

Marching One Step at a Time: Hans W. Frei on Christian Discipleship

Daniel D. Shin

Candler School of Theology, Emory University

Abstract: The aim of this essay is to explore Hans W. Frei's thought on theological hermeneutics, Christology and ecclesiology at the intersection between religious education and social justice, human liberation, and civil rights. It closely follows Frei's discussion of intention-action identity analysis to examine his understanding of the self as public, the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus, and the constitution of Christian identity. In particular, it highlights the pivotal importance of the exchange between Christians and socio-economic realities in the public world. Thus, contrary to common misunderstandings of Frei's project, the essay shows that his work does not promote a sectarian flight from the public world, but invites a principled moral and political involvement, including issues related to nuclear disarmament, care of nature, and fight against poverty and discrimination.

In addressing the Conference's theme "Let Freedom Ring!", one may not jump to postliberal theology as a conversation partner to think about the intersection between religious education and social justice, liberation, and civil rights. After all, what do postliberal theologians who have been charged of sectarian retreat have to say about social responsibility?¹ What does New Haven have to do with Birmingham? Surprisingly, much more than it initially appears. Since it is beyond the scope of this essay to explore the many and varied conceptual terrains of representative postliberal theologians, it focuses principally on Hans W. Frei's theological hermeneutics, Christology, and ecclesiology for the task of educating Christians for social responsibility.²

Of course, Frei was by no means a card-carrying public theologian, and it was only toward the end of his career he explicitly spoke about public theology, a carefully circumscribed progressive politics, and Marxist analysis of person as the dialectical relation of individual and society. But he was deeply concerned about the social issues of his day, such as poverty and discrimination, the agony of the Vietnamese people, the horror of overpopulation, and the despoliation of nature.³ Consider what Frei says about Christian involvement in the public world: "One is grateful for the rise of black self-consciousness, one battles for nuclear disarmament, and one pleads with fellow-theologians to make their theology in this time of 'nearly apocalyptic seriousness' a theology of (human) freedom."⁴ This plea may create dissonance in the ears of his critics because it is not what you would expect to hear from one of the chief architects of postliberal theology whose proposals seemed to have advocated sectarian withdrawal to an isolated realm of, ecclesial discourse and practice.⁵ But there is another dimension to Frei's project which is generally overlooked, a passionate concern for the public world.⁶

In order to gain a critical purchase on the public character of Frei's project, we begin our analysis with his proposal for a realistic, history-like narrative reading in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*. One might object that returning to his hermeneutical proposal informed by New Criticism, historical-literary analysis of modern theological hermeneutics, and social-sciences is once again heading down the cul-de-sac of the intratextual world of biblical narrative.⁷ But it is precisely his hermeneutics which can shed immense light on Christian social responsibility. What are the key features of Frei's realistic, history-like narrative reading relevant to the present

concern about Christian responsibility? The chief characteristics of a realistic narrative reading are the following: one, biblical stories are read literally as describing historical occurrences in the world; two, through the interpretive method of figuration or typology, which is both literal and historical in procedure, various stories in the scriptures are united into a cumulative, chronological continuity; and three, this cumulative narrative encompasses the present age and the reader, so the appropriate hermeneutical response is to fit oneself into that world vis-à-vis figural interpretation.⁸ A realistic narrative reading renders the biblical world as the primary world which distinctively shaped one's understanding of God, the world, and the self. But Frei explains that with the arrival of modern historical-scientific framework the great reversal took place so that "interpretation is now a matter of fitting the biblical story into another world with another story than incorporating that world into the biblical story."⁹ Under the influence of historical-positivism and its obsession with historical veracity, the meaning of the text was reduced to its extratextual, historical reference. When this also proves difficult to maintain, another shift is made from ostensive referents to ideal referents, suggesting that biblical narrative is about universal moral and religious lessons.

