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The Revealing Love of God: A Systematic, Hermeneutic, and Phenomenological Approach to  
Thinking Well about the Love of God

By  
Daniel L. Nelson

Claremont Graduate University  
2020

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## **Approval of Dissertation Committee**

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Daniel L. Nelson as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religion.

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## Abstract

The Revealing Love of God: A Systematic, Hermeneutic, and Phenomenological Approach to Thinking Well about the Love of God

by  
Daniel L. Nelson

Claremont Graduate University: 2020

“The medium is the message:” theological reflections on the idea that God is love. I am proposing that the idea of the self-revelational nature of God’s being functions, among other ways, rhetorically, such that the content of revelation (God’s love) determines the rhetorical mode of its communication (giving orders, inviting, begging, etc.). The three aspects of rhetoric that Kenneth Burke emphasizes in *A Rhetoric of Motives*—the use of identification, that it is addressed and, as such, is convincing (persuasive)—are examined in terms of revelation. Chapter one seeks to clear the way for what is commonly understood as special revelation by arguing that theology does not argue for the existence of God; rather, what are mistakenly understood as arguments for existence in Anselm and Aquinas are actually arguments for fixing the referent of the term ‘God.’ The second step in the chapter is to then recognize the possibility of revelation (phenomenally) in discussion with Jean-Luc Marion.

Chapter two will consider rhetoric as persuasive and intrinsically concerned with both form and content. The goal in this chapter is to show that rhetoric is an expression of a form of life. The role this plays in my larger argument is one of suggesting that, since in Christian theology revelation has to do with the living God, God Himself expresses the form of His life (Ch. 3). Two themes are in focus: 1) rhetoric as the art of persuasion will require an understanding of persuasion—what and how do we persuade? In expressing a form of life, one is

always at least implicitly (unthematically) persuasive—it is an expression of an orientation and understanding of life and an invitation to the other to orient oneself in this way as well. As will be shown, persuasion, and thus rhetoric, are concerned with what is right, what is true, what is possible, and how to discover this together (relationally and intersubjectively). Therefore, I will seek to show that rhetoric as the art of persuasion (and thus about identification and address) is confessional, linguistic, contextual, and concerned with agency.

Chapter three addresses the concept of revelation specifically and theologically and this is accomplished by exploring the revelation, the trinity, and Christology in discussion with Karl Barth. I show how Barth's *Church Dogmatics* are systematically concerned with the identification of form and content, and that they are likewise exhaustively rhetorical and hermeneutical. Eberhard Jüngel interprets Barth's conclusions metaphysically, as an issue about thinkability and the being of God, interpreting the Christological and trinitarian moves as locating God in his coming. I attempt to replicate this move while building on their work; I want to push this understanding in a rhetorical direction and thus point to the ethical implications particularly in relation to love and witness.

Chapter four seeks to clarify and understand what it means that God has revealed Himself as love, again in conversation with Barth, Jüngel, and Luther. Chapter five begins to consider the ethical implications of self-revelation as rhetoric in terms of the rhetoric of witness.

The conclusion is that form and content are identical in God. The *way* that God communicates is identical with who God is. The revealing love of God is understood rhetorically as God's self-revelation. As such, the content of God's self-revelation, namely that God is love, must be communicated as love and thus lovingly. From this we understand that love creates freedom and freedom (can and should, in order to be free) acts in love—this is in fact how and

what is to be understood from the resurrection, death, and life of Jesus Christ. The final thesis is that, because God's self-revelation is rhetorical (an expression of the divine form of life), and He creates the new possibility of being in correspondence to Him, then our human witness to the work and act of God is also rhetorical (an expression of a new openness to that divine life). Importantly, it is a corresponding witness not simply when it is reported *that* God is love (content), but only when it is reported that God is love *in a loving way* (form). When there is a failure in the *means* of this communication, it is a least questionable if the content is the same.

To my professors, Ingolf Dalferth and Anselm Min

And to wife, Vanessa, and my daughter Katelyn,  
the loves of my life



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## INTRODUCTION

I am proposing that the idea of the self-revelational nature of God's being functions, among other ways, rhetorically, such that the content of revelation (God's love) determines the rhetorical mode of its communication (giving orders, inviting, begging, etc.). The three aspects of rhetoric that Kenneth Burke emphasizes in *A Rhetoric of Motives*—the use of identification, that it is addressed and as such is convincing (persuasive)—are examined in terms of revelation.<sup>1</sup> Chapter one seeks to clear the way for what is commonly understood as special revelation by arguing that theology does not argue for the existence of God; rather, what are mistakenly understood as arguments for existence in Anselm and Aquinas are actually arguments for fixing the referent of the term 'God.' The second step in the chapter is to then recognize the possibility of revelation (phenomenally) in discussion with Jean-Luc Marion. Chapter two will consider rhetoric as persuasive and intrinsically concerned with both form and content. Chapter three addresses the concept of revelation specifically and theologically. Chapter four seeks to clarify and understand what it means that God has revealed Himself as love. Chapter five begins to consider the ethical implications of self-revelation as rhetoric in terms of the rhetoric of witness.

For the purposes of this argument it is assumed that God does in fact effectively reveal himself and as such communicate himself. This will become clearer in what follows, but the basic premise is that thinking about God must follow after God; there is a reason for initial and continued thought about God (theology) because of God. There are two concerns: 1) is in regard to the form and content of God's self-revelation—who does he reveal himself to be and how does he do it—and 2) is in regard to the ways in which the witness to such revelation (the

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 45–46.

proclamation of revelation) becomes muddled, confused, and contrary to the actual revelation, specifically in regard to love. This issue is one of perennial concern for the Christian church, but also for any theology that claims revelation as its source. I am not claiming to have a solution for this difficulty; however, I do hope to cast this issue in new light (or at the very least engage in the conversation), and in so doing to show that it is a good thing to remember that the God who reveals himself is the one who judges and critiques the proclamation of his revelation because he is the content thereof. Secondly, themes regarding sacrifice will be explored in relation to God's love, and the rhetoric of witness in such encounters.

One of the key problems in an endeavor of this kind, focused on rhetoric (the use of language) is that of how to relate language to being. Part of this difficulty is exposed phenomenologically in distinguishing between revelation and self-revelation, the latter which occurs in language. Revealing an object under a blanket, or revealing a subject through language are not identical, even though in both cases something is revealed. However, supposing the object under the blanket is a person, she does not become a subject except through language and ultimately self-disclosure.<sup>2</sup> As such, language opens up being—it is an uncovering, an unconcealing, and a concealing at the same time. The link between the word and life cannot be conceived in a strict correspondence, or a formalized ratio of 1:1; however, it is in this process of 'letting appear,' of 'showing itself from itself,' that the word uncovers and comes forth. Gerhard Ebeling describes the relation thus:

The word as it were in the condition of flowing lava—where the link between the word and life did not need to be restored retrospectively and with great trouble, but welled up

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<sup>2</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, vol. II: Human Destiny (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 64–65. He writes: "Human personality, unlike animal life, has a depth and uniqueness which cannot be understood purely in terms of external behaviour.... The other self cannot be understood until he speaks to us. Only the 'word' of the other self, coming out of the depth or height of his self-transcendence can finally disclose the other 'I' as subject and not merely as object of our knowledge."

with elemental force, as the springing up of the word in the processes of life and the issuing forth of life from a living and life-giving word. The fear of a loose and vitiated understanding of the spirit had taken such a hold that there was not the courage to integrate the word and the spirit, the word and life, and the word and experience in the right way.<sup>3</sup>

In light of working to integrate the word and life, the word and being, the word and experience, Ebeling points to the ethical dimension as well: it is not just that word and life must be integrated, but that this must be done in the right way. This is the task before us, to begin to understand what the “right way” might be.

As we progress in this task, the starting point will not be a direct engagement with language, but rather with experience from a phenomenological perspective, including the phenomenon of speech about God. These questions guide the whole of the discussion: How to speak about God? How does God communicate? Who or what does he communicate? Why should God be understood as love? And furthermore, how does God take hold of our conceptions of love and alter and/or expand them?

Methodologically, and grossly oversimplified, I want to take a hermeneutic approach, following Barth, and Jüngel’s interpretation of Barth, but from the perspective of rhetoric (using Ebeling’s formula of the process of the communicative act: “I am saying something to you”) to discuss *how* “I am saying something to you,” and *how* God is revealing himself to us. Additionally, by utilizing an approach combining rhetoric and hermeneutics, the relation between the ontological and the ontic—between “forms of life” and the structure underlying such forms—can be both distinguished and clarified without being sundered. I want to use the idea that rhetoric expresses a form of life, and to use it to conceptually describe the ways in which we engage with the ontic reality of our concern. It is an attempt to expand the idea of

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<sup>3</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, *Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language* (Philadelphia, Pa, 1973), 16.

rhetoric beyond that of a method and to suggest that a form of life, as expressed (and an unexpressed form of life lacks both form and life) is rhetorical. As such, a discussion of rhetoric will follow, expanding from the initial narrowness of oratory to the fuller sense just outlined. In so doing, it will also become clear that there is a strong dialectical relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics that can be further seen in a discussion of revelation and proclamation. Moreover, the discussion of rhetoric in this way enables the usage of phenomenological descriptions. These descriptions will prove helpful in comparing the ontic to the ontological, the content to the form, while enabling a more careful critique of proclamation and a fuller understanding of revelation and what is revealed.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM OF TALK ABOUT GOD AND THE PROBLEM OF REVELATION: PHENOMENOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

I want to begin with a very simple question: why do we talk of God? In the Christian tradition, there are number of explanations, many of them making a distinction between general revelation and special revelation. This particular distinction is often then understood in terms of what can be known of God from reason and is as such available to anyone on the incredible condition of being alive. Special revelation, on the other hand, is that knowledge that can only be known in faith and by God's grace. This knowledge is understood to be more specific, and includes the doctrines of the trinity, soteriology, creation, the idea that God is love, in a word, the content of what God is like. My contention, in agreement with Karl Barth, is that there is only "special" revelation when it comes to God; God is not accessible to us conceptually or actually apart from God. God is a subject, and thus for us to know Him (and thus to trust and obey in gratitude) requires that He speaks—we require His self-revelation. As such, there are two goals in this chapter: first, it is necessary to show that 'God' talk is not primarily a matter of Enlightenment Reason, that can be rationally and abstractly discussed while still maintaining the referent of *God*. To do this, I will show that "arguments" for God's existence are not the place where we begin or gain legitimacy in talking about 'God.' Second, because reason is not recognized as the place of encounter with God (I cannot just think *about* God) some other manner is necessary. For this, at least to provide a possible form and structure for revelation, Marion's understanding of revelation as the ultimate saturated phenomenon will be discussed and problematized—form without content does not solve our difficulty of God-talk.

There are several specific problems to address given our topic. The first of these is the fact that there is talk about God—“God” is used and occurs in a variety of situations and contexts by those claiming to believe and by those who claim there is no God. This leads to another interesting set of problems: because a part of how words and language are understood involves a relationship to other words, such as a contrast term (i.e., ‘table’ as opposed to ‘chair’, or more generally, ‘table’ and  $\neg$  ‘table’), what is the contrast term to ‘God’ that allows us to understand the reference? This question can be answered in one of two ways, 1) which ‘God’, as picking one among several options; 2) by the more general negation of marking off all that is not ‘God’.

By briefly looking at Anselm’s, Aquinas’, and Schleiermacher’s rules for talk about God by way of definition, I suggest that this way of talking should be distinguished by an external and an internal perspective—a perspective of faith, and a perspective of non-faith. Importantly, both of these perspectives are totalizing, and as such are orientational. It is not that there are different phenomenon encountered in each perspective, but that the movement from one to the other allows a new (or re-) interpretation of *all* of one’s experience. Thus, the usefulness of these definitional approaches is that they allow us to conceptually grasp the referent from either perspective and serve as a starting point of identification as an aspect of rhetoric and therefore also of revelation.

However, because it is almost impossible to think of definitions not functioning nominally, these rules do not provide the content for that referent nor establish whether there is anything being referred to (actually). To give a philosophical/phenomenological account of the *possibility* of content for “God,” I will look at Marion’s phenomenology of revelation as the saturated phenomenon. The very concept that Marion is working with in his phenomenology, givenness, can be understood as the starting point for an external descriptive account of faith.

The point of these particular moves and considerations is to move “God” from being *prima facie* encountered in the realm and world of a constituting subject in terms of the highest faculty of reason, to an objective subject. The concern is not with the fact that we are constituting subjects, it is with the role and place of reason in this scheme. Furthermore, it is not a retreat to a fideistic position against reason attempting to contrast faith and reason, nor is it to dissuade us of long-standing traditions of the position and power of reason as the highest of human faculties. It is simply that “God” is not first *encountered* and *experienced* in reason, any more than paintings, or fire, or friends, or love, are first encountered and experienced in reason. The differences between reasoning about a hypothetical friend and your *friend* are starkest at the very point of an objective subject. Part of the goal in this present chapter is to clear the path, so to speak, of certain obstacles of reason, primarily in the form of arguments for the existence of God. As such, by examining certain “arguments” for the existence of God, I will show that they are not arguments for existence at all but rather the arguments function indexically, pointing to and fixing the referent for the term ‘God’ as a thin description and thereby allowing for internal (faith-perspective) theological *reasoning* about what has been revealed *about* God (i.e. God himself).

However, first, a brief note regarding a couple of key distinctions: meaning, reference, and rules. Charles Sanders Peirce offers a helpful three-part schematic of sign, object and interpretant that can be used to understand meaning. First, by meaning, I want to understand what the term ‘God’ signifies. If I use “God” as a sign, what am I signifying? In other words, what is the object to which the sign refers? Peirce, in his final version of his semiotics, while integrating his theory of signs with a teleological theory of inquiry, further distinguishes between the immediate object and the dynamic object. In Kantian terms, this distinction would be



(loosely) similar to the phenomenal and the noumenal. As a part of a theory of inquiry, the immediate object is just that—what can be immediately understood to be the object of a given sign in relation to a given rule of understanding. Of course, because it is an immediate contextual understanding and we are working towards knowledge of the object, this immediate object is informationally incomplete.<sup>1</sup> The dynamic object would be full knowledge of the object as it is, which is the end goal of inquiry. This seems fairly straight forward, although there are obvious difficulties in determining or deciding if there is just such an object, as will be seen in examining the arguments for the existence of God below. Importantly for Peirce however, the dynamic object and the immediate object do not represent two distinct objects. As C.J. Hookway summarizes, we can offer “two answers to the question: what object does this sign refer to? One is the answer that could be given when the sign was used; and the other is the one we could give when our scientific knowledge is complete.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, the important part is the relational semiotic aspect of how the sign and the object are related through and to the interpretant, or the rules for making sense of the reference, and in how the dynamic object is related to the immediate object. Now of course the question is what rule(s) are employed, and what rules ought to be employed in understanding ‘God,’ and what is the object to which the sign ‘God’ refers (both immediately, and dynamically)? I am suggesting that God himself is the sign, object, and interpretant, such that God corresponds to himself in the act of revelation.

A second part of this discussion that bears closer consideration is whether one should understand one of the rules for using the sign ‘God’ is that God functions as a proper name (a

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Atkin, “Peirce’s Theory of Signs,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2013 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2013), 19, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/peirce-semiotics/>.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Hookway, *Peirce* (London: Routledge, 1985), 139.

proper name is used to determine the referent). The further complication is one of then employing descriptivist or non-descriptivist accounts of names. Michael Scott suggests that there is a history of descriptivist accounts of the name God, as far back as Anselm, but finds such accounts to be problematic. As will be shown, I think such a reading of Anselm is problematic. Moreover, Mark Johnston offers an account of ‘God’ not as a proper name, but as an abbreviated title or a “*descriptive name*” for a being (as opposed to a proper name).<sup>3</sup> Johnston’s account highlights a particular difficulty and danger that is essential to my thesis: namely that a descriptive name must be used to index and make reference to what is described, and that the object described must in some way satisfy the description.<sup>4</sup>

In order to satisfy such a description, Johnston speaks of “hitting the mark” and moves the discussion away from the question of “Does God exist” to the question of “Do you believe in *God*,” a question bearing similarities to Luther’s own: “What does it mean to have a God, or what is a God.”<sup>5</sup> And Luther’s concern, as well as Johnston’s (at least in the opening sections regarding ‘God’ and idolatry) is to understand what it would mean to have *God* as God. “To have

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<sup>3</sup> Mark Johnston, *Saving God: Religion after Idolatry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 7–8; Michael Scott, *Religious Language* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 87. Johnston argues: “If ‘God’ as we now use it is a name in any sense, it clearly does not function like an ordinary proper name. In its function, it is closest to what philosophers call a descriptive name, a name that in some way abbreviates a description and so is tied to that description for its meaning.”

Scott offers a criticism of Johnston’s view, suggesting that just because the term was not historically a proper name, it does not prevent it from becoming a proper name. Scott finds descriptivist accounts problematic on basic philosophical grounds; the case of ‘God’ does not present a special problem of reference.

<sup>4</sup> Johnston, *Saving God*, 8. “Here is a fact about *descriptive* names: you can’t use such a name with its ordinary meaning without being disposed to use the description associated with the name to determine the reference of the name. And here is an even more relevant fact: you don’t get to refer to something by a descriptive name unless the thing in question actually satisfies the associated description.... You don’t get ‘forgiven’ for making crucial factual errors in the case of descriptive names, for the reference of such names is just that of their semantically associated descriptions.”

More broadly, and to our point, the Christian use of ‘God’ uses as its descriptive rule the trinitarian grammar. This will be explicitly discussed in chapter 3.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther, “The Large Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther, 1529,” in *Word and Faith*, ed. Kirsi I. Stjerna, vol. 2, *The Annotated Luther* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 300.

a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart.... Trust and faith of the heart alone ... make both God and an idol.... Anything on which your heart relies and depends... that is really your God.” Luther continues discussing this relationship of faith and obedience (for obedience is the result of trust and faith) such that the danger of failing to hit the mark, the danger of having faith in the wrong object, can be universalized: “Whatever good thing you lack, look to me for it and seek it from me, and whenever you suffer misfortune and distress, crawl to me and cling to me. I, I myself, will give what you need and help you out of every danger. Only do not let your heart cling to or rest in anyone else.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, for Luther and Johnston, the problem is picking out *God* when using “God.” How does one know that in saying “God” one is referencing or pointing to *God*? Moving from questions of existence to questions of belief and faith gives rise to the question of revelation. As Johnston argues, if believing in God involves “hitting the mark,”<sup>7</sup> and God is properly understood as the highest one, then one cannot actually hit the mark unless so enabled by God: “there is no chance of believing in God, unless God has disclosed himself to us. The achievement of believing in God can come about only in the wake of God’s self-revelation. And no religion, no practice or set of beliefs, however appealing, can make itself enlivened by God’s self-revelation.”<sup>8</sup> As such, I am claiming that each of the following authors is using ‘God’ as an indexical, and that they are establishing the rules (interpretants) minimally necessary for the triadic relation of sign/object/interpretant to effectively refer to the dynamic object God. Finally, it is always in the context of faith (an internal perspective) that these rules make sense.

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<sup>6</sup> Luther, 300.

<sup>7</sup> Significantly, this turn of phrase can be read as opposed to *ἁμαρτία*, which is translated as “sin,” but means, literally, “to miss.”

<sup>8</sup> Johnston, *Saving God*, 9.

## 1. Arguments, Definitions, and Rules: Anselm, Aquinas, and Schleiermacher on Referring to God

### 1.1 Anselm: “Something (that) than which nothing greater can be thought” as faith seeking understanding

To begin our task of showing that reason is not the phenomenological starting point for an experience of God that is transformative, but reason is in no way disregarded, an examination of Anselm’s so called “ontological argument” is necessary. First and foremost, it needs to be noted that Anselm begins his investigation and proposal of the “ontological argument” for the existence of God in the context of talking with God (prayer) and for his fellow monks in a similar fashion as Augustine does in his *Confessions*. This means, importantly, that Anselm is in fact *not* presenting an ontological argument in a Kantian sense, nor is he doing what Descartes does—the argument does not begin from a conceptual definition of God. Again, similar to Augustine, and in fact quoting him, the argument is to be understood as “faith seeking understanding.” Between these two considerations, prayer and faith seeking understanding, Anselm’s argument becomes less an argument proving a proposition, but rather functions as a rule concerning how to *talk* about God. Much of the philosophical discussion of Anselm’s argument rightly focuses on the connection between being and language, and much of the discussion is taken up in philosophical theism. However, the issue is grammatical in terms of reference. How does it make sense to use the term ‘God’, and what attributes are appropriate and necessary in order to fix the referent for our discussions? Anselm is not producing a proof of the existence of God for the very reason that God’s existence is assumed at the beginning. It does, however, provide a helpful rule for knowing that God is the referent of ‘God’ in a given context such that ‘God’ is “something than which nothing greater can be thought” and as it continues,

existing is greater than not existing, therefore the God that we are talking about by employing ‘God’ necessarily exists. Simply put, it does not make sense for a monk to mediate and worship a God that he does not think is real. Essentially, the concern is for meaning making—what does it mean to speak of God, and Anselm constructs his answer, per the request of his fellow monks, in terms of the “necessity of reason.”<sup>9</sup>

Anselm provides a starting point for discussing ‘God.’ He does it rhetorically—although reason and dialectic is the specific rhetorical mode, the important point is that it is not context free. Additionally, Anselm’s definition is appropriately indefinite—“something than which nothing greater can be thought” does not provide positive content. The definition of necessity moves language in God talk to analogical speech. Likewise, in his reply to Gaunilo, who, for the sake of argument, plays the fool who denies the existence of God, Anselm distinguishes the ontological significance of the difference between the greatest island conceivable, and something than which nothing greater can be thought. The real distinction being made is one between creator and creation. God is not greater than any given created thing, nor even the sum of created things—God is that which without there can be no thoughts, and this importantly means that God is not to be counted among creation (things, islands, the set containing all things, etc.). Anselm is offering a negative logical definition of the referent of ‘God’—the existence predicate in this case becomes an essential predicate and allows the traditional formulation of God being the one whose existence and essence are identical and inseparable. Problematically, by simply examining the “ontological argument” of chapters 2-4, one can be led to a natural theology, or simply a

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<sup>9</sup> Anselm, “Monologion,” in *Monologion and Proslogion: With the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), prologue 3. “They prescribed the following form for me in writing this meditation: absolutely nothing in it would be established by the authority of scripture; rather, whatever the conclusion of each individual investigation might assert, the necessity of reason would concisely prove, and the clarity of truth would manifestly show, that it is the case, by means of plain style, unsophisticated arguments, and straightforward disputation.”

philosophical argument—a precursor to Descartes—with the result of a mere conception of God that can be broadly integrated into any number of theistic traditions.

However, to return to the initial point, Anselm is working from a particular point of reference, with a particular perspective, and oriented in a particular way—“*fides quaerens intellectum*,” and “*credo ut intelligam*.” The idea and contention is that his faith is reasonable, that his understanding is not a vague or abstract understanding, but the understanding of faith, and as such the proper object of his understanding is the object of faith: God in Jesus Christ. “In this attitude he stands in encounter with God for he knows that God must stand in encounter with him if his *intelligere* is not to be delusion and if he himself is not to be a mere *insipiens*.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, it is not that a rational understanding can come to replace the object of faith, nor that the object of faith is the result of a process of reasoning. We do not come to the conclusion of God in Anselm, but rather “the ‘rational’ knowledge of the object of faith is derived from the object of faith and not *vice versa*.”<sup>11</sup>

Yet, Anselm’s discussion, particularly when read outside of the context of the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion*, leaves open the problem of the “fool.” In a very helpful argument, Gyula Klima explicates the medieval theory of reference to highlight the cogency of the fool’s argument as it begins in thought.<sup>12</sup> However, in the argument he also notes that the identification of the fool, as such, might hinder dialog and at least one purpose of providing a

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<sup>10</sup> Karl Barth, *Anselm, Fides Quaerens Intellectum: Anselm’s Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of His Theological Scheme* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Press, 2009), 39.

<sup>11</sup> Barth, 52.

<sup>12</sup> Gyula Klima, “Saint Anselm’s Proof: A Problem of Reference, Intentional Identity and Mutual Understanding,” in *Medieval Philosophy and Modern Times*, ed. Ghita Holmström-Hintikka, vol. 288, Synthese Library: Studies in Epistemology, Logic, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2000), 69–88, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-94-011-4227-4>.

proof, namely, persuasion. As a result, Klima advances an understanding of reference with two types, both of which are consistent with medieval ontology and metaphysics while relating to the problem of ‘intentional identity’: parasitic reference and constitutive reference. The idea is that I can *think* of what someone is referring to, and in a sense understand the reference, but that does not necessitate that I *agree*, or *assent* to the nature of the signified. In other words, I can understand and *think*, ‘parasitically’ attaching my thought to the other’s reference, in this case, “something than which nothing greater can be thought,” without *assenting* that what the other thinks is “something than which nothing greater can be thought” meets that requirement of thought.<sup>13</sup>

The point to draw here is two-fold. 1) There is a decided difficulty in moving from thought and language to being. However, the goal in briefly discussing Anselm is to identify the negative rule and to fix the referent for God-talk. This is a definitional argument, and it is from the perspective of faith seeking understanding. As Dalferth suggests, the movement is from knowledge to knowledge, a very Aristotelian logical move—from knowledge (insight) to *reasoned* knowledge.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the epistemic issue is not one of either creating new knowledge, or of replacing faith with knowledge. It is specifically the knowledge of faith: “When at the beginning Anselm declared himself capable of bringing to an understanding of the Nature of God even a person to whom the *Credo* has until now been foreign either because he was not

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Grammar of Assent*. As Newman observes, notions, such as the abstraction of “something than which nothing greater can be thought,” which it becomes when understood outside the parameters of *fides quaerens intellectum*, can be held even in contradiction in the same mind. (CH. 3?)

<sup>14</sup> The connection to Aristotle will be further clarified in the second part. Very briefly, Anselm is mirroring the Aristotelian movement from induction to deduction in moving from the *Monologion* to the *Proslogion*.

acquainted with it or because he did not believe it, that cannot mean... that by such instruction he could create either for that man or for himself a substitute for the knowledge of faith.”<sup>15</sup>

2) How then does one acquire faith? The “fool” is not a fool because of his lack of rationality—it is not that he cannot understand the idea of “something than which nothing greater can be thought,” but it is a denial that the referent of such a thought (God) satisfies the criteria, or as will be discussed later, that the thought has no orientational value, or in William James’ terms, is not a live option. It is here in discussing the “fool” and the idea of ‘parasitic reference’ that we can distinguish between an internal (faith) and external (reason) perspective.<sup>16</sup> Here it is enough to note that the horizon of a given perspective, each of which is in this case totalizing, determines the range of available meaning, and that the failure to find a “rational means of translating between them” results in an end to discussion.<sup>17</sup>

Most importantly, Anselm’s definition of ‘God’ as “that than which nothing greater can be thought” provides a negative definition; his definition does not provide positive content for the nature of God, but rather such positive content must be given by God himself (what is believed in faith). “in faith we are given... a designation for God which is not totally inadequate... for the simple reason that it expresses nothing about the nature of God but rather lays down a rule of thought which, if we follow it, enables us to endorse the statements about the nature of God accepted in faith.”<sup>18</sup> It is this idea of a rule for speaking about God that is important for our purposes; in fact, Anselm is less defining God, than he is establishing a rule for

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<sup>15</sup> Barth, *Anselm, Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, 57.

<sup>16</sup> This distinction, as is the next distinction between faith and theology, is taken up in conversation with and owed to, Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Theology and Philosophy* (Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Dalferth, ix.

<sup>18</sup> Barth, *Anselm, Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, 80.



talking and thinking about God. In connection with the above distinction between internal and external perspectives, there is an additional distinction to be made between faith and theology.

Theology cannot be confused with faith. Theology is a specific activity that seeks rational clarity about faith. The rule for speech and thought about God is given in faith and used for rational reflection on that faith. “Something than which nothing greater can be conceived” is not to be understood in terms of the external perspective of reason, nor is it to be confused with faith in God given in revelation, but as an interpretive tool to rationally, conceptually, and therefore, theologically to reflect on who God is. The result of this distinction is that theology properly takes place localized in a particular social, religious, believing, context and tradition. This idea will continue to be developed as we go on.

### *1.2 Aquinas: The 5 Ways as Rules for Talking about God*

Aquinas, too, discusses five ways, or five arguments for the existence of God, and again there is a long history of debate over the effectiveness, validity, and usefulness of his arguments. However, I want to suggest that Aquinas is doing something akin to what Anselm attempted with his argument, that is, fixing the referent and establishing rules for using the term ‘God’. The common tradition is to see Aquinas as working to argue for God’s existence. The fact that he needs five ways to do it, with problems arising in each individual instance, and that the preceding questions present a case for whether it is a necessary endeavor to argue for the existence of God, indicates that there might be more nuance than is often acknowledged. It is also significant that many defenders of the arguments are quick to point out that the five arguments should be understood together in order to establish their credibility. The suggestion here is that Aquinas is doing something similar to Anselm (as I have presented him), but more positively (less

apophatically): fixing the referent for speech and thought about God. I am suggesting that we take seriously Aquinas's own words as he ends each section: "and this everyone understands to be God."<sup>19</sup> The First Cause, Unmoved Mover, Perfect Being, and Cosmic Designer, while remaining rather thin theological and religious descriptions are nonetheless positive. Aquinas employs a linguistic emphasis in constructing his proofs, or more correctly, definitions.

For, in point of fact, the second article of the second question is "Whether it can be demonstrated that God Exists."<sup>20</sup> Thus to understand the proofs, or rather, demonstrations, that follow, it must be understood what Aquinas thinks he can do with a demonstration. Therefore, Aquinas's demonstrations require an understanding of Aristotelian logic, which in turn requires an understanding of Aristotelian metaphysics. While such an undertaking is far beyond the scope of this project, a few comments will be made.

Underlying our comments here is Aquinas's own clear understanding of Aristotle, having written his own commentaries on several works of Aristotle. Aquinas recognizes that "in order to prove the existence of anything, it is necessary to accept as a middle term the meaning of the word, and not its essence, for the question of its essence follows on the question of its existence."<sup>21</sup> What Aquinas is doing then is unpacking a conception of the meaning of 'God' to be able to use as a middle term in his demonstration.

For Aristotle, the usage and role of a demonstration is secondary to observation, producing reasoned knowledge of the fact. But because it is reasoned knowledge of the fact, and not simply knowledge of the fact, the demonstration must indeed come second. Aristotle's

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<sup>19</sup> *ST I*, q. 2, a. 3.

<sup>20</sup> *ST I*, q. 2, a. 2.

<sup>21</sup> *ST I*, q.2, a.2.

syllogism requires that an assertion is made, an assertion that requires that something is asserted of a subject, that something is predicated of a subject. He observes four basic relationships of affirmation and denial of this subject predicate relation. First is the universal affirmation and a universal denial and then a particular affirmation and a particular denial. The form of the syllogism then is a formalized set of logical semantics for deduction. When something is predicated of a subject there is a verb which indicates the way in which the predicate belongs to the subject. In the larger form of the syllogism we are dealing with sentences or whole assertions and the relations not just of subject and predicate, but of assertion to assertion.<sup>22</sup> Aristotle then considers the formalization of this as two categorical premises (assertions of subject/predicate bd, dc) with one term in common (d). He recognizes that there are three combinations of terms and identifies these as figures (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>) respectively. Importantly, syllogisms in the first figure are considered perfect, which means that the conclusion follows necessarily based only upon the premises (no additional premises are needed). Of note, Aristotle also thinks that syllogisms of the other two figures can be converted to the first figure.<sup>23</sup> It is also of note why these deductions are thought to be both perfect and valid—Aristotle does not prove them so to speak, but rather *points out* that they are valid. One of the main reasons for this is because of the relationship between the terms of the assertions (the subject and predicates). Aristotle identifies the term that the premises share as the middle term, whereas the other two terms are the extremes.<sup>24</sup> One is identified as the major term, the other as the minor term. The major term is the predicate of the conclusion and

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<sup>22</sup> The standard way of working this out symbolically is as follows: A= universal affirmation, E= universal negation, I= particular affirmation, and O= particular negation. The sentence Abd = all b's are d. Ebd = no b's are d. Ibd = some b's are d. Obd = not all b's are d.

<sup>23</sup> There are four valid 1<sup>st</sup> figure syllogisms, AAA, EAE, AII, EIO (All All All, None All None, All Some Some, None Some Not all).

<sup>24</sup> Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*, II.23.68b9-36.

the predicate of one premise, whereas the minor term is the subject of the conclusion and the subject of a premise.<sup>25</sup>

What does it mean then that Aquinas is arguing *to* a middle term? If he is arguing to a middle term, ‘God,’ then according to the rules above, he is actually working to identify a subject of which things can be predicated—a term that other premises can share as he continues his theological enterprise. As arguments from cause to effect, and because of Aquinas’s familiarity with Aristotle, it is the role of the middle term that determines whether or not an argument is inductive or deductive. Significantly, deduction—or demonstration proper to scientific knowledge (reasoned knowledge of the fact)—gains its terms from induction. This distinction of arguing *to* or *through* a middle term is noted in Aquinas’s own commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*: “to ask ‘is there such a thing?’ is to ask ‘is there a middle term which can be used in a demonstration of its existence.’”<sup>26</sup> And thus, my claim: Aquinas is merely setting the stage in order to be able to talk about God (i.e. fixing the referent of ‘God’). Furthermore, Aquinas offers more clarity regarding how to understand what he is doing by offering arguments for the existence of God: “Before one knows whether something exists, one cannot strictly speaking know what it is: for there are no definitions of what does not exist. Hence the question, does it exist, is prior to the question what is it. But one cannot prove that something exists, unless one understands what its name signifies.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> In AAA this would look like Abd, Adc, therefore Abc, with b as the major term, c as the minor term, and d as the middle term. As mentioned above, Aristotle points to this figure as being perfect because of the relationship between the extremes and the middle, where the major and minor terms are connected through the middle term. This is not the case in the other two figures, but he does develop rules of inference that allow for conversion to the first figure.

<sup>26</sup> Aquinas, *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*, L. II, lect. 1, n. 412.

<sup>27</sup> Aquinas, *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*, L. I, lect. 2, n. 17; C.F.J. Martin, *Thomas Aquinas : God and Explanations*, chap 4, 37-49, accessed June 19, 2019, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=feb8bd7c-cc18-4631-927e->

Finally, and as mentioned, Aquinas is explicitly arguing from effects to causes. He is recognizing effects that are apparent to all, and identifies the cause with the term ‘God.’ This is not a proper name, but a name of a nature, specifically of a creator nature (essence). In his own words, “hence this name ‘God’ is a name of an operation so far as it relates to the source of its meaning. For this name is imposed from his universal providence over all things; since all who speak of God intend to name God as exercising providence over all.”<sup>28</sup> The cosmological arguments that Aquinas offers are arguments that indicate an operation, a causally originative operation, establishing both dependence and givenness (in more current terms) that is commonly recognized. It is this that we call “God.”

This view is at odds with more analytical and specifically philosophical understandings of the arguments for the existence of God. For instance, Richard R. La Croix offers an analytical purview of the argument for the self-evidence of God’s existence which Aquinas gives at *ST* I, q.2, a.1.<sup>29</sup> La Croix claims Aquinas fails to prove his point that God’s existence is self-evident in itself (*simpliciter*) but not self-evident to us. The difficulty he cites lies in whether the issue of self-evidence “can be settled by determining whether...or not we know the meaning or nature of the subject and predicate of the proposition.”<sup>30</sup> However, this is the precise thing Aquinas is working to clarify in his arguments: what we mean by ‘God.’ As an operation, and functioning as

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05e02bcc6ac7%40pdc-v-sessmgr02&vid=0&format=EB. As Martin helpfully discusses, Aquinas is actually working with signification and reference in ways similar to Frege, Kripke, and Geach. There are obvious and significant differences of course, which Martin helpfully identifies as well.

<sup>28</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, q.13, a.8c. For an excellent account of Aquinas on signification, see Martin, chaps. 4, 37–49.

<sup>29</sup> Richard R. La Croix, “Aquinas on the Self-Evidence of God’s Existence,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 3 (1976): 443–54.

<sup>30</sup> La Croix, 448.

a middle term, Aquinas is explicitly working to allow the term ‘God’ to function as a subject by identifying the subject with said operation.

However, as pointed out, this is a very thin description of God. Yet, this is nonetheless a significant distinction that he is working to make, a distinction between creation and creator—God in his providence, a first cause, a cosmic designer.<sup>31</sup> If we understand Aquinas to be fixing the referent of ‘God,’ and combine that with a reading of Aquinas that understands his work primarily as theology (not primarily as philosophy), then this becomes a grammatical step in the same manner of Augustine and Anselm of “faith seeking understanding.” It is a step to enable one to understand the Christological God talk—very man, very God—of Chalcedon. Dalferth, in arguing for just such a reading of Aquinas, suggests,

Therefore, the five ways in the *praeambula* do not offer independent arguments for the existence of God, but explain the meaning of the term ‘God’ as commonly understood through the different forms of our causal knowledge of the world. They argue for a correlation of certain forms of finite knowledge with an existing practice of God-talk in order to explain the meaning of the term ‘God’ as used in the unfolding of the divinity that we need to understand in order to understand the *vere deus* of Christ.<sup>32</sup>

He continues by suggesting that this can best be seen by reading the *Summa Theologica* backwards. In so doing, the soteriological and theological import is emphasized, and the arguments from Part I are no longer philosophical foundations for theology, but rather tools for understanding God talk in the context of faith.<sup>33</sup> As Aquinas argues, “where faith is sought for,

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<sup>31</sup> See further, Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas; Three Essays*. (New York: Pantheon, 1957), 51–67; Ingolf U. Dalferth, “A Relaxed View of Metaphysics. Neo-Aristotelian Thomism and the Theological Legacy of Thomas Aquinas,” *Zeitschrift Für Theologie Und Kirche* 114, no. 1 (2018): 63–65, <https://doi.org/10.1628/004435417X14822419363982>.

<sup>32</sup> Dalferth, “A Relaxed View of Metaphysics. Neo-Aristotelian Thomism and the Theological Legacy of Thomas Aquinas,” 60.

<sup>33</sup> Dalferth, 59–60. “However, if we do not read the *Summa* from beginning to end, but from the end to the beginning, as I suggest we should, then a different picture emerges. This is true both of his account of the *vere homo* in part II and of his account of the *vere deus* in part I. In both parts the order of exposition moves from the simpler to the more complex. But this is not to be misunderstood as the laying of philosophical foundations for the theological

those arguments which are in opposition to faith and those which seek to have precedence over it are cast aside, but not those which in due manner follow it.”<sup>34</sup> It is thinking which follows after God.

We have glanced at what Anselm and Aquinas have done, at least in part because they have both been misread out of context, which has had consequences for how we can think about God specifically in regard to arguments and rationality. Because of the changing nature of contexts and how texts can be understood, there have been numerous and long debates about the “god of the philosophers” using these theologians for whom such debates were never possible. They are establishing the interpretants necessary to make the sign-object relationship meaningful and so that the sign, at minimum, can refer to the correct object. It is a mistaken idea that we can rationally argue or even assent to convincing our heart/desires of what ought to be loved, at least by any necessary link. Knowing the truth or the right thing to do is no guarantee of doing the right thing or believing what is true. Hence, I am arguing for a rhetorical understanding of revelation, as opposed to a dialectical one, which leads to our final introductory thinker on God-talk: Friedrich Schleiermacher.

### *1.3 Schleiermacher: A Feeling of Absolute Dependence and Rules for Talking about God*

Schleiermacher’s systematic theological work, *Christian Faith*, is structured around the “feeling of absolute dependence.” One of the reasons for this is to reject possibilities for arguments for the existence of God (in reference to the decontextualized usage of such

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accounts of divinity or humanity. It is rather the logic of an analytic exposition that moves from elements to more complex structures, from the ›syllables‹ that we use in forming ›words‹ and the ›words‹ that we use in formulating ›sentences‹ that can convey true propositions to the ›text‹ of Christology that tells us what God has done for our salvation.”

<sup>34</sup> Aquinas, *Super Boethium De Trinitate*, q.2 a.1 ad.3.

arguments and their reapplication to faith), hence his insistence on “feeling” as the connecting element between “knowing” (reason/*logos*) and “doing” (ethics/*ethos*). Feeling, for Schleiermacher, is primary rather than rationality (knowing). In §4.4, Schleiermacher discusses and establishes his own rules for ‘God-talk’ on the basis of the feeling of absolute dependence at least in part for the pastoral and practical reason of being able to ensure and account for the universal nature of religion. To the same end as Aquinas, Schleiermacher’s rules are identifying what we commonly refer to as God, and for Schleiermacher, it is a feeling of “whence.”

In our proposition “absolute dependence” and “being in relation with God” are made equivalent. This affirmation is to be understood in such a way that precisely the *whence* coposited in this self-consciousness, the whence of our receptive and self-initiated active existence, is to be designated by the term “God,” and for us “whence” holds the truly primary meaning of the term “God.”<sup>35</sup>

God means the whence, a fact remarkably similar to the understanding Aquinas presents of God as an operation. In both cases, a phenomenon is observed, an experience had, or a movement from an effect (an affect for Schleiermacher) to a cause. Yet the difference is still crucial.

After discussing Anselm and Aquinas, who seem to be focused on the rational aspects of faith and ‘God,’ Schleiermacher’s locating of ‘God’ as a feeling of whence is remarkable. In fact, he claims “God is given to us in feeling in an origivative fashion.”<sup>36</sup> It is a denial of an abstract notion of God that is given which then could give rise to a feeling of said God: “The customary view moves in the reverse direction, claiming that the feeling of dependence would first arise based on a knowing about God that is given from elsewhere. This move, however, is mistaken.”<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, proofs for the existence of God, according to Schleiermacher, are

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<sup>35</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith: A New Translation and Critical Edition*, ed. and trans. Terrence N. Tice, Catherine L. Kelsey, and Edwina Lawler (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), §4.4.

<sup>36</sup> Schleiermacher, §4.4.

<sup>37</sup> Schleiermacher, §4.4, n. 22.



superfluous to faith-doctrine—for if a proof could be successfully grasped, it would only avail to “objective consciousness,” which in no way leads (*necessarily*) to piety (faith); the same condition and problem regarding Anselm’s fool.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, Schleiermacher makes a point that the proofs have no place in dogmatics because they cannot be given the proper form (which for him involves an unfolding of the feeling of absolute dependence), nor can they be referred back to Scripture. This is an important grammatical and logical point about the need for and nature of arguments in particular contexts: “This is shown, in that in offering them [proofs] one cannot refer back to Scripture or to symbolic books at all, because they do not themselves provide any proof whatsoever but only provide assertions, and a person for whom such assertions are already an authority requires no proof.”<sup>39</sup> Of course, the caveat here is that the context is dogmatics not apologetics. This is a theological task that he is undertaking and in this task such proofs are irrelevant: it is faith seeking understanding.<sup>40</sup>

There are two key considerations in Schleiermacher’s rejection of the proofs and in his definitional approach to ‘God’ that bear closer attention at this juncture.<sup>41</sup> First, by locating ‘God’ as a whence, he is asserting a certain grammar for God-talk, such that *existence* becomes a nonstarter. The distinction being made is the same one that both Anselm and Aquinas are trying

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<sup>38</sup> Schleiermacher, §33.3.

<sup>39</sup> Schleiermacher, §33.3.

<sup>40</sup> Schleiermacher, §33.3. “Thus, in every part dogmatics must presuppose a condition of immediate surety, faith; and, accordingly, as concerns God-consciousness in general, its task is not to effect recognition of God-consciousness but simply to explicate its content.”

<sup>41</sup> A discussion of a feeling of absolute dependence will be taken up later in the section in relation to Marion.

to make—that between the creator and creation (or between the infinite and the finite). Whether it is Anselm’s negative definition, or Aquinas’s more positive definition, or Schleiermacher’s ‘whence’, the notion is one of a source. All agree that this notion is both accessible (whether by a kind of knowing or feeling) and in use as what is commonly meant by ‘God.’ Yet in each case, and this is what must be considered in the next section, the essence or nature to which the term is referring is obscure. Schleiermacher’s identification of God-consciousness and a feeling of absolute dependence is a helpful step in avoiding anthropomorphizing (an analogy of being).<sup>42</sup> The point is that what the nature of this ‘God’ is must still be established and concretized, which Schleiermacher does, suggesting,

Then the answer has to be that there is no such thing as a purely monotheistic piety, in which God-consciousness, in and of itself, would have to be the content of religious elements of life from the very outset.... On this account, in our Holy Scriptures "God" constantly bears the surname "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and Christ's own declaration concerning himself also implies that every relation to Christ also contains God-consciousness within itself.<sup>43</sup>

In other words, the Christian image, understanding, or talk of God can never be separated from Jesus Christ.<sup>44</sup>

The second consideration is that by locating ‘God’ as an immediate awareness (self-consciousness) of whence, the impetus of logic, of knowing, becomes secondary. Which means that logic, or dialectic, in its more formal usage (even arguments for the existence of God), are not the correct—or at least primary—means of communicating about God. Hence,

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<sup>42</sup> Anselm and Aquinas take similar steps, but substance metaphysics make it more difficult to recognize how they do that presently.

<sup>43</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §32.3.

<sup>44</sup> Again, this is the same claim the Dalferth is making regarding how to read Aquinas.

Schleiermacher's apologetic work, *On Religion*, is a beautiful rhetorical apology for *religion*, which is consistent in his approach to God-consciousness.

