

The Year of Jubilee: From Asceticism to Jubilation in Contemporary Christianity

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### *Introduction*

In Isaiah 53, the prophecy of the messiah describes him as “despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity.”<sup>1</sup> Because most Christians understand this verse as a portrayal of Jesus Christ, it became emblematic of the early-Christian relationship with suffering. Early-Christians maintained a strong relationship with asceticism, suffering, and depravity as images of the cross remained fresh in the mind of the community. The story of Christianity was thus based upon suffering. This way of life allowed for a closer connection to Jesus by living a life similar to His. The persecution of the Christian community after the death of Jesus emphasized this notion and suffering for the benefit of the religion was seen as beneficial. Additionally, in a worldview where Paganism was the standard, Christianity had to make a clean break from indulgent practices in order to create a unique identity for practitioners. Today, however, in a Secular age things have changed. We now see joy instead of suffering as a focus of Christianity. Joy, or what I will call “jubilation” now can be seen as a spectrum from jubilation as church doctrine, to jubilation as a gift from the Holy Spirit.

Many scholars of Religion have concluded that the rise of Protestantism led to the rise of Secularism.<sup>2</sup> In particular, William Cavanaugh’s book titled *The Myth of Religious Violence*, makes a critical connection between Protestantism and Secularism. He argues that the rise of Protestantism paved the way for Secularism to flourish. In the same way that Protestantism constructed Secularism, the reverse is also now true. The emergence of Secularism is reconstructing Protestantism. The relationship between these two phenomena is dialectical and continuous. The Protestant response to Secularism includes a centralization of joy rather than asceticism in Christian practice. However, jubilation has a long history in Christianity. Christians

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 53:3

<sup>2</sup> Theorists like Webb Keane, Elizabeth Hurd, and Saba Mahmood comment on this connection.

throughout time have valued jubilation, and this emphasis is rooted in Biblical and pre-Modern understandings of the religion. That jubilation emerges now, in the Secular age, as central to the faith can both be seen as a response to Secularism and a recovery of an ancient theme.

The rise of Secularism in modernity is forcing Christianity to adapt to a changing landscape. The religion has to focus on remaining helpful and relevant in a world that is becoming increasingly concerned with drawing the line between religion and all other aspects of society. In order to fit the needs of society, Christianity begins shifting away from depravity centered religion in favor of a religion based on joy and happiness. In this paper, I will use the term jubilation to include all forms and interpretations of joy. Jubilation is an umbrella that includes joy, laughter, and rejoicing. This wider definition allows more freedom to engage with evidence of joy (such as laughter and rejoicing) in addition to the more general understanding of joy as emotion.

In his book titled *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor establishes his own theory of Secularization. In this work, he concludes that Secularism does not stop at the separation of church and state. Rather, Secularism deeply and dramatically impacts all facets of life because all modern people live in “the immanent frame.” People living in the immanent frame are focused primarily on the physical and immediate world. The pivot away from focusing on the afterlife and transcendent world requires Christianity to move toward a religion that acknowledges the physical benefits of the faith. In contemporary Christianity, jubilation is commonly seen as a benefit to the Christian faith that makes religion a valuable addition to daily life.

I argue that with the rise of Secularization, Christians have reframed their religion to distance from suffering and instead center jubilation to maintain cultural relevance and to make the religion more palatable for the Secular Age, while also pushing back against Secularization

in order to return to Biblical Christianity. In the United States, many modern Christians would agree about the significance of jubilation in Christian practice. They may even suggest that it is an essential element of Christianity. But how it is conceptualized, emphasized, and practiced ranges from jubilation as church doctrine, as a byproduct of faith, as discipline, and as a gift from the Holy Spirit. All of these configurations aim to integrate biblical references, early Christian understandings, and the contemporary pressures on religion as justifications for this shift.

In this essay, I will first present Charles Taylor's arguments regarding Secularism and how it has impacted Christian practice. Next, I will use William Cavanaugh to understand the reciprocal relationship between Christianity and Secularism. Then, I will provide a brief overview of Biblical citations of jubilation to help us understand the textual warrants of this practice. Next, I will look toward pre-Modern understandings of the role of jubilation in Christianity from Father Chrysostom and Saint Benedict of Nursia. Finally, I will move to the contemporary theological conceptions of jubilation. This section will be organized by most buffered conceptions of jubilation to the most porous conceptions of jubilation. I will use the book titled *Joy and Human Flourishing*, which includes chapters from different theologians, as a basis for these various conceptions as it includes chapters from prominent contemporary Christian theologians. I will use additional sources from a variety of denominations, in order to illustrate that the trend toward jubilation is common throughout Contemporary Christianity. Finally, I will end with the most porous understanding of jubilation which is a case study of jubilation in Pentecostalism.

### *Secularism and the Immanent Frame*

In his book titled *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor establishes a new framework for conceptualizing the way Secularization impacts society. To begin, he presents two commonly used definitions of Secularism. The first is the separation of church and state. The second is a large scale decrease in religiosity in favor of atheism and agnosticism. Taylor argues that both of these definitions are insufficient to understand the complexities of how Secularism changes the lives of all living in the Secular Age. These definitions suggest that religion is merely removed from the political sphere, and individuals choose not to attend religious services. Taylor argues instead that the very fabric of society is altered with the rise of Secularism. Taylor presents a third definition of Secularism which he calls “Secularism three” that is based on conditions of belief. “The shift to secularity in this sense consists, among other things, of a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace.”<sup>3</sup> What differs about this new definition is acknowledging the way that the Secular Age changes the very essence of society and the structures at play. All are impacted by the shift to Secularism, even those who choose to add a religious component to life.

To stress that society at large is impacted by Secularism, Taylor constructs a new concept called “the immanent frame.” “The immanent frame” is an outlook especially concerned with the physical and present world. “The immanent frame” is made up of two interrelated key points: the buffered self and the movement towards a “God-neutral” framework. Taylor explains the experience of the modern or buffered sense of self by saying, “the possibility exists of taking a distance from, disengaging from everything outside the mind. My ultimate purposes are those

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<sup>3</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

which arise within me.”<sup>4</sup> The buffered self is able to separate and discipline emotions. This differs from the pre-Secular “porous” conception of self. For the porous self, “The source of its most powerful and important emotions are outside of the “mind”: or better put, the very notion that there is a clear boundary, allowing us to define an inner base area, grounded in which we can disengage from the rest, has no sense.”<sup>5</sup> The porous self views all feelings as being inflicted upon by an outside source. This point is important when looking toward jubilation because it is no longer assumed that jubilation always comes from God.

In his book, Taylor uses the example of black bile to further understand the distinction between the buffered and porous self. In medieval science and medicine, it was thought that black bile was associated with a melancholy temperament. There is no way for the pre-Modern person to separate their body from their emotions. “Black bile is not the cause of melancholy, it embodies, it *is* melancholy.”<sup>6</sup> The “emotional life is porous... it doesn’t simply exist in an inner, mental space.”<sup>7</sup> In contrast, modern medicine would define melancholy as a problem with the body, like a hormone imbalance or lack of nutrients. The modern person immediately feels relieved because the emotion is not justified. The modern person is able to make the distinction between mind and body. This allows for a distance and disengagement from emotion. The pre-Modern person is unable to disengage in this way because “black bile *is* melancholy.”<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, in the immanent frame, there is a “God-neutral” framework. In the pre-Secular God-implicated worldview, “societies and not just parishes but whole kingdoms, were seen as standing together towards God...[t]he deviancy of some would call down punishment on all.”<sup>9</sup>

But in the “God-neutral” understanding, faith is individualistic. Additionally, God is not

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<sup>4</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 42.

necessarily intimately involved in the everyday, mundane aspects of life. This is because there is human agency now at play. Humans can now play a role by controlling or disengaging from emotions. Therefore, God's role in everyday life is scaled-down. The immanent frame allows for individuals to see God as an overarching creator, but not necessarily a particular being responsible for every single event and human emotion.

