LIVING THEODRAMA

This book marks a significant gatepost in the analogy of theology and theatre: an opportunity for looking back at how far we have come, and to look forward to what may lie ahead. Identifying key themes and motifs in theatrical theory and practice and bringing them into dialogue with significant dimensions in theology and theological ethics, Wes Vander Lugt enters the company of actors on the theological stage. All other players are likely to be glad to accept the wisdom presented in this invaluable book.

Sam Wells, Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields, London, UK

The ‘turn to theater’ is not yet as well-known as the earlier turns to language and narrative, but it may prove to be every bit as far-reaching, not least for theology and theological ethics. Vander Lugt’s richly researched and clearly written work helps us make the turn, and will elicit oohs and aahs as readers come to appreciate the theatrical model and take in the exciting new vistas for integrating doctrine and life, theory and practice, formation and performance. At the core of the proposal is an important and creative suggestion about the need for disciples to learn ‘disponibility’: the readiness to receive, and respond fittingly to, any and all divine initiatives, in particular the offer of life in Christ. Living Theodrama builds and improves on previous work in theatrical theology and ethics and will become a must-read for anyone wanting to join the conversation.

Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, USA

Much theological writing in recent times has employed the idea of performance to explicate the true character of Christian ethics. However, such an analogy with the theatre has often been pursued with little understanding of the nature of acting as such. That fault is amply rectified in this fascinating study in which numerous twentieth century analyses of the stage are discussed to great effect in illuminating how Christian practice and character development might be best understood.

David Brown, University of St Andrews, UK

Living Theodrama is a fresh, creative introduction to theological ethics. Offering an imaginative approach through dialogue with theatrical theory and practice, Vander Lugt demonstrates a new way to integrate actor-oriented and action-oriented approaches to Christian ethics within a comprehensive theodramatic model. This model affirms that life is a drama performed in the company of God and others, providing rich metaphors for relating theology to everyday formation and performance in this drama. This book contains not only a fruitful exchange between theological ethics and theatre, but it also presents a promising method for interdisciplinary dialogue between theology and the arts that will be valuable for students and practitioners across many different fields.
Ashgate Studies in Theology, Imagination and the Arts

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Reimagining Theological Ethics

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Foreword
Samuel Wells

To make a promising analogy is one thing; to pursue it in exhaustive detail another; to pick up the ways the analogy and the sustained treatment have been adopted and adapted in myriad settings is a third; to go back to the source of the analogy to test out its principal constituent parts is a fourth; and to synthesize all these dimensions in a lucid, elegantly structured and meticulously researched piece of work is a fifth. We are much in Wes Vander Lugt’s debt that he here offers us a work that does all these five things. This book therefore marks a significant milestone in the analogy of theology and theatre: an opportunity for looking back at how far we have come and to look forward to what may lie ahead.

Perhaps I should say a little about each of the five things this book achieves. Christianity is not primarily a set of abstract ideas. It is reflection on performance, definitively the performance of God in Christ, Israel and the church. Incarnation, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection and the sending of the Spirit constitute a performance in relation to which all theology is reflection. But that reflection inevitably and appropriately issues in further performance—imitation and improvisation. And so we have our analogy.

No one can explore this subject without significant engagement with Hans Urs von Balthasar. When an author has contributed a five-volume sustained treatment of a theme, such a work becomes the touchstone for further treatments. Hence Vander Lugt opens out the field for us by indicating where von Balthasar has had the last word and where he has had the first, where his work sets the standard and where it begins a conversation.

Since von Balthasar, many theologians have ventured where angels fear to tread and explored the ground tilled but not yet exhausted by the analogy. Vander Lugt has done the reader and the academy a great service in covering these diverse treatments, coming from different places and oriented toward different goals, and has identified the ones he believes—with good judgement—to have made the most fertile interventions. It is hard to imagine any future study in this field will not want to begin by learning from Vander Lugt’s judgements here.

But these contributions are yet preliminary. Where this present work makes most impressive ground is in identifying themes and motifs in theatrical theory and practice and bringing them into dialogue with significant dimensions in theology and theological ethics. For example, Vander Lugt explores whether Scripture is understood best as a script or a transcript: here he employs the detailed language of the analogy in ways that illuminate theology and clarify issues that might be more contentious if the analogy was not to hand. The overall...
weight of the book is to provide considerably more substance to the language of theodrama—understood not simply as the emplotment of salvation history but as the sustained interconnection of theological with theatrical themes.

For me the most rewarding aspect of Vander Lugt’s work is the way in which he draws on the work of a series of authors such as Brecht, Brook, Izzo, Johnstone, Lecoq, Mamet, Stanislavski and Spolin, some of whom might be surprised to find themselves under consideration in a theological study, but each of whom has insights that up until this point have tended to remain stray eddies rather than part of the river of theological enquiry. Within this enquiry, the notions of disponibility and fittingness emerge as key strands in Vander Lugt’s perspective. I was particularly struck by his apposite discussion of the disponibility of God.

Wes Vander Lugt in this volume enters the company of actors on the theological stage. All other players will be glad to accept and over-accept his wisdom and look forward to many more performances.
Acknowledgments

The drama of researching and writing this book involved many characters deserving hearty acknowledgment at the curtain call. There are many who provided valuable feedback on various levels throughout the process. Russ Vander Lugt endured a labor of love by reading the entire manuscript and offering crucial feedback. Dinnertime conversations with Tim and Becky Stojanovic were worth their weight in gold, along with Tim’s constant encouragement and particular comments on the text. Christopher Bechtel was always eager to be a sounding board, and his friendship is an enduring gift. Paul Weinhold pressed me to consider the dynamic interplay between tradition and Scripture and always asked good questions. Kevin Vanhoozer initially inspired me to tackle this topic and gave timely feedback on several chapters. Michael Partridge helped me wrestle with the complexity and relational character of formation and performance. Students at L’Abri Fellowship in Switzerland patiently listened to my heady lectures and then helped me take the topic out of the clouds and relate it to everyday life. Colleagues at the Institute for Theology, Imagination, and the Arts in St Andrews asked great questions and helped me clarify critical insights at an early stage. In particular, Dave Reinhardt and Jim Watkins were always willing to grab a pint and exchange ideas. Trevor Hart was a superb PhD supervisor as I worked out these ideas, and his queries, observations, and suggestions sharpened my thinking and strengthened this project. I am grateful to Samuel Wells and David Brown for their relevant questions and helpful suggestions for future development.

Additional characters in this drama enabled me to survive and thrive through every twist and turn. Our church family in St Andrews was an incredible gift, and it is hard to imagine this book taking shape apart from life together with these people. I am particularly grateful for the prayers and encouragement of our home group as well as the Stirling family’s friendship and hospitality. Walking alongside young people in St Andrews was the critical ministry context for this academic work, which merged in a unique way during “Casting Call,” a youth-led drama project. I am so thankful for these teens and for the joy of journeying with them. Then there are those who were far away geographically but always close in spirit. Kelly Kapic and Drew Wilkins showed more enthusiasm for my abilities and ideas than I deserve and helped me to persevere. Bill and Wendy Myers are the best in-law parents imaginable, and their care and concern is unflinching. Finally, I am exceedingly thankful for my parents, Gaylen and Marla Vander Lugt, who always show genuine interest in my work and spurred me on through their prayers, encouragement, and example of faith.
Finally, my wife Stephanie is my greatest advocate and closest friend, and she deserves more acknowledgments than I can possibly express. Without her by my side, far less would have been possible.

Soli Deo gloria
List of Abbreviations


To Stephanie Vander Lugt
my peerless partner in this graced and gritty drama
Chapter 1
Prologue to a Theatrical Theology

If theology, therefore, is full of dramatic tension, both in form and content, it is appropriate to turn our attention to this aspect and establish a kind of system of dramatic categories.

Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theo-Drama*, I, 128

We need to conceive of revelation not as a drama that plays out in front of us, but the drama that is our drama.

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/2, 498

The Theatrical Turn in Christian Theology

Two opposing currents run deeply in the Christian tradition: the anti-theatrical prejudice and the intrinsic theatricality of faith. The former appeared as footnotes to Plato, whether as ontological objection to imitative representation or ethical disapproval of arousing the passions. Equally dismissive was the Puritan and later fundamentalist perspective that theatre is an epicenter of evil, existing merely for base entertainment. Although many Christians today endorse neither Platonic nor Puritan prejudices against theatre, the lingering effects still permeate everyday parlance. Petty conflicts are dramas to be endured or to avoid; causing a public ruckus is making a scene; authenticity is the opposite of play-acting; and, more specific to Christian practice, living by grace is placed in opposition to relying on personal performance.

Alongside outright denunciation or subliminal suspicions of theatre, however, Christian theologians have long recognized the theatricality of divine revelation and human response. For example, James K.A. Smith observes that underneath Augustine’s critique of theatre exist enduring affirmations regarding the goodness of creation, fleshly incarnation, and embodied resurrection, all supporting a

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2 Some prominent examples include William Prynne’s *Histriomastix* (London: Michael Sparke, 1632) and J.M. Buckley’s *Christians and the Theatre* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1875).
As a result of these affirmations, theologians as diverse as Clement of Alexandria, John Calvin, and Pedro Calderón de la Barca have employed theatrical metaphors and models to describe God’s world and work. In addition, liturgical dramas and medieval mystery plays sustained theatre within the Christian tradition and provided a precedent for positive theatrical expression. Although the relationship between Christianity and theatre remains strained in some circles, the involvement of Christians in religious and mainstream theatre is flourishing and considered a godly vocation.

Another indication that the anti-theatrical prejudice is crumbling among Christians is the greater number of Christian scholars pursuing interdisciplinary dialogue between theatre and systematic theology, biblical studies, ethics, worship, and other areas of Christian thought and practice. In fact, a cursory glance over the landscape of Christian theology will reveal a “theatrical turn” throughout the last several decades. What accounts for this theatrical turn? What motivations and methodologies are guiding Christian theologians and ethicists in their dialogue with theatre? Although there are a myriad of motivations, the rest of this section will outline nine movements that have influenced the theatrical turn, highlighting the foremost scholars advancing interdisciplinary dialogue between theology and theatre.

From Theatrical Social Science to Theatrical Theology

The theatrical turn in Christian theology is intertwined with the more general theatrical turn in the social sciences. Psychology was the first discipline to draw deeply from theatre, with Jacob Moreno in the 1920s pioneering a new method he later called “psychodrama.” As an original approach to group therapy, psychodrama valued the power of spontaneous encounter and experimented with role-play and improvisation. Later developments, such as drama-therapy and socio-drama, blurred the lines between psychology and theatre by seeking self-

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transformation through performance. Since performances of the self always occur on a social stage, a similar dialogue with theatre emerged within sociology, with G.H. Mead’s sociological dramaturgy interpreting individuals as playing roles according to social scripts. Perhaps the most influential figure in popularizing sociological dramaturgy and role theory, however, is Erving Goffman, who explored the dynamics of everyday interactions and how people negotiate believable performances of social roles. With the advent of postmodernism, sociologists such as T.R. Young have expanded on interpersonal dramaturgy popularized by Goffman to address macro-social and political dramaturgy. Within these large-scale performances, verbal communication is clearly a critical component alongside non-verbal communication. As such, J.L. Austin and John Searle investigated the nature of linguistic “performatives,” or things people do with words, with subsequent sociolinguists examining the influence of social and cultural norms on verbal performances.

Finally, drawing on the vast dialogue sustained between theatre and psychology, sociology, philosophy, and linguistics, anthropologist Victor Turner identified humans as *homo performans*, employing theatrical models to explain human and cultural rituals. At the same time, Richard Schechner elaborated multiple points of contact between theatre and anthropology, merging these interests by creating the first ever department of performance studies, at New York University.

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12 For example, see Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1984). This theatrical model has been adopted by several feminists and other post-structuralist pundits seeking to highlight marginalized linguistic performances, such as Judith P. Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performatve* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

Schechner maintains that whereas not everything in life is performance, almost everything can be studied as performance. With every discipline and sphere of life now open to investigation as performance, it was inevitable that this theatrical turn would extend to theology. In fact, through the work of Schechner and others, a major barrier to interdisciplinary dialogue with theatre had been overcome, namely, dismantling the association between theatre and showy hypocrisy, focusing instead on theatre’s authentic creativity. Similarly, theologians are interacting with theatre in more constructive and less disparaging ways, forging new insights and dissolving long-standing suspicions of theatre. In doing so, the social sciences are critical dialogue partners for wrestling with the drama of existence and forging productive interdisciplinary methodologies for interacting with theatre. As theologians draw insights from the social sciences and the world of theatre, however, John Milbank warns that theology must be governed by God’s revelation rather than secular norms. This caveat motivates a primary aim of this book: clarifying how theology can dialogue with theatre without losing its grounding in divine revelation.

From Human Drama to Divine Drama

Theologians, along with social scientists, that human existence is dramatic. Hans Urs von Balthasar observes that we are inherently familiar with drama “from the complications, tensions, catastrophes, and reconciliations which characterize our lives as individuals and in interaction with others.” Like drama, our lives have a beginning, middle and an end, a plot riddled with conflict in which we play many roles. If Christian theology merely reflected on the shape of human existence—a theology from below—this would be reason enough to employ a theatrical model.


15 Reflecting on the theatrical turn in anthropology, Clifford Geertz wrote 20 years ago that a theatrical model is “coming to be applied extensively and systematically, rather than being deployed piecemeal fashion—a few allusions here, a few tropes there. And second, it is coming to be applied less in the depreciatory ‘mere show,’ masks and mummerly mode that has tended to characterize its general use, and more in a constructorial, genuinely dramaturgical one—making, not faking, as the anthropologist Victor Turner has put it” (Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology [London: Fontana, 1993], 26–7).


17 Balthasar, TD I, 17.
But theology also begins from above, reflecting on and responding to God’s revelation. God does not reveal himself in logical formulas or secret knowledge; God reveals himself by saying and doing things on the world stage. The whole purpose of Balthasar’s five-volume *Theo-Drama* is to explore the drama of God’s infinite being and redemptive action that frames every finite drama. The *theodrama*, therefore, is the drama of God’s communicative action in dynamic interaction with his creation. Several theologians have adopted Balthasar’s theodramatic approach, such as Kevin Vanhoozer, who affirms that both “the content and the process of divine revelation” are dramatic, a covenantal comedy of the triune God who speaks and acts for the sake of our salvation.18

Vanhoozer observes that theology as human projection (à la Feuerbach) “eliminates the theo from theodrama” and theology as existential expression (à la Bultmann) “drains the drama out of theodrama.” By contrast, beginning with God’s dramatic revelation keeps both together.19 If revelation is dramatic, then theology should follow suit.20 Rather than choosing between text-centered or history-centered theologies, Michael Horton maintains that dramatic theology draws from the entire scope of God’s textual and historical performance.21 Consequently, the theatrical turn in theology recognizes the primacy of a revelatory, divine drama that precedes, enlivens, and interfaces with the drama of human existence in real time and space. This is seen most clearly in the drama of Jesus’ incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, which Max Harris explains is theatrical in the best sense: the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us, engaging all our senses and drawing us into the drama.22 In the theodrama, God’s incarnation is the pre- eminent performance. Chapter 3 addresses in more detail how the performance of the triune God, and more particularly the performance of the Protagonist Son, informs human formation and performance.

*From Monologue to Dialogue*

In the beginning of his *Theo-Drama*, Balthasar articulates several trends in modern theology that provide rationale for a theodramatic approach, including the move

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toward recognizing genuine dialogue between God and humanity. Influenced by biblical theology and philosophical personalism, this trend recognizes that at the heart of the biblical drama are dialogical covenants God initiates with his creation and chosen people. While God’s covenant-making performances never make him dependent on his creatures, they do entail a real, relational drama between God’s infinite freedom and sovereignty and the finite freedom and responsibility of his covenant partners. Barth articulates a similar dynamic between divine and human freedom, asserting that revelation is not “a drama that plays out in front of us, but the drama that is our drama.” A crucial distinction exists, however, between God’s infinite, perfect performance and humanity’s finite, imperfect performance.