#### *1.4 Introductory Conclusions*

Having mentioned some of the difficulties in the philosophy of language dealing with the term 'God,' we can see that the point of discussing arguments (or lack thereof in the case of Schleiermacher) for the existence of God is to move the context of these arguments from a discussion of existence—in the sense of a being among beings, to emphasize that they are establishing rules for (and recognizing the preexisting fact of) God-talk and how it can refer, specifically that there are rules required to fix the referent, to help "hit the mark." The primary rule established in these discussions, whether implicit or explicit is that 'God' *cannot* refer to a being among beings, not even that which is greater than can be thought, but refers to that without which there is no being to discuss.<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, as was briefly indicated by Anselm's fool, the fact of God-talk and the conceptual /notional definitions established do not necessitate an "actual," or "real," referent—whether it is the greatest island, or unicorns, or a goatstag, or Zeus, or the Buddha, or Yahweh. Thus, part of the strength and purpose of considering Schleiermacher's move to feeling (pathos)

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<sup>45</sup> To see a clear statement of this perspective, see, Dalferth, "A Relaxed View of Metaphysics. Neo-Aristotelian Thomism and the Theological Legacy of Thomas Aquinas," 80. He writes: "Rather, that to which the term ›God‹ refers in Christian practices is ›more than‹ the most perfect and most necessary entity, not by being more of the same kind but by being different from everything else in principle: God is the creator, and not a part or mode of creation; God is the one than which nothing greater can be thought because without God there would be nobody to think and be nothing to be thought at all. To orient one's life by reference to God is not to turn to an entity among entities, not even to the most perfect and necessary one, but to place oneself in relation to the one without whom nothing else would and could be (creator / creation distinction). This is the basic distinction to be safeguarded always and everywhere."

is a consideration of a being affected. The problem is one of how to relate language to being—and how to force and stretch finite language, reflecting finite being, to express a relationship of the infinite to the finite, of the creator to the creature.

As Cardinal Newman argues, terms, such as ‘God,’ can stand for “things” that are either real or conceptual. He further distinguishes the real from the conceptual by suggesting that “real” terms are singular, come from experience, and form *images*; this comes dangerously close to a “Schleiermacherean subjectivism.” The conceptual, on the other hand, does not refer to a “thing” but to a notion and is thus a common term—an abstraction gained by comparing, synthesizing, and abstracting from experience.<sup>46</sup> A concept is a generalization, not an image.

Essentially, I want to suggest that ‘God’ is properly a real term, not a notional one. If, grammatically, God is properly understood as a real term, it follows that an experience is required. This is of course not to say that ‘God’ is not also used as a notional term, but that for it to move from a notional term to a real term, from an abstract referring to a concrete referring, from a concept to an image, something has to happen—an event of some sort that can function to reorient the individual in which ‘God’ becomes personal and appropriated.<sup>47</sup>

## 2. Marion’s Phenomenology of Revelation

Because we are looking for some type of an event given in experience to help make sense of a referent (object) for ‘God’ (sign) making the term real (at the *very least* a pragmatically live

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<sup>46</sup> John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. (London: Burns, Oates, 1874), chap. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Newman, chap. 6.

option), phenomenological descriptions can be very helpful.<sup>48</sup> Marion has developed just such a phenomenology, and after a brief discussion of the salient aspects (in no way comprehensive) and a brief methodological critique, I will present my own methodological considerations and proceed to argue that God's self-revelation is rhetorical.

Presently, Marion's phenomenological method enables an external account of faith that is notional and descriptive, such that God-talk must at least be accepted as a possibility which can only be judged *a posteriori*. Despite Marion's anti-metaphysical phenomenology, epistemologically he bears many similarities with Aquinas, particularly arguing from effects to causes, or arguing to givenness.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, there are phenomenological links between Schleiermacher's idea of a feeling of absolute dependence, feelings of freedom and dependence, and Marion's structure of givenness. Both can be read as recognizing a fundamental and radical passivity in the human person and the very structure of experience—a radical passivity that again exemplifies the creator/creature distinction.

In *Being Given*, Marion has, as he says, “but one theme: if the phenomenon is defined as what *shows itself* in and from itself (Heidegger), instead of as what admits constitution (Husserl), this *self* can be attested only inasmuch as the phenomenon first *gives itself*.”<sup>50</sup> Our goal is to

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<sup>48</sup> C. Andrew DuPée, “Out of Context: Newman and Marion on Religion, Revelation, and Hermeneutics,” *Philosophy and Theology* 30, no. 1 (January 2018): 91–122, <https://doi.org/10.5840/philtheol20186792>. DuPée offers a helpful and clear assessment of how to link Newman and Marion in their phenomenological projects. “By continuous reference to that which is outside of, forming, exceeding the subject, we have crossed the boundaries of both history and context separating the two [Newman and Marion]. We can thus say the [sic] their investigations of saturated phenomenality, and of real assent, both share similar aims and objects” (98).

<sup>49</sup> Marion would object to such a broad generalization; but as I was arguing above, Aquinas is much less metaphysical than his interpreters, which Marion also recognizes (see *Givenness and Revelation*, 20–23). My generalization hinges on the conclusion that Aquinas is working to establish the creator/creature distinction, which, again, shows a radical passivity, akin to Marion's own “gifted.”

<sup>50</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffery L. Kosky (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 2013), 4.

discuss this theme in two respects. First, we must understand something of what Marion is getting at in discussing the saturated phenomenon, and how this relates to revelation. Second, we must understand Marion's conception of revelation and the relation of revelation to "the gifted," "the called," and "the witness."

Marion establishes a triple reduction of the giver, the gift, and the givee (receiver) to establish that only givenness remains, or "the originary giving intuition—that is, the *self*-givenness—of phenomena. Only then will one secure experience as *Evidenz*, evidence or, better, self-evidence: the direct awareness of phenomena as they manifest themselves."<sup>51</sup> One is not looking for anything behind what gives itself as itself, only the appearing. As he continues and discusses degrees of givenness, Marion suggests that Kant's and Descartes' paradigmatic cases always made use of a scarcity of intuitive givenness, whereas Marion's own goal is to show that the instances of poor phenomena and common-law phenomena follow the paradigm of the saturated phenomena which has four decisive characteristics: 1) unforeseeability (quantity), 2) unbearable and intolerable (quality), 3) without relation or analogy and therefore absolute, and 4) it is irregardable. In the words of Stephen E. Lewis, Marion, in "enlarging the horizon of phenomenality and suspending the Kantian presupposition of the constituting transcendental 'I'"<sup>52</sup> seeks to return to "the things in themselves." In this way Marion is establishing that it is not human beings, or our minds, that constitute things. It is not that the 'I' gazing upon something therefore makes it intelligible by conceptualizing it. Rather than the Kantian strictures on phenomena, such that they can only reveal themselves under certain conditions (time and

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<sup>51</sup> Kevin Hart, "Introduction," in *Counter-Experiences : Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Kevin Hart (Notre Dame, Ind. : University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>52</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis, 2016, forward, viii.

space, categories of the mind, and the unity of transcendental apperception), Marion's phenomenology is seeking to free the phenomena in its very appearing. According to Marion, it is rather that the saturated phenomenon, in giving itself, overwhelms our concepts, submerges our horizons, and turns the 'I' into a witness. No longer forced to adhere to a strict anthropomorphism epistemologically, the 'I' as witness reports what is given of itself and by itself.

Furthermore, the extreme extent of the saturated phenomenon is that of revelation: "it saturates phenomenality to the second degree, by saturation of saturation."<sup>53</sup> Part of the goal for Marion is to propose possibility, to not limit or reduce what can and cannot appear as phenomena *apriori*, and therefore, revelation is at *least* a possibility, "for the very concept of Revelation belongs by right to phenomenality.... I am outlining it [Revelation] as a possibility—in fact the ultimate possibility...—of phenomenality, such that it is as carried out in a possible saturated phenomenon."<sup>54</sup> However helpful it is to establish the possibility of revelation, Marion also correctly asserts that phenomenology (as a method of inquiry) lacks the authority to decide if and when there has been a phenomenon of Revelation—although in *Givenness and Revelation* he does approach "Revelation as a phenomenon."<sup>55</sup> Problematically, revelation is bound in the horizon of phenomenality itself, showing itself as the "paradox of paradoxes, according to an

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<sup>53</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 235.

<sup>54</sup> Marion, 5. Or also, "My entire project has been directed to liberating possibility in phenomenality, to unbinding the phenomenon from the supposed equivalencies that limit its deployment" (234).

<sup>55</sup> Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 59; Marion, *Being Given*, 236; see also n. 90. "I am obliged *here*—in phenomenology, where possibility remains the norm, and not actuality—only to describe it in its pure possibility and in the reduced immanence of givenness. I do not *here* have to judge its actual manifestation or ontic status, which remain the business proper to revealed theology." He continues in the footnote to this passage, writing, "Phenomenology describes possibilities and never considers the phenomenon of revelation except as a possibility of phenomenality.... Phenomenology, which it owes to phenomenality to go this far, does not go beyond and should never pretend to decide the fact of Revelation, its historicity, its actuality, or its meaning."

essential law of phenomenality.”<sup>56</sup> Marion tries to be careful by not placing any conditions that can precede possibility *apriori*. And yet, revelation, as that which subsumes all horizons, is still located within the horizon of possibility: form (structure) but devoid of content. In this case, it does in fact seem arbitrary that Marion chooses to discuss revelation using Jesus Christ as a paradigm example rather than something else, ranging from any number of prophets, seers, or holy men, from Socrates to Muhammed to Ghandi, to the *possibility* of aliens, or even talking rocks and burning bushes. Essentially, I do not so much want to deny the structure but to point out that the structure (at least for revelation) makes sense only with specific content.

On the other hand, Marion’s phenomenological descriptions of Jesus as the Christ in using the biblical witness is very helpful in clarifying what he is doing. He raises several questions that bear on our own topic of looking for an experience that has enabled God-talk, that would allow and indeed enable the use of ‘God’ as an indexical, but in so doing, he affirms that theology proceeds after God. Marion argues that any theology that is to be taken seriously, must deal with the issues that I have been working to note above, such that, “revelation, if it can ever be conceived, arises from the question of phenomenality much more than from the question of beings and their being (existence), and certainly infinitely more than from the question of knowledge of objects (demonstration). What do we see, what can one ever see, of the invisible? That is the question.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, as Marion discusses Jesus as the Icon of the invisible God, we can indeed recognize an experience, more precisely, an event, that comes to us from elsewhere, fulfilling his philosophical and phenomenological requirements.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 235.

<sup>57</sup> Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Marion, 5. He writes: “In the final instance, all the manifestations of God in Jesus Christ, all the biblical ‘theophanies’...consist only in this paradox which defines revelation in terms of phenomenality: the appearing, among the phenomena that our world never tires of making bloom, of a phenomenon coming forth *from elsewhere*



However, there are still four issues that require clarification. 1) As Marion himself identifies the issue, and it is the same one we have been dealing with—whether logic, or knowing, is the proper field in which to begin discussions about ‘God,’ the charges of radical apophaticism, as well as the potential of fideism can be offered. Yet, as was mentioned in the discussion of Johnston above, the issue for Marion is not one of epistemology, not one of knowledge, but a matter of faith, a matter of the heart, and a matter of love: “Indeed, what is at issue when the issue is God either remains incomprehensible by definition, or is degraded into an idol.”<sup>59</sup> For, Marion continues, “if God is the issue, the issue is never one of demonstrating his existence (and still less his non-existence), because his (possible) essence remains, and *must* remain, inaccessible to us. If one believes he understands God, it isn’t God: this rule is inviolable.”<sup>60</sup> In this case, human knowledge of God is indeed radically apophatic, but that is not the whole story, and this is the benefit of Marion’s phenomenology of revelation: something can still be said, but it comes from elsewhere, from the other. As he concludes,

The biblical Revelation of God by himself does not come to give an answer (without proof) to the question of the existence of God. Instead, it comes to transform our idolatrous and therefore in this sense insignificant debates (about the existence and the essence of an other than us...) into a serious test.... Faith does not enter in as an obscure replacement for the light of understanding, but in order to bring the understanding to decide to will or not to will to accept the coming of God who gives himself in and *as* the event of Jesus.<sup>61</sup>

Again, it is thinking which follows after God.

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than from the world, the appearing of the pre-eminently inapparent, the visibility of the invisible *as such, and which remains so in its very visibility.*"

This will be taken up in more detail as the discussion continues.

<sup>59</sup> Marion, 116.

<sup>60</sup> Marion, 116.

<sup>61</sup> Marion, 117.

Even if the approach is defensibly radically apophatic, the method further suggests that the charges of fideism remain misplaced because, as mentioned above, the issue is not one of epistemology—it is not a matter of knowledge. Remaining in this framework of epistemology, the atheist and the theist are all too similar in both their belief and their usage of ‘God’; both are referring to an idol. To this end, Marion points out that “in the end such a believer is mostly in agreement with the common atheist who, likewise, affirms himself by challenging that which—he *believes*—is worthy of the name of God, when it is indeed only his idol.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, echoing Johnston, the question is not “does God exist,” but “do you believe in God,” and “what is your God?”

2) The second issue has to do with the very nature of the phenomenon of revelation as Marion presents it. Accepting that Jesus is the Icon of the invisible God, accepting that Jesus is the event of the coming of God to us, it remains that presently, we do not see Jesus. *God* is not a phenomenon. In other words, it may not be enough to indicate that revelation is an event, but we must go further, asserting that self-revelation is a language event. How then can we have a phenomenology of a language event that allows for revelation in and through language, especially, if by nature, revelation (if it is to be actual) must overwhelm all of our categories of thought, and indeed turns the “I” into a witness? In what way can “I” witness? Such questions of agency will be discussed in the fourth issue below.

3) The third issue is that of bracketing. Givenness can only be accounted for by bracketing (by failing to give attention to) the giver, the gift, and the givee. Concurrently, and problematically, givenness and saturated phenomenon offer an overly optimistic view of the world—for in this horizon, evil, badness, and suffering are also gift and givenness, which

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<sup>62</sup> Marion, 116.

presents dissonance with our lived experience.<sup>63</sup> While readily recognizing that bad and or evil happen *to me* (in the dative), the usage of “gift” hardly feels appropriate, especially in a language use perspective, as we will see. Furthermore, specific acts, such as Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross, cultic sacrifices, and Abraham’s “sacrifice” of Isaac, are all given and must be understood in terms of givenness as well. Problematically, in responding to these given phenomena, meaning is not guaranteed. Yet, the meaning of sacrifice in these contexts is developed and given precisely in the concrete contexts and relationships. Who is sacrificing whom (or what) to whom (or what) and for who (or what)? Which leads to the fourth issue.

4) The fourth issue regards agency in two respects. First, in the above example, what is the role of response, or as Marion discusses it, the role of the will. If what is given is God in Jesus as love, then it is possible to see the attraction.<sup>64</sup> But what of negative experiences, of the givenness of pain and suffering, of injustice and evil? In what way am I an agent in having a constitutional inability to constitute? Is there any responsibility to respond in such a way that the ‘I’ is not simply a pure mirror so that what is given can manifest itself? Or to use a phrase of Nietzsche, “Truth is ugly. We possess *art* lest we *perish of the truth*.”<sup>65</sup> This is especially problematic if as Marion concludes, “The gifted, inasmuch as finite, has nothing less than the charge of opening or closing the entire flux of phenomenality.”<sup>66</sup> Noting the discomfiture such a

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<sup>63</sup> This is also a difficulty of ‘gift’ language. The terminology can carry unhelpful connotations even in this highly specialized and technical usage.

<sup>64</sup> Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 43–44. “The will only wills if it finds and experiences an attraction that puts it into operation; now, this attraction, always coming *from elsewhere* (generally, from the thing willed) comes, in the case of God, from that which gives itself all the more to be loved as it itself loves, and consists only in love.”

<sup>65</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §822, quoted in Aaron Ridley, “Perishing of the Truth: Nietzsche’s Aesthetic Prophylactics” 50, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 427. The concern is the question: what is the task of our work? Do we work to make things better (as per the initial creation commandments in Genesis) through art (or gardening)?

<sup>66</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 307.

conclusion creates, Marion explicates further: “Nothing of what gives itself can show itself except to the gifted and through it—not by constitution, anticipatory resoluteness, or exposure to the Other, but by the will to see, originally derived from givenness itself.”<sup>67</sup> And finally, he concedes that “what gives itself shows itself only insofar as it is received by the gifted, whose proper function consists in giving in return that the given show itself; and such a conversion of the given into a shown phenomenon can therefore be realized only in the field, obviously finite, where the gifted receives and stages.”<sup>68</sup> As such, the given becomes reliant on the gifted for its phenomenality. This becomes more problematic as one approaches the saturated phenomenon in its extreme, revelation, because if it depends on the will of the gifted, then the given loses its ability to critique, even in its excess.

Thus, in response to revelation as givenness, it seems problematic that it is required that one must will to will a particular type of response, such as belief, prior to being able to see. The role of the self in receiving (as the gifted) and in responding requires more agency than seems congruent with Marion’s priority of givenness, especially in bracketing the givee. In regards to revelation, he concludes: “no one can see that which is uncovered (*apokalypsis*) unless he believes it; but no one can believe if he does not will it, and *no one can will unless he loves what he believes and wills to will*.”<sup>69</sup> This would seem to make faith, rather than a gift, or a grace, into a matter of the will and decision.

Furthermore, if ontologically givenness is the primordial structure of phenomenon, including our human lives, then how ought my ontic experience—my objective existence—be

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<sup>67</sup> Marion, 307.

<sup>68</sup> Marion, 310.

<sup>69</sup> Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 44–45.

accounted for? For in one's life it at least *seems* that one does indeed make decisions, one does act, and in fact give, rather than only be acted upon. What is to distinguish letting what is given appear by the "gifted's" staging of it *as* itself from the gifted's interpretation of what was given, and thereby concealing the given? In terms of revelation, which as the saturated phenomenon redoubled, and therefore the paradigmatic case of givenness, the role of human agency is downplayed too strongly in reaction to Modern and Enlightenment views; and yet, as Thomas A. Carlson observes, at the same time human agency might still play too powerful a role.<sup>70</sup> As indicated, the role of the will in Marion's phenomenology as the decision of the gifted/called in a response is understood as the revealing of the given in phenomenality. Carlson asks, "If Marion clearly and insistently aims to critique and unsettle the modern thought of sovereign subjectivity, does there not remain nonetheless a strange trace of sovereignty in the role that he attributes to decision in the movement from givenness to phenomenality?"<sup>71</sup> Carlson, in discussing subjectivity, argues that

Marion's conception here of the saturated phenomenon is based in a radical reversal of intentionality... according to which it is not the active, nominative subject of consciousness and language who sets the conditions under which the phenomenon appears, but much rather the unconditional and irreducible givenness of the phenomenon that first gives birth to a radically passive, vocative, and dative "subject"—or no longer a subject but rather what comes (historically) after because (in fact and principle) radically preceding the subject in the modern senses.<sup>72</sup>

In other words, while Marion is clearly privileging givenness and the primacy of receptivity in human agency indicating a radically passive subject, it seems that Marion could be understood to be replacing the constituting "ego" with a constituting "will."

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<sup>70</sup> Thomas A. Carlson, "Blindness and the Decision to See: On Revelation and Reception in Jean-Luc Marion," in *Counter-Experiences : Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Kevin Hart (Notre Dame, Ind. : University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 172–74.

<sup>71</sup> Carlson, 172.

<sup>72</sup> Carlson, 155.

The second respect in which agency can be considered is related to the idea of the anonymity of the “giver/caller.” I want to suggest that, in connection with the shift to a language event, even in the case of such radical passivity (which I would affirm) it is a call and a response from a subject to a subject. It is in fact the call that creates the subject, first in the dative (to me), but also in the nominative—‘I’ become an agent in this call because the call is not in fact anonymous but intentional—even if ‘I’ can only know that after the fact. In other words, what (or more appropriate with the call and response language, *who*) makes givenness itself a possibility—what makes givenness possible at all? Having arrived at a conclusion of givenness (by a counter-method), one can now ask Schleiermacher’s question: “*Whence?*” From whence is it given? From whom is it given? Why is there objective existence at all? Thus, in such a circular way, we have returned to the question of ‘God’ as a question of form (phenomenological possibility) without content. However, revelation is still a possibility—God-talk while still lacking content, remains possible.

### **3. Methodological Considerations and Revelation**

Taking Marion’s possibility of revelation, form without content, as a structural possibility of experience, and combining it with a Wittgensteinian language use approach in forms of life, I hope to consider the possibility of content. The helpfulness of combining these two approaches is in paying attention to how language is used in experience—contextually and concretely. And as I am specifically considering Christian theology, looking for the content of the Christian idea of revelation, Jesus Christ is the topic of the following.

My contention, a very traditional one, is that Christian life and practice cannot be understood and do not make sense without reference to Jesus Christ, especially in relation to

God-talk. Christian use of ‘God’ fails to refer to God if it does not in fact refer to Jesus Christ. Yet reference to Jesus Christ leads to two types of questions. First, is a question of the *manner* or *mode* of revelation: how does God reveal himself (rhetoric). The second type of question is one of meaning—how to properly make sense of Jesus Christ: who is he? what is he for us? and how can he be what he is for us (hermeneutics)? To answer both of these types of questions, it is necessary to keep the following methodological considerations in mind in both relation to and contradistinction from, Marion.

There are four general methodological considerations that I would like to acknowledge. Taken together, these four considerations, 1) confession, 2) form of life, 3) context, and 4) freedom/dependency make a similar point about the grammar of theological reflection and *how* to look for meaning. The hermeneutical nature of finding meaning in this sense is directly related to how one lives in two ways. First, how the Christian life is lived informs the images, ideas, and concepts (the world-view); second, and at the same time, the world-view (contextually both the religious and non-religious aspects) informs how one goes about living the Christian life. Moreover, these four considerations can be mapped onto the four issues discussed in Marion. In answer to the issue of apophaticism and/or fideism, both of which can be understood as misplaced because the issue is not primarily an epistemological one, we add confession. In answer to questions concerning how to move from appearing to appearing in language, we add a consideration of Wittgenstein and forms of life. In answer to the issue of bracketing and decontextualization, we add a consideration of D.Z. Phillip’s emphasis on context. And in answer to the issues of agency, we will return to a further discussion of Schleiermacher as both a “higher realist” and in regard to feelings of freedom and dependence.

1) The first is Dalferth's grammar of Christology such that christological statements are to be understood as confessional in nature. I am focusing on the confessional nature of Christian proclamation because frequently it is both the loudest and the most observed. The confession "I am a Christian" and "I believe Jesus is the Son of God" as *propositions* are generally focused on the subject who confesses, not what the subject confesses. Furthermore, if the concern is propositional, then as Marion indicates (and as discussed by Johnston) the question is epistemological and about knowledge. Confession is about belief—"Here I stand"—and in that sense, about *what* is confessed (who). By focusing on the confessional nature of Christian proclamation I am hoping to return to and argue that the confession and proclaiming the confession ought to correspond to the what (and in this case, who) is confessed. Dalferth argues that this confessional nature means that christological statements, statements about Jesus Christ are properly made in the second person, emphasizing the 'for us' nature of the statements.

Dalferth writes,

We are well advised to use the christological thought form and theology in the way outlined: not as a definitive doctrinal statement of the truth that we cannot understand but only accept or reject, but as a hermeneutical guideline that inducts us into a process of reorienting our life toward the creative presence of God and helps us to move through the questions and answers posed and provoked by the gift structure of Christian faith again and again in our own way and at our particular place in history.<sup>73</sup>

One further note: the "gift structure of Christian faith" must be distinguished from Marion's givenness, and will be discussed more in relation to Schleiermacher. Briefly, however, Christian faith is a specific gift, with a giver, a gift, and recipient, and that is the structure that is played out and reorients the Christian. For Marion, givenness is the structure of all life and it remains a matter of will to be able to recognize that. The Christian gift structure of grace, and faith seeking

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<sup>73</sup> Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Crucified and Resurrected: Restructuring the Grammar of Christology*, trans. Jo Bennett (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2015), xviii.



understanding, recognizes that the orienting nature of faith is itself a gift—“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (John 14:6, *NRSV*). The emphasis on confessions is on the subject to whom the confession refers, Jesus Christ—the one whom God raised from the dead—not on the specific way that he is referred to (which leads to the next two methodological considerations). As Dalferth points out, “The decisive factor is the identity of the referent, not the nature of the reference, since the identity does not proceed from the reference but precedes it. Thus, in some way, a confession must be about the one who was and is acknowledged as God’s firstborn raised from the dead.”<sup>74</sup> When using ‘God,’ as discussed above, it functions indexically and as a descriptive name. In other words, the Christian reference to God must have recourse to identify Jesus Christ. Here, we have the idea, again, that God proceeds. We think about God because of God. These hermeneutical guidelines have pragmatic consequences; however, our goal is to recognize these as a starting point for examining the *rhetoric* of how God reveals himself as love in Jesus Christ.

2) The second methodological consideration revolves around Wittgenstein’s ideas of forms of life and language games as ways of examining the above pragmatic results. If we can move from revelation as the saturation of saturation, to self-revelation in language, which would still have the structural considerations of the saturated phenomenon, then the way that language is employed becomes central. Now it is not simply an issue of what is referred to in God-talk, but how is it used. In this sense what is most important is not the particular vocabulary but rather the meaning of the words, ideas, pictures, and concepts and how this is expressed in lived experience. Wittgenstein writes:

Actually I should like to say that in this case to the *words* you utter or what you think as you utter them are not what matters, so much as the difference they make at various

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<sup>74</sup> Dalferth, 29.

points in your life. How do I know that two people mean the same when each says he believes in God? And just the same goes for belief in the Trinity. A theology which insists on the use of *certain particular* words and phrases, and outlaws others, does not make anything clearer (Karl Barth). It gesticulates with words, as one might say, because it wants to say something and does not know how to express it. *Practice* gives the words their sense.<sup>75</sup>

It is the *use* of language in our lives that is important. However, it is significant to make sure that practice is understood in a sufficiently broad way, otherwise there is no way to critique vocabulary that is used. Practice cannot only be understood as my practice. While one might be able to grasp *my* understanding of God or the Trinity by the difference it makes in my life, *I* am not Christianity, or the Christian tradition, and can be wrong. Self-revelation, from a subject that can consciously reveal itself, is in language. It is the language event that opens the field of phenomenality, that lets things appear. Above I suggested that revelation might have to move from event to language event; now, in following Barth I will push further—it must move from event to act. And, contra to Wittgenstein’s remark about Barth, what I find him to be doing is pointing out that certain words create more confusion than others *in application*. He is not “gesticulating” per-se, but rather clarifying a theological and Christian *use* of words as this is developed into the whole of Christian faith and life. In this case, we are considering what I will be identifying as the rhetoric of witness. It is with language and through language that what is given can show itself; the *use* of ‘God’ has a place in a form of life that reorients one to *everything*.

Language use and forms of life have an interesting intersection with the concept of metaphor.<sup>76</sup> As such, a brief comment will add clarity to the movement from event to language

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<sup>75</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 85.

<sup>76</sup> There is also a relation with analogy, but that discussion is another project.

event, and finally to act, in linking being to language, and help to elucidate a possibility of language use.

“The transfer of being into language, although itself existent, is a special event. It is the event of truth, in which that which is *lets itself be discovered*, and, *as that which is discovered*, enters into connection with *that which has already been discovered, standing over against the (human) discoverer*, and *corresponding to the discovery (of the discoverer)*. As this transfer of being into language, the event of truth is an absolute metaphor.... Metaphors in language preserve the movement of being into language by continuing this movement within language and expanding both our language and our relation to being. They participate in truth, by leading the actual beyond its actuality without asserting anything false about it.”<sup>77</sup>

Here, Jüngel is offering a way that language and being interact, that in fact being can come to language, as that which (in Marion’s terms) is given as event. The relation of being to language in this sense is generative, says more than is actual, and creates new meaning. Jüngel, in this argument, works to show that metaphor, as the only proper way to speak about God, “clarifies the way in which being is,” indicating its historicity.<sup>78</sup> And so he concludes that for God to come to speech, in this historicity, means that “God himself makes human familiarity with himself possible.”<sup>79</sup> As such, God must come to language in the same way that he comes to the world, wherein “this coming to speech is then narrated *in* language.... In such language God allows himself to be discovered as the one who comes. Language about God is thus eminently the language of discovery.... Both the world and the worldly act of discovery are themselves *newly discovered*. God is a discovery which teaches us to see *everything* with new eyes.”<sup>80</sup> This is the

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<sup>77</sup> Eberhard Jüngel, “Metaphorical Truth. Reflections on Theological Metaphor as a Contribution to a Hermeneutics of Narrative Theology,” in *Theological Essays*, trans. John Webster (New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014), 56–57.

<sup>78</sup> Jüngel, 61.

<sup>79</sup> Jüngel, 62.

<sup>80</sup> Jüngel, 63.

form of life, and the way that language is used, in *Christian* God-talk, creating meaning and showing *how* (the way) that being is, with “the cross of Jesus Christ [as] the ground and measure of the formation of metaphors which are appropriate to God.”<sup>81</sup>

3) The third methodological consideration is a point made clear by D.Z. Phillips. Phillips reminds us that confessions and uses are made within particular contexts and that attention must be paid to those contexts. Far from the phenomenological bracketing that Marion seeks to employ to recognize the fundamental givenness, Phillips suggests that it is precisely the specifics of context—who, and to whom, what, where, when, why, and how that makes things meaningful. Failure to attend to the given context wherein concepts, confessions, and language are used, especially with religious or ethical propositions, leads to confusion. Using Kierkegaard’s language of the “monstrous illusion,” Phillips suggests that there is a distinct and erroneous view in philosophical theism that seeks to justify God as existing metaphysically prior to any particular revelation, or religion, or theology.<sup>82</sup> Marion makes a weaker claim than the one that Phillips is criticizing, such that God is only possible, because revelation is a possibility. In either instance, whether as possibility or necessity, God is divorced from people who believe, worship,

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<sup>81</sup> Jüngel, 65. Barth argues to a similar point: “We must realize that the Christian message does not at its heart express a concept or idea, nor does it recount an anonymous history to be taken as truth and reality only in concepts and ideas. Certainly the history is *inclusive*, i.e., it is one which *includes* in itself the whole event of the ‘God with us’ and to that extent the history of all those to whom the ‘God with us’ applies. But it recounts this history and speaks of its *inclusive* power and significance in such a way that it declares a name, binding the history strictly and indissolubly to this name and presenting it as the story of the bearer of this name. This means that all the concepts and ideas used in this report (God, man, world, eternity, time, even salvation, grace, transgression, atonement, and any others) can derive their significance only from the bearer of this name and from His history, and not the reverse. They cannot have any independent importance or role based on a quite different prior interpretation. They cannot say what has to be said with some meaning of their own or in some context of their own abstracted from this name. They can serve only to describe this name—the name of Jesus Christ.... The Christian message about Him—and without this it is not the Christian message—is established on the certainty that He is responsible for it, that He as the truth speaks through it and is received in it, that as it serves Him He Himself is present as actuality, as His own witness.” (*CD IV.1*, 16-17)

<sup>82</sup> D. Z. Phillips, *Recovering Religious Concepts: Closing Epistemic Divides* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 16.

and confess God. On one hand, God is thought to *have* to be logically prior (what *must* be the case) in order for God to exist in a predetermined manner. On the other hand, as a possibility, there is a decided failure to “*look and see*,” as Wittgenstein avers.<sup>83</sup> The suggestion arises from these views that we can effectually talk *about* ‘God’ without any reference to traditions that confess God. Phillips’ point is that to understand what it means for God to exist, and more importantly, what it means to believe in God, we have to look in a particular context—specifically a context that lives a form of life and confesses God. “It is not to it [metaphysical belief or phenomenological possibility] that we must look if we want to understand what it means to believe in God, but to matters of the spirit in religious practice.”<sup>84</sup>

4) The fourth consideration is an appropriation of Schleiermacher’s observations regarding dependency in *The Christian Faith*. For Schleiermacher, feeling as immediate self-consciousness operates in two directions, 1) between the self and the world, and 2) within the self. In the first relationship between the self and world, it is a relation of finitude to finitude, experienced as a varying mixture between a feeling of freedom, as the ability to act and effect, and a feeling of dependence, as the experience of being acted upon and affected. These feelings of freedom and dependency function on a sliding scale, and constitute the basic structure of our lived experience, our experience with what is given. It is the feeling of absolute dependence that occurs only on the self-side, or only in the distinctions within the soul, such that it is a feeling of

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<sup>83</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen = Philosophical Investigations*, ed. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, Rev. 4th ed. (West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §66.

<sup>84</sup> Phillips, *Recovering Religious Concepts*, 16; Dalferth, *Crucified and Resurrected*, 44. He writes: “The ‘wisdom of the world’ may find the cross a stumbling block and an offense. And it may have problems with the idea of the resurrection. But religious feeling and moral sensitivity are better able to deal with belief in the resurrection and even attempt to support it with metaphysical and moral arguments—in the form of proofs of the soul’s immortality. In this way they also manage to neutralize the word of the cross.”

*whence*: a feeling of the fact that the very capacity to feel, know, and do, the fact that one is related to a world, is only possible as a *whence*. Additionally, this feeling of absolute dependence is understood as being able to be coposited along with all other feelings. In point of fact, Marion's gift structure and ideas of givenness can be understood as an elaborate unfolding of the "feeling of absolute dependence"—a feeling such that structurally one's agency is given. It is also helpful to consider Schleiermacher here in relation to Marion because of the criticism leveled regarding agency; for Schleiermacher goes a step further and recognizes that in so much givenness one still plays an active role, a role that fluctuates between the poles of freedom and dependency, yet without the sovereignty of the will. Because it is a *feeling* of freedom and a *feeling* of dependence, one does not have to exercise the will in order to be affected in either way—the will is engaged after being so affected (immediate self-consciousness). Additionally, it is helpful to consider these roles of agency in the response to revelation, i.e., the responsible witness to revelation (as indicated above in 2).

In response to the second question of agency regarding what makes givenness possible at all, Schleiermacher merely points us in the direction that we wish to pursue. Given our discussion, while Schleiermacher does not *prove* the existence of God, locating God-consciousness in feeling, it is not a crass subjectivist move. Schleiermacher is a higher realist, such that if we are absolutely dependent, then there is a *real* cause for that feeling. Yet, the cause of a feeling of absolute dependency is not a *being*, but is properly identified as *causality* or *activity* itself. This *whence*, as discussed above, is what is meant by 'God.' In relation to Marion, this means that the givenness of givenness is what would be meant by 'God'. But by merely indicating, Schleiermacher does not go far enough and Barth takes us a step further: he emphasizes the freedom and decision of God, which is what moves God's self-revelation from

*mere event* to act: “It is by choice that the Word of God is identical with the humanity of Christ, Holy Scripture, and proclamation.”<sup>85</sup> The important point is that God corresponds to Himself; in revelation, it is God’s self-revelation and self-communication; He reveals Himself as who is He is. Who He is is God *pro nobis*. This self-communication takes place definitively in Jesus Christ.

#### 4. Conclusions

There are several goals in looking at these authors and discussing rules for talking about God in a discussion of revelation, phenomenology, rhetoric (Ch.2). First, to establish that such talk not only happens, but it is meaningful, albeit contextually and in use: *for* someone. Second, it was to acknowledge that there are conceptual images and ideas required to fix the referent, otherwise talking about ‘God’ does not mean talking about any particular God. Third, it is meant to highlight that God talk originates in God—hence revelation. If we discover revelation, then it is no longer revealed to us. It is the dative case of an action happening *to me* that is meant to be highlighted in this conception. This was clarified (and problematized) in the discussion of Marion. Fourth, it is meant to indicate that argument can only occur after the fact. Argument can only be *a posteriori*—not an argument from experience, but that any argument (whether *a priori* or *a posteriori*) can only be made after experience—or faith seeking understanding. “I believe, help thou my unbelief.”

Having indirectly provided this conception of self-revelation as a possibility, and revelation as possible not only as event, but revelation as act, having discussed methodological concerns of moving from being (and experience) to language, and having shown that argument is

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<sup>85</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. G.W. Bromiley, vol. I.1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2010), 157.

not the primary way in which revelation comes to us, space has been cleared to discuss rhetoric.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Notably, in this section, there are obvious anthropological questions, as well as further questions concerning experience. As regards the question of a general anthropology, while necessary, it is beyond the scope of this study. In fact, to sufficiently address such anthropological concerns would require another book. Additionally, within the very framework that is being established, any anthropology would have to be considered from multiple perspectives—the perspective of faith and of non-faith, a reorientation from old to new from within the faith perspective, and a recognition of both what it is to be human and how to be human in true way based upon the self-revelation of Jesus Christ. This is an area that can be more fully explored.

The second question of experience is also significant, as God cannot be reduced to an experience (as the condition of all experience); there is always something more and beyond—there is an intrinsic eschatological nature to God, and as we shall see, to love as well.



## CHAPTER TWO: ON RHETORIC

The natural place to begin a discussion of rhetoric is with Plato and Aristotle, and I will after drawing attention to a point made by Kenneth Burke in *A Rhetoric of Motives*. In the first part of his book, he draws attention to the range of rhetoric, “trying to indicate what kinds of subject matter not traditionally labeled ‘rhetoric’ should... also fall under this head.”<sup>1</sup> I share a similar goal of attempting to broaden the definition of rhetoric to an anthropological level. For rhetoric specifically deals with the whole person. It is not singular in emphasis, but rather concerns the whole of life, and can offer an invitation to view everything differently. Burke suggests that the two main aspects of rhetoric are “its use of *identification* and its nature as *addressed*.”<sup>2</sup> The previous chapter was in fact largely concerned with a concept of identification, particularly the identification of God by use of the term ‘God’. As Burke further points out, “identification implies division,” and that was one of the main themes: the division<sup>3</sup> between creator and creature as a minimum marker of indexically identifying God. This also indicates the difficulties inherent in identification such that a minimum of content and an inability to arrive at said content from our perspective. The identification must come from God.

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<sup>1</sup> Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 46.

<sup>2</sup> Burke, 45.

<sup>3</sup> Here, in this case I mean division in the strongest sense of distinction and difference. The creator is separate from creation absolutely, except by His own choice. This is to emphasize the point that there is no natural religion or general revelation apart from special revelation. The creator/creature distinction (as I will commonly refer to this difference and division) is only recognizable from the perspective of faith, a result of revelation. God must identify Himself as such, and like Burke observes, it is in identification that division (and distinctions) are made.

Because God must identify himself in the act of self-revelation, the second aspect of rhetoric is address and it is addressed to someone for some purpose. Thus, address leads to persuasion, and the traditional understandings of rhetoric as the art of persuasion. Burke concludes that “there is no chance of our keeping apart the meanings of persuasion, identification (‘consubstantiality’) and communication (the nature of rhetoric as ‘addressed’).”<sup>4</sup>

The goal in this chapter is to show that rhetoric is an expression of a form of life. The role this plays in my larger argument is one of suggesting that, since in Christian theology revelation has to do with the living God, God Himself expresses the form of His life (Ch. 3). Presently, there are two themes to focus on: 1) rhetoric as the art of persuasion, will require an understanding of persuasion—what and how do we persuade? Formally, what is required? To show how this is the case, the four methodological considerations will be mapped on to our questions of rhetoric. In expressing a form of life, one is always at least implicitly (unthematically) persuasive—it is an expression of an orientation and understanding of life and an invitation to the other to orient oneself in this way as well. As will be shown, persuasion, and thus rhetoric, are concerned with what is right, what is true, what is possible, and how to discover this together (relationally and intersubjectively). Therefore, I will seek to show that rhetoric as the art of persuasion (and thus about identification and address) is confessional, linguistic, contextual, and concerned with agency.

2) The second theme is to explore the nature of a communicative event. This will focus on the relationality of those involved and the inter-relatedness of the four concerns listed above. The model is borrowed from Gerhard Ebeling. His paradigmatic sentence of the process of the communicative event reads: “I am saying something to you.” In the analysis of this paradigm,

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<sup>4</sup> Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 46.

one of the key points is that as address, the focus is on saying something *to* you. In it in this context that I say *something*, i.e., that I talk about something. Ebeling, and the focus on rhetoric, helps maintain that talking about something always takes place in a context of talking *with* someone.<sup>5</sup>

## 1. Rhetoric and Persuasion

Rhetoric has had a poor connotation at least since the time of Socrates and Plato and its association with sophistry. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates questions Gorgias concerning the subject matter of rhetoric, comparing it to (among other crafts) what a mathematician studies (numbers), and suggesting that the mathematician must be able to communicate his knowledge of numbers. In this way, mathematics has the art of persuasion about math within its field of study, and is therefore concerned with discovering, unveiling, and persuading about the truth of numbers. On the other hand, rhetoric itself, disconnected from a specific field of knowledge and having no subject (object) proper to it, is not concerned with truth, but rather “conviction.” Since this time, there has been a lingering distrust of rhetoric such that it is about persuasion, and therefore manipulation, that it deals with bypassing or ignoring the rational (*logos*) and swaying people with eloquent words and stirrings of feeling (*pathos*). For Plato’s Socrates, in the *Gorgias* at least, rhetoric is “a producer of conviction-persuasion and not of teaching-persuasion concerning what’s just and unjust.”<sup>6</sup> Plato’s concern with justice and the ability for justice to be established

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<sup>5</sup> Looking forward (Ch. 3), this event must be reinterpreted in light of God’s self-revelation such that the paradigmatic sentence becomes “God says God to God, and to us.”

<sup>6</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Donald J. Zeyl (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1987), §455a. Given the overall direction of this project, it seems necessary to point out that I am focusing on Aristotle’s conception of rhetoric, not Plato’s, even though dialogues such as the *Gorgias*, *The Symposium*, and the *Phaedrus* all bear on the discussion in the later chapters in regard to *eros* and love. However, the scope of this project prevents a full consideration in this direction. In the same way, I can only point to Augustine’s use of *eros*.

concretely apart from multiplicity is to identify a firm link between knowing and doing, between knowing what is just and speaking what is just; between knowing what is just and using the art of persuasion *for* justice and therefore, justly. Yet, as he shows in the *Gorgias*, Plato does not think rhetoric is the art (technique) to arrive at such a goal.

For Aristotle however, rhetoric serves a noble purpose—because it can be used for bad ends does not mean that the skill itself is ignoble. As is pointed out in every introductory philosophy course, Aristotle identifies ‘good’ as kind relative. What this means for our discussion is that the art of persuasion has a ‘good’ and can be used for a good. In terms of justice, this means that as an art, the rhetorical act must be tailored to the situation, and that justice must be relative, and therefore specific, to the situation as well. Moreover, for Aristotle it is in the connection of *logos* to *pathos* to *ethos* that rhetoric has its convincing power for action; the separation of these characteristics subverts the *telos* of the rhetorical act. And since rhetoric in this case is *for* persuasion, we must remember that persuasion too is always goal oriented—persuasion is *for* something; it requires a response from the one who is to be persuaded.<sup>7</sup> Of course, by engaging with the other in such a way, the possibility for misunderstanding is readily realized. Thus hermeneutics can be recognized as the art of interpretation wherein the goal is proper understanding, and understanding has its basis in meaning. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this Aristotelian theme is specifically taken up by Heidegger and Gadamer in that hermeneutics, as the art of interpretation (initially directed towards texts), has been expanded to an art of meaning making as part of the structure of human being. Along with the further development of

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<sup>7</sup> “When ‘the power to persuade’ becomes the all-too-easy target it is made out to be in, for example, Plato's *Gorgias* and *Sophist* and later in Descartes, Locke, Kant, and Hegel, this competence is dissociated from its declared connection with the morality of a community or culture (and more broadly with the human orientation to ideals as guides for behavior).” Walter Jost and Michael J. Hyde, “Introduction,” in *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in Our Time: A Reader* (Yale University Press, 1997), 3, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bdt.4>.

hermeneutics as a field (as theories and/or methods of interpretation) and not simply a tool (rules for reading specific texts), rhetoric too has gained significance, particularly wherein how rhetoric and hermeneutics relate. It should be noted that the significance gained is that rhetoric is no longer understood simply as a list of techniques to be applied for persuasion, but as an expression of a form of life (an *ethos*), a *way* of being-in-the-world.

Nonetheless, the nature of this relationship is not entirely clear. If we are to maintain the traditional definitions, at least as a starting point, then we are dealing first with arts (*techne*), which to use Schleiermacher's definition, is a rule (or set of rules) that have no rules for application. Rhetoric is the *art* of persuasion; hermeneutics is the *art* of interpretation. Put in this way, a clear dialectical relationship can be observed between the two arts.<sup>8</sup> If we further move rhetoric from dealing only with persuasion in a broadly public sphere to the art of communication in general, whether spoken or written, then the relation between hermeneutics and rhetoric becomes even clearer. What we see then, in both Plato and Aristotle, is the importance of communication. Dialectics can effectively be understood as a subcategory of rhetoric—a special kind of rhetoric. Generally rhetoric, as communication, is such a fundamental part of human life that it is taken for granted.

H.P. Rickman writes: “We can then redefine rhetoric as the study of effective communication.”<sup>9</sup> And it is the effectiveness of rhetoric that is of particular import for our discussion of revelation and the responsible witness to revelation. What I want to suggest is that our forms of life, the structures of givenness and of being-in-the-world, are always expressed.

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<sup>8</sup> By dialectical relationship, in this case, the reference is of a Hegelian nature, rather than the classical reference to argumentation. One of the difficulties will be in distinguishing the equivocal nature of some of these terms through history.

<sup>9</sup> H. P. Rickman, “Rhetoric and Hermeneutics,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 14, no. 2 (1981): 101.

