

## Introduction | An Alienated Theorhetic

God, whatever His other failings, is a great rhetorician.

—Mark Forsyth, *The Elements of Eloquence*

In her poem “On the Parables of the Mustard Seed,” Denise Levertov revisits Jesus of Nazareth’s famous analogy between a mustard seed and the kingdom of God. In Luke’s retelling, Jesus asks, “What is the kingdom of God like? To what can I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that a person took and planted in the garden. When it was fully grown, it became a large bush and the birds in the sky dwelt in its branches” (Luke 13:18–19).<sup>1</sup> The quote is from a description of cypress trees from the book of Ezekiel: “I in turn will take and set [in the ground a slip] from the lofty top of the cedar; I will pluck a tender twig from the tip of its crown, and I will plant it on a tall, towering mountain. . . . It shall bring forth boughs and produce branches and grow into a noble cedar. Every bird of every feather shall take shelter under it, shelter in the shade of its boughs” (Ezek. 17:22–23).<sup>2</sup> Jesus’s repurposed images are usually understood to mean that the kingdom of God will flourish despite its insignificant beginnings.

That is not wrong, Levertov reflects, but it is not right enough. The point is not simply that something small grows into something large; the point is that mustard plants do not usually grow large at all. Mustard plants are more bushes than trees. More than simply drawing an arresting analogy, Jesus is imagining a miracle. “Faith is rare, He must have been saying, / prodigious, unique— / one infinitesimal grain divided / like loaves and fishes.” This deeper lesson is easy to miss. “Glib generations mistake / the metaphor, not looking at fields and trees, / not noticing paradox.” It is “*as if* from a mustard-seed / a great shade-tree grew.”<sup>3</sup> Faith depends on the ability to say “*as if*”

The miracle that I am after here is not as prodigious as the kingdom of God. But it begins from a seed equally small. In this project, I pursue *theorhetic*, a term employed by Steven Mailloux to designate the rhetoric used when we are

talking “to, for, and about God.”<sup>4</sup> Mailloux offers this brief definition on his way to making a larger point about Jesuit rhetorical practice. But this brief definition promises a new project for rhetorical studies, a project dedicated to the invention of theological questions, including the ultimate question of God. Trained by Kenneth Burke, rhetoricians have perhaps become too used to speaking of the rhetoric of religion, as though the entirety of religious rhetoric could be represented in a single prepositional relation.<sup>5</sup> The prepositions of theorhetic, however, suggest multiple species. Theorhetic-*to* might include rhetorics of prayer and liturgy. Inherently and etymologically precarious (L. *precarius*, dependent on another’s will, uncertain—related to *prex*, prayer, request, intercession), theorhetic-*to* requires the discipline of the open hand. Under theorhetic-*for*, we might arrange the familiar rhetorics of preaching, catechesis, and evangelization. The basic office of the theorhetic-*for*, as Augustine imagined it, is to “communicate what is good and eradicate what is bad, and in this process of speaking . . . win over the antagonistic, rouse the apathetic, and make clear to those who are not conversant with the matter under discussion what they should expect.”<sup>6</sup> Theorhetic may invite even more prepositional relations. In contemplation, one might observe theorhetorics-*in* God; in mysticism, theorhetorics-*from* God; in meditation, theorhetorics-*through* God. Pilgrimage goes *toward* God; discipleship follows *after* God; postmodern theologians imagine possible theorhetorics-*beyond* God. “Therefore let us pray *to* God,” says Meister Eckhart, “that we may be free of God.”<sup>7</sup>

Theorhetic-*about*, the third of Mailloux’s species, takes up the fundamental challenge of reflecting on who God may be. What is God? Where is God? Who is God? What does God want? Theorhetic-*about* treats these questions as matters of persuasion rather than formal rationality or philosophic conceptualization. Theorhetic-*about* is the rhetoric that invents God’s *persuasion*, a word that carries a few different meanings. Persuasion can refer to ordinary, intentional appeals to the other—including the Wholly Other—but it need not be limited in this conventional way. Persuasion can also imply a more archaic sense of “the fact, condition, or state of being persuaded” (*OED*) and a sense of religious belief or commitment, as in “Professor Lynch is of the Catholic persuasion.” This notion of persuasion-as-characteristic has also been casuistically stretched—with both humorous and hostile undertones—to include personal features that are not quite matters of choice, as in, “Professor Lynch is of the Irish-Catholic persuasion” (“and,” the enthymeme might run, “you know what that means”). This usage suggests that “persuasion” paradoxically designates both

matters of assent and matters of assignation; it suggests something like what Diane Davis calls “prior rhetoricity,” an ontological notion of rhetoric in which the human person (though not only the human person) is shaped by an “affectability or persuadability.”<sup>8</sup> For there to be any sense of ordinary or traditional persuasion at all, there has to be this ontology of persuadability in the first place.

Extended to the divine, these various nuances indicate that persuasion is something that God makes happen, something that happens to God, and something that suggests who God may be. Observing some of the available means of these persuasions can produce a theorhetoric-*about*. In this particular project of theorhetoric, I observe the persuasions of God through four key terms: meekness, sacrifice, atonement, and holiness. The persuasions of God could never be reduced to these four or any single list of terms; one might add a host of others—mercy, wrath, idolatry, forgiveness, justice, love. But any such list would certainly include meekness, sacrifice, atonement, and holiness as key topoi through which powerful religious rhetorics continue to be invented. The critical aim of this project is to track how these topoi have sometimes been invented in the past, and the creative aim is to imagine how in the present and future they might invent differently.

As I begin to theorize these theorhetorical topoi, I am cognizant of a remark offered by Thomas Rickert in *Ambient Rhetoric*: “We do not need a new rhetoric . . . ; rather, we must work anew with what has already been brought forward in rhetorical theory and practice.” Such is my intention here. Rather than hatching entirely new ideas about rhetoric, I hope to work anew with what has already been brought forward. Key to that work is recognizing how the field’s understanding of rhetoric has changed and how that understanding has stayed the same. “Rhetoric,” Rickert continues, “can no longer be understood solely as a subjective, verbal, visual, or even performative art. These permutations should not be jettisoned, certainly; instead, we need to expand and rework them.”<sup>9</sup> The idea of “permutation” (*per*, thoroughly + *mutare*, change) becomes significant here. Permutation suggests a change that maintains some relation to what is being changed from. To suggest new permutations is to suggest variations rather than rejections.