Frei determines the great reversal comes with a heavy price because it undermines the church's literal-ascriptive reading of the gospel narratives, resulting in the loss of the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus. Hence, he proposes a critical retrieval of a realistic narrative interpretation which undergirded the church's literal-ascriptive interpretative practice. A realistic narrative is a sort of depiction which renders meaning through the mutual determination of ordinary agents and public circumstances set in the historical context of the everyday world.¹⁰ But not to be missed in Frei's understanding of realistic narrative interpretation is how pivotal the dimension of the public is. He explains, "persons and publically accessible circumstances are indispensable to each other.... In their interaction they form the story and thereby cumulatively render its subject matter."¹¹ Applying this insight to the gospel narratives, which he considers to be a realistic narrative, he highlights that its chief ingredients is characters "set within a specific historical time and within a definite economic and social structure which served to focus their character, station and identity."¹² Thus, we need to come to terms with the fact that the key feature of Frei's critical restoration of a realistic narrative approach is the interaction between the subject and external circumstances set within a specific historical time and concrete economic and social realities. And coming to terms with the public of society in his hermeneutics involves a recognition that at the heart of his proposal lies Marxist literary insight into the dialectical interplay between the subject and external, social structures. He writes, "Marx understood far more clearly than Feuerbach that man (including his thinking) exists both as the moving, dialectical relation of individual and society and as the conjunction of culture with material nature."¹³ Far from advocating fideistic retreat from history to a self-enclosed world of sectarian discourse and practice, Frei's concern for the society is tightly interwoven into his theological hermeneutics.

Frei's concern for the public of society spills over into his Christological and ecclesiological investigations in *The Identity of Jesus Christ*. Based on his analysis of the church's realistic narrative interpretation, Frei observes that the literal sense of the gospel narratives is about a specific person who is none other than Jesus of Nazareth. To investigate further the identity of Jesus rendered by the gospel narratives, Frei borrows insights from Gilbert Ryle's intention-action identity analysis.¹⁴ According to Ryle, a person's identity is not merely symbolized but illustrated and constituted through her interactions with the social circumstances of the public world.¹⁵ As Henry James would say, "What is character but the determination of

incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?”¹⁶ The self is found precisely in the dialectical unity between inner intention and outer action in the public of the world, which are inextricably linked together in their public objectifications, such as her name, speech, and body.¹⁷ On this account, the self is a public self, rather than some entity that stands behind public objectifications like a “ghost in the machine.”¹⁸ If this is the case, then it is possible to describe one’s identity by attending to the narrative about what she undergoes in the meshing together of her interactions with the historical realities.

Before proceeding to apply intention-action identity analysis to the gospel narratives, it is essential to recognize the rationale behind Frei’s selection as it offers a radically different option in modern theology. In subject-alienation models rooted in the idealist notion of the self, a person’s authentic identity is understood to remain separate from her interactions with the public world. Such public objectifications are taken as disjunctive, foreign entities that tend to misrepresent, estrange, and distort the true inward self. This is because the self is essentially understood as a non-objectifiable self-reflectiveness and posited at an infinite distance from its public world. A consequence of such an idealist metaphysics that separates the self into inner and outer is a constant temptation to posit a “ghost in the machine,” e.g., the transcendental ego of both idealism and existentialism. Furthermore, the idealist ontology has enormous repercussions in modern theology. For instance, Schleiermacher was deeply entrenched in the idealist notion of the divide between a self-conscious, subjective inwardness and an objective, bodily humanity—the former being the true self and the latter being an estrangement and distortion of the former—and understood Jesus in terms of inward, unprecedented God-consciousness. He lifted Christ’s subjectivity above the ordinary historical realities according to the quality of his inner subjectivity—the feeling of absolute dependence—and understood God’s indissoluble presence as related to this inner history. Correlatively, Frei criticizes that this introspective gaze results in a flight from history, eventually enclosing Christian faith in the private realm of religious consciousness. Christianity becomes a privatistic religion of mystification or deeper self-reflective stance in the inner and private realm of personal knowledge.