Since, in general, we hope to be understood (albeit not always or by everyone) and to communicate meaningfully, our very lives have a rhetorical element. The goal of communication is to be understood; the goal of understanding is to understand what is communicated. The way to show that understanding has taken place is to communicate, verbally, through expression, or through action, what has been understood. But understanding here cannot be limited simply to cognition—it is not simply a rational matter. If someone asks me, “Please pass the ketchup,” and I understand only at the level of rationality—the words have meaning in the order in which they are spoken—and I do not actually pass the ketchup, then it is fair to question whether understanding has indeed taken place because I have failed to communicate my understanding in a way appropriate to the initial request (response). The difficulty in this situation of understanding and response is in fact two-fold. On the one hand, there could be a problem of the communicator—did I communicate in the right way? The second is the issue of the one who understands—the failure to follow the direction or respond in the way that one would like (fulfilling the request to pass the ketchup), could be a failure of understanding, but it could also be a refusal. And whether this is a failure of understanding or a refusal cannot be determined *apriori*. D.Z. Phillips makes a similar point by recalling a conversation in a play by Samuel Beckett. Phillips summarizes: “One character says, ‘Let’s go.’ Another replies, ‘Yes, let’s.’ Neither moves.... If we want to call this a severance of willing from acting, it is important to note that the person is no longer saying anything. He is babbling, not speaking.”<sup>10</sup> Phillip’s interpretation is clearly a possibility, but babbling is not the only possibility. A hermeneutical

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<sup>10</sup> D. Z. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil & the Problem of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 29. The play in reference is *Waiting for Godot*. While in this discussion Phillips is arguing about the logic of God’s will, such that in our lives, “normally, ‘willing’ simply is ‘acting,’” the hermeneutical and rhetorical implications are such that what we understand and what we say are intimately related. When understanding is severed from speech (persuasion?), there is no communication.

understanding is always expressed rhetorically; a rhetorical expression is always understood hermeneutically—otherwise it can be questioned whether we are speaking at all. Willing and acting can no more be separated and still be meaningful than can hermeneutics and rhetoric (as we are understanding them). Because we always already find ourselves in a world of meaning and understanding as part of the very structure of what it means *to be* human, then when this understanding breaks down, we look for a new orientation or way of understanding what we perceive.

Take again, for instance, ‘God.’ From an external perspective, using ‘God’ without reference to *God*, in the Christian tradition understood through the person and work of Jesus Christ, is entirely possible. Something is said, it is not meaningless. But that meaning is not necessarily shared. Use of ‘God,’ and lack of a desired response in the communication of the term, is to be expected, at least on occasion, and cannot be reduced to babbling. On the other hand, Jüngel’s insistence on the nature of religious language as metaphorical, in ways similar to Marion’s discussion of the event nature of revelation and the call and response structure, is directly related to this possibility of a failure to either communicate or to respond. Jüngel identifies this as “address.”<sup>11</sup>

Heidegger refers to this engagement in a world of concern as being-in-the-world; Wittgenstein identifies something similar when he discusses “forms of life.” The interpretive-hermeneutic task is recognized in the ways in which we go about *being* and the ways that such being is communicated. The methodological notes above drew out the difference here. If our being-in-the-world is a structural form, in the way that Marion establishes givenness, then

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<sup>11</sup> As mentioned, the critical point is the difference between talking *about* something (statement, assertion, etc.) and talking *to* someone (address).

“forms of life” are just those ways (the forms as content now) in which that structure (as form) is enacted. Our concern is of a theological nature, for if rhetoric and hermeneutics are inseparable, and are revealed in specific forms of life and ways of being-there, as responses of the gifted to the call, then the *way* that God communicates himself (not just who he communicates himself to be) is of decisive importance for our own specifically Christian ways of communication and living.

While it is not possible to recount the history of both rhetoric and hermeneutics, it is worthwhile to note the referents of each are not universal. In the very approach to understanding what rhetoric and hermeneutics are a hermeneutical awareness is necessary in the sense of an “understanding of understanding.”<sup>12</sup> Building on Aristotle’s conception of rhetoric as an art conditioned by the circumstances, and following his presentation of *phronesis* (practical knowledge), it is possible to understand a positive function of rhetoric. More than simply a tool to remain inauthentic being-with in the ‘they’, or as a member of the herd and therefore sick of life, rhetoric can be a creative assessment and implementation of an understanding of the circumstances and what is possible therein.<sup>13</sup>

Again, Jüngel is instructive here. As shown in the discussion in the first chapter, Aristotle’s logic is a logic of statements, assertions, and propositions. The logic then is instructive when truth or falsity is in question—when something is either affirmed or denied of

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<sup>12</sup> Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Radical Theology: An Essay on Faith and Theology in the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 47ff. Dalferth refers to this as the hermeneutics of event. Looking ahead, the event language plays a significant role in the theological implications.

<sup>13</sup> This idea is well expressed in Jost and Hyde, “Introduction,” 10. They write, “In his description of how publicness defines a world of common sense and common *praxis*, for instance, Heidegger tends to emphasize its “mass”-like (Plato), “crowd”-like (Kierkegaard), and “herd”-like (Nietzsche) propensity to bring about a mindless conformity in its adherents. That rhetoric can and does play a role in sustaining our publicness is undeniable. With Heidegger, then, it can be said that those who theorize and practice the orators art are involving themselves with a *techne* whose way of being admits more than a modicum of inauthenticity (*uneigentlichkeit*).”



something. “Every sentence has meaning, not as being the natural means by which a physical faculty is realized, but ... by convention. Yet every sentence is not a proposition; only such are propositions as have in them either truth or falsity.”<sup>14</sup> If the statement is not a denial or an affirmation, then it is not within the purview of logic, but, in Jüngel’s words, that of “rhetoric or poetics, whose intellectual subject matter is not the truth of a statement, but rather language which lives from and pleads for this truth.”<sup>15</sup> There is an unfortunate moral ambiguity in both rhetoric and dialectic (at least potentially) which Aristotle recognizes and denounces, and yet is still necessary because the arts themselves, in order to be arts with content, are required to always consider not just the truth, but counter-arguments and false opinions, and to be able to construct these arguments as well. The denunciation occurs because Aristotle believes what is true and just is easiest to prove and most convincing, but when it fails it is important to look to the person doing the persuading to see why. In the same way, knowledge of the counter-argument is meant give the speaker understanding to help ensure that the truth wins out. There is an additional difficulty in the rhetorical situation such that to be persuasive, or to prove something, people must sometimes be instructed, but instruction is not always possible, and yet something must still be decided. Therefore, the means of persuasion (rhetoric as tools) are important to know, but again for the purposes of the truth.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, rhetoric, as concerned with the truth, bears a relationship to knowledge. But this is a knowledge of practical matters, not of art, nor of science. The context in which the rhetorical

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<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, “De Interpretatione,” in *Basics Work of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, trans. E.M. Edghill (New York: Random House, 2001), 17a 1-3.

<sup>15</sup> Jüngel, “Metaphorical Truth,” 35.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (Mineola, New York: Dover, 2004), 1355a21 ff.

act occurs (speeches) is political and therefore concerned with human action.<sup>17</sup> But human activity, does not allow for the same kind of definitions or certainty as a science—in much the same way that ‘God’ inherently invokes ambiguity. As such, and frequently, though proof is the goal, and demonstration is the means, the contingent nature of the content precludes scientific demonstration, but not demonstration as such. It is simply that by beginning with contingent matters, the conclusion must be contingent as well (the premises must be better known than the conclusion). But it does not mean that there is no knowledge or truth, it is simply that various views can be had, and various conclusions can be reached—the ethical/political goal is to reach and persuade of the true one. Again, this in turn means, that knowledge and ethics (logos and ethos) are related and connect through pathos, because emotions change how we see (know) and how we act (ethics). Thus, “the art of rhetoric has a special responsibility for truth.”<sup>18</sup>

Yet, in this responsibility for the truth, the concern is *concrete possibilities*, not modal/logical possibilities. The obvious implication is that one can *actually* understand the circumstances. An understanding of the circumstances is unfortunately not as ‘clear and distinct’ as is often presupposed; to have a reflective understanding, one must take account of the ‘fore-structures’ of thought, the ‘thrownness’ and ‘fallenness’ of being-there, or in Gadamer’s terminology, the ‘prejudices’ of our present tradition. Moreover, it is not just enough to recognize or reflect “I have prejudices”; the point is to see how these pre-judgments influence

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<sup>17</sup>For an excellent discussion of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, see M.F. Burnyeat, “Enthymeme: Aristotle on the Logic of Persuasion,” in *Aristotle’s Rhetoric: Philosophical Essays*, ed. David J. Furley and Alexander Nehamas (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3–56, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/claremont/detail.action?docID=3031097>; M.F. Burnyeat, “Enthymeme: Aristotle on the Rationality of Rhetoric,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Rhetoric*, ed. Amélie Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 88–115.

<sup>18</sup> Jünger, “Metaphorical Truth,” 35. It is also noteworthy that this is the counter-position to the Platonic one that opposes rhetoric (opinion, doxa, Sophists) and truth (knowledge, philosophers).

my understanding and that, as such, my understanding is not fixed, but can and must occur continually anew as a new event of understanding, and therefore in *time*.

In light of the rhetorical concerns of understanding and communication, it is the possibilities understood as possible in *this* circumstance that are of significance for the rhetorical act. As Jost and Hyde point out, “the question is not ‘What is abstractly true or right?’ but ‘What is true or right or good in this unique case?’ Even this formulation suggests a division in kind between the two questions, as if the general question were about (philosophic, nonrhetorical) truth, and the specific question about passing probabilities (mere rhetoric).”<sup>19</sup> The problem introduced as the division between truth and mere probability is supposedly overcome by a merging of the two questions, such that the general gains its meaning in the particular. The truth of a proposition can only be determined as it is actually used. A theoretical truth (in this sense) is only a possibility, and therefore less than “true,” with the important exception of analytical truths.<sup>20</sup> As Heidegger addresses this problem in *Being and Time*, which Gadamer follows, the formulation is thus: “*the essence of Dasein lies in its existence*,” and therefore the task of Being is found and discovered in being as an actual existing individual.<sup>21</sup> This returns us to the “real” and “notional” understandings of terms in Newman’s thought presented above. This is the phenomenological aspect of rhetoric. In other words, philosophical *truth* can never be separated from the lived contingencies in which those philosophical truths arose—they might not be

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<sup>19</sup> Jost and Hyde, “Introduction,” 11.

<sup>20</sup> Of course, this point on analyticity must be understood contextually as we have been suggesting. Cf. W.V. Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” in *The Philosophy of Language*, ed. Aloysius Martinich and David Sosa, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 455–68; Hilary Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004); Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward S. Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial/ Modern Thought, 2008), 67.

timeless. Gadamer remarks, “What emerges from the background of the great tradition of practical ... philosophy reaching from Aristotle... is that practice represents an independent contribution to knowledge. Here the concrete particular proves to be not only the starting point but also a continuing determination of the content of the universal.”<sup>22</sup> Ontological truths can only be known and discovered in the ontic. Truth and logic/rationality is not a Platonic idea “out there” transcendent and objectifiable distinct from a being-there anymore than is phenomenological givenness. As Gadamer writes, “In the case of rhetoric this means that, divorced from the natural situation and natural practice, merely learning and knowing the rules does not help anyone achieve real eloquence; and it means, conversely, that a discourse that just follows the rules, without having any appropriate content, remains empty sophistry.”<sup>23</sup> Rhetoric is not just mere possibilities (probabilities), but the concrete possibilities of the actual. Again, the *telos* of rhetoric becomes decisive because it is not just what is concretely possible in the actual circumstances but rather that we try to persuade each other regarding what ought to become actual from those very possibilities.

If in the first chapter revelation was developed as a possibility by Marion, then in this section the point has been to establish that ‘possibility’ is not the decisive factor, but rather concrete possibilities of the actual. We do not want to leave revelation to a wishful thinking (like Feuerbach), and therefore relegated to the imagination. We express what we understand rhetorically in the *ways* we live, and this *way* of expression (rhetoric) then provides the basis for

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<sup>22</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, Revised Translation (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 582. This quote is located in the afterword regarding a discussion of the relation between science and hermeneutics, specifically in response to the criticism that Gadamer failed to understand the importance of scientific method.

<sup>23</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer and Joel Weinsheimer, “Rhetoric and Hermeneutics,” in *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in Our Time*, A Reader (Yale University Press, 1997), 57, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bdt.5>.

living together, and arriving at shared understandings. It is not just that revelation is possible and that if there were a revelation it would have the structure described by Marion; it is that revelation is rhetorical—it is communicated, effectively, by, for, and to someone, and that means concretely and contextually.

### *1.1 Rhetoric and Confession*

The situation of rhetoric, the fact of its concern with an audience, that its goal is persuasion, presupposes several factors. I have indicated that in this situation, according to Aristotle, that rhetoric is of a political and social interest, concerned with the well-being of the city and concerned with what is true. There is an intrinsically practical side to rhetoric, and because of this, there is an orientation to the future. The starting point is actuality, but only insofar as it provides material for future possibilities: “Actuality is not the sum total of being; it represents only being in time. More is possible.... Part of the process of understanding actuality is discovering what would and what would not count as such possibilities.”<sup>24</sup> As such, part of God-talk then would include, if it is indeed rhetorical, a consideration of such possibilities in light of the actuality, the *whence*, the givenness, the revelation, that provoked such talk. God-talk, as part of the language of faith and as confessional in nature, is then a response of a particular type, whether in denial or in affirmation. And again, the reference in any case is concerning the one confessed—*God*. However, as our discussion of Marion indicated, the structure of givenness means that possibilities themselves are given. By confessing, the Christian person is pointing to the kind of possibilities of God’s transforming and creative activity of

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<sup>24</sup> Jüngel, “Metaphorical Truth,” 16.

actuality in Jesus Christ.<sup>25</sup> Thus, because rhetoric is an address, it requires a response. This is mirrored in Marion's language of call and response as well. I want to emphasize that a confession is a particular type of response, one that is primarily about the one who has called. But, and because of this, and in regard to the practicality and effectiveness that are essential to rhetoric, it can never be considered apart from the response. Confession, rhetorically, then while primarily about the one confessed, nonetheless creates an actuality with new possibilities in the one who does the confessing.

Importantly, confession is not necessarily the only kind of response, although I shall attempt a reduction nonetheless. As we have noted, confession is about the content of the confession, not the one doing the confessing. Thus, a response, in acceptance and affirmation, or in rejection and negation, or in indifference and neutrality, are all still confessional in nature as they witness to the object in a particular way—the way that the object is revealed to them and what they are able to understand the object *as*.

## 1.2 Rhetoric and language

Rhetoric is intrinsically linguistic. It is oratory. But it is about practice, in Wittgenstein's terms, it is about use, it is about forms of life. Rhetoric is not simply an expression of a form of life, an expression of an understanding of a form of life, but due to the practical and future

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<sup>25</sup> Jünger, 17. "Christianity is quite specific in that it understands such possibilities as *donum* (something given) to which actuality itself is not entitled, i.e. as a *potentia aliena* (outside power) which, however, still belongs to the being of actuality. Possibility is a gift. And in the judgment of faith, actuality lives by such gifts of possibility, however much this escapes of attention as our minds fasten onto actuality."; Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Crucified and Resurrected: Restructuring the Grammar of Christology*, trans. Jo Bennett (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2015), xvi–xvii. "Because of its christological thought form, Christian theology is essentially about the creative activity of God in creation and new creation, and about the creative passivity of human life as the locus where God's prior activity in creation becomes manifest in a way that transforms human life from a life of ignoring or denying God's presence to a life of faith in the love of God and all others as God's neighbors." Furthermore, Kierkegaard has defined God as the fact that *everything* is possible (citation needed).

oriented nature of the art, it is an expression of a proposal for an adoption of a form of life, and at the very least an understanding of said form of life. Frequently, and problematically, Socrates's criticism of rhetoric is carried over and applied to what Aristotle does: persuasion is not primarily concerned with truth, but with persuading (convincing) an audience "to have some belief or other."<sup>26</sup> Thus, at least part of the task of the orator (rhetorician) involves understanding the actuality, the matter of fact of the situation. If the art of rhetoric is indeed about "trying to generate a *belief about certain facts*"<sup>27</sup> and not simply belief in general, we once again encounter both the problems of apophaticism and fideism. Yet, if, as Marion suggests, and was noted in connection with Wittgenstein, both charges miss the mark because the issue is not primarily an issue of knowledge but of practice.<sup>28</sup> In other words, how can one try to generate a belief about certain fact (let us call it an *actuality*) when, as discussed above, part of what is actual is more than actual—possibilities: "In the dimension of possibility, the being of an actual state of affairs encounters possibilities which, although they are not themselves actualised, still belong to the being of that actual state of affairs."<sup>29</sup> The problem is not one of knowledge, of epistemology, but one of being able to see, and oddly, the metaphor of seeing is accomplished, as metaphor, in language. Therefore, the linguistic link to rhetoric and metaphor, as that which says more than is actual is significant. In fact, Engberg-Pedersen discusses rhetoric as contextualized in a setting of

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<sup>26</sup> Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "Is There an Ethical Dimension to Aristotelian Rhetoric?," in *Essays on Aristotle's Rhetoric*, ed. Amélie Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 124.

<sup>27</sup> Engberg-Pedersen, 124 Engberg-Pedersen discusses the *Wahrheitsfindung* as truth-discovery, a term which he in turned borrowed from; Markus H Wörner, *Das Ethische in der Rhetorik des Aristoteles* (Freiburg: K. Alber, 1990), 70. I wish to connect the term to Jüngel's idea of metaphor as discovery.

<sup>28</sup> See Ch.4 and Ch.5—it is one thing to know that God is love, and it is another thing entirely to love God.

<sup>29</sup> Jüngel, "Metaphorical Truth," 16.

“*Wahrheitsfindung*.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, if rhetoric as an expression of a form of life becomes a place for truth-discovery, then Jüngel’s observations regarding metaphor as discovery such that God-talk engages in and discovers both the world of being (facts, states of affairs, etc.) and the act of discovery, then it seems that revelation is rhetorical. Burke suggests that this is achieved in rhetoric by “stylistic identifications,”<sup>31</sup> which is at the heart of metaphor such that the “imagery can figure as a terminology of reidentification (‘transformation’ or ‘rebirth’).”<sup>32</sup> We can understand everything in a new way.

### 1.3 Rhetoric and context

The context of rhetoric (a rhetorical situation) is one of truth-discovery, and truth-discovery is intrinsically about persuasion. *Wahrheitsfindung* in rhetorical expression possesses other characteristics besides being linguistic. The idea of truth-discovery, rhetorically, involves two key presuppositions that are inseparable from rhetoric and from one another. First, as mentioned above, confession is a response to an address. But this implies, second, that the one who can respond is free to do so. In other words, the situation of *Wahrheitsfindung* requires that revelation in language, the discovery of the truth, take place from subject to subject. It is not impersonal, it is not abstract. The discovery of the truth is more than simply a knowing—the rhetorical situation implies just that. It is about what possibility can and ought to be actualized given what we do know. As a subject related to another subject, persuasion is always about more than arguments, and Aristotle makes this infinitely clear: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* are the

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<sup>30</sup> Engberg-Pedersen, “Is There an Ethical Dimension to Aristotelian Rhetoric?,” 124.

<sup>31</sup> Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 46.

<sup>32</sup> Burke, 45.



necessary and required means of persuasion. More than that, if we maintain that revelation is properly rhetorical, then the context—in the broadest possible terms—is the condition of possibility for persuasion. The context is the actuality, the state of affairs, from which possibilities are even considered as possibilities to actualize.

The second aspect of the context of rhetoric as *Wahrheitsfindung* is that these subjects in relation to one another must be free. Freedom is an implication and presupposition of persuasion—there is no need for persuasion otherwise. Not free absolutely, for the radical passivity of givenness, of the facticity of the situation, is the actuality from which one begins—and for subjects to relate there must be some third by which and through which they do so (actuality), but free in that they work to discover the truth of that actuality, including the possibilities, and what to work towards actualizing.

#### *1.4 Rhetoric and agency*

Thus, rhetoric, as necessarily involving subjects, has to do with agency. Not only does rhetoric require freedom, it also creates freedom. As human beings, we *effect* the world and others by our language and we are *affected* by the world and others through language. Schleiermacher's feeling of *whence*, is immediate self-consciousness that accompanies all other feelings—namely those feelings of freedom and dependence. In his lectures on hermeneutics, Schleiermacher stresses the common nature of a language in connection with how that language is instantiated and individualized in each person. “Language is the manner in which thought is real. For there are no thoughts without speech. The speaking of the words relates solely to the presence of another person, and to this extent is contingent. But no one can think without

words.”<sup>33</sup> However, it is the use of the words, in the metaphorical form of address of the rhetorical situation as truth-discovery, that emphasizes freedom of agency. Schleiermacher continues,

According to this, every person is on the one hand a location in which a given language forms itself in an individual manner, on the other their discourse can only be understood via the totality of language. But then the person is also a spirit which continually develops, and their discourse is only one act of this spirit in connection with the other acts.... Another, new thought could not be communicated if it were not related to relationships which already exist in language.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, the agency of the subject is expressed in and through the free formation of language in thought and speech, but only in relation to the totality of language as a whole. Jüngel discusses a similar idea by arguing that the manner in which one forms and creates metaphor, or the manner in which one brings being to language as more than is actual, is in fact the “freedom of the speaker.”<sup>35</sup> In the event of address, in the act of speaking, the speaker is free to create meaning with language, in hope of bringing discovery to the interlocutors.

However, this freedom of the speaker is based upon the fact of language itself. Language is the given, it is the actual from which one is both free to create and is antecedently dependent upon. It also means that the listener is free to respond, and free to understand or misunderstand. Thus, “this means that the *claim of the possible* can only be asserted as a granting of freedom. The authority of the possible is the authority of given freedom.”<sup>36</sup> In the rhetorical situation of

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<sup>33</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 8.

<sup>34</sup> Schleiermacher, 8–9.

<sup>35</sup> Jüngel, “Metaphorical Truth,” 69–70. “The metaphorical structure of language, which is rooted in truth as the event of the transference into language of that which is, implies freedom of choice in words, which is the freedom of the speaker. This freedom of language is conditioned by the interplay between the [sic] ourselves and the world, in which we understand ourselves cosmomorphically and the world anthropomorphically.”

<sup>36</sup> Eberhard Jüngel, “The World as Possibility and Actuality: The Ontology of the Doctrine of Justification,” in *Theological Essays*, trans. John Webster (New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014), 120.

*Wahrheitsfindung*, one is addressed with an *assertion* of possibility. Because rhetoric (formal oratory) is concerned with persuasion, then the particular rhetorical form (mode of communication or form of speech act, i.e., command, invitation, confession) is a plea or an invitation. In a word, the rhetoric of witness, and of revelation is that of the invitation. As Paul writes in 2 Cor. 5:20 “So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; *deomai* on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (NRSV, italics added). “In a plea, God’s love finds its most appropriate expression; and this love reconciles the world to God.”<sup>37</sup> While there are numerous rhetorical modes in which we participate, the rhetoric of witness (for the Christian) is one of an invitation, made concrete in acts of confession, prayer, and proclamation, in the practices of faith.

Our goal here is to suggest the universal nature of rhetoric: “Thus, rhetoric becomes the art of ‘human, all too human’ discourse.”<sup>38</sup> ‘God’ as a term is conceptually empty, it requires content. The content must be given, but it is given in language. The phenomenon of a language event wherein *God* comes to speech is a rhetorical moment involving identification, address, and persuasion—a moment of truth-discovery where possibilities are encountered intersubjectively as an invitation to participate in a shared form of life—an invitation to live in a certain *way*.

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<sup>37</sup> Jüngel, 120.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Ricoeur and Robert Harvey, “Rhetoric—Poetics—Hermeneutics,” in *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in Our Time, A Reader* (Yale University Press, 1997), 63, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bdt.6>. Ricoeur’s usage of Nietzsche in respect to rhetoric is especially meaningful, as Nietzsche was a philologist and his arguments are decidedly rhetorical arguments meant to *show* the unreasonableness of a totalizing reason (among other things). In this same passage Ricoeur writes of the totalizing and universalizing tendencies of rhetoric: “In the first stage, the whole human order can be annexed by the rhetorical field in that what is considered ordinary language is nothing but the functioning of natural languages in ordinary situations of conversation; now, conversation puts particular interests into play—particular interests really being those passions to which Aristotle devoted book 2 of his *Rhetoric*. Thus, rhetoric becomes the art of ‘human, all too human’ discourse.”

There is one final consideration that ties each of these aspects of rhetoric together: time. Possibilities and actualities, contexts, agency, and language, all take place in time at specific times. This suggests that the future orientation of rhetoric has the possibility of hope, that the intersubjective nature of rhetoric contextualizes the event in a way that allows for growth (or decay). It suggests that not all things are possible at all times. Development exists (positively and negatively) as a possibility derived from the invitation to participate in just such a shared form of life.<sup>39</sup>

## **2. Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and God-talk: The Paradigm of the Communicative Event**

To make this more concrete, take for example, the structure of a conversation. Gerhard Ebeling suggests that “if we make our starting point the polarity of speaking and listening, the basic situation can be expressed in the simple formula: I am saying something to you.”<sup>40</sup> The basic structure of a conversational event (rhetoric) is that of the sender (speaker) and receiver (listener), wherein the sender *sends* a message to a receiver who *receives* a message. This picture can be complicated by adding elements like encoding (how the message is sent), noise (distractions), and feedback (receiver’s response), but it nonetheless paints a one-sided picture of a conversation. It simplifies the situation to the point of being about the message, about the conveyance of information,<sup>41</sup> to the detriment of the location and event of understanding itself. “I

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<sup>39</sup> This is merely an indication of a way of carrying this idea forward. It deserves more consideration than can be given presently.

<sup>40</sup> Ebeling, *Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language*, 167.

<sup>41</sup> It is not that conveying information is bad, but there is more to communication than the conveyance of information. There is a more positive accomplishment in the communicative event that information is only a part of. Yet, this is not to deny that sometimes, information is in fact the primary concern. But this is a contextual and circumstantial determination.

am saying something to you” is about more than that “something”; it is, as discussed above, a moment of truth-discovery in the tension of address (call) and response. As Ebeling concludes,

“Thus the relationship between the speaker and the listener is not a simple one, like that between the launching-pad and the target, between which language takes its flight and transports items of information. This mechanical conception must be completely transformed. We should rather say that language brings the speaker and the listener together in the same place. It draws them together, or at least it ought to. It works for an understanding in which the speaker and the listener do not merely share odd items of information, but, ... learn to understand each other.”<sup>42</sup>

In the communicative event, then, there is a hermeneutic necessity of understanding the circumstances and situation into which I wish to speak.<sup>43</sup> In the conversation itself, in the give and take of sharing ideas and emotions, new possibilities of meaning and new possibilities for speaking are generated as understanding is *reached*.

In the context of talk about God, in the context of confessions of God, in the context of taking the context seriously, the role of rhetoric comes to the fore, as was shown above.

Ebeling’s work in hermeneutics helps to provide a general framework for understanding rhetoric, first as verbal communication in the speech act, but also as the way of communicating a way of life. Ebeling argues, “in every process of communication life, love and language are still an indivisible unity,” and as such belong to the very structure of human being.<sup>44</sup> Ebeling further discusses the unity of experience in communication in the context of authority, responsibility, a

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<sup>42</sup> Ebeling, *Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language*, 164.

<sup>43</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 12–14. “It follows that there are three divisions of oratory—(1) political, (2) forensic, and (3) the ceremonial oratory of display.”

<sup>44</sup> Ebeling, *Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language*, 159; see also Gadamer and Weinsheimer, “Rhetoric and Hermeneutics,” 58. Gadamer writes, “Neither the art of interpreting nor that of understanding is a specific skill one can acquire in order to become one of those who have learned it, like a kind of professional interpreter; rather they belong to human being as such.”

challenge to understanding, mutual understanding, and verification.<sup>45</sup> His distinctions are helpful as they will provide a framework to understand the rhetorical possibilities of witness, specifically witness to revelation.

In terms of authority, which is in terms of the ‘I’ who is the subject of the communicative event, there is an associated responsibility that is both passive and active. I find myself addressed and in that I too address. Ebeling’s question here is “what ultimately gives authority for the use of language?”<sup>46</sup> Second, in terms of responsibility, the concern is the address, or utterance, of the ‘I’. Why am I acting, why am I speaking *this* word, *these* words? Or more specifically, “what helps us to understand the situation and see it so clearly that the very word it requires comes at the right moment with the power to set it to rights?”<sup>47</sup> Third is the object, the ‘something’ being said, that creates a challenge to understanding—what does one *mean*. The point here, is, according to Ebeling, “to set the listener into action in the direction of understanding.... What language can and ought to achieve is made all the more clear, the more a statement provokes thought.”<sup>48</sup> Fourth, in terms of mutual understanding, the subject is the other addressed, the listener. The goal is to *arrive* at mutual understanding; a mutual understanding is not presupposed but is worked towards in overcoming obstacles such as “those caused by a determination not to listen” and the lack of adequate language—it “becomes a problem of power and authority.”<sup>49</sup> Finally, in verification, the concern is truth, but more specifically, the concern

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<sup>45</sup> Ebeling, *Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language*, 168–79.

<sup>46</sup> Ebeling, 169.

<sup>47</sup> Ebeling, 171.

<sup>48</sup> Ebeling, 174.

<sup>49</sup> Ebeling, 176.

is with what it is that *makes* us true. And what is true for Ebeling is love, that we find ourselves *coram deo*.<sup>50</sup>

The task that our discussion of rhetoric and hermeneutics has led us to via Ebeling is one of trying to understand what it means to live our lives before God, and how we find ourselves in a situation that *is* before God (the *Grundsituation* of existing in the presence of God), such that we have authority and responsibility, that we have challenges to understanding that can be overcome in mutual understanding, and that we are concerned with truth. In other words, there is a rhetorical response to witness to the truth of our situation gained in a hermeneutical understanding of both our situation (immediate and contextual) and *the* situation (before God). Likewise, the very nature of revelation is rhetorical in that it engages the contingency of actuality with possibility, allowing opportunities to be re-oriented by the inbreaking and shattering of horizons. Self-revelation, in and through language invites the other to become a subject. In the freeing for a response, the subject is in fact re-created (with the possibility as a new creation?) allowing for a new orientation in which everything can be seen differently. It should be noted however, that Ebeling's formula fails to explicitly account for *how* "I am saying something to you," which is of significant concern for our question regarding rhetoric and revelation. We have thus far suggested that possibility needs to be understood in the concrete possibilities of the actual, that structuring requires content, and that all of this is communicated—but how is it communicated?

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<sup>50</sup> Ebeling, 179–80.

### CHAPTER THREE: REVELATION

In light of all of the above, I now want to switch perspectives. Up to this point I have primarily been dealing with views of God and revelation that are not specifically theological. God has been discussed as a possibility in revelation, and as requiring content. Following the idea of content, a discussion of rhetoric ensued, in which understanding and living (communicating) form an inseparable unity. We ended with a formula of “I am saying something to you.” However, in light of what has been argued, I want to suggest a different starting point: the rhetoric of God’s self-revelation. While the structure remains the same—that of a subject saying something to another subject—at issue is another “trick of language.” In this structure, the “I” is both the initiator and the active subject, which is somewhat at odds with the ideas of givenness and the priority of dependence. Furthermore, if we are to take seriously that it is God revealing *Himself*, that he is the content of his revelation, such that theological thinking follows after God, and that this revelation is totalizing in its orientation, then it is helpful to re-understand God and who God is from what he has revealed, not from what we have constructed or assumed.

The obvious critique is that this is simply another construction. And in a sense this correct. However, the point of this construction is not definitive answers, but rather a *way*, a means, of critiquing and correcting our ideas and conceptions (both), and a way of being open to revelation. “God first,” as popular mottos advise; but that does not just mean subjectively in my life I put God first. It means ontologically, structurally, metaphysically, God *is* first. God is the creator. God speaks, God speaks to us, and that is prior.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barth, *CD*, 2010, I.1:296.



In other words, Ebeling's formula is transformed into "God says God to God, and to us," and is in a sense an unfolding of Barth's assertion "Deus dixit."<sup>2</sup> To unfold this construction, I will interpret Barth's Christocentric approach, paying particular attention to Jüngel's understanding. Using the five distinctions of Ebeling's above (authority, responsibility, challenge to understanding, mutual understanding, and verification), I want to show what it means that "God says God to God, and to us," and that this cannot be understood apart from love, but that, in Marion's sense, the horizon of love is exploded—it takes on new meaning in light of who God reveals himself to be (Ch. 4). In this situation, it is no longer how we interpret and understand our situation (hermeneutics), and thus respond to it (rhetoric), but how the experience of the event of God interprets us and our situation. It is the rhetoric of God that poses the hermeneutical problem for us. Very briefly, affirming that God is love, that he has revealed himself as love in freedom, and that he is himself the witness of this love for us is the new situation in which we find ourselves as Christians. This orientational position forces us to reinterpret all prior interpretations in terms of God (creation, governance, reconciliation), not rejecting our being-in-the-world, but as a way opening up the possibilities of our own existence in new and hitherto unforeseen ways.

This section will make up the bulk of the argument, working systematically through *Church Dogmatics I.1* and *IV* to show *how* (question type 1: form, rhetoric), and *what* (question type 2: content, hermeneutics) God has said and revealed. It is because we are impacted that questions arise, such as the questions above regarding how we can know God as something more than just a possibility; questions are not merely speculative, inventive endeavors, but based upon

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<sup>2</sup> Barth, I.1:296.

the concrete actualities that are given, that break in on our horizons.<sup>3</sup> Marion is again helpful here in discussing the gift structure. Theology is a response; therefore, it is not a question of how to conceive of God, but a question of how our thinking can *follow* God.<sup>4</sup> According to Jüngel, the fundamental hermeneutical problem of theology is “the fact that the being of God *proceeds*.... For only because the being of God proceeds is there an encounter between God and humanity.”<sup>5</sup> In this sense, God “paves the way” and “mak[es] a path” upon which theological thinking is led *by* God and this path is understood as revelation.<sup>6</sup> In a word, God has addressed us.

If we take Ebeling’s statement about communication as a unity of life, love, and language seriously, then the idea of revelation as communication will likewise be a unity of life, love, and language. In other words, the idea of revelation is necessarily dealing with the *living* God. The theological task then becomes one of thinking “in what way God is *the living one*?”<sup>7</sup> The hermeneutical situation, the context in which we have the opportunity and task to understand is not a static ‘before God’ but a dynamic, active situation—it is a living God that defines our situation. And this living God fundamentally reorients us to our immediate and contextual

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<sup>3</sup> See further: Marion, *Being Given*, §21-§24. In this discussion of the saturated phenomenon, specifically in relation to the ideas of paradox and witness which are significant to the given topic, Marion writes: “Constituted witness, the subject is still the worker of truth, but he cannot claim to be its producer. With the name *witness*, we must understand a subjectivity stripped of the characteristics that gave it transcendental rank. (i) Constituted and no longer constituting, the witness no longer enacts synthesis or constitution. Or rather, synthesis becomes passive and imposed on it. As with constitution, the giving of meaning (*Sinngebung*) is inverted.... (ii) That is, in the case of a saturated phenomenon, intuition by definition passes beyond what meaning a hermeneutic of the concept can provide, a fortiori a hermeneutic practiced by the finite I.... For the witness cannot avail himself of a viewpoint that dominates the intuition which submerges him. In space, the saturated phenomenon swallows him with its intuitive deluge; in time, it precedes him with an always already there interpretation” (216-217).

<sup>4</sup> Eberhard Jüngel, *God’s Being Is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth: A Paraphrase*, trans. John Webster (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 9. “The theological question concerning the being of God involves thinking which *follows* the being of God.”

<sup>5</sup> Jüngel, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Jüngel, 10. “The theological concept with which this particular path is correctly grasped is revelation.”

<sup>7</sup> Jüngel, xxv.

situation, such that it too must be understood in a new way in light of the understanding of the living God. The question then becomes one of how to think of this living God: how can we know him, how can we reorient ourselves in respect to him?

Fundamentally, the questions posed above are confused because they take the individual as the locus of orientation. This problem was alluded to in the discussion of hermeneutics above, as regards our being-there (thrownness and fallenness), our traditions, and our prejudices—as the locus of orientation, the person is not an independent arbiter, but constituted by the very relationships in which they discover themselves. The hermeneutic situation really begins when something presents itself as intractable. It is because we are impacted that questions arise, such as the questions above regarding how we can know God. It is not that theological thinking presupposes the being of God in order to think about God, such that it becomes an extended “what if” endeavor.

The event in which God encounters humans is revealed in Jesus Christ, the God-man.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, Christian theology begins with Jesus Christ. As such, the reorientation of our lives in both a specific and a general way is due to our encounter with, as witnesses, the event of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> As Ingolf Dalferth concludes: “Theology ... is a sustained intellectual effort to understand everything in a new way from the point of view of the eschatological breaking in of God’s creative presence in the human reality of this life and world in and through God’s Word and Spirit.”<sup>10</sup> For our present purposes, the interest is in how Jesus Christ is decisively the revelation of God.

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<sup>8</sup> Jüngel, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Jüngel, 11. “Thus the existence of the man Jesus confronts us with the hermeneutical problem, both with regard to our understanding of God and with regard to our understanding of the self and the world.”

<sup>10</sup> Dalferth, *Crucified and Resurrected*, xiii.

Of course, this presentation has difficulties. One of the primary difficulties is that, as was also indicated previously, God is not a phenomenon. The whole difficulty as Marion points out, is how something invisible (non-phenomenal) can show itself in its very non-phenomenality. This is why he calls it the paradox of paradoxes. Dalferth suggests that revelation as a saturated phenomenon (Marion) cannot actually refer to a phenomenon for the simple reason that ‘God’, based on the rules above (which Marion would likely, at least loosely, concur with), signifies that which makes all other phenomena possible.<sup>11</sup> If the suggestion is that God is to be sharply distinguished from creation (the world of phenomena) as the creator (the whence of the possibility of all phenomena), then at most, like a Schleiermacherean feeling of absolute dependence, “God can be addressed phenomenologically not as phenomenon but...as something unthematically concurrent with phenomena.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, “God’s revelation/act” becomes an interpretation of phenomenon(a) in a particular way. In a word, in the light of faith.

In the same way that rhetoric and hermeneutics were dialectically linked together, so too, are revelation and faith. Of course, this requires some understanding of what is meant by faith. Frequently, faith is understood as trust or belief, and as such is understood in epistemological terms as regarding knowledge of some kind. Yet, given the methodological considerations laid out (Ch. 1), the issue is not primarily one of epistemology, but an issue of practice. And while practice certainly possesses informational content—the life of faith is in fact about something—that is not the primary focus. As Luther discusses in relation to the First Commandment, to have a God is to trust in something completely; to trust (faith) is an act, not a knowledge, and it is

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<sup>11</sup> Dalferth, *Radical Theology*, 192, see also n. 52 on the same page. Dalferth discusses (briefly) that the saturated phenomenon is a boundary term used descriptively rather than critically.

<sup>12</sup> Dalferth, 192.

worked out in a form of life of gratitude and obedience (ideally, and when it is faith in *God*). As Marion writes, “The clearly non-epistemological intention of revelation aims to manifest God in person; God’s intention is not so much to make himself known as to make himself *recognized*, to communicate himself, to enable men to enter into a communication that puts them in communion with him.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, faith is not so much a stance on knowledge (what one knows) but a response to an address (call) in a particular manner. Faith as a type of act in response to revelation is “that human act in which we allow what God has accomplished in our regard to be and to occur for ourselves.”<sup>14</sup> Faith is an act of passivity, an act that acts within the horizon of our passivity: “When we do not affirm that we are passively affirmed by God, the result is not the destruction of human nature but a self-contradiction in the *acting out* of what we are.”<sup>15</sup> But Christian faith of this type is possible only with the presupposition of revelation. If we are to maintain our thesis that revelation is rhetorical, then faith too can be understood in this light. If rhetoric situates us in a context of *Wahrheitsfindung* as an invitation to a form of life based on the ontological priority of the possible—particularly that possibility of acting in and agency by which we are made to be subjects because so addressed—then faith is not simply the human act of willing to understand or the decision of the will to see revelation, but the gift to act and see in just such a way.

If we understand rhetoric as persuasive, effective communication, and hermeneutics as beginning in the situation of misunderstanding, the situation of a failure to understand, then revelation as rhetorical in fact presents the hermeneutical problem. If revelation presents us with the action of God in Jesus Christ as the one who loves in freedom, and if faith is the response and

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<sup>13</sup> Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, 27.

<sup>14</sup> Eberhard Jüngel, “Extra Christum Nulla Salus--A Principle of Natural Theology?,” in *Theological Essays*, trans. John Webster (New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014), 187.

<sup>15</sup> Jüngel, 187.

acceptance of this revelation, then there is an inherently critical aspect to both. For if I respond in faith, and take up the perspective of faith, then I have in fact allowed myself to be interpreted. “The point of Christian communication of faith, then, consists neither in confirming this interpretation [which is given and accepted] nor in adding another to it. Rather it is, put negatively, to *dislocate* humans within their worlds of meaning (to make their prior orientation radically problematic) and, put positively, to orient them anew in another way.”<sup>16</sup> As Dalferth continues this thought in a footnote: “Christians are not called to confirm the existing and the given, to justify it or legitimize it. Instead they are called to critically consider what within it is viable for the future [rhetoric] and thus to be promoted, and also what has no such viability and is thus to be overcome or brought to an end.”<sup>17</sup>

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“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him’” (John 14:6-7, NRSV).<sup>18</sup> I want to focus on this oft forgotten metaphor

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<sup>16</sup> Dalferth, *Radical Theology*, 208.

<sup>17</sup> Dalferth, 208, n. 12.

<sup>18</sup> John 14:8-28, “Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep

of the *way* and its direct relation to truth (knowledge) and light (witness). These are not separate factors that can be understood abstractly and apart from one another. Jesus Christ is the truth and the light only in the *way that He is*. Jesus Christ is truly the way and as the light. Jesus Christ is the light of this way because he is the truth. This is the essential formula of everything that follows.

What follows is the systematic theology portion of the presentation. By suggesting that reason and argument are not the primary means of encountering God and thus rejecting natural theology and general revelation, the goal is now to engage with the central questions of systematic theology through revelation, the trinity, and Christology. Throughout this explication I attempt to demonstrate that Barth's dogmatic argumentation is hermeneutical and rhetorical through and through, i.e., it portrays God from the beginning and throughout as the one who makes himself understood and communicates himself to us. It should also be noted that the point of the following explication and analysis is, as per the title, to help us think well about the love of God, which is taken up in the next chapter. And in that light of the goal of thinking well about the love of God, content and rhetorical form must match: one can only speak of love lovingly; one cannot force love, but only invite to it: do you love me?

Yet, presently, our question now has three aspects. We have been asking these questions, clarifying methodological concerns, and indirectly answering them up to this point, but now the

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my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.” (NRSV)

Here in this passage is the basic structure overall. Jesus reveals the Father, and the Spirit enables us to know Jesus and therefore the Father. Revelation is based on the idea of love, and it is in love that revelation is occurring, but that is because God himself is love.

questions must be explicitly asked and answered. As the theme is now revelation, we ask: what is revealed, how it is revealed, and in keeping with our emphasis on rhetoric as *effective* communication, what is the effect of this revelation? These questions are in fact the questions of rhetoric: identification, address, and persuasion. For Barth, these questions require each other in order to be answered—to answer the question of identification is to also answer the question of how (address) and to what effect (persuasion). Barth concludes that the first step to answer the questions posed by revelation, specifically the question of the subject of revelation, is to unfold the doctrine of the Trinity (CD 1.1, 383). This study will follow in this direction as well; however, first revelation itself must be made conceptually clearer.

In much the same way as ‘God’ can be used in numerous ways in various thoughts and speech acts, many of which are neither religious nor theological, so too can ‘revelation’. In fact, conceptually, there is nothing intrinsically religious about revelation. I reveal my feelings (mostly anger) when I stub my toe. The author reveals the characters thoughts throughout the action of the story. The magician reveals how he performs a trick. A car company reveals a new model. I reveal that I believe in God. God reveals... what? Godself? In other words, is the same concept of revelation being used when we speak of revelation generally and when we speak of God’s self-revelation?

Yet self-revelation is no more intrinsically religious than ‘God’ or ‘revelation’. Neither are terms such as self-communication or self-interpretation conceptually clearer in this context. For self-communication can just as easily signify that I am talking to myself as I am communicating about myself. But there is also an important sense in which ‘self-communication’ is used to signify the intimate phenomenon wherein my self is shared with another. These experiences occur sporadically and in instances of negative evaluation, we



frequently use phrases such as: “So that’s what you’re really like,” “Now we see the real you,” or, “you are letting your true colors show.” These instances and events, again negatively, illustrate both a degree of inconsistency and a degree of (newly recognized) coherence between form and content. On the positive side, we frequently mark a number of “heroic” figures for this very identification of form and content. Some of these heroes “rise” to the occasion, but their actions are merely a difference in degree rather than kind. They are the ones, the average everyday heroes who are veiled in our midst. The ones who, when asked why they did what they did, answer that “I just did what anyone in that situation would have done,” despite the obvious evidence that no one else did.

However, as Nietzsche famously notes, all of life is interpretation. Everything revealed, and communicated, is understood as something. We interpret persons as vicious or virtuous, as villainous or heroic, as salvific or damning, as lovable or contemptible. When I attempt to reveal myself to another (you), what I say is important—it offers an interpretation of how I see and understand myself (upon reflection). But in the very act of offering a verbal (linguistic) interpretation of myself, I require you to interpret my words; because I am not merely a word event; in speaking, I have created an interpretive divide between form and content, between word and deed.<sup>19</sup> Hence, the proverb, “actions speak louder than words.” We make judgements based

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<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Genealogy of Morals,” in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, Modern Library ed. (New York: Modern Library, 2000), I §13. Nietzsche writes: “But let us return: the problem of the *other* origin of the ‘good,’ of the good as conceived by the man of *ressentiment*, demands its solution.