The tensive relation inherent in permutation articulates this book’s *kairos*, method, and ethos. The book’s *kairos* is the postreligious, postsecular, and post-Christian moment—a time in which certain kinds of Christian religious language have become unsayable even to many Christians and even as the effects of that older language (i.e., the practices and beliefs it prescribed) continue to linger. As with the terms “postmodern” and “posthuman,” “post-Christian” suggests

both a decisive break and an enduring influence. The term also has both descriptive and prescriptive import. It describes a changed relation to a cultural inheritance, but it also may indicate a more ethical stance toward that inheritance.

The book's methodology is likewise hinted at in the idea of permutation, both in the available means of invention and in its transdisciplinary approach. Regarding the former, the book practices a *complicit invention*, working through tradition and convention rather than against them. Such an approach is necessary for a post-Christian theorhetic that would reclaim and reimagine ideas like meekness, sacrifice, atonement, and holiness. In addition, an archaic meaning of permutation as "exchange" or "barter" (*OED*) indicates the book's transdisciplinary approach, which draws on philosophy, anthropology, literature, and of course theology. Scholars from all these fields offer resources for the invention of a God-haunted inquiry that is distinctly rhetorical. Regarding theological ideas in particular, this project assumes that the most powerful post-Christian critique should proceed *from within* Christian tradition rather than outside it. In other words, this book presupposes that, insofar as many of the rhetorical effects of these *topoi* proceed from disordered Christian thought, better Christian thought can and should make repair.

Finally, the idea of permutation also suggests something about the ethos I perform here, an ethos that is recognizably Christian but is also oriented toward a post-Christian context in which traditional religious language has become moribund. Michael Hyde has reminded rhetoricians of an older meaning of "ethos" as "dwelling place," with implications of "haunt" and all that word connotes—familiar grounds, the places (terrain, *topoi*) to which we repeatedly return, and ghostly presences that dog us.<sup>10</sup> This ethos, which I later describe as "alienated," dwells within Christian tradition, even as it feels haunted within that tradition. It cannot quit the old dwelling place, but it must invent new ways to inhabit it.

For the remainder of this introduction, I expand on the book's *kairos*, method, and ethos. Concerning the book's actual approach, these three rhetorical conditions cannot really be separated, except for purposes of explication. Each is implicated in the others. The book's alienated ethos, for example, is reflected in a methodological approach that would recover ideas from, with, and within Christian tradition. The methodology is appropriate for a moment in which many traditional Christian ideas, and the appeals that proceed from those ideas, no longer seem persuasive. But the only way out is through.

## A Post-Christian *Kairos*

It is an old story that the death of God has been greatly exaggerated. On the surface, Nietzsche's famous prediction appears to have come true, as empty churches are turned into supermarkets, floral shops, bookstores, and gyms.<sup>11</sup> Yet these structural conversions still indicate the long shadow of the once-living God, who haunts these secularized spaces in which people still seek their daily bread, purchase bouquets for private altars, gather the texts of personal liturgies, and practice the most self-denying asceticisms. God has appeared to survive the twentieth century's multiple assassination attempts: global warfare, genocide, atomic weaponry. In the wake of so much suffering, it should not be surprising that it might become difficult to imagine a deity both sovereign and benign. Scholars would eventually pose the "secularization thesis," the claim that WEIRD societies (Western, educated, industrial, rich, and—at least for the moment—democratic) were on an irreversible trajectory away from religion.<sup>12</sup> Yet the proponents of the secularization thesis would eventually be forced to admit that they had spoken too soon.<sup>13</sup> Religion would "return," as a social and historical reality, a political force, and a public philosophical question. Now, rather than speaking of secularity, it has become common to speak of the "postsecular," a term that suggests that religion retains tremendous political and cultural power even if it no longer enjoys an unquestioned political or cultural status.

Yet even if the case has been overstated, the death of God seems to have occasioned a "post-Christian" moment, characterized by the lingering effects of a diminished faith. For some people, this diminution is a cause of distress. Gabriel Vahanian, whose 1957 *The Death of God* helped set the stage for what would come to be known as "death of God" theology, argues that a post-Christian culture is one shaped by a Christianity that it no longer takes seriously. In the post-Christian era, "Christianity suffers 'not a torture death but a quiet euthanasia.'"<sup>14</sup> If God is dead, it is because God has become "neither necessary nor unnecessary."<sup>15</sup> This Christian morbidity has been caused by Christians themselves, who have settled for spiritual mediocrity.<sup>16</sup> "Is not indeed the literature of 'peace of mind,' of 'mental health,' a poison which is now attacking the head of Christianity—the heart presumably having stopped long since?"<sup>17</sup> There can be little doubt that some of the literatures of the present day—certain versions of "self-care," for example—might prompt the same bitter questioning.

For others, the euthanasia of Christianity is a relief. The Belgian art critic Thierry de Duve imagines that the post-Christian era will see “humankind freed from its subordination to the power of the father because it refers its fraternity—and its sorority—to the empty place of the symbolic father rather than the filled place of the incarnated son.”<sup>18</sup> Out from under the nobodaddy, a formerly Christian culture can reach its full spiritual and ethical maturity. Others offer a more descriptive account of the post-Christian moment, arguing that, like it or not, Christianity is poised to supersede itself through a religiously induced secularization. This is the argument made by Marcel Gauchet, who describes Christianity as the preeminent “religion for departing from religion.”<sup>19</sup> By this, he means that Christianity completes a process under way even before the so-called archaic religions gave way to the axial age, with its “mature” or “historical” religions. The emergence of religion *qua* religion—that is, as a phenomenon that is thinkable in and of itself—allows human beings to distinguish a transcendent or sacred sphere from an immanent or profane sphere. Once this division exists, the demise of religion is inevitable. Christianity’s attempt to overcome this separation by universalizing its values, and thereby collapsing the distinction between “religious” and “ordinary” life, paradoxically sets religion on a terminal decline, though a decline that may take centuries to complete. Finally, there are some who argue that this secularization is precisely what Christianity should want. Gianni Vattimo makes the counterintuitive argument that secularization is “the constitutive trait of an authentic religious experience.”<sup>20</sup> Secularization allows Christianity to shed what Vattimo sees as the reactionary superstition that has too long ordered and distorted its institutional expression. Christianity can then find its true vocation to love, freed from disordered attachments to miracle, mystery, and authority.