Having clarified his rationale for choosing intention-action analysis, Frei then applies it to the gospel narratives because he takes them to be about enactment of intentions that involve external circumstances in the public world. In a realistic narrative, a character’s identity is both constituted and illustrated through the process of enacting one’s intentions through her engagement with public circumstances and events.¹⁹ The gospel narratives are indeed realistic, history-like descriptions about the enactment of Jesus’ intentions in external circumstances set in a web of socio-economic and political forces, which both constitutes and reveals his unsubstitutable identity.²⁰ This being the case, intention-action description is appropriately suited to the task of examining Jesus’ identity in a concatenation of self-enactment patterns provided in the gospel narratives, such as his teachings, ministry, and passion and resurrection. Or simply, clue to Jesus’ identity lies in the narrative description of what he did and underwent.²¹

What, then, is the content of Jesus’ identity? Frei accepts that the pattern of Jesus’ identification is both simple and complex, but summarizes it by saying that if “we seek to determine what Jesus was like by identifying the enactment of his central intention, we note that those who told the story about him speak of his obedience to God’s will.”²² Jesus’ identity is both illustrated and constituted by his obedience to God in enacting salvation for the world.²³ This is most clearly illustrated in the narrative sequence from his passion to resurrection, rather than in Jesus’ teachings, because this is where we come closest to the historical events in Jesus’ life in which his intention is publically enacted. Beginning from the sequence at the Garden of

Gethsemane and in the public events that transpire afterward, the crucial ingredients of Jesus' intention-action pattern of moral obedience to God and public circumstances collide to render a non-symbolic story.²⁴ Jesus both initiates and consents to the shape of external public events, which are both the hand of God and the rising tide of historical forces that merge to affect Jesus' arrest and death.²⁵ The identity of Jesus is seen indirectly in the mysterious unity of his interactions with this complex web of public and historical forces to enact salvation, even to a "full and public enactment on the cross."²⁶ These public circumstances are unsubstitutable events, such as public trials, beatings, and sufferings, without which there would not be the unsubstitutable identity of Jesus. Under this description, Jesus is a unique, particular, and unsubstitutable person within his equally unique and unsubstitutable circumstances.²⁷ Frei concludes, "We do not need ... more heavily freighted identity descriptions. He is what he appeared to be—the savior Jesus from Nazareth."²⁸ Just as the public world is a crucial dimension of realistic, history-like narrative, it is a pivotal feature of his understanding of the identity of Jesus Christ.

Toward the end of his Christological investigation, Frei turns to the problematic of Christian identity formation, which intensifies his engagement of the public of society. Analogous to how the identity of Jesus is constitutionally connected to his enactment of obedience in the historical details of his life, the church's identity is also constituted through its obedience in the public world. Christians are summoned to approximate Jesus' pattern of obedience by refracting it in their lives through critical and active engagement in the socio-economic and political spheres of the world. But the public world is not merely a means to the objective of Christian identity formation; it is the realm of God's redemptive work. Frei maintains that both the church and the world are to be conceived in unity as instruments of God's providential ordering of human history, making their interaction inevitable, if not necessary. In fact, he situates the church and the world in close proximity as neighbors. He suggests, "Humanity at large is the neighbor given to the church, through whom Christ is present to the church."²⁹ It may be difficult for the church to swallow, but it is through humanity at large that Christ is present to the church! Given a public world understood as also graced by God, there is no place for arrogance and exclusivity in the church because it does not have a monopoly on the presence of Christ.

Pressing further the notion of God's presence in the world, Frei argues that Christ is present to the world in its mysterious passage from event to event. He writes, "there are other events in the history of mankind at large that may parabolically bespeak the presence of Christ in a far more significant and evident way."³⁰ This should not come as a surprise because Frei observes that so much of the sense of divine agency in the Bible is connected to public events.³¹ And judging this to be the case also in the contemporary world, he urges Christians to take note of the events and advancements in the public world, such as the technological revolution, the marvelous integrity of the sciences, movements against poverty and injustice, ecumenical reconciliations, the gift of literature and the arts, the horrors of overpopulation and the destruction of nature, the search for humanness, and the care of human souls.³²

