

part I

THY WILL BE DONE

Easter installation 2014 in Nøtterøy Church (Norway)

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Part I of the installation that is produced in Nøtterøy parish church (county Vestfold, Norway) during Easter 2014, takes its point of departure in one section of the basic prayer within Christian tradition, the Lord's Prayer, writing Thy will be done. The artistic expression is made of big letters written on the floor under the pulpit, in broken glass from wine bottles.¹

Personal background

Since 1985, the Easter mystery has been at the core of my artistic practice. I have experimented with formal expressions of the cross and the crucifix in order to dig into and understand the narratives of the passion of Christ, his suffering, death – and resurrection. When I began this work, my preconception of Easter was uneasy. Mentally, I was stuck in the nightmare of Good Friday, unable to move on to Easter Morning. In my mother tongue Good Friday is called Long Friday (Norwegian: *Langfredag*). When I realized the English name of this endless, bad day, I first became confused. How could such a day be called a *good* day? How could a day of torture and suffering be denoted positively?

During the following 10 years, I struggled to answer my own questions and find ways to symbolize the complete narrative from Palm Sunday to Easter Morning. Finally, I concluded in expressions that felt satisfying to me (1995).² The good aspect of crucifixion – according to my own understanding – was not the fact that Jesus died, but two things:

a) Jesus was killed because he held on to his ideas, refusing to let go of them. According to the evangelical narrative, he had many chances to get away and survive, but he actually kept saying things he knew would bring him to the cross (for instance during the interrogation by Pontius Pilate), and his refusal to run away from the soldiers in the garden of Gethsemane.

b) After the death on the cross, *something* happened. In this respect, one may say that the resurrection was an *effect*. The death on the cross symbolizes that death is not final, but the very beginning of something new and different. The resurrection is a starting point for the Church, *Ecclesia*, (from Greek: the community of the people of God, the believers).

At this stage, I was ready to move on in my artistic practice and look at the life of the Church, and my own, as being part of the *Ecclesia*.

Prayer

If any practice characterizes the Church, it is prayer; the collective prayer of the service,

¹ This text is written catechetically (from Greek *catechesis*, oral teaching) in order to be informative for everyone regardless of preconception.

² Pictures are available here: <<http://gallery.refsum.no/#!album-5>>.

the liturgy (from Greek *leitourgia*, the work of the people) and individual prayer. But what is prayer? The disciples asked Jesus how they should pray. The evangelist Luke writes:

Now it happened that he was in a certain place praying, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples".³

The evangelist Mathew writes:

*So you should pray like this:
Our Father in heaven,
may your name be held holy,
your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us.
And do not put us to the test,
but save us from the Evil One.⁴*

Lord's Prayer

The evangelical text of Mathew is in many ways similar to *Our Father* or *The Lord's Prayer*, except for the ending praise. The Lord's Prayer has been the most foundational prayer in the Christian tradition from its very beginning until day. All Christian churches pray the Lord's Prayer as their main prayer. In this respect, this prayer may be regarded an ecumenical (from Greek *oikoumene*, the inhabited world) tool that unites all Christian denominations. There are many translations and varieties of the Lord's Prayer. But regardless of its wording, the prayer consists of three parts:

1) an entrance, 2) that which we pray for and 3) an end, like this:

- Request: *Our Father*
- Address: *in Heaven*
- Praise: *may your name be held holy*
- Positive wish: *thy kingdom come*
- Submission and accept: *thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*

- We ask for pray material survival: *Give us this day our daily bread*
- We ask for forgiveness: *And forgive us our trespasses,*
- Negotiation and responsibility: *as we forgive those who trespass against us*
- We ask for protection: *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*

- Praise: For the kingdom, *the power and the glory are yours. Now and forever.*
- Let it be so: *Amen⁵*

What does it mean to pray?

- a) Prayer is to address or talk to God
- b) Prayer is to experience the presence of, or to be with, God

³ Luke chapter 11, verse 1 (*The Jerusalem Bible*, see: http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=49&bible_chapter=11).

⁴ Matthew chapter 6, verses 9-14 (*The Jerusalem Bible*, see: http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=47&bible_chapter=6).