Raymund Schwager carried on Balthasar’s concern for theodramatic dialogue, arguing that dramatic theology supersedes narrative theology because of its ability to “integrate a genuine line of reasoning” while giving adequate attention to the covenantal, conflictual action of the salvation drama. His work has inspired a continuing tradition of “Innsbruckian dramatic theology,” characterized by conflict orientation (Konfliktorientierung) and an emphasis on God as doer (Gott als Handelnder), as an alternative to liberal theology.

More recently, Kevin Vanhoozer has similarly defended God’s dialogical authorship of and covenantal involvement in the theodrama. He suggests that when theologians resist metaphysical speculation and attend to the dramatic form of God’s revelation in Scripture, we notice that God is the sovereign author, but humanity enjoys the “dignity of communicative interaction” with God. For Vanhoozer, God does not author the theodrama through coercive monologues, as some have interpreted classical theism. Rather, dialogue is the means by which God authors the theodrama and interacts with human actors, who are free on the

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25 Barth, CD I/2, 498. Consequently, the drama of Jesus Christ “is not a drama which is played out a remote distance,” making humans “interested or disinterested spectator[s]” (CD III/1, 387).
26 Balthasar, TD I, 268.
27 See Horton, Covenant and Eschatology, 273.
30 Vanhoozer, Remythologizing Theology, 45.
basis of their response-ability and answer-ability. The dialogue is genuine and communicative, yet God is still in ultimate control. Is Vanhoozer’s “dialogical determinism” a plausible proposal for triune authorship, and how does God’s action as playwright relate to his action as protagonist and producer of the theodrama? Adequately addressing these questions requires further exploration of a trinitarian theodramatics, which is the focus of Chapter 3.

From Narrative Understanding to Dramatic Performance

Theatrical theology shares affinity with narrative theology, but one important difference is the greater fluidity between perception and performance within a theatrical model. Whereas narrative theologians often refer to understanding that arises from indwelling, telling, and living the Christian story, a dramatic model contains more capacity to encapsulate this movement. As Gerard Loughlin observes, “when a person enters the scriptural story he or she does so by entering the Church’s performance of that story: he or she is baptized into a biblical and ecclesial drama. It is not so much being written into a book as taking part in a play.” In addition, while a narrative framework emphasizes understanding a story from the past, a theodramatic framework highlights our present participation in a drama extending from the past into the future. Samuel Wells warns that narrative theology is easily tempted by Gnostic tendencies, with correct understanding easily ossifying into “secret knowledge,” while a dramatic approach accentuates “a dynamic, spiraling process of constant repetition, reinterpretation, transfer, and restoration of meaning.” If narrative tends to fixate on understanding what has happened, then drama orients us toward participating in what is happening. Of course, as Wells points out, this is a false dichotomy, for the Holy Spirit unites the

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31 Ibid. 331–4. Vanhoozer enters into conversation with Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Mikhail Bakhtin in outlining a dialogical theodramatics. Daniel Treier also engages in a similar conversation, and concludes that “drama is a fitting way … to plot the relationships of divine and human action in their necessarily diverse ways” (Virtue and the Voice of God: Toward Theology as Wisdom [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006], 93–4).

32 Vanhoozer, Remythologizing Theology, 384.


34 Samuel Wells, Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2004), 45–6.

35 A dramatic model, therefore, resists closure, which is why David Ford suggests that “the image of an ongoing drama has some advantage over that of a narrative, and the concept of theodrama … has rich potential” (Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 82).
story of past redemption to the drama of the church’s performance. As Richard Heyduck explains, drama actually includes narrative. It is a broader, more fruitful category, because it orients theology toward faithful performance in the present. If we view Scripture merely as telling a story or narrative, warns Francesca Murphy, there is danger of slipping toward a-historicism and static reception of the text; but, within a dramatic paradigm, the actor-interpreters enter into dynamic interaction with the biblical script. Consequently, while the theatrical turn in theology values the centrality of story, it pushes narrative theology to its logical conclusion, namely, that the intelligibility and credibility of the biblical story arises out of faithful performance.

From Biblical Application to Interpretive Improvisation

In many traditional models, biblical interpretation is an intellectual exercise to determine textual meaning, distilling theological and ethical principles and then applying these principles to contemporary scholarship and practice. Nicholas Lash, however, challenged this position by viewing biblical interpretation through the lens of theatrical performance, arguing that the everyday performance of the church is biblical interpretation. Within this model, Scripture functions like a script that the church interprets through patterns of words and deeds on the world stage. Frances Young, although interacting more with music than theatre, also describes biblical interpretation as the “art of performance” requiring imaginative and improvisational skill. Furthermore, Tom Wright expands Lash’s proposal by describing Scripture as four acts of a five-Act play, leaving the church responsible to improvise the fifth and final Act in a way consistent both with previous acts and the prophesied end of the play. Consequently, Wright envisions the Christian life

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as a process of improvising with an unfinished script, thus showing concern for the primacy and authority of the biblical script while leaving room for contextual improvisation pursued with “innovation and consistency.”

Other biblical theologians, like Walter Brueggemann, also view Scripture as a script, but disagree to what extent Scripture presents a unified drama.

Despite these disagreements, many scholars prefer to work within a theatrical model, replacing the one-dimensional movement from biblical interpretation to application with a dynamic process of interpretive improvisation, including “re-enactment, retelling, rehearsing, redescribing [and] reperformance” in new contexts.

Vanhoozer contrasts this “drama-of-redemption” approach to other popular methods for going “beyond the Bible” to theology and ethics, proposing that contemporary interpreters improvise with the biblical script in order to achieve theodramatic wisdom.

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to consider carefully this proposal and to ask, among other things, whether construing Scripture as script is the most accurate metaphor to describe the nature and function of Scripture in the theodrama. In addition to having an impact upon biblical theology and interpretation, the theatrical turn has also made inroads into biblical exegesis, whether in the form of dramatic hermeneutics or biblical performance criticism.

While significant in their own right, these areas of inquiry are outside the bounds of this book: the investigation of biblical theodramatics in Chapter 4 largely focuses on a theatrical model for biblical theology and interpretation and its impact on theodramatic formation and performance.


From Individuals to Community

If Scripture is something like a script that guides improvised performances, and those improvisations are both the result of and means for interpreting Scripture, then it is also true that this is a communal process. Biblical interpretation, like the task of theology and the mission of faithful performance, is the task of a whole company of actors. Even though postmodern theory has accentuated the social context of reflection and action, some models of doing theology still assume scholarship is accomplished in isolated, ivory towers. Compounding this problem is a view of theology as merely a process of reading and writing texts: a view much more inclined toward individuality and subjectivity, whereas “drama captures both individual and public aspects of theological discovery and its subject matter.”

Nicholas Lash explains that when biblical interpretation and theology are linked with embodied performance, it is “no more possible for an isolated individual to perform these texts than it is for him to perform a Beethoven quartet or a Shakespeare tragedy.” Whether we are referring to theology written in a study, preached from a pulpit, or enacted in everyday habits, it is always performed in the context of a larger company, both past and present, in which everyone has different roles, gifts, and responsibilities.

Not only does a theatrical model highlight the communal and relational nature of biblical and theological performance, but it also enables us to re-imagine, as Johnson and Savidge do, the nature of human identity as individuals-in-community, as image-bearers of a relational God. The communal and relational context of theodramatic performance extends beyond the company of actors to include the audience: those outside the company who are not committed to participating in the theodrama as presented in Scripture. Many interested in the theatrical turn have acknowledged this point, but few have investigated in detail how audiences actually have an impact upon theodramatic formation and performance. As a result, this book explores the theodrama as performed by individuals and their companies (ecclesial theodramatics: Chapter 5) in the presence of an audience (missional theodramatics: Chapter 7).

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49 Horton, Covenant and Eschatology, 10.
50 Lash, Theology on the Way to Emmaus, 43.
52 Johnson and Savidge, Performing the Sacred, 61–5.
53 For example, see Rosemary Haughton, The Drama of Salvation (London: SPCK, 1975), ch. 4; Murphy, The Comedy of Revelation, xv; Ben Quash, Theology and the Drama of History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 35–6.
From Epic and Lyric to Dramatic

The irreducibly relational and communal nature of theodramatic participation highlights just one reason why there is, according to Balthasar, “no external standpoint” from which to describe and evaluate the theodrama. Using categories borrowed from Hegel, Balthasar shows how “drama” embraces both the “epic” and “lyric” modes of Christian faith and theology.54 Whereas an epic stance clamors for objectivity and seeks to understand reality according to systems and structures, a lyric stance revels in subjectivity and the intensity of personal experience. Between these two extremes lies the dramatic mode, modeled by the New Testament authors, for whom, as witnesses of the drama of Jesus Christ, “the only chance of being objective is by being profoundly involved in the event they are describing.”55 Ben Quash, an avid interpreter of Balthasar, describes the potential for the dramatic mode to heal the rift between “the brutally given, and the brutally, banally free.”56 In other words, a dramatic perspective gets neither hopelessly mired in subjective experience nor abstractly removed in objective reflection. It allows people, in short, to be “living witnesses to wisdom.”57 David Ford is another proponent of a dramatic framework that sustains both epic perspective and lyric intensity because it maintains “a sense of plot and purpose without suppressing individuality, diversity, and the complexity of levels, perspectives, motivations, and ideas” that combine critical and creative wisdom.58

Ford observes to his chagrin that most classical Christian theology tends toward the epic mode.59 In fact, Quash accuses Balthasar himself of epic tendencies despite his desire to move toward the dramatic. In general, he claims that Balthasar’s emphases, style and tone tend to erode “time, particularity, irreducible personhood and finite knowledge” despite his theodramatic vision.60 A truly dramatic approach will embrace the indeterminacy, provisionality, particularity, and contextuality of theology and practice, operating “within the drama, before the end of the play.”61 Nicholas Healy is another theologian who investigates the implications of this approach, tracing the contours of a theodramatic, practical-

54 Balthasar, TD I, 54–5.
55 Balthasar, TD II, 57. For an excellent summary of this theme in Balthasar, see Aidan Nichols, A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness, and Truth (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 60.
57 Quash, Theology and the Drama of History, 50.
59 Ibid. 28.
60 Quash, Theology and the Drama of History, 197.
61 Ibid. 221.
prophetic ecclesiology in contrast to blueprint or epic ecclesiology that is prone to abstraction, rationalism, normativity, and excessively systematic coherence.\textsuperscript{62} Since theology reflects on and occurs in the midst of historical, temporal, and cultural contingencies, a theodramatic approach does not rush toward closure and attends carefully to changing contexts. Although each chapter below deals with different elements of context, Chapter 8 in particular attends to the contextual dimension of the theodrama as it relates to creation and culture, two arenas in which neither epic nor lyric approaches are ultimately satisfactory.

\textit{From Theory to Practice and Back Again}

Another angle from which to consider the relationship between the objective and subjective elements in the theodrama is the relationship between theory and practice, or between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Since theological reflection takes place while participating in the theodrama, Balthasar correctly asserts that “in the real Christian life, dramatically lived out, there is no moment of pure orthodoxy distinct from and prior to orthopraxy.”\textsuperscript{63} Not only is “right practice” the goal of “right belief,” but faithful practice is also the necessary condition for faithful understanding. In the theodrama, nothing is outside the drama, so participants do not have the luxury of learning about the play before performance. We learn \textit{about} the play by performing \textit{in} the play.\textsuperscript{64} Does this mean, however, that within the theatrical turn in theology, practices have priority over theory? Does the theatrical turn in theology follow the cultural-linguistic turn by privileging the practices and grammar of particular communities?\textsuperscript{65} While some proponents of the theatrical turn may lean in this direction, those who follow in the tradition of Balthasar privilege the “preeminent divine activity in the drama of Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{66} Vanhoozer places himself firmly within this camp, rooting both orthodoxy and orthopraxy in the communicative action of the triune God. What both theology and ethics have in common, therefore, is their reliance on the performance of God in history and Scripture.\textsuperscript{67}

Theology seeks to understand the divine drama, and ethics seeks to embody that understanding in fitting performances. All of this happens, of course, in the midst of performing in the theodrama, and so the relationship between theology

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{62} Nicholas M. Healy, \textit{Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
\item \textsuperscript{63} Balthasar, \textit{TD} I, 68–9.
\item \textsuperscript{64} As Ben Quash observes, the theodrama is not a play we learn “before we get involved in the action—like learning a theory, or reading the instruction book for our new microwave oven before using it. We learn it \textit{in action}, as we go along” (“The Play Beyond the Play,” in Jeremy Begbie [ed.], \textit{Sounding the Depths} [London: SCM, 2002], 92–104 [98]).
\item \textsuperscript{65} As articulated in Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Balthasar, \textit{TD} I, 69.
\item \textsuperscript{67} This is based on a similar observation in Vanhoozer, \textit{Drama of Doctrine}, 311.
\end{itemize}
and ethics is complex and intermingled. Theology belongs at the heart of ethics, and ethics belongs at the heart of theology, because both involve faith seeking performative understanding. As Barth maintained: “dogmatics is ethics and ethics is dogmatics.” Overall, the theatrical turn is not interested in practice over theory or ethics over theology but in the dynamic interplay between these two disciplines. One way to describe this approach, therefore, is to follow the theatrical turn toward a renewed vision of theological ethics, a vision for faith seeking performative understanding.

*From Scientific to Aesthetic*

Another reason theology and ethics are inseparably linked is their mutual connection with aesthetics. According to Balthasar, both theology and ethics arise out of an encounter with the beauty of God’s revelation in the performance of Christ. Perceiving this beauty occurs in the midst of our own participation in the drama and calls for the holistic response of performative understanding. “For God’s revelation is not an object to be looked at: it is his action in and upon the world, and the world can only respond, and hence ‘understand’, through action on its part.” As such, theology and ethics are not dry, scientific disciplines reflecting on brute facts and organizing propositions into tidy systems. Rather, theology and ethics are expressions of wonder, explorations of desire, and responses to the “weight of glory” experienced while participating in the theodrama and encountering Christ. Truth, goodness, and beauty are neither abstract transcendental nor principles discovered through disengaged rationality, but “theatricals” revealed through God’s true, good, and beautiful performances and encountered through participatory imaginations. According to Vanhoozer, imagination is the ability to see, feel, think, and act in ways appropriate to the truth, goodness, and beauty of God and his theodrama. Theodramatic imagination focuses on what has happened, is happening, and will happen in this drama according to God’s promises.

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69 Barth, *CD* I/2, 793.
71 C.S. Lewis observes that we do not merely want to see this glory, but to “pass into it receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it” (*The Weight of Glory* [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001], 42).
73 Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 377.
Within the theatrical turn, therefore, theology and ethics are imaginative habits that have more in common with the art of understanding and performing in a play than with conducting a scientific experiment. Theology is not a mere index of truths but the imaginative art of understanding the theodrama for the purpose of wise performance. Similarly, ethics is not a mere index of duties, but the imaginative art of performing in ways that match the pattern of God’s own performance. Entering into dialogue with theatre as a performing art orients theology toward artful reflection and ethics toward artful action. It also emphasizes the “artisanal” nature of these disciplines, which Lisa Hess describes as “embodied, exploratory, communal, risky, cross-categorical, and deeply contemplative.” Consequently, while this book is not an exercise in theological aesthetics, there is an overall sensitivity to the aesthetic dimension of theological ethics and a commitment to prevent beauty from becoming “the poor stepsister of truth and goodness.”

Terminology for the Theatrical Turn

Theologians who promote the theatrical turn draw on a myriad of theatrical terms and concepts but often in an inconsistent and uncritical manner, which creates barriers for effective interdisciplinary dialogue. Even before Balthasar coined the word “theodrama” with the publication of Theodramatik (1973–83) and its English translation (1988–98), drama was often the word of choice for theologians and ethicists, but is this the best choice? What is the difference between drama and theatre, and how do these terms relate to other key terms such as script, performance, and improvisation? Based on these distinctions, what is the best use of these terms within the theatrical turn in theology?