This clearly is not a sectarian withdrawal from the public sphere as critics have charged, but a genuine engagement in a common history following the pattern of Jesus' obedience. But there is a caveat; he cautions that the church is constituted by a different intention-action pattern than that of Jesus. The church is called upon to follow Jesus but not to preempt the role of the Christ figure, because the world's salvation depends solely on the person of Jesus. Therefore, the church is not "to reiterate it completely but only in part, not from too close by but at a distance in

the figure of a disciple than in the cosmic, miraculous, and abysmal destiny of the original.”³³ Christians are not to echo simply or repeat Jesus’ pattern, especially the cosmic scope of his redeeming activity, but to refract it in their own distinct ways. The identity of Christians, personal and collective, is not to be confused with the identity of Jesus.³⁴

Notwithstanding the call to follow at a distance, Frei counsels that Christian discipleship entails hammering out a shape of life that displays the persuasive eloquence of the Christian faith. Christians are to actively engage political, social, and economic worlds in order to reiterate the pattern of Christ’s obedience. This hammering out a Christian life is crucial for two reasons. One, by hammering out a shape of life patterned after Jesus, the Christian faith becomes meaningful and truthful to us.³⁵ It is in and through learning the language and practices of the Christian community that the pilgrim is grasped by the persuasive eloquence of the Christian faith. The Christian life is not primarily about cognitive truths gained by scrambling our conceptual categories, but entails the hard labor of hammering out a life patterned after Jesus Christ in the public world.³⁶ Two, hammering out a persuasive discourse and action is vital toward Christian witness in the world. Frei comments, “Perhaps . . . it has very little to do with any kind of talk and much more with the eloquence of a consistent pattern of life that has seemingly suffered an inexplicable wounding and healing invasion, rare though that sort of thing is.”³⁷ He has in mind here people whose lives displayed such persuasive eloquence, e.g., Søren Kierkegaard, Simone Weil, and Dag Hammarskjöld. Frei asks, “Who would not be able to hear the echo of the original story in these elements of its reiteration? To many a convinced Christian this reiteration is indeed by far the most convincing argument for Christianity.”³⁸ Such figures did not retreat from the public world at large but engaged it and shaped the course of history differently. It is in this spirit, Frei elsewhere urges the Christian to work “with pleasure and hope in behalf of his fellow-men in the very contexts of secular life in which we are all set. One is grateful for the rise of black self-consciousness, one battles for nuclear disarmament, and one pleads with fellow-theologians to make their theology in this time of ‘nearly apocalyptic seriousness’ a theology of (human) freedom.”³⁹

Frei expresses here a profound concern for the public world because the doctrine of providence requires it. Unfortunately, due to his sudden death it is difficult to tell how his public theology might have unfolded. However, in an essay posthumously published, Frei suggests that with “caution, care, forethought and luck the gospel might have affinity with a carefully circumscribed progressive politics, rather than a strategy of revolution or some political theology.”⁴⁰ Frei expresses reservation because there is no natural line of affinity between the witness of the church and liberal politics, so he cautions that it is only “one step at a time, no more than that for the task of public theology.”⁴¹ However, given his understanding of God’s providence in the world, he clearly would have advocated a principled moral and political involvement in the public of the world. He was certainly aware that the future of public history is mysterious and cannot be forecast, but believed historical events and advancements will ultimately find their place in God’s providential ordering of the world in Jesus Christ. This affords Christians a hope, and their ongoing discipleship in the world is a token and a pledge of that eschatological hope.

¹ For a chronological account of the development of postliberalism, see Paul J. DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 1-56. For further reading on postliberal theology, see George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984); Ronald Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospels as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985); William Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989); idem, "Revisionist and Postliberal Theologies and the Public Character of Theology," *Thomist* 49, no. 3 (1985): 392-416; idem, "Paul Ricoeur and Postliberal Theology: A Conflict of Interpretations?" *Modern Theology* 4, no. 1 (1987): 35-52; idem, "Postliberal Theology," in *Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. David Ford, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 343-356; Mark Wallace, *The Second Naiveté: Barth, Ricoeur and the New Yale Theology* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1990); James J. Buckley, "Revisionists and Liberals," in *Modern Theologians*, 327-342; Richard Lints, "The Postpositivist Choice: Tracy or Lindbeck?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61, no. 4 (1993): 655-677. Stephen Stell, "Hermeneutics in Theology and the Theology of Hermeneutics: Beyond Lindbeck and Tracy," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61, no. 4 (1993): 679-703; Terrence Tilley, "Incommensurability, Intratextuality, and Fideism," *Modern Theology* 5, no. 2 (1989): 87-111; Werner Jeanrond, "The Problem of the Starting Point of Theological Thinking," *Hermathena* 156 (1994): 5-20; James M. Gustafson, "Liberal Questions: A Response to William Placher," *The Christian Century* 116, no. 10 (March 24-31, 1999): 353-354.

² Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); hereafter cited as *Eclipse*. Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997); hereafter cited as *Identity*. Hans Frei, "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does It Stretch or Will It Break?" in *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. George Hunsinger and William Placher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); hereafter cited as "The 'Literal Reading'" and *Theology and Narrative*. Hans Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); hereafter cited as *Types*.

³ Frei, *Identity*, 193.

⁴ Hans W. Frei, "Karl Barth: The Theologian," in *Theology and Narrative*, 172-173. On Frei's discussion of Barth's figural interpretation and secular sensibility, see Frei, "Karl Barth: The Theologian," 167-176. See also Karl Barth's own discussion in *Church Dogmatics*, III/2 and *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963).

⁵ Review of *Types of Christian Theology* by Schubert Ogden, *Modern Theology* 9:2 (April 1994): 211-214. See also David Tracy, "Lindbeck's New Program for Theology: A Reflection," *The Thomist* 49 (July 1985): 65; Gordon Michalson, "The Response to Lindbeck," *Modern Theology* 4, no. 2 (January 1988): 113-116.

⁶ Frei's use of the term "public" is rather comprehensive and refers to the common realm of history in which God's providential ordering of the world is revealed. This may not be conspicuous in Frei's work because the general orientation of his investigation is to follow the internal logic of the Christian community in the Anselmian mode, which seems sectarian and removed from the public world at large. But, as explicitly indicated in the final portion of the *Identity of Jesus Christ*, Frei is clearly interested in the connection between God's providence and the political

odyssey in history. So while he has one eye on the formal and dogmatic exercise focused on Jesus of Nazareth, Frei has another eye focused on God's presence in the world, recognizing that there is a divine providential pattern to political developments in the world. See Frei, *Identity*, 55.

⁷ Frei's early project was confused with proposals made by New Criticism and Narrative Theology, which tend to promote a radical sense of discontinuity between the world of biblical narrative and the public world. See Lynn Poland, "The New Criticism, Neo-orthodoxy, and the New Testament," *Journal of Religion* 65, 4 O (1985): 469-470; Gary Comstock, "Two Types of Narrative Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55 (Winter 1987): 687-717. Comstock interpreted Frei to mean that the category of realistic narrative reading rests on both literary and philosophical foundations because he perceives that not only human life but the entire world has a narrative structure. Gary Comstock, "Truth or Meaning: Ricoeur vs. Frei on Biblical Narrative," *Journal of Religion*

66 No 2 (April 1986): 122. See also David Lose, "Narrative and Proclamation in a Postliberal Homiletic," *Homiletic* 23, no 1 (Summer 1998): 1-14.

⁸ Frei, *Eclipse*, 1-3. A brief word about figural interpretation is needed here. The practice of figural interpretation is particularly relevant to the present inquiry because it is an effective means of incorporating the contemporary reader into the intratextual world of biblical narrative and thereby offers an interpretative vantage point from which the present reality is understood and engaged. For further discussion about common misreadings of Frei's hermeneutical proposal as advocating a sectarian retreat from the public world, see Daniel D. Shin, "The Public Character of Hans W. Frei's Theology: Reflections on Theological Hermeneutics, Christology, and Christian Formation" (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2011), Chapter Three.

⁹ Frei, "Literal Reading," 72. The general epistemology at work here is that of meaning as ostensive reference. For instance, deists and rationalists argued that meaning is found in the text's ideational reference, or the universal truths of reason, rather than historical reference to contingent facts. In Locke, we see a movement to make the meaning of narrative with ostensive reference, and in Wolff to collapse meaning with ideal reference to universal truths. For further discussions on the subject matter either as ostensive reference or ideal reference, see Frei, *Eclipse*, 95, 100-101, 119-120, and 256-268.

