil by controlling access and communication to God (Roth 117; cf. Young, *The Shack* 66).

However, Grossman has painted a possibly fictitious picture. On the one hand, Young does make some harsh remarks about "theological training" in *The Shack*. On 65-66, the narrator describes seminaries as a place where people become "proper authorities and intellects," those who end up teaching in seminaries, writing books, and teaching in churches, they are those who speak with God and know about God. They emphasize Scripture over experience, because everyone interprets experience, but not everyone interprets interpretations of experience (aka, scripture); Scripture lends itself to having an interpretive authority. If "personal experience […] trump[s] revelation" from the Bible, then church and academic leaders have lost a bit of power in guiding their sheep (Geisler and Roach). However, Geisler and Roach only cite twenty pages of narrative they dislike theologically—80-100—instead of pages talking about experience and the Bible, like 65-66 and 119.

On the other hand, although Geisler and Roach attack *The Shack* for asking people to listen to God and not authorized interpreters of the Bible, one of the God characters in the book, Papa, asks the main character Mack if he remembers his seminary classes, a question asked inside of Geisler and Roach's twenty-page citation. Papa asks this question assuming a memory of the classes would help Mack, which the narrator says he does not: "None of his old seminary training was helping in the least" (91). Things not remembered are little help in times of need. Mack may have defenestrated the baby with the bath water of his theological education, an action based on his poor experience. But the reader need not assume Young implicates all theological education.

Young's narrator does implicate some theological education and his punch is aimed at just those educators raising a fuss.

In the arguments between these readers—of which Young is one—orthodoxy and heresy turn out to be whatever the speaker believes. They claim and cite the Bible, experience, tradition, and reason. The onlookers find no basis to their words other than other words, be they biblical words or otherwise; they are built upon the sandy shores of interpretation, not the impossibility of rock (Matt. 7:24-27). And although their intentions focus on the moral, theological, and spiritual well-being of their listeners, they become like bickering bishops of the fourth century, trying to establish power as an authorial and authoritative voice in the Christian world or to re-establish their power as a reliable voice within the academy and church.

3.1.2. The Church v. Wm. Paul Young

One of the more animated critiques in this power struggle comes from Mark Driscoll, an author and pastor of Mars Hill Church in Washington. During a sermon series on Christian doctrine, Driscoll asked if some people had read the book. He quickly moved on, harshly entreating, "If you haven't, don't." Seeing nothing in the book beyond the trinity, Driscoll flippantly calls it "goddess worship," "modalism," "graven-image-ism," and "heresy."

Chuck Colson and his crew from the popular website *Break Point* are less harsh, although their advice and critiques are similar to Driscoll's. Colson makes a radio spot he subtitles "Stay Out of *The Shack*," in which he says the book has merit, but not enough

for anyone to read.[31] Not even enough reason for Colson to pick up the book; according

Young, Colson admitted having never read the book in an e-mail to Young

(Conversation).

       If Colson truly neglected to read the book before recommending people to "stay

out of *The Shack*," then his power has gone awry. In conversation and during his speech

at Gardner-Webb University, Young related a story about this sort of power in the

church, one he was quite eager to tell. While giving a talk in Orlando, Young had his first

and only encounter (to date) with people protesting him, his book, and his theology.

Young went outside and was asked if he worked at the venue as he handed them water

bottles. When Young finally expunged the mysteries of his identity, he found out none of

the small group of protestors had read the book. The crew must have been under the

leadership of a higher authority in their church, an authority with enough power to inspire

people to protest something of which they had no first-hand experience. This example of

the church reminisces of earlier times when the laity were kept ignorant of the content of

their beliefs (often due to language barriers), but taught to follow those further along in

the hierarchy than themselves, an attitude quite contrary to many of the values that make

Protestants Protestant. (cf. Driscoll).

       Although *The Shack* takes a small part in Driscoll's and Colson's work, they have

used their status to keep people from engaging with different theological possibilities.

They are asking people not to think for themselves, but to think what they are told. This

misuse of power may be disguised as "protection" to the people and leaders like Driscoll

---

[31] Colson says the book has merit in its message of God's love. Another review on *Break Point* disagrees, saying "Papa [...]—despite the entire premise of the book—doesn't love like God" (McSherley).

and Colson, but disguised and misguided or not, they protect only their power and the money that accompanies it.

In response, Young uses much of the same jargon to achieve a certain power so people will read his book. At one point during his speech at Gardner-Webb University, Young said, "*The Shack* has the orthodox position," and he calls people "idiot[s]" if they do not see God at work in the current success of the novel. However, Young is not using this jargon to protect his power, but rather to achieve a power of influence, a subversive power. Much like Driscoll and Colson, Young might not hunger explicitly for power, but in order to proffer what he believes is truth, he needs to be listened to and in order to be listened to, he needs to have authority.

