

Laudare Necessè Est

Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and a Theology of Praise

The claim that Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is profoundly, though by no means exclusively, concerned with praise is a claim that hardly needs much argument to be accepted. As a Roman play, it draws attention to the rich rhetorical tradition of praise in Classical Antiquity, beginning, in a sense, with Aristotle but also flourishing in Cicero's Latin oratory; as an Elizabethan play, it invites us to turn to the Renaissance appropriation of the Classical heritage or, to give the sixteenth century its due, to the literature on praise in the century after the Reformation. Much can be and has been said on these heads,¹ but I do not wish to take either of these obvious paths. Instead, I choose a different, and perhaps much more limited, approach as suggested by the subtitle of this paper.

Brutus' legitimisation of killing Caesar largely depends on his linguistic transformation of the murder into sacrifice. The controversy over the sacrificial interpretation of Caesar's assassination is central to the power struggle between Brutus and Antony. Further, there is much non-verbal (ceremonial, ritual, cultic) praise expressed and even expected in *Julius Caesar*. The play begins on this note, with the tribunes "disrob[ing] the images . . . decked with ceremonies,"² and a long list could be

¹ See, e.g., András Kiséry, "The Rhetoric of Wounds: Persuasion in *Julius Caesar*?" in Ágnes Péter et al., eds., *The Anachronist, 1995: A Collection of Papers*. (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd University, 1995) pp. 28-59. and Krystyna Kujawska-Courtney, "Julius Caesar: Two Visions of the Past" in "Th' Interpretation of the Time": *The Dramaturgy of Shakespeare's Roman Plays* (Victoria, BC: University of Victoria, 1993) pp. 26-58.

² William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. Marvin Spevack (Cambridge, etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1988) l.i.63-64.

drawn up till the closing lines of the play in which Antony's verbal praise of Brutus is answered to by Octavius' promise of ritual praise.³ The ritual praise expressed and the sacrificial language used in the play suggest a new context for praise; it is further supported by Caesar's divinization. While the "republicans" offer Caesar as a sacrifice to the gods for the sake of Rome, he himself becomes a god. What I propose is, first, an analysis of praise in *Julius Caesar* in light of par excellence religious views, invoked at least indirectly by the play, of the same topic; and secondly, an interpretation of Caesar's divinization in the same light.

The religious matrix within which I situate the play is Christianity. The choice is to some extent arbitrary, but it was in this cultural-religious milieu that the play was born. Further, it is not merely on extratextual grounds that the choice can be argued. I will show that Shakespeare placed subtle but clear pointers to the Christian context provided by the age. Or more precisely, *Julius Caesar* may not be a Christian play, but Christianity is not simply the cultural-religious context in which it was written, but it also penetrates into the play's text/ure. I will, accordingly, look at (chiefly Protestant) theological considerations about the nature and characteristics of praise in the shorter first part of my paper. In the more substantial second part I shall read Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and bring observations from the first part to bear on it.

I

Great art Thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised [Ps 145:3]; great is Thy power, and of Thy wisdom there is no end [Ps 147:5]. And man, being a part of Thy creation, desires to praise Thee. ... Thou movest us to delight in praising Thee; for Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.⁴

Augustine's magnificent opening passage of the *Confessions* is one of the most famous Christian texts on the praise of God. These lines are, in fact, a commentary on the Psalms, the primary scriptural texts of praise. Augustine begins by stating, as it

³ To be precise, Octavius promises a funeral with military honours (V.v.68-81). For an insightful discussion of ritual in the play, see Brents Stirling, "Ritual in *Julius Caesar*" in Peter Ure, ed., *Shakespeare, 'Julius Caesar': A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1969) pp. 160-71.

⁴ Aurelius Augustine, *Confessions*, transl. J. G. Pinkerton, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974) I.i.1.

were, his set of axioms, which are the fundamental Christian tenets: man is God's creation and as such desires to praise his creator. But these lines can be read in at least two ways. They can be read descriptively (having a "formal" or "phenomenological" sense, saying what *is*) and they can be read normatively (saying what *ought to be*).

Read as a description, Augustine's text states at least two of the basic postulates of Christian theological anthropology, *viz.*, that all humans, including those who deny it, are both created by and in need of God. The point is certainly made from within the faith circle, and thus derives from a serious commitment to a complex set of values and norms, but for those who share that commitment, the applicability and validity of the postulates go well beyond the circle within which they are accepted. Later theologians have formulated the same point in different ways. Right at the beginning of his *Large Catechism*, interpreting the first commandment of the Decalogue, Luther defines *god* as "that to which we look for all good and where we resort for help in every time of need; to have a god is simply to trust and believe in one with our whole heart. ... I say, whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is really your God."⁵ Paul Tillich's *ultimate concern*, to quote a twentieth-century theologian, is a similarly formal interpretation of the first commandment: god is the content (whatever it happens to be in actual fact) of one's ultimate concern.⁶ The desire to praise, on this view, is a consequence of the createdness of human beings and an expression of their (perhaps unrecognised and/or unacknowledged) need of God. And as Christians believe that we are all created by God and in need of him,⁷ we all desire to praise God. It is not of our choosing, it depends solely on God. In Augustine's words, each one of us, simply by "being a part of [God's] creation, desires to praise" him, and God "moves us to delight in praising" him.⁸ Praise is thus not optional; it is a necessity: we must praise. That is what I mean by the tortured Latin phrase of the title, "laudare necesse est."

On a normative Christian reading, however, there is only one true God who should be acknowledged as such. Praise is due to the transcendent source of life, God

⁵ Martin Luther, *Large Catechism* (1529) transl. John N. Lenker (Minneapolis: Luther, 1908) Pt. 1, par. 1.

⁶ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-65) Vol. I, p. 11. For a sustained discussion, see "The Reality of God" (Part II.II), esp. Vol. I, pp. 211-34.

⁷ I choose the politically incorrect masculine pronoun to avoid clumsiness and awkwardness caused by the use of *God* at every turn, fully aware that male God-language is metaphorical.