¹⁰ He writes, "Realistic narrative is that kind in which subject and social setting belong together, and characters and external circumstances fitly render each other." Frei, *Eclipse*, 13. Frei's understanding of realistic narrative interpretation was deeply influenced by Auerbach who says this about the world of the biblical narrative: "What we see here is a world which on the one hand is entirely real, average, identifiable as to place, time, and circumstances." Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 37.

¹¹ Frei, *Identity*, 62. Karl Barth, who has deeply influenced Frei's project, emphasizes the pivotal significance of the concrete historical character of the Christological narratives. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, III/1, trans. G. W. Bromiley et al., ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), 340. Likewise, Frei understands history as the interplay of concrete, particular human agents and public circumstances. And this is of critical importance to his claim that history is the redemptive story of the divine providence enacted in and through Jesus Christ.

¹² Frei, *Eclipse*, 145. For further discussion on the public context of realistic narratives, see Frei, *Eclipse*, 217, 224-232, 280, 312-313, and 321-323. Also see Frei, "Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal," in *Theology and Narrative*, 34.

¹³ Due to his carefully circumscribed and modest use of general theories, he shows great self-restraint in appealing to Marxist literary criticism, but it implicitly funds a great deal of his perspective on the interaction between the subject and historical realities. This insight into the dialectical unity between the self and the contextual structures of the public of society is absolutely critical in rejecting the idealist ontology operative in modern theology, as shown below. On certain occasions Frei openly acknowledges his indebtedness to Marxist thought, as in his essay entitled "Feuerbach and Theology," and this is confirmed by his formal, literary analysis of realistic narrative in *The Eclipse*. Though not as explicit and extensive as one might like, the importance of Marxist literary criticism to his work on realistic narrative is clearly indicated by his references to works by Georg Lukács, René Wellek, and Austin Warren.

Indeed, it is true that Frei's stress on the interplay of character and historical forces and social structures in realistic narrative is appropriated from Auerbach, but he happens to be the teacher of Fredric Jameson, an American Marxist literary critic. Frei's linkage to Marxist thought can also be traced through references to Wayne Meeks's work that has been influenced by Marxist thought, such as the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin. Again, his connection to Marxist literary thought is made obvious in his reference to Lukács's emphasis that the "inner dialectic" between social circumstances and individual existence lies at the heart of realistic literature. These considerations suggest that Frei's work on realistic narrative and Marxist literary criticism share common concerns and interests, even an intellectual genealogy concerning the public of society. Frei, "Feuerbach and Theology," in *Theology and Narrative*, 250-256; idem, *Identity*, 56; idem, "Feuerbach and Theology," *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 35 (1967): 256; idem, *Eclipse*, 217-232, 325, and 335. I am indebted here to Charles Campbell's analysis of Marxist literary

thought in Frei's work. Campbell rightly argues that Frei's insight into the importance of the interplay between character and public circumstances needs to be situated in the larger context of Marxist thought, rather than simply in relation to Auerbach. See Charles Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 74-76. See Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism*, trans. Edith Bone (London: Hillway Publishing Co., 1950).

¹⁴ For further discussion on intention-action identity analysis, see Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of the Mind* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1949), 25-61. Frei's understanding of the self as public deeply is influenced by Gilbert Ryle's work, which has addressed the issue of the "ghost in the machine," or the "intellectualist legend."

¹⁵ Frei, *Identity*, 100. The identity analysis Frei prefers is intention-action description, which answers the question of modification of personal identity by examining a particular way an intention is enacted in a specific instance or a limited stretch of time. But he recognizes that self-manifestation analysis is also helpful because it examines the continuity of personal identity as it persists throughout the whole scope of one's life. Whereas intention-action analysis attends to a person's enactment of intentions in the public world to answer the question "What is he like?", self-manifestation description examines the continuity of identity through its changes over a cumulative period to answer the question "Who is he?" The self-manifestation description of Jesus' identity, then, occurs through the structuring of the gospel narratives as "a whole into a single developing series of stages in the identification of its persisting subject, Jesus of Nazareth." He sees three stages in Jesus' life—infancy, adult ministry, and the last stage of his life—and it is the last stage that is the most important in understanding Jesus' identity. For further discussion of self-manifestation description, see Frei, *Identity*, 100, 136, 164-171.

