

Article

Public Lament and Intra-Faith Worship in an Appalachian Context

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Abstract: On 5 April 2010, the largest mining disaster in the US since 1970 occurred at the Upper Big Branch Mine in West Virginia. Twenty-five miners were known to have died in the explosion, with the fates of four miners unknown. Families of the twenty-nine miners gathered together at the mine site as they awaited word as to which of the miners died and who had survived. On 6 April, the Red Cross invited representatives from the West Virginia Council of Churches to the mine site to help organize pastoral support for the families. On the evening of 10 April, five days after the explosion, word came that all of the 29 miners had died in the initial explosion. Governor Joe Manchin declared, on 25 April, for a public memorial service for the miners—an event attended by several thousand worshipers and led by clergy, denominational leaders, and public officials, including President Barack Obama, Vice President Joe Biden, Senator Robert C. Byrd, and Governor Manchin. This collaborative essay traces how the pastoral, political, and relational response to trauma shaped this liturgical form. Given the oral traditions of the region, narrative will be one of the primary structures for analysis, and testimony is central to this public worship. A public secular ritual with its goals of unity and inter-riting of distinct religious voices and identities will provide a grammar for reading the service.

Keywords: inter-riting; cross participation; etic and emic; trauma membrane; belongingness



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1. Introduction

Pastoral theology emerges from the particularities of pastoral care for a given community. When the given community understands itself as distinct from the dominant culture, it is essential to engage with the insights of ecology, sociology, and economics, in planning, leading, and analyzing public liturgy; for example, an Appalachian multicultural worship in the context discussed in this essay.

Heather Murray Elkins and Jeffrey S. Allen have explored the complexities of Appalachian intra-faith in West Virginia—a region that is demographically monoracial with 93.05% White population ([World Population Review 2022](#)). The West Virginia Council of Churches has been providing a sustainable intersection for ecumenical and multiracial worship experiences in diverse contexts and occasions in the regional community. Thus, the case study and the commentary in regards to the works of the West Virginia Council of Churches offer insights into liturgical pastoral care for communities, especially dealing with ecological and economic trauma.

The roles of narrative and orality in Appalachian culture are essential, since it is shaped by multiple histories of trauma, lament, and healings from them. This approach requires an analysis of speeches and addresses, as well as the performative aspects of the ritual. We are using this approach to ritual as it is outlined in *Ritual and Its Consequences*. The authors argue that:

Ritual always operates in a world that is fragmented and fractured. Moreover, the subjunctive world created by ritual is always doomed ultimately to fail—the ordered world of flawless repetition can never fully replace the broken world of

experience. This is why the tension between the two is inherent and, ultimately, unbridgeable. Indeed, this tension is the driving force behind the performance of ritual: the endless work of ritual is necessary precisely because the ordered world of ritual is inevitably only temporary. The world always returns to its broken state, constantly requiring the repairs of ritual (Seligman et al. 2008, p. 30).

This view of the *ritual and the tragic* of the world will undergird this essay, as it provides a lens for the particular relationship between coal and communal identity in the Appalachian community (ibid.). One question needs to be addressed early in this essay: why would a study of the memorial service for coal miners in Appalachia—a region whose population is often described as “Protestant” and “white”—belong to a collection of essays on multicultural worship? Our response to this question involves deconstructing some commonly held assumptions about Protestantism, secular/religious public disaster memorials, and Appalachia itself. Central to this analysis is the definition of culture that comes from the work of David E. Whisnant, in his *All That Is Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*. He states:

Culture is “the entire range of belief, attitude, value, characteristic behavior, posture, and so on, which makes up the individual and collective identity of an ethnic, regional, or socioeconomic group...” This understanding of “culture” is the cornerstone by which a community’s ritual actions in response to a traumatic loss of life are measured. It encompasses “social organization, judgments about family and community structure, forms of worship, school curricula, entertainment, and cultural nuances that inhere in such things as bodily postures and rhythms, vocal cadence, and interactional style” (Whisnant 2009, p.12).

This definition of culture is interlinked with our understanding of ritual. (Seligman et al. 2008, p. 180) include non-Protestant traditions, as well as alternatives to social scientific understandings, as factors in considering the meaning of ritual. This view assumes “a world that is fragmented and broken” (ibid., p. 30). The language of lament shapes this region’s worldview, from which songs and laments can be understood as the deep grammar or the accent of this community. In his address, then-Vice President Biden summarizes and critiques the sacrificial history of coal miners: “No one should have to sacrifice their life for their livelihood” (Biden 2010). The “should” is understood, however, as the reality of coal mining that is regrettable but required.