This small sampling of arguments indicates the range of interpretations of the post-Christian turn, which may be bad news, good news, or simply the news. Alternatively, secularization may not be happening at all. Much has been made, at least in the United States, of the rise of the so-called nones, the increase in the number of people who choose “none” when asked about formal religious affiliation. The nones are not “religious” in the conventional sense of the term (they do not belong to religious communities, they do not attend weekly services, etc.), yet they do not necessarily reject the idea of God.<sup>21</sup> Their search for the divine continues, even if their conventional religious identities are hard to track. Some scholars speak of the religiously “remixed,” which includes not just the familiar “spiritual but not religious” but also the “faithful nones” and the

“religious hybrids.”<sup>22</sup> Other lists include categorizations as diverse as atheists, weak agnostics, strong agnostics, secular humanists, humanists, the secular, the spiritual, the spiritual-but-not-religious, and neopagans—along with the nothing-in-particular, the all-of-the-above, and the none-of-the-above.<sup>23</sup>

Many of these developments have been described by Charles Taylor in his landmark *A Secular Age*, which rejects any “subtraction story” of secularization. Subtraction stories are those that characterize modernity as nothing more than the society that emerges once a culture is drained of the murky waters of religion (thus revealing a Scandinavian-style paradise of confessional-free liberal flourishing). By Taylor’s estimation, a secular age is defined neither by the dominance of nonreligious institutions nor even the vestigial religiosity of which Vahanian speaks. A secular age is rather marked by “a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace.”<sup>24</sup> A secular age is thus backgrounded by what Taylor calls the “immanent frame,” the sense that human experience and aspiration are now contained entirely within a natural order, such that human flourishing no longer requires a transcendent background against which its ideals need be measured. For the first time in human history, it becomes widely possible to imagine spiritual yearning without a transcendent referent. But this persistence of that yearning is evidenced by what Taylor calls “the nova effect,” an explosion of spiritual possibilities that spawns “an ever-widening variety of moral/spiritual options, across the span of the thinkable and perhaps even beyond.”<sup>25</sup> The enduring need for spiritual practice or commitment often requires “sacrifice” (of time, of rest, of entertainment) even when the practice is not traditionally religious. Seen within the context of the nova effect, the swapping of kneelers for NordicTracks may not indicate a fundamental change.

Within the immanent frame, the adherents of transcendent cosmologies find themselves under what Taylor describes as “cross pressure,” the sense in which people are compelled to grope for a “third way” between the unsatisfying choices of traditional theisms and a disenchanted world.<sup>26</sup> The cross-pressured are those who feel pulled toward the transcendent even against the headwinds of the immanent. “The whole culture experiences cross pressures, between the draw of the narratives of closed immanence on one side, and the sense of their inadequacy on the other, strengthened by encounter with existing milieux of religious practice, or just by some intimations of the transcendent.”<sup>27</sup> Cross pressure contributes to the nova effect as people begin to search for ways to put

expression to their intimations. As they try to express this sense of the transcendent, they will encounter the existing milieu of religious practice—including the commonplaces now abandoned by a diminished religious power, whose terminology has become theologically unmoored.

In other words, the dawning of a secular age occasions a rhetorical crisis. “Perhaps totally new words are needed; perhaps a decent silence about God should be observed; but ultimately, a new treatment of the idea [of God] and the word can be expected, however unexpected and surprising it may turn out to be.”<sup>28</sup> Another religious scholar writes, “religious language had lost its meaning, or, even worse, the inherited meanings had grown perverse in the wake of a long list of modern atrocities.”<sup>29</sup> Bruno Latour practices the same sort of anonymous theorhetorical theorizing, lamenting “the *torments* of religious speech,” the agony of being trapped between dead and unborn languages.<sup>30</sup> For Latour, the seemingly moribund lexicon of Catholicism demands “flurries of ‘mental reservations’” in order to be uttered. How can it still be possible to say things like, “Virgin Mary,” “descended into hell,” or “life everlasting”?<sup>31</sup> Latour feels the “temptation to purify” religious language of these older forms, but this solution seems equally unsatisfying.<sup>32</sup> Once you start smashing the old images, Latour argues, you will end up with

the lowest common denominator of religions, something so bland and so versatile that it could be spread throughout the world without shocking anyone. A “moral ideal,” a “feeling of the infinite,” a “call to one’s conscience,” a “rich inner life,” “access to the great all”? What a lot of poppycock that “God” is! A simple portmanteau of morality—as if morality needed the support of religion. Thanks to such purification, we’ve got rid of the useless dross, but there’s nothing left that would allow us to address ourselves in words that bring life to someone who, on hearing them, would find themselves transformed.<sup>33</sup>

The choices seem appalling: either a traditionalism that calcifies into the reactionary or a progressivism that floats into the ether.

In 1961, Vahanian insisted that the death of God in the West demanded “either an almost inconceivable reconstruction of Christianity or the emancipation of Western culture from Christianity in its present condition.”<sup>34</sup> Four decades later, Latour’s remarks suggest that the crisis has only intensified. Given the radicalness of Vahanian’s call—total reinvention or total emancipation—it



is little wonder that “this question of the return of religion is transmitted not by theologians and/or religious leaders but by and through philosophers and cultural theorists who heretofore had little or no expressed interest in religious or theological questions.”<sup>35</sup> Only in this transdisciplinary place, at the same time standing both inside and outside tradition, can we hope to invent new expression.

This book presupposes that rhetoricians are also given an assignment in response to this *kairos*. The search for new religious forms in a postsecular, post-Christian age presents an opportunity for rhetoricians to exercise their fundamental vocation, which John Poulakos memorably defined as “the art which seeks to capture in opportune moments that which is appropriate and attempts to suggest that which is possible.”<sup>36</sup> (This is only one of the many plausible and useful definitions of rhetoric that we will revisit throughout the book.) It is clear that rhetoricians with religious interests find themselves in an opportune, even epochal moment; it is for them now to discern that which is appropriate and suggest that which is possible. Whatever those interventions may be, it seems clear that rhetoricians interested in religion need not confine themselves solely to the observation and description of rhetorical activity within religious spheres. Given the lingering power of the “religious,” despite (or because of) the waning power of “religion,” our task must include the discovery and creation of new religious expression, up to and including persuasions of God.