But authority is not the problem. The problem lies in misusing power by keeping people ignorant of other options. Young has not been in power long enough to misuse his power much. In fact, Young even loves his theological other, even though he throws the occasional names at them. Instead of abundant name-calling, he gives them bottles of water (Young, "Keynote Speech"). Despite the amount of name-calling and presence or absence of acts of love, the issue of orthodoxy/heresy boils down to power, not doctrine.

3.1.3. Books and Wm. Paul Young

To date, two books have been written with the title, *Finding God in* The Shack, both published in 2009. Unlike those previously examined, Randal Rauser and Roger E. Olson praise the book, but only to a point. Olson examines *The Shack* as a didactic novel, comparing to how he interprets the Bible, enjoying the story, but "correcting" the theology he finds, what he calls a "theological mistake" (38). However, Olson has compared the "God" in *The Shack* to his God, the God of classical theism. The Papa-

Jesus-Sarayu trinity is not the God many people believe in, and Olson holds *The Shack* accountable for the two trinities not being the same—a subversive inequality Young wants the novel to have.

Rauser's work is similar. More so than Olson, though, Rauser fits his reading of *The Shack* to his theology as much as possible. Rauser's work defends Young against many unnamed critics, recognizing how a text can be used to support multiple interpretations, but only when taken out of "the context of the relevant passages as well as the wider testimony of" the work as a whole (52).

Olson and Rauser represent a common way Christians read religious fiction. Neither author reads *The Shack* like a literary critic would. Instead of investing themselves in the book and examining themes, they look for where they agree and disagree with what they believe the author intended to say. Even here, they are not comparing *The Shack* with reality, but rather with an interpretation of the Bible, which is a collection of interpretations of reality. And in this comparison, they examine Young's novel only to support themselves and "protect" the theology of the less educated, like the critics before them. However, unlike the critics before them, Olson and Rauser have not made their thoughts available to anyone with access to a computer. Olson and Rauser made a critique that makes them money and raises awareness of their name in the larger world of the Christian academy and church.

Again, regardless of intention, the protection of orthodoxy becomes a way to promote the protector. These situations lead towards a preventable confusion of God with human authorities. If these Christian leaders truly want to promote people finding God— in *The Shack* or anywhere else—they should take precautions. No one should ever find

themselves in a situation where they need to "wipe the face of [an authority] off the face of God," a problem Young had with his missionary father (Young, "Keynote Speech"). And we can avoid these situations by making education available to everyone, promoting education and dialogue, and removing oppressive alterities from our language. Yes, even at the expense of lowering the cost of "Christian" education and "Christian" education materials, like books.

3.2. Deconstruction at The Shack's Door

While deconstruction occurs outside of *The Shack*, similar occurrences happen inside. Because of the deconstruction inside the novel, readers find meanings with which they either agree or disagree. When recognizing the deconstruction, the polemical arguments become meaningless as the different meanings found in the novel deconstruct.

Similar to how orthodoxy is claimed by most interpreters of *The Shack*, the text privileges equality over divisions such as orthodoxy and heresy as its us/them binaries deconstruct. Beginning in the foreword, the text sets up a special/ordinary binary. In describing the main character, the narrator calls him "quite ordinary, and certainly not anyone particularly special, except to those who truly know him. […] he is rather unremarkable" (9). Although Mack is so ordinary, he is very smart (11) and "In a world of talkers, Mack is a thinker and doer," making him not so normal (9). Amidst the claims to normality, the narrator says "[Mack] is now even more different and special than he used to be" after a few "remarkably peculiar" years (11).

The narrator, Willie, cannot decide whether Mack is normal or special, confused by appearance and reality. In addition to confusion surrounding Mack, Willie continues to use unstable superlatives. On page 11, he introduces the reader to "*The Great Sadness*"

(always italicized), which could be a large sadness and/or a good sadness. Sadness is not usually a good thing, unless thinking teleologically; if the end result of the sadness justifies the means, viz., pain of the sadness, then the sadness could be interpreted as "great" in retrospect, what Rauser calls a "*greater goods* theodicy" (108, original emphasis). Although Mack did not desire the murder of his daughter Missy, the sadness helped him "become one of those rare people who are totally at home in their own skin," a man who has a good relationship with God, one both deep and wide (11).

The superlatives confuse how Willie interprets *The Great Sadness*, again based on appearance/reality. While intimately close, the sadness was great in quantity, not quality. Years after and upon reflection, the sadness appears qualitatively good. If not for the sadness, there would have been no redemptive story to tell. *The Great Sadness* is a *felix culpa*, a happy fault. Traditionally interpreted, sins resulted in Jesus as the Christ, Missy's death and the resultant sadness yielded the story of *The Shack* that changed the life of Mack, Willie, and many others who read of the place "where tragedy confronts eternity," according to the book's subtitle.

The Shack as a redemption story typifies the Christ story. The innocent Missy dies and as an effect, people learn about and grow closer in a relationship with God. This typology is foreshadowed in the story of the Multnomah princess (27-28, 30-32). With this typology in triplicate—Missy, the Multnomah princess, and Jesus—the redemption story of Jesus becomes less special. It becomes ordinary.