Within the immanent frame, there is no longer a need for the transcendent world to engage in society. There is no longer a need to expect religious texts to operate in politics or economics because the physical world is complete without the addition of religion. In pre-Secularist society, the transcendent world was required to answer for and understand the physical world, but this is no longer the case. We are all living with this framework because of our Secular age. We still have the choice to remain open to the transcendent world, but it is no longer essential. Taylor argues that "the immanent frame" permits some of us to live our lives open to the transcendent and others to live closed lives grounded in a self-sufficing humanism. He takes special care to not place value judgements on either the closed or open perspective, but notes that both require a "leap of faith."<sup>10</sup> There is a leap of faith required to accept religion or the transcendent world as true, but an equal leap required to accept that all in existence is immanent and physical.

In this argument, Secularism is not something that an individual can opt out of. Rather, Secularism and "the immanent frame" actually change each individual's relationship to the world and themselves. The immanent frame is characterized by a separation between body and mind. It is also characterized by a rise in humanistic understandings of personhood. Humans now see themselves as "an order of nature, in which we are a part of this greater whole."<sup>11</sup> Time shifts

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<sup>10</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 550.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 547.

from being sacred in the pre-Secularist era, to being perceived as a resource.<sup>12</sup> Even those who choose to follow a religion still operate within the framework presented. Therefore, Secularism is not merely a shift from religious to irreligious, or the separation of church and state. Secularism deeply transforms the foundation of how each individual constructs their own identities and their choice to adopt a religious appendage or not.

Due to “the immanent frame”, Christianity is no longer engrained in every aspect of society and therefore is not essential in daily lives. While some may choose it as an add-on to give life meaning or add a sense of community, it is absolutely possible to operate in the world without any religious belief. This movement to Secularism means that religions now have to prove their relevance and benefits so practitioners continue to choose a belief system that is no longer required. Because of the newfound connection between humanity as an order of nature, individuals now see their goals as based on earthly desires and pleasures. Taylor says, “This is continued in the last two centuries by a discourse, not of anti-Christianity because of its supposed rejection, or regulation of the sensual. The human good is in its very essence sensual, earthly; whoever identifies a transcendent goal departs from it, betrays it.”<sup>13</sup> Christianity is forced to pivot away from an emphasis on depravity and suffering in favor of a religion that is palatable to the secular gaze. This includes emphasizing jubilation as a crucial aspect of the faith. A faith centered around joy is more likely to retain practitioners than a religion that asks followers to forego enjoyment and pleasure.

Understanding the context of Secularization is essential for understanding the complex motivations of contemporary Christian theology. But this does not indicate that jubilation in the Christian tradition emerged out of pressure from Secularism. Jubilation has long standing roots

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<sup>12</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 542.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 547.

stemming from the life of Jesus and has always been an element of Christian practice. The rise of Secularism and therefore “the immanent frame” created a new cultural context that allowed Christianity to retrieve an element of jubilation that was present but perhaps under emphasized in its ancient period.

### *Christianity and Secularism as Reciprocal Entities*

Secularism undoubtedly has an impact on religion and its function in society. This concept especially affects Protestantism since it is so closely linked to Secularism. And it can easily be argued that Protestantism is more closely linked to Secularization than other religious systems because it is focused on separating the “religious” from the “irreligious” in order to have the purest form of faith. This separation allows for religion to be boxed into one facet of life, instead of consuming every space. Thus, religion is no longer needed to function and makes way for “Secularism three.” But it is not simple enough to say that Secularism changes Christianity. These two ideas are not opposites, but are rather complementary ideas that are in constant conversation with one another.

In William Cavanaugh’s book titled *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*, Cavanaugh argues that the rise of Protestantism also led to the rise of Secularization. Cavanaugh operates with the assumption that there is no transcultural or transhistorical definition of religion. The definition changes based on place, culture, and power dynamics. This makes religion difficult to pin down exactly. In the premodern era, *religio* was used to describe all aspects of life that involved duty to the emperor and the gods. For this reason, religion and politics were impossible to separate. During the Reformation, Protestants emphasized a hyper-individualized relationship with God that no longer depended on a priest or

church community for building faith. Protestants purified the religion by removing aspects of “tradition” or “culture,” therefore drawing a distinction regarding what is religious.

Religiousness is now tied to praying and going to church, a small subset of life. Rather than affirming the subtraction story (that secularism happens because of decreased religious practice), Cavanaugh states that defining religion as being separate from culture or economics decreases the power and importance of religion in everyday society. This only occurs when societies as a whole purify religion by removing aspects that can be defined as “irreligious.” He explains: “The rise of religion is accompanied by the rise of its twin, the secular realm, a pairing which will gradually remove the practice of Christian religion from a central place in the social order of the West.”<sup>14</sup> Introducing the category of religion narrows the authority of religion in other aspects of life leading to Secularism. With Secularism, religion becomes an optional add-on to the rest of life and is no longer necessary to explain economic or political life.

As Secularism emerges on a large scale, the concept of religion also emerges. The two are inextricably linked because religion is only defined once Secularism defines what religion is not. Protestantism shapes Secularism, by drawing boundaries around religious practice making way for the secular. And Secularism in turn shapes religion by forcing it to fit within “the immanent frame.” The relationship between religion and Secularism is reciprocal in nature.

### *Jubilation in the Bible*

The role of joy in the Bible is complex and multifaceted. The varying languages and translations make it difficult to simply look for mentions of the word “joy” since there are many words that translate to joy, each with their own unique connotations. There is one clear tension that is present in the verses that mention joy and laughter. Some verses seem to see joy as a gift

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<sup>14</sup> Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 70.

given by God while others see joy as an emotion that individuals must cultivate. In order to unpack these Biblical justifications for porous or buffered conceptions, I will first look at Biblical references of the Greek word *chara* or joy, then look at warrants of laughter in the Bible, and finally look towards the Greek word *kauchōmenoi* often translated as rejoicing.

When looking to the Bible for verses about jubilation, it is almost impossible to know where to start. In New International Version translations, there are 214 mentions of the English word “joy” in the Bible, and one-fourth of the mentions are in the book of Psalms. The most common Greek word for joy is *χαρά* or *chara* which is mentioned 60 times in the Bible. The common Hebrew words are *rina* and *sameach*. According to Strong’s Concordance, *chara* means joy, calm delight, or inner gladness. It is related to *chairo*, which means to rejoice and *charis*, which means grace. The word *chara* suggests joy because of God’s grace, and joy in knowing God’s goodness. On the other hand the Hebrew words for jubilation do not have the connotation of grace. For our purposes here we will focus on New Testament uses of jubilation.

In her chapter of *Joy and Human Flourishing*, Marianne Meye Thompson aims to make sense of the role of joy in the Bible. She describes three categories of joy. The first is joy as a human response to occasions and events. Here we see joy, gladness, singing, and shouting due to events such as marriage. Therefore, the events are seen as good because they bring out jubilation. Secondly, joy is mentioned as the antithesis of suffering. Oftentimes in scripture, joy takes the place of sorrow and grieving. Most of these verses are found in the Hebrew Bible in the books of Psalms and the prophet Isaiah. And the third use is joy in the midst of affliction. This type of joy “provides a deeply grounded sense of well-being in the present world.”<sup>15</sup> In order to best understand the shift from a faith based on asceticism and suffering, to a faith that emphasizes jubilation, we will primarily be looking at verses that fall into the third category of joy

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<sup>15</sup> Thompson, “Reflections on Joy in the Bible”, 20.

mentioned in the Bible, verses that use *chara*. Additionally, I will be narrowing my search even further to the New Testament as it provides great insight into the ways Christians construct their beliefs around asceticism and jubilation.

This important third category of joy focuses on a supernatural peace and happiness that occurs even within dire circumstances. This distinction is crucial because it acknowledges the incredible pain, suffering, and persecution that early Christians faced. These verses do not ask Christians to forget or gloss over their suffering, but instead, within that suffering to choose to rest in God's faithfulness. One of the most popular verses of this type is in the book of James, said to have been written by Jesus' brother to an unknown group of Christians. James writes, "My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing."<sup>16</sup> The Greek word *chara* is used to demonstrate joy that comes from God's grace. The act of choosing joy actually develops a deeper faith for the Christians that are experiencing persecution. James describes joy as a spiritual discipline similar to praying and living in community because faith is incomplete without this practice. James says here that joy is a choice; it's a discipline that requires work and dedication. It will challenge us to become more mature and complete in our faith. This argument shows elements of the porous and buffered self. While Christians can create joy within themselves as a buffered construction, God is still responsible for granting joy in a more porous understanding of emotion. This will liminal space between the porous and buffered self will be a common theme throughout the paper. Additionally it shows benefits to the physical world, but also to the transcendent world because joy develops faith.