To be clear, my argument is not that Christian tradition represents the only possibility for theorhetorical invention. Rhetoricians can and should invent multiple rhetorics across multiple traditions. But the present study will confine itself to Christian tradition if only because its persuasions endure even in a post-Christian era. The crosses and Christian messages that marked the January 6 Capitol attack demonstrate this point, as does the overall problem of Christian nationalism in the United States. Paradoxically, Christian nationalism is often most intense in the *absence* of religious practice and theological literacy. So-called cowboy churches, untethered to any larger affiliation or theology, have become a breeding ground for this nationalistic, theology-free identity.<sup>37</sup> But even the theologically literate are not immune from the temptations of power. Leon Wieseltier has coined the term “Christianists” for those who see Christianity as a political program rather than a religious faith, particularly the Catholic “integralists” who aspire to institutional dominance rather than the free-range identity politics of the cowboy preachers. The integralists would correct the defects of liberalism

through the institutional establishment of a blinkered vision of Catholic Social Teaching. This movement presents a problem for Catholics and other Christians but certainly not only for them. Wieseltier warns, “the programs and the fantasies of the Christianists bear upon the lives of citizens who are not Christians, who answer to other principles.”<sup>38</sup>

These phenomena underscore Taylor’s point that a “subtraction story” is too simplistic an explanation for the ongoing religious shift in US culture.<sup>39</sup> If the subtraction story is an unlikely vision of the future—and the rise of both the seeking nones and the identity-driven Christianists suggests that it is—then there is a responsibility for rhetoricians to observe the available means of more authentic Christian rhetorics that might challenge violent distortions of Christianity more decisively than any secular critique. What we need is not a subtraction story but a transformation story. That transformation story must include the invention of post-Christian persuasions of God—persuasions of God that speak to and within a moment in which Christianity is both tethered and unmoored from its theological traditions. The project of this book is to imagine a theorhetic for this moment—an appropriate and possible post-Christian theorhetic *that is not in rivalry with any other persuasions*. My aim is not to reassert “Christian culture” nor simply to revert to traditional Christian expression nor to reject all such expression. Instead, I hope to relieve the torments of post-Christian religious speech while also resisting the temptation to purify it.

As I pursue this project, my major interlocutor will be a thinker whose own cross-pressured position makes his work particularly useful for inventing a post-Christian theorhetic: René Girard (1923–2015). Girard is perhaps best known for his insight into the dangers of the sacred, as explicated in his 1972 book *Violence and the Sacred*. But Girard’s interest in religion extends beyond the origins of religion and into the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Drawing on these sources, Girard presents a compelling case for an authentic reading of the Gospels against the misuses to which they have often been put. Through this reading, Girard presents what David Dawson calls “a Christian witness against Christendom,” a phrase whose paradox captures the sense of cross pressure described by Taylor.<sup>40</sup> Girard is a thinker who considers the Gospels the text par excellence for decoding the problems of human culture but who is also sometimes credited as having formulated “the most formidable theory of the death of religion ever ventured.”<sup>41</sup> That theory goes to the heart of Christian rhetorics of sacrifice, atonement, and the cross, all connected in the commonplace that “Jesus died for (y)our

sins." Not surprisingly, many people both within and outside of Christian tradition find the prevalent expressions of this idea unpersuasive. Nick Flynn succinctly captures this rejection in his poem "Emptying Town": "My version of hell / is someone ripping open his / shirt & saying, / look what I did for you."<sup>42</sup> This idea is also thoroughly critiqued by Kenneth Burke in *The Rhetoric of Religion*, where Satan himself is scandalized by the notion of a perfect sacrifice. As Burke argued in 1961, just a few years after Vahanian's *Death of God*, the connection between violence and reconciliation presents both rhetorical and political problems for Christians and non-Christians alike.

At the heart of the issue, argues Girard, lies the problem of rivalry. Because human subjects desire mimetically, their desires often converge on the same objects, including relationships, wealth, property, or prestige. That competition is very often resolved through the scapegoating of innocent third parties, scapegoating that is hidden by means of a sacralization. For Girard, however, the basic problem is not language but mimetic desire. Our ontology—or anthropology, as Girard prefers to call it—is structured through a constitutive mimesis that always threatens to descend into competition. This same sense of competition, and the violent form of resolution that accompanies it, has infected certain Christian theories of atonement (i.e., "Jesus died for [y]our sins"). The rhetorics around these theories are warped by the same impulse, as Burke observes. Yet *pace* Burke, this economy is not the only available understanding of what Christians take to be Jesus's sacrifice. As Girard reads them, the Gospels present a counternarrative in which an act of vulnerability becomes the means of exit from the violent economy of the sacred. The Crucifixion is not simply an iteration (and therefore confirmation) of that economy but rather the rejection of it. It is also a rejection of the sense of rivalry that animates the scapegoating process in the first place and has warped historical expressions of Christianity. This is what Dawson means by a "Christian witness against Christendom." The challenge for any post-Christian theorhetoric, therefore, is to invent a Christian rhetoric that is not shaped by an impulse toward rivalry, a rhetoric that refuses to begin from a place of competition.

Such an idea may seem antithetical to the nature of rhetoric, which is often understood to offer a means of managing rivalry and competition. Rhetoric finds its home, as Burke famously put it, within "the Scramble, the Wrangle of the Market Place, the flurries and flare-ups of the Human Barnyard, the Give and Take, the Logomachy."<sup>43</sup> In Burke's project, rhetoric becomes a means of observing the implications of identification and division, of cooperation and

conflict. These are not merely opposites but rather mutually constitutive. Our fundamental need for “consubstantiality,” for forming common ways of life, makes the tension between cooperation and conflict unavoidable.<sup>44</sup> Within this tension lurks the persistent danger of scapegoating, a danger particularly acute within religious forms of consubstantiality. “*Corruptio optimi pessima*,” writes Burke, “the corruption of the best is the worst.’ And it is the corruptors of religion who are a major menace to the world today, in giving the profound patterns of religious thought a crude and sinister distortion.”<sup>45</sup> Burke was writing about the “Hitlerite distortions” of Christianity that would contribute to the Nazi scapegoating and attempted genocide of European Jews. Seventy years later, we can look around and see new expressions of these crude and sinister distortions. One might reasonably wonder whether the patterns of religious thought are all that profound if they are so easily twisted. One might also wonder whether rhetoric’s art of managing rivalries—through contrasting arguments, staging controversies, presenting options—can finally purify the Christian religious *eristic* with a more irenic *agon*.