That lambs dislike great bird of prey does not seem strange: only it gives no ground for reproaching these birds of prey for bearing off little lambs. And if the lambs say among themselves: ‘these birds of prey are evil; and whoever is least like a bird of prey, but rather its opposite, a lamb—would he not be good?’ there is no reason to find fault with this institution of an ideal, except perhaps that the birds of prey might view it a little ironically and say: ‘we don’t dislike them at all, these good little lambs; we even love them: nothing is more tasty than a tender lamb.’

To demand of strength that it should *not* express itself as strength, that it should *not* be a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs, is just as absurd as to demand of weakness that it should express itself as strength.... For just as the popular mind

on the correspondence between word and deed—we seek to draw together form and content as they correspond in an event—a moment that emphasizes the confluence of causes and the radical passivity from which one must then act. It is in this moment that my self-interpretation can be interpreted because it is revealed as both conformity and dissonance between word and deed. If our essence is in existence, then in terms of form and content we are left with a question.

Existentially, why can I never do what I want to do, and why do I continue to do what I do not want to do? “I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.”<sup>20</sup>

The idea, then is that I am never the only, or even decisive interpreter of my self—for in Heidegger’s terminology, the very nature of what it means *to be* is that I am thrown into the facticity of the world, that I can only exist always and already in a world of relations. But what about when we speak of God? In the first chapter, we attempted to establish that the purpose of ‘God’ as a term was meant to indicate a qualitative difference between what is created and a creator. ‘God’ introduces the idea of a being differentiated by not being thrown, by not existing

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separates the lightning from its flash and takes the latter for an action, for the operation of a subject called lightning, so popular morality also separates strength from expressions of strength, as if there were a neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was *free* to express strength or not to do so. But there is no such substratum; there is no “being” behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything.... No wonder if the submerged, darkly glowering emotions of vengefulness and hatred exploit this belief for their own ends and in fact maintain no belief more ardently than the belief that *the strong man is free* to be weak and the bird of prey to be a lamb—for thus they gain the right to make the bird of prey *accountable* for being a bird of prey.

When the oppressed, downtrodden, outraged exhort one another with the vengeful cunning of impotence: ‘let us be different from the evil, namely good! And he is good who does not outrage, who harms nobody, who does not attack, who does not requite, who leaves revenge to God, who keeps himself hidden as we do, who avoids evil and desires little from life, like us, the patient, humble, and just’—this, listened to calmly and without previous bias, really amounts to no more than: ‘we weak ones are, after all, weak; it would be good if we did nothing *for which we are not strong enough*’; but this dry matter of fact, this prudence of the lowest order which even insects possess (posing as dead, when in great danger, so as not to do ‘too much’), has, thanks to the counterfeit and self-deception of impotence, clad itself in the ostentatious garb of the virtue of quiet, calm resignation, just as if the weakness of the weak—that is to say, their *essence*, their effects, their sole ineluctable, irremovable reality—were a voluntary achievement, willed, chosen, a *deed*, a *meritorious* act.”

<sup>20</sup> Romans 7:18-19 (NRSV).

within facticity, but as one who enables such possibilities. As we proceed, this kind of distinction will be made clearer, and also more concrete.

However, none of the above makes it any clearer what is meant in a theological setting (from within the orientation of faith) by self-revelation or by self-interpretation. Importantly, in terms of God, self-revelation is not different from our human analogies by degree, but by kind—His self-revelation is something completely new, completely from without, as Barth says, “commandeering” our language, or as Marion suggests overwhelming our categories— it is *sui generis*. This difference in kind is clarified in two respects: 1) God is. He exists and fully actualizes His essence. God always is what He does; a correspondence of “form” and “content” that is true for no created being. This idea has often been expressed (classically) in terms of simplicity. 2) The second difference is that God is His own self-interpretation in His self-revelation. And because His revelation is self-revelation, His interpretation of Himself is also identical with who He is.

Thus, the following is to unfold how these terminological considerations are in fact reliant upon who God has revealed Himself to be. When I use the term ‘revealed’ it is to be understood by the reflexive pronoun wherein the antecedent is God. The term ‘self-revelation’ will function in our context to indicate this complete unity of form and content such that it also interprets itself and is therefore also self-interpretation.

If we understand revelation as *apokalypsis*, as unveiling, then the following would seem to be a helpful analysis of its structure.<sup>21</sup> There is a) something revealed, b) to someone, c) as

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<sup>21</sup> Ingolf U. Dalferth, “Introduction: Understanding Revelation,” in *Revelation: Claremont Studies in Philosophy of Religion, Conference 2012*, ed. Ingolf U Dalferth and Michael Ch Rodgers, Religion in Philosophy and Theology (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 5–6. I am deeply indebted to Dalferth’s analysis in the following section.

something, d) through some means e) in some situation, f) by someone. This offers a fuller account than the common simple sentence provided above (revelation is unveiling). For instance, I (f) reveal a car (a) to my wife (b) as a present (c) at Christmas time (e) by putting a bow on the car (d). Yet, if we attempt to apply this structure to God's revealing we encounter a problem of clarity, especially if we maintain that God reveals Godself (the subject of revelation). In other words: God (f) reveals God (a) to God (b) as God (c) eternally [?] (e) by God (d). This at the very least seems to indicate that nothing has been revealed due to the self-referential nature of the event.

Thus, in order to argue for our thesis that God's self-revelation is rhetorical, in order to transform Ebling's sentence from "I am saying something to you," to "God says God to God" we must somehow add "and to us" as a subordinate clause. However, and this is a significant part of the argument, it is not we who add the subordinate clause. If our thinking truly follows after God, then it is the fact that God himself has willed "and to us" – that God has willed to be Immanuel.

In order to maintain the Creator/creature distinction established in understanding uses of the term 'God', somehow "with us" must be included in God's self, again due to the self-referential and circular nature of divine revelation. In other words, the Christological *vere deus* and *vere homo* is understood as eternal and essential as the reason for itself and the reason for our knowing it. "How else could He be known or expounded but in the event of His own self-exposition as it corresponds to the event of His existence?" (*CD II. 2, 39*).<sup>22</sup>

Our method here moves in reverse while holding onto a phenomenological principle. Presupposing the existence of the man Jesus of Nazareth, the witnesses proclaim both his

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<sup>22</sup> References to *Church Dogmatics* will be indicated in text by *CD*, followed by volume, part, and page number.

resurrection and his ascension. Our question seeks to understand how this appearing is to be understood as revelation but also the subject of this revelation. The goal is to show that God understood as love is revealed to us through and by God's identification with Christ on the cross. Furthermore, Christ on the cross, and God's identification thereof, have to be linked to God as he is in himself. As such, I will be highlighting three elements of Barth's theology that indicate and illustrate the continuity between the first and fourth volumes to show how Barth's Christology is both the starting point and the end goal: after an initial consideration of revelation as self-revelation and self-interpretation (part 1), a discussion of the Trinity will be in order (part 2), followed by more explicit Christological considerations under the heading of "inclusivity" (part 3).<sup>23</sup>

In answer to these questions, we will begin with, like Barth, the Word. The prologue of the *Gospel of John* can be understood as a central text for unfolding a biblical understanding of revelation.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.... (v. 10) He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his

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<sup>23</sup> I am aware that these are not the common notions to discuss Christology, but I am using them to specifically address deity and humanity and the relationship therein. Although, note the use of "inclusive" by Barth in the following passage (italics added), which is also my intended use:

"We must realize that the Christian message does not at its heart express a concept or idea, nor does it recount an anonymous history to be taken as truth and reality only in concepts and ideas. Certainly the history is *inclusive*, i.e., it is one which *includes* in itself the whole event of the 'God with us' and to that extent the history of all those to whom the 'God with us' applies. But it recounts this history and speaks of its *inclusive* power and significance in such a way that it declares a name, binding the history strictly and indissolubly to this name and presenting it as the story of the bearer of this name. This means that all the concepts and ideas used in this report (God, man, world, eternity, time, even salvation, grace, transgression, atonement, and any others) can derive their significance only from the bearer of this name and from His history, and not the reverse. They cannot have any independent importance or role based on a quite different prior interpretation. They cannot say what has to be said with some meaning of their own or in some context of their own abstracted from this name. They can serve only to describe this name—the name of Jesus Christ.... The Christian message about Him—and without this it is not the Christian message—is established on the certainty that He is responsible for it, that He as the truth speaks through it and is received in it, that as it serves Him He Himself is present as actuality, as His own witness." (*CD IV.1*, 16-17)

name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth... (v. 18) No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. (John 1:1-18, *NRSV*)

As we have been dealing explicitly with the idea that revelation and rhetoric are not only linked but part of an inseparable form/content unity, we will address the idea that who God is cannot be separated from *how* he reveals himself.

Overall, the movement is in many ways a reduction, but it is a teleological reduction with a specific purpose: by collapsing revelation (as rhetoric, speech) back into the life of God, the goal is to show that not only does God choose to be God in the manner of his revelation, but he is in fact himself—revelation in Christ and by the Spirit. This, by extension, informs and controls the manner in which Christians understand the identification of God and love (Ch. 4), and the manner in which Christians confess and are witnesses, which will be taken up in the final chapter.

## **Part I: Revelation, the Trinity, and Christ in the Thought of Barth**

In the *Church Dogmatics* Barth begins with the Doctrine of the Word of God, and he covers traditional dogmatic prolegomena, with one significant alteration. After discussing the fact that God does speak, and that God reveals, he places the doctrine of the Trinity as the hermeneutic key to understanding the rest of his dogmatic project. Much of Barth's discussion is built around understanding the relationship between human speech and divine speech, and the role of human speech in relation to revelation in the first volume of *CD*. Barth envisions this relation primarily in terms of witness and proclamation.

The task of this section is to acquire an understanding of Barth's view on revelation, with the goal of showing the continuity between a more abstract understanding of the Trinity, present in *CD I.1*, and the concrete event that is Jesus Christ in *CD IV*, which allows for the "abstraction" of *CD I*. The attempt here will be to show how the unfolding of the triunity of God in His self-revelation, which is the controlling topic of *CD I.1 The Doctrine of the Word of God*, is the key to understanding Barth's Christology. The implication of this is that if the immanent trinity is the economic trinity, then the Christology unfolded in Part IV is the key of understanding *The Doctrine of the Word of God* in *CD I.1*. Revelation and an understanding of the triunity of God become the presuppositions for Barth's Christology, and the history of Jesus Christ is the presupposition of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Before beginning, a few words are necessary in regard to the content of Barth's Christology in the above terms—what or who is being revealed, the content of the doctrine of the trinity, and what is included in this life of God. Specifically, this must be done in terms of two further ideas. The first is the idea of "God with us" and the second is the idea of covenant.<sup>24</sup> Briefly, "God with us" is the epistemological basis for any and all knowledge of God; humans are capable of knowing God only as He reveals Himself to them: "But how can we know God if we do not find the truth and power of His being in His life, and of His life in His act? We know about God only if we are witnesses—however distantly and modestly—of His act" (*CD IV.1*, 6-7). It is this act in Jesus Christ that we have to do with specifically (*CD IV.1*, 17). Barth wants to

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<sup>24</sup> The idea of covenant is central to Barth's Christology, but it is worth noting that in *CD I.1*, in the index, the term appears only twice, and one of the entries appears to be an allusion to the idea of covenant as a relation between God and man in terms of Immanuel rather than an explicit reference. Nonetheless, the same point is being made in both *CD I* and *IV* about the sovereignty of God's free decision to relate to his creation graciously and therefore unconditioned by anything but himself.

lay special emphasis on the idea that God with us is primarily a statement about God, and only secondarily a statement about us.<sup>25</sup> This is will be explicated in what follows.

The idea of covenant is meant to safeguard the freedom of God as God, the free decision of God to be who He is—which is both “our *God*,” and “*our* God,” who is with us. In *CD I.1*, as dealing with the Word, the relationship of the biblical witness to a historical understanding of Jesus Christ is “traced back to election, revelation, calling, separation, new birth—concepts which as it were shatter the immanence of the historical relation from within inasmuch as God is the Subject of the action denoted by them” (*CD I.1*, 148). As such, Barth concludes that the biblical authors can only be understood as using these concepts “as terms for God’s free acts” (*CD I.1*, 148). Here, God does not will to be God without us, and in that sense “what unites God and us men is ... that He creates us rather to share with us and therefore with our being and life and act His own incomparable being and life and act, that He does not allow His history to be His and ours to be ours, but causes them to take place as a common history” (*CD IV.1*, 7). Moreover this covenant is importantly not between equal partners, but is decidedly asymmetrical—it is God initiated and God fulfilled and in that sense, it is a covenant of grace (*CD IV.1*, 39-41).<sup>26</sup> In this way, reconciliation, and the free decision of God to be God for us in this way is simply God being faithful to himself—it is his covenant—an eternal covenant, or eternal election with Himself, and therefore, with us, and it is he who keeps, enables, and fulfills his promises. For Barth, the doctrine of reconciliation can never be separated from Christology.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “For primarily it is a statement about God: that it is He who is with them as God.” (*CD IV.1*, 4)

<sup>26</sup> “The fact of the covenant of God with man is obviously a fact of His free choice, the choice of His grace.” (*CD IV.1*, 40).

<sup>27</sup> “We find at once that there are three ‘christological’ aspects in the narrower sense—aspects of His active person or His personal work which as such broaden into three perspective for an understanding of the whole event of the atonement” (*CD IV.1*, 128). Or, on the same page, Barth writes: “This is the truth which must light up the doctrine of reconciliation as Christology.”



## 1. Revelation<sup>28</sup>

To begin, Barth's Christology understands that *Christ* is God's self-revelation, and *Christology* is the theological unfolding of that self-revelation. Methodologically, Barth is clear that the only starting point to talk about God is God's self-revelation. While in *CD I.1* this idea of self-revelation is discussed first in the context of the doctrine of the Word, and second explicated in terms of triunity, the discussion becomes significantly less abstract in *CD IV* where Jesus Christ is the concrete universal, and the ordering and ideas expounded in the doctrine of the Word<sup>29</sup> are clarified and explicated in terms of the saving work of Jesus Christ. His methodology further dictates that the "christological propositions as such, are constitutive, essential, and central in the Christian doctrine of reconciliation. In them we have to do with that one whole" (*CD IV.1*, 125).

In relation to the covenant and God with us, Barth emphasizes the freedom and decision of God, which is what moves God's self-revelation from event to act: "It is by choice that the Word of God is identical with the humanity of Christ, Holy Scripture, and proclamation" (*CD I.1*, 157); we will say more on this later. The important point is that God corresponds to Himself; in revelation, it is God's self-revelation and self-communication; He reveals Himself as who is He is. Who He is is God *pro nobis*. And as noted, this self-communication takes place definitively in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>28</sup> For the following two sections on both revelation and trinity, I am indebted to the understanding of Barth in Jüngel, *God's Being Is in Becoming*. Moreover, Jüngel argues that for Barth the doctrine of the Trinity is located at the beginning of the *CD* as a hermeneutical key to understanding everything that follows (16-17).

<sup>29</sup> This is a threefold doctrine of the Word: the Word spoken (Christ), the Word written (Bible/scripture), and the Word proclaimed (preaching). I mention this because it is central to his understanding of revelation and Christology, and as such theology.

Barth makes a particular move that distinguishes him from what he calls the “older Dogmatics” and the liberal theologians (such as Schleiermacher). This move is in his dogmatic and theological location of the doctrine of the Trinity. Barth claims that “revelation itself as attested by Scripture, we call the root of the doctrine of the Trinity” (*CD I.1*, 307). If this is indeed the case, then to speak of revelation is to speak of the whole range of Barth’s dogmatics. But this of course raises the question regarding the importance of where to begin our theological reflection? Barth’s structuring here is in marked contrast from earlier dogmatic prolegomena. For instance, Louis Berkhof, the Reformed theologian, identifies six standard schemes in which the material of dogmatics is organized.<sup>30</sup> He is rather disparaging of each of these methods, except for the “Synthetical method” which is both traditional and the one that he follows.

Methodologically, Berkoff argues that the “synthetical method” “takes its starting point in God and considers everything that comes up for discussion in relation to God. It discusses the various doctrines in their logical order, that is, in the order in which they arise in thought, and which, lends itself to the most intelligible treatment.”<sup>31</sup> In the “distribution” of doctrines, the doctrine of God comes first (after a prolegomena), followed by the doctrine of man, and then third is Christology (generally understood as the principle of salvation). The doctrine of the trinity (in this ordering) usually occurs as an article under the doctrine of God, on par with the knowledge of God (natural and supernatural), the existence, the essence, and attributes of God, the doctrine of creation, and the doctrine of providence. Thus, in this scheme, the content of faith is restructured to fit a logical ordering.

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<sup>30</sup> Louis Berkhof, “Introductory Volume to Systematic Theology,” in *Systematic Theology*, New Edition (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996), 72–75. Berkhof identifies these schemes as: trinitarian, analytic, covenantal, Christological, kingdom, and synthetical. In each case he works to point out the main organizing principle for the order of dogmatic material showing that all except the synthetical method lead to less than satisfactory results at best, and contradiction at worst. Obviously, I am not in agreement with his conclusions.

<sup>31</sup> Berkhof, 74.

Barth, however, moves the doctrine of the Trinity to his prolegomena, as the basis for an unfolding of the doctrine of God. And as Barth helpfully explains, the purpose of a prolegomena is to clarify “how knowledge is attained” (*CD I. 1*, 25). His driving point is that “an explicit account of the particular way to be taken in dogmatics, must be an inner necessity grounded in the matter itself,” which is not the same as ordering the doctrinal articles “according to the order in which they arrive in thought” as does Berkhof (*CD I. I*, 31). Thus, the way we study God is determined by God, and for Barth, the task of dogmatics is “the task of testing, criticizing and correcting the actual proclamation of the Church at a given time” (*CD I.1*, 288).

We discussed Marion’s philosophical approach as identifying a form, the conditions of revelation, abstracted from the content. But we are also following Barth in rejecting the modern attempts to ground theology in anthropological concerns (Tillich and questioning; Schleiermacher and feeling; even Calvin and the “*sensus divinitas*”).<sup>32</sup> Barth rejects these approaches, just as he rejects the distinctions between special and general revelation as being on equal terms or as self-evident.

While Barth is writing in contrast to these claims regarding the way of knowledge of God as having any other basis besides God himself, he is also keeping Feuerbach’s criticism sharply in mind. If we discuss God from any other basis than his own self-revelation—from any basis other than that He has revealed himself in distinct modes of being—then Feuerbach’s assertion is correct: God is a projection of what is best in humanity.

But even more importantly, Barth marks himself off from the older dogmatics not just in the ordering, but also starting place. While Berkoff suggests beginning with the logical ordering,

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<sup>32</sup> I mention each of these monumental thinkers in passing not to be disparaging but because a large part of my goal in thinking of revelation as rhetorical is to recognize these very anthropological concerns.

it is inconsistent to claim the ordering is consistent with the unfolding of God's self-revelation.

Even taking the Bible, or religion, or revelation in general is an unacceptable starting point:

“We have called this God's Word in an absolute sense apart from any becoming, the event of God's Word in whose power the Bible and proclamation become God's Word. As the Word of God reveals itself, the Bible and proclamation are the Word of God. Hence it is the concept of revelation which must give us the key to an understanding of the relations between the two and from which we must also take the very questions with which we approach the two.... We cannot enquire into revelation generally.” (*CD I.I*, 290)

As Barth establishes, it is the special revelation of God in Jesus Christ as Lord that enables and the authority of Scripture and proclamation in the Church and not vice versa. Jüngel continues this idea, arguing “God in his revelation is experienced in a way which calls into question that which has been hitherto self-evident. Revelation is not simply a highly particular repetition of that which is the case in general.”<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, this is also a rejection of the claims of natural theology, arguing that a natural theology (general revelation) “presupposes that God's manifestation in our creatureliness, the creation of man which is also the revelation of God, is in some place and in some sense, e.g., as confirmed by the Gospel, directly discernable by us.” (*CD I.I*, 130) But it is not directly discernable, “for we do not even know we are created merely from being created but only from the Word of God, from which we cannot deduce any independent, generally true insights that are different from God's Word and hence lead up to it” (*CD I.I*, 131).

As a result of the emphasis on revelation as self-revelation and the resulting question of the subject of said self-revelation, the doctrine of the Trinity is moved to the prolegomena in Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. This location is also in stark contrast to Schleiermacher's approach. In a positive light, Schleiermacher identifies the doctrine of the Trinity as a “copestone” to his

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<sup>33</sup> Jüngel, “Extra Christum Nulla Salus--A Principle of Natural Theology?,” 182.

dogmatic project.<sup>34</sup> Negatively, it is of no significance to the development—it is not necessary because it does nothing to clarify and cannot be seen to stem from a feeling of absolute dependence (or an experience of God-consciousness). The anthropological implications of this are such that God’s triunity is dependent on a human recognition of a feeling; the Trinity does not function as the basic grammar of theology, but rather a subjective recognition shapes doctrine. If theology is to be based on revelation, then it has to be based on God’s self-revelation as it occurs, and Barth’s point is that this self-revelation occurs in three modes, such that God corresponds to God. God is not grounded in the Bible; the Bible is a book, and becomes Scripture when God’s Word is heard therein. God is not grounded in religion—not even the Christian religion. God is the ground and source, not the result. God is not grounded in natural theology or just any general revelation, but God is the ground, source, content, and form of His own self-revelation. Barth claims the doctrine of the Trinity is the framework for the rest of the prolegomena because it *interprets* how God has revealed Himself as Lord. Therefore, we are discussing revelation, trinity, and Christology in this chapter.

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The scope of our present inquiry shall be narrowed to the unpacking of three summary claims regarding this view of revelation and how it then relates to theology: 1) Barth’s goal in this understanding of revelation is to establish the objectivity of God. 2) Revelation is not something additional added on to God, but it is rather the repetition of God. 3) Revelation is totalizing and orientating as it discloses the human situation *coram deo*.

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<sup>34</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §170.1. “By virtue of this interconnection [uniting of the divine nature with human nature in both Christ and the Church] we now justifiably regard the doctrine of the Trinity, insofar as these features are lodged within it, as the copestone of Christian doctrine. Accordingly, we also regard this equal status of the divine in each of these two unions with the divine in the other, and then also of the two with the divine nature as such, to be what is essential in the doctrine of the Trinity.”

## 1.1 Revelation as objective

Barth goes to great pains to emphasize the divine subjectivity and thus, for us, God's objectivity. To many American Evangelicals, his path to make this point may seem heretical at worst and at best simply confusing, as he creates an important distinction between the Word of God and the Bible, refusing to collapse one into the other. The objectivity of God's Word present to us in the Bible *seems* like a positive way to maintain God's objectivity. However, such a course leads to an idolatry of a book. Rather, Barth argues that "the Bible, then, becomes God's Word in this event, and in the statement that the Bible is God's Word the little word 'is' refers to its being in this becoming" (*CD I.1*, 110). "This event" that Barth is referencing is the event of revelation such that it is "a description of God's action in the Bible" (*CD I.1*, 110).

Simply put, it is the Word of God that qualifies as revelation. The Bible is a witness to past revelation, specifically the revelation of the Word of God<sup>35</sup>, the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, who is the revelation of God Himself. Thus, the objectivity of revelation has to do with the objectivity of God, once again pushing in the direction of the idea that "theology follows after God." Barth maintains the significance and importance of the Biblical texts but refuses to identify the Bible with revelation.<sup>36</sup> For our purposes, it is significant that Barth concentrates on the idea of witness, which he explicitly defines as "pointing in a specific direction beyond the self and on to another. Witnessing is thus service to this other in which the witness vouches for the truth of the other, the service which consists in referring to this other" (*CD I.1*, 111). Therefore, the Bible can never be identified with God, in the sense of the Word of

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<sup>35</sup> "*Deus dixit*" as Barth argues; or "*deus loquens in persona*" as Calvin puts it in the *Institutes*.

<sup>36</sup> Barth writes: "The reason why we diverge from this custom is this. It is hard to see how in relation to Holy Scripture we can say what is distinctive for the holiness of this Scripture if first we do not make it clear (naturally from Holy Scripture itself) who the God is whose revelation makes Scripture holy." (*CD I.1*, 300)

God, yet it “is God’s Word as it really bears witness to revelation” (*CD.I.1*, 111). Barth’s concern is to recognize that, in an Augustinian sense of a sign, the Bible, as Scripture (so understood by the enlivening of the Holy Spirit) points to the self-revelation of God, in the history and person of Jesus Christ.

Thus, there are two additional points to be recognized in the objectivity of God. The first is the idea of Lordship, with an emphasis on freedom.

We may sum all this up in the statement that God reveals Himself as the Lord. This statement is to be regarded as an analytic judgment. The distinction between form and content cannot be applied to the biblical concept of revelation. When revelation is an event according to the Bible, there is no second question as to what its content might be.... To be Lord means being what God is in His revelation to man. To act as Lord means to act as God in His revelation acts on man. To acquire a Lord is to acquire what man does in God when he receives His revelation—revelation always understood here in the unconditional sense in which it encounters us in the witness of Scripture.... Without revelation man does not know that there is a Lord, that he, man, has a Lord, and that God is this Lord. Through revelation he does know it. Revelation is the revelation of lordship and therewith it is the revelation of God. (*CD I.1*, 306)

There are a number of ideas to draw out from this passage concerning revelation and lordship.

This is another way of discussing the concerns of covenant. As mentioned, covenant is also meant to maintain God’s objectivity over-against and apart from human beings. In light of our prior discussions, Lordship also unfolds an aspect of the creator/creature distinction that was so important in understanding the term ‘God’. If it is the case, as Barth concludes, that God reveals *Himself* as the *Lord*, then this is in fact the essence of the reason for our absolute dependence and radical passivity. We also have our objection to Marion’s separation of form and content in the very concept of revelation. In other words, the biblical and religious Christian concept of revelation does not arise apart from the God who reveals Himself. Barth’s point is that God is not limited to the Bible, but rather God has chosen to reveal Himself through the witness of that

particular medium as Christ, God's self-revelation in person—it is not simply speculation of what could have been the case, but *is* the case—theology follows after God.

Furthermore, it is revelation, or rather God in His revelation that has the controlling and orienting functions of placing human beings (and as such, all of creation) into a relation of knowledge. Thus, Barth places little to no value on any versions of general revelation (more specifically in terms of natural theology). This is because in a view of general revelation, we conclude “God” and a conclusion could be that ‘God’ is understood as Lord. Such a conclusion is very different from one of God revealing Himself as Lord, wherein there is no place for a conclusion (again, because it is not *primarily* an epistemological issue, even though there is knowledge) about His Lordship.<sup>37</sup> Here we can draw a distinction between concluding (in a formal sense) and responding.

One way, albeit a counter-intuitive one, is to compare this rhetorical point to Nietzsche's stylistic methodology. Nietzsche does not always make clear extended arguments in his text, as evidenced by his aphoristic style. Furthermore, much of his language is intentionally (rhetorically—in the sense of style) inflammatory. Nonetheless, he does have a point that he wishes the reader to understand, and he guides his readers towards this point *showing* the absurdities of particular arguments, guiding his reader with analogies, metaphors, and images that disrupt. One particular example is Nietzsche's case against Socrates.

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<sup>37</sup> Barth writes: “There is, therefore, no natural religion, no natural theology, no natural law. In all these concepts ‘natural’ means apart from Jesus Christ, apart from the Son of God who became also the Son of Man, who is called and is also Jesus of Nazareth, who in His unity with Jesus of Nazareth has also a human essence. The antithesis to this ‘natural’ is not in the first instance the concept of ‘revealed,’ but that of human nature once for all and definitively exalted in Jesus Christ, once for all and definitively placed at the side of the Father and in fellowship with Him. Without this—and without of course, God's revelation in it—even the true God would be to us a hidden God, and therefore in practice no God at all.” (*CD IV.2*, 101)



Nietzsche employs Socrates as a physician who seeks to heal the human animal of its unruly and untamed passionate and affective nature. Nietzsche suggests that Socrates goes about his healing work by elevating the rational nature to suppress and tame the passions, a nomenclature that has been maintained in Western culture over the last 2000 years. But if Nietzsche is to provide a critique of rationality using a clear, rational, formal argument, it would be self-defeating. How could we take him seriously in his critique if he is employing the very same standards to make said critique?

Barth is, in a manner of speaking, making use of this same kind of distinction for general and special revelation. General revelation looks and draws a conclusion. Thus, the problem with general revelation is with its starting point (and this is/can be extended to theological attempts to start with experience of existential concerns—the theologies of Schleiermacher, Tillich, Rahner). Although observation and deduction are helpful and immensely significant, here we encounter the same severance of form and content effected by Marion. How can we arrive at revelation as a conclusion (general revelation) if it is not in the premises? How can we know whether any experience that overwhelms the horizons of meaning is in fact revelation? Without revelation, how could we distinguish between what is revelation and what is not? Therefore, and this is Barth's point, we have to begin from special revelation—specifically God's self-revelation and self-interpretation) and argue to general revelation (signs of God's activity in the world). Therefore, Barth, in emphasizing God's objectivity and thus His nature as a distinct subject who is totally and transcendently other, recognizes that God cannot be the "who" of revelation without revealing Himself as such. We can conclude God is Lord—in the sense that we have been shown, His Lordship has been unveiled to us—but this is not the same as careful study of all of the facts, which are then organized rationally and logically in such a way that I can be

confident in concluding. A conclusion in this far looser sense is closer to a response. God revealing Himself has the power of reorienting the human subject in such a way as to *see* that God is Lord.

Yet this distinction between concluding and responding needs to be understood in light of what Barth is arguing, and this can be done by briefly discussing the act/event distinction, which is the second point regarding the objectivity of God. The objective side of this dialectic is that God, as Lord, acts. His act is an act of revelation. “To act as Lord means to act as God in His revelation acts on man” (*CD I.1*, 306). And while this is a dialectic, it is qualitative, and not just qualitative, but also determined by one side, God’s side. God’s act of revealing Himself as Lord is God’s free decision to be in such a way, namely, to be *our* Lord.

But if revelation is God’s act of revelation such that God acts as Lord in revealing Himself, then that act can only come to us, can only appear to us as an event. Phenomenologically, this event of revelation, from the human perspective, can helpfully be given the structure that Marion offers. This event overwhelms all of our categories of constitution—this is what it means that God reveals Himself as the Lord. The objectivity of God prevents the creaturely subject from constituting and determining God. God *reveals* Himself, and God reveals *Himself*. He chooses to be God in just this way, as Lord, and the Lord who reveals Himself to us, as Immanuel, as the God who saves. Hence, in the long quote above, “When revelation is an event according to the Bible, there is no second question as to what its content might be,” Barth speaks of the event of revelation, *and* he speaks of God’s act (*CD I.1*, 306). Here too we can see not just the emphasis on God’s objectivity, but also the corresponding emphasis on a radical human passivity. Thus, “In the Bible revelation means the self-unveiling,

imparted to men, of the God who by nature cannot be unveiled to men” (*CD I.1* 375).

Rhetorically, God identifies himself in revelation.

## 1.2 Self-Revelation as the repetition of God

If it is the case that we experience the event of revelation, and in so doing are given an opportunity to respond to the content such that one can give assent (confess) that the subject of the revelation is God, it is also significant to establish that revelation is not something extra added on to God. This is simply an implication of our above point regarding God’s objectivity wherein He reveals Himself as the Lord—as a subject. Self-revelation as the repetition of God then is also God’s self-interpretation. What God is (in the classical sense of *essence*) is both unknowable and incapable of being experienced by human beings, *unless* God comes to us.

In the decisions taken in this freedom of God the divinely good becomes event, and truth, righteousness, holiness, and mercy deserve to be called what their names declare because they are real in the freedom of God.... But all this becomes fully characteristic only when we note that what we have here is not an abstract revelation of lordship but a concrete revelation of the Lord, not Godhead... but God Himself, who in this freedom speaks as an I and addresses by a Thou.... As freedom, lordship and Godhead are real and true in God Himself and only in God Himself, being inaccessible and unknown if God Himself, this I, does not speak and address by a Thou. (*CD I.1*, 307)

Rhetoric, when understood on the basis of “making true” then becomes helpful in understanding revelation. God’s objectivity in his revelation of lordship is not rhetorical in the common negative senses, wherein tropic speech is meant to hide and veil. God’s objectivity is rhetorical in the sense that it is self-revelation and self-interpretation—in choosing to disclose Himself in this manner, as Lord, “as an I [that] addresses by a Thou,” God is His revelation. There is nothing *behind* the revelation of God. It is in this sense then that God *makes* Godself *true* for us in how He reveals Himself.

Jüngel is helpful in interpreting Barth on this point. “Revelation is that event in which the *being of God* comes to word.”<sup>38</sup> Part of the purpose of using ‘event’ language is that it prevents any separation of form from content as we have noted above; therefore, revelation as event of the self-interpretation of God deals solely with God.<sup>39</sup> According to Barth this is understood such that God “is the Revealer, the revelation and the revealedness” (*CD I.1*, 299); or as Jüngel interprets Barth: “God is subject, predicate and object of the event of revelation.”<sup>40</sup> This mirrors the modification to Ebeling’s sentence: “God says God to God, and to us.” As such, there is an implicit unity in revelation as we “have to do with God in a *threefold* way.”<sup>41</sup> It is because of revelation that the doctrine of the Trinity serves to recognize and understand both the unity and the differentiation of God’s being as perceived and as revealed in the event of revelation. Theologically and dogmatically, “the doctrine of the Trinity is the interpretation of the self-interpretation of God.”<sup>42</sup> God is not God apart from his revelation, again, because it is God who chooses to reveal himself and it is God who chooses to be ‘God with us’ as the ‘hidden God’ revealed and yet “inscrutable.”<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Jüngel asserts that “if revelation is God’s self-interpretation, then in revelation God interprets himself *as* the one who he *is*,” which corresponds to the structure provided in *CD IV*, where in the event and person of Jesus Christ, God reveals

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<sup>38</sup> Jüngel, *God’s Being Is in Becoming*, 27.

<sup>39</sup> Jüngel, 28.

<sup>40</sup> Jüngel, 28. Barth makes a similar point when he writes, “Revelation is indeed God’s predicate, but in such a way that this predicate is in every way identical with God Himself” (*CD I.1*, 299).

<sup>41</sup> Jüngel, 28.

<sup>42</sup> Jüngel, 29.

<sup>43</sup> Jüngel, 30–31.

himself as the Lord, such that “in these ‘as-relations’ God reveals himself at the same time as the one who *can* reveal himself, i.e., as the Lord.”<sup>44</sup>

Jüngel observes that Barth is employing the doctrine of the Trinity to avoid subordinationism (wherein God can become an object to be grasped—this was our first point) and modalism (wherein there is another God behind and beyond his revelation—this is our current concern).<sup>45</sup> However Jüngel also notes that avoiding these two dangers is “not the final significance” for Barth, because there is also a positive task fulfilled by the doctrine of the Trinity, namely, to “make clear that, and in what way, the God who reveals himself can be (a) ‘our *God*’ and (b) ‘*our* God’” (which is our third point).<sup>46</sup> Thus, according to Jüngel, the “highest and final statement which can be made about the being of God is: God corresponds to himself.”<sup>47</sup>

Jüngel argues that “God’s *self*-interpretation (revelation) is interpretation as correspondence. Note: *as interpreter* of himself, God corresponds to his own being.”<sup>48</sup> Again, we can see an attempt to collapse any sort of form/content divide. In revelation, we are not dealing with something distinct and separate from God, but God Himself—the point of self-revelation! This does require a note on interpretation however. Barth (and thus Jüngel) discuss interpretation in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, specifically in the context of the source of the that doctrine. Barth goes to great pains (*CD I.1*, 333-347) to differentiate his view from the traditional

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<sup>44</sup> Jüngel, 33.

<sup>45</sup> Jüngel, 34–35.

<sup>46</sup> Jüngel, 35.

<sup>47</sup> Jüngel, 36.

<sup>48</sup> Jüngel, 36.

Catholic doctrine of *vestigia trinitatis*.<sup>49</sup> Barth's effort in turn takes up the problem of the *analogia entis*. It is in this context of discussing the problem of the root of the Trinity that Barth makes the important claim about interpretation—and it is this claim that is then necessary for understanding the what is meant by God's self-interpretation. Barth distinguishes interpretation and illustration, claiming that the doctrine of the *vestigium* and the *analogia* both fall prey to the problems of illustration. The distinction, according to Barth, is that "interpretation means saying *the same thing* in other words. Illustration means saying the same thing *in other words*" (*CD I.1*, 345). The nuance of this distinction is not lost on Barth and he is very conscious of the difficulty of his definition, recognizing the essential potential (almost necessity) of failing in regards to interpretation, and yet still arguing that the distinction must be drawn because of the issue of finding the *root* of the doctrine of the Trinity in anything except the revelation of God.<sup>50</sup> As such, Christ is God's self-interpretation, the root of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the only *vestigium* of the trinity.

But this is also the importance for our present point—that revelation is not something additional added on to God. Revelation does not illustrate what God is like. It is not an example of God, or merely something God does but could not have done without ceasing to be God. God is his revelation, hence both self-revelation and self-interpretation. God interprets himself in the Son, God repeats himself in Christ, in his revelation as the one who reveals himself.

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<sup>49</sup> The doctrine of *vestigia trinitatis* and Barth's objections will be discussed more fully later.

<sup>50</sup> Additionally, Barth seems to be making reference to Augustine's examples in *De Trinitate* as he works to find examples (*vestigia*) of the trinity in the created order. Again, though, and Barth is aware of this, Augustine is beginning from revelation itself and seeking to understand. The rejection comes in the confusion that can be created by adding something to the revelation, and in so doing, cease to be talking about God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I think this point has at least some validity in pointing out the tendency to, say, critique Augustine's examples, without following through to the point of the purposes for which those examples are employed. For example, a critique of the working of the mental trinity in humans not as a vestige of the Trinity, but as a misguided account of knowledge/psychology/anthropology.

Furthermore, self-revelation, as self-interpretation, as correspondence is not us interpreting God. Jüngel makes this point by maintaining that the doctrine of the Trinity cannot and does not replace revelation, but it serves to prevent us from thinking that our “understanding of the being of God [is] a human construction.”<sup>51</sup> Dalferth argues that a Christian revelational theology

advocates revelation based identifications of God because it seeks to be true to God’s self-identification in Christ. This is the point from which it starts and that it presupposes. Hence its insistence on the idea of divine self-identification: not that we identify (and interpret) something as God but that God identifies (and interprets) himself to us in such a way that we can form (more or less adequate) information-based conceptions of him which control our believing, experiencing and acting in all areas of life and thought.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, rhetorically, we have both identification and *address* wherein it is in revelation that God addresses us in identifying himself.

### 1.3 Revelation as orientation

Dalferth’s point in the preceding section draws together the three points we have been discussing: it maintains the objectivity of God as a free subject in his self-identification (self-revelation and self-interpretation) thereby suggesting that God is not something distinct from his revelation or who he reveals himself to be. Finally, it is by the above two considerations that it is appropriate to understand revelation as orientational. It is in the orientational aspect that the third aspect of rhetoric also is clarified. To be oriented by revelation, as discussed above in relation to Marion’s phenomenology, is to first become disoriented—to have the categories of thought and constitution overwhelmed, such that the experience becomes an event that is constituting.

Dalferth discusses two aspects that are necessary for something to be considered orientating knowledge: it must be locating, and it must serve to order/organize the world around

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<sup>51</sup> Jüngel, *God’s Being Is in Becoming*, 37.

<sup>52</sup> Dalferth, *Theology and Philosophy*, 191–92.

just such a location.<sup>53</sup> He speaks frequently in terms of knowledge and information (as above), which at first appearance seems to be antithetical to the emphasis I have been making on the non-epistemological primacy of revelation. Therefore, a word of clarification. My argument is not anti-knowledge, anti-information, anti-reason; it is simply to point out that one ought not to begin a discussion of revelation, or a discussion of God from such a perspective. It is revelation that *provides* knowledge; however, it is knowledge of a particular kind—namely orientational knowledge (as opposed to knowledge of a thing or knowledge of a fact).<sup>54</sup> It is in this sense of orientational knowledge that our concerns with rhetoric are also made clearer. Orientational knowledge is knowledge for action, it is knowledge that allows for possibilities of the actual to become new actualities. This kind of orientational knowledge, according to Dalferth, reduces the complexity of our world “by selecting some of the available information and ignoring others, and the resulting *orientational knowledge* helps to guide our actions by allowing us to *locate* ourselves in our world and to *order* the world with respect to us.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, in the case of revelation, particularly of self-revelation taken in account with the objectivity of God as subject, revelation is also *dislocating* and *disorienting for us*. It is also at this point that the dialectical tension between discourse about God appears: is God comprehensible or incomprehensible? What is the difference between the hidden and revealed God? What about the immanent and economic trinity? For instance, Barth argues:

How could it be this self-revelation if we could demonstrate its *quo jure*? If we could do this, it would not be its revelation, but the speech of another subject. Our knowledge of this fact means that as the subjects who know it we are reached and seized and enclosed by it, that it makes itself known to us. It does not mean that we have made an assumption,

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<sup>53</sup> Dalferth, 204.

<sup>54</sup> Think also of Aristotle’s use of reason, after observation, to arrive at *reasoned* knowledge of the fact, which was distinct from knowledge of the fact.

<sup>55</sup> Dalferth, *Theology and Philosophy*, 204.



and in some way come to make it. We ourselves are presupposed in the process of our knowing. We are presupposed as the subjects to whom it is given to see and hear and understand this fact. Our knowledge, therefore, encloses a renunciation of all prior knowledge of the disclosure of this fact or our openness for it. Our knowledge can only be an event. It can only take place.... What we know and say can have the value and power of witness only to the extent that we do in fact take up to it an attitude of the greatest childlikeness and promptness, as those to whom it has disclosed itself. (*CD IV.2*, 124)

In a word, Barth's dogmatics seeks to affirm both the fact that God is incomprehensible and the fact that God is comprehensible—in so far as he reveals himself to us.<sup>56</sup> The mystery is that God reveals Himself as He is in Himself. Not only does God make himself known to us, but in the process of addressing Himself to us, He identifies us, He locates us, and He provides the location from which to order and organize the world around us. None of this is to suggest that we do not always already have to live and act oriented to the world in particular ways. The point is that God's self-revelation re-orient us by dislocating and creating new perspectives (re-ordering).<sup>57</sup>

In the above quote, Barth writes, "Our knowledge, therefore, encloses a renunciation of all prior knowledge of the disclosure of this fact or our openness for it" (*CD IV.2*, 124). This means that the reorientation, or the new (*sui generis*) orientational knowledge cannot be derived or discovered because of how I am oriented in terms of God. In fact, if there is an arbitrarily applied concept of the world, an orientation generated by our being-in-the-world, thus by our concern and therefore contingent, then to understand the fundamental, grounding, primal, human position (that of a creature) can only be produced by an in-breaking—this orientational

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<sup>56</sup> The issue of incomprehensibility and comprehensibility will be more closely examined in connection with the doctrine of the Trinity. Looking forward, we do not want to remove the incomprehensibility of God as God—the distinction between creator and creature, but in Christ, God Himself has removed the incomprehensibility in that He has revealed Himself to be a God who is for us in such a way that He overcomes the barrier (sin) preventing us from participating in the life of God. God reveals Himself and interprets Himself as self-giving love in freedom both in Himself and for us.

<sup>57</sup> Dalferth, *Theology and Philosophy* Ch. 18.

knowledge of God forces us to see all of the same things newly, against a different “permanent background of the possible.”<sup>58</sup> It is only by God’s self-revelation that we can recognize our situation *coram Deo*.

The second aspect of orientational knowledge has to do with the ordering of the world around ourselves, which takes place because of the dislocation and relocation through revelation.

The Gospel alone, which no man has invented or planned or constructed, but which encounters man, if at all, only as God’s free revelation, is the Law in the knowledge of which man finds himself accused and judged and condemned. But the Word made flesh, the grace of God encountering man, his salvation, the Gospel, is Jesus Christ. He and His existence as the Son of God and Son of Man are the light in which man as a man of sin is made to know himself, in which he must see and confess himself as such. (*CD IV. 2*, 381)

Yet, as the above discussions indicate, God’s revelation is His free choice, and in His revelation He repeats Himself. In repeating Himself, He addresses Himself to us, and it is in the light of this address that we discover our own identity such that we can be persuaded (in the broadest sense of coming to see) that God is love. Divine self-revelation is orientational for us because there is no separation of form from content. God is who He is in His revelation. And He reveals Himself as self-giving love in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We recognize who we are through knowledge of the Law and who we are through knowledge of the Gospel. The Pauline and Lutheran dialectic of Law and Gospel illustrate both the dislocating and relocating aspects of revelation.

Finally, a brief note on the totalizing aspect of orientation. Not all orientations have to be totalizing—in fact a number of incomplete or partial ways of ordering and locating ourselves in the world are mistakenly thought to be totalizing; this causes significant grief and misery in our experience. The mistakes made in such partial orientations recall certain Wittgensteinian

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<sup>58</sup> Dalferth, 204. See also the above discussion of Nietzsche’s rhetoric.

criticisms: there are multiple language games, played in multiple forms of life and the rules of particular games do not determine the rules of all other games. This kind of mistake can be easily seen in the problems generated by ‘isms’, i.e., scientism, socialism, Nazism, Kantianism, Barthianism, etc.<sup>59</sup> Once an ‘ism’ is added, the mistake seems to be to universalize and totalize a particular aspect of the thinker or movement in a decontextualized and ahistorical manner. This results in “category mistakes,” in attempting to “take the measure of the measure,” and in committing the “fallacy of logical inversion.”<sup>60</sup> Differing descriptions are not mutually exclusive nor are they necessarily able to be reduced to one another. Each of the various disciplines deals with aspects of experience and reality—they can offer new ways, new lenses through which to see the world, but they can also be set aside and interchanged, or even combined (at least in some limited fashion).<sup>61</sup> I can examine a flower as a piece of evolutionary biology, noting the particular characteristics and traits that allow said flower to smell nice and attract bees. Or I can examine the flower in a more literary sense noting the beauty and temporality of the flower, comparing it to a loved one for example, perhaps quoting Shakespeare. I can switch between the two perspectives as needed or as appropriate given the circumstance (I am in class, or I am

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<sup>59</sup> While this is problematic in most cases, I hesitate to say that an ‘ism’ is necessarily a mistake.