Who has the right to describe the life rites and rituals of Appalachia? This is a critical question for this region and its people. Julian Murchison discusses the *etic* aspect of ritual participation, and provides the framework for analyzing cultural phenomena from the perspective of one who does not participate in the culture being studied (Murchison 2010). Her critical perspective is significant for recognizing the distinctiveness of Appalachian identity, particularly, regarding the complex culture of coal communities. Failure to recognize that one’s perspective is *etic*, that of non-belonging, has contributed to misreading of Appalachian culture, which contributes to an economic colonization of people, resources, and region. In contrast, an *emic* perspective comes from voluntarily locating oneself within a culture, religion, or regional identity, and being recognized as one belonging to the culture. We are using the term ‘belongingness’ to describe this emic perspective. The emic perspective is not a given, however. It is an interlacing relation; a patchwork quilt perspective. In other words, this belongingness does not presume a uniformity of perspective, or guarantee that the community will consistently recognize one’s credentials of belonging.

Sensitivity to the complexity of cultural identities of Appalachia is required in order to prevent the re-inscribing of negative and romanticized stereotypes. West Virginia is the only state that is included in its entirety in the formal definition of Appalachia. Its religious identity has been “portrayed in stereotypical terms that focus on the archetype called the ‘mountain preacher’ who oscillates between two extremes with unfortunate and unrealistic characterizations: as either a strict, suffocating Calvinist or an emotionally unstable fanatic with a penchant for serpent handling” (McCauley 1999, p. 105). However, this reading erases its religious and cultural diversity and adds to the marginalization and simplification

of West Virginian identity. Even the term “Protestantism” obscures the reality of non-denominational mountain churches. In addition, West Virginia has a “considerably lower rate of religious affiliation than for the nation as a whole” (Pritchett 2006). Historically, religious and cultural mainline “missions” to the region have projected a homogeneous culture for their own ends. Cultural stereotyping has also served outside forces of exploitation, be they energy companies or pharmaceutical corporations.

It is essential to recognize the impact of industrialization in forming the religious diversity in the region and the state. The nation’s critical need for natural resources is summarized in the phrase, “King Coal.” This need for coal in heating homes, powering trains, and fueling battleships led to open-door European immigration policies supported by coal owners. Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Jews, and Muslims were recruited, and their numbers were added to those who came for work in the lumber mills, the glass factories, the steel mills, and the gas and oil reserves.

The industrialization of the region can be mirrored in the diversity of migrants drawn by the railroad and coal fields. East European Jews, Roman Catholic Italians, Poles, and Lutheran Germans joined the first-wave immigrants: the Scots and Irish. Nearly a tenth of the people in West Virginia were immigrants following WWI, but most of these were in the state’s three major coal regions. Governor Manchin’s family was among those Italian immigrants who settled in the Fairmont area, finding work in the coal fields. In the Fairmont region, “the entire range of Americanization impulses were evident.... The hub of malevolent, pragmatic, and benevolent Americanization impulses which were not present elsewhere in the state.” (Lewis 2002, p. 262).

Industrialization following the Civil War transformed the state from a primarily subsistence economy to a dependent extraction economy, but the transition could only take place through the contributions of immigrant laborers. The concentration of corporate power of coal, railroads, and politics can be seen in the “Fairmont Ring”, a small group of politicians and coal-owners with connections to companies such as Standard Oil, the Baltimore and Ohio Railway, Fairmont and Consolidated, and Monongah Coal Companies, which were powerful enough to purchase U.S. Senate seats in the early 1920s. (Drake 2001, p. 152).

The contribution of Black coal miners to the conversion of West Virginia’s subsistence economy to an industrial base was substantial, but not often recognized. Between the 1890s and early 1930, Black miners made up over 20 percent of the state’s total coal mining labor force. Southern Black families migrated to the state, drawn by the coal operators’ offer of better jobs and the families’ hope for fewer Jim Crow laws.

One memorable migrant to the Mountain State was Booker T. Washington, who recorded the cost of the American Dream of mining. “Work in the coal mines I always dreaded . . . There was always the danger of being blown to pieces by a premature explosion of powder, or of being crushed by falling slate. Accidents from one or the other of these causes were frequently occurring and this kept me in constant fear” (Washington 1901, pp. 137–38).

1.1. Belongingness and Appalachian Identity

Belongingness is a term we use to describe the identity of those whose cultural origin is West Virginia, either by birth or location, or those who leave their birth place for economic survival, but make pilgrimages back “home.” Although Appalachia can be described as an immigrant-based region, there is a disconnection between that history and a kind of geography of belonging to the place. An outsider can achieve “belongingness,” but it requires years of being rooted in the community and being recognized for service by those “born and bred” in the Almost Heaven. We have combined the emic/etic perspectives to this service with the realization that neither birth nor service to the community removes these boundaries in our work, since we do not belong to a coal mining community. Belonging is atomistic for Appalachia. There is no centered source of community authority, although

social role does provide some initial access, such as those of a pastor, a governor, or a president.