Yet my argument does not deny these traditional agonistic rhetorical practices. If anything, my argument pursues these practices more intensely by imagining a theorhetorical *agon* that distinguishes rivalry from difference and even conflict. A post-Christian theorhetoric is one that should not be distorted by the impulse to competition, whether it is competition with other religious traditions or even with the absence of tradition. What we need now, perhaps more than ever, is a Christian religious rhetoric that refuses to see Christianity as a “team sport,” to borrow a phrase from Jonathan Haidt. In *The Righteous Mind*, Haidt argues that, contrary to conventional assumptions, faith is primarily a matter of community building rather than belief. Religion is very good at enmeshing people in cooperative relationships, but that is also precisely what makes it “well suited to be the handmaiden of groupishness, tribalism, and nationalism.”<sup>46</sup> My project is to image a theorhetoric that is post-Christian precisely insofar as it refuses groupishness, tribalism, and nationalism, all of which are formed by rivalry—the impulse to reduce one’s perceived opponents to a mirror for our own reflection. Rivals, according to Girard, do not differ from each other; they imitate each other—that is, rivals imitate the very people to whom they believe they are opposed. This is the game that a post-Christian rhetoric must refuse to play. If rhetoric is the practice of the open hand proffered in friendship, a post-Christian theorhetoric must be the practice of the open hand raised in preemptive surrender.

I take this kind of nonrivalrous rhetoric to be the implied rhetorical goal of Girard's project (though it is not a goal Girard himself would have recognized). Girard argued that our historical period was marked as a transition from one expression of religion to another. In a late interview, he offered this read of the post-Christian situation: "If I'm right, we're only extricating ourselves from a certain kind of religion so as to enter another, one that's infinitely more demanding because it's deprived of sacrificial crutches. Our celebrated humanism will turn out to have been nothing but a brief intermission between two forms of religion."<sup>47</sup> The "sacrificial crutches" to which Girard refers are the habits of the violent sacred—the practice of exclusionary sacrifice that shores up group identity on the backs of victims. Though these sacrificial practices often unfold within religion, Girard insisted that authentic religion refuses victimage. In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard initially defined religion as "another term for that obscurity that surrounds man's efforts to defend himself by curative or preventive means against his own violence."<sup>48</sup> In later work, however, he insisted that true religion seeks to uncover this obscurity and then to refuse participation in the purgative violence it hides. The central message of the Gospels—along with the Hebrew scriptures, without which the Gospels cannot stand—is a rejection of violent sacrifice as the touchstone of religion. This is how Girard's work can be understood as a "Christian witness against Christendom," which is a good shorthand for a post-Christian theorhetoric. Articulating this emergent rhetoric is the critical and inventive project of the present book. Its project of rhetorical criticism is to observe the rhetorical structure and implications of Girard's argument; its project of invention is to fashion a rhetoric that might speak about God without leaning on the violent sacred.

### Method: Toward Theorhetoric

In *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*, Latour opens a religious address with the following caveats: "I have no authority whatsoever to talk to you about religion and experience, since I am neither a preacher, nor a theologian, nor a philosopher of religion, nor even an especially pious person. Fortunately, religion might not be about authority and strength but exploration, hesitation, and weakness."<sup>49</sup> This statement captures both the transdisciplinary risks and aspirations of the present project. Exploration, hesitation, and weakness seem to be appropriate methodological starting points for the rhetorician embarking on a

study of God, a project usually managed in theology. But the aspiration of theorhetoric is not to pursue theology in any professional sense; instead, it is to ask questions of a theological import and to answer them by rhetorical, transdisciplinary means. Theorhetoric does not, therefore, amount to practicing theology without a license. Yet the invention of the persuasion of God is “theological” in a broad sense, as the theologian Jens Zimmerman explains: “Whenever one reflects on the meaning of biblical texts or reasons about God, one is, in fact, doing theology.”<sup>50</sup> By this standard, theorhetorical reflection is authorized.

It is particularly authorized by those theologians—and there have been many such theologians—who have felt authorized to draw on rhetorical scholarship. The theologian Elizabeth Johnson writes that she and her colleagues “ply their craft by marshaling reasons, laying out arguments, making a case the way a trial lawyer might do, seeking to present an intelligible and convincing scenario.”<sup>51</sup> Even beyond the “big rhetoric” sense, contemporary theology has been self-consciously rhetorical. “Following the death of the God of theism,” David Klemm writes, “theology seems not so much to lack a subject matter as to need new and persuasive ways of disclosing it.”<sup>52</sup> Klemm’s comments indicate a rhetorical turn that began in scripture studies in the 1960s, when theologians and scripture scholars began to turn to the “new rhetoric” for new available means.<sup>53</sup> By 1987, Wilhelm Wuellner observed the advancement of this approach beyond studies of formal structure and into larger questions about the way in which scriptural interpretation informs value, judgment, and community.<sup>54</sup> For these reasons, Wuellner would describe rhetoric, “whether the classical ‘old’ or the proposed ‘new rhetoric,’” as “philosophy’s archival and religion’s closest ally.”<sup>55</sup>

The theologian and scripture scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza goes even further than Wuellner, arguing that rhetoric does not only oppose the ethical, as the usual Platonic framing has it, but actually ensures the ethical. Rhetorical methods, Fiorenza insists, introduce an “ethics of accountability” by insisting that theologians acknowledge their own purposes, contexts, and audiences.<sup>56</sup> These rhetorical issues, Fiorenza insists, help to bring forward the social locations of both the theologian and the theology that is produced. This commitment to a kind of rhetorical transparency becomes especially important for feminist, womanist, and liberationist theologies, all of which insist that there is no “theology in general” but only theology that is produced at particular moments by particular people to respond to particular problems.

There is long-standing precedent, therefore, to pursue Christian theological reflection in a rhetorical key, a project undertaken by rhetoricians like George

Kennedy and James Kinneavy. As the theologian John Milbank notes—citing Kinneavy—Christianity “from the first qualified philosophy by rhetoric in contending that the Good and the True are those things of which we ‘have a persuasion,’ *pistis*, or ‘faith.’”<sup>57</sup> “Faith,” adds Kenneth Chase, “is rhetorically constructed, and this faith provides the basis for embracing rhetorical practice.”<sup>58</sup> To imagine a Christian theorhetic—even a post-Christian theorhetic—is therefore hardly alien to Christian tradition. If anything, “Christian theorhetic” is a pleonasm that reminds us of the centrality of rhetoric to whatever Christianity is and whatever post-Christianity may yet be.