⁸ Augustine I.i.1.

the Creator.⁹ Indeed, divine praise (in the objective and not the subjective sense of the adjectival phrase) is only due to this God, for such praise is the acknowledgement of creatureliness and the goodness of being (primarily over against non-being and only secondarily, if at all, meaning any given quality of a specific existence). In other words, what is acknowledged is not that my life is a good life according to some standard of life quality but that it is a life and therefore good; it is, so to speak, a good ontological status because it makes communion with God possible. Or put simply, it is better to be than not to be. Because we are always already created and because life (the good ontological status) is always already bestowed upon us, praise is always already due, and it can always only be a response.¹⁰ *Response* I said because it is important to notice that, in the Christian scheme of things, human behaviour is always already a response, for it is always preceded by God's action. That underscores the necessity of praise.

Christian doctrine has it, however, that although the Fall did not alter the basic structure of the universe (the roles of creator and creature remained intact), it altered the human perception of it (we no longer see clearly in terms of those roles). We still need a god – our hearts are still restless, we still orient our lives according to some supreme value, we are still ultimately concerned – but we no longer recognise and choose the true God, the one and only Creator. (In fact, we do not recognise him, Christian theology holds, until he reveals himself, and cannot choose him until he chooses us.)¹¹ The fact of our createdness is not changed by our denial of it, but the acknowledgement of anything less (other is always less) than the true God as creator is blasphemy. Phenomenologically, humans cannot help being creatures and orienting their lives to some ultimate point of reference, but, normatively, they should only recognise God as the source of their creatureliness and as the content of their ultimate

⁹ Surely, praise is due to each person of the Trinity, including God the Redeemer (Jesus Christ) and God the Sanctifier and/or Sustainer (Holy Spirit), but the specifically trinitarian form of Christian praise need not concern us here. (Not to mention that a position exclusively associating the first Person of the Trinity with the creation would be untenable.)

¹⁰ The great literary example of this perfect human behaviour, rendering praise as due and a response in the first instance, is Milton's prelapsarian Adam in *Paradise Lost*. His first speech upon his creation begins with the question "how came I thus, how here?" which he immediately answers for himself, recognising his finitude, acknowledging the goodness of being, and praising its source, the Creator: "Not of myself; by some great Maker then, / In goodness and in power preeminent; / Tell me, how may I know him, how adore, / From whom I have that thus I move and live, / And feel happier than I know" (*Paradise Lost: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources Criticism*, ed. Scott Elledge [New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1975] VIII.277-82).

¹¹ Cf. John 6:65, Romans 5:8, 9:16, etc.

concern. Worshipping anything but God is idolatry although one cannot help worshipping something. Praise, to repeat, is not optional.

I want to suggest that inasmuch as Christian theological anthropology is right in its assessment of the human situation, or, more precisely, in the assessment of humans' primary duty of praising God, all other forms of praise may be seen derivative from this always already given duty of divine praise. Or to put it the other way round, the archetypal form of praise is that of the divine, and all other forms are modelled on that. Modelled, that is, not servilely repeated. Modelling should here perhaps be best understood in the sense of analogy. And the norm of analogy, I wish to suggest, is the relationship between the two great commandments: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ... Love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:37,39).¹² Or again, the highest *form* of praise is the praise of the divine, but it is perverted (idolatrous) if not in fact addressed to God. It is in light of these insights that I will examine my chosen text. Before turning to it, however, I want briefly to consider the nature of true divine praise, but for the sake of conciseness I shall limit my observations to the Protestant theological tradition.

The technical term for the praise of God in Christian theology is doxology.¹³ In Protestant theology, it is discussed within systematics. Drawing on relevant modern literature, I want to make two basic points. The first may be called ontological. In his discussion of doxology, Edmund Schlink presses the other side of the same coin I introduced above as the currency of this paper. Praise of God, I have said, is the acknowledgement of creatureliness and the goodness of being. "Doxology," Schlink says, "is basically concerned with praising and acknowledging the divine reality. . . . [It] is the reflection of the eternal divine majesty in human praise."¹⁴ Whereas I put the emphasis on human limitation, Schlink stresses divine infinitude. Whereas I put the emphasis on *what* follows from the recognition of the transcendent source of life, Schlink stresses *how* human finitude and the goodness of being are acknowledged.¹⁵

¹² I am not prepared to transform that simply into 'praise the Lord your God with all your heart ... and praise your neighbour as yourself,' yet I think that the self indeed sets a limit to the praising of the other. Pursuing this question would, nevertheless, lead far beyond the scope of this paper.

¹³ Various (e.g., liturgical, dogmatic, form critical etc.) definitions of the term are possible. I simply use it as a synonym for the 'praise of God' (or 'divine praise' as I called it above).

¹⁴ Edmund Schlink, *The Coming Christ and the Coming Church*, transl. G. Overlach et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968) p. 19.

¹⁵ I am here showing the correspondence between Schlink's formulation and my own, and arguing their equivalence. However, in a properly and strictly theological treatment of the subject, I think my approach

Doxology is oriented towards the divine. So much so, argues Schlink, that the first and second person formulae yield to third person formulae. “The basic form of doxology is not, ‘God, I praise Thee’, but ‘Let God be praised’. It is not ‘God, I glorify Thee’, but ‘God is glorious’. ... God Himself is the one and only subject in doxology.”¹⁶

This has two implications. First, doxology goes beyond an ‘economic’ view (God’s relation to the world; reflection on his actions) to an ‘immanent’ view of God (God in himself; a reflection on his essence). Second, and more significant from our present point of view, in this reflection upon God’s essence the praising self completely disappears. In doxology “the worshipper brings himself, his words and the consistency of his thought as a sacrifice of praise to God.”¹⁷ “The ‘I’ is sacrificed in doxology. Thus doxology is always a sacrifice of praise.”¹⁸ The praising subject, then, disappears in the act of praise, yet, Christians would argue, it attains its true identity by being completely overwhelmed by, and thus finding union with, God.