<sup>60</sup> Randy Ramal, “The Fallacy of Logical Inversion: On Avoiding Discourse in the Hermeneutics of Religion,” ed. Ingolf U. Dalferth and Hartmut v. Sass, *The Contemplative Spirit: D.Z. Phillips on Religion and the Limits of Philosophy* (Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 173–202.

<sup>61</sup> Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology*, 48–49. Putnam makes this point while distinguishing conceptual relativity from conceptual pluralism. He writes: “The fact that the contents of a room may be partly described in the terminology of fields and particles and the fact that the contents of the room may be partly described by saying that there is a chair in front of a desk are not in any way ‘incompatible,’ not even ‘at face value’: the statements ‘the room may be partly described by saying there is a chair in front of the desk’ and ‘the room may be partly described as consisting of fields and particles’ don’t even *sound* ‘incompatible.’ And they are not cognitively equivalent (even if we do not bar the fantastic possibility of defining terms like ‘desk’ and ‘table’ in the language of fundamental physics, the field-particle description contains a great deal of information that is not translatable into the language of desks and chairs). That we can use both of these schemes without being required to reduce one or both of them to some single fundamental and universal ontology is the doctrine of pluralism.”

My point is that creation language allows for an unthematic orientation for the possibility of pluralism.

hiking with my wife) and one perspective does not have to influence the other or negate the other. But if I were to look at this same flower as God's creation, it does not make sense to stop seeing it as creation if I begin looking at this flower poetically or scientifically. It is important to be clear about *where one stands* when one looks. For where one is located (where one stands) is often the blind spot that one does not see and that nonetheless informs everything one does see. It is in this sense that revelation as orienting is also totalizing—one is forced not to recognize or experience new phenomena, but rather to see and understand all prior and future experience and phenomena in a new way, including the place where one stands.

The result is that in discussing God's self-revelation, we have covered the aspects of rhetoric defined at the beginning: identification, address, and persuasion, in relation to objectivity, repetition and self-interpretation, and orientation, respectively. The next task to is examine rhetoric and revelation in relation to the trinity of God, which is indicated in the very exposition of revelation as self-revelation.

## 2. *Trinity*

If we are to agree with Barth that revelation itself is the root of the doctrine of the Trinity, and we have pointed to Barth's emphasis on the objectivity, repetition, and orientational nature of God's self-revelation, then the next task is to discuss the doctrine of the Trinity so that the self-relatedness of God is revealed to us in such a way that the subject of revelation is made known as God. Barth writes, "The specific question about revelation which is answered by the doctrine of the Trinity is, however, the question who it is that reveals Himself, the question of the subject of revelation" (*CD I.1*, 380). Therefore, our discussion of the Trinity is structured in four steps that seek to clarify the question of the subject of revelation. The first step is an examination

of Augustine's trinitarian thought. Augustine historically plays a significant role in Trinitarian doctrine and a discussion of his usage of relational predication as well as the "inward turn" he employs in seeking *vestigia trinitatis* are necessary to see the concerns that Barth emphasizes in his reworking of the doctrine. Thus, the second subsection will attempt to clarify Barth's reworking of the trinitarian doctrine. This will involve two further steps: drawing out the consequences of this reworking in terms of the economic and immanent trinity to the conclusion that God *pro se* is God *pro nobis*; and showing how the doctrines of *perichoresis* and appropriation clarify Barth's collapsing of the distinction between the economic and immanent trinity, while looking forward to some Christological considerations. In truth, all of these considerations are to be understood in the context of self-revelation and more specifically in the context of Christology. On the proposed reading of Barth, if the immanent trinity is the economic trinity, then the Christology unfolded in Part IV is actually the key for understanding *The Doctrine of the Word of God* in CD I,1. Thus, while we have begun with a discussion of self-revelation, moving to the trinity, and then to Christology, it is Christology that allows one to understand self-revelation and trinity; theology follows after God.

In order to stress that the form/content distinction matters for understanding the subject of revelation, we now have to consider how it relates to the distinction between the economic and immanent trinity in trinitarian thought. For, particularly in discussions of the trinity, the distinction seems to have led to real differences between who God is in himself and who He is in his works, despite the classical rule *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*. The concern that I have been emphasizing by suggesting that revelation is rhetorical is that having separated content from form (or *vice versa*) one is no longer talking about the same thing. Barth argues that "The secular form without the divine content is not the Word of God and the divine content without

the secular form is also not the Word of God” (*CD I.1*, 175). The content affects the form, and the form affects the content. And thus Barth continues, “We can neither stop at the secular form as such nor can we fly off beyond this and try to enjoy the divine content alone” (*CD I.1*, 175). But this does not mean that the distinction can be ignored. This is our rhetorical conclusion. However, it is necessary to also realize that we are deriving our concepts of content and form from God’s self-revelation. If one tries to make a distinction between the economic and immanent trinity, then one is making a distinction between form and content. The distinction is only problematic when and if it leads to a difference between the being of God and His action in the world, or continuing Barth’s thought, the form without content would be a “realistic theology, the other idealistic theology, and both bad theology” (*CD I.1*, 175). This difference is frequently understood such that the immanent Trinity is “an unknowable God behind the knowable activities of the economic Trinity.”<sup>62</sup> But if God has actually revealed *Himself*, then there is not another God behind revelation.

## 2.1 Augustine’s foundation of the doctrine of the Trinity

The first issue to discuss is one of historical language. Traditionally, the doctrine of the Trinity has been understood in terms of *homoousios* and *hypostases* (or consubstantiality and persons). Much theological work in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been to adjust and interpret this essentially Aristotelian language and metaphysics to be appropriately meaningful for modern persons of faith. In fact, Barth intentionally abandons the usage of ‘person’ language as untenable for modern ears. Barth prefers to speak of “modes of being” instead. Of course, this is

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<sup>62</sup> Joshua Ryan. Kira, *Between Speech and Revelation: An Evangelical’s Dialogue with Farrer, Jüngel, and Wolterstorff* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2019), 65.

not in and of itself clearer, but by discussing three elements of Augustine's trinitarian thinking, 1) substance/nature language in terms of generation, 2) relational predication, and 3) the *vestigia trinitatis*, the goal is to clarify what Barth is doing as he reformulates the doctrine of the Trinity.

Importantly, Augustine is making a functional use of the doctrine of the Trinity for the purposes of salvation. For Augustine, the doctrine of the Trinity is meant, in fact, to lead one to a relationship of participation in the life of God himself. As C.C. Pecknold writes:

The turn towards functionalization is a shift in learning (from the *regulative* to the *redemptive*). Augustine is using the Trinity in the analogies to draw the reader through a process of spiritual conversion in which the journey inward may invite the journey upward. The conversion itself is the point, so that the believer may be drawn out of himself and into a *relationship* of remembering God, understanding God, and loving God.<sup>63</sup>

This is important to remember in any discussion of how Augustine works to solve the problem of the unity of the divine nature and the trinity of the persons by using the ideas of generation and relation. His concern is salvation and sanctification. Augustine wants to understand the nature of the trinity primarily from a pastoral perspective that can be studied and used for edification.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, if Augustine's purpose for understanding the Trinity is one of spiritual significance—salvation—then, when in *The Trinity*, as he works to establish one possible way of understanding the Trinity analogically (in terms of what is highest and most reflective of God in creation, specifically where the *image* of God resides in human beings), he analyzes the relationship between love and knowledge in the one who seeks understanding: the studious individual.<sup>65</sup> His point is that the self, love, and knowledge are all related to one another in an

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<sup>63</sup> C. C. Pecknold, "How Augustine Used the Trinity: Functionalism and the Development of Doctrine," *Anglican Theological Review* 85, no. 1 (2003): 138.

<sup>64</sup> Methodologically, then it is important to note that Barth is *not* making a functionalist argument for the doctrine of the Trinity.

<sup>65</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund O.P. Hill, 2nd ed. (New York: New York City Press, 2012), x.1.1.

inseparable way such that they cannot be understood without one another. This relationship is, according to Augustine, marked by the fact that one cannot love something that is completely unknown, nor can one know (in the fullest sense) what is not loved.<sup>66</sup> It is love that motivates towards a fullness of knowledge, it is love that moves, but knowledge—in a preliminary form, and incomplete—can be said to provide a direction in which to move. This relationship of love and knowledge has a direct function in how to understand faith and reason in Augustine, especially in relation to “knowing God.” It is also an instance of the *vestigia trinitatis*, the mark of the creator in his creation. But it also needs to be understood from the perspective of faith seeking understanding; faith provides the initial knowledge necessary for direction, love the desire to seek understanding, and all as the grace of God. Additionally, love and knowledge make it difficult to apply the term ‘mystery’ to the discussion of God as something *completely* unknown: “What you are absolutely ignorant of you simply cannot love in any sense whatever.”<sup>67</sup>

To further clarify the above point of the relationship between faith, knowledge, and love, Augustine writes quoting from 2 Corinthians 5:7 and 1 Corinthians 13:12 regarding the distinction between “faith” and “sight”: here we walk by faith because we do not *yet* see God “face to face.”<sup>68</sup> Faith in this case is an intermediary step, a prerequisite, but not the final goal. “Yet unless we love him even now, we shall never see him.”<sup>69</sup> The point of Augustine’s line of

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<sup>66</sup> Augustine is not arguing that it is possible to not love something that is known. This point he seems to take for granted, and rightly so. In his own words, “Something can be known and not loved...” (*Trinity*, viii.4.6), which carries echoes of James words: “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder.” (James 2:19, NRSV).

<sup>67</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, x.1.1. Likewise, as this remains a mystery, it is not solvable like a riddle.

<sup>68</sup> Augustine, viii.4.6.

<sup>69</sup> Augustine, viii.4.6.



query is to raise the issue of loving what is unknown, because, and here is the crux of the matter, how can one love God before he is known.<sup>70</sup> The role of faith here is to provide the initial knowledge that allows for love of God, yet faith comes as a gift of divine grace. As Augustine concludes: “Faith therefore is a great help for knowing and loving God, not as though he were altogether unknown or altogether not loved without it, but for knowing him all the more clearly and loving him all the more firmly.”<sup>71</sup>

**2.1.1 Augustine on nature/essence and generation.** The first step is to recognize the kinds of distinctions that Augustine is working with as he seeks to understand the doctrine of the Trinity, especially in light of the (then) recent affirmation of the Trinitarian symbol. Augustine is working with a classical metaphysic, significantly inherited and influenced by Aristotle.<sup>72</sup> Recalling our discussion of Aristotle above (Ch. 1), Aristotle’s logic is looking for definitions. He understands definitions to get at the essence of what some particular thing is—what makes a thing that kind of thing.<sup>73</sup> The idea of *homoousios* in the Trinitarian symbol should be understood as “of the same essence.” This idea of “of the same essence” is also in reference to classical metaphysics stemming from Aristotle, wherein there is a distinction between primary and secondary substances. A primary substance, which Aristotle privileges, can be understood as a

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<sup>70</sup> Augustine, viii.4.6.

<sup>71</sup> Augustine, viii.9.13. Barth however, does not view faith in this way. In adhering to the Protestant ideas of *sola fide* and *sola gratia*, faith itself is a gift of God and there can be no knowledge of God apart from God.

<sup>72</sup> Yes, Augustine is commonly said to bear significant Neo-Platonic influences in his thinking. However, the Neo-Platonic position is (loosely and oversimplified) an integration of a number of Aristotelian concerns and ideas into a Platonic framework. Hence, I am talking of Augustine and Aristotle especially in discussing language, logic, and predication.

<sup>73</sup> This is also played out in his view of ethics wherein good is kind-relative.

concrete particular, an actual ontic being. Conversely, a secondary substance is best understood as a nature/essence/genre/natural kind. Misunderstandings of the distinctions between essences/natures and persons, and the category mistake of placing ‘God’ in a set along with all being, have led to accusations and rejections of trinitarian theology as “ontotheology.”<sup>74</sup> Nonetheless it is within this framework of classical metaphysics that Augustine began to work out systematically an understanding of both the threeness and oneness of God as witnessed to in Scripture while intentionally repurposing and transforming categories of thought to avoid confusions such as ontotheology, specifically by utilizing “relation” language rather than “person” language.

As such, Augustine’s use of generation in his discussion of the threeness and oneness of God refers to the communication of the same nature or essence. Generation is specifically to be distinguished from both creation (out of nothing) and making (out of something). In terms of God, primary and secondary substance (being and nature/essence) are numerically identical. However, this identification between primary and secondary substance is not the case for any created thing—for instance, any given human person does not exhaust the essence/nature of what a human being is. When a new human child is “generated”, it carries the on the human nature (secondary substance) but it is a distinct concrete individual, and thus a new/separate primary

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<sup>74</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 69. Heidegger writes: “And because this average everydayness makes up what is ontically proximal for this entity, it has again and again been *passed over* in explicating Dasein. That which is ontically closest and well known, is ontologically the farthest and not known at all; and its ontological signification is constantly overlooked. When Augustine asks: ‘*Quid autem propinquius meipso mihi?*’ [But what is closer to me than myself?]’ and must answer, ‘*ego certe laboro hic et laboro in meipso : factus sum mihi terra difficultatis et sudoris nimii*’ [Assuredly I labour here and I labour within myself; I have become to myself a land of trouble and inordinate sweat],’ this applies not only to the ontical and pre-ontological opaqueness of Dasein but even more to the ontological task which lies ahead; for not only must this entity not be missed in that kind of Being in which it is phenomenally closest, but it must be made accessible by a positive characterization.” Heidegger regards Augustine (as well as the whole classical tradition) as having an over-realized ontology such that rather than revealing Being, Being becomes confused and concealed—never capable of talking of it in an existential fashion but only in ontic terms and categories. Even though he is critical, he does recognize that Augustine did see a problem, even if, per Heidegger, his solution masked the problem.

substance. However, generation in God means that the communication of a nature is the communication of the same being (since they are numerically one)—such that God is one God. This point was stressed in terms of revelation as well. God does not reveal Jesus; God reveals Himself, and more precisely, Jesus Christ reveals God because He is *vere homo* and *vere Deus*. Simply identifying the threeness of God in terms of generation does not negate the issue of how to understand what is generated. Therefore, Augustine suggests that the way to identify the distinction in what is generated from the oneness of God is by relational predication of persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

**2.1.2 Augustine on relational predication.** Relational predication is one of the “categories” developed by Aristotle to discuss the how subjects can be related to predicates or rather how substances can be related to accidents.<sup>75</sup> Augustine adapts relational predication and realizes that this kind of predication can exist outside of a substance whereas all other predications refer to a modification of a substance. Relational predication is generally understood to occur between substances, but because it is between substances, it is not a modification of the substance. For instance: “The person is on the roof” identifies two substances (person, roof) but the predicate applied to ‘person’ changes nothing of the nature of the person or the roof. In this way, Augustine uses this to show how the persons of the Trinity are of one substance (one God) that is self-related. The Father, as a relational predicate, identifies the relation of generation to the Son—the Son is the one generated. And the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, or as the love of the father for the son. In order for this kind of relational predication to be a predication of God, it must be eternal, such that God is eternally related as Father, Son and Spirit

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<sup>75</sup> Aristotle, “Categories,” in *Basics Work of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, trans. E.M. Edghill (New York: Random House, 2001), 1b25–2a4.

(no more, no less). And this also means that in God (and this only occurs in God because of the identity of primary and secondary substance) that relationality and substance eternally co-inhere. For all other created substances, relationship is between different substances and yet remains outside said substances. The relations in God can further indicate a distinct work that is nonetheless fully a work of God. The Father is understood as ungenerated, whose work is creation; the Son is generated and his work is redemption; and the Spirit is gift, whose work is sanctification.

It is also important to see that this kind of generation and relational predication enable the communication of attributes in such a way that God remains God, that the Son is God, and that the Holy Spirit is God. The relationality then can also connect to the ideas of participation, wherein the many can participate in the one (though this is a philosophical problem, Augustine makes it soteriological), but that is because the one itself, the fullness of being, *is* relational.

**2.1.3 Augustine on the *vestigia trinitatis*.** In the second half of *De Trinitate*, while Augustine thinks the activity of creation itself is a reflection of the triune God, and that God reveals Himself in Christ, he wants to find/identify something substantial in creation that resembles the three-in-oneness of God in Christ. In Augustine's search for a likeness in which to understand the trinity, he works to move beyond a materialism in theology, a materialistic way of thinking of God. Given what we have discussed, Augustine looks for "images," "traces," and "vestiges" in terms of both substantiality and especially relationality. Furthermore, Augustine takes the Genesis account of human beings being created in(to) the image of God seriously, which leads him to ask in what way do humans image God. Augustine suggests that humans are created to the image of God, which has two implications. First, the created image in and of itself is not and cannot ever

be an adequate or complete imaging of God. Second, and in connection with the first implication is that the ‘to’ indicates movement, and thus relation, specifically in terms of communion and participation. Augustine understands salvation to be in this inclusion of humans by God in participation as we conform to that image.

Augustine moves through several examples: a trinity of love, a trinity of mind, knowledge and love, of self-knowledge in remembering, understanding, and willing. It is important to note that in each case the relations must subsist in some singular instantiation of an essence (nature). Likewise, because of his belief in creation, everything can be a “trace” of the trinity as it is all God’s work and thus can be a sign pointing to God. An “image” on the other hand resembles in that it can share (participate) in the original; as such, this image is only found in the human being and only in the highest part of the human—our rationality. The image of God is found in the best part of human nature, human reason, and must thus be similar to God in some way. In Book 14 this leads Augustine to discuss the rational soul as that which is immortal and as that which is capable of receiving God, as that which is capable of communion (*capax Dei*).

For our purposes, it is this same aspect that Barth criticizes. Special attention is paid to the “inward turn” employed by Augustine in his search for God. Augustine himself is thinking Christologically; he recognizes that Christ is the model distinguished from “image”, example, and sacrament, fully God and fully human. An “image” is a second-hand at one remove from the model (Christ), and humans as the image, are thus “adopted children;” it is through the salvific work of God in Christ that human beings participate and are included in the relationality that is the life of God. However, in turning inward, in turning to the creation to find vestiges of the Trinity, while initially meant to aid the understanding in knowing God, it took the place of revelation. Here one encounters the same problem encountered in our discussion of special and

general revelation: there is no way to get from general revelation to special revelation, no way of identifying revelation as revelation without God's prior self-revelation.

A second difficulty, is that Augustine's contribution in modifying the category of relation is still held captive to a substance ontology. Something is related to something. This leads to the same confusions as above wherein the analogy, the vestige of relationality in our own experience becomes the point up reference for talking about relationality in God. And again, Augustine finds that in God relationality and substantiality coincide in perfect harmony, which the world is created to reflect. As we will see, Barth keeps the relationality, but is less concerned about maintaining the "substantiality" language. In part, this is because it can seem to allow for a Hidden God, *Deus Absconditus*, behind his revelation. In place of this, Barth moves to event language.

Part of this discussion of resolving certain difficulties of the Trinity is that human language is inadequate to discuss the topic. God transcends our language such that it is impossible to capture him within language—which means that there is always a necessary element of mystery in the discussion. However, it is imperative to properly understand what is meant by mystery. As already indicated, Augustine does not want to understand mystery as something completely incomprehensible. A mystery in this sense is not a secret. The Apostle Paul goes to great lengths to say that the mystery is known—mystery is not a negative term—for it has been revealed.<sup>76</sup> Mystery is not meant to indicate a two-step notion of God, but rather it is

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<sup>76</sup> "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight *he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ*, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on

to be understood as the self-revealing nature of love as revealed in the ascension, resurrection, cross, and life of Jesus Christ. At the same time, mystery is also supposed to indicate that it is God who has revealed Himself and that therefore the essential difference between creator and creature remains such that he has been revealed *as Lord*. Language can never fully capture God, it cannot objectify Him for as Lord, God is always a subject who acts in freedom. However, for Augustine, the focus upon relational predication and substances in speaking of God precludes any other accidental predication because that would be a modification of who God is, a modification of his substance (primary and secondary because they are the same for God)—which, as truly being, is eternal and immutable. Thus, we come again to the mystery: How has the eternal and immutable God come to his creation? How has the eternal and immutable God become man?

## 2.2 Barth's reworking of the Trinitarian tradition

As helpful and revolutionary as Augustine's use of relational predication is, he still returns to the ontological primacy of Being: God is being itself as it relates to itself (Himself). Barth (and by extension, Jüngel) try to ontologically locate God's being in becoming (coming), that is, in the event (human perception) of His act (God's free choice) and in so doing distance themselves from 'substance' language and the problematic metaphysics therein. God is as he comes to us (in terms of eternity and immutability, this would suggest that God is, *in se*, eternally

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Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the *gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory*" (Eph. 1:3-14, NRSV, emphasis added). See also, Eph. 3:1-9; Col. 1:27, "To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (NRSV); Col. 2:2-3, "I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (NRSV), for a small sample of passages indicating the nature of mystery and its explicit relation to Christ and therefore to revelation.

and immutably coming to His creation as love in freedom). And though theologically Augustine is very close to this position, the functionality that he gives to the doctrine of the Trinity, allowed for a number of problems.

The point of talking about Augustine is to illustrate that a number of the discussions of the trinity are based on not quite understanding what he is trying to do with the doctrine, why he formulates it as he does, and why he employs the examples he does. It is also important to note that Barth and Augustine are not trying to do the same thing in their discussions of the trinity. Where Augustine's work is functional and trying to use examples of a trinity in order to draw us into a closer relation with God (as just indicated), Barth is concerned primarily about the doctrine of the trinity as an unfolding of and a human attempt to understand the questions raised by revelation, in which case Barth's main concern is Christology. It is from the problems generated by the ascension, resurrection, death, and life of Jesus Christ that we find that we must grapple with unity and difference in God. It is because as a sustained and systematic theological endeavor, Christology works to understand the very subject of revelation—God's self revelation—that the trinity becomes an issue at all. Problems are generated for readers of Augustine by overly focusing on the manner in which he attempts to clarify what it would mean for something to be both three and one, how we could understand both the unity and the difference that is in God, while foregoing larger hermeneutical and exegetical questions. By framing Augustine's discussion of the Trinity in more functional and pastoral contexts, wherein Augustine is looking to aid understanding for the sake of sanctification, I would like to affirm his examples as *contextually* useful and helpful. Nonetheless, it is these very examples of the trinity that Augustine uses that create the difficulties.



Barth, too, offers a way of reading the tradition concerning the *vestigia trinitatis* that is consistent with both the goal of the tradition and with his own “neo-orthodox” understanding of revelation. As mentioned, Barth only speaks of a single *vestigium*, Jesus Christ himself. He writes: “What happened, then, was not that they tried to explain the Trinity by the world but on the contrary that they tried to explain the world by the Trinity in order to be able to speak about the Trinity in this world” (*CD I.1*, 341). And it is exactly this that we see Augustine doing in *De Trinitate*. However, as Barth continues, he also asks how it could be that what began with such good intentions could lead to such problems (the problem of looking for vestiges of the trinity in the world for apologetic purposes, the problem of moving from the God of Christianity to the “god of the philosophers,” the problem of the “denial of the trinitarian God of Holy Scripture”) (*CD I.1*, 342). He identifies these difficulties in two different fashions. First, there is the *vestigium*, and second, the analogy of being (*analogia entis*). The analogy of being and *vestigium* of the trinity are closely related difficulties in having to do again with our discussion of revelation such that the starting point for understanding (interpreting) revelation becomes corrupted in this view, a confusion arises as they seek to “illustrate” rather than “interpret.” Barth argues that the theologian is on dangerous ground

whenever theological language, as here [in the *vestigia trinitatis*], thinks it must not just be the interpretation of revelation but also its illustration.... Where the line is to be drawn between these two cannot be stated generally. But there is a line, for revelation will submit only to interpretation and not to illustration. If we illustrate it we set a second thing alongside it and focus our attention on this. (*CD I.1*, 345)

It is by this kind of reasoning that Barth concludes that the “there can be no proper or direct *vestigium trinitatis*, no direct and complete *correspondences* to the triunity of God, apart from God’s own being and life and therefore within the creaturely world” (*CD IV.2*, 338, emphasis

added).<sup>77</sup> As discussed above, it is the idea that God corresponds to God, and thus again, there is a rejection of general revelation. In Christian theology, we are dealing specifically with God in his self-revelation and it is this self-revelation that can be the only root of the doctrine of the Trinity. Thus, for Barth, it is not a search for *vestigia* (in the plural) but rather it is looking to the *vestigium* (singular) in Jesus Christ.

Because revelation takes place definitively in Jesus Christ, who is the Word of God, Barth unfolds the doctrine of the Trinity, or as he prefers, triunity, as who God reveals himself to be in Jesus Christ. There are two areas of discussion under the doctrine of the Trinity that will help lay the groundwork for Barth's Christology: 1) a discussion of God's being in and for itself (*pro se*, immanent trinity) and God's being for us (*pro nobis*, economic trinity) which is carried out under 2) a discussion of *perichoresis* and appropriation. It should be noted that one important distinction, for Barth, is that the doctrine of the Trinity is not the basis of understanding God's Triunity but rather the doctrine seeks to act as a rule (of sorts) for witnessing to and talking about how in Jesus Christ God reveals Himself as trinity.<sup>78</sup>

**2.2.1 On the economic and immanent trinity and correspondence.** One of the more significant consequences of the metaphysical language of 'being' as it was used and commandeered by the Christian tradition was that (despite intentions otherwise) it led to a

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<sup>77</sup> At this point Barth refers us back to the very sections we have been working from in *CD I.1* §8.3.

<sup>78</sup> "Father, Son and Spirit are distinguished from one another by the fact that without inequality of essence or dignity, without increase or diminution of deity, they stand in dissimilar relations of origin to one another. If we have rejected the possibility of deriving the difference in the three modes of being from the material differences in the thought of God contained in the concept of revelation, because in the last resort there can be no question of any such differences, we can and must say now that formal distinctions in the three modes of being—that which makes them *modes* of being—can indeed be derived from the concept of revelation." (*CD I.1*, 363)

This is methodologically the same reasoning behind Barth's constructive Christology (and the differences from the older dogmatics).

division between God *in se* and God *ad extra*, between God as he is in Himself and God as he is for us in his works. This division returns us to issues of knowledge of God and revelation. Does God reveal Himself, or merely something about Himself? Thus, the concern in discussing the economic and immanent trinity is (for our purposes) simply to understand who the God is who reveals Himself in such a way that who God is is not sundered from what He does. Or as Barth identifies the issue: “The very fact of revelation tells us that it is proper to Him to distinguish Himself from Himself, i.e., to be God in Himself and in concealment, and yet at the same time to be God a second time in a very different way, namely, in manifestation, i.e., in the form of something He Himself is not” (*CD I.1*, 316). Importantly, this subject must be understood on its own terms, by interpretation (specifically in terms of God’s own self-interpretation) rather than through “illustration,” and thus in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, if we are to understand that “God corresponds to himself,” we have to now analyze the statement such that the Church’s doctrine of the Trinity is an interpretation of God’s own self-interpretation in His self-revelation. As a statement of relation, the idea of correspondence “means that God’s being is relationally structured being,” and that these relations are “‘genetic relations,’” in agreement with Augustine.<sup>79</sup> However, Barth wants to use the phrase ‘mode of being’ rather than what he considers a (possibly) “misleading concept of ‘person.’”<sup>80</sup> The difficulty with ‘person’ language in modern usage is that it indicates ‘personality.’ Thus, one comes to think of three distinct and differentiated personalities in God. However, as was mentioned above, this is not the classical understanding of the term. “‘Person’ as used in the Church doctrine of the Trinity bears no direct relation to personality,” because the

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<sup>79</sup> Jüngel, *God’s Being Is in Becoming*, 37.

<sup>80</sup> Jüngel, 37.

result would be “the worst and most extreme expression of tritheism” (*CD I.1*, 351). Thus, in what way is God’s being related to itself such that it is both three and one? Barth and Jüngel argue that the distinctions of the modes of being of God are “to be understood out of the relations which prevail between them.”<sup>81</sup> But in the same way, “the oneness of God’s being must be shown precisely in the differentiation of the three modes of being among themselves.”<sup>82</sup> In a word, Barth and Jüngel are looking to show that in the Scriptural witness to revelation each of the persons (modes of being) is a repetition of God. Hence, Barth writes,

The lordship discernible in the biblical revelation consists in the freedom of God to differentiate Himself from Himself, to become unlike Himself and yet to remain the same, to be indeed the one God like Himself and to exist as the one sole God in the fact that in this way that is so inconceivably profound He differentiates Himself from Himself, being not only God the Father but also—in this direction this is the comprehensive meaning of the whole of the biblical witness—God the Son. That He reveals Himself as the Son is what is primarily meant when we say that He reveals Himself as the Lord. *This Sonship is God’s lordship in His revelation.* (*CD I.1*, 320)

The rule guiding this is “*opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* [the external works of the Trinity are indivisible].”<sup>83</sup> Because God’s being is related to itself in this way, “God’s being as being is pure *event*,” such that “it is a matter of a ‘repetition of God.’”<sup>84</sup> As discussed, event language has several benefits, one of which is that events *happen*, they are not reducible to the constituent reasons/factors/causes, but in the multiplicity must be understood as one. Likewise, God is not to be understood as the “highest being” because if one continues to utilize ‘being’ language, God’s being is no longer understood as event.<sup>85</sup> Once again, the significance of event language is

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<sup>81</sup> Jüngel, 38.

<sup>82</sup> Jüngel, 38.

<sup>83</sup> Jüngel, 38.

<sup>84</sup> Jüngel, 39.

<sup>85</sup> Jüngel, 40.

simply an interpretation of both the self-grounding nature of God's being as corresponding to himself (God is Lord) and the relational aspect such that the ideas of both freedom and love are made actual: "in the freedom of his being as event this singular being is *love*. But the being of God is singular love precisely as threehood."<sup>86</sup> Thus, God's being is event in the "mutual self-giving of the three modes of God's being."<sup>87</sup> Finally, because of love and event, God's being can only be understood concretely.<sup>88</sup> But he can only be understood concretely from this side, from the fact that He *has* revealed Himself as the God *pro se* who is *pro nobis*.

Thus, it is possible to understand why Jüngel endorses Karl Rahner's collapsing of the economic and the immanent Trinities: "The 'economic Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity."<sup>89</sup> Jüngel continues, affirming the statement "because God himself takes place in Jesus' God-forsakenness and death," which is to say that God Himself suffers and dies, takes up nonbeing into Himself in Christ on the Cross.<sup>90</sup> To say that God himself takes place has to be understood in terms of event and relation, it is the repetition of God. As such, Jüngel writes "the God who is love is totally identical with his essence in his existence. His existence is his essence. That is precisely what the doctrine of the Trinity formulates. It does this by thinking of the essence of God, which is love, as an essence

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<sup>86</sup> Jüngel, 41.

<sup>87</sup> Jüngel, 41.

<sup>88</sup> Jüngel, 41.

<sup>89</sup> Karl Rahner quoted in Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 370.

<sup>90</sup> Jüngel, 370. This has enormous implications on the *communicatio idiomatum* (communication of properties) and commits Jüngel to a *theopaschist* position. This will be discussed in the third part of this chapter, but in a word, it is God who suffers and dies in Jesus Christ and this also has consequences for our understanding of love.

constituted by relations and by thinking of the relations which constitute God's essence as the divine existence."<sup>91</sup>

In highlighting the rule, "*opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* [the external works of the Trinity are indivisible]" (*CD I.1*, 362, 375), Barth's concern is to identify the God who reveals Himself to be a God that is for us, as who He is in Himself. What this then means is that in Jesus Christ, we are dealing with God, and furthermore, that God has been eternally related to us in this way as His own free decision in love. We have a doctrine of the trinity in response to God's self-interpretation as a trinity in His revelation. As Barth specifically discusses the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, he splits the sections into two parts. The first part is always the "for us" aspect—God revealed to us—specifically in and by Jesus Christ. The second part is always a consideration of this indivisibility, such that if God is this way "for us," then He is this way "for us" in Himself, eternally (*CD I.1*, §10-12). God is not understood as "something" that stands behind His revelation—and since He has revealed Himself in three modes (Father, Son, and Spirit)<sup>92</sup>, He is eternally related to Himself in these three modes as One God.<sup>93</sup>

To be able to talk about the oneness or threeness of God you have to hold both aspects together. The unity of God cannot be separated from the Threeness of God even though God's self-revelation forces us to consider the distinct modes of God's being God is the one who is lord. This is why Barth holds onto the relational predication aspect of Augustine and forgoes person talk—because God *is* these very relations. As such, Barth also forgoes substance

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<sup>91</sup> Jüngel, 371.

<sup>92</sup> Just to reiterate, "modes" here cannot be understood as problematic as in the way of modalism, but it is a more "modern" understanding of the person category in Barth's thought.

<sup>93</sup> "According to Scripture God is manifest and is God in the very mode or way that He is in those relations to Himself. He brings forth Himself and in two distinctive ways He is brought forth by Himself. He possesses Himself as Father, i.e., pure Giver, as Son, i.e., Receiver and Giver, and as Spirit, i.e., pure Receiver." (*CD I.1*, 364).

language and in so doing, he is able to collapse the economic and immanent Trinity while still maintaining a distinction that preserves the objectivity of God as subject.<sup>94</sup> What is accomplished by collapsing the economic and the immanent trinity is that God for us (*pro nobis*), which is what we see as God-revealed—his self-revelation for us—is exactly what God is like in himself. God in Himself is identical to who He is for us. And God is in this way because God has *chosen* to be for us as he is in himself.

Finally, as mentioned above, the relationality and the rejection of substance language moves discussion to event language. God is the event of his self-revelation—and this is what has been meant by suggesting that there is not a hidden God behind self-revelation; God does not reveal something about Himself, He reveals Himself, and who He is *is* the dynamic indwelling of creative freedom in love in relation of Father, Son, and Spirit.

**2.2.2 Perichoresis and appropriation.** The next issue is to consider then is to briefly consider how oneness is related to the threeness. This must be further clarified because God’s unity is not a unity of substance, but rather the unity of these relations. Here Barth makes use of the traditional terminology of *perichoresis*, as an indication of “indwelling” or “co-presence” (*CD I.1, 370-1*). And because he is explicitly emphasizing the relational nature of God, then *perichoresis* is meant to draw out the dynamic identity of God. Furthermore, “just as in revelation, according to the biblical witness, the one God may be known only in the Three and the Three only as the one God, so none of the Three may be known without the other Two” (*CD I.1, 370*). More precisely, Barth wants to distinguish between God’s work and God’s essence,

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<sup>94</sup> For a well-argued account of the importance for maintaining the distinction between the immanent and economic trinity, see: Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology*, Second Kindle Edition (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017).

while at the same time identifying them as one—“God’s work is His essence in its relation to the reality which is distinct from Him....The work of God is the essence of God as the essence of Him who... is revealer, revelation and being revealed, or Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer” (CD I.1, 371). *Perichoresis*, as co-presence or indwelling, is dialectically related to appropriation as emphasizing the oneness of God; however, this oneness is precisely in the dynamic indwelling and relation of Father, Son, and Spirit. Appropriation then is the other side of the dialectic that emphasizes the threeness of the modes of being of God.<sup>95</sup> Here appropriation is used to indicate the distinctness of God’s work without surrendering the unity of God in His work. And again, “the revelation of God attested in Scripture forces us to make this differentiation. Scripture itself continually speaks in terms of these differentiations and it does so with great seriousness” (CD I.1, 372). Any attempt to only speak of the Threeness or the oneness of God results in error either towards “pagan mythology” or “tritheism,” and as such, “to the involution and convolution of the three modes of being in the essence of God there corresponds exactly their involution and convolution in His work” (CD I.1, 374).

*Perichoresis*, then, has to do with the unity of the three modes of God’s being “as encountering one another in unrestricted participation.”<sup>96</sup> The point here is to understand first the distinction between the “reality of God and the reality which owes its existence to God’s work”<sup>97</sup>, but not in order to establish ‘this world’ as opposed to ‘another world.’ God’s essence

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<sup>95</sup> “In the vocabulary of the older dogmatics what falls to be said about this positive relation between Father, Son and Spirit in God’s work and Father, Son and Spirit in God’s essence is the doctrine of appropriation (attributes, assignments). By the specific assigning of a word or deed to this or that person of the Godhead, there should be brought to our awareness... the truth of the trinity which is in fact undivided in its work and which still exists in three persons.” (CD I.1, 373)

<sup>96</sup> Jüngel, *God’s Being Is in Becoming*, 45.

<sup>97</sup> Jüngel, 45.



(or being in himself) cannot be separated from God's work— "God as God is...God in his essence and work."<sup>98</sup> Returning to the guiding rule of "*opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*" we can see that it is always *God* who is revealed as the unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit among themselves.<sup>99</sup> Again, this is meant to indicate two things. Negatively, this is a rejection of the substance language, such that a relational predicate must be a relation of *something*. Positively, God is not a *something*, but He is these relations. The direct implication has to do with a number popular ways of talking about God, and a common manner of trying to use examples (illustrations) to talk about God's triunity. For instance, an idea of a white fatherly figure with a white beard who sends his son down to earth and who talk to each other with the spirit traversing between them is to completely misunderstand (by virtually every standard, but even more so since the idea of *something* is no longer a part of the account).<sup>100</sup> Father, Son, and Spirit is how God relates to Himself and He is those relations. When He reveals Himself, He reveals those relations, which means that the focus is on how the Father relates to the Son, how the Son relates to the Father, and how the Spirit holds them together. And this is what Barth goes into great detail in Volume IV, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*.

Appropriation, on the other hand, works as a counter-movement to *perichoresis*, dealing rather with the concrete differentiation in the modes of being of God's being. "How is the unity

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<sup>98</sup> Jüngel, 46.

<sup>99</sup> Jüngel, 47.

<sup>100</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, Revised Edition (New York: Macmillan Co., 1982), 21–22. Here, I am reminded of Lewis writing as a devil to an apprentice devil on the matter of prayer as he observes something about the manner in which we as people tend to think of God. He writes: "The humans do not start from that direct perception of Him which we, unhappily, cannot avoid.... If you look into your patient's mind when he is praying, you not find *that* [direct perception]. If you examine the object to which he is attending, you will find that it is a composite object containing many quite ridiculous ingredients.... I have know cases where what the patient called his 'God' was actually *located*—up and to the left at the corner of the bedroom ceiling, or inside his own head, or in a crucifix on the wall. But whatever the nature of the composite object, you must keep him praying to *it*—to the thing he has made, not to the Person who has made him."

of the divine modes of being able to express itself in God's *work* without surrendering its differentiation? It is thus a matter of the oneness of unity and differentiation in the divine modes of being in the work of God."<sup>101</sup> Appropriation then is "a hermeneutical process for defining the being of God, through which the particular attributes and operations of the Trinity (in the unity of its modes of being) are ascribed to one particular mode of being," i.e., revealer, revelation, and revealedness; Creator, Reconciler, Redeemer; etc.<sup>102</sup> However, it should be noted that appropriation is used in two senses. First, it is used as attribution "in so far as God assigns to himself his being as the triune God. In this way God corresponds to himself."<sup>103</sup> This simply means that God has chosen to be related to himself in just this way: as Father, Son, and Spirit. Second, appropriation is used as a process undertaken by the theologian "describe the individual modes of being of God as such."<sup>104</sup> The point that is emphasized is that the description undertaken by the theologian must (ought, should) be 'interpretation' such that it 'corresponds' "precisely" to the event of God's revelation.<sup>105</sup>

The final formulation presented by Jüngel is as follows: "God *is* concrete in the harmony of his modes of being as the one who brings to speech, as the one who he chooses to be.... God is concrete in that he assigns to himself his being *as* Father, *as* Son and *as* Spirit, and so corresponds to himself."<sup>106</sup> This occurs in the event of revelation, which is understood as self-

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<sup>101</sup> Jüngel, *God's Being Is in Becoming*, 48.

<sup>102</sup> Jüngel, 48–49.

<sup>103</sup> Jüngel, 51.

<sup>104</sup> Jüngel, 51.

<sup>105</sup> Jüngel, 51.

<sup>106</sup> Jüngel, 51.

interpretation, wherein “God brings himself to speech as the one (as object) who (as subject) in the concrete unanimity of his being has brought himself to correspondence (in that he assigned his own being to himself).<sup>107</sup> Again, we are back at the idea of “God’s being proceeds” which established the framework for the questioning undertaken as *the* theological problem.

Thus, these two brief introductory sections regarding revelation and the triunity of God, have attempted to highlight that it is God who reveals Himself, and that He is who He is in the act of revelation. Furthermore, He has revealed Himself as both one and three—whether by appropriation we speak of the Father, the Son, or the Spirit, it is always God who is revealed. Again, it is here helpful to recall Barth’s doctrine of Reconciliation, wherein the concreteness of God’s being is revealed as historical event in Jesus Christ, as the “self-communication” of God.<sup>108</sup> For,

as He causes the world, and in His grace ourselves, to be His creatures, His men, and to exist before Him as is appropriate, and as in the same grace He does not allow us to go our own ways and to fall, as He does not withhold Himself from us but reveals Himself as our Partner and acts as such, from the provisions of our daily bread to our deliverance from all evil—in all these things He is primarily true to Himself, revealing Himself as the One He is in Himself, as Father, Son and Spirit, in expression and application and exercise of the love in which He is God.(*CD IV.2*, 346)

Thus, in the final conclusion, it is in collapsing the distinction between the immanent and economic trinity that we can see that God’s work in creation, reconciliation, and redemption is who God is. The result is that God is who he is in reconciliation, and that form and content are equally inseparable. It is not enough to consider what God has done in his work, and it is not enough to consider how it is accomplished in abstract. This unity of form and content is made explicitly clear in the resurrection, death, and life of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ does not reveal the

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<sup>107</sup> Jüngel, 51.

<sup>108</sup> Jüngel, 44.

Father abstractly, but in the work of reconciliation God reveals himself (as Lord and as freely choosing to relate to himself and us) concretely. It is to this topic that we move next and as we discuss Barth's Christology proper, these same controlling ideas will be worked out concretely in relation to Jesus Christ.<sup>109</sup>

### *3. Inclusivity and Christology*

The third task of this chapter, having now discussed the formal aspects, is to show that these formal aspects are understood in just this way because of the concrete self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Essentially, the goal is to show how the above two sections are conclusions drawn from the revelation of Jesus Christ; Barth can be understood as beginning his dogmatic project over from the perspective of the doctrine of reconciliation (Volume IV). The task will be to discuss both the form and the content concretely. This will be accomplished in three steps: 1) the very structure of *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* is an interpretation of revelation and trinity, in terms of Jesus Christ, which 2) requires a brief discussion of Christology in terms of inclusivity. Finally, 3) an unfolding of the answers to the questions of who Jesus Christ is, what is he for us, and how he is who he is for us. These questions point to the rhetorical concerns of identification, address, and persuasion, respectively, as well as a unity of form and content. We have noted Barth's emphasis on event, on repetition, and on correspondence in both revelation and the doctrine of the Trinity. As Barth summarizes,

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<sup>109</sup> "The fact that He is particularly manifest for us in this indissolubly and characteristically distinct act or attribute in this or that mode of being may not and must not mean that we have not to believe and worship God in the other modes of being even though they are temporarily hidden from us. Just as Scripture is to be read in context as the witness of God's revelation, just as, e.g., Good Friday, Easter and Pentecost can only say together what they have to say, so we must say that all God's work, as we are to grasp it on the basis of His revelation, is one act which occurs simultaneously and in concert in all His three modes of being. From creation by way of revelation and reconciliation to the coming redemption it is always true that He who acts here is the Father and the Son and the Spirit." (*CD I.1*, 374-5)

The doctrine of God's three-in-oneness gives answer to the question about the subject of revelation attested in Holy Scripture. The answer may be summarized by saying that the revelation attested in Holy Scripture is the revelation of the God who, as the Lord, is the Father from whom it proceeds, the Son who fulfils it objectively (for us), and the Spirit who fulfils it subjectively (in us)... He becomes and He is manifest to us. But this very becoming and being is and remains a determination of His existence. It is His act, His work. (*CD I.2,1*)

It is now when, as we attempt to unfold these questions of Christology, that the topics of revelation and triunity become clear. Perichoresis and appropriation, revelation and triunity, as well as the distinctions (and subsequent collapse thereof) gain their concrete meaning in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Before proceeding, a note on "moments" is required. For Barth, moment is a dialectical term and is used to make distinguishing comments on something that can only properly be considered a whole, totality, or unity (he frequently refers to "aspects"). In other words, while separated for the purposes of clarification and understanding, moments/aspects cannot remain in isolation. It makes sense to talk about heads, or tails, as *parts* (aspects) of a coin, but taken in isolation, you are no longer talking about a coin. It makes sense to talk about justification, sanctification, and vocation only as moments of reconciliation in the one act of God. It makes sense to speak of Jesus Christ as servant, as Lord, and as witness only as moments of the second person of the Trinity. It makes sense to talk about the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus Christ only as moments of the one act of reconciliation. It makes sense to talk about the person and the work of Jesus Christ as moments, but "it is in the particular fact and the particular way that Jesus Christ is very God, very man, and very God-man that He works, and He works in the fact and only in the fact that He is this One and not another" (*CD IV.1, 128*).<sup>110</sup> Importantly, moments are

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<sup>110</sup> The paragraph continues: "This is the truth which must light up the doctrine of reconciliation as Christology." (*CD IV.1, 128*)

not meant in the sense of time in this context. It is not a temporal ordering, except possibly in *our* experience—I might experience tails prior to heads when I look at a coin but that does not make tails prior to heads temporally, thus emphasizing the universal import of Jesus Christ.