Even rhetoricians who do not speak explicitly about religion or God have sensed the theological implications of rhetorical inquiry. In *Deep Rhetoric*, James Crosswhite insists that, contrary to conventional expectations, rhetoric is an appropriate means of asking ultimate questions. Rhetoric has not only a horizontal axis but also a vertical axis, “along which it generates ideals of freedom and reason and nonviolence and the human formation of human beings.” These axes cannot of course be separated: “Every historical situation has its own verticality, its own imagination of what goes beyond the situation.”<sup>59</sup> But the vertical axis suggests that rhetoric addresses questions beyond the immediately practical (even as it takes those questions seriously). Theorhetic would seem to be naturally interested in the question of the vertical, not because of some quasi-Platonic notion of a sky-bound heaven but because rhetoric is ultimately “a way of being human, a way of educating human beings, a way of nonviolence, a way of reason and freedom, a political way . . . and more.”<sup>60</sup> The aspirations of rhetoric—the “more”—allow for the aspirations of theology and, by extension, theorhetic. Pursuing this project includes a more rhetorical understanding of argumentation that “rhetorical theory must work to retrieve from millennia of philosophical and theological reifications,” which is to say that rhetorical theory needs “to translate philosophical terms into communicative ones, back into rhetoric, without losing the passion of philosophy for something more.”<sup>61</sup> Those theological reifications include the idea that God is primarily or exclusively a metaphysical proposition question rather than a practical question.

Many theologians and philosophers of religion have already undertaken the work of rescuing God from theological reification. A theorhetic will join this project, not initiate it. But in joining it, rhetoric will push the question of God toward the communicative, toward the persuasive, toward an invention that responds to the transcendence of both the other and the Wholly Other. “Since transcendence always moves toward something,” Crosswhite writes, “and influence

is always influence in some direction, the question of whether there is some overall purpose to rhetorical transcendence, some overall goal, will always arise, and so deep rhetoric will always generate formally 'theological' and teleological and ethical questions."<sup>62</sup> Just as theology cannot but rely on rhetoric to advance its claims, rhetoric cannot advance its claims without touching on theology. Though Crosswhite himself might be disinclined to speak primarily in those terms, he suggests that to be deeply rhetorical implies the possibility of being deeply theological.

As Crosswhite's broaching of the theological suggests, the book's method can be characterized by the phrase "complicit invention," an idea I borrow from Eric Charles White's *Kaironomia*. White reminds his readers that *kairos* indicates the possibility of new or surprising response to the world; without its timeliness and flexibility, response becomes habituated, rote, deadened. In other words, new situations would seem to demand a kairotic, rather than merely traditional, response. "How can one make sense of a world that is eternally new simply repeating the ready-made categories of tradition? Tradition must answer to the present, must be adapted to the new circumstances that may modify or even disrupt received knowledge."<sup>63</sup> This is the reason that the post-Christian represents a crisis as both emergency and opportunity. Traditional language and ideas no longer seem able to answer to the present; new permutations are needed.

But White's understanding of *kairos* reminds us that any rhetorical intervention will always be a permutation—that is, a reworking. This is true, argues White, even for the radical situatedness of Gorgias's sophistic rhetoric. White understands *kairos* to be in a paradoxically "complicit" relation with tradition, or *doxa*.<sup>64</sup> Only through such complicity can the insights shaped by *kairos* become communicable. "The desire that thought should continually innovate, so that rather than simply repeating, it would always posit alternatives to tradition, is accompanied by the recognition that *thinking must become complicit with tradition if it would communicate with an audience*."<sup>65</sup> No rhetorical invention can be entirely new; even the "unprecedented" depends on precedent to be described as unprecedented at all. *Kairos* can therefore promise no meaningful response or practical action without some measure of complicity with those traditions or habituated responses that might preclude kairotic response—hence White's term "kaironomia," which suggests a mutually constitutive relation between the singularity of *kairos* and the regularity of custom, or *nomos*.



The notion of complicity—of working through and by means of the tension between *kairos* and *nomos*—also resonates with John Muckelbauer’s treatment of rhetorical invention in *The Future of Invention*. Too often, Muckelbauer argues, methods of invention and structures of thought assume the negative dialectic—that is, that “negation is the generative principle of transformation.”<sup>66</sup> Any position is held in reaction to some other position, whether it a position for, against, or even a “third way” that somehow synthesizes and transcends the options. But all of these options are structured on negating. Despite what may seem like powerful postmodern critiques of conventional modes of argumentation our habits of discourse continue to be articulated through a dialectical form in which advocacy, critique, or synthesis are the only available positions. But there also seems to be no escape from this problem. To deny the gesture of negation—to be “against” it somehow—is to affirm the very gesture that one is trying to evade.

In response to this problem, Muckelbauer urges a movement *among* the three positions of advocacy, critique, and synthesis. Rather than “overcoming” the dialectic, which would simply repeat the action of negation, Muckelbauer urges what he calls an “an ‘affirmative’ sense of change,” in which moving among or through positions creates the conditions in which new possibilities and insights might emerge. It is not a matter of whether one repeats but how one repeats.<sup>67</sup> Richard Lanham writes, “No synonymy is ever exactly synonymous. Each new variation can be read not as an opaque variation or an already determined reality but as a transparent glimpse into a new reality.”<sup>68</sup> Invention does proceed through an absolute rejection but by traveling through available possibilities as a practice of “immersive responsiveness” in which the rhetor discerns “what [a position, an idea] can do.”<sup>69</sup> These notions of repetitions and immersive responsiveness resonate with the idea of complicit invention that I am drawing from White. They also provide a particularly appropriate methodology for a post-Christian theorhetic that must say something new even though it cannot jettison the old. A post-Christian theorhetic is inherently “complicit” with Christian tradition, in all senses of that term. It is inextricably folded into (*L. com*, with + *plicare*, fold, twist) Christian tradition and implicated in what that tradition has sometimes wrought. I am not seeking to purify Christian discourse of appeals to meekness, sacrifice, atonement, or holiness. Nor do I wish to replace them, a move that might render unrecognizable what they represent. (Again, nothing can ever be utterly unprecedented.) Rather, my project is to reinvent these terms through complicity with the tradition that produced them. This reinvention begins by reconceiving these terms as *topoi*, which Wayne Booth once defined as “the almost-empty

places-of-agreement where those who think they disagree can stand as they hammer out their disagreements.<sup>70</sup> Though the argument I present here goes beyond traditional notions of argument, Booth's notion of "almost-empty places" recalls that *topoi* are equipped with contour and shape. Put another way, they come with baggage, or what Burke might call "equipment for living," along with equipment that may make living harder than it need be. This equipment cannot simply be abandoned; it must instead be retooled, just as contour must be reshaped. My aim is therefore to reconfigure these *topoi* so that they generate appeals more appropriate and possible in a post-Christian moment.