My second point is epistemological. Wolfhart Pannenberg takes up his teacher’s suggestion and investigates further Schlink’s understanding of doxology as the sacrifice of self in praise. Comparing doxology with analogy, he argues that all language about God has a basic doxological character. Analogy would know the unknown through the known. However, God is ultimately beyond our comprehension, and when words are applied to him, their “conceptual univocity” is sacrificed in praise together with the self.¹⁹ Analogical language, despite its claim, fails to provide a means of access to God’s essence because it mistakenly presupposes that not only “language about God but God himself [is] analogous to the world of human experience.”²⁰ In doxology, by contrast, God is praised, on the basis of his actions, for who he is in himself. Thus doxology goes right to the essence of God, but by intention it does not want to ‘derive information’ about the Godhead. However, perceiving something as an act of God (on

to doxology with its emphasis on the human side, with the simultaneous emphasis that this is always already a response, has much to recommend it. An exclusive emphasis on the Barthian ‘wholly other’ God seems to lead to difficulties in theological construction.

¹⁶ Schlink p. 22.

¹⁷ Schlink p. 42.

¹⁸ Schlink p. 22. Incidentally, it is in this sense that worship and praise can be seen as types of life eternal (a favourite Christian image). In both cases, there is (complete) unity between divine and human, God is all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28).

¹⁹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Analogy and Doxology” in *Basic Questions in Theology: Collected Essays*, transl. George H. Kehm (3 vols.; Vol. 1., Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970; Vols. 2 & 3, London: SCM, 1971-73) Vol. 1, p. 216.

²⁰ Pannenberg p. 223.

the basis of which God is praised) itself presupposes a notion of God acting in the world. This circularity cannot be broken, but it can be grounded in God's self-revelation.²¹ Thus "adoring speech about God himself which is contained in doxology always points ahead to God's revelation."²² It is in and through this revelation that God validates, by making it his own, by giving it its "ultimately valid content,"²³ the language used to praise him. The attitude of doxology "is alone appropriate for a legitimate knowledge of God."²⁴ The praising subject acquires right knowledge of God and self, the two are closely interconnected, in doxology.

The issues raised in this section (the necessity of praise, the problem of its appropriate object, the nature and language of doxology and its relation to the praise of the other, the ontological and epistemological significance of praise) will also be of major concern in the following reading of *Julius Caesar*, to which I shall now turn.

II

Caesar is the primary object of praise in Shakespeare's play, or rather, he is the primary object of debate over praise. How much praise is due to him? — But Caesar is also noteworthy as a subject of praise. He customarily, though not exclusively, refers to himself in the third person singular, calling himself by his name Caesar.²⁵ That this has a peculiar ring in modern ears, and in this respect Shakespeare's original audience was already modern, is due in large part to the fact that the name Caesar is not just like any other name. All Roman emperors kept the name as a title after Julius Caesar: the name *became* a title. Audiences of *Julius Caesar* cannot help catching that overtone whenever the name is uttered. In fact, the play itself calls attention to this quite early through Cassius' meditative comparison of Brutus' name with Caesar's (I.ii.142-47). The very utterance of Caesar's name is praise. But, quite apart from the actual meaning of the name, Caesar's third person reference to himself by name has a formal structure we may call, in light of the foregoing argument, doxological. Caesar's 'I' is offered up to Caesar. Thus the self is sacrificed, paradoxically, in praise of the same self. Further, his

²¹ Surely, this grounding itself is circular inasmuch as seeing Jesus of Nazareth as its ultimate locus is only possible through the eye of faith. The theological/hermeneutic circle is unavoidable, but the historicity and givenness of Jesus provides at least a grounding.

²² Pannenberg p. 236.

²³ Pannenberg p. 237.

²⁴ Pannenberg p. 225.

²⁵ II.ii.10, 12, 28-29, 42, 44-45, 48, 65, 68, 112; to list the references from one scene only.

identity (or self-identification, at any rate) exhibits a similarly self-referential character. “I rather tell thee what is to be feared / Than what I fear: for always I am Caesar” (I.ii.211-12). This is surely not an ordinary self-introduction. It is almost entirely beside the point to assert that such a gesture would make no dramaturgical sense. That is true enough,²⁶ but the relevant thing to notice is that the *linguistic* form of the utterance precludes the interpretation of introduction. The temporal adverb (*always*) is redundant unless its function is emphatically to introduce the element of constancy, underscoring the self-sufficiency of the subject. Second, the identification appears in a *for*-clause of reason. Whatever the preceding clause claims (and it is of secondary importance that it happens to make the high claim of fearlessness), its truth derives from the self’s unshakeable identity. Caesar’s “for always I am Caesar” is akin to the divine tautology of Exodus 3:14, “God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am’” (NIV).

Similarly self-referential is Caesar’s explanation why he will not come to the Senate meeting. “The cause is in my will. I will not come: / That is enough to satisfy the Senate” (II.ii.71-72). Apparently, there is no cause external to himself that could move, or in this particular case stay, him. It must be added, however, that Caesar goes on to say, “But for your *private* satisfaction, / Because I love you, I will let you know: / Calpurnia here, my wife, stays me home” (73-75, italics mine). There is a disjunction between public and private (another important theme of the play), but that conflicts with Caesar’s projected image of himself as divine (superhuman), predicated on constancy. Indeed, this ‘lapse’ into the private proves fatal for Caesar: Decius can reinterpret Calpurnia’s dream, shake Caesar’s resolve and flatter him, with the offer of impending coronation, into attending the meeting of the Senate where he is slain. Caesar’s last utterance is a self-address in the characteristic third person form, carefully placing the vocative at the end, “Then fall, Caesar!” (III.i.77).²⁷ Caesar’s last word is himself.

²⁶ The lines occur towards the end of a seventeen-line speech which is addressed to Antony and is itself in the middle of a dialogue.

²⁷ Caesar’s self-image of immovability (the unmoved mover, another subtle claim for divinity on Caesar’s part, and perhaps a pointer to Christianity on Shakespeare’s) is very dear to him: “I could be well moved, if I were as you; / If I could pray to move, prayers would move me. / But I am constant as the northern star ... Yet in the number I do know one / That unassailable holds on his rank, / Unshaked of motion, and that I am he / Let me a little show it” (III.i.58-71). His dying command to himself may be a last (heroic or desperate or futile) attempt to uphold that image. When he is stabbed, he only falls because he himself decides to: no power can shake him.