1.2. Authenticity and Authority as Healer/Liturgical Leaders

This etic/outsider position is important to acknowledge, as pastoral and liturgical care is offered particularly when the community has suffered a traumatic loss. Connectedness to a community can be established by evidence of caring and empathetic knowledge. In this disaster-based liturgical event, it is critical that the “liturgists” are pastorally present with the families without being intrusive, are practiced in the skills of empathetic listening, have the authority to protect those who have suffered loss from public exposure, and are able to provide required assistance in the immediate crisis and sustained support in the months that follow the loss and its public service.

The term “trauma membrane” is a marker for the experience of the miners’ families present for this service as well as a description for the history of coal extraction and West-Virginian communities. It is a concept central to the training of pastoral care workers in this area. “As part of the healing process in the aftermath of catastrophic stress, the trauma membrane forms as a temporary psychosocial structure to promote adaptation and healing. The trauma membrane acts as an intrapsychic and interpersonal mediator, interfacing between the person and the traumatic memories and everyday reminders of the traumatic event from the external world” (Martz and Lindy 2010, p. 27).

The narrative of this mining disaster and the collaborative analysis in this essay traces how the pastoral and relational response to trauma shapes the liturgical. Given the oral traditions of the region, story is one of the primary structures for analysis, and the role of testimony is central to this public service. Mining disasters have both industrial and ecological aspects of loss and trauma. A public Christian ritual held in response to an industrial-ecological tragedy assumes its stated goal to be healing and unity, as well as serving as a public platform for interpreting the identity of a people who see themselves as culturally distinct from a dominant urban culture.

2. Case Study

An overview of the printed order reveals this relationship of the religious and the political in a public memorial service following a disaster, either human-made, natural, or a combination of both. The descriptions of the service will be presented in present tense, and to encourage a wider reading of the essay, the recording of the service in its entirety can be found online ([Memorial Service for West Virginia Coal Miners 2010](#)).

People are still in shock at the site of the explosion. While most people know where their loved ones were working in the mine and could surmise whether they had died at the time of the explosion, the hope remained that one of the four, whose bodies were not officially found until April 10, could have been their loved one who would be still alive.

Four communities existed where the families gathered to await the word as to whether their loved one was alive or not: the miners’ families and friends, volunteers and aid workers, UBB Mine staff, and government personnel, including Governor Manchin and his staff and House of Representative member Nick Joe Rahall.

During the week of the attempted rescue, many false starts for exploration of the mine came and went. It was very chaotic. The announcement that the miners had all perished came late at night. The families’ hopes were crushed in a single blow.

The shadow of the Sago Mine Disaster also hung over the Upper Big Branch Mine disaster. This time, thanks to the authority of the Governor’s office, families were kept secluded from the pressures of the news media, largely sparing the families from undocumented or invited persons claiming to be “sent by God” with messages about the survivors. The West Virginia Council of Churches organized pastoral support at the request of the Red Cross and had a daily presence. The rapport that the volunteer pastors developed with the families of the miners, as well as the gatekeepers in the local and state levels, provided access to the disaster site and the authority to negotiate the planning of the service at the

invitation of the Governor's office. Governor Manchin requested that the West Virginia Council of Churches put together the memorial service. The Council's work of gathering the clergy who were present on-site provided the initial authenticity and authority to offer pastoral care and liturgical leadership.

The initial intention for the service was to be a religious service of lament, affirmation, and healing for the families of the miners who had perished. Scriptures, songs, and testimonies were chosen with the purpose of personal and communal pastoral care. It was planned as a service for those who "belonged" at the disaster site due to the loss of loved ones and by the virtue of their pastoral presence during the crisis.

The original design and intention were altered when other state, and then national, political leaders requested to be included and to have their presence acknowledged in the service. This alteration required an interweaving of a memorial service for miners with a service of civil religion, by which the categories of Christian and "American" are blended. This exemplifies the inter-riting process that links regional, religious, and civil religion in a trauma-based service designed for the public square. It is not unique to Appalachia or coal mines; services following mass shootings invoke this form of lament, affirmation of meaning in traumatic loss for individuals and communities, and unspecified promises from civic leaders to solve the problem that created the crisis.

These services of loss, lament, testimony, and affirmation of endurance can be considered a life-cycle trauma rite for West Virginia, with its historic legacy as a supplier of the nation's coal-based energy. Families of these lost miners had funeral services in their own congregations, led by local clergy. This event, however, was to be a public service with the state and nation as the co-participants with the families and friends of the miners. The Governor's staff began to take a more active role in the design of the service, partly in response to the growing awareness of the regional response and then the national media. Changes in music, speakers, visuals for live broadcasting occurred once it was determined that President Obama and Vice President Biden were to take part.