### 3.1 Barth's Structure of the Doctrine of Reconciliation

I am drawing attention to the structure of the fourth volume because it allows a glimpse of what Barth's concerns are and shows how he is working to keep the form of his dogmatic enterprise consistent with the content of who it is about. As already suggested, this means that the concerns recognized in the discussion of revelation and in the discussion of the trinity are now seen concretely. This subsection will be divided into three "moments" corresponding to the one work of God. The first moment is a "downward" movement, from God to creation. The second moment is an "upward" movement from humans (creation) to God. The third moment is an orientational, unifying movement relating the first two movements. In other words, the doctrine of reconciliation is structured as three moments according to the Christological statements *vere deus*, *vere homo*, and *vere deus-homo*.

**3.1.1 The objectivity of God as subject (identity).** Barth places the primacy of God as central to any and all thinking about God. As we move into the doctrine of reconciliation, the concepts of both covenant and election are advocated as terms to indicate the objectivity of God as a subject who has freely chosen to relate to his creation. In the incarnation, God is faithful to Himself. And if this work of God (reconciliation) is indeed a *work* of God, then this work is identical with who God is. The implication is that reconciliation (and thus, salvation) do not result from a mistake—it is not human sin that so prompts God to act, to correct a mistake. God

does not come to save human beings because we have the most need as Aquinas suggests. God is for us in this relational and participatory *way* in himself and thus from eternity. Reconciliation is God's initiative, incarnation is God's initiative, from God's primal decision, in Himself. Jesus Christ is *vere deus* in this work, as he is God in the true way—God for us.

This means that the incarnation (a moment of the work of reconciliation, and thus a moment of God's self-revelation) is properly understood as radical grace.<sup>111</sup> This grace is radical in the sense that it is both free and undeserved—it is a gift in the most complete sense, for God is not necessarily obligated to his creation. He has freely chosen to be for his creation in loving nearness. This makes the covenant (in each case—Noah, Abraham, Israel, David, Christians) qualitatively asymmetrical. An additional point of dissonance with some of the older dogmatics (the traditional view espoused by Berkhof, for instance, or the anthropocentric starting points of Schleiermacher and Tillich) is that, in Barth's *CD*, the doctrine of man does not follow the doctrine of God, but the doctrine of man is a consequence of Christology. This reversal makes theological anthropology dependent on Christ and thus on revelation because it is only there where we can learn what it means to be human in a true way (*vere homo*).

The overall structure is threefold. In the first moment, Barth recognizes that in Jesus Christ we see God's verdict for his creation. This is the moment of justification. Thus, in Jesus Christ, *vere deus*, Barth discusses the "way of the Son into the far country." In this verdict, God is revealing Himself as *for us*. In §59 "The Obedience of the Son of God," it is the obedience of the Son of God to the Father that shows the *way* (how) God is for us: the Lord is servant. But it is also the Lord as servant that shows how human beings have failed, have missed the mark, have sinned. God incarnate is God entering into the human situation, becoming as the creature. The

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<sup>111</sup> This is also true of the work of creation. More will be said on creation in the discussion of love in the next chapter.

“far country” for God just is His creation. He himself overcomes the infinite divide between creator and creature, and He accomplishes this by becoming identical with us. This means God became flesh; God, in Jesus Christ exposes Himself to pain, death, temptation, and nothingness. Thus, the “Obedience of the Son of God” is in allowing Himself to be judged; in obedience, the Son of God does not justify himself, even as *vere deus*, but allows himself to be judged by the Father for this is what it means to be God in the true way. It is as a servant that Jesus Christ reveals himself as Lord. “In Jesus Christ we have to do with very God. The reconciliation of man with God takes place as God Himself actively intervenes, Himself taking in hand His cause with and against and for man... [such] that He Himself becomes man” (*CD IV.1*, 128). In a word, God proves his godhood in the incarnation, in suffering unto death, in being the servant, in his self-humiliation for “in this act He is this God and therefore the true God, distinguished from all false gods by the fact that they are not capable of this act,... that their supposed glory and honour and eternity and omnipotence not only do not include but exclude their self-humiliation” (*CD IV.1*, 130).

Under *vere deus*, it is the way of the Son of God into the far country, which aligns traditionally with the Christological office title of Priest, though Barth carries out the discussion in terms of judge. The Son of God is obedient. The Son of God is incarnate, is human; and as such suffers, dies, and experiences our nothingness. This establishes both the divine verdict, that God has chosen to be for us, and it effects our justification. Jesus Christ, the Judge,<sup>112</sup> is Himself judged in our place and experiences our death, but it is in the resurrection that God justifies His

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<sup>112</sup> Barth tends to replace ‘priest’ with ‘judge’ but intends the same thing—namely a role that must be filled, but human beings are incapable of sufficiently filling. He continues, pointing out that a priest’s function in the cultic setting is to offer the sacrifice, and Jesus as priest, is the one who offers the sacrifice and is the sacrifice. But it is in this sense that Jesus is also the Judge, judged in our place. Barth is thus identifying the doctrine of substitution as the first aspect of the doctrine of reconciliation. See *CD IV.1*, 273-283).



Son (substitution). This in turn reveals the sin of man, pride, as that arrogance that seeks God's place in justification. In structuring the problem this way, Barth also establishes the significance of the problem of sin, and the reality of it. Sin is not just *a* problem. It is the problem that God overcomes Himself and in this way, and thus, sin is understood as only that which God does in fact overcome in this way. In the moment of justification, Barth suggests that there is an ontological change such that in the resurrection, by entering and experiencing our death, God overcomes and triumphs over nothingness, sin, and chaos. As a new creation, human beings are freed for life and from the power of sin. This also means that while the cross is central in our justification and reconciliation, it must be understood in terms of resurrection. For it is in the resurrection that God attests to Himself.

Finally, having understood God the Father, as revealed in the Son, having understood sin and human beings as revealed by the Son, it is the role of the Spirit to gather the Body of Christ. "The Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus Christ is the awakening power of the Word spoken by the Lord who became a servant and therefore of the divine sentence which judges and justifies sinful man." (*CD IV.1*, 151). Furthermore, Barth continues that "It is not the faith and understanding of its members which constitute the community, but the Word and verdict of God believed and understood, Jesus Christ Himself in whose death on the cross that verdict is pronounced. It is not that they know God, but that they are known of God." (*CD IV.1* 151). This means then that in this work direction and promise are central—hence the primary metaphor of the *way*. For

In the whole event of atonement, justification, sanctification and calling, as grounded in the divine verdict, direction and promise, have as it were a central function. In them, in the understanding of grace under these concepts, it is still a matter of expounding the being and work of Jesus Christ as the Reconciler of the sinful world and therefore of sinful man with God. (*CD IV.1*, 147)

**3.1.2 Repetition and correspondence (address).**<sup>113</sup> However, that only accounts for the first moment of reconciliation. The second moment of reconciliation under the heading *vere homo*, is the Homecoming of the Son of Man, which aligns traditionally with the Christological title of king. The Son of Man is exalted; humanity is invited to participate in the life of God. “The reconciliation of the world with God takes place in the person of a man in whom, because He is also true God, the conversion of all men to God is an actual event.” (*CD IV.1*, 130) Barth summarizes the content of this movement and moment thus:

He is a creature, but superior to His creatureliness. He is bound by sin, but quite free in relation to it because He is not bound to commit it.... As the true God, i.e., the God who humbles Himself, Jesus Christ is the true man, i.e., the man in who all His creatureliness is exalted above His creatureliness.... As God He was humbled to take our place and as Man He is exalted on our behalf. He is set at the side of God in the humanity that is ours. He is above us and opposed to us, but He is also for us. What has happened in Him is the one true man is the conversion of all of us to God, the realization of true humanity. (*CD IV.1*, 131)

In the second movement of reconciliation, God reveals Himself as true humanity—as human in the true way—He reveals Himself as for us again, and in another way. God is *for us* in this other way as revealing that to be human in a true way we must be open towards God as *creatures of God*. Barth begins the section by examining the parable of the prodigal Son in Luke 15 (*CD IV.2*, 21-35). While he desires to avoid a simple Christological interpretation, he suggests that the overall movement and direction is the way of God towards us in order that we may return to God. The point of the parable (and by extension, Barth’s use of it) is that God does everything to enable us to see who we truly are (human in a true way) and live as such (open to God). “There can be no simple equation of Jesus Christ with the lost son of the parable – and even less, of course, with the flesh of the fattened calf which was killed for his reception, as Ambrose once

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<sup>113</sup> “The Homecoming of the Son of Man”: §64 “The Exaltation of the Son of Man;” §65 “The Sloth and Misery of Man;” §66 “The Sanctification of Man.”

suggested” (*CD IV.2*, 23). Rather Barth suggests that the whole parable ought to be read in the light of the Gospel, particularly with reference to the humiliation and exaltation—the way of God in the work of atonement—such that the “going out and coming of the lost son, and therefore the fall and blessing of man, takes place on [this] horizon” (*CD IV.2*, 23).

In Jesus Christ’s being for us in this way, as the true man exalted by the Father, the direction of the Son (to the Father) points to our sanctification. In Jesus Christ, humanity is sanctified, “raised to the status of children” (*CD IV.1*, 143). The sin revealed in connection with this sanctification and direction is sloth, the willful falling, a willful setting “against the grace of God which is addressed to him (humanity), and leads him, and orders his going, his own dark ways of frivolity or melancholy or despair which he seeks and chooses and follows” (*CD IV.1*, 143) It is Jesus Christ sanctifying us that allows us to “stand and proceed along the way which God has appointed for [us] as the way of true freedom, in this way rendering obedience” (*CD IV.1*, 146).

Finally, having understood God the Father as revealed in the homecoming of the Son on Man, of understanding the humanity of God in terms of Jesus Christ and thus our true humanity, and by extension sin as sloth, it is the role of the Spirit in this second way to build up (sanctify) the body of Christ. In the first moment, the Spirit gathers the church; in the second moment, the work of the Spirit is the upbuilding of the Church. For, “these men are united in a common action orientated by a commonly imposed obedience, and... by a commonly given freedom” (*CD IV.1*, 151). Barth places special emphasis on the fact that even though this freedom and obedience is actualized in the Christian community, it is not “by the obedience, the freedom, or even the love of these men that the Church is built up and lives. It lives wholly in the power of its Lord and His Spirit” (*CD IV.1*, 152).

**3.1.3 Orientation and the Spirit (persuasion).** The third moment of reconciliation is under the heading of *vere deus homo*,<sup>114</sup> which aligns traditionally with the Christological office of Prophet. Barth primarily understands this moment as Jesus Christ who is the true witness to His work of atonement. As true witness, Jesus Christ is understood as the guarantor “that He who is Himself the material content of the atonement, the Mediator of it, stands security with man as well as God that it is our atonement—He Himself being the form of it as well as the content” (*CD IV.1*, 137). God attests to himself in this movement, in this moment of reconciliation. In trinitarian terms, this is the unity of relationship established in the Holy Spirit. As Christ reveals Himself as the guarantor and true witness, the true mediator between God and humans, sin is revealed as falsehood in negating and denying the movement of God towards us and the movement from us back to Himself. Thus, the third aspect of the one work of reconciliation and “the grace of God in its third form” has to do with our vocation and our calling, for “God does not act above our heads, He does not ignore us, but He addresses us and calls us” (*CD IV.1*, 143). This calling then is for us to witness in this secondary and derivative fashion, we witness to what Christ has done in the spirit, attesting to the Spirit witnessing to us. It is the Spirit of Jesus Christ that makes this work of reconciliation real to us subjectively; personally we appropriate it, but that means we are called collectively and individually to witness to this action of God in justification and sanctification. Importantly, for Barth this subjective appropriation is first

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<sup>114</sup> This is also an allusion to Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo?* Rather than the usual English translation of *Why God became Man*, Barth emphasizes the God-Man, the hyphen and the unity, as in “why the god-man?”

accomplished collectively, in community—for the whole movement and basis is one of relationality.<sup>115</sup>

Finally, the third aspect of the third moment is the mission of the church. Now, the whole church is acting to witness to what Christ has done and it becomes the mission of this community of witness to be sent out, “standing vicariously for the whole world” (*CD IV.1*, 152). Because it is the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ that is active in sending the community, the community witnesses to the new life, and the future promise of the loving nearness of God: it is “a community which proclaims the coming kingdom of God as the substance of the whole future of man; but for that reason a missionary community” (*CD IV.1*, 153). And this coming of the kingdom of God has been actualized and achieved in the work of reconciliation to which the Church bears witness—the Church in no way works to accomplish this reconciliation.

With this simplified understanding of the structure of *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, the goal was to show that Barth related all doctrine and thinking about God to Jesus Christ and that only in Jesus Christ can we think about or understand God as *vere deus* and *vere homo*. It is within this structure that the specifically Christian role of witness, as a necessary consequence of the self-revelation of Jesus Christ who is a unity of form and content, is interpreted by self-revelation and is thus rhetorical. This is the concrete means of discussing self-revelation of and the doctrine of the Trinity.

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<sup>115</sup> This is to be understood Christologically, not Platonically. It is not by participating in the form of the human, or some other general concept, that we are justified and sanctified. It is first Christ, then the body of Christ, and then Christians.

### 3.2 Inclusivity

However, the three major sections under discussion (the three moments of the one work of reconciliation) need to be understood as inclusive, a combining of all those moments. They can only be distinguished for the sake of discussion and clarity, but each moment *includes* and is *related* to the others. This means that justification, sanctification, and vocation are not a sequence but must be understood as different moments of the one complex event of reconciliation. The only way to talk about justification is to talk about sanctification and to talk about them both is to talk about calling or vocation. The only way to talk about Christ as priest (as the humiliation of the Son of God) is to talk about the exaltation of man and Jesus as King. Jesus Christ is never found in the Scriptural witness as either only Jesus or only Christ (in an individual state). Separated from this content, or in a different form, God is abstract and therefore not God. If we discuss the Father and the Son without the Spirit, we are again in abstraction, or more concretely if we speak of Jesus Christ without the Spirit, we are involved in speculation and abstraction. For if Jesus Christ is the self-revelation of God, then the *pro nobis* aspect must be made subjectively true. *I* confess, but my confession is concerning *God*. And so, Barth writes that “faith and love and hope are relative concepts. The being of the Christian indicated by them is a being in relation. Faith lives by its object, love by its basis, hope by its surety. Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit is this object and basis and surety” (*CD IV.1*, 153-4). Moreover, sin (*homo incurvatus in se*,<sup>116</sup> pride, sloth, and falsehood) as well as anthropology and ecclesiology are included as consequences of the knowledge gained from God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

By inclusivity I want to highlight two directions of ideas in Barth’s Christology and recall the discussion of perichoresis. This is the dynamic *act* of God and the dynamic *event* for us.

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<sup>116</sup> Matt Jenson, *Gravity of Sin : Augustine, Luther and Barth on Homo Incurvatus in Se* (London, GBR: T & T Clark International, 2007). This is an excellent study on sin.

While we can make distinctions for the sake of discussion, there can be no actual division—the work of God is inclusive. The first is the methodological Christo-centrism, which has been hinted at as well in revelation and in terms of trinity. Here, however, the emphasis of the Christo-centric approach is that it is not just through Jesus Christ that revelation occurs, but that all other statements, doctrines, etc., find their significance and meaning only in relation to him and must in fact be organized around him. The danger of confining Christology to a section of dogmatics, particularly in relation to and distinction from the doctrine of atonement, can lead to a type of nominalism, such that the name of Jesus Christ becomes merely a *sign* of the event of atonement. Part of the uniqueness of Barth’s methodology is that he identifies the ontological ramifications of the ontic particularity of Jesus Christ: this event “corresponds not only to cognition but to being” (*CD IV.1*, 122-3). Importantly, it is the fact of this dynamic being, a being that is relationally in its becoming, or coming. Moreover, he seeks to affirm the two natures aspects of both Chalcedon and Nicaea. His dialectical method here does not seek to dissolve the tension between the two natures, but rather to fully affirm both, in the same way that he seeks to understand both the threeness and oneness in God (trinity). The distinction of the Son of God and the Son of Man, while properly distinguished in order to be discussed, can and never are actually separated in Jesus Christ. The only way to truly discuss the Son of God is to include and necessarily discuss him as the Son of Man, and vice versa. Here Barth is moving away from more traditional Protestant discussions of the humiliation and exaltation, and the two natures of Christ (two natures, two states) and intentionally interpreting them in terms of each other as found in the resurrection, death, and life of Jesus Christ. Barth is taking this approach as a hermeneutical and exegetical principle; because he finds no instances of the deity or humanity of God discussed in abstract, but only in the particular concrete history and act of Jesus Christ,

Barth tries to keep that significance in his own systematic presentation.<sup>117</sup> Humility and exaltation are dialectical moments of the same act, the event of God in history.<sup>118</sup>

The idea of the ontological significance, in a word, the universal significance, of Jesus Christ, the concrete universal, leads to the second direction to be indicated by “inclusivity.” The concern is not just cognition, i.e., right doctrine, but a concern about being—specifically the being of God and the being of humans, summarized into three aspects: very God, very man, and God-man, as mentioned. *Christ* is the focus of Barth’s theology, not *Christology*.<sup>119</sup> The collapse of the distinction between the person and the work of Jesus Christ is further indicated in Barth’s discussions of the relationship between the two natures, and the *communicatio idiomata* of earlier dogmatics, which can be understood as an extension and unfolding of his understanding of *perichoresis* and appropriation. He writes (even in his first volume):

What seems to be the burning question of the nature of the co-existence and co-operation of the two factors is a highly irrelevant question. God and the human element are not two co-existing and co-operating factors. The human element is what God created. Only in the state of disobedience is it a factor standing over against God. In the state of obedience it is service of God.... Where God is truly served, there—with no removal of the human element, with the full and essential presence and operation of the human element in all its humanity—the willing and doing of God is not just present as a first or second co-operating factor; it is present as the first and decisive thing as befits God the Creator and Lord. (*CD I.1*, 94)

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<sup>117</sup> “In the New Testament there are many christological statements both direct and indirect. But where do we find a special Christology? –a Christ in Himself, abstracted from what He is amongst the men of Israel and His disciples and the world, from what He is on their behalf? Does He ever exist except in this relationship?” (*CD IV.1*, 124)

<sup>118</sup> “We hasten to explain that the being of Jesus Christ, the unity of being of the living God and this living man, takes place in the event of the concrete existence of this man. It is a being, but a being in a history. The gracious God is in this history, so is reconciled man, so are both in their unity. And what takes place in this history, and therefore in the being of Jesus Christ as such, is atonement. Jesus Christ is not what He is—very God, very man, very God-man—in order as such to mean and do and accomplish something else which is atonement. But His being as God and man and God-man consists in the completed act of the reconciliation of man with God.” (*CD IV.1*, 126-7)

<sup>119</sup> Mistaking theological reflection (Christology) for Christ is a straightforward way to fall victim to Christological nominalism. Christ is not a theological reflection—Jesus Christ is God’s saving presence in our midst on which all life and salvation depend.



Here, inclusivity denotes that the humanity of Christ is included in God himself. The divine and the human natures are not in competition in Jesus Christ, and it is not a development into divinity, nor into humanity. As God, the creator, His human nature is obedient. As obedient, it is not diminished or subsumed or reduced. Barth's teleological and relational understanding of God and the humanity of Christ means that Christ's humanity is the standard by which we understand what human nature is. Human nature is not something discussed and discovered and then added to God. There is no need discuss which acts are divine and which are human in Jesus Christ. Here again, we see the repetition of the collapsing of the economic and the immanent trinity in concrete. This including of humanity in God's own self, by the assumption of a created human nature by God, can in no way stand over-against or opposed to God. The second person of the trinity is the Word of God in the flesh (*logo ensarkos*), not the abstracted Word (*logos asarkos*)—the Word of God is always incarnate. On the danger of making a distinction between the work and person of Christ, Barth writes:

An abstract doctrine of the person of Christ may have its own apparent importance, but it is always an empty form, in which what we have to say concerning Jesus Christ can never be said. Again, it is almost inevitable that a doctrine of the work of Christ separated from that of His person will sooner or later give rise to the question, and perhaps even impose it, whether this work cannot be understood as that of someone other than that divine-human person....

What is needed in this matter is nothing more or less than the removal of the distinction between the two basic sections of classical Christology, or positively, the restoration of the hyphen which always connects them and makes them one in the New Testament. (*CD IV.1*, 127-8)

More precisely, by inclusivity in terms of being, I want to refer to one of Barth's larger divergences (which can be seen as mirroring his restructuring of the doctrine of the Trinity) from traditional dogmatics: the doctrines of the two states (humiliation and exaltation) and the doctrine of the two natures (very God, very man) and the doctrine of the three offices (priest, king, and prophet discussed above) are used to mutually interpret one another (*CD IV.1*, 132-

135). The structuring of God with us, covenant, revelation, trinity, are all made sense of as aspects of a whole in His “active person or His personal work” (*CD IV.1*, 128). This mutual interpretation is accomplished by highlighting that it is the humiliation of God, wherein God can freely choose, and has chosen to be for His creation as a creature. The point, here, is that Barth is making theological use of Hegel’s conception of an actual and a spurious infinite in terms of servanthood and lordship, and in terms of Creator and creature. Only the Creator is unlimited by anything besides himself and Barth makes the implications of this explicit. Jesus Christ is God and actively intervenes as man: “this One who takes part in the divine being and event He became and is man.... This is how God is God, this is His freedom, this is His distinctness from and superiority to all other reality” (*CD IV.1*, 129). God is God by becoming human.

The second aspect of this has to do with Jesus Christ as “man in the true way.” As human being in this true way (truly human, *vere homo*), Jesus Christ is not part man and part God but He is “altogether man in virtue of His true Godhead whose glory consists in His humiliation,” such that we have to deal with God and human being as a dynamic event (*CD IV.1*, 130). Barth argues that it is the fact of the difference in how Jesus Christ is a human that makes Him the mediator between God and man. However, he is equally quick to point out that it is indeed a human nature that is equal to our own—limited and suffering. In this way too, Jesus Christ reveals what it means to be truly human, and this “is a matter of the manhood of the eternal God of God” (*CD IV.1*, 131). In union with God, the human is free; Jesus Christ is a creature but not limited by this creatureliness such that He is not assured to sin—the humanity of God is in perfect obedience with its creator. (*CD IV.1*, 131). As true man, Jesus Christ is exalted, and the servant (creature) becomes a lord.

The third aspect of inclusivity in terms of being is Jesus Christ as Mediator, or God-man, which Barth avers does not so much say something new alongside the other two aspects but holds them together in a totality as one. Here, in discussing these three aspects of Barth's Christology in terms of very God, very man, and very God-man, we can see again the same trinitarian structuring made concrete that was discussed more abstractly in relation to God above.

Finally, the goal of discussing Jesus Christ and Christology in terms of inclusivity is to help clarify that in God's self-revelation He is the one who comes and is related to Himself in such a way that His external works are identical with the internal life of God, and moreover, God comes to His creation (what is different from Himself) in such a way as to draw it to Himself. As Dalferth concludes:

God is made actual in the work of the Spirit, in that he enacts his life as a process of self-actualization through the perichoretic differentiation between Father, Son, and Spirit. Each is what it is only in and from within the others. God lives and makes his divine life eternally real through the continuous self-differentiation and self-relating of Father, Son, and Spirit.... The point of God's self-actualization through the perichoretic differentiation and mutual indwelling of Father, Son, and Spirit is the realization of the love that God is. This love reaches far beyond itself and extends to what is other than itself: *it is precisely as God's self-love that it is his love for the other.*<sup>120</sup>

### 3.3 Unfolding the answers of Jesus Christ in his self-revelation

Even though Barth's careful structuring and Christocentric methodology are helpful in relating everything back to Jesus Christ, and therefore God, and illustrates the significance of what God has done in and through Jesus Christ and how this can apply to our own lived experience, there is more to be said. It is not enough that this can be understood in terms of the inclusivity of Jesus Christ. A more careful analysis of the unfolding of the life and proclamation as understood from the perspective of the resurrection needs to be attempted. This attempt will

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<sup>120</sup> Dalferth, *Crucified and Resurrected*, 232–33. Emphasis added.

be made in examining the language and answers to three questions—who is Jesus Christ, what is he for us, and how he can be what he is for us? A large part of Dalferth’s project in *Crucified and Resurrected* is to show how, when by examining the creedal statements, we ought to look at the types of questions and problems those statements were meant to answer. None of these questions can be answered satisfactorily in isolation, as we have established above. Agreeing with Dalferth, for an answer to be theologically sound, it must account for the “historical, eschatological, soteriological and trinitarian network presented in the Christological model.”<sup>121</sup> It is because of Jesus Christ, of trying to understand the three above questions, that the creeds are structured in the way they are and the Scriptures are written in the particular ways they are. But it should be immediately recognized that there is not a singular form in which the Scriptures are written, but rather there is a plurality of forms, styles, and implicit theological points and emphases. This makes any sort of simplistic distillation problematic, and it is why we have stressed that it is God Himself who gives authority to the Bible such that in this plurality of forms God reveals Himself, making a book into Scripture.

**3.3.1 Question 1: Who is this Jesus?**<sup>122</sup> To answer this question about the personal identity of Jesus, one must look to the scriptures that offer interpretations of his life and significance. In this sense, the category of the ‘historical’ is subsumed under a theological answer. This does not mean that history is unimportant, but rather that it is not the starting point of the search for who Jesus is. Because there are only texts, it is necessary to attempt to understand what those texts are

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<sup>121</sup> Dalferth, 85.

<sup>122</sup> Dalferth, 83–156. In answering the following questions, I am closely following Dalferth’s work.

trying to convey when they discuss who Jesus is.<sup>123</sup> Dalferth argues that “the Gospels are far from being biographies of Jesus.... By organizing the material available to them... the evangelists present *implicit Christologies* that can be theologically explicated.”<sup>124</sup> Dalferth further suggests that the gospels are introducing a mode in which to understand and recognize who Jesus is. This process of recognition provides a way of acquiring/appreciating who Jesus Christ is within the reader’s own environment rather than simply providing answers. Dalferth indicates that this can only be done by the individual concerned. Even so, “the personal responses are not arbitrary as long as we follow the inherent logic of the Gospel narratives and allow ourselves to be guided by the set of questions with which these texts confront us.”<sup>125</sup>

Therefore, in the context of the Gospels, how are we to understand who Jesus is? What are the authors trying to convey—what is this “good news?” Part of the consideration of the personal identity of Jesus Christ is to recognize who Jesus claims to be—the testimony of his life. The life of Jesus testifies through what he says, what he does, and *how* he does and says (the way, the life, and the truth). Dalferth summarizes “the essence of his [Jesus’s] public discourse and activity: the *proclamation of the dawning reign of God and the nearness of his love.*”<sup>126</sup> This essence is shown in three ways: by providing the “central content” of Jesus’s preaching, linking “the fulfillment of this preaching with the person of the preacher, Jesus himself,” and

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<sup>123</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). The beginning chapters offer a helpful discussion of reading that Wright calls “critical realism” to recognize the historical, yet somewhat ambiguous way of reading a text that works to understand what the text meant to those to whom it was written.

<sup>124</sup> Dalferth, *Crucified and Resurrected*, 89.

<sup>125</sup> Dalferth, 90.

<sup>126</sup> Dalferth, 91.

understanding both “in the same terms (as good news).”<sup>127</sup> This is the unity of form and content. This is the self-revelation of God. The “good news” can only be understood in the Gospels from the perspective of the Easter event such that “from the outset they construe the dawn of the reign of God as proclaimed by Jesus within the context of his story.”<sup>128</sup> The “central content” or “*subject matter* (i.e. the message of Jesus presented by Mark) ... [is] in the *coincidence of the proclamation and the proclaimer*.”<sup>129</sup> The point here is that Jesus does not just proclaim good news, but he *is* good news. Jesus’s identity is properly understood in terms of God, specifically as God for us (*deus pro nobis*).<sup>130</sup> This is learned from one of the ways in which Jesus addresses God, namely as Father. Father/Son language is of theological significance because it helps begin to formulate a trinitarian conception of God such that “the decisive theological factor is thus neither the image nor its application to Jesus in themselves but what is being said *about* God in applying it to Jesus.”<sup>131</sup> The image of the father clarifies the meaning of “God,” whereas “the story of the ‘Son’ fleshes out the meaning of ‘Father’; the testimony of the life of Jesus unfolds the meaning of ‘Son’; and the Spirit gives substance to the Fatherhood of God by illuminating the story of Jesus as that of the Son and as the key to understanding the Fatherhood of God.”<sup>132</sup> Again, we have a Trinitarian understanding of God being made implicitly in the Gospel’s

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<sup>127</sup> Dalferth, 91.

<sup>128</sup> Dalferth, 92.

<sup>129</sup> Dalferth, 93.

<sup>130</sup> Dalferth, 120.

<sup>131</sup> Dalferth, 108.

<sup>132</sup> Dalferth, 108–9.

themselves. The doctrine of the Trinity is not an arbitrary way of talking about God, but rather maps out the way that God has revealed himself as relational and for us.

**3.3.2 Question 2: What is this Jesus for us?** If the question of the personal identity of Jesus relates primarily to the historical aspect of a trinitarian and theological answer—if Jesus is God for us—then the sense of the ‘for us’ is the soteriological aspect. We are addressed (the rhetorical moment) and we are addressed by God (identity) for salvation. We must now consider the significance for us of the personal identity of Jesus Christ in terms of salvation. However, as has been noted, this is not a closed field of interpretation for the imagery of salvation; there is a starting point though—Jesus Christ. In using the scriptural basis, Dalferth argues that special attention ought to be given to the terms of Lord, Christ, and Son of God because they enable the organizing of Christological designations and therefore point to specific soteriological understandings. “The complete network of designations is essentially founded on a *grammar of trinitarian theology* that governs the whole of Christian discourse about Jesus Christ, God, ourselves, and our world.”<sup>133</sup> Because Christology always has to do with soteriology, that means Christology is also always about us—it is about the relation of Christ to us, and us to Christ. As ‘Lord,’ God’s power is given content and understood in a specific way through the life and resurrection of Jesus. God’s power is the power of love and faithfulness.<sup>134</sup> Soteriologically, this means that certain ‘strong-arm’ evangelistic methods are at best confused, and at worst contradictory to the good news of God’s salvific loving nearness and faithfulness because the form does not correspond to the content.

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<sup>133</sup> Dalferth, 123. This was also seen above in Barth’s collapsing of the Christological doctrines of humiliation and exaltation.

<sup>134</sup> Dalferth, 123.

The term 'Christ' also requires attention because this term links Jesus with the Jewish tradition in such a way as to provide a starting point for the hope of salvation in an eschatological sense, but also that Jesus is more than just the Jewish hope. Richard Bauckham, in his book *Bible and Mission* argues that there has always been an understanding that salvation should be understood as inclusive, moving from the particular (the Jewish people, now Jesus), to the universal (the world, everyone). He writes, "The realistic narratives of the Scripture can portray only the ever-recurrent setting out from the particular towards the universal in a movement which can move in a universal direction only by way of other particulars, since the goal is not an abstract universal, but the gathering of all particulars into the one kingdom of the one God."<sup>135</sup>

Finally, 'Son of God' importantly brings out the nearness of God as Father, through Jesus. It is not simply that the God who loves, loves everyone, but also that he is near to us like a Father (in the sense that Jesus expresses). Of salvific significance then is that through Jesus we are able to live in the presence of God. We are able to experience not just a salvation 'from,' but also a salvation 'for.' Once again, Dalferth helpfully expresses this conclusion: "Jesus's salvific significance thus consists in the fact that God brings about our salvation through him and his Spirit. God defines himself in him and through him as the one who draws so near to us as love that we are able to live wholly out of his presence and to thank him as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 16.

<sup>136</sup> Dalferth, *Crucified and Resurrected*, 131.



**3.3.3 Question 3: How is Jesus what he is for us?** If we have understood the identity of Jesus to be God revealing himself as self-giving love, and the salvific importance of Jesus for us as the nearness of God allowing us to live in his presence (address), then the question of how Jesus can be our savior refers back to God as well. It is by referring back to how God has defined himself in Jesus that we can understand how Jesus can be for us.<sup>137</sup> Jesus is what he is for us because of God's activity. God reveals himself to us in the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of the Son, Jesus Christ, and this is known by us through the Spirit (persuasion).

We can see that each question must be answered in relation to God and that as we answer each question our understanding of the terms grows as it is informed by who God communicates himself to be in Jesus Christ and through the Spirit. In order to speak of God in a Christian sense, then the meaning must have reference back to the activity of God as self-revelation. Because of the differentiation in God's self-revelation, God can only be properly understood from a trinitarian perspective. The grammar of Christian theology is therefore trinitarian in nature, not as a dogmatic artifice, but because that is how he has revealed himself. This is what the prior two major sections (revelation and trinity) sought to formally establish.

By answering these questions about Jesus Christ, Barth's Christological structuring of the doctrine of reconciliation, and by extension, Christian theology, is not only helpful, but appropriate. Barth takes the grammar of Christian theology seriously and by relating all things back to Jesus, in whom God has revealed himself, he is able to make sense of God, Jesus, ourselves, and our world, in a new way—and from this perspective (that of faith) one is able to see that Jesus Christ is in fact the divine event without which nothing else would be (creator/creature distinction). But it is not just about talking about God; rather it is a life lived in

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<sup>137</sup> Dalferth, 131.

relation to God within a particular, contingent, context. Dalferth makes the point that rather than christological statements being true because they accurately describe God, christological statements “are true because they give verbal affirmation to God’s self-communication by clarifying that God is understood... only in the way he has made himself understood in Jesus Christ and through his Spirit: all true communication about God is rooted in communication with God, which, in turn, is the result of God’s self-communication with us.”<sup>138</sup> Revelation is rhetorical, and this is both the *way* that God communicates Himself to us and *what* He communicates Himself to be for us—creative nearness of love in freedom.

It is not a matter of the content of truth but of the character of truth, of the identity of the divine work of grace with the divine Word of grace, of Jesus Christ who not only is what He is and does what He does but in so doing encounters us, testifying to us, addressing us, promising to us, pledging Himself to us, in all His majesty summoning us—in the right sense as a teacher and example—to come to Him, and in that way His own prophet, the prophet of His future as ours and ours as His. (*CD IV.1*, 138)

Barth’s structuring left room for specific hermeneutical questions to be raised regarding the ‘grammar’ of Christology. Following Dalferth’s work in analyzing the specifics of the Christian message, it can be seen that God has revealed himself as differentiated and therefore that he must be understood in a trinitarian manner. This was done by examining three questions: 1) who is Jesus, 2) what is Jesus for us, and 3) how can he be what he is for us. We can see that each question must be answered in relation to God and to ourselves and that as we answer each question our understanding of the terms changes as it is informed by who God communicates himself to be in Jesus Christ and through the Spirit. ‘God’ has to be understood from the trinitarian grammar of Christian theology. If not, ‘God’ is essentially an empty concept, divorced from confession, forms of life, and context, and therefore arbitrary.

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<sup>138</sup> Dalferth, 148.

Leslie Newbigin draws two helpful conclusions regarding the ethical implications of the dangers of failing to understand God in terms of a trinitarian grammar. The first is regarding individualism. If God is one, rather than Trinitarian, this understanding will have practical consequences in human society as people seek to be “selves” and understood as individuals, rather than to be understood as in relationship to other persons. “If the ultimate reality is this solitary, monarchical God, it is natural... to think that human beings are essentially separate individual units, to be understood in terms of their individual selfhood and not, in the first place, as members in society.”<sup>139</sup> The second observation that Newbigin makes concerns power, such that a unitarian conception of God can be used to justify the use of power and violence: “A model of ultimate reality in terms of a monarchical figure of unlimited power tends—it is argued—to validate a conception of human affairs in which sheer power is the ontological basis of everything.”<sup>140</sup> However, this is not the Christian understanding of God, this is not the God revealed as self-giving love and salvific nearness in the person of Jesus Christ and the mediation of the Holy Spirit. The central point is that the story of salvation is not between God on the one side and us on the other side but a divine event through and through: we are intrinsic to God and not outside or opposite to God, even while in no way necessary or equal to God.

## **Part II: Rhetoric and Revelation**

Throughout this presentation, I have shown how Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* are systematically concerned with the identification of form and content, and that they are likewise

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<sup>139</sup> Leslie Newbigin, “The Trinity as Public Truth,” ed. Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion* (Grand Rapids Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1996), 5.

<sup>140</sup> Newbigin, 6. There are also echoes of ideas stemming from Nietzsche’s concept of the “will to power.”

exhaustively rhetorical and hermeneutical. Jüngel interprets this metaphysically, as an issue about thinkability and the being of God, interpreting the Christological and trinitarian moves locating God in his coming such that “God is in that he comes to himself—from God to God as God.”<sup>141</sup> I have tried to, in some sense, replicate this move, but rather than understand it as he does to query this self-differentiation of God “about its trinitarian and ontological implications,”<sup>142</sup> I want to push this understanding in a rhetorical direction and thus point to the ethical implications particularly in relation to love and witness. Now, to conclude, we return to the beginning and attempt to understand Ebeling’s paradigmatic sentence in terms of all of the preceding. This will be accomplished following the distinctions Ebeling used in his analysis of the linguistic act in his paradigmatic sentence “I am saying something to you”: authority, responsibility, challenge to understanding, mutual understanding, and verification. In the course of exploring how the structure of the communicative event can be applied to God’s self-revelation (from the basis of that very self-revelation), the paradigmatic sentence is transformed to “God says God to God and to us.”

### *1. Authority*

However, from what has been said, it is arbitrary to describe God as the one who loves in freedom: it has been asserted, but not definitively shown. The goal is to examine the rhetoric of the event of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God—the *way* that God reveals himself—and to consider if the *way* is consistent with who he reveals himself to be—the one who loves in

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<sup>141</sup> Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 381ff.

<sup>142</sup> Jüngel, 380.

freedom. First,<sup>143</sup> if we follow Ebeling’s structuring from above, then the event becomes one in which God addresses humans in the same way as he addresses himself (the Word), which is following Barth’s and Jüngel’s method of thinking which follows after God.<sup>144</sup> The subject of the basic communicative event (the ‘I’ in “I am saying something to you”) is now God himself. And the question of authority—who is God that he can use language in this way, becomes radically different. It is the fact that God does enter our language in this way, in the parables and metaphors of Jesus,<sup>145</sup> and most explicitly in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that God “proves” his authority to “use” the language of his creation. However, again, what is the rhetorical nature of this authority in the way of its expression? The hermeneutical concern is in understanding how God proceeds, but part of that understanding is the ‘rhetoric’ of that ‘how’. Of significance is that God comes, as Paul writes, “for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Thus, God does not present himself as domineering, or totalitarian, or imperialistic, but rather as one who creates (re-creates, renews) those whom he addresses—we do not change for God to come, rather God’s coming changes us.<sup>146</sup> It is an invitation to accept (acknowledge, appropriate) this gift.

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<sup>143</sup> Because this is being structured following Ebeling’s basic sentence, there will be five points. This is in no way meant to imply a five-fold God—but simply to point out that the entire situation *coram deo* is because of God’s action.

<sup>144</sup> This will be considered and elaborated upon as we continue, but this was part of the reason to discuss the distinction between creator and creature as well as the nature of rhetoric as addressed above.

<sup>145</sup> Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 289–98. To grossly oversimplify this discussion, Jüngel, argues for the surplus of meaning available in both metaphor and parable.

<sup>146</sup> Philippians 2:5-8, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” (NRSV)

## 2. Responsibility

The second consideration is one of responsibility; here too the consideration is radically different if it is understood as the ‘why’ of God’s word to us. Here we deal with why God addresses us, such that God’s address is understood to be appropriate to the situation, that the word so addressed is the one that has the “power to set it to rights.” If God’s word to us is the Word, if it is God’s own self, then that has significance for our understanding of our situation. As Barth shows in his structuring of the doctrine of reconciliation, it is God’s action that reveals human sin; such is also the case here. God is responsible, not in that he is culpable for the situation, but in that he has the power to set the situation to rights and that it can only be accomplished by him. Here, in that God takes responsibility for *our* situation, he is revealing that he is free and that he is willing to do what we cannot do: to put our relationship with God in order. He does this not because he responds to our situation, but because he determines himself to be the one who so loves as to not want to be himself without the other (us).

## 3. The Challenge to Understanding

Third, in the challenge to understanding, we are not just addressed by God in freedom, but he says something specific to us, the ‘what,’ or the ‘content’ of revelation. The question of meaning becomes significant in this moment. At this point a brief aside on Barth’s definition of interpretation will be helpful. Barth argues that interpretation is saying the *same thing* in different words, with emphasis on ‘the same thing.’<sup>147</sup> As Jüngel paraphrases Barth, Jüngel is ‘interpreting’ what Barth says, as Barth works to ‘interpret’ the content (as an event and occurrence) of Scripture, which is the witness to Jesus Christ, who is God’s ‘interpretation’ of

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<sup>147</sup> Jüngel, *God’s Being Is in Becoming*, 27; Barth, *CD*, 2010, I.1:347.

himself. In the event of revelation, we are dealing with God's self-interpretation, such that he is revealing to us exactly what he is like and who he is.<sup>148</sup> Thus, God interprets himself by becoming present as he interprets himself. So, in the event of revelation, the 'something' being said as a challenge to our understanding, is God himself—He makes Himself present as He is: creative and redemptive love. God addresses because God has taken responsibility for our situation, and to take care of our situation, he has said himself. But again, the rhetorical question asks how has he said himself (as the *what*, the content)? Paul, in bearing witness, writes in his first letter to the Corinthians, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (2:2). The very same emphasis on the crucified Christ is attested to in all four gospels. God said himself in coming to earth and dying, even on a cross: therefore, "we are to read the statement 'God is love' as an exposition of the self-identification of God with the crucified man Jesus."<sup>149</sup>

However, this still does not establish that God is love, for many have found the crucifixion to be the revelation of a cruel and demanding God, who can only be satisfied with blood and death.<sup>150</sup> But that is not the Christian problem—faith understands that God reveals Himself as love, and then has to understand how the cross can be understood as a becoming present of God's love.<sup>151</sup> Here though, of decisive importance, it is God the Father, who loves his

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<sup>148</sup> This sentence may be misleading; in the view I am expounding, God is not a subject who says something as such, but the very event itself, and as such that which makes any subjectivity possible.

<sup>149</sup> Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 326.

<sup>150</sup> Dalferth, *Crucified and Resurrected*, 286–91. Dalferth traces seven varieties of critique of a *theology of sacrifice*: 1) historical, 2) logical, 3) moral, 4) theological, 5) sociohistorical, 6) hermeneutical, 7) exegetical. He moves the consideration from an idea of a theology of sacrifice to one of understanding *why* the New Testament speaks of sacrifice (as a 'picture') and what that means in terms of revelation—what is God revealing in Jesus's death and resurrection *about* the concepts of sacrifice; how should sacrifice be reinterpreted in light of Jesus.

<sup>151</sup> This carries the familiar structure of the problem of evil, such that either God's goodness or his power are contradictory to our experience. Here either the cross or love are taken as the starting point. In one case, the

Son, whom he *sends*, who dies and is *resurrected, for us*; it is not that God demands the death of his Son for satisfaction. “God defines himself in him [Jesus] and through him as the one who draws so near to us as love that we are able to live wholly out of his presence and to thank him as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,”<sup>152</sup> which identifies our new lives in the presence of God and recalls the second part of Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation: a movement from humans (specifically the human Jesus) to God. The Father is understood as loving in raising the Son, and the Son is understood as loving the Father in his obedience.<sup>153</sup> Or as Jüngel writes, “God *differentiates* himself in that he loves himself. In an irremovable differentiation within himself, he is *lover* and *beloved*.”<sup>154</sup> What is revealed on the cross is that God is love, and this can be spoken of in terms of sacrifice and death because of the soteriological significance of this event. In this event,

Christ represents the end of sacrifice and the sacrificial cult because he stands for the purification and reordering of the disrupted, damaged fellowship between God and humanity, which should have been restored, purified, and reordered through sacrifice but has now been restored, purified, and reordered once and for all *in an entirely different way* that will hold good for all eternity: God’s eschatological self-mediation on the cross and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>155</sup>

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cross indicates that God is not love. In the other case, love requires that the cross be reinterpreted as not primarily about violence and thus as revealing that God is love.

<sup>152</sup> Dalferth, *Crucified and Resurrected*, 131.

<sup>153</sup> Dalferth, 294. “The references to Jesus’s sacrificial death do not mean that the crucifixion is to be understood as a ritual act of killing. Sacrifice here has a figurative function: it gives intelligible expression to the concurrence of God’s loving commitment to Jesus and to Jesus’s commitment of himself to God’s love.”

<sup>154</sup> Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 327. In the same paragraph, Jüngel is also careful to point out that God loving himself is not to be understood as “the self-love of an I,” and that this differentiation acknowledges the language used in scripture: “In John’s language, he is God the Father *and* God the Son.”

<sup>155</sup> Dalferth, *Crucified and Resurrected*, 298.