At the opposite end from Caesar is the *plebs*. The picture Shakespeare draws of the mob is anything but flattering. The function of the opening scene in which the tribunes chide the plebeians for forsaking Pompey for Caesar is often recognised as a preparation for III.ii, Antony's tremendous success in swaying their allegiance from Brutus. True as that is, I want to emphasise the continuity in the relations of the mob with individual leaders. We learn from Murellus that the plebeians had "many a time and oft ... sat / The livelong day, with patient expectation, / To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome" (I.i.36, 39-41). Yet the play begins with their admiring Caesar, who "comes in triumph over Pompey's blood" (50). Casca, having witnessed the crowd's expression of approval to Caesar's gestures at the Lupercal, concludes a little later that "if Caesar had stabbed their mothers they would have done no less" (264-65).

The commoners make their next appearance in III.ii, the funeral scene. They enter with Brutus and Cassius demanding satisfaction from them. This is apparently in keeping with their latest allegiance to Caesar. However, Brutus is called 'noble' even before he begins his speech (III.ii.11). It is enough that he promise them that "public reasons shall be rendered / Of Caesar's death" (7-8), and the plebeians are already predisposed to accept them - almost regardless of what they in fact are. After his speech, Brutus is cheered, offered a statue, the crown and a triumphant procession to his house (40-45). And the same pattern is repeated with Antony, who enters with Caesar's corpse during Brutus' speech. Brutus has to entreat the crowd to stay to hear Antony, speaking by his permission, yet as soon as he exits, Antony is immediately addressed as 'noble' (56) by the commoners though Brutus is not completely discarded as yet. That only comes as a result of Antony's speech for which he is duly rewarded with the title 'most noble' (224, see also 108 and 198), and the plebeians offer their life for him (199). Caesar, who, out of sight, was declared a 'tyrant' (61) just minutes ago, is now again 'most noble' and 'royal' (233-34, also in 190). The importance of sight could hardly be overstressed in this scene, and my point is just that. The crowd praises whoever is in sight, and it is enough to be seen to invoke praise from the crowd. It is no accident, I think, that Brutus and Cassius flee Rome upon "some notice of the people, / How [Antony] had moved them" (261-62). There is no more face to face encounter between the plebeians and leading individuals.

I do not want to overstate my case, and I am not suggesting that it is possible to reason with a mob bent on mutiny. Rather, I am saying that the *omission* is noteworthy. To be sure, there is another encounter between individual and mob, and it proves disastrous for Cinna the poet, upon whom the crowd forces the identity of Cinna the conspirator (III.iii). But it also proves disastrous for the plebeians. This

scene is their last.²⁸ Anything beyond this simple statement is speculation, but in a speculative vein I suggest that what proves fatal for the crowd is the forsaking of its characteristic mode of speech. The crowd's function has been to praise throughout. Its laudatory speech is here replaced by interrogation. That becomes its undoing because nothing can be said after that.

Between Caesar and the crowd, Antony is the key character of praise. Before his confrontation with the conspirators, he barely speaks (only 35 words,²⁹ to be precise). All of his utterances are addressed to Caesar, the latter's name occurring five times. Antony's words are all words of praise. When he does not praise Caesar, he praises Cassius (I.ii.196-97). When he comes to meet the conspirators after the assassination, he sends his servant before him, carefully instructed to impart his praise of Brutus in both word and deed.³⁰

Thus, Brutus, did my master bid me kneel,
 Thus did Mark Antony bid me fall down,
 And, being prostrate, thus bade me say:
 Brutus is noble, wise, valiant, and honest;
 Caesar was mighty, bold, royal, and loving.
 (III.i.123-37)

The gesture of sending one's servant before or instead of one is well-established. Two famous biblical examples, somewhat anachronistic for the Julius Caesar of history, but not so for Shakespeare's audience, are Jacob's sending messengers with gifts to Esau (Genesis 32) and the Capernaum centurion sending the elders of the Jews and then his friends to Jesus (Luke 7:1-10). The significance of these parallels is enhanced by the fact that Antony's sending of his servant to Brutus cannot be found in Plutarch, Shakespeare's source. I take this small scene as of the points where Christianity does not remain merely Shakespeare's context, but penetrates into the text.

Antony continues his praises, primarily to Caesar, throughout act III. It is through praise (or perhaps its careful manipulation) that he rises; and he falls into such

²⁸ The significance of this detail as the crowd's undoing was suggested to me by Harry Keyishian's article "Destructive Revenge in *Julius Caesar* and *Othello*" (in *The Shapes of Revenge: Victimization, Vengeance, and Indictiveness in Shakespeare*. [Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities, 1995] p. 89) though I explain it in somewhat different terms.

²⁹ I.ii.5, 9-10, 191, 196-97, II.ii.118.

³⁰ I am here concentrating on the *words* of praise, but as suggested in the introduction, there is much non-verbal praise in *Julius Caesar*.

depth of abusiveness as height of praise he ascended. As he deified Caesar, so he reduces Lepidus, through language, to inanimate corporeality: first to animality and then the status of property (IV.i.18-40). Some eighty-five per cent of Antony's entire speaking role is concentrated in act III and the opening scene of IV (itself only 50 lines). And roughly the same proportion of his text is directly laudatory or (this is far the smaller part) deprecatory. In a very real sense, Antony exists in such language. The prime example is his funeral oration (III.ii.65-261), which I want to discuss in a little more detail.

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The first of the four points I want to make in this sketchy reading of the *oratio funebris*³¹ concerns the relationship between showing and telling in the speech, perhaps *the* interpretive issue. Antony's speech concludes with replacing words with sight, with showing Caesar's mantle and then his corpse.³² But the speech is built on that contrast from the very beginning. Caesar's ambition is always referred to in reported speech, "Brutus *says* he was ambitious."³³ On the other hand, Caesar's great deeds are presented in direct speech. He *was* a faithful friend (III.ii.77), compassionate with the poor (83) and furthered Rome's good (81-82), but he *was said* to be ambitious. Praise is always immediate (doxology is in the present tense). Immediacy is both a condition and a consequence of praise. It will also be noted with regard to Antony's rhetorical strategy that it conforms to a doxological pattern in that he praises Caesar for what he was through what he did. Caesar is not presented descriptively but narratively. The story of his deeds is told. More accurately, an apparently false description (he was ambitious) is repeatedly contrasted with the narrative of his life. The plebeians are thus invited to infer the 'immanent nature of Caesar' (if such a blasphemous formulation is not inexcusable) from Antony's 'economic' rendering of him. It is through praise that true knowledge of Caesar is obtained, and it is through praise that knowledge of self can also be arrived at. The plebeians learn that they are citizens not liberated from Caesar's tyranny but deprived of a generous benefactor. By demanding the will (and in the given context that is at least implicit praise) they also learn who they really are, *vix*, heirs

³¹ Among the best recent readings known to me of Antony's speech are Kisíry's and Kujawska-Courtney's interpretations.