The pastoral intentions of a religious service for local grieving families can be described as an emic dynamic. Once national political dynamics come into play, however, the etic function emerged in the planning and the performance of the ritual. The role of insiders and outsiders, the Appalachian mining culture, and the urban elite culture were interwoven around identity and energy politics, economics, theologies, and this trauma-shaped event.

2.1. The Bulletin

The bulletin's front cover is a black background, with the names of the miners above an image of an American flag. A miner's gloves and miner's helmet with light are at the bottom. The inside pages contain the order of the service and the participants, edged on the left with a picture of a sculpture of a coal miner. The service title is printed sideways on the right: "Hope and Healing," with the words, "We will remember" in white letters against a black border. The back cover provides opportunities for contributions for the miners' families: the ethical response indicative of a culture that wants to provide care in times of disaster.

The acknowledgements list includes disaster relief national groups, mining corporations, religious groups, local businesses, telecommunications. The vendors listed in the bulletin provided support for the families on the day of the memorial service, but one vendor is missing from the bulletin because they declined to be on a list with Massey Energy.

2.2. Ritual Space

The old Beckley Armory is the worship site, a gym-like setting with a raised dais. The Family Worship Center nearby serves as a staging area for the clergy. A member of that congregation helped to create the 29 white crosses that line the tables on the floor level and provided the helmets with lights that will be hung on the crosses. The battery pack/lights attached to each helmet were provided by a mining company. There is a podium on the stage, with photos of the miners attached to the black stage curtains and two screens where

the faces of the individual miners are posted as their names are read. Everyone is seated on the floor level, with the President, Vice President, and their aides in the front row on the right.

2.3. Elements of the Service

Please see following Table 1.

Table 1. A Memorial Service of Hope and Healing.

Entrance of Elected Officials	
Family Tribute	Gayle C. Manchin <i>First Lady of the State of West Virginia</i>
Posting of the Colors	<i>West Virginia National Guard</i>
National Anthem	Randall Reid-Smith <i>Commissioner of Culture and History</i>
Opening Prayer	Rev. Mike Pollard <i>West Virginia Baptist State Convention</i>
Welcome	Joe Manchin III <i>Governor of the State of West Virginia</i>
Greeting	Rev. Dennis D. Sparks <i>Executive Director, West Virginia Council of Churches</i>
<i>Choral Special</i>	<i>"Angels Watching Over Me"</i> <i>Trap Hill Middle School Choir</i> <i>Yvonne Seay, Director</i>
"Psalm 121"	Rev. Helen Oates <i>District Superintendent, UMC</i>
Remarks	Senator Robert C. Byrd Senator Jay Rockefeller <i>Members of Congress</i> Nick Joe Rahall, <i>Spokesman</i> Alan B. Mollohan Shelley Moore Capito
Hymn	<i>"Amazing Grace"</i> Michelle Hontz, Piano <i>Appalachian Bible College</i>
Gospel	Bishop Michael J. Bransfield <i>Roman Catholic Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston</i>
Meditation	Rev. James Mitchell <i>Chaplain, West Virginia State Police</i>
Remarks	Joseph R. Biden, Jr. <i>Vice-President of the United States</i>
Eulogy	Barack Obama <i>President of the United States of America</i>
Special Music	<i>"Go Rest High on That Mountain"</i> Matthew Jones
Benediction	<i>"Coal Miner's Prayer"</i> Joe Manchin III <i>Governor of the State of West Virginia</i>
Postlude	<i>"This Little Light of Mine"</i> <i>Martin Luther King Jr. Male Chorus</i> Bill Hairston, Director

The Family Tribute led by Gayle C. Manchin, wife of then Governor Joe Manchin, opens the service by asking all to stand. She has a very active role in the public representation of West Virginia, currently serving as Federal Co-Chair of the Appalachian Regional Commission, originally established by President John F. Kennedy, and signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson.

First Lady Manchin announces the first name, but there is a long uncertain silence. The CNN camera is directed toward the side view of President Obama on the front row, with VP Biden to his right. The camera then focuses on the projected miner's face image as the family walks down the aisle, carrying the miner's helmet. Manchin meets them, and leads them to the first cross on the far left. He helps a family member suspend the helmet on the cross. The head lamps are not on. Permission to publicly voice lament and faith is critical to emic process of multicultural worship. In this service, none of the miners' family members or surviving miners were given "voice," but carrying their lost loved one's helmet forward to be placed on a white cross as their names are called is a powerful silent testimony. The first family moves along the long display of crosses to greet the President. He hugs most; some shake his hand. They are the only family to greet him in this way.