Mack's relationship with Christ is special, as presented in the foreword and the encounter in *The Shack*. Yet, as special as it is, the narrator tells it among other stories, equally as special, and, therefore, equally ordinary. This superlative deconstruction again

happens in the story with Papa's preference for the phrase "especially fond" (91). God is "especially fond" of all people and all creation. This especial fondness becomes simple fondness, it becomes normal and ordinary when it is for everything. The word "especial," "normal" and other superlatives lose meaning in their overuse in *The Shack*.

God's love is normal. Christ is normal. Normality becomes preferred, shifting the binary until Papa again says "especially fond" or tells Mack, "Everything is about *him* [Jesus]," implying Jesus is more special than the Multnomah princess or Missy (95, original emphasis). Papa is speaking orthodoxy when she lifts Christ above other redemption stories, but the narrator subverts Papa with heresy, proclaiming redemption as normative and found in many places other than Christ. No matter what interpreters say about the book, they find a deconstructed meaning in dialogue about the text and even in the text itself, which cannot maintain a preference for orthodoxy or heresy. Neither is better or worse, as the superlatives used to describe them are meaningless.

3.3. Opening The Shack*'s Door and Anathematizing the Creed*

With a deconstructed orthodoxy/heresy, we see the misused power behind so-called good intentions and care for the moral, theological, and spiritual lives of the Other, namely, the less educated or powerful. Instead of engaging in debate about who is right and wrong, deconstruction opens up the events of *The Shack* and Nicaea to discussion and cooperation. We can disagree with the propositions interprets from either document, but without hierarchy and all the attempts for "mastery" by name-calling and discernment warnings (Derrida, "Monolingualism" 39; cf. Young, *The Shack* 124-25, 145-46).

Instead of shouting our arguments and boasting of our perceived rightness from the mountaintops, YouTube, and the blogosphere, we can learn from what others are

saying about Nicaea and *The Shack*—no person repeats either document when they interpret it, but rather they give their own thoughts as prompted and informed by the texts and thereby adding to the events (cf. Louise Rosenblatt's of ideas of "poem" and the transactional experience in Bressler, 79). No one has to be a soldier in the event of reading and discussing, because nonviolence is a possible way to engage the Other in the literary experience in an interpretive community (Bressler 80, 346).

Instead of vying for power, we can take whatever positions we are given in the blogosphere, the internet, and the cosmopolis, informing and being informed by all Others in discussion, not debate (Cobb, "Christ" 209; "Evangelism").[32] In this way, we open the door of *The Shack* and anathematize the creeds, letting the authors out of the texts, letting meaning out of the texts, yes, even letting ourselves and God out of *the* text—out of any text—and into our lives, what Taylor calls "the closure of the book" (7).

Closure connotes not only closing the book, but completing and securing the book, which for Taylor means forgoing any formal definition of the book, because any book or work is more than what is bound by its cover (Taylor 77; cf. Foucault 22-23). The closure of the book is the deconstruction of the text—of *The Shack*, of the Council of Nicaea—and the opening of the door to new possibilities, to interpreting a book in community with as many readers as possible, including other books in a truly intertextual fashion. Without the heavy chains of orthodoxy/heresy, we can open the door, secure the closure of the book, and write and interpret—a text, an event, life, ourselves, God—with the help of God and neighbor (cf. Taylor 79).

---

[32] By "cosmopolis," I do not mean a city with diverse cultures in it, but the world as a functioning, interrelated unit—as a city.

Chapter 4: Theology and the Wake of Impossibility: Implications of Deconstruction

As seen in the events of Nicaea and *The Shack*, those touting the orthodox label often approach orthodoxy in unorthodox manners, inadvertently—or advertently—taking a god-like place in theology, a role not even God deigns to take. They step up where God does not, speaking into existence what is and is not correct belief, creating the *logos* of *theos*—creating a hierarchy in which the self supersedes all members of the trinity—and calling it good. Theology becomes anthropology, ego-logy, and ipseity, echoing the words of Alexander Pope: "Say first, of God above, or man below, / What can we reason, but from what we know?" (I:17-18).

Still, talk of orthodoxy and heresy permeate the church like the smell of garbage. As Rauser says, "Within Christianity there are few words that cut to the quick as sharply as *heresy*" (43; original emphasis). The two appellations are fickle. A person could be condemned a heretic one day and hailed as orthodox the next, or vice versa, since "orthodoxy" is changing, which it cannot rightly do if it is truly "right belief."

Each time orthodoxy changes, the new leaders "label previous divergences as heretical and unorthodox and unchristian, leaving the impression for their descendants that everyone everywhere under the banner of orthodoxy has always agreed with them" (McLaren 33). Every time orthodoxy purported to change, it deconstructed. Not only did orthodoxy do something it cannot rightly do, but the orthodoxy was changed because of deconstruction, because those attempting to define orthodoxy (however unsuccessfully) thought the current definition did not reflect reality. They noted a problem in language and the need for change and justice (Derrida, "Deconstruction in a Nutshell" 16; cf. Caputo, "WWJD?" 27, 29).