¹⁶ As cited in Frei, *Identity*, 133-134.

¹⁷ Frei explains that intention-action analysis of the subject attends to "a public medium that both fitly represents and is the subject." Frei, *Identity*, 141. For further discussion on the body as a public medium, see Frei, "The Accounts of Jesus' Death and Resurrection," in *Theology and Narrative*, 62-63.

¹⁸ For further discussion of external, public circumstances, see Frei, *Identity*, 62, 138, 146-149, 154, 169-170, 174, and 190-191. Elsewhere he writes, "A man is known precisely to the extent that he is what he does and what is done to him. A character in the realistic novel may not be simply his public role or persona; but his role is that of describable action and to that extent our slant on him is public.... The novelist also knows ... the direct connection between his characters and their words ... only to the extent that a character is firmly ingredient in his public life, in the interaction of what he does and what is done to him." Frei, "Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal," 36. Concerning external impingements, Frei emphasizes that "a person's story is not only the enactment of his own intentions or his own identity, but the enactment of others' intentions and even unintended events as well as those not specifically intended." Frei, *Identity*, 137.

¹⁹ In his explanation of intention-action identity analysis, Frei highlights that it focuses on a person's public enactment of intentions, because intentions by themselves are inadequate markers of identity—not all intentions are enacted or visible. The specific enactment of intentions for a person are most significantly what she or he does, or put more simply, personal identity is an intentional act. Frei, "Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal," 36; idem, *Identity*, 62, 138, 146-149, 154, 169-170, 174, and 190-191.

²⁰ See DeHart's comments concerning Barth's influence on Frei's understanding of theological anthropology, which considered human identity in terms of embodied and enacted selfhood. DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses*, 104. See also Hans Frei, "The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr," in *Faith and Ethics: The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 106, 111; idem, "The Encounter of Jesus with the German Academy," in *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 137.

²¹ Frei writes, "The identity of Jesus in that story is not given simply in his inner intention, in a kind of story behind the story. It is given, rather, in the enactment of his intentions. But even to say that much is not enough. Rather, his identity is given in the mysterious coincidence of his intentional action with circumstances partly initiated by him, partly devolving upon him." Frei, *Identity*, 138. Hans Frei, "The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr," 115. This is similar to Barth's *Church Dogmatics* beyond the prolegomena in which Christology and soteriology became closely

connected by an understanding of personhood as self-enacted agency or performative project, rather than by a notion of revelation as existentially imparted and appropriated knowledge. The best examples are “The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country” and “The Royal Man,” in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2009), IV/1, 157-210; IV/2, 154-263. Frei, “Barth and Schleiermacher: Divergence and Convergence,” in *Theology and Narrative*, 71-72.

²² See Romans 5:19; Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8. Frei, *Identity*, 146. Frei also comments, “In the New Testament story, Jesus is seen to enact the good of men on their behalf—or their salvation—in perfect obedience to God.” Frei, *Identity*, 145. Later he writes, “Who, then, was Jesus? He was what he did, the man completely obedient to God in enacting the good of men on their behalf.” Frei, *Identity*, 152. See also Frei, “The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr,” 115.

²³ Frei, *Identity*, 145-148 and 154; idem, “The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr,” 110. See Gordon Kaufman’s response to Frei’s use of traditional Christian symbols, which he considers not only archaic but also dangerously oppressive and destructive at times. Gordon Kaufman, “Response to Hans Frei,” in *Legacy of H. Richard Niebuhr* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 31. On feminist critique of traditional doctrines of atonement and response, see Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); Leanne Van Dyke, “Do Theories of the Atonement Foster Abuse?” in *Perspectives* 12, no. 2 (February 1997): 11-13; Sarah Coakley, “Kenosis and Subversion,” in *Powers and Submissions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

²⁴ Frei, *Identity*, 59 and 62. Also see Frei, “The Accounts of Jesus’ Death and Resurrection,” 54.