Cross participation is one of the aspects of multicultural worship that this service demonstrates with its recorded relationships of President Obama and Vice President Biden with the community. In cross-participation, "one hopes to send a message of recognition and hospitality. Formal recognition of the rights and freedoms of a religious group is often guaranteed by law, but a more subjective form of recognition of people is never given in a direct way, but only indirectly by appreciating what they appreciate" (Herck 2015, p. 44).

The intention of cross-participation by the White House is seen in their presence. The subjective form of recognition by the community is muted or openly withheld for most of the service, noticeably changing only after the address by Biden followed by the eulogy offered by Obama.

Twenty-three of the remaining families would not greet him or make eye contact during this 37 min ritual. Even those whose crosses are positioned directly in front of the President and Vice President do not acknowledge their presence. Some turn their backs to avoid eye contact. Only one older man in a family group shakes his hand as he waits. Included in this non-greeting is the one Black miner's family. The camera angle heightens a sense of public reluctance or personal resistance to President Obama.

One explanation is that the miners' families were reacting to accusations that his administration was anti-coal. In his presidential campaign Obama had commented about limiting greenhouse gas emissions, but went on to affirm the nation's need for coal, but the political damage was done. As the Senate Republican Policy Committee framed it, "Americans should not be surprised that President Obama wages a war on coal. The linchpin of his energy strategy is to pursue policies that disadvantage time-tested, affordable, reliable energy products derived from our abundant, domestic resources of coal and other fossil fuels. The President wants 80 percent of U.S. electricity to come from renewable energy sources by 2035 and has already invested billions of taxpayer dollars, created more than 700 government programs, and populated his administration with environmental radicals and Wall Street bankers to ensure his success" (Senate Republican Policy Committee 2012).

The reality that natural gas obtained through fracking has sidelined coal as an energy source is not acknowledged in the public speeches of WV political leaders and fossil-based industrial owners. It is the "environmental radicals and Wall Street bankers," those who do not "belong," who are responsible for coal's decline.

Manchin crosses over to Obama for a quick word after eight families have walked past without greeting. The substance of the communication is unknown to observers. The President nods in agreement and only moves out of his place twice afterwards, once to hug a family member in the front row, and once to shake hands with one member of a large family waiting in the aisle. President Obama had met with the miners' families just prior to the service. Their refusal to even make eye contact in the public service that was being broadcast to the nation could be read as an act of unity and resistance to the "outsiders."

Choosing not to recognize the President could be read as an act of intentionality. It can also be seen as a non-verbal interpretation of Appalachian coal miner identity to outsiders.

Those who are led by the fourth motivation for cross-ritual participation, namely the urge to communicate deep recognition to other faith groups using ritual as the ode of communication, testify to laudable intentions. They should be conscious of the fact however that their participation is nothing but a symbolic presence which does not really involve them in this ritual (Herck 2015, p. 52).

Manchin is the official chosen ritual leader and Comforter-in-Chief. He has the authenticity of “belonging,” having patiently waited with the mining families for five days, arranging for their pastoral care and identifying himself with those in the trauma membrane because of his own family history of coal mining loss.

2.4. *The Posting of the Colors*

Please see Table 1.

The military sign/act of the presentation of the colors and national anthem reflects a regional history woven into the national protocol. West Virginia shows one of the highest rates of military service in the country, with veterans making up over 10 percent of its population. Maj. Gen. Hames A Hoyer, Adjutant General of West Virginia National Guard, summarizes the history and the motivation of a region of immigrants. “It is in the DNA of people who live in the Appalachian Basin to serve As they settled in communities and became successful, they felt a sense of responsibility to serve the nation that gave them these opportunities” (Grasham 2018).

This fusing of mining and the military evokes the shared sense of costly service to the nation that miners offer for the sake of national economic well-being. There is also the sense of camaraderie that miners share. The theme of sacrifice and social recognition derived from the industry is underscored in each of the WV officials’ speeches. They frame coal mining and military service together, each requiring a willingness to be put in harm’s way. The significance of this sacrifice, with its generational trauma and promise of economic prosperity, is enhanced by the presence of the President and the Vice President of the United States, as well as the national audience watching the live broadcasting.

2.5. *Religious Leadership*

The Opening Prayer led by the head of the West Virginia Baptist State Convention, the Greeting by the Executive Director of West Virginia Council of Churches, and the Gospel reading by the West Virginia Roman Catholic Bishop reflect leadership roles based on pastoral presence at the disaster site and/or social capital of the denomination in the state. The only other woman in the service, Rev. Helen Oates, is a United Methodist District Superintendent serving where the service is held. She reads Psalm 121, which, in the common wisdom of the region, “proves God is a West Virginian” (Oates 2010).