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<sup>16</sup> James 1:2-3

Then there are verses like Romans 15:13, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>17</sup> This verse seems to imply that God gives joy as a reward for following Him. Galatians 5:22 portrays a similar message that ties back to the Holy Spirit. The verse states, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness.”<sup>18</sup> The verse shows that the gift of joy is given when the Holy Spirit is accepted into one's life. Both of these verses have the Greek *charas* that is translated to the English word joy. Understanding the complexities of the original Greek texts create a deeper understanding of biblical joy as being inextricably linked to God. And this theme continues in Acts 2:28 where faith in God is responsible for the gift of joy without the practitioner actively seeking. The verse states, “You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.”<sup>19</sup> These verses, in combination with James 1:2-3 complicate human understanding of joy as it seems like it can come from various sources because of various actions. While humans have agency as they choose to accept God and follow His will, there does seem to be a porous element here because God is the giver of joy. The ambiguity on the topic, especially in considering how joy is cultivated makes it difficult for theologians to make a solid argument regarding the porous or buffered nature of Christianity.

Another signifier of jubilation is laughter. Laughter is mentioned many times in the Bible. A quick Google search will lead you to pages and pages of Bible verses that discuss laughter and jubilation. Verses like, “Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them”<sup>20</sup> and “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven... a time to weep and a

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<sup>17</sup> Romans 15:13

<sup>18</sup> Galatians 5:22

<sup>19</sup> Acts 2:28

<sup>20</sup> Psalm 126:2

time to laugh”<sup>21</sup> are abundant. Even in Genesis, Sarah laughs at guests who tell her she is going to have a baby because of her old age. Once Isaac is born, Sarah says, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.”<sup>22</sup> Humor and laughter is present throughout the Bible as a reaction to God’s grace and also as a reaction to ironic or surprising events. There is a major distinction in these verses between derisive laughter and joyful laughter.

In the Old Testament, there is tension between God’s autonomous orderliness and human disobedience. “Repeatedly, we find laughter of derision as God points out the flaw in human thinking which assumes it can challenge God’s order.”<sup>23</sup> Sarah laughs in Genesis, highlighting God’s ultimate authority and power over human life. But laughter in the Old Testament should not be equated with frivolity. The writer of Ecclesiastes says, “Laughter is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish.”<sup>24</sup> The writer is referencing the trivial side of laughter that is scorned.

The debate regarding whether or not Jesus laughed has been a conversation surrounding the church for centuries. Determining whether or not Jesus participated in laughter influences how laughter is perceived by Christians. While the answer is unclear, the Bible does mention laughter in 25 separate scriptures. Only three of these verses are in the New Testament. All three mentions of laughter in the New Testament of the New Revised Standard Version are in the gospel of Luke. The first mention occurs after Jesus taught and healed a large group of people from Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre. The crowd tried to touch him “and those who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured.” After this event, Jesus turns to his disciples and he says, “Blessed are you

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<sup>21</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:1-4

<sup>22</sup> Genesis 21:6

<sup>23</sup> Heddendorf, *From Faith to Fun: The Secularisation of Humor*, 52.

<sup>24</sup> Ecclesiastes 2:2.

who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.”<sup>25</sup> Jesus insinuates here that laughter is a blessing from God that occurs after hardship. Here laughter is something that is juxtaposed with sorrow as if to say that laughter is truly a byproduct of jubilation.

According to Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers, Luke 6:21 is “the only instance in the New Testament of the use of ‘laughter’ as the symbol of spiritual joy.”<sup>26</sup> While there are several verses, like James 4:9, that says, “Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.”<sup>27</sup> The accurate translation of the text is debated. The Greek word ἔλως or gelos, “was too much associated with the lower forms of mirth to find ready acceptance.”<sup>28</sup> Whereas the Aramaic word used in Luke 6:21 is the same word used in Genesis 21:6 when Isaac is born. This had a higher meaning “Hebrew laughter was a somewhat graver thing than that of Greek or Roman. It had no comedy to degrade it.” When taking into account the original Greek, this scripture promotes laughter as a gift from God that is contrasted with weeping caused by worldly events.

Laughter is mentioned again in chapter 8 of the Gospel of Luke when Paul recounts a miracle performed by Jesus. A leader of a synagogue came to Jesus because his twelve-year-old daughter was dying. He begged Jesus to perform a miracle. The crowd told him to leave because his daughter was already dead. Jesus responded by saying, “Do not weep; for she is not dead but sleeping.” After Jesus spoke, verse 53 states that “[the crowd] laughed at him, knowing that she was dead.” This particular scripture is very different from the previous scripture that treats laughter as a sign of spiritual joy. This scripture seems to show a different side of laughter that is

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<sup>25</sup> Luke 6:21

<sup>26</sup> Ellicott, “Book Review - Luke”.

<sup>27</sup> James 4:9

<sup>28</sup> Ellicott, “Book Review - Luke”.

mocking Jesus and his miracles and therefore would allude to the fact that Christians should not be using laughter, especially in the case of mockery.

Of course, mentions of laughter in the Bible do not tell the whole story. There are many verses in the New Testament that discuss jubilation and gladness without specifically mentioning laughter. Also, some books were taken out of the Bible during the canonization of the text because their stories were deemed ‘incongruent’ with the other books. Some of these books in the Apocrypha or the non canonized texts do mention laughter. For example, the Gospel of Judas, a gnostic gospel that has a contentious history, says,

One day he was with his disciples in Judea, and he found them gathered together and seated in pious observance. When he [approached] his disciples, gathered together and seated and offering a prayer of thanksgiving over the bread, *[he] laughed*.<sup>29</sup> The disciples said to [him], “Master, why are you laughing at [our] prayer of thanksgiving? We have done what is right.” He answered and said to them, “I am not laughing at you. You are not doing this because of your own will but because it is through this that your god [will be] praised.” They said, “Master, you are [...] the son of our god.” Jesus said to them, “How do you know me? Truly [I] say to you, no generation of the people that are among you will know me.”<sup>30</sup>

This passage complicates the notion of laughter in the church because it mentions Jesus laughing. “Jesus’ laughter in The Gospel of Judas indicates his awareness of the difference between the superiority of his knowledge and the ignorance of his interlocutors. His derisive laughter serves to indicate their appropriate relation to Jesus regarding knowledge. Marius Nel, in the article titled “He who laughs last – Jesus and laughter in the Synoptic and Gnostic traditions” sees this scripture as an acknowledgment that God’s knowledge is complete, but humanity’s knowledge is partial.”<sup>31</sup> While Gnostic texts are not seen as authoritative as the

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<sup>29</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>30</sup> Gospel of Judas

<sup>31</sup> Nel, “He who laughs last – Jesus and laughter in the Synoptic and Gnostic traditions”, 70.

canonized Bible, this story in the Gospel of Judas still provides insight into early Coptic Christian's perspective of Jesus and laughter.

The Bible seems clear that laughter is not fully good or fully bad, but the reason for the laughter is in question. Laughter in the case of Sarah in Genesis and Jesus in Luke chapter 8 is used to highlight disbelief in God's autonomy. Sarah laughs at the prospect of bearing a child. The crowd laughs at Jesus not believing he can raise someone from the dead. In these examples, laughter does not seem to be the problem, but rather the mockery of God's authority is the central issue. Laughter as a reaction to God's grace and goodness, like in Luke chapter 6 and is an important spiritual attribute that should be practiced.

Finally, I will discuss the prevalence of "rejoicing" throughout the New Testament to round out the study of jubilation in Christianity. Romans 5:10-11 gives Christians the instruction to "rejoice" -or *καυχάομαι* (*kauchōmenoi*) in Greek- because of God's goodness. "Now that we are God's friends, how much more will we be saved by Christ's life! But that is not all; we rejoice because of what God has done through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has now made us God's friends."<sup>32</sup> The greek word *kauchōmenoi* means to boast in or rejoice in God. Romans departs from the notion that jubilation is a gift all Christians receive when they accept the faith. Rather it is a discipline that is required even in the midst of pain and suffering because of God's goodness. 1 Thessalonians echos a similar sentiment by asking Christians to be joyful and rejoice because God actually desires them to be this way. "Be joyful always, pray at all times, be thankful in all circumstances. This is what God wants from you in your life in union with Christ Jesus."<sup>33</sup> Rather than being a gift from God, this mindset is a practice for Christians that pleases the Lord.