²⁵ The forces of history include his accusers and judges, all the vested interests they represent, and behind them a vast mass of humanity. Frei, *Identity*, 156. Mike Higton helpfully clarifies that the constitution and illustration of Jesus’ identity occurs simultaneously as God’s own enactment of redemptive activity in the world. And for this very reason, we cannot think of God except by thinking about Christ. Mike Higton, *Christ, Providence, and History: Hans W. Frei’s Public Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 81-82.

²⁶ Frei, *Identity*, 165.

²⁷ Frei, “The Accounts of Jesus’ Death and Resurrection,” 56. Frei, *Identity*, 147.

²⁸ Frei, *Identity*, 172. According to Frei, this is the manner in which the New Testament narratives have displayed the literal-ascriptive logic attributed to them by the early church. The unsubstitutable identity is ascribed by the Christian community to Jesus of Nazareth as the subject of various titles, predicates, and actions. The literal sense of the gospel narratives is about a specific person who is none other than Jesus. This is in stark contrast to how modern liberal theology understood Jesus Christ from its anthropological starting points and its preoccupation with the apologetic goal of arguing for the possibility of truth-claims about revelation in Jesus Christ based on a general account of the human condition. The loss of literal-ascriptive reading has resulted in the loss of the self-focused, unsubstitutable identity of Jesus Christ. He therefore reverses the logic of modern theology by claiming the meaningfulness of the gospel narratives as a function of their narrative form, and also soteriology as a function of Christology. Frei, “Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal,” 28.

²⁹ Frei, *Identity*, 192.

³⁰ Frei, *Identity*, 192.

³¹ Frei, *Identity*, 189; idem, “The Accounts of Jesus’ Death and Resurrection,” 72.

³² Frei, *Identity*, 193.

³³ Frei, “The Accounts of Jesus’ Death and Resurrection,” 56. Frei also writes, “[Jesus] is a very demanding figure—to judge by a large consensus in a long tradition—requiring both our confession of him as Lord and Master and a form of life not indeed heroically reiterative of his own but recognizably shaped in his image even though at the distance of imperfection.” Frei, “The Encounter of Jesus with the German Academy,” 133.

³⁴ Frei recalls the closing lines of Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*: "He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou me!' and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who he is." Frei, "The Encounter of Jesus with the German Academy," 134. Gene Outka helpfully explains the impassable difference between Jesus and believers as well as points of correspondence. He notes that the believers are called upon to understand their identity in light of Jesus' and to extend appropriate patterns of obedience in the church and in the world. The correspondence lies in the range of activity that includes humanity at large. But there is a limit set on the activity of the believers because of the disjuncture between Jesus and his followers. God's providential ordering of the world in Jesus transcends the intramural activities of the church. Gene Outka, "Following at a Distance: Ethics and the Identity of Jesus," in *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation*, ed. Garrett Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 145-153.

³⁵ Frei, *Identity*, 199. Frei's refusal here of an imaginative obliteration of time should be taken as a dismissal of a sectarian, ghettoizing retreat from the world. On the relation between theological hermeneutics and Christian formation, see Wayne Meeks, "A Hermeneutics of Social Embodiment," *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (January, April, July 1986): 184-185.

³⁶ Frei specifies the indissoluble relation between truth-claims and Christian praxis in this way: Christianity is "true in some other sense than a referential one. It is true by being the way it works in one's life, and by holding the world, including political, economic and social worlds, to account by the gauge of its truthfulness." Frei, "Response to 'Narrative Theology,'" in *Theology and Narrative*, 210.

³⁷ Frei, *Identity*, 70.

³⁸ Frei, "The Accounts of Jesus' Death and Resurrection," 54.

³⁹ Frei, "Karl Barth: The Theologian," 172-173.

⁴⁰ Hans Frei, "H. Richard Niebuhr on History, Church, and Nation," in *Theology and Narrative*, 232. Given his understanding of the unfolding of God's providence in the world, a carefully circumscribed progressive politics entails reading the newspaper and the Bible along side each other, which demands the skill of figural imagination of the complex realities of the historical world through the parable of Christ.

⁴¹ Frei, "H. Richard Niebuhr on History, Church, and Nation," 232-233.