2.6. *Role of Music*

The Choral Special was performed by the Trap Hill Middle School Choir, a school closest to the site of the service. The song “Angels Watching Over Me” is a poignant reminder that angels cannot prevent the loss of human life, but the young voices provide both sight and sound of consolation to the families. The first verse of “Amazing Grace” is so well-known that it creates an emic moment of unity, providing a common voice in diverse cultural settings as well as intra-faith gatherings.

The Special Music “Go Rest High on That Mountain,” performed by Matthew Jones, is well-known to the community of mourners. It, like Psalm 121, is an Appalachian song of place and faith. It marks the transition from lament to celebration. The struggle is over; the victory, won, for those miners. Their sacrifice has been recognized and honored in heaven as it has been now on earth, and they will be waiting for their loved ones to join them. “High on the mountain” provides a sense of transcendence and Appalachian identity. It generates a deep sense of “belongingness” and demonstrates the power of a culturally

sensitive sung affirmation of faith. It unifies the two distinct identities: the romanticism of coal mining and the reality of its human cost.

There is an energy, a turn from lament to a sense of celebration, at this point in the service. The mood and body movements seem filled with a sense of validation and release. A solo voice begins “This Little Light of Mine.” This Black spiritual is widely used as a children’s song of agency and faith. It was also used in civil rights demonstrations and acts of resistance. On this occasion, it gathers the community’s voices in an affirmation of faith in God, the dignity of those they’ve lost, and their identity as coal providers for a nation. The song also provides ritual closure of the service, as described later in the essay.

2.7. *The Remarks*

The term “Remarks” deserves a comment as it is used in this setting. The plural indicates that this is not a casual form of speech; it is an address to a community, made in a specific situation, dealing with an event or issue relevant to that community. The religious term, meditation, is an interfaith term. It is not a Protestant sermon or a Roman Catholic homily. It can also apply to the verbal address by a liturgical leader in other faith traditions. Here, it is used for Rev. Mitchell’s presentation. The term normally associated with a funeral address, eulogy, is reserved for President Obama.

A more accurate term to describe the “remarks” of the Vice President, the members of the Senate, Senator Robert C. Byrd, Senator Jay Rockefeller, and the members of Congress is “testimony,” demonstration of belongingness and faith affirmation. Governor, now Senator, Joe Manchin’s speech articulates this history of immigration, Americanization, and cultural and spiritual identification with coal mining. His own family’s history of immigration and coal mining is central to his framing of the accident. Drill to the core of his politics, and the trinity of coal, gas, and oil, is also clear. He speaks to the “outsiders” using his narrative to demonstrate his “belongingness” to those who are grieving loss. The entire statement is provided here so that the various intentions of the service can be seen in his greeting.

My main goal since I learned of the explosion has to make sure our miners were represented honorably and that their families would have the support and protection that they needed during this difficult time. I’ve personally been through this type of a tragedy. I lost my uncle and a lot of my classmates in 1968 at the Farmington West Virginia mine explosion. So, it was important to me to make sure that those who do not know West Virginia mining families would come to understand the character and substance of these wonderful people who play such an important part in this great state and this great nation of ours. As I listened to our first lady read each of our 29 miners names and watched as each family came forward to place a helmet in honor of their loved ones. I was saddened like all of you, but I was also inspired amid the pain. I see courage. It’s the same courage I saw in the face of these wives, these mothers, the fathers, the brothers, the sisters, the sons, and these daughters, those long nights, as we all waited for more news at the Upper Big Branch mine, each of you, each of you exhibit a will and a spirit that we all admire. And this service today, it is our expression of love and hope for the comfort that we wish for all of you and your family. These were strong men. They were strong in stature. They were strong in character. They were strong in their love for you. They were strong in their courage. They were strong in their communities. They were strong in their commitment to every family member and they were so strong in their faith in God. Today is our strength as our chance to be strong in their honor, these were hardworking and brave men. And I know you all know it takes brave men to work beneath the surface. Today is our chance to be brave also in their honor. Mining was the job they chose and it was the job they loved. They were very skilled and they were very good at what they did. I believe. I believe that each of those 29 miners like every miner working today, as well as many of their fathers and grandfathers that worked before them had not only a strong commitment

to provide a good living for their families, but a deep patriotic pride that the work they did and the energy that they produced made America strong and free (Manchin 2010).

Both Governor Joe Manchin and Corporal James Mitchell, a Freewill Baptist minister and the Chaplain for the West Virginia State Police, are individuals who share concern about the miners and their families and who took extraordinary efforts in providing comfort to the families. Governor Manchin had the families sequestered away from the press, likely as a result of the families who were involved at the Sago Mine disaster experience, and made sure, on the night when it was announced that there were no survivors, that each family had a clergyperson nearby. Corporal Mitchell developed close relationships with the families, praying with them and attending the funerals of many of those who died.