⁵ For various versions, see: http://www.lords-prayer-words.com/lord_roman_catholic_version.html

To think that prayer can manipulate God and influence the future is like believing in magic. Many have experienced that prayers do not work regardless of how much they pray, ill fortune and disasters happen all the same. Disappointed they may turn their back to faith and religion – “it is just!” However, this is not the way prayer is taught within the Christian tradition. In a philosophical, theological perspective the only secure thing to say about prayer is that it affects the one who prays. And in the Christian tradition, one thinks that prayer affects those who are prayed for. The mature religious attitude to prayer is that one prays in order to change oneself and to be open to the will of God. . Through this change in attitude, the person who prays becomes better able to cope with the way things go in the world. Such an attitude is expressed in the Lord’s Prayer in the section “Thy will be done”.⁶ Prayer understood in this way may actually represent a survival strategy.

In this perspective, the prayer section *Your will be done* is the central section in the Lord’s Prayer. Not only is it placed in the middle of the prayer text, it is in itself the core message of the prayer.

The old Norwegian version (1744) translated this as: *Skje din vilje* (English: happen your will). This is quite a scary way of saying it, as it acknowledges openly that I am not directing the world, only God is. And furthermore: the prayer explicitly expresses that *your will – not mine – decides*. *Your will be done*, in consequence, deals with surrendering to that which is going to happen, accepting what may come. It represent a claim to surrender to an acceptance of the terms of what is given to you, without being able to change or direct one’s own destiny.

In this very acceptance and surrender there may actually be liberation. The Norwegian resistant fighter and survivor of Auschwitz concentration camp, Kirsten Brunvoll, tells in her biography about her experience in 1944, during the transport to the camp:

*I thought quietly and spoke quietly, but my whole body shivered, and it was impossible for me to be quiet. I was sure that the trucks, which now picked us up, would drive us directly into the gas chambers. All of a sudden I could no longer fight. I said to myself: if it is so that I am to die, so let me die. Thy will be done [Skje din vilje]. Instantaneous, I relaxed. The shivering stopped, and I was filled with a warmth of happiness, convinced that if I died now, then it was because it was to the best for me.*⁷

Thy will be done

Let your will happen, *Your* or *Thy will be done* consists of three parts: a verb, a pronouns and a noun.

- The verb expresses an action, something that will come.
- The pronouns points away from me, towards another; a you.
- The noun stands for something that is given; a will.

⁶ See: Brümmer, Vincent. 2008. *What are We Doing When We Pray? On Prayer and the Nature of Faith*. Hampshire, UK: Ashgate. Original edition 1984, pages: 12-13.

⁷ In Norwegian:

Jeg tenkte rolig og snakket rolig, men hele kroppen skalv, og det var ikke mulig for meg å bli rolig. Jeg var sikker på at lastebilene som nå hentet oss, kjørte oss like til gasskamrene. Plutselig orket jeg ikke mer å kjempe. Jeg sa til meg selv: er det så at jeg skal dø, så la meg dø. Skje din vilje. Momentant slappet jeg av. Skjelvingen opphørte, og jeg ble fylt av en lykkelig varme, overbevist om at hvis jeg døde nå, så var det fordi det var det beste for meg.

(Brunvoll, Kirsten. 1964. *Veien til Auschwitz*. Oslo: Aschehoug. Original edition, 1947, page:153.)

Translations to various languages reshuffle these parts differently.⁸ *Thy will be done* is in Latin: *Fiat voluntas tua*, similar to Icelandic: *Værði vili þin*, directly translated: be (-come) will yours.⁹ The accent lies either on the verb, be or become, or on the noun, the will, which is not mine, but belongs to the other, the you. The noun will (Latin *voluntas*; Greek *boúlesis*, to will; German *Wille*, French *volonté*) is a word that carries a possibility of choice and alternative solutions.¹⁰ The prayer section *Thy will be done* communicates all the same that the will of the other rules out mine, and the one who prays actually says that this must be the case.

Artistic process

How can the Easter narrative be expressed anno 2014 and specifically in Nøtterøy church – a church that was originally built in the early 12th century and consecrated to Holy Mary? After the Reformation (1536) the cult of Mary was discontinued; all images, sculptures and probably a side altar devoted to her were removed. The Evangelical Lutheran tradition is characterized by its strong emphasis on the Word (the Biblical texts). Personally, I regard the so-called catechism tablets from Scandinavia in the after-reformatory period especially beautiful and relevant in our time. These tablets, covered by calligraphy or a tight handwriting, replaced the former altarpieces with evangelical images. This is the tradition I was inspired by when approaching the space in Nøtterøy church. The question, however, was what to write.