### An Alienated Ethos

Any complicit invention also includes the rhetor. White argues that when Gorgias describes Helen as being overcome by seduction, the sophist is also describing himself. The paradoxical position by which the seducer is also seduced "can be taken as the emblem for an ideal dynamic between a principle of intentionality (or the self that would repeat itself in the world) and a principle of spontaneity (or the unforeseen opportunity of the immediate occasion)."<sup>71</sup> This paradox resonates with Crosswhite's equally paradoxical notion of a "deep rhetoric," which he defines as "a way we open ourselves to the influence of what is beyond ourselves and become receptive, a way we participate in a larger world and become open to the lives of others, a way we learn and change."<sup>72</sup> The notion of opening, of being receptive, at once passive and active, vulnerable and intentional, speaks to the posture that is most appropriate for the persuasion of God, which implies both traditional persuasive activity and the ontological condition of persuadability, especially in response to the Wholly Other.

The dynamic between intention and spontaneity, between the activeness of opening and the passiveness of being open, also suggests something about the ethos from which and through which I offer these arguments. It is an ethos that stands somewhat at odds with the kind of "explicitly Christian theory or approach to the study of rhetoric" for which Martin Medhurst called in 2004. Medhurst asks, "Don't we need an explicitly Christian theory of rhetoric for the twenty-first century that does, in fact, engage the revealed Truths/truths of Christianity?"<sup>73</sup> In some ways, my project is an answer to Medhurst's question insofar as it draws on the sources that he insists are necessary to any putative Christian rhetoric: Christian scripture, Christian theology, and contemporary

rhetorical theory. My project also engages questions of “the revealed Truth/truths of Christianity” that are appropriate and possible for the twenty-first century. But that chronological placement is also where my project begins to diverge from Medhurst’s. The twenty-first-century context seems to me to call for something that accounts for Girard’s notion that one form of Christian religion is giving way to another, a more demanding form that must stand without the sacrificial crutches on which it has too long leaned. This is how we might understand the idea of post-Christian rhetoric: a rhetoric that draws on the sources outlined by Medhurst but toward the project implied by Girard.

To imagine such a crutchless Christianity is to pursue something akin to Darrell Fasching’s notion of “alienated theology,” in which one asks theological questions “as if’ one were a stranger to one’s own narrative traditions.”<sup>74</sup> The present book may therefore be understood as a project of *alienated theorhetoric*, an attempt to refashion theological concepts as rhetorical topoi and to do so as if I were a stranger to the tradition that produced those concepts. The subjunctive is important here. The truth is that I am not a stranger to these traditions. As a Christian (of the cradle-and-still-practicing Catholic persuasion), I feel the persuasive force of the topoi of meekness, sacrifice, holiness, and especially atonement. I do not wish to evacuate this power, but I also want to imagine less coercive expressions of that power. I endorse Latour’s stubborn refusal to purify the “useless dross” but also Nick Flynn’s equally stubborn refusal to be guilted into gratitude. This is how I understand the alienated ethos that might produce an alienated theorhetoric (haunted, I haunt). I write from “my” tradition because it is the one I know but also because it is the one with which I identify. This identification makes me responsible for it—not solely or ultimately, of course, but responsible nonetheless. Fortunately, I have guides—including Girard, Latour, Catherine Keller, Richard Kearney, and Jacques Ellul, among many others—who also write from this sense of alienation and responsibility.

Any project of theorhetoric, no matter the tradition from which it springs, raises the question of the rhetorician’s own position. The theologian Rudolph Bultmann writes that “it is not legitimate to speak about God in general statements, in universal truths which are valid without references to the concrete, existential position of the speaker.” He adds, “It is as impossible to speak meaningfully about God as it is about *love*. Actually, one cannot speak *about* love at all unless the speaking about it is itself an act of love. Any other talk about love does not speak about *love*, for it stands outside love.”<sup>75</sup> To speak *of* God is to engage in relationship *with* God, even if that relationship is articulated through

alienation. As I seek to invent a theorhetic-*about* in these pages, I am perforce expressing a theorhetic-*to*, an imprecation to the God who I hope may be. That imprecation is inescapably rhetorical, for the religious word, as Ernesto Grassi writes, is always “expressed in rhetorical language, in that language that urges itself on us in our desperate and pathetic engagement, for with it the chief concern is the formation of human existence.”<sup>76</sup> By these understandings, one cannot embark on a project of theorhetic except from a place of desperate and pathetic engagement where the speaker is forming some human existence. This existential posture does not deny rigorous standards of scholarship, but it does admit the ultimate motivations of such scholarship.

The poet and memoirist Christian Wiman offers a useful rule of thumb for judging the kind of writing to which theorhetic aspires: “trust no theory, no religious history or creed, in which the author’s personal faith is not actively at risk.”<sup>77</sup> My personal faith is very much at risk in these pages. My theological imagination has long been shaped by the ideas I take up here, both while I was raised in the church and even after I left it. These ideas have continued to claim my imagination since my return. Describing her own return after a period away, the poet and memoirist Kathleen Norris captures my own experience of reversion: “When I began attending church again after twenty years away,” she writes, “I felt bombarded by the vocabulary of the Christian church.” The familiar vocabulary of faith “seemed dauntingly abstract, . . . even vaguely threatening.”<sup>78</sup> That sense of bombardment and threat hangs over the ideas of meekness, sacrifice, atonement, holiness. And yet, these notions cannot be simply erased. Who, then, would inherit the earth? How could we recognize generous self-sacrifice? Or genuine reconciliation and restitution? Or a divine encounter that requires no exclusionary violence? My study is therefore motivated by a very personal and profound hope that a different kind of theorhetic might invent different persuasions of God.