Today, the binary means different things to everyone who talks about them. And talk about them they do, whether or not they ever use the words "orthodoxy" or "heresy." The binary is at the forefront every time a denomination or church splits, every time a person moves from one church to another, every time a denomination removes its support from an academy or vice versa, and every time a conversation on belief turns into an argument, where one person involved questions the salvation or "Christianity" of another. Sometimes salvation or the level of Christianity does not even have to be at stake in order for the issue to be one of orthodoxy and heresy, as orthodoxy/heresy can be defined to the smallest area of belief, or remain in broad or "generous" categories (McLaren 23-24, 28).

Orthodoxy is an obsession and a game of power, which is not to say one should throw away everything labeled orthodox. All orthodox beliefs and all orthodox adherents are not to blame for the actions of a loud minority of orthodox persons. The council of Nicaea might not have proceeded in good methods, but the doctrinal conclusions are not necessarily wrong. Even the sponsors of the crusades might have made correct inferences about life, humanity, and God.

Neither should we try to establish another orthodoxy. Orthodoxies are oppressive means of differentiating "us" and "them" across time and culture. We cannot help but hold beliefs about reality, sifting through what we deem right and wrong—our logic about or "*logos*" of reality, including God—but these beliefs can become personal micronarratives instead of macronarratives. And we can seek to deflate these micronarratives, humbly trying to deconstruct our own constructions. This sort of play and deconstruction gives way to implications for identity and theology, to deconstruction as the way of the cross.

4.1. Deconstruction as the Way of the Cross: Crucifixion/Resurrection

This auto-deconstructing faith embodies the *imitatio Christi*, especially the

bearing of the cross, following Christ in a life between the crucifixion and resurrection of

the son of God—of the *logos* of *theos*, of God—which is anathema and the foolishness of

God (1 Cor. 1:18; Deut. 21:23; cf. Culpepper 555). It is between the *via dolorosa* and the

road to Emmaus where we can suffer crucifixion, but continue living, hauntologically, as

a trace of who we were and who we were becoming. Somewhere between the cross and

Emmaus, we make identity statements—"I" statements—but we also recognize the

deconstruction of these statements so the process of identification continues, never

settling in one camp like orthodoxy or heresy, but rather traces the limits of each, traces

the limits of self, traces the hauntological identity of Christ through imitation.

To be like Christ is to pick up his cross, "to drink the cup" of which he drank, and

walk the way of suffering and grief he experienced on his way from Gethsemane to

Golgotha (Matt. 20:22; Mark 10:38; John 18:11). In this *imitatio Christi*, we experience

and connect to the darkness shrouding crucifixion, the darkness of dereliction when

identity is first abandoned and the darkness caused by the hegemony blocking light to the

Other in our experiences, ourselves, in God, and in society (Selmanovic; cf. Winquist's

concept of darkness as the unspoken and suppressed in *Epiphanies of Darkness*). This

darkness includes drinking the cup God metaphorically handed Jesus and the cup Jesus

offered his disciples in remembrance of him—the anamnesis, the Eucharist, the

communion where individuals become traces of themselves, traces of Christ, and,

therefore, traces of each other. In this *imitatio Christi*, we pour out ourselves on a cross,

but gain a trace of ourselves and others on the way to Emmaus and the breaking of bread

and the sharing of the cup. Not only does orthodoxy/heresy deconstruct, but the orthodox and heretics become unified in being the body of Christ—becoming one in the way that Jesus and God are one (John 17:22).

In this darkness, the suppressed meets the oppressor as the veil between them is torn. In the tearing of the veil, the preferred part of the binary is no longer holy and the structure supporting the binary is declared impotent (Culpepper 561-62). At Nicaea, the darkness was partly Arius and his sympathizers, but also the poor who are so often ignored and grouped together as agreeing with the empire and the church. Surrounding *The Shack*, that same deconstruction happens in groups like the Southern Baptist Convention through its associations with their LifeWay Christian Stores and their voice in Albert Mohler. Not all Southern Baptists believe what their leaders believe. Even those touting orthodoxy have a heterodoxy beneath them. Similarly, those agreeing with what they read in *The Shack* might not find in *The Shack* what William Paul Young, Rauser, or Olson find there.

With Nicaea and *The Shack*, the arguers tout "right belief," implicitly tossing their opponents into the darkness of heresy, the darkness of oppression. Anything tossed into darkness will eventually come to light, like an epiphany, as Winquist describes it (xii). The epiphanies flip the binary in play, which is endless unless we move beyond the binary into deconstruction and future possibilities in the wake of the play. Looking at Nicaea and *The Shack*, we can move beyond arguments of *homoousios,* the trinity, and inclusive or pluralist theology, realizing a haunting God of reality will never be the God in which we believe. Instead of obsessing over right belief at the expense of the Other, we

can construct our own theology with the Other, whether or not they construct the same theology.