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<sup>32</sup> Romans 5:10-11

<sup>33</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

This brief review of jubilation in the Bible tells us several key ideas that will be helpful when examining pre-secular and post-secular Christianity. First, the text is inconclusive about how joy is cultivated. Some verses allude to the fact that joy is a gift from God, other verses lean toward joy as choice Christians must cultivate within themselves. This ambiguousness makes room for Christians to take up a more porous conception of self that would attribute all emotion to God, or a more buffered conception that would see emotion as something that could be constructed and internally regulated. Secondly, the Bible suggests that jubilation, within the right context, is useful and beneficial for the Christian practice. Cases of mockery are frowned upon, but jubilation because of God, as a reaction to grace, or as choice appear to be Biblically warranted.

### *Pre-Modern Conceptions of Jubilation*

Pre-modern Christians kept a strict adherence to depravity, poverty, and asceticism. Early Christians deprived themselves of pleasure in the physical world in favor of benefits in the afterlife. In addition, these Christians saw God as intimately involved in each aspect of life. God was viewed as the ultimate giver of all emotions, including joy. This is in line with Taylor's theory of the pre-Modern, porous self as the emotions were given by God and therefore could not be regulated or distanced from the self.

For early Catholic monks, asceticism was a critical aspect of their conceptions of faith. Saint Benedict of Nursia, a Catholic saint that established twelve communities of monks, wrote his instructions for how monks ought to live. "The Rule of St Benedict, from the ninth century onward almost universally accepted as the set of norms regulating monastic life, expressly warns of the dangers of laughter and idleness."<sup>34</sup> This book was written in 516 by Benedict of Nursia

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<sup>34</sup> Ghose, *Laughing Gods, Weeping Virgins: Laughter in the History of Religion*, 131.

particularly to establish order, foster understanding, and provide a ‘spiritual father’ for the new communities that he established. Soon this became the foundation of the Benedictine Order of the Catholic church. In Chapter 7, humility is divided into twelve degrees or steps to the ladder of heaven. The tenth rung states, “Do not readily laugh.”<sup>35</sup> In this work, he also claims Christians should “avoid elation.”<sup>36</sup> There is a strong correlation between humility and the absence of laughter for monks. When discussing the Easter season, St. Benedict seems to contradict himself by saying, “with joy of the Holy Spirit, may offer to God somewhat over and above the measure laid upon him; that is to say, let him deny himself in the matter of food, of sleep, of talking, of mirth; and let him look forward to holy Easter with the joy of spiritual longing.”<sup>37</sup> While humility and therefore abstaining from excessive jubilation is crucial for the afterlife, there does seem to be a role for jubilation in early Christian practice. This jubilation is based solely in the resurrection of Jesus, rather than outside frivolity.

Various other real and fictitious monks have tried to weigh the balance between jubilation and asceticism since the construction of the church. One central debate surrounds whether or not Jesus laughed. The Bible never mentions whether or not Jesus laughed. The famous novel, *Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco chronicles the lives of Benedictine Monks as they navigate the question of whether or not Jesus laughed. In one of the famous lines, two monks are discussing a book by Aristotle about comedy. One of the monks, Jorge de Burgos, is determined to abandon pleasure while another monk, William of Baskerville, is questioning his decision. William of Baskerville asks, “But what is so alarming about laughter?”<sup>38</sup> Jorge de Burgos responds by saying, “Laughter kills fear, and without fear, there can be no faith, because without fear of the

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<sup>35</sup> Benedict, *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 14.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Benedict, *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Eco, *Name of the Rose*, 575.

Devil there is no more need of God.” William of Baskerville responds to this by claiming that laughter is proper to humans, that it symbolizes human rationality and may be used to show foolishness to the wicked. Jorge ends the argument by saying comedy encourages, “defect, fault, weakness -- would induce false scholars to try to redeem the lofty with a diabolical reversal “through the acceptance of the base.”<sup>39</sup> Although this book is fiction, it does a great job representing the way the early Church navigated conversations surrounding jubilation and how it fits into the Christian faith practice.

Real-life Church Father Chrysostom, from the early Catholic church, shares a similar sentiment as Jorge de Burgos. While he does not advocate for the absolute abolishment of jubilation in Christian lives, he does caution Christians to be intentional with how they engage with jubilation and laughter. Chrysostom says, “I speak not to take away laughter altogether but to call for a different, reformed type of laughter, let us laugh, I pray you, and be merry so we sin not” (11). Then in Homily XVII, Chrysostom says, “Christ is crucified and dost thou laugh?”<sup>40</sup> In these quotes, the center of Christian lives is the crucifixion of Christ, and laughing in any way would be wholly inappropriate. Still he recognizes a place for joy and pleasure in Christian practice. Chrysostom writes about the joys of fasting. He says, “Jesus fasted to show us what a great good fasting is as a means against the devil. Fasting is sad for naïve persons but a joy for those who seek wisdom.”<sup>41</sup> He shows the way that jubilation comes in the midst of suffering. Asceticism is not the absence of jubilation, but rather a gateway to it. In this understanding, early Catholic monks did not necessarily pursue joy independently but saw it as an consummation of their diligence in the ascetic lifestyle.

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<sup>39</sup> Eco, *Name of the Rose*, 578.

<sup>40</sup> Buckley, *Morality of Laughter*, 164.

<sup>41</sup> Elders, *Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors: The Philosophers and the Church Fathers*, 175.

In addition to the aforementioned examples of jubilation in the early Catholic tradition, Martin Luther provides a different insight into how derisive laughter and humor can be used to highlight the discrepancies within the Catholic church. Luther uses satire to critique the Catholic church. “To the end of his life, for all his devout intensity and single-minded concentration on the issue of God, Luther could use laughter as a powerful persuasive tool and usually could laugh at himself as well.<sup>42</sup>” Luther’s contemporaries criticized his use of humor for such a holy conversation. In many ways, Protestantism hinges on Luther’s ability to persuade Catholics of Catholicism’s shortcomings. He builds a new church and a new understanding of the Bible through the use of humor. Although, when looking to the Biblical understanding of derisive laughter, it appears that Luther’s use of humor may not be in line with Biblical teachings.

On several other occasions, Luther claims to use humor to deal with painful topics. When preaching, Luther uses satire in order to make his points. For example, Luther wrote a treatise titled “On Jews and Their Lies” that is riddled with satire. At the end of this rather abhorrent work, Luther writes a prayer for Jews urging them to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. In it, he says, “I am loath to think of this, and it has not been a pleasant task for me to write this book, being obliged to resort now to anger, now to satire, to avert my eyes from the terrible picture which they present.”<sup>43</sup> He used humor as a way to address doctrinal issues and persuade others to join the church. His use of satire allowed him to criticize other groups while also appearing tolerant.

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<sup>42</sup> Lull, Timothy F., and Derek R. Nelson. "Critic of the Church: 1517–1519.", 43.

<sup>43</sup> Luther, "On the Jews and Their Lies (1543)",176.

*Post-Secular Conceptions of Jubilation*

With the rise of “Secularism three”, the church becomes increasingly concerned about providing tangible benefits to its members. Many denominations chose to shift from a traditional fire-and-brimstone doctrine to a grace-filled understanding of God. But it is hardly this simple. Contemporary Christianity brings a tension between balancing the need for jubilation in spiritual life and the need to appear meek and mild-mannered as well. This ambivalence can be seen in attitudes toward women. Women are expected to be a “Proverbs 31 Woman.” One who is both happy,<sup>44</sup> as instructed in Proverbs 31:28, and also not too desirable as “charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain.”<sup>45</sup> There is an undeniable desire to be joyful, but this joy must be mitigated as not to draw attention to oneself. This tension arises prominently for women, but young people as well.