³² Kisíry cogently argues that this showing is carefully orchestrated and "its ontological status as a direct point of access to truth" is undercut (p. 52).

³³ III.ii.78, 85, 90; cf. also 69-70; emphasis added.

(III.ii.137, 233-43). “[A]doring speech ... in doxology,” we recall Pannenberg’s thesis, “always points ahead to God’s revelation.”³⁴ I suggest that the climax of the oration with the uncovering of Caesar’s body can be read as the divine manifesting itself to the devotee(s) in the consummation of praise. At the climactic point knowledge is no longer mediated through language but revealed (apparently) directly.

Second, honour is one of the key words in the play. Cassius makes it central, “honour is the subject of my story” (I.ii.92). Brutus hinges everything on it when he begins his address to the plebeians, “Believe me for my honour, and have respect to mine honour that you may believe” (III.ii.14-15). Antony picks up the theme – the lines “Yet Brutus says he was ambitious, / And Brutus is an honourable man” (85-86) are always coupled – and subverts it. Basing, as Brutus himself did, the validity of Brutus’ claim on his honour and then undermining that validity, Antony manages to undermine his honour. By the end of the oration, the conspirators, who were all mentioned as ‘honourable men’ at the beginning of the speech, become ‘traitors’ (176, 188), but only after the interpretation has first been offered by the stage audience (145).³⁵ Thus the real bone of contention between Antony and Brutus is not the interpretation of Caesar but of Brutus’ honour. Caesar’s greatness is only the particular ground on which the battle is fought.³⁶ That is also to say that Antony’s praise of Caesar has a pragmatic goal; it is not true (albeit idolatrous) doxology but a subversion of it, primarily aimed at Antony’s own divinization, to which I shall return. Ironically, his initial claim of having “come to bury Caesar, not to praise him” (66) may be truer than we usually take it to be.

³⁴ Pannenberg p. 236.

³⁵ It is easy to locate where the pressure that Antony has been building up against his own ostensible conviction bursts, and where the new interpretation is articulated: “[Antony:] I fear I wrong the honourable men / Whose daggers have stabbed Caesar, I do fear it. / [4 Pleb:] They were traitors. Honourable men!” (III.ii.143-45).

³⁶ By the end of the tragedy, the battle shifts to new ground, and Brutus’ own death (or body) becomes its locus. But, apparently, the prize to be captured by the war is still his honour (cf. V.i.29-47, 56-60, 110-12, iv.20-25, v.34-38, 56-57). In the last resort, he has to literally sacrifice himself in praise of his honour. The magnanimity (or otherwise) of this deed much depends on the set of values against which it is measured. In ancient Rome, no doubt, his decision was applauded. But in Renaissance (Christian) England there was a strong prohibition against suicide. And lest the audience forget about it, Shakespeare reminds them (V.i.97-112). Brutus’ initial resolve is against suicide. It is only because “[h]e bears too great a mind” (112) that he is unwilling to bear the shame of being led captive to Rome. If my interpretation is not mistaken, the audience can hear a faint (or possibly quite audible) echo of a question here.

Third, Antony's speech may culminate in, but it does not end with, revealing Caesar's corpse. The oration is concluded two more times. Few critics consider the significance of the repetition, and even fewer provide persuasive explanations.³⁷ It lies, I believe, in Antony's ulterior motive – ulterior, that is, not simply to his avowed purpose of burying Caesar but even to his 'obvious hidden meaning' of praising him. Antony is praising himself; self-praise is the function of the repeated closures. In the second concluding passage (III.ii.200-20) he praises his own oratory and rhetorical skill in the same way he has been praising Caesar, by asserting the opposite of his true meaning and subtly subverting the past.³⁸ In the present passage it is the more immediate past that is subverted, the preceding part of the public gathering (funeral). This detail supports my point that Antony is here congratulating himself on his achievement. He completely erases the (recent) past. He speaks as if neither Brutus' speech nor his own had been delivered. "What private griefs they have, alas, I know not, / That made them do it. They are wise and honourable, / And will no doubt with reasons answer you" (203-5). But the 'public reasons' have already been 'renderèd' (7)!

But were I Brutus,
 And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony
 Would ruffle up your spirits and put a tongue
 In every wound of Caesar, that should move
 The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny.
 (III.ii.216-20)

This is exactly what he has just done. The plebeians had been quite ready to "Revenge! About! Seek! Burn! Fire! Kill! / Slay! Let not a traitor live!" (III.ii.195-96) even before Antony began his second conclusion. While it appears that Antony cancels out his part of the past as well as Brutus', there is a remarkable difference in that the effects of Brutus' speech are completely gone while Antony's are stronger than ever. Subverting the past by cancelling it in this case simply epitomises his overarching rhetorical strategy: praising by ostensibly denying praise, yet maintaining the immediacy of what is to be admired (here, of his own speaking voice).

³⁷ Keyishian's interpretation I find downright unconvincing. "In three separate, spasmodic movements, each more intense than the one that came before, Antony uses the crowd's curiosity about the will to focus and mobilize their revengeful anger. ... Antony calls them back in order to prevent their being swayed again to the conspirators' side" (pp. 87-88).

³⁸ For a brilliant discussion of Antony's subversion of history in the first part of the speech (and in general), see Kujawska-Courtney (esp. pp. 28-29, 44-46).