4.2. The Waking Impossibility

As we construct not an orthodoxy, but rather a personal theology, we reach for correctness, but with humble faith, not prideful certainty. We expect perfection in belief—equality with God—is something ungraspable, but in the same breath we expect to take hold of it. We bind the child of the promise on top of the altar and raise the knife, but expect the promise to continue—a hope against hope (Romans 4:18; Caputo 45-46).

The wake of deconstruction and theology is impossible. They cannot have a wake, for a wake in water implies movement and movements have beginnings, but deconstruction and theology have no originary events. A funerary wake implies a life, but deconstruction and theology exist hauntologically. There is no real assurance of life or death, but rather acceptance of the specters. Still, something is awakening and it is something new, a newborn awakening, the awakening of impossibility.

Derrida once shivered at this new thing, but Caputo recognizes a shift in deconstruction from the early fear of Derrida to an affirmation of the thing that is already here, yet still coming—already, not yet, as the theologians call it (Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play" 293). Instead of the fear, deconstructionists look into the face of the future, into the womb of birthing and say, "*oui oui—à l'impossible*, in a great burst of passion for the impossible," "a pact with the impossible" (Caputo, "Prayers and Tears" 3, 4).

With awakening impossibility, faith is possible. If belief could achieve orthodoxy, a definitive or established rightness, then there would be no room for faith. With

orthodoxy, faith is impossible. But when belief cannot achieve rightness or, better, when belief is impossible, then faith is possible (Caputo, "WWJD?" 45). And more, faith is not only possible, but necessary, for action requires belief, opinion, or something to take the place of these two, viz., faith—praxis and -doxa are contours of each other.

With this deconstruction of belief, of orthodoxy/heresy and the awakening of impossibility and faith, oppression is removed from alterity. No longer do different beliefs create power struggles and oppression. Any us/them binary becomes part of the process of identification and is accompanied by recognizing the play in the binary, how sometimes the "I" is an "us" and other times a "them," and, eventually, how the terms "us" and "them" are simply insufficient understandings of reality, because "labels […] tacitly impose a common identity on a diverse group, overlooking internal differences" (Medina 656). The "I" simply becomes an "I," a name, a proper name, which cannot be translated into any language, not even the one language of the Other, the language of us/them. But without these labels, this us/them language, there are only proper names. "And understanding is no longer possible when there are only proper names, and understanding is no longer possible when there are no longer proper names" (Derrida, *Des Tours de Babel* 105).

The other cannot be understood without translation, without categorizing, without proper metaphors, analogies, and descriptions—which we do not have, since there are only proper names, only self-identification, not identity. Understanding is impossible and leftover are faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:13). Faith steps in as we reach out to embrace the other, which we must, hoping for the return of that embrace. We cannot engage in identification without community, for memory needs community. And if exactness in

translation is impossible, approximation and the faith to achieve the impossible is necessary.

In order to live in community faithfully, we need the other and therefore love, another impossibility. We cannot love what we do not know and understand, yet we can neither know nor understand any other. So love is love of the unlovable, of enemies (Caputo, "WWJD?" 46; Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35). Truly, what kind of love is it that only loves those who deserve love (cf. Derrida, "Cosmopolitanism" 36)? Love and community and interrelated concepts—forgiveness, hospitality, justice—must become "aneconomic," and "incognitos of '*the* impossible'" (respectively: Derrida, "Cosmpolitanism" 34; Caputo, "WWJD?" 58, original emphasis).

On the other hand, equally important, is being heard. "They" need to hear "us" as much as "we" need to hear "them." Individuals are unlabelled, untranslatable, and unique, each with something to offer—that is, they are normal, each one of them "ordinarily special" to alter Papa's language. No experience should be deprived of access. Not everyone will hear each experience , but they should be accessible to any with ears to hear.

Just as not everyone will hear, neither will discussion always be pleasant. When we hear and are heard, communities change and memories with them. When memories change, people change. We change. We are influenced as we influence, we lose any ability to grasp onto any identity, be it "Protestant" or "Christian." The untranslatable proper name eludes translation by anyone, even the self, because it never settles, it "is bound up with difference," or *différance* (Medina 657). Discussers become restless nomads, traces of identities, never stopping in any one identity, never understanding the

self, the other, the community, the cosmopolis, or God, but always reaching for that goal, "run[ning] in such a way as to get the prize" (1 Cor. 9:24; cf. Taylor 138).

But with all our running, all our journeying, we are "never arriving (*arriver*) decisively at just one final destination" (Caputo, "WWJD?" 47). This denial of identity is similar to our denial of theology. We allow the reality of humans to deconstruct identifiers, so we also allow the reality of God to deconstruct a theology. Instead, we embrace identification and theologizing. Just as the self is a trace of identities, God becomes lost and found in *différance*. God will always be "holy and wholly other" than our ideas of God, will always be deconstructing our understanding of God, will always be beyond, or at least different from, our propositions and stories about God (Young, *The Shack* 98; cf. Aquinas 1.1.9). God was never in *The Shack*, the Bible, or any theology. God is with us, not books. The God in *The Shack* is not the God of *The Shack*. The God in the Bible is not the God of the Bible, is not the God of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Leah, and Rachel. God is lost and found "in the infinite play of interpretation," always just beyond the next unreachable star (Taylor 103; Leigh and Darion).