#### 4. Mutual Understanding

Fourth, in Ebeling's structuring of the word-event, is the idea of mutual understanding. For God speaking as both lover and beloved (Father and Son), mutual understanding is an internal given. But God as a self-interpreting event reveals himself and as love, loves what is other (humans, creation). As the Holy Spirit, God is love itself—the love from the Father to the Son, the love from the Son to the Father, and just as importantly, the love of the Father and the Son for us. Without the Spirit, Lessing's "ugly ditch" is all too real. The idea of mutual understanding is radically transformed as well when God is both the one who speaks and the one who listens, when God is the "subject, predicate and object of the event of revelation."<sup>156</sup> This is why the rhetorical structure is "God says something (Himself) *to Himself*, and to us." But this means that *for us*, there is no access to God apart from God himself—mutual understanding is not something arrived at in the mediation of understanding between God and humans, one of give and take and compromise. The issue as mentioned above is to overcome a difficulty in the refusal to listen, which cannot be overcome on the part of the listener. And as our question has continually asked, what is the rhetorical way in which God reveals himself as love in freedom to us? As will be argued in the next chapter, God can only reveal His love lovingly. Once again, we must answer that in Jesus Christ, we are not dealing with an overpowering, domineering, power or authority, but a love that opens possibilities and *invites* us into the mystery of God's life as love. It is the Spirit who quickens the witness of scripture, that makes the Bible more than a book, and experienceable as that which interprets us, which addresses us, and in so addressing us as a language-event, there is "a surplus of meaning" that "truly opens up more and different

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<sup>156</sup> Jüngel, *God's Being Is in Becoming*, 28.

possibilities than has already been present in the actuality at hand.”<sup>157</sup> But more than just opening new possibilities, the very structure of our being-there is constituted by God’s self-communication. As Dalferth explains, “Reality is the creaturely manifestation of the unfathomable and inexhaustible self-interpretation of God, who makes Godself understandable for others by interpreting Godself for others as God interprets Godself for God.”<sup>158</sup> This is accomplished in creation, which furnishes the means for communication (a medium) in supplying the content that we use to conceptualize, speak, and interact with (the worldhood of the world), and furthermore, in that “God interprets Godself in *Jesus Christ*” to specify and concretize God’s self-understanding for us.

### 5. *Verification*

Finally, in terms of truth, Ebeling’s sentence has functionally been transformed from “I am saying something to you,” to “God is saying God to God, and to us” and in this structure, God “is the unfathomable and inexhaustible *making-self-understandable-as-itself-through-something-different* that makes it possible for others to understand themselves.”<sup>159</sup> In other words, in God’s self-interpretation, he makes himself understandable to himself in order to become understandable for and to us, and thereby opens the truth of our situation *coram deo*. It is God himself, in Jesus Christ, who constitutes and reveals that our true situation is one before God. And it is therefore God who enables and constitutes the hermeneutical and rhetorical

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<sup>157</sup> Dalferth, *Radical Theology*, 153.

<sup>158</sup> Dalferth, 155.

<sup>159</sup> Dalferth, 156. The condition of the possibility of this is that God makes himself understandable to himself by interpreting himself as love to himself.

situation of our being-there and being-with as creatures in creation, such that we can use language in the way of “I am saying something to you” to witness to the possibility of an ever-new event in which God is the “making-Godself-understandable-as-God truth-event.”<sup>160</sup> It is a love that opens possibilities and plays those possibilities into our lives as opportunities and chances to become the place where God’s love is at work in creation.

The next step is to examine more closely what is to be understood by “God is love” (1 John 4:8).

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<sup>160</sup> Dalferth, 156.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE REVEALING LOVE OF GOD

As we near the end of the study, our course has traveled a number of topics beginning with understanding the term ‘God’ and explicating a number of important methodological concerns emphasizing the inseparability of form and content. I then showed that these methodological concerns mapped closely to the concerns of rhetoric as the art of persuasion (form) and to hermeneutics as the art of understanding (content), such that address and confession, language, context, and agency are all essential concerns. Finally, in the previous chapter, I offered an attempt to demonstrate that Barth's dogmatic argumentation is hermeneutical and rhetorical through and through, i.e., it portrays God from the beginning and throughout as the one who makes himself understood and communicates himself to us as himself. In doing this, I also found significant support and agreement in the thought of Jüngel's attempt and Dalferth's work as they continue to unfold the implications of Barth's method.

However, in the concluding section, as God's love is discussed, it seems that ‘love’ is taken for granted. God the Father loves God the Son in the resurrection, and God the Son loves God the Father in his obedience, even unto death. God loves us (creation) in his coming (incarnation) and God is this love as the Spirit. The difficulty, even in all of this, is that ‘love’ is simply being applied to a series of actions (events) and not clarified in and of itself. In other words, why do we use the term ‘love’ to talk about God's being—why do we not say “God is wrath”; or “God is holiness”; or “God is wisdom” (which we *do* say, but not in the context of discussing the relationality of God [trinity]... should we?). 1 John 4 clearly makes the statement that God *is* love. The question is how should love be understood? In the larger sense of revealing, what, and in what way, does the God who is love reveal about us?

First, it should be clear that our answer lies in God. If God is love, then the only *possible* and *appropriate* understanding is precisely an understanding of God. The goal of the previous chapter was to clarify that God is who He is in his self-revelation, in self-relatedness (trinity), and in Jesus Christ. Briefly, we concluded that God has revealed himself as the Lord in the history of Jesus Christ. Here we can fully and unqualifiedly agree with Barth: “Everything that we have to say about the love of God can only be an exposition of this name, of the actuality of the history of Jesus Christ. To cease to expound this name is to miss the actuality of God’s love” (*CD IV.2*, 764). Our goal is to more closely analyze what it means that God is love in this light and how it in fact critiques and reorients us in our own experiences of love.

To do this, there are at least three steps, the first a consideration and analysis of both Barth and Jüngel’s conceptions of love. Jüngel helpfully criticizes Barth in regards to love, but he also encounters a methodological concern that must be addressed. Gleaning what is helpful from both, I will then attempt to offer my own (hopefully) more adequate account. Throughout, there will also be a recognition of the phenomenal nature of love as it is experienced. Finally, following Jüngel’s use of Luther, I will consider several of Luther’s ideas and how they allow for engagement with narratives in Scripture showing the plausibility of this understanding of love such that it is identical in terms of form and content—that the God who is love communicates lovingly.

## **1. Barth on Love**

One of the important aspects of Barth’s thought, as was brought out in the last chapter, is the dialectical aspect, such that by using event language we are able to make distinctions for the

purposes of discussion while acknowledging the unity. This was shown explicitly in unfolding the doctrine of the Trinity and in the inclusivity of the Christological thought patterns. God is the self-relatedness of Father, Son, and Spirit.

The reason why I have sought to suggest that revelation is rhetorical is because of the nature of God's self-revelation as love. Barth equates I John 4:8,16 and John 4:24.

The two explain one another. To say 'love' in the Johannine sense is to say 'Spirit'—the Spirit in whom God is wholly the Father of the Son and wholly the Son of the Father and as such the One who first loves us. And to say 'Spirit' in the Johannine sense is to say 'love'—the love which as and even before God loves us is the love in which as the Father He loves the Son and as the Son the Father. (*CD IV.2, 757*)<sup>1</sup>

By looking at the resurrection, death, and life of Jesus Christ (including His own witness and testimony), by seeing the trinitarian movements of *perichoresis*, the way of the Son into the far country and the homecoming of the Son of God, God interprets Himself as relational. He is essentially and actually these relations. And in these relations, God has interpreted Himself as the one who gives Himself in freedom. The word used in the Scriptural witness to identify this way of self-relating as self-giving is *love*. Barth argues the point thus:

In this triunity of His essence God loves both as and before He loves us.... In this triunity of His essence God is eternal love. In Himself He is both the One and the Other. And He is this, not in any reciprocal self-seeking, indifference, neutrality or even enmity, but in the self-giving of the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father which is accomplished in the fact that He is not merely the Father and the Son but also the Holy Spirit, and therefore as the Father is wholly for the Son, and as the Son wholly for the Father." (*CD IV.2, 757*)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See also Jn 3:35, 5:20, 10:17.

<sup>2</sup> This important passage begins: "The One who there spoke to man and still speaks to us, and in so doing discloses His own being and nature, is not an isolated monad which as such cannot love, or can love only itself, so that love is fundamentally alien to it, and it is only casually (not internally but externally) that it does also love. On the contrary, He is revealed to us as first existing in Himself as the One who loves. For He does not exist only in one mode. He exists in the mode of the Father and the Son. And He exists—this is the decisive point in the present context—in the mode of the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who is common to the Father and the Son, and who unites the Father and the Son." (*CD IV.2, 757*)

I want to suggest that it is in this sense, in terms of love, that revelation ought to be understood as rhetorical. However, if we can argue that God is love, and God reveals Himself, then God's self-revelation is of love. Thus, *love* is also rhetorical. Love is rhetorical in terms of identity, address, and persuasion. Love is rhetorical because love is relational such that the other is required and that address seeks a response—the love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Son for the Father, as well as the differentiation of the Father from the Son and the Son from the Father. Love is rhetorical because it is contextual and is not a relation of subject to object but of subject to subject. But this finally means that love is rhetorical because as relational, contextual, and concerning address, love has to do with agency. Love *creates* agency in that as address (and thus seeking a response) love creates room for that response; love creates freedom for a response.

### *1.1 Love and Sin*

This movement of love is most clearly seen at the cross of Christ. For as we have discussed, the Son of God is God in His obedience to the Father, even unto death (Phil. 2:6-11). But this moment of obedience, this self-giving of the Son to the will of the Father, seeks a response.<sup>3</sup> This response is not separate but simply another moment of the same work of God, the moment of resurrection, the affirmation, God's "yes" to His Son. And this moment is guaranteed for us by the witness of the Spirit—this is God. God is related to Himself thus, and as such has chosen to relate to His creation (us) as He relates to Himself—as love.

This is what is to be understood from the preceding chapters. However, there are still a number of things to discuss in terms of love. If love (as God's self-revelation) is in fact rhetorical in the ways mentioned above, and rhetoric is still to be understood as the art of persuasion, then

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<sup>3</sup> "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34 (NRSV).

it is also helpful to see that there is a goal, a *telos*. ““For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life”” (John 3:16, NRSV). It is the ‘so that’ that requires attention. Love is self-giving ‘so that.’ And it is thus necessary to also discuss what the goal of love is. God, in his self-revelation and identification with the Son on the cross and in the resurrection makes it clear that the goal of love, His goal, is unity in communion. This is the parable of the prodigal son: the father runs out to embrace the son and holds a feast in celebration ““for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!”” (Luke 15:24, NRSV). In fact, this is seen in all of the parables that Jesus tells in Luke 15: the restoration of what is lost to its proper place. The sheep is found—rejoice; the coin is found—rejoice; the son is found—rejoice! As Paul writes, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39, NRSV). This is Jesus Christ’s own witness to and interpretation of Himself and thus of love. It is forward-looking and salvific. It is a completion and affirmation of God’s faithfulness first and primarily to Himself and then to us. Thus, Barth can argue that “creation is the outward basis of the covenant (Gen. 1) and the covenant the inward basis of creation (Gen. 2) .... Finally, the story of the fall and its consequences (Gen. 3) is a happening which, for all its fearfulness, like the later resistance of Israel and the divine judgments which came upon it in consequence, does not take place outside but within a special relationship of the affirmation of man by God, of God’s faithfulness to man” (*CD IV.1*, 27).<sup>4</sup> God’s love is free because God does not need us—He has *elected* to be for us.

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<sup>4</sup> Barth also makes reference to the doctrine of creation in *CD III.1*, §41.



This *telos* has both its starting point and ending point in God Himself. This is the free decision of God *to be* in His *coming* (Jüngel), in His self-relation and in His relation to creation. This is God as Lord, and this God is love. God is not static but is this very coming, and this coming has the goal of drawing us to Him, to share in His life of love, not as equals, not as gods, but as fully and truly human—as seen in the exaltation of the Son of Man. As Barth argues, if indeed covenant and creation are so related (God’s will and act such that His will is His act and vice versa) then again it is in the resurrection, death, and life of Jesus Christ that the nature of the relationship of creation to creator is also made known. For,

God and the human element are not two co-existing and co-operating factors. The human element is what God created. Only in the state of disobedience is it a factor standing over against God. In the state of obedience it is service of God.... Where God is truly served, there—with no removal of the human element, with the full and essential presence and operation of the human element in all its humanity—the willing and doing of God is not just present as a first or second co-operating factor; it is present as the first and decisive thing as befits God the Creator and Lord. (*CD I.1*, 94)

In Jesus Christ, creation is not in opposition to the creator, and they are not “equally yoked.”

Creation is not “over against” the creator except in disobedience (which is only properly understood from the obedience of the Son of God). God is love in that He makes possible and *invites* us to be related to Him as He relates to Himself and to us.

However, what does the presence of an invitation indicate? What is this disobedience that places creation (human beings) over against the creator (God)? Simply put, it is missing the mark<sup>5</sup>, missing the end (salvation as life with God) for which we have been created. Sin is always to trespass against God and other people such that sin is a self-destructive act towards the order that God has created (*CD IV/1*: 398).<sup>6</sup> It is missing the mark in terms of a failure to relate

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<sup>5</sup> Recall the discussion on sin and missing the mark in terms of referring to God (Ch 1).

<sup>6</sup> “Sin is any attempt to be otherwise than who we are, that is, those who are with and for God and others. This attempt is always vain, accomplishing nothing. Not only are we morally wrong, but we are simply in error

in the right way and to the right things. In this sense, sin is necessarily related not only to the Creator/creature relationship, but also to the relationship between creatures. Sin is an act against creation itself, an act against the ordering work of God, and is revealed as that which is overcome by God. If humans are indeed properly understood as infinitely different in *kind* from God, then all sin is primarily sin against God and secondarily against the creation.<sup>7</sup> Through Jesus Christ the *total* person has been redeemed and made new because it is the whole person who is a sinner: “It is for the whole man, in his integrated unity in which he does what he is and is what he does. This disposed of the idea that actions are merely external and accidental and isolated. They are not, as it were, derailments. A man is what he does. Their wickedness and folly count. They are his wicked works and by them he is judged” (*CD IV/1: 405*). There can be no distinction between sinner and sin for Barth; sin is alienation and estrangement of who we have been created to be (our nature). In a word, sin is the disruption of form from content. Sin has embraced the totality of the human person—we are not what we ought to be (related to and open to God); therefore the solution involves the totality of God’s intervention. And the totality of God’s intervention is Himself—for God *is* love.

The last point to note about Barth’s understanding of sin is that sin too is dialectical—in the sense that when looking at moments of sin, whether of pride, sloth, or falsehood, we are only making distinguishing remarks. For sin to be revealed through Christ in the human response, sin will necessarily correspond negatively to the works and actions accomplished by the person of Jesus. For our present purpose, if God is love, then we as human are not love. If God reveals

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about what it means to be human.” Matt Jenson, *Gravity of Sin : Augustine, Luther and Barth on Homo Incurvatus in Se* (London, GBR: T & T Clark International, 2007), 151.

<sup>7</sup> Barth carefully acknowledges that by leaving sin in an abstract form there can be a failure to recognize objective evil, which thereby divorces thought and action into greater or lesser sins (*CD IV/1: 404*). But if sin is against creation and thus God, then such distinctions are not helpful or relevant.

Himself in coming both to what is Himself and what is not (God says God to God, *and to us*), then the negative correspondence is that we fall in upon ourselves. Therefore, in the same way that Barth distinguishes moments in Jesus Christ's life and work, yet it remains one work, one life, and one person, so too does sin in each of its moments of corresponding pride, sloth, and unbelief, remain sin—a movement away from God. In Barth's own words:

The error of man concerning himself, his self-alienation, is that he thinks he can love and choose and will and assert and maintain and exalt himself...in his being in himself, his self-hood, and that in so doing he will be truly man. Whether this takes place more in pride or modesty, either way man misses his true being. For neither as in individual nor in society was he created to be placed alone, to be self-controlling and self-sufficient, to be self-centered, to rotate around himself. Like every other creature he was created for the glory of God and only in that way for his own salvation.... He is man, himself, as he comes from God and moves towards God. He is man as he is open to God, or not at all. If he chooses himself in any other way, *incurvatus in se*, in self-containment, then he misses the very thing that he seeks. (CD IV/1: 421)

Sin is a person's "destructive opposition to God, his neighbor, and himself" (CD IV/2: 379).

Because we are explicitly working to understand what it means that God is love, and Barth deals with love as opposed to the sin of sloth, it will also be helpful to note this contrast. Thus, in light of the work of Christ as the Royal Man, the exalted human, as the second moment of reconciliation, sloth is the mundane failure to move towards God.<sup>8</sup> If pride can be understood as actively moving away from God, sloth is not moving towards God as obedient creatures following the command revealed in Jesus Christ's exaltation as man. This is human existence in

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<sup>8</sup> Discussions of sin, particularly in terms of pride and sloth, have undergone much debate in certain Feminist Theologies. The main thrust of these positions is that pride is not the characteristic sin of the experience of women in the aggrandizement and striving of selfhood. Rather, the paradigmatic sin for women is sloth, in the sense that it conveys a sense of the loss of self, and a failure to be properly actualized as an individual. It is significant to note that Barth does not allow for the separation of pride from sloth, and recognizes in sloth a certain mundane and ordinary failing. Additionally, for Barth, sin is precisely a failure to be properly actualized because it is a refusal to live in correspondence to our truly human nature as revealed in Christ Jesus. For further discussion, see Daphne Hampson, *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought* (Port Chester, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2001). [http://site.ebrary.com/lib/claremont/docDetail.action?docID=10023381&ppg=1.](http://site.ebrary.com/lib/claremont/docDetail.action?docID=10023381&ppg=1.;); Jenson, *Gravity of Sin : Augustine, Luther and Barth on Homo Incurvatus in Se*, 98-129.

“a very mean and petty world of evil” (CD 4/2: 404). By coming to man and humbling himself, Christ reveals that humans are proud. Likewise, since Jesus Christ as human has been raised up and exalted, He reveals that humans are slothful. Despite the initial contradiction between pride and sloth, Barth argues that while sin is always pride, it is also always sloth.

In addition to the active form of sin in pride—self-exaltation—sloth introduces inactivity as sin as well. As a point of clarification, sloth is understood as inactivity in a certain regard; as humans and created beings, our existence is constituted by our activity thus making the idea of sloth seem contradictory to our reality. Clearly, we cannot do *nothing*. Just as clearly, the activity of pride appears contradictory to the inactivity of sloth, and yet both are sin. Therefore, in what regard can sloth be understood as inactivity and not contradictory to Barth’s conception of sin (although sin is necessarily contradictory to human being)? Sloth is *lazy* disobedience. Barth clarifies,

The forbidden or reprehensible tardiness and failure of man obviously fall under the general definition of sin as disobedience. In face of the divine direction calling him to perform definite action, man refuses to follow the indication which he is given. Even in this refusal to act, however, and therefore in this inaction, he is involved in a certain action. The idler or loafer does something.... The only thing is that it does not correspond to the divine direction but is alien and opposed to it. He does not do what God wills, and so he does what God does not will. He is disobedient and he does that which is evil. (CD 4/2: 404-405).

In this way, it is the disobedience that counts as the constitutive action. In the above passage, it is the refusal to follow in a direction, and Barth expands on this refusal. First, and most significantly, it is a refusal of the freedom that is promised in Jesus (CD IV/2: 409). The refusal of freedom is developed in four different relationships: 1) between the individual person and God, 2) between the person and other persons, 3) between the person and creation, and 4) between the person and historical finitude. Once again, the point of emphasis is the pervasiveness and totality of sin and the existence of the sinner. We do not relate properly to

God, to each other, to our own nature, or our created contingency and finitude, and in refusing to accept God's word and judgment in Jesus, we as humans exist as sinners. And it is in precisely *this way* that God is love. He sets us free to relate to Him as we ought, in the way that Jesus does, as children and heirs of the promise, "so that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." For this is what love does—it addresses and creates a context, a situation for a free response—love creates agency.

### *1.2 Eros and Agape*

In the Christian tradition, much is made of the distinction between the specifically Christian love (*agape*) and other forms of love (*eros, philo*). In Barth, *eros* and *agape* are set up as contrasting forms of life—life moving in different directions and with a different center. This is an important distinction and helpful way of discussing problems of love and for recognizing what is particular about Christian love with a long history in Christian theology. On the other hand, as Jüngel notes in his criticism of Barth, *eros* and *agape* in themselves cannot be so dialectically opposed.

First is the task of identifying the opposition between *eros* and *agape* that Barth seeks to sharpen. To understand this opposition, it must be located in the context of Barth's dogmatic thought; hence the preceding discussion of sin as being a movement away from God and in on ourselves (*incurvatus in se*). Importantly, when discussing *eros* and *agape*, it is not that one is love and the other is not love. Both are love but they function and move in opposite directions and take different forms. For Barth, *eros* is intrinsically a circular love wherein the self is at the center and, as love, it desires but always for its own sake.<sup>9</sup> Love that turns in on itself, which is

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<sup>9</sup> "The movement of this love takes the form of a circle." (CD IV.2, 734)

grasping, and has the self for the center is *eros*. Barth makes the distinction that this form of love “does not have its origin in self-denial, but in a distinctively uncritical intensification and strengthening of natural self-assertion” (*CD IV.2*, 734). *Eros* as love is circular in the way that human sin is shown to be *incurvatus in se*, even as it goes out from itself and “may seem to give what is his, lavishing and dissipating it on the object of his love” (*CD IV.2*, 734). Yet, as *incurvatus in se*, this love only “seems” to give, for this giving is in fact a “means to win or keep or enjoy this object of his love” (*CD IV.2*, 734). Thus, *eros* is always in opposition to Christian love, even when seeking God, for it is possessive, grasping after God to *make* Him for me: “Beyond all other goods and values, it may even reach out to the Godhead in its purest form and thus be a most wonderful love of God. But in all its forms it will always be a grasping, taking, possessive love—self-love” (*CD IV.2*, 735-734). *Eros*, even in all of its activity, is sloth, for it is a lazy disobedience failing to move in the direction that we have been called—towards God.

If this is to be dialectically opposed to Christian love (*agape*), then Christian love (the love that is God) is that “which seeks and attains its end as the self-giving of the one who loves to the object of his love” (*CD IV.2*, 735). Christian love as *agape* is from God whereas, *eros*, because it is in fact opposed to this, it is from the “self-contradictory man” (*CD IV.2*, 748). For us, *agape* in this self-giving and in this correspondence to God, as in Jesus Christ, *vere homo*, love gives “to the other with no expectation of a return, in a pure venture” (*CD IV.2*, 745). And this is what we see in the Gospel narratives and the history of Israel, “[God] comes alongside us. In His life and work He does not exclude our life and work, but includes them. He imparts Himself to us, entering into relationship and fellowship with us. He gives us His heart” (*CD IV/2*: 788).

### 1.3 A Definition and Basis of Love

More precisely, Barth discusses three ways in which God is love functions as the basis for human love: 1) electing love, 2) purifying love, and 3) creative love. 1) Primarily, Barth understands electing love in terms of freedom; it emphasizes that love “is the free act of God” (*CD IV.2*, 766). Furthermore, this is the both God’s free act in determining Himself as Father, Son, and Spirit, but also in His external work for us. In this sense love is not necessary—there is no right, *a priori*, to expect love, let alone deserve it. Love becomes necessary in the freedom and self-revelation of God as He reveals Himself to be eternally related to Himself as this kind of self-giving love.<sup>10</sup>

However, while this emphasis on freedom is both appropriate and helpful, it also identifies the first difficulty with Barth’s presentation. Part of the reason for discussing *eros* and *agape*, as well as sin as *incurvatus in se*, was to provide context for the difficulty that Barth encounters. Even as we attempt to unfold what God’s self-revelation and self-interpretation for us means, such that He is in Himself as He is for us, it becomes difficult to distinguish God (who is love as self-giving) from *eros*-love (as love curved in on itself). For if God Himself is love as the inter-trinitarian self-relation, and He has freely chosen this, as Barth argues in terms of election, then how is the *for us* not simply the erotic *for me* (in terms of God)? For *eros*, as mentioned, can be self-giving too; it is in the purpose and goal that *eros* and *agape* are to be differentiated. Thus, regardless of God’s self-differentiation and relation as Father, Son, and Spirit, love remains self-referential—which was the essence and direction of *eros*.

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<sup>10</sup> “In no relationship to another is God committed and bound to love. It is He who of Himself decides to do this. He determines and makes this other the object of His love. He differentiates him as such. It is true even and primarily of the essential love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father that it is free; that it is not necessary in the form of a natural process; that it is necessary only in virtue of the freedom in which God loves eternally and is God in the freedom of this action.” (*CD IV.2*, 766)

2) In regard to purifying love, Barth argues that this is both judgment and grace. God, who is love, takes the problem of sin and its consequences seriously. This is what is meant by self-giving—“for God’s love is not a divine state. It is an act. Indeed, it is the life-act of God. It is the act of His self-giving, of His self-giving to sinful man as such” (*CD IV.2*, 772). As God’s act, which is free, which we see and experience in the resurrection, death, and life of Jesus Christ, we have to do with the dynamic nature of event, the relationality of God choosing to be in this way, *for us*. This is the Christological inclusivity, it is the way of the Son into the far country, and the homecoming and exaltation of the Son of man. This movement is purifying in the sense that sin is not ignored—God does not tolerate this disobedience. It is also free, for God does not have to come; He does. However, this disobedience is not only understood in judgment, but also in grace. “This is revealed in the fact that in the event from which the New Testament witness derives and which it declares grace and judgment are no longer two related but different and distinguishable sides or aspects of the love of God. But it is in His grace that God has exercised judgment, and in His judgment that His grace has triumphed” (*CD IV.2*, 775).<sup>11</sup> It is a gift that God comes to those who are undeserving, more importantly to those who are actively trying to be god for themselves and thereby disobey. God is love such that He reveals Himself as the one who is so concerned for His creation that He takes upon Himself His own judgment of it “in the person of His Son, suffering it as the judgment of death, and thus removing it once and for all” (*CD IV. 2*, 775-776).

Once again, a difficulty is encountered. The teleological aspect of God’s love (which is Himself and thus His own goal) asks the “so that” question. To what end is God’s love purifying

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<sup>11</sup> The passage continues: “In the history of Jesus Christ—quite otherwise than in that of Israel—it is one and the same thing (not two) that God chides and blesses; that He humbles and exalts; that He smites and heals; that He kills and makes alive. That which is deserved is itself that which is undeserved.... It is the completion of the history of the purifying love of God.” (*CD IV.2*, 775).



so that it is self-giving and thus *essentially* and necessarily opposed to the direction of *eros*? If the answer is salvation, then two further questions appear: what are we saved from, and what are we saved to (or for)? In terms of judgment, we are saved from the death that we have chosen in being curved in upon ourselves; in terms of grace, we are saved to the presence, relationship, and life of God. Yet, if this is the case, then why should we not understand God's love as *eros* as well? It is still a self-giving for the purpose of a return to the self. How can the act of love, in taking seriously sin such that both judgment and grace are passed, not be grasping and possessive? Here God is saying, "You *are* my people." A claim has been laid upon us: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19-20, NRSV).<sup>12</sup> But this claim, this price that has been paid, is also meant to be understood as grace, as a gift.

Previously, in discussing Marion, the distinction and bracketing of gift, giver, and givee that allowed only givenness to remain was problematized by the concrete circumstances of the gift.<sup>13</sup> And now, Derrida's assertion is relevant: "For there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity."<sup>14</sup> In fact, Derrida goes even further, arguing that "for there to be a gift, *it is*

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<sup>12</sup> Paul continues, in 7:22-24: "For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ. *You were bought with a price*; do not become slaves of human masters. In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God" (NRSV, emphasis added). I draw attention to this simply because it is easy to dismiss the first passage as referring to sexual sin and purity (fornication). But Paul uses the same argument later to extend his point—whatever one does, remember that you belong to God, the God who gave Himself completely for you. In fact, as Paul continues to discuss marriage, food, drink, the law, and how one ought to exercise Christian freedom, he concludes: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." (1 Cor. 10:31-11:1, NRSV).

<sup>13</sup> See also, Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Creatures of Possibility: The Theological Basis of Human Freedom*, trans. Jo Bennett (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2016), Ch. 4, 80-114.

<sup>14</sup> Jacques. Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 12.

*necessary* that the givee cannot repay, amortize, reimburse, acquit himself, enter into a contract, and that he never have contracted a debt.”<sup>15</sup> Marion establishes his idea of bracketing in arguing against Derrida (and Marcel Mauss) that the gift is primarily to be interpreted as economic, or as *exchange*. Marion concludes, “if there is givenness, it implies the suspension of exchange; it should therefore also break with the principles of sufficient reason and identity, no less than with the four forms of causality that economy, in its metaphysical regime, follows.”<sup>16</sup> Conversely, in the passages of Paul cited above, and in an understanding of God’s revelation as self-revelation, bracketing does not help. There is a fundamental exchange. Marion is correct in pointing out that many of the most important and authentic gifts “exceed all knowledge that the givee would have of it.”<sup>17</sup> And he is correct in recognizing that this failure of knowledge or identification of the gift can have a positive function in that “it permits the givee to bear its [the gift’s] excess—for even an unrecognized gift is still given, and it permits the gift to not depend on the givee, for a mistaken gift is still a gift given perfectly.”<sup>18</sup> It is the conclusion that givenness “demands” that the givee be bracketed that is problematic. There is a fundamental change in orientation and possibilities that occur in the coming of God as love *for us*. A bracketing of the *for us* seems to ignore and forego the rhetorical and the revelatory nature of God’s self. Barth’s point is that it is precisely *for us* because of who God is in Himself that He comes. However, this claim of God upon us still at the very least seems to be self-referential and Derrida’s observations regarding

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<sup>15</sup> Derrida, 13–14.

<sup>16</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 76.

<sup>17</sup> Marion, 76.

<sup>18</sup> Marion, 76.

the phenomenological aspects of the gift as exchange (again emphasized by Paul) seem to make Barth's distinction between *eros* and *agape* not as clear cut and decisive as he hopes.

This becomes even clearer when Marion, again working from Mauss and Derrida, argues that the giver must be bracketed as well. And this too is the problem that Barth wants to locate with love as *eros*, that, according to Derrida, "the gratifying image of goodness or generosity, of the giving being who knows itself to be such, recognizes itself in a circular, specular fashion, in a sort of auto-recognition, self-approval, and narcissistic gratitude."<sup>19</sup> Even in self-giving, the result is always aimed at the self. Marion recognizes this phenomenon, especially in the unacknowledged, rejected, or ignored gift. For in this case, "the loss becomes gain par excellence—the best possible outcome, since I in fact win infinitely more than I lost: myself over and against a gift that is worth far less than me."<sup>20</sup> Thus, in revelation, even self-revelation as love, the purpose of purification, the grace seen in the exaltation of the Son of Man, the differentiation in God's self that He freely chooses to relate to both Himself and us in this way, raises the question of effectiveness. Is God's work of reconciliation for us or for Himself? I think that there is a clear way out of this difficulty, but Barth with the strong and absolute distinction between *eros* and *agape* at the very least complicated the issue.

3) The third definition of love that Barth indicates is that love is creative. The creativity of love is addressed in two essential ways. The first way is that the God who is love shows that He is love in actually creating. This is also a way that Barth works to address the above criticisms. He argues that, second, this love is specifically creative in that it creates those who can also love. The love of God creates possibilities for human beings to be able to love, human

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<sup>19</sup> Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, 23.

<sup>20</sup> Marion, *Being Given*, 77.

beings *qua* human beings who are incapable of love because they are in fact sinners (*CD IV.2*, 776-777). According to Barth, and in agreement with the argument in I John 4, the love of God is creative love as “it creates it [love in human beings] as something completely new, making us free for love as for an action which differs wholly and utterly from all that we have done hitherto” (*CD IV.2*, 777). Thus, as opposed to Marion, who brackets the giver in reaction to Derrida’s analysis of the gift as exchange, Barth has especially emphasized the character and nature of the giver, the gift, and the recipient: “His love is His self-giving to and for man” (*CD IV.2*, 777). Moreover, in this grace (gift) Barth also emphasizes the lack of reciprocity—because love is creative, there is nothing it can expect in return. The creativity of love highlights a fundamental asymmetry between God and creation, the asymmetry that was emphasized in terms of Lordship and covenant previously. If God creates the possibility of love in human beings, then He cannot need to be loved in return. Furthermore, the gift of this electing, purifying, and creative love, according to Barth, “has nothing whatever to do with the pleasure of a triumphant love which attains its desire” (*CD IV.2*, 777). As Paul writes in his letter to the Romans:

God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.... For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (5:8, 10-12, NRSV)

And thus, we can also now see why Barth identifies love and Spirit in John’s writings. The Spirit is Gift. Love is a gift, and the Spirit is love. This gift (as and of love) creates a particular kind of subject, one who is likewise free to love in the same way she is loved, creatively.

## 2. Jüngel on Love

The digression into love, sin, and givenness (gift) illustrates a number of difficulties that Barth's qualitative dialectical method encounters in the opposition of *eros* and *agape*. In much the same way that Barth wanted to use the language of *modes* to talk about the Trinity rather than the more traditional *person* language while holding onto the truth of such discussions, I too think that using different language to discuss *love* is more helpful. In order to do this, I will primarily be identifying a particular strength of Jüngel's discussion of love in *God as the Mystery of the World*.

The main difficulty with Barth's presentation is his denial that God derives benefit or has any sort of intention in achieving His purpose in being as He has chosen to be through love. This is the difficulty of accounting for the "so that" in John 3:16. This is the difficulty of the joy in the finding and the homecoming of the parable in Luke 15. This is also the oddity presented by Marion and Derrida of decontextualizing and abstracting the all relationality from grace (gift). The distinction between *eros* and *agape* lacks clarity when we refer back to the movement and directions in the Barthian understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is relatively easy to see the self-giving aspect of incarnation, as well as the self-giving aspect of the obedience, even to death on a cross, but the homecoming, the return, and exaltation is less clear. How does the return movement avoid the grasping and self-referential nature and direction of *eros*?

I have tried to show how Barth attempts to overcome this problem, but Jüngel's embracing of the *desire* aspect of *eros* I think avoids the difficulty altogether. Rather than make all self-reference and self-relationality a curving in on one's self, Jüngel shows that desire is an essential aspect of God's self-revelation as love. Thus, Jüngel identifies love hermeneutically, phenomenologically, and formally as "the event of a still greater selflessness within a great, and

justifiably very great self-relatedness. Judged materially, love was understood as the event of the unity of life and death for the sake of life.”<sup>21</sup> God chooses to relate to Himself and in being so self-related can act selflessly (God gives Himself). As Michael Rea observes, “the idea that God *wills* our good is prevalent in the tradition, as is the idea that God wills union with us; and the fact that God wills something seems sufficient for at least the analogical attribution of desire for it to God.”<sup>22</sup> The important part of this to recognize is that just as ‘God’ must be defined from God’s self-revelation, so too ‘love’ must be defined from God’s self-revelation. Love is not something God has, it is not something He *feels* towards something other, for if this is the case, then as Jüngel observes, and the difference between God and human beings is annulled—we too seem to “have love.”<sup>23</sup>

In identifying God and love, the task is to understand that whatever is meant by Christian love is God, and vice versa. As I have shown in my exposition, the fact that God has revealed Himself as self-related and thus related to us, the fact that this has been witnessed to and interpreted by God Himself in the resurrection, death, and life of Jesus Christ, makes the identification of love with pure *selflessness* unthinkable. The form does not match the content. God *wills* to be selfless “*so that*” the other will be drawn into a life oriented and shared with God as a child of God (i.e., not as God). Yet, this means that God’s love (the God who is love) is

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<sup>21</sup> Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 317.

<sup>22</sup> Michael C. Rea, *The Hiddenness of God* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2018), 67. Rea is, importantly, not arguing from revelation. In this work he is showing that understanding divine love as idealized human love functions as a defeater for arguments that use divine hiddenness as a premise for the nonexistence of God. Likewise, even his point above about the will of God being understood analogically as desire is still problematic. My argument has been to show that God, who is love, reveals Himself as the one who *desires* to relate to Himself and to us in just such a way.

<sup>23</sup> Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 316.

not general and abstract, but particular and specific: “Love is oriented toward a specific Thou. It desires *this* Thou and not anyone.”<sup>24</sup>

There are two related issues regarding the consequences of how love is understood to connect the self and the other. The first regards the work of creation. If love is this abstracted, disinterested, or at least only self-interested, movement that is the life of God, then creation is reduced to an emanation. Emanation is the extra of God’s love, but it does not conceptually allow for God to *act* for us. Love desires the other and in this desire *creates*. This is what Barth indicates when he discusses the creation as the external basis of the covenant. And this is why Barth understands love as creative, for it creates something new, something that is open to the possibilities of love. But God has also chosen to be love towards and for His creation so that creation can participate in God as creation. The problem was that this was made less clear by the opposition of *eros* and *agape*.

The second issue has to do with the concept of sacrifice and surrender. It is often the case that the obedience of the Son into the far country, the obedience of Christ even to death on the cross is identified as sacrifice. This is then interpreted to mean that God requires sacrifice—sometimes to appeal to his holiness, sometimes to assuage his wrath. Both are problematic. For once again, there is a failure to account for the “so that”; a failure to account for the teleological purposes of God, inseparable from how He has revealed Himself. Simply focusing on the category of sacrifice, on the giving (even self-giving) is to mistake the form for the content. The rhetoric of such a love is that nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of God.

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<sup>24</sup> Jüngel, 318.

Jüngel continually makes this point that love is the unity of life and death for the sake of life. The love of God, the death of Jesus, is for the sake of life.<sup>25</sup>

### 2.1 Molnar's Criticism and Hermeneutics

Jüngel's hermeneutical method is very helpful in a number of ways, but Paul Molnar has recently accused it of an inconsistency in undertaking a phenomenological consideration of love to help unfold what it means that God is love.<sup>26</sup> At the heart of Molnar's argument is the notion that Jüngel imports concepts from below into understanding God's love and that this is due to a failure to recognize a separate doctrine of the immanent trinity that is not based upon the economic trinity. Molnar, writing in the Barthian tradition, like Barth seeks to assure the total freedom and independence of God as subject, but in this argues that Barth supports some form of a doctrine of the immanent Trinity.<sup>27</sup> It should also be noted that Molnar is specifically arguing against a number of implications and consequences of adhering to Rahner's axiom of the

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<sup>25</sup> More will be said on this matter of sacrifice and suffering later.

<sup>26</sup> Molnar, *Divine Freedom*, Ch. 9. Note that this is a Kindle edition. Citations will include a chapter and location.

<sup>27</sup> Molnar, "Preface," loc. 267. He writes: "Does it not encourage theologians to introduce some type of logical necessity into the inner life of the Trinity such that God's inner freedom is conceptualized more in terms of our experiences of love and freedom than in terms of God's actual freedom for us in sending his Son to become incarnate so that we might have life in his name (Jn. 3:16)?"

Some confusion and reversal of the creature/creator relationship inevitably follows the failure to consistently distinguish without separating the immanent and economic Trinity while at the same time recognizing that there is indeed only one triune God such that, as T. F. Torrance liked to say, there is no God 'behind the back of Jesus Christ.'" In this, we are in agreement. This idea is central to Molnar's project. Another iteration of his point: "My contention is that a contemporary doctrine of the immanent Trinity will help theologians recognize and maintain both divine and human freedom by stating with clarity that God's freedom in se as the eternal Father, Son and Holy Spirit exists outside of and apart from our experience of faith and salvation. By recognizing that God did not and does not need to act mercifully toward us ad extra, even as he in fact did so and does so in his Word and Spirit, we recognize the freedom of grace" ("Chapter 8: The Function of the Trinity in Jürgen Moltmann's ecological Doctrine of Creation," loc. 8867).



immanent and economic Trinity.<sup>28</sup> And it is to this statement of Rahner's that Jüngel gives "unqualified agreement."<sup>29</sup> Thus, Molnar's criticism.

The goal of Molnar's criticism I agree with, and it should be noted that Molnar recognizes the dissonance between Jüngel's argument in *God as the Mystery of the World*, and his earlier paraphrase of Barth in *God's Being is in Becoming*. And Molnar is again correct to draw attention to Jüngel's claim that theology has two tasks in understanding that God is love: "It must... do justice to the essence of love, which as a predicate of God may not contradict what people experience as love. And on the other hand, it must do justice to the being of God which remains so distinctive from the event of *human* love that 'God' does not become a superfluous word."<sup>30</sup> Molnar emphasizes Jüngel's point that our understanding of "God is love" cannot be understood as contradictory to our experiences of love. And he is right to criticize this formulation—if God's self-revelation is to be recognized as that which breaks in on our horizons of meaning, overwhelming our categories of thought, both dislocating and reorienting us, and if love is properly to be understood as electing, purifying, and creative, then at the very least, if God is truly revealing Himself, and He is truly love, and we have no access to God apart from God, then this love is, to us, *sui generis*. However, Molnar is also mistaken in recognizing exactly what Jüngel is doing. Due to the hermeneutical nature of the starting point—God Himself—for a horizon to be broken, to be overwhelmed, requires that there is a horizon. This is the basic understanding of creation, such that God creates what is other than Him. And if He is love, then by extension, we are not (at least in no comparable sense). But this also suggests that

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<sup>28</sup> Molnar, "Preface" loc. 260.

<sup>29</sup> Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 369–70.

<sup>30</sup> Jüngel, 315, emphasis original; Molnar, *Divine Freedom*, "Ch. 9, Eberhard Jüngel," loc. 10514.

we do operate within some horizon. ‘Love’ does in fact have meaning in our everyday conversations and circumstances. For instance, “I love ice cream,” “I love my wife,” and “I love my neighbor as myself,” are all meaningful statements and can get us no closer to understanding what “God is love” means.<sup>31</sup> Plato waxes eloquent about the pitfalls of rhetoric and the necessity of love (*eros*) in relation to knowledge. Augustine argues for an ordered love, a love that loves the right things. But it is Luther in the “Heidelberg Disputation” who distinguishes the other aspect of the creative love of God. It is also Luther to whom Jüngel turns.

Molnar argues that Jüngel’s statement, “the economic doctrine of the Trinity deals with God’s history with man, and the immanent doctrine of the Trinity is *its* summarizing concept,”<sup>32</sup> fails to appropriately account for the antecedent nature of God’s freedom (even if there is no access to this apart from revelation). Thus, Molnar concludes that Jüngel’s method in regard to understanding love means “revelation can only change the meaning of our preunderstanding of what love is; it is presumed that we know the truth and that revelation completes that knowledge.”<sup>33</sup> However, Molnar fails to account for Jüngel’s usage of the dialectic of law and gospel as “emphasized in the distinction of ‘revealed God’ and ‘concealed God,’” another aspect of Luther’s influence on his thought.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> With Wittgenstein, we can simply say that these sentences are meaningful in particular language games, and forms of life. I have tried to identify this as rhetoric—a lived expression with a purpose.

<sup>32</sup> Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 346.

<sup>33</sup> Molnar, *Divine Freedom*, Ch.9, “Eberhard Jüngel,” loc. 10534.

<sup>34</sup> Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 346.

### 3. Luther

Thus, to conclude this chapter, I will show the import of Luther's thought for understanding what is meant by "God is love." In this I am indebted to Jüngel, although I will show the rhetorical aspect of this statement by using it to interpret (as God has interpreted Himself) several passages of scripture. There are three points to be made in regard to God who is love: 1) Love is about life, and thus we have to do with the *living* God. 2) Love is personal, particular, and contextual—in this sense love is orienting. 3) Love is freeing and creative.

To begin: The distinction between God who is love and human beings who do love is paramount in the thought of Barth, Jüngel, and Molnar. In each case, love is not meaningless, but it is essential that Christian love can only be understood properly on the basis of God, who is both love and His own self-revelation. The error of imputing experiential elements of love into the understanding of God is the source of enormous pain and confusion in the witness of the Church. The metaphor of God as Father and the ensuing entailments of such a relationship is quickly read in terms of dominance, patriarchy, and negative associations with one's own father figures. While this may be primarily a pastoral concern, the overall task of theology is to clarify our understanding of faith to address just these kinds of concerns! This is the confessional nature of the task.

#### *3.1 Heidelberg Disputation and Matthew 9: The Rhetoric of Forgiveness and Following*

The 28<sup>th</sup> thesis of Luther's "Heidelberg Disputation" reads as follows: "The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. Human love comes into being through that which is pleasing to it."<sup>35</sup> This appears to directly align with Barth's own understanding of the

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<sup>35</sup> Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings.*, ed. Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell, 3rd Edition (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2012), thesis 28, 24.

creative aspect of God's love; however, Jüngel notes that Barth does not engage with Luther on this point—except to emphasize that God's love does not require *any* object.<sup>36</sup> Because of the connection between love and revelation, such that God reveals that He is love, suggests then that the three observations about revelation (objectivity, repetition, and totalizing and orientating) also apply to love. This understanding will be made clear by means of Luther's thesis.

In the proof of the thesis Luther argues that it is widely accepted that the “object of love is its cause.”<sup>37</sup> It has been our concern to refute this throughout our discussion—God's love is free, it is His decision and it is not caused by the object of love (either in Himself or for us). This accounts for both the electing as well as the purifying aspects that were noted in Barth. Love is both choice and gift. It is *free grace*. But Luther continues and identifies the real difference between the love of God and the love of human beings: “The love of God flows forth and bestows good. Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive.”<sup>38</sup> This relates to Barth's account of the creative aspect of love. What Jüngel draws out here is the fact that God's love moves towards what is unattractive thus highlighting the desire (*eros*) of God. Jüngel also suggests, through his phenomenological analysis of love, that “human love *makes* a person beautiful in a certain way;” and while this should be affirmed, its basis is not in love itself, but in the fact that even as created in love initially, sometimes we as humans correspond (accidentally) to God's love (and not vice versa).<sup>39</sup> Here, even as Jüngel

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<sup>36</sup> Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, footnote 34, 330. It should be noted that the translation of Jüngel relies on a different translation of Luther.

<sup>37</sup> Luther, “Heidelberg Disputation,” thesis 28, 24.

<sup>38</sup> Luther, thesis 28, 25.