In a journal article titled, “On Mormon Laughter,” Shawn Tucker addresses this tension. There are pastors and theologians encouraging laughter at every corner, but then those who laugh in excess are deemed juvenile or even seductive. At the beginning of his article, Tucker talks about his time training to be a Latter-Day Saint (formerly known as the Mormon Church) missionary. During this time, the group would grow delirious from the long hours, the extensive classes, and lack of physical activity. This led them to be slightly silly. Some of the teachers at the training center would ridicule the students for laughing in excess and would ask that they compose themselves. Then, several years later during a Church of Latter-Day Saints general conference, one of the speakers, Joseph B. Wirthlin gave an address titled “Come What May and Love it.” Tucker says, “In this talk, the Apostle affirmed how ‘over the years I have learned a few things that have helped me through times of testing and trial. I would like to share them with

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<sup>44</sup> Proverbs 31:28

<sup>45</sup> Proverbs 31:30

you. The first thing we can do is learn to laugh.’ To illustrate the value of laughter, Elder Wirthlin offered many experiences that elicited loud laughter from the congregation at the Conference Center.<sup>46</sup>”

Jubilation in excess is clearly frowned upon by the church. While it is valuable and included in the Bible, too much jubilation is inauthentic. Modern theologians attempt to navigate this juxtaposition by drawing distinctions about the source of jubilation and how it is cultivated. If everything is characterized as jubilation, then it loses its potency. The three mainline streams of thought include jubilation as religious discipline, as church doctrine, and as a byproduct of faith. Each of these theologies attempts to define jubilation as a means of providing structure and legitimacy for this Christian practice.

You will notice that each of these pathways of jubilation in contemporary Christianity have an emphasis on earthly pleasure as an element of the Christian faith. As evidenced by early Christian conceptions of faith, it is clear that this concept was not integral in the early church. The transition to pleasure as a pagan ideal or an indulgence in human desire, to pleasure as an important element of the Christian practice, is a reflection of the immanent frame at work. But there also appears to be a push-back against Taylor’s theory of “the immanent frame” as well. Taylor explains that “the immanent frame” includes a buffered self, a God-neutral framework, and an attention to the physical world. The shift to jubilation in contemporary Christianity only includes a heightened awareness of the physical world and human flourishing. It is important to note that this transition is not inherently “wrong” or “anti-Christian” but rather demonstrates the way religion has chosen elements of Secularism without being fully subjected to “the immanent frame.” All the following theological conceptions of jubilation see God as intimately involved in giving joy, and recognize individuals as at least somewhat porous beings. The following

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<sup>46</sup> Tucker, "On Mormon Laughter.", 141.

arguments will be organized from most-buffered to most-porous conceptions, and concluding with the case study of the Pentecostal Reformation which is the most porous.

### *Jubilation as Religious Discipline*

In response to James 1:2 and other scriptures that insinuate jubilation as a choice, many theologians have come to the conclusion that jubilation is a choice humans can make. This conception leans more toward a buffered conception of self. Humans are responsible for cultivating jubilation within themselves. While God is the source of jubilation, it is not bestowed among all Christians. Rather, it requires an active participant to choose joy in the midst of suffering.

As mentioned in the Bible, Christians are encouraged to pursue jubilation in the midst of suffering. For some theologians, this is an active choice that Christians must make in order to cultivate jubilation in their own lives. This practice has many benefits. In James, the Bible says that choosing joy in the face of trials actually builds faith. This choice often does not come easily, but is a discipline that is learned and fine tuned throughout life. For Protestants, this understanding was a critical piece of the departure from Catholicism towards a more individualized faith. Luther says, "God is repelled by sorrow of spirit; He hates sorrowful teaching and sorrowful thoughts and words, and He takes pleasure in happiness. For He came to refresh us, not to sadden us. Hence the prophets, apostles, and Christ himself always urge, indeed command, that we rejoice and exult."<sup>47</sup> In this theological argument, jubilation is not simply a reward for accepting Jesus Christ as the messiah, but goes one step beyond this recognition.

Calvanist Theologian and professor, John Piper, takes this belief to the extreme. Piper acknowledges the human desire to have joy as a natural experience. He says, "The longing to be

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<sup>47</sup> Potkay, "Spenser, Donne, and the Theology of Joy", 46.

happy is a universal human experience, and it is good, not sinful. We should never try to deny or resist our longing to be happy, as though it were a bad impulse. Instead, we should seek to intensify this longing and nourish it with whatever will provide the deepest and most enduring satisfaction.”<sup>48</sup> While some theologians may disagree about the source of jubilation, Piper is adamant that joy can only come from God. During creation, God created humans with a desire for jubilation. But this desire can only be fulfilled living a Christian life and accepting Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

The desire for this euphoric jubilation is what leads people to Christ. Not only is it beneficial to practice in Christianity, but it is actually essential to being a Christian. Jubilation is not a passive gift that one receives after becoming a Christian. This is a constant discipline that requires agency and dedication. He explains his rationale by saying,

The pursuit of joy in God is not optional. It is not an “extra” that a person might grow into after he comes to faith. It is not simply a way to “enhance” your walk with the Lord. Until your heart has hit upon this pursuit, your “faith” cannot please God. It is not saving faith. Saving faith is the confidence that if you sell all you have and forsake all sinful pleasures, the hidden treasure of holy joy will satisfy your deepest desires. Saving faith is the heartfelt conviction not only that Christ is reliable, but also that He is desirable. It is the confidence that He will come through with His promises and that what He promises is more to be desired than all the world.<sup>49</sup>

For Piper, jubilation is motivated by human desire but is not concerned with the benefits to human life. The main purpose is glorifying God to the highest degree. Jubilation comes not simply from being a Christian, but is a requirement that all Christians must pursue in order to live a Christian faith.

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<sup>48</sup> Piper, *Desiring God*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

Two important points come out of Piper's theory of joy. The first is the role of human agency in joy as discipline. Christians have the ability to gain joy, rather than being at the whim of God. This is crucial because in the secular world, individuals become increasingly interested in having choice and autonomy in religion. This theory appears to be more appealing to "the immanent frame" because of the role of agency. Secondly, the emphasis on pleasure as a necessity for joy and therefore human life highlights the way Christianity is pivoting in light of the immanent frame. Piper says, "The pursuit of pleasure is a necessary part of all worship and virtue. That is: The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever."<sup>50</sup> In an aim to make Christianity more palatable, jubilation and pleasure are seen as deeply intertwined in Christian practice. In fact, practitioners must have these elements in order to be seen as a proper "Christian."

On the other hand, this method poses some ethical dilemmas similar to the Prosperity Gospel. Individuals are responsible for their own jubilation, in a very buffered understanding. If their faith does not produce fruits in the form of joy, then their faith is seen as inadequate. This could also present a problem as mental health discourses become more prevalent. Seeing jubilation as discipline could create a pathway for demonization of mental health issues in the Church as an issue of faith or practice.

### *Jubilation as Church Doctrine*

While theologians, like Piper, argue that the role of jubilation is a uniquely personal encounter with God, Charles Mathewes argues that it is essentially a communal and Church matter. He claims that jubilation must come from an outside force, but leadership is responsible for cultivating that joy in the congregation. There is less agency in this conception, compared to

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<sup>50</sup> Piper, *Desiring God*, 2.

jubilant as a religious discipline. Here, priests and pastors are responsible for receiving jubilation from God, and conveying that joy to the community. This understanding lies between a completely porous conception of self and a completely buffered conception of self. Porous because God is still the giver of jubilation, but buffered in the way that leadership can also cultivate that jubilation within the church.

Mathewes explains in his chapter of *Joy and Human Flourishing* titled “Towards a Theology of Joy”, that joy is neither something Christians actively participate in nor passively experience. Mathewes defines it as the middle-voice. Jubilation is inherently caused by a non-willed force world and cannot be found without looking toward God. He says, “Joy is provoked by something contingent...something outside of oneself.”<sup>51</sup> Not fully within human control but also not necessarily outside of it. “Joy is sort of a sacramental state: in creation yet prompted ultimately by something beyond.”<sup>52</sup> Because of the precarious role of jubilation, teetering on the edge of human jurisdiction, the Church must take the forefront in cultivating it as doctrine.