Drama, Script, Theatre, and Performance

If we define drama and theatre strictly according to etymology, drama (from the Greek dromenon) is “a thing done” and theatre (from the Greek theatron) is either

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75 In this sense, ethics is first a way of seeing (the form of Christ’s performance) before it is a way of doing or performing (improvising on the form of Christ’s life) (see David Bentley Hart, The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003], 339–43; Stanley Hauerwas, Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981], 46).


“a place for seeing” or the “spectacle” that is seen. In reality, both drama and theatre are fluid concepts, and have developed beyond their original etymology so that drama is a text-centered concept and theatre is a performance-centered concept. In other words, drama typically refers to a genre of literature that provides a script for public performance, whereas theatre typically refers to the actual public performance or production. Drama is the written play, whereas theatre is the play in performance. Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis make a similar distinction with a helpful phrase: “the written drama scripts the theatrical event.”

In traditional theatre, drama is often synonymous with the script, with both referring to a written text intended for theatrical performance. In more experimental forms of theatre and within the field of performance studies, however, script tends to take on a broader meaning. Richard Schechner, for example, traces the relationship between drama, script, theatre, and performance in terms of four concentric circles. The smallest, core circle is drama, which is the textual map created by the author(s). The next circle is the script: a pattern of doing or a code of events based on the drama. Theatre constitutes the next circle, referring to the manifestation of the drama and/or script in real time and space. Finally, the largest circle is performance, which encompasses the whole event, including the interaction between actors and audience. Schechner summarizes: “The drama is the domain of the author, the composer, scenarist, shaman; the script is the domain of the teacher, guru, master; the theater is the domain of the performers; the performance is the domain of the audience.” One benefit of Schechner’s model is that it applies to a wide range of performance scenarios, including traditional, improvisational, and experimental theatre. In traditional theatre, for example, all four elements are present, but in improvisational theatre, there is no drama and often only a partially formed script based on rehearsal and practiced techniques. Schechner also helps us realize the fluidity of these elements, how “they enclose

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78 Given these two different meanings, this project makes the distinction by using “theater” to refer to the place of performance and “theatre” to refer to the act of performance. This has the added benefit of using the international spelling of “theatre,” which is becoming increasingly common even within the USA.


80 For example, Johnson and Savidge equate the two by stating that “a drama is a script that is incomplete until performed in a theatrical production” (Performing the Sacred, 12).


82 See Schechner, Performance Theory, 71 fig. 3.1.

83 See also ibid. 87.

84 Ibid. 70.
one another, overlap, interpenetrate, simultaneously and redundantly arousing and using every channel of community.”  

Distinguishing drama from theatre is particularly important given the rise of avant-garde or post-dramatic theatre. Han-Thies Lehmann describes the “trade secrets of dramatic theatre” as imitation, comprehensible plot, formation of social bonds, primacy of the text, and forming the illusion of world representation. Consequently, post-dramatic theatre is concerned to de-dramatize these elements, purging performance in an effort to get beyond drama. Is the theatrical turn in Christian theology also trying to get beyond drama or is the purpose to re-dramatize theology, as Vanhoozer has proposed? In order to address this question, it is necessary to indicate how the terms “drama,” “script,” “theatre,” and “performance” may be used correctly and consistently within Christian theology.

First, if drama is a textual map for performance, then drama refers to both Scripture and other written works—including creeds, confessions, and theological and ethical treatises—that guide contemporary performance. An important difference, of course, is that both Scripture and theological works record and reflect on what has happened, whether God’s performance or the performance of his creatures, before calling for further performance. Consequently, despite the popularity of the metaphor, it is not entirely appropriate to call Scripture a script, an issue addressed in more detail in Chapter 4. Second, if scripts are understood as patterns of doing, then scripts are the lived, practiced, and embodied Christian traditions that persist through time and from place to place, despite local variation. The drama and script together, therefore, provide the life-plot and patterns for human action. Third, as the manifestation of the drama and/or script, theatre is what happens when people participate in the plot or enact patterns of action at particular times and places as informed by Scripture and tradition. Fourth, while performance is very similar to theatre, it can be used in the broadest possible sense to refer to any action or deed within the theatre of existence, no matter how scripted or unscripted. Both theatre and performance, therefore, are oriented toward action. Unfortunately, as indicated at the beginning of this chapter, both theatre and performance sometimes carry negative connotations, both in Christian communities and in broader society. For instance, theatrical might be used to describe something or someone that is pretentious, showy, or over-the-top, and performance is often associated with hypocrisy, insincerity, or the prideful attempt to achieve salvation by works. In this book, however, theatre refers to quotidian action rather than showiness, and performance simply means participation in the theodrama as enabled by the triune God. Faking a Christian role remains a

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85 Ibid. 94.
87 Ibid. 74.
88 Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 87.
temptation for participants in the theodrama, but Chapter 5 will explore how theodramatic performance can display Christ-like, eschatological authenticity.

Improvisation

Improvisation is another theatrical concept that suffers from widespread misunderstanding and derision. When referring to a particular form of theatre, improvisation is “unscripted acting in which the performers collectively make up the story of situation as they go, or collectively try to carry out a specified difficult performance in the presence of the audience.” This kind of improvisational theatre often assumes a comedic form popularized as “improv” by TV shows such as Whose Line Is It Anyway? More fundamentally, however, improvisation is a skill used in every form of theatre, since to improvise is to “produce or make (something) from whatever is available.” Improvisation is fundamental to all theatrical performance, for even in scripted performance repeated nightly each moment is unique and involves unpredictable interactions and circumstances. Whether used in rehearsal, scripted theatre, or specifically in improv shows, improvisation is the skill of creating a meaningful performance out of what is at hand.

Just because improvisation is spontaneous, however, does not mean it can be accomplished without preparation or discipline. The best improvisers are the most disciplined, those who have learned the skills to respond most effectively to whatever is happening in the present moment. In fact, according to Richard Schechner, improvisation is the very crux of theatre as the creative conjunction between spontaneity and discipline. Improvisation is not, contrary to common opinion, just showing up and fabricating things out of nothing. Correcting these misconceptions allows us to see more clearly how Christian practice is intrinsically improvisational. As Bruce Ellic Benson remarks, “in the beginning, there was improvisation,” and improvisation continues to constitute the nature of existence as “a mixture of both structure and contingency, of regularity and


unpredictability, of constraint and possibility.” More specifically, human participation in the theodrama is improvisational, because although human are actors, “they do not yet know their lines, or how the play ends.” In addition, this participation is improvisational, because we are always adapting to changing circumstances and responding to particular conditions. Learning to live well, Stanley Hauerwas remarks, is “to make the unexpected our greatest resource” through creative improvisation. Ethical improvisation bears “testimony to God’s creativity and abundance,” as he directs us toward creative and fitting participation in the theodrama.

Samuel Wells fruitfully explores Christian ethics as improvisation and corrects misconceptions that could act as barriers to seeing improvisation as an effective model. First, Wells explains—relying on insights from director Keith Johnstone—that improvisation is more a matter of doing what comes naturally than being original. Improvisers who try to be original are not only prideful but are working too hard. Trying to be original often leads to either paralysis or forced results, whereas just doing the obvious based on what came before and conditions in the present situation produces fitting action. For improvisers in theatre and the theodrama alike, this involves knowing the story in which we are participating, developing an awareness of the current situation, and having the confidence to do what fits. Second, improvisation is not about being extremely witty and standing out with individual talent, but contributing to a group on the basis of trust and respect. Heroism is discouraged, and skillful improvisers are those who recognize their roles and play them faithfully in conjunction with others. Consequently, to emphasize improvisation in Christian ethics is to privilege relationships and community rather than elite individualism. Improvisation is for ordinary people, for it constitutes a core component of everyday life. Everyone can improvise,

94 Ibid. 295.
because everyone does improvise. Third, Wells laments that improvisation is often linked with a view of the unconscious as corrupt and potentially demonic. While recognizing that the unconscious is affected by sin, Wells asserts that it has been neglected in accounts of the moral life, especially as a gift that God can heal and restore. Finally, Wells acknowledges that improvisation is often associated with triviality and self-indulgence, although this is a misleading stereotype. Improvisation often does involve laughter, but it involves every other human emotion as well. Similarly, the improvised Christian life requires every human emotion, including playful humor, especially because “the joke is God’s and the laughter is divine.”

Theodramatic or Theotheatrical?

Given the clarifications above, is it still legitimate to describe this book as a study in theodramatics? Even though the introduction is framed in terms of the theatrical turn in theology, theodramatic remains the most popular term among contemporary scholars, especially given the formative influence of Balthasar’s Theo-Drama. In keeping with the distinctions above, however, theatrical theology emphasizes the practical goal of theology as faith seeking performative understanding. Dramatic theology highlights rootedness in the drama of Scripture that presents the covenantal dialogue between God and humanity. Dramatic theology is still concerned with performance, but consistency with these terms means the primary focus remains the text, drama, or script providing the plot and patterns for performance. Some advocates of the theatrical turn in theology may desire to distance themselves from the theodrama, together with the primacy of Scripture and its coherent and comprehensive meta-drama. The aim of this book, however, seeks to fuse theodramatic concerns with a theotheatrical approach. Embracing the theatrical turn in theology does not entail neglecting the drama of Scripture; on the contrary, it makes the most of biblical interpretation and theology by connecting them to faithful performance in everyday life. As such, this book acknowledges the possibility and necessity of dramatic theology while giving full attention to the theatricality and performativity of the Christian life. Continuing to refer to the theodrama forges continuity with others who have used and continue to use this term since Balthasar; juxtaposing it with the language of theatricality and improvisation keeps in play the priority of liveness and embodied performance. If the danger of dramatic theology is epic objectivity, then the

danger of theatrical theology is lyric subjectivity, and both are necessary for a fully theatrical theodramatics.

**Methodology for the Theatrical Turn**

Having clarified terminology, it remains to outline a suitable method for interdisciplinary dialogue between theology and theatre. Lamentably, in many interdisciplinary efforts within the theatrical turn, this important step is overlooked or approached in an ad hoc manner. This is partly evident in the language used to describe the relationship between theatre and theology. Balthasar, for example, calls theatre a metaphor, model, and analogy for Christian theology.103 Similarly, Vanhoozer claims that his theodramatic approach follows a theatrical model,104 dramatic paradigm,105 theatrical analogy,106 and theatrical metaphor.107 Likewise, Wells describes improvisation as an appropriate analogy,108 mode,109 and model110 for exploring Christian ethics. And when summarizing the performative turn in New Testament studies, Stephen Barton refers to performance as a model, metaphor, analogy, and paradigm for biblical interpretation.111 Whereas different terms may be appropriate in different contexts, it seems that scholars have a difficult time describing how theatre functions as an interdisciplinary dialogue partner for theology. As it turns out, how one describes this relationship has an impact upon how the dialogue proceeds, so it will be helpful to explore various options before tracing out an appropriate methodology.

**Theatre as Metaphor**

In simple terms, a metaphor is speaking of one thing as something else.112 More technically, Janet Soskice defines a metaphor as “a figure of speech whereby

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103 This is true from the very beginning pages of Balthasar’s work (see e.g. **TD** I, 9–23).
105 Ibid. 158.
106 Ibid. 159.
107 Ibid. 159.
108 Vanhoozer, The Drama of Doctrine, xii.
109 Wells, Improvisation, 152.
110 Ibid. 11.
we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another.”¹¹³ Metaphors are essential to the way we understand the world; in fact, we live by them.¹¹⁴ The life of faith also rests on metaphors, for God has chosen to accommodate and reveal himself through metaphors, enabling us to grasp his purposes and our relationship with him. God is my shepherd, Jesus is our redemption, the church is the bride of Christ, the kingdom of God is a mustard seed—all of these metaphors give Christian faith meaning and shape. As such, metaphors are not mere ornamental additions to the language of faith, but vehicles for creating meaning.¹¹⁵ Consequently, we can employ theatrical language as metaphors for God’s being and action as well as Christian existence: creation is the theatre of God’s glory; the church is the company of the gospel; Christian living is improvisation, and so forth. The world of theatre provides compelling metaphors to explain and explore reality from a Christian perspective.

Theatre as Analogy

What is the difference between theatrical metaphors and theatrical analogies? This depends, of course, on how one defines analogy, whether as a particular linguistic device or a general comparison between one thing and another. Linguistically, an analogy arises when a relationship between two things is compared to the relationship between two other things (for example, the director is to the actors as the Holy Spirit is to Christians). More generally, however, an analogy is any comparison between two similar things, which often have greater similarity than two things linked metaphorically.¹¹⁶ For example, we can say “God is beautiful” by analogy given the fitting similarity between “God” and our concept of “beauty,” whereas “God is a playwright” surprises us in the juxtaposition of two different terms and thus functions as a metaphor.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 2nd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Lakoff and Johnson also posit that metaphors are a way of thinking before they are a way of speaking. Nevertheless, given that thoughts become language in order to communicate meaning, we will focus on metaphors as figures of speech.
¹¹⁷ Ibid. Most theologians acknowledge, therefore, that all God-talk is analogical, whereas an ongoing debate persists regarding if all God-talk is metaphorical. Discussions regarding the analogical nature of God-talk are footnotes on the theology of Thomas Aquinas, who proposed analogical language as a middle way between equivocal (metaphorical) and univocal (literal) language (*Summa Theologiae*, vol. 3 [1a.12–13]: *Knowing and Naming God*, ed. Herbert McCabe [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006], 1a.13.5).
Whether theatrical language functions metaphorically or analogically in relation to theology, therefore, depends on the degree of similarity between their conceptual fields. To the extent that human life is actually a matter of improvisation, it is accurate to draw an analogy between improvisation and Christian practice. But whereas theatrical improvisation is quite different than the improvisation we experience in everyday life, it is also accurate to use improvisation as a metaphor for Christian practice. In other words, whether we speak of an analogical or metaphorical relationship between theatre and theology depends on whether we are emphasizing the similarity or difference between these disciplines, and both may be appropriate. In general, this book continues to refer to theatrical metaphors, in part because metaphor is a less ambiguous concept but also because the world of theatre, although a representation of reality, is quite different from everyday life.

**Theatre as Model**

Models differ from both metaphors and analogies because they are states of affairs rather than linguistic devices. Janet Soskice suggests that a model is not simply *speaking of* or describing one thing as something else (metaphor), but *viewing* one thing as something else.\(^{118}\) She sets her perspective in contrast to those, such as Max Black and Ian Barbour, who view models simply as extended or systematic metaphors and assert that models only differ from metaphors in that they are theoretical and systematically sustained.\(^{119}\) Sallie McFague and Avery Dulles also describe models as extended metaphors, explaining that in a theological context, models are employed to organize belief and practice, connecting a coherent view of reality to everyday actions.\(^{120}\) John Goldingay, like Soskice, is careful to distinguish between metaphors and models by identifying the constructive nature of the latter as “an image or construct that helps us grasp aspects of these realities by providing us with something we can understand that has points of comparison with the object we wish to understand, thus helping us get our mind round its nature.”\(^{121}\)

While it is necessary to distinguish between linguistic metaphors and conceptual models as Soskice and Goldingay advise, it is still true that a model exists in metaphorical relationship to the reality being modeled. What is more, talking or writing about a model (for example, improvisation as a model for Christian practice) requires the use of metaphors (for example, Christian practice as improvisation), so it is indeed advantageous to view models as metaphorical.

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constructs. The benefit of using models in theology, John Franke observes, is that they “provide images and symbols that enable us to conceive of the richness and complexity of the divine life and action of God in the world without claiming that they are absolutely literal or precise.” Theatre provides such a model for Christianity, and we will consider more specifically how this model functions after clarifying whether or not theatre also functions as a paradigm.