The third conclusion is a blatant self-congratulation. Antony calls back the mob to remind them that they have forgotten about the will.³⁹ Antony is too shrewd a tactician (and orator) to leave anything to chance. He effectively (though not in detail) discloses the contents of Caesar's will when the plebeians are first manipulated into demanding it, i.e., when it is first mentioned (III.ii.121-31). Employing yet again the paradox of negation, Antony says, "'Tis good you know not that *you are his heirs*, / For if you should, O, what would come of it?" (137-38, emphasis mine.) And when he is 'compelled' (148) by the crowd to read the will, he immediately shifts the focus to Caesar's body. Having gained his point (as regards the testament), he is ready to discard it and move on. The crucial reinterpretation of the conspirators from 'honourable men' to 'traitors' has just taken place (145). Antony's position is secured; he begins to play a game with the audience. Eighty lines and two conclusions later, Antony returns to the theme, I believe, for no practical reason. Nor does this final conclusion seem to increase the mob's rage – it is already extreme. He simply indulges himself by controlling the uncontrollable and reminding his audience (at least off-stage) that he needed no aid to inflame the plebeians, to make them mad (136). When he finally lets go of the crowd⁴⁰ and is left alone on stage, Antony, at least implicitly, congratulates himself on fulfilling his own prophecy uttered by way of a promise to Caesar's corpse (III.i.259-75).⁴¹ And the gesture is repeated in the concluding lines of the whole scene, this time addressed to Octavius' servant: "Belike they had some notice of the people, / How I had moved them" (III.ii.260-61). This self-praise gives again the lie to Antony's praise of Caesar.

Lastly, Antony's doxology performs its ontological function. He is transformed by the performance of his laudatory speech. At the opening of the scene, he is at the mercy of the conspirators. It is only "under leave of Brutus and the rest" (III.ii.73) that he can speak. Not much before, he was fleeing for his life (III.i.97).⁴² When the scene

³⁹ At this point Keyishian's reading breaks down completely. The crowd is not curious about the will; it has forgotten it entirely.

⁴⁰ This again is a symbolic action. Antony, the last master of the plebeians, lets them loose, formally renouncing his control. "Now let it work. Mischief, thou are afoot, / Take thou what course thou wilt!" (III.ii.250-51). We have seen what fruits his gesture bears. The master-less mob veers off course (linguistically and 'ontologically') and disintegrates.

⁴¹ For the self-fulfilment of the prophecy, see Kiséry p. 44.

⁴² It was through praise (flattery) of Brutus that Antony took the very first step from fearing for his life to be tolerated by the conspirators. Brutus calls him "a wise and valiant Roman" and claims that he has "never thought him worse" (III.i.138-39), but that is only after the servant's delivery of Antony's message and is

is over, he is the lord of Rome. The achievement is due to his oratory. Kujawinska-Courtney sees the chief cause of the failure of Brutus' speech in its calling attention to the speaker.⁴³ With this he "breaks the rhetorical rules of the *laudatio funebris*. ... The ideal teller of the *virtus* of a king should figuratively disappear from his own enunciated narrative."⁴⁴ Antony observes this basic rule – and succeeds.⁴⁵ He so much disappears from his narrative that at the first conclusion Caesar's corpse replaces his own body and Caesar's wounds his tongue. By offering himself in praise to Caesar, Antony shares in his divinity.

Antony's sharing of Caesar's divinity does not contradict my earlier claim that Antony is primarily concerned about praising himself, and his doxology of Caesar is not genuine. What I have just described, Antony's divinization, takes place *on stage*, on the primary plane of interaction and interpretation between Antony and the plebeians. *They* take his praise to be genuine and accord him a place next to Caesar: both are called 'most noble' in quick succession (III.ii.224, 233). Further, the mob is quite willing to hear Antony, to follow him, and to die with him (199) – there is not much room for further devotion. On the secondary plane, the audience *of* the play may see through Antony's praise of Caesar and recognise his self-aggrandising intentions. In the audience's eyes Antony's praise of Caesar may be perverted, but then the audience will also perceive that Antony does not truly become divine, merely rises in power. Phenomenologically, Antony's rise through praise is undeniable. Whether it is seen in

somewhat disingenuous. True, Brutus did spare Antony's life, but only because he thought him insignificant and entirely dependent on Caesar (II.i.160-65, 181-83).

⁴³ "[I]t is not incidental that in 41 lines of Brutus' speech there are 23 personal and possessive pronouns referring to the speaker" (Kujawinska-Courtney p. 44).

⁴⁴ Kujawinska-Courtney p. 44. Following Schlink, I argued above that the sacrifice (disappearance) of the self is characteristic of doxology. I take Kujawinska-Courtney's concurrence (in fact, her reference is to L. Marin's *Portrait of the King*, trans. Marta M. Houle [Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1988] pp. 78-80) as supportive of my claim that all praise is modelled on the praise of God.

⁴⁵ While I find this contrast fascinating and insightful, it requires qualifications. Brutus' speech was no failure, or it was one only with respect to Antony's. Maintaining my point as regards praise, immediacy and the mob's tendency to take proximity as the only prerequisite for praise, I think Antony's success is due in no small part to Brutus' absence. In fact, Antony only disappears from the first part of his speech. In what I call its second conclusion (III.ii.200-20), there are thirteen pronouns referring to Antony and, in addition, his name appears twice. Further, roughly half of that passage is explicitly about himself, and only three and a half lines are directly about Caesar. These data support my claim in the previous paragraphs that the point of the repeated closures is self-praise.

ontological or relational (power) terms is a matter of interpretation, and I noted (discussing Pannenberg) the inevitable circularity in the interpretation of praise.

In various ways, then, Caesar's, Antony's and the plebeians' characteristic mode of speech is doxological. In various ways, their doxologies are all blasphemous,⁴⁶ and they all have to fall.⁴⁷ What is interesting to note is that despite the perversion these doxologies are subject to in Caesar's, Antony's and the crowd's speech, they still exhibit ontological and epistemological characteristics. It is clearest with Antony and the plebeians, who exist in and through laudatory language, but Caesar's divinity also happens in his self-referential speech.

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The conspirators can reasonably be expected not to comply with this 'caesarocratic' discourse. Indeed, their⁴⁸ speech pattern is different. It is usually more difficult to demonstrate the absence of a feature than its presence, and my best argument is to refer to the entire text of the play. The conspirators' language lacks the all-pervasive doxological character exhibited by the Caesarists' speech. But to advance less elusive arguments, a brief analysis of the use of apostrophe and proper names in Brutus' and Cassius' speech may be helpful.