However, when comparing the presentations by Governor Joe Manchin and Corporal James Mitchell, two competing, overlapping, and intertwining narratives about the mine disaster and West Virginia begin to emerge. Both reflect the complex reality that is West Virginia, and both compete for dominance in the state's narrative to itself and the outside world. The one narrative is outward-focused, paternalistic, romanticized, transactional, and defensive; the other narrative is inward-focused, communal, relational, and vulnerable. These narratives are informed in part by the various roles that each play—one as governor, one as pastor, but they also reflect a deeper reality that is manifested both in the construction of the worship service and in their presentations to the families.

Governor Manchin's presentation is outwardly focused on the state and nation and has paternal overtones. He notes early on that, "My main goal since I learned of the explosion was to make sure our miners were represented honorably and that their families would have the support and protection that they needed during this difficult time." In contrast, Corporal Mitchell takes a more inwardly focused approach, one that is more communal in nature. He directly engages the families of the miners and his presentation becomes a re-union that is grounded in a recounting of the events that occurred during the week of the disaster.

Rev. Mitchell begins by re-establishing that sense of community and belongingness that first surfaced as the trauma membrane was forming. He reminds them that he has spent time with them during the disaster, attended viewings and funerals with them, and heard both the families' faith and their love ones' stories:

About 29 miners who were tragically taken from us 20 days ago, you are without a doubt, some of the most wonderful people that I've been blessed to meet. And I'm thankful to call you my friends. I also stand here today in honor of the 29 miners themselves, whom I feel I know through each and every one of you through the hundred hours that we spent together at the family site and the precious moments at 24 of the 29 viewings and funerals, I was blessed to attend (Mitchell 2010).

Rev. Mitchell stands with the families: "It is in their memory. It is for your support. And it is in your honor that I stand here today." This is Rev. Mitchell's declaration of his understanding of the intention of the service. While both Rev. Mitchell and Governor Manchin share their concern for the families, Rev. Mitchell stands with the families, while Governor Manchin takes a more paternal approach.

Further, Governor Manchin's presentation takes a more romanticized and somewhat transactional view of the miners and mining. He states,

And I know you all know it takes brave men to work beneath the surface. Today is our chance to be brave also in their honor. Mining was the job they chose and it was the job they loved. They were very skilled and they were very good at what they did. I believe. I believe that each of those 29 miners like every miner working today, as well as many of their fathers and grandfathers that worked before them had not only a strong commitment to provide a good living for their families, but a deep patriotic pride that the work they did and the energy that

they produced made America strong and free. And my wish is this: that every American takes time to say a prayer for every coal miner working today that keeps our great nation vibrant and safe to not only thank them, but to honor them for their work and their patriotism (Manchin 2010).

On the other hand, Rev. Mitchell's homily is both communal and relational, demonstrating belongingness. Like many family reunions, it is a time of shared memory as he describes his initial engagement with the families, their hopes, and their pain. His first night with the families on the day of the explosion is a turning point, a time when he and the families became bonded. Faith takes center stage, and prayer become the nexus of hope and comfort:

After the governor addressed us, something happened that changed the rest of that week. We all joined hands and prayed to our heavenly Father for what He alone could provide, things like peace in the midst of perplexity; things like calmness in the midst of calamity and strength in the midst of suffering. And when Amen was spoken, many of you repeated with a resounding amen and amen. Many of you shared with me that week, your personal faith in the Lord, Jesus, and that what you looked forward to as much as the briefings were our times that we would spend together in prayer (Mitchell 2010).

It is at this point in his homily that Rev. Mitchell begins to weave the families' experience of the disaster with the Christian narrative:

I understand how we are comforted when we pray to the Lord for we know, and remember what the scripture teaches us about him in the Gospel of Matthew. The scripture says he was moved with compassion for them because they were weary and scattered like sheep, having no shepherd. And in the Gospel of Luke, he says, as he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out, the only son of a mother. And she was a widow. And when the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry." Let us not forget the compassion demonstrated in the book of Romans, but God commendeth or demonstrated his love toward us. And that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Yes. I agree with your family. He is a compassionate God (ibid.).

There were two narrative roads that Rev. Mitchell could have taken in his homily. He could have followed the narrative common among the speakers of patriotism and sacrifice for the nation. However, Rev. Mitchell never conflates mining with patriotism, which so often happened in the service. This is significant, because Rev. Mitchell is a Desert Storm veteran, and if anyone that day had the credibility to make that assertion, it would have been him.