Our theology, deconstruction, communities, discussions, worldviews, and identifications may not settle, but we will have love (1 Cor. 13). Embracing the aporia and play of theory and practice amidst orthodoxy and heresy, we partner with the other. Instead of calling each other orthodox or heretic, we can call them sister and brother, moving together to seeing the kingdom of God growing amidst humanity.

Afterword: Physician, Deconstruct Thyself!

"There are even signs that deconstruction may prove, in the course of its progress, to be self-deconstructing, i.e. self-curing, so that those who come down with it may eventually find themselves diagnosed as normal once again, well and truly able to carry out the institution's business as usual. And if that turns out to be the case—so runs the argument of this paper—it will be a new and serious occasion for anxiety" (Felperin 254).

"Deconstruction [is] a kind of passion or prayer for the impossible" (Caputo, "WWJD?" 63).

Left in the wake and waking of deconstruction and theology, we construct and deconstruct our micronarratives and those of others, constantly looking for truth, but always finding it just out of reach. This constant deconstruction will carry heavy impacts on theology and Christianity. We will no longer see Christian as something we are, but rather as something we are becoming, since identity and identifiers deconstruct and we are left only with identifying and traces. Leaving behind the appellation "Christian" is no easy task. Self-labeled Christian communities will either be hesitant or evangelistic towards those pursuing Christ outside of labels.

Many self-labeled Christians will also be quite resistant to those who speak of God, Jesus, Christ, and the Holy Spirit (among other religious figures) outside of their tradition and beliefs. Although deconstruction of orthodoxy/heresy will lead towards greater community, it will also lead towards a new sort of isolation for those making the transition from Christian to one tracing Christ, one who is a trace of self and a trace of Christ. The doors of churches may close to deconstructing persons, but the door to *The Shack*—the door to God—will be opening. And with this opening and closing of doors,

traces will find new communities, although the person might find oneself closed to some communions.

But doors have closed throughout the ages. Doors were closed in 325 CE, creating early orthodox/heresy binaries. Even before then, doors were opened and shut. Scholars often read the epistles of the New Testament as polemical works, promoting one belief system against another: "if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be [*anathema*]" (Gal. 1:8).

Often discouraging, closed doors keeps one moving, walking from the cross to Emmaus, anathematized and consecrated to God on a journey of tracing Christ. Even when doors are opened, a deconstructing Christian does not rest. When Jesus followed Cleopas to Emmaus, he shared with the people and there eyes were opened. But their eyes were not just opened, their eyes brought forth newness, birth and rebirth, as implied by the verb *dianoigo* (Luke 24:31). Just when their eyes opened and recognized Jesus, ideas were born and the Jesus they knew "became vanished from them" (Luke 24:31, author's translation). And their eyes became ripe for more births as the hauntological vision of Jesus disseminated new possibilities for their understanding, as evident in the construction of the New Testament. Every new knowledge is only a glimpse and must be treated as such. New knowledge is to be replaced, because when eyes are opened and reopened, the target vanishes, going further beyond sight.

My argument fits the above mold. My work, too, only goes so far. I hope it births ideas and opens eyes just long enough to see itself, Jesus, and justice vanish. In spite of this hope, neither my argument nor deconstruction are needed to reach this place between the cross and Emmaus. Indeed, people are deconstructing binaries and moving towards

love and the kingdom of God without having ever heard of deconstruction, Derrida, or any other postmodern philosopher. But not only do we not need my argument and deconstruction, we actually cannot use either my argument or deconstruction to reach the kingdom.

I have presented a technical argument to which few people gain access for physical, intellectual, and leisure reasons. I have presented an argument against arguments. I ask for Christians to stop name-calling in order to love and I have tossed around words like "harsh" and "flippant," doing nothing active in this paper to help the other, but rather to call others to them. These words are just that—words, not actions, albeit words about an important topic. Still, my argument begs to be deconstructed and replaced by something better, something with actions and words, something that will also be deconstructed and replaced, again and again, until love and the kingdom come and the impossible becomes passable.

Currently, I am watching my words deconstruct. I am re-placing my words with actions, translating the jargon into something a different audience can understand, a diverse audience from the upper echelon at a Presbyterian church to the adults who go to that church to be served a meal once a week. Instead of arguing, I try to embrace others and it proves difficult, a change for which I am not always prepared. A change for which I seek help in others by hearing them and being heard by them, by communal anamnesis, by communal deconstruction—deconstruction or critical thinking, or criticism, or justice, or love.

Whatever wake comes next or whoever's wake comes next, I am awake and in a community in which I can help others and be helped by others.