They customarily call each other by name, but they almost infallibly employ the vocative form, often accompanied by the second person pronoun.⁴⁹ Similarly, with the exception of one important situation, they hardly use third person formulae with reference to themselves. When they do,⁵⁰ it is either not laudatory⁵¹ or the context warrants it – either their honour or their life is at stake. But these instances are by far the exception. They use much more frequently the first person singular pronoun than their own name. The self-aggrandising air of Caesar's language is almost entirely absent

⁴⁶ I shall return to the perspective from which this claim can be made in the concluding part of my paper.

⁴⁷ Antony's fall is only completed in *Antony and Cleopatra*, but there are already clear indications of his eclipse by Octavius (cf. V.i.19-20, and the structurally crucial lines are assigned to Octavius, he has the last word). Caesar's fall and the crowd's undoing (disappearance) are also complex, but cannot be treated here in detail.

⁴⁸ I focus exclusively on Brutus' and Cassius' language.

⁴⁹ "Among which number, Cassius, be you one" (I.ii.44). "I know that virtue to be in you, Brutus" (90), etc.

⁵⁰ As in I.ii.46, 116, 172, iii.90, II.i.58, III.i.21, V.i.72, 111, v.39.

⁵¹ E.g., 'poor Brutus' (I.ii.46).

from theirs. The only notable exception is the quarrel scene. In a mere forty lines (IV.iii.77-115) they have recourse to third person forms (speaking of themselves and/or the other) more than throughout the rest of the play. But the third person form is by no means laudatory here. On the contrary, it serves a sarcastic function by creating distance (removing the self or the other to the third person) – but sarcasm is precisely perverted praise.⁵² To the extent that praise of another human being is dependent on doxology, the perversion of the latter results in the perversion of the former: all mutual relationships either break down or become destructive or distorted in *Julius Caesar*.

Caesar's name is frequently uttered by both Brutus and Cassius, but it is hardly ever augmented by an adjective on their lips.⁵³ Nor do they often address Caesar in the first half of the play. True, there is not much interaction between them, but even so the contrast with Antony is remarkable. A striking contrast sets in with, perhaps astonishingly, the assassination scene. The staging⁵⁴ of the murder is such that the conspirators approach Caesar with an address each. Their apostrophes introduce a supplication (the plea for Publius Cimber) and express, either in word or in gesture, Caesar's praises.⁵⁵ This marks a turning point. No sooner is Caesar slain than his praises are first tolerated (Antony's pronounced at the scene pass with impunity) then encouraged (Antony is to praise Caesar at the funeral), finally loudly and actively sung. In his own 'funeral' oration, Brutus praises Caesar, finding only one (though fatal) fault with him, ambition. Superlative praise becomes so much Caesar's due that he is no longer identified by his name but by his greatness. In the quarrel scene Brutus refers to him as "the foremost man of all this world" (IV.iii.22).⁵⁶ Finally, both Cassius' and

⁵² The irony is complete when Cassius addresses Antony and Octavius in the second person while speaking of himself and Brutus in the third (IV.iii.93-99).

⁵³ The only noteworthy exception, not to mention Cassius' "tired Caesar" (I.ii.115), is the parenthetical "immortal Caesar" in I.ii.60. I think it is either reported speech, quoting popular opinion, or, if Cassius is inserting his own remark, it is to be taken ironically if not sarcastically. Of course, not only adjectival phrases with *Caesar* as their head can express praise or deprecation of him; cf. "So vile a thing as Caesar" (I.iii.111). Generally, the conspirators do not praise Caesar while he is alive though they may sometimes acknowledge his good qualities as in Brutus' nocturnal soliloquy (II.i.19-21).

⁵⁴ Here I mean the conspirators' 'production' though it is inseparable from the actual performance in the theatre.

⁵⁵ As in Metellus' opening line, "Most high, most mighty, and most puissant Caesar" (III.i.33).

⁵⁶ Incidentally, a few lines earlier his name did appear, duly graced by the adjective 'great' (IV.iii.19).

Brutus' dying words are addressed to Caesar. In fact, their suicides elicit from them three such apostrophes.⁵⁷

The difficulty of identifying the hero of *Julius Caesar* is almost proverbial (some favour Caesar, others prefer Brutus, not to mention Cassius or the rise and eclipse of Antony), and the disagreement among critics on this matter was itself established as a critical commonplace a long time ago. Corresponding to the problem of the hero is the interpretation of the conspiracy. Was liberty upheld by Caesar's murder, who is then seen through Cassius' eyes an ambitious tyrant despite his frailty; or was his stabbing the basest crime against "the noblest man / That ever livèd in the tide of times" (III.i.256-57), in which case Antony's view of Caesar is adopted? The emblematic event whose interpretation epitomises the larger debate over Caesar's ambition is his refusal of the crown at Lupercal. Antony maintains that Caesar did not accept the crown though offered thrice (III.ii.87-89) while Casca, another eye witness, thinks "he was very loath to lay his fingers off it" (I.ii.238). Caesar's putting it by was "every time gentler than other" (228-29). The crucial thing to notice is, however, that the audience only has narrative accounts of the event. The Lupercal celebration takes place off stage; we have no immediate experience of the scene against which to measure its competing interpretations.

It may seem at first sight that Shakespeare prefers the 'republican reading' and makes Brutus the hero of the play.⁵⁸ In terms of my reading that would be suggested by the unattractiveness of the perverted doxological speech structures of the Caesarists and the fact that the play concludes on a note of Brutus' praise. The strict vertical organisation of human relationships in which those below are to praise, even to the point of idolisation, the one(s) above, precludes horizontal relations like friendship. And it also necessitates either the subversion (perversion) of praise or idolatry. In neither case can the claim of the other be adequately acknowledged and granted. The conspirators, on the other hand, seem to abide by the rule that the self must limit the praises of the other if idolatry is to be avoided. Cassius sets himself (or Brutus or Casca – at any rate, another self) as measure against Caesar and questions his disproportionate glory.⁵⁹ Brutus is more liberal with his acknowledgement of Caesar's greatness, he nonetheless sets himself as the limit to his ambition (III.i.16-39). However, Cassius

⁵⁷ V.iii.45-46, 94-96, v.50-51.