Theatre as Paradigm

At a certain point, it is possible for a model to morph into a paradigm if it gains enough weight. In other words, a paradigm is a dominant model, and, as such, it determines the range of all possible models. Paradigms, according to McFague, are founded on root metaphors: consequently, a paradigm shift in theology arises from a root metaphor replacement. Similarly, Thomas Kuhn, in his groundbreaking work on scientific paradigms, posited that a paradigm consists of a dominant model or exemplar shared by the scientific community. When a scientific community observes sufficient anomalies in the existing paradigm, a paradigm shift and scientific revolution begin. Similar shifts and revolutions occurred throughout church history, such as during the Reformation, when communities discovered anomalies and inconsistencies in the contemporary theological paradigm. Whereas theatre certainly functions as a model for some scholars advancing the theatrical turn in theology, it is not a paradigm because it is not a dominant model shared by global church.

Theatre as a Model for Christian Theology and Practice: Characteristics and Clarifications

Based on these distinctions, it is appropriate to view theatrical theory and practice as a model for Christian theology and practice, a model that contains many metaphors. Soskice suggests that, like scientific models, theological models seek to present an accurate vision of reality. Whereas both scientific and theological models use symbolic representation, draw on the imagination, and seek a comprehensive ordering of experience, models within theology call for more personal involvement, since they are rooted in our deepest and most cherished

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122 For example, Soskice explains that the concept of fatherhood is a model for God, but that we use it to speak metaphorically (Metaphor and Religious Language, 55).
124 Barbour, Myths, Models, and Paradigms, 124.
125 McFague, Metaphorical Theology, 110.
beliefs and experiences. Before discussing the particular advantages and disadvantages of a theatrical model, therefore, it is important to note how models function within Christian thought and practice more generally. First, models are both explanatory and exploratory, assisting us in interpreting our experience in light of divine revelation and expanding our knowledge beyond familiar horizons. For example, the model of God as a playwright seeks to explain his being and action in the world and to explore new possibilities of thought and action arising from this model. Consequently, models are meant to synthesize what we already know and to generate new, faithful theological insights and ethical practices. As Aidan Nichols explains, models provide vividness and immediacy to a theory while pushing beyond familiar conceptual boundaries. Second, all models bear a genuine yet incomplete correspondence to reality. This critical-realistic perspective avoids the Scylla of literalism and the Charybdis of fictionalism and highlights the central role of the imagination. To model the Holy Spirit after a theatre director, for example, means charting a creative vision about the Holy Spirit’s real work in directing the free actions of humanity, but we cannot confuse the model with the modeled. Third, models are inherently inadequate, and multiple models are needed for faithful theology and practice. Models are inherently inadequate for theology, because certain aspects of the subject matter—God and his interaction with humanity—are inexhaustibly mysterious. Consequently, McFague is correct to acknowledge the impossibility of “super-models,” advocating a myriad of models to grasp the reality of God’s being and action. Fourth and finally, models are life-enriching as much as they are knowledge-building. A good model does not merely provide truthful theological knowledge but also engenders faithful and fitting ways of living in correspondence with the reality being modeled.

Based on these characteristics, in the context of Christian theology and practice, a model can be defined as a state of affairs with metaphorical potential to explain reality in relation to divine revelation, expand theological knowledge, and exert practical influence. In addition to these criteria, McFague asserts that models should bear fittingness to the reality being modeled, complement other models, and cope with anomalies. Dulles provides a more comprehensive list of criteria: basis in Scripture, basis in Christian tradition, capacity to give Christians a

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sense of their corporate identity and mission, fostering virtues and values admired by Christians, correspondence with Christian religious experience, theological fruitfulness, and practical fruitfulness in the lives of believers.\textsuperscript{135}

Whether or not a theatrical model can achieve all these goals is a basic question that will be explored in the chapters that follow. In the meantime, a few clarifications are necessary to show how theatre will function as a model in this book. First, theatrical theory and practices, rather than dramatic texts, will serve as the model for Christian theology and practice. While many fruitful studies have been done using drama as a model to explore biblical texts,\textsuperscript{136} the main focus of this book is the theatrical turn in theology, and so theatrical performers and their performances (which contain elements of drama) will serve as the model. Several capable interpreters of Balthasar have deduced that whereas his theodramatic approach is a stunning development in Christian theology, he emphasized the dramatic at the expense of the theatrical.\textsuperscript{137} Quash even concludes that if Balthasar’s approach was followed without modification, it would actually “disable a theodramatics” by diminishing the significance of time, neglecting resistant material and performtive particulars, subjugating subjects to structures, and presuming a God’s-eye view.\textsuperscript{138} By focusing on theatrical theory and practice rather than drama, therefore, this book seeks to build from and correct Balthasar’s legacy, as Wells urges, by “genuinely embracing time as a friend, and therefore reinstating the practices of the church and the significance of the present.”\textsuperscript{139}

Second, this study does not concentrate on one particular form of theatre (scripted theatre, experimental theatre, or improvisational theatre), one particular style of character formation (role distance or role identification) or the work of one particular theatre director (Brecht, Stanislavski, or Brook); rather, it draws from a variety of theatrical traditions and practices. The advantage of this approach is to ensure that theology is enriched by a greater number of theatrical models and perspectives, rather than limiting the dialogue to particular forms or styles.\textsuperscript{140} While it may be appropriate at times to identify one-to-one equivalents between the life of faith and theatre (for example, church as company), there are other times when these correspondences are less adequate (for example, Scripture as

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{135} Dulles, Models of the Church, 180–81. \hfill \textsuperscript{136} Vanhoozer, “The Drama-of-Redemption Model.” \hfill \textsuperscript{137} See Ivan Khovacs’s critique in “A Cautionary Note on the Use of Theatre in Theology,” in T.A. Hart and Guthrie (eds), Faithful Performances, 33–50. \hfill \textsuperscript{138} Quash, Theology and the Drama of History, 196–7. \hfill \textsuperscript{139} Wells, Improvisation, 51. \hfill \textsuperscript{140} This is one of Josh Edelman’s main critiques of Vanhoozer’s Drama of Doctrine, which he claims draws from limited theatrical models and thus stands on “relatively unsure cultural ground” (“Can an Act Be True? The Possibility for the Dramatic Metaphor for Theology Within a Post-Stanislavskian Theatre,” in T.A. Hart and Guthrie (eds), Faithful Performances, 51–72 [53]).}
The disadvantage, however, is that we will not be able to delineate in detail particular areas of theatrical theory and practice. An effort will be made, however, to draw on the most relevant and respected studies and to exhibit genuine interaction with these sources.

While dialoguing with theatre as a model, caution must be exercised not to gather tidbits selectively from theatre in order to make a theological point. The best interdisciplinary method will seek first to understand a theatrical theory or practice on its own terms, and only then to use this theory or practice as a model. Balthasar offers good advice in this regard: “It seems to me, that instead of suddenly rushing into the construction of such a [dramatic] theology, one should first elaborate a ‘dramatic instrumentation’ of the literary and lived theatre, and thus of life itself, in order to prepare images and concepts with which one can then work (with an adequate transposition).” If by “transposition,” however, Balthasar means what he stated earlier as a “thorough modification” of insights from a theatrical model, then this methodology is less helpful. What is more fruitful, and yet much more difficult, is being truly open to discovering heuristic insights within theatre, rather than simply finding rationale for pre-established beliefs and practices or trying to make theology more interesting. In asking what the West End and Broadway have to say to Jerusalem, we will only discover the answer by really living in each of the cities, rather than merely making occasional visits, and staying long enough to understand their languages and the cultures.

Fourth, this book is limited to the extent that it will explore Christian theology and practice through the lens of theatre rather than vice versa. Both conversations are crucial, but the parameters of this study are such that it must focus on one part of the conversation, while applauding other scholars who are completing

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141 As such, Johnson and Savidge espouse that fixed “dynamic equivalents” can be dangerous, and at other times it is important simply to state the incongruence between the model and modeled and let the equivalence stand (Performing the Sacred, 59).


143 Balthasar, TD I, 11.

144 This constitutes another element of Edelman’s critique of The Drama of Doctrine and what he views as a misuse of both Peter Brook and Constantin Stanislavski. Khovacs, too, accuses Balthasar of “exploiting drama to enrich the language of theology,” and he faults Vanhoozer for limiting the potential of a theatrical model by interpreting it through the lens of speech-act theory (see Khovacs, “A Cautionary Note,” 33, 42–3).

145 Vanhoozer asks this question in The Drama of Doctrine (79), and in another essay makes a similar observation regarding philosophy and theology, identifying himself as a “nomad” existing on the borderlands between these disciplines (“Once More into the Borderlands: The Way of Wisdom in Philosophy and Theology After the ‘Turn to Drama’,” in Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Martin Warner [eds], Transcending Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology: Reason, Meaning, and Experience [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007], 31–54 [53]).
the dialogue.\textsuperscript{146} Besides interacting with theatrical theory and practice, therefore, the other main conversation partners will be those theologians and ethicists who have used theatrical metaphors and models in a constructive manner.\textsuperscript{147} Selecting sources in this manner has the fortuitous result of creating dialogue across theological disciplines and between voices that may not normally be juxtaposed. The theatrical turn links the systematic theologies of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Michael Horton, and Kevin Vanhoozer; the ethics of Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells; and the biblical theology of Walter Brueggemann and Tom Wright, to name just a few. As such, one goal of this book is to show how a theatrical model for Christian theology and practice is uniquely poised for theological ethics and ethical theology, connecting two disciplines that should never be separate.

A sixth and final clarification is that while this study recognizes the exceptional promise of a theatrical model, it is not without potential pitfalls, nor is it the only promising model. While appreciating many features of the theatrical model, for example, Anthony Thiselton warns that it can, like any model, be overplayed and hold us captive.\textsuperscript{148} Although a theatrical model is “wonderfully insightful and instructive,” Hauerwas observes, “the Christian faith is far too rich and complex to be captured by a single analogy.”\textsuperscript{149} While it is healthy to resist the allure of super-models that exclude other models, could it be true that the theatrical model is comprehensive enough to include all other models? One reason why this may be true is because as an art form, theatre is a cooked version of raw life,\textsuperscript{150} so while the drama of redemption resembles theatre, it is also true that theatre resembles the drama of redemption. Consequently, Rosemary Haughton is bold enough to conclude that the drama of salvation “is not a mere metaphor; it is about as accurate a description as it is possible to give of the way in which the real availability of salvation is made known, and its character explained to human minds.”\textsuperscript{151} If Haughton is correct, then the theatrical turn in theology is not a superfluous effort to make theology more interesting, but an attempt to rediscover the heart of living theodrama.

\begin{itemize}
\item 146 Johnson and Savidge, \textit{Performing the Sacred}; Khovacs, “Divine Reckoning in Profane Spaces.”
\item 147 Some scholars continue to be attracted by a theatrical model but struggle with its association with “showiness” or “play-acting” (see Brian Brock, \textit{Singing the Ethos of God: On the Place of Christian Ethics in Scripture} [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007], 60 n. 28).
\item 149 Stanley Hauerwas, \textit{Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence} (London: SPCK, 2004), 106.
\item 150 Schechner, \textit{Performance Theory}, 30.
\item 151 Haughton, \textit{The Drama of Salvation}, 46.
\end{itemize}
Living Theatre and Living Theodrama

The Empty Space is Peter Brook’s appeal for living theatre as opposed to deadly theatre. Deadly theatre determines all stage directions, leaving no room for improvisation and creativity. It is theatre reduced to imitative and conventional action. Theatre becomes deadly when approached “from the viewpoint that somewhere, someone has found out and defined how the play should be done.” Not only that, but deadly theatre persists when people think theatre should not adapt to the changing culture. At the heart of deadly theatre lies deadly acting, but also deadly writing, deadly directing, and deadly criticism. A living theatre, by contrast, will be holy and rough, powerful enough to grasp a vision of the invisible through the visible, and sufficiently earthy and immediate to connect with real life.

Likewise, this book explores the living theodrama. It investigates the real and ongoing theodrama in which we all perform our rough and holy faith. As such, it resists deadly theological ethics that would promote uncreative imitation, sentimental spirituality, unsatisfying clichés, and naive resolution. Reflection on the living theodrama gives rise to theatrical theology and motivates a livelier way of life made possible by a living king who died, rose again, and embodied both the rough and holy. Finally, participation in the living theodrama rests on the assumption that “in the midst of human mismanagement, self-righteousness, decadence and disease, grace somehow shines and partially transforms both the world and our perception of it.”

\[\text{152} \quad \text{Peter Brook,} \ \text{The Empty Space} \ \text{(Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 15.} \]
\[\text{153} \quad \text{Ibid. 16.} \]
\[\text{154} \quad \text{Ibid. 17.} \]
\[\text{155} \quad \text{Ibid. 19.} \]
\[\text{156} \quad \text{Ibid. 32–3.} \]
\[\text{157} \quad \text{See Shannon Craigo-Snell and Shawnthea Monroe,} \ \text{Living Christianity: A Pastoral Theology for Today} \ \text{(Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2009).} \]
\[\text{158} \quad \text{M. Harris,} \ \text{Theater and Incarnation}, \ \text{ch. 6.} \]
\[\text{159} \quad \text{Ibid. 101.} \]
Chapter 2
Practicing Theodramatics:
Formation and Performance

Disponibilité sums up in a single term the condition improvisers aspire to … It’s a kind of total awareness, a sense of being at one with the context: script, if such there be, actors, audience, theatre space, oneself and one’s body.

Anthony Frost and Ralph Yarrow, *Improvisation in Drama*, 152

Fitting action, the one that fits into a total interaction as response and as anticipation of further response, is alone conducive to the good and alone is right.

H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 64

Theatrical Formation and Performance

For any actor or company of actors, formation and performance are two essential elements of life in the theatre. Theatrical formation refers to the preparation, development, and growth of actors toward excellence and a readiness for particular roles and performances. Theatrical performance simply refers to what happens on stage before an audience. What constitutes the theatrical process, therefore, is the unending and mutually dependent movement from formation to performance and from performance to formation. On the one hand, formation without performance is pointless, because performance is the very reason why actors are concerned with formation. Performance is the *raison d’être* of formation, and a theatre of unending rehearsal destroys the purpose of theatre. On the other hand, performance without formation is futile, because formation enables actors to prepare for a performance that will interest the audience.1 The pivotal role of formation may be more obvious with scripted drama, including a readiness to play certain roles and deliver scripted lines, but formation is also crucial for improvisers who are trained in a whole variety of skills and habits. Frost and Yarrow describe at length the meaning and method of improvisational formation, which includes activities such as relaxation, games, movement exercises, space familiarization, concentration and attention, and practice following directions and

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1 The only possible exceptions are “happenings,” which often focus on the pure performativity of an event. Formation is still often necessary for happenings, however; even if the actor is not preparing for a particular role or learning a script, for, as Peter Brook concludes, “without preparation the event would be weak, messy, and meaningless” (*The Shifting Point: Forty Years of Theatrical Exploration, 1946–87* [London: Methuen Drama, 1989], 8).
“offers.” Furthermore, formation for improvisational theatre involves learning to work with others by developing trust, respect, interactive skill, and an ability to incorporate their actions and offers.

Even though formation is crucial for performance, it has obvious limits. Whether performing from a script or improvising a scene, it is impossible for actors to prepare fully for any performance; actors never surpass the need for continual formation of theatrical skills, habits, and attitudes. Furthermore, given the unpredictability of the environment, varying audience reactions, and the actor’s physical and emotional condition, each moment in performance is unique and unrepeatable. Even the most comprehensive and rigorous training cannot prepare actors for every eventuality of performance. When actors attempt to prepare in this way, says Brook, theatre becomes deadly. These limitations are especially prominent in improvisation, where unpredictable elements are intensified and performances are under-determined.