Works Cited

"Anamnesis." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1991.

Aquinas, Thomas. "Summa Theologica." *New Advent*. *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*. 2nd rev. ed. 1920. Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Web. 29 March 2009.

Ayres, Lewis. *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004.

Bauer, Walter. *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*. 2nd German edition by Georg Strecker. Translated by Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins. Ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971.

Bressler, Charles E. *Literary Crisiticm: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. 4th edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2007.

Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008.

Canton, NC. Canton, NC, n.d. Web. 21 April 2010.

Caputo, John D. *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*. Bloomington, IL: Indiana UP, 1997.

Caputo, John D. *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?: The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church*. The Church and Postmodernism. Ed. James K. A. Smith. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.

Chadwick, Henry. "Faith and Order at the Council of Nicaea." *Harvard Theological Review* 52 (1960): 172-95.

Challies, Tim. "A Reader's Review of *The Shack*." *Challies Dot Com: Informing The Reforming*. 20 May 2008. Web. 09 Sept. 2009.

"*Cherem*." *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Ed. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005.

Chesterton, Gilbert K. *Heretics*. London: The Bodley Head, 1960.

Cobb, John B., Jr. "Evangelism & Mission." *Ask Dr. Cobb.* Procces and Faith, Oct. 2004. Web. 03 March 2008.

Cobb, John B., Jr. *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*. Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press of Philadelphia, 1975.

Colson, Chuck. "Diminishing Glory: Stay Out of *The Shack*." *Break Point*. 06 May 2008. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

Critchley, Simon and Richard Kearney. "Preface." *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*. Jacques Derrida. New York: Routledge, 2001. vii-xii.

Culpepper, R. Alan. *Mark*. Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary. Vol. 20. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007.

Derrida, Jacques. *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*. Translated by Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes. Thinking in Action. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Derrida, Jacques. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida.* Ed. John D. Caputo. New York: Fordham UP, 1997.

Derrida, Jacques. "Des Tours de Babel." Trans. Joseph F. Graham. *Acts of Religion*. Ed. Gil Andijar. New York: Routledge, 2002. 104-34.

Derrida, Jacques. "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of

Reason Alone." Trans. Samuel Weber. *Acts of Religion*. Ed. Gil Andijar. New

York: Routledge, 2002. 42-101.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology.* Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Corrected Ed.

Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1997.

Derrida, Jacques. *Monolingualism of the Other, or, The Prosthesis of Origin*. Trans.

Patrick Mensah. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998.

Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the

New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences."

Writing and Difference. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: The University of Chicago

Press, 1978. 278-93.

Didion, Joan. *The White Album*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979.

Driscoll, Mark. "Trinity: God Is." *Mars Hill Church*. 30 March 2008. Web. 30 Oct. 2009**.**

Erickson, Millard. *Christian Theology.* 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic,

1998.

Eusebius. "Letter on the Council of Nicaea." *New Advent*. *Nicene and Post-Nicene

Fathers, Second Series*. Vol. 4. Trans. John Henry Newman and Archibald

Robertson. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890. Rev. and ed.

for *New Advent* by Kevin Knight. Web. 10 Dec 2009.

Eusebius. "Life of Constantine." *New Advent*. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second

Series*. Vol. 1. Trans. Ernest Cushing Richardson. Buffalo, NY: Christian

Literature Publishing Co., 1890. Rev. and ed. for *New Advent* by Kevin Knight.

10 Dec 2009. Web.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*.

Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.

Faith House Manhattan. Faith House Manhattan, n.d. Web. 02 May 2010.

Geisler, Norman and Bill Roach. "*The Shack*: Helpful or Heretical?: A Critical Review."

Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

Gignac, Joseph. "Anathema." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. *New Advent*, n.d. Web. 12

March 2010.

Grant, Robert M. "Religion and Politics at the Council at Nicaea." *Journal of Religion* 55

(1975): 1-12.

Grizzard, Marc. *Amazing Grace Baptist Church*. Marc Grizzard, n.d. Web. 28 April

2010.

Grizzard, Marc. "Book Burning 2009." *Amazing Grace Baptist Church*.

Grizzard, Marc. "Book Burning 2010." *Amazing Grace Baptist Church*.

Grizzard, Marc. "Heretics to Avoid." *Amazing Grace Baptist Church*.

Grizzard, Marc. "King James Version 1611." *Amazing Grace Baptist Church*.

Grizzard, Marc. "Perversions." *Amazing Grace Baptist Church*.

Girzzard, Marc. "What We Believe." *Amazing Grace Baptist Church*.

Grossman, Cathy Lynn. "'Shack' Opens Doors, But Critics Call Book 'Scripturally

Incorrect.' *USA Today*. 29 May 2008. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory*. Ed., trans. Lewis A. Coser. Chicago: U of

Chicago P, 1992.

Hart, Kevin. *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy*. New
      York: Fordham UP, 2000.