⁵⁸ He is a strong candidate for the hero of the play because he sees and freely acknowledges Caesar's greatness yet he acts against him in the name of some greater value. For him, there is a tragic conflict of values and the one has to be (literally) sacrificed in order that the other may prevail.

⁵⁹ I.ii.95-131, 140-50, iii.76-78.

uses praise repeatedly to manipulate Brutus,⁶⁰ and he is rather successful in it. How much Brutus is moved by Cassius' (fake)⁶¹ flattery is difficult to say. He *is* moved, but he may be moved in good faith.⁶² Likewise, he honestly attempts to convert Caesar's murder into a ritual sacrifice. (The inherent connection between sacrifice and praise needs no further comment.) I only want to add a minor point here to Brents Stirling's careful treatment of the question. Stirling fails to notice the significance of Brutus' first soliloquy in II.i.10-34. It is here that Brutus seems to make up his mind though his resolution will (have to) be reconfirmed. And in this speech there is no mention of sacrifice. The final metaphor is that of a serpent's egg which must be destroyed because of the *potential* threat it poses. And Brutus does not hit on this (conveniently subhuman, repulsive, and dangerous) metaphor without searching. The matter must be 'fashioned' and 'thought' of in the right way if it is to look excusable because Caesar's present condition does not warrant the complaint of tyranny.⁶³ All subsequent talk of sacrifice and Brutus' subsequent praise of Caesar is undercut by this initial disingenuous verbal manoeuvre which is performed in a soliloquy, and thus we should not doubt that it is what Brutus really thinks. Praise is no easy matter for the 'republicans' either.

But their real stumbling block is its necessity, which takes us back to the problem of Caesar as an object of praise. Conspiracy's "monstrous visage" must be hidden "in smiles and affability" (II.i.81-82); freedom's liberation must be cloaked in ambition's praises. *Laudare necesse est* – there is no way round it. The point is driven home rather forcefully by Antony in his last encounter with Brutus and Cassius before the battle of Philippi (V.i.39-44). His biting address leaves them virtually speechless. To his "flatterers" Cassius can only reply by turning against *Brutus*, and his only remark concerns how the accusation could have been physically silenced, not how it could be countered. It cannot be countered. And this paradox lies at the heart of the conspirators' quandary. Nor was it a momentary difficulty for which the principle of the end justifying the means, however dubious, could have provided the answer. The problem of Caesar's praise remains with them. They must praise Caesar in order to make their deed (and themselves) praiseworthy. They corrected what alone was amiss in him (ambition). The conspirators acted (or claim to have acted) in the name of some higher principle (Rome and her traditions, the gods, love of their country, freedom, the

⁶⁰ I.ii.55-62, 90-91, 142-47, iii.i.297-309, II.i.90-93.

⁶¹ Fake inasmuch as the letters certainly are ungenue, and this artfulness undermines his spoken protestations of popular opinion.

⁶² Cf. II.i.46-58.

⁶³ "And since the quarrel / Will bear no colour for the thing he is, I'fashion it thus" (II.i.28-30).

common good, etc.) which was to be preferred not only to Caesar's own advancement but also to all that was great in him. The higher *he* is praised, the nobler the *principle* which is by definition to be preferred to him. In a different way from the Caesarists, the conspirators still (try to) attain to their own true selves (as champions of "Liberty, freedom, and enfranchisement!" III.i.81) through offering up their praises to Caesar. And as they do that, they apparently gain new knowledge of Caesar's true nature, how powerful he is.⁶⁴ Doxology again performs its ontological and epistemological functions.

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Caesar is thus the source of life in the play. He is the fixed centre: so firmly fixed that even physical destruction cannot (re)move him. In various ways, the characters all circle around him as planets around a sun. The title is thus not misleading. True, the play may be a 'Tragedy of Brutus,' but even that is only a commentary on 'Julius Caesar' – whose name neither requires nor tolerates further syntactic modification to designate the play's theme. He remains in the centre even after his assassination. The conspirators' failure may be described in terms of iconoclasm and idolatry. Iconoclasm provides no solution for idolatry because it destroys the icon but not the idol, and they are not the same. The idol, as Luther would say, is a matter of the heart, not of the eye.⁶⁵ The attitude that alone gives rise to caesarocratic idolatry,⁶⁶ the conspirators cannot alter; in fact, by the end they also capitulate both linguistically and physically.

But to conclude that Caesar is the focus of the play is not necessarily to take sides in the Caesarist/republican debate. The centrality of Caesar may not be something that the play, as its own commentary, applauds. It may simply register it. That is precisely my claim. But it can only be seen from an outside point of view. When the icon is destroyed, the idol remains, but *Julius Caesar* as a Roman play seems to offer no distinction between that and the true addressee of doxology. Caesar, in his own historical context, *was* divinized. The play seems to revoke the perspective from which caesarocratic praise appears misplaced. But if political and military success and/or the appearance of a ghost (IV.ii.274-85) seem for us insufficient grounds to idolise Caesar,

⁶⁴ Note the simple present tense Brutus uses: "O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet! / Thy spirit walks abroad, and turns our swords / In our proper entrails" (V.iii.94-96).

⁶⁵ "As I have often said, the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and idol" (Luther Pt. I, par. 1).

⁶⁶ Cf. I.iii.103-06.

we need a perspective from which this intuition may be conceptualised. I have suggested that such a perspective can be provided by the theological considerations of the first part of this paper. We must praise – we need a god: whatever elicits the doxological response from us is (formally) our god. But it may not in fact (normatively) be God. That leads to idolatry. Idolatrous praise exhibits the same characteristics as true doxology, but (at least in the long run) it is destructive. *Julius Caesar* is a tragedy.

But I do not (need not) argue that it is a Christian play. Specifically Christian concerns have here belonged to the critical apparatus. The attention the play calls to a discrepancy between Roman and Christian mores concerning suicide, Antony's gesture, invoking Biblical parallels, of sending his servant before him, the pervasiveness of sacrificial language and ritual elements in it as well as Caesar's divinization provide a strong enough invitation for such a critical approach. Whether it has been fruitful may be judged by the success or failure of the foregoing analysis.