Instead, Rev. Mitchell chose to connect with the deep spirituality found in Appalachia and with the values of community and belonging that are the hallmark of a counter-narrative to the romanticization of mining espoused by many of the speakers. He turns back to the Bible to revive the themes of grief, loss, and comfort (surely the experience of many of us who live here) by referring to the scene in the Gospel of John, where Jesus tells the disciples he is leaving (also an Appalachian theme), also harkening back to the theme of friendship with which he began the homily.

Governor Manchin and Rev. Mitchell share stories of loss in their remarks, demonstrating the persistent narrative of trauma in forming a self-identity. Governor Manchin states,

I've personally been through this type of a tragedy. I lost my uncle and a lot of my classmates in 1968 at the Farmington West Virginia mine explosion. So, it was important to me to make sure that those who do not know West Virginia mining families would come to understand the character and substance of these wonderful people who play such an important part in this great state and this great nation of ours (Manchin 2010).

There is a sense of defensiveness, an intention to interpret the miners' lives as evidence of West Virginia's value and the substance of the miners' character in his statement. It is a

political/economic/national/transactional narrative that accepts sacrifice as essential to the nation. Rev. Mitchell, on the other hand, weaves his story of personal loss into a note of hope derived from the Gospel and the unchanging nature of God.

Ten years ago, this fall, I lost my father to cancer. He was my father, my counselor, and my friend. About a month before his death. He asked me to take him for a ride in the truck. Upon our return, we sat in the truck as the sun burst through the windshield, onto his very serious demeanor. I looked over and I said, "Dad, what are you thinking about?" He replied, "Son, everything changes. Nothing ever stays the same forever." And you know, in a temporal sense, my father was correct in an eternal sense. I'm strengthened to know that Almighty God never changes. My almighty God. He never fails. And He is never defeated and has never succumbed to anything. Amen. . . . I drew strength from that very truth and draw it today. I still miss him. Miss him greatly as you will. But the Lord has given me grace and strength to survive (Mitchell 2010).

President Obama also sounds a theme of hope in his eulogy, but he anchors hope in the friendship, culture, and loyalty of the community of miners. The mood has shifted toward openness. Someone yells out "We love you, President Obama!" at the beginning of his eulogy. He signals his recognition of the community's identity by his opening recitation of the places that the miners called home, and then their names. Eulogy is the formal act of funeral rhetoric, usually shaped by personal and/or pastoral knowledge of the deceased and the meaning of their lives to the community. Obama demonstrates this knowledge after the naming by describing the miners' daily journey to the mines and then evokes applause by saying that their work is "the energy that powers the world" (Obama 2010).

He strengthens the sense of cross participation and hospitality by citing "The Coal Miner's Daughter," and uses the song, "Lean on Me," written in Beckley, WV, as the lesson on loyalty and community that West Virginia and these mining families offer to the nation. The need for sacrifice is not unquestioned, however. "Miners keep America's lights on. Don't let this happen again" (ibid.). (It is important to note that no new legislative or regulatory actions by the state or federal level were taken in the aftermath of this loss.)

2.8. Benediction and Altar Call

"Coal Miner's Prayer" is read by Governor Manchin prior to the singing of the final song. He reminds the community he read the prayer on the last day that they waited together for news of the miners. The poem, author unknown, rehearses the reality and the romanticism of sacrifice. (Coal Miner's Prayer n.d.)

And as they work beneath the clay,
With heads bowed down these miners pray,
That God will hear them up above
And send them safely to the ones they love.
Now if this cannot come to pass,
And he must pay the price at last,
The miner leaves his last demand
"Keep my child safe above the land." (Manchin 2010)

As the soloist begins to sing "This Little Light of Mine," miners, dressed in black shirts, come forward and begin to turn on each of the lights on the helmets hung on the individual crosses. When the Martin Luther King Jr. Male Chorus joins in, many in the congregation join in. Governor Machin speaks over the joined voices, delivering what is an altar call for the community, an industry, and a national audience. "These are the lights of the world!"

The President and Vice President move down the aisle toward the exit. They are surrounded by family and friends of the miners. They are greeted by hugs, handshakes, a marked transformation from the beginning of the service. President Obama is walking

with his arm around one of the older women, a member of a miner's family, as he moves beyond the range of the camera.

3. Conclusions

This essay's primary contribution to the study of multicultural worship is its interpretation of inter-riting in relationship to the regional, religious, political, economic, and environmental aspects of ritual and trauma in Appalachia. In addition, using these concepts of culture and ritual may provide greater sensitivity to observing and participating in services that involve conflicting or competing cultural values. Finally, a model of cross-participation offers the possibility of healing and pastoral care in a trauma-shaped community, with hospitality being offered and received, for however brief a time, among diverse groups and individuals who have gathered to lament, testify, and pray together.

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