The Holy Bible: Authorized King James' Version. Nashville: Broadman and Holman,
      1997.

Horsley, Richard A. *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee: The Social Context of
      Jesus and the Rabbis*. Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1996.

Jones, Arnold Hugh Martin. *Were Ancient Heresies Disguised Social Movements?*
      Historical Series. Ed. Clarence L. Lee. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966.

Knight, Kevin. *New Advent.* 2010. Web. 12 March 2010.

Leclercq, Henri. "The First Council of Nicaea." *The Catholic Encyclopedia. New Advent*,
      n.d. Web. 09 March 2010.

Lee, Clarence L. "Introduction." *Were Ancient Heresies Disguised Social Movements?*
      Arnold Hugh Martin Jones. Historical Series. Ed. Clarence L. Lee. Philadelphia:
      Fortress Press, 1966. v-xi.

Leigh, Mitch and Joe Darion. "The Impossible Dream (The Quest)." *Man of La Mancha
      (1965 Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Universal Classics Group, 2001.
      MPEG.

"Library: Frequently Asked Questions." *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
      Library*. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d. Web. 26 April 2010.

LifeWay Christian Stores. LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist
      Convention. 2008. Web. 14 April 2009.

LifeWay Christian Stores. "Read With Discernment." Web. 14 April 2009.

LifeWay Christian Stores. "'Read With Discernment'—Book Briefing: *The Shack*—by

    William P. Young." Web. 14 April 2009.

McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 4th ed. Malden, MA:

    Blackwell 2007.

McLaren, Brian D. *A Generous Orthodoxy*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004.

McSherley, Travis K. "Bringing Heaven Down to Earth: The Small God of *The Shack*."

    Break Point. Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

Medina, José. "Identity Trouble: Disidentification and the Problem of Difference."

    Philosophy & Social Cirticism 29.6 (2003): 655-80.

Michener, Ronald T. *Engaging Deconstructive Theology*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007.

Mohler, R. Albert. "A Look at *The Shack*." *The Albert Mohler Program*. 11 April 2008.

    Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

Mohler, R. Albert. "A Look at *The Shack*." *The Albert Mohler Program*. 26 May 2008.

    Web. 30 Oct. 2009.

Olson, Roger E. *Finding God in* The Shack*: Seeking Truth in a Story of Evil and

    Redemption*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009.

Payne, Robert. "A Hammer Struck at Heresy." *Christian History* 15.2 (1996): 11-19.

    Academic Search Premier. Web. 31 May 2009.

Pedrick, James. "How AIDS Revealed the Hole in My Gospel." *Relevant Magazine*.

    Relevant Media Group, 1 Dec. 2009. Web. 5 Jan. 2010.

Peters, Ted. *God—The World's Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era*. 2nd ed.

    Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000.

Pope, Alexander. *Essay on Man*. *Essay on Man and Other Poems*. New York: Dover

    Publications, 1994.

Powell, Jim. *Derrida For Beginners*. New York, NY: Writers and Readers Publishing,

    Inc., 1997.

Poythress, Vern Sheridan. "Biblical Studies: Kinds of Biblical Theology." *Westminster*

    Theological Journal 70/1 (2008): 129-42.

Rauser, Randall. *Finding God in* The Shack. Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2009.

Roth, Robert Paul. "Well Intended Heresies." *Word and World* 8.2 (1988): 115-23.

Selmanovic, Samir. "Learning to Love the Other in God, Self, and Society."

    TransFORM: East Coast Gathering on Missional Community Formation. 30 April

    2010, Wesley Theological Seminary. Lecture.

Smith, James K. A. *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and*

    Foucault to Church. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2006.

Stiver, Dan R. *The Philosophy of Religious Language: Sign, Symbol, and Story*.

    Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996.

Taylor, Mark C. *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago

    Press, 1984.

Tennyson, Alfred. *In Memoriam.* New York: W. W. Norton, 2004.

Todd, Richard A. "Clergy, Bishops and Pope." *Introduction to the History of*

    Christianity. ed. Tim Dowley. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002. 195-203.

Wand, John W. C. *The Four Councils*. London: The Faith Press, LTD., 1951.

Wilhelm, Joseph. "The Nicene Creed." *The Catholic Encyclopedia. New Advent*, n.d.

    Web. 10 March 2010.

Winquist, Charles E. *Epiphanies of Darkness: Deconstruction in Theology*. Philadelphia:

Fortress Press, 1986.

Wright, David F. "Councils and Creeds." *Introduction to the History of Christianity*. ed.

Tim Dowley. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002. 164-86.

Yoder, John Howard. *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method*. Grand

Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002.

Young, William Paul. *The Shack: Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity*. Los Angeles:

Windblown Media, 2007.

Young, William Paul. Conversation. 31 Oct. 2009.

Young, William Paul. Keynote Speech. 31 Oct. 2009, Gardner-Webb University.

Keynote Speech.

Zito, George V. "Toward a Sociology of Heresy. *Sociological Analysis* 44 (1983): 123-

30.