Since the installation is meant for the silent week and Easter time, I turned to the oldest description of what happened in connection to the death and resurrection of Jesus. The text written by St. Paul around the year 50, says:

*The tradition I handed on to you in the first place, a tradition which I had myself received, was that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried; and that on the third day, he was raised to life, in accordance with the scriptures*¹¹

Since Jesus died around the year 30, this text is written approximately 20 years after the actual event. Paul never met Jesus. Still, it is astonishing how little he has to tell – especially seen in relation to how verbose he usually is in his letters! In this matter, however, he carefully reserves himself, saying “*in accordance with the scriptures*”. He presents this reference in relation to that has happened concerning the death of Jesus and repeats it when he refers to the resurrection. But when he tells about the death and burial he is confident, just stating: *he was [Jesus] buried*. St. Paul believes “*in accordance with the scriptures*” (Latin, *secundum scripturas*), like the expression in the Nicene creed from the early 4th century.¹²

I find this an exciting perspective to bring into our time. The tradition and faith of the Church consists of what we believe, in accordance with what was written down and passed on through words. As a visual artist I have the liberty to be inspired and to summarize all impressions, impulses and previous experiences into a single expression. Instead of discussing the contents of the Easter narrative as such, I have chosen to take

⁸ Translations to 1793 languages and dialects are here: <http://www.christusrex.org/www1/pater/index.html>.

⁹ *Skje* is in Icelandic *verðe*, see <http://www.lofotpyramiden.com/fadervar.html>.

See: http://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fader_v%C3%A5r.

¹⁰ <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=12332>

¹¹ 1. Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 3-5 (see: http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=53&bible_chapter=15).

¹² See: <http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=495>.

my point of departure in the events of Gethsemane garden, when the story was still unresolved. Jesus prays:

*'Abba, Father!' he said, 'For you everything is possible. Take this cup away from me. But let it be as you, not I, would have it.'*¹³

The conclusion in the prayer of Jesus is: *let it be as you, not I, would have it*, which in effect contains the same message as the prayer section of Lord's Prayer: *thy will be done*. This is what Jesus – according to the Evangelists' tales – prays, and this is what becomes the continuation of the story.

Expression

The Easter installation is a site-specific work that was produced in two separate stages. The shortest form of the actual section of Lord's Prayer in Norwegian is the old translation *Skje din vilje*. I have chosen to use this version for two reasons. First, because this is the saying I was taught as a child, and second, because this expression is more compact in letters and I think more interesting as a calligraphic shape. I have no objection to newer translations that may be more exact in comparison with the original Greek formulation.

Part I, *Skje din vilje*, was written before Palm Sunday. The material is broken wine bottles, a substantial part of which are altar wine bottles from the Cathedral of Oslo.

Part II was to be laid Easter Saturday Eve. Information about of this part was available at the time of its actualization. The congregation collected transparent recycled glass during Lent (40 days before Palm Sunday) that was to be used for the work.

The work was shown until 2nd Sunday of Easter, April 27th, and the event was ended by an artist's talk and conversation between the artist and the visitors within the church room.

Short biography

Grete Refsum is a professional visual artist and artistic researcher, educated in Oslo National College of Art and Design, Diploma in stained glass (1985) and *Hovedfag* (Master equivalent) in colour/form (1992). She holds a dr. ing. (PhD equivalent) from Oslo School of Architecture (2000) in the topic of ecclesial art. For 25 years, Refsum has worked on religion and existential topics as the theme of her art and art development work and artistic research. Taking her point of departure in the Western Christian tradition, she has explored the cross as symbol, liturgy and prayer or meditation. Her goal is to create visual expressions that offer new interpretations, which may contribute to reflections on contemporary religiosity and spiritual needs. The intention is to raise issues that seem relevant today and pass Christian ideas on to new generations. During the last years, Refsum has experimented with relational art projects in ecclesial spaces, in which the congregation and the visitors have been involved as participants. Her artistic expression is generally abstract, geometric or symbolic so that it opens for dialogue between faith and non-belief, ecumenically between various Christian denominations, and inter-religiously between different religions. For more information and complete curriculum vita, see: <www.refsum.no>.

¹³ Mark 14. 36 (see: http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=48&bible_chapter=14); see also Matthew (26.39) and Luke (22.42).