The Church is responsible for raising up Christians, and therefore should actively aim to promote jubilation. This can be done through primary practice and the derivative communal response to those primary encounters. Mathewes argues that jubilation has always been rooted in the Church, not in individualized conceptions of faith. “And whatever the history of the Puritans would suggest, the history of Christian revival movements—including, in recent decades, the emergence of a vibrantly expressive and joyful form of Christian worship, in the exploding Pentecostal movement across the world—gives evidence of powerful dynamics toward exuberance and delight deeply rooted in the tradition.”<sup>53</sup> This understanding could allow for the

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<sup>51</sup> Mathewes, *Joy and Human Flourishing: Essays on Theology, Culture, and the Good Life*, 66.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 67.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

Church to remain relevant during the rise of Secularism, instead of Christians choosing to pursue an inward relationship with jubilation. But Mathewes is careful to caution against labeling this move toward centralizing the Church as striving a mere attempt to stay relevant. He instead argues that this is truly the best way for Christians to live and the most true interpretation of Christian texts. He says, “This does not mean that a theology centered around the cultivation of jubilation is ruthlessly pragmatically tied to immediate demands for church relevance. It is not simply a rather low to the ground therapeutic ethics, helping us to see what it is to live and be happy only in the distention that is hope. It is also properly a metaphysics, a way of seeing creation as creation, and indeed as yet incomplete waiting to be fully realized in the eschaton.”<sup>54</sup> According to Mathewes, jubilation as Church doctrine is the most true form of practice.

Jubilation as Church doctrine can pose a problem in the Secular Age as the obsession with choice grows. In Taylor’s definition of the immanent frame, the individual becomes increasingly concerned with oneself, and moves away from communal thinking. Mathewes addresses the fear of oppression as being a hindrance to faith and therefore also jubilation. Because it is unchosen, many choose not to pursue it in favor of having full autonomy over their lives. Mathewes says, “Precisely because joy is so profoundly unchosen, but is a responsive commitment to what is there before us, demanding of us, it is very difficult indeed to articulate in a worldview so overmastered by the ideology of choice. And that is my complaint.”<sup>55</sup> When shifting from joy as a discipline that can be manufactured or practiced by the individual to a conception of joy that is not active, it is difficult to fit the conception into the Secular world. Due to this incompatibility, the Secular Age becomes synonymous with a “joy-less economy.” Mathewes explains saying, “the distinct idea of joy has no place structurally, intellectually, and

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<sup>54</sup> Mathewes, *Joy and Human Flourishing: Essays on Theology, Culture, and the Good Life*, 71.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 79-80.

increasingly phenomenologically.”<sup>56</sup> For this reason, jubilation can no longer be in the hands of the individual believers because their obsession with choice will co-opt their pursuit of it. Church doctrine now must center joy in order to break away from the “joyless economy” and establish a community that accepts God’s role in provoking jubilation.

Pope Francis poses a similar sentiment regarding jubilation’s role in Church doctrine, especially when it comes to priests. Sean Sheridan tells of Pope Francis’ emphasis of joy in his *Evangelii gaudium*, “In response to the 2012 Synod of Bishops, Francis issued his 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*. The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, jubilation is constantly born anew. In this Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come.”<sup>57</sup> There is a clear connection between jubilation and the Church for the Catholic tradition. This demonstration often happens in the homily which occurs in the Eucharistic context, as a moment of dialogue between God and His people. Interestingly, Pope Francis sees homilists as beacons of joy within the church; branching away from mere doctrine to require religious leaders to expose joy. “The homilist ought to communicate his excitement for the message communicated and his desire to share with his listeners his own personal sharing of the Gospel and the joy that can be found in living an evangelical life as espoused by the Gospel and the teachings of the Church.”<sup>58</sup>

The benefits of a homilist that shares with jubilation are many, for both the preacher and the congregants. “Part III of ‘Preaching the Mystery of Faith,’ develops the spiritual qualities of a good preacher. He is to live a life of holiness and know his people and their joys and sorrows.

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<sup>56</sup> Mathewes, *Joy and Human Flourishing: Essays on Theology, Culture, and the Good Life*, 89.

<sup>57</sup> Sheridan, *A Service Beyond All Recompense*, 154.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 157.

He is to be a man who loves the Scriptures and is shaped by the word of God. He should adhere to the Church's Sacred Tradition but also have an understanding of contemporary culture."<sup>59</sup> A priest that is acutely aware of joys and sorrows, while also leading the congregation to jubilation increases the priest's spiritual qualities. Having the skill to be a good preacher means pursuing jubilation in the midst of suffering and giving the message of God with this. Effective teachings require an element of jubilation according to Pope Francis because preachers are emblematic of the Church as a whole. And because the Church brings jubilation to its followers, the priest must exhibit these qualities as a figurehead of the Church. It benefits the congregation as well, "effective preaching, both liturgical preaching and evangelizing in the non-liturgical setting, should deepen our relationship with Christ whether we are the cleric who delivers the message or the one who hears the message and is called to bring others to Christ. Regardless of what our state of life is in the Church, we are all mandated to evangelize and to proclaim the joy of the Gospel."<sup>60</sup> Having a leader that emphasizes jubilation makes attaining joy more achievable for those in the pews.

Pope Francis is clear that jubilation begins in the Church but does not end in the Church. As preachers share scriptures and homilies with the joy they have obtained by being the Church, the cycle continues. Congregants are blessed by this doctrine, and go forth to bring joy to others. This rests in the power of church leadership more than doctrine for the Catholic Church. The importance of church leadership that is in tune with God's gift is highlighted in Pope Francis' interpretation.

The role that church doctrine is playing in contemporary Christianity is a direct response to the changes that Secularization brings. Primarily, in a now "God-neutral" society, the Church

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<sup>59</sup> Sheridan, *A Service Beyond All Recompense*, 163.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 163.

must change in order to meet the needs of the congregation. In the Secular Age, individuals are acutely aware of the physical world, rather than the transcendental world. In order to retain relevancy and also keep membership up, churches have the burden to prove the physical world benefit of the Christian faith. And yet, this shift does not fit perfectly into Taylor's immanent frame theory. The Church highlighted jubilation as the benefit that is given to Christians to mitigate this difference that emerges in Secularism. Contemporary Christians do prioritize human flourishing, but also see themselves as somewhat porous beings. In this way, Christians are not fully submerged in Secularism, but rather use aspects of "the immanent frame" in order to return to Biblical Christianity.

#### *Jubilation as a Byproduct of Faith*

Perhaps the most common conception of jubilation in contemporary Christianity is jubilation as a mere byproduct of belief in Jesus as the Messiah. This is most clearly seen in the prosperity gospel that highlights the notion that all properly practicing Christians should be experiencing the joy of the Lord as a reward for their faith. The prosperity gospel assumes that human flourishing is always the will of God, and therefore Christians must believe and follow God's will to reap these benefits. When looking at this argument through a Taylor's Secular framework, elements of human flourishing and human agency are strongly in line with "the immanent frame." But this argument also seems to have a somewhat-porous conception of self. While humans have agency in choosing God's will, God is still the ultimate actor and giver of jubilation.

While this framework can appear to be relatively surface level compared to the more nuanced understandings presented by other theologians, N.T. Wright bolsters this framework

with Biblical references to jubilation. He comments on joy in the Bible as being a response to knowing the truth of Jesus, “The ‘joy’ we see in the gospels is thus not simply the natural human delight in times of healing and reconciliation... it is...the joy of discovering that Israel’s God was, at last, doing the thing he had promised, rescuing the people from their ‘exile’ and providing forgiveness, restoration, and new life.”<sup>61</sup> If jubilation in the Bible is in response to faith in who Jesus is, then would not this condition also apply to contemporary Christianity? As Christian’s accept Jesus as the Messiah, they will experience the same joy found in the gospels. Wright expands further by adding, “The four gospels link their narrative, and with it their theme of joy, to the ancient hope of Israel to the biblical promises and prospects that, so they claim, are now finding a new and different kind of fulfillment.”<sup>62</sup> In Wright’s understanding, concepts of jubilation have been altered little by Secularization, instead remaining inextricably linked to the Bible source of jubilation, which is faith in Jesus Christ.

After the resurrection, the disciples were filled with jubilation, “because...they believed not only that Jesus had been raised from the dead, launching God’s new creation, but that he was now enthroned as the world’s rightful sovereign.”<sup>63</sup> The disciples were able to find jubilation in the midst of suffering because of the faith in Jesus. If this proof still holds true in the contemporary age, jubilation ought to be a byproduct of faith. In this understanding, the individual has little agency over cultivating their own jubilation, rather it is a gift bestowed upon them. But additionally, jubilation is evidence of a “good Christian life.”