Given the limitations of formation, most theatre companies realize that one of the best ways to train is by performing. During performance, actors become aware of weaknesses and strengths and develop a greater sense of the necessity and urgency of formation. Only delusional actors would assert complete readiness for performance, realizing that performances must go on despite inadequacies and the usual fears, forgetfulness, and fatigue. The inevitable shortfalls of formation, therefore, require actors to dispel fears of failure. In fact, directors of improvisational theatre emphasize failure as the goal of performance, because failure is the result of risk, creativity, and genuine effort. For example, Keith Johnstone recommends that when an actor performs timidly, the director should ask: “Why aren’t you screwing up?” The only way to improve is to perform, and to perform is to fail. These failures then motivate further formation, which is tested by subsequent performances. In sum, the entire theatrical process is a dynamic interplay between formation and performance existing in an unending spiral of reciprocity: formation fuels performance and performance informs formation.

Theodramatic Formation and Performance

As in theatre, life in the theodrama involves the dynamic interplay between formation and performance. Theodramatic formation is the preparation, development, and growth of individuals and the church toward Christ-likeness,
Practicing Theodramatics: Formation and Performance

along with the readiness for particular roles and performances in the theodrama. This formation is a process of being transformed and conformed into the image or form of Christ by the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29) together with the active “putting on” of Christ-like character and the gifts of the Spirit (Rom. 13:12–14; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:22–4; Col. 3:10–12). In the theodrama, of course, performance encompasses all of life: actors are always on stage and in character, and, as such, there is no distinction between off-stage identity and on-stage roles. Theodramatic performance, therefore, constitutes the entire lives of individuals and the church on the world stage. The purpose of theodramatic formation is faithful performance, and performance is the means and context for formation.

Rather than maintaining this interdependence and complexity, however, many approaches to theological ethics focus on either the formation of performers or the quandaries of performance. A performance-oriented approach primarily addresses problems, decisions, issues, and cases arising in performance and judges them according to principles and/or concrete situations. For example, this approach might explore if abortion is right or wrong in principle, and whether there are particular exceptions to a general rule. The formation-oriented approach, however, investigates the character, virtue, habits, and attitudes of the performer. For instance, it takes a step back from quandaries to ask what kinds of people would consider performing an abortion in the first place. While each approach has its strengths, each also has a tendency toward imbalance by either overlooking formation in favor of performance or vice versa. The weaknesses of this false dichotomy are obvious, but does a theodramatic perspective do any better in maintaining the dynamic interplay between formation and performance, between actor and action?

Balthasar addresses this issue by emphasizing the inseparable relationship between contemplation and action. For Balthasar, contemplating the beautiful enables actors to perform the good, and performing the good leads actors into formative encounter with the beautiful. Contemplation naturally gives rise to action, for in contemplating the beautiful action of God in Christ, “we suddenly realize that we have been made to take our part in the action as a whole and that we are therefore participants in this action.” In general, Balthasar presents a movement from contemplation to action, but also emphasizes their dynamic

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7 While theodramatic formation shares much with “spiritual formation,” it highlights the dynamic interplay with performance and the readiness for roles and performances in the theodrama.

8 The themes of imitating Christ, Christ-likeness, and putting on Christ will be explored in greater detail in Chapters 3 and 5.

9 This approach includes both casuistry—reasoning from principles to particular cases—and situation ethics, which emphasizes the uniqueness of each case. Each borrows in different ways from the deontological and consequentialist traditions.

interplay: “Action is the fruit of contemplation, though contemplation can and must continue throughout the action and fertilize it.”¹¹ Thus, Balthasar creates an inseparable link between theological aesthetics and theological dramatics: “There can be no question of simply perceiving, contemplating, or registering what is shown; whoever is moved in faith must go out on the stage (θεατρίζω: Heb. 10:33; cf. 1 Cor. 4:9), in sight of a world which at first imagines it can afford to be nothing more than a spectator itself.”¹² While appreciating this relationship between contemplation and action, it would be misguided to limit theodramatic formation to contemplative perception of the beautiful. Formation includes a vision of the beautiful, but also involves formation of attitudes, desires, virtues, knowledge, skills, habits, and more. What is needed, therefore, is a more holistic understanding of formation while maintaining the dynamic interplay with performance, which is what both Hauerwas and Wells seek to accomplish.

Like Balthasar, Hauerwas observes how aesthetic vision affects virtuous character, which in turn engenders faithful action; he also reverses the order, showing how action forms vision and character.¹³ Therefore, the Christian life is a matter of “learning to live as you are and be as you live.”¹⁴ Hauerwas adamantly resists any approach to ethics that focuses merely on quandaries, decisions, or situations, since “the kind of ‘situations’ we confront and how we understand them are a function of the kind of people we are.”¹⁵ Moreover, the kind of people we are depends on the drama in which we are situated and how this drama shapes our imagination and habits.¹⁶ Similarly, Wells identifies imagination and habits as crucial components of theodramatic formation. According to Wells, the ability to improvise skillfully in the theodrama is dependent on the readiness of the performer, which means that ethics is more about rehearsal and formation than action and performance. He identifies worship as the theodramatic equivalent of theatrical rehearsal, both being the time and place during which performers build habits and cultivate imagination.¹⁷

Although Wells accurately represents the formative power of worship, one weakness of comparing worship to rehearsal is that Sunday worship is itself a part of theodramatic performance. Worship does not form actors outside of or preceding performance, but is part of the performance with powerful potential to shape our vision and virtue. In addition, James K.A. Smith convincingly argues

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¹¹ Ibid. 52–3.
¹² Balthasar, GL II, 52.
¹⁴ Hauerwas, A Community of Character, 150.
¹⁵ Ibid. 115.
¹⁶ Hauerwas develops the theatrical model together with James Fodor (Performing the Faith, ch. 3).
¹⁷ Wells, Improvisation, ch. 5.
that Christian worship as the liturgy of the church exists alongside other “cultural liturgies” such as shopping or watching television, which compete in forming our hearts, minds, and wills. The question is not if these liturgies are formative, but which “liturgical performances” are the most formative in our lives and also which ones ought to be. Indeed, each decision we make, like the decision to watch a football game instead of participating in corporate worship, is by default a decision to be formed by a particular liturgy. And the more we perform a liturgy—whether worshipping, shopping, or frequenting social media sites—the more these liturgies will shape our identity as actors and the quality of our performances. In other words, every decision is an instance of formation, and how we are formed inevitably influences our decisions. Consequently, rather than prioritizing actor formation over appropriate action, it is more accurate to recognize how formation and performance are dynamically interwoven. Quandaries form character just as character helps us deal with quandaries or even determines which quandaries we will face. Despite this dynamism, it is still important to distinguish between these two aspects of theodramatic participation and to explore each one in greater detail.

Theatrical Formation and Disponibility

Having established that formation is an essential element in the theatrical process and highlighted its dynamic interplay with performance, it remains to explore various perspectives on what constitutes theatrical formation. Constantin Stanislavski, often considered the father of modern acting, devoted his directing career to preparing actors for performance through character formation. In his system, the goal is for actors to play their parts as if they were real, with intense attention to one’s inner life and tapping into emotional memory. For Stanislavski, therefore, proper formation involves acting, thinking, and feeling as the character would act, think, and feel. Despite the wide-ranging influence of Stanislavski’s system, many have challenged his perspective on inward and emotional formation. For instance, Bertolt Brecht insisted that actors should not prepare by emotionally identifying with their roles, but by mastering the external.

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18 This is a central thesis of James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).
19 Wells articulates the priority of actor formation, but exploring how action informs the agent might augment his argument. “It is the actor who matters, more than the action: ethics is about forming the life of the agent more than it is about judging the appropriateness of the action” (*Improvisation*, 81).
elements—the *gestus*—necessary to play their parts skillfully. Brecht believed that when actors maintain emotional distance from their roles and focus on the externals, it enables spectators to experience the *Verfremdung* or “A-effect” and fully encounter the theatrical illusion, which enables authentic transformation.

Consequently, Stanislavski and Brecht represent two opposite poles of theatrical formation: internal, emotional formation and external, gesticular formation. This is not to say that these two approaches are completely at odds. In fact, Brecht listed nine things that can be learned from Stanislavski, and others have subsequently observed that their perspectives are commensurable and not contradictory. For example, both Stanislavski and Brecht give a pivotal role to imagination in grasping the overall story, tying together diverse elements of the play, and enabling each action to fit whatever else is happening on stage. In this sense, whether actor formation is primarily about developing internal or external habits, it always involves developing a readiness to contribute appropriately to one’s role or place in the story. In other words, both Stanislavskian and Brechtian approaches are commensurable with developing a receptive disposition, whether receptive to a role, fellow actors, the director, the script, the audience, or the overall mission of the play.

In scripted theatre, it may be possible to overlook this core element of formation, since it is technically possible for an actor to memorize and perform a part without being receptive, although it would result in a poor performance. In improvisational theatre, however, the need for a receptive disposition is much more obvious, since the constantly developing and unpredictable nature of improv requires actors who are continually responsive to everything around them. Jacques Lecoq uses the word *disponibilité* to describe this state of readiness that enables improvisers to have "receptiveness to everything around us." It is a state

\[\text{elements—the *gestus*—necessary to play their parts skillfully.}\]

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\[\text{\(22\) Ibid. 192–3.}\]

\[\text{\(23\) Ibid. 236–7.}\]

\[\text{\(24\) Eric Bentley, “Are Stanislavsky and Brecht Commensurable?” in Carol Martin and Henry Bial (eds), *Brecht Sourcebook* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 37–42. I explore the relationship between Stanislavskian role identification and Brechtian role distance at greater length in Chapter 5.}\]


\[\text{\(26\) Robert Barton, a director of scripted theatre, describes actor preparation as developing a state of “alert responsiveness” or “relaxed readiness” (*Acting: Onstage and Off* [New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1989], 24–5).}\]

\[\text{\(27\) Jonathan Fox articulates this aspect of formation in terms of service or commitment (*Acts of Service*).}\]

of “discovery, of openness, of freedom to receive,” that allows the improviser to be on the stage with a “freshness of beginnings.”

Taking their cue from Lecoq, Anthony Frost and Ralph Yarrow identify disponibilité as a state of being “open to what is happening” (disponible à l’événement), a concept they admit is quite difficult to translate into English. They try anyway: “Availability—openness—readiness—acceptance: the precondition of creativity. It implies not resisting but flowing with the world and the self.” As the core of creative formation, disponibilité implies both a readiness to accept what is happening and also an openness to respond and keep the action going. Jerzy Grotowski refers to a similar disposition in his “poor theatre” method, which “demands a mobilization of all the physical and spiritual forces of an actor who is in a state of idle readiness, a passive availability, which makes possible an active acting score.” Consequently, disponibilité implies both passive receiving and active giving. Frost and Yarrow summarize the meaning and significance of this concept for improvisation:

Disponibilité sums up in a single term the condition improvisers aspire to. It offers a way of describing an almost intangible and nearly undefinable state of being: having at (or in) one’s fingertips, and any other part of the body, the capacity to do and say what is appropriate, and to have the confidence to make the choice. It’s a kind of total awareness, a sense of being at one with the context: script, if such there be, actors, audience, theatre space, oneself and one’s body.

This definition contains several crucial observations regarding disponibilité as the core of theatrical formation. First, disponibilité is not just an actor’s general receptiveness or availability, but is oriented in particular directions: toward the script or story, actors, audience, theatre space, and self. In addition to these elements, it is appropriate to include disponibilité toward the director, the playwright (in scripted theatre), and to performance traditions. Putting these together, theatrical disponibilité is a multi-dimensional receptivity and availability oriented toward the director, playwright, script or story, company or troupe, performance traditions, audience, theatre space, and self. Second, although actors can develop the habit of disponibilité during rehearsals, it is a habit that must continue to develop throughout performance by means of constant attentiveness and awareness, which solidifies the dynamic interplay between formation and performance. Third, disponibilité is a broad enough concept to describe the process of formation in both scripted and improvisational theatre, while at the
same time unifying traditions of inward and outward formation, since disponibilité is an intellectual, emotional, relational, embodied, and therefore holistic habit.

In transitioning to consider the relevance of theatrical disponibilité for theodramatic formation, the French disponibilité will be discontinued in favor of the English “disponibility”—a recognized transliteration meaning “the condition of being at one’s disposal”—as well as the adjectival (“disponible”) and verbal (“to dispone”) forms. Part of the reason for this choice is that some theologians featured below already use “disponibility” in English, and, despite its relative obscurity, it may prove a fruitful term to promote in theological and ethical discussions. In addition, disponibility is preferable over disposability because of the latter’s unfortunate connotation with being disposed of, rather than being disposed to someone or something. “Disponibility” carries the positive sense of being disposed toward the other, and therefore pertinent synonyms include “availability,” “receptivity,” and “openness.” With these terminological clarifications in mind, we turn to consider the role of disponibility in theodramatic formation.

**Formation: Theodramatic Disponibility**

If disponibility characterizes a well-formed, seasoned actor, to what extent does this concept illumine theodramatic formation? To answer this question, this section explores perspectives on disponibility from several modern theologians, assessing their use of the term in relation to formation. Next, it highlights both the continuities and discontinuities between theatrical and theodramatic disponibility. And finally, it investigates the means for developing disponibility in the theodrama.

**Disponibility in Modern Theology**

Given his interest in theatre, it should come as no surprise that Hans Urs von Balthasar uses the concept of disponibility most extensively, alongside a constellation of related terms such as “availability,” “readiness,” “openness,” and “indifference.” In connection with theatre, Balthasar uses disponibility to describe Stanislavski’s ideal actor, one who is completely available to perform a particular role. In other words, disponibility is a condition “enabling the actor convincingly to embody the (poetic) reality of the role, to ‘substantiate’ its ‘truth.’” Without developing disponibility, actors abandon their mission and are simply left with “the stage cliché,” doomed to inauthentic performance.

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Balthasar links disponibility to the Ignatian tradition of *indiferencia*, which also stands in continuity with the notion of *apatheia* espoused by several Church Fathers and *Gelassenheit* common among Rhineland mystics. Unlike the passive connotations of these other concepts, however, Balthasar contends that indifference is an attitude of receptivity that goes “beyond passivity and activity,” and can be paradoxically called an “active indifference.” Like the disponibility of a seasoned actor, indifference is not just passively letting things happen but an openness to respond actively to one’s role and to God. Thus, indifference is “readiness for anything God may ask,” or “a readiness to step into whatever role in the play God has in mind.” Balthasar explains how this concept stands in close proximity to Luther’s notion of “pure faith,” which implies a radical openness to God’s infinite goodness. As such, David Schindler concludes that Balthasar uses indifference to denote the fundamental attitude of Christian existence: “complete disponibility to God’s will.”

The perfect example of disponibility is Jesus’ readiness to do the will of the Father. Balthasar links this observation with Stanislavski’s role-oriented disponibility and explains how Jesus’ disponibility to his role and mission given by the Father provides the model for disponibility to our role and mission in Christ. To be disponible, therefore, is to be in a state of complete receptivity to the will of God the Father as embodied by the Lord Jesus, not a “quietistic passivity, but a pure availability, one that is so open that it responds to even the most unexpected nod of the Head.” Furthermore, Balthasar locates a prime example of disponibility in Mary the mother of Jesus, who displays an “active-passive readiness to receive the whole Word.” Indeed, it is Mary’s “disponibility of her attitude of faith” that makes her the “ideal (moral) and real (physical) womb of the church.”

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38 Ibid. 103.


43 Balthasar, *ET* IV, 304 (emphasis added).

44 Ibid.

45 Balthasar, *ET* II, 166. Likewise, Quash describes Balthasar’s concept of disponibility as “ready to serve the Lord as his handmaid” as exemplified in the disponibility and readiness of Mary (“The Theo-Drama,” in Edward T. Oakes and David Moss [eds], *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 143–57 [149]). On this basis, Corrine Crammer asks if disponibility is
Ben Quash questions, however, if Balthasar’s delineation of indifference or disponibility actually avoids the danger of passivity and if it diminishes the role of human actors in the theodrama. Rather than freeing the acting subject, Quash criticizes the concept of disponibility for freezing the subject “by a suppression of the things that make human individuals into active, responsible, joyful players in the drama of God and in the arena of the Church.”

For example, would not disponibility have required Job to face his tragic situation with unqualified acceptance rather than actively questioning God’s purposes? Quash maintains that disponibility occupies the opposite extreme of prideful self-assertion, leaving the subject limp in the hands of a sovereign God. Quash faults Balthasar for de-dramatizing the theodrama, and contrasts this with Barth’s more existentially dynamic position. Although both Balthasar and Barth embrace an Augustinian view of freedom, “Barth wants in the creature the obedient embrace of freedom … von Balthasar … wants the free embrace of obedience.”

While Quash’s criticism is understandable, especially since Balthasar’s vision of disponibility is not always clear and spread across multiple works, we must present Balthasar’s view fairly by affirming that a person with complete disponibility never ceases “to be a spontaneous and free human subject.” Disponibility does not prohibit action or freeze the subject, for as Balthasar explains, “receptive and open readiness for God is the ground of all action.” We may conclude, therefore, that disponibility functions for Balthasar as the root of faithful performance in the theodrama, the very attitude or state of being that enables active involvement. David Schindler rightly equates Balthasar’s theodramatic ethics with the process of cultivating disponibility. He explains that disponibility, this “letting love have its way,” takes many different forms because it “is particularized in as many missions as there are persons chosen by Christ to take part in his universal mission.” In short, disponibility is the essence of theodramatic formation, empowering actors to perform their mission and embody their roles. As such, Balthasar observes, “radical disponibility is what is decisive. It is not part of the door but the whole door (one’s entire existence) that turns on a single hinge.”

46 Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History*, 134. Those things include “energetically committed creativity, imagination, [and] poesis” (ibid. 132).
48 Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History*, 158.
Whereas Balthasar identifies Jesus and Mary as the supreme models of disponibility, Khaled Anatolios ascribes divine disponibility primarily to the Holy Spirit. According to Anatolios, disponibility is God’s intra-trinitarian availability in the Person of the Holy Spirit, manifested in the Trinity’s outward disponibility to the world. With insights gleaned from philosopher Gabriel Marcel, who articulated disponibility as the essence of human inter-subjectivity, Anatolios delineates several ways in which God is both inwardly and outwardly disponible. For instance, the Spirit is disponible to our prayers, enables our prayers, and “animates our boldness” to respond to God’s action. As such, the Spirit is the one who transforms every datum of creaturely reality into the donum of divine–human encounter. Moreover, since the Spirit is the essence of God’s disponibility as available love, the human ability to love and perform the good is a gift of the Spirit, who indwells us and renders us disponible to God and others.

In addition to Balthasar’s christological and mariological disponibility and Anatolios’s pneumatological disponibility, Wells articulates an ethical disponibility more in keeping with the practices of theatrical improvisation. He proposes that disponibilité, which he gleans from Jacques Lecoq, constitutes the heart of Christian formation: a “state of readiness” and “relaxed awareness” formed by participating in the life and worship of the church. He writes: “The practices and disciplines of Christian discipleship aim to give the Christian this same state of relaxed awareness, so that they have the freedom—indeed, the skill—to ‘be obvious’ in what might otherwise seem an anxious crisis.” Christians with disponibility, therefore, possess the strength of character, imaginative vision, and practical skills that prepare them to improvise their roles in the theodrama. Although Wells demonstrates a fruitful exchange between theatrical disponibility and Christian ethics, this concept does not permeate the rest of the book. If we pursue the model further, is it possible that theatrical disponibility has even more potential for illuminating the nature of theodramatic formation?

One possibility for exploring this potential is to recognize the multi-dimensional nature of theatrical and theodramatic disponibility. As observed above, theatrical disponibility is multi-dimensional receptivity oriented simultaneously toward the director, playwright, script or story, company or troupe, performance traditions, audience, theatre space, and self. Transposed into theodramatic terms, we might delineate theodramatic disponibility as a multi-dimensional receptivity oriented simultaneously toward the triune God (as playwright Father, protagonist Son, and

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54 Ibid. 288.
55 Ibid. 301–2.
56 Ibid. 303.
57 Ibid. 307.
59 Ibid. 81. Wells borrows the idea of “being obvious” from Johnstone, *Impro*. 

producer Spirit), Scripture (as script or story), the church (as company or troupe), oneself (as actor with roles) tradition (as performance traditions), unbelievers (as audience), and local context (as theatre environment and place). In making these comparisons between theatrical model and theodramatic reality, the theodramatic elements neither correspond exactly nor are limited to their theatrical models. For example, even though it may be fruitful to speak of God as playwright, producer, and protagonist in the theodrama, he also acts as audience.\(^{60}\) Despite the inevitable differences between the theatrical model and theodramatic reality, there is still enormous potential in pursuing the model to its full extent, exploring how theodramatic formation is a matter of developing disponibility, not merely in its christological (Balthasar), pneumatological (Anatolios) and ethical (Wells) dimensions, but as trinitarian, biblical, ecclesial, traditional, missional, and contextual disponibility.

In the context of everyday participation in the theodrama, these multiple dimensions of disponibility intermingle and overlap to a significant degree. For example, one might develop disponibility to the triune God simultaneously and by means of developing disponibility to Scripture, although it is profitable to explore these dimensions separately. Therefore, even though each dimension will be addressed separately in the chapters that follow, disponibility is a complex whole, and it is still legitimate to discuss disponibility in general as the ideal condition for actors in the theodrama. Besides its multi-dimensional nature, understanding theodramatic formation as disponibility lends other critical insights.

To begin, it brings unique focus and a measure of clarity to discussions regarding “dispositions” in character or virtue ethics, helping to discern the nature of dispositions and how they relate. For example, William Spohn recognizes that dispositions are “habitual character dynamics that become motivations for specific actions” and “connote a readiness to act in certain ways,” but he fails to articulate specifically how Christians should be disposed.\(^{61}\) As we have already seen, actors in the theodrama have the potential to be disposed in multiple directions, and thereby develop trinitarian, biblical, ecclesial, traditional, missional, and contextual dispositions. Theodramatic disponibility, therefore, is the comprehensive availability of an actor in the theodrama whose character is formed by these various dispositions and consequently is ready to participate faithfully in the theodrama.

Moreover, disponibility is an ideal concept for keeping formation and performance in dynamic interplay. Disponibility is a condition that creates a readiness to perform, but it is also a condition that matures throughout and as a result of performance. Thus, disponibility shapes and is shaped by performance. Furthermore, understanding theodramatic formation as disponibility helps us reframe the whole discussion in terms of discovery and dynamic, relational

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\(^{60}\) These metaphors will be explored in Chapter 3.

\(^{61}\) William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 121.
development without ignoring all boundaries and constraints. Equipped with theodramatic disponibility, Christians are prepared to approach each situation in “a state of discovery” and a “freshness of beginnings,” developing a readiness to act in ways that are fitting to the liberating constraints of the entire context.\footnote{Beyond Improvisational Disponibility}

**Beyond Improvisational Disponibility**

Even though theatrical disponibility provides valuable insights for understanding theodramatic formation, the concept—especially as described by Lecoq and Frost and Yarrow in connection with improvisation—also has several limitations. First, according to these scholars, disponibility is a state of neutrality prior to all action.\footnote{Using phrases from Jacques Lecoq, *The Moving Body*, 38.} While disponibility prevents prideful self-assertion, it is important to acknowledge that any action, including all action in the theodrama, arises from subjects wholly embedded in contexts and with commitments that make us biased beings. Theodramatic formation, therefore, does not seek neutrality, but recognizes that actors are already invested and perpetually participating in the theodrama. Balthasar points out the obvious: since every person has a role in the theodrama, we must exclude any possibility of neutrality.\footnote{Ibid. 38; Frost and Yarrow even flirt with translating this word as “neutrality,” but decide that “in English this has unfortunate connotations of asensuality and of being disengaged” (*Improvisation in Drama*, 152–3).} Hauerwas similarly concludes: “Under the guise of neutrality the moral is reduced to matters of choice.”\footnote{Balthasar, *TD I*, 309.}

Second, if disponibility develops from a neutral standpoint, then it precedes formation of characters for particular roles. If, like Balthasar, we understand disponibility in a Stanislavkian sense, however, then disponibility is by its very nature commitment and receptivity to a particular role. Likewise, Christians improvise on the world stage as characters united to Christ by the Holy Spirit, not as generic beings. As those who have been regenerated and are being renewed by the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:5), Christians are able, as Paul remarks earlier, “to be ready to do whatever is good, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men” (Tit. 3:1–2).\footnote{Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*, 31.} Not only that, but each person in the theodrama, Christian or non-Christian, develops and prepares for performance as a person created in the image of God and within the constraints of creaturely existence. All of these factors determine that theodramatic disponibility is a condition of particular characters with a mission to perform.

\footnote{My translation. The entry for *hetoimos* (readiness) and related terms in Kittel’s theological dictionary explains that these words connote a multi-dimensional readiness that “gives the Christian life a distinctive dynamic character” (Gerhard Kittel [ed.], *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–76), vol. 2, 706.)}
Third, according to Lecoq, disponibility not only precedes character formation, but has no “history, past, context, or passions.” But if disponibility is a condition of characters, then we must admit that all characters are located in temporal situations connected to the past. Even most improv directors recognize that improvisers need to tap into their past to craft fitting performances. That being said, the future remains replete with possibility, for as Keith Johnstone observes, “the improviser has to be like a man walking backwards. He sees where he has been, but he pays no attention to the future.” Is the same true for theodramatic formation and performance? On the one hand, participation in the theodrama is rooted in history, and actors in the theodrama are responsible to cultivate disponibility to the historical theodrama as revealed in Scripture. Paul wrote to Timothy that Scripture is useful for many things, primarily so that “the man of God may be competent and made ready for every good work” (2 Tim 3:17). By attending to Scripture, Christians can be like people “walking backward,” capable of reincorporating the biblical plot. But on the other hand, theodramatic disponibility also includes availability toward the future as biblically and prophetically imagined. As Trevor Hart affirms, “while we may not have access to a script, we need, and are offered, some imaginative vision of an end, a closure, a telos to our living which bestows meaning and worth upon it, and which grants a sense of direction.” Proper theodramatic disponibility is attuned and responsive to the past and the future as revealed in Scripture: the “already” and the “not yet.” One of the major differences between theodramatic and improvisational disponibility, therefore, is the role Scripture plays as theodramatic transcript and prescript.

Fourth, because Christians develop disponibility as characters in the theodrama, the process of formation is riddled with conflict. This clashes with Lecoq’s view that improvisational disponibility is “a state of receptiveness to everything around us, with no inner conflict.” Theodramatic formation takes place in the midst of a cosmic and spiritual battle, a conflict between the old and new self. As the apostle Paul admits, “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Rom. 7:15). Disponibility involves “the desire to do what is right,” but is constantly confronted with the inability to carry it out (Rom. 7:18). In the midst of this conflict, Christians take great comfort and

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68 Johnstone, Impro, 116.
69 My translation. (Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version.)
71 This idea will be unpacked in Chapter 4.
72 Lecoq, The Moving Body, 36.
73 James D.G. Dunn describes this as essentially an eschatological conflict, with the believer experiencing the not-yet-fulfilled potentials of Spirit-filled life (Romans 9–16 [Dallas: Word Books, 1988], 389–90).
courage in the Spirit as director, who not only sets us free from sin and death, but also empowers us to live in newness of life (Rom. 8:1–4).

Lastly, it is common to view disponibility, especially in improvisational theatre, as a state of unconstrained availability to pursue any possibility. Indeed, if the improviser in a state of disponibility is a neutral being or blank slate, as Lecoq maintains, then the possibilities for action are endless. But if improvisation within the theodrama is historically situated, character-bound, conflict-ridden, and Spirit-enabled, then it must be understood as an availability to act within particular constraints. As Jeremy Begbie rightly observes regarding musical improvisation: “Improvisation provides a powerful enactment of the truth that our freedom is enabled to flourish only by engaging with and negotiating constraints.”74 Besides what Begbie calls the “continuous constraints” of living in time and a physical universe,75 theodramatic disponibility is constrained by the various directions in which the improviser is disponible: the triune God, Scripture, the church, tradition, unbelievers, and local context. Formation and performance are oriented toward each of these dimensions, and we are paradoxically bound yet free to improvise within them.76 As such, they are “liberating constraints” within which we begin to conceive of improvisational possibilities.77 Disponibility, as Begbie describes it, “demands of the participants a peculiar kind of alertness to these constraints.”78 It is “for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Gal. 5:1), freedom within the loving constraints of God’s gracious gifts.79

Based on this critical engagement, it is possible to observe how theatrical disponibility—whether for scripted or improvisational theatre—provides heuristic insights for theodramatic formation as multi-dimensional disponibility that readies actors for theodramatic performance.80 Several areas have been highlighted, however, in which theodramatic disponibility differs from its theatrical model and

75 Ibid. 201.
76 Ethical discernment, as Brueggemann observes, is “the delicate recognition that reality is an intricate network of limits and possibilities” (Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy [Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997], 465).
77 Gary Peters, drawing on the work of Isaiah Berlin, calls this constrained freedom a “negative freedom,” which includes “a collective language of care and enabling, of dialogue and participation, a pure aesthetically cleansed language of communal love” (The Philosophy of Improvisation [Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2009], 29).
78 Ibid. 200.
79 As such, this is both a freedom from slavery to sin (Gal. 5:2–12) and a freedom for Spirit-filled living (Gal. 5:13–26); cf. James D.G. Dunn, The Epistle to the Galatians (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 261.
80 Although space prohibits exploring this connection at length, disponibility shares many similarities to Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus as the disposition that produces the regulated improvisation of practices (Outline of a Theory of Practice, 72, 78).
needs to maintain more secure theological footing. Given these considerations, theodramatic disponibility may be defined as receptivity or availability to the triune God, Scripture, the church, tradition, unbelievers, and local contexts that produces readiness for theodramatic performance. Disponibility is inherently biased, arising out of passionate action and involvement in theodrama. It is what David Ford articulates as the heart of the good life: an “active passivity” and “letting ourselves be embraced” in a web of relationality. Christians develop theodramatic disponibility as characters in the theodrama, embroiled in the battle against sin and the particularities of finite existence. Sin is but one constraint among many within which theodramatic formation and performance unfold, but the Spirit enables Christians to embrace and navigate these constraints with improvisational freedom.

**Developing Disponibility**

According to Frost and Yarrow, developing disponibility involves a “total awareness” of everything, because without this awareness, actors are unable to be receptive and adapt to each situation. Likewise, from a more philosophical perspective, Gary Peters locates the core of improvisation in “an awareness of relationalities.” Similarly, Wells identifies “relaxed awareness” with disponibility in Christian ethics, which enables “trust and respect for oneself and other actors … alertness and attention … fitness and engagement.” Rather than defining disponibility as relaxed awareness, however, it is more accurate to recognize awareness as an intellectual habit that aids the development of disponibility. Without building awareness, an actor will never be disponible or receptive and, therefore, will not have a readiness to perform.

To explain this concept of awareness, it is helpful to draw on Michael Polanyi’s distinction between focal and tacit awareness. Focal awareness is the attention we give to a particular object, like the text on this page. Tacit awareness is our knowledge of other subsidiary objects and our entire surroundings, like the room in which you are reading this text. In addition, Polanyi explains how we interiorize focal awareness of individual objects in order to build tacit awareness of a coherent whole. We maintain our tacit awareness even when we are no longer

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82 For an excellent exploration of these issues, see Kevin Taylor and Giles Waller (eds), *Christian Theology and Tragedy: Theologians, Tragic Literature and Tragic Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011).

83 Frost and Yarrow, *Improvisation in Drama*, 152.


giving focal awareness to the original object. For instance, a reader will continue to be aware of this text even after he or she pauses or finishes reading and moves on to do something else.87 Interestingly, Polanyi describes the relationship between focal and tacit awareness by employing a theatrical metaphor. Actors experience stage fright when their focal awareness of particulars on stage overwhelms or obliterates their tacit awareness of the play and its plot. In other words, when actors focus on their specific lines or actions to the neglect of everything around them and a sense for the whole context of the play, it will paralyze their performance.88 Actors need both focused attention and comprehensive awareness. Based on this observation, developing disponibility, whether in the theatre or the theodrama, involves developing awareness of every dimension and attentiveness to particular elements. Awareness without attentiveness is like seeing the forest but missing the trees, whereas attentiveness without awareness notices the trees but misses the forest.

Developing theatrical disponibility, therefore, is a matter of cultivating attentiveness and awareness. Stanislavski observes how concentrated attention to something or someone already implies receptivity and a readiness to respond. In fact, he notes that the more attention we give to something or someone, the more we desire or are inclined to do something with or for that object or person.89 As such, attentiveness aids disponibility, since included within the attentive gaze is receptivity and a readiness to respond, inspiring creative performances. John Reed Hodgson and Ernest Richards highlight this connection: “If we are open and receptive, we can make discoveries both about ourselves and others from these moments. If we are less receptive, the tendency will be to reproduce what we consider to be socially acceptable responses which become standardized and stereotyped.”90 Developing disponibility through focused attention and comprehensive awareness, therefore, leads to imaginative performances rather than resorting to stereotypical action.

Attentiveness and awareness are equally important in developing theodramatic disponibility. Martha Nussbaum maintains that every good action depends on being “finely aware and richly responsible,” and in order to be ready to perform the good, each person needs “the ability to discern, acutely and responsively, the salient feature’s of one’s particular situation.”91 Furthermore, Nussbaum explains how improvisational action requires even more attentiveness than acting with a script, since it involves being “actively aware and responsive at every moment.”92

88 Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, 56.
89 Stanislavski, An Actor Prepares, 76.
92 Ibid. 94.
The improviser who is responsively attentive and aware is a disponible actor and ready to perform in the most fitting ways. Consequently, the improviser “must at every moment—far more than one who goes by an external script—be responsively alive and committed to the other actors, to the evolving narrative, to the laws and constraints of the genre and its history.” Therefore, the person who is able to develop disponibility through attentiveness and awareness will have “an ability to miss less, to be responsible to more.”

Vanhoozer relies on Nussbaum to conclude that Christians will be ready to improvise in the theodrama when they are “finely aware and richly responsible.” An improviser in the theodrama is “ready both because of her prior training and because she is alert and attentive to her environment.” For Vanhoozer, attentiveness and awareness are “ingredients of the virtue of perception” that prepares us to act in fitting and wise ways in diverse situations. More specifically, Vanhoozer speaks of being “attuned and attentive both to the canon and to the contemporary context.” Therefore, theodramatic performance involves spontaneity resulting from “years of disciplined preparation.” This process of formation brings an actor into a state of disponibility, which is “one’s preparedness to fit in and contribute to whatever starts to happen.”

In similar fashion, Hauerwas argues that before we can do the good we must see the good, which involves attentiveness to and awareness of reality in an “effort to overcome illusion.” As such, “the moral life is more a matter of attention than it is of will.” The best kind of improvisation in the Christian life arises from “a kind of attentiveness, attunement, and alertness traditionally associated with contemplative prayer.” Christians need to be attentive to the story in which they are performing, for “without the requisite alertness and respectful, disciplined attention to the creative rhythm of things, the performance falls flat.” Hauerwas also notes that faithful improvisation “demands a certain attention and receptivity, an alertness on our part to the movement of God’s grace in every move.” This attentiveness and awareness forms characters with readiness to enact fitting improvisation.

Even though they do not use the term “disponibility,” Nussbaum, Vanhoozer and Hauerwas all acknowledge the importance of attention and awareness in

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93 Ibid. 155.
94 Ibid. 164.
95 Vanhoozer, Drama of Doctrine, 338.
96 Ibid. 333.
97 Ibid. 334.
98 Ibid.
99 Hauerwas, Vision and Virtue, 43.
100 Ibid. 41.
101 Hauerwas, Performing the Faith, 81.
102 Ibid. 101.
103 Ibid. 103–4.
ethical formation. They do not always state clearly, however, the object of this attention and awareness. Vanhoozer states that attention should be directed toward canonical text and contemporary context, Nussbaum advocates attention to and awareness of the dramatic situation and evolving narrative, and Hauerwas speaks in general terms of attentiveness to the movement of God’s grace in the world. At this juncture, the multi-dimensional nature of theatrical and theodramatic disponibility provides welcome clarity. According to this model, actors in the theodrama develop disponibility through attentiveness to and awareness of the triune God, Scripture, the church, tradition, unbelievers, and local contexts. The following chapters will explore each of these dimensions in turn, creating a vision for theodramatic formation as multi-dimensional disponibility.

Performance: Theodramatic Fittingness

By discussing theodramatic formation in terms of disponibility, we are already in the realm of performance, since even formation takes place on the theodramatic stage. Despite this dynamic interplay, it is still helpful to consider how performance of action corresponds with formation of actors. Given the multi-dimensional nature of formation articulated above, this section investigates how the notion of fittingness navigates the complexities of theodramatic performance in relation to each dimension. Since fittingness is a term utilized in both aesthetic and ethical theory, this section begins with a brief examination of the use of fittingness in both disciplines and finishes by showing how theodramatic fittingness combines both by seeking beautiful performances of the good.

Aesthetic Fittingness

In aesthetic theory, one use of fittingness is in judging the overall harmony of an artwork based on the appropriateness of individual parts to the whole. For example, a painting displays fittingness if its individual brush strokes contribute appropriately to the painting as a whole. A building is aesthetically fitting if the style of its windows matches the overall architectural design. Critics explain the fittingness of any artwork in various ways based on the relation of parts to the whole and often will judge an artwork’s success according to the extent of its fittingness.104 Nicholas Wolterstorff calls the artist “a worker in fittingness,” which means at the least that artists seek to create works that have fittingness of individual parts to the whole.105

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This notion of fittingness also applies to the “fit” between different elements within an artwork, such as the fit between musical and non-musical elements in operatic drama. For example, Jerrold Levinson demonstrates both descriptive and dramatic fittingness within Strauss’s *Salome*. On the one hand, Strauss creates descriptive fittingness by matching Herod’s expression “there is a chill wind blowing” with “eerie glissandos,” or setting John’s prophetic announcements to “flat-tone, relentless” music. On the other hand, Strauss obtains dramatic fittingness by setting theological disputations to a “spirited fugato” or creating strained vocal lines for Narraboth, a particularly anxious character. According to Levinson, Strauss’s genius is not merely the descriptive and dramatic fittingness between musical and non-musical elements, but that he is able to maintain the fittingness of musical coherence and completion.

In similar fashion, Bertholt Brecht asserts that an effective drama is one that displays fittingness between all the incidents that happen on stage and the overall story being performed.

In addition to fittingness as coherence of parts to wholes and between different elements within the work of art, fittingness also applies to appropriateness of certain qualities to other qualities, whether within or beyond the artwork itself. Wolterstorff explains this concept by observing how fittingness is a feature of all reality, since most people would recognize the fit between lightness, smallness, ice cream, Mozart’s music and Matisse’s paintings or between heaviness, largeness, warm pea soup, Beethoven’s music, and Rembrandt’s paintings. In addition, Wolterstorff claims that most people associate Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* with purple and burgundy rather than yellow and green. Wolterstorff calls this kind of fittingness “cross-modal similarity,” because although colors are a completely different modality than music or drama, we can still identify the colors that fit different kinds of musical or dramatic performances. Works of art also express fittingness on a more profound level, whether in relation to states of consciousness, human experience and actions, or the holy. The artist as a “worker in fittingness,” therefore, creates art displaying fittingness within the work of art as well as fittingness between that artwork and a whole world of meaning and associations.

Based on this understanding, to what extent are actors “workers in fittingness?” For one, actors seek to maintain the fittingness of their own character and actions to the story developing on stage. A skillful actor is able to make every word and action fit at a particular moment, based on everything that happened previously.

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107 Ibid. 58.
110 Ibid. 114–17.
111 Similarly, Hans Rookmaaker identifies “appropriateness” as the ultimate norm for good art, which he explains as a synonym for “good taste” (*Art Needs No Justification* [Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2010], 45–53).
and everything happening in the present. Actors are “workers in fittingness,” therefore, by virtue of acting in appropriate ways to specific situations and within the play as a whole. In this sense, skillful theatrical performance maintains a good fit with every dimension of the theatrical event, including the director, playwright, script or story, company or troupe, performance traditions, audience, and theatrical environment. Furthermore, an actor is a worker in fittingness by discerning the physical and verbal expressions that fit whatever emotion or idea she is trying to communicate. For instance, if an actor wants to express something funny and desires the audience to laugh, she needs to discern what kind of expression is fitting with hilarity, which may vary according to the situation. Of course, this notion would get more difficult if an actor is assigned to express authentic dependence on God. What would or should this look like? What kind of action is fitting in this kind of situation? These questions are a natural segue into the use of fittingness within the realm of ethics.

**Ethical Fittingness**

Fittingness has a long history in ethical reflection, with scholars tracing the concept back to Homer, while recognizing Cicero as the foremost proponent of the concept in the ancient world. Cicero equated moral goodness with fittingness (*decorum*), explaining that good conduct is that which is most fitting to our roles or characters allotted by nature. While a similar theme can be found in the early Church Fathers, medieval theologians used fittingness to describe the beauty of a well-proportioned act. For example, Duns Scotus argued that an act is good to the extent that it is proportioned beautifully to every relevant condition. In other words, acting morally is an artistic act of relating all the elements of a situation in a beautiful manner. While Catholic moral theology continued to maintain an emphasis on situational fittingness, it also became a major theme within twentieth-century situation ethics. C.D. Broad, for instance, argues that an action is right

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114 This should be distinguished from proportionalism as it developed in twentieth-century Catholic moral theology, which involves judging right action according to the proportion of good and harm involved (see T.E. O’Connell, “Proportionality, Principle Of,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia* [Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003]).

115 For a good introduction to this theme in Scotus, see Mary Beth Ingham, *The Philosophical Vision of John Duns Scotus: An Introduction* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 175–6.
given its harmony within an overall situation. “When I speak of anything as ‘right’, I am always thinking of it as a factor in a wider total situation, and that I mean that it is ‘appropriately’ or ‘fittingly’ related to the rest of this situation.”

Likewise, W.D. Ross claims that just as a key is “right” for a particular lock, an action can be right or fitting for a particular situation. Moral fittingness involves the “greatest amount of suitability possible in the circumstances.” Ross explains, however, that moral fittingness is actually more aesthetic (a piano being in tune with an orchestra) than it is utilitarian (finding the right key for the lock). As such, “there seems to be something not altogether different in the way in which one part of a beautiful whole calls for the other parts.” By defining fittingness as the suitability of a particular action within a beautiful whole, Ross’s expression of moral fittingness matches the first aspect of aesthetic fittingness articulated above: the harmony of parts to the unified whole.

H. Richard Niebuhr develops a similar understanding of ethical fittingness but within an overall framework of moral “response-ability.” Responsibility begins by cultivating situational awareness and interpreting our awareness of the situation in order to understand it correctly. Thus, Ogletree observes that Niebuhr locates the foundation of moral obligation in interpretive attentiveness. Not unlike the notion of disponibility articulated above, Niebuhr believes that readiness to act with fittingness arises from attentiveness to and awareness of what is happening. Not only that, but fitting action also depends on the ability to anticipate reactions and subsequent responses. Only after developing situational awareness and anticipation, Niebuhr claims, are we prepared for fitting action in the context of human relationships. Thus: “Fitting action, the one that fits into a total interaction as response and as anticipation of further response, is alone conducive to the

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118 Ibid. 53.
119 Ibid. 54.
120 Since ethical fittingness shares so much with aesthetic fittingness, it follows that the arts—and theatre in particular—can help us cultivate ethical fittingness (see William C. Spohn, “The Formative Power of Story and the Grace of Indirection,” in Patricia Lamoureux and Kevin O’Neil [eds], *Seeking Goodness and Beauty: The Use of the Arts in Theological Ethics* [Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005], 13–32 [28–9]).
123 Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 64.
good and alone is right.”124 Niebuhr refers to the early church as an example of a community first discerning what is happening and then formulating a fitting response. These actions were the product of a social self in solidarity with others and situated in time.125 Niebuhr summarizes his proposal in both relational and aesthetic terms:

Our responsive actions have the character of fittingness or unfittingness. We seek to make them fit into a process of interaction. The questions we raise about them are not only those of their rightness or wrongness, their goodness or badness, but of their fitness or unfittingness in the total movement, the whole conversation. We seek to have them fit into the whole as a sentence fits into a paragraph of a book, a note into a chord in a movement in a symphony, as the act of eating a common meal fits into the lifelong companionship of a family, as the decision of a statesman fits into the ongoing movement of his nation’s life with other nations, or as the discovery of a scientific verifact [sic] fits into the history of science. But whether they fit into the actual process, that is another story.126

Fitting action, according to Niebuhr, includes the appropriateness of particular responses to the overall interactions and conversation in which these responses are located, much like the response of trumpets within the overall performance of a symphony. Consequently, it is not just the situation that is determinative of fitting action, but the overall story or myth in which that situation is located. As such, Christianity “calls into question our concept of what is fitting—that is, of what really fits in—by questioning our picture of the context into which we now fit our actions.”127 In other words, fitting action requires both situational wisdom and narrative imagination. Furthermore, fitting action is oriented to the fitting action of the triune God, particularly toward Jesus who is “the responsible man who in all his responses to altercations did what fitted into divine action.”128 Indeed, Jesus makes fitting performance possible, and the Spirit guides and directs. As such, James Gustafson rightly observes that fitting action is not merely the result of human discernment, but “refers to what God is enabling

124 Ibid. 61. Douglas Browning, writing around the time of Niebuhr’s death, articulates a similar understanding of ethical fittingness: “The right action is really the fitting action, given the entire situation, which includes one’s factual beliefs and moral standards, as well as the external factors of context and consequence” (“The Moral Act,” Philosophical Quarterly 12/47 [Apr. 1962]: 97–108 [98]).
125 As a result, Linda Holler observes that Niebuhr’s notion of fitting action implies relatedness and the coherence of an entire system of relationality (“In Search of a Whole-System Ethic,” Journal of Religious Ethics 12/2 [Fall 1984]: 219–39 [221]).
126 Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, 97.
127 Ibid. 107.
128 Ibid. 164.
and requiring, not just what seems pleasing to men.” Similarly, John Howard Yoder criticizes a Stoic view of fittingness that many Christian ethicists have adopted, where fittingness refers to what is most adequate, relevant, or effective without any reference to the particularity of Jesus. True fittingness is that which is appropriate to the law of God as fulfilled by Jesus; fittingness is christological rather than merely situational.

**Theodramatic Fittingness**

What do these explorations of aesthetic and ethical fittingness contribute to an understanding of theodramatic performance? Before suggesting a way forward, it is crucial first to consider Vanhoozer’s use of fittingness in *The Drama of Doctrine*. On the one hand, Vanhoozer employs language similar to H. Richard Niebuhr’s by referring to fitting participation and responses within the theodrama. Although there is more than one way to participate with fittingness in the theodrama, some ways “make for a better fit given the (created and recreated) nature of things.” On the other hand, Vanhoozer differs from Niebuhr in articulating two primary dimensions of theodramatic fittingness: Scripture and situations. First, “by showing us what is fitting, Scripture becomes the means of our becoming fit.” The Spirit shapes “our sensibility as to what is evangelically fitting” through our reading of Scripture. Second, fitting participation in the theodrama requires fittingness to changing situations. As the scenes change, our fitting action needs to adapt, and doctrine helps us to maintain “dramatic consistency.” Like Niebuhr, Vanhoozer also recognizes that fitting action should anticipate the future as eschatologically imagined.

Vanhoozer maintains that fittingness integrates the ethical and the aesthetic. Borrowing language from Wolterstorff and others, Vanhoozer asserts that fittingness gauges the harmony between the parts and the whole.

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131 Ibid. 176. Yoder also explains how fittingness is never merely focused on one’s individual role (as in Stoicism) but judged in terms of relationships within the body of Christ (eclesial fittingness) and the church’s mission (missional fittingness).  
133 Ibid.  
134 Ibid. 109.  
135 Vanhoozer, “Praising in Song,” 117.  
136 The concept of fittingness, in other words, is one way of unpacking Moltmann’s statement that “morality and aesthetics are one” (*The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl [London: SCM, 1992], 261).  
137 Ibid. 116.
specifically, “the form in which other parts of the theo-drama are ultimately to fit, in short, is the history of Jesus Christ, a history that represents the whole and complete divine action from creation to consummation: the Christo-drama.”

Therefore, “Christian wisdom is largely a matter of rethinking theology, ethics, and worship alike in terms of Christo-dramatic fittingness.” Since Scripture reveals the Christo-drama, particular performances should display fittingness to the canonical text. “As the only authoritative account of the Christo-drama, the canon thus becomes what we might term the church’s Rule of Fit.”

But given changing circumstances and contexts, particular performances should also seek fittingness to contemporary context. Here, Vanhoozer draws on Wolterstorff’s notion of fittingness as cross-modal similarity to describe the process of “transposing biblical modes of speech and action into their contemporary counterparts.”

By improvising fitting theodramatic performances, Christians are going beyond literal repetition to a metaphorical and imaginative transposition of the canonical script into new situations. Consequently, “patterns of speech, thought, and action will be fitting insofar as they discover and display a real similarity to the Christo-drama in spite of the culturally dissimilar.”

In sum, Vanhoozer believes that theodramatic fittingness is canonical and contextual, which is ultimately ruled by christological fittingness.

Vanhoozer brings appropriate theological perspective to bear on the situational complexity of fitting action. Like Broad, Ross, and Niebuhr, Vanhoozer agrees that fitting action constitutes particular responses to particular situations. Another similarity between Vanhoozer and Niebuhr is their recognition that fitting action arises out of accurate attention to and awareness of the situation, and thus fittingness is grounded in disponibility to the context, including the entire narrative or drama in which we are situated. But whereas Niebuhr only vaguely refers to the narrative that determines our understanding of and fitting response to particular situations, Vanhoozer specifically and carefully identifies Scripture as the source of our vision and the standard for fitting performances. In other words, the strength of Vanhoozer’s proposal is that he orients both disponibility and fittingness toward Scripture and situations and shows how they relate, making biblical fittingness the norm for situational or contextual fittingness.

Despite this clarity, Vanhoozer’s

138 Vanhoozer, Drama of Doctrine, 257.
139 Ibid.
140 Ibid. 259.
141 Ibid. 260.
142 Ibid. 263.
143 More recently, Vanhoozer has affirmed the Trinitarian nature of theodramatic fittingness: “Participation in God is ultimately a matter of ‘fitting’ into forms of triune communicative activity” (Remythologizing Theology, 272).
144 Russell Connors Jr also captures this dynamic, but uses music instead of theatre as his guiding model (“Music and Morality: ‘Performance’ and the Normative Claim of Scores and Texts,” in Lamoureux and O’Neil [eds], Seeking Goodness and Beauty, esp. 161).
proposal still seems to overlook the complexity of fitting action as it relates to every dimension of performance. Rather than a two-dimensional model of fittingness, therefore, a multi-dimensional model, as already articulated in relation to disponibility, does greater justice the complex art of theodramatic performance. While faithful performance certainly involves biblical and contextual fittingness, it also contains trinitarian, ecclesial, traditional, and missional dimensions. Just as actors in the theatre pursue well-crafted performances that fit with the script or developing story, the director’s guidance, other actors, performance traditions, the audience, and context, so also actors in the theodrama seek a similar form of performative wisdom.

While multi-dimensional fittingness follows from a theatrical model, it also has biblical precedent. We observe this, for example, when the apostle Paul helps Christians in Corinth wrestle with the issue of head coverings in worship (1 Cor. 11:1–16). Toward the end of this section in his letter, Paul makes it clear that wearing head coverings is a matter of fittingness: “Judge for yourselves: is it fitting for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?” (1 Cor. 11:13). Up to this point in his argument, Paul had already indicated several strategies for discerning the fittingness of this action, which will be delineated while relating them to overall themes in the Pauline corpus.

First, Paul urges *christological fittingness*, not only as a result of mystical union with Christ as the head of the body, just as man is the head of woman (1 Cor. 11:3), but also in the form of practical imitation (1 Cor. 11:1). Christological fittingness is a dominant theme in all of Paul’s letters, like in Ephesians 5, where actions fitting for saints (Eph. 5:3)—as opposed to sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, and so on—are founded on Christ’s giving himself as an offering and sacrifice (Eph. 5:2). Paul makes a similar injunction in Colossians 3:18 for wives to submit to husbands “as is fitting in the Lord.” Acting in christologically fitting ways, therefore, means performing in ways that follow the pattern of Christ’s own performance.

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145 My translation. Most versions translate *prepon* as “is it proper … ?” (e.g. NIV and ESV), although Walter Bauer et al. suggest “to be fitting/to be suitable” (*A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd edn [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999], 861).

146 Thiselton suggests that Paul appeals to fittingness in v. 13 in reference “to the variety of arguments and principles which apply to this situation,” many of which Paul has already explained in vv. 1–12 (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000], 843).

147 Here, Paul uses *anēkon*, which is similar to *prepon*, and focuses on what is appropriate (Bauer et al., *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 78–9). Paul also puts these words in parallel in Eph. 5:3–4, showing their conceptual congruency. Several commentators on Ephesians note that *prepon* is a term taken from Stoicism, although Paul uses it in a different manner, as we observe already in this notion of Christological fittingness (Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* [Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1998], 477; Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999], 360 n. 4).
Second, Paul appeals to *traditional fittingness* by encouraging the Corinthians to maintain the traditions Paul had received and delivered (1 Cor. 11:2). By encouraging traditional fittingness, Paul is not referring to mere human tradition (Col. 2:8), but to the way, truth, and life of Jesus as expressed in both orthodoxy (2 Thess. 2:15) and orthopraxy (2 Thess. 3:6–15). Traditional fittingness is thus an extension of christological fittingness, since Paul only urges imitation of traditions in so far as they faithfully represent and recapitulate Christ.

Third, Paul defends the *biblical fittingness* of head coverings from the perspective of the biblical story and the creation order, with head coverings displaying a fitting reincorporation of this story (1 Cor. 11:8–12). Although Paul’s use of Scripture has often perplexed interpreters, there is no doubt that fittingness to particular passages and the plot of Scripture takes priority in Pauline ethics. A similar dynamic is at work in Titus 2, where Paul instructs Titus to teach and practice what is fitting to healthy doctrine (Tit. 2:1), which seeks to understand the biblical drama culminating in person and work of Jesus who has the power to redeem and purify (Tit. 2:12–14).

Fourth, Paul considers *contextual fittingness* in connection with the propriety of women covering their heads, shaving them, or leaving them uncovered (1 Cor. 10:6).\(^{148}\) This corresponds with Paul’s previously stated concern to be all things to all men, whether Jews or Gentiles (1 Cor. 9:19–23). Consequently, included in this cultural fittingness are hints of a *missional fittingness* oriented toward the reception of unbelievers. In addition, some commentators have noted that when Paul argues that head coverings are fitting to “the way things are” (1 Cor. 11:14), he is not drawing on the Stoic idea of fittingness to nature, but fittingness to the conventions of his particular culture. Thus, this kind of fittingness can be subsumed under the dimension of contextual fittingness.\(^{149}\) Paul certainly does ground his argument in the created order (1 Cor. 11:7–9), but his observations regarding length of hair and his appeal for women to wear head coverings are ways for this created order to be respected with fittingness to first-century Corinthian culture.

Finally, Paul acknowledges an *ecclesial fittingness* to the practices and performances of other Christian individuals and communities (1 Cor. 11:16). To promote ecclesial fittingness, Paul feels strong enough, as in the case of Onesimus

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\(^{148}\) Some commentators focus on the Roman custom for women to cover their heads during prayers and sacrifices (e.g. Witherington), and others focus on the similar Jewish custom (e.g. Conzelmann). It is most likely that Paul had both practices mind in order to discern cultural fittingness (Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 823–5; cf. Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995], 233; Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1975], 185).

\(^{149}\) John Calvin, Wolfgang Schrage, and Anthony Thiselton have argued that by “natural,” Paul was referring to “how things are” in the “context for which he was writing” (cf. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 844).
(Philem. 1:8–9), to use authoritative commands, but prefers to make appeals for performing fitting action on the basis of love.

From this brief overview, we can observe that a Pauline perspective on fittingness matches the multi-dimensional nature of theodramatic performance. The only dimension of theodramatic fittingness Paul does not mention in 1 Corinthians 11 is a fuller trinitarian fittingness, although elsewhere Paul puts great emphasis on living in a manner fitting to the Spirit (Gal. 5:16–26) and to the Father from whom we receive blessing (Eph. 1:3) and on whom we are constantly dependent (1 Cor. 8:6). Since the Father and Spirit are one with the Son, performance that is fitting toward the Father and Spirit is also fitting to the Son, although it is possible to address each in turn, which is the goal of the following chapter. If christological fittingness is expanded to include trinitarian fittingness, therefore, Paul’s perspective provides ample reason to articulate the goal of theodramatic performance as words, thoughts, and action that are fitting to the triune God, Scripture, the church, tradition, unbelievers, and local context.

The fittingness Paul encourages in 1 Corinthians, consequently, is the wisdom of Christ rather than the wisdom of the world. God has “made foolish the wisdom of the world” (1 Cor. 1:20) by suffering in the place of sinners on the cross. On the cross, the most foolish action becomes the most fitting action, and reveals Christ as the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24). God reveals his wisdom not through abstract aphorisms but in the particular person and performance of Jesus of Nazareth in which there is “nothing disembodied, nothing abstract, nothing impersonal.” If Christians have received the mind of Christ and his Spirit of wisdom (1 Cor. 2:14–16), then wisdom will similarly resist “the gray fog of abstraction” that “absorbs the sharp particularities of the recognizable face and the familiar street.” Rather, wisdom is fitting action in the concrete. This notion of wisdom as concrete fittingness has much in common with Aristotle’s articulation of practical wisdom, or phronesis, as a matter of acting “at the right times, with reference to the right objects, toward the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way.” As such, answering a fool according to his folly may be fitting in some situations, but not in others (Prov. 26:4–5). Fitting action is not just doing the right thing, but doing the right thing artfully and beautifully: “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver” (Prov. 25:11). A word spoken may be true, but it may


not be fitting, because it is not “timely.” Theodramatic fittingness, therefore, is wise action in ever-changing situations, which muddles any attempt to memorize a moral script and perform it on cue: fittingness is an improvisational art. While fittingness is always oriented toward artful performance in concrete situations, however, it also places these situations within the context of the entire theodrama and the action of the triune God, whether transcribed in Scripture or transmitted by Christian tradition. In this way, “fittingness always assumes that some order has been set down around us,” and thus situational fittingness always takes into consideration this entire order. When fittingness is oriented to every dimension of the theodrama, the result is wisdom that provides, according to Daniel Hardy, “a configuration for the multi-dimensionality of the world and God, and how they are and should be related.”

One way to grasp the multi-dimensional nature of theodramatic fittingness is in connection with Wolterstorff’s notion of cross-modal similarity. In the case of theodramatic performance, modes are the various dimensions of performance, whether trinitarian, biblical, ecclesial, and so on. An action is most fitting, therefore, when it displays appropriateness to every mode or dimension. For example, solemn worship may fit biblically, ecclesially, traditionally, but it may not fit contextually or missionally, for instance, in an African worship service. In this case, solemn worship does not have high cross-modal similarity with an African context. Vanhoozer surmises that cross-modal similarity reveals the need for contextualization, or what he prefers to call “transposition” of the biblical world into contemporary scenes, although as already mentioned, it is slightly more complex than that. Shannon Welch captures the beauty and complexity of fitting performance: “To work for a fitting response, but not a final or definitive response, is to respond with beauty and evocative creativity to the ambiguity and domination of life. … It is not triumphalistic, but evocative, for it embodies an intelligent, vital engagement with the complexities of life.” In reality, discerning the fittingness of particular performances in the theodrama resembles the art and complexity of theatrical performance, in which each dimension blends and influences the others. But does each dimension have equal importance, as in Schechner’s performance

153 Barth, CD III/4, 584.
154 A secular counterpart is Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “necessary improvisation” (Outline of a Theory of Practice, 8).
157 Vanhoozer, Drama of Doctrine, 260–61.
theory, or do some take priority over others?\textsuperscript{159} If they are equal, what happens if tradition contradicts Scripture, or the contextual dimension obscures the missional dimension? These and other questions related to the relationship between the various dimensions will be taken up in subsequent chapters. At this point, it suffices to observe that no dimension can be ignored and a dynamic interplay exists between each dimension as actors in the theodrama seek to perform with wisdom, beauty, and fittingness.

**Formation, Performance and Theological Virtues**

Having discussed formation as disponibility separately from performance as fittingness, it is crucial to emphasize once again the dynamic interplay between formation and performance. Enacting fitting performances forms disponible actors, and fittingness requires virtuous disponibility.\textsuperscript{160} And not only that, but both disponibility and fittingness have trinitarian, biblical, ecclesial, traditional, missional, and contextual dimensions. Another way to trace the connection between disponible actors and fitting actions is by relating them to what are traditionally called the theological virtues: faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:13).

At first glance, disponibility seems to be most similar to faith as receptivity and availability toward someone or something. In fact, Karl Barth describes faith as “receptivity in relation to its object,”\textsuperscript{161} a kind of relational trust which he distinguishes from Schleiermacher’s “dependence” since it arises out of God’s prior receptivity and grace toward us.\textsuperscript{162} To be disponible, therefore, is to be someone who trusts, and, in the theodrama, this trust is directed ultimately toward the one who is trustworthy: the triune God. But while trust is a present reality, it is also oriented toward the future, where trust merges with hope. The person who really trusts someone also possesses hope in their continued trustworthiness, with confidence that promises will be fulfilled. Hope is another way of describing disponibility oriented toward the future, particularly the eschatological future promised and already experienced in Christ and revealed in Scripture, thus making us “available for everything.”\textsuperscript{163} Moreover, disponibility is also linked with love, since love includes a disposition to enjoy someone or something for what it is, rather than seeking to do something with it. Disponibility could be substituted for how Oliver O’Donovan describes love: “an attitudinal disposition that gives rise to various action without being wholly accounted for by any of

\textsuperscript{159} Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 62.


\textsuperscript{161} Barth, *CD IV/1*, 635.

\textsuperscript{162} Barth, *CD II/1*, 129.

them.”164 In sum, disponibility is the confluence of faith, hope, and love, described by Balthasar as “letting go of everything that is one’s own as a bold entrusting of oneself to God.”165

If disponible formation is a way of being trusting, hopeful, and loving, then fitting performance is the enactment of trust, hope, and love in particular situations and toward particular people. It is not enough to trust, hope, and love in general, but to do so in a way that displays trinitarian, biblical, ecclesial, traditional, missional, and contextual fittingness. A key question in the chapters that follow is how each of these dimensions relate, both in developing disponibility and in performing with fittingness. Are all of these dimensions equal, or are some dimensions—like trinitarian disponibility and fittingness—that provide the norm for all the others? While answers to this question and others like it will be taken up in due course, there is one conclusion worth stating at this juncture. Theodramatic formation involves becoming people who are faith-full, hopeful, and loving; theodramatic performance is the enactment of faith, hope, and love. This entire process, moreover, is dependent on the God who makes us disponible and empowers our fitting performances. God is the faithful one, the hoped-for one, and the loving one, and theodramatic formation and performance find their true meaning in communion with him.

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