## Chapter Outline

The argument of this book proceeds through four chapters. Chapter 1, “The Meek Defense,” begins the work of inventing a post-Christian theorhetic by imagining a rhetoric of meekness, a rhetorical style or posture characterized by a refusal of rivalry. Though the Christian associations with meekness are familiar (Matt. 5:5), many of this book’s audiences may balk at meekness as a

rhetorical style or posture. For many non-Christians, meekness may sound like a dangerous moral approbation of unjust suffering. Indeed, even for Christians, meekness may sound like an overpronounced Christian humility that would silence Christianity altogether. For rhetoricians, finally, meekness may seem inimical to the productive agonism that characterizes rhetorical practice and exchange. Nevertheless, chapter 1 argues that the Christian idea of meekness resonates with current rhetorical theory, which has developed an understanding of rhetoric as an ontological reality, a way of being that characterizes all relations long before anyone attempts to “wield” any “art” of rhetoric. Rhetoric describes what we are as much as it describes what we might do. Within that stance of fundamental vulnerability, we can no longer speak of rhetoric only or even primarily as a technique that one might possess. Yet our constitutive vulnerability does not mean that one cannot practice a “style of engagement,” to borrow another phrase from Muckelbauer.<sup>79</sup> Meekness is thus a style as well as a feature of our rhetorical ontology. It is a term that can be used descriptively as well as prescriptively. In the latter case, meek rhetoric seems most appropriate for a post-Christian theorhetic that would invent from Christian tradition without placing that tradition in rivalry with other traditions.

Chapter 2, “Friendly Injustices,” presents a rhetorically oriented overview of René Girard’s study of religion. Though Girard’s work has made the occasional appearance in rhetorical scholarship, his work has not attracted sustained attention.<sup>80</sup> Recent work in the rhetorical study of the sacred has begun to engage Girard, and chapter 2 extends that engagement.<sup>81</sup> This chapter’s primary aim, however, is to observe the rhetorical implications of Girard’s thought. Though Girard does not recognize those implications as rhetorical, he does acknowledge that his conclusions about religion demand new forms of religious expression within Christian tradition. That rhetorical demand in turn requires a reconfigured understanding of rhetoric, one that takes account of mimetic desire and its relation to the sacred. This reconfigured understanding resonates with the rhetorical theory outlined in chapter 1. The meek defense provides the most appropriate framework for a post-Christian rhetoric—a rhetoric that maintains a relationship to tradition even while problematizing it and a rhetoric that refuses rivalry. As we will see, the refusal of rivalry is yet another implication of Girard’s thought that Girard himself does not recognize. In his discussions of Christianity, Girard sometimes falls into the very sort of competitive impulse that his theory is trying to critique. Despite this issue, Girard’s thought provides a way to articulate an alienated theorhetic. Chapter 2 accommodates Girard’s ideas

to rhetoric and rhetoric to Girard's ideas, thereby opening the way to the more explicitly transdisciplinary theorhetorical invention that follows in chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 3, "Overcoming Christianity," elaborates a post-Christian style of engagement by tracing three Girardian encounters—with Kenneth Burke, Christian atonement theology, and the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo. Each of these encounters provides available means of inventing a post-Christian theorhetoric. In the case of Burke, Girard provides a challenge to the logology of *The Rhetoric of Religion*, which is premised on a particular Christian atonement theology. One of our field's foundational studies of religious rhetoric assumes a highly contestable notion of divine relation (despite the book's protestations to be strictly atheological). Girard's work, however, points toward an understanding of the atonement as a form of persuasion rather than punishment. That understanding of the atonement, which represents an alternative but still-orthodox Christian theological tradition, is best articulated through the kind of rhetorical style imagined by the meek defense. Finally, chapter 3 propels these theological questions into a series of debates between Girard and Gianni Vattimo. Vattimo is best known for his idea of "weak thought," which designates the thought that follows in the wake of the enfeeblement of Being. This postmodern project of radical hermeneutics seems, at least at first, radically at odds with Girard's self-described anthropological and empirical project. Despite these differences, Vattimo finds in Girard a religious confirmation of weak thought using a Heideggerian *Verwindung*, a distortion or twisting that maintains a relation to an original claim. *Verwindung* suggests a paradoxical relation to tradition that is at once a recovery and a recovery *from*. Girard, for his part, rejects these readings as too ludic a take on the harsh reality of the cross; the fundamental problem of mimetic desire means that there can be no Christian expression without the Crucifixion. Chapter 3 treats this argument as a kind of fundamental topos for inventing a post-Christian, alienated theorhetoric.

Chapter 4, "Uneasy Holiness," extends the theorhetorical inquiry into how "the sacred" and "the holy" have functioned within both religious studies and rhetorical studies. The chapter thus forwards an emerging inquiry into the role of rhetoric in what Rudolf Otto dubbed the "numinous" (*L. numen*, divine, divine majesty, deity), an experience or encounter with the otherworldly.<sup>82</sup> Within this inquiry, a debate is developing over whether "sacred" or "holy" represents the richest resource for theorhetorical invention. For some scholars, the "sacred" preserves the otherness of the Wholly Other, which Otto also called

the “*mysterium tremendum*,” the frightening mystery at the heart of divinity.<sup>83</sup> For others, including Girard, the “holy” suggests a divine relation free of violence. As rhetoricians engage in this argument, they will, naturally enough, turn to the literature of religious studies (e.g., Otto, Émile Durkheim, Mircea Eliade, and Giorgio Agamben, among others) to understand the function and meaning of these familiar terms. But this inquiry presents only further uncertainty. As one might expect in an inquiry into the ineffable, the available lexicon is often unequal to the task. Yet the paradox of ineffability is that it compels a rhetorical response, even when the response must draw on unstable terminology. As a case study of these issues, chapter 4 extends the theorhetorical reinvention of atonement to a case study of Pope Francis’s *Gaudete et Exsultate* (2015), an “apostolic exhortation,” or letter intended to move the faithful toward some desired aim. Though such a document may seem an odd resource for a post-Christian theorhetoric, the exhortation nevertheless bears the traits we will have developed throughout the book: a meek rhetoric that refuses rivalry, that presents a convalescence of tradition, and that aspires to holiness free of exclusionary violence.