Croatian Theologian Mirsolav Volk iterates similar sentiments regarding jubilation as a reward for a good life. He starts by defining joy, which is not inherently linked to belief in a

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<sup>61</sup> Wright, *Joy and Human Flourishing: Essays on Theology, Culture, and the Good Life*, 48.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

transcendent power (although it can be). First and foremost, joy is free. If it is not, it is not joy.<sup>64</sup> He describes joy as happiness with added intensity. He dives deeper by adding, “I trust that by the time our somewhat arduous lab work is done, you will be persuaded that joy is much richer than the feeling of happiness, even great happiness and that the authentic joy, though not itself the good life, is the emotional substance and manifestation of the good life.”<sup>65</sup> Jubilation exists as a byproduct of the fruits produced by faith, while also being evidence of the good life among others. Volk’s definition of joy is rooted in the understanding that it is a reward for a good life. But what is the good life? Volk says, “any plausible candidate for the good life has to incorporate all three: life is truly and fully good when (1) it goes well, (2) we lead it well, and (3) when it is pleasurable.”<sup>66</sup> Jubilation is your reward for living this good life, but it is fully dependent on meeting these criteria first. There must be a good life first before there can be jubilation as the reward. “If there isn’t any good, either perceived or actual, to rejoice over—no good circumstances or active stances—happy feelings you might have may look and feel like joy, but they will not be joy. As an emotion, joy is always over something (perceived) as good, ... which means that true joy presumes proper relation to some actual good.”<sup>67</sup> But still jubilation is not synonymous with the ‘good life’, rather it is the emotional dimension of the good life, “of a life that is both going well and is being lived well; complete and lasting joy is the emotional side of the ultimate good.”<sup>68</sup>

Another aspect of Volk’s construction is that of community. In a Durkheimian notion, Volk says, “Joy is best experienced in the community. Joy seeks company (‘come and rejoice with me’) and the company of those who rejoice feeds the joy of each.”<sup>69</sup> In theory, Christianity

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<sup>64</sup> Volk, *Joy and Human Flourishing: Essays on Theology, Culture, and the Good Life*, 132.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

<sup>66</sup> Volk, *Joy and Human Flourishing: Essays on Theology, Culture, and the Good Life*, 133.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 135.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 132-133.

should meet these requirements of leading a good life and of community. The Bible emphasizes both these points as being essential to Christian life. In this case, jubilation is a reward for living life in the way the Bible instructs, but also an essential element to living Biblically.

While Volk and Wright both see jubilation as a byproduct of faith or living the ‘good life’, one important distinction between Volk and Wright is the negotiation between pleasure and suffering. While Wright’s argument is centered around the disciples as experiencing jubilation in the midst of suffering, Volk’s argument actually requires pleasure as a precursor to jubilation. Wright’s argument is more in line with the early-Christian conception of Christianity as a religion dependent on suffering because of the crucifixion. Early-Christians believed that their suffering would be rewarded with undeniable jubilation. In other words- jubilation is a byproduct of their dedication and adherence to Christianity. Volk acknowledges the way Secularism has centered the physical world and pleasure. In response to this shift, Volk recognizes the importance of pleasure as an element of the ‘good life’.

While this theological argument is strongly aligned with early Christian conception of the “porous self”, the emphasis on pleasure and the element of work is uniquely Secular. Volk and Wright mention the pleasure that Christianity brings to its adherence. The recognition of the physical world as having relevance to the human condition is evidence of the immanent frame. Additionally, this argument still requires an element of choice and work that is required to reap the benefits in a somewhat buffered way. The distinction between porous and buffered in this context is not clear, as this argument appears to have elements of each construction. Because God is still the source of joy and gives joy to Christians, this argument is more porous than the previous two.

*Case Study: Jubilation as Evidence of the Holy Spirit*

Charismatic movements are famous for their concepts of jubilation as a gift from the Holy Spirit. Jubilation as evidence of the Holy Spirit is the most porous understanding of self. God is the ultimate and only giver of jubilation. Human agency plays a very limited role in cultivating jubilation in Pentecostalism. This practice of Baptism of the Holy Spirit is rooted in verses like Galatians 5:22, “the fruits of the spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.”

Most historians would say that the Pentecostal Church emerged out of 19th-century revival movements in the United States and Britain, but the Pentecostal Revival began in the 1940s. In 1928, the World Christian Fundamentalist Association considered Pentecostalism as “unscriptural.” Pentecostals continued to practice and grow churches all over the world until congregations banded together in 1947 to create the Pentecostal World Fellowship. This is how the church was able to start growing, but they only started seeing converts from mainstream Christian denominations in the 1960s.<sup>70</sup> This became known as the Charismatic Movement.

The church became focused on evangelism. Within this radical evangelicalism, themes of restorationism, premillennialism, faith healing, and greater attention to the person and work of the Holy Spirit were central to emerging Pentecostalism.<sup>71</sup> Pentecostals believed that Christ would be returning soon, and they, therefore, expected an end-time revival of spiritual gifts, similar to those mentioned in Acts 2.<sup>72</sup> Some church leaders began to reference a spiritual experience that would help believers to “evangelize the world” and therefore bring more people to the church. This experience became known as “baptism of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Hunt, "Charismatic Movement.", 56.

<sup>71</sup> Blumhofer, *Aimee MacPherson: Everybody's Sister*, 11–12.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 18–19.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 30–31.

Pentecostals used Acts Chapter 2 as Biblical evidence for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The passage discusses the spiritual act of speaking in tongues and compares the onset of the gift as a wind coming from the heavens. Acts 2:1-4 states, “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”<sup>74</sup> Pentecostals used this passage to justify speaking in tongues, but the baptism of the Spirit has more expressions outside of the one directly mentioned. Some Bible references mention gifts of prophecy (Acts 19:6), boldness (Acts 4:31), healing (Acts 5:15), spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19), wisdom (Acts 6:3) and joy (Acts 13:52).

Although not mentioned in the previous list, or in the Bible itself, some Pentecostal believers have equated “spiritual laughter” as evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Author Margaret Paloma wrote an ethnographical work about the Pentecostal Revival in Toronto. In her book, she mentions several stories about people experiencing “holy laughter.” One is in the popular Christian film, *Go Inside the Toronto Blessing* produced by Christian filmmaker, Warren Marcus. “Throughout the video, pilgrims are interviewed who have experienced inner healing and relational healing... In a particularly striking scene, Marcus is seen interviewing a white couple from South Africa about the effects of the renewal when ‘the power of God fell.’ During the interview which happened between renewal services, the couple began to shake and fall to the floor. First, the wife began to laugh uncontrollably as she reached out for her husband. When asked ‘What are you feeling — what’s going on here,’ the wife (still laughing and ‘oohing’ in

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<sup>74</sup> Acts 2:1-4

between words) replied: ‘It’s like laughter, happiness, love.’ Then the couple fell to the floor, still laughing and locked in each other’s embrace.”<sup>75</sup>

This example of holy laughter is a product of jubilation. Paloma tells another story about a conference in England where two pastors from Texas, Jan and Byron Mote preached. “I had been watching the couple in front of me throughout the service. The wife had been engaged in holy laughter earlier in the service, while the husband sat stone-faced, frequently looking around the room. Now both were clinging to each other and laughing uncontrollably. The elderly couple sitting next to me was also laughing heartily while Jan continued to read... Eventually, Jan and Byron began to bless the laughter. As they did so, Byron got a ‘word’ about the healing God was doing... The outbreaks of laughter continued to gather momentum. Mote proclaimed, “God is throwing a major party.”<sup>76</sup>

In the second example of holy laughter, Byron Mote seems to be alluding to the fact that God is actually behind the laughter. This would mean that God is uniquely involved in the process of holy laughter. This can pose a problem, and open the Pentecostal denomination or Charismatic traditions up to criticism. This criticism comes in several forms. Most of the academic and theological criticism focuses on speaking in tongues. For this research, holy laughter and speaking in tongues perform the same function as an exhibition of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Because scholarship on holy laughter is limited, we will use these criticisms of speaking in tongues and extrapolate them into our understanding of how holy laughter is perceived by various Christian denominations.

Some theologians believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit (i.e. speaking in tongues and holy laughter) is demonic. Alexander Mackie concluded that “speaking in tongues is a symptom

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<sup>75</sup> Paloma, *Main Street Mystics: The Toronto Blessing and Reviving Pentecostalism*, 98.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

of an emotionalism or a pathological dissociative process.”<sup>77</sup> Others believe that these behaviors might be normal, but uncommon. This group argues that speaking in tongues is not limited to Christian churches. A researcher of speaking in tongues, Virginia Hines, said, “Quite clearly, available evidence requires that an explanation of glossolalia as a pathological must be discarded.”<sup>78</sup> A group of critics argues that speaking in tongues (therefore baptism of the Holy Spirit) is not a modern practice and “the reformation period gives no evidence of the continuance of speaking in tongues.”<sup>79</sup> Another criticism could be provided in response to Tucker’s article titled “On Mormon Laughter” mentioned earlier. Silly or rabid laughter is not valuable in Christian practice. Jubilation in Christianity must be disciplined in order to be respected. In the Pentecostal Revival, the laughter appears to be overzealous and therefore is deemed inauthentic.

On the other hand, Pentecostals argue that these spiritual gifts “can be an aid to a spiritual group.” These gifts create a direct line of communication between practitioners and the divine. God directly intervenes by causing holy laughter (or speaking in an unknown language). In practice, there tends to be a clear divide between people who have the baptism of the Holy Spirit (who speak in tongues, speak prophecy, experience holy laughter) and those who do not. There are clear exhibitions of this baptism that create divides among congregations.

Because “Pentecostals have no confessions of faith, [and] no consistently articulated doctrines”<sup>80</sup> the emphasis of the denomination and the unifying experience between Pentecostals is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Donald Dalton argues that this results in “theological impoverishment, subjecting theological analysis to ahistorical assumptions and sociological and psychological categories.”<sup>81</sup> Most Pentecostals believe that holy laughter and speaking in tongues

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<sup>77</sup> Copeland, *Speaking in Tongues in Restoration Churches*, 14.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>80</sup> Althouse, *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies: World Without End*, 205.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 205.

is a gift available to all Christians, which places immense pressure on congregants to either experience the holy spirit, or to fake it.

Although there is biblical evidence for this practice, the backlash from theological and academic circles is prevalent. Jill Stevens discusses the emotional manipulations that happen in Evangelical circles in her book *Sensational Devotion: Evangelical Performance in Twenty-First-Century America*. Stevens introduces the term dramaturgy that she defines as “a system of performative tactics designed to manipulate the physical, rhythmic encounter between user and medium.”<sup>82</sup> Churches use these sensational acts to elicit an emotional response from participants. “Even as evangelical dramaturgy works to confirm and bolster the faith of existing believers, it also appropriates the resonant rhythms of popular culture in order to invite new users into an otherwise unfamiliar belief system.”<sup>83</sup> This emotional experience compiled with other members speaking in tongues, and experiencing holy laughter puts pressure on churchgoers to perform an exhibition of faith to prove authenticity. From a theoretical perspective, jubilation as a gift from the Holy Spirit appears almost exclusively porous. But in practice, there appears to be some element of self-control and discipline because of outside pressures on the congregation.

The church emotionally manipulates members through the use of music, lighting, guilt in order to create an inauthentic experience between mankind and the divine. There is social pressure to perform accurately in order to be deemed a “true Christian.” Within the Pentecostal Revival, laughter aids religion in being an opiate of the people in several ways. While it might provide members with immediate sense of fullness and purpose, it creates lasting issues of questioning authenticity of experience when one begins to unpack the emotional manipulation that occurred. Holy laughter can also distract people from the class structure that the church

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<sup>82</sup> Stevenson, "Embodied Belief, Affective Piety, and Evangelical Dramaturgy.", 24.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 49.

instills because the organization of the church is connected to the individual's relationship to the divine.

On the other hand, Holy laughter can lead to devoutness as seen in the two examples from Maragret Paloma's book *Main Street Mystics: The Toronto Blessing and Reviving Pentecostalism*. Both examples show the way that the gift of spiritual laughter affirms their belief in a higher power, and therefore aids in their devotion. In the example of Jan and Byron Mote, the spiritual laughter that occurred during the conference affirmed that what they were doing was good and beneficial. Mote proclaimed, "God is throwing a major party." This quote shows the way God is blessing their work through this exhibition of jubilation. The Pentecostal Revival is based in exhibitions of faith, that create devoutness in participants but also can cause emotional manipulation and peer pressure.

When examining this case study of Pentecostalism as it relates to jubilation, it is very clear that baptism of the holy spirit involves a "porous" understanding of self. While this may be true, there are certainly elements of jubilation as evidence of the Holy Spirit has ties to Secularism. Looking to the example of early Christian ascetics, poverty and reverence was evidence of one's piety. In contemporary Pentecostalism, exuberance and effervescence is the way Christian's faith is judged; this alone shows the impact of Secularism and "the immanent frame." Two particular examples stick out as uniquely Secular. Primarily, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is unusually understood as a Christian asking for this blessing. At the very least, one asking for this baptism must be willing or open to the idea. Elements of the "buffered self" are apparent here as the individual has some aspect of agency in this event. Secondly, the concept of jubilation and pleasure as gift from God highlights the immanent frame as being focused on

earthly pleasure. Christianity is no longer focused on living a life similar to Jesus', but is instead focused on the physical benefits of faith, like jubilation.

### *Conclusion*

As Protestantism emerged during the Reformation, it paved a way for Secularism to flourish. With the rise of what Taylor calls "Secularism three", concepts of self-hood and agency are radically changed. "The immanent frame" changes the very fabric of society. The community identity is traded in for a hyper-awareness of individuality. The individual is now concerned with their own choices as being independent of a higher power. These choices are largely made considering the physical world, as opposed to the transcendental world that was prioritized in early Christianity. The new framework that Secularism provides poses a large issue for Christianity. In a world where physical benefits are prioritized and centered, Christianity's emphasis on suffering no longer fits within this structure. Therefore, theologians, churches, and individuals must mitigate this difference. Still using the Bible and Christian tradition, but also using Secularism frameworks and contemporary thought allowed Christianity to adapt to a religion that centers jubilation and pleasure as an aspect of the faith. This shift is not baseless. In order to make this shift, theologians pull from Biblical and early Christian perspectives of jubilation. Christianity fractures "the immanent frame" and uses some aspects in order to return to Biblical understandings of jubilation. In this way, the move to recenter jubilation is considered revival of "true Christianity." This study highlights the deep resources and flexibility of Christianity, how it is able to adapt to Secularism while retaining its connection to tradition.

In order to adapt to the changing landscape, Christianity shifts its emphasis from suffering to jubilation, which makes it more congruent with the new Secular worldview. This move is accomplished by centering the physical world in discourse around jubilation, in line with

“the immanent frame.” But there does appear to be some pushback against Taylor’s “immanent frame” as well. While the physical world and human flourishing have clearly impacted contemporary Christian practice, most theological arguments still included a porous conception of self. The porousness of contemporary Christianity contrasts with Taylor’s understanding as the buffered self being inherent in all modern peoples.

While some elements of contemporary Christianity fall in line with Taylor’s pre-modern conceptions, I would caution against labeling Christianity as medieval. Rather, I propose that Christianity is moving beyond the Secular Age and seeing outside of “the immanent frame.” Christianity is critically analyzing elements of Secularism that are invisible to those fully submerged within this world view. This critical analysis makes Christianity enter a more advanced societal stage.

The role of jubilation in contemporary Christianity provides evidence of Secularism impacting religious practice and proves that Secularism is more than just a separation between church and state or a decrease in religiosity. Rather, Secularism changes the nature of religion. And yet, contemporary Christianity also pushes back against Taylor’s “immanent frame” by showing aspects of porousness in the cultivation of jubilation. This example complicates Taylor’s theory. Taylor argues that “the immanent frame” in totality impacts all people within the Secular Age. Contemporary Christianity instead shows that “the immanent frame” can be fractured and utilized in order to revitalize Biblically founded “true Christianity.”

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