<sup>39</sup> Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 330.

makes use of Luther, he does not adequately account for what the “love of man” is—Luther clearly states that “human love comes into being through that which is pleasing to it.”<sup>40</sup> Human love does not make things lovely or beautiful, but is thus attracted, and for that reason, Luther also notes that “human love avoids sinners and evil persons.”<sup>41</sup> As Luther continues defending this thesis, he cites Matthew 9:13, a narrative wherein Jesus says, “For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners,” and explains the verse in terms of the cross: “This is the love of the cross, born of the cross, which turns in the direction where it does not find good which it may enjoy, but where it may confer good upon the bad and needy person.”<sup>42</sup>

To clarify what Luther is getting at, and to offer a possible understanding of the witness of the gospel of Matthew to God, who is love, I want to place Matt. 9:13 in context. In this section of Matthew’s narrative, Jesus performs a number of healings. The first seventeen verses provide the essential framework to understand the rest of the activity in the chapter. It begins with Jesus healing the paralytic in verse two; what occurs is that Jesus tells the man his sins are forgiven, and then later, to *prove* that he has the authority to forgive sins, there is a work of physical healing.

This story is surprising. Imagine what this person (and his friends who carried him in) is thinking? They did not come to Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. They have a clear idea of what they want from this encounter. The man is paralyzed, and they *carried* him in. Obviously, they want him to walk again. They are on a quest for physical healing. Does Jesus know? Maybe the paralytic does need forgiveness, but it seems clear that he needs to walk too—this is the need he

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<sup>40</sup> Luther, “Heidelberg Disputation,” thesis 28, 24.

<sup>41</sup> Luther, thesis 28, 25.

<sup>42</sup> Luther, thesis 28, 25.

sees. The other side of this story consists in the accusation of blasphemy (Matt. 9:3) which is meant to indicate that Jesus is effectively declaring Himself to be God. And He is revealing this about Himself by stating that His work is the relational work of forgiveness and reconciliation—even to those who do not know they need it, to those who are “sinners, evil persons, fools, and weaklings in order to make them righteous, good, wise, and strong,” in the words of Luther.

The forgiveness of the paralytic sets the stage for the next pericope in which Jesus tells Matthew, the tax collector (and thus traitor to the Jewish people) to follow him.

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him.

And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard this, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” (Matt. 9:9-13, NRSV)

There are three observations from this passage that directly affect our point. The first is the invitation, “follow me.” There are a number of religious conceptions of what it means to follow Jesus, but our goal is to show the rhetorical nature of this request and how God’s love is revealing. The story seems to indicate that Jesus invited Matthew to follow him to Matthew’s own house to partake of a meal. Dietrich Bonhoeffer argues:

God’s commandment allows human beings to be human before God. It lets the flow of life take its course, lets human beings eat, drink, sleep, work, celebrate, and play without interrupting those activities, without ceaselessly confronting them with the question whether they were actually permitted to sleep, eat, work, and play, or whether they did not have more urgent duties.... The self-tormenting and hopeless question about the purity’s of one’s motives, suspicious self-observation, the blazing and wearisome light of ceaseless conscious awareness—all this has nothing to do with God’s commandment, which grants the freedom to live and act....

Rather, vis-à-vis God’s commandment human beings are allowed to be actually on the way (rather than always hesitating at a crossroads). They are allowed to know the proper decision as something that is truly behind them (and not just as something with which they are always faced). They are allowed, entirely without any inner conflict, to do one thing and not the other—which perhaps is equally urgent from the perspective of a

theoretical ethic.... And God's commandment itself can now give life unified direction and personal guidance, in the form of everyday seemingly small and insignificant words, sentences, hints, and aids.<sup>43</sup>

Before the issue whether there should be a distinction between God's commandment and God's invitation is addressed, Bonhoeffer is recognizing and affirming the goodness of human activity in doing *human* things. Thus, God's "command" to "follow me" means to eat dinner with God (at least directly in this particular story). It means to share a table with God. Not a special table, but the table that Matthew eats at normally, the table he uses every day.<sup>44</sup> Following Jesus starts where and when God speaks to us and involves everyday life. It is not something different but it changes everything, and thus, "follow me" does not deal with all new experiences but with a new experience of experience. We are dealing here with the totalizing and orientating aspect of self-revelation in which we are invited to live life as children of God, in the kingdom of God.<sup>45</sup>

In the same way that Jesus tells Matthew to follow him back to his own house for dinner, at his own table, Jesus does not instruct him to alter his company by distancing himself from friends, family, or the people with whom he would normally eat. The question of the Pharisees is about the people at the table. When Jesus comes to us, where does he find us? Right where we are and it is there that he asks us to follow him, not out of and away from the lives we live, but back into them. Thus, Jüngel, in discussing love, and building up to Luther's thesis, asserts that

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<sup>43</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Clifford Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles West, and Douglas Stott, vol. 6, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2005), 384–86.

<sup>44</sup> To elaborate on this point, one could discuss the "table" thus: it is the table you use everyday and that holds your mail, and your groceries, and various seasonal decorations. The table that has chips, stains, pencil marks from kids doing homework, water rings from parties, and maybe a little bit of breakfast still on it. It is your table. Or recall Psalm 23:5 "You prepare a table before me/ in the presence of my enemies" (NRSV).

<sup>45</sup> Or, in the oft underestimated theological and Lutheran acumen of Nietzsche: "Jesus said to his Jews: 'The law was for servants—love God as I love him, as his son! What are morals to us sons of God!'" Friedrich Nietzsche, "Beyond Good and Evil," in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, Modern Library ed. (New York: Modern Library, 2000), §164.

“Love wants to radiate.... For that reason, love does not lead into an idyllic retreat from the world, nor into a realm beyond, away from all lovelessness, hate, or even inattentiveness and boredom. Rather it leads into all of these, engages in struggle with them, and moves more deeply into them.”<sup>46</sup> It is in our actual lives that the work of forgiveness and reconciliation starts—this is to where the God who is love comes. It is at the table, it is in the instructions to “follow me,” that God’s love and God’s coming reveals itself (Himself). Jesus’s invitation to “follow me” always begins with God coming to us.

Moreover, in the context of the story of the paralytic, forgiveness and reconciliation by way of opening new relational possibilities of love is what God’s coming to us and the invitation to follow indicates. It is the God who is love who brings forgiveness and reconciliation. I want to emphasize how following Jesus is not about religious rites, piety, or ceremony, for while these activities may point to something new, they lack the totalizing and orientating features that are indicated with God’s coming. Following Jesus requires that the ordinary and everyday, the truly human be included in the life of God. If God sees his own work as primarily about forgiveness and reconciliation, then it is possible that forgiveness and reconciliation is where we should start when we try to understand what it means to follow Jesus. ‘God’ is a relational word, ‘love’ is a relational word, ‘gift’ (grace) is a relational word, and thus we come to understand ‘forgiveness’ as a relational word as well. In Greek, the most basic meaning of the term used for ‘forgiveness’ is “to send away”. Forgiveness is a relational term and carries the same structural components analyzed in ‘gift’ language above. Forgiveness requires one who is the forgiver, one who is forgiven (or can be) and something—action, word, etc.—which can be forgiven. Forgiveness is the way that these terms are related. Forgiveness requires a context. In our story, it is Jesus

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<sup>46</sup> Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 325.



(forgiver) and the paraplegic (forgiven) and the sins (thing to be forgiven). But how are they related? What or who is “sent away” –the root meaning? Is it the paraplegic? Does Jesus leave? Or is it the sins that are sent away? Forgiveness is about removing barriers to healthy, proper, loving, life giving relationship. And God has done this for us, even though we fail to recognize our need for it—He has created this possibility for us. Following Jesus is about entering into the new life of being set right by God—about entering into his forgiveness and reconciliation. The love of God *creates* what is pleasing to it.<sup>47</sup>

God, as love, creates because He is self-giving in such a way that He desires to relate Himself to what is other than Himself. But God, as love, also reconciles. To consider salvation as rescue from our mistakes is too narrow—it is a salvation for something, to share in the life and love of God. Thus, creation requires salvation regardless of the problem of sin because there is no way for us to share in God’s life unless and without God making it possible. Because He has accomplished the work of salvation in such a way, in sending his Son, in coming to us, we can understand the magnitude of the problem of sin—nothing less than God himself can fix the problem, can reconcile us to Him. Again, as Jüngel clarifies this point, he states “the love which God is cannot be understood only as a love which *radiates* into lovelessness. It *involves itself* with that lovelessness. That counterpart which it finds is not worthy of love. Rather, it makes what is totally unlovely into something worthy of love. And it does that *by* loving it.”<sup>48</sup> This is the rhetorical point to emphasize, that form and content are inseparable: God is love and thus always acts and reveals Himself lovingly.

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<sup>47</sup> See Jüngel, 358–59. Jüngel’s discussion on reconciliation, the law, and forgiveness of sin as *incurvatus in se* is very helpful. It should be noted that he does not explicitly use the terminology of *incurvatus in se*, and that he primarily uses Mark’s text to make his point, whereas I obviously made use of Matthew.

<sup>48</sup> Jüngel, 329.

There is one final point to make in regard to exploring this possibility of reading Matthew 9 as witnessing to the revealing love of God. Verse thirteen in full reads: “Go and learn what this means, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners” (NRSV). The quote from Hosea 6:6 is interpreted by the sentence that follows it. There are two things to note in this regard. 1) Sacrifice is again not the goal. It is not self-giving for the sake of self-giving. Love does not just *radiate* for the sake of radiating. It is merciful. It is in fact the *gift* of *not* receiving what *is* deserved.<sup>49</sup> Or, as the Hebrew texts translate the quote from Hosea, “for I desire *steadfast love*, not sacrifice” (NRSV).<sup>50</sup> 2) This simply reiterates that the love which is God desires, bestows, and makes good (lovely) what is not, as Himself (steadfast love).

### *3.2 Law, Gospel, and the 10 Commandments: The Rhetoric of Command and Invitation*

Above, Bonhoeffer raised the issue for us of the command of God, whereas the argument that I have been pursuing suggests that God’s self-revelation, as love, and thus as rhetorical (in the sense that it must then be persuasive), functions as an invitation. This issue of command is part of the Lutheran dialectic of law and gospel. The thesis I am proposing is that the aspects of witness that are generally taken as law are in fact still functioning rhetorically as invitation and not as command. To illustrate this, it is most helpful to again look at Luther’s thought, particularly as he develops this dialectic in his “Large Catechism.” The first point, however, is to agree with Barth that we ought to reverse Luther’s dialectic, understanding it as gospel then law.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Contrast this with our understanding of free grace, i.e., receiving what is unexpected and undeserved.

<sup>50</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>51</sup> “In the true Christian concept of the covenant of God with man the doctrine of the divine election of grace is the first element, and the doctrine of the divine command is the second. It is only in this concept of the

This is possibly one of the most central distinctions in Luther's thought, and this distinction of law and gospel appears in almost all his writings in some form or another. I will briefly indicate several places where the "law and gospel" appears and its importance for an overall understanding of Luther's theology. Essentially, it is difficult to understand Luther without understanding the law and gospel distinction.<sup>52</sup> Gerhard Ebeling aptly assesses the importance of this distinction in terms of the doctrine of justification: "The proper function of the doctrine of justification is that of giving a true significance to all other doctrines. But it can only be understood as Luther saw it if it is identical with what is implied by the distinction between the law and the gospel as the basic guiding principle of theological thought, and therefore as the decisive standard of theological judgement."<sup>53</sup>

First, the law and gospel distinction clearly appears in the organization of his catechism (specifically, or at least explicitly, the "Large Catechism"). The structure begins with the Ten Commandments, followed by the creed, the Lord's prayer, and then sacraments. Here the distinction between law and gospel serves both an ethical and theological function. The Ten Commandments, with special emphasis on the first commandment and what it means to have a

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covenant that the concept of God can itself find completion. For God is not known and is not knowable except in Jesus Christ" (*CD II.2*, 509).

Or, Barth also writes: "But because the risen and living Jesus Christ is the one Word of God, this Word—as the community hears and proclaims it—is the one Word of the divine will and act of reconciliation. It is God's Yes to man and the world, even in the No of the cross which it includes. God says No in order to say Yes. His Word is the Word of that teleologically established unity of the death and resurrection of Christ. It is the Word of the cross as the promise of life, not as the threat of death; as the Gospel, not as the Law; or as the Law only as it judges and directs as Gospel, demanding unconditional trust and total obedience. That is how the community hears this one Word. And it serves it as this one Word. It does not come before the world, therefore, as an accuser, as a prosecutor, as a judge, as an executioner. It comes before it as the herald of this Yes which God has spoken to it." (*CD IV.1*, 347)

<sup>52</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought*, trans. R.A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), Ch. 7-8. Ebeling offers very helpful insight into the significance of the law and gospel distinction for Luther's thought as the basis for theological thinking grounded in the centrality of justification.

<sup>53</sup> Ebeling, 113.

God (something in which you trust fully) proceeds to show that the commandments are not just prohibitions, but that they possess positive instruction and content as well. All of the other commandments are in some sense referred back to the first commandment.<sup>54</sup> For instance, the fourth commandment on honoring one's father and mother is extended to honoring civil authority and God himself, but also that those in authority ought to exercise that authority as God does towards us.<sup>55</sup> The enumeration of the ways of failing to obey this commandment and the identification of all the evil suffered because of such a failure is also important to note; one of the chief functions of the law for Luther is to point out sin. Thus, the commandments are law, which point out sin, aid in curbing sin (only to a point), and create a fear of God's wrath for failure to obey. Ebeling identifies these two uses of the law as the theological and the civil use, one furthering God's purposes towards creation, and the other "limiting the consequences of sin."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> See Chapter 1 on use of the term 'God'.

<sup>55</sup> Luther, "The Large Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther, 1529," 321. Luther writes, "In connection with this commandment, we must mention the sort of obedience due to superiors, persons whose duty it is to command and to govern. For all other authority is derived and developed out of the authority of parents."

Even more important to our overall point is the fact that Luther argues honor is higher than love because it includes obedience. While Luther's point is to recognize the import of properly ordered relationships (such as we have also done in stressing the creator/creature relationship) as more than simply affection, it remains problematic. Thus, Luther writes: "For it is a much higher thing to honor than to love. Honor includes not only love, but also deference, humility, and modesty directed... toward a majesty... Honor requires us not only to address them lovingly and with high esteem, but above all to show by our actions, both of heart and body, that we respect them very highly, and that next to God we give them the very highest place" (315). Conversely, we have shown that love includes obedience in the self-revelation of Jesus Christ, and not vice versa.

<sup>56</sup> Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction*, 138–39. "But because this takes place in the context of the preaching of the gospel, the accusation brings about a saving renunciation of self justification, and the death it brings becomes the first step towards life. Luther says that to understand, stand, teach and carry out the law in this way is the true, 'theological' use of the law, for it furthers the aim of God's action towards man. It serves the true work of God by carrying out his 'strange works'. For God kills in order to bring to life...."

This is the 'civil use of the law', the *usus civilis* or *politicus*, as Luther described it. If the law is limited and restricted in this way and regarded soberly and without illusions, its valuable earthly function becomes clear. The law provides in the world as it now is, a sinful world, an irreplaceable and necessary service, so long as it is not misused to provide justification in the sight of God, but is intended to lead no further than to worldly, secular righteousness, namely, by limiting the consequences of sin and subduing man."

Next, in the “Large Catechism,” is the creed, broken down into three articles. Luther places special emphasis is on the second article on Christ as the redeemer. The creed identifies the Gospel as the promises of God and chief among these promises is that He is a gracious redeemer while we were yet sinners (failing to keep the law). As such the chief role of the Gospel is to point to the promises of God. In view of this the Gospel (as pointed to in the Catechism) points back to the first commandment and what it means to trust fully in something—and the correct thing to trust fully in is God, as he has shown and promised to be good and worthy of such trust. Hence, the Lutheran and Protestant emphasis on *sola fide*.

Finally, and importantly, is the third part of the catechism on the Lord’s prayer. This is the work of the Spirit as sanctification as well the work of the Spirit as holding the law and Gospel together. Here, prayer functions as response to God, obeying what he has commanded, and seeking that what he has promised in the Gospel would be true in a personal and existential way: *for me (us)*. It is in this way that the Spirit graciously allows us to do what God commands, and this is the mark of faith. Works do not gain merit, they reveal faith. As such, law and Gospel are held together by the sanctification of the Spirit, as the law is completed by the Gospel through the Spirit. Again, Ebeling is instructive:

On the other hand, the gospel is of its very nature a distinction between the law and the gospel. Thus the gospel is not present in a pure and undefiled form when it stands on its own, untroubled and undisturbed, with its relation to the law never considered. In such isolation, the gospel could not be the gospel. For the gospel only comes into action when it does so in distinction from and in opposition to the law—and when as a result the law is really the law.<sup>57</sup>

However, the law and Gospel distinction also appears in the context of scripture and scriptural interpretation. Luther suggests that all of scripture can be divided into law or gospel, and he denies that this is to be identified strictly with the old and new testaments. The distinction

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<sup>57</sup> Ebeling, 118.

again refers to commands and to promises, and again, the goal of the law is to primarily point out sin. Those parts of scripture which help to identify sin would be categorized as law, and those parts that illustrate and tell of the promises of God (specifically in the good news of Christ) are gospel.

While this distinction can be seen in his writing on free will, on sin and grace, and on theology, the general significance of this distinction is that for Luther they are to occur and be discussed in this order: law then Gospel. For the Gospel and the promises of God make sense and are desired only in light of the fear of the wrath of God for the inability to keep the law. The gospel is good news for Luther because of and in relation to its distinction from the law. As indicated above they are properly held together by the Spirit (and this reveals that the Law and Gospel distinction is in fact a Trinitarian distinction: law—God the father, creation; Gospel—God the Son, redemption). Yet, this distinction also takes place in the human person and is directly related to the doctrine of justification, as noted above. For in this life, the tension between the law and the desires of earthly life mean that we are never without sin, but the Gospel means that the promises of Christ hold good for us, and God does not count our sin against us, even as we become more Christ-like by the work of the Spirit.

This incredibly brief (and inadequate) treatment of Law and Gospel will at least allow for the necessary contrast. The reason to focus on this distinction is due to the understanding of scripture, revelation as self-revelation, and God as love being comprehended as rhetorical. For instance, if we understand the Ten Commandments as law, then the justificatory import is in the relation they bear to our inability and thus need for God.<sup>58</sup> The command of God, if it is truly

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<sup>58</sup> Ebeling, 133–34. Again, Ebeling is instructive: “It is possible to let the coming of Jesus and even the cross have such an effect on oneself that it is treated as a statement of the utmost severity of the law. Or else, for example, one can understand the first commandment in such a sense that the voice of the gospel is heard in it. If what we have said is true, that the only true use of the gospel is faith, then we may be so bold as to state the reverse,

God's self-revelation, has to be understood as love as we have come to understand that God *is* love. Therefore, even as the Ten Commandments are considered as law, such that they require and establish the *ought* of human action, and set the limits on human sin, *as* scripture, they witness to God's self-revelation. In other words, the task is to understand how these commandments witness to God. If the Christian is to take as definitive that Jesus Christ is God revealing Himself to us as love, then the commandments cannot be understood as revelation apart from Jesus Christ, and thus love. The result is that the commandments are not "laws" but are telling us (primarily in a negative sense) how God relates to both Himself and to us (thou shalt not...). God is not related to us by bearing false witness, by covetousness, by killing, or adultery. In the same way that salvation and forgiveness reorient us and make us free to love our neighbors as ourselves, enabling us to relate to and be related to God as Jesus is, as *truly human* (open to God), the commandments are an *invitation* to relate to God and each other in correspondence to God. If the introduction to the commandments is taken seriously, then the claim is that these are God's people, chosen and thus representative of Him.<sup>59</sup> If these commandments are meant to witness to the self-revelation of God, the God who is love, then they cannot be reduced to moralizing. And if the good news is that God comes to us as love in Jesus Christ for the work of reconciliation, to *create* us anew as His people (children of God),

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so long as it is properly understood : every word to which I listen in true faith, and in accord with Jesus, that is, every word which is the word of God for me, in that it becomes for me the word of faith, becomes for me a testimony of the gospel—even if it is the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. On the other hand, everything to which I do not listen in faith is the word of the law.” The distinction of law and gospel is made in faith, and importantly the Ten Commandments need not *only* be understood as law. Nonetheless, as Ebeling continues, it is also clear that the commandments *do* function as law: “Anyone who seeks to comprehend the reality of the law need look no further than the Ten Commandments. It would be difficult to find elsewhere so elementary, so striking and so concrete a formulation of the absolute demand made upon him in the sight of God, as a human being in relation to his fellow-men” (135).

<sup>59</sup> “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:2-3). See also Ex. 19:1-6.

then the “law” is not abolished but fulfilled (Matt. 5:17-18). God *is* related to us in this way; we can now relate to each other, by the gift of God, as God relates to us, as love. In this sense, again, form and content are inseparable. It is only from the perspective of the gospel, of God’s self-revelation, that the law does in fact witness to God. As such, this distinction is collapsed such that there are not two rhetorical modes of God’s self-revelation because it is in fact *self*-revelation, and God has revealed Himself as love. God repeats Himself.<sup>60</sup>

### *3.3 The Freedom of the Christian: The Rhetoric of Love and Freedom*

The law and gospel distinction, as understood only from the perspective of the gospel, such that commands are witnessing to how God relates to Himself and us, leads to one more important thought from Luther regarding love, particularly in relation to freedom. Luther makes this point in understanding commandments in his rather famous work on Galatians, “On Christian Liberty.” As Paul writes in Galatians, “For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (5:13-14, NRSV). There are three considerations: 1) what do we mean by freedom? 2) What does Paul mean by love? And 3) how are freedom and love related? Luther summarizes the relationship with these two theses: “A Christian is lord of all, completely free of everything. A Christian is a servant, completely attentive to the needs of

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<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the law and gospel dialectic also traces helpfully onto the aspect of love as *purifying* in the thought of Barth. In the same way that love is both judgment and grace, so too is law and gospel understood as love.



all,”<sup>61</sup> and then proceeds to show how these two paradoxical theses are in fact dialectical moments.

1) Freedom: We are called to be free. First, the implication is that if we are called to freedom, then in some respect we are lacking freedom. In Galatians 3 and 4, Paul discusses the movement from a slave to a son, from a slave to the gods, to a son of God. Paul is playing particularly on the legal rights of slaves vs. children, and the capacity to exercise those rights. Moreover, this calling to freedom is not to do whatever you want. Freedom is not understood as isolation, or aseity, or apathy.<sup>62</sup> Freedom is not removing ourselves from the complexity of relationality with what is other, but creates ways of engaging with the other. This is the kind of freedom that Paul is talking about, the kind of freedom that we have in Jesus Christ, a freedom to serve one another in love, for love creates freedom.

2) Love: How should love be understood in this passage, bearing our theme that God is love? Paul argues that the church is to serve one another in love, and that the law, which has been a target of Paul’s ire up to this point, is here summed up by the golden rule: Love your neighbor as yourself. Given our above discussion of law and gospel, it should be clear that Paul has drawn attention to a transformation. To clarify, this idea of loving yourself requires a new orientation, as naturally, human love only loves what is attractive—naturally, human love is grasping and curved in on itself, desiring itself.<sup>63</sup> This cannot be the understanding of the law. As

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<sup>61</sup> Martin Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian (1520),” in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings.*, ed. Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell, trans. Mark Tranvik, 3rd Edition (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2012), 404.

<sup>62</sup> Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 373. “By orienting this distinction between God and God to the Crucified One, we have significantly corrected the classical doctrine of God. For this distinction between God and God based on the cross of Jesus Christ has destroyed the axiom of absoluteness, the axiom of apathy, and the axiom of immutability, all of which are unsuitable axioms for the Christian concept of God.” And because they are unsuitable axioms of God, they are also unsuitable axioms of Christian love and freedom.

<sup>63</sup> More colloquially, “Please don’t love me like you love yourself!”

discussed, the law, in light of the gospel, as witness to the self-revelation of God, corresponds to God. The law is meant to show how to live in God's *way*, how to live like God, to reflect and show God to other people and to the nations (for Israel), i.e., the way of love. How one loves herself is not the starting point of the command. This summary of the law is revealing how God loves, the God, who is love. God loves us like he loves himself, and the command is to love in correspondence to God's love. It is God who loves his neighbor (creation) as himself (Jesus Christ), in fact, who creates a neighbor to love, and who saves His neighbor whom He created, and who draws this neighbor, whom he created and saved, into his own life of love as He has done for Himself and for us in Jesus Christ. This is the love of God on the cross, the love of God for us, and the love that we are meant to and able to (to a degree and secondarily, through the grace of God) correspond.

3) Freedom and love. God reveals Himself as free in that He acts for us. This is not freedom for the sake of freedom, but freedom for the sake of love. In fact, God reveals Himself as the one who is absolutely free in that He loves what is different from Himself. This is seen explicitly in God identifying with Jesus on the cross. Only God can be free in this way, to embrace and engage with death and nothingness, and still be Himself.<sup>64</sup> God as love is freedom *to* love. Paul seeks to establish the point of a legal (according to the law) relationship to emphasize the *new* relationship to God He has enabled. Christians have the rights of the sons and daughters of God—and we have an example in Jesus of what it means to live in this relationship. What did the Son of God do? How is he love for us? As Paul writes in Philippians:

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind,

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<sup>64</sup> Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 383. "God goes into the far country when he goes to the death of Jesus. But even in death, he involves himself in nothingness, but he is not conquered by nothingness. Even in the far country of death, God comes to himself. Thus he is the victor over death! God comes to himself even in the death of Jesus Christ, the Father to the Son."

having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross. (2:1-8, NRSV)

Love and freedom are related in such a way that freedom makes room for love, and love loves to create freedom. Jesus came and called us to freedom, he set us free, free to love, and in his love he has in fact made us free. If we exercise freedom selfishly, lovelessly, it is lost.<sup>65</sup> In the same sense, “the strength of love is limited to the event of love. If love ceases to happen, it ceases to be.... There is no such thing as a standstill in love.”<sup>66</sup> We are aware of this in many of our personal relationships. It is a recurring theme in narratives of all kinds, that of unrequited love. Love cannot be *manufactured*. Love cannot be *forced*. Love is rhetorical as it can only be persuasive and invitational—when love ceases to *be* in such a dynamic way, at the very least, it

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<sup>65</sup> It is once again helpful to look at Nietzsche’s discussion of the will to power. He does not provide a normative ethics, but he does subject all expressions of the will to power to a logical test of commensurability—will this instance of overcoming, the actual achievement, stop future achievement? Is the expression of the will to power nihilistic? If the answer is yes, then Nietzsche says that it is opposed to life. See Bernard Reginster, “The Will to Power and the Ethics of Creativity,” in *Nietzsche and Morality*, ed. Brian Leiter and Neil Sinhababu (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 43.

In the same way, we can apply this to freedom—does this instance of choice ultimately create more freedom? If love does not create freedom, and if a decision does not create freedom, then it is not a loving decision. This is in fact, the same point that Luther makes against Erasmus: if one cannot do anything good without help, then that means one can only do evil. If one can only do evil (one thing) then where is freedom? See Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, Baker Academic (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).

<sup>66</sup> Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 324–25.

ceases to be Christian love (and by extension, love entirely).<sup>67</sup> God's freedom works (creation, reconciliation), and is effective for it is freedom in love, love which is free (grace) and freeing (creative). Love, then, from this analysis ceases to be love if it ceases to be free. Thus, when Christians love their neighbors as themselves, they love and give in such a way that they allow the freedom of a new experience, an experience of the freedom and love of God, so that they too can be free to love their neighbors. Love creates freedom; freedom acts in love.

#### 4. Conclusion

This exploration of what is understood by the statement that God is love has interpreted the statement in terms of God's self-relatedness as revealed in the resurrection, death, and life of Jesus Christ (history). By explicating Barth's conception of *eros* and *agape*, we concluded that this left a difficulty in terms of God's desire (will) and thus freedom, to be for us. This was somewhat assuaged by examining the basis of Christian love (God) as electing, purifying, and creative. In the course of discussing the relation of judgment and grace as moments of purifying love, "gift" was understood as radical grace, and as rhetorical: the gift has to be understood as a "hermeneutical phenomenon."<sup>68</sup> Jüngel's analysis overcame the difficulty by asserting that God

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<sup>67</sup> Whether a partner, a child, a friend, love is not love if it is communicated without love. One cannot demand, "You *must* love me!" One can only hope a partner, a child, or a friend, will love in return. Adding an ought or duty to love seems strange and out of character. And yet, that is what we do with our conceptions of God when moralizing or when sinning. We place foreign restrictions on what God can and cannot do as opposed to the parable of the hired farmhands in Matt. 20. God loves in freedom and in so doing He makes what He loves lovable, without making what has become lovable love in return.

<sup>68</sup> Dalferth, *Creatures of Possibility*, 2016, 92. Dalferth's analysis emphasizes the radical passivity and the structure that is necessary to understand the gift. Importantly, he argues, "the code word *gift* does not denote *something*, neither an object nor a thing, but rather a *particular social use* of objects or things: in other words, a particular way of communicating" (93). This is what I have been emphasizing in terms of God—God is not *something*, but the very relationship of communicating those relationships in a particular way: love.

as love explicitly desires—for love is (formally) “that still greater selflessness within such great self-relatedness.”

However, Molnar criticized Jüngel in allowing human conceptions of love as capable of guiding and directing our understanding of what it means that God is love. The issue at stake is significant, for the whole point of revelational theology is that thinking about God must follow after God. At the same time, Molnar glossed the significance of Jüngel’s hermeneutical method, which implies a concept of love and structure that is hermeneutically and phenomenologically available. It is *within* this horizon that God reveals Himself and challenges, critiques, and creates a new way of loving, as love Himself, *for us*. Following in the direction that Jüngel points, three aspects of Luther’s thought were examined along with three possible interpretations of the witness of scripture.

From the “Heidelberg Disputation” it was emphasized that the love of God creates and makes the object of His love lovable, and I followed Luther’s clue in looking to Matthew 9. The goal was to show that God’s self-revelation as love is loving and thus rhetorical: God addresses us, by identifying with us in Jesus Christ where we are (historically and in creation), and in so doing *is persuasive* (creates genuine new possibilities from the context of the actual and creates the freedom to respond). In this respect, we also saw that self-revelation, as love, then creates the possibility for us to be truly human in correspondence to Jesus Christ. This in turn led to a discussion of Luther’s distinction of law and gospel, wherein the Ten Commandments are shown not to be a different rhetorical form, but rather remain, as God’s self-revelation, a revelation of God who is love. The commandments thus have to be read in terms of the gospel, and are not a list of moralizing instructions, but a revelation of the God who is love and how He has chosen to relate to His creation. In Jesus Christ, we are invited to correspond to God and live in that

correspondence. Finally, Luther's theses in *Concerning Christian Liberty* were discussed to clarify how love and freedom ought to be related based on God's self-revelation. The conclusion is that form and content are inseparable. How (rhetoric) God comes to us (as love) is identical with who He is (God is love).

One final consideration will help make these points clearer. Through Johannes Climacus, Søren Kierkegaard shares a concern about how two who are qualitatively different (a king and a peasant) could share a life of love together.<sup>69</sup> The problem, as Kierkegaard presents it, is not that the king cannot love the peasant girl, but *how* to convince (persuade, in fact, *love*) the lowly maiden to love him back truthfully, without resentment, without questioning his love. It is not necessary that she love him, but it is desired because, in fact, he loves her. The issue raised here should not be dismissed lightly—for the premise and argument up to this point has been that in ourselves, we as human beings are radically undeserving of God's love. On a personal level, this can create the same resentment felt by the maiden, desiring to be loved as an equal, for oneself, not what can be made of you.

Alone he grappled with the sorrow in his heart: whether the girl would be made happy by this, whether she would acquire the bold confidence never to remember what the king only wished to forget—that he was the king and she had been a lowly maiden. For if this happened, if this recollection awakened at times, like a favored rival, took her mind away from the king, lured it into the enclosing reserve of secret sorrow, or if at times it walked past her soul as death walks across the grave—what would be the gloriousness of erotic love then! Then she would indeed have been happier if she had remained in obscurity, loved by one in a position of equality contented in the humble hut, but boldly confident in her love and cheerful early and late.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments, Johannes Climacus*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, vol. VII, Kierkegaard's Writings (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 26–36.

<sup>70</sup> Kierkegaard, VII:27.

The difficulty is the difficulty of love itself. How can one communicate “I love you” in such a way that the possibility of a response “I love you too” can be true?

Two solutions are offered by Kierkegaard. In one case, the maiden is raised in status to be the equal of the king, but she must remain in awe of the splendor and distracted by the difference and would thus “be essentially deceived.”<sup>71</sup> Their love is unhappy, at least on the part of the king. The second solution is one of descent, wherein the king moves down to her level, and becomes a servant. Problematically, this is simply a “plebian cloak” for the king, but for God, “it is his true form. For this is the boundlessness of love, that in earnestness and truth and not in jest it wills to be the equal of the beloved.”<sup>72</sup> This is the story that we have been telling, that God is who He is in His self-revelation. God is the one who goes into the far country, He is the one who returns and is welcomed home. In the incarnation “the form of the servant was not something put on.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, Jesus Christ, as God “must suffer all things, endure all things, be tried in all things, hunger in the desert, thirst in his agonies, be forsaken in death, absolutely the equal of the lowliest of human beings,” for He asks us the question put to Peter: “Do you love me?” (John 21:15-17, NRSV).<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Kierkegaard, VII:29.

<sup>72</sup> Kierkegaard, VII:32.

<sup>73</sup> Kierkegaard, VII:32.

<sup>74</sup> Kierkegaard, VII:32–33.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE RHETORIC OF WITNESS

The revealing love of God is understood rhetorically as God's self-revelation. As such, the content of God's self-revelation, namely that God is love, must be communicated as love and thus lovingly. From this we understand that love creates freedom and freedom (can and should, in order to be free) acts in love—this is in fact how and what is to be understood from the resurrection, death, and life of Jesus Christ. The final thesis is that, because God's self-revelation is rhetorical (an expression of the divine form of life), and He creates the new possibility of being in correspondence to Him, then our human witness to the work and act of God is also rhetorical (an expression of a new openness to that divine life). Importantly, it is a corresponding witness not simply when it is reported *that* God is love (content), but only when it is reported that God is love *in a loving way* (form). When there is a failure in the *means* of this communication, it is at least questionable if the content is the same.

If part of the initial criticism of Marion is in his consideration of agency, then it is worthwhile to consider our response to revelation, especially if we are going to take seriously the methodological considerations of the first part. It is not just that we confess, or make a confession, but *how* do we confess—how do “I say something to you?” What is the form of life in which we make such a confession, and how can/ought that confession inform the form of life? When, where, and to whom do we make our confessions? And finally, in what sense is the confession a response to what is given—where does human agency have meaning in this relation of dependency, even radical dependency?

The first step will be to return to the ideas of confession and forms of life recognizing that, as Wittgenstein correctly points out, confession and new life in Christ is reorienting:



So this can come about only if you no longer rest your weight on the earth but suspend yourself from heaven. Then *everything* will be different and it will be ‘no wonder’ if you can do things that you cannot do now. (A man who is suspended looks the same as one who is standing, but the interplay of forces within him is nevertheless quite different, so that he can act quite differently than can a standing man.)<sup>1</sup>

There is now, in light of God’s action (event, speech-event), a responsibility (in the true sense of responding) to witness to this new way of being-in-the-world (love), which is now the subject at hand. I want to suggest that a fundamental ontology (Heidegger, Gadamer) discloses a fundamental ethic as a matter of pragmatically enacting “an understanding that defines the ‘basis’ of our being-in-the-world.”<sup>2</sup> The witness of the Scripture to God’s self-revelation is a witness to God’s relationality for us and in Himself. For us, He is in Himself this relationship of freedom in love: one that creates, and thus He is also one that reconciles and forgives. God defines our being as relational being in this way. In Heideggerian terms, because being-with is a structural *apriori* of being-there, then authenticity is not so much a matter of *merely* pulling away from the Other, but of reintegrating this new understanding of one’s own potentiality-for-being back into the everydayness of the ‘they’. Rhetorically, as an expression of a form of life that is persuasive and invitational, this expression is also intrinsically social and political. The recognition that God, in the person of Jesus Christ, is *for me* shapes and defines what it means to live, act, and be in the world. God’s self-interpretation interprets us—we find ourselves

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<sup>1</sup> Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 33. It is important to note that “we” do not suspend ourselves, or acquire this new orientation on our own. It is in a way experienced as an event and we find ourselves, by the grace of God, able to recognize that we are indeed suspended from “heaven” in this way.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Schmidt, “On the Sources of Ethical Life,” *Research in Phenomenology* 42, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 37. In context, Schmidt writes: “Such an ethics should be understood as neither theory nor practice; it is, rather, founded in how we make sense of our world, how we understand, and this cannot be fully accounted for as a theoretical matter, nor does such sense emerge as a matter of practice alone. Properly understood—something I do not believe that Heidegger himself quite achieved—such an ethics undercuts or deconstructs the very notion of a theoretical/practical divide, since it concerns the formation of that character out of which both theoretical and practical relations to the world emerge. Understood in this way ethics is much more a matter of an enacting of an understanding that defines the “basis” of our being-in-the-world. It is that for which one bears absolute responsibility, since it returns one to that which is most of all one’s own.”

addressed. Therefore, in terms of rhetoric (because of the hermeneutical understanding and reorientation), the individual Christian will model her life on the life of Christ—He is the living paradigm. Christ is the paradigm in the sense that He shows us how to live a life before God, in the presence of God, and that to love God, we must love our neighbors, for they are God’s neighbors first.<sup>3</sup>

Within the context of the Church then the role of proclamation (our response to revelation) occurs specifically. What and how do we proclaim? Barth seems to focus on proclamation as preaching the word because that is distinctly Christian. While I do not think he is wrong, I do think that his approach can be misconstrued, and then viewed as too narrow. It is easy to miss how ethics is completely integrated throughout the *CD*. I tried to avoid such a misreading by utilizing the concept of rhetoric and expanding that concept to express a form of life. Because the Christian faith is universal in scope—God is the creator and redeemer of all that is—the Christian faith will always have to witness in all things, activities, and places, to the God who reveals himself as love—it is a total reorientation. Just as the *way* in which God reveals Himself is known to be consistent (identical) with *who* he reveals himself to be, so too ought our witness—the *way* in which we live, speak, and act, reflect *who* we have been understood to be by God. The hope is that in our witness, in the basic situation of “I am saying something to you,” God himself can be experienced (God says God to God, and *to us*). In the passivity of faith—the recognition and realization that we have been loved by God—we have new freedom, new possibilities to love others, in such a way that they too, as recipients of transformative love (a

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<sup>3</sup> Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Creatures of Possibility: The Theological Basis of Human Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 122–23. He writes: “[Concrete love of one’s neighbors] is not founded on the reciprocity of like for like but in the experience of having become God’s freely chosen neighbor without having a right or entitlement to it; and since God also relates to all others as his freely chosen neighbors, one can rely on God in every situation, for people do not choose God; God chooses people. Everyone therefore has a right to be seen and treated as God’s neighbor just as much as oneself. Seen in this light, love of one’s neighbor becomes a reorientation of one’s life by God.”

love that makes us lovable), experience God. In that God repeats himself in revelation, our witness to others consists of the hope that God will make his presence known in his absence—that in our witness, room is made for the possibility of God repeating himself again to the other, not just structurally but actually. Ebeling’s sentence shows the framework wherein authority, responsibility, the challenge to the understanding, mutual understanding, and verification all take place in a derivative manner, and are to correspond to the love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. It is not ‘I’ who understand what God has done, but rather that God has addressed ‘me’ and in so doing given me a new understanding of myself, my world, and you. In a word, God has opened up new possibilities to love the other, and in so doing, make the other lovely. This is the love of God on the cross: that we give ourselves, in correspondence and witness to the God who is love, over to death, for the sake of life.

As being-there, the rhetoric of witness is necessarily always already involved in and constituted by a world of others and of concern. But being-there has been given new meaning in the self-revelation of God and new possibilities for understanding in light of this self-revelation. The rhetorical and hermeneutical situation is one of acknowledging that “the ways Jesus goes about loving and saving the world are personal: nothing disembodied, nothing abstract, nothing impersonal. Incarnate, flesh and blood, relational, particular, local.”<sup>4</sup> As such the rhetoric of witness remains a matter of *phronesis* that is concerned with the means of achieving a goal, in relation to that given goal. “Ways and means permeate everything that we *are* in worship and community. But none of the ways and means can be compartmentalized into functions or isolated as concepts apart from this biblical and Trinitarian world in which we follow Jesus.... If

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<sup>4</sup> Eugene H Peterson, *The Jesus Way: A Conversation on the Ways That Jesus Is the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2007), 1.

any of the *means* [rhetoric] we use to follow Jesus are extraneous to who we are in Jesus—detached ‘things’ or role ‘models’—they detract from the *end* of following Jesus.”<sup>5</sup>

### *Witness and Proclamation*

The goal in suggesting that God’s self-revelation is rhetorical has obvious ethical implications, and I have merely begun to tease them out. One particular recurrent theme has been that of self-giving. I now want to briefly address this theme in relation to witness by looking at the ascension and the promise of Pentecost in Acts 1. “‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’” (Acts 1:8, NRSV).

As discussed, the Spirit as love is the mediator and guarantor of God’s self-revelation and thus it is in the coming of the Spirit that witness to God’s self-revelation (that He is love, and the eschatological and soteriological implications therein) is possible. The Spirit comes. It is only the act of God’s Spirit that enables and allows us to witness. Said another way, since God *is* love the only way to witness *to* love is because of God. The Spirit comes and in that coming we are sent as witnesses. This is the structure of love that is so related to itself that it is creative for the sake of the particular other.

It was argued that in I John love and the Spirit are synonymous because God is love and as such God is understood as the relational unity of Father, Son, and Spirit, *for us*. This means that the coming of the Spirit is the coming of God, but it also prohibits an understanding of love abstracted from our understanding of God. God shows us what love means and love in this understanding is what God is; God is not any love, God is this kind of love (self-giving in

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<sup>5</sup> Peterson, 2.

creative freedom “so that”). The initial premise was that theological thinking follows after God—God is thought about because He has revealed Himself in some of way—thus, theology is properly faith seeking understanding. Natural theology and general revelation are both unacceptable starting points in this understanding.

It is a common practice to divorce the way, the truth, and the light. Religious and theological talk has problematic tendencies of becoming hyper-focused and thus (forgive the colloquialism) “miss the forest for the trees.” ‘God’ is discussed but not in relation to God—hence theological thought ceases to follow after God. God is reduced to a conceptual idea, a speculative thought, a mere idea, or a first cause, none of which take seriously the relationality of the *living God*. Yet, we continue using word the ‘God’.

As such, the manner in which God commandeers language and reveals himself provides both the content and the form for our witness. For our witness to correspond to God it means only that we create space for a response—for that is what love does, it creates possibilities from what is actual. Furthermore, in our witnessing we do not bring, activate, entice, persuade, or manipulate God’s self-revelation into taking place. If the Spirit is the one that enables us to witness (because the Spirit is love), then the Spirit also has to be the one who reveals Himself.

This is part of the context in which Dalferth discusses human being in terms of radical passivity.<sup>6</sup> Yet, the other side of this radical passivity is to witness because it is rhetorical. Because we are always already in a world of relationships, we are always witnessing to someone, in some sort of a context, about something. Importantly, we do not witness to everybody—at any given time, we can only witness to someone or some particular group of someones. That means they are addressed and that the basic situation is rhetorical (an expression of a form of life). In

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Dalferth, *Creatures of Possibility*, 2016.

this address, we attempt to create some kind of identity (metaphorical) for a purpose. Recalling Ebeling's paradigmatic sentence, when communicating with someone I identify something as something for some reason. The goal is that in this task of identifying one is persuasive. Yet, in this sense persuasion can only be an invitation because of factors that constitute being persuasive: it has to be a free choice, and that means my presentation has to enable a choice, opening up a possibility. Moreover, the goal is not just to open up possibilities but to show the other these possibilities while saying "Try this one." As such, the presentation is always personal, contextual, it is for something, and it is also confessional. One witnesses as a confession: it is not in a confession because it is one's witness. Confession and witness are not about the individual but about what is being confessed. It is not that I am loving, it is that God loves me. Because God loves me, I can tell you He loves you too. It is in this structure that the command is an invitation "love your neighbor as yourself."

To clarify this point about witnessing and confessing, it is helpful to consider the term 'martyr'. Formally, 'martyr' does not have anything to do with dying. This connotation of death arises in the Christian tradition and becomes standardized in English in large part because of the first century martyrs; however, the primary understanding of martyr is "witness." Thus, all persons who have faith are martyrs.

When witnessing to something, the object/subject that is indicated is reflected in that witness. Much like with confession, it is what (who) is being confessed that is determinative, not who is confessing. Similar to Aristotle's thesis that the object of love is its cause, so too can we suggest that the object of witness is not just its cause but also its form. Death is an *accidental* feature of witnessing; except in the Christian case because one is witnessing to the one who loves so much that he goes to his death for the sake of life. If we are going to effectively witness to this

love of God, the God who is love, who died on the cross for us—who loves us even in our ignorance and our sin, while ignoring him and curving in on ourselves—that means we cannot stop loving any sooner than unto death either. The form and content are identical, thus my witness ceases being a witness to God’s love if I am not witnessing lovingly. There is no necessity of seeking death, or suffering, or persecution, but death is also not a barrier to or negation of the love that the Christian is called to witness to. The very nature of this love goes all the way, and gives everything. For we are witnessing to the one who loves so much that he died for us “so that.”

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16-17, NRSV). God so loved the world that He sent His only Son, as human, into the far country, sharing in our experience, even unto death. There is no experience that disqualifies us from God’s love. He enters into and engages with our total experience. When we witness to this love of God, it has to be in the same form, in the same *way* otherwise it is not a witness to this content. How can we witness to the God who is love unlovingly?

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