Abstract

*Opus Dei*: Toward the Sacramental Counterpoint of

Liturgy and Ethics in a Diasporic Imaginary

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Theological method is the mindscape of perceiving and conceiving God, world, and human life. It is the crystallization of the patterns and practices of religious knowing as well as the axiological structure of culturally and historically embedded organization of knowledge and imagination. As such it cannot be detached from ethical, social, and political imagination and praxis. This project is a quest for ethically inflected methodological envisagements of a non-hegemonic model of relationality from the perspectives of constructive sacramental-liturgical theology in conversation with postcolonial theory and diaspora discourses. The competitive and mutually detractive disengagement between liturgy and ethics is interrogated as a symptom of the binaristic epistemological imagination of Western colonial modernity and its mainstream Christian theological creativity. Liturgical-sacramental discourses have been routinely adiaphorized in dominant Western theology as a matter of methodological value-coding. Similar methodological habits influenced the marginalization of ethics in theological inquiry. Sacramental discourse, however ambiguously, challenges the dualistic and relationally competitive texture of Western modern theological imagination. It resonates particularly aptly with certain recent postcolonial critiques of coercive and non-reciprocal templates of relationality to foster a shared reflection on the nature of asymmetrical, yet ethically invested, configurations of relationality.

The constructive impetus of this project originates from the exploration of a postcolonially colored diasporic imaginary. As a diasporic female Latvian-American theologian, I reflect on it as a trajectory of methodological comportment in theological inquiry. To assess the transformative potential of diasporically situated reconceptualizations of the symptomatic divide between liturgy and ethics as precisely a methodological conundrum, the deeply ambiguous contributions of diasporic Russian Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann and Jewish Lithuanian-French ethicist Emmanuel Levinas are surveyed. From within a diasporic imaginary, I argue that an ethically inflected theological envisagement of relationality in the present era of postcoloniality can be engendered through a conversation between the Eastern Christian idea of sacramentally inscribed synergy and the postcolonial conception of hybridity. To modulate the dualistic gridlocks, the notion of counterpoint as a specification of postcolonial hybridity by Palestinian-American postcolonial theorist Edward W. Said emerges as the pivotal constructive figure of an ethically and sacramentally scored constellation of relationality.