

Feast as Resistance: Communion and Table Fellowship as Ecclesial Resistance to Evil

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Abstract: This paper takes the concept of black joy as a corporate practice of resistance against evil and extends it to apply to liturgical feasting as resistance against evil—through ritualized corporate worship (Eucharist) and table fellowship (eating a meal together). The proposal connects current discussions in analytic theology and black theology to propose an account of how the Church can help resist evil. After demonstrating how feasting in both the Eucharist and table fellowship help resist evil, the paper names two challenges to liturgical feasting and presents solutions to both problems by drawing upon the understanding of the human gaze as presented by child psychologist Vasudevi Reddy and upon theologian Eleonore Stump’s work on shame. The paper demonstrates how liturgical feasting as Eucharist and table fellowship helps to anchor and reinforce each other and provides a setting for the sharing of gazes and stories, the defeating of shame, and the forming of a collective memory that helps a community in its resistance of evil.

Keywords: Eucharist, Resistance, Ecclesiology, Black Joy, Feast, Memory

Introduction: Bringing Black Joy as Resistance into Conversation in Analytic Ecclesiology

Analytic theology is an emerging discipline with a striking dearth of literature on ecclesiology as compared to other theological discussions (Cockayne 2019, 100). This underdevelopment in analytic ecclesiology means that analytic theology is limited in its discourse of how to address real effects of sin and division in the Church. It also means that the resources offered by black theologians such as Willie Jennings or Martin Luther King Jr., who offer critical and constructive accounts of

ecclesiology, are not sufficiently engaged in analytic theology.¹ This article is an attempt to contribute to budding literature on analytic ecclesiology by bringing it into conversation with existing rich literature about ecclesiology in black theology.²

In a 2014 video interview titled “The Theology of Joy” hosted by the Yale Center for Faith and Culture, Jennings is asked to define joy as a theologian, minister, and black man—to which he responds: “Joy is an act of resistance against despair and its forces.”³ Joy is a way of life that resists all the ways “despair drives us towards death and its signatures of violence, war, and debt—all of which strangle life and present a life not worth living.”⁴ Joy here as Jennings describes it is an intentional practice of communal coming together to fortify each other through fellowship and laughter, cultivated by those who have been “able to sing those songs in strange lands,” who can “make you laugh when all you want to do is cry,” who have “learned to ride the winds of chaos and can say to you, ‘C’mon, let me show you how to do that’.”⁵ Joy is a counter-intuitive, corporate practice, a communal spiritual discipline that has sustained the children of slaves in the face of despair and evil. It is not a superficial expression of happiness that ignores or denies adversity. Instead, joy is the defiant celebration of good, a declaration of hope in the face of evil—this is *resistance to evil*. It is an emphatic No! to evil’s attempts at desecrating the sacred community and the imago Dei.

For Jennings, segregation was a negative reality that unexpectedly produced a positive good: black joy. Moving forward, Jennings tantalizingly offers the possibility of joy that creates, that happens in the in-between when different peoples come together, rather than a joy that is built within segregated spaces. From him we also hear the possibility of expanding that practice to the broader Church as it faces the evils and adversities of the world. For evil and despair are not unique to the black experience; the signatures of evil affect all the children of Adam and Eve. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. notes in his opening address to the 1964 Berlin Jazz

¹ Sameer Yadav’s work, which intersects those very conversations, is a prime and outstanding example of the opportunities present and can be found in the forthcoming *The T&T Clark Handbook of Analytic Theology* (edited by James Arcadi & James T. Turner Jr, release date Jan 2021) and also in *Marginalized Identities, Peripheral Theologies: Expanding Conversations in Analytic Theology* (edited by Michelle Panchuk and Michael Rea).

² I am indebted to the valuable feedback given by the following people on earlier drafts of this paper: Vi Bui, Harvey Cawdron, Joshua Cockayne, Andy Everhart, Joanna Leidenhag, and Koert Verhagen.

³ Willie Jennings, “Theology of Joy: Willie James Jennings with Miroslav Volf,” Yale University, accessed July 14, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fKD4Msh3rE>

⁴ This is a quote from the same interview with Jennings, “Theology of Joy”.

⁵ These are quotes from the same interview with Jennings, “Theology of Joy”.

Festival: “Everybody has the Blues. Everybody longs for meaning. Everybody needs to love and be loved. Everybody needs to clap hands and be happy.”⁶

The question remains of how the larger Church can learn from the valuable practice of joy as resistance to evil. We must explore what is transferable to those who stand adjacent to or outside of the experience of joy in the black church tradition—because communal spiritual practices that resist evil and despair are essential to the health and flourishing of all churches.

This paper takes the idea of a corporate ecclesial practice that resists evil and brings the kernel of that idea into conversation with emerging accounts of ecclesiology in analytic theology. More specifically, in my exploration I take the concept of black joy as resistance to evil and by extension propose that *feasting* can be a group liturgical action that helps the Church to resist evil and its signatures of death, despair, and desecration of life.

My argument focuses on how liturgical feasting helps resist evil. To start, I draw from Joshua Cockayne’s recent work on liturgy as ritualized action in its corporate gatherings of worship on Sundays (n.d. 1). I expand upon Cockayne’s work on liturgy to offer an account of how the Church can resist evil through feasting in the ritualized liturgy of worship (Eucharist) and the improvisational liturgy of the table fellowship meal (eating together).⁷ I then establish the biblical basis for feasting as resistance to evil by examining the meals of Passover, the Last Supper, and the early church’s practice of the Eucharist. Drawing from recent discussions of rituals in the Hebrew Bible and their impact on the formation of collective memory, I explore how engaging in ritualized corporate worship can help a community’s resistance of evil. However, I go on to demonstrate that there are two problems to be overcome if this proposal is to be successful: (i) table fellowship as resistance is thwarted by the

⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr., “On The Importance Of Jazz: Opening Address to the 1964 Berlin Jazz Festival,” <https://www.wcll.com/dr-martin-luther-king-jr-importance-jazz>. King also says in this speech “The Blues tell the story of life’s difficulties, and if you think for a moment, you will realize that they take the hardest realities of life and put them into music, only to come out with some new hope or sense of triumph. This is triumphant music. Modern jazz has continued in this tradition, singing the songs of a more complicated urban existence. When life itself offers no order and meaning, the musician creates an order and meaning from the sounds of the earth which flow through his instrument. It is no wonder that so much of the search for identity among American Negroes was championed by Jazz musicians. Much of the power of our Freedom Movement in the United States has come from this music. It has strengthened us with its sweet rhythms when courage began to fail. It has calmed us with its rich harmonies when spirits were down. And now, Jazz is exported to the world.”

⁷ In my expanding of the definition of liturgy, I borrow from another analytic theologian, Joanna Leidenhag, who contributes to the emerging body of work on liturgy in analytic ecclesiology by offering an account of the charismatic gifts as a kind of improvisational liturgy (2020, 1).

segregation that exists within communities and thus limits the recognition of and resistance to evil, and (ii) this segregation leads to the experience of shame, which prevents people joining in a fellowship. To address these two problems, I explore the importance of gaze-sharing for overcoming shame and segregation, highlighting the ways in which truly beholding the story of another can begin to make fellowship possible between segregated persons and communities.⁸ Finally, I argue that this solution is incomplete without the recognition of the critical work of the Holy Spirit, who gives the resources needed for overcoming the problem of shame and thus equips a community to better address the problem of segregation. Drawing these claims together, I return to Jennings's discussion of black joy and highlight the parallel ways liturgical feasting (joint-fellowship and ritualized corporate worship) serves as an effective way of resisting evil.

1. Defining Liturgy

I begin with some brief remarks on the nature of liturgy and how it connects to the discussion of black joy. From Jennings's comments above, we hear that black joy is a historical, corporate practice that builds corporate resistance and corporate resilience against evil. For Jennings, these practices involve an *intentional defiant resistance* to the reality and narrative of evil, a *creative or recreative act* that takes what is evil and makes it into good, and an exchange of valuable practical knowledge (a currency) that occurs *between persons in a community to be learned and shared*. To put it another way, there is no individual learning of black joy. It necessarily involves community in the learning of how to take a broken evil experience and transform it instead into good.

Jennings's reflections provide an interesting point of intersection with Cockayne's latest work on liturgy in analytic theology. In the final chapter of his forthcoming book, Cockayne defines liturgy as ritualized action in its corporate gatherings of worship on Sundays, but he is careful to point out that originally, liturgy was meant to refer to how people lived (n.d., 1). Strikingly, he notes that liturgy in the Greek, *λειτουργία* (*leitourgia*), could be translated as "work of the people" — a phrase also used by Jennings in explaining joy (Cockayne, n.d., 2). Though circumstantially isolated individuals still participate in the Church when they worship in isolation, *gathering for worship* is vital for the life of the Church (Cockayne, n.d., 2).

⁸ My proposal incorporates recent discussions in theology about the human gaze, ritual and memory, as well as theologian Eleonore Stump's work on shame in order to demonstrate how a shared gaze can help clarify collective memory, the sharing of stories, and the overcoming of shame needed to resist evil as corporate body.

Though Cockayne focuses primarily on liturgy as Sunday ritualized action, when “liturgy” is used in this essay, I draw upon *both* senses of liturgy: *Sunday ritualized action* as well liturgy as a *way of life*. Cockayne seeks to explain how “liturgical action is bound up with ethics and what to do when those in the Church diverge from the perfect will of the persons of the Trinity” (Cockayne, n.d., 1). He asks this central question: “How does participating in the liturgies of gathered worship allow for participation in the Church as the body of Christ?” (Cockayne, n.d., 2). His question helps to frame the central question of this article, namely, how does participating in liturgy—of both gathered *Sunday ritualized action* and *way of life*—allow for the Church to participate corporately in resisting surrounding evil?

As the existing discussion indicates, liturgy extends to a broad range of practices in our everyday lives. This paper focuses upon the act of *eating a meal together*—feasting in joint-fellowship—as the way a church participates in liturgy as a way of life. *Eating together* involves sharing—of time, resources such as food and drink, of gazes (strange to imagine a table where people never look at each other as they eat), and conversation which leads to the sharing of stories. Eating together leads to table fellowship—of the literal sort and the metaphorical sort. With liturgy as *way of life* concentrated primarily upon the act of eating together, this paper focuses on two senses of liturgy: *Sunday ritualized action* and feasting around *a table in joint-fellowship*. With liturgy thus defined, I demonstrate how the ethical and the ecclesial are bound together. The task is to show how these two liturgies interact and help build resistance to evil.

2. Feast as Resistance in the Scriptures

However, before we can understand the role of liturgical feasting in resisting evil, we need first to explore its biblical foundations. Christian tradition draws upon the Hebrew Scriptures and the practices of a community who also knew oppression and despair in all its forms: Israel. I now examine Israel’s particular ritual of the Passover feast as its corporate, liturgical response to evil. I then demonstrate how Jesus continues feast as resistance to evil in his use of the Passover meal when anticipating the cross in the Last Supper. After this, I show how feast as resistance in communion—communal *eating in table fellowship* and corporate *ritualized worship*—becomes a reality in the early church.

The Passover meal originates in Exodus 12, when the Israelites are told by God through Moses and Aaron to observe the first Passover meal that is to be commemorated by all future generations as the festival of unleavened bread—to remember God’s bringing Israel out of the land of Egypt (12:1–13, 12:23–27 NRSV).

The instructions to the Passover feast are given with an *anticipation of future deliverance* and the instruction to *remember past deliverance* from evil. In remembering and anticipating in this way, the observers of the feast also *participate in resisting evil* through the active observance of the Passover meal which preceded deliverance from Egypt.

In John 13:1, John notes that the Passover feast is near as he introduces the Last Supper, which is Jesus's last act before the arrest that leads to crucifixion. The command to remember this meal is more explicitly given in Luke 22:19–20, where Jesus says of the bread he breaks, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Jesus instructs his followers to extend that *remembrance* and *anticipation* to the cross and resurrection—the story of God's faithfulness to all of the world. Like the Passover, the Last Supper is an act of *remembrance, anticipation, and participation* in God's resistance against evil in the face of the despair of the world.

However, instead of an *annual* act of remembrance, the Passover meal as remembering God's overcoming evil becomes a more regular practice in the early church as it gathers together. Pauline scholar Douglas Campbell offers insight into Paul's correction of the abuse of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 (2020, 283). Campbell suggests that at least some of the early church communities had *daily* meals that provided food for those who could not provide such for themselves. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul chastises wealthy Corinthians who bring food and drink to those communal meetings and consume such in drunken and gluttonous excess to the exclusion of its poorer members—which was standard Hellenistic practice but "clearly violated the body of Christ, which was being both remembered and participated in at that very moment through the Eucharist" (Campbell 2020, 283). Thus, it is not the Lord's Supper that such wealthy Corinthians eat, because they fail to feast as an act of resistance—remembering the past and anticipating the future—against evil and despair. One can hardly say that a wealthy person who gorges himself next to a starved fellow believer rightly anticipates God's delivering them both from evil.

From Campbell we gain insight that the daily meal for the early church was a liturgical act—both in the *ritualized action* of corporate worship as well as way of life that involved *eating a meal together*.⁹ A feast that fails to include its members as fellow participants at the table fails to remember the actions of Christ who resists evil in his incarnate life, death, and resurrection—and such a feast fails to anticipate the goodness of that deliverance for all. The feast is no longer, and the event is merely a gorging upon food among disconnected people. The *remembrance and anticipation* are

⁹ This affirms our two-part exploration of liturgical feasting.

what make the act of eating together an act of corporate resistance to evil—a liturgical action.

Thus, the difference between a gluttonous overeating in a group of people versus a feast as liturgical resistance to evil is that the latter *remembers the story* of Christ's overcoming evil in specific history and *includes the other fully* as a participant at the feast (both the corporate worship as well as the table fellowship meal) as they *together anticipate* God's continued and final deliverance of creation from evil when all things will be made new. The glutton does not need the community and suffers liturgical amnesia; self-gratification is the goal. Feast as resistance is joint-worship and joint-fellowship that remembers God's actions in time and space—so that participants can continue to live into that reality with anticipation of future deliverance during this lifetime and at the end of the eschaton.¹⁰

From Campbell's insight into the early church, we see that the ritual action of the Eucharist cannot be separated from the everyday action of the table fellowship meal—of relationship that reaches across the pews of a Sunday morning. Evelyn Underhill writes that “the total liturgical life of the Church is not merely the services, offices and sacraments it performs” and that it is instead the life of Christ himself indwelling in the Church (Underhill 2002, 86). In other words, extending Underhill's emphasis, our understanding of feasting must be informed by the reality of Christ working in all the interstitial spaces beyond ordered signs and sacraments—in the living of everyday life, relationships, and table fellowship meals that help connect the *Corpus Christi* together.

I have now given the biblical basis for arguing for feasting as a liturgical practice that helps to resist evil. This serves as scriptural foundation for the next part of my proposal, in which I show how feasting involves the building up of memory critical to recognizing and resisting evil.

3. Collective Remembering During Ritualized Worship

The call to remember and anticipate deliverance from evil through feasting is clear in Scripture. How exactly memory is invoked through feasting needs to be explained further. I now demonstrate how ritualized corporate worship helps the participant

¹⁰ The feast as resistance presses against the signature boundaries of the world. It is a vision of animals of all sorts being presented to Peter as a feast to eat (Acts 10:9–16) that inaugurates Peter's understanding of salvation in Christ being extended to include the Gentiles. Though Peter experiences the reality of Jew–Gentile participation in worship in his encounter with Cornelius in Acts 10–11, he must unlearn ingrained behaviors when Paul rebukes Peter for separating himself from the Gentiles because of circumcision concerns in Galatians 2:11–15.

to remember and anticipate Christ's work of resisting evil by drawing upon Cockayne and Gideon Salter's work on collective memory to address how remembrance and anticipation work during the Eucharist (liturgical feasting in ritualized action). I then show how joint-fellowship (eating together) should be a natural part of that participating in resistance against evil.

When asking the question of what it means for a group to collectively remember something, Cockayne and Salter (C&S) distinguish among three aspects of memory as found in philosophical and psychological work: semantic, episodic, and procedural (Forthcoming, 2–3). Semantic memory refers to recalling of facts and concepts. Episodic memory is the recalling or “re-living” of an event in the life of a person who is recalling it. Procedural memory is practical “know-how” that a person may not always be able to articulate but regardless is able to perform, such as riding a bicycle or driving a car. These are accounts of individual memory — what it means for an individual *to remember something*. As they then ask what it means to understand these three types of memories in *collective contexts*, C&S draw upon Brevard Childs's argument that the Hebrew act of remembering *actualizes* the past for a generation removed from past events so that they participate in an intimate way in those acts of redemption (C&S Forthcoming, 4; Childs 1962, 56). Semantic memory is invoked through the scriptures and history recounted. The retelling and ritualizing of past events in the Passover Seder through the ingestion of bitter herbs reminds the participant of the bitterness experienced by the community who suffered Egyptian slavery firsthand (C&S Forthcoming, 4). Though C&S would be hesitant to call this collective episodic memory, I suggest here that a *secondary* episodic memory is created: the Seder is a real experience that recounts the past of another (as differentiated from recalling a first-hand experience). What can be recalled by the Seder participants is their experience of the Seder, which involves the retelling of the Passover; thus episodic memory is involved. Finally, and no less importantly, the communal act of retelling and remembering the past builds a procedural memory “of how to relate to God and to relate to the world” (C&S Forthcoming, 4–5).¹¹ All three senses of memory described above involve both individual as well as collective memory formation.

C&S's articulation of how collective memory is invoked in the Passover Seder can now be extended to liturgy — in ritualized worship and at a table meal (with my edit of a secondary episodic memory). Eucharistic feasting in ritualized worship involves the recounting of story and scripture during the worship service; semantic memory

¹¹ Experiential recalling could be one's experiencing a play where the actors on the stage are recalling a memory. What is experienced by the audience is the remembering of a past memory by the actors on stage, not the acting out of the scene.

is built. The experience of the spoken liturgical readings, songs, and other aspects of the service provide a *secondary* episodic memory—a *reliving of the experience of recalling* the Last Supper (not the experience of the *actual* Last Supper which happened two thousand years ago.) The Eucharist service builds a procedural memory, an understanding of what happens during a Eucharist meal, at minimum in the partaking of the elements.

In remembering Christ's resistance of evil on the cross, the worshipper (hopefully) is also encouraged in the accompanying liturgical aspects of the service to love their neighbor (Luke 10:27–37), to care for the poor (Matthew 25:35–40), to speak up against injustice (Isaiah 1:17), and thus to resist evil. Ideally, the worshipper is encouraged through the homily, recited prayers, and songs to pursue this in how they live out their everyday lives, including who they show hospitality towards and who they extend friendship, welcome, and compassion towards. Like the Israelites who were called to remember the past and anticipate the future by holding a feast and thus participate in God's resistance to and overcoming of evil, *the worshipper is invited to participate in that resistance to evil—not just in the worship service but in the world beyond*—including the fellowship table to which they invite others to dine with them.¹²

Then, the guest invited to partake of the hospitality offered at a table meal may also very well be invited to explore faith in Jesus and eventually partake of the Sunday ritual of the Eucharist. The relationships and prayers built across the table of food and across the table of the Lord's Supper help nourish the participants in their everyday resistance against evil. The stories of those at the table of fellowship may greater inform and affect 1) the Eucharist service in the prayers expressed and the applications emphasized for everyday living and 2) the intentional programs of fellowship and care for the vulnerable that a church may pursue beyond Sunday. As relationships built around the fellowship table impact and inform ritualized worship, the Eucharist helps re-immerses the participants in the collective semantic, episodic, and procedural recalling of Christ's resistance against evil, thus nourishing the participant as she seeks to be more and more like Christ in her resisting evil. Thus, ritualized corporate worship and table fellowship *should* mutually enforce each other. This is the first point of my argument:

- 1) Liturgical feasting (ritualized corporate worship and joint-fellowship) should together lead to resistance against evil.

¹² The Christian who fails to invite friends and neighbors to explore real faith is a different problem altogether; we shall not explore this here.

Having developed this account of everyday ritualized action as a resistance of evil, we can now see that feasting can be understood as ritualized corporate worship as well as joint table fellowship (eating together). Both involve food, remembrance, and gathering persons together. I now demonstrate how the critical link between *feasting as corporate worship* and *feasting as table fellowship* become severed as a result of the segregated spaces that are often the reality of the Church in a fragmented world.

4. The Challenges Segregation Poses to Liturgical Feasting

In an ideal world, remembrance, anticipation, and participation in resistance against evil through ritualized worship (the Eucharist) should inform and continue into table fellowship that further equips the worshipper to resist evil in the world. C&S argue that the Seder and Eucharist are like a kind of collective familial reminiscing, so that the story told is not just *a* story but is *our* story—the story of that collective community (C&S Forthcoming, 15).¹³ Maurice Halbwachs notes that the collective memory of families serve as a coherent frame, a set of examples for teaching and elements which express the attitude of the group, reproduce history, and “define its nature and its qualities and weaknesses” (1992, 59).

However, as Jennings asserts, churches are often segregated by race, ethnicity, class, and more. In such a reality of segregated spaces, the sharing of an “our story” is difficult. According to C&S, participating in the Eucharist is participating as a member of a family (Forthcoming, 15). Christians are supposed to form a new kind of family of adopted kin; but if the kin remain separated and segregated, then their stories are not shared, and there exist no agreed upon traits that characterize teaching norms, natures, strengths, and weaknesses. Navajo theologian Mark Charles argues that with no common memory or history, there can be no real community (Charles and Rah 2019, 204).¹⁴ The lack of a common story, a common reminiscing, means that one does not get a full picture of the pain and evil suffered by the Body. This results in 1) the inability to recognize evil and 2) the resultant inability to form a collective memory that helps resist evil. Though someone—let’s call her Jane—can direct her “gaze” upon Juan, even with perfect physical vision, Jane might not fully understand the reality of what is in her view. Her gaze, even with unhindered physiological conditions, is clouded because she fails to hear and

¹³ Italics C&S’s.

¹⁴ Charles argues that “Where community is to be formed, a common memory must be created”.

acknowledge the story of the other. If one does not share recollection and memory, the family connections remain unrealized.

When the Church operates in segregated spaces, the critical link between ritualized corporate worship and joint-fellowship is severed, which then limits the recognition of and resistance to evil. Not only that, but a second problem emerges: the problem of *shame*. Stump differentiates between guilt and shame by first focusing on two basic desires in love: 1) a desire for the good of the beloved and 2) a desire for union with the beloved (2016, 113). She defines guilt as the anticipation of anger that might lead to something that is not for a person's good. Stump defines shame as the anticipation of rejection. This definition is helpful because it helps name a fundamental challenge in pursuing table fellowship: if one anticipates rejection, then the likelihood of attending the feast diminishes. It would be strange for someone to happily attend a feast when they expect to be rejected socially in that setting.

When believers from fragmented communities come together, the likelihood is that this experience will be uncomfortable and unsettling—much like attempting to ride waves as a new surfer. Prejudices, biases, idolatries, and systems of injustice are exposed. Most chiefly, shame threatens to divide and prevent the deeper exchange of stories that leads to clarification and forming of collective memory that remembers rightly, anticipates deliverance, and participates in resisting evil—with clearer eyes. Segregation and its byproduct of shame remain challenges to liturgical feasting and table fellowship.

Here then is the second point of my argument:

- 2) Feasting as resistance to evil is thwarted by i) segregation that exists within communities, which limits the recognition of and resistance to evil and ii) the experience of shame that emerges from segregation and prevents people from joining in fellowship.

5. Overcoming the Barrier Imposed by Segregation Through Gaze Sharing¹⁵

We move now to resolve the first barrier segregation poses to liturgical feasting. In his critique of post-medieval Western Christianity, Jennings contrasts the postures of European missionaries Jose de Acosta Porres and John William Colenso when

¹⁵ Let the reader note that relational disconnection is only one of many significant effects of segregation. Discussion of righting inequitable systems will not be explored here, as the focus is on the initial barrier of relational separation and blindness to the other caused by segregation. The hope is that relational connection and sharing of story will create better foundations for communal acts of justice and resistance.

facing the reality of Western Christianity's colonizing impact on brown and black believers.¹⁶ Acosta is hardhearted and justifies the evil of colonization on indigenous peoples and lands (Jennings 2010, 113). Colenso has a much more intimate experience as he takes on African Zulu students (Fuze and Ngidi) who help him translate the Scriptures and confront his assumptions and blinders with their questions about Scripture and their own realities (Jennings 2010, 163). He is confronted with their gaze, their story, which pierce his own story and gaze. Colenso "chooses the African" after seeing evil for what it is (his colleague Shepstone's bloody thirst for power), and places "all the intellectual, political, social, and ecclesial tools he had honed in defining and defending his [previous] theological position" for the "service of the black body" (Jennings 2010, 163). His family, wife and children, follow suit (Jennings 2010, 165).

Colenso's story shows the breaking down of his inability to see evil and also the forming of a *united common memory* as a result. Colenso is brought into a different kind of interaction with the non-European person because he needs the help of Zulu translators to succeed in his task. In the first many years, Colenso is unable to see the limitations of his segregated theology and thus his segregated practice of liturgy. However, in the careful listening to the voices of his fellow translators, there is a kind of fellowship that ultimately leads to the piercing and clarifying of his own gaze on others and himself—and to his participation in dismantling evil in his mature years (Jennings 2010, 165). A collective memory is formed in place of the formerly disjointed recollections of British presence in South Africa.¹⁷ I would say here that the real relationships built across the translation table—and the table fellowship meal—transfigures Colenso's own understanding of *who* is family, of *whose* values and examples he chooses as his own.

In doing so, Colenso breaks a script that was laid out for him about *who* belongs to his family, about *who* gets to shape his semantic, episodic, and procedural memory. He broke the boundaries of *who* was considered the family that gets to shape his worldview and thus changed the way he pursued liturgical feasting. Colenso didn't stop feasting—he changed *how* he feasted—he improvised after

¹⁶ Many more stories are featured in *Christian Imagination*, but for the sake of this article, I focus on these two.

¹⁷ While Jennings calls for the celebration and remembrance of Colenso's change of heart and trajectory in his later years, he does not aver from emphasizing Colenso's historic participation in and subscription to the deeply problematic tradition of Christian translation that was bound to colonialism and the dead-end options of the false universal (docetism) and particularity—subsuming contextualization (adoptionism). Jennings's newest work *After Whiteness* critiques further how gospel translation was boundary-crossing that led to slavery and death instead boundary-crossing that led to freedom and life. See *CI*, 166–167.

being immersed in a community and being confronted with their stories, their values, and their memories. He met the gaze of his African brothers for long enough that he could not deny their humanity and rightful place in his own framework as brothers—as spiritual kin. Thus, Colenso’s *gaze was transfigured*.

What is meant by the transfiguring of one’s gaze? I acknowledge here the limitations of the word “gaze,” which could be seen as excluding persons with visual impairment. However, my use of “gaze” here is metaphorical, as someone could have 20–20 eyesight but not recognize what their neighbors experience; hence, such a person experiences metaphorical cloudiness in her gaze.¹⁸ Brian Brock, who writes about disability and ecclesiology, notes that “there is a direct correlation between the shape of the human gaze upon others and the God they believe beholds them—and for whose action they await” (2019, 195). The word “gaze” need not be avoided because beholding is not contingent on physical sight.

To experience the transfiguration of a gaze is to experience change in how one views the other. I now demonstrate how fellowship must make room for joint attention, the sharing of a liturgical gaze which connects stories and resources needed to recognize and resist evil.

Jennings argues that the segregation of the Church into segregated spaces of worship is the fruit of white supremacy in Western Christianity, and what follows this critique is his proposal for a way forward: Spirit-led boundary-crossing communion—living life together—in spaces once forbidden to the other.¹⁹ Charles and Soong-Chan Rah offer something tantalizingly similar to Jennings when they say, “We have discovered the power of developing common experiences and a common memory, which move us toward a common purpose” (2019, 4).

Though Colenso’s later years should be hailed as an example of intimate joining that reflects the possibility of the Church as a united body, his blindness to evil during his earlier years (as well as the many missionaries before and after him) highlights that *liturgical ritual services are not objective by virtue of semantic recounting* of the Last Supper. Despite the reality and truth of Christ’s work in resisting evil on the cross, the understanding of *what and which evil is being presently resisted* is filtered

¹⁸ Hence, one could say “I once was blind but now I see” in the sense of spiritual sight, even if one is technically blind.

¹⁹ Jennings writes, “We who live in the new space of joining may need to transgress the boundaries of real estate, by buying where we should not and living where we must not but living together where we supposedly cannot, and being identified with those whom we should not... For us in the racial world, the remade world, a crucial point of discipleship is precisely global real estate... Our imaginations must be drawn to new possibilities of living arrangements that capture our freedom in Christ and turn them toward desiring a journey of joining enabled and guided by the Spirit of God” (2010, 287).

through the lens and experiences of those who prepare and participate in the liturgy—and through their limited collective memory and the set of uncontested norms, family narratives, and biases therein. Thus, since a church is often a segregated space where the community present is cut off from the gaze of others, intervention is needed. Otherwise, a worshipper’s remembering of Christ’s work on the cross is accompanied by a limited anticipation of deliverance, and ultimately then her participation in resisting evil is limited.

The worshipper’s gaze needs to be transfigured, her blinders removed, and her vision clarified. Child psychology research by Vasudevi Reddy tells us that the human infant forms its perception of self in the gaze of the other (2008, 126). Eleonore Stump makes the case that “full-fledged dyadic joint attention” is necessary for “mentally full-functioning adults” to experience closeness and presence essential to love (2010, 109). Stump also argues that joint or shared attention is a “second-person experience between two persons who are mutually aware of each other” (2013, 7). This joint attention is necessary for truly loving the other, as you cannot love someone of whom you are unaware, and joint attention leads inevitably to the transfiguring of a person’s gaze as she understands another more deeply.

This understanding of the human—as inextricably connected to the other and his identity shaped by how the other relates to him—is displayed in the story of Christian Picciolini, a former white nationalist that helps recruit white people away from white nationalism.²⁰ He recounts from his story and from the story of the successful recruiting of other white persons away from white nationalism that it was not the presentation of data or stronger arguments that led to change; it was encountering undeserved compassion from black, brown, and gay persons. The unexpected compassion occurred in the intimacy of conversations—in the joint attention established. It shows how in telling and sharing story—that it is not merely an optical gaze that is shared. One’s worldview and understanding of good and evil becomes more deeply textured and shaped, and reshaped against previous blinders and presuppositions. What happens at the table of conversation and table fellowship leads to change, the transfiguring of what someone understands when gazing upon the other—and also upon oneself.²¹

²⁰ Yara Bayoumy and Kathy Gilsinan, “A Reformed White Nationalist Says the Worst Is Yet to Come” in *The Atlantic*, August 6, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/08/conversation-christian-picciolini/595543/>.

²¹ Theology and liturgical practices stand to gain from scientific research and also work like Picciolini’s in an information age that is full of nationalism, xenophobia, and “alternative facts.”

The sharing of story from the viewpoint of another, the sharing of stories of perseverance of faith in adversity, and the sharing of what an individual believes to be the story that Christ inhabits help form the believer who receives that story and hopefully joins herself more deeply to the story of the Body. The family of believers that is the Church and the local church does not get to experience the reality of a family story until such a collective family memory is formed—with its accompanying models, lessons, and values. In the forming of such a family story—that is more deeply aware of what hurts for the other and what is needed to help the other—is the forming of resistance against evil that affects a family member.

We stand here to benefit again from C&S, who summarize several different studies of the effects of family reminiscing styles on the development of children (Forthcoming, 13–14). The lesson here is not just about gazing but also the impact of sharing stories in detail. When mothers adopted a “‘highly elaborative’ reminiscing style”, their children were able to recount memories with greater quality and quantity of detail (C&S Forthcoming, 13). More strikingly, “formation of a clear family narrative has been shown to be connected to children’s and adolescents’ psychosocial wellbeing” (C&S Forthcoming, 14). A family setting that allows for shared recollection of a memory is more likely to help a child develop into a self-efficacious adolescent with higher self-esteem (C&S Forthcoming, 14; Bohanek et al. 2006, 39–54). A family that tells stories with more emotional detail and has a clear articulation of how emotional conflicts are resolved will more likely yield an adolescent who is more academically and socially competent (C&S Forthcoming, 14; Marin, Bohanek, and Fivush 2008, 573–93). From social psychology research, we see that the sharing of stories in a group and the healthy resolution of family conflict in a group is essential to developmental well-being. We can hope to apply the same to the development of the family that is the local church, which is ever growing as it adopts new members and ever expanding its collective memory if the church is properly pursuing the flourishing of its members.

Here then, is an opportunity. Equipped with such information, the Church, which is beholden to the command to love one’s neighbor and love one’s enemy, could serve as a space of mutual beholding gazes (recollection of story included), with programs and initiatives informed by science and anti-racism work that help lead to reconciliation across differences.²² Bias can be overcome through repeat exposure

²² Consider the plethora of resources aimed at unconscious bias, diversity and inclusion, and cross-cultural training in workplace and educational environments. Consider also the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa aimed at restorative justice after apartheid; the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide; and the Sankofa Journeys offered by the US-based Evangelical Covenant Church, which are cross-racial interactive

to the other, which confronts a false notion of self and the other. Instead of assuming that directives to avoid bias and racism will change behavior, feasting through table fellowship could serve as a necessary and important place of transfiguring gazes so that members of the Church can better resist evil.

The conversation is not limited to the realm of race or ethnicity alone. Men that truly have table fellowship (versus gluttony) with women colleagues and neighbors may truly hear and see the other in the reality of their stories and the challenges and evils they face as women—or as sexual minorities.²³ Fill in the blank with immigrants, non-citizens, people of a different class or caste—and the list goes on. It is not always clear that a ritualized worship setting leads to those stories being heard. The intentionality of joint-fellowship at the table meal could serve as a way to better ensure that those stories are heard so that the worshipper's gaze may be transfigured.

What results is that the practice of table fellowship meals then clarifies and transfigures the three senses of memory described by C&S. Incorrect facts and distorted versions of history are confronted in the sharing of story and the sharing of gaze between persons whose representative communities may have conflicting accounts of facts and past events.²⁴ Semantic memory is clarified and transfigured. A new episodic memory results from this experience of table fellowship where an individual's gaze is clarified. As table fellowship is pursued again and again, procedural memory begins to build in participants who learn to have table fellowship across differences and learn new stories.

An analogy is that the surfer learns the fundamental skills of riding a wave so that she can face each and every unique wave in its form. The surfer must adapt to the unique circumstances of each wave (as no two waves are alike), but her procedural memory of knowing the set of actions needed to catch a wave in theory help her achieve her goal of riding each wave. Acquisition of procedural memory helps build perseverance in pursuing the surf. Acquisition of procedural memory for the feasting participant helps build perseverance in pursuing resistance against evil. Improvisation is possible for the surfer and liturgical participant as new waves and challenges are faced. We are now able to affirm point three of my argument:

pilgrimages “that equip Christians to pursue racial righteousness inside and outside the church.”
<https://covchurch.org/justice/racial-righteousness/sankofa/>

²³ Take for example the rise of the recent #metoo movement that has helped amplify the voices of women who have been sexually harassed and mistreated by men.

²⁴ Consider the American Civil War, which often is taught by an alternative name “The War of Northern Aggression.”

- 3) To correct the effect of segregated spaces, joint-fellowship must make room for the sharing of a liturgical gaze which connects stories needed to recognize and resist evil.

6. Overcoming the Challenge of Shame to Feasting

The first challenge of the severed gazes and disconnected stories due to segregation addressed, we now turn to the second challenge posed by segregation to liturgical feasting and table fellowship: shame. Assuming that one is willing to enter into such table fellowship with a learning posture and relatively healthy reactions to being confronted with new and challenging experiences, there are still many threats to table fellowship and gaze transfiguration enduring the discomfort of that interaction—a chief motivational barrier being shame. In other words, liturgical gaze helps in beginning to resolve the problem, but the gaze alone does not resolve it entirely. In this section, I make creative use of Stump’s work on shame to propose how the believer may be given resources to overcome shame that threatens the possibility of table fellowship.

Stump lists four types of shame:

- i. shame resulting from one's own wrongdoing
- ii. shame stemming from being a victim of someone else's wrongdoing
- iii. shame following from some impairment or depredation of nature
- iv. shame attached to being a member of the human race

While repentance and forgiveness can help *defeat* guilt, Stump argues that something else is needed to defeat shame, which anticipates rejection from another because of something undesirable in the person based on a certain standard (2016, 113). Stump proposes that the atonement provides an answer for type 4 shame because Christ’s uniting himself to human nature honors *all* of human nature and also provides the fruit and gifts of the Holy Spirit as a result of the indwelling of the Spirit (2016, 124–25). Thus status is restored—each human person is deemed worthy because of that honor conferred through Christ, and greater gifts are given to each person through the Spirit.

While Stump’s types address the universal sense of shame and the shame an individual might feel in approaching God, they do not sufficiently address the shame that a person may feel in a human community *by virtue of being part of a people group*. I propose an amendment to Stump’s list of types of shame by offering a fifth

category that is in-between the three individual types of shame and the fourth universal type:

- v. shame attached to being a member of group of people within the human race (race, gender, class, nationality)—victim or perpetrator, oppressed or oppressor

This additional type recognizes the shame that an individual might feel for belonging to a certain subset of humanity: an undesired lower caste or class, a Rwandan Hutu vis-à-vis a Tutsi, a white descendent of slave-owners vis-à-vis the black children of slaves in the Western world. It also addresses the reality of inherited shame, as an individual might not be a direct perpetrator or direct victim of wrongdoing or direct possessor of an impairment or degradation, but the individual may have inherited the results of that shame, and the individual's community a collective experience of having inherited the results of such shame.

Consider, for example, the relinquishing of language forced upon indigenous/aboriginal children in Western societies during past centuries where their access to indigenous culture was seen as undesirable.²⁵ Now, despite the current push to affirm indigenous story and culture, children of indigenous persons must deal with 1) the inheriting of shame (its psychological, physical, and systemic effects) from their ancestors, 2) the surrounding non-indigenous neighbors also inheriting negative attitudes about indigenous persons, and 3) the discomfort or shame such inheritors (of anti-indigenous bias and the historic actions that might have accompanied it) may feel in entering such conversations. Stump briefly but potently notes that God cannot change the past; history remains what it has been and is (2016, 117). Thus, forgetting such history is not an option because forgetting does not defeat shame nor confer greater status through honor.

How then can such shame be defeated? Theologically speaking, Jew and Gentile, Jews and Gentiles, have been joined together as one new humanity as per Ephesians 2. Jennings makes use of Ephesians 2 to call the Church to embrace the reality that it is being invited into a singular kinship network through the body of Jesus and the story of Israel (2010, 272). In order to be in space of table-fellowship and meet the gaze of another, whether that person represents a people who have been wronged or at odds or been oppressed by an individual's own, the participant needs the resources of the Holy Spirit, who gives access to the one Father and makes two split

²⁵ Indigenous will be used instead of Native American or First Nations for the sake of using language that is accessible beyond North America.

people groups one (Ephesians 2:22). Simply speaking, the fruits of the Spirit are given so that the individual receives what she may need to confront the discomfort of being in that space of table fellowship: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23). Thus the threat that shame poses to a shared liturgical gaze is countered with the resources given from the Holy Spirit to overcome that shame.

But the giving of the Spirit's gifts is not what *removes* or *defeats* shame. The Spirit's gifts are what helps the participant in table fellowship *resist the impulse to walk away because of shame* and persevere so that the gaze between the participants begins to become unclouded, and the people at the table are seen not as theoretically-possible brothers or sisters, but as real brothers or sisters. In the sharing of stories and narratives that are foreign to or conflict with one's own, the Spirit is what gives an individual the perseverance needed to endure the correcting of that gaze between persons. As the experience of table fellowship deepens and as the gazes are exchanged, the participants begin to see and have compassion for the evil their fellow diners face. The gazes enter the unclouding process when table-fellowship participants choose to listen to the story of another, and the gazes transform when the individuals choose to care enough to do something about the evil the other faces beyond the walls of the Eucharist and the table of fellowship. When this decision to care, to love the other as oneself, happens, the people at the table are participating in the reality that Christ has already joined them to the other as family. But now, the stories have become a group narrative; the family reminiscing has converged into a united, not uniform, memory and anticipation of the future—and a participation in resisting evil. Unclouding the gaze and choosing to stay in that unclouded gaze defeats the fear of rejection. Shame is thus overcome, *not because a person has earned it* through table fellowship, but because the participant has been able to recognize the problems in her gaze which kept her from embracing union with someone whose identity or history might have caused feelings of shame for her, be it a rich person uniting her story with a pauper, a white person choosing to love a black or brown other, a man choosing to resist evil that affects his sisters. This leads me to my fourth point:

- 4) Resources from the Holy Spirit help individuals from segregated spaces persevere in sharing a liturgical gaze so that shame may be defeated.

This transfiguration of a participant's gaze through the sharing of story in table fellowship is not without discomfort nor challenge. But in receiving the resources

from the Spirit needed to get to the embrace of a singular family reality and collective memory, the Peters may repent once more of their wall-building, and the Pauls may confront the places of blindness and self-protectionism, and the stories of hope and perseverance can serve as food for those who wrestle with despair. The new bonds and reshaped gazes upon the other and the self can serve as helpful anchoring to resist evil that affects the other (as well as oneself). Such a joining together in remembering corporately and rightly is the participation in feasting as resistance to evil.

7. Building Resilience in Resisting Evil

With the challenges to a severed liturgical gaze and the obstacle of shame thus addressed, both aspects of feasting (corporate worship and table-fellowship) are freed to help anchor and reinforce the other in order to more effectively resist evil. I now demonstrate how such a mutually enforcing practice of liturgical feasting builds resilience in resisting evil.

Feasting, eating together, sharing resources of sustenance together, is a way that Christians can pursue creating living connections and relationships so that stories are exchanged to establish a bond of collective remembrance and a commitment to the other as spiritual family. These stories go beyond the Last Supper and beyond Israel's Passover meal; they include the story of the perseverance of black Christians and the black church—of black joy. They include the story of the perseverance of the persecuted church. They include the confessions of those who sat on the wrong side of history and participated in gluttony. Such a sharing of stories creates a corporate act of remembrance—of remembering *rightly*—and thus also anticipating deliverance rightly and participating rightly in that resistance to evil.

The transfiguring of a shared liturgical gaze not only leads to a shared collective memory of the past; it leads to resilience in resistance against evil. Stories of resistance that are shared in fellowship create not just resistance, but resilience—a long term perseverance against despair. Procedural memory is further built, as different spiritual practices of resisting evil are repeatedly exercised and passed onto people and generations.

We can revisit here our starting point of black joy. Black joy is a procedural memory building practice that invokes semantic and episodic memory as it passes from generation to generation. Feasting as resistance can similarly provide the very things black joy as resistance to evil has helped provide: 1) *intentional defiant resistance* to the reality and narrative of evil, 2) *a creative or recreative act* that takes

what is evil and makes it into good, and 3) an exchange *between persons in a community to be learned and shared*.

Jennings writes that the solution to a segregated world is for Christians to intentionally “transgress the boundaries of real estate by buying where we should not and living where we must not but living together where we supposedly cannot, and being identified with those whom we should not” (2010, 287). He states that “our imaginations must be drawn to new possibilities of living arrangements that capture our freedom in Christ and turn them toward desiring a journey of joining enabled and guided by the Spirit of God” (Jennings 2010, 287). I propose that it is the sharing of stories in spaces of feasting that will enable such imagination—as again a resistance to despair and evil in a fragmented world. Feasting as resistance is often the manner by which God invites an ecclesial body into rejecting a way of death and embracing a way of life.

Finally, what happens in table fellowship—the transfiguring of one’s gaze and recognition of evil, the building of a collective memory, and the long-term resilience in resisting evil—also in turn affects ritualized corporate worship. For when the participant of a Eucharist remembers the last supper and anticipates deliverance, her gaze through the body of Christ (Jesus’s crucified and risen body and the body that is the Church) is to a greater hope that includes the deliverance of a brother or sister or community that was once unseen in her own gaze. Worship, which should help a Christian persevere in loving God and loving neighbor, helps the believer receive anew the gifts and fruit of the Spirit and continue in resisting evil. Thus, we can affirm the fifth and final point of my proposal:

- 5) With their gaze shared and clarified, liturgical feasting through joint-fellowship and ritualized corporate worship mutually enforce each other and lead to more effective resistance of and resilience against evil.

Conclusion

I have offered an account of feast as resistance to evil, drawing upon the work that Cockayne has done in defining liturgy:

- 1) Liturgical feasting (ritualized corporate worship and joint-fellowship) should together lead to resistance against evil.
- 2) Feasting as resistance to evil is thwarted by i) segregation that exists within communities, which limits the recognition of and

- resistance to evil and ii) the experience of shame that emerges from segregation and prevents people from joining in fellowship.
- 3) To correct the effect of segregated spaces, joint–fellowship must make room for the sharing of a liturgical gaze which connects stories needed to recognize and resist evil.
 - 4) Resources from the Holy Spirit help individuals from segregated spaces persevere in sharing a liturgical gaze so that shame may be defeated.
 - 5) With their gaze shared and clarified, liturgical feasting through joint–fellowship and ritualized corporate worship mutually enforce each other and lead to more effective resistance of and resilience against evil.

I have expanded Cockayne’s definition of liturgy and argued for how a specific practice from a particular tradition could help inform the larger Church’s own ways of resisting evil. Taking Jennings’s description of black joy as resistance, I have offered the paradigm of feast as resistance, drawing upon the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures to inform my reading. Feast as resistance has been defined as a two–part liturgy of joint worship and joint fellowship which help bring about ecclesial healing and unity through the transfiguring of one’s gaze, the receiving of resources from the Holy Spirit, and the forming of a communal memory—all of which makes it possible for a church community to better recognize